

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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December

It is now December, the last month of the year. As we think of December bringing the year to an end, we should also be conscious that there will be a last month in our life. There will be a last year, a last day and a last moment, which will bring our life in this world to an end – when we will pass into eternity, into heaven or hell. So in December, and especially at the end of December, each of us should make a point of asking particularly: Am I prepared for eternity? Am I ready to die?

But how should we prepare for eternity? To answer a question like this, we must, of course, go to the Bible. It tells us: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6). And what does it mean to seek the Lord? We must go looking for Him where we can expect to find Him.

Where should we look? The rest of the verse we have just quoted from should help us: “Call ye upon Him while He is near”. To call on God is to pray to Him; so we must seek Him in prayer; we must call on Him for all that we need, especially for our soul's needs. And we must do so while God is near to us, while we are still spared in this world and are able to hear Him speaking to us through the Bible. No one can pray after they die Christless and are sent away to a lost eternity.

If we are to pass safely into eternity, all our sin must be forgiven. Then we will not have to go to hell to be punished for our sin. So we must seek for One who can be our substitute, who has suffered the punishment due to sinners. That Person, as I hope you know, is the Lord Jesus Christ; He came into this world to suffer and die in the place of sinners. And He calls us to look to Him – to believe on Him, to trust in Him – as the One who is willing to save sinners, from their sins and from all the consequences of their sins.

Praying is often spoken of as going to the throne of grace (see Hebrews 4:16), where Christ reigns in glory and mercy. We are to go there to seek the Lord. We are also to go to the Bible, seeking to find Him in it. And we are to go to public worship. There, besides prayer, praise and a Bible reading, we have the preaching of the gospel. When we listen to preaching, we should be looking for Christ, calling on the Lord to bless His Word – asking Him

to send the Holy Spirit to make us able and willing to look to Christ. Then we will see Him as a Saviour suited to us in our need as sinners.

We may be conscious of particular ungodliness in December, though no part of the year is by any means free from ungodliness. But I am thinking just now of the many parties, and other events, that are held at this time of year, especially in the run-up to Christmas.

Of course, it is not wrong for family and friends, and colleagues or fellow students to gather together. The point just now has to do with what may take place at such gatherings. Almost always, people are looking for pleasure apart from God. Then the activities are quite inconsistent with the holy respect for God and His commandments that should rule our lives. For instance, is there likely to be drunkenness there, in one degree or another? Is there likely to be bad language, or dirty jokes? Does the programme include dancing? Or is some other activity planned that would involve sin?

Then you should remember the Scripture command: "From such withdraw thyself" (1 Timothy 6:5). Do not go to any activity that could cause damage to your soul. You may not be able to choose your workmates or your fellow students, yet the choice of close friends is yours. But to spend time with ungodly people unnecessarily is to risk harming your soul.

A great part of December is passed under the shadow of Christmas. It is often celebrated with no reference to religion. It becomes a time just to give presents and receive them, and to eat, drink and be merry. So some professing Christians raise the cry that we should put Christ back in Christmas. But no, we should not even try.

The Bible does not tell us to observe the day of Jesus' birth. It is not enough to say that the Bible does not forbid it; we must have a positive command for every part of our worship. In any case, no one really knows the date of His birth. And winter is rather unlikely, because the shepherds were keeping watch over their sheep during the night when Jesus was born (see Luke 2:8); it was likely to have been a cold night if December 25 was correct. Indeed, well over 300 years had passed before people started to observe the day of Christ's birth as a religious festival.

Various dates had been suggested, including January 2, May 20 and November 17. But the day chosen was one that marked "the rebirth" of the sun, when it began again to rise again in the sky. At that time many people were, in ignorance of the true God, worshipping the sun. No one, then or now, should bring pagan ideas into the Church. So Scripture does not allow us to try to put Christ into Christmas, which was originally a pagan festival. We do well to follow the example of Reformation leaders like John Calvin and John Knox and have nothing to do with observing Christmas.

Daniel's Determination not to Be Defiled

5. By Babylon's Pressures

Rev K M Watkins

This is the final part of an updated version of a paper originally given at the Young People's Conference in 1998. Daniel, one of the Israelite children carried away by King Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon, was determined not to be defiled by the sin of that place. In previous articles we have seen that he would not be defiled by Babylon's pollutions, pleasures, religion, education, intimidation or honours. Now we also see that he would not allow the pressures in Babylon to prevent him from being useful in his work.

7. Daniel did not let Babylon's pressures stop him from being useful.
Daniel was a *godly* man. He had been effectually called in God's grace to embrace the promised Christ. In the Book of Daniel we read precious prophecies of Messiah, that He would "be cut off" to "finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness" (9:26,24). Out of loving loyalty to his Saviour, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile his profession by the sin that abounded in Babylon.

But Daniel was also a *gifted* man. God gave him great wisdom and ability, and gifts like that are to be used for good. Daniel rose to high office in the government of Babylon. Just as he had been called to believe in Christ, so he was called in providence to serve his society and community, even in Babylon. Daniel was determined to fulfil that call, and not to shirk the responsibilities and opportunities that came to him.

Very few have exceptional gifts like Daniel. Very few are called to do extraordinary things like he was. But we are all given some abilities, more or less. And we are called to use them when we have any opportunity. For Daniel, it may have appeared easier to sit out his time in Babylon in some quiet corner, avoiding the temptations, troubles and stresses of high office. But no. Daniel was not going to allow the pressures in Babylon to prevent him from being useful.

God's people must do the same. God calls them all to some area of usefulness in the world. It is their duty and privilege to be busy and diligent in it. They must not allow the difficulties brought by the world to stop them from being useful. Yes, like Daniel they must avoid sin, and where possible avoid temptations to sin. But that does not usually mean that they cannot do anything useful in the world with the gifts and opportunities that God gives them.

At every step, Daniel applied himself diligently to his work. That began with diligence in his studies. When he and his three friends came to their final

examination, “in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the King enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (1:20).

When Daniel interpreted the dreams and messages that no one else could, this brought him to prominence. “Then the King made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon” (2:48). Far from refusing this, Daniel even had his friends promoted: “Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon” (2:49). In his work in the kingdom, Daniel was so diligent that “the King thought to set him over the whole realm . . . forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault in him” (6:3,4).

All of this came at a price. Others became jealous and were quick to accuse Daniel's three friends when they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image. They did the same to Daniel himself when he refused to stop praying to God. Daniel had to go into the den of lions, just as his friends had to go into the burning fiery furnace. Criticism and even persecution often come to those who use their abilities diligently and refuse to go along with sin.

Would it not have been easier for all four of them just to take a back seat? Then perhaps no one would have noticed them and they could have lived out their lives in Babylon without difficulty. But that would have been wrong. That would have been letting the pressures of life in Babylon stop them from using their God-given gifts as He was calling them to do.

Daniel did not think that in order to maintain godliness it was necessary to withdraw as far as possible from functioning in the world. He is a great example of how to live godly in the very midst of this present evil world. While he was neither of the world nor like the world, yet he was very active in it. That is what God requires of His people. He does not call them to be hermits.

See how this is taught in the New Testament. “Ye are the salt of the earth”, the Saviour told His disciples (Matthew 5:13). As salt slows down the process of corruption, so Christians are to be active in their society, as a means in God's hand to restrain the excesses of sin. God used Daniel to make Babylon a better place, as a good influence even on ungodly Nebuchadnezzar. Who can tell how much the government was improved because Daniel was there? Every part of life that is not in itself sinful needs a Daniel in it. It is not for Christians to run away to the hills. What use would the salt of their grace be then?

“Ye are the light of the world”, the Saviour continued (Matthew 5:14). It

is not for Christians to find a little corner somewhere and keep their light to themselves. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house" (verses 14,15). When God lights a candle of grace inside a man through the gospel, he is not to keep the light to himself and hide it, by withdrawing from the world. Rather, like the candle placed on the candlestick, he is to live in the world so as to give light to all around him. How shall darkened sinners ever know about the light if every enlightened soul stopped having any dealings with them? Just think what light Daniel must have put forth in Babylon!

Again, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The Christian's good works are not to be done for mere show, but they are to be done where evil men might see them, and might be led themselves to glorify God. This cannot happen if Christians withdraw from any effective and influential role in life. Through Daniel's faithfulness, Nebuchadnezzar confessed, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings" (2:47).

The Saviour prayed, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world" (John 17:15,16). It is His people's duty to do what He prayed for. To run away out of the world would go against His prayer. He would have them to function in ordinary daily life, as far as that does not involve sin. Although that will cause them to face pressures at times, Christ prays that they would be kept from evil. It is the evil of sin in the world, not life in the world, that they are to flee from.

Paul sets out this teaching very clearly: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). It is not necessary for God's children to run away from earthly callings and usefulness. Rather, they are to be in the very midst of each unbelieving generation, shining as lights in the darkness. Thus did Daniel, and in so doing he did not defile his testimony.

Plainly Peter expected the people of God, as they went about their callings in the world, to be going in and out among worldly people. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you", he wrote (1 Peter 3:15). Even as they worshipped God, sanctifying Him inwardly in their hearts and thus pursuing holiness, believers were to be near enough to the unconverted that they could expect to be asked why they were so different.

Believers are not to associate with the ungodly in their sins. But as they pursue their callings in the world, other people will see their personal witness to Christ and sometimes ask about it.

Daniel would not be defiled by Babylonian pressure into a dishonouring withdrawal from usefulness and influence. He “continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus” (1:21). For upwards of 70 long and difficult years Daniel remained in the high places of Babylon, in the midst of great temptations. But he did not give up the fight; he did not run away. He continued an effective witness on the side of the Lord. Daniel teaches us how to live godly in ungodly times, how to be in the world but not of the world, how to discharge our earthly calling whilst being kept from the evil on every side. Just as it would have been defiling for Daniel to have conformed to Babylon’s sin, so also if he had allowed Babylon’s pressures to silence the testimony of his grace.

To conclude, “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (1:8). This he did by the saving grace of God working in him, both to will and to do according to God’s good pleasure. As we follow our varied callings in this defiling world, it will only be by the same saving grace that we will purpose in our hearts not to be defiled. Daniel has shown us the way; may the Lord lead us in it too.

Heaven and Hell

2. The Resurrection

Rev J B Jardine

The first section of this Youth Conference paper appeared last month. It spoke first about death and then about the difference between the righteous and the wicked at death.

The idea of the general resurrection of the dead is unique to Christianity; it is not matched by any similar doctrine among heathens. Many peoples hope for a life after death, but none hold to the idea of a resurrection when the body will be reunited with the soul. The resurrection is confirmed by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: “At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed: and all the dead shall be raised up, with the self-same bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls for ever” (32:2).

The bodies of men after death return to the dust and see corruption before the general resurrection of the dead. God, who formed the human body out of the dust and breathed life into it, will by His great power raise the same

body from the grave. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26). And Jesus said of Himself: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

The resurrection of the saints is firmly established by the resurrection of Christ Himself: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). To the righteous the grave is a place of rest, free from pain and suffering, where they will await the morning of the resurrection, when they will arise with renewed life and vigour. But to the wicked the grave is a prison where they will be kept in chains until the judgement.

Those that are alive on the earth at the last day will not die but will undergo a wonderful change. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). They will undergo a change like those that have died and have been resurrected: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The dead will be raised with the same bodies, as the word resurrection suggests, but with different qualities, as we have said. "The bodies of the just, by His Spirit, [shall be raised] unto honour; and be made conformable to His own glorious body" (*Confession* 32:3). The resurrected bodies of the righteous will be wonderfully changed to fit them for the glory and delights of heaven. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The Scriptures do not give any specific information about the change to take place to the bodies of the wicked. They will be raised to "shame and everlasting contempt" . "The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour" (*Confession* 32:3).

The righteous are raised by the Spirit, who is the bond of their union with Christ. "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in

you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11). The wicked will be raised by the power of Christ, as a just judge. “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

At the resurrection, the righteous will be raised glorious, powerful and spiritual; they cannot decay any more. They will no longer be subject to disease or death and no defect will be found in them. They will be full of glory and brightness, made like Christ’s glorious body. Christ “shall change our 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). Being clothed with strength, they will be powerful and will know no weakness or weariness. They will be spiritual and have spiritual qualities. As Thomas Boston says, “a dying day is a good day to a godly man. Yes, it is his best day; it is better to him than his birthday, or than the most joyous day which he ever had on earth”.

More Reading and Better Reading

Matthew Vogan

Research by the international firm Deloitte earlier this year produced some unexpected findings. It is often assumed that internet use has reduced the reading of books among young people, but the Deloitte research suggested that 16-24 year-olds worldwide prefer print on paper to e-books. They also read more compared to older generations. At face value, this sounds promising. But this is only encouraging if the books being read are profitable. Unfortunately, the report indicated that more fiction is being read than non-fiction.

The Apostle Paul could say that, when he became a man, he put childish things behind him. He no longer thought as a child (1 Corinthians 13:11). Entertainment by books of fiction comes within this category. Being immersed in a fantasy world is less than helpful. It does not prepare readers for their responsibilities in time and in eternity. Giving our minds to the truth is of far greater benefit. For instance, the true history of the past can give clearer and more useful views of life. Our priority must be to give our minds to “whatsoever things are true” (Philippians 4:8). We must redeem the time of our brief life because “the night cometh” (John 9:4).

False teaching and thinking can be put over through fiction in a way that makes them easier to receive. What is morally doubtful or impure can be

hidden in the story. The reader is drawn into the story before this may be clear. They then find it almost impossible to stop even if their conscience speaks against what they are reading. Most fiction entertains by describing what is sinful, often in subtle and suggestive ways.

There are plenty of good books to read without resorting to anything that does not provide enough profit or that wastes our time and damages us. “And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Life is short; there are too many books to read. Even the best of them can lead us away from the one book which is really needful, if we do not approach them in the right way. We must read spiritual books prayerfully, humbly and scripturally (that is, comparing them with the Bible). Martin Luther warned: “It is not many books or much reading that makes men learned”. Rather “it is good things, however little of them, often read, that make men learned in the Scriptures, and make them godly, too”.

What should our better reading include? How do we know what is most important for us to read? In future issues of this *Magazine*, we would like to outline, God willing, five books you should read. They are books that we must not only read but also master. Naturally, people’s opinions vary about their favourite books. We will try to focus on the books that were most popular and most prized in Scottish Christian homes in the past. These stood the test of time, over many generations, and their usefulness remains for us today.

What the Bible Teaches on Holy Living

8. The Spirit Making the Soul More and More Holy

Charles Hodge

This series is taken, with editing, from Hodge’s book, *The Way of Life*. Last month’s article spoke about the Bible’s teaching about the union of the believer with Christ. The branches of a tree are so *united* to the vine that they share in its life and are absolutely dependent on it; thus believers are so *united* to Christ that they receive life from Him and are absolutely dependent on Him.

Union with Christ is the source of spiritual life, but how is that life to be maintained? The Bible says that believers are purified by faith (Acts 15:9), live by faith (Galatians 2:20), are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is important here because it is the bond of union with Christ. It not only gives believers the right to plead His merits for their justification, but through faith they receive the Holy Spirit. Christ promises all who come to Him that they shall receive the water of life, which means the Holy Spirit.

By faith believers are united to Christ. When persuaded that this has taken place, they have confidence to draw near to God and, by His grace, they open their souls to the sanctifying influence of His love. It is by faith that they look to Him for strength to overcome temptations and to carry out their duties. It is by faith that they receive those exceeding great and precious promises, whereby they are “made partakers of the divine nature”.

All real Christians know from experience that faith in Christ is the source of their holiness and peace. If when they are tempted to depression or sin, they look to Him for support, they are conscious of strength to resist and endure. No effort of will and no persuasion could ever give them that strength. They may be pressed down by difficult circumstances; but if they then remember that they are one with Him who suffered for them, they can rejoice in their tribulations. They know that, if they suffer, they shall also reign with Him.

Because of union with Christ, believers receive the Holy Spirit as the source of spiritual life. To maintain that life they must avoid everything that may provoke the Spirit to withdraw from them. The Bible teaches us that the Spirit may be grieved; that His influences may be quenched; that God, in judgement, often withdraws these influences from those who thus offend Him. Evil thoughts, unholy attitudes, acts of sin are to be avoided – not only as what is wrong, but also what is against the Holy Spirit. They must remember that it is serious when believers defile their body or soul with sin; they are the members of Christ and their bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, they should cherish right thoughts, proper purposes and holy desires; not only are these things right in themselves, but they come from the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies them.

This is very different from opposing sin and stirring up right feelings in dependence on our own strength. The life which the Christian leads is by faith in Jesus Christ; and it is by constant dependence on the Holy Spirit that this life is maintained. We cannot make ourselves holy by our own strength, no more than we can be justified by our own works.

It is mainly through prayer that we receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit. We must think of prayer as the means God has appointed to obtain the Holy Spirit. “If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.” So we are urged to go on praying earnestly, especially for the divine influence by which the life of God in the soul is maintained and advanced.

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit works in the people of God both to will and to do according to His own good pleasure. At the same time, believers should diligently use all scriptural means to grow in grace and in

the knowledge of God. Though we cannot know how the Spirit exerts His influence, it is described as enlightening, teaching and persuading. So, although the Spirit dwells in God's people, they must still act themselves.

The Spirit acts by leading them to act. Thus they are commanded to do what He is said to do for them. God's children believe, though faith is of the operation of God; they repent, though repentance is the gift of Christ; they love, though love, gentleness, goodness and all other graces are the fruits of the Spirit. The work of sanctification is carried on when God influences His people to exercise right attitudes and feelings.

Every holy feeling strengthens the principle of piety and leaves the soul permanently better. One hour's communion with God produces an impression that will never be removed; it makes the soul for ever less inclined to evil and more inclined to good. And as the Holy Spirit makes the soul able to do what is holy, and brings it into communion with God, He thus makes it more and more holy, and better fitted for the unchanging and perfect holiness of heaven.

It is mainly by thinking about the truth, the worship of God, and the doing of one's duty that these holy exercises are called into being. No one can fear God unless His holiness and power are present to their mind; no one can love Him except by thinking about His excellence and goodness; no one can believe, except by thinking about His word; no one can have hope, unless they view His promises.

If we were perfectly holy, we would never think about these things without the corresponding feeling arising in our hearts. As the Holy Spirit corrects the sinfulness of believers, these things exert a suitable influence on the soul. So the Bible says that believers are sanctified by the truth (John 17:19); they are made clean through the word of Christ (John 15:3); they are born again by the word of truth (James 1:18); they are changed into the image of God by beholding His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

For Younger Readers

The Fool and His Stick

He was an important man. I do not know his name, but it was something like Lord Smith. I am sure he had plenty money. He paid someone to live in his house, or perhaps it was a castle. This other man was called a jester, or a fool. This man would say funny things which would make the lord laugh.

One day the lord gave the fool a stick. He told the fool to keep the stick until he found someone who was more of a fool than himself. Then he was to give the stick to the man who was more foolish.

Some years later, the lord become sick. The fool came to see him. "Where will you go?" asked the fool.

"On a long journey," said the lord.

"And when will you come back?" the fool asked, "In a month?"

"No."

"Within a year?" the fool asked again.

"No."

The fool had more questions: "What then? Never?"

"Never", the lord agreed. He knew he was going to die.

Then the fool asked if the lord had prepared for going away.

He admitted that he had made no preparation at all.

The fool was not so foolish after all. Probably he only pretended to be foolish. So he asked something like this: "Are you going away for ever and have you not prepared at all before going?" And then the fool handed the stick to his lord. He had found someone more foolish than himself.

We are all going to die. We must ask God to prepare us so that we will be ready to go to heaven when we die.

For Junior Readers

Finding God in a Cellar

Do you know that there is a place called Farr right up on the top of Scotland, on its north coast? It is a long way from big towns and cities. Long ago there were many more people in these country areas than there are today. And many godly people lived in the north of Scotland. One of the godly people in Farr was a man called John Mackay.

John was born in the 1830s and was brought up to attend church just like you have been, I expect. He even went to extra meetings and "catechisings", as they were called, where the minister or an elder would gather a group of people together to ask them questions about the Bible and *The Shorter Catechism*. Although many of the godly people in those days did not speak much about how God had worked in their souls, John told some close friends about his

conversion. And after his death, someone wrote about him in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*.

As he grew up, he was pleased that people thought well of him because he went to church regularly. But he had to leave the north to find work. He went to Edinburgh and trained to be a policeman. Away from the good influences of his home, he began to get involved with worldly friends and worldly pastimes. He began to sin in ways he had never done before. His pride in his own religion was over; “the last rag of self-righteousness I took south with me was gone”, he said.

Then, one evening, the Lord convinced him that he was a sinner. He was walking the streets of Edinburgh doing his duty as a policeman. He said that the Lord so convicted him of his sinfulness that he had to leave the street and hide in a coal cellar. There he went down on his knees to confess his sinfulness and to plead with God to forgive him. The Lord heard his prayer. He said that, before he left the cellar, he discovered how suitable the Saviour was for lost sinners.

When he went back up to the street, he said, everything seemed different – all things became new, as the Apostle Paul describes it. Soon after this he returned to the north to live; he now became a stone mason. He was made an elder in his church and was also the precentor there for many years. He remained a steadfast Christian until old age and he was not ashamed to show others that he feared God.

Will you not pray that God would keep you from the sins of the world around you and that you would come to know God while you are young. John did so, but then he would have wished he had come to Christ sooner. The Lord has promised in the Bible, “Those that seek Me early shall find Me”.

J van Kralingen

All Made Clear in Isaiah 53

The man lived in France and had been brought up in the Jewish faith. So, as he had always been taught, he did not believe that Jesus is God. Somehow he started to study the New Testament and found it a very interesting book. But, even when he felt that he knew the Lord Jesus well – having learned so much about Him in the the New Testament – he was still not really persuaded that Jesus is God. Yet the all-important question was always in his mind: “Who was Jesus?”

At that time, his wife became “convinced”, said the man, “of His grace and power to save, and was baptized, making a public profession of her faith

in Christ. This caused me to search more earnestly for the truth.” He wanted a solid answer for the question: Who was Jesus?

Soon afterwards this French Jew obtained a copy of the Old Testament in French. He already had a copy, but it was in Hebrew, with comments from the rabbis in the margin. One day he decided to do what he could to find out the truth about the Lord Jesus. He shut himself in his room with his French Old Testament and prayed to God to show him whether or not Jesus was the Messiah – the One God had promised in the Old Testament to send as a deliverer for His people. As the man prayed, he felt he was now willing to follow the path which God would show him. He believed that it was better, as the disciples had said, “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Then he opened the Old Testament and searched in almost all its 39 books.

“It was wonderful”, he noted afterwards, “how I was led to the verses which spoke of the promised Messiah”. He found it just as wonderful how God enlightened his mind to see how “all the prophecies applied to Jesus, and could apply to none other than Himself”. He noted that many of these passages were marked in his Hebrew Old Testament by the rabbis as “obscure”, but he now found them “wonderfully clear”.

He was perfectly sure that Jesus was the Messiah; for him there could now be no argument about it. That was tremendously important, but it was also hugely important for him to know why Jesus died such a shameful death on the cross. He found an answer to this also. He believed that “it was to ransom me by His precious blood”. He recognised that Jesus “was the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world”; in other words, His was the sacrifice that could really take away sin. The man discovered that this “was all made clear in Isaiah 53”.

Then he “was able to make a public profession of [his] new-found faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour”. Now that this Jewish couple had both become Christians, they both broke away from the Jewish faith; they no longer kept the Old Testament laws that were only for Israel as a nation. “We were made free”, he commented, “with ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Romans 8:21). We lost most of our Jewish friends, and our own family turned against us.” No doubt that left them feeling sad, but they saw that God made up for it by bringing them “into Christian fellowship with many of the Lord’s people”.

But let those of us who have been brought up to know that Jesus is indeed the Son of God make good use of this privilege. It will leave us more guilty at last if we reject what God has provided in Him for needy sinners like us. Let us come at once to Him by faith . . . for He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

The Young People's Magazine

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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)

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Looking Around Us

Living for Ever?

An article appeared on the BBC website recently, with the title, “The creature with the key to immortality?” The creature is the sea anemone, often to be found by the sea. They are soft-bodied animals that attach themselves to rocks and coral reefs in shallow waters. They use their tentacles to inject venom into any small fish or shrimp that touches them; then they pull the paralysed victim into their mouth. There are more than 1000 species of anemone; the smallest measures just a few centimetres across, while the largest is more than a metre.

The article states that “researchers are wondering whether the creatures could hold the secret to eternal life”. The researchers’ point is that, while anemones may be poisoned, or another creature may eat them, their bodies do not seem to get older. On the other hand, human bodies become less fit as they get older, human minds become less sharp and their memories fail. Dan Rokhsar, a professor of genetics at the University of California, Berkeley, states, “They live a very long time; one was documented to have lived 100 years. If their tentacles are cut off, they grow new ones. Even if their mouths are cut off, they grow new ‘heads’.”

Researchers would expect to find tumours in these animals, but that does not seem to happen; they do not appear to get cancer. They always seem to stay young. Said Professor Rokhsar, “If I look at a sea anemone today and compare it to [what it is] a week later, the same structure will be there but many of the cells will have been replaced”.

How does this happen? Researchers do not know. Whatever the answer to that question, the basic principle is: this is the way God created them. Professor Rokhsar says that “sea anemones share a lot with us. We found a lot of similarities we had not seen when comparing humans to fruit flies.” There are, it seems, “parallels in the way . . . the genes are structured”. This reveals, he claims, a link that “goes back at least 700 million years”.

But apart from the fact that Creation took place far more recently than 700 million years ago, the reason for such similarities is that the same Creator made both human beings and sea anemones. Some of His creatures He made more alike in various ways than others, but He did all His work wisely and well. Yet, in some ways, from the time of the Fall, everything in the world has been spoiled through human sin.

It is because of sin that human beings cannot live for ever in this world. God has said, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the

judgement” (Hebrews 9:27). Nor can I believe that sea anemones, in spite of how wonderfully they are able to replace parts of their bodies, can survive for ever – or, more correctly, till God will bring the whole world to an end. May we all be prepared for that solemn time when we must pass into eternity and the time when we must appear before the judgement seat of Christ! Those who believe in Him, and they only, will have eternal life.

The Old and the New Creation

That was a wonder-working word
which could the vast creation raise.
Angels, attending on their Lord,
admired the plan and sang His praise.

From what a dark and shapeless mass
all nature sprang at His command!
Let there be light, and light there was,
and sun and stars and sea and land.

With equal speed the earth and seas
the mighty Maker’s voice obeyed;
He spoke, and straightway plants and trees
and birds and beasts and man were made.

But man, the lord and crown of all,
by sin his honour soon defaced;
His heart (how altered since the Fall!)
Is dark, deformed and void and waste.

The new creation of the soul
does now no less His power display
Than when He formed the mighty whole
and kindled darkness into day.

Though self-destroyed, O Lord, we are,
yet let us feel what Thou canst do.
Thy word the ruin can repair
and all our hearts create anew.

John Newton

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