

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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God Speaks to Everyone

Ebenezer Erskine was one of Scotland's best ministers. After he died, in 1754, another minister exclaimed to a friend: "You never heard Ebenezer Erskine preach! Then you never heard the gospel in its majesty." To speak so strongly in an age when Scotland had several exceptional ministers must have been an exaggeration, but no one can doubt that Erskine's preaching powerfully displayed the majesty of the gospel of the grace of God.

In 1704 Erskine married Alison Turpie, a young woman noted for her godliness. Erskine was already a respected minister when one day he overheard a conversation between his wife and his younger brother Ralph, who also was a minister. Erskine was in his study and could not help listening to Alison and his brother as they discussed religious experience in the garden just outside his window. He felt their ideas and feelings were so different from his that he felt forced to conclude that they had something which he lacked. He decided that this "something" was saving grace – and Ebenezer Erskine sought it earnestly. It was according to Christ's promise: "Seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7). This was the time, he thought, when he was truly converted.

No doubt God had something highly important to teach Erskine in the way that He then dealt with him. If he was already converted, Erskine learned much more, by this experience, about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. If, as he himself believed, he was not already converted, he then learned what was more important than anything else in this world. But one thing is clear from his life and preaching, during the many other years he spent in the ministry: he was a truly godly man, a man whose preaching was blessed by God to a remarkable degree.

As you read various verses in your Bible, you might ask yourself: Is God speaking to *me* here? How can I know? Ebenezer Erskine has the perfect answer to that question. "God speaks to every sinner", he said in a sermon, "as particularly as though He named him by his name and surname."

So, when the Bible speaks about sin, it speaks to everyone who reads it and to everyone who listens to it being read. No one has any right to ignore

its message. When we read that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), we are to say, This is spoken to me directly – just as if my full name was mentioned, and my address, and my date of birth, and every other identifying detail I can possibly imagine. Yes, it does apply to others, but what I have to take to heart is this: this is true of *me*. So we ought to confess before God: I have sinned; I am coming short of His glory.

And when we think like this, we should stop and think of the seriousness of our position. What does it mean to be a sinner? It means that we have not kept the law of God – a Being who is perfectly holy. And this holy Being is our Creator. So He has the right to expect perfect obedience from us. And in the Bible He is telling us all this personally; He is speaking to us as directly as if He mentioned our name.

It is the same when a minister addresses a congregation. He speaks about the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin and the terrible consequences that will follow it in a lost eternity. Although he may speak to the congregation in general and does not seem to address anybody in particular, remember that he speaks as an ambassador for God. So he is speaking to every individual who is present – about sin and its consequences – as particularly as if he mentioned them all by name.

And his is true, whatever message he brings. He may be explaining one of the Bible's teachings. Then everybody must listen, because it is a message from God. And we should make a proper response. We should believe the message (assuming the minister keeps to the truths of the Bible). What is more, we should worship God – we should lift up our hearts to Him to express some idea of His greatness and the wonder and the glory of all that He has done. God is *worthy* to be praised and, whenever we hear about Him and His wonderful works, we should respond by praising Him. The final Psalm in a service gives us a particular opportunity to praise God, because we not only have the words of the Psalm before us, we have also heard many other things which show how wonderful God is and this should draw out from our hearts the response of praise.

When did God work more wonderfully than in providing salvation? We hear how Christ Jesus took human nature and came into the world. That was indeed a marvellous action, but why did He do so? He came to save sinners, human beings polluted by sin. He came because they have offended their Creator, the holy God; they deserved to suffer eternal punishment. But Christ came to take the place of sinners; He came to obey the law of God instead of them; He came to die for them – to go to the cross of Calvary and suffer their punishment. He did die, and the third day He rose again. His resurrection was a sign that God the Father had accepted Christ's whole work – all that

He did, until He suffered on the cross and cried, “It is finished”, and died.

When a minister preaches along these lines, who is he speaking to? He is speaking to everyone, individually, just as if he was mentioning them all by name. What should their reaction be? They should receive the message as totally relevant to themselves personally. They must not say, This is for someone else. That may be true, but it is to miss the point. The fact is: when we hear about Christ and salvation through him, God is speaking to each of us personally, just as if He told the preacher to mention us by name. God sends the message of salvation to every individual hearer, and each hearer ought to make a proper response. What is that? It is to believe the message about Christ as the one and only Saviour, and to trust in Him. Christ calls you to look to Him; He calls you to come to Him. In other words, He calls you to trust in Him. And He assures you: “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). No one has any right to say, It is not for me.

But someone might ask, Can I be sure that I may trust Him for salvation? Have I any right to believe that He will save me? The answer is that Jesus Christ calls everyone who hears the gospel message to look to Him. He says, “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22). So He is calling *everyone* to trust in Him who hears Him speak through the Bible, or who hears any of His ambassadors proclaim the gospel message. Through them He is speaking to every individual hearer, just as surely as if their name was mentioned.

When we hear the call of the gospel, we are to understand that Christ is speaking to us as if there was no one else present in church. Indeed when He speaks to us in this way, we should be afraid of offending Him by refusing His salvation. When such a glorious Person comes to us personally to offer such a wonderful gift – Himself and salvation through Him – how dare we refuse? It is the ultimate insult.

Someone might say, I have committed so many sins; these sins have been so evil; can there be salvation for me? Yes, there can. Do not think that Christ can only save those who have committed a few small sins – then no one could be saved. Christ can save the chief of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15). No one has any right to say, This salvation is not sufficient for me.

How did Erskine find hope when he concluded he was still unconverted? It must have been through the same gospel he was to preach so freely to other sinners throughout the rest of his life. He must have realised that, although the name Ebenezer Erskine was not found in the Bible, Christ was speaking to him as surely as if his name *was* actually mentioned. Christ called Erskine to Himself, and he came – in other words, he believed the message of the gospel, and he trusted in Christ as the one Saviour of sinners.

Why Did God Permit Sin?

Adapted slightly from *Brownlow North – His Life and Work*. North was a minister about 150 years ago.

At the end of one of his services in Edinburgh, a young man asked to speak to Brownlow North, and was taken in to the side room, where he was meeting with those who were anxious about their souls. The man told him: "I have heard your sermon, and I have heard you preach often now, and I neither care for you nor your preaching – unless you can tell me why did God permit sin in the world".

"Then I'll tell you," the preacher at once replied; "God permitted sin, because He chose to do so." The man was taken aback by the ready retort. It threw no light on the subject of his question and yet expressed all the conclusion which the deepest thinkers on that mysterious subject have been able to arrive at, referring to it as an unsolved enigma. God in His good pleasure permitted it for reasons altogether wise, but not revealed to us, and to a large extent beyond our power to understand.

"Because He chose it," he repeated, as the objector stood speechless, and added, "If you continue to question God's dealings and argue against them, vainly puffed up by your carnal mind, striving to be wise above what is written, I will tell you something more that God will choose to do. He will some day choose to put you into hell. It is vain for man to strive with his Maker; you cannot resist Him. And neither your opinion of His dealings, nor your blasphemous expression of them, will in the least lessen the pain of your everlasting damnation, which will most certainly be your portion if you go on in your present spirit. There were such questioners like you in Paul's time, and what the Apostle said to them I say to you: 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?'"

The young man interrupted him and asked, "Is there such a text as that in the Bible?"

"Yes, there is, in the ninth chapter of Romans; and I recommend you to go home and read that chapter and learn from His own Word that God claims for Himself the right to do whatever He chooses, and does not permit the thing formed to say to Him that formed it: 'Why hast Thou made me thus?' And after you have read it, you are to remember that, besides permitting sin, there is another thing God has chosen to do – God chose to send Jesus." In a few words, North then pointed out to him the way of salvation, both from sin and wrath, which God had prepared of His own free and sovereign will, and urged him to embrace it.

The following Friday a young man wanted to speak to him. After being

shown upstairs, he asked North if he remembered him, but he could not recall who he was. “Do you not remember the young man who asked you to tell him why God permitted sin?”

“Yes, perfectly.”

“Well, I am that young man; and you said that God permitted sin because He chose it, and you told me to go home and read the ninth chapter of Romans. And you also told me that God chose to send Jesus to die for such sinners as I was, and I went home and did what you told me.” The young man said he had gone home, and after reading that chapter, which so many find a stumbling-block, he had pleaded for pardon in the name of Jesus, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be his teacher. He was afterwards enabled to believe that he had been heard and forgiven, and now he said, “I am happy, O so happy. And though the devil comes sometimes to tempt me with my old thoughts, and to ask me what reason I have to think God has forgiven me, I have always managed to get him away by telling him that I do not want to judge things any longer by my own reason but by God’s Word, and that the only reason why I know I am forgiven is that, for Christ’s sake, God chooses to pardon me.”

From Genesis to Revelation

3. From Jacob to Moses

This series is intended to provide an overview of the Bible. The last article pointed to some of the contrasts in Genesis between God’s children and those who were not – for instance Jacob and Esau. It ended with a glance at how God overrules everything in His providence, including the wickedness of Joseph’s brothers when they sold him into Egypt. A *type* is like a picture, designed by God to give teaching of what would later be made clearer – for instance, an animal sacrifice was a type of Christ offering Himself up instead of sinners.

Jacob and his family lived out the rest of their lives in Egypt under the Pharaoh of the time. A few hundred years later their descendants were made slaves under another Pharaoh. Their hardships made them cry to God, who sent Moses and Aaron to lead them out of Egypt to the promised land. We could learn many things about God’s providence by following through the events by which the Israelites were brought out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and across the wilderness, before they were brought into the inheritance which God had promised to Abraham.

But God intended these events to be pictures of what is spiritual. For instance, you can see Israel’s slavery in Egypt to be a picture of the bondage that sinners experience as the slaves of Satan. God made them realise that

they were in a desperate condition; He brought them out by His power, for the sake of Christ – of whom Moses was a type as a leader. When sinners believe in Christ, God in His kindness brings them out of Satan's kingdom. Then they have to pass through the wilderness of this world before they are brought at last to the promised inheritance of heaven.

Beyond the Book of Genesis and the first half of Exodus, there is much in the rest of the five books of Moses – Genesis to Deuteronomy – which you may find very difficult to understand. There are so many detailed instructions about laws and ceremonies with very little explanation – especially about what we are to learn from them. We are told that “the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 2:7). So when the people did not understand the ceremonies which they were instructed to perform, they were to go to the priests, who were to teach them about these things. But what about us today? How can we learn what is meant by these ceremonies? We may find in other parts of the Bible what may help us to understand, and we may learn something of their meaning as we listen to preaching. But, above all, we should ask God to give the Holy Spirit to help us grasp their meaning.

In these early stages of God's revelation, He made known many truths by means of what we may call pictures, such as types. We have already noticed some of the teachings which God gave in connection with sacrifices. A slightly fuller list of these teachings would include the fact that all sin deserves eternal death, that a substitute may suffer instead of the sinner, and that sin can be forgiven as a result of the death of the substitute. A believing Israelite in Old Testament times would have understood that the sacrifices and the promises were all pointing forward to the One who was to bruise the devil's head, the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15). This was Christ who, in John's language, was to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

Christ was not only represented by the sacrifice; every priest in Israel was a picture of Him, especially the high priest, from Aaron onwards. The most important sacrifices in Israel were those offered on the Day of Atonement. That was the one day in the whole year when the high priest could go into the inner room in the tabernacle – or later, the temple – the room which is known as the holy of holies. He went in with the blood of that day's special sacrifices and sprinkled some of it there. The blood was evidence that the animals had been sacrificed; it was a sign of their death.

So we read in Hebrews of Christ as a high priest entering into “a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” – in other words, entering into heaven itself. It was “neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal

redemption” (9:11,12). After Christ offered up Himself as a perfect sacrifice, He entered into heaven as the Saviour who had died; so His blood – in other words, His death and all its benefits – is made freely available to sinners. The man who was high priest after the ascension of Christ, when he thought of his work of offering up sacrifices, should have realised that all the sacrifices were already fulfilled in Christ; there was no need for any more. Because Christ’s sacrifice was perfect, it will never need to be repeated. Thus Peter told the high priest about Christ: “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31) – and indeed for the whole world.

Take another example of a type. There is great emphasis on leprosy in the Book of Leviticus – though it was not exactly the same as the disease known by that name today. Those who suffered from this wasting disease had to live apart from other people and identify themselves by crying, “Unclean, unclean”. Leprosy is a picture of sin. And we should note the care with which it had to be established whether someone who seemed to be suffering from this disease actually had leprosy or not. Then, for the person whose leprosy had been healed, there was a process of cleansing – which involved the offering of sacrifice – and this points to leprosy’s connection with sin. Not that the leper was necessarily a worse sinner than anyone else, but his leprosy was a type of his own sin and of the sins of others.

When Christ was performing miracles, among the most notable was His healing of lepers. It was a further picture of His power to deal with sin and to heal the sinner – on the basis of His sufferings and death. Thus Matthew tells us that Jesus “healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (8:16,17) – for sickness was the result of sin coming into the world. Christ’s healing of leprosy and other diseases was a sign that He had come to deal with the altogether-more-serious disease of sin by bearing its guilt and enduring its punishment unto death.

Romanism: Another Religion?

1. Asking Basic Questions

Rev D W B Somerset

This is the first part of a paper presented at the 2008 Youth Conference.

With the rise of atheism and of Islam in Britain, Protestants have increasingly found themselves taking the same line as Romanists on important moral and political issues such as abortion, euthanasia and

blasphemy. This common ground makes it natural to ask whether Romanism is so wrong after all; if there is so much common ground, are we not perhaps in general agreement with the Church of Rome? Could it be the case that our forefathers were too narrow and extreme in their hostility towards her errors?

This is one influence which is tending to make people less alert to the dangers of Romanism in the present day. A second influence, which always operates and is even more powerful, is the tendency in fallen man to lose the impression of spiritual things. When God's people are close to Him, and when the Holy Spirit is enlightening their minds, they see plainly the realities of heaven and hell, of Christ and the devil, of truth and falsehood. But under the influence of this world, the impression of spiritual things fades away. The all-important need of truth in spiritual things is lost, and the danger of error is no longer so apparent. And as our differences with Rome are essentially spiritual, there is always the danger of a drift in the soul towards tolerating and accepting Romanism. This is why this subject was chosen for the Youth Conference. We need to remind ourselves afresh of the dangers of Romanism and of the reasons why we as a Church believe it necessary to give so much emphasis to these dangers.

The approach that we are taking is to consider Romanism as a religion. School children in Britain are nowadays being taught basic facts about Islam and Hinduism and other false religions, and we may ask some basic questions about Romanism to see how it compares with Biblical Christianity. Is it the same religion or a different one? Obviously on the surface there are similarities, such as the words that are used: *Christ, the Bible, justification* and so on. But, as we shall see, Romanism is so different in practice from Biblical Christianity that we would argue that it amounts to a separate religion. The differences between them can be compared to those between Biblical Christianity and Islam. Indeed it will be helpful, as we go along, to keep Islam in the picture so as to get a broader perspective on the subject. And if our conclusion is correct – that Romanism is a separate religion disguised as Christianity, then clearly it will follow that Romanism is highly dangerous, and that we as a Church are quite right to be exposing and denouncing it.

There are various general questions that one can ask about a religion. Sometimes it is not easy to get an answer to these questions because, for many people, religion is largely a matter of performing rituals, and they are hazy about doctrines and beliefs and have no interest in them. They observe festivals perhaps, such as Christmas or Eid, but they cannot give a sensible explanation for their behaviour.

We want to consider four questions that can be asked about Biblical Christianity, Romanism, Islam, Judaism and any other religion: (1.) What

does the religion teach about God (or gods)? (2.) What does the religion teach about man and about death? (3.) What morality does the religion teach? (4.) What does the religion direct us to do? These are basic questions, and in the next article we consider the first of these questions.

Separation from the World

4. More on What is *not* Meant by Separation

J C Ryle

This is another section, slightly edited, of a chapter from the book, *Practical Religion*. It has been slightly edited. Last month's article began explaining what is *not* meant by separation from the world. Ryle warns here against separation from a Church for the wrong reasons, but such separation may be necessary – if, for instance, the Church is on an unscriptural foundation.

(e) When Paul said, “Come . . . out and be . . . separate”, he did not mean that Christians ought to leave the company of mankind and shut themselves up in solitude. It is one of the crying errors of the Church of Rome to suppose that great holiness is to be attained by such practices. It is the foolish delusion of the whole army of monks, nuns and hermits. Separation of this kind is not according to the mind of Christ. He says distinctly in His last prayer, “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). There is not a word in the Acts or the Epistles to recommend such a separation. True believers are always represented as mixing in the world, doing their duty in it, and glorifying God by patience, meekness, purity and courage in their various positions, and not by cowardly deserting them. It is also foolish to suppose that we can keep the world and the devil out of our hearts by going into holes and corners. True religion and unworldliness are best seen, not in timidly forsaking the post which God has allotted to us, but in boldly standing our ground and showing the power of grace to overcome evil.

(f) Last, but not least, when Paul said, “Come . . . out and be . . . separate”, he did not mean that Christians ought to withdraw from every Church in which there are unconverted members, or refuse to worship in the company of any who are not believers, or to keep away from the Lord's table if any ungodly people go up to it. This is a very common but a very serious mistake. There is not a text in the New Testament to justify it, and it ought to be condemned as a pure invention of man. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself deliberately allowed Judas Iscariot to be an apostle for three years and gave him the Lord's Supper. He has taught us, in the parable of the wheat and

tares, that converted and unconverted will be “together till the harvest” and cannot be divided (Matthew 13:30).

In Jesus' Epistles to the Seven Churches, and in all Paul's Epistles, we often see faults and corruptions mentioned and reproved; but we are never told that they justify desertion of the assembly, or neglect of ordinances. In short, we must not look for a perfect Church, a perfect congregation and a perfect company of communicants until the marriage supper of the Lamb. If there are unworthy church members, or unworthy partakers of the Lord's Supper, the sin is theirs and not ours; we are not their judges. But to separate ourselves from Churches, and deprive ourselves of Christian ordinances, because others use them unworthily, is to take up a foolish, unreasonable and unscriptural position. It is not the mind of Christ, and it certainly is not Paul's idea of separation from the world.

I commend these six points to the calm consideration of all who wish to understand the subject of separation from the world. Far more might be said about each and all of them than I have space to say here. I have seen so many mistakes made about them, and so much misery and unhappiness caused by those mistakes, that I want to put Christians on their guard. I want them not to take up positions hastily, in the zeal of their first love, which they will afterwards be obliged to give up.

I leave this part of my subject with two pieces of advice, which I offer especially to young Christians. I advise them, for one thing, if they really desire to come out from the world, to remember that the shortest path is not always the path of duty. To quarrel with all our unconverted relatives, to cut off all our friends, to withdraw entirely from mixed society, to live an exclusive life, to give up every act of courtesy and civility in order to devote ourselves to the direct work of Christ, – all this may seem very right, and may satisfy our consciences and save us trouble. But I suggest it is often a selfish, lazy, self-pleasing line of conduct, and that the true cross and true line of duty may be to deny ourselves and adopt a very different course of action.

For another thing, I advise them, if they want to come out from the world, to watch against a sour, morose, unfriendly, gloomy, unpleasant attitude, and never to forget that there is such a thing as winning “without the Word” (1 Peter 3:1). Let them strive to show unconverted people that their principles, whatever others may think of them, make them cheerful, agreeable, good-tempered, unselfish, considerate for others, and ready to take an interest in everything that is innocent and of good report. In short, let there be no *needless* separation between us and the world. In many things, as I shall soon show, we must be separate; but let us take care that it is separation of the right sort. If the world is offended by such separation, we cannot help it.

But let us never give the world an opportunity to say that our separation is foolish, senseless, ridiculous, unreasonable and unscriptural.

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

30. The Well

The island of Aniwa did not get as much rain as some of the surrounding islands because it was flat and the rain clouds did not gather over it. Even when there was rain, it quickly drained away through the light soil and porous coral rock. This meant that, at certain times in the year, good clean water was very scarce and the people often became ill from drinking dirty water.

Paton decided to dig a well to see if he could find an underground fresh water source. He had prayed to God about the matter and felt that God would guide him and help him in this work. He wanted the well so that he and his family would have a ready supply of fresh water but also because there was a lot of heathen superstition surrounding the supply of water and rain. The island's holy men demanded gifts from the people in order to make it rain. If it did not rain after getting these gifts they insisted on getting more, and if it did happen to rain they took the credit for making it rain.

One morning, during the dry season, Paton was speaking to two friendly old chiefs, both of whom had started asking serious questions about Jesus. He told them: "I am going to sink a deep well down into the earth, to see if our God will send us fresh water up from below". The chiefs had never heard anything so outrageous – rain water coming from under the earth? They thought Paton had gone mad.

Paton started digging the well. He chose a spot near the mission station and close to a public path. However he soon became tired working under the hot, tropical sun. But, determined to keep the project going, Paton filled his pockets with fish hooks and used them to pay the men – "one fish hook for every three buckets filled". But progress was still slow and the fish hooks were disappearing, and Paton was still working very hard digging and clearing at every opportunity. At last he had dug about 12 feet deep; not quite half of what he thought he would have to do. But alas, the next morning, one side of the well had collapsed and all their hard work was undone.

Paton turned his hand to engineering and erected a pulley system over the top of the well. He then started the digging once again; this time though, no local men would enter the hole to dig. When Paton had filled a bucket he rang a little bell and the bucket was pulled up and emptied. It was then lowered back down for Paton to repeat his back-breaking work.

He worked day after day, toiling away. When he had dug about 30 feet he noticed that the earth and coral were becoming damp. He was encouraged by this. But, although he had faith that God would open up a spring for them, he also had a strange terror that the water would not be fresh, but salty sea water.

One evening Paton said to the old chief: "I think that Jehovah God will give us water tomorrow from that hole!" Paton asked the chief to come the next day to see the rain water come up through the earth. He knew he was risking a lot by saying this, but he felt that the Lord was leading him, and he knew that he sought God's glory, not his own.

At dawn the next morning, Paton started digging a narrow hole in the very centre of the well. He sweated as he dug down and down and when water came rushing up and filled the bottom of the well he was shaking with excitement. The water was muddy, but Paton scooped some up to taste it, and it was fresh! He almost fell on his knees in the water at the bottom of the well to praise the Lord!

Many of the island's chiefs had gathered around the top of the well with their men. Once Paton had calmed down he filled a jug he had taken down with him – making sure that they all saw that it was empty. The mud had settled quite a bit and by the time Paton had got to the top with his jug of water the men were waiting eagerly.

Paton called them closer to come and see the water that Jehovah God had given them. They drew round Paton, looking on in astonishment and superstitious fear. The old chief took the jug and shook it to see if the water would spill. Then he touched it to see if it felt like water. At last he tasted it, and rolling it in his mouth with joy for a moment, he swallowed it, and shouted, "Rain! Rain! Yes, it is rain! But how did you get it?"

Paton answered, "Jehovah my God gave it out of His own earth in answer to our prayers and labours". Paton told the people of Aniwa that the well was there for everyone to use. It was then with great joy and enthusiasm that all the people worked together to help Paton complete the well. They were delighted with this wonderful new supply of fresh water.

You and I have probably never been in a position where we truly value water as we ought. I am sure that some of you have been very thirsty – maybe after running around during a game of football or tennis on a hot day. By the end of the game you are just gasping for a drink and, when you get a nice cold drink, you do appreciate it. Or maybe the water supply was cut off for a day in your street as maintenance work was being carried out, and it was a nuisance not to have running water for a few hours. You would have been glad once it was turned back on. But these are not life-threatening

situations and the appreciation you felt at the time probably did not last very long.

While it is good to appreciate the blessings God has given us in this life, it is even more important to seek the spiritual blessings He offers to us as sinners. When Jesus met the woman of Samaria at the well He told her, “Who-soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). This is the most important thing that you and I ought to seek – to have everlasting life through Jesus Christ. *S M Campbell*

For Younger Readers

The Strong Minister

Long ago there was a minister called John Macdonald. He was a very strong man. Every summer for many years, he walked long distances so that he could preach to many different people in the north of Scotland.

One day he was walking from one place to another. There was no path for him to follow. The mist came down; then evening came and darkness fell. He did not know which way to go; he was lost.

He thought he would have to spend the night outside. Then he saw a light. It was in someone’s house.

Mr Macdonald walked over to the house and knocked on the door. A woman came to the door. The minister told her that he was lost and asked if he could spend the night inside. She allowed him to come in but warned him about her husband. When he would come home, she said, he would put Mr Macdonald outside.

Anyway the minister went in and sat down. Almost at once he heard footsteps. It was the woman’s husband. He was carrying a huge load on his back, a stag that he had killed. He put the stag down and came inside. He too was a very strong man. The woman pointed to the minister and her husband at once told him to go away.

Mr Macdonald answered, “I will not go out from here tonight”.

But the man told him: “I will soon put you outside the door”. And he grabbed Mr Macdonald’s collar.

The man was strong but the minister was even stronger. When the

man tried to put him out by force, Mr Macdonald had to defend himself. He forced the man onto the floor and placed his knee on the man's chest. He told the man: "You will not get out of this until you promise never again to put a tired stranger out of your house". The man promised. And Mr Macdonald then allowed him to get up.

When bedtime came, Mr Macdonald took a Bible from his pocket and held family worship. But when he went on his knees to pray, he listened carefully in case the man would attack him. But no, the man did not touch him. After worship, the man and his wife went to bed and left the minister to sleep beside the fire, if he could.

In the morning, Mr Macdonald again held family worship. Then he was ready to set off for the next place where he was to preach. He asked the man to guide him. The man said, No. Then Mr Macdonald offered to pay him five shillings (which was then quite a lot of money).

When they reached the place where he was to preach, the minister gave the man his five shillings. He then told the man that there was to be a sermon. He asked, "Will you not wait to hear it?"

"No," he answered, "I do not want your sermons." He started to walk away. Then Mr Macdonald said, "Wait, man, and I will give you five shillings more". Now that he was being paid, the man was willing to sit and listen to the sermon.

Mr Macdonald went to begin the service. Only then did the man realise that his visitor was a minister. Probably the man lived far away from everyone, and never went to church. The service went on and Mr Macdonald began to preach. Soon God used something the minister said to show the man that he was a sinner. He screamed and began to run away from the people.

Mr Macdonald asked some men to go and ask him to come back. The man did come back.

There were services every day until Monday, and the man came to them all. On the Monday, Mr Macdonald went to him to give him his second five shillings, but he would not take the money. What he really wanted now was to have his soul saved.

It was four years later when Mr Macdonald came back to the

place. The man was different now. He believed in Jesus. How happy Mr Macdonald and the man must have been to speak together now!

The man was strong; the minister was even stronger. But God is far stronger. Nothing is too hard for Him. He can change men and women – and children too – so that they become very different. They then want to love God and do what is right.

So Near the Harbour

Ninety years ago, on 1 January 1919, HM Yacht *Iolaire* sank just outside Stornoway harbour. It was one of the worst shipping disasters in British waters during the twentieth century. On that sad New Year's Day over 200 young men, mostly from the islands of Lewis and Harris, were drowned.

The First World War had just come to an end. A vast number of men had been killed in the awful battles of that war and those who had survived were now making their way home. You can imagine their excitement as they neared their homes and the hero's welcome that awaited them!

On December 31, soldiers, sailors and civilians gathered in the village of Kyle hoping to catch the mail boat across the Minch to Stornoway. It became obvious that there were far too many passengers for the mail boat, so it was decided that the soldiers and civilians should board it, while the sailors were to be transported on the Admiralty yacht, *Iolaire*.

It was dark and cold and the seas were running high, but after 2 am the sailors spotted the lights of Stornoway. How close to home they now were, no doubt looking forward with pleasure to the welcome of their loved ones! But as the ship approached the port, only a few yards from the shore and about a mile away from the safety of Stornoway harbour, disaster struck! The ship struck the dangerous rocks known as the Beasts of Holm. How tragic!

The scene was terrible: huge waves dashed against the ship and the rocks it had struck. No lifeboat could survive in these conditions. The sailors were wearing their full uniforms, including heavy boots, so even if they had learned to swim (which few in these days had the opportunity to do) swimming from the wreck would have been almost impossible. One brave man, John Finlay Macleod, somehow managed to get to the shore pulling a line and hawser. About 40 men succeeded in scrambling along this to safety. In just over an hour after the distress rockets were fired, the ship slipped off the rocks and sank.

Having survived the horrors of war and having got so close to home, over

200 of these young men drowned. So close to safety, but still outside the security of the harbour! Should that not make you think of the danger your soul may still be in?

If you look up Joel 3:16, you will see the words, “the Lord will be the hope of His people”. In the margin the translators have put *harbour* instead of *hope*: “the Lord will be the harbour of His people”. This is the harbour that you need – to be found in Christ, the only place of safety. To be near Him is not enough – the sailors could see the lights of the town; they were that close – but they were outside the harbour, and they drowned. To be friendly with those who are saved is not enough – some of the sailors did get to the shore but their friends perished. To respect your minister and enjoy his preaching is not enough – those who admired the bravery of the sailor with the hawser but did not hang on to it drowned with the rest.

Will you not make it your priority to “seek the Lord while He may be found”? And do not rest until you are inside that safe harbour, for “the Lord will be the harbour of His people”.

J van Kralingen

Looking Around Us

The Internet

The Internet is a very useful tool. Young people especially use it, to find out information and to keep in touch with each other. But when a survey shows that teenagers are spending 31 hours a week online (yes, that is nearly 4½ hours a day) you have to ask if they are using all that time wisely.

Almost certainly not, especially when a third of those questioned admitted that they try to hide what they are looking at, when one of their parents comes into the room. Young people may hide much from their parents, but they should remember that God sees everything. You cannot hide anything from Him.

Most disturbing is the finding that, on average, teenagers spend one hour and 40 minutes a week looking at Internet sites which show grossly-immoral material. Now, the figures may not be very accurate, and many youngsters may not visit such sites at all. But clearly there is a serious problem.

Today's young people are growing up in an age when many glory in what is filthy. It has become so easy to defile your mind with what is sinful. But ask God keep you from looking at what you would not want your parents to see you looking at. And remember the words of Paul: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, *whatsoever things are pure* . . . think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“Wise As Serpents . . .”

Caroline Petrie is a community nurse in Somerset; her work is to visit patients in their own homes and attend to their needs. Some weeks ago she was suspended. Had she mistreated one of her patients? Not at all, but in December she had asked an elderly patient: “Would you like me to pray for you?” after putting dressings on her legs.

Normally, it seems, patients “are absolutely delighted” at such an offer, but on this occasion the woman said, “No, thank you,” and Mrs Petrie insists that she did not press the matter. But her employer, the North Somerset Primary Care Trust, was told about the incident and suspended her without pay. She was accused of failing to show a “commitment to equality and diversity” and could have lost her job.

Happily, after meeting Mrs Petrie, the Trust recognised that “she had been acting in the best interests of her patients”. They agreed that nurses do not have to “set aside their faith” at work and can “continue to offer high-quality care to their patients while remaining committed to their beliefs”.

Well, of course. But these things should never have been in doubt. The nurse should never have been suspended. But the original reaction of the Trust shows the bias against Christianity which is becoming so obvious today. Satan no doubt rejoices at such an attitude to Christianity.

At one time, pupils could learn much about the Bible and true Christianity in many schools. Now things have gone so far that a five-year-old pupil in Devon was told off for speaking to one of his friends about Jesus and heaven. And when the school receptionist sent an e-mail to her friends asking them to pray for the school, the head teacher told her that she had brought the school into disrepute and might be dismissed. Very likely the head teacher seriously overstepped his authority. But society has gone a long way in the wrong direction when such things are possible.

All such incidents make it clear that many young people, and others, now face great difficulties in maintaining any kind of Christian profession, as they go about their duties in the world. But no one should think that, whatever may be the spiritual environment they have to work or study in, they can stand in their own strength; they need to be absolutely dependent on Christ. If we trust in ourselves we will make many a blunder. And how much we need to make sure that ours is a true, spiritual Christianity, at the centre of which is a living faith in Christ Jesus as the only saviour of sinners! Jesus’ words to His disciples are as relevant as ever: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). He is able to keep His disciples today, so that they act wisely, do no harm and yet are faithful to Him.

Youth Conference 2009

Arrangements

Venue: Scottish Youth Hostel, Inverness.

Dates: Tuesday, April 7, to Thursday, April 9.

Chairman: Rev D A Ross.

Lower Age Limit: 16 years old.

Applications: To Rev D A Ross, F P Manse, Laide, Ross-shire, IV22 2NB, *as soon as possible* (the closing date is March 28). See the February issue for an application form. The fee will be £40 for applicants in full-time employment and £20 for others. Cheques are payable to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Programme

Tuesday, April 6

2.30 pm

The Relevance of Scripture for Today

Knowing your Bible

by Rev D Campbell

7.00 pm

Baptism

A Biblical View

by Rev D Macdonald

Wednesday, April 7

9.30 am

John Calvin and Calvinism

An Introduction to *The Christian Institutes*

by Rev D Campbell

1.30 pm

Church History in Easter Ross

A Tour conducted by Rev Neil M Ross

7.30 pm

Prayer Meeting

In Inverness Free Presbyterian Church

Thursday, April 8

9.30 am

Martha and Mary

Expressing Devotion to Christ

by Rev H M Cartwright

Further information will be sent to each applicant about a week before the conference. If you have any queries, do not hesitate to phone Mr Ross (tel: 01445 731340). But please do *not* delay sending in your application.

Price 70p