

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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Volume 80

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Number 8

Questions About Prayer

As I walked by a church a few days ago I noticed the slogan on its wall: "Try praying". This church was not the first to use these words to encourage people in difficulty to begin to pray. To encourage people to pray is obviously a good thing, but the slogan does raise important questions.

1. Who are we to pray to? It must be a being who has a real existence, who can hear us when we call on him. He must have the power to supply our needs, to remove our troubles and to make our situation in life easier. If the being to whom we pray is not all-powerful, we cannot expect to get much, if any, help from him. If that being cannot hear the petitions of people everywhere, it is most unlikely that he will hear us when we pray to him for help. If he cannot hear us and if he cannot help us, there is no point in praying to him.

But there is real point in praying – if we pray to the living and true God. He is the only Being who can answer our prayers. He can do anything we ask for – provided it is something that a perfectly-holy Being may do, provided it will be good for us to receive what we have asked for, and provided it is according to His holy will. God will never help us to do anything that is sinful – although He may allow us to have it by way of judgement. But then it would be a punishment for our sinful, God-dishonouring attitudes, for He may give rebellious sinners up to follow their own desires when they are determined to reject Him.

Nor will God give His children what they pray for if He knows that it will not be good for them, especially if it will not be good for their souls. Yet, if God's children are sinfully asking for something, and so much setting their hearts on getting it that they do not give God the first place in their thinking, He may give it to them – and, sooner or later, they will realise that they would have been far better off without it. They will realise that they were making it an idol, giving it a place in their heart which only God should have.

Perhaps it is reasonable to expect that a message about prayer on the wall of a Protestant church will necessarily refer to prayer to God. Yet a Roman Catholic reading the message might easily imagine that a prayer to Mary, the

mother of Jesus, would be just as effective – perhaps even more so. But the Bible never tells us to pray to Mary, only to God. And this is a world where large numbers of gods are being worshipped by those who reject the true God – the One who created all things. So multitudes of people are “praying” to beings that have no existence, except in the minds of those who worship them. These prayers can never be answered.

Buddhists assume that there is no God and that what they call “*the divine* is within the life of the individual” person who is praying (the words in quotation marks are taken from a Buddhist organisation’s website). And the purpose of prayer, we are further told, is to awaken a person’s “inner capacities of strength, courage and wisdom rather than to petition external forces”. For them, prayer can only be a means of arousing themselves to do better. How much they need to realise their own limitations!

But there is only one Being who is able to hear people praying, wherever they are right across the globe. He is the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. He is the true God, the living God – in contrast with idols, who have no real existence beyond the stone or wood of which they are made. These false gods have no personalities, and so they have no capacity to think, or do anything in answer to the petitions addressed to them. But the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible is able to answer their petitions, because He is all-powerful. And He is able to give the best possible answer to these petitions, because He is perfectly wise.

2. *How are we to approach God?* We must remember that we are sinners and that God is altogether holy. David asked the Lord: “Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill”? David was thinking about the Tabernacle, where God’s presence was. Who could live safely in the presence of the holy God? And he answered his own question: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psalm 15:1,2). In other words, it is only someone holy who can come near to the holy God.

Yet neither David himself, or anyone else before or since, has been perfectly holy. How then can anyone draw near to God in prayer? The answer must be: Through a mediator, someone who is perfectly holy and can stand between God and sinners, to present their petitions to Him. But where can we find such a person? In His great mercy, God has provided a Mediator: His own Son, who came into this world to reconcile sinners to God. And on the basis of His sacrifice at Calvary, Christ Jesus acts as Mediator by presenting the petitions of unholy sinners to a holy God. That is the only way we can expect Him to hear us. And that is why we include in our prayers such words as: “for Jesus’ sake”.

3. *So should we try to pray?* There should be no doubt about the answer.

We *must* pray. We must *always* pray. God created us; so we are to worship Him. And prayer is part of worship. One should not be too critical about a call to prayer, but there is something not quite right in the tone of the slogan, “Try praying”. God is infinitely great; He is infinite in majesty; so we must think about Him with great reverence.

Prayer to God is not something that we may try when all other possibilities have been exhausted. When we think of doing something, the first thing we should do is pray. When we see a danger, even at a great distance, the first thing we should do is pray. In the morning we should pray for God’s care and blessing in connection with everything that will happen through the day, and we should do so for Jesus’ sake. He knows everything about what is to take place; we certainly do not. And in the evening we should ask God to forgive all the sins we have committed that day and to watch over us through the night, for Jesus’ sake.

But what is the most important thing you should pray for? It is for your soul: that all your sins would be forgiven, that you would be delivered from the power of sin, that you would live a holy life, that you would love God, that you would trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are to come before the holy God in prayer, it is totally wrong to focus so much on the ordinary things of this life that you ignore your soul. After all, the things of this life, important though they may be, will all pass away. But your soul will exist for ever. So you must seek “*first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness”. If you do this, Christ promises that all other things that you need “shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Philip Henry was a godly English minister. He knew he should take everything before God in prayer. And that is what he did when two of his children were seriously ill. He prayed earnestly for them. He said, “If the Lord will be pleased to grant me my request concerning my children, I will not say as the beggars at our doors do: ‘I’ll never ask anything of Him again’. But, on the contrary, He shall hear oftener from me than ever. And I will love the Lord the better and love prayer the better as long as I live.” Yet, even if God did not heal the children, we can be sure that Henry continued to pray – even without the encouragement of an answer to that particular time of prayer.

It is good for us to pray: to commit our present and future circumstances to God, who rules over everything and does so wisely. We should not only commit to Him our days and years in this world, but especially our eternal future. We should not only commit to Him the ordinary affairs of life, but especially our spiritual needs, so that we would live holy lives, seeking to spend our days to God’s glory.

Saving Faith

3. The Nature of Faith

Rev D W B Somerset

Last month's article dealt with the object of faith: that is, in whom or what we are to trust. Four answers were given, four objects in which we are to trust: (1) the Word of God, (2) Christ, (3) God Himself and (4) Christ's righteousness. These are not different sorts of saving faith; it is simply the same faith exercising itself in different ways.

1 *Assent and Trust.* Corresponding to the first two objects of faith that we have mentioned, the Word of God and Christ, are the two elements of faith, namely *assent* and *trust*. Believers assent to the Word of God, in that they accept it and believe it to be true; but they believe it in such a way that they trust in Christ, and they commit themselves to Him. Their faith is not a mere assent (which is the view of faith that goes by the name of Sandemanianism). We must at the same time "appropriate" Christ; we must make Him our own. As *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (in chapter 14) says, "the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace".

2. *Scripture examples.* We can see this crucial element of trust illustrated in some of the scriptural expressions which are used for faith.

One such expression is *looking to Christ*. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The picture is that of a stung Israelite in the wilderness looking to the brazen serpent. If he was to do this, he had to have some sense of his need and danger, and some expectation or hope about the remedy. It is a picture that is appropriate for the simplicity of salvation, and hence for the weakest faith. As the nearly-hopeless Israelite might look to the serpent almost in despair, so the poor sinner may look to Christ, much as the father of the child said to Him: "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (Mark 9:22).

Another picture is that of *fleeing or coming to Christ*. In saving faith, there is the element of fleeing from the danger, and there is the element of trusting in Christ. We would not flee to, or look for help from, someone who was as dangerous to us as the original danger. There must be some hope and trust. The story is told of a Dutch minister who was out walking and saw a hawk pursuing a sparrow, which took refuge in his bosom. Ordinarily the sparrow

would have been afraid to do such a thing, but the danger of the hawk was so much greater that the sparrow ventured on the kindness of the minister. So we are to take refuge in the very One who is pursuing us. This is the paradox of the gospel. The danger is God (in His terrible justice) and yet we flee to God (in His mercy made available in Christ).

A third picture is that of *receiving, resting upon, eating and drinking* Christ. Here we very much see trust and appropriation, or receiving. We cannot rest peacefully upon anything we do not trust, nor can we happily eat or drink what may be poisonous. As the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, about the wild gourds, "O man of God, there is death in the pot" (2 Kings 4:40). If we are to feed on the Word of God, it must be "the sincere [or unadulterated] milk of the Word"; if we are to feed on Christ, we must believe that His "flesh is meat indeed and [His] blood is drink indeed" (John 6:55).

What the Bible Teaches on Holy Living

4. Self-Denial

Charles Hodge

This series is taken, with editing, from Hodge's book, *The Way of Life*. Last month's section was entitled: "Love to God leads to obedience". "Obedience", Hodge said, "is just love in action."

The activities of spiritual life are attended by peace and joy. Thus Paul says: "To be spiritually minded is life and peace". Excellence and enjoyment cannot be separated. The Bible speaks of communion with God as a joy that is "unspeakable and full of glory", and a peace that passes "all understanding". So joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit; it goes along with spiritual life and is an evidence of it; it is the oil of gladness which the Spirit pours over the renewed soul to stir up its activities, to brighten its face, and to make it active in the service and praise of God.

The image of God, after which the soul is renewed, consists in moral excellence. Moral excellence is the state of mind that causes someone to have right feelings and actions in all situations. So those who have correct views and feelings about God must feel and act correctly to other people. Those whom the Bible describes as good people not only worship God but are kind and just. The full statement of our duty to others is found in the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

What does this love mean? It is the inclination to show our neighbour respect and kindness, and to want to do him good. This love is long-suffering

and kind; it does not envy the happiness of others but rejoices in their welfare. It is not proud, nor does it behave itself unseemly. It does not seek its own. It rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. It "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things". Without this love, all professions of piety, all gifts, all outward acts of self-denial or charity, are worthless. This love is essential to Christian character.

Self-love, which prompts us to pursue our own happiness, belongs to our nature as human beings; so kindness, which prompts us to seek the happiness of others, belongs to the nature of the new man. A *new man* means a good man, one who is like God – holy, just, kind and merciful.

Religion always produces this meek, kind, trustful spirit, but it varies with individual people's characters. The Bible does not teach that we must have the same feelings for everyone. While we must be kind to everyone, the Bible allows for the closer relations that people may have with others as members of a family or a community. The same principle of religion leads us to obey those whom we ought to obey and honour those whom we ought to honour. It makes people respectful, thoughtful and friendly to those who are on the same level; and to be just and kind to those who are under them.

It is very important to consider that these attitudes are essential to true religion. The people of God are like God, but we have seen that God is just, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. So those who are dishonest, unkind, proud, revengeful, or deceitful are not His people; they do not bear the image of God; they have never been renewed in the spirit of their minds. Let no one deceive himself with the hope that he may be a good Christian though he is a bad parent, child or neighbour. A Christian is like Christ.

Another form in which a renewed heart will show itself is self-denial. "If any man will come after Me," said the Saviour, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me". Why must we deny ourselves? Partly because, by pleasing ourselves, we often interfere with the good of others, and partly because so many of our desires are evil or go too far. The gospel tells us that we are "not to please ourselves", but everyone must "please his neighbour, for his good to edification", even as "Christ pleased not Himself", but "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich".

As we interact with others each day, we have constant opportunity for self-denial. He who has the same mind as Christ is not selfish; he is ready to give up pleasing himself; he will even give up his own rights for the good of others. If meat causes his brother to offend, he will not eat meat while the world lasts. To the Jews, he becomes as a Jew, so that he may gain the Jews.

To the weak, he becomes as weak, so that he may gain the weak. He does not live for himself. His own interest is not the main end he pursues. As a selfless regard for the good of others specially distinguished the Redeemer, it distinguishes all His followers, for God has predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Because of the Fall, we have corrupt natures; so we need to deny ourselves. Christians have mortified the flesh – they are putting their sinful nature to death. So they keep their bodies in subjection. But pride, vanity, envy, malice and the love of self are more dangerous foes than any sin related to the body. They are stronger, they last longer, and they are more likely to deceive. As these dispositions are deeply seated in our nature, the putting off the old man, which is corrupt, or the destruction of these unholy principles, is the most difficult of all Christian duties, and renders the believer's life a constant conflict. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh . . . so that [the believer] cannot do the things that [he] would." Yet, in this conflict, the better principle is usually victorious, for the children of God do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It is clear then that true Christians are renewed after the image of God and so are holy. They love God; they rest with satisfaction on His perfections, they submit to His will; and they rejoice in their relation to Him as His children. They have fellowship with the Father of their spirits and with Jesus Christ His Son. They are obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to their former lusts, but as He that called them is holy, so they are holy in all manner of conversation. As they bear the image of a just and merciful God, they are honest and kind to their fellow-men, not seeking their own good, but that of others. And as they cannot obtain this victory over themselves without conflict and self-denial, they keep up a constant opposition to the more hidden evils of the heart.

Some people may be ready to say that if this is religion, then no one is religious. It is certainly true that many are called and few chosen. "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." We must take our idea of religion from the Bible, and not from the lives of those who claim to be religious. Clearly the Bible says that religion is love to God and man; and love to God will show itself in reverence, worship and obedience, and love to man in kindness and justice. And our conscience tells us that no outward obedience, or earnestness in religious services, can entitle us to be called Christians – unless we are godly and obedient to God, unless we are just and kind to our fellow-men, and unless we are self-denying.

But while all these points are necessary to Christian character, not all Christians are alike. Their characters vary as much as their bodily appearance

and their powers of mind. But as everyone, in the midst of endless variety, has the same kind of body and mind, so all Christians are led by the Spirit and all produce the fruits of the Spirit, although they may differ in the strength of their Christian graces.

John Brown of Haddington

1. The Young Shepherd

Several John Browns have been ministers in Scotland. This John Brown is always associated with the little town of Haddington, south east of Edinburgh. In this town he spent his whole ministry of 36 years declaring the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.

But John Brown was born near the Perthshire village of Abernethy, in 1722. His father, another John Brown, was a linen weaver in winter and a salmon fisher in summer. His was a religious home, and in his older years, writing in his Haddington manse, the younger John Brown considered it “a mercy that I was born in a family which took care of my Christian instruction, and in which I had the example of God’s worship, both evening and morning”. We too should value the Christian teaching we may have received in our homes and the opportunity to attend family worship.

As he looked back to his younger years, John found it “remarkable” that his father was able to read the Bible, for the father had never been to school – though after he began to act as a shepherd, some older men spent time teaching him to read. But mostly he seems to have taught himself.

The younger John did go to school, but his schooldays did not last long, probably not more than a year; his parents could no longer afford to pay for his education. Yet John learned to read and write and do arithmetic; he even began to study Latin before he left school – but only for one month. “My thirst after knowledge was great”, John remembered. He was eager to learn. It was not enough for him to read; he wanted to learn by heart what he read.

It was common enough for children to learn *The Shorter Catechism*, but John also learned *The Larger Catechism*. And, for instance, he also learned by heart *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*, a much longer work by Thomas Vincent, first published over 50 years before John first picked it up. John must have had a tremendous memory for, in its 1980 reprint, this book runs to 270 pages of questions and answers based around the answers of *The Shorter Catechism*. But he was to confess that his pride was what lay behind his diligence, “particularly in learning by heart what catechisms I could get”. Yet he would later have found it very useful to have

learned so much solid scriptural teaching; it provided a firm foundation for his work as a minister, and his life as a Christian.

The communion season in Abernethy was held in July each year. It is said that thousands of people gathered to it. Obviously they could not all get into the church. The services were held outside, on a green slope at the bottom of a hill outside the village. On the Sabbath morning, only those who were to go to the Lord's table went to the church. But one year, when John was about seven, he slipped into the church and sat on the gallery. He was rather impressed as he watched the people going to the table and taking the bread and the wine, the symbols of Christ's body and blood – symbols that pointed to His death. But someone from below noticed John and he was sent out of the church. No doubt that was the rule, but it might have had a severe effect on young John and put him off religion altogether. Thankfully it did not.

Sadly, John's father died when he was just 10, and his mother died only two years later. What was the young lad to do now? A "small religious family" kindly took him into their home for a time. John suffered four serious bouts of illness one after the other, within a few months. They were so serious that almost no one expected him to survive; the repeated illnesses left him very weak.

John recalled that "in 1734 and especially in 1735, the Lord by His Word read and preached" spoke powerfully to his soul. He read Joseph Alleine's book, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, and God used it to stir up his conscience. As a result, he made a covenant with God, which he later described as "legal". (John meant that he hoped to earn salvation from God by keeping His law.) He vowed to God to pray six times a day when he was looking after sheep, and three times if he was not. Why the difference? Perhaps because it was easier to find a quiet place to pray in, if he was among the hills, but more difficult if he was with other people. He also made a covenant with God after reading William Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest*. When later he had a clearer understanding of spiritual things, John complained of the bias of his heart keeping him away from the Saviour; it was making him "willing to do anything but to flee to Christ and His free grace alone for my salvation".

He enjoyed reading various other good books; among them was one by William Gouge called *Directions How to Walk with God*, which made him very careful to keep God's commandments – at least outwardly. If John knew that he had committed some sin, he prayed for forgiveness and then felt that all was well. The sermons he heard and the books he read made a great impression on him, which sometimes lasted for several days. Especially these impressions made him pray, but he did all in his power to keep other

people from seeing how religion was affecting him. In the end, he almost always prayed outside and, in case anyone came along and saw him on his knees, he always had a book open in front of him so that the person would think that he was reading.

John said that things went on like this until he was about 14; he confessed that he was putting his outward form of religion in the place of Christ, setting up formal prayers as his saviour; indeed they were his god. By all his religious activities he was, in his own way of thinking, perfectly sure that he was on his way to heaven. But outward religion will not bring us to heaven; we must look to Christ, and to Christ alone, to save our souls from the eternal punishment which we truly deserve.

After some time he left the small family and became, for two or three years, a herd boy in a larger family. Sadly, he now became less careful about how he lived. He did not even go to pray every day; yet he satisfied his conscience by praying more often one day if he had prayed less often another day. He later acknowledged God's mercy that, in every family where he lived, "except perhaps one, there were some appearances of the grace of God"; and also neighbours who were helpful to him.

A serious illness in 1741 made John more anxious about his soul. One day about 12 o'clock, the sheep he was looking after were resting in a fold. He decided to go and hear a sermon in a place about two miles away; he ran all the way there and back. At that time he did not usually have any opportunity to go to church; he must have been working too far away.

But now he kept on going to the service, and the second or third time he went, the text the minister preached on was: "There are some of you that believe not" (John 6:64). The sermon, John remembered, "pierced my conscience as if almost every sentence had been directed to none but me". It made him conclude that he was one of the greatest unbelievers in the world. "This sermon threw my soul", he said, "into no small agony and concern and made me look on all my former experiences as nothing but common operations of the Spirit." (By *common operations* Brown meant those works of the Holy Spirit which are common to both converted people and those who are not converted: convictions of sin, for example.)

Later in life, when his understanding of spiritual experience was more mature, Brown felt it was possible that the Holy Spirit had been working savingly in his soul at that time. In his earlier days as a minister, Brown used to warn those who were in the same position as he had been; he told them that they were still unconverted. But he learned not to make his own experience the standard for preaching to others. So we might ask, When was John Brown converted? Perhaps we are best to leave the question unanswered. It is often

very difficult for people to tell exactly when they passed from spiritual death to spiritual life. What is much more important is to be able to answer the question: Am I converted now? And if you still find it very difficult to answer that question, remember that the Lord Jesus is yet calling you to look to Him – to trust in Him – and be saved (Isaiah 45:22).

For Junior Readers

John Livingstone's Sermon

Have you ever heard of the Kirk of Shotts revival? Shotts is a small place between Glasgow and Edinburgh which was made famous in Christian circles by a time of great blessing in the year 1630. These were difficult times for the reformed Church in Scotland, but the Lord raised up people who were a help and support to the Christians at that time. Some of these were godly women who became known as Ladies of the Covenant. One of them was Lady Anne Cunningham. Her husband had died when he was quite young and she used the rest of her life doing what she could to help the cause of Christ.

One day, on her way to Edinburgh, her carriage broke down when passing near the manse in Shotts. The minister, Mr Home, kindly invited her to spend the night in his manse until her carriage was fixed. There was no other suitable place to stay in the area.

While she was in the manse, she realised that it was rather small and badly in need of repair. She generously offered to pay for the building of a new and more suitable manse. The minister was very thankful.

He later visited her to thank her for all her kindness. He at once agreed to her suggestion: that two of the best-known and most able ministers of the day, Robert Bruce and David Dickson, be invited to the next communion season at Shotts.

As word of this spread, a very large crowd gathered to attend the services. The ministers were helped in preaching and the people enjoyed much of the Lord's presence and blessing over the days of the communion. There was a great spirit of prayerfulness among them after the Sabbath evening service; so they did not want to go away. Indeed many of them spent the whole night praying in groups; they were asking for God's blessing to follow the services.

Until then it had not been usual to have a service on the Monday after a communion Sabbath. But the ministers realised that the people did not want to leave and they agreed to hold a service that morning. The minister who was asked to preach was a young man called John Livingstone. He was

rather nervous about preaching in front of such a large crowd and such able ministers. But, trusting in the Lord to help him, he preached from Ezekiel 36:25,26: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

As he was about to close the sermon, large drops of rain began to fall. The service was in the open air, so the people began to cover themselves with their cloaks and other garments. The minister noticed this and used it to teach them a spiritual lesson.

If a few drops of rain upset them, he warned them, how much more distressed they would be if the Lord rained fire and brimstone on them as they deserved. He went on to offer them Christ as the one refuge from the storms of God's wrath due to them for their sins. And he assured them that the door of mercy still stood open for sinners like them. The Holy Spirit so blessed his words that about 500 people were converted under that one sermon.

Is that not a wonderful story? Perhaps you could learn by heart the two verses from Ezekiel which the minister preached from. And pray to the Lord that He would send His Holy Spirit to bless the words to you, as He did to the people at the Kirk of Shotts.

J van Kralingen

Reading the Scriptures

James W Alexander

This is one of a series of letters that Alexander wrote to a younger brother, which were published as *My Brother's Keeper*. The letter has been edited. Alexander was a minister in various places in America, including New York. Perhaps Alexander's advice on memorising verses from the Bible demands too much, yet it is just what he did himself. But suppose you were to learn by heart one verse every day, you should find it a very useful exercise.

You gave me much pleasure when you told me that you were reading the Scriptures with attention. And I am glad to find you asking how you may go on reading them with greater profit. I shall answer your questions and also, from time to time, write you some directions on other things.

1. Should I read the Bible in order? I think you should. Not that this should be the only way of reading the Bible, but every day you should be going forward.

Suppose you were roaming through a beautiful estate, such as the place

on the River Delaware where Joseph Bonaparte stays, and that your aim was to learn all about it. You might follow two methods.

First, you might set out at one of the gates and follow the first path; then go off into a grove of trees and walk a few steps; then return to see the fish-pond or the statue. You might spend a day or two doing this, and at the end of it you would have seen many beautiful things. But while you had looked at some of them four or five times, there would be many other spots you would not have seen at all. Instead of looking 10 times at the observatory, you might have looked at 10 different scenes.

What was the matter? I will tell you: you did not view it in *regular order*. You had no plan. So you might spend years reading the Scriptures, and at the end of that time you would have learned many whole chapters or even books of the Bible; yet there might be some very useful parts of it which you would know nothing about. Why? Because you did not read it in *regular order*.

Second, you might get an exact plan of Bonaparte's grounds, a little map on a piece of paper. Then you might divide the plan into parts and say, I can do so much today and so much tomorrow, etc. Then you might go over every step of the fine parks and gardens, look at every bridge and examine everything interesting. You would have seen every single place of beauty.

But what makes the difference between these methods? You viewed it this second time in *regular order*. Thus too you ought to read the Scriptures. And if you lay down a plan, take care to observe it and keep it up for a few years, you will know something about the whole Bible. Why? Because you read it in *regular order*.

2. Should I memorise verses? Most certainly you should: at least six every day. The more you learn in this way, the more you will be able to learn. If you learn six verses every morning for one year, you will have learned more than 2000 verses, or more than 60 chapters.

The best plan I know of is partly to learn your verses before you prepare for bed. Think of them again as you fall asleep; repeat them as you wake up the next morning; and after prayer and reading the Bible, the next morning, learn them perfectly. And if you lay to heart what you learn, it will be your greatest treasure. Nobody can rob you of it. You may be shipwrecked, or robbed, or sent to prison, but no one can take it out of your memory.

3. Should I read the Bible for amusement? Not exactly. If you mean reading it with a thoughtless, careless mind, certainly not. But if you mean reading its beautiful stories and its lively descriptions because you admire them, and because you enjoy them, it is certainly right for you to read it like this. I have just been reading again the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis, and I find it more interesting than anything I ever saw in any kind of book.

Now there is no harm if you go to the Bible for pleasure, rather than to any other book. It is strange that more people do not find out how much interesting history the Bible contains; just think of the life of David. Yet scarcely anyone opens the Bible for enjoyment.

So I have answered your questions. Now I will add a few more remarks. There are two books in the Bible which are very interesting and useful. One was written as poetry; the other is prose. Most of the first was composed by a great king; most of the second was composed by his son, another great king. One was by a warrior, a musician and a poet; the other was by the wisest king who ever lived. In these two books you will find directions for how you should worship God and how you should live. The Psalms are noble pieces of prayer, thanksgiving and praise; the Proverbs are short sayings, every one of them full of meaning and rich with wisdom.

When you are older, I would recommend you to read each of these books through once a month. The Book of Psalms is already divided into portions, for every morning and evening, in the book I gave you. And the Book of Proverbs has just as many chapters as there are days in the long months, one for every day. Almost every day you will find an opportunity to use at least one of these short proverbs to govern your speech or behaviour. And as the Lord Jesus Christ is the great subject of many Psalms, you will learn from the New Testament how to find Him everywhere in your daily reading.

For Younger Readers

God Is a Good Father

Andrew Bonar was a good man. He was a minister in Glasgow. One day he looked out of his window and saw his children passing by. They were going to spend a few hours taking a walk in the country.

He loved his children. And because he loved them he wanted to give them something. So he called them back into the house and gave them what they would enjoy on their walk. Perhaps it was something nice to eat.

Some time afterwards, Mr Bonar went to pray to God. He remembered the words of Jesus: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"

What did Jesus mean? He was speaking first about fathers in this world. They are sinners. But, like Mr Bonar, they know how to give good things to their children.

Jesus was speaking to God's children. Who are God's children? They are people who love Him and who trust in Him.

And God loves them. So He will give good things to them. He knows what is best for them. Because He loves them, He will not give them anything that will harm them – just like Mr Bonar would not give anything to his children that he knew to be harmful.

God's children are to ask Him for good things, because He is willing to give them. And we should all ask God to give us good things. He knows everything that you need. Ask Him to give you a new heart, so that you would love God and trust in Him. Ask Him to make you one of His children.

The Faithful Blind Boy

It was probably the year 1555, during Reformation times. John Hooper, a godly minister, had been sentenced to death because he was a Protestant. He had been Bishop of Gloucester during the reign of young Edward VI. Now Edward's sister Mary was on the throne, and she was a persecuting Roman Catholic.

A blind boy called Thomas Drowry was also in the same prison, and for the same reason. He pleaded with his guard to let him go and visit Hooper. At last he was successful and was allowed to go to the minister's cell. There Hooper asked him questions about why he had been sent to prison and about his faith. Then the good man spoke to him like this: "God has taken from you your outward sight. For what reason, He best knows. But He has given your soul the eye of knowledge and faith. May God give you grace continually to pray unto Him." Then, Hooper said, Thomas would not lose that sight; but without it he would be blind both in body and soul.

Thomas was brought to be examined before an important churchman, the Chancellor of Gloucester Cathedral. He was first asked if he believed that, when the priest at mass says some particular words, the bread and wine were no longer bread and wine but "the very real body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar". (Roman Catholics claim, against the Bible's teaching about the Lord's Supper, that the bread and wine are changed into Christ Him-

self, although there is no change in their appearance. This is what they call transubstantiation. What the Bible teaches is that the bread and wine are *symbols* of Christ's body and blood.)

"No," Thomas answered, "I do not." He believed the teaching of the Bible.

"Then", the churchman told him, "you are a heretic and shall be burned. (A heretic is someone whose beliefs are very seriously wrong.) "But who told you this heresy?" he was then asked.

"You, Master Chancellor."

"Where?" the churchman asked.

"In yonder place", Thomas told him, as he pointed to the pulpit.

"When did I teach you so?"

"When you preached there a sermon to all men as well as to me, upon the sacrament," and he mentioned the day when the Chancellor did so. "You said the sacrament was to be received spiritually, by faith, and not carnally and really, as the Papists have taught."

The Chancellor could not deny that he had done so, for he was once a Protestant, but he had turned back to Rome, after Mary became Queen. So he advised Thomas: "Then do as I have done, and you shall live, as I do, and escape burning". He did not think about the fire of a lost eternity.

But Thomas was made of sterner stuff, by the grace of God. He told the Chancellor that, though *he* could so easily turn around "and mock God, the world and your conscience, yet will I not do so". Thomas was trusting in Jesus Christ; clearly the Chancellor was not – or he could not have spoken as he did.

"Then God have mercy upon you!" the Chancellor exclaimed. And he added, "But I will read the condemnation sentence against you."

"God's will be fulfilled!" was the submissive reply from Thomas.

One of the officials was shocked at the Chancellor's hypocrisy and tried to shame him into getting somebody else to pass judgement and read the sentence against Thomas. "Will you read the sentence against him, and condemn yourself?" the man asked.

But the Chancellor was determined to pass the wicked sentence himself. "I will obey the law", he told the official.

That very day, Thomas was led out to be burnt in the same fire as a poor bricklayer called Thomas Croker who was also to suffer because of his faithfulness to God and His truth. It was said that they both "most constantly and joyfully yielded their souls into the hands of the Lord Jesus". Clearly Hooper's wish had been fulfilled, that God would continually give Thomas grace to pray to Him. God will always keep those who trust in Him and pray to Him, even in the most difficult situations.

I Am Debtor

R M M'Cheyne

When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know –
Not till then – how much I owe.

When I hear the wicked call
On the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink
On the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know –
Not till then – how much I owe.

When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know –
Not till then – how much I owe.

When the praise of heaven I hear
Loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise,
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know –
Not till then – how much I owe.

Even on earth, as through a glass
Darkly, let Thy glory pass,
Make forgiveness feel so sweet,
Make Thy Spirit's help so meet,
Even on earth, Lord, make me know
Something of how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,

Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.

Oft I walk beneath the cloud,
Dark as midnight's gloomy shroud;
But when fear is at the height,
Jesus comes, and all is light:
Blessed Jesus, bid me show
Doubting saints how much I owe.

When in flowery paths I tread,
Oft by sin I'm captive led;
Oft I fall, but still arise;
The Spirit comes, the tempter flies;
Blessed Spirit, bid me show
Weary sinners all I owe.

Oft the nights of sorrow reign
Weeping, sickness, sighing, pain,
But a night Thine anger burns;
Morning comes, and joy returns:
God of comforts, bid me show
To Thy poor, how much I owe.

Looking Around Us

A Valuable New Testament

In the 1960s a student was looking around in a second-hand bookshop in Cambridge and found a copy of William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. He paid 25 shillings (=£1.25) for it and now he is going to sell it. Southeby's, the auctioneers, expect that it will sell for £35 000.

Obviously this is a very valuable book because of its age. But we should remember the great efforts Tyndale made to give English-speakers parts of the Bible in their own language. Not only did he have to flee England so that he could translate the Bible with any safety; in the end it cost him his life.

But what makes any Bible really valuable is its contents; it is the Word of God, telling us what we need to know for salvation. May we know, like David, that "the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold."

Price £1.00