

The Young People's Magazine

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The Shorter Catechism

One day in August 1643 a ship from London sailed into the port of Leith. Two ministers, Stephen Marshall and Philip Nye, came ashore and headed for St Giles Church in nearby Edinburgh, where the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was meeting. They had come to ask the Scottish Church to send men to join the Westminster Assembly, which had already begun its discussions. The General Assembly appointed five ministers, including Alexander Henderson and Samuel Rutherford, and some elders to go to London to join the men gathering regularly in Westminster Abbey.

It was already November when most of the Scots reached London, though Henderson had arrived in September and some others never took up their appointments. Probably the English ministers' August voyage to Leith was perfectly pleasant, but a voyage in November would likely have involved sailing through stormy seas. The Scots were no doubt very glad to reach the Thames and come ashore.

Some of them were to be heavily involved in the discussions of the Westminster Assembly for up to five years. They often wished that they could return to their own churches in Scotland, but duty called them to remain in London. The travelling conditions of 360 years ago made it impossible to return home for even a brief visit. Not for them, nor for centuries afterwards, a quick one-hour flight back to Scotland.

From the Westminster Assembly came the Shorter Catechism, whose answers many of you are learning. These answers provide brief summaries of the main teachings of Scripture. (The Westminster Assembly also produced the Larger Catechism; in it there are almost twice as many questions, and the answers are generally a lot longer. Although you might indeed find it difficult to memorise the Larger Catechism, you would find it useful to study it sometime. The Assembly is best known for the Westminster Confession of Faith, and we will try to look at it next month, God willing.)

Many young people who found it difficult to understand the Catechism have afterwards been very thankful that they did make the effort to learn it by heart. When they began to think seriously about spiritual things, they

already had in their minds a framework of scriptural doctrine on which they could draw. Indeed one man said, almost 100 years ago, "The older I grow – and I now stand upon the brink of eternity – the more comes back to me the first sentence in the Catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes: 'What is the chief end of man?' 'To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.'"

These words form the starting point for the whole Shorter Catechism. They should be the starting point for each of us as we think about our lives. Why are we here? What is the point of life? What lies beyond death? All these questions, and many more, find at least the beginning of a response in that first answer in the Shorter Catechism. Our chief end – our main aim – in life ought to be, first of all, to give glory to God both in time and eternity. To give first place to glorifying God will not lead to a wearisome, unhappy life; rather it will result in a life in which we truly enjoy God. And it will lead on to perfect enjoyment – the perfect enjoyment of God – in heaven for ever.

But how can we find out what it means to glorify God? The second answer tells us that the only rule "to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy" God is the Bible. The next answer goes on to tell us that the main teachings of the Scriptures are (1) "what man is to believe concerning God" and (2) "what duty God requires of man". So the Catechism, for the next 35 questions and answers, concentrates on "what man is to believe". Questions on God, and His works in creation and providence, lead on to others about the fall of man, and about our sin and misery as the result of Adam's first transgression. Then follows teaching on Christ as "the only Redeemer of God's elect" – how, as mediator, He executes "the offices of a prophet, of a priest and of a king, both in His estate of humiliation and exaltation". The Catechism goes on to speak of how Christ's work of redemption is applied to sinners, how they are "effectually called" by the Holy Spirit out of Satan's kingdom into God's. It then describes some of the blessings of salvation, and the section concludes with a statement of the benefits which believers receive at death, and at the resurrection.

The Catechism then switches to discussing our duty, and does so in terms of the Ten Commandments. In each case it explains briefly what is required in the commandment and what is forbidden. It shows the high demands made by each of the Commandments. How useful the Catechism would be if we not only learned these particular answers but, by God's grace, put their teaching into practice!

Afterwards there is some further teaching about sin, and then two particularly important questions about faith and repentance. The rest of the questions come under the heading of the means of grace; these include the

reading and preaching of the Word of God, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and finally prayer. The last eight questions explain the various petitions of Lord's Prayer.

Only a few of Scotland's churchmen were involved in the Westminster Assembly, but the Shorter Catechism has nowhere had greater influence than in Scotland. It was the teaching of the Catechism, backed up by the faithful preaching of the gospel, that produced such solid Christians in the Scottish Highlands, for instance, over 100 years ago. In a Gairloch manse of that time, two boys grew up who went on to be divinity professors in Scottish universities. Sadly, they forsook the faith of their father, John Baillie, but one of them bore testimony to the quality of religion in Gairloch at that time. Since he left there, he wrote, he had never lived "in a community that was, generally speaking, so well acquainted with the contents of the Bible or *so well able to explain and defend what it professed to believe*". Why was this? Because the people had thoroughly learned the answers of the Shorter Catechism and had carefully absorbed the sound teaching of their ministers. And, in many cases, all this was blessed to their souls by the Holy Spirit.

This is the teaching we need today, and a willingness to receive it. Of course, we must not ignore the Bible; we must keep going back every day to this fountain provided by God – the fountain from which flows directly the rivers of living water. Apart from listening to good, sound preaching, there is no better way to get a sound grip of the basic teachings of the Bible than to learn thoroughly the answers of the Shorter Catechism.

We should look on it as a great blessing that God raised up the godly men of the Westminster Assembly who prepared the Shorter Catechism. And it is a great blessing to have it today – an accurate, reliable summary of the teachings of Scripture. Even although it is now considerably more than 300 years since the Shorter Catechism was first put together, it is still well worth learning it. It is most certainly not out of date. Because God's Word is always relevant, this summary of its teaching is also relevant.

We should not, of course, be content with being able to repeat the answers accurately. We should ask the Lord to give us a spiritual understanding of their teaching. We should never be satisfied until we have that saving faith so well described in the Shorter Catechism: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel". Only if we have that faith, will what we have learned from the Catechism really become profitable to our souls. And it will help us to resist the false ideas about religion and morals that are so common today. With a good knowledge of the teaching of the Shorter Catechism we will indeed be well placed to explain and defend what we believe.

“The Lord was with Joseph”

7. God Meant it for Good

Rev Neil M Ross

This is the last part of a paper given at the 2000 Youth Conference. Last month's instalment dealt with Joseph's elevation to first minister of Egypt.

The narrative of how Joseph dealt with his brothers when they came to Egypt to buy corn is deeply interesting and very touching. We find it in Genesis chapters 42 to 45.

First, he presented a severe front and spoke roughly to them. This not only disturbed them but also aroused memories of how they had ill-treated their brother. “They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Genesis 42:21).

It is very clear, however, that Joseph still loved his brothers. He was deeply affected when they acknowledged to one another their evil conduct. “He turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again” (Genesis 42:24). Then, when the time came to identify himself to them, “Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren” (Genesis 45:1).

I think the lesson is clear: if any of our loved ones go astray, we must go on loving them. We should also try, in a wise and firm way, to bring home to them their wrongdoing. We should do our utmost to reclaim them, even although this may involve having to deal severely with them.

The most striking incident in the meeting between Joseph and his brothers was when he actually forgave them for treating him wickedly. He did so willingly – but not until they had acknowledged their sin (even if they did so only to one another). His generous, forgiving spirit was shown by his kind, compassionate words to them: “Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:4,5).

Here is an example which we would do well to follow. To harbour an unforgiving spirit when the wrongdoer expresses due regret is quite contrary to the spirit of the gospel. Peter asked the Saviour, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” Jesus' reply was: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21,22). On another occasion the Saviour warned, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he

repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luke 17:3,4). Those who have the hope that God has forgiven them should be all the more ready to forgive others, as Paul said to the Ephesian believers, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Joseph’s tender concern and love for his father was shown not only by his anxious enquiries after him, but also by the provision he made in Goshen for him and his whole family. We see also the most affectionate welcome he gave his father when they met after those 20 years of separation: “Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while” (Genesis 46:29). Here is another lesson for us. We should never cease to show our love for our parents, and we should do all in our power to help them in their old age. We live in an age when old people are not given proper respect. Some officials and medical people even regard them as an unwelcome burden on the country’s resources, but we are to follow the teaching of these texts: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32), and, “Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22).

We come now to the account of Jacob blessing Joseph and his brothers. When the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob blessed their sons, it was not a mere statement of prayerful good wishes, but also a prediction, given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, about the future of that son or tribe. The blessing pronounced by Jacob upon Joseph was the most wonderful of all. It begins, “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well”. Then it speaks of the abundant blessings which were to be upon the head of Joseph (Genesis 49:22-26). This blessing showed both the leading position to be occupied by the tribe of Joseph and the prosperous future in store for it. Before then, of course, Joseph had received a further blessing when Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 48:13-16).

We can rest assured that an abundance of blessings has been prepared for us if we belong to the spiritual Israel – the people to whom the Lord has granted spiritual blessings in Christ. It is also a great privilege if godly parents and grandparents have blessed us (and if we are older, for them to have blessed our children) – that is, when these godly relatives have expressed prayerful good wishes for us, especially for our spiritual welfare.

Great was Joseph’s grief when his beloved father died shortly after pronouncing those blessings. “When Jacob had made an end of commanding

his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Genesis 49:33 and 50:1).

After the burial of their father, his brothers feared that Joseph would take revenge on them. But he told them, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." (Genesis 50:19-21) What a wonderfully compassionate, generous, forgiving spirit! Let us seek it for ourselves also.

Joseph never lost sight of this fact: all that happened to him, including his great troubles, was appointed by God. He said, "God meant it unto good . . . to save much people alive", a fact he had previously stated more than once. Joseph had learned the truth of what Paul wrote centuries later: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). When Matthew Henry preached on this text, he said that sometimes afflicting providences work together even for the *temporal* good of believers, "as in the case of Joseph, whose way to the second chariot of the kingdom lay through the pit and the prison".

Here is encouragement for those of you who have the hope that you have been brought to love God. You can rest assured that not only are your difficulties and troubles appointed by God, they are also intended by Him to work out for your benefit. Therefore you should not be too cast down by your troubles; you should be asking the Lord to bless them to you.

As with individual believers, so it is with the true Church of God as a whole. Blessings are in store for it, in spite of its troubles – indeed sometimes as a result of her troubles. Although the Church of God in Joseph's time had its troubles, blessings were prepared for it, and Joseph was God's appointed instrument for accomplishing His purpose of blessing His people.

We today should look to God, who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, that He would revive His Church in this dark day – and also that He would raise up many Josephs to accomplish His purposes of mercy. Joseph was confident about the future of the Church. "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence," he said on his deathbed. He fully believed God's promise about future blessing for His people, as we see in Hebrews 11: "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones".

May we believe and plead God's promises about the future glory of the Church. And let us pray, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth".

“I Will Pray Alone”

Jacob lived long ago in a German village with his wife Anna and their little boy John. Jacob took no interest in spiritual things, but the boy had a godly grandfather who always prayed earnestly for him. When he was brought to church as an infant to be baptized, his grandfather prayed, “May he be beloved of God in time and throughout eternity!” The grandfather often walked the six miles to visit the little boy; he used to lay his hand on John’s head and say, “The Lord bless you, my child. The Lord bless you and keep you as the apple of His eye.”

On the grandfather’s sixtieth birthday, Jacob and Anna drove over in a cart with their little boy to see him. John was delighted at the idea of spending the whole day with his grandfather, but Jacob could not stay long. He had to go home and promised to come back again in the evening.

When the time came for him to go back for his family, Jacob heard a terrible peal of thunder just as he was harnessing the white horse. The storm which came on was so severe that he decided it would be better to leave his wife and child to spend the night at Grandfather’s house. Little John was highly delighted after being told that he would not be going home that day; he would not leave his grandfather side. But Anna was disappointed. She would have much preferred to go home, as she always felt rather ill at ease in Grandfather’s presence.

When evening came, the whole household gathered together. John’s grandfather opened the large Bible and read a part of it out loud. He then offered up an earnest, childlike prayer out of the fulness of his heart. Afterwards everyone went off to bed after saying, “Good night”.

The next morning, Anna set off to walk back home with John. It was a lovely summer’s day, and the morning was still quite cool. They walked through the birch woods and past several little waterfalls. John was very fond of flowers; he seldom passed them by. But that day he walked quietly and seriously behind his mother through the beautiful meadows. It was as if he could not see a single flower. Anna too did not feel inclined to talk; her mind was uneasy, and she did not know why. Suddenly John stopped and looked up at her face. Mother,” he asked, “Why does Father not do as Grandfather does?” His mother was rather confused. She did not want to answer him. “Go and look for flowers”, she told him and continued to walk on.

But John was not interested in flowers. They went on silently until they came to the top of a hill, from where they could see a beautiful view stretching out to distant mountains. Anna sat down to rest for a little while,

and John sat down beside her. "Mother," he asked a second time, "why does Father not do as Grandfather does?" Anna felt impatient. "Well," she answered rather sharply, "and what does Grandfather do?" "He takes the big Bible," said John, "and he reads and prays." His mother blushed. "You must ask your father about it", she told him.

When they reached home, Jacob was not there. He had gone out to reap a field some distance away and would not be back till evening. Anna knew this and she thought she would persuade John to go to bed early. She hoped that by the morning he would have forgotten his question. But she was wrong.

John pleaded: "Mother; just let me wait till Father comes home". At 8 o'clock his father arrived and John ran up to him at once.: "Father," he asked quickly, "why don't you do as Grandfather does?" Jacob looked hard at him; he did not expect such a question. So he just asked, "What are you doing up here, John?" Then he ordered the boy: "Go to bed; it's late".

John was silent and went sadly to bed. He was even more sad when he got up the next morning; he seemed quite different from his normal self. He sat silently and sadly at the breakfast table with folded hands and his head down, without touching his milk. "What is the matter, John? Why don't you eat?" his mother asked.

John still had nothing to say. So, after a little while, she asked again, "What is it then, child?" He looked up at his mother for a moment with a sad expression on his face and let his head drop down again.

His father and mother had finished and were just going to clear away the breakfast when she asked a third time, "Child, tell me what is the matter". Then John told her, "I want so much to pray, mother and, if no one will pray with me, then I must pray alone".

This was too much for Anna. Tears filled her eyes. She hurried into the next room to tell her husband what John had said. But Jacob had been able to hear his son because the door was open. His conscience was touched. "John is right," he said, "and we are wrong." Then they fell on their knees together for the first time ever. They prayed with few words but with many tears. They used the publican's prayer: "God be merciful to us, sinners!" God heard their petition and helped them. He has promised that "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven".

There was no longer any need for John to be afraid that he would have to pray alone. His father and mother had begun to bend their knees together before the Lord. They pled for mercy and forgiveness, for a new heart and for grace to commit themselves and their child entirely to Him.

Never give up praying, even if you have to pray alone.

The Book of Ruth

65. Unexpected Difficulties

Rev Keith M Watkins

Ruth 3:15-17 "Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city. And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her. And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law."

The sun was just about to rise when Ruth arrived home. Naomi, her mother-in-law, was surprised to see her at that hour. She asked, "Who art thou, my daughter?" In other words, "Is that you, Ruth?" Naomi wanted to know how it had gone with Boaz. Was Ruth going to marry him?

Probably Naomi was somewhat discouraged to see Ruth alone. Why was she not with Boaz? Had the plan gone wrong? Had Boaz refused to marry Ruth? Remember how Naomi wanted to find rest for her daughter-in-law, in the house of a husband (see 1:9 and 3:1). And think how much she wanted the family of Elimelech, her deceased husband, to have children. Otherwise the family name would die out. All her hopes had been pinned on Boaz, Elimelech's near kinsman. If he married Ruth, not only would Ruth have a husband, but also any children would make it possible for the family to survive through the generations. Everything depended on Boaz.

But Ruth was on her own. Had Naomi's plan for Boaz and Ruth come to nothing? No. Ruth quickly explained to Naomi "all that the man had done to her". Boaz had promised to marry Ruth, but there was an unexpected obstacle in the way. Unknown to Naomi, there was a kinsman nearer than Boaz. That man had the first right to marry Ruth. But Boaz was going to see him that very day, and if he refused, Boaz and Ruth would marry. Ruth came home alone, not because Boaz was unwilling, but because he had to remove the difficulty first. It was harder than Naomi first thought to get Ruth married to Boaz.

If you are one of God's people, it can be like this when you are praying for sinners to be saved. You want them to be married to the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps like Naomi you have plans for accomplishing this. At last you have a conversation with them about spiritual things, and it looks very encouraging. Or you are able to give them a book which points them to Christ. Or they tell you that they have started to pray for salvation, and they show by their attention to the means of grace that they are under concern for their souls.

But then, like Naomi with Ruth, something happens to discourage you. Some obstacle comes in the way, and the conversions you hoped for do not take place. Perhaps those you are praying for seem to lose interest. Or possibly there is some sin in their life which seems impossible for them to leave. Perhaps they meet someone who is a bad influence on them. Or perhaps some event occurs to draw away their attention from spiritual things – both blessings and troubles can do this with the unconverted.

At such times you can become very discouraged, and start to say on behalf of these people you care so much for: “The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and [they] are not saved” (see Jeremiah 8:20). You may begin to think that they will never be saved, that they will never meet the Saviour, that they will never be united to Him in the spiritual marriage of the everlasting covenant. Each time you see them leave church spiritually alone, you are afraid that they will always be “without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

But it is not necessarily so! The obstacles to their union with Christ can be removed, as in the case of Ruth and Boaz. And just as Boaz was the one who was going to remove the obstacle for Ruth, so Christ is able to remove obstacles in the way of sinners' salvation. Is their sin a great obstacle? Then listen to Him: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Does some difficulty rise up like a huge mountain that cannot be moved? Then listen! Jesus said that faith as small as a tiny mustard seed would remove mountains (see Matthew 17:20). Look to the Lord to remove the difficulty, for He is able. If you are praying for someone, never give up. Never give up witnessing to them. Never give up pointing them to Christ. Do not despair in unbelief, but go on trusting in the Saviour. He can do what seems impossible to you.

Remember Jairus whose daughter was so sick she was close to death. He asked Jesus to come and heal her, and Jesus started out for his house. How promising it all looked for that loving father! But on the way Jesus was delayed, and then the news came that the girl was dead. No doubt Jairus was ready to give up and think all was lost. But Jesus prevented that! He told him: “Be not afraid, only believe” (Mark 5:36). Jairus did believe, and Jesus raised his daughter from the dead. Sinners are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. It is far more difficult than we can know to bring them to spiritual life. But do not despair. Only believe! Look to Christ to do it.

I am sure that Naomi must have been hanging on Ruth's every word, looking for encouragements from Boaz. And Ruth had brought home with

her a very special encouragement. Ruth quickly unwrapped her large shawl and showed Naomi the six measures of barley that Boaz had given her. It was all she could carry, and it was especially for Naomi, for he had told Ruth: “Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law”. Naomi could not forget her own words on returning to Bethlehem: “I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty” (1:21). Boaz understood! He was going to make sure that Naomi should never be empty again.

There is gospel teaching in this, we are sure. Naomi became empty because of sin. The Lord removed her husband and both her sons. But now, with Boaz doing all that was necessary for marrying Ruth, she would be full again. Through Boaz, Ruth would fill the family with children. Through Boaz, there would be food again, without having to glean in the fields like the poorest people in the land. In a similar way, sinners have been emptied through sin of all spiritual good. They have nothing. But through the Boaz of the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ, they can be filled with all the fulness of God’s rich grace. They can receive “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over” (Luke 6:38).

Boaz gave Ruth six measures of barley. That was a lot of barley. And this time Ruth did not have to do any work to obtain it. It was a free gift from Boaz. By this he was telling the two women that their working and labouring was ended. They could now rest, for in spite of the difficulty in the way, Ruth would soon find marriage rest in the house of a husband. Plainly Naomi understood this token from Boaz, for she said to Ruth, “Sit still, my daughter . . . for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day” (verse 18). The women’s work was ended; their rest was coming very soon. Perhaps a person you are praying for is nearer to salvation than you think. Place all your hopes in Christ for their coming to rest in Him.

For Junior Readers

Egypt

Have you studied Ancient Egypt at school? You will have read about the Pharaohs, who were the rich and powerful kings of the country. No doubt you will also have seen pictures of the pyramids, for which Egypt is famous. They were enormous structures built to serve as tombs for the Pharaohs. Much of what we know about the wealth and learning of Ancient Egypt comes from these tombs. Inside they were richly decorated with wall paintings showing scenes from the person’s life. And many of their possessions were buried with them. The hot, dry climate helped to preserve

many of these articles, so we have a lot of information about how the Ancient Egyptians lived.

Where in the Bible do you read about Egypt? You will remember that we are told in the book of Genesis about Joseph being sold into Egypt. Later his family all moved to Egypt to get food in a time of famine. So the children of Israel settled in Egypt. The book of Exodus then tells us how the Egyptians worked them very hard until the time when God delivered them and brought them back to the land of Canaan.

Who led the Children of Israel out of Egypt? Moses, of course. You will all be familiar with the account of his life from the Book of Exodus. But there are also references to him in the New Testament, both in Acts 7 and Hebrews 11.

Because he had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was brought up in the splendour of Pharaoh's palace. We are told that he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds". All the culture, wealth and glitter of life among the royalty of Egypt were his. No doubt he could have had anything he wanted; he could have done anything he desired. Imagine that! I am sure you would love to be in such a position. You could easily list many things you would like to have or that you would like to do.

But what are we told about Moses? "By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Can you believe that? He gave it all up: his life in the palace, wealth, pleasure, opportunity.

He turned his back on them all. Why? Because Moses had faith to see that it was all just for a short time. All these honours, riches and pleasures were only "for a season"; they would not last. They may have seemed glittering and entrancing when he was young but, when he was more mature and considered them carefully, the reproaches of Christ easily outweighed the best this world could offer him. The enticing pleasures of sin could not have been avoided if he continued in Pharaoh's palace. But he rejected them because he realised that he could only have them for a short time. They were not really satisfying and they could not last.

Now, while you are young, will you not pray for the same faith that Moses had? Will you not pray for eyes to look at your life in the same way that Moses did. Should you not realise that, however attractive the world and its friendships are, they will only last "for a season"? Remember that you have a soul which will live for ever, either in heaven or in hell. So you can

surely see that even the best things this life may offer cannot be compared to spiritual blessings. Then you will be able to say with David:

“Since better is Thy love than life,
my lips Thee praise shall give” (Psalm 63:3).

Yes, God’s loving kindness in salvation is better than all the best things of this life. It is even better than life itself. *J van Kralingen*

For Younger Readers

The Stars

Have you ever looked up at the sky on a dark night, when there were no clouds to hide it? Did you see all these stars twinkling above you? There were very many of them. Did you think of counting them?

If you did, I think you would soon have given up. There are far too many stars for anyone to count. No one anywhere in this world can count the stars.

There is only One who can count the stars. That is God. Psalm 147 speaks about Him like this:

“He counts the number of the stars;
He names them every one.
Great is our Lord, and of great power;
His wisdom search can none.”

As you look up at the stars, they seem so very small. But really they are very, very big. It is because they are so far away from us that they seem so small. But God knows how big they are.

And He knows how many stars there are. He knows all about them. That is why He has given names to them all, as the verse from the Psalm tells us. (You should try to learn this verse.)

God knows all about the stars because He made them. The first chapter of the Bible tells us that God made the sun and the moon. Then it says, “He made the stars also”. That is why the Psalm says, “Great is our Lord and of great power”. God is very strong; nothing is too hard for Him.

God keeps the stars in their places in the sky. But, although we are very much smaller than stars, God can look after us too. So you

should ask Him to watch over you. You should ask Him to keep you from doing what is wrong. God hates what is wrong. (One word for what is wrong is *sin*.) God hates sin.

You should ask God to make you hate sin too. Because God is great, He can make you hate sin. Just as He knows all about the stars, He knows all about you.

He knows all your sins. He hates all your sins. Ask Him to take away all your sins, for Jesus' sake.

Read the Whole Bible

J B Waterbury

This article is chapter 24 from the book, *Advice to a Young Christian*; it has been edited. Last month's chapter was called, "The Bible First".

Many young Christians confine their attention to some parts of the Scriptures and neglect the rest almost entirely. Generally they select portions such as the Gospels, the Psalms, and some of the Epistles. This perhaps favours the evidence of their being Christians and may also best help them to grow in grace. In this early stage of their progress, they cannot be expected to take an overall view of scriptural truth, and show mature knowledge of theology. But there is a danger that they may continue this practice for too long. If so, they will always be children. They cannot grow in knowledge. They will be feeding on milk when they ought to be receiving more substantial food (see Hebrews 5:12,13).

Permit me then, my friend, to caution you against undervaluing any part of the Bible. I must exhort you to go on to perfection. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" – and all is, therefore, profitable for attaining that perfect standard at which you aim.

In these remarks, I speak from personal experience. My attention was for a long time confined almost exclusively to the Psalms, the Gospels and a few of the plainest Epistles. I read and reread them until I had committed much of them to memory, and I was very familiar with them all. I do not regret this, and I never shall. But my mistake was to suppose that the parts of the Bible which deal with history and prophecy, and some of those which deal with doctrine, did not apply to my circumstances and so had little claim on my attention. I fear that others have fallen into this mistake. I have found that the other parts of the Bible, which I thought were too deep for me to read, beautifully explained those very scriptures to which I confined my attention.

The Word of God is one magnificent whole. It is like a beautiful structure built according to the finest principles of architecture. The young Christian may be compared to a superficial observer, whose attention is taken up with a glance at the fine arches and columns of this temple. He dwells upon these as the principal attractions. The more advanced saint has not only entered the lobby but also the court inside. He has carefully examined the foundation and admired its structure. He has found no part defective or unnecessary. As his mind sweeps the noble building at one glance, he exclaims, How magnificent! How worthy of the architect!

So, while I would encourage you to read closely those parts of the Bible which appear most suited to your circumstances, I would caution you not to neglect other important parts of holy Scripture. As I said already, you will see much more clearly the beauty of your favourite passages by reading the Bible as a whole. The true method of interpreting Scripture is to compare one part with another. If I had realised this sooner, I believe my knowledge of scriptural truth would have been much more extensive than it now is. I have learned from experience that the historical books of the Old Testament not only throw light on all the later parts of the Bible, but are filled with most exalted and soul-enlivening ideas. Since I began to study the Scriptures in order, I have lingered on the Books of Moses as on enchanted ground. The types and shadows have been full of meaning. Christ and Him crucified is prominent in all of them.

I am convinced of the usefulness of studying the Bible in order. And I can assure you that my former practice, of opening it and reading wherever my eye happened to fall, was much less satisfying. I hope that you will carefully avoid those circumstances which prevented me progressing in the knowledge of God's Word. Consider it as the labour of your life to study the Scriptures in the way I recommend, for you can be sure that you will not have reached perfection in this study even if you live to be 80. But why should I call it a labour when it is so delightful a privilege? It is indeed a labour to those who do not love the character of the law of God and who do not obey it. But is it a labour to that mind which is, by the Holy Spirit's influence, in tune with the beauties of heavenly truth?

As we learn more and more of the wisdom, goodness and mercy of God, we shall the more earnestly desire to be conformed to these divine attributes. It is in this way that we shall grow in grace and in the knowledge of God and of our Saviour. In the world around us, everything is full of glory; everything speaks of the wisdom and power of God and calls on the soul to ascend to its all-glorious Creator. But in the Bible, we have God speaking to us directly, and speaking to us as to His children.

Go then and listen diligently to the Scriptures. Search them. Read them systematically. Make them your companions by day and by night. And may their heavenly influence be so poured into your soul that you shall, step by step, lose the image of the inhabitants of this world, and take on the image of those of heaven.

Old Yet New

While George Whitefield was preaching one day in London, perhaps in the 1730s, an old man and Mary, his wife, passed along the road some distance away. They were returning to their home in Kent. They were leading their ass which was probably loaded with goods they had bought in London. The preacher's voice caught their attention and they were also attracted by the size of the crowd which was listening to him. So they went off the road a little to hear what he was talking about.

Whitefield was speaking about Christ suffering death outside the gate of Jerusalem over 1700 years before then. The old man listened for a while, and then seemed to speak to his ass: "Go, Robin; it was a long time ago. I hope it is not true."

But the preacher's message had caught his wife's attention; so she wanted to stay longer. The old man tried to hurry her along. "Mary," he told her, "come along; it is only what happened a long time ago."

Obviously his words did not have the desired effect, because they stayed listening to Whitefield for a little longer. As they did so, they were both melted into tears as they felt convinced of the necessity of being saved.

When at last they were making their way home, they talked over what they had heard. Then the old man remembered his neglected Bible, and asked. "Why, Mary, does our old Book at home not say something about these things?" We are not told Mary's answer, but when they reached home, they got out their Bible and examined it. They were astonished at what they found.

"Why, Mary," asked her husband, "is this indeed our old Book? Why, everything in it appears quite new!" It was old yet new.

Their Bible had been neglected till then, but it shed light for them on their character, their conduct and their destiny. Mary, like her namesake in Bethany, was brought to choose the good part that was not taken away from her. And her husband found the old story of redemption new; he came through Christ, the new and living way, the only means of access to the Father. He became a new man in Christ Jesus, and no doubt they are both now singing the new song before the throne of God in heaven.

Looking Around Us

Dishonesty

Up to 100 000 false reports of theft of mobile telephones are brought every year, police said recently in London. One reason is that insurance companies will pay out for a stolen phone but not for one that is lost.

This is just one of the many dishonest practices that people engage in. They think that no one will ever find out. But they are wrong.

When police in South London phoned the number of a mobile which a man claimed to be stolen, it rang in his pocket. And even if no one finds out in this world, we should remember that “God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Dishonesty is natural to fallen human beings. We should ask God to help us to be honest in everything.

With Jesus Night and Day?

A Roman Catholic church in Rome has issued a leaflet with the question: “Did you know that near the Circus Maximus [a famous ancient building in the city] you can be with Jesus night and day?” Obviously something that should be highly desirable.

For a believer to have the presence of the Saviour at any time might not seem strange. Nor should it. But the leaflet is meant to find volunteers who will spend one hour a week at the church as part of its program of “perpetual eucharistic adoration”. This is explained as “prayer before the Blessed Sacrament solemnly exposed” – in other words, when the bread of the mass is on display. The capital letters presumably reflect the belief that the bread is no longer bread; Roman Catholics believe that, in the mass, the bread is transformed into Jesus Christ Himself – what they call *transubstantiation*.

That idea, of course, has absolutely no authority from Scripture. Common sense itself should be enough to tell us that what looks like bread, feels like bread, smells like bread and decomposes like bread is, plainly and simply just bread – nothing else. So those who are involved in this “eucharistic adoration” are not worshipping Jesus; they are worshipping bread. And that is idolatry – worshipping what is not God.

But we are to draw near to Jesus by faith. And we are to adore Him wherever we are. He reveals Himself in the Bible and in scriptural preaching. If we look to Him by faith, we will indeed worship Him. If we do so, we will at last be with Jesus in heaven, “before the throne of God”, where we will “serve him day and night” for ever.

The Triumph of the Gospel

Zion's King shall reign victorious;
All the earth shall own His sway.
He will make His triumph glorious;
He will reign through endless day.
What, though none of earth assist Him?
God requires not help from man.
What, though all the earth resist Him?
God will realise His plan.

Nations now from God estranged,
Then shall see a glorious light;
Night to day shall then be changed,
Heaven shall triumph in the sight.
See the ancient idols falling,
Worshipped once, but now abhorred;
Men on Zion's King are calling,
Zion's King by all adored.

Then shall Israel, long dispersed,
Mourning seek the Lord their God,
Look on Him whom once they pierced,
Own and kiss the chastening rod.
Then all Israel shall be saved,
War and tumult then shall cease,
While the greater Son of David
Rules a conquered world in peace.

Mighty King, Thine arm revealing,
Now Thy glorious cause maintain;
Bring the nations help and healing,
Make them subject to Thy reign.
Angels, in their lofty station,
Praise Thy name, Thou only wise;
O let earth, in imitation
Join the triumph of the skies.

T Kelly