

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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Ready to Die?

When Liu Tingxun died in China in 728 AD, he must have thought he was very well prepared for his journey, after death, to the next world. He had prepared a glowing account of himself and his achievements in this life which was to be buried with him. Then – so he wanted to believe – those who were responsible for judging men and women in the next world would see how wonderful he was and give him the place that was properly his.

Liu Tingxun was an army general and held an important position in the Chinese Government. In public life, he claimed to have been noted for his “kindness, justice, statesmanship, modesty, loyalty, truthfulness and deference”. And, according to himself, the skills he showed as a soldier were the same as those shown by the great heroes of the past.

But Liu Tingxun was wasting his time. The One who will judge us in the next world cannot be deceived. God knows exactly what we are; He does not need to be told about us – about what kind of people we are and what we have done. When we leave this world, He will not be impressed by our great achievements in this life; what will matter is what kind of people we are. The most important questions then will be such as these: Have we a new heart? Did we believe on Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners?

It will not then matter how much we thought of ourselves, or what others thought of us. What will matter is what God thinks of us; in other words, what He knows about us. And He knows absolutely everything about us: not only what other people might be aware of, such as what we say and do, but also what we think. So God knows whether we love Him or not; He knows whether we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ or not; He knows all about our attitudes and our motives. God has a perfect understanding of everything. Other people may be aware of something you said, but they may not understand *why* you said it. God knows exactly what your motives are. Indeed He knows us far better than we know ourselves. So, on the day of judgement, the conclusions of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Judge, will be according to the real facts; everyone will receive perfect justice.

Rhys Prichard was born in 1575. He went to Oxford University to study

for the ministry, but he spent his time there badly and was often drunk. When his studies were over, he was appointed minister of his home town of Llandovery in South Wales, but his behaviour was no better than when he was a student. Someone often had to push him home in a wheelbarrow because he was too drunk to walk. Other people in his parish found it easy to excuse their drunkenness; they said, "Bad as we may be, we are not half so bad as the parson".

One night, Prichard shared some of his ale with a goat that followed him into the inn where he went to drink. He roared with laughter as he watched the goat lie on the floor under the influence of the alcohol. The next evening, Prichard was back at the inn determined to enjoy the antics of the drunken goat once more. But this time the animal had more sense; he took one sniff of the ale before turning away and running outside.

Prichard was struck in his conscience; he could see that the animal was behaving more sensibly than he was. He confessed that he had "experienced a hundred times the filthiness and misery of drunkenness", but he had learned nothing. Yet it seemed that the goat had learned something and he taught the foolish minister a very useful lesson. "If I persist in this conduct," Prichard now asked himself, "what have I to expect but wretchedness and contempt in this world and eternal perdition in the next?" There was nothing before him, he realised, but a miserable life and a lost eternity.

Then he thanked God that it was not too late for him to change. He rose up at once, leaving a full glass of ale behind him on the table. He went home and lived the rest of his life a changed man. It seems to have been a real, saving change he experienced, and we are told that for more than 30 years afterwards he preached the gospel faithfully and that people were converted.

What a mercy that Rhys Prichard did not delay giving up his sin! He did not wait to finish that last glass of ale. At once he gave up his drunkenness and turned to God in repentance. He did not delay seeking the Lord. He knew it was his duty to seek salvation at once and, it seems, he did so.

He could have told himself that he had no time to waste, because he could die very soon and, because he was not trusting in Christ, he would go to a lost eternity. That was all perfectly true. But very possibly that was not how he reacted; probably the thought that seized his mind was this: he was living a very sinful course of life, he was despising God and it was totally wrong for him to go on like this for one moment longer.

That is the attitude that every sinner should have – even if, as we human beings might think, there are many others who are committing much more serious sins. To be an unconverted sinner is to be a rebel against God, an unbeliever in Jesus Christ, and there can be no more serious sin than to reject

the gospel. It is our duty to turn from our sins at once and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. Those who so trust are ready to die; they are fit to appear before God in judgement; they will spend eternity in heaven, not in hell. And they glorify God by beginning to live their lives to His glory. How dishonouring to God to *think* of living 99.9% of one's life in rebellion against Him and His law and then to slip into His kingdom at the last moment – and only to escape a lost eternity!

There was a rich man whose name is now unknown; he was dying. But, throughout his life, he had ignored the solemn realities of death, judgement and eternity. And now they were staring him in the face.

“O that I had been wise,” he exclaimed, “that I had known this, that I had considered my latter end! Death is knocking at my doors. In a few hours more I shall draw my last gasp, and then judgement, the tremendous judgement! How shall I appear, unprepared as I am, before the all-knowing and omnipotent [all-powerful] God? How shall I endure the day of His coming? Holiness is the only thing I now long for. I have no words to tell you how highly I value it. I would gladly part with all my estate, large as it is – or a world – to obtain it. Now my blind eyes are enlightened; I clearly discern the things that are excellent. What is there, in the place where I am going, but God? Or what is there to be desired on earth but religion?”

He wanted God to spare him in this world for a little longer. He thought that he would spend the rest of his days wisely; he would seek God and find Him. But then he told himself that it was too late.

Yet he was still on earth, where God shows mercy, for Jesus' sake. But it was by no means the best time to seek God; he was ill and perhaps no longer able to read his Bible, and it was impossible for him to go to church and listen to the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. No doubt it was Satan who was telling him that it was already too late to find salvation – the very same devil who, one can be sure, had been tempting him, for the whole of his previous life, that he had plenty of time left to find salvation – telling him he could live any way he wanted for as long as he wanted and yet be converted at the last minute and still get to heaven. But on the verge of death, conversion seemed much more difficult than he expected.

Satan, remember, is a liar (see John 8:44). He still continues his evil work. Is he telling you that you need be in no hurry to seek salvation, to prepare for heaven and be ready to appear before the judgement seat? You dare not allow yourself to listen to him. Instead, listen to God, who is true in everything He says. Listen to Him especially when He says to you: “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Now is the time to seek God; very soon it may be too late. Do not delay.

Abraham – The Friend of God

5. The Friends of God Worship Him

Rev Neil M Ross

This series of articles is based on a lecture given at a Youth Conference, and is intended to highlight some lessons to be learned from Abraham's life. In part 4 we saw that the friends of God are pilgrims.

In his pilgrimage from Mesopotamia to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, and on to the end of his life, Abraham showed that he was the friend of God by worshipping God. For example, when he arrived at Shechem in Canaan, he built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 12:7) – with his large household (consisting of his immediate family, several relatives and many servants) he worshipped God. In fact, Abraham and his household made up the Church of God in the world at that time. It was at Shechem that God appeared to Abraham again, repeated His former promises to him, and added the promise that Canaan would become the land of his descendants.

After remaining at Shechem for a period, Abraham moved farther south in Canaan and camped near Bethel. Again, “he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8). It is evident that he conscientiously led his household in worship, taught them the truth of God, and directed them to be obedient to God. Later on, God testified of Abraham: “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Genesis 18:19).

So the friends of God are worshippers of God. Jesus said, “The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). They desire to worship God and delight in doing so, whether in their private devotions, family worship, or public worship. True believers echo the words of the psalmist, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth” (Psalm 26:8).

Most of us can repeat from memory the well-known words of David:

“How lovely is Thy dwelling-place,
O Lord of hosts, to me!
The tabernacles of Thy grace
how pleasant, Lord, they be!” (Metrical Psalm 84:1).

It is one thing to say these words by heart; it is another to say them from the heart. Sadly, many worshippers have no heart for the worship of God. They are like those of whom Jesus said, “This people draweth nigh unto Me

with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8). It is a serious matter when young people who have been brought up to worship God in private and public, cease to do so. We have known young men and women who, when they left home to study or work, stopped going to church. What a grave mistake they made!

Obviously people who absent themselves from church without a good reason cannot claim to be the friends of God. Those who avoid the public worship of God, or to whom the Sabbath and the worship of God are a weariness which they wish to be done with, show that they are enemies of God and greatly need to be reconciled to Him.

Just as friends delight in fellowship with one another, so the friends of God delight in *having communion with God in worship*. Abraham had much communion with God by prayer and offering sacrifices – and when God appeared to him and spoke with him. It is true that Abraham and other patriarchs were granted special appearances of God (or *theophanies* as they are sometimes called), when they received a new or repeated revelation from God which they then passed on by word of mouth to others.

How highly favoured we are in having the written Word of God, which is the clear, permanent revelation of His mind and will. The friends of God love it and go to it with the same prayerful resolve as David: “I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints” (Psalm 85:8).

This is what sinners need: peace with God. They cannot have it except by believing in Christ, the Prince of Peace, who has made peace by the blood of His cross. So to the Bible they must go to find Christ, know Him, believe in Him and have peace with God.

Only then will it be their desire and pleasure to commune with Him in prayer and praise. Only then will they wish Him to hold communion with them in His Word. The Apostle John wrote to fellow believers: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

Some people go to church to hear a preacher rather than to listen to God. Long ago in Scotland there was a famous minister called Ebenezer Erskine. A lady, who did not know him, heard him preach in her church and was deeply impressed by his preaching. Having discovered who he was, she went the next Sabbath to hear him in his own church. But, although there was no difference in his preaching, she did not get the benefit she hoped for. Why not? Erskine himself told her: “Last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus Christ, but today you have come to hear Ebenezer Erskine”. The friends of God wish to hear and see “no man, save Jesus only”.

Prayer was a prominent part of Abraham’s worship. We know how he

pleaded with God for a son (Genesis 15:2,3), and interceded with God for the people of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Do we, like Abraham, worship God and commune with Him by prayer? The prayerless person is a proud person (see Psalm 10:4) and is no friend of God. On the other hand, the friends of God say with godly Asaph:

“But surely it is good for me
that I draw near to God:
In God I trust, that all Thy works
I may declare abroad” (Metrical Psalm 73:28).

Asaph drew near with his heart – not just with his lips. As one preacher said long ago: “It is one thing to say one’s prayers. It is another thing to go to the Lord as if we really wanted the thing for which we ask.”

Some of you may have read about the old man of a previous century who was converted when he was 73. He said his mother had taught him, when he was three, to repeat a certain prayer every night. After he was converted he would say, “I am the old man who said his prayers for 70 years, and yet all that time never prayed at all”. Ask God to give you “the Spirit of grace and of supplications” (Zechariah 12:10), so that you might truly worship Him and have fellowship with Him in the days of your youth.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

The Old Ploughman

3. “How Wonderful!”

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. A long conversation left the minister clear that a real change had, by God’s grace, taken place in George’s soul.

George and the minister met again for another talk, at John Dean’s cottage. The minister asked George: “I suppose you would not like to go back to your native village and live as you used to do?”

“Why,” George replied, “I think no happy spirit would like to come out of heaven to live on earth again.”

“You often think of how you used to live?”

“I think of it with sadness and horror. But I knew no better then. What a mercy that death did not take me when my poor wife died!”

“What thoughts had you of God?”

“I didn’t think about Him much; but when I did, I thought He was a great, mighty Being who never cared nothing at all about what we said or did.”

“Had you any idea of your soul, or its immortality [that his soul would never die]?”

“Why, I was always puzzled about it. Sometimes I thought that very wicked people went to hell when they died, especially the rich.”

“Had you never any fears about going to hell?”

“No, never. My common thoughts were that, when I died, there would be an end of me, just the same as with the sheep or the horse.”

“You believe that is a change in you now, and one for the better?”

“O yes, the Lord be praised! I knew there was a change in me when I was in your vestry the night after I heard that blessed sermon, but I know it better now. I now find it lasts with me, but then I feared it wouldn’t. If I had known 50 years ago what I know now, it would have been a good thing for me. I should have been all that long time a power happier in my soul. I wish my poor wife had lived to see this day.”

“Who brought about the great change that has been produced in you?”

“Yes, it is a great change, like changing a flint stone into bread, or a bog into a garden. The Bible calls it being called out of darkness into marvellous light. This is a faithful account of it. *Darkness*, I take it, means ignorance; and *light*, I take it, means knowledge. I have come from one state to another, and nobody can make me think otherwise. Why, if a blind man sees the sun, he must know his eyes are opened.”

“Very true, but who produced the change which you say you have felt?”

“At first, I thought it was you, because I felt it when you were preaching that blessed sermon. But now I know better. Now I know that it is the Lord that gives light to the understanding and grace to the heart. And praised be His name, I can now say what Paul said, ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’.”

“You have felt a great change, but do you feel perfect, or do you feel that your heart is still wicked?”

“O there is a power of sin in my heart. The fallow ground is ploughed up, but it is not clear yet. And this puzzles me. I pray the Lord to make me holy but He hasn’t done it yet. But I had great comfort when Mr Dean read to me the seventh chapter of the Romans. I thought, when he was reading, that the writer of that chapter felt that he had a wicked heart – as I often feel that I have one.”

“I suppose you believe that He who has began the good work in you will carry it on and bring it to perfection?”

“Yes, if you remember, you proved that when you preached a sermon the other Sabbath from the gladsome works of Paul. I put them on my heart

the next day [that is, he learned them by heart]: 'Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:6)."

"Do you remember any illustrations which I brought forward to show the reasonableness of expecting that the Author of the good work of grace will complete it?"

"Yes, you said that a wise builder, when he has put in the foundation and carried up the house a storey or two, will not leave off and let it tumble to ruins when he wants to use it. No, he'll go on till he has finished it. And so I hope the Lord will finish the good work He has begun in my soul. It is wonderful. I sometimes think about it till I get so puzzled that I have to go for a walk to get my thoughts back, and then my heart gets warm with thankfulness to Him for His great kindness."

"I suppose you sometimes long to have the good work brought to perfection?"

"Now, on this point I'm a bit disappointed. I thought at first, when I felt the change, that I should soon get free from sin. But now I find, from reading the Bible and from Mr Dean talking to me, that I shan't get free from sin till I get to heaven. The sermon you preached last Sabbath morning brought a power of comfort to my soul; I put the text on my heart and don't think it will ever get off: 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'. How wonderful! To see the Lord Jesus Christ in His glory so soon as we are dead and to be like Him! I should like that hour to come."

George came to the minister in his vestry one evening and said, "I can't do much to serve Jesus Christ and His cause as I'm old and poor, but I should like to do what I can, as the woman did that you told us about on Sabbath". He seemed to be looking for the minister's approval for giving out some tracts to the boatmen who came to his son's pub. George went on: "Perhaps the Lord may bless the reading of them to the conversion of some poor sinner, as old and as ignorant as I was once. If He should, I shall have a power of heart gladness."

He also began to visit sick people. One day the minister went to call on one of the members of his congregation who was seriously ill. When he entered the house, the minister realised that the old ploughman was ahead of him. George was praying; so the minister stepped quietly up the stairs and listened to the good man speaking simply and honestly to the Lord.

George confessed: "O Lord, by nature we be poor and wicked and ignorant sinners; we don't know ourselves; we don't know Thee; we don't know Jesus Christ. We were once under a sentence of death, but we didn't know it. Pardon all our wickedness and all our sins for Christ's sake."

He gave thanks for Jesus' life and death and asked for a blessing on the man who was so ill: "Keep away the great enemy [Satan]. Come and meet him on his way to Thy kingdom. May he soon see Thee and be like Thee."

He then asked the Lord to save him, "a poor old sinner", who had lived for 70 years but "didn't love Thee, nor pray to Thee. Make me fit for heaven and take me there when I go out of this world of sin and sorrow." He ended by blessing Jesus "for going to get a place in heaven ready for us, that we may have a good home when we are taken out of this world of sin and sorrow".

Through the Alphabet with the Bible

Here are five verses from the Bible containing the word:

Enter

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name (Psalm 100:3).

Precept: *Enter* ye in at the strait gate . . . because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13).

Promise: I am the door: by Me if any man *enter* in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (John 10:9).

Prayer: O set ye open unto me the gates of righteousness;

Then will I *enter* into them and I the Lord will bless.

(Psalm 118:19).

Encouragement: Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may *enter* in through the gates into the city (Revelation 22:14). S

God's Providence

3. "Holy, Wise and Powerful"

Rev W A Weale

The main point of last month's article was that God's works of providence are extensive; they extend to "all His creatures and all their actions".

1. God's works of providence are *holy*. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Psalm 145:17). We have already noticed that God limits the scope of sin and directs it to holy ends. We could think here of Joseph's words to his brethren when they said they were afraid

that he would take revenge on them after their father Jacob's death: "Fear not . . . ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Genesis 50:19,20). Again we have the crucifixion; this was without doubt the most evil act ever committed, but out of it came blessing for the whole world.

In Acts 8:4 we read of the early persecution of the saints, but again the outcome was holy and wise. They were scattered and "went everywhere preaching the Word", but if there had been no persecution, there would have been no scattering; and if there had been no scattering, the gospel would not have gone out to the perishing heathen. Also we are told in Romans 11 that the Jews were "broken off" the olive tree, but this was so that the Gentiles would be grafted in.

In all this we see God directing even the most wicked acts of men to holy ends. But we must again remember the need to guard against any thought that God is the author of sin or of any act of sin. There is a difference between God *foreordaining* the act and *performing* it. God purposed that Joseph would be sold into Egypt, but He did not sell Joseph. He is not the author of sin, nor does He approve of it. So we see that God's works of providence are holy.

2. God's works of providence are *wise*. He is "the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working" (Isaiah 28:29). Paul speaks of God's purpose that "the manifold wisdom of God" "might be known by the Church" (Ephesians 3:10). And *The Westminster Confession of Faith* brings this out in its section on God's dealings with His people in providence: "The most wise, righteous and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends" (5:5).

One could think of many examples in the Bible of those whom God dealt with in this way. For instance, Job, Moses, David and Peter were thus tested and left for a while to "manifold temptations to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts". God shows His people what they are capable of if they are left to themselves; He does so to make them more dependent on Him and to make them more watchful against sin in the future. So we see wisdom, as well as holiness, in God's works of providence.

3. God's works of providence are *powerful*. "He ruleth by His power for ever" (Psalm 66:7). It was when God brought His plagues on Egypt that Pharaoh was made to see God's power and was compelled to tell Moses to

bring the Children of Israel into the wilderness to offer sacrifice. Then he said, "Bless me also". Pharaoh later changed his mind on this, but he was at last brought to see the power of God in his destruction. Nebuchadnezzar was also brought to acknowledge about God: "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou?" (Daniel 4:35). Many more kings and rulers before and since, whether they were prepared to acknowledge it or not, have been brought to see the powerful nature of God's works of providence.

For Younger Readers

The Bible-Seller

A man was going about from place to place selling Bibles. He came to a village, but no one wanted to take him into their house and give him a bed to sleep in. They did not like his religion; they did not believe that people should read the Bible.

But one man liked the way he spoke and invited him to his house. And the man bought a New Testament from him. Before beginning dinner with the family, the Bible-seller asked if it was all right for him to say grace. He wanted to thank God for the food that they were going to eat. The man said it was all right.

One of the boys in the family began to laugh. His father was angry. But the Bible-seller said, "Forgive the boy. I myself used to do the same thing when I was his age. The Lord is merciful."

The next morning the man saw the Bible-seller take out his Testament. It was just like the one the man bought for himself. The Bible-seller read from it quietly for some time. Then he went on his knees and prayed to God. The family knew that he meant what he was saying in prayer to God, who was his heavenly Father.

So the father of the family decided that he too should read the New Testament. Often on Sabbaths he read it aloud to the rest of the family. Another of his sons said later, "He learned in its pages that there is one Saviour and one Lord, Jesus Christ".

If you have learned to read, you should take your Bible every day and read a little from it. And remember that the Bible-seller not only

read from his New Testament; he also prayed. You too should ask God to bless to you what you have read. May He bring you too to know the one Saviour and one Lord, Jesus Christ!

For Junior Readers

The Tower of Pisa

Have you heard about the Tower of Pisa in Italy? It is a tall, freestanding bell tower, part of the cathedral of Pisa. It is usually referred to as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It is a circular tower made of white marble, eight stories high with columns at every level, so that it looks a bit like a giant wedding cake!

Building work began in 1173, and it was designed to be perfectly vertical. It took many years to build and, even before it was finished, it had started to lean to one side. This has caused a big problem over the centuries and many engineers have tried different ways of correcting the weakness – concrete was injected into the foundations to try to make them stronger; narrow steel belts were fastened round sections of the tower to prevent it from falling in on itself; more recently lead weights were fixed to the north side to counter-balance the tilt to the south.

What has caused this problem? Why does the tower lean? It is all to do with the foundations! For one thing they were not dug deep enough for such a heavy building and, even more importantly, the soil underneath was sandy and marshy – unstable and totally unfit to support such a large structure. As a result of this, not only does the tower lean, it is also sinking.

What does that remind you of in the Bible? Jesus told a story about two builders. They both had to build a house. Perhaps to look at both houses, they seemed to be much the same – nicely painted and strong-looking. But underneath they were very different.

The wise man had dug down deep and laid the foundation of his house on the rock. It was solid and safe. So, when the storms and floods came, it was perfectly secure.

What about the other builder? He did not bother with a proper foundation. He just started building on the sand or earth. How foolish? What happened to his house when the storms came? “Immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” It gave him no shelter in his time of need!

Jesus is teaching a spiritual lesson by this story. We all need to be grounded on a sure foundation for eternity. We need a foundation that will never give

way. There is only one such foundation, “for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”.

To hear about Christ is not enough; to know about Him is not enough; you also need to obey Him. He said that the wise man heard His sayings *and did them*. That was the difference between him and the foolish man.

What foundation are you building on? Are you, by faith, resting on Christ, the Rock? If not, you must be resting on something else, on a sandy foundation, which will give way under you at last. May you learn to say, “On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand”.

J van Kralingen

Christ as Priest

J H Thornwell

Thornwell was once a well-known minister in America. In 1849 he was teaching in a college in South Carolina. This article, as edited, is the conclusion of a sermon he preached to the students at the close of the session. The subject of his sermon was Christ as Priest

On occasions of this sort, there are so many circumstances which should solemnly impress whatever truths may be spoken, on those who hear them. And when, at such a time, there is every likelihood that what is said may be remembered in later years, I have always preached on some vital doctrine of the gospel. It is my earnest desire and prayer that those who hear me may be saved. The care which I always feel for the young men under my charge is most intense when they are about to leave. If it would do good, I could weep tears of blood over those who have never been persuaded to be reconciled to God.

I see them going out into a world which is full of dangers: there are temptations on every side; they have in Satan a wily enemy who is plotting their destruction, and they have a deceitful heart which is readily caught with his guile. Yet in the midst of traps and snares they are confident of perfect security. A spell is upon them, which must ruin them if it is not broken. When I think that they are probably hearing my voice for the last time, I feel I must cry aloud in one final, desperate effort to dispel the enchantment which must seal them up in death if it is not dispelled. My young friends, I earnestly beseech you to give heed to this day’s teaching, even if you have forgotten all the rest. Carry with you its lessons and, before you yet become immersed in the world, reflect on the obvious points which flow from the subject that has just been discussed:

1. Is Jesus a Priest who has been appointed with the solemnity of an oath?

Then all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The righteous and the unfallen have no need of a mediator. It is only when guilt has separated between God and men that a daysman is required between them – one who can lay his hand upon them both. The incarnation, temptations, trials, sufferings and passion of our Lord are all to be regarded as an awful and solemn proclamation of human guilt.

2. Is Jesus a Priest? Then sin cannot be pardoned without satisfying God's justice – without an atonement. Is the sacrifice of Christ an act of worship? Are those unspeakable sufferings, with which He put away the curse of the law, parts of a sublime song of praise to the Eternal King? Then how clear it is that God is glorious in the punishment of the guilty and that no one can hope to escape!

3. Is Jesus now a Priest in the holiest of all? Then with what confidence and boldness – in spite of our guilt and pollution – we may come to the throne of grace in prayer! Why should we perish when the mercy seat is before us, and a reconciled God accessible to all? And can we imagine that if we are finally lost, when we have such advantages and when God has provided such a fulness of grace for sinners, we shall perish in any ordinary way? The abuse of mercy will kindle the fires of justice.

I would now impress on you again, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, these solemn truths, which have often been urged on you already. These things are your life. Young and buoyant, you may not feel the importance of religion now. But the scene will change. The days of darkness must come. Calamities may overtake you in which you will need the support of a friend with a stronger arm than any that can be found among the sons of men. The hour of death must come, and after death the judgement. The world now smiles before you; its prospects enchant you; its honours charm you. But “the fashion of this world passeth away”.

Religion is the principal thing. Let it then be your first care to have Christ as your friend. “There is none other name under heaven given among men”, whereby you can be saved. The alternative to faith in this Divine Redeemer is eternal death. Can you hesitate which to adopt? Can you endure the thought of eternal banishment from God? Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can abide in everlasting burning? Make Jesus your friend; confide in Him as your Saviour – and you conquer the world, trample over death and take hold on eternal life.

This is now my prayer for you – and it shall ever be my prayer for you – that you may know Jesus in the sweetness of His grace and the power of His resurrection. Then, though separated here and scattered to distant places, we shall be united again where parting shall be no more.

If I could be sure that you would all meet me at God's right hand, I could now bid you farewell without a tear and with a cordial Godspeed to your various pursuits in life. But the thought that any here may perish is agony, and my heart sinks within me as I am compelled to send into the world so many that I love, so many that Jesus as a man would love, who yet do not love Him, and care little for His sacrifice or prayers. May God give you all the spirit of grace and wisdom in the knowledge of Him!

What the Bible Teaches About Sin

8. Our Own Righteousness and Strength Are not Enough

Charles Hodge

Another article shortened from the book, *The Way of Life*. Last month's article continued to speak about conviction of sin, when the Holy Spirit brings sinners to acknowledge God's justice in what He demands in His law and in the punishment He threatens against those who break His law.

Another vital point about real conviction of sin is to realise that our own good works will do nothing to recommend us to God; they cannot be the ground on which He will accept us. The Scriptures declare that we are justified freely, not by works, lest any man should boast, but by faith in Jesus Christ. We must see the holiness of God, the extent of His law and our own unworthiness in such a way that we fully realise we cannot, by our own works, secure either pardon or acceptance.

It is easy to profess that we do not trust to our own righteousness, but really to stop relying on our supposed excellence is difficult. When someone is roused to a sense of his guilt and danger, he is almost certain to flee to any refuge except the one provided in the gospel. The most natural method of quietening conscience is a promise to do better. The sinner gives up particular sins, and perhaps struggles against all others.

This conflict is often long and painful but is never successful. The sinner soon finds that there is some sin he cannot give up, and feels that something more must be done if he is ever to be fit for heaven. If he is very ignorant of the gospel, he tries to make satisfaction for his sins by performing painful duties. There is no limit to the self-denial to which someone with a guilty conscience will submit in order to satisfy God. If people can purchase heaven or atone for past sins, by present suffering, they will gladly try.

Where people know something about the teachings of the Bible, they realise that outward good works cannot bring about our justification before God. They must have duties of a higher value. They pray earnestly, for

instance, and go to church, under the impression that they shall satisfy God's demands and secure His favour. Thus Paul, as touching the righteousness which is of the law, considered himself to be blameless. But he found that all his duties and religious observance were worthless. And everyone who is brought to accept the gospel offer of salvation realises that his sins are not pardoned for anything he either does or abstains from doing.

Indeed he sees that what people call their good works are so impure that they are a reason for condemnation. What are cold, irreverent, wandering, selfish prayers but a mockery of God's holiness? And what is any routine of heartless observances in God's eyes – or if not heartless, they are so imperfect that we ourselves cannot approve of them? The sinner needs little insight into the state of his heart, or the real nature of God's law, to convince him that he must have a better righteousness than his own duties.

The convinced sinner is soon driven from this foundation of sand, but he goes to another refuge nearer the cross, as he supposes. He stops thinking of establishing his own righteousness, but he still wishes to be made worthy to receive the righteousness of God. He knows that he can never cancel his debt of guilt, that his best services are not worthy to be accepted, that with all his care he never lives a day in full obedience to the just demands of the law, and so his salvation must be of grace.

But he still thinks he must in some way deserve that grace. The distressed soul imagines that if he could be more distressed, more humbled, he might be accepted. He sees that if his long course of disobedience, his rejection of Christ, his disregard of mercies and warnings, are forgiven at all, they must be freely pardoned. But this hardness of heart, this lack of repentance, he feels, is a sin which must first be got out of the way before the others can be forgiven.

Yet, in fact, it is just one of the long, black catalogue. It can no more be conquered or atoned for separately, before coming to Christ, than any other sin of heart or life. It is often a long time before the soul is brought to see that he is really trying to make itself better before applying to the physician – to work out at least some preparatory part of salvation for itself, so as not to be entirely indebted to the Redeemer.

At last the soul finds out its mistake – that Christ does not save sinners for their tenderness or conviction. But it is the unworthy, the hard-hearted, the ungodly, those who have nothing to recommend them, that Christ came to save. He accepts them in order to make them repentant, tenderhearted and obedient. These graces are His gifts, and if we stay away from Him until we get them ourselves, we must perish in our sins. The soul must be brought to this conviction before it will obey the offers of the gospel.

Looking Around Us

The Digital Sabbath and the Biblical Sabbath

In Western society we now find an endless stream of communications fed by the internet, social media, television and 24-hour news. It seems that everywhere you go in public these days, someone is staring into a digital device. As they enter our lives in new and increasingly-demanding ways, we can develop a tendency to focus upon what seems urgent rather than what is actually important.

In a fast-paced world, many people in business also struggle to find enough time for everything in work and life. Mobile technology means that work can now also invade home life through constant e-mail interruptions and the pressure of being expected to monitor them and respond. A new term, *time poverty*, has been invented to describe this condition. Many also recognise that relationships and health of body and mind can be damaged as a result. In response more voices are urging the need to slow down.

In recent months there has been a trend to promote a “digital sabbath”: one day in the week when one foregoes technology. Many of those urging this, such as the Sabbath Manifesto movement, come from a Jewish background. Evangelicals in America have abandoned the Christian Sabbath so entirely that it is almost unthinkable that they would provide any leadership in this area. Indeed the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards in America have provided a guide to which electrical and electronic devices can be operated on the Jewish Sabbath and in what way – some of which is really a guide for operating them indirectly.

People without religion can easily see the benefits of one day of rest per week. This was championed in the nineteenth century by the French politician and anarchist leader Pierre-Joseph Proudhon; it was also upheld by the Supreme Court in the United States in 1961.

While our societies desperately need the temporal benefits that the Sabbath secures, we fear that the motivation behind the “digital sabbath” may be a desire for what is commonly (and objectionably) called “me time” and “quality time”. Some people, on the other hand, find the pull to use technology a stronger attraction than the benefits of taking a break. The Sabbath must not therefore be defended solely or mainly because of the outward benefits that it offers. Merely to recognise the usefulness of the Sabbath is still a long way from acknowledging that God has commanded us to keep it, and even further from experiencing the blessedness of making it a day of worship and a feast day for the soul.

The benefits to be sought in Sabbath-keeping are first of all spiritual. Those

who observe the Lord's Day by "spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy" (*Shorter Catechism*) will be able to say, "Upon my heart, bestowed by Thee, more gladness I have found" (Metrical Psalm 4:7). John Willison (an eighteenth-century Scottish minister) wrote: "Observe it to [God's] honour and praise, and He will surely bless you, and make you glad with the light of His countenance. There was never any who truly observed this command, but will say that rare and blessed are the fruits which are to be reaped from this blessed duty".

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord" (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Matthew Vogan

Thoughts After an Illness

He tenderly binds up the broken in heart,
The soul bowed down He will raise;
For mourning, the ointment of joy will impart;
For heaviness, garments of praise.

Ah, come then and sing to the praise of our God,
Who giveth and taketh away,
Who first by His kindness and then by His rod
Would teach us, poor sinners, to pray.

For in the assembly of Jesus' firstborn,
Who anthems of gratitude raise,
Each heart has by great tribulation been torn,
Each voice turned from wailing to praise. *R M M'Cheyne*

Australia and New Zealand Youth Conference 2013

The Youth Conference will be held in Australia, at Winmalee Christian Conference Centre, from Tuesday, January 8, to Thursday, January 10, DV. The cost is \$120 per person. For further information please contact Mr J van Praag at jnvp@aapt.net.au.

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