

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 82

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Number 1

Answers for People's Questions

They claimed it was art, but it was a weird performance – in a cemetery in Bristol where more than 250 000 people have been buried. A group of people gathered to address questions to the dead. Not at all surprisingly, none of them answered.

Probably no one expected an answer. Dead people cannot hear us, nor can they speak to us in reply. Yet people try to communicate with the dead, especially in an age like this when most people no longer pay attention to the Bible and the counsel God gives us there. He warns us against paying attention to those who have “familiar spirits” – who act as mediums, who try to communicate with the dead (see, for example, Leviticus 19:31).

King Saul tried this. But we are told that “Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also [in particular] *for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit*, to enquire of it” (1 Chronicles 10:13).

One after another of those who gathered in the Bristol graveyard took a microphone to ask questions such as, “Is death just a change, or is it the end?” Of course, if death is the end of people's existence, there was no possibility of a response; it was a pointless question. But the fact is that when someone dies, the soul passes into eternity – either to heaven or to hell, where it is out of contact with this world – and the body is left behind.

If we want to find out an answer to this question, we must go, not to a graveyard, but to the Bible. There we will find the right answer, to which we should pay serious attention. Even if the change which death does bring about would only last for a short time, we surely ought to prepare for it. How much more seriously we should prepare for death and the great change it involves, since we will never return to this world!

How seriously we should then listen to the call that God gives: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6,7). Yes, there is abundant pardon

for all sin – for everyone who will seek the Lord, forsake their godless ways and thoughts, and believe in the Lord Jesus. Let us be clear that the Bible tells us all that we need to know about what lies beyond death.

Another question was: “Would you say you found peace wherever you are now?” Again, of course, there was no answer from any of the graves around the person who asked this question. But there is a clear answer in the Bible; and whether the answer is Yes, or No, depends on the kind of life that the person lived. The Bible makes it clear that, as “the tree falleth, there it shall be” (Ecclesiastes 11:3). If a tree falls in some forest far away from everyone, it will just lie there. If it was leaning towards the north, that is the direction in which it will lie after it falls; similarly if the tree was leaning towards the south, that is the direction to which it will point.

So, when someone you know dies, you might ask, Is the person now at peace? Before you answer that question, you should ask, In what direction was he or she leaning when they were alive? Were they leaning towards holiness or towards sin? Were they seeking godliness or godlessness? Were they trusting in Christ or were they rejecting Him? If you could answer these questions accurately, then you can tell if they are now at peace. One thing is sure: “There is no peace . . . to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:21).

For each of us, an important question is: Will I be at peace when I die? But even more important are questions such as these: Am I at peace with God *now*? Have I been delivered from the wrath to come – God’s righteous anger against me for my sin?

The fact is that God could not be righteous unless He will punish sin. That is what the Bible means by speaking about His anger against sinners. But that anger can be turned away because Jesus, the sinner’s substitute, endured God’s anger in the place of sinners. Thus “whosoever believeth in [Jesus will] not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:15). To put it another way, everyone who will believe in Jesus will escape God’s anger and, after death, will be at peace with God for ever in heaven.

A further question in the graveyard was: “Is there a better way to live?” Yes, there is. And there is a much better way of finding out how we should live in this world than by asking dead bodies who cannot possibly hear anything. All such questions can be answered from the Bible.

First, we must listen to God’s will as expressed in the Ten Commandments, beginning: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”. We ought to give God the first place in our lives, not some other person or thing. We must worship Him; and we must obey Him in everything He says; we must repent of our disobedience – we must turn from our wrongdoing. Not least, we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may be saved from our sins.

But there is much more teaching in the Bible about how we should live, not least in books like Proverbs and the Epistles. And we can see how godly people lived – like Paul, Mary Magdalene and Peter – as they sought, sometimes imperfectly, to be obedient to God and to what He has commanded. Again we can see how ungodly people like King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel lived without thinking seriously about how God told them to think and speak and act. We should seek to follow the example of those who obeyed God's commands and reject the example of others.

Jesus spoke about a very rich man who enjoyed a huge feast every day. At his gate there lay a good man called Lazarus who was a beggar. Both men died; Lazarus went to heaven, but the rich man was sent to hell. That was according to how they lived in this world: one sought the forgiveness of his sins and wanted to live to God's glory; the other did neither of these.

From hell, the man who had once been rich asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to teach his brothers, so that they would not come to that "place of torment". He thought that if someone would come to them from the dead, they would repent. What was Abraham's answer? It was this: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). In other words, if people will not listen to the Bible, then no one will persuade them – not even someone who has come back from the dead.

Neither will anyone be persuaded to turn to God, even if it was possible for dead people to give them an answer to their questions. We must get our answers from the Bible. And if we are to get good – to find salvation – from the truths of the Bible, these truths must be powerfully applied to our souls by the Holy Spirit, for the sake of Christ. This is what we should seek more earnestly than anything else.

We must all die. But we do not know when. Perhaps you might say that it would be a good idea to make it a New Year resolution to seek salvation earnestly now. Yet New Year resolutions are well known, not for being kept, but for being broken. We need God's help; we need Him to work within us to make us willing to seek Him, as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the One who died in the place of sinners. And we must go on seeking Him. Jesus Christ has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7). That is one of the many wonderful truths to be found in the Bible. Let us take God's book seriously! Let us study it earnestly!

And ask God to bless it to your soul, to give you a new heart, to make you willing and able to trust in Christ Jesus. Then ask God further to keep you safe throughout the rest of your time in this world, to give you grace to live a godly life, and to bring you safely at last to a better world in heaven above.

The Beginning of Months

Rev K M Watkins

“**R**ora Emanwa y’Eng’ondi ya Nyasae, oyokorusia ebibe bi’Ense.” Those were the words that the Kenya missionary asked a child in the class to read aloud. It was the beginning of January, and as usual he was visiting local schools to distribute Bible calendars to the children.

The words came from the text for January, the first month of the year. They are in Ekegusii, the language of the Kisii tribe in south-western Kenya. They mean: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. This is what John the Baptist said when he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, and they can be found in John 1:29.

The calendars were produced by the Trinitarian Bible Society. During the previous year, the translation team at the Kenya Mission had been busy making sure that the words were translated accurately and clearly, just as they are in the English of the Authorised Version.

Each page of the calendar had a beautiful picture on it, as well as a text from the Bible. It was a rare treat for these young pupils to receive such a colourful gift. The missionary told the class that the calendars had come all the way from London, in England. The children had never travelled far from their own village, and it made them wonder to think that these calendars had come from so far away.

Then the missionary told them that the words on the calendar had come from much farther away than London. They were words from the Bible, which is the Word of God. Therefore they had been sent to them all the way from heaven. He encouraged the children to read and pray about every month’s text during the coming year. He exhorted them to memorise the text each month and so hide the Word of God in their hearts, as in Psalm 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee”.

The children were amazed to think that the words in their hands had come all the way from heaven. Are you amazed like that when you pick up your Bible? Every word in it has come to you from heaven. The same is true of preaching. Paul told his hearers in Antioch: “To you is the word of this salvation sent” (Acts 13:26). Of all the good and perfect gifts which come down from heaven, can there be anything better than the good news of the gospel? The Bible has this message for you from heaven: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

The missionary began to explain the meaning of John 1:29 to the children,

telling them that the passover lamb in the Old Testament was a picture of Jesus in the New Testament.

When they came out of Egypt, God told the children of Israel that they were always to start their calendar year in that month – it was to be like January is to us. “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you” (Exodus 12:2). Their escape from slavery marked the beginning of their history as an independent nation, when they were set free to worship and serve God in the way He wanted.

The missionary told the children that they needed a “beginning of months” too. He was not talking about the calendar on the wall, but about the beginning of spiritual life. Like the Israelites in Egypt, they too were slaves, because they were in bondage to their sins. Whatever they tried to do, they could not set themselves free from sin. They needed a new start – just like the Israelites. They needed spiritual life, which would free them to serve the Lord. They needed to be born again. Then they would have their own “beginning of months” – the beginning of a new way of life, not living for sin but living for the Lord.

The missionary went on to explain what the children of Israel had to do on the night of the passover. They had to take a perfect lamb – one that had no blemishes or injuries – and they had to kill it. They had to be very careful with the blood as it poured out. It had to be sprinkled on the side posts of their door and on the lintel above it. God went through the land that night and destroyed all the firstborn children of the Egyptians. But the Israelites were safe. None of them died, for God had promised: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). That night the Israelites left Egypt. The missionary went on to explain the gospel meaning of the passover.

The passover lamb had to be perfect. That pictured the *sinlessness* of the Lord Jesus Christ, “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). Jesus can take away His people’s sin because He has no sin of His own. If He was Himself at fault, even in the smallest thing, His sacrifice would have been rejected. But He did not have one single blemish, or flaw. What a wonderful thought! The Lamb of God is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Behold the sinless Lamb of God!

The passover lamb had to be killed. That pictured the *sacrifice* of the Lord Jesus Christ, “the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12). To take away sin, His life had to be taken away, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). There was death in every house in Egypt – in the homes of the Israelites, as well as the homes of the Egyptians. The difference was who died. In Egyptian homes, Egyptians died. In Israelite homes, the lamb died. That is

the meaning of the cross of Christ. The Lamb of God died instead of His people – He suffered death in their place. As their substitute, He was punished for their sin.

The passover lamb had to be roasted with fire. That pictured the *sufferings* of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). Sin provokes God’s anger. His wrath is like fire, burning against sinners. The Lord Jesus, suffering the punishment for His people’s sin, felt the burning flames of divine wrath going out against Him. That is how His people escape the fiery torments of hell – there is no wrath for them, for it has already burned against their Saviour.

The Israelites did not die on the passover night. That pictured the *salvation* of believers. They were saved because of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses, not because they were better than the Egyptians. They were guilty of sin like the Egyptians. But unlike the Egyptians they believed God’s promise to deliver them when He saw the blood that had been sprinkled. To be saved, we must trust in the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God. We must believe that our sins will be forgiven when we rely on Christ’s blood for the forgiveness of sin.

The passover lamb had to be eaten together with bitter herbs. That pictured the *sorrow* for sin that is in repentance. When a sinner truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he enjoys the sweetness that is in the salvation of Christ, just as lamb is pleasant to the taste. But a true believer also repents of his sin, and that makes him mourn with bitterness within, just as the herbs were bitter to the taste.

The missionary urged the children to repent and put their faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. If they believed in Him, they would be able to say that “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). That would mark the beginning of something so new and so much greater than the beginning of a new year. It would mark the beginning of spiritual life.

The missionary ended by telling them about a Sabbath School teacher he knew. This man – then in the Church of England – was trying to teach the children, but he was not saved himself, and therefore could not properly explain the gospel. The Lord brought him under conviction of sin, and he was seeking how to be saved.

One day he was preparing to speak to the children about the passover lamb. He was using a set of teacher’s notes. In the Egyptian houses the firstborn died. The notes told him to tell the children that in the houses of the Israelites the lamb died instead. In an instant the wonderful meaning of those words – “the lamb died instead” – filled his soul with light. Now he understood. Christ, the Lamb of God, died *instead* of His people. The

teacher believed. That is what he told his pupils to do. That is what the missionary told the children in Kenya to do. That is what you must do too. Then you will know a real “beginning of months”!

Job – Fearing God and Eschewing Evil

3. The Perfect Man (2)

Rev David Campbell

This series was originally a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. The last article began to explain what is said about Job as a “perfect man” in Job 1:1. This article goes on also to explain other terms used in that verse.

Fearing God often refers to the worship of God. To worship God with reverence and godly fear is an essential aspect of true Christianity, for “our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28,29). To have godly fear is to live in awe of God, to tremble at His word, to give Him glory and honour for His majesty and holiness, to live under a sense of His observing eye, to desire to please Him and not to grieve or offend Him. But it involves a love and delight in God and is an intelligent bond of fellowship with God and with His people. They that fear the Lord speak often one to another as they think upon His name (see Malachi 3:16).

Eschewing, or avoiding, evil is not just keeping out of harm's way, or fleeing what might tempt and draw and provoke us to sin (which it certainly involves) but it is to shun sin – to avoid it and turn from it – and it is to hate it as defiling, hateful in itself and hateful to God, as well as hurtful to ourselves and others. The fear of God makes people shun evil and that fear is taught by His Word – not the precepts or opinions or fashions of men.

Shunning evil will therefore include guarding against being ourselves a cause of stumbling or of sin to others. To avoid being a source of sin to other people is a very great part of the godly fear that is commended in the Bible. We can read of this expressly in various chapters of the Old and New Testaments. For a very full and useful guide to the nature and extent of the moral law as our rule of life, we should consult *The Larger Catechism*, along with the Scripture proofs, in its treatment of the Ten Commandments. I heartily encourage all young people who have graduated from *The Shorter Catechism* to consult *The Larger Catechism* very closely, especially in this area.

Some further light is shed for us on what is meant by *fearing God and eschewing evil* in chapter 31. These are the closing words of Job in his final answer to his friends. While it is spoken by Job about himself, we have no reason to claim that it is not true of him. Like much of what he says, it is in

answer to the false accusations of his friends rather than an attempt to justify himself before God for salvation. Let us just pick out two or three verses which are of significance.

Job says, "I made a *covenant with mine eyes*; why then should I think upon a maid?" Here is the fear of God, eschewing evil. The Saviour taught that he that looks on a woman, to lust after her, has committed adultery already with her in his heart. Job made a covenant with his eyes to avoid that sin. Young men, this is what you will require to do in our evil and adulterous generation. Young ladies, you too must remember that how you dress may be a snare to men and you must make a covenant too, of modesty and chastity.

Marriage is God's appointed remedy for the sins, so prevalent in every generation, against the Seventh Commandment. Job describes adultery as "a heinous crime . . . an iniquity to be punished by the judges . . . a fire that consumeth to destruction". All that tends to that sin in ourselves, or provokes others to it, is forbidden in the Seventh Commandment. The opposite virtues are to be the matter of our covenant also – the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity in thought, speech and behaviour.

Again protesting his integrity, Job identifies positive *duties in relation to others* as evidences of the fear of God. Despising the cause of his servants, withholding the poor from his desire and neglecting the widow are all identified as sins he eschewed. He did not eat his food alone, but with the fatherless children; he provided the poor with clothes. He protests that he showed love to his enemies, not wishing their destruction, not cursing them or allowing those he had responsibility for to do so either. He opened his door to the traveller and would not allow the stranger to stay all night in the street. These are all moral duties identified later by the Prophets and by Christ and His apostles, as marks of true believers; they are part of the rule of life for the people of God. They proceed from faith – not a dead or barren faith, but a faith that works by love.

In Ezekiel 14:14 Job is named along with Noah and Daniel as especially godly men – men whom the Lord would have been perhaps expected to hear if they prayed for Israel. In Ezekiel the Lord says that, even if they prayed to Him for Israel, He would not hear. This helps us to understand what is meant by Job being called a perfect and upright man who feared God and eschewed evil. He was like the other two mentioned – he was like Noah who "walked with God" and like Daniel who was "greatly beloved".

It is good to have the character of saints outlined and described for us; it should prompt and encourage us to go in the ways of holiness. They are, as the Bible calls them, a cloud of witnesses who compass us about. The saints in Bible history are authoritative guides and examples in their holy lives. They

are approved by God. The saints in Church history are also to be followed so far as they followed Christ and walked in the footsteps of the flock.

The Clogmaker and the Bible

About 200 years ago, there was a Protestant minister in Nantes, a city on the Loire River in north-west France. He had a stock of Bibles to sell. It was a time when it was very difficult to import Bibles into France.

Somehow one of these Bibles came into the hands of a beggar. He went about the countryside offering to read to groups of people from this book, for a small fee. No one in these parts had any knowledge of the Bible; so there was a lot of interest.

One lovely summer evening, the beggar came to the door of an old man who made wooden clogs. The beggar asked for alms, some money one might give to a needy person. But the old man felt he needed alms just as much as the beggar.

"If you will not give me alms," the beggar answered, "give me a sou, and I will read you a chapter in the Bible." (A sou was a very small coin.)

"What's that? I never heard of that before."

"It's a book, and it tells you all about God."

The old man paid the sou, and the beggar sat down on a large stone near the window. He took out his Bible and opened it at John's Gospel, chapter 3. The clogmaker listened in amazement as the beggar read; he was hearing something totally new; his whole mind was absorbed. He was particularly moved by the words of verse 16: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". Soon the beggar was reading the final words of the chapter: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him". Then the reading stopped.

"Go on, go on!" cried the old man. "Don't stop."

"No," answered the beggar; "I only read one chapter for one sou."

The old man paid another sou, and then the beggar began to read again. But when he reached the end of the next chapter he stopped once more.

"O go on," cried the old man; "don't stop so soon. Friend, go on."

"No, no, I only read one chapter for one sou. Give me another sou and I'll give you another chapter." For the beggar, obviously, Bible reading was not a way of doing good to the souls of those who listened to him read; it was simply a way of making some money.

The old man paid a third sou and listened to another chapter. But he had no more money; so he could hear no more of God's Word, which had made so great an impression on him. But he asked the beggar to tell him where he had got the book.

The beggar told him the minister's name, and said that he lived in Nantes. The old man did not forget what he heard. Especially he thought over the words of John 3:16, about God giving His Son so that sinners might have everlasting life.

About a fortnight later, the old man told his son to take care of the workshop that day, because he was going to Nantes.

"To Nantes, father! What, an old man like you going all the way to Nantes! It is more than 70 miles."

The clogmaker was not discouraged and found the Protestant minister at the address he had been given. He explained to the minister: "I am told you have a book which tells people all about God".

"You mean a Bible?"

"O yes. That's it, and I want one."

"Well, friend, what can you afford to pay for one?"

"Pay?"

"Yes, pay – for we do not *give* the books."

"I cannot pay anything; you gave one to the beggar, and I am as poor as he is." (But it seems that the beggar may have got the Bible some other way.)

"Where do you come from, friend?"

The old man told him the name of the village where he lived. Then the minister asked, "How did you come?"

"I walked."

"How do you go home?"

"I walk back."

"What! Do you tell me that an old man like you will walk 148 miles for the sake of a Bible?"

"Yes, and I shall think myself very well paid if I get one."

"Then, my friend, you shall certainly have a Bible even if I never give another away. Now, what kind of Bible would you like to have – one with a large print? I suppose you read well."

"Never read a word in my life."

"Not read! What can you do with the book if you cannot read it?"

"O sir, give me the book, for I have a daughter, and she can read. And there are three other people in our village who can read."

Because of the old man's earnestness, the minister gave him a Bible, and the clogmaker went home a happy man. He invited the people who could read

to come to his cottage, and they and his daughter read the Bible to him in turn. The old man had a very good memory; he learned by heart many passages from the Bible. More importantly, he began to understand its teachings.

About six months after the clogmaker's visit to Nantes, the minister was startled by a loud knocking on his door. It was the old man, who explained, "I'm all wrong – all wrong".

"Who told you that you were wrong?"

"The book; the Bible says so."

"Indeed, what does it say?"

"It says that I'm all wrong. Here am I, a poor sinner, who has been praying all his life to the Virgin Mary. Why, she needed a saviour as much as I do!"

"What, you a Roman Catholic saying that! How do you know that?"

"It says in the book that she rejoiced in God her Saviour – *her* Saviour. So you see she needed a saviour as much as I do. And people tell me that you Protestants have got a religion just like the Bible."

"Our religion *is* like the Bible; that is very true."

"Well, please, I want to become one of you."

"And, before we admit anyone to be a member of our Protestant Church, we examine him."

"Examine, sir, examine! I'm an old man, over 70, and I do not know the number of my days. Therefore the sooner the better."

A meeting was quickly arranged, and the minister asked the old man various questions to find out what he knew about the truths of the Bible.

"What do you know, my friend, about Jesus Christ?"

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

"Good. What do you say about Christ's death?"

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

"What would you say are the privileges of those who are Christ's followers?"

"There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

"And what would you say is the duty of the believer in Christ?"

"Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

"My friend, if these are your views, you have clearly been taught by God, and we could not hesitate for a moment to admit you among us and to welcome you as a brother."

The old man was then received, according to the proper form, as a member

of the French Reformed Church, and a document to certify this was given to him. He then asked the minister to wrap it up for him. The minister folded it up in a poster he pulled out of a pile of waste paper.

Several months later, the clogmaker was back in Nantes. The minister asked him why he had come. He answered, "For the meeting", and pointed to the announcement on the poster.

In fact, the day was right, and so was the month; but the year was wrong. And the minister explained that they had not had such a yearly meeting for 14 years because of opposition, probably from Roman Catholics. A meeting was quickly arranged and a number of people gathered when they heard that the old clogmaker had come.

Each of the next three years, the good old man came again – always urging the people of the church to spread the Scriptures, as the best way of delivering people from false teaching and leading them to a knowledge of Christ as their Saviour (though the Bible itself lays great stress on the preaching of the Word). But the fourth year, the old man did not appear; he had gone to a better world.

See that you, who have a Bible, make good use of it. Remember the words of Jesus: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Thomas Boston

2. Student Days

Frank Daubney

The first part of this Youth Conference paper described Boston's younger years, including his conversion. Later he looked back on his early life as one in which he had to face many disappointments, but in all his difficulties he was brought to lean upon the Lord.

Boston enrolled in Edinburgh University in 1691, aged 15. He studied writings in Latin and Greek, philosophy and science but other than that very little has been recorded about his time there. He was constantly concerned about his father's lack of money and spent so little that, in his second year, he began to have fainting fits; these troubled him for several years. Once, when he was at home in June 1693, he took one of these fits, and the family thought that he was likely to die. He was so careful about money that, by the time he graduated, the total cost for his four years' tuition fees, college dues and maintenance amounted to only £11.

Apart from his university classes, he studied music, so that he could

improve his singing of the Psalms. He also studied shorthand, so that he could write out his sermons more quickly, although in the end he found it “marred the frame of his spirit”.

In the summer of 1694, Boston received a bursary from the Presbytery of Duns to become a student of theology, and the following January he returned to Edinburgh to the School of Divinity. He only remained for one session but speaks very highly of his professor of theology, whom he describes as “the great Mr George Campbell”. At that time students who had taken one session of theology with credit were allowed to earn a living by teaching and to complete their studies under the supervision of their presbytery. Because of on-going financial difficulties, Boston decided to follow this course of action, though with a great deal of reluctance.

His first job was teaching in the parish school of Glencairn, in Dumfriesshire, where he found the pupils and the people of the area unsympathetic to religion. Even though the minister was kind to him, Boston found him to be vain and “untender”. The minister would go to the local “alehouse” and take with him Boston, much against his inclination; the minister claimed it was so that he could speak with an old man. They would be provided with a mixture of warm ale and brandy which Boston refused to drink. All of this gave him much cause for prayer to be delivered from the evil influences around him.

His prayers were answered when, shortly afterwards, he was invited to become tutor in a family in Clackmannan. He took up these duties in February 1696. The young boy, Andrew Fletcher of Aberlady, was already attending grammar school, and Boston’s duties were light.

The lord and lady of the house were away for considerable periods of time after Boston arrived, and he felt responsible for the spiritual good of the family. He therefore kept family worship, catechised the servants and encouraged them to pray alone. He also warned them against sinful practices; some of them resented this, feeling he was overstepping his authority. He was learning “in some measure what it was to have the charge of souls; and being naturally bashful, timorous and much subject to the fear of man, I attained, by what I met with there, to some boldness, and not regarding the persons of men when [they were] out of God’s way”. On the whole he found his time there to be “a thriving time for his soul”. He set time aside for fasting, prayer and self-examination.

He was now approaching the end of his period of training for the ministry, when students would present themselves to one of the presbyteries where they lived, for trials and examinations, with a view to becoming a probationer. Boston, having become known for his piety and blossoming gifts, was invited for trial by several presbyteries. After much prayer he decided to enter on

trials in the combined presbytery of Duns and Chirnside. This was on 23 March 1697, when he was 21. After an exhaustive course of examinations, including essays in theology, and a sermon at Chirnside on John 1:16: "And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace", Boston was licensed to preach the gospel as a probationer on 15 June 1697.

His preaching soon began to attract attention, and little wonder! It was preaching that only a man who knows his own heart could attain to. At first, he was very much a preacher of the law; he said himself that "he hoped to set fire to the devil's nest". But a kindly older minister helped him by saying to him: "If you began preaching Christ, you would find it very pleasant". From that day on, there was no lack of the loving call of Jesus in Boston's preaching. "I have often", he said, "remembered that word of Mr Dysart as the first hint given me by the good hand of God towards the doctrine of the gospel."

Despite his reputation, Thomas Boston was a probationer for over two years before he got a call. These were the days when landowners, called heritors or patrons, had the final say in who should be called to a charge. If a minister did not preach what they wanted to hear, or was too strict for their liking, or would not bow to their requirements in other ways, they would not permit the call to proceed, whatever the congregation might want. In addition, some ministers who felt rebuked by Boston because of the godliness and uprightness of his life and character, would have used their influence against him. There were, apparently, seven different parishes where, if left to make their own choice, the people would have called Boston, but they were prevented.

During this period, he was reading Matthew's Gospel 4:19, where the Saviour says, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men". Boston was very anxious to know how he might follow Christ and become a true fisher of men; so, for his own instruction, he wrote what he called *A Soliloquy on the Art of Man-Fishing*. He himself called it just a scribble, and it was only published after his death. But since then it has been widely admired, and it is a source of astonishment that a 22-year-old probationer could produce a book showing such depth and insight.

Although Boston was sometimes depressed by all the disappointments, there were other times when he was greatly encouraged. Often he would be told of blessings received under his preaching, and experienced Christians were not slow to express their astonishment at such a young man opening up their most hidden experiences. He was heartened by these tokens of encouragement and thanked God.

After many ups and downs and much agonising at the throne of grace, the

Lord's work of preparation was complete. The people of the parish of Simprin, just a few miles south-east of Duns, were of one mind with their heritor that Thomas Boston should be called as their minister. And on Thursday, 21 September 1699, he was duly ordained and inducted to the charge.

The parish of Simprin was small and the church building tiny. All that remains today is a gable end, with a plaque commemorating the fact that it had been Boston's church, and broken-down walls which form an outline of the original shape. The location is beautiful, looking in one direction to the slopes of the Lammermuirs and in another to the Cheviot hills.

On his first Sabbath in Simprin, Boston preached from the text, "For they watch for souls as they that must give an account". He was able to say, "This is my rest, here will I dwell. I found my heart well content with my lot, and the sense of God's calling me to that work with the promise of His presence. O it satisfies my soul, and my very heart blesseth Him for it. For really it is the doing of the Lord, and wondrous in my eyes".

For Younger Readers

Sermons from Prison

Obadiah Grew became a minister in England long ago. Later he was not allowed to preach. But he kept on preaching about Jesus Christ because it is so important for people to hear about Him.

Then he was put in prison for preaching. About that time, he went blind. What could he do now? Every week he told a man what he wanted to say in his sermon. The man wrote it all down and went on to read it to four others who wrote the sermon down. Later each of them read it to four other men. So on Sabbath, the sermon was read to 20 different groups of people.

See what God can do to make people hear about Jesus Christ.

For Junior Readers

Ready to Die

Do you know where Rothesay is? It is on the Isle of Bute, which is off the west coast of Scotland. Many years ago, a boy called Robert Livingstone was born there. His father had been a member in the Free Presbyterian Church in Glasgow. Robert was brought up to read the Bible and to attend church.

In those days, all children were taught Bible knowledge in school. The

headmaster said that, when Robert was only 8, he knew more of the Bible than any other pupil in the whole school! The family later moved to Glasgow, and Robert was able to attend all the church services and also the Bible Class, which was taken by the minister.

It was through studying *The Larger Catechism* as a teenager that Robert was converted. The Holy Spirit blessed to his soul the truths which were being set before him in the Bible Class. The Spirit “enlightened his mind in the knowledge of Christ”. When still in his teens he was accepted as a member of the church and grew up to be a serious lad who was a good example to those of the same age. The family then had to move out of Glasgow to Coatbridge, and Robert regularly walked nine miles into Glasgow to attend church, then nine miles home again. Such was his love for the public means of grace; it showed how much he appreciated them.

In his 20s Robert worked in London and then for a few years in Argentina. He was there when the First World War broke out in 1914. He returned to Britain in 1916 and joined the army in order to fight for his country. He took part with thousands of other brave young men in the fighting in France and was thankful to be spared for a time, when so many of his comrades were killed.

Robert was due to return to London on 10 April 1918 but, in God's providence, that did not happen. The evening before then, his company were rushed up the line as reinforcements to resist the German offensive around the French town of Estaires. Along with many others, he lost his life in the fierce struggle that day.

The difference with Robert was that he was prepared to die. He sought the Lord when he was young. Before he left school he was already “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation” – safe for time and for eternity.

What about you at the beginning of this new year? Are you seeking “the Lord while He may be found” and calling “upon Him while He is near”? In his last letter before going into action, Robert wrote, “Whether I survive this or not, all I ask is that, whatever God has in store for me, He may by His grace prepare me for it, so that He may cause me to bless His name”.

It is clear that Robert was indeed prepared for death and eternity – because he did “seek . . . first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” when he was young. Ask God, at the start of this year, to make you able to say with David in Psalm 27:

“When Thou didst say, Seek ye my face,
then unto Thee reply
Thus did my heart, Above all things
Thy face, Lord, seek will I”.

J van Kralingen

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2016-17

UK Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section: *Dingwall:* Hannah Mackenzie, Matthew Ross. *Glasgow:* Jessica Norris. *Guildford:* Susanna Risbridger. *Kyle of Lochalsh:* Sarah Whear. *Inverness:* Daniel Maton. *Llanelli:* Angharad Cran. *Tonbridge:* Katie Playfoot.

Intermediate Section: *Cheadle:* Henry Johnson. *Dingwall:* Esther Ross. *Didcot:* Thomas Wiltshire. *Edinburgh:* Bradley Morrison. *Gairloch:* Josh and Kyrene Tallach. *Glasgow:* Louise Norris. *Inverness:* Jessica Maton. *North Harris:* Ruth Morrison, Beth Morrison. Portree: Hannah Macraill. *Snizort:* Jonathan Macleod. *Stornoway:* Jamie Doig. *Tonbridge:* Joseph Playfoot.

Junior Section: *Barnoldswick:* Claudia van Essen. *Beaulieu:* Deborah MacLean. *Brighton:* Katharine Hills. *Dingwall:* Lydia Ross. *Edinburgh:* Fraser Morrison. *Glasgow:* Cameron Ross, Rebecca Smith, Grant MacLennan. *Inverness:* Victoria Maton. *Kyle:* Mark Whear. *London:* David and John Munns. *Ness:* Rachel Murray. *North Harris:* Hannah Jardine, Neil Morrison. *Portree:* Lewis Fleming. *Snizort:* Andrew Macleod. *Stornoway:* Fraser Macleod. ??? Andrew Harrison.

Upper Primary Section: *Barnoldswick:* Daniel van Essen, Isaac Fisher, Calvin Middleton. *Dingwall:* Catherine Campbell, Thomas Ross. *Glasgow:* Susie Macpherson, David Norris, Hugh Ross. *Halkirk:* Nicole Campbell, Annelise Hymers-Mackintosh, Donald Maclean. *Inverness:* Lois Maton. *Llanelli:* Carys Cran. *London:* Sarah Munns. *North Harris:* Ruairidh Morrison. *North Tolsta:* Angus Morrison, Uilleam Morrison. *North Uist:* Mairi MacDonald. *Portree:* Catriona Macraill. *Southampton:* Chloe Wilkins. *Stornoway:* Cameron Mackay, Jeni Macleod, Joshua Morrison, Owen Morrison. *Trowbridge:* Samuel Broome. *Uig:* Mark Macleod.

Lower Primary Section: *Aberdeen:* Julia Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Jael and Ruth Fisher, Bethan and Susannah Middleton, Sam van Essen, Madison Westlake. *Edinburgh:* Beth Dickie, Susannah Campbell, Anna Cameron-Mackintosh, Darcy Esson, Joseph Vogan. *Glasgow:* Sarita and Christianna Fraser, Elena MacLennan, Paul Macpherson, Calvin and Samuel Norris, Shona Ross. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh, Catriona and Grace Maclean. Nkechi Ogbonna. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie, James Maton, Callum Arie Morrison. *Laide:* Reuben Tamar. *Larne:* Habakkuk and Manow Fox. *Llanelli:* Carwyn Cran. *Ness:* Domhnall MacColl, Emily Murray. *Portree:* Matthew Fleming. *Stornoway:* Faith Mackay, Emma and Naomi Morrison, Levi and Isaac Morrison, Kate Murray.

Looking Around Us

Parents and the Truth

Christmas may be over by the time you read this, but it is worth referring to a study which appeared in the medical journal, *Lancet Psychiatry*, near the end of 2016. The headline of one report about the study was: “Should parents lie to children about Santa?” The authors of the study say, No. They are afraid that telling children about Santa Claus could undermine trust in their parents and lead to great disappointment when they find out the truth.

Of course, Santa Claus does not exist. No one, beyond a certain age, believes that he does. And no parent would pretend that he does exist if they took the Ninth Commandment more seriously: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”. This is how God directs us.

It is wrong to tell lies, but people often get away with doing so. But when

they are found out, others will find it difficult to trust them. For parents to tell lies to their children – even when people might think, wrongly, that the lies are harmless – will probably damage their relationship with their little ones. One of the study’s authors asks, “If parents can lie so convincingly and over such a long time, what else can they lie about?” And when children find out that their parents have been deceiving them in one matter, they are likely to be suspicious about what their mother and father say about other things.

It is dangerous to associate the *myth* of Santa Claus with the *fact* of the birth of Christ. Further there is no evidence that He was born in December; nor is there any command in the Bible to hold a religious festival to remember His birth. This means that we have no right to observe one.

It may seem hard when parents do not allow their children to take part in Christmas activities, but it is always best to do what is right. And I am sure that most parents will try to make up for their children the enjoyment they feel they are missing by not going to Christmas activities.

Richard Dawkins is a well-known scientist who very forcefully promotes evolution and opposes religion just as forcefully. He used to argue that children should not be encouraged to believe in Santa and other fairy tales; he objected to children being taught about anything which seems to be supernatural. Now he sees an advantage in it; he hopes that when children find out that Santa is a lie, they will be more ready to reject everything that is supernatural. He hopes that children will reject what is revealed in the Bible about God and about what He has done in creating the world and everything in it, and indeed in creating the whole universe. But the Bible is all true.

It is very important for children to be able to trust their parents, especially when they tell their little ones about God and His commands. Yes, when your parents (or your minister) tell you that God created a good world but that sin entered it, and so everyone is a sinner, they are telling you the truth. And when they teach you about Christ Jesus coming into the world to suffer and die for sinners like you, again they are telling you the truth. How good if you know they always tell the truth and so you can trust them whatever they say!

2017 Youth Conference

This year’s Youth Conference will be held, God willing, at Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perth, PH2 9EG, from Tuesday, April 11, to Thursday, April 13. Further details should appear in next month’s *Young People’s Magazine*.

Price £1.00