

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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No 1

Earning Salvation

How can you earn salvation? Lots of people have tried. They saw that they were not quite what they should have been. Perhaps they realised that they were very far from being perfect. Maybe they even grasped the fact that God looked on them as sinners – who had done a great deal that was wrong, and who therefore deserved to be punished.

So they tried to do something to put the situation right. They told themselves that they would live as God wanted them to live, that they would keep all His commandments, that they would give themselves to prayer and reading the Bible. They thought that in such ways they could please God and pay for their salvation.

One such man was Saul, from Tarsus, in south-east Turkey. He tried very hard to keep God's commands. Everyone who knew him must have been very impressed at how he wanted to obey every last detail of God's law. He later said that, as "touching the righteousness which is in the law", he had been "blameless" (Philippians 3:6). But however careful Saul was to keep God's law, were his thoughts as blameless as he felt his outward life was? Obviously not. At some stage in his life he was disturbed by the Tenth Commandment: "Thou shalt not covet" (see Romans 7:7). Most of the time no one could see if Saul was covetous or not. That was something which went on in his mind. But God could see it all. And Saul began to realise that he was not as perfect as he thought he was. He was a sinner against God.

What Saul was really doing was trying to pay for his salvation. But the money he was bringing – obedience to God's law – was not the sort of money God could accept. He was like someone taking to a shop the kind of money, toy money, which could be used to play a game; it could be no use whatever. God had to reject Saul's obedience as worthless. For one thing, there was no love to God in his attempts at obedience.

But what kind of obedience can God accept? Certainly nothing that we sinners can bring. God can accept only perfect obedience, from perfect people. And there has been no perfect obedience, nor any perfect people, since Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. Although Saul was so

careful to keep God's commands, his was not perfect obedience. He may not have committed the kind of sins that most other people were guilty of, but he did commit sin, and he did not love God with all his heart. And however good *we* might imagine we are, we too are sinners; we do not love God with all our heart.

Does that leave us without hope? No, it does not. Although no one can earn salvation for himself or for anyone else, there is one Person who earned salvation for everyone who will believe in Him. That, of course is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into this world to be a Saviour.

Saul discovered that he could not save himself, no matter how hard he tried to keep God's law. When Jesus Christ met him on the way to Damascus, he realised that this is the Saviour whom God has appointed. What Saul could not do, Jesus Christ has done. He kept the law perfectly; He suffered the punishment that sinners deserve.

Saul trusted in Him at once, and never again could Saul think of bringing his own righteousness to God as a payment for salvation. We know him better as Paul the Apostle, who spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel, trying to persuade other sinners to give up their efforts to pay for their salvation – by their attempts to keep the law of God. He called on them instead to believe in Christ, to trust wholeheartedly in His perfect work. How often Paul must have spoken the words which he was to write to his friend Timothy: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

George Whitefield was someone else who tried very hard to try to earn salvation by his own efforts. George was brought up in Gloucester and, when he reached about 17, he was going on in a course of sin. But God, he said, stopped him – by which, no doubt, he meant that God made him feel in his conscience the sinfulness of what he was doing.

Then, he said, “I began to be more watchful over my thoughts, words and actions”. He tried to prepare himself for the Lord's Supper, although he was not fit for it; he was not converted. But he was not well instructed; he was trying to do his best.

This included observing Lent, which is supposed to represent the 40 days which Jesus Christ spent without food when he was tempted by the devil (but the Bible gives us no authority to keep Lent). During this period, George fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, for 36 hours altogether. He spent time in prayer, reading religious books, and he went to church twice every day. He was diligent in studying the books for his course at school, including the Greek New Testament. He was beginning to be uncomfortable with playing cards and going to the theatre. He even dreamed that he was to see

God on Mount Sinai – he was, of course, afraid to meet Him; he was not fit to stand before God. Yet, as a result of his influence, some of the other schoolboys gave up some of their sins.

George kept this up for a whole year, until he went to Oxford University. Indeed most of the things he did were right; what was wrong was to make them the whole of his religion, to try to use them as payment for his salvation. He had yet to learn that they could not save him.

Before he found salvation in Christ alone, he was to go even further in his attempts to please God by his own works. He fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays every week. He gave up eating fruit and gave away the money he used to spend in that way to poor people. He began to eat the poorest kind of food he could find. He wore a patched gown and dirty shoes. In the evening he prayed outside for up to two hours, sometimes on his knees and sometimes lying flat on his face. During the six weeks of Lent he gave up eating meat except on Saturdays and Sabbaths, and often on Saturdays too. At last his health broke down and his studies were affected.

But God had mercy on George. As he was reading the Bible, he found salvation through Christ Jesus. What he could not do, he discovered, Christ had done. And George Whitefield too was to spend most of the rest of his life preaching the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Both Saul of Tarsus and George Whitefield were bringing to God what they thought was good money. But it was not. He could not accept it; it was worthless. Everything they did, no matter how good it seemed, was sinful; it was not done from right motives. They had no desire to honour God by coming to Him in the way He has appointed. And many others have been just as foolish, trying to pay for their salvation rather than looking to Christ, who has provided the only salvation that is acceptable to God. Yes, lots of people have tried to earn salvation by their own efforts, but none of them has been successful. Only by trusting in Christ can a sinner be saved.

What about *you*? Have you realised that you need to be saved from your sins, that otherwise you will have to suffer for ever the punishment which your sins deserve? And have you realised that you need to be saved from trying to earn salvation by your own efforts – by keeping God's commands, for example, and being active in religious duties such as reading your Bible?

Now these things are right in themselves. Do not give up any of them. But give up *trusting* in them. Salvation is what you can never earn. You must look away from yourself and all that you can do, no matter how long and how hard you try to make yourself acceptable to God. You must trust in Christ, who has done everything that a sinner needs for salvation. You must look to Him, and to Him only, who came into the world to save sinners.

“As the Lord Commanded”

8. Who Should Conduct Public Worship?

Rev D W B Somerset

In the previous article we considered the subject of Psalm-singing in the public worship of God. This is the final article in this series on worshipping God.

The question of who should conduct public worship might seem rather a small one, but it has led to a surprising amount of controversy. For this reason we think that it ought to be addressed.

The biblical ideal, at which the whole Church and every individual congregation ought to aim, is that each congregation should have a minister. And the minister should conduct public worship and preach the gospel. This view is denied in some circles, but the verse which establishes it beyond doubt as the scriptural pattern is: “The Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). The preaching of the gospel is central to public worship, and here we are told that Christ has ordained that those who preach the gospel are to derive their income from that work. They should not need to engage in any other work in order to support themselves and their families. The preaching of the gospel, with its associated duties, is to be their full-time work.

Of course, if no one is able or willing to support them, then they may lawfully engage in other forms of employment. Paul worked as a tentmaker in Corinth and in Ephesus (Acts 18:3, 20:34), and many pastors and missionaries have had to support themselves in difficult situations. But the duty of the Church to maintain its ministers is emphasised at great length in 1 Corinthians 9: “Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man, or sayeth not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of that hope. If we have shown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” (verses 7-11). Such emphasis indicates the importance to the Church of the office of the full-time minister.

It is clear, then, that congregations are to have ministers, if possible, and that these ministers are to conduct the services. The ordained ministry is a gift to the Church from the Father, received at the hand of Christ: “And He

gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 3:11-12). The glorious doctrines of the gospel are entrusted to ministers, and they are required to be faithful in expounding them: “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Ministers are sent by Christ with a special authority to proclaim the way of salvation: “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Romans 10:14-15). So glorious is the gospel that there is a beauty in the office of preacher: “As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (verse 15).

What happens when no minister is available? This was a problem in Scotland at the time of the Reformation and, as a temporary measure, the offices of “reader” and “exhorter” were introduced. The reader would conduct a service reading a chapter from the Bible and prayers from the *Book of Common Order*. The exhorter was allowed, in addition, to give an exhortation, and readers were encouraged to aspire to this higher office. The office of exhorter died out in the 1570s, while that of reader was formally abolished in 1581, although in practice it continued until the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s. In the eighteenth century the shortage of ministers led to the introduction of “home missionaries”, a position which survives to the present day. Generally readers and home missionaries would have been elders, but this was not always the case.

The natural practice, if there is no minister, is for an elder to conduct the service. Elders are required to “feed the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2), and they should be “apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). While this would not necessarily involve public speaking, there is no reason why an elder should not publicly expound the Word of God in the absence of a minister. The distinction is often made that the missionary or elder “exhorts” rather than “preaches”, and while the difference might not always be clear in practice, the distinction upholds an important biblical truth. The minister in preaching has authority from Christ as a herald, whereas the elder is speaking more as a father or a brother.

In the absence of an elder, the biblical pattern is for any professing man to conduct the service. Titus was reminded that he was “to set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). There must have been congregations in these cities, and these presumably had no pastor if there were no elders. Yet the congregations must have been

assembling for public worship, and this must have been conducted by whichever man in the congregation was most suitable. If no elder is available, it is clearly better to have someone who is not an office-bearer conducting the service than to have no public worship at all. Often elders and men prefer to read sermons rather than to speak, and to this there is no objection. But this is obviously only an option when the service is in a language in which written sermons are available. In most languages there are very few published sermons.

It is an important general principle of Presbyterianism that, in the absence of a settled minister, whoever conducts the service should do so by the authority of the interim moderator of the congregation, the minister who has been appointed to look after it for the time being. The interim moderator, in turn, is answerable to the courts of the Church, and ultimately to Christ Himself. In this way a regular order is preserved in the Church, and both speaker and hearers may be confident that the one speaking is doing so with the authority of Christ. The hearers are seeking to discern, in the words spoken, the voice of the One that "speaketh from heaven" (Hebrews 12:25). And it helps them to "attend upon the Lord without distraction" (1 Corinthians 7:35) if they satisfied in their minds that the speaker has been sent to them, in His providence, by the Head of the Church.

For Junior Readers – Lessons from the Life of John G Paton

16. A Leap in the Dark

There was fighting on Tanna yet again; 1860 was certainly not a peaceful year. During this time, a message came from the Mathiesons who lived at the mission station on the other side of the island. They were in poor health and had run out of European food, and they wanted Paton to send them some flour. Normally this would not have been a problem, but the war on the island made it impossible to travel to them over land.

In spite of the stormy weather, Paton managed to persuade two chiefs and several strong warriors to take him in a canoe to the Mathiesons. Paton filled a large pot with flour, tied the lid down and fastened the pot securely to the middle of the floor of the canoe. All the men in the canoe, apart from Paton, were good swimmers. The best swimmer sat behind Paton, so that he could grab Paton and help him to the shore if the canoe capsized.

The men paddled long and hard against the wind and the huge waves. They eventually came within two miles of the Mathiesons' mission station, and here the men gave up. They said they could not go any farther. They

were going to take the canoe ashore there because they had friends living nearby and they would be safe. The only problem was that the huge breakers were crashing over rocks, making it very dangerous to go ashore.

At last the leading warrior shouted: “Missi, hold on! There’s a smaller wave coming; we’ll ride in now.” Paton then describes what happened: “My heart rose to the Lord in trembling prayer. The wave came rolling on; every paddle, with all their united strength, struck into the sea; and the next moment our canoe was flying like a seagull on the crest of the wave towards the shore. Another instant and the wave had broken on the reef with a mighty roar, and rushed past us hissing in clouds of foam.”

All the men who had been paddling were knocked out of the canoe into the sea and Paton was the only one left sitting in the canoe as he held onto his seat for dear life! Paton didn’t know what to do. Another wave came crashing in behind him and he saw a man half swimming and half running along the rocks on the reef. In an instant Paton leapt out of the canoe and was struggling through the water to reach the man. Just as the wave crashed onto the rocks, the man managed to grab Paton, and the wave swept the two of them to the shore. What a relief!

Paton thanked God for taking him safely to land. He looked around and could see the other men from the canoe making their way safely to the shore. One of the men even managed to reach the shore with the pot of flour on his head undamaged! Some of the men had cut themselves on the rocks, but no one was seriously hurt. The men were going to wait with their friends and, when the wind was in the right direction, they planned to return home.

There was no fighting on this part of the island; so it was safe to travel by land. What a surprise the Mathiesons got when Paton arrived with his pot of flour. Paton spent a pleasant time with his mission friends. He then had a few hours’ rest before he started his journey home.

It was night time and Paton had decided to make the dangerous journey across land. He thought he could manage it with God’s help. Paton knew that the men of Tanna were cowards when it was dark. They did not like to leave their villages at night, so he thought he would be safe if he kept away from the villages.

He set off and made good progress. He followed the shore, knowing that it would eventually take him home. When he heard voices, he slunk into the bushes and waited till the people had past. He was about half-way home when steep cliffs blocked his route. Asking God for help he managed to climb the cliff, bit by bit, grasping tufts of grass and roots of bushes. Then he had to avoid a village; so he crawled on his hands and knees in the darkness, along the edge of the cliff, with the sea swirling far below. But somehow he got

lost and couldn't find the path down to the shore again. If he stayed where he was, the savages were sure to kill him in the morning.

He knew that there was a place where the rock face was smooth and went straight down into the sea. If somehow he managed to get down this cliff face and if the tide was low, he would be able to wade to the shore. But if the tide was high, the water would be too deep and Paton would drown. He tried throwing some stones down to find out if he could hear them splash; he even threw his umbrella down but he could hear nothing. What was he to do?

He prayed to God for safety and decided that his only way of escape was to jump off the cliff. He tied his clothes firmly around him in case they caught on something. He lowered himself off the cliff holding onto a branch and then he let go! He plummeted down, the air swirling past him, and then his feet struck the sea below, and the water cushioned his fall. Thanking and praising God, he picked himself up. It was low tide and he waded round the bottom of the cliff to the shore. He even found his umbrella!

When he eventually arrived home, the people were amazed that he had survived this journey. "Surely anyone of us would have been killed!" they exclaimed. "Your Jehovah God alone thus protects you and brings you safely home."

Paton was doing his duty. He was helping others in God's name. When we are doing what we ought to be doing, we can also ask God for His help and guidance. The Apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

If we are doing what we should be doing and we feel things becoming difficult, we can pray to God for help and patiently wait for Him to answer us. It does not need to be a long prayer; a short prayer from the heart is enough. This is what the woman of Canaan said to Jesus when she was in trouble: "Lord, help me". You can find out why she was asking for help by reading Matthew 15:21-28.

S M Campbell

Missionary to India

20. On to America

Last month we followed Alexander Duff to some of the places he visited in Scotland trying to arouse interest in the Mission in India, where he had spent many years.

Duff was sometimes irritated by ministers speaking too highly of him as they introduced him to a meeting. And he was particularly disturbed by the over-enthusiastic comments which appeared in an American newspaper. He told his wife: "It is all well enough to thank God for any instruments He

may raise up [to spread the gospel]. It is another matter to speak or write of them in exaggerated terms amounting to flattery.” He felt that this took away from the glory of God, who is the Giver of every good gift.

So Duff must have been rather anxious when he left Liverpool on the *Africa* in late January 1854 to cross the Atlantic. He had spent nearly four years touring Scotland holding meetings everywhere. Now he had accepted invitations to visit the United States and Canada. During a very stormy fortnight, he suffered badly from sea-sickness. As he lay in his cabin, his whole life passed before him and he admired God’s constant loving-kindness. But he thought of the many ways in which he had come short and wished that his whole life could be blotted out so that he could begin again, with a heart completely dead to sin and the world, and fully devoted to God. Of course, he could not begin again; he could only cling to what he called “the precious assurance” that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

The last day of the voyage was calm, and the ship anchored at the mouth of the Hudson River waiting for the next day to dawn and the thick mist to lift so that they could steam the last few miles to New York in safety. The next day the fog was still too thick but, when the fog cleared a little on the third day, the ship grounded several times on a sandbank. Each time she was able to pull herself off by going hard astern, until at last she stuck fast as the tide fell. When she stuck again the following day, the passengers were brought ashore on a smaller vessel.

Soon Duff was complaining of being upset by the exaggerated reports about him appearing in the American papers. He told his wife: “The glory is too much taken from the Creator and bestowed on the creature. This is sinful, and the holy and jealous God will not allow it.” And he exclaimed, “O for grace, grace, grace! Pray for me, O pray!”

Once ashore, Duff was soon launched into an endless round of meetings, beginning in Philadelphia. The first meeting took place in a hall which could hold over 3000 people, and there were thousands more who wished to attend – on a day when several feet of snow covered the ground outside. The next Sabbath evening, he preached in the same hall. Many ministers were present, as were several important people in the city who rarely went to church. Long before the service was to begin, the hall was packed. There were so many people in one of the galleries that it sagged noticeably but, mercifully, it did not give way. Because of the huge crowd and the lack of ventilation, the atmosphere in the hall was dreadfully stuffy; Duff compared it to the steamy heat in Calcutta in September. Because of this, he shortened his sermon, but he acknowledged, “The Lord greatly strengthened me. The people were obviously affected. My impressions be lastingly sealed home on souls!” He

went home soaked with sweat and spent a restless, sleepless night.

Then, on other days, there were visitors, shoals of them, and constant invitations to speak. "Ministers in all directions ask me to preach for them," he wrote to his wife; "committees of all sorts, of a religious or missionary character, do the same; managers of schools entreat me to visit and address their pupils. . . . Indeed, if I could multiply myself into a hundred bodies, each with the strength of a Hercules and the mental and moral energy of a Paul, I could not overtake the calls and demands made upon me . . . since my arrival." And he wrote this on a day when he was so exhausted that he did not have enough energy to put on his clothes; he had to go back to bed.

Yet he felt God had given him work to do. People were telling him that, besides giving a new impulse to the cause of foreign missions, he had impressed them in a new way with the importance of personal godliness. And Duff's response? "To the Lord be all the praise and the glory!" Then he exclaimed: "O for more grace, more living spirituality, more faith, more wisdom, more entire self-forgetting!"

He went to a place called Elizabethtown in the hope of finding some peace and quiet. "But these people's notions of quiet seem odd enough," he told his wife. "It is all in kindness, but this way of showing kindness is quite killing." Several friends were invited for dinner and they left for New York on the 6 pm train. Then dozens more came to meet Duff and, after family worship at 8 o'clock, many of them went away, leaving him exhausted and suffering from a bad headache. But other people flowed into the room to take their places. Duff struggled on till 10 o'clock, when, totally weary, he excused himself and went to bed. This may have been an extreme case, but something like it was repeated time and again during his stay in America.

And, of course, there were repeated meetings and services. At a meeting in New York, Duff spoke for two hours. He began by explaining what the Bible has to say about missionary work. Then he led his hearers to India. He described its crowds of people, its old temples, its mountains, its jungles and rice fields. And he spoke about how reluctant the followers of Christ were to bring the gospel to other parts of the world. Newspaper reporters sat at a table, but many of them had put down their pens. "They might as well have attempted to report a thunderstorm", someone commented – such was the overwhelming force of Duff's address. He ended by predicting, in the light of the Bible, the future triumphs of true religion.

Then it was on to Washington, where he preached before the political leaders of the United States and met the President. A visit to the Niagara Falls in early April must have provided a welcome break, but in Canada too he had to face an endless round of meetings and visitors. On his way west

from Hamilton to New London, the train was trudging slowly up the track until, not long after midday, at a station near a place “ambitiously called Paris”, the engine suddenly slipped off the rails. Thankfully, none of the carriages overturned; no one was injured; but the windows of Duff’s carriage were broken. There was nowhere for the more than 600 passengers to go; they waited outside in freezing temperatures for a train from the other direction. But it too had been involved in an accident. Then came another train heading west but it could not get past. As night fell, a train travelling east arrived at the little station and both sets of passengers exchanged trains. By 8 pm they moved off again, not reaching New London till after 11 o’clock.

A congregation had gathered at 7 pm to hear Duff; they waited patiently till 9.30, when a telegraph message arrived telling them about the accident. The service was rearranged for 10:30 am the next day. On the return journey to Hamilton, the engine again slipped off the track; once more the carriages stayed upright. But the passengers had to wait outside in the piercing cold till near midnight. Yet Duff was able to praise God when he reached his destination uninjured.

The next day Duff sailed across Lake Ontario to Toronto, then a town of only 40 000 people. He was met by Robert Burns, once a minister in Scotland, but now in Toronto. On the Sabbath afternoon, although suffering from a bad cold, Duff preached in a very large church, which was so crowded that there were people even on the pulpit stairs. At the top of the stairs was William Mackenzie, a prominent politician. After the ministers went home, Burns expressed his fear that Mackenzie had come to get ideas for a mocking article which he would write for the newspaper that he edited. But the next morning Mackenzie wrote a long letter to Burns in which he spoke of Duff in the highest terms. In his first prayer Duff had referred to Zacchaeus, who wanted “to see Jesus who He was”; Duff was thinking of those who had come to church that day just to see a famous missionary. Mackenzie, a little man, wrote that he indeed went Zacchaeus-like to church, found no seat in a pew and no sycamore tree to climb, and went to the top of the pulpit stairs. There he was arrested by God’s truth in a way he had never experienced before. Duff could only hope that God would bless these impressions for the man’s salvation.

There followed an endless round of visits and meetings in Toronto and other places in Canada until he returned to New York. When he arrived on the quay to board the ship which would take him to Liverpool, Duff found a huge crowd gathered to bid him farewell. He was presented with £3000 for his work in India, equal perhaps to £300 000 today. But he was totally worn out, and many months of ill health lay before him.

For Younger Readers

Hugh Never Forgot

One day Hugh did something wrong. At last his father heard about it. And he was not pleased.

After tea his father took Hugh upstairs.

Did he punish Hugh? No, though he must have punished Hugh many other times, when he did what was wrong.

Did he give Hugh a big row? No.

He did something that Hugh never forgot. They both went down on their knees and his father prayed. He asked God to change his son and to give him a new heart.

Hugh's father wanted him to stop doing wrong things. But he wanted more. He wanted God to change Hugh so that he would not want to do what is wrong.

Hugh never forgot the evening when his father prayed with him. He would probably have forgotten if his father had punished him or given him a big row – but not when he prayed.

Years later, God did change Hugh and gave him a new heart. He was very thankful then for his father's prayers. You too should be thankful if your father and mother pray for you.

And you too should pray. Ask God to change you and to give you a new heart.

Choosing Friends

J C Ryle

Another piece, slightly edited, from this noted nineteenth-century English minister. It follows the article last month on making the Bible our guide.

Never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God. Understand me, I do not speak of *acquaintances*. I do not mean that you ought to have nothing to do with anyone except true Christians. To take such a line is neither possible nor desirable in this world. Christianity does not require us to be uncourteous.

But I do advise you to be very careful in your choice of *friends*. Do not open all your heart to anyone merely because he is clever, agreeable, good-

natured, high-spirited and kind. These things are all very well in their way, but they are not everything. Never be satisfied with the friendship of anyone who will not be useful to your soul.

Believe me, the importance of this advice cannot be overrated. You cannot measure how much harm is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a soul. Give him this help, and he cares little for all the armour which you may put on against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, good homes, letters from parents – he knows well that all will avail you little if you will only cling to ungodly friends. You may resist many open temptations, refuse many plain snares, but once you take up a bad companion, he is content. That awful chapter in the Bible, which describes Amnon’s wicked conduct with Tamar, almost begins with these words, “But Amnon had a friend, *a very subtle man*” (2 Samuel 13:3).

You must recollect that we are all creatures who imitate others. A command may teach us, but it is example that draws us. There is something in us all which means that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those we live with. And, the more we like them, the stronger this disposition grows. Although we are not aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions; we gradually give up what they dislike and take up what they like, in order to become closer friends with them. And, worst of all, we catch their ways in things that are wrong far quicker than in things that are right. Health, unhappily, is not contagious, but disease is. It is far easier to catch a chill than to impart a glow, and to make each other’s religion dwindle away than grow and prosper.

Young people, I ask you to lay these things to heart before you let anyone become your constant companion, before you get into the habit of telling him everything, and going to him in all your troubles and all your pleasures. Before you do this, just think of what I have been saying. Ask yourself, Will this be a useful friendship to me or not?

“Evil communications” do indeed “corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33). I wish that text were written in people’s hearts. Good friends are among our greatest blessings. They may keep us back from much evil, enliven us in our course, speak a word in season to us, draw us upward, and draw us on. But a bad friend is a positive evil, a weight continually dragging us down and chaining us to earth. Keep company with a man without religion, and it is more than probable you will in the end become like him. That is the general consequence of all such friendships. The good go down to the bad, and the bad do not come up to the good. Even a stone will give way before a continual dropping. The world’s proverb is only too correct: “Clothes and

company tell true tales about character". "Show me who a man lives with," say the Spaniards, "and I will show you what he is."

I dwell the more upon this point because it has more to do with your prospects in life than at first sight appears. If ever you marry, it is more than probable you will choose a wife among the connections of your friends. If Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had not formed a friendship with Ahab's family, he would most likely not have married Ahab's daughter. And who can estimate the importance of a right choice in marriage? It is a step which, according to the old saying, "either makes a man or mars him". Your happiness in both lives may depend on it. Your wife must either help your soul or harm it; there is no medium. She will either fan the flame of religion in your heart, or throw cold water upon it and make it burn low. She will either be wings or fetters, a rein or a spur to your Christianity, according to her character. He that findeth a good wife does indeed find "a good thing"; but if you have the least wish to find one, be very careful how you choose your friends.

Do you ask me what kind of friends you should choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul, friends whom you can really respect, friends whom you would like to have near you on your death-bed, friends who love the Bible and are not afraid to speak to you about it, friends such as you will not be ashamed of owning at the coming of Christ and the day of judgement. Follow the example that David sets you; he says, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63). Remember the words of Solomon: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). But depend on it, bad company in this life is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come.

Enemies

In the Book of Joshua, chapter 10, we read of five wicked kings who gathered together to fight against Joshua and his men. But we are told that the Lord gave the victory to Joshua. In the end, the five wicked kings fled and hid in a cave at a place called Makkedah.

As Joshua and his men had to pursue other enemies, he commanded his men to seal the mouth of the cave so that the five kings would not be able to escape. Later on, Joshua ordered his men to open the mouth of the cave and to bring the five kings to him. He then ordered his men to put their feet on the kings' necks, and the five enemy kings were executed one by one. This

is a powerful account of how the Lord can help us against our enemies.

We too have powerful enemies. We might even say that our hearts are like the cave at Makkedah – that is, we have wicked kings hidden there. But in our hearts we have many more kings than five. To mention just a few, we have King Envy, King Jealousy, King Covetousness, King Dishonesty, King Laziness, King Liar, King Unbelief, King Sabbath-breaking, King Vanity, King Selfishness, King Procrastination, and so the list goes on. These kings are strong and have a powerful grip on our hearts and lives. We are their slaves and they rule us completely. But the worst part of it is that we enjoy being their slaves, we take pleasure in doing their will.

You might be wondering whether you really have all these wicked kings ruling your life and you may also wonder how they got into your heart in the first place. We are told in the Word of God that all these wicked kings are already living in our hearts when we are born. In spite of what people say about babies and young children being innocent, sinless creatures, God says the opposite. So godly King David tells us: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

You might also be asking yourself what you can possibly do with such a host of powerful enemies in your heart. Let us consider what they are able to do to us in our short life on this earth.

King Envy and King Jealousy will cause us to envy other people’s happiness. They are able to make us thoroughly unhappy just because other people around us are happy and because they have what we want. We may end up wishing that bad things would happen to them and that they would lose the nice things they have.

King Dishonesty and King Liar make us tell lies about other people and cheat on them. King Covetousness makes us wish we could have everything we look at, even things we do not need – or what God, in His wisdom, has not given us. If God did not restrain us, we could end up stealing, or even killing, so that we could have those things.

Of all these kings, the most cruel is King Unbelief. He sits very high in our hearts and will do his utmost to keep us out of heaven. The Word of God tells us that we are born sinners and that we deserve to perish in hell for ever. The only way to obtain salvation for our souls is to believe in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners. He was holy and without sin and He died a most cruel and miserable death so that those who believe in Him will be saved. Now, King Unbelief wants to see people’s souls suffering in hell for ever and his mission is to whisper lies in their ears day and night. One of his powerful tricks is to make people believe that, because God is merciful, He will not send them to hell; so they do not need

to repent of their sins. But God tells us, in the Bible, that the only way to heaven is by faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But King Unbelief tells us that there are other ways to heaven – for instance, that we can go to heaven by being good or decent people.

King Unbelief has a very powerful ally, King Procrastination. He persuades people to put off coming to Christ for forgiveness and he makes them believe that they can enjoy a sinful life while they are young – and later on they will come to Christ. He tells them: “Tomorrow you will go to Christ; there is no need to hurry”. How many souls are now in hell because they left off seeking Christ till the next day! And when they least expected it, they were called into eternity.

Do you ever think of the wicked kings that live in your heart? I hope you do, because otherwise you are in danger of losing your soul. But maybe you wonder how you can subdue such powerful enemies. Remember how Joshua called his men to put their feet on the necks of the five wicked kings. He then encouraged them with these words: “Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom you fight”. God is far more powerful than His enemies and ours. He can help you to fight the wicked kings that hide inside your heart. Do not let King Procrastination and King Unbelief deceive you into thinking that there is plenty of time in the future. You are to believe the Word of God: “*Now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

C Johnson

Looking Around Us

Thanking the Lord

Children at Portree Primary School on Skye said a very short grace before lunch each day. They thanked God for their food and “for everything”, addressing Him as “Lord”.

Then a parent objected, and the word *Lord* was removed from the grace. Who the children thought they were saying thanks to at this stage is not clear. But, whatever other people do, we should always thank the Lord, the true God, for everything. Every good thing we get comes from Him.

Thankfully other parents and local people contacted the school to say they were unhappy at the change, and the school went back to the original form of their grace. Schools and other public bodies seem terrified when someone objects to them acknowledging God in any way. But here public pressure made the school continue its old practice.

God rules over everything. Let us be careful not to deny Him in any way.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises

Prize-Winners at John Tallach School 2007

Form 1: Idirashe Chikomba, Rumbidzai Makaza, Justice Nyathi, Sepiso Zulu, Nkosiyapha Khumalo, Mongiwa Ndlovu, Petronella Ncube, Sanelisiwe Dube, Lynne Ncube, Bahle Ndlovu.

Form 2: Zibusiso Dlamini, Mbokeni Kulube, Ntsikelelo Nyilika, Vuyiso Dhlamini, Casper Ncube, Aubrey Nkomo, Ndabezinhle Msimanga, Thandiwe Lusinga, Mbongeni Maphosa, Ntombikamama Moyo, Thamsanqa Ncube, Bhekisipho Mpofu.

Form 3: Musawenkosi Ncube, Sicelo Matambo, Samukeliso Thambo, Daisy Chikwanha, Richard Jekopo, Sindiso Nyathi, Yurinov Mambau, Christian Mlangeni, Tendai Muronzi, Blessings Tshuma, Michelle Dube.

Form 4: Ashton Mpofu, Chengegai Shereni, Bukhosi Mathiya, Petronella Dube, Heather Moyo, Nomagugu Pilime, Hazel Mhlolo, Iphithule Mathiya, Predious Tshuma, Nosizwe Dube, Bongiwe Ndlovu, Nomawethu Moyo.

UK Names for Exercise 1 2007-08

Senior Section: *Bonar Bridge:* Sandy Campbell. *Dingwall:* Beverly MacKenzie. *Glasgow:* Laura Chisholm. *Inverness:* Catherine Schouten. *Kyle:* Daniel Whear. *London:* Elizabeth Munns, David Rowland, Jeremy and Justin van Kralingen. *North Uist:* John Cameron, Christina Macdonald. *Shieldaig:* Jen A Fraser. *Stornoway:* Alasdair G Gillies. *Stratherrick:* John A Fraser. *Swavesey:* Helen and Rebecca Parish. *Uffington:* Lucy Cooper.

Intermediate Section: *Barnoldswick:* Philip J Martin, Robert Ross. *Bonar Bridge:* Elizabeth Campbell. *Crowborough:* Kelvin Woodhams. *Dingwall:* Alistair Mackenzie. *Dunoon:* Rachel Maley. *Edinburgh:* Eilidh Logan, Isla and Jonathon Macdonald. *Glasgow:* Donna Chisholm, Catherine Freeke, Kate and Neil Gillies, Rachel Macleod. *Haywards Heath:* Hannah Woodhams. *Inverness:* Andrew Campbell, Anna Fraser, Thomas D Maton. *King's Lynn:* Joanna Wiltshire. *North Tolsta:* Sean Macleod. *North Uist:* Margaret Cameron, John A Macdonald, Lauren Macinnes. *Portree:* Rachel Mackinnon. *Scaynes Hill:* Philip Main. *Sidcup:* Rupert J Turnbull. *Stornoway:* Sarah K Gillies, Lauren Macdonald. *Swindon:* Alison Tugwell. *Uig:* Murdo G Mackay. *Vatten:* Rebecca Fleming.

Junior Section: *Barnoldswick:* David Martin. *Croydon:* Andrew Hickman. *Dingwall:* Andrew Macleod, Ruth M MacLeod, Finlay Murray. *Dunoon:* Elspeth Maley. *Edinburgh:* Catriona Logan, Daniel MacDonald. *Faringdon:* Philippa Sayers. *Gairloch:* Rachel Mackenzie, Mairi Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Ruairidh Macleod, Callum and Peter MacPherson. *Inverness:* Peter Schouten. *London:* Amy van Kralingen. *Longcot:* Ruth Cooper. *Luton:* Stephen Kingham. *North Harris:* Tormod Mackinnon. *North Tolsta:* Shona Harrison, Sheena Mackenzie, Lucy A MacLeod. *North Uist:* Iain Boyd, Fraser Macdonald. *Portree:* Cameron Rose. *Sidcup:* Jeremy and Lucy Turnbull. *Stratherrick:* Ewen Fraser. *Swavesey:* Sarah Parish. *Trowbridge:* Joanna Broome. *Vatten:* Sabrina Annand.

Upper Primary Section: *Aberdeen:* Sarah Somerset. *Barnoldswick:* Rebecca Ross. *Broadstairs:* Edward Martin. *Chippenham:* Jessica Salkeld. *Croydon:* Marcus and Susanna Hickman. *Dingwall:* Graham MacLeod. *Edinburgh:* Emma Norris, Annabelle Macdonald. *Gairloch:* Donald Mackenzie, Catherine Wyatt. *Glasgow:* Rebecca Macleod, Kenneth Macpherson. *Inverness:* Jonathan Fiddes, John and Rebekah Maton. *Kyle:* Nathan Whear. *London:* Andrew Munns. *Longcot:* Samuel Cooper. *North Tolsta:* Murrion Harrison, Innes Mackenzie, Scott Macleod. *North Uist:* Eilidh Cameron, Angus Macinnes. *Sidcup:* Jemima and Joseph Turnbull. *Staffin:* Neil Matheson, Carey Ross. *Stornoway:* Cirsty Gillies, Aimee Macleod. *Swavesey:*

Matthew and Robert Parish. *Tonbridge*: Heidi Playfoot. *Trowbridge*: Nathan Broome. *Vatten*: Jayne-Anne and John Fleming.

Lower Primary Section: *Barnoldswick*: James Ross. *Chippenham*: Rosie Salkeld. *Dingwall*: Hannah Mackenzie, Jane and Mark Mackenzie, Laura MacLeod, Alasdair, Donald and Uilleam Murray, Matthew Ross. *Edinburgh*: Jessica and Jonathan Norris. *Gairloch*: Andrew Mackenzie, Roderick Wyatt. *Garrabost*: Isla and Duncan Macdonald. *Glasgow*: Jonathan and Sarah MacLeod, Katie Macpherson, Rachel Smith. *Haywards Heath*: Joseph Woodhams. *Inverness*: Jonathan Janczak. *King's Lynn*: Susie Wiltshire. *Kyle*: Sarah Whear. *London*: Claudia and James Campbell, Claudia, Miles and Oliver Martin, Henry and Samuel Munns. *Ness*: Joshua Acton, Kathryn Ferguson, Joanna and Jonathan Maclean. *North Tolsta*: Anna and Mairi Campbell. *Sidcup*: Annabelle, Henry and Sebastian Turnbull. *South Harris*: Cameron MacLeod. *Stornoway*: Cara and Matthew Macleod, Ryan MacSween. *Swavesey*: Priscilla Parish. *Trowbridge*: Abigail and Daniel Broome.

2008 Youth Conference

This year's Youth Conference will be held, God willing, from Tuesday, April 1, to Thursday, April 3. Further details should appear in next month's magazine.

Youth Conference Recordings

Recordings of most of the papers given at Youth Conferences from 1985-2000 are available on the website www.middletoome.com. More recent recordings are being added.

An Idle Word

It passed away; it passed away;
You cannot hear the sound today.
'Twas water lost upon the ground,
Or wind that vanishes in sound.
O who will gather it, or tell
How idle from the lips it fell?

'Tis written with an iron pen,
And you shall hear it yet again.
A solemn thing it then will seem
To trifle with a holy theme.
O let our lightest sayings be
Uttered as for eternity!

Anon

Price 70p