

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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Number 9

God's Blessing?

Yesterday I read that someone who bought a lottery ticket in the United Kingdom has won £61 million in a Euromillions draw. No doubt most people will expect that the winner, with all this money to spend, will live happily ever after. That is the traditional ending of fairy stories, but in the real world no one need be surprised if things turn out very differently.

For one thing, this is a sinful world where all sorts of jealousies and tensions can ruin relationships even in the midst of so much riches, riches that one can scarcely imagine. A writer in *The Herald* newspaper claims that such a win “is more likely to bring misfortune than joy”.

She refers to the Bayfords, a Scottish couple who are pictured celebrating their even-more-spectacular win of £148 million; they were obviously unbelievably happy. But it did not last. The happiness disappeared from their marriage within 15 months of their win and they are now divorced. They blame the “stresses” created by their sudden wealth. Mrs Bayford, it is reported, has admitted that she no longer speaks to her parents and brother, describing them as “demanding and greedy”. She claims that she and her husband gave £20 million to her family; they, on the other hand, claim that they were given “only” £1 million each.

Whatever the facts of the matter, the first point for us to note is that this huge amount of money did not bring the Bayfords lasting happiness. The next point to note is that, while their win brought them a huge amount of money and the opportunity to buy everything they could possibly want, it did not come with God's blessing. Why do I say so? Because gambling is something that the Bible points us away from. But if people earn a substantial amount of money in an honourable way and acknowledge God's goodness to them in His providence, they can have God's blessing with it.

To gamble is to misuse God's providence. The Bible tells us: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33). Lots were cast in Bible times on special occasions, to decide serious matters – as when a disciple was to be chosen to replace Judas Iscariot; this was a way of putting the decision into the hand of God. Charles Bridges, a

noted English writer, explains that to use lots “is an acknowledgement of [God’s] absolute sovereignty” – that He rules over everything that happens.

But to stake one’s money on whether the numbers on a particular lottery ticket will be chosen is not treating God’s providence seriously. People are paying small amounts (usually) of money in the hope of winning a much bigger amount which they have not earned. They are coveting what belongs to someone else, and that is to break the Tenth Commandment. And because trying to gain money in this way does not involve a serious decision in a matter approved by God, this is to take His name in vain.

Bridges says that people, when gambling, are “appealing to an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God” – in other words a God who knows everything, is present everywhere, can do everything. But those who play a lottery are not thinking about God in such ways, although “the whole disposing [of the winning numbers] is of the Lord”. It does not enter their mind that God, in His providence, is in control of everything that happens. He sees them, wherever they are; He sees them when they are gambling and He recognises it as sin; and He has power to punish them for their sin.

To gamble is to trifle with God’s providence – even when taking part in a charity raffle, which most people would probably see as utterly harmless. Yet it is not harmless. It is wrong; it is dishonouring to God. Besides, many a person is spending money, sometimes large sums of money, on lotteries and other forms of gambling – money which they can ill afford. If they did not gamble, they could spend it on things that would be really useful. In gambling, some people will win prizes, but only a tiny number will win large amounts. The fact is that most people will never win anything; they are just wasting their money.

How much better to be content with such things as we have (Hebrews 13:5), like old Matthew. He was a good man, and one evening he arrived at church and said, “I envy nobody in the world. I have had a bit of supper before I came: I roasted a red herring before the fire, and fried a few cold potatoes in a bit of old butter, and it was very tasty and good.” It does not sound like he had much of a meal, but old Matthew enjoyed it and no doubt thanked God for it. He had no thought of getting rich through a lottery or anything of that nature.

We should be very thankful for our food and everything else God gives us, including a home to shelter us from the wind and rain, or perhaps from the burning sun. We should be thankful too for our friends, though we must be careful as to who we make our close friends; if they are ungodly or follow a false religion, they may do us great harm. (This is not at all to suggest that we should be rude or unfriendly to such people.) The Bible warns, “He

that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

We should also be particularly thankful for the love of our families, and young people should be very conscious of the care and love which their parents show them. The Fifth Commandment states, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12). And as they become older, young people should try to repay their parents, as much as possible, for that love.

But what about God's love? Have we experienced that? God's kindness in providence is indeed a very great blessing, for which we should be very thankful. But vastly more important is God's saving love, when He comes in mercy to sinners rushing down the broad way to a lost eternity. Then He turns them from their sins, enables them to look to Christ as the One who died for sinners, gives them a new heart and directs them up the narrow way that leads to everlasting life in heaven.

Old Matthew was sure of one thing: "We cannot be poor if we have Christ, and we cannot be rich without Him". He was right. He was content with the little that God had seen fit to give him in providence. But he was united to Christ. So he had spiritual riches – spiritual riches that will last for ever. He knew that God would supply all his real needs, for this life and for the next.

But how poor sinners will be if they die without Christ! They do not have grace in their hearts; the sin of their hearts and lives has never been subdued; their iniquities have never been forgiven. They are just not fit for heaven; so they cannot go there.

Yet how rich those who love God will be when they are brought home to heaven – old Matthew among them! They will never lack anything. As they stand before the throne of God, everything will be supplied, for the sake of Christ, that will make them completely blessed and perfectly happy for ever and ever. Even in this world, God has promised to supply all their needs. Especially He will sustain the new life that He has placed in their souls, but He will provide for them in every way, even when it seems most unlikely. He will never forget His promises.

If we want to live our lives according to the teachings of the Bible, we will want to have nothing to do with gambling of any kind. Yet to avoid such outward sins is not enough. We need a new heart, and only God can change our heart so that we begin to lose our love for the world and the things of the world, and start to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. If God so works within us and we begin a life of dependence on Him, then all will be well – in this life, at death and throughout eternity. That is truly to have God's blessing.

Spiritual Counter-Terrorism Necessary

Matthew Vogan

In a previous article, last month, we saw how the great evil of terrorism reminds us of the greatest evil, sin – especially indwelling sin. Like terrorists, sin is a hidden enemy that aims at maximum destruction. It is a constant, unpredictable and deceitful threat.

We can also learn spiritual lessons for our fight against sin from the methods used to combat terrorists. No such comparison is perfect. Yet it can be helpful, as we think about Scripture teaching on the warfare against sin.

1. Effective government. Stable civil government is a great blessing from God. Terrorists thrive in unstable countries with weakened governments. In some nations in Africa and the Middle East, terrorists have such strength that they control certain areas and the government cannot exercise any of its powers.

Sin desires to achieve the same outcome in our lives; and by nature, in ourselves, we are powerless against it. We need the best possible government. The King of kings can rule and defend us and subdue these enemies. Only the power of Christ can prevail against sin. This is the only effective government that can defend us against the evil wiles of sin. Only true believers who are united to Christ by faith can resist sin. It is through the Spirit alone that we can put sin to death (Romans 8:13). There will be no peace and true security otherwise. Sin robs us of our peace (Romans 8:6).

2. Effective law enforcement. Governments pass laws in order to control and combat the activities of terrorists. To be effective, they must not only pass these laws but also enforce them.

Likewise a true knowledge, understanding and personal application of God's law in its fullness is essential to resisting sin. The knowledge of sin comes through the moral law, understood in its full breadth and depth. It is a solemn fact that many constantly sin because they do not enquire into the true extent and application of God's law. The soul must charge itself with the guilt of a sin before it is persuaded of the need to resist it. It ought to hold a court of law in the conscience to convict itself of sin and pass the sentence that God's law requires.

It must enforce the death penalty of execution, that Scripture requires against sin (Romans 8:13). Scripture calls this *mortifying* or *crucifying* sin. Though sin may escape from us, we must be persuaded that death is what it deserves. One sin mortified will not deal with every sin, but it will weaken the power of sin in general. It is very difficult for countries to get rid of

terrorism altogether, but they can have success in preventing, restraining and weakening its activities. We have to weaken sin even though we cannot completely root it out.

3. Effective border control. A country must seek to prevent terrorists from entering with the intention of causing destruction. They expel those that are guilty of promoting terrorism. A strict watch is kept on all borders to identify possible threats. Officials are constantly on the watch to identify anyone who resembles those on their list of prohibited persons. They cannot afford to relax their watch and any restrictions.

The borders of an individual believer's heart are what Bunyan called eye gate, ear gate, feel gate and so on. Security scans are required at these access points. Opportunities and temptations to sin often come through these senses. These are often called the *occasions* of sin. If we are careless about what, in particular, we see and hear, we may be drawn into sin. David says, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (Psalm 101:3). He seeks divine help with this resolve: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Psalm 119:37). In this way, the soul seeks to expel anything that would cause it to sin.

4. Effective surveillance. Intelligence is a key aspect of counter-terrorism. Suspects are monitored to assess any plans and activities. It is also important to monitor communications to check for anything that might help the cause of terrorism. They are alert to any plans being shared for possible attacks. Thus the believer seeks to become fully acquainted with the activities of sin. Its ways, wiles, methods and successes are studied in order to detect and prevent it in the future. They get an understanding of how sin takes advantage of weaknesses of temperament and character.

Believers also monitor their hearts and the communications of their thoughts and desires with each other. They watch over what their desires become entangled and delighted with or what their memory recalls. They examine whether these things are sinful and in danger of communicating sinfully with their will. This is part of what Scripture commands when it says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23). They also seek to "set a watch" (Psalm 141:3) over their mouth lest they sin in that way too.

5. Effective suppression. Along with such surveillance and interception countries must watch against the type of speech that promotes terrorism. This must be suppressed as much as any direct activities. Even if there is no evidence of attacks being planned, this type of speech can lead on to terrorism. Others are "radicalised" into terrorism because of it. The authorities cannot allow small elements of terrorism or its ideas to flourish, or it will continue to grow and develop.

It is the same with sin. The soul cannot turn a blind eye to what the tempter calls “small sins”. These too are dangerous and must be dealt with. “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes” (Song 2:15). The soul cannot afford to focus only on the sins that cause it most trouble and are most obvious. We need what John Owen calls a universal sincerity. This means being ready to resist any and every sin and seek to have it killed.

6. Effective armed resistance. None of these will be of any use unless we take arms to resist a well-armed threat. When armed weapons are carried against us, the same level of force is required in response. Sin aims at our death. No self-defensive arms were ever more justified and necessary than the spiritual weapons wielded against sin. Mere resolutions not to sin are not enough; action is required. “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

As John Owen puts it, we must act faith daily in Christ's death: “Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin”. Christ died to condemn sin and destroy the works of the devil. Believers are dead to sin through that death of deaths (Romans 6:2). This is the most effective armoury. There is power in Christ's death and we are to be more and more conformed to it.

7. Effective promotion of good. One way in which the British Government has sought to counter terrorism is through positive messages. They wish to promote what they believe are the opposite values to those fostered by terrorists. They seek to foster good relations. It becomes more difficult for messages that radicalise to win ground when the conditions in which they flourish do not exist. Sadly, there can be much that is misguided in such attempts. It is the responsibility of government to reward them that do well and punish evil doers (Romans 13:3). Yet the loss of true moral values means that vague or confused values may be promoted.

Encouraging and doing what is holy, just, good and right helps to undermine evil. Sanctification requires not just dying to sin but living unto righteousness. Each helps the other. Putting on grace and the new man helps us to put off the old man with its deceitful lusts (Ephesians 4:22-26; Colossians 3:10-12). We can only live unto righteousness by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion. It ought to be obvious to us that sin is an even greater and more constant enemy to our souls than terrorism is to society. John Owen noted that, every day, sin either foils or is foiled; it either prevails or is prevailed upon. Its effects are far more devastating than terrorist threats in society. Thus Mansoul is warned by Emmanuel [the Lord Jesus] in John

Bunyan's book, *The Holy War*, "Nothing can hurt you except sin; nothing can grieve Me except sin; nothing can make thee base before thy foes but sin. Take heed of sin, My Mansoul."

Neglecting to put sin to death is spiritually ruinous. Yet, in spite of this, there is no need for despair. We are told: "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). As John Owen notes, this not only tells believers that they must put sin death, but also that it is possible. There are sufficient resources through the Spirit, and there is a promise of vigorous, blessed spiritual life to those who do.

The Russian Tailor

In 1816 Richard Knill sailed from England as a missionary to India. But after suffering from cholera and other health problems, it seemed clear that he could not safely continue in India any longer. So just over three years after leaving, he was back in his own country. Instead Knill set off for Russia and began work in St Petersburg. One day a tailor called at his house. Knill already had a visitor; so he gave the tailor a seat and handed him a tract in English, which he knew the man could understand.

Knill was soon back with the tailor, who said, "I hope you are pleased with your coat".

"Yes", Knill replied; he was very pleased with it. But, he asked in turn, was the tailor pleased with the tract?

"O, I never trouble myself about books."

"Do you not? I am sorry for that; you are getting an old man, and if you do not trouble yourself about books, I fear there is something else which you neglect."

"What is that?"

"Your precious soul. And 'what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'"

"Ah, I guess what you mean; you think I ought to become religious."

"Yes, that is it."

"It would be impossible for me to carry on my large business if I was religious."

"You astonish me. How would religion interfere with your business?"

The tailor explained that, if he was religious, he would have to go to church on Sabbaths.

Knill agreed, but pointed out that, assuming the tailor was sincerely

religious, he would rejoice when the Sabbath came, because he might hear something about God and salvation.

"That would be impossible with my business." The tailor went on to explain that he employed 30 men, and on Sabbaths he paid most of his bills and received most of the money he was due. "It is my busiest day."

"What! Do you never go to church?"

"Never."

"This is worse and worse. You say you do not read good books and you do not go to church; depend upon it: you are going to hell. I have long thought that no man would go to heaven merely because he read the Bible and went to church, but I am deeply convinced that the man who neglects these things is not going to heaven. How can you live in this way? Do you not believe there is a God?"

The tailor looked angrily at Knill and asked, "Have you ever seen God?"

"I have not seen God, but I have seen you, and you are one of God's works." He meant that God has created everyone, including the tailor.

"Very well, when you meet with anyone who has seen God, please let me know." The tailor wished Knill a good morning and left.

Knill did not see him again until the funeral of the man who had introduced the tailor to him. This man had died of typhus fever, and many people mourned his death; Knill described him as an "excellent man". Many came to the funeral, among them the tailor, and Knill noticed tears "rolling down his aged cheeks". The missionary did not know if it was something that he said that moved him so much, or was it the death of his friend?

The next Sabbath, the tailor came to church and again on the following two Sabbaths. Knill asked one of his friends if he had seen the tailor.

"Yes," he answered; "I can tell you something very interesting about that old man. Then the friend explained: "He has bought an English Bible, and says he is determined to read it – yes, and to read it all through, to see whether what you say is true or not".

"Then there is hope for him. There is always hope of a man when he begins to read the Bible with attention."

The tailor began to attend weekday services as well as on the Lord's Day, and his face was often lit up with joy. But Knill never spoke to him until one Saturday night, when he was sitting in his study, his wife came to tell him: "There is a stranger asking for you".

"Who is it?"

"I do not know," she said, "but I think it is the Russian tailor."

Knill went to speak to him. The tailor said, "Saturday night is not exactly the time to call on you, Mr Knill, but I have a little business".

“What business?”

“One of your hearers wished to present you with a new coat, and I have brought it; I hope you will not be angry.”

Knill told him: “I am not in the habit of being angry with anyone, but especially with one who would give me a new coat”. Then he asked, “What kind friend has done this?”

The visitor did not want to say.

“Is it a young man?” asked Knill.

“No.”

“Is it an old man?”

“Yes, an old man with a grey head.”

Knill recalled later: “There he stood by my side, with his hair as white as milk, but I had no idea that he was the man”. Then Knill suggested that the man tell Mrs Knill who had sent the coat. He agreed to do so and it was not long before Knill found out that the coat was a gift from the tailor himself.

Of course he warmly thanked the tailor. But, he asked, what had made the tailor give him the coat?

The tailor then burst into tears, and confessed, “If God had not changed my heart, I never should have thought of giving you the coat”.

“If it is connected with a change of heart, then the coat is very valuable.”

Then the tailor said something that showed Knill that his visitor had indeed experienced a change of heart: “I want to ask you what I should do for my men [those who worked for him]? I feel very much about their souls. What do you think I should do for them? Should I give them copies of the Testament?”

Of course, Knill encouraged him to do so. He went quickly home and called his men together. He asked each of them: “Can you read?”

Some could read Swedish, others were able to read German, Finnish or Russian. When he had worked out how many of his people could read each language, he came back to Knill to order copies of the New Testament in these languages. But there were other men working for the tailor who could not read at all; so he made arrangements to have them taught. He wanted all who worked for him to be able to read God’s Word for themselves.

From then on, the tailor usually spent half an hour each evening with his men. He would ask the men to turn to a chapter in the Bible; then they would all read each verse in their own language, and the tailor would explain it to them briefly in Russian, the language which they all understood. No longer was the tailor breaking the Sabbath in his business. Instead, every other day in his workshop, there was Bible reading, prayer, praise, and teaching from the Bible.

For Junior Readers

“More Than Enough”

Last month's article told about Mary Bethune, a girl on the Isle of Skye who began to ask everyone she met if they could tell her about the God who could deliver from death. No one could. So she walked all the way to Inverness; there she was taken to church and God blessed the sermon to her. At last she found the God she was seeking for so long.

Do you know where Strathpeffer is? It is a village near Dingwall in the Scottish Highlands which became popular as a spa resort after mineral springs were discovered there. People with all sorts of illnesses used to travel there to “take [or, drink] the waters” in the hope that they would be cured. A long time ago a lady from Skye made her way there in the hope that the waters would benefit her. She brought her young daughter, Janet, with her.

They stayed there for several weeks. During this time Janet followed some of the crowd who made their way to the church services in Dingwall. Large numbers of people used to attend the communion services there in those days and listen to the godly ministers who would be preaching. Although Janet had been to church in Skye, she had never heard preaching like this before. For the first time she was convinced that she was a sinner in God's sight.

Janet was determined to return to the services on the Lord's Day. She wanted her mother to come with her so that she too would hear the Word of God preached. Sadly her mother had no interest in the truth. She did not want to go herself and she did her very best to prevent Janet from going.

In spite of all Janet's pleadings, her mother refused to let her go; indeed she tried to force her to break the Sabbath by doing unnecessary work at home. But Janet's longing to hear the Word of God was so great that she felt she must set off on her own. As she left the house, her wicked mother cursed her with awful oaths.

Poor Janet was so distressed that she nearly turned back. But the Holy Spirit encouraged her by helping her to remember some of the things she had heard in church – so she walked on until at last she reached the congregation in Dingwall.

The sermon had already started. What did Janet hear? The first thing she heard the minister talking about was the blood of the cross – he was pointing to Christ's death – and how it could cleanse away the guilt of sin. He also said that it could take away her feeling of being condemned. She then heard him say words which suited her exactly: “If you are feeling the curse of God, and your mother's curse as well, you will find more than enough in this blood to remove both and to make you righteous before God”. Janet heard these

words and they were blessed to her soul. She listened carefully to all that was said; she drank it all in.

At the end of the service everyone began to leave – but Janet had nowhere to go. She knew nobody in Dingwall. But the Lord had prepared a friend for her – Mary Bethune, who also was from Skye and had come to Inverness seeking Christ many years before! She spotted the lonely girl and invited her to her own home. As Janet’s mother had rejected her, Mary took her to live with herself and the two became firm friends. They attended the preaching of godly ministers and enjoyed it. They also prayed for the Isle of Skye, where they had both come from. They asked that it would yet enjoy the gospel blessings which were so precious to them.

Should you not value the preaching of the gospel as Janet did? Will you not pray that the Lord, who blessed His word to Janet and to Mary, would bless His word to you also? He is the same God still – as the Psalmist said,
“For Thou art gracious, O Lord, and ready to forgive;
And rich in mercy, all that call upon Thee to relieve.”

J van Kralingen

Principles of the Christian Church

3. The Church as a Human Body

Rev D W B Somerset

Last month’s section of this Youth Conference paper looked at the first of four pictures of the Church given in the Bible: it is like a city.

The second illustration of the Church used in Scripture is that of the Church as a body: the body of Christ. God “hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

This illustration of the Church as a body is used at length in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul says that “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (v 13), and this body has many members. He mentions the foot, the hand, the eye, the hearing and the smelling (that is, the power of hearing and of smelling). Thus, the individual Christians are seen as “members of [Christ’s] body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30). Christ Himself is the Head of this “mystical body” from whom it derives its life, its wisdom, and its direction: so that “speaking the truth in love, [the people of God] may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

The previous illustration of the Church that we considered was a city, but the picture of the body shows that the connection between Christians is very

much closer even than that between neighbours and fellow-dwellers in a city. The members of a body cannot be separated from each other in their very existence. If they are separated from each other, then one of them, at least, must also be separated from the Head, and hence has ceased in practice to be a member of the body. Thus they are “members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25), each being joined to Christ, the Head, and through Him to every other member of the body; and each one, therefore, having a certain “possession” in every other one.

The members of the body have a duty and need to care for one another, and an injury to one is an injury to all. Similarly, an honour given to one part of the body is an honour to the whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. “Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

This mutual dependence of believers is seen whenever Christ uses the Church to accomplish anything. If we suppose a man using his body to help someone, then almost the whole body would be involved. The eyes would be used to see, the ears to hear, the mouth to speak, the neck to support the head, the hands to act, the arms to position the hands and supply strength, the feet and legs to move the body, the ears to balance, the lungs to breathe, and so on. So it is with the body of Christ.

Christ may employ one particular member for a certain duty, but that member will have been helped by many others. The preaching of the Word, for example, will have been necessary for implanting spiritual life in that member in the first place. Then there will have been a continual need for the Word of God to sustain Christian life and to grow in grace and knowledge.

Some believers in the past, such as William Tyndale, were used to translate that Word. Others will have been used for the preaching of the Word. Others again have provided Christian company and Christian counsel. Others have probably been praying, generally or specifically, for the one who is to act. Thus the whole body is used to support each individual member. Sometimes several members of the body are used in co-operation, as we use the members of our own bodies: Paul may be used to plant the seed of the Word by preaching, while Apollos may be used later to water the seed (1 Corinthians 3:6).

One important principle that plainly follows from this picture of the body is the *spiritual independence of the Church*. If Christ is the Head of the body, then there is no place either for a pope or for a monarch, as the head on earth. Such a person could only be a usurper. Christ is already working in His people and commanding and directing them, and the intrusion of some false “head” could only oppose and hinder His work.

Generally, the state does not welcome or accept the spiritual independence

of the Church and seeks to interfere with it. This “Erastian”¹ interference takes various forms: for example, prohibiting meetings of Church courts or allowing them only at the discretion of the state; appointing bishops to oversee and control these meetings; overruling the discipline of the Church through the civil courts; allowing wealthy landowners to choose the ministers (patronage); interfering with the worship of the Church (for instance, requiring organs); appointing religious feasts to be kept by the Church (whether Christmas and Easter, or the anniversary of the death of “King Charles the Martyr”), and many others. All these are a manifest intrusion into that close relation between Christ and His own mystical body.

For Younger Readers

The Bird that God Sent

It was early in the morning, and a poor man was sitting at the door of his house. His eyes were red because he was crying.

What was wrong? He owed money to someone, and he had no money to pay him. So he expected a man to come to take away some things from his house. The man would sell them and use the money to pay the person who was owed money.

As the poor man sat outside his house, a little bird flew along the street. Then it flew over his head and into his cottage. He went inside, closed the door, caught the bird and put it into a cage. At once it began to sing very nicely.

Just then there was a knock on the poor man’s door. He was afraid that this was the man who would take away his things.

No, it was not. It was someone looking for the bird; he was the servant of an important lady. People on the street had told him that the bird had flown into the house. He wanted to know if the poor man had caught it.

“O yes,” said the man, “and here it is.”

Soon the servant came back to thank the poor man. He brought some money from the lady as a reward for catching the bird. It was just the amount of money he needed to pay what he owed. “God has sent it to me”, the poor man said. How thankful he was!

¹Erastianism is the government of the Church by a king or the state (see the first article in this series).

John Brown of Haddington

10. Last Days

John Brown was a minister in Haddington, south-east of Edinburgh. In last month's article we noted some of his advice to a young man and also some counsel to his own children. He was then becoming old. This is the final article.

Looking back after nearly 40 years of preaching Christ, and salvation through Him, Brown imagined being young again and able to choose whether to be King of Britain or "a preacher of the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven". Even if it meant begging for his food for six days of the week so that he would have "an opportunity of preaching on Sabbath to an assembly of sinful men, I would by His grace never hesitate a moment to take my choice". He would choose to be a preacher because "by the gospel men live, and in it is the life of my soul".

He was still very conscious of sin, not least in his heart – and he was including pride among his sins. He spoke strongly against himself, but that was not because he was very wicked in comparison with other people. It was because God had taught him much about himself and about the holiness God demands in His perfect law. Yet he knew that God had been very good to him, and this kindness encouraged him "to leave my present young family on Him without the least anxious care or fear".

No matter what difficulties or troubles we may experience in this life, we will have no regrets at last if we are trusting in the Lord as John Brown did. Heaven will very quickly make up for everything.

Brown was now 64. He was now less well than he used to be. He was not really able to do so much work. "I am determined to hold to the Church's work as long as I can", he told those who wanted him to take things easier. And he asked, "How can a dying man spend his last breath better than in preaching Christ?"

The next year, 1787, saw Brown in his pulpit for the last time. He later wrote to the people of his congregation, reminding them that he had not "spared either body or mind in the service of your souls"; he had preached nothing but "the truths of God". He had "laboured chiefly to show . . . your consciences the most important truths concerning your sinfulness and misery, and the way of salvation from both through Christ". He had tried to "give your consciences no rest but in Christ and Him crucified. The delight of my soul was to commend Him and His free and great salvation to your souls, and to direct and encourage you to receive and walk in Him. . . . And now I leave all these discourses, exhortations, instructions and examples as a testimony for the Lord against you", if they did not lay to heart their need

of the eternal salvation. That salvation was what he saw as the one thing needful, which could never be taken from them.

Yet he was not in any way basing his hope of salvation on anything that he had “done as a minister and a Christian”; he saw so many flaws in his life. “I have no hope of eternal happiness”, he added, “but in Jesus’ blood, which cleanseth from all sin, in redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of my sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

“Now I die,” he wrote, “firmly persuaded [of the truth] of those things which I preached unto you.” The way of salvation he preached to his people was exactly the way he wished to walk in. After all he had said about the sinfulness of their hearts, he believed that the filthiness and guilt of their sin was 10 000 times worse than he had told them.

So he went on: “Knowing, in some measure, the deceitfulness of sin and the devices of Satan, I laboured to warn you of them. But what especially delighted my heart was to set before you the excellencies, the love, the labours of the Redeemer, and God in Him, giving Himself” for sinners. He also delighted to describe to them “the work of God on the heart in the day of His power”. He emphasised: “I will leave it as my dying testimony that there is none like Christ, there is nothing like fellowship with Christ. . . . I would not exchange the pleasures of religion which I have enjoyed, especially in . . . my youth, for all the pleasures, profits and honours of this world, since the creation to the present moment.

Brown was concerned that some of his people were content to have only an outward form of godliness, without knowing its power. And, he asked, were they careful to train up their children for the Lord? He feared that many would go down to hell deceiving themselves that all would be well when they would die – and all the gospel sermons that they had heard would disturb their conscience, “to assist it to . . . torment you”. He exhorted them: “Let me then beseech you now, without a moment’s delay, to consider your ways. Listen to the Lord’s invitations.”

He went on: “For the Lord’s sake, dare not, at your infinite peril, to see me again in your sins” as “refusers of my glorious Redeemer and Master. O give Him your hearts; give Him your hearts! I never complained of you giving me too little. . . . But I always thought and complained that you did not use my Master Christ as I wished, in your hearts, lives and houses”. He pleaded with them to give Christ “these ignorant, guilty, polluted and enslaved hearts of yours, that He, as made of God unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, might enter in and fill them for evermore with His grace and truth”.

The dying minister went on to give his people advice about finding

another minister. They were to seek him from the Lord “by much fervent prayer. And let it be your care to call one whose sermons you find to touch your consciences.”

And Brown concluded his long letter by quoting the verse: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Brown was becoming weaker. One day, at mealtime, he thanked everyone around him. Then he turned to his wife and thanked her particularly “for your kindness to me”. But much as he loved his wife and children, he confessed, “I must go back to this: ‘Whom have I in heaven but Thee [God]? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee’” (Psalm 73:25).

One of his younger children was called Peggy. One day, when she came into her father's room, he placed his hands on her head and told her to remember to pray to God. “Your father must soon leave you, but cry unto Jesus: ‘Thou art my Father and the guide of my youth’. I do not think that I was much older than you when God caused me to claim Him. . . . God has been good to me.” And then: “Though you will not have a bedroom like this to come and see your father in, you will be taken to a far better Father's room”. And just three years later, that is just what happened. She died and went to heaven.

Perhaps it was the same girl who told Brown that she wished that he would live on. But his wish, as he told her, was to be with Christ. Then the little one asked, “Would you not wish to take us with you?”

“It is not I,” he said gently, “but Christ who must do that.” And he added, “As to my departure, I will not set the time of it to God. He is wise, and I am a fool.” Of course, John Brown was no fool – except in comparison with God – but he knew that it would be very foolish of him, a mere human being, to try to set the time of his death. He was content to leave that time in God's hands. He told his children that he had tried to cast them on God's care and added, “See that you cast yourselves on Him”.

June 4 was the birthday of George III, who was then the British King, and the church bells in Haddington were rung for the occasion. Brown, with his spiritual mind, thought of a far higher king. “Blessed be God”, he said, “that we have a better King's birthday to celebrate: unto us a child is born, in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord”.

Then, just over a fortnight later, on 19 June 1787, John Brown of Haddington passed to his eternal reward in heaven. His last words were: “My Christ”. They formed, someone has suggested, a summary of his life. *Our* greatest desire should be to have the Lord Jesus Christ as ours. Then, when we die, we will share in the same eternal reward.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2015-16

UK Prizes and Awards

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London: Habakkuk and Manow Fox. *Ness:* Donald MacColl, Emily Murray. *North Tolsta:* Uilleam Morrison. *Portree:* Catriona Macraile. *Stornoway:* Cameron and Faith Mackay, Emma, Naomi and Owen Morrison, Levi Morrison. *Tain:* Benjamin and Clement Reynolds.

Looking Around Us

An Honest Boy

Scottish Power, one of Scotland's largest energy firms, was very impressed with the honesty of a boy called Daniel. That is all they know about him. He and his mother were in the visitor centre at their Whitelee Windfarm on Eaglesham Moor, not far from Glasgow. Daniel picked up a stretchy-man toy costing just 10p, in the centre's gift shop. He thought his mother had paid for it, but when he got home, he realised that he was wrong.

So he sent back the toy with a letter explaining what had happened. He did not give his address, so the company does not know how to contact him. They want Daniel to get in touch so that they can send him a reward – what the company calls a “gesture of thanks” for his honesty.

It is good to hear of such things happening. God has said, “Thou shalt not steal”. So we are not only forbidden to break into people’s houses, or a shop, to remove what does not belong to us. We must be totally honest in our dealings with other people. We should ask God to help us to do what is right in every situation.

Heavens on Earth

An American businessman – his father was involved in producing the first man-made diamonds – is now proposing to build what a newspaper headline calls “1000 heavens on earth”. These “heavens” each are to be towns for 20 000 people.

David Hall is a Mormon, and his plans are loosely based on *The Book of Mormon*, which occupies over 500 pages in the copy that I looked at. Its Introduction claims that it “is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible”. But it is not in any way a continuation of the Old and New Testaments that God has given to mankind. In Deuteronomy 4:2, God warns, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it”. These words are echoed in the last book of the Bible: “I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18). Clearly, it is a dangerous thing to add to the words of the Bible. And it is dangerous to pay attention to the teachings of anything, like *The Book of Mormon* which is claimed to be an addition to the Bible, yet is so strongly forbidden by God.

There can be no heaven on earth. On earth, even in the best-planned towns, there are jealousies and conflicts; there will be none of these things in heaven. On earth there will be sadness, sickness and death; there will be none of these things in heaven, where everything is perfect, where there is no sin and nothing to disappoint anyone. On earth, however attractive or otherwise our situation may be, we should always be looking on to eternity and asking God to prepare us for heaven. He calls to each of us, in the Bible, which from beginning to end has His full authority: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

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