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The Selfishness of Sin

A young man and a young woman become firm friends. They decide to get married. Their wedding day comes, and at the service they make vows to each other, before God. These vows amount to this: to love each other wholeheartedly, until death.

But too often the husband walks out on his wife because he has set his heart on some other woman, or the wife walks out on her husband because she has set her heart on some other man. This is to act selfishly, to think only of their own happiness, which they imagine will be much greater with their new boyfriend/girlfriend than with the one whom they promised to love for the rest of their lives. This is also selfishly to ignore the interests of their children, who should be able to grow up with both their parents. And it is to ignore their vows before God.

But all sin is selfish. Jesus tells us: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). In other words: How do we want others to act to us? That is how we should act to them. We do not want people to act selfishly to us, and we should not act selfishly to them. Yet, more or less, everyone acts selfishly. We forget, or do not care to remember, that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves – and, as Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, our neighbour is anybody we come in contact with.

Mankind was created in perfect holiness; so neither Adam nor Eve could have been accused of selfishness before they fell into sin. They loved each other perfectly all the time. They always thought of what each other would like; Adam tried to please Eve, and Eve tried to please Adam. And they both wanted to please God in everything they did; they always wanted to put Him first. In this they succeeded, because they were perfectly holy; there was no sin in their hearts.

But as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they became selfish. See how Adam blamed Eve for his sin. He told God: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat". Does that sound like a loving, unselfish husband? No doubt, Adam still loved Eve, but it was no

longer an unselfish love. Indeed he seems also to have been blaming God, who had given him a perfect wife. Adam no longer loved God; he no longer put God first.

We are all fallen sinners. We find it easy to be selfish. Unless God gives us new hearts, we think more of ourselves than of others, and we certainly do not give Him the first place. The question that we usually feel to be most important is: What do *I* most want to do? But the first question should always be: What does *God* want me to do? It was only when God changed Paul's heart that he thought of asking the question: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Now what he wanted to know was what God wanted him to do. He was beginning to learn to put God first. Some years later, he was still very conscious of how devoted believers should be to Christ. He wrote that they "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Think of the woman of Samaria. She married her husband. Then something happened and she married someone else. Then she married another husband, and another husband, and another husband still. When Christ met her at the well, she had already lived with five husbands. Now she was living with a man who was not her husband – someone she was not even married to. No doubt selfishness had got in, on every occasion, between this woman and each of her husbands. She was ignoring God's commandments, especially the commandment that says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery". She was not putting God first. She needed a new heart.

The wonderful thing is that the Lord saved her. She was born again and she believed on Christ. She now had a new heart, and her selfishness was being taken away. Whatever else changed in her life, we can be perfectly sure that she gave up her relationship with the man who was not her husband. That was part of putting God first.

William Mackay lived about 16 miles away from the church in Tongue in the far north of Scotland; there was not even a road to his house. One Sabbath in winter he walked all the way to church through drifts of snow. The minister asked him why he had ventured out on such a stormy day when, apart from himself, only people living near the church had come to the service. There were three things that had moved him to come to church that day, William told him: (1.) The Lord had given him strength and he considered it his duty to wait on Him in public worship. (2.) He came to add to the number in the congregation that day and so encourage the minister, when he knew that many would stay away. (3.) He came so that, if the Spirit of God should be working in the church that day, He might not find his pew empty. Here was a man showing a remarkable lack of selfishness. He was

putting God first and, at the same time, hoping to get a blessing for his soul. Wise man! Clearly, God had given him a new heart

Paul, the woman of Samaria and William Mackay are now in heaven. They are as free from selfishness as our first parents were in their original state, when God created them – before they fell into sin. God has completed the saving work He began in these three people in this world; so they love Him perfectly, and they will always do so. They are consistently putting God first in everything.

How can we have our selfishness cured? How can we put God first? One thing is sure: we cannot cure ourselves. But God can cure us; He can give us new hearts. That is something we should praying for very earnestly.

The Role of Women in Society

4. Women in the Home

Rev Neil M Ross

This is the fourth part of a paper given at the 2004 Youth Conference. The last part looked at the teaching of the Bible about women in the Church.

Some verses in Titus 2 lead us to the main role of the woman in society. They show us that older women are to be “teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (verses 3-5). The woman is, above everything, to be the helper of her husband in his role as the head of the family; she is to carry out the responsibilities of a wife and mother.

“The young women”, Paul also says in Titus 2, “are to be sober” – that is, as John Gill explains it, they are to be modest and temperate; and also wise and prudent in their conduct to their husbands, and in the management of family affairs. They are also to love their husbands – that is, they are to help and assist them all they can; to seek their honour and interest; to try to please them in all things; to secure peace, harmony and union; to conduct themselves affectionately towards them, and sympathize with them in all their afflictions and distresses. This love to their husbands, Gill goes on, is not so much in the sense of being faithful to them (that is covered by the requirement to be “chaste”) as not being sullen and ill-natured. And, of course, their love to their husbands is to be shown by, among other things, obedience – “obedient to their own husbands”.

Another requirement is: “to love their children” – not with an over-

indulgent and ungoverned affection, says Gill, but so as to seek their real good. Parents are to seek, not only their temporal good, but also their spiritual and eternal welfare. They are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; they must use proper discipline – otherwise a parent may be said to hate a child. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

And women are to be “keepers at home”. This does not mean that they are to be closeted up in the home, as it were, but just that they are to be homemakers. As another commentator rightly explains, they are to be “attentive to their domestic concerns, and to their duties in their families”. The wife and mother of whom we read in Proverbs 31 “looked well to the ways of her household” – that is, she was an excellent homemaker, although she was very active outside the home.

Another verse which speaks especially to wives and mothers is 1 Timothy 5:14. Paul says, “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house”. True, this verse speaks about widows who are yet young, but at the same time it echoes the creation mandate that, through marriage, mankind is to increase and the earth be populated. And in family life especially, the woman is to be the helper of her husband. God has created man to glorify Him; therefore mankind is to multiply within the framework of marriage so that (as Malachi 2:15 shows) a godly seed may be raised up to serve and glorify God from generation to generation.

No one is as suitable in guiding the household practically, day by day, as the wife and mother of the home. This is a most important task, but the feminist movement has been so successful in denigrating it that many, even among professing Christians, think it demeaning that one should be tied to the work of being a wife and mother. We are to note, however, that the importance of her task is shown by the word “guide” (as in 1 Timothy 5:14, “guide the house”). In Greek it is a strong word, which may be translated *rule* or *rule the house*, not, of course, by usurping authority over the husband and father, but by managing and directing household affairs.

Scripture abounds in examples of godly wives and mothers whose work in the family, especially by teaching their children in the faith and showing them a good example, resulted in a blessing for generations to come. No doubt Hannah prepared Samuel as much as she could for serving the Lord, as did Timothy's mother (and his grandmother).

The whole drift of Scripture passages about family life is that the wife and mother ordinarily devotes herself to her husband, children and home. Today, many mothers go out to work and fathers look after the home, but as Anne Graham rightly says in *Womanhood Revisited*, “The Bible never suggests

that role reversal is an option. Men and women both have important but different responsibilities in the building up and functioning of a home, but these responsibilities, in normal circumstances, are not interchangeable. Yet many Christians happily concur with the idea of the house-husband as a commendable alternative lifestyle. This has everything to do with feminist belittling of manhood. It has nothing to do with Biblical masculinity.”

Another activity in the home which some mothers engage in is home schooling. If they are able to cope with such a tremendous responsibility, good and well – and may the divine blessing attend their efforts! But while mothers are to instruct their children in the Christian faith, we do not believe as a Church that the Scriptures lay home schooling on them as a duty. Some mothers are very successful at home schooling, and the result of their work is to be admired. There are other mothers, however, for whom the burden of educating their children at home is just far too much, and they are forced to give it up. They should never be made to feel guilty on that account.

Single Women: Here is another class of women who are sometimes made to feel guilty by thoughtless people. We can be so taken up with the value of marriage, and in promoting the traditional family, that we lose sight of the needs of single women and the valuable contribution which many of them make to society generally, and to the Church in particular. “As Christians,” says Sharon James, “we want to support family life. The danger is that we elevate the good to the position of the best, giving the impression that family life is the ultimate aim for human life.” Then she rightly counsels her readers to remember that Jesus put human marriage and family in second place to following Him.

We see in Scripture that it can be an advantage to be single – for example, for some women serving the Lord in a mission situation. The married Christian woman is concerned about pleasing her husband, as 1 Corinthians 7:34 says, while the unmarried Christian woman is able to devote herself more fully to serving the Lord.

It is naturally the wish of most single women to marry one day and have a family. It is not good for human beings to be alone – man has been created as a social being – but there are some Christian women whose desire before God for this blessing has not been granted. They see in Scripture that “God setteth the solitary in families” (Psalm 68:6) – but not in their case, as far as marriage is concerned. Why? Such women are enabled, sooner or later, to submit to the sovereign will of God, believing that if they delight themselves in Him, He will not fail them or forsake them. No doubt they can testify, to an extent that others cannot, of the blessedness of being set in the family of God and having their Maker as their husband.

Scripture shows that in certain circumstances it is not a bad thing to be single, but rather the opposite. So those who are married should not display a pitying attitude to those who are single, nor should they badger them about their singleness, but rather respect them as singles.

Many single women are homemakers par excellence, although they have neither husband or children. Their homes are havens of hospitality to relatives and friends. They often prove to have a cementing effect on their extended family. Many of them have a warm heart and a warm home for the Lord's people, including young people, as many of yourselves can testify. Think of the widow of Zarephath, who fed Elijah during the famine, and Mary and Martha, who entertained the Saviour.

All in all, the contribution of many single women to society in many fields and professions cannot be calculated. They are in a position to make a commitment to various kinds of work, which married women generally cannot do, as we hope to notice next.

James Kidd of Aberdeen

3. Minister of Gilcomston, 1801 onwards

Rev D W B Somerset

This is another part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. In the second section, we saw Kidd, a native of Northern Ireland, become a Professor of Hebrew in Aberdeen and a preacher of the gospel.

On 15 June 1801, James Kidd was inducted as minister of Gilcomston Chapel of Ease in Aberdeen. The so-called "chapels of ease" had come into existence because the population of Scotland had grown from one and a quarter million people to one and a half million between 1750 and 1800. Many of the parishes in towns now had too many people for a single minister to look after, and the obvious thing for the Church of Scotland to have done was to have divided these parishes into more manageable sizes. The non-evangelical ministers, however, were not prepared to see this happen, partly because of the financial consequences to themselves. What happened instead was that chapels of ease were built to accommodate the extra people. The minister of a chapel of ease had to do the work of a parish minister but was not entitled to be a member of a Presbytery.

The Gilcomston Chapel of Ease had been built in 1771 to provide for the inhabitants of Denburn, a poor suburb of Aberdeen, largely inhabited by weavers and shoemakers. John Duncan, usually referred to as Rabbi Duncan, was born there in 1796 and later became a member of Kidd's congregation,

before becoming a well-known, godly minister. His father was a shoemaker in Denburn.

Quite what the state of the congregation was in 1801, we are not sure, but the previous ministers had certainly not been as remarkable as Kidd. He had three services every Sabbath, the morning service lasting over two hours. Within a short time after his induction, the chapel, which seated nearly 2000 people, was filled to overflowing; the congregation was one of the largest in Scotland. Gilcomston Chapel of Ease is still in use (but now called Denburn Parish Church) and it is hard to believe that so many people could have crammed into it, but apparently the seats were “narrow almost beyond endurance” in Kidd’s day. At his annual communion, over 2000 went to the Lord’s table, with ten table addresses. The service, held in the open air, lasted the entire day.

Kidd’s preaching was extraordinary. Generally he preached from the Old Testament in the morning, the Gospels in the afternoon, and the Epistles in the evening. He was thoroughly scriptural and evangelical in his doctrine, his mind being “deeply imbued with the truth”, but to this was added a natural energy and eloquence which made him very popular. The descriptions of his preaching speak of his “argumentative energy” and “vehement volubility”. His manner, it is said, was “warm, fervent and commanding” and his language “bold, piercing and energetic”. He was simple too and easy to follow, and one writer said, “I do not believe that he ever preached a sermon without being thoroughly understood by his poorest hearers”.

On top of all this, however, there was an eccentricity about him which kept the attention of his hearers. No one knew what he might do or say next. A typical example of this was when he illustrated the biblical teaching on the corruption of the human heart by stating that men by nature were “rotten at heart, like JC’s potatoes”. The shopkeeper JC who was thus insulted was sitting right in front of him at the time, and was naturally both embarrassed and indignant at hearing this description of his wares. Doubtless Kidd was deeply apologetic afterwards.

On another occasion he was lecturing on the book of Daniel. Donald Sage, who was later minister of Resolis, told that “when he came to describe the sudden and appalling appearance of the ‘handwriting on the wall’, as well as its paralysing effects upon the guilty Belshazzar, Dr Kidd was not content with merely describing the scene in so many words, but, to impress the minds of his congregation still more with all the points of the case, he considered it necessary to act the scene before their eyes. Accordingly, after giving a very natural and powerful picture of Belshazzar’s terror, to the utter amazement of his hearers, he became the identical Belshazzar him-

self. He began to tremble from head to foot, he raised his hands and his eyes in parallel lines to the roof of the church, knocked his knees vigorously together, and ultimately dropped down, gradually and gracefully, onto the pulpit floor. After remaining there just long enough to allow his astounded hearers to recover their breath, the doctor got up again and concluded his lecture." We are not sure that such behaviour can be justified in the pulpit, but perhaps we can make the excuse for Kidd that he often used to make for himself. After some extraordinary or unseemly incident, he would apologise sorrowfully for his behaviour, explaining that he had been "seized with an Irish fit".

On another occasion Kidd was preaching on his annual visit to one of the parish churches in the town of Arbroath. A hearer described the scene: "The service got on prosperously till it came to the time for the Doctor to give out his text. At this stage he seemed to be in a state of considerable annoyance and confusion. He turned over the leaves of the old pulpit Bible from Genesis to the Revelation. Then he took the Bible up and shook out all the numerous stray leaves onto the floor of the pulpit. He took up the stray leaves one by one and examined them carefully; he crammed them back into the Bible again; he shut it, and gave it a violent knock with his fist, saying, 'Do you call *that* a Bible? My text is not to be found in it!' Then to a man in the nearest pew: 'Here, sir, give me the loan of your Bible'.

"And thus, under difficulties, he started his sermon, and was well on, and in the full flood of his eloquence, when suddenly he hitched up, saying, 'I don't know how long I have preached; you have no clock in the front of the gallery, as you should have, to admonish me, and I have nothing (pulling it out) but this old rattle-trap of a watch, which goes an hour fast one day and an hour slow the next'. Then (raising his voice): 'I'll tell you what, my friends; I'm coming back next year, and if by that time you don't have a new Bible on this desk, and a new clock in the front of that gallery, I'll let you hear about it on the deafest side of your heads!'" Needless to say, the new Bible and clock were both in place well before Kidd's next visit.

He had a particular dislike of people sleeping during his services, and there are numerous anecdotes of his attempts to awaken them. "You sir," he thundered, "number 3 in the second seat from the front in the top left, what are you asleep for? Rouse him up, rouse him up! Won't he wake? Put your thumb into him, his next neighbour!"

In the summer the church became so warm that those who felt drowsy during the sermon had permission to stand up for a while if this would help them to stay awake. Sometimes on a summer evening as many as 30 or 40 people might be standing up in different parts of the church.

Kidd had an equal dislike for coughing, and in one of his published sermons, he concludes his introductory remarks with a request for attention “without the disturbance of coughing or throat-clearing, which so frequently obstructs both speaking and hearing”. On another occasion he was recorded as saying, “Give over that coughing, Sir! You’re disturbing me. Do you cough that way all the week? It is my opinion that a number of people come here once a week just to clear their throats.”

Apart from his preaching, another part of the service in which Dr Kidd excelled was his public prayers. “Prayer”, it was said, “was to him the very soul and breath of religion.” His public prayers were notably fluent and appropriate. One man, describing a typical service at Gilcomston, spoke of the “beautiful” prayer that Dr Kidd might be expected to utter. Another man related how on “the first occasion when I resumed attending the church, I was taken all of a heap with listening to his first prayer. The easy flow of language, the choiceness of his topics, and the brevity of the whole came upon me like a new revelation.”

For Junior Readers

An Enemy of God?

Have you ever thought of yourself as an enemy of God? Perhaps you feel shocked at the idea! Why, you say, I attend church, I read my Bible, I even learn parts of it by heart and I pray to God. Surely then I must be His friend.

But what does the Word of God tell you? It tells you that you are enemies of God by birth. As a result of your fall into sin in your first father Adam, you have been born into the world with “birth sin”, or “original sin”. Not only that but, since you were born, your sins have made you “enemies in your mind by wicked works”.

However well your outward behaviour may seem to conform to the Word of God, you have a “carnal mind [which] is enmity against God”. In fact you have been “taken captive by [the devil] at his will”. So, if you are in the devil’s camp, you must surely be an enemy to God! What a sad and dangerous place to be!

Is there any way of escape from the devil’s captivity? I am sure you have heard about people being taken hostage. In wartime, hostages are sometimes taken by one side or the other. Even in peacetime, people are kidnapped and held hostage. Before the kidnappers will release them, they demand that a ransom be paid, usually a very large sum of money. The

kidnappers promise to release the hostage alive when they are paid the ransom.

But what is a ransom? It is a price paid for freedom. Can you think of any verse in the Bible that tells you of a ransom price being paid for sinners, who are enemies of God and held captive by the devil? Jesus, speaking of Himself, said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many". What price did He pay for the salvation of sinners? Did He not give His life?

The apostle Peter wrote: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ". No less a price would do. Much as your parents and relatives love you, they cannot pay a ransom great enough to save your soul:

"Yet none of these his brother can redeem by any way;

Nor can he unto God for him sufficient ransom pay.

Their soul's redemption precious is..."

Psalm 49

Yes, it was a very costly ransom. As Christ also said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". No greater ransom could be paid. And Paul points out another amazing thing: "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8). Christ gave His life as a ransom for sinners.

Will you not come and confess that you are a sinner, that you are an enemy to God? Will you not pray then that God would save you; that He would say of you: "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24)?

J van Kralingen

Niff and His Dogs

Niff was one of the worst men in his village. He had a powerful voice and, when he was angry or drunk, everybody could hear him shouting his blasphemies. The village children were afraid of him and his sad-looking wife and ragged children must have lived a miserable existence. He organised bull-baiting events, where dogs were encouraged to attack bulls – and the more the blood flowed, the better the entertainment. Niff also kept cockerels for fighting and a number of racing dogs. Many of the publicans in the area kept on good terms with Niff; he would organise events like bull-baiting and cock-fighting at their premises; the crowds who gathered to watch would buy large amounts of alcohol. But before these evenings were over, fights often broke out among the spectators.

John Ashworth lived in the same district and took a great interest in the welfare of such characters. One day he met Niff on the road. Niff had three dogs on chains and was heading for dog races near Manchester, where the spectators would gamble on the winners. "Well, Niff, how are you?" Ashworth asked him.

Niff stopped, took a filthy pipe out of his mouth and answered gruffly: "I do not know that it much matters how I am. Just stand on one side and let me and my dogs have room to pass."

"But before you pass I should like to tell you what thought was passing through my mind the moment I saw you and your dogs." Niff did not reply, but he stood in front of Ashworth as he went on: "I have been thinking you are the worst man out of hell, and I am amazed you have not gone there long since. You have been the ringleader of every description of wickedness for the last 30 years. You have led hundreds, if not thousands, into sin and ruin, and I fear many of them are for ever lost; and yet you, the principal cause of their destruction, are permitted to live on in your wickedness. You are the greatest wonder of God's mercy in all Lancashire."

Niff was clearly annoyed. But the next moment he hung his head and looked ashamed. Ashworth felt he had made some impression on Niff's hard heart. He put his hand on Niff's shoulder and went on: "Now, Niff, is not all I have said true? And is it not astonishing that God has so long spared you? O I wish you had been converted in your youth and then, instead of being a worker for the devil, doing evil, you would have been a servant of God, doing good." Ashworth then invited him to come to an open-air service the next Sabbath and added: "Who knows but it may lead to your salvation?"

Niff, of course, had never paid any attention to his need of salvation; he would no doubt have thought it the most unlikely thing that could possibly happen to him. And most people would have agreed. But Ashworth did not think it impossible, though he felt that if any man in England was beyond the reach of God's grace, it was Niff. He knew the power of God to save the worst of sinners, for Jesus' sake. But Niff told Ashworth: "I am not going to promise anything of the sort; so stand out of my way". He then barged past and headed for the race.

Several hours later, Ashworth saw Niff again, now on his way home. Niff did not want to meet him, so he crossed the road. Ashworth crossed the road too. "Well, Niff," he told him, "you are returning from the race. I do not care whether your dogs have won or lost, but I do care about your precious soul and I wish you would make me a promise."

"What do you want me to promise?" Niff asked sharply.

"That you will be shaved on Saturday night."

“What has my being shaved on Saturday night to do with it?” Niff wanted to know, and he laughed loudly.

“Well, say that you will be shaved and I’ll tell you.”

“Well, to get rid of you, I promise that I will. But it will be the first time for years.” He usually shaved on a Sabbath morning.

Ashworth’s next request was that he would put on a clean shirt that Sabbath morning. Niff laughed again and said, “That will be something new in our house if I do, but I have generally put it on on the Monday, if I had one. But I will see about it, and I think I will do it.”

Ashworth now had a further request, which explained the previous two: “Will you come to the Green and be at the service?”

“No, no, I shall go no further. I have promised more than I am likely to perform, but the man that sees me at a preaching will have good eyes.”

“I hope my eyes will see you, and that God in His mercy will meet you. Goodbye, Niff.”

Sabbath came. It was a beautiful day. As the crowds gathered for the service on the Green, there was no sign of Niff. During the singing, Ashworth noticed him standing at the door of his house; he seemed to be wearing a clean shirt. But Ashworth was soon disappointed to see him walk away. Yet, some time later, Ashworth’s eyes could see Niff under the branches of a nearby holly bush. As the service proceeded, Niff came closer. Everybody was amazed to see him.

The preacher spoke on the words: “Escape for thy life” – the words which the angels used to encourage Lot to flee quickly from Sodom. And he went on to speak of Christ coming to this world, taking upon Himself the form of a man, weeping, groaning and dying to save sinners. As Niff listened, he moved farther forward; he seemed to be totally absorbed in the glorious truths he was hearing for the first time. God’s Word was finding its way into his heart.

Niff was also persuaded to come to the other two services that day. And he waited for a prayer meeting after the evening service. He was clearly very impressed. During one of the prayers he looked up to Ashworth, who was right beside him, and groaned: “What must I do? What must I do?”

“Can you give up your dogs, Niff?” Ashworth asked him quietly.

“Sell my dogs! Sell my dogs! What has that to do with it?”

“All must be given up for Christ. Your dogs are your gods. Can you part with them for salvation?”

“Give up my dogs! What harm have they done? No, no; I cannot give up such good runners as they are.”

After the meeting, Ashworth called at Niff’s house. His wife and children

were watching him in amazement. "I see you are astonished", Ashworth told her, "and no wonder. Your husband has attended three religious services today. I think a great change is coming over him. You know what a wicked life he has led, and how you and your children have suffered in consequence. His tongue, that has millions of times blasphemed the name of God, has this day cried for mercy." And, once more, Ashworth told Niff that he must give up his dogs.

"What must I do? Cannot I keep those dogs and get pardon too? The dogs are innocent enough, are they not?"

"Yes," Ashworth answered, "the dogs are not to blame; but I am informed that you have three races yet to come off, and there is much betting on them. But dogs and wicked companions must all go." Ashworth knelt down and prayed with the family. He left Niff still in tears. For more than a week, Niff continued in great concern for his soul. Then Niff got rid of his dogs.

That night he could not sleep. About 2 o'clock he rose from his bed and fell on his knees to pray. "O my Lord Jesus Christ," he cried in such a loud voice that the others in the house were alarmed, "I have now given up all that I cared about for Thee. If there be anything else left, show me and I will give it up too. Jesus save me! Pardon my mountain of guilt and speak my sins forgiven." God heard his prayer, and Niff believed that he was now a sinner saved by grace. He began to praise God in just as loud a voice as before, so that his wife and children thought he had gone mad. Then he went down on his knees again to pray for their salvation.

A few days later, Niff visited Ashworth and told him what had happened. With real sincerity he asked Ashworth what he must do to keep him from falling back into sin and how to get rid of his friends, who were given to cock-fighting, dog-racing, drinking and Sabbath-breaking; he expected they would be coming to his house as before.

"Well, Niff," Ashworth told him, "they must be utterly forsaken." And he went on: "When your old wicked companions come to see you, ask them to sit down, and tell them all about your conversion". Then he was to ask them to come to church. Ashworth concluded: "You will by these means soon rid yourself of them, or perhaps do some good".

After his conversion, Niff had great sorrow because of how effectively Jimmy, his oldest son, had copied his example. But his great sorrow turned into great joy when he saw Jimmy turning to Christ. Just a year later, Jimmy died. Then Ashworth watched Niff, standing beside Jimmy's bed, stretch out both his hands towards heaven and cry, "Glory to my God, I have now one son in the mansions above; my Jimmy is now in heaven. Lord, convert my whole family, and then we shall meet in paradise."

So Rich a Reward

J B Waterbury

This is the conclusion of the book, *Advice to a Young Christian*, and has been edited. Chapter 28 appeared in the April issue and ended: "May you aim high in seeking the prize of your high calling! May you go from strength to strength, from victory to victory, until you inherit the highest rewards of the blessed ones in heaven!"

I have been urging on you various duties which are important in forming a high standard of godliness; they have to do especially with God and your own soul. I have not considered the duties you owe to other people; they are not so important. Besides, if you pay attention to the advice I have given you; if you persevere in the path I have marked out; if you are diligent in prayer, self-examination, and studying the Bible as I have urged you, you will most certainly not be careless about the various other duties of life. The course I have recommended will have a controlling influence on your relationships with others; it will put everything in its proper place. It will make you obedient to your parents, a friend to your sister, and diligent in your studies.

I cannot believe that the serious warnings and earnest appeals which I have made to you will be entirely wasted. I trust that, even after I am dead, you will display all that maturity of knowledge, purity of character, and holiness of purpose and action which together make up what a Christian should be. But if, after all, you should compromise with the world and be willing to settle down on that low and unworthy standard which is too common among our churches; if a few years should find you foremost in pleasure and fashion, and undistinguished from the noisy, vain and trifling crowd; I think it will be because your conscience has been rapidly hardened and your heart quickly steeled to a sense of your duty.

But I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak. Still, I know more than you can yet know of the deceitfulness of the heart, the subtle suggestions of Satan and the powerful attractions which the world presents to a warm, youthful imagination. You are as yet living a sheltered life, so you can form only a faint idea of the power of the world's temptations. Perhaps you are ready to conclude that your heart cannot be conquered by any of their assaults. Be assured that this is a great mistake. If you indulge this thought, you will most certainly fall into sin and you will have to weep over the disgrace which you will bring on religion. Perhaps you will have to regret the ruin of some soul who has been made bolder in sin through your carelessness. You have a dangerous road to travel. You cannot be too watchful. You cannot offer up too many prayers for guidance and

protection. Your armour cannot be too bright, nor your eye too cautious.

Remember what I have already said, that falling away begins in the closet. Watch there for its first appearance. Be ready to notice it and correct it. Prayer is your stronghold. In every dark, distressing hour, cast your eye upward to God. When the world seems most fascinating and draws you away to itself, God – and God alone – is the “strength of your heart”. When trouble comes and you become sad and lonely, where can you look but to Him who hears the mourner’s cry? Prayer has always been powerful and effective. It has wiped away the tear of the one who is repenting and lit up a gleam of hope. It has broken the strong cords of rebellion and changed the lion into a lamb.

In the work of self-examination, be thorough, regular and persevering. Remember your aim: it is a high character. Deal faithfully with your soul. Judge it severely, from the law of God. Think ahead to the great account you must give to God at last. Then the judgement will not burst upon you unprepared. You will go forward calmly to the bar of God and, conscious of forgiveness, you will unhesitatingly open your heart to His careful inspection.

Let the Word of God dwell in your heart. Study its holy pages with prayerful diligence and submit to its doctrines with total faith. Let it direct you in what you do; let it guide you in what you believe; and may it be the foundation of your hope.

Briefly, take to yourself the whole armour of God: the shield of faith, by which you may quench the fiery darts of Satan; the helmet of salvation, to defend your head; the breastplate of righteousness, to cover your bosom from the arrows of slander or envy; the sword of the Spirit, whose sharp edge will make you fearless in the attack, and powerful in the defence. Thus protected, look upward and press onward. God is your strength, and when He strengthens the arm – even the arm of the weakest believer – that arm is irresistible. Do not lay aside your weapons while one foe within you is unsubdued, or one enemy without is unconquered. But life is short. The time is at hand when you shall have a full and free discharge. The crown of glory glitters in prospect. After a few more days of obedience to your King, that crown shall be placed upon your brow.

When death comes, he will prove your last enemy. As he falls beneath your triumphant struggle, you may hear the notes of victory bursting from ten thousand angels on your dying ear. Then your work is done. Then your warfare is over. You shall receive a golden harp and learn heavenly music. In your eternal song, you shall for ever chant the praise of Him who sits upon the throne, and of the Lamb. The trials of life will be remembered no more – or if remembered, they will serve as new themes of praise and

thanksgiving. Who would not struggle a few short days to inherit so rich a reward – to wear for ever so bright a crown?

For Younger Readers

Can We Understand?

Four men came along the road riding on motor cycles. The first of them stopped beside me as I walked towards them. He asked me a question, but I could not understand him. He tried a second time, but still I could not understand what he said.

Why did I find it so difficult to understand the man? Because he came from another country and spoke a different language. Yes, he was trying to speak English. But he did not know English well enough to make me understand what he was trying to say.

There was a time when everyone in the world spoke the same language. There were not many people then. They were all living in the same place. Everyone could understand what everyone else was saying. Nobody ever had any difficulty.

One day they decided to make a very high tower. They said, "Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven". They did not trust God to care for them.

So God stopped them from understanding each other any longer. Now they were all speaking different languages. They had to separate from each other and live in different places.

You could not have understood the man on the motor cycle either. But if God was to speak to you, could you understand?

Yes, you could.

But how does God speak to us?

He speaks to us in the Bible. And He has made it possible for us to hear Him speaking to us in English. The Bible was not written at first in English. But God is good to us. And one way He has shown Himself good to us is that He made some men want to turn the Bible into English. So we have the Bible in words we can understand.

You may find it difficult to understand much of the Bible. But ask God to help you understand. Ask God to speak to you. Ask Him to show you some of the wonderful things in the Bible.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2003-04

UK Prizes and Awards

Senior Section

Prizes: *Dingwall:* Joanne Mackenzie. *Glasgow:* Jacqueline Freeke. *Halkirk:* Cherith Sutton. *Inverness:* Ben Fiddes. *London:* Naomi K Rowland.

Awards with Merit: *Inverness:* Hanna J Schouten. *Kyle:* Joanne Whear. *North Uist:* Margaret J Macdonald.

Awards: *Farr:* Ruth M MacQueen. *Fort William:* Nathaniel Smith. *South Harris:* Iain MacLean. *Stornoway:* Angus D Macleod.

Intermediate Section

Prizes: *Bonar Bridge:* Rebecca Campbell. *Dingwall:* Kathryn Mackenzie, Neil MacLean. *Glasgow:* Kenneth C Gillies, Marion MacLeod. *Inverness:* Mark Campbell, Chloe Fiddes. *London:* Josie van Kralingen. *South Harris:* Stewart MacLean. *Stornoway:* Anne R Dickie.

Awards with Merit: *Dunoon:* Esther Mailey. *Farr:* Caitlin R MacQueen. *Fort William:* William S Mackinnon, Sarah Smith. *Highworth:* Rebecca Woodhams. *Inverness:* Lois Fiddes. *London:* Rebecca Munns. *North Uist:* John A Macdonald. *Swordale:* Sara Macleod. *Tomatin:* Lois V Cameron-Mackintosh. *Westerham:* Edward Hanks.

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Junior Section

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Awards with Merit: *Aberdeen:* Rebecca Buchanan. *Dingwall:* Sarah M MacLean. *Glasgow:* Laura Chisholm, Donald MacLeod. *Guildford:* Matthew Risbridger. *Inverness:* Catherine Schouten. *London:* Elizabeth Munns, Jeremy van Kralingen. *Stratherrick:* David Fraser, John Fraser. *Swordale:* Murdo S Macleod.

Awards: *Barnoldswick:* Siphon Ncube. *Kyle:* Daniel Whear. *London:* David Rowland. *North Uist:* John Cameron, Flora Macdonald, Alastair Macdonald. *Scaynes Hill:* Martha Main. *Stornoway:* Karina Ferguson, Alasdair G Gillies. *Ullapool:* Siobhan and Stuart McCulloch, Susannah C Mackenzie.

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Awards with merit: *Edinburgh:* Isla MacDonald, Jonathan MacDonald. *Fort William:* Rachel Mackinnon. *Glasgow:* Peter MacPherson. *Inverness:* Andrew Campbell. *Larne:* Renwick Sharp. *London:* William Munns. *North Uist:* Margaret Cameron, John MacDonald, Laura MacInnes. *Scaynes Hill:* Philip Main. *Stornoway:* Sarah Gillies. *Uig:* Murdo Mackay.

Awards: *Barnoldswick:* Philip Martin. *Farr:* Alasdair MacQueen. *Glasgow:* Fiona Beaton, Donna Chisolm, Rachel MacLeod. *Larne:* Deborah Acton. *London:* Edward Munns, Rupert Turnbull. *Ness:* Joshua Smith. *North Tolsta:* Sean MacLeod. *Peasmarsh:* Alasdair Bailey. *Stornoway:* Lauren MacDonald, Andrew MacQuarrie.

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Looking Around Us

Too Late

A man pleaded guilty in a court in Leeds to driving under the influence of drink. He had 120 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath – more than three times the legal limit of 35 micrograms. When Terry Yorath was driving his Jaguar in Leeds in this state, a young woman was knocked down and suffered a broken pelvis.

His solicitor told the trial that, when interviewed, Mr Yorath said, “It’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to me. . . . I just feel so sorry for the girl.” No doubt Mr Yorath was perfectly sincere in what he said. But it was too late to prevent the accident. And it was too late to prevent whatever caused the accident. But, most seriously, it was too late to go back to the point before he took too much to drink.

We need to think ahead. We need to be clear that all our actions have consequences. And some things are specially sinful because they have particularly serious consequences. One of these things is over-indulging in alcohol. The accident might not have happened if Mr Yorath was sober; at least it might not have been so serious. He certainly should not have been driving unless he was sober.

More generally we should ask ourselves, Will what I am doing harm my soul? Soon it will be too late to reverse the damage that most people are doing to their souls by the sinful way they are living their lives. And the most serious damage to their souls results from not seeking the Lord. Soon we will all be in eternity, and then it will be too late to seek salvation.

The Bible tells us: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” – before it is too late. Remember that you can never return from eternity to seek salvation.