

The Young People's Magazine

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Serving God

Another year is coming to an end. It was another year in which we had an opportunity to serve God – something we should think of as a tremendous privilege. Indeed, to serve God is the most important reason for our existence, as the Shorter Catechism tells us: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God”. God created us so that we would live God-glorifying lives. And we cannot glorify God unless we want to serve Him.

What does it mean to serve God? It means to act as His servant – to do what He wants us to do. But how will we know what He wants us to do? The main part of the answer to that question is: we must do what He tells us in the Bible. So we must obey His commandments.

Yet we must remember that we are to serve God “acceptably” (Hebrews 12:28) – in a way that is acceptable to *Him*. And we should be clear that a merely outward observance of the commandments is not acceptable to Him. If our heart is not in our religion – if we do not love Him wholeheartedly – our obedience cannot be acceptable to God, however convincing it may be even to those we live with. The phrase which follows *acceptably* makes this even clearer: “and with godly fear”. In other words, if we are serving God acceptably we are doing so with that holy respect for Him and His commandments which comes from a new heart. We cannot serve God acceptably unless we have experienced a change of heart. Whatever you may or may not do by way of service to God – whether or not you have any special duties to carry out in, for instance, your congregation – the first and most important matter is to live a godly life.

But not only should we seek a new heart, we should then seek to grow in grace, to make progress in godliness. It is poor service, assuming we have been given a new heart, if we are complacent about making progress in the life of grace – if we do not want to serve God better than we do.

God may call some of His children to particular kinds of service. He may call some men to become ministers – to go and preach the gospel somewhere in their own country, or perhaps as a missionary in some far-off land. And that is a wonderful opportunity to do what could be a very useful work – to

be a means in God's hand of preparing sinners for heaven. God may call others to be elders or deacons in their own congregation, which could also be very useful.

Yet whatever work we may find ourselves doing in God's providence, we have an opportunity to serve God – if the work is not in itself sinful. To do any job as well as we possibly can is a witness to others that we are doing it for God's sake. Many of you are not yet in employment, but you can serve God by studying conscientiously in school or in university. Whatever our position in life, we are to serve God by living a life of careful obedience to His commandments. Such a life, sadly, will not be perfect. But if, by God's blessing, we keep from outward sin, we are a witness, before the world, to the fact that it is indeed possible to live a consistently Christian life. Enoch, the Bible tells us, "walked with God". And Matthew Henry explains that "to walk with God is to set God always before us, and to act as those that are always under His eye. It is to live a life of communion with God." That is how Enoch lived – serving God "acceptably and with godly fear", and he did so to an unusual degree. Enoch is an example for us all.

Parents have a special opportunity of serving God, by training up their children in the way they should go (see Proverbs 22:6). Young people considering marriage should be thinking prayerfully about the very serious responsibilities they will have to face in bringing up a family if the Lord in His goodness will bless them with children. There was once a man called John Randolph who said that he would probably have been an atheist but for the memory of his godly mother. She used to make him kneel by her side and, taking his little hands in hers, she would teach him to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven". How usefully John's mother served God!

But all God's servants have, more or less, the opportunity to pray. They are to pray for His Church, that it would become stronger and be protected from Satan's attacks. They are to pray for the good of sinners throughout the world, particularly that they would be converted. They are to pray also that God would restrain sin and so change the whole world that not only individuals but whole nations would turn to Him.

As godly people get older, we may think that a time comes when they are no longer able to serve God. An old minister, for instance, who used to proclaim the gospel to large congregations, with much of God's blessing, is no longer able to preach. An old elder who used to spend a lot of time visiting the families in his congregation is no longer able to leave his home. An old lady who used to be well known for her quiet, godly life is now confined to bed. Have they stopped serving God? No, most certainly not. James Buchanan, a noted minister in Edinburgh, wrote in 1841 about the old

disciple who is completely disabled: “He is apt to wonder why he is preserved in life when his usefulness is apparently gone”. And he went on: “He who considers that the greatest usefulness consists in glorifying God will see at a single glance that there is no ground for such thoughts”. Why? Because such people “may glorify God as much by patient suffering as by active service and may thus be in the highest degree useful to those who are around them”. And they may have special opportunities of serving God in prayer.

We do not have long to serve God, but it is the greatest privilege we can possibly have. People may seek for status in this life – by becoming famous for their wealth, or the job they do, or whatever. But in fact there is no status as high as this, acting as a servant of the living and true God. Not everyone understands that, of course; most people in Britain today think it is foolish to be religious. But the fool is the one who has said in his heart that there is no God. It is not what other people think that really matters; it is what God thinks. And, when the last day will come – when we will stand before Christ to be judged according to how we have lived in this world – it will be obvious that what really mattered in this life was to serve God. And, even in this world, if people really were willing to believe how great a being God is, they would understand how great a privilege it is to serve Him.

Josiah already had high status in Judah when he began to serve God. He became King of his country when he was just 8. But when he was only 15 or 16 he began to seek God. The evidence that he found God is that he began to serve Him; we are told “he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father [it means, his ancestor], and declined not to the right hand nor to the left” (2 Chronicles 34:2). He served God by ruling his people well and by doing what he could to get them to obey God’s commandments. As the years went by, how glad he must have been that he had not delayed beginning to serve God until he was older!

If we realise how great God is, we will want to draw near to Him through Jesus Christ and be reconciled to Him. And we will want to serve Him. As another year draws almost to an end, are *you* still happier to serve Satan than to serve God? Surely it is time, before another year begins, to approach God through Jesus Christ, asking Him to give you a new heart and to make you willing to serve Him for the rest of your days in this world – however many or few they may be? If you begin to serve God sincerely in this world, you will serve him perfectly in heaven for ever. Whatever difficulties you may experience here, the reward in heaven will be so great that everything of that kind will be forgotten. One by one, your years are passing away. Your opportunities to serve God are becoming fewer. Surely it is right that you should give the rest of your short life to the service of God.

The Book of Ruth

73. The Man with no Name

Rev Keith M Watkins

Ruth 4:1. "Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! Turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down."

Boaz wanted to marry Ruth. But there was a man in the family who was more closely related to her. According to the laws of Israel, that nearer relative had the first right and the first responsibility to marry a widow like Ruth. So Boaz, being a God-fearing and law-abiding man, went to the gate of the city, to see if the nearer relative would do his duty.

We have mentioned the nearer relative. What was his name? We do not know. The Bible does not tell us. In fact, the Holy Spirit hides his name in a very deliberate way. The fact that the man is not named is greatly emphasised. As Boaz waited at the gate, the man came by. He is described simply as "the kinsman of whom Boaz spake". There is no clue as to the relative's name. Boaz calls to the man. He addresses him only as "such a one". In modern English, we might say "Mr So-and-So". When David did not want to tell Ahimelech exactly where his men were, he said that they were in "such and such a place" (see 1 Samuel 21:2). In this way the Holy Spirit hides this man's name: he is just "such and such a man". He is the man with no name.

Why are we not told the man's name? It is because he failed to do his duty. In his position as the closest relative, he should have married Ruth. His failure to do so showed that he was not a godly man, but a worldly man. What does the Bible say about the name of such a man? "His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street" (Job 18:17). "Thou hast put out their name for ever" (Psalm 10:7).

What a contrast to the rest of this chapter! It is full of names. In 22 verses, no fewer than 19 different people are named. Boaz, the faithful kinsman who did his duty, is named seven times. David, the future king of Israel, is also mentioned, and many others. That is to their honour. But the name of the unfaithful kinsman is put out of memory. His name has been sunk into dishonour. It has been covered over for ever.

This was a punishment to fit the man's crime. For why was he required to marry Ruth? It was to preserve the name of Ruth's husband, Mahlon, who had died (see verse 5). Mahlon had died without having a child, which meant that his name would cease from Israel. But if a kinsman would marry Ruth, then their first child would be counted as Mahlon's, and that would preserve

his name in future generations. But the unnamed kinsman was unwilling to do that. He did not care about Mahlon's name being blotted out. Therefore the Lord punished him by blotting out his own name. He was unworthy of having his name recorded. He could have helped. He should have helped. But he refused to help. Therefore there was no help for it, but his name had to be blotted out. He had to be a man with no name.

Scripture is full of names. Many are the names of the Lord's own people. The Lord loves every one of those names. From all eternity, He wrote those names in His own book – "the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). They were written on His heart in love, as can be seen in the Old Testament high priest, who had the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on his breastplate, right upon his heart. Their names are engraved in the palms of His hands (see Isaiah 49:16), for in His faithfulness He can never forget them. The high priest of old also carried the names of Israel on his shoulders. When Jesus went to the cross, He bore His people's names on His sin-bearing shoulders, as all their iniquities were laid on Him. When He calls them to Himself in the gospel, He – as the Good Shepherd – calls them all by name (see John 10:3), as if each one was the only one. He has promised never to blot out their names from the book of life, but to confess their names before the Father (see Revelation 3:5). So let them rejoice, because their names are written in heaven (see Luke 10:20).

But there are many "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). To these people Jesus will say on the day of judgement: "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23). They are like the nameless relative. Their names are not mentioned, because they themselves are rejected. But why?

The unnamed kinsman would not honour his dead relative's name. That is why he obtained no honour for his own name. It is the same in the gospel. Those who will not honour the name of Christ crucified will find that their own names obtain no honour. The Lord has said: "Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Samuel 2:30). Their names will be buried in disgrace for ever. They will go into eternity as people whose names are not worth remembering.

If people do not name the name of Christ by seeking to depart from all iniquity for His sake (see 2 Timothy 2:19), the Lord Jesus will not name their names when He gathers His people into heaven. If they do not receive Him by faith and "believe on His name", they will never have their names counted among the children of God (see John 1:12). If in this world they are ashamed of the name of Christ, and will not stand up for Him and for His

words, they will find that He will be ashamed of them on the last day, and will not name their names for salvation (see Mark 8:38). If they have not served Him nor laboured for His name's sake (see Revelation 2:3), they will find that Jesus will not labour to save their names from "shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). If they will not suffer for the name of Jesus now, they will have to suffer the pain of having their names blotted out for ever.

We may have our names recorded on communion rolls in this world. But a mere name to live will not be enough. Our souls must be united, by a true and living faith, to Him whose name is Jesus. Otherwise our names will never be among those recorded in heaven. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Reader, what of yourself? Will your name appear on the roll of heaven? Or will it be blotted out for ever, as if you were a person with no name?

Wonderful Revenge

Early one summer morning, Evan Jones set out from his little cottage away in the mountains to sell two ponies in Carmarthen, about 40 miles away. He rode along on one of the ponies, leading the other behind him. After selling them, he intended to spend the night in an inn and walk home the next day.

Evan had no difficulty selling the ponies; the price was £20, worth much more then than now. He set off for home, but before long he discovered that his wallet had disappeared; someone must have stolen it. He turned back and reported the theft to the police. But they just told him that he should have been on his guard against pickpockets; the best thing he could do was to go home at once. Evan was tired after a long day; so he asked the landlady of a small inn to give him a bed for the night. No doubt explaining that all his money had been stolen, he promised to send the money on to her as soon as he reached home. But she sent him away; she would not listen. Probably she had heard such stories before and no money ever appeared.

There was nothing Evan could do but set off again on the long road to his home in the mountains. He was tired and hungry, but he kept going – committing himself as he went to the care of God. And he kept his spirits up by repeating passages of Scripture to himself and singing. After a few miles, to Evan's surprise, two men caught up with him. He did not like the look of them but, as he knew that he had nothing they could steal, he did not feel afraid. And, very likely, he would have again asked God for His blessing.

Evan was right to be suspicious of the men. They had watched him selling

his ponies and followed him from Carmarthen so that they could have the £20 for themselves. But they did not realise that it had already been stolen. At a lonely pass in the hills, one of the men jumped suddenly on Evan from behind and knocked him down. They searched him for the money but of course there was no money to find. Highly annoyed, they began to hit him and kick him, before leaving him on the ground groaning and bleeding, half-naked and only half-conscious. Evan had to lie there all night, not knowing where he was or what had happened to him.

The next morning, Evan managed to get up on his feet again and struggle along the mountains tracks in the direction of home. But, weak as he was, he only managed to cover eight miles that day, reaching another inn as darkness began to fall. The innkeeper, a man called Gudgeon, had a reputation for being hard and cruel. And that evening, when Evan appeared at his door dirty and bloodstained, with his clothes in rags, he confirmed his reputation. He was drinking with a friend at the time and was horrified at Evan's appearance. Evan tried to explain why he was so bedraggled and asked for a bed for the night. Gudgeon just abused him. "I know who you are," he shouted, "one of them religious chaps that never pays for a drop of good ale! I don't believe a word you say; you've got into bad company. And I say, Serve you right! And you can just get out of my sight this minute."

Evan tried to persuade the innkeeper to take him in, but completely without success. However weary and weak and hungry he was, he had to struggle on again. But, farther on in that little village, he found a haystack and lay down for the night on some of the hay. The next day, in God's kindness, Evan reached home safely. He was a strong man and eventually he recovered from his injuries completely.

Summer passed into winter and, one very cold day, Gudgeon was returning from a business trip to a town on the border between Wales and England. He stepped off a train and headed towards the mountains tracks which would lead him in the direction of his home. He had a long walk ahead of him, but he had arranged for his servant to wait for him with horses for the last stage of his journey. All went well for the first few miles, but snow began to fall as the road climbed into the hills. Gudgeon continued on his way, but at last he found himself walking through a blizzard, and before very long all the walls and hedges and ditches were covered by the heavy snow. He could no longer make out the road in front of him and found himself trudging through one snowdrift after another. He knew he was in danger and looked around for some form of shelter, but there was no cottage to be seen, or even a shed.

As he went on, there came flooding into his mind memories of the evening the previous summer when he had so unkindly refused to take pity

on Evan after he had appeared at the door of his inn injured and weary. "It's a judgement on me," Gudgeon told himself, "and it's only what I deserve. What a wonderful revenge it would be for that man if he could see me now!" He struggled on for some hours. But at last he began to sink in the deep drifts, and he became exhausted. No doubt he could see himself having to lie down and die without any hope of ever being rescued. But he began to do something which he probably had never done for a very long time: he began to pray. He cried: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner". He was very conscious of how appropriate the word *sinner* was. He thought of many wicked deeds he had committed, but especially of how he had turned Evan away from the inn. And he knew it was because he hated Evan's religion that he had done so; he had even mocked him for his religion.

Gudgeon had given up all hope of being rescued when he heard a sheep bleating faintly and then, farther off, a dog barking. He shouted as loudly as he could, and in the distance he could hear someone shouting back. He kept on shouting, but he was now up to his chin in snow and felt he had very little hope of being found although he knew there was someone not far away. Suddenly a large dog ran up to him and pushed its nose against his face, before running away again. Soon the dog's master appeared, moving easily over the snow in his snowshoes. What a relief!

But relief turned to horror when he recognised the man as Evan Jones. Would Evan turn away and leave him to perish? After all, it would be the perfect opportunity for Evan to take revenge on the innkeeper who had so heartlessly sent him away just a few months before. But Evan was a God-fearing man and could not begin to think of leaving even his enemy to perish. He had come out to rescue his few sheep from the snowdrifts; now he rescued Gudgeon and brought him into the warmth of his own home. There the innkeeper was given hot drinks and food and put in the best bed in the house. In spite of the past, he was shown all the kindness that the Jones family could possibly give him.

At first Gudgeon was too weak to speak, but by the next morning he had recovered enough to set out for home. Evan took him on his own horse to where the innkeeper's servant was waiting for him. With tears in his eyes, Gudgeon tried to thank his rescuer. But Evan told him brightly: "Don't thank me. It was the Lord who sent me to save you, and it was for Him I did it; I couldn't do anything less."

"I know that," replied Gudgeon, "and I do thank God indeed. But you haven't only saved my life; you've shown me what it is to be a Christian. And now there is nothing in the world that I want as much as to be made like you." It was indeed a wonderful revenge.

Nothing more is told us about Gudgeon. We can only hope he did not give up praying after he got home, and that he truly turned to Christ. Too many people, who begin to pray in times of danger, forget God's kindness after they have been rescued. In any case, it is far more necessary that our souls should be saved from sin than that we should be saved from any other form of danger. Let us never give up asking, "God be merciful to me a sinner".

Religion in Eastern Europe

1. The Reformation

Rev David Campbell

This is the first article in a series based on material presented at the 2004 Youth Conference. It gives part of the background to the activities of the Free Presbyterian Church in that part of the world. It is written in the hope that readers in countries such as Scotland will get a sense of how greatly privileged they are because of their Christian heritage.

In Britain we can still consult the writings of Reformation times, which form part of our religious heritage. The nations of Eastern Europe have no such heritage. Let us look very briefly at the history of the Reformation period in these lands to discover the reason.

(1.) *The extent of the Reformation.* Although Eastern Europe does not have a Reformed heritage, a work of reformation did take place there. John Hus and Jerome of Prague (then in Bohemia, now in the Czech Republic) were noble preachers of the gospel and gave their lives in defence of it. God used them to bring the Scriptures to many in the lands of Eastern Europe. The martyrdom of Hus in 1415 "gave the Church more trouble than he could have given had he lived". Not only did his death ignite the Hussite Wars, but his followers spread east and west with their doctrines and all the persecutions of the Roman Church were unable to stop them. Jerome's "learning and wit and his eloquence made him an honoured guest" in the royal courts of Hungary, Poland and Lithuania, as he promoted the doctrines of Wyclif, who sought to reform the English Church. Jerome received these doctrines while in Oxford and was martyred in 1416.

When the Reformation in Western Europe began in the time of Luther, the truths of the gospel spread into the lands of Eastern Europe. Lutheran teaching influenced the Baltic states in the north and many adopted the Augsburg Confession, a Lutheran document. Yet the Old Testament was not translated into their languages until the seventeenth century.

A noted Polish Reformer during the early years of the Reformation was

John Laski. He is described by Erasmus, a prominent writer of the time, as possessing “a glorious ancestry, high rank, prospects the most brilliant, a mind of wonderful richness, uncommon extent of knowledge . . . and with all this there is about him not the faintest taint of pride”. Returning from Western Europe, where he had absorbed the principles of the Reformers, Laski set about reforming the Church in Poland. Opposition made him flee west again but his heart was in the land of his fathers. He did much to strengthen the Reformation Church in the Netherlands at this period and spent some time in England with Hooper, Cranmer and Latimer. He became an authority on Presbyterianism and, under Edward VI, he set up the first Presbyterian church in England, among the foreign Protestants in London. Eventually, in 1556, he was invited to return to Poland, where the king placed him in charge of the Reformed churches. During his absence, the work of Reformation had progressed steadily, and now the people flocked to his standard. A powerful Polish Church was organized.

Further south also, in Hungary, where Jerome of Prague had once preached, a work of reformation was going on apace. Hungary received the Reformation doctrines through both Reformed and Lutheran missionaries. In 1538, Protestants founded the College of Debrecen, which became famous for educating ministers and teachers for Reformed churches. The Germans living in Hungary adopted the Augsburg Confession and the native Magyars the Helvetic Confession. A Hungarian Bible translation was published by Gaspar Karolyi in 1590. The Hungarian Church continued to be administered by superintendents, while councils of elders, according to the model of Geneva, emerged only in the seventeenth century. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) established the city of Debrecen as a fortress of the Reformed faith and Hungary's second largest city has been known as “the Hungarian Geneva”. Calvinism gave Debrecen its first printing house, established in 1561 to publish works that supported Reformation theology. According to one modern Hungarian Reformed scholar, more than 95% of the population of Hungary was Protestant at the end of the sixteenth century.

In the Russian Empire also, missionaries from the West proclaimed the truths of the gospel. Ivan the Terrible, one of Russia's most bloodthirsty Tsars, ruled for over 50 years during the time of the Reformation in Europe. Yet, in spite of his unpredictable outrages, some Protestant ministers were received at his court. As church and state came into conflict in the rest of Europe, the Russian Tsar too had constant conflicts with the leaders of the Orthodox Church. Sadly, this massive empire, which included much of modern Ukraine, did not receive the same blessing as other nations. In the sixteenth century, both Lutheran and Calvinist groups spread in Belarus.

While the countryside was little affected, every city had a Protestant community, and some Protestant books were published in the Belorussian language. Disciples of Calvin and Luther had some limited influence among the nobles of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which then embraced the rest of what is now Ukraine, but this was mainly by way of education. While the gospel did reach parts of the Balkan States in south-eastern Europe, there were only small pockets of Protestants there. Their influence was negligible as the region was then largely controlled by the Turks.

(2.) *The destruction of the work of Reformation.* Considering the successes of the Reformation in Poland and Hungary, we might well ask, What became of this heritage? Briefly, what undermined the Reformation in various parts of Western Europe all but destroyed it in Eastern Europe. In the providence of God, the devil was permitted to bring these nations back into the darkness from which they had been partially delivered. We would give three reasons for the absence of a Reformed heritage in Eastern Europe: (1) false doctrine, (2) major divisions in Protestantism and (3) the blood-thirsty campaign of persecution in the Counter Reformation. These had a big influence in Western Europe, but in the East the Reformed work could not stand up to the onslaught.

In Poland, the work of John Laski was too late to heal the wounds made by heresies and divisions. Being very gentle himself, he strove to the end of his life to bring about a union of Protestants in his own country. But it was to no avail, although there was a union after his death and the Bible was translated into Polish in 1563. In the end, the efforts of the Jesuits and the errors of the Socinians (who did not believe that Christ is God) worked to destroy the Reformation heritage. So complete has the Counter Reformation been in Poland that it is one of the most Roman Catholic countries of Eastern Europe today.

After the Thirty Years' War, Hungary was much reduced in size. Here the Counter Reformation began slowly, but eventually the Inquisition almost extinguished the Protestant Church. The country that had been 95% Protestant became Roman Catholic and the few Protestants who remained were allowed no influence. Yet there remained a small testimony to what the Lord had done in these lands; almost everywhere else became darkness, and spiritual bondage prevailed. Evidence of a work of reformation in the Russian Empire is limited, but the fact that the Jesuits founded a university in the Belorussian city of Vilna in 1579 shows the intensity of Rome's opposition to the work. The university became the centre for the Counter Reformation in the area, and soon a printing press was established there, printing Counter-Reformation literature.

Thus Satan was permitted to destroy much of the good work of the early Reformers and their followers in Eastern Europe. How grateful we ought to be for the goodness of God to us in Scotland, where there is a Reformed work down to the present day. Whatever troubles have beset the Reformed Church in Scotland, we are privileged to have been given a banner to display because of the truth. When we compare our advantages with the situation in Eastern European nations we should remember the scripture: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required".

For Junior Readers

Fading Away

Have you noticed the beautiful variety of colours on the trees this autumn? There are all sorts of shades of greens, oranges and reds. Before long the autumn winds will blow all the leaves off the trees and the branches will gradually become quite bare.

Does this remind you of a verse in the Bible? Perhaps Isaiah 64:6: "We all do fade as a leaf"? But what does it mean? It compares your youth to the fresh green leaves in spring. But it tells you that the day will surely come when, if God spares you till then, you will grow old and fade away. What then? As Peter wrote: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away." So like the leaf you will fade, like the grass you will wither, and like the flower you will fall. You will not remain here for ever.

What else fades and passes away? What about the pleasures of this life? They may seem very attractive to you when you are young. But do not be too much taken up with them. Like bubbles which children blow, they will burst when you try to catch them, and you will realise that there is no lasting pleasure in them. At the longest they are only "for a season".

Perhaps at this stage you are not concerned about what the world has to offer. You follow your parents' instructions, attend church, learn your Bible verses and your Catechism answers. But do not be proud or self-righteous about these things. On the other hand, be very careful that these good habits do not fade. Then it would have to be said to you in the words of the Bible: "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away".

At this time of year we see many things which fade away. What about all the Christmas trees and decorations which seem to appear everywhere each December? Before long the trees will have to be taken outside and left to wither. The decorations will become tattered and have to be taken down.

How very foolish to try to associate these things with the religion of our Lord and Saviour.

The Bible is very plain about such customs; they date back to the heathen of Bible times. In the prophecy of Jeremiah we are told clearly: "Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen . . . for the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest . . . they deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not". Do not be enticed by all the empty, worldly activities which take place in the name of Christmas but have nothing to do with true religion. As Solomon said, "Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long".

As this year comes to an end, and in the midst of so much that is passing away, where is your hope and trust? Pray that it would be in the One who said: "I am the Lord, I change not". Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and today and for ever".

J van Kralingen

The Voice of Conscience

The voice of conscience is really the voice of God in everyone's heart, telling us what is right and what is wrong. By listening to what it says we know how to do the right and to avoid the wrong. But if we disobey the voice, it becomes less clear, and this is why some sinners get so hardened in their sins.

Now I want to tell you how a little boy, many years ago, learned a very painful lesson. His name was Willie, and at the time this happened he was 10 years old. His father used to go to a place of worship on Monday evenings, because he had to lead the singing and attend to the library, and Willie was glad to go with him. One evening his father said he could not go, as he had a special piece of work to finish, and would be in the workshop until very late; so Willie must go by himself and tell the minister. I am sure that he meant to obey, but on the way there he met four boys who persuaded him to go with them to play in a field.

He then began to think how he could deceive his father on returning home, and then conscience began to speak. Well, he went home at the usual time, half past eight, and sat down to supper. His father came in from the workshop and asked the expected question: "Who prayed at the meeting tonight?" Then came the prepared answer: "Mr Barlow, Mr Dexter and Uncle Reuben". At that moment there was a knock at the door and, when the

visitor came in, it was Uncle Reuben. The visitor was asked to join them at supper; and Willie sat there suffering two things: he was afraid he should be found out and punished; yes, but conscience was telling him that he had disobeyed his father, deceived his parents and acted the part of a liar.

His father went back to the workshop at nine o'clock, but Uncle Reuben stayed until it was nearly 10. Willie was not found out and crept up to bed. Did he kneel down to pray? No. Did he go quietly to sleep? No. The solemn church clock struck 10 in the darkness, and every note gave pain. Still he kept awake, and the clock struck 11, each note telling him he had done wrong. Then, after another hour, the clock struck 12; and each note seemed to Willie as if it was God telling him that *He* knew all about it, although he had escaped punishment.

Some years passed away before Willie confessed to his father, and they rejoiced together that God is a God of mercy, and that there is forgiveness with Him if by His grace we are brought to confess our sins. Willie is now an old man and loves to write to his young friends and tell them of the mercy of God to those who seek His favour.

William Wileman

For Younger Readers

Who Got First Choice?

Do you remember reading in the Bible about Abraham and his nephew Lot? You can find out about them in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible.

God was good to them. They both had lots and lots of cattle. They had so many cattle that the men could no longer live near each other. There was not enough food for all these animals to eat. And there were arguments between the men who were looking after Abraham's cattle and the men who were looking after Lot's cattle. So Abraham and Lot had to separate.

Who do you think got to choose where to live? Do you think it should have been Abraham, because he was older?

Well, if Abraham was selfish he would have demanded the right to choose. But Abraham was not selfish. He asked Lot which way he wanted to go, to the right or to the left. Abraham gave Lot the first choice.

Wasn't Abraham kind? He is an example for us to follow. Abraham was not selfish and God blessed him.

The Young People's Magazine

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*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)*

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Looking Around Us

“Thou Shalt not Steal”

An American minister was preaching, Sabbath by Sabbath, on the Ten Commandments. When he spoke about the Eighth Commandment, he suggested to the people in the congregation that if they had stolen anything they should bring it to the church and place it in bins provided in the lobby of the building. He was probably unprepared for the response. The bins filled up with men’s shirts, towels taken from hotel bedrooms, and other items including a power drill and a soldering iron.

This shows the power of God’s law to work on the human conscience. God has put a conscience in every human being, to raise the alarm when they sin – as the story about Willie, earlier in this issue, illustrates. And conscience will respond when God’s law is proclaimed – in some people more so, and in others less.

This makes it all the sadder that many people are losing touch with God’s law because, more in the United Kingdom than in the United States, they do not go church or read their Bibles. And a generation is passing through school with little or no contact with the Scriptures or the Ten Commandments.

Attempts are made to improve children’s behaviour, but can we really expect these efforts to be successful if there is no reference to the source of final authority – whether in school or in the wider community? That source of final authority is, of course, God speaking through His law.

Conscience needs to be enlightened by the Word of God so that it would react at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. Let us not ignore our conscience when it raises an alarm because of sin.

The Archaeopteryx

Archaeopteryx fossils have long been valued as examples of missing links, by those who promote the theory of evolution. In 1982 a biologist at Harvard, one of America’s most prominent universities, claimed that the archaeopteryx was “the almost-perfect missing link between reptiles and birds”. On the other hand, those who accept the Genesis account of creation have pointed to the archaeopteryx’s flight feathers, which are fully developed and show that the creature was indeed a bird, and not a link with any other creature.

Now, however, some British scientists – who no doubt still accept the theory of evolution – have published new conclusions in the scientific journal *Nature*. They have used computer techniques to reconstruct the part of the archaeopteryx’s skull that held its brain, ears and eyes. They have

found that these were very similar to the corresponding parts of living birds, and that the archaeopteryx possessed everything that was necessary to enable it to fly. So the scientists have decided that the archaeopteryx was not some kind of link between birds and their imaginary evolutionary ancestors.

But no one would ever have wasted time looking for missing links if they had believed God's revelation in the Bible. That revelation is always reliable: "Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of Thy righteous judgements endureth for ever" (Psalm 119:160).

Prayer

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways;
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And cry, "Behold, he prays!"

O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us how to pray.

James Montgomery