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Solving the Whole World's Problems

Mohandas Gandhi was a highly successful lawyer in South Africa before he returned to his native India. There he became the leader of the movement for independence from Britain. He is highly respected in many quarters today because his campaigns used non-violent means to achieve his ends. However, he was murdered in 1948.

Gandhi is reported to have said that, when we “shall get together on the teachings laid down by Christ in this Sermon on the Mount, we shall have solved the problems of the whole world”. He was probably thinking of such self-denying commands as: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you”.

But however far someone like Gandhi might go in following these teachings, his thoughts about the Sermon on the Mount ignore something absolutely fundamental. They take no account of the fact of human sin. There will always be problems in the world, because men and women and boys and girls will never, in this life, love each other perfectly. Sin is a fact of everyone's life, because it is a feature of every human heart. There is no doubt that, when God converts sinners, a change takes place in their lives, and a change in the way they interact with others. But, sadly, they will never be perfect until they get to heaven; so the world will never be free from problems. Yet it is absolutely true that *many* of the world's problems would disappear if people would begin to follow the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, and others would cause much less difficulty.

Gandhi was far too optimistic about the power of human beings to change themselves. Suppose millions of people in some country decided to live better lives and get together on the teachings laid down by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. These people might try, to the utmost of their power, to keep to these teachings – they might make a sincere, earnest attempt to love their enemies, to bless those that curse them and to do good to those that hate them. It would no doubt bring about a huge and welcome improvement in the state of their country.

Yet it is one thing to *decide* to live a better life; it is another matter

actually to do so. How many people make various resolutions every new year to live better lives, to give up some sin, to be nicer to those around them! And how quickly most of these resolutions are forgotten – some of them before the time arrives for putting them into effect!

To conform consistently to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount needs more than human power – more power, at least, than *fallen* human beings are capable of. Unless God changes our hearts, they will remain corrupt, completely under the power of sin. That is not to say that anyone is as bad as he could be. Obviously not, many people are remarkably kind and helpful. God in His goodness restrains sin, more or less, in every human being. But the fact remains, as Paul expresses it, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7,8). In other words (although the unconverted sinner may be very unwilling to accept the truth of these verses) his heart is opposed to God and he does not want to keep God’s law. Such a heart will never submit to what God’s law requires.

But what does God’s law require? In reply to that question, one could go through all the Ten Commandments, and then through the rest of the Bible picking out all its teaching about how we should live before God. And if we really considered what we were finding, how impressed we would be about our need for God’s grace so that we might begin to do God’s will! But we may sum it all up like this, as Jesus did: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37,39). But who in this fallen world could be so selfless to love everyone else as much as themselves, in all circumstances? And here is a more difficult question: Who could possibly love God with all their heart and soul and mind? It is completely beyond us; only in heaven will it be possible, by God’s grace.

And it is much easier to start off with good intentions than to keep going. Unless God will change our hearts, we will never keep on doing right, although we might seem to start off well. Many people followed Jesus for some time, impressed with His teachings. But they turned back; they “were offended” by what He said. And that is how it will always be, apart from God’s saving work in our hearts. Yes, we may turn over a new leaf, and we may keep going in that new direction; but it will not be a complete change – there will be no change of *heart*. We will never truly love God. We will never really be concerned to live to the glory of God.

Another reason why it is difficult to keep on doing what is right is the power of temptation. We should never underestimate the power of Satan. We can see how cleverly he handled Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, even

when they were without sin, when they had good hearts and had power to resist temptation. They very quickly succumbed to his temptation. So we do not need to think that we can stand against Satan's temptations if we have only our own natural strength. We need to depend continually on God Himself to protect us.

Thomas Chalmers was perhaps Scotland's best-known minister by the 1830s. He spent the first 12 years of his ministry in Kilmany in Fife, and for most of that time he was unconverted. In sermon after sermon he preached about the meanness of dishonesty, the evil of telling lies and various other sins. He spoke against what he later described as "all those deformities of character which awaken the natural indignation of the human heart against the pests and disturbers of human society". But, earnest as he was, he never heard of anyone being influenced for good by anything that he said. His preaching was a total failure. Try as he might, he could not sort out the problems of the community or the problems of anyone in it. He was trying to do something beyond his power, because he had never realised that a proper foundation was necessary – salvation through Jesus Christ.

First Chalmers had to believe the gospel himself. As yet he did not know his need of Christ, and of the saving work of the Holy Spirit in his own heart. He confessed later that he never saw his preaching having any effect on anyone in his congregation until – from the time of his own conversion – he was impressed with the fact that there is no love to God in the human heart, and that it does not want to draw near to Him. He then began to preach such doctrines; he showed his congregation the scriptural way of reconciliation – by "the free offer of forgiveness through the blood of Christ", as he himself described it.

Only when he began to emphasise these matters to his people was there an improvement in their lives. Only when they began to believe the gospel – putting their trust in Jesus Christ as the God-appointed Saviour of sinners – did he see anyone turning from sin. Only then did Chalmers see people giving up lying and other forms of dishonesty. Only then did he see any change in "the pests and disturbers of human society".

What is true of individuals is true of the world as a whole. Nothing can really solve the problems of the world except the gospel. Only as the gospel is applied by the Holy Spirit can there be any real reduction in the wickedness which causes so much suffering throughout the world. The first priority for each of us should be to seek salvation for our own souls. Then we should pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit would bless the gospel everywhere. And we should ask just as earnestly that God would send out godly ministers to preach that gospel. What a change this would make in the world!

Joash and His Friend Jehoiada

C H Spurgeon

Another chapter from the book *A Good Start*. It has been abridged. You can read about Joash and Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles 24.

There is a book called *The Museum of Natural History*, and the strangest animal in that museum is man. It would be far easier to understand any other creature than a human being. He is worthy of great study; and the more he is studied, the more he will surprise you. You can never tell from what a man *is*, what he will be. The case before us is highly extraordinary, because here is a man with every possible advantage, who displayed the best form of character through a number of years, and yet in the end was not thought worthy to be laid in the sepulchres of his fathers with other kings of Judah. A man who began his reign like the dawning of the day ended it like the middle of the night.

I wonder whether anyone we know will turn out to be very wicked before his life is over – I mean, those who have begun well and are now the hope and joy of those who know them, but who will end badly, in dishonour to themselves and grief to their households? Probably you can find them out by this one test; they will probably say, “It is impossible that it should be so with us”. Yet those who are afraid lest it should be so, and ask for grace that it may not be so, are probably those who will be preserved from it and whose path will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

What need there is to go below the surface in examining moral and spiritual character! In appearance Joash was all that we could wish. Yet, if he had really been what he seemed to be, he would have continued so. If there had been that work of grace within his soul which there appeared to be in his life, he would not have turned aside as he did; for where a work of grace is real, it has an abiding influence throughout the whole of life. Where the Lord has planted godly principles in someone's heart, and given him a new heart, these things are not taken away from him. “They went out from us, but they were not of us”; said the apostle John, “for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” So it was with Joash. He turned aside from God because he had never truly known Him at all, and his last end was worse than the first because his beginning was really not what it had seemed to be.

Although Joash came of a bad family, he had a good aunt, who was married to the high priest, and the aunt and the uncle took care of young Joash. When he was just an infant, they stole him away, so that Athaliah might not kill

him with the rest of the royal family. Thus Joash had the remarkable privilege that “he was with them hid in the house of God six years”. I do not think we ever value enough the first six years of a child’s life; the impressions of these years have a remarkable influence over the rest of life. Joash was where God’s praise was sung from day to day, and where holy prayer was always offered. He was seldom away from the fragrance of the incense, or the sight of the white-robed priests. He heard nothing that could defile him, but everything that could instruct and purify him.

Perhaps the first thing that you can remember is your mother taking you to a place of worship; maybe you can never forget the time when your father led you there and did not seem to be happy unless his boy was trotting by his side when he went to hear the gospel. Amongst our earliest memories are the sayings of gracious people in whom we took an interest when they came to our father’s house. It is a grand thing that the first days of one’s life should bear the mark of God’s finger. It is well, when the clay begins to revolve on the potter’s wheel, that the first fingers touching and shaping it should be those of God’s servants. God grant that they may be as the very finger of God upon our souls! Thus Joash began his career by being hidden in the house of the Lord for six years.

After he was seven, he was started on his life’s business in a very admirable way. He was to be the king, but great care had to be taken to sweep away the usurper Athaliah from the throne, and to put the little king upon it. And Jehoiada managed the whole affair with great skill. He also drew up a covenant for the king to sign – a covenant with God that Joash would be obedient to Him as the supreme King, and a covenant with the people that he would rule according to justice and not be a tyrant over them. It was all done so well that no objection was ever taken to it. Joash reigned with great prosperity and happiness over a people who were blessed by his rule, Jehoiada being his faithful prime minister and guide.

It is a grand thing to be started aright in life; it is half the battle, you know, to begin well. Some young men and women are launched in life wrongly; it seems almost a matter of course that they should yield to temptation. But many of you were not started in this way; you began with a father’s blessing and a mother’s prayers. You recollect when you first went out into life; some of us remember the ride on the coach when, early on a bitterly frosty morning, we had to leave our father’s house for the first time to go across the country. We recollect it well, and how God cared for us and blessed us; and we desire to praise Him that He has preserved us even till this day.

I am showing you the bright side of Joash’s career first. After the six years

in the house of God, he had a grand start in life with everything to his advantage. Alas, alas, alas, that, with such a bright beginning, he should come to such a sad end!

Notice also that "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest". While that good man lived, the king was under his influence. He consulted Jehoiada in every matter of importance; Jehoiada even seems to have guided him to some extent in the matter of his marriage. Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord, not only what was right in the sight of good people. He seems to have been outwardly obedient to the law of Jehovah; he appeared to be a loyal servant of the great King. This was so, not only for a short time, but all the days Jehoiada lived. Well, have we not known men and women who lived under the good influence of some kind elderly person – uncle or aunt, father or mother – and they did what was right year after year, as long as their godly relatives lived? They were diligent in going up to God's house, apparently devout in prayer and reading the Bible, willing to assist in all sorts of service for the Lord, and outwardly leading most useful, admirable lives all the time that these higher influences were over them.

More than this, Joash was zealous for the outward side of religion: "It came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord". He actually chided Jehoiada, his uncle, because of the slowness of the Levites: "The king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection?" Yes, and there are some whose hearts are not right towards God, who nevertheless are very zealous about the outward side of divine worship. It is a much easier thing to build a temple for God than it is to *be* a temple for God. And it is a much more common thing for people to show zeal in repairing temples than in reforming their own way of life.

So this young man, you see, went even beyond his uncle in intense zeal for the cause of God, just as there are many who, trained up in the ways of the Lord, are tireless in rendering some outward service to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would give to the building of a church; they would work hard to promote the paying for it, and so forth. But, alas, you may give and you may work and you may attend to all the outward parts of religion, and yet have no part nor lot in the matter! John Bunyan says that, when he was an ungodly man, he yet had such a reverence for the outward side of religion that he would have kissed the ground that the minister walked on, and every nail in the door of the church seemed holy to him. That is all very fine; but unless there is a great deal more than that in us, we shall fall far short of God's requirements.

The Book of Ruth

78. The Lost Shoe

Rev Keith M Watkins

Ruth 4:7,8. "Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe."

Naomi's husband had died and there were no living children. She needed to sell his land. In Israel that was always prevented if possible. A relative would step in and "redeem" the land, by giving the widow the price of the land yet allowing her to continue living there. There was a relative willing to do this for Naomi: the "kinsman" in the text quoted above. He had said, "I will redeem it" (verse 4).

However, this was a complicated case. Naomi had a daughter-in-law, Ruth, another widow without children. The relative would also have to "redeem" Ruth by marrying her. The kinsman was not willing to do that. Thankfully, there was another relative. And he was willing. That was Boaz. Boaz would buy the land and marry Ruth. So the first relative told him, "Buy it for thee".

Then the relative "drew off his shoe" and gave it to Boaz. When an important transaction like this was taking place, when land was "changing" hands, and especially when redemption was involved, this was the way that the Israelites made it clear to everyone what had been done. "This was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things: a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel." The relative giving his shoe to Boaz witnessed to the truth that the matter was concluded in a proper legal manner.

"A man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour." What a strange thing to do! It might seem so to us, but it had a very special meaning in Israel. The shoe was symbolic. The relative would have used that shoe to walk on Naomi's land and possess it as his own. The Lord promised the Israelites that they would possess the land of Canaan in these terms: "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours" (Deuteronomy 11:24). Wherever their feet walked, that would become their property. When David spoke of his expanding kingdom, he said, "Over Edom will I cast out my shoe" (Psalm 60:8). Edom was a land full of God's enemies but David would rule over it and claim it for the Lord. That would be like David's "shoe" setting foot on that land. That was a picture of Christ

building His kingdom, and of the day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

The relative gave up his rights to Naomi's land. Now he would never tread on that soil. His shoe would never be there. He would never have ownership, possession, power or authority over that land. That is why he gave his shoe to Boaz. Boaz was the redeemer, not himself.

Giving up his shoe also showed that the relative had given up all rights to Ruth, once and for all. He could never make any future claim upon her. Rather, it was Boaz who had the right to marry Ruth. Boaz alone was her redeemer. He was the one with the shoe in his hand.

We have seen before that the near relative is a picture of the law and that Boaz is a picture of the gospel. Can the law save? Can it redeem? Can it repossess the privileges and benefits which Adam lost? Can it unite the sinner and God in an everlasting and spiritual marriage? Never! Like the relative, it must take off its shoe.

Imagine the near relative with no shoe on his foot. Think of Ruth seeing him like that. See her turning aside completely from that shoeless man. He was not going to help her, she knew that. Make sure you do the same. Take a good look at God's holy law; think through the Ten Commandments one by one; consider the perfection that the covenant of works demands: "This do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28). Can you do all that? All the time? With all your heart? Of course not! That is "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" (Romans 8:3). Realise that the covenant of works cannot help you, and turn your back on it for ever. The works of the law cannot redeem your soul.

Now imagine seeing the near relative give his shoe to Boaz. Think of Ruth when she saw Boaz in possession of the shoe. It told her that Boaz was going to redeem the land. He was going to marry her and deliver her out of her sorrows. That made her look entirely and only to Boaz. Again, make sure you do the same. See that the redemption of sinners has been handed over to the Lord Jesus, in the covenant of grace. Go to Him to redeem you.

The relative stood aside for Boaz. This is what the law does whenever someone believes in Christ for salvation. It gives up its claims. It stands aside once and for all and allows Christ to take full and final possession of the believing soul. It can do this because Jesus, the Boaz of the gospel, has obeyed all its commands and suffered the fulness of its curse. This He has done for all His people. Believers are under the covenant of grace, not the covenant of works. For them, the shoe is in Christ's hand, not in the law's hand. So put your trust in Christ for salvation, and then the law has no claim on you. It cannot condemn if you are in Christ Jesus.

The covenant of works has no right to put one foot on the believer's soul. It has given the shoe to Christ. It has given up its legal claim on the believer because Christ has paid the price of redemption. So, if you have believed in Christ for your salvation, do not turn back to the law. If the free grace of Christ in the gospel has made you right in the sight of God and redeemed your soul from everlasting destruction, you should never turn again to the covenant of works. The believer is for ever free from the law, and is married to another – to Christ.

Paul told the Galatians that if there was a law that could save, righteousness would have been by the law, not by the sufferings and agony of the Son of God in our nature (Galatians 3:21). But just as the kinsman had to admit defeat – he could not redeem Ruth – so the law is not able to redeem sinners. Such a law does not exist. Remember this! “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16). Redemption will never be by our works, but only by God's mercy in Christ. The law must take off the shoe and give it to the gospel. Only the gospel can bring sinners into the estate of salvation. It can only be done by the Redeemer – the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to Him!

“If You only Knew . . .”

Mr Howard had been the minister of his parish for 20 years. A kind, pleasant man, he was on friendly terms with everyone and had a concern for their welfare. He was well educated and the people looked up to him because of this. Mrs Howard took an interest in the people around her and their two girls too tried to help their poorer neighbours. The whole family seemed very happy, but in fact Mr Howard was finding his work a burden; it was becoming rather wearisome to prepare for the most important part of his work: to preach two sermons every Sabbath.

Yet he continued to be conscientious in preparing his sermons. He would choose a text from the Bible and carefully write out his discourse. But it was always on some moral subject – telling the people to be good but giving them no proper foundation for goodness. He did not yet understand that no one can be good unless they are born again, and he had not realised that no one is acceptable before God unless they have believed in Jesus Christ. But twice every Sabbath he would go to the old parish church and, in his quiet pleasant voice, read over his sermon with its learned-sounding quotations from old Greek and Roman writers.

The minister had noticed that his sermons seemed to make no impression on his hearers. No one seemed to feel their conscience accusing them of sin;

no one, it appeared, was brought to any interest in spiritual things; no one was asking: "What shall I do to be saved?" And, supposing someone had come to him with such a question, he would not have been able to give them a proper answer. None of his quotations from the ancient Greeks and Romans would have helped anyone to find forgiveness for their sins; and, for all his study of the Bible week by week, he had not grasped its central message: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Learned and kind Mr Howard certainly was, but he did not know the Saviour; he had never been born again.

One of the family servants for the past three years was 25-year-old Ellen. She was quiet and shy but always reliable and ready to help; so Mrs Howard and the girls were very fond of her. Ellen developed what seemed to be nothing worse than a feverish cold. Mrs Howard looked after her as carefully as if she was one of her own daughters. Yet Ellen showed no sign of improving, and so it was not really a surprise when the doctor told Mrs Howard that he was sure Ellen was suffering from tuberculosis. He was afraid that she would not live long and suggested that she should be sent to her own home. But after Mrs Howard had discussed the matter with Ellen's relations, she decided to continue to nurse her where she was.

Mr Howard came to Ellen's room every day to read to her from his Prayer Book and he was very upset at the doctor's diagnosis. He felt it was his duty to prepare her for death. So, one morning, after closing the Prayer Book, he said gently: "You are *very* ill, Ellen".

"Yes, I am, sir," Ellen replied with a bright smile.

"I'm afraid the doctor thinks you may never be really well again", Mr Howard told her, very conscious that this was a difficult duty for him.

"O yes," Ellen whispered, "I'm quite sure I shall never get better."

"And doesn't it trouble you?" Mr Howard asked her, surprised at how calm she was.

"O no, no!" Ellen said emphatically.

"Well, I'm very glad you feel like that," the minister told her. And he went on trying to encourage her: "Of course it must be a great comfort to you to feel how blameless your life has been, how well you have always done your duty."

Ellen's face lost its bright look; she was shocked at what she had heard. She knew that her life had most certainly not been blameless. But Mr Howard thought she had not understood him, so he repeated what he had said. Tears came into Ellen's eyes and she just shook her head without saying anything.

Mr Howard assumed she must have been thinking about some little

failure, which he would probably have found difficult to describe as a sin. So he said kindly: “Of course I know you haven’t been perfect; but, you see, we have the blessed Jesus to make up for our deficiencies. If we do all we can, He has promised to do the rest; and I am sure He will take you safely to heaven, Ellen.”

Ellen sat up quickly in bed. “No, no, no!” she said earnestly. “Christ must do it all, *all*; He has done it all.”

“Yes, of course,” the minister replied, “in one sense He has done it all. But, you know, Ellen, He expects us to do what we can, and then He will make up . . .”

Ellen did not let him finish; she knew this was the complete opposite of what the Bible teaches. She pulled her Bible a little closer to her; she quickly turned up Paul’s Epistle to Titus and pointed to a verse. She asked the minister to read it: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”. She hoped Paul’s words would teach the minister that no one can earn salvation, because it is completely the result of God’s mercy. She then got him to read the whole passage and afterwards turned to the words in another of Paul’s letters, the Epistle to the Romans: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight”. Next she turned over the page and pointed to the words: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Ellen was exhausted and sank back in her chair. Mr Howard tried to encourage her in her weakness: “I am very pleased that you can look forward with such resignation, Ellen”.

But she corrected him. “With joy,” she whispered, “because Jesus has done *everything*.” She could see by the look on his face that the minister did not really believe her. So, as it were, she mustered every last ounce of strength and told him: “O sir, if you only knew, if you could only believe, if only you would preach the Lord Jesus Christ as *all* – not a helper but a Saviour; a full, complete Saviour!” Ellen knew that she could do nothing to save herself, that she must look to Christ for everything. And she wanted Mr Howard too to see for himself that this is so.

Ellen now looked so tired that Mr Howard rushed away to call for help. He then went to his study with these last words of Ellen’s ringing in his ears. He was stunned. Was it possible, he asked himself, that his preaching was all wrong? He had indeed noticed that his sermons lacked power, but it had never crossed his mind that he was preaching something very different from what the Bible teaches. Now as his mind groped uncertainly for answers to his questions, he remembered the words of the Apostle James: “If any of

you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him". And that is what he did. He went down on his knees and asked God to forgive him if his preaching had been wrong. He prayed that God would teach him and guide him and give him light on the Bible.

His prayer was heard. And no doubt Ellen was part of that answer. Every day until her death, Mr Howard spent at least an hour with her in her room benefiting from her knowledge of the Scriptures. Sometimes she could hardly speak, but even then she would turn over the pages of the Bible to show him the verses which answered his questions.

After Ellen's death, the people noticed a big change in their minister's sermons. He would not now have felt wearied in preparing his sermons. And he spoke earnestly to the consciences of his hearers as he set forth Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour – not any longer as Someone who will help us when we cannot quite succeed in earning our salvation.

And there was a change in his sermons because there was a change in his own heart and life. No longer did he feel that he had to depend on good works for his salvation; he had been convinced that he was a helpless sinner and he had thrown himself on God's mercy. He had looked to Christ Jesus for a complete salvation. And he no doubt prayed earnestly that God would bless His Word to the good of souls. We are told that he was greatly used, first in the conversion of many sinners, and then in these individuals being built up in their most holy faith.

For Younger Readers

God Heard

Richard Cecil was a good minister who lived long ago. One day he was riding on his horse from London to Lewes. He was carrying a lot of money.

He hoped to get away from London early in the morning. But he had so many things to do that he did not get on his way till 12 o'clock. So he was still on the road when it became dark.

Mr Cecil met another man on horseback who seemed to be drunk. He was afraid that the man would fall off his horse. So he shouted to the man to be careful. But the man did not seem to listen.

The minister then rode right up to the other horse to warn the man of his danger. But it was a trick. The man was a robber.

The man grabbed the reins of Mr Cecil's horse and the minister

at once knew that this was a bad man. He could see that he was in danger. He tried to get away. But the man told him he would knock him down on the ground if he tried again to get away.

At once three other riders appeared. When they stopped, Mr Cecil was in the middle of them all. He knew he was in serious danger. What could he do?

Just one thing. He could pray. He remembered God's words in Psalm 50: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee". So Mr Cecil did pray, believing that God could help him.

The man who seemed to be the leader of the gang spoke. He asked Mr Cecil who he was and where he was going.

Mr Cecil always wanted to be honest. He knew that it is always wrong to tell a lie. So he just told the men his name and where he was going.

He must have been very surprised when the leader answered, "I know you and have heard you preach at Lewes". Then he told the other men: "Let the gentleman's horse go".

God heard Mr Cecil's prayer. He was safe.

God the Father

1. In the Trinity

Rev J R Tallach

This is the first part of a paper at the 2005 Youth Conference. The first two ideas are handled in this article. The other two will be the subject of further articles.

There are different ways of considering fatherhood. I remember a woman saying that her father had passed away not long before then. She was aged about 50 and I suppose her mother had passed away some time before and she had no close relatives. In any event, she said that it was only then, when her father died, that she realised that he was the only person in the world who was interested in everything that happened to her.

We will return to this, but in the meantime there are four areas of the fatherhood of God which I would like to discuss. The first involves God the Father *in the Godhead*. As the Shorter Catechism says, "There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God; the same in substance, equal in power and glory".

The second area is God the Father as the *Father of creation*. All three

persons were involved in creation, but the Father is the "Father of spirits" – the Father, in other words, of your soul and mine.

The third way the Bible describes God the Father is as the *Father of His people Israel*. Israel was a shadow of the true Church of God. What do I mean by a *shadow*? Someone may be standing round the corner and you cannot see him directly but, if the sun is shining in a certain direction, you will see his shadow falling across your path. You know he is there and from the shadow you have a clear outline of his appearance. Israel, taken out of Egypt through the wilderness and into Canaan, is a shadow of the true Church of God, and God was their Father.

The fourth point is one that we all ought to have an interest in. It is God the Father as *Father of the whole Church*, the elect of God. Jesus was speaking of the Father in this way when He said to His disciples: "I ascend unto My Father and to your Father" (John 20:17). "In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). And Paul wrote: "I bow my knees unto the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14,15).

1. In the Trinity, God the Father is the first in order, but He is equal with the Son and the Spirit in power and glory. Only a little can be said on this matter, as this is a great and eternal mystery, beyond our power to understand: the one God and the three persons in the Godhead, the Father eternally begetting the Son and the Son being eternally begotten by the Father. Paul speaks of "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (Romans 8:3). And John says that "God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

You remember that, when God would test Abraham, He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac" (Genesis 22:1). Abraham had many sons, but Isaac was the son through whom all the promises were to be realised. And therefore it was as if he was Abraham's only son. In Genesis we read of "the sons of god" – that is, those who feared God. But here we have God's own, and only begotten, Son. It is on this relationship that the family of God in heaven and earth is based.

What can we learn from this doctrine of the Father in the eternal Trinity? First, we should learn humility in the face of its mystery. "But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20). Second, it gives a measure of the love of God to sinners: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

We must also learn our physical dependance on God. Psalm 90 begins: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations". And God brings

an end to life when He says, “Return”. The Psalm also contains the prayer, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”. All our days are in His hands.

2. The second way in which God is spoken of as Father arises from *His work as Creator*. Paul says to the people of Athens: God “giveth to all life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth . . . For in Him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring” (Acts 17:25,26,28). The Athenians had many altars to many gods, and even an altar to an unknown god, but Paul was telling them that the one God made us all. We are all His offspring and of one blood, and all times and places are set by Him. This was the God Paul was telling them of.

In Hebrews 12, Paul speaks of how our natural fathers correct us. He goes on to ask, “Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?” John Owen explains the phrase, *the Father of spirits*, by saying, “The soul is immediately created and infused, having no other father but God Himself”. Every child born into the world has a soul which has been formed by God the Father; it has been given by Him.

We are to learn from this the “goodness and forbearance” of God, and we are to learn to be good and forbearing ourselves. Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies and to bless them that cursed them. Jesus pointed to the example of their Father in heaven: “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). From the way God, their Father, dealt with His enemies they, His sons, were to learn to love their enemies.

For Junior Readers

Mirrors

People have used mirrors for thousands of years – from at least as far back as Bible times. These very old mirrors were not made of glass as they are today. Then they were made of metal, usually copper, which was highly polished until you could see a reflection in it. It seems these old mirrors were usually round; they had handles (perhaps like a small tray) so that they could be carried around easily. It is likely that the Hebrew women brought some of these mirrors with them when they left Egypt. They are actually referred to in Exodus 38:8, where the word has been translated *looking glasses*.

What are mirrors used for? Mostly for checking our appearance. You look at your reflection in the mirror and then try to put right whatever is wrong.

For example: if your hair is untidy, you comb it; if your face is dirty, you wash it; if your dress is ripped, you change it. In other words, you act on what you see in the mirror.

But what about our spiritual appearance? Where can we look so that we can find out what is wrong with our spiritual state? We can look in the Bible. The Apostle James refers to people looking “into the perfect law of liberty” – that is, the whole teaching of the Bible. The Word of God shows them the true state of their souls; it shows us the sins which ruin them so terribly. Surely, when you know that the mirror of the Bible is available to you, you should use it.

Sadly, not all do! We read of the people of Laodicea (in Revelation 3), who thought they were “rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing”. They thought all was well with their souls. But if they had looked into the mirror of the Bible they would have seen that they were in a very bad way. In fact they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”.

There are others who do look in the mirror of the Bible but don't act on what they see. We read about them in James, chapter 1: “If any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [or mirror]: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way and straightway [at once] forgetteth what manner of man he was”. Perhaps many of you are like that. You hear the minister telling you about your sinful state and your need of salvation. But what do you do about it? Nothing?

If that is so, are you not a forgetful hearer? And isn't it very foolish to see what your problem is but then to do nothing about it?

What you need to do is to look into the mirror of the Word *and* to act on what you see. James goes on to say, “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being *not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work*, this man shall be blessed in his deed”. The mirror of the Word shows us that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”. So we should pray that God would remove these rags and clothe us in the robes of Christ's righteousness. When we see that our sins are as stinking wounds, should we not go to Christ to have them healed? He is the great Physician of souls, a Doctor who can really cure them.

The Bible shows us that our hearts are “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”. Should we not pray the words in Hosea: “Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously”?

Be sure to use the Word of God as a mirror so that you may see the state of your soul. And when you have done that, be sure to act on what you see!

J van Kralingen

Looking Around Us

Praying to Mary

The new Pope seems to be as keen to promote the worship of the Virgin Mary as the previous one. He told a gathering of 20 000 in St Peter's Square in Rome "to turn constantly and with confidence to the Virgin, entrusting to her each one of your needs".

But that is to treat her as a god. How can she hear the prayers addressed to her from all parts of the world at one time? She was an ordinary human being while in this world, although a godly believer. Now that she is in heaven, she has no special standing among the glorified spirits there. She is in no way divine.

We must depend completely on the Bible for all our ideas in religion. And the Bible tells us that it is to God Himself we must entrust all our needs and do so constantly and with confidence. *He* can hear all our prayers, even those which are only thoughts deep in our hearts – when our lips do not move at all and no one else can hear us. And He has provided a Mediator – Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. Through Him, not through Mary, we may approach God; for His sake we may look for an answer to our prayers.

There is no other way of having our needs supplied. Roman Catholic teachings about Mary are not based on Scripture; they are based on heathen ideas about the queen of heaven (see Jeremiah 44).

The Bible in Stirling University

The University's Students' Association has called for Gideon Bibles to be removed from all rooms in university accommodation, because they could offend non-Christians. The president of the Association, however, wants "other faith texts" provided to create a campus of what he calls "great diversity".

This is one more example of departure from the true religion in Scotland. And Scotland is no different from other once-Christian countries. Of course, this generation has rejected the idea that there is true and false in religion. But they are wrong. There *is* only one true religion. That is Christianity – as taught by the Bible.

A former chaplain at the university was right to say, "I think there is an agenda here, seemingly politically correct. There is actually a hostility towards faith by those who have none." That should not surprise us, because there is enmity to God in the heart of every fallen human being. But why did the chaplain not bear witness to the uniqueness of Christianity?

At one time Britain was obviously a Christian country. In some ways it still is. But in other ways the national religion seems to be atheism. But there is a God, and all will have to appear before Him at last to give in their account for how they have used their privileges. Not the least important matter will be how they have used the Bible if it was within their reach.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2005-06

Names for Exercise 2

Senior Section: *Dingwall:* Joanna Mackenzie. *Farr:* Ruth MacQueen. *Fort William:* William S Mackinnon. *Inverness:* Chloe W E Fiddes. *Kyle:* Joanne Whear. *London:* Rebecca Munns, Naomi Rowland, Josie van Kralingen. *North Uist:* Rhoda Cameron. *Portree:* Finlay MacRaild. *Rotherfield:* Edward Hanks.

Intermediate Section: *Blunsdon Hill:* Emily Sayers. *Bonar Bridge:* Rebecca and Sandy Campbell. *Dingwall:* Beverly and Kathryn Mackenzie, Sarah MacLean. *Dunoon:* Esther Maley. *Farr:* Caitlin R MacQueen. *Fort William:* Sarah Smith. *Glasgow:* Neil Freeke, Kenneth C Gillies, Donald MacLeod. *Guildford:* Matthew Risbridger. *Inverness:* Mark Campbell, Lois H Fiddes, James Fraser, Jonathan Schouten. *Kyle:* Paul Whear. *London:* Elizabeth Munns, David Rowland, Alexander Turnbull, Jeremy and Justin van Kralingen. *North Uist:* John Cameron, Kerri Macinnes. *Scaynes Hill:* Abigail and Martha Main. *South Harris:* Stewart MacLean. *Stornoway:* Anne Dickie, Karina Ferguson. *Stratherrick:* David Fraser. *Swordale:* Murdo S Macleod. *Tomatin:* Lois Cameron-Mackintosh. *Ullapool:* Susannah C Mackenzie.

Junior Section: *Aberdeen:* Rebecca A V Buchanan. *Barnoldswick:* Philip J Martin. *Bonar Bridge:* Elizabeth Campbell. *Crowborough:* Heidi Woodhams. *Dingwall:* Alistair Mackenzie. *Edinburgh:* Eilidh Logan, Jonathan MacDonald. *Farr:* Alistair MacQueen. *Fort William:* Rachel M Mackinnon, Joshua Smith. *Glasgow:* Laura Chisholm, Catherine Freeke, Hugh Gillies, Neil Gillies. *Inverness:* Andrew Campbell, Natalie Macaskill, Catherine Schouten. *Kyle:* Daniel Whear. *London:* William Munns, Constance and Rupert J Turnbull. *Longcot:* Lucy Cooper. *North Harris:* Donald R Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Mark Mackenzie, Sean MacLeod. *North Uist:* Laura Macinnes. *Scaynes Hill:* Philip Main. *Stornoway:* Alasdair Gillies. *Stratherrick:* John Fraser. *Vatten:* Rebecca Fleming.

Upper Primary Section: *Barnoldswick:* Robert Ross. *Cranbrook:* Alasdair Bailey. *Dingwall:* Alasdair Maclean, Andrew MacLeod, Ruth MacLeod. *Edinburgh:* Catriona Logan, Isla MacDonald. *Farr:* Finlay Cramp. *Gairloch:* Rachel Mackenzie, Mairi Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Ewen Beaton, Fiona Beaton, Donna Chisolm, Ian Gillies, Iona Gillies, Kate Gillies, Rachel and Ruairidh MacLeod, Peter MacPherson. *Haywards Heath:* Hannah Woodhams. *Inverness:* Anna Fraser, Thomas Maton, Peter Schouten. *Lochcarron:* James Ross. *London:* Edward Munns, Rachel Strata, Lucy Turnbull, Amy van Kralingen. *Longcot:* Ruth Cooper. *North Harris:* Tormod Mackinnon. *North Tolsta:* Sheena Mackenzie, Lucy MacLeod. *North Uist:* Margaret Cameron, John Alex MacDonald. *Salisbury:* Jill Buchanan. *South Harris:* Catherine MacLeod. *Stornoway:* Sarah Gillies, Lauren MacDonald, Andrew MacQuarrie. *Stratherrick:* Ewen Fraser. *Trowbridge:* Joanna Broome. *Uig:* Murdo George Mackay. *Vatten:* Sabrina Annand.

Lower Primary Section: *Aberdeen:* Sarah Somerset. *Barnoldswick:* David Martin, Emma Norris, James and Rebecca Ross. *Croydon:* Andrew Marcus, Susanna Hickman. *Dingwall:* Laura and Sheena MacLean, Graham MacLeod. *Edinburgh:* Annabelle and Daniel Macdonald. *Farr:* Muriel Cramp. *Fort William:* Anna and Gerrit Smith. *Gairloch:* Donald Mackenzie, Catherine Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Grant Beaton, Cameron Gillies, Callum and Kenneth Macpherson, Rachel Smith. *Haywards Heath:* Edwin and Kate Woodhams. *Inverness:* Jonathan Fiddes, John and Rebecca Maton. *Kyle:* Nathan Whear. *Laide:* Nikki Maclellan. *Lochcarron:* Hannah Ross. *London:* Sarah Hawke, Claudia, Edward and Oliver Martin, Andrew and Samuel Munns, Angus Pontin, Ben, David and Elizabeth Strata, Henry, Jemima, Jeremy and Joseph Turnbull. *Longcot:* Samuel Cooper. *Ness:* Johan MacInnes. *North Tolsta:* Isla Macdonald, Innes Mackenzie, Scott Macleod. *North Uist:* Iain Boyd, Eilidh Cameron, Angus Macinnes. *Perth:* Calum Patterson. *Raasay:* Joseph MacGowan. *Staffin:* Neil Angus Matheson, Carey Ross. *Stornoway:* Leah Beaton, Cirsty Gillies, Aimee Macleod, Eilidh Macleod, Ryan MacSween, Finlay and Uilliam Murray. *Ullapool:* Lewis Mackenzie. *Vatten:* Jayne-Anne and John Fleming.