

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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Contents

The Bible Is the Standard	123
Abraham – the Friend of God:	
4. The Friends of God Are Pilgrims	126
The Old Ploughman:	
2. Tears of Heart Sorrow and Heart Gladness	128
God’s Providence:	
2. It Is Extensive	130
For Junior Readers:	
A Bitter Disappointment	132
What the Bible Teaches About Sin:	
7. More About Conviction of Sin	133
Through the Alphabet with the Bible:	
Draw	136
For Younger Readers:	
The Lost Coin	137
Australia and NZ Youth Conference	138
Looking Around Us	139
Evening Thoughts	140

Cover Picture: Prague; see page 123.

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The Bible Is the Standard

For some hundreds of years before the Reformation, Europe experienced great spiritual darkness. Yet the darkness was broken here and there by bright lights such as John Wycliffe, who taught at the University of Oxford and was associated with a translation of the Bible into English. He was only saved from severe persecution because powerful men protected him from the wrath of the Roman Church. He died in 1384.

Another bright light was John Hus of Prague, who was around 12 years old when Wycliffe died. He was a successful student, and his career took a huge leap forward when he was appointed rector of Prague University. But the Holy Spirit made him willing to entrust himself “to the most merciful Lord for His pardon”, which was far more important than reaching a high position in the University. Hus had access to the writings of Wycliffe and was influenced by them – so influenced that he translated some of them into his own language.

Later Hus was appointed to another important position, one where he could be much more useful; he was made preacher in the Bethlehem Chapel, also in Prague, where he preached to large congregations. There he spoke in the local language – rather than in Latin, which ordinary people could not understand. He criticised some of the false practices of the Church, such as their pretended miracles and the worship of, for instance, what was supposed to be the blood of Christ and the milk of the Virgin Mary. Referring to the claims of the Church, he declared: “What a strange thing! They cannot rid themselves of fleas and flies, and yet they want to rid others of the torments of hell.”

Yet he also warned others, such as robbers and receivers of stolen goods, that they “deceive themselves vastly if they imagine they please God when, having gathered much together by evil means, they give a little to the poor”. But his preaching had a positive side too; he proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ to needy sinners. He called on his hearers to seek Christ in the Bible, not in miraculous signs.

But we should not be surprised that there was strong opposition. It was led

by the Archbishop of Prague, who strongly criticised the books of both Hus and Wycliffe. And when some of these books were collected together, it was the Archbishop himself who set fire to them in the courtyard of his palace. Hus made the comment: "Fire does not consume truth". That is true; yet it may do a great deal of damage, and we should remember the great effort that was required to write out all these books by hand in the days before printing. Many useful books were destroyed. But the truth itself did survive.

Hus's firm conviction was "that every word of Christ is true". One writer says, "Everywhere in his writings, the Scripture was the standard. He constantly revealed a tremendous grasp of the Bible, and some of his letters are almost a maze of biblical quotations."

In the end, Hus was called to a meeting of a General Council of the Church which was, at that time, meeting in Constance, now Konstanz, in southern Germany. Emperor Sigismund, then ruler of a large part of Europe, gave him a safe conduct, a promise that he would suffer no harm. But soon after reaching Constance, Hus was locked up in a dungeon very close to the outfall of the town's sewer. His trial lasted for seven months and, whenever he returned to his cell, he must have found the smells from the sewer most unpleasant, especially during scorching days in summer. It should be no surprise to find that Hus made the Bible the foundation for his defence before the Council, but he was allowed very little opportunity to speak. Writing to his congregation, back in Prague, he told them: "They have tried to frighten me from the truth of Christ, but they have not been able to overcome the strength of God in me".

The Emperor sent two Lords to visit Hus in prison, in the hope that they would persuade Hus to change his views. These men were sympathetic to Hus; basically they told him to do what he believed was right: "Under no circumstances do anything against your conscience or lie in the sight of God, but rather be steadfast unto death in what you know to be the truth". It was good advice.

Hus replied that, if he had been shown that he was wrong, he would wish humbly to confess it. He went on to claim God as his witness when he expressed his willingness to change his mind. But first someone had to show him some part of Scripture which proved that he was wrong – and that is what no one was able to do. In fact, it would seem that nobody tried to do so.

Scripture formed the basis of all his thinking. Writing to members of the University of Prague, he told them that the Council wanted him to confess that every statement they had taken from his books was false. He refused to do so, he wrote, unless they would show from Scripture that any particular statement was false.

The safe conduct counted for nothing – though Sigismund blushed when Hus referred to it – and, on 6 July 1415, Hus was condemned and sentenced to be burnt at the stake. After the sentence was passed, Hus knelt down before everyone and prayed: “Lord Jesus, pardon all my enemies for the sake of Thy great mercy. Thou knowest that they have falsely accused me, brought false witnesses, and made up false charges against me. Pardon them for the sake of Thine infinite mercy.”

Here was indeed a merciful man – who, Jesus said, will “obtain mercy”. And while he was shown no mercy by those who had condemned him, God showed John Hus infinite mercy and brought him safely to heaven. The very day he was sentenced, Hus was led out and tied to the stake. The fire was lit, and twice Hus prayed for mercy. A third time he began to pray, but the wind blew the flame into his face. Soon his spirit left this world; he went home to glory, for the sake of Christ and His mercy.

He was saved because he believed the testimony of Scripture. So must we. He believed that he was a sinner and that, because he was a sinner, he needed a saviour. To follow the false practices of the Church of his time, he learned, would do him no good. He rested his soul on the Saviour whom God had provided and who was revealed in the Bible. So all was well with him, although he had to pass through many difficulties and the end of his life was particularly painful. But God never failed him; nor will He fail anyone today who trusts in the Saviour revealed in Scripture.

Hus was always willing to be corrected if anyone could point him to some part of the Bible that showed he was wrong. He knew that the Bible has all of God’s authority behind it; so he willingly submitted to its teachings. No doubt, there was much more he could have learned from the Bible, but his opportunities for studying it were cut short by the wickedness of men who refused to submit to God’s revelation.

We too should submit to the Bible as the source for everything that we believe. So if there is anything we believe which the Bible shows to be wrong, we should say in the spirit of Hus: I give up that idea because I trust Scripture. But if someone challenges what we believe, and we can find it in the Bible, we should stick to it firmly and refuse to change our minds, no matter what pressure is put on us. God gave Hus grace to act in this way.

Similarly if we are doing anything that the Bible condemns, we should be willing to change our ways as soon as we are pointed to the relevant part of Scripture. But if what we are doing is according to the teaching of the Bible, we should refuse to change our ways, no matter what pressure is put upon us. Yes, we need grace to act like this. But we may pray to God: “Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me” (Psalm 25:5).

Abraham – The Friend of God

4. The Friends of God Are Pilgrims

Rev Neil M Ross

This series of articles is based on a paper given at a Youth Conference. It is intended to highlight some lessons to be learned from Abraham's life. In part 3 we saw that the friends of God become separate from the world.

Abraham was one of those people who, the Bible says, “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Indeed he was the main one who so confessed. On one occasion he said to the people where he was: “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you” (Genesis 23:4) – in other words, he was just passing through that place and, as it were, not putting down any roots. So the important lesson for us is that spiritually we *must be pilgrims or sojourners* in this world. Not only are we to separate from the world of ungodliness, as we saw already, but we are also to proceed along the narrow way to heaven.

Abraham, you will remember, left Ur in Mesopotamia at the call of God and travelled to Haran. After living there for five years, and after the death of his father Terah, he moved on. He did so after God renewed His call to him and he had God's promise to bless him. With his great household (which is reckoned to have been several hundred, or up to a thousand, people, including relatives and servants), Abraham travelled about 400 miles in a southerly direction until he reached the Jordan valley. After crossing the River Jordan he camped in Shechem (today's Nablus), which is between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. So we see that his whole journey from Ur to Canaan followed what is now known as the Fertile Crescent, which provided for his household and flocks.

When he left Haran, Abraham was not only travelling to Canaan but also to an altogether better country, even to heaven itself. Hebrews 11:14-16 tells us that “they that say such things” (that is, who confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth) “declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly”. Abraham's final and glorious destination is also described as “a city”; Scripture tells us: “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for *a city* which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:9,10).

Are you travelling to “the Celestial City”, as John Bunyan calls heaven, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*? Our natural inclination is to fix our hearts on

earthly things rather than on heavenly things. By nature we love the world despite being warned, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). We cannot be both friends of God and lovers of the world. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Let us heed the oft-quoted warning of Samuel Rutherford: “Build your nest upon no tree here for you see God has sold the forest to death”.

So *pilgrims* we must be if we would arrive in the kingdom of heaven, where Abraham now is. “Many shall come from the east and west,” said Jesus, “and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). The alternative is dreadful.

Jesus also said, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:28). They are truly wise who accept the invitation of the heaven-bound pilgrims, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Numbers 10:2). We must especially heed Christ Himself when He is calling to sinners through the preaching of the gospel: “Follow Me!”

Some fear the prospect of the loneliness of the pilgrim life. It is true that there are few today on the journey along the pilgrim’s “narrow way” (in comparison to the millions who are going in the opposite direction along the “broad way”). But we are sure these pilgrims are the best companions one can have in this world. In any case, the truly Christian pilgrim, as he presses on in the journey to heaven, has God as his God and Christ as the “friend that sticketh closer than a brother”.

Does God call us to set our backs to the world and our faces to heaven? He does indeed! Think of this command, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17,18).

At the same time we have to resist the temptations and the pressures to ignore this call or to put off obeying it. Was Abraham pressurised to remain in the heathen area of Mesopotamia? Scripture does not say so and it would be a mere supposition for us to say so, but it would not be surprising if he had been criticised by the worldly-wise people who knew him, when he separated from them in obedience to God.

When a sinner seeks salvation and begins to separate from the world and to be on the side of Christ, he will be opposed by Satan and by former companions in sin. He may even be pressurised by worldly family members to be less religious; he may perhaps be accused of being extreme. And some

people may advise him that he can have both his religion and various pleasures which he himself knows are not right.

Let us follow the example of Abraham: "When he was called . . . he obeyed" (Hebrews 11:8). Think of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: when he sought salvation and left the City of Destruction he fled for his very life. "So I saw in my dream that the man began to run," says Bunyan. "Now he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, 'Life! Life! Eternal life!'"

Bunyan tells us that Christian did so in response to the instruction of Evangelist, who "gave him a parchment roll; and there was written within, 'Flee from the wrath to come!'" (Matthew 3:7). Happy are the people who have fled to Christ for refuge, for there is "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). They shall not perish but have everlasting life in that "better country, that is, an heavenly", where Abraham and all the redeemed shall dwell for ever.

The Old Ploughman

2. Tears of Heart Sorrow and Heart Gladness

George Medway was getting old and went to live with his son in another town. There he met John Dean, who brought him to church. During the sermon he was absorbed in what the minister said, and the Holy Spirit blessed the truth to him.

That evening George and John again went to church. The sermon was based on words in Luke 15:2, which say of Jesus: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them". George was impressed as the minister read his text, and especially when he came to say something like this:

"Yes, Jesus Christ is able and willing to save the chief of sinners, those who have gone to the greatest length in wickedness. To confirm this truth I will refer you to some of the facts about Him recorded in the Bible, which will tell you what He has done. There was the dying thief – a robber and a murderer. There were sinners in Jerusalem who insulted Jesus when He was in the agonies of death. There was Saul of Tarsus, the chief persecutor of his time. And there were some of the people of Corinth, who were guilty of the most terrible crimes.

"Though God's all-seeing eye could not find out greater sinners on the face of the earth, yet they were forgiven and renewed and sanctified, and they are now mingling their praises with the spirits of the redeemed, before the throne in heaven. And Jesus Christ is the same now as when He saved these men

and women from their sins – the same in power and the same in compassion. His ascending to the throne of glory has brought about no change in His attitude towards fallen humanity. And are not some of you living witnesses to the truth of this statement? Have you not gone further than many in the number and the seriousness of your sins? And yet, through the exceeding riches of God’s grace, you hope to be saved even as others.”

George now very much wanted to meet the minister. So the next evening, John brought him along to the vestry of the church, where the minister was sitting, thinking about some of the serious truths of the Bible. Although the minister spoke gently to him, George could not get a word out for some time. At last he said, “I am now in a new world. I’ll tell you what I mean. I know I am in the old world, but what you said yesterday morning has led my heart into a new world; and my heart, not my eyes, sees wonderful things.”

“And what have you seen in this new world?” asked the minister.

“I have seen myself a sinner. I have lived about 70 years sinning against God and didn’t know it till yesterday morning.”

“What sins have you committed?”

“A power of sins. I’ve been a great sinner. Why, I didn’t love God nor fear Him. I didn’t know nothing about Him until yesterday morning.”

“What else have you seen in the new world?”

“I have seen Jesus Christ. O how kind to come down from heaven and die for us! This is new to me; it is wonderful.”

George began to speak about his love to Jesus Christ: “I can’t speak His name but I feel I love Him. I can’t think about anything else very well. If I think of anything else, my heart gets dull and cold, but when I think about Jesus Christ it gets young again.”

“But why do you love Jesus Christ?”

“Because He came down from heaven and died on the cross. I don’t know how to make out very well what I mean. But I think Jesus Christ will save me. This makes me love Him. I feel a great change here”, and he put his hand over his heart. “I can’t tell it, but it is something real.”

“Are you quite sure that you feel a real change of heart?”

“Why, if there is no change in my heart, where do my fresh thoughts and feelings come from? I never had none such till yesterday morning. I don’t know much now, but I wouldn’t be again such a poor old ignorant sinner I was before yesterday morning for all the lands and houses in our village or all the parish.”

“I hope your change is real, and that it will prove a lasting change.”

“I hope so. I should cry a power of tears if I thought it should be changed back again. The Lord save me from that!”

“Then you must thank Him for making this great change in you and pray to Him to make the change a lasting one.”

“I do. I'm sure I do. I cried hundreds of tears last night when I was in bed, and they be such tears as I never cried before – tears of heart sorrow and heart gladness.”

“You hope to be saved?”

“I do, and am very thankful for it.”

“But how do you expect to be saved?”

“Why, just how you told yesterday morning: by Christ, and by nothing else. I should not like another Saviour, because He was so good as to die for us. How wonderful! I never heard anything like it before. I wish I had heard that blessed sermon 50 years ago.”

Needless to say, the minister was very satisfied. It seemed clear that a real change had taken place, by God's grace, in George's soul.

God's Providence

2. It Is Extensive

Rev W A Weale

In the first part of this Youth Conference paper we were shown, last month, in the introduction that “God has planned everything for His creation and . . . everything will come to pass as He has purposed”; this is what is meant by God's providence. The first main point was: “God's works of providence are ongoing”.

God's works of providence are extensive. That is to say, they extend to “all His creatures and all their actions”, and they do this down to the smallest detail. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?”, asked Jesus, “and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” We have to say also that God's providence includes people's free and sinful actions. We must remember that providence is always *God's* providence. Sometimes the emphasis is on the Father's actions, sometimes the Son's, and sometimes on those of the Holy Spirit. But whatever divine Person is named, it is always the providence of God; all is rooted in Himself. “In Him all things consist.” “The government is upon His shoulders.” Bearing this in mind we may notice several points that are dealt with in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

1. *Providence and human freedom*. The question here is, If providence takes in everything, how does this relate to our responsibility? The answer is that it is God's providence and it extends to second causes. For example, God draws a sinner to Himself, yet it is by his own decision that the sinner

comes to Christ, so that initially the person may not recognise God's hand in it at all. However, he later comes to see the truth of what Jesus says: "No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him".

The *Confession* also speaks of God ordering things to fall out "freely or contingently" (something is *contingent* if it happens as a result of something else). For example, Judas freely betrays the Lord Jesus, and the prophets freely speak of things to come, and God works through this freedom. In other words, God has given man freedom, so that the choice he makes is his own and yet this choice is according to God's purpose. We must also notice here that a person's character does not always determine conduct, for people may act out of character. But man acts freely whether it is in or out of character, and yet God manages the whole complex of actions.

2. *Providence and miracles*. Here again we will let the *Confession of Faith* guide us. It tells us that God generally uses means to attain His ends, yet He is free; He is not a prisoner of the mechanism He has created. He can work without, above or against means as He pleases. Examples of working without means are, the Lord turning the water into wine and performing many of the healing miracles, including the raising of Lazarus. Examples of working above means are His using a spittle and clay to restore sight. Examples of working against means (or contrary to means or to the laws of nature) are His walking on the waves, the axe head floating, and the men in the fiery furnace.

One of the questions sometimes asked is: Can we expect miracles today as at the time of the Apostles? The answer is that we cannot expect to heal people or raise them from the dead as the Apostles did, but God still gives wonderful answers to prayer; also every saved sinner is nothing less than a miracle of grace.

3. *Providence and sin*. Providence extends back to the first sin, when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, which resulted in the Fall and in all other human sins. We have to acknowledge that it was in God's purpose that man should fall; yet our first parents freely chose to eat of the forbidden fruit. Again, when David sinned by numbering the people, he freely chose to do so; yet it was for a reason. God moved him to do this in order to punish the people for sin. David himself recognised this when Shimei cursed him. "The Lord has said unto him, Curse David" (2 Samuel 16:10).

We see this again in Rehoboam's decision to listen to the foolish advice of the young men when the people of Israel were pleading for a kinder and gentler rule than that of his father. We are told: "The king hearkened not unto the people, for the cause was from the Lord" (1 Kings 12:15). The crucifixion is the best example of this; all that took place was "determined before to be done" and yet, while God determined, man was responsible.

This of course raises the question of the relationship between God's providence and man's sin, a question that led to the doctrine of *concursum* (or, working at the same time). Francis Turretin, a noted Swiss writer, sums up the argument like this: "The first cause is the first Mover of every action [God] and the second cause cannot move unless [it is] moved, or act unless acted upon; otherwise it would be the cause of its own motion and so the first cause". Whatever profit there may be in pursuing this thought, and we question if there is any, several points need to be made:

(1) It must be said that God preserves His creatures who are sinning and even preserves them during the very act of sinning. Eve could not stretch out her hand to take the fruit of the tree unless God maintained her strength.

(2) God's government also operates when He fulfils His purposes through the sinful acts of men. Again this is especially seen in Christ's crucifixion.

(3) There is a matter of permission here also. "God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:13). But this permission is one that bounds and governs, which means that God limits the scope of sin and directs it to holy ends. All that being said, we must always guard against any thought of God being the Author of sin, or even of tempting man to sin; "the just Lord . . . will do no iniquity" (Zephaniah 3:6). Remember how James puts it: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13,14). Beyond that, we believe it is unwise and unscriptural to proceed.

For Junior Readers

A Bitter Disappointment

Do you remember reading about Apsley Cherry-Garrard in *The Young People's Magazine* for May? He was one of the youngest members of Captain Scott's final expedition to the Antarctic, which began in 1910. He was one of the men who set off in the darkness of winter to collect eggs from Emperor penguins, a journey which took them 35 days in unbelievably cold and difficult conditions.

These men were totally focused on this dangerous task. In the dark, often on their hands and knees, they had to find their way to the penguin rookery. They had to cut steps in the ice with their axes and to use their sledge as a bridge to cross over dangerous crevasses – huge cracks in the ice. At last they reached the rookery and obtained their prize – they collected five eggs and set off back to their base. However, on the way Cherry-Garrard fell and

broke both the precious eggs he was carrying, leaving only three to bring back to advance the study of penguins.

Eventually these eggs were brought back to Britain by the surviving members of the expedition. Cherry-Garrard was given the task of delivering them to the Natural History Museum in London. You can imagine how he felt. These eggs, obtained at such a cost, were now to be handed over to the scientific experts. It was a big occasion for Cherry-Garrard.

At first a junior assistant was reluctant even to accept the specimens which had been won with such effort. Cherry-Garrard was told to see a more senior member of staff. Then he had to wait around in a corridor while the man spoke for a long time to someone he thought more important. At last, someone grudgingly took the eggs from him and unwillingly gave him a receipt. When the experts got round to examining the eggs, they decided that they could not learn much from them. How bitter a disappointment!

Should this not teach us how unimportant our successes are if they are only for this life? What did the Saviour say? “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.”

None of the successes of this life last for ever; they are just for a moment. What we should be seeking are those things which will last for eternity. This is emphasised in the Prophecy of Isaiah by the question: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not?” Then God tells us: “Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live”. Surely that is what you should want above everything else – that your soul would be saved, that it would live for ever. Will you not make this the most important thing in your life? *J van Kralingen*

What the Bible Teaches About Sin

7. More About Conviction of Sin

Charles Hodge

Another article shortened from the book, *The Way of Life*. May's article showed how important it is to believe that *our* sin – not only our outward actions but the sin of our heart – is evil and that it deserves God's punishment. With it comes a sense of shame and of unworthiness.

Mixed with this sense of unworthiness are bitter self-condemnation and sorrow for our many offences. To these is often added a fear of God's anger: a dread that our sins can never be forgiven, that our defilement can never be washed away. No suffering in this world can exceed what the soul may endure under the pressure of these feelings. It cries out with Job: “The

arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirits; and the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me". Or with David, "While I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted; Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off".

It is no doubt true that it is the holiest of people who have generally had the strongest convictions of sin, yet strong convictions are not necessary. A believing grasp of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, while it does not prevent sorrow because of sin, extracts the bitterness of remorse and fear from the repentance. There is no true religion in these terrors. Those who have not repented may, on their deathbed, have this sense of guilt, humiliation, remorse, dread of punishment and other indications of an awakened conscience. And, in many cases, those who have suffered all this distress lose their serious impressions and sink back into carelessness.

Though the dread of the wrath of God often goes along with conviction of sin, it is not the main matter. In many cases there is little such disturbance. Perhaps the most usual form of religious experience involves people being deeply distressed because their feelings are out of line with what their understanding and conscience tell them. Many complain that their hearts are like ice; that what they know about their disobedience and thanklessness produces little or no feeling. Such people would gladly exchange their lack of feeling for the keenest distress; their constant prayer is that God would take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. This form of experience is just as consistent with the nature of conviction of sin. What is necessary is that conscience would testify to the justice of what God says about our character and conduct – to acknowledge that we are what God says we are.

This state of mind may be produced in very different ways. Sometimes it is the result of a calm review of life, comparing the usual state of our heart and conduct with the law of God. Sometimes, some sin more serious than usual seizes on the conscience. The mind is led to fix on its responsibility to God and the conviction of its guilt becomes settled. This is necessary to the sinner's return to God. So long as he thinks himself whole, he will not apply to the physician. So long as he regards his sins as either few or trivial, he will feel no concern for pardon or sanctification.

But when his eyes are opened and his conscience aroused, he feels that his case demands earnest attention at once. He knows he is not prepared to meet his God, that his sins are so great that they cannot be forgiven apart from the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Every true Christian has in some way been brought to this conviction, to acknowledge that he personally, in God's sight, deserves punishment.

Next, conviction of sin includes a sense of being condemned before God.

Our views of the punishment due to sin must depend on our views of sin itself. If we do not realise properly the evil of sin, we shall not realise properly the punishment it deserves. Hence most people secretly reject what Scripture says on this subject. They feel that they are sinners; they feel that they deserve God's displeasure; but they still revolt against the dreadful condemnations in Scripture against all sin.

That the soul should revolt against the idea of its own misery is natural to us. But what the Bible condemns is the opposition of the heart to the truth and justice of God's declarations about the punishment due to sin. It is this disposition to regard God as unjustly severe which ought to be subdued, because it shows that our hearts are not in harmony with His Word – that we regard as unjust what He pronounces just. All experience shows that this is a very common state of mind. And its existence proves that our views of the guilt of sin are not sufficiently clear to bring us to submit to God's plan to redeem sinners from deserved condemnation.

The opposite extreme to this is the feeling that our sins are so great that they cannot be forgiven. This is not uncommon. When someone gets a clear view of the evil of sin, but does not grasp the true plan of salvation, despair is the natural result. Conscience is known to speak truly when it judges that our sins deserve death. And unless the soul sees how God can be just and yet justify the sinner, it cannot hope for mercy. Nothing can be more pitiable than a soul in this condition. Its views of the justice of God and of the evil of sin are not exaggerated. It is their truth which gives them power and makes pointless the soothing assurances of friends: that the sinner's guilt is not as great as he imagines and that God will not be strict in marking iniquity. An enlightened conscience cannot thus be quietened.

Where people have some knowledge of the plan of salvation, it will usually restrain their fears of God's displeasure, even when they do not understand it perfectly. People know that God can pardon sin, that there is salvation, at least for some, for some *have* been saved. And although the sinner often thinks that his is an exceptional case, or that there is something specially serious about his guilt which puts him beyond the reach of mercy, yet he cannot be sure that this is the case. Even in his darkest hours, the possibility of salvation is not entirely destroyed.

One extreme is to oppose the truth that the sinner is justly exposed to condemnation; the other is to despair of mercy, and this arises from unbelief. Between these extremes lies the genuine conviction that one *deserves* punishment. If it is revealed in the Bible that the wages of sin is death, we must accept that truth; we must admit that it is what our sins justly deserve. We must not complain that the law is too severe; we should be conscious that God

can neither do wrong or threaten wrong and that forgiveness must be entirely a matter of grace.

But we should remember that there are many things involved in Christian experience which may not be distinctly noticed. Many may pass from death to life without any very distinct impression that what God has threatened against sin might justly come upon *them*. Their attention may have been arrested and their hearts moved by the love of God in Christ; yet they may have been conscious, at the time, of little more than a warm consent to the gospel, and the desire and purpose to live for the service of God. Still, even such people, as soon as their attention is directed to the subject, fully recognise what they deserve. They are ready to acknowledge that salvation is a matter of grace, and that they would have no right to complain if they had been left to perish in their sins. Although the experience of God's people on this subject varies, they agree in acknowledging the justice of God in what He demands and what He threatens. And they agree in looking on themselves as unworthy of the least of all His favours.

Through the Alphabet with the Bible

Here are five verses from the Bible containing the word:

Draw

But it is good for me to *draw* near to God (Psalm 73:28).

Precept: Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you (James 4:8).

Promise: And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will *draw* all men unto Me (John 12:32).

Prayer: Draw me, we will run after Thee (Song of Solomon 1:4).

Encouragement: Thou *drewest* near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, Fear not (Lamentations 3:57). S

For Younger Readers

The Lost Coin

Jesus once spoke about a woman who was very busy sweeping her house. She was looking for something. What was it?

The woman had ten silver coins and she lost one of them. She wanted to find the lost coin because it was very precious. So she went about the house, sweeping with her brush, looking very carefully for the lost coin.

And she found her lost coin. How glad she was when she found it!

The story is what we call a parable. It is like a picture. Jesus told it to show people that they are lost until God finds them. We will never go back to God unless He comes to find us.

Remember how glad the woman was when she found the coin. So, when God finds someone and brings them back to Himself, there is joy in heaven.

Australia and NZ Youth Conference

Jacob van Praag

The third Youth Conference in Australia was held this year, in January. It saw between 25 and 30 young people gather to enjoy not only the very informative and instructive papers but each other's company. The Conference was again held at the Winmalee Christian Conference Centre, as it had proved a most suitable venue the previous year and was the choice of the young folk again this time.

Five papers were presented. The first was given by Mr Hank Optland and was entitled, "The Three Kings" (David to Rehoboam – some lessons for today). Mr Optland used the history of St Stephen's church in Sydney to point out the causes of declension, stressing that "those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it". This congregation was at first connected with the Free Church and was a very effective Christian witness in Sydney. But from the late 1800s, such things as organs, choirs, man-made hymns, sitting for prayer and standing for singing, and stained-glass windows were brought in gradually. At last, by the 1970s, entertainers, politicians and even two Roman Catholic cardinals had filled the pulpit. Similarly, the minister of St Stephen's was the first Presbyterian minister to take part in a service in St Mary's Roman Catholic cathedral in Sydney.

After the paper, the young folk were divided into groups of 4 or 5 and given a number of questions to consider. For example Question 5 asked what the group's approach would be if they sensed or heard of any call for a departure from sound biblical practice in their congregation. The ministers and elders present were very pleased indeed with the answers proposed by the groups.

In the evening, Rev Jett Smith spoke on "The Life and Service of the Apostle Paul". He also emphasised Paul's conversion and character. He began by mentioning the electing grace of God; Paul was just as much an enemy to the cause of Christ as Pharaoh and Goliath had been. He was called by grace, and the astonishing thing is that God saved and changed him, so that he was no longer an enemy but a servant of Christ and useful in His cause. "Paul's conduct", Mr Smith said, "agreed with his doctrine, and he is an

example to us in his purpose, faith, love, patience and perseverance amidst afflictions and persecutions (see 2 Timothy 3:10,11).” Again the groups were sent to consider questions proposed by the presenter of the paper, and this was repeated for each of the following papers.

On Wednesday morning Mr Calvin MacKenzie presented a paper on “The Establishment of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Australia During a Climate of Presbyterian Decline in the late 1800s”. Among the questions Mr MacKenzie proposed was: “What distinguishes the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland from other churches and why is it worth preserving?” It was most heartening to hear the responses from the young folk.

The afternoon was kept free for all to enjoy the surroundings of the conference centre on a bush walk, or to take part in other activities available. The centre staff made sure there was plenty to eat, including an abundance of fruit.

The evening paper by Rev G B Macdonald, on the Watch Tower Tract Society (falsely called Jehovah's Witnesses), was most informative. He outlined the main beliefs, practices and errors of the organisation and highlighted a number of their false prophecies over the years. A large part of the paper was occupied with opposing their denial of the divinity of the Saviour. As many of the young folk have had some contact with members of the Society, the discussions following the paper were lively and enjoyable.

The final paper was on Thursday morning, when Mr Cornell Van Kralingen spoke on Islam, giving a very full powerpoint presentation. The five pillars of Islam were put in stark contrast to the five points of Calvinism. The five duties required of every Muslim are: Shahadah, to affirm that there is only one God, Allah, and that Muhammad was his messenger; Salat, to pray five times a day; Zakah, to give alms (money) in a system of tithes; Sawm, to fast during the month of Ramadan; Hajj, to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime unless prevented by ill health or poverty. Mr Van Kralingen showed how Islam, like the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses, keeps its devotees in bondage. In both those papers, there was discussion on how we should witness to these people if and when opportunity exists.

When the discussion on this last paper was over, we went upstairs for a very nice lunch. Then it was time to pack up before we all went away. Some had to drive 1400 kilometres to Queensland and others to Grafton; a number more left to fly back to New Zealand. We are grateful to the Most High for precious opportunities of fellowship and pray that there may be much fruit to His honour. God granted journeying mercies, for which we give thanks. A most enjoyable time was had by all. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps 133:1).

Looking Around Us

A Great Occasion?

For Roman Catholic children, their first communion is a great occasion. They will often wear expensive clothes, have a party afterwards and – probably most important for the little seven-year old – be given presents. An Irish newspaper reports that “there are people who will spend well over 1000 euro, when photographers and a dress and the catering and the party are taken care of”. The average present this year was expected to be €37 (about £30), and the boy or girl can expect to receive a total of €337. All this emphasis on outward show and money cannot possibly leave the youngster with a very spiritual impression of the occasion.

But no one should view the mass as an enjoyable social ceremony; it is an idolatrous performance. When the boy or girl accepts the wafer, he or she is taking what is claimed to be the actual body – indeed the body and blood – of Jesus Christ. It does not look like flesh and blood; it still looks and feels and tastes like a wafer. Of course, it still is a wafer; the priest’s words have no power to make any change in the wafer or in the wine.

The most serious matter is the idea that the wafer may be worshipped, because – so it is claimed – it has been transubstantiated (a big word for the change that is said to take place in the wafer and the wine) into the actual body and soul of Jesus Christ. The very fact that the wafer is accepted when people are *kneeling* at the “altar” fits in with the idea of worshipping the wafer (for what they are worshipping is not Jesus). And this is a dangerous thing to do because the Second Commandment forbids idolatry. It says, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or *any likeness of any thing* that is in heaven above, or *that is in the earth beneath*, or that is in the water under the earth: *thou shalt not bow down thyself to them . . .*”.

In 1 Corinthians 11 those who would come to the Lord’s Supper (what Roman Catholics have changed into the mass) are told to examine themselves. They should ask themselves questions like: Am I truly believing in Christ, trusting in Him alone for salvation? Am I really seeking to turn away from sin and walk in the paths of new obedience – according to the teachings of Scripture? Do I want to live a holy life, not only when other people can see me, but also when only God can see me? And do I want to have a holy heart? We cannot expect seven-year-olds to be able thus to examine themselves; so they should not come to the Lord’s table.

But none of these things are a problem for the Roman Catholic system. So long as the person, youngster or adult, has been baptized, no one looks for

anything resembling a change of heart. How dangerous to encourage children and others to believe that a few outward ceremonies are sufficient to bring them safely into the eternal world!

We need to trust sincerely in Jesus Christ, the Saviour appointed by God. But let no one – not even the strongest Protestant – deceive themselves into thinking that all is well with their souls unless they are truly trusting in Christ, and in Christ alone. He says to us all: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

Evening Thoughts

Author of life, with grateful heart,
My evening song I'll raise;
But O, Thy thousand, thousand gifts,
Exceed my highest praise.

What shall I render to Thy care,
Which me this day has kept?
A thankful heart's the least return,
And this Thou wilt accept.

Now night has spread her darkening wing.
I would the day review;
My errors truly mark and see
What now I ought to do.

What sins, or follies, holy God,
I may this day have done
I would confess with grief and pray
For pardon through Thy Son.

Much of my precious time I've lost;
This foolish waste forgive;
I'm one day nearer brought to death.
May I begin to live!

S E Pearce

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