

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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Thinking God's Thoughts

Johannes Kepler was born in 1571 in Germany and lived till 1630. He is famous for his study of the sky, especially of planets. He obviously took an interest in these things when he was young, first observing a comet when he was just six. His discoveries were significant, but especially so as his eyesight was poor; at the age of four, he had suffered an attack of smallpox.

When he was 28, Kepler travelled to Prague to become the assistant to Tycho Brahe, the court mathematician, who had been making observations on the paths of the planets through the sky. The next year, Brahe died and Kepler stepped into his job. After studying the information that Brahe had recorded, Kepler was able to work out an answer to a problem about the path of Mars that had been puzzling people – the planet seemed to move backwards at one stage in its orbit round the sun.

Kepler went on to work out that Mars' path around the Earth is not exactly a circle; it is an ellipse, a sort of flattened-out circle. He made up tables giving the movements of various planets. The tables predicted when Mercury and Venus would next pass across the sun, as viewed from the earth. This was not to happen again until after Kepler died, but he was proved right when these planets did cross the sun on the dates he had predicted.

Kepler is best known today for his three laws about the movement of the planets. But there is something else for which perhaps he should be better known. It is the words he used as he considered the discoveries he had made. He said, "O, Almighty God, I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee". He was recognising God as the Creator of everything, including the earth, the planets and the sun. So, when Kepler was discovering the paths of the various bodies in the sky, he was just recognising the paths that God had placed them in. He was recognising a few of the thoughts that were in God's mind when He created these objects, and now these thoughts were passing through Kepler's mind.

Thus, whatever discoveries scientists may make – today or at any time in the past – they are only finding out what God already knew when He put His thoughts into effect at the Creation. When Kepler was making his discoveries,

he was thinking God's thoughts after Him. Kepler knew that God was the Creator, and he acknowledged this. How good it would be if all scientists, and everyone else, would acknowledge God as the Creator!

Even if we know very little about science, we should realise that God has revealed Himself. Paul says that God's "eternal power and Godhead" are "clearly seen" in this world and, when they do not believe in Him, this leaves people "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). When we see the beauty of so many places around us, we should conclude that it was a being with a very powerful mind that designed everything; they could not just have come into existence by chance. And even *if* it was possible for such things to happen by chance, it was even more unlikely that, for instance, birds could have come into being with such beautiful coats of feathers. Let us think also of the sheer power required to make the earth, with its mountains, its seas and all its other features; it should be obvious that tremendous power was needed, and that power must be God's.

Only if people have a strong prejudice against God, can they want to believe that this world, and all the other bodies across the sky, came into existence by chance. But this sadly is the position today; large numbers of people much prefer to believe that there is no god than submit to the God who really exists. They do not like the thought of having to do His will and keep the commandments.

We have been thinking about God's revelation in nature. But what it tells us is limited; it gives us no answer to these questions: Does He show love to His creatures? Is He holy and just in what He does? What is His attitude to sin? Can He read our hearts? Can He help us in our difficulties? If we are to answer such questions, we need a much fuller revelation than nature will ever give us. Nor can God's revelation in nature teach us what lies beyond death or what we need to do to prepare for dying.

Ever since the Creation, God has been making revelations in various ways. He spoke directly to Adam and Eve and they heard His voice; He appeared to others, like Abraham and Jacob, in dreams and visions; He spoke to many people through prophets. But none of these revelations could be permanent unless it was written down. So God's greatest and most complete revelation is what is written down in the Bible. There we can get an answer to all the questions that we really need to have answered, including the questions in the previous paragraph.

First, in the Bible, God reveals Himself as love: "God is love", we are told (1 John 4:8). And before God had any creature to love, there was perfect love between the Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But God also reveals Himself as One who loves His creatures: He is "The Lord,

The Lord God, merciful and gracious" (Exodus 34:6); in showing His mercy and grace, He is making known that He loves human beings.

And yes, He is holy and just in all that He does – in particular, in His dealings with people in this world. We read that "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Psalm 145:17).

God can help us in our difficulties. We can think of our difficulties as burdens, and we are told to cast our burdens on the Lord (Psalm 55:22) – especially the burden of sin.

But God hates sin; He says about a particular sin: "Do not this abominable thing that I hate" (Jeremiah 44:4). But we should remember that He hates every sin. Because God can see into everyone's heart, He knows what is right there and what is wicked; so He will faithfully reward the righteous and punish the wicked. He says, "I the Lord search the heart . . . to give every man according to his ways" (Jeremiah 17:10); He will punish all wrongdoing if the sinner does not repent.

From the Bible we also learn what we could not otherwise know about what is beyond death. There is a heaven where everyone will have every possible blessing for ever and ever. But who will go there? Those who, although they were sinners, have trusted in Jesus as the Saviour of sinners (see 1 Timothy 1:15). And what about those who do not trust in Him? Solemnly, they must be punished, in hell. Because there is no possibility of repentance after death, the punishment of sin must go on and on for ever. At the end of the world, there will be the Day of judgement, when everyone who ever lived will gather before Jesus Christ as judge, and He will examine all the evidence about everyone. He will call the righteous to heaven, and He will send the wicked away to hell (Matthew 25:34,41).

If we are to die – and obviously we must, sooner or later – and if we know how serious the parting of the ways is on the other side of death: either to heaven or to hell; then surely it is obvious we should prepare for that time. But we need the Bible to tell us the preparation we need. We need to be born again (John 3:3,5,7); we need forgiveness and faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:24). So we are told: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

All these are God's thoughts. He has revealed them to us for our good. But they will do us no good unless we start to think over these truths ourselves. We must, like Kepler, think God's thoughts after Him. I do not know anything about Kepler's spiritual state, but his attitude to God's creation was admirable. Yet we must not stop there; we must think seriously about what God has revealed, especially about sin and salvation. We must ask Him so to bless His thoughts to us that we may receive them.

Saving Faith

4. Some Further Points

Rev D W B Somerset

Last month's article described what faith really is. This article is the final one in this series, which was originally a paper at this year's Youth Conference.

4. *How people come to faith.* Having said what faith is, we now want to consider how people come to faith. Coming to faith is not as easy as some suppose. Unbelief is natural to a dead soul, and bringing people to faith is as hard as raising them from the dead. How does God do this? The answer is: By His Word and Spirit.

1. *By God's Word.* The first means that He uses is His Word. People have to hear the Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Those that do not hear the Word cannot be saved (we are not now talking about infants, or simpletons, but about those that have the capacity to understand the Word). Of such it is said, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). The Word preached, or the Word written, or the Word spoken must in some way come to them.

2. *By God's Spirit.* But the Word by itself is not enough. They may hear outwardly, but they will not receive the Word unless God works inwardly to make them receptive: to give them understanding and to give them a willingness to come to Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, whom God sends into their hearts. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit works faith in their hearts, and because God has given them the Spirit, therefore it is God who has given them faith. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Giving them faith is closely connected with raising Christ from the dead. When God raised Christ from the dead, this carried with it a spiritual raising of His people from the dead in due time as an inevitable consequence. "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

5. *Assurance of Faith.* How may I know whether I have faith? In considering this, I want briefly to give three marks given by the famous Scots divine Thomas Halyburton in his work, *The Great Concern of Salvation*. These are marks which believers should be able to recognise even in a "storm", even in a time of temptation and backsliding.

1. The first mark is *approbation of the gospel*, that is, approving the gospel way of salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and simple faith in that. The believer thinks that this is a good way of salvation, indeed a glorious way. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). The believer is fully satisfied with it; he cannot see any respect in which it could be improved, either as far as he is concerned, or as far as God is concerned, or as far as Christ is concerned. The wisdom of God is apparent to him; and this approbation remains with him even when he is tempted or when he grows cold in religion. He will never forsake this way or prefer any other.

2. The second mark is *approbation of the law*, that is approving of God's law. As Paul says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). The law is a transcript, a copy, of God's holy nature; it is what God's holiness automatically requires of His human creatures. It is therefore a partial revelation or reflection of God. The false gods of the heathen allow sin in various forms, but the God of Israel, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, does not. The believer approves holiness and condemns sin in himself, and he approves holiness and condemns sin in others. Even when he is yielding to temptation, he is still condemning what is tempting him. This condemnation of evil is one of the things which makes Christians unpopular in the world. It is known that they condemn the favourite sins of the world.

3. The third mark is that *Christ is made precious* to them. "Unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). He is precious both for what He has done for them, and because of what they see in Him as the Son of God. He has saved them from eternal death, at great cost to Himself: "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20), said Paul. They esteem and love Him for that. But they also esteem and love Him for the view that they get of God in Him: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This is what they saw in their conversion, as Paul saw the glory of Christ on the road to Damascus. "God hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). This too remains with them at all times. They never wish to forsake Christ, nor do they ever see any other that they prefer to Him. They are fully satisfied with the portion that they have in Him.

6. Conclusion. The purpose of these articles is to direct our minds towards the highly important subject of faith, and to clarify our thoughts on that subject. In closing, we should mention one other important point which has given rise to discussion, namely the warrant of faith: what right or permission

have we got to believe in Christ? We hardly need a “right” to believe in things, but as far as Christ is concerned, we are free to receive Him because He describes Himself as a gift given to unbelievers. He said to the Jews who were rejecting him, “My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). Again this freeness is implied in the words, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). So all these gospel things are ready, and we are each one invited to the feast.

Daniel's Determination not to Be Defiled

2. By Babylon's Pleasures or Religion

Rev K M Watkins

This is the second part of an updated version of a paper originally given at the Young People's Conference in 1998. Daniel was one of the Israelite children carried away by King Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon. Although young, Daniel was already a child of God. Babylon was a sinful place, full of many evils. Daniel had no choice about where he lived, but he was determined not to be defiled by the sin of Babylon. Last time – in July – we saw that he would not be defiled by Babylon's pollutions. Now we see that also he would not be defiled by its pleasures or its religion.

2. Daniel would not be defiled by Babylon's pleasures. The city of Babylon had grown very rich and was much increased with goods. It abounded in luxury and devoted itself to pleasure-seeking – “given to pleasures”, as it is put in Isaiah 47:8. In Nebuchadnezzar's royal palace, Daniel was plunged into the very midst of this luxury. He faced problems immediately. He was required not to eat and drink the simple diet of the Jews, nor even the diet of ordinary people in Babylon. For three years he was to eat and drink the King's luxurious food and wine (see Daniel 1:5).

Food and wine in themselves of course are not sinful. “Every creature [created thing] of God is good, and nothing to be refused” (1 Timothy 4:4). But Daniel knew that if his bodily appetites were indulged too freely, this could damage his soul. It is hard for the soul to focus on spiritual things, when the body is continually feasting on earthly delights. Having been taught that life was more than the body, he was not going to feast his body and starve his soul by over-indulgence.

So “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). Instead he would have “pulse [vegetables] to eat, and water to drink” (verse 12). Thus he kept his flesh in subjection, keeping under his bodily appetites and keeping a rein on his desires for earthly pleasure. Hundreds of years

later, the Apostle Paul would do the same. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

But two millennia since then, it seems that many who profess true religion have forgotten this. If ever there was a day and age in which people were "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4), surely it is ours. Yes, we may use the good things of this life; "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). But like Daniel we should recognise the spiritually-draining effect of being caught up too much with them. We should remember what became of the rich man who "fared sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19). All his good things were only in this life. In the life to come, in hell, he has nothing but torment.

If we hope to enjoy pleasures at God's right hand for evermore, we cannot abandon ourselves to earthly pleasures, however lawful they may be in themselves. The Apostle Paul had learned how to abound in plenty as well as to suffer need (see Philippians 4:12). Sometimes he was "full"; at other times he was "hungry". But he always kept a watch over his bodily desires.

It is not just our eating and drinking. We need to keep a watch over all our recreations and enjoyments. They must not take up too much time. They must not absorb too much of our thinking. They must not be allowed to take control of our hearts. Pleasant things can be so ensnaring to the soul. They must not be allowed to defile us. Even with lawful things, Paul was determined not to "be brought under the power of any" of them (1 Corinthians 6:12).

How was Daniel able to refuse the fleshly attractions of Babylon's very obvious pleasures? Surely they must have been very tempting. He was able to refuse them because he had already been attracted by divine grace into a saving experience of God's love. So he was not going to be drawn away by "worldly lusts" (Titus 2:12). Christ had captivated his heart's affections, so nothing could steal them away again. It should be the same for us. Only a view of Christ by faith will overcome our devotion to the things that this world offers us. When our affections are set on spiritual things above, where Christ is, then they will not be set too much on carnal things here.

3. Daniel would not be defiled by Babylon's religion. Babylon was very religious, as well as luxurious. But it was a place of false religion – a "land of graven images" where "they are mad upon their idols" (Jeremiah 50:38). Idolatry abounded. In such a place Daniel had to live. He could not flee physically from that idolatrous land, but he did flee spiritually. He was not going to be defiled with idolatry.

Even eating the King's food and drinking his wine would have brought religious defilement, for it would almost certainly have been offered to idols. This was another reason why Daniel would not partake of the royal

provisions. Belonging to the people of Israel, who ate the manna – “angels’ food” – when they were in the wilderness, he was not going to eat idols’ food when he was in captivity. Besides, during the period of the Mosaic law it was a requirement of his own religion, the true religion, that as an Israelite he should not eat those foods which God had called unclean. Babylon’s food would have included many foods that were ceremonially unclean.

Today, many would say that this was a small thing: surely an idol was nothing anyway, and God would understand if Daniel ate the food he was given. But not Daniel. When God was making a difference, so would he. Otherwise he would defile himself with Babylon’s religion. Not without great danger, he sought an arrangement whereby he might be excused. This was because he would not compromise between his God, the only true and living God, and Babylon’s false gods.

Elijah had challenged the people on Mount Carmel to choose between Jehovah and Baal. If Jehovah of the Israelites really was the true God, it was time for the Israelites to stop defiling themselves by compromising with idolatry. Perhaps the time has come for some of us to do the same, for idols can take many forms. Only God should have the chief place in our hearts. Anything that takes His place is an idol.

Later in Daniel’s life, a requirement would be made for religious honours to be paid to King Darius. For 30 days, petitions could be made only to him (see Daniel 6:7). But Daniel knew that prayer was to be made to the God of heaven alone. At that time Daniel purposed not to defile himself by ascribing to a mere man the honour that belonged only to God. Instead he continued praying to the living God.

We also must purpose not to be defiled with the idolatry that so prevails today. How often a little compromise would be an easy way out! But if we do not wish to be defiled by sin, we must obtain grace to remain faithful. How often divine honours are given to people and things that are not God. If we would not be defiled, we must keep from any involvement in idolatrous practices. In a day when sports personalities, singers, musicians and film stars, and all the other so-called celebrities, are exalted to the status of idols, to whom almost everyone bows down in cult-like adoration, the Lord’s people will purpose in their hearts to keep separate from it all, so as not to defile themselves with it. There is no other way to be faithful to God.

In Babylon they changed Daniel’s name to Belteshazzar (see Daniel 1:7). In the Hebrew language, his original name included a reference to the true God – it meant *God is my Judge*. His new name was the opposite – it included a reference to a Babylonian idol called Bel. It meant *Keeper of Bel’s hidden treasures*. The Babylonians could change Daniel’s name like

that, but they could not change his heart. He was determined to have no other gods before Jehovah. Therefore he would not eat food that had been sacrificed to false gods.

Even the ungodly knew that Daniel would never compromise with idolatry. They knew that he would pursue the true religion at all costs. They would say, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God” (Daniel 6:5). Would people say that about us? From what they have seen in us until now, have we given them grounds to expect us to go on compromising and associating ourselves with idolatry? Or have they seen in us something of Daniel, who purposed in his heart that he would never be defiled with idolatry?

Just as we “cannot serve God and mammon [money]” (Matthew 6:24), so we cannot serve any idols alongside the true God. We must purpose in our hearts to have one God, even the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take Him as our only God. Sometimes that will mean that we have to refuse things that others accept and do not even question. Anything connected with false religion of any kind must be rejected. “Wherefore, my dearly beloved,” follow Daniel’s example and “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).

“He is Perfectly Holy”

An Indian boy was a pupil in a Protestant mission school. But, for some reason, he had to go with his parents to their village. He took a few books with him so that he could go on studying, and also some tracts. He read these tracts to the people in the village, many of whom gathered round him. They were amazed that one of their own boys was able to read. They had never seen that sort of thing before. They all thought he was very clever.

One day he went out to the river. It was very hot, and he felt his head sore. Someone brought him home and he went to bed very ill. For two days he was unconscious, but the next day he seemed better. He asked his parents to bring him his books. But they refused. They had decided that the one they imagined was the goddess of knowledge had caused his illness. In their ignorance, they thought that the goddess would take away his life if they gave the lad his books.

He was disappointed. But he spoke sensibly: “You must not worship idols. The worship of idols is a great sin in the sight of God.” Then he added, “We are all sinners”.

Someone asked him if he thought his parents too were sinners. It was a

difficult question. He knew the right answer, but he did not want to offend them unnecessarily. So he took a few moments to think about it.

Then he said plainly: "Yes, my earthly parents also are sinful. But I have a Father in heaven who is free from all sin. He is perfectly holy. I am going to Him."

Soon afterwards he passed away into eternity. Can we doubt that he went to his Father in heaven, who had made known to him the way of salvation through Jesus Christ?

You too are a sinner. Do you seek to be reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ? If you trust in Him, you too will have a heavenly Father, who will take care of you right through your life in this world. And when life is over, He will bring you to be with Him for ever.

John Brown of Haddington

2. Shepherding and Studying

Last month's article introduced young John Brown, who grew up in the Perthshire village of Abernethy. He lost his parents in early life and then became a shepherd. For some years he had serious thoughts about his soul. One day a sermon on John 6:64 pierced his conscience.

The next day, John heard a sermon on Jesus and His work of redemption; the text was Isaiah 53:4: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows". John commented that it "enlightened and melted my soul in a manner I had not formerly experienced". He knew that he was "a poor lost sinner, the chief of sinners," and by faith he then received "the Lord Jesus as having done all for me, and as wholly made over to me in the gospel, as the free gift of God and my all-sufficient Saviour". He believed that Jesus was perfectly suitable to save him from his folly, ignorance, guilt, filthiness, slavery, misery and other needs. He recalled, "This sermon had the most powerfully-pleasant influence on my soul of any that I ever heard".

He also felt "drawn to the Lord" through a sermon on another text in Isaiah. It was: "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (45:24). He was now 19 and, comparing these more recent experiences with those he had earlier, he noted that he now had far clearer views of the freeness of God's grace. He was also much clearer about "taking hold" by faith of "the gracious promises of the gospel" and pleading these promises before God in prayer.

Looking back many years later, John remembered many Sabbath services, communion seasons, times of family worship and private worship as giving him great delight. But he did not always experience that delight, and the

changing nature of his feelings taught him that he must have no confidence in himself. He must “live by faith on the Son of God and His everlasting covenant, which are ‘the same yesterday, today, and for ever’”.

One of the men for whom John worked was John Ogilvie, who was a godly elder in the Abernethy church where Alexander Moncrieff was the minister. Ogilvie was no longer young but he longed to learn more about the things of God. He had never been taught to read; so he welcomed young John – not so much for the work he was paid to do in herding sheep and looking after the lambs, but more because he could read the Bible to him, and possibly other religious books. The two Johns soon became close friends. They built a small structure on the slopes of a hill where they could shelter in bad weather but, more importantly, where they could go aside to read the Bible, pray and sing psalms together.

Henry Ferney was another lad who worked on Ogilvie’s farm. He used to tease John Brown, but one Sabbath evening he went rather far when the shepherds were bringing the sheep to the fold. Henry hurried along those he was looking after. He had gathered some pieces of gorse bushes and dropped them at the entrance to the fold and then made a pile of gorse near the post to which the gate was fastened. Then John brought along his sheep. He was the last to do so; so he had to shut the gate. Perhaps it was getting dark and he did not see the gorse until, barefoot, he walked over it to shut the gate. As he moved back, Henry pushed him headlong into the pile of gorse and roared with laughter.

When John stood up with bleeding face, hands and legs, Henry expected a tongue-lashing or a challenge to fight. But no, John just asked him why he had done that “on the Lord’s night”, showing his concern for Sabbath-keeping and his love for the Lord of the Sabbath. To speak like this had far more effect on Henry than if John had lashed out at him with his tongue or his fists. Henry was stung by the meek reply that John gave. And he was upset until he was assured that John had fully forgiven him.

From then on, he and Henry were firm friends and John took an interest in Henry’s spiritual welfare. At bedtime John would ask, “Henry, did you go about prayer this night?”

“Yes.”

“When was it?”

Henry would then tell him. And John would consider that it must have been far too short. He would say, “Henry, you must have little to seek at a throne of grace. Henry, if you but saw your many needs and the many mercies God is ready to give you for asking, you would not be finished so soon.”

After some time, Ogilvie sold his sheep and retired to Abernethy village.

It was probably because he was getting old and it was difficult for him now to tramp the hills. But John had to find somewhere else to live and work. And no doubt John and Henry went their separate ways.

As we have seen, John's time in school was very short. It was never possible for him to go back to school and get some more education. But he still wanted to learn, especially other languages. He had got just a taste of Latin at school, but he wanted to know more. He borrowed whatever books he could find. When he had two free hours in the middle of the day, he might rush away to the minister at Arngask, over three miles away, to get help with his studies. He also went to his own minister, Alexander Moncrieff, for some tuition. Moncrieff would give him Latin exercises to do and expected him to take several days to get through them. But John would be back much sooner than expected, with his work finished and looking for more. No doubt he had plenty time to study while the sheep were grazing – so long as none of them wandered away.

Then John became interested in Greek; after all, it was the language in which the New Testament was originally written. But how to get started with a language which has a different set of letters from English and Latin? He was too shy to ask his minister friends for help in this new area of study. He decided to begin with the lists of names in Matthew 1 and Luke 3; he assumed rightly that there would not be much difference between the English form of these names and the Greek. And no doubt, again and again, he would ask God to bless him in his efforts. Clearly God heard his prayers, for he was successful. At some stage he began to have the help of a book of Greek grammar and occasional lessons from a Mr Reid (perhaps another minister). He also tackled Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament was originally written – probably starting in the same way as with Greek, before obtaining a Hebrew grammar book.

John wanted a Greek New Testament of his own. When he had saved up enough money, he went to buy one. Perth was just seven miles away but it was not likely that any shop there would have a Greek Testament to sell. So he set off for the university town of St Andrews one evening, after the sheep were safely in the fold. He arranged with his friend Henry to look after them until he returned. John reached St Andrews the next day and went to a bookshop. The bookseller was startled when the barefoot 16-year-old in rough, shabby clothes asked for a Greek Testament. "What would you do with that book?" the bookseller asked. He was sure John could not possibly read it.

But John answered meekly: "I'll try to read it". And he did. His learning of languages was part of the education John needed to be a minister. God in His providence was making willing to make the great effort.

What the Bible Teaches on Holy Living

5. Holiness is Necessary

Charles Hodge

This series is taken, with editing, from Hodge's book, *The Way of Life*. In earlier articles he has been speaking about the nature of true religion; last month's section was about self-denial.

Let us now say a little about the need for true religion. We should always bear in mind that the need for holiness is absolute. This is because salvation is impossible without holiness. Salvation mainly consists in a change of heart. Jesus is the Saviour because He saves His people from their sins. So those who are not holy have not been saved. The teaching that someone may live in sin, and still be in a state of salvation, is as much a contradiction as to say that a man may be healthy when he is ill.

A state of salvation is a state of holiness. The two things cannot be separated, because salvation is not only deliverance from the penalty of sin, but also from its power. It delivers people from bondage to evil desires in the heart; it brings them into the favour of God and fellowship with Him. God's image in the soul is restored, so that the person loves God and delights to serve Him; so salvation always begins on earth. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." This is what Jesus said.

No delusion has less excuse than the idea that a state of grace is consistent with a life of sin – this idea is directly opposed to every doctrine of the Bible. Without holiness no one can see God. If we are not holy in heart and life; if we are not governed by a respect to the will of God; if we do not delight in communion with Him; if we are not led by the Spirit and if we do not have the love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance which that Spirit always produces – then we are not truly religious people; we are not in a state of salvation.

The Bible knows nothing of proud, selfish, covetous, impure Christians. Christians are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God; they seek spiritual things; they are poor in spirit, meek, pure in heart, merciful; they hunger and thirst after righteousness. Not that they are already perfect, but they follow after; they press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. They look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven at the end of the world, when He shall change their "vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Philippians 3:21).

As God is holy, His people must be holy. There can be no communion without agreement. If one loves what another hates, approves what another condemns, desires what another rejects, there can be no fellowship between them. "What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" So, as long as we are what God disapproves of, so long as we do not love what He loves, there can be no fellowship between Him and us. Hence Christ says, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again."

God's favour and fellowship are essential to our happiness. To be in heaven means to see, love and serve God; so it is plain that, unless we are made holy, we cannot be saved. We cannot enjoy the friendship, the activities, or the pleasures of the people of God above, if we do not delight in them here. The need for holiness arises out of the very nature of God, and it cannot be changed.

We know also that redemption is intended to lead to holiness. Christ gave Himself for His Church that He might sanctify and cleanse it, that it should be "holy and without blemish". He died "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God". Thus it is clear that those who remain in sin are not redeemed. It undermines the whole – it makes the death of Christ have no effect – if we imagine that those who are saved can continue in sin. The glory of God is promoted in and by His people only so far as they are made holy.

Every child of God feels that the glory of their redemption is to be delivered from sin and made holy. This is the crown of righteousness, the prize of the high calling of God, the exaltation and blessedness for which the believer longs, suffers and prays. To tell him that he may be saved without being made holy is to go against all his ideas of salvation and to crush all his hopes. The nature of salvation, the character of God, the declarations of His Word agree in proving that holiness is absolutely necessary. So whatever we may be or whatever we may have, we are not the children of God if we are not holy.

For Younger Readers

The White Cloths

It was a communion Sabbath. Lots of people were going to church that Sabbath; so Andrew Bonar and other young boys and girls had to go upstairs in church to sit on the gallery. The boys and girls enjoyed sitting somewhere different on that Sabbath. From

the gallery, they could look down on the other seats and on the Lord's table. It had white cloths over the tops of the seats.

Little Andrew longed to be among those who sat at the Lord's table, with its white cloths. But he thought he needed to be very good before he could go – before he would be fit to sit at the Lord's table. He was a sinner and he needed to be put right.

But Andrew was wrong in what he thought. He could not put himself right and then go to the Lord's table. He must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died in the place of sinners. Andrew must trust in Him.

It was God who could make Andrew good. If God made Andrew good, then he could come to the Lord's table when he was older.

So it is with us. We cannot make ourselves good. We must first trust in Jesus Christ. And then we will be made good. Then we will be able to go to heaven when we die.

Did Andrew become good? Yes, he did. God was kind to him. He made Andrew willing to trust in Jesus. And God made him good. He grew up and became a minister. God took him to heaven when he died, and now he is perfectly good.

For Junior Readers

The First Voyage

Many years ago in America a Christian man, T H Gallaudet, wrote a kindly letter (printed here with some editing) to a young lad who was about to leave home and go on his first voyage as a sailor. As some of you may be starting in new schools this term, the advice he gives may also be very helpful to you. It is certainly worth reading and putting into practice!

"I write from the heart, and I pray God that He would add His blessing to what I affectionately send to you so that you would consider it.

"If you aim to have the character which will lead others to place confidence in you, remember that you must begin to form it from the first day that you go on board ship, and that you must go on adding to it every day afterwards. If you think that you are so young, and have so unimportant a position, that what you say and do for the first few months of your sailor's life will not be noticed and remembered, you will find yourself most sadly mistaken.

“Besides, if you do not begin right, you will find it more and more difficult to get the right intention. If you swear the first month, habit will lead you to swear more the second month, and the third, and so on; and when will you have the resolve to stop?

“Suppose you break the first Sabbath, and let those on board your ship who have no religion see that you are like them. Then will you be able to resist their temptations and sneers, and keep the second and following Sabbaths as you ought? Be determined from the very beginning, looking often to God in earnest prayer to help you to keep it holy and to help you to speak and behave as a Christian, respectable young man ought to do.

“To do this, you will need strength from God; you need to be a Christian at heart. This will be your only true safety. Many new temptations will surround you. You will need moral courage to resist them.

“Look then to God, in humble and earnest prayer for the influence of His Holy Spirit, to lead you to sincere repentance for sin, and to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your only Saviour. Continue to look to Him, in the same way, for those daily supplies of wisdom, grace, and strength that you will specially need.

“Read the Bible daily, even if it is only a few verses. Read it more fully on the Sabbath, and also such other religious books as you may have. Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. I know there will be certain duties which, as a sailor, you will have to carry out on that day, but you can keep from all conversation and conduct that is not in line with the holiness of the day, and you can let those around you see that you are under the influence of Christian principles in this matter.

“Avoid close friendship with profane and irreligious people, while you treat all in a kind and polite manner. Pray for such people, and try to do them good in every wise and proper way. Avoid bad and loose books and pictures – if there are any of them on board – as you would avoid poison. Show, in a marked and decided way, that you disapprove of them. They have ruined thousands of souls.

“If there are any decent and religious sailors on board, try to get to know them and make friends with them. Two or three can greatly strengthen each other in what is right and good. Think of your dear father and mother, of your family and friends. Behave yourself well for their sakes. Think of your future. Think of God, whose eye will always be upon you. Think of death; it may overtake you unexpectedly. Think of eternity – how soon you will be there, to partake of its joys or sorrows, which no one can describe.

“May the Lord bless you, guide you and keep you in the way of duty, of safety, and of peace.”

J van Kralingen

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2014-15

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Prize: *Barnoldswick:* James and Rebecca Ross. *Glasgow:* Emma Norris, Rachel Smith. *Stornoway:* Joanna MacLean. *Tonbridge:* Heidi Playfoot, James Playfoot.

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Looking Around Us

How to Stay Christian in College

This is the title of a book published last year in the United States and was advertised in an e-mail which dropped into my inbox this morning. The cover of the most recent printing claims that over 300 000 copies have already been sold, which suggests that many students and would-be students are concerned about losing their faith in college or university. But perhaps more copies have been bought by anxious parents and other relatives.

There are two ways in which we might understand the word *Christian* in the title. First, it may refer to those who are born again and so are trusting in Christ alone for salvation. We are told in Acts 11:26 that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”. As disciples (a word here used to describe many more than the original twelve) they were seeking to learn from Christ and from the messengers whom Christ sent out to preach the gospel. Such Christians will always be Christians; they cannot lose their faith.

The danger for them is that they may backslide. In a new environment, perhaps living away from home for the first time, making fresh friends and listening to new ideas, they may become careless about spiritual things; they may pray less; they may read their Bible less; they may become more worldly. How necessary to pray both before and after going to college: “Lord, keep me”. If they go back in any degree to trusting in themselves, they will discover, perhaps very painfully, that they cannot keep themselves.

Second, the word *Christian* may refer to those who believe that the Bible is true and try to keep the Commandments, but they are not born again. So they are not looking to Christ for salvation; they are not concerned about heart obedience to the Commandments. Thus they do not worry about thinking holy thoughts rather than sinful thoughts. But remember how Christ warns those who are angry with other people “without a cause” that they are “in danger of the judgement”; they are breaking the Sixth Commandment; similarly he warns those who think unclean thoughts that they are breaking the Seventh Commandment (Matthew 5:22,28).

Another important point is that many who think they are true Christians are not actually so. When they enter a new situation, the cold winds of worldliness and unbelief may blow away the false faith they once had.

Away from and in contact with all sorts of ungodly people, unconverted “Christians” are in danger of becoming more worldly and are more likely to sin outwardly. The danger is that they may drift further and further away from their previous way of life and will not stay Christian in any sense.

The letter on page 177 has much to teach older teenagers, as well as the younger lad to whom it was originally addressed. Let me sum up briefly your duty if you are not a real Christian: pray; read the Bible and think prayerfully over what you have read; try to apply its teachings to your situation in life; seek the Lord now, not at some indefinite time in the future; and do not depend on yourself to stay away from sin.

Price £1.00