

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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Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod BSc, 11 Auldcastle Road, Inverness, IV2 3PZ. Tel: 01463 712872; e-mail: kdmacleod@gmail.com. All unsigned articles are by the Editor.

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Like an Empty Shell?

Have you ever seen a seagull with a shell in its mouth? It wants to eat the food inside, but it cannot get at it. So it flies up in the air and lets the shell drop onto a road or some other hard surface. When the shell has smashed, the seagull is able to get at the food and eat it up.

But what if the shell that the seagull found was empty? Then, when the shell fell on the ground, there would be no food for the seagull to eat. What a disappointment!

No doubt the seagull could find another shell and so get something tasty to eat. But how much more serious if our religion is like an empty shell! Think of someone going to church regularly, reading the Bible, going on his knees to pray, perhaps morning and evening, and living his life in such a way that no one notices him breaking any of God's commandments.

All of these outward parts of religion may seem very impressive, but if there is no living faith in Christ Jesus as the Saviour from sin, they form just an empty shell. There is no real religion; there has never been any sincere worshipping of God. This person has no real sense of need because of being a sinner, not only outwardly, but also in his heart.

Thus the sinner is unwilling to face up to the fact that "neither is there salvation in any other [than Jesus]: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12) – no one else but Jesus is revealed by God in this world as a Saviour. So we cannot rely on anyone else to save us; especially we cannot rely on ourselves and our good works.

The great sad fact is that, when death approaches, there is nothing to give the unbelieving sinner the strength and comfort and hope that he needs in the face of that great "last enemy" (as the Bible describes death). If that sinner has no faith in Christ, his religion was an empty shell. When he most needs something solid, as his soul is about to be parted from his body, he finds that he has nothing solid to lean on.

Many sad stories have been told of people who assumed that they had a form of religion which was good enough for them – even before God. But

they found out, perhaps as they were passing into eternity, that their religion just was not good enough; in fact it was only an empty shell. Most certainly there was nothing inside the shell that could please God.

Think of King Saul, whose religion was only outward at best; he was not trusting in the Lord God of Israel to pardon his sins and make him holy. He had to confess, "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more". He would not repent; instead he wanted a witch to raise up the dead prophet Samuel, something that God had very strongly forbidden; no one may try to speak to the dead. Poor Saul had no support as he faced death.

Think too of Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples. He heard many of the wonderful sayings of Jesus. But he did not take them to heart; he did not have true, heart religion; his religion was just an empty shell. He was dishonest, a thief; and in the end he betrayed Jesus to His enemies, who then put Him to death. Judas then plunged into despair and took away his own life. He had nothing to trust in when the bottom fell out of his world. Only when the sinner trusts in Christ, who was perfectly holy and worked out a perfect salvation, can God be pleased with him – for the sake of Christ and what He did for sinners.

Archibald Alexander was a noted minister in the United States. He wrote about an earlier minister called Samuel Finley. Finley was told that his illness could not be cured. You might expect him to have been disturbed at the information. But no, he was trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. He said, "Welcome, Lord Jesus".

On the Sabbath before his death, his doctor told him he would not live for more than a few days. Finley's response was: "May the Lord bring me near Himself!" He said he had been waiting for heaven like one of the Israelites in Bible times longing to enter Canaan: "I have been waiting with a Canaan hunger for the promised land." His religion was certainly not just an empty shell; he was longing for heaven as a place where there is no more sin.

Then he went on: "I have often wondered that God suffered me to live. I have more than wondered that He ever called me to be a minister of His Word." He was thankful for the strength that God had given him, but he confessed that he had not used that strength as well as he should have. He knew that he was far from perfect, but he knew he must go to the Lord for deliverance, and he exclaimed, "How faithful are the promises of God!"

He showed patience: "Although I have as earnestly desired death" as the workman longs for evening, "yet will I wait all the days of my appointed time". He prayed earnestly that God would make him able to endure everything patiently until the end of his life. He then declared, "I can truly say that I have loved the service of God . . . but with much weakness and

corruption". He believed that "a Christian's death is the best part of his experience. The Lord has made provision for the whole way: provision for the soul and provision for the body." But he blessed God that eternal rest was near; he would soon be in heaven, and the endless eternity he would then enjoy was just long enough "to enjoy my God".

Someone asked Finley if he would choose to live or to die. He answered, "To die" and added that he felt like Paul when the Apostle spoke about the same point: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). While he lived, he had the great blessing of being a follower of Christ and was under God's care; if he died, his condition would be even better. Just like Finley, Paul's religion was not just a shell.

Finley told one of his congregation: "I have often prayed and preached among you, and the doctrines I preached are now my support and, blessed be God, they are without a flaw". Clearly Finley had something solid to rest on in the face of death; he was trusting in Christ and was feeling real support. So he told someone to tell a group of people, whom he knew, that he was not afraid to die.

A minister who visited Finley asked him what he saw in eternity that made him wish so strongly for heaven. Finley told him: "I see the eternal love and goodness of God. . . . I see the love of Jesus. . . . O to be with Him! I long to be clothed with the complete righteousness of Christ."

Not every true believer will have as clear views of the wonder of the blessedness that is ahead of them when they die. Nor will every believer be as sure of entering into that perfect blessedness. But what is sure is that all believers will most certainly arrive in eternal glory.

Yes, some of them may be afraid that theirs is only an outward religion – just the shell, without the reality. But such people are clearly not careless, though they may not be as earnest as they ought to be. Everyone is on the way to heaven who has desires which have been renewed by the Holy Spirit – though not be as obviously earnest as Samuel Finley. If such people wish to be holy and to depart from sin, if they long to see multitudes of people converted so that God would be glorified, if they want to see the Church of Christ purified and made more willing to follow her Master wholeheartedly – then they have begun to follow the Saviour and will be taken into heaven at the end of their lives.

If you are still unconverted, the important matter for *you* is to seek Christ now, before death sweeps you into eternity. But if you believe you have found Him, then ask for grace to examine yourself so that you would be sure you have true religion. Then you will be preserved from finding out, too late, that your religion is nothing more than a shell.

Two Places not on the Map

Rev K M Watkins

In rural Africa, many children have never travelled more than just a few miles from their homes. But they still study Geography at school. They learn about countries far away in the rest of the world. None of the children have visited those countries. But they believe that those places exist. They know where they are on the map.

In exams they are given an outline map of a country. The map will have small triangles, circles and blue winding lines. Next to these symbols the children have to write the correct names of the mountains, cities or rivers. Sometimes they are given an outline map together with a list of mountains, cities and rivers. Then they have to mark their correct positions on the map and write the names alongside. You have possibly done tests like this.

There are two places that do not appear on any geographical map. School pupils in Africa have heard about these places too. Many believe that these two places exist, even though they cannot place them on a map. You also have heard about these two places. People all over the world know about them. Even though they do not appear on maps, and even though you do not learn about them in Geography lessons, they are real places.

Many people are in these places. But I have not been to them. You have not been to them. Of all the people alive in the world today, not a single person has travelled to either of these two places. You cannot get to them in a car, a boat, a plane or even a rocket. No map can plot the journey. You can use the internet today to find directions for the route between two places almost anywhere in the world. But no computer can show you the way from where you are now to where these two places are.

Do these places really exist? Yes! In the end, everyone will go to the one or the other. Have you guessed what these two places are? Do you believe that they exist?

One of these places is like a horrible *prison*, only much worse than a prison. If you search on “prisons” in a map program, you will see where all your local prisons are. Some prisons are more strict than others, and there are places in the world where the prisons are fearfully severe and the inmates suffer terribly. Even if you found the location of the worst prison in the world today, its suffering would be tiny compared to the prison that cannot be found on any map.

The Bible warns us about this worst of all prisons, calling it a “lake of fire”. A man in that prison says: “I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24). Unlike many in the prisons of this world, who can look forward to the day

of their release, there is no escape from this prison. It is “the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43). The prisoners will never be allowed out. Neither sleep nor death will ever come to release them from their agony. “The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:11).

If you ask me where this prison is, I cannot tell you. But it certainly exists, somewhere in God’s universe. If you ask me to show it to you on a map, I cannot do that. But I can show it to you in the Bible. If you ask me to give you physical directions to get to it, I cannot do that. But the Bible warns you about the kind of life that certainly leads to it.

The Lord Jesus said: “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matthew 7:13). Starting the journey to the prison is not difficult – the route begins with a wide gate. We are all conceived in sin (see Psalm 51:5) and enter life with hearts that are fully set on following the broad way that leads to the prison.

We grow up full of sin and unbelief, without God and without Christ. We follow the way to the prison so closely that we might as well be following the route on a map. The world draws us along, telling us to think and live as it does. As we follow, we are heading straight to the prison. Our own sinful hearts cry out, demanding to be satisfied with sin, pulling us down the road that leads to the prison. The devil puts temptations in front of us that lead in only one direction – to the prison. Every time you hear the gospel and reject it, you are refusing to leave this way to the prison.

It is a “broad” way, for on it we do not try to stay within the boundaries and limits of God’s law. Instead we take liberty to do as we please, rejecting what the Bible says. Right now, most people in the world live like this, for “many” go on this way.

Although this is “a way which seemeth right unto a man . . . the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12), for it “leadeth to destruction”. This does not just mean that it ends in death. Death happens to everyone. This is something much worse than that. Unconverted sinners go to the worst of all prisons when they die – the prison of *hell* – the place where God punishes sinners for ever. That is one of the two very real places that you will not find on any map. How you need to make sure that you never go there! “Flee from the wrath to come” (Luke 3:7).

The other place is like a *home*, only much better than even the best of homes in this world. You might be able to show on a map where your home is. Yet no map can show you the location of this best of all homes. But the Bible does tell us what it is like.

Home is where your family lives. In the best home, the one that is not on

any map, God's children will dwell with God the Father and Jesus their Elder Brother, in the communion of the Holy Spirit. All Christian brothers and sisters will be there. The whole family of God will dwell together in perfect blessedness.

Home is where you are loved and cared for. In the home that is not on any map, God's people could not be more loved. They could not be better cared for. Everything is provided for them, even "pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). Home should be a happy place. That is where we should find comfort after experiencing things that upset us. In the best of all homes, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17). All who reach it "shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

Home is where you are safe, out of the reach of danger. There you can rest. In the most excellent home, that is not on the map, God's people are completely safe from all their enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil. There they rest from all the burdens and trials of this life. They shall "rest from their labours" (Revelation 14:13).

You cannot find this place on a map, but surely you should want to go there! Again, no map shows the route to get there, but the Bible shows the way very clearly. When Thomas asked Christ, "How can we know the way?" the Lord Jesus answered, "I am the way" (John 14:5,6). You cannot show that on a map, but it is a true and real way. It is the only way to the best of homes, for Jesus went on to say: "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me". It is the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relying on His Person and work for salvation. Those who believe in Him will not perish in the prison of hell, but will go to the best of all homes – heaven.

The Saviour describes this way: "Enter ye in at the strait gate . . . because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14). The way to heaven begins with "the strait gate" – meaning a gate that is so narrow that it is difficult to squeeze through. This describes the new birth and a true conversion. Regeneration (which makes you a new creature), hearty repentance (which means you leave your sins) and faith in Christ (which involves denying all goodness of your own) – none of these are welcomed by the sinner. But there is no alternative way to begin. If we will not enter by this gate, we will not enter at all. Then we will have to go to the prison of hell. You see why the Saviour said that we "must be born again" (John 3:7).

The journey is no easier after that. For "narrow is the way". Those who have truly believed on the Lord Jesus for salvation do not remain on the broad way, wandering wherever they please. Now they want to please Christ, by

keeping closely to His commands, without turning aside to the left or to the right. The closer they keep within the strict bounds of their Lord's will, the happier they are. It is the way of sanctification, "the way of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8) where they "more and more . . . die unto sin, and live unto righteousness" (*Shorter Catechism*, Answer 35).

This narrow way is the only way that "leadeth unto life". If you want to live in heaven, that best of all homes, that is not shown on any map, this is the way that you must go. Many people think they want to go to heaven, but not many are willing to travel the right way there – "few there be that find it".

Which way are you on? Where will you spend eternity? Will it be in a prison or in a home? No maps of this world can guide you. So search the Scriptures! They will lead you to Christ, and so to heaven.

For Junior Readers

General John Field

John Field lived in England a long time ago, in the 1850s. He joined the Army when he was young. After some training, he was sent out to India, which was then part of the British Empire. He decided that, when he went there, so far from home, he would enjoy himself and forget about religion.

In fact John was so opposed to religion that he took a real dislike to another young officer simply because he was a Christian. But the Lord used this young officer indirectly in John Field's conversion.

One morning, when John was out training, the Indian servant who cleaned their rooms by mistake left behind a religious book belonging to the Christian officer. When John returned and noticed the book and its title, he was so annoyed that he picked it up and threw it across the room, onto the floor, and left it there. But in the evening he picked it up and actually read some pages, but he soon put it down again. The next day, the servant returned; and with many apologies he asked for the book which he had left by mistake. He needed to return it to the other officer.

Yet, the Lord, in His kindness, used that book in John Field's conversion. Something touched his conscience, in the few pages he had read; the Holy Spirit impressed it on his mind. From that day on, John stopped swearing and he started to pray and to read the Bible.

As he read the Bible he began to see more and more of his lost state as a sinner and of his need to look to Christ alone for salvation. He began to look forward to the Lord's Day each week. He now got much good from praying and reading the Bible. He thanked God for preserving his life up till then and

for awakening him to see that he was a sinner. He prayed earnestly that God would keep Him in the paths of righteousness and truth.

He was convicted of the dangers of worldly pleasures and had the courage to take a firm stand against them. Many years later he told his son: "I had no one to consult, but I went to God's Word to find out. And the Spirit soon made me feel that I must separate from my old life and give up my worldly pleasures, so that I might walk in newness of life and please the Lord. I gave up at once dances, theatres, cards and other things, and I have never been to any places of the kind nor touched cards since. I look back over these 50 years and I thank God who helped me to do so."

He also had a burden for the souls of those around him. Not long after this he began to hold services for the other soldiers. He always emphasised to them their lost and ruined state, their need of the new birth and the provision of Christ in the gospel. One officer whom he prayed for and wrote serious letters to was eventually converted – after 16 years. This news brought great joy to General Field!

And what about you? I expect you have been brought up with the Bible in your home and have the privilege of having it explained to you in church. Should you not value these blessings and remember now your Creator in the days of your youth?

J van Kralingen

Thomas Boston

5. Standing Firm in the Face of Problems

Frank Daubney

In last month's section of this Youth Conference paper we saw Boston leaving the small parish of Simprin for the larger parish of Ettrick, also in the Scottish Borders. We also saw some of the difficulties he experienced, but he continued to preach sermons explaining the way of salvation.

At a time when Boston was beginning to see some signs of deepening religious life in Ettrick, more trouble arose. In September 1715 the Earl of Mar raised the Jacobite standard at Braemar, beginning the 1715 rising against the Protestant King George I. He, with other Highland chiefs, began to march south to Perth. Here the army divided, meaning to take different routes to England.

One group was to pass through the Ettrick area, and this brought total panic to the whole region. For several weeks the people of Ettrick were in fear of their lives and property as the army of Highlanders passed through, providing for themselves by confiscating or stealing whatever was available.

This was a great distress to Boston and, to make matters worse, the government authorities required ministers to produce a list of able-bodied men aged from 16 to 60, who were to appear in Selkirk and be enrolled in a temporary militia to defend the parish.

The men of Ettrick refused to enrol and they became even more resolute when a tax was levied to pay the expense of the expected conflict; they believed the authorities already had sufficient resources to repel the invaders. It grieved Boston that he was compelled to read these edicts, but it was he, rather than the authorities, who bore the brunt of the people's resentment. Eventually the Highlanders moved on to meet with English rebels at Kelso, and together they marched south to Preston, where the rebellion was defeated.

In September 1716, Boston was given a call to the parish of Closeburn, in Dumfries-shire. The commissioners from Closeburn, and its presbytery, urged him to accept the invitation. Boston was deeply upset by the call, because he had never given any indication that his desire was to leave his people in Ettrick. As always, he was driven to prayer. He felt sure that to leave the parish at this time would undo much of what he had done.

The people of Ettrick noticed the visitors from Closeburn at the manse and quickly realised they were at risk of losing their minister. Concern about his possible removal brought them to appreciate the excellence of their pastor. A woman wept in the street as he walked by for fear of him leaving. One of the wealthy landowners in the parish, who until that time had shown no interest in Boston's ministry, began to attend church regularly and continued to do so for the rest of his life. Many came to plead tearfully with him not to leave them. The elders of the congregation announced a fast, and many gathered desiring that, through confession of sins and prayer, they might avert the possible loss of their minister.

The process dragged on for almost a year before it came before the Commission of the General Assembly in 1717, where the majority seemed to favour his translation to Closeburn. Boston asked for permission to speak and, despite his natural shyness, he spoke powerfully and persuasively. His fear of being separated from the people he had come to love added urgency to what he had to say. He recorded afterwards: "I must say the Lord was with me, giving me in that hour what to speak and courage to speak it, and even when I ran, He left me not to stumble". Finally, by a vast majority, it was agreed that he should stay in Ettrick. On the following Sabbath, there was room in the church for only a fraction of those who came. He had won the hearts of his people and shown his love to them and they to him. He was now preaching to a united and appreciative congregation.

But trouble, in one form or another, was never far away. In 1717 the

General Assembly of the Church was called upon to give its judgement on what became known as the Auchterarder Creed. This was a statement prepared by the Presbytery of Auchterarder, in Perthshire, which had been put to a student applying for licence. I think they had some doubts if the student's beliefs were scriptural. The so-called creed said, "It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God".

It was awkwardly worded and widely misinterpreted. It sounded as if it was giving permission to live a lawless life. Of course, it did nothing of the kind; it is sound scriptural doctrine. Christ came to save sinners, not the righteous. We must come to Him confessing that we are sinners, and seeking forgiveness. If we wait until we have forsaken sin, we will never come to Christ, because it is impossible for the natural heart to do so. Yet the creed was condemned by the Assembly.

As I already mentioned, Boston had studied closely his copy of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which dealt with exactly this subject. Although he did not speak in the Assembly debate, Boston mentioned his treasured book to a colleague, who obtained a copy for himself and then lent it to a fellow minister. This was James Hog, of Carnock in Fife, who published a new edition of the book in 1718.

Then began a heated debate. The *Marrow* was attacked in Synod sermons. It was debated in the General Assembly and, by an Act of May 1720, the *Marrow* was condemned. It was a book which the members of the Westminster Assembly had specifically recommended in 1643. But now, less than 80 years later, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland banned ministers from preaching, writing, printing or circulating anything in its favour and were instructed to warn their congregations against reading it. Many ministers and members of the Church were astounded and upset. Boston had not been a member of the Assembly that year but he was very grieved to hear the news. He could have let the matter go, but the book was too precious to him. His complaints to presbytery and synod were in vain. So, with others, he drew up a petition to the Assembly of 1721.

The document was known as "The Representation", and it argued against the Act, with its condemnation, as an unwarranted restraint upon the liberty of ministers. It said the Act rejected doctrines which were precious and fully supported by Scripture. It was, they said, a "wounding of Christ in the house of His friends". It was clear from the wording of the document that the 12 ministers who compiled it were not seeking to make a party-political point, but were seeking to preserve the truth.

The outcome was that "The Representation" was not only condemned by

the Assembly but its 12 supporters, including James Hog, Thomas Boston, Ebenezer Erskine and Ralph Erskine, were ordered to be rebuked. The “Marrowmen” suffered their rebuke calmly. Thomas Boston said, “I received the rebuke and admonition as an ornament put upon me for the cause of truth”. “It is better”, said another, “to be under the reproach of men for following Christ, than to be under the curse of God for forsaking Him”. Yet the 12 men handed in a protest which was not allowed to be read in the Assembly. The protest stated that they regarded it lawful to continue to preach and teach the truths contained in the *Marrow*.

In the following years, the *Marrow* was purchased and read by many to the great benefit of multitudes. Boston said, “That struggle, through the mercy of God, turned to the advantage of truth in our Church, both among the ministers and the people . . . few public differences have had such good effects; and saving truths have, in our day, been set in an uncommon light”.

In the Marrow controversy, people saw a group of well respected ministers who, for conscience’ sake, were prepared to stand fast for gospel truths against the Church’s will and against the dry, dead preaching that was heard from many pulpits. Boston went on to write and publish extensive notes on the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, by way of explanation and commentary. This book is still useful and profitable today.

The Unbeliever and the Commandments

The man did not believe the Bible but he decided to examine the Ten Commandments. Before doing so he had pictured Moses as the leader of a superstitious people who, on Mount Sinai, had awed his followers. The man examined the Commandments very carefully; he was like a lawyer looking for a flaw in his opponent’s case.

Afterwards he showed great fairness in giving his conclusions. He now fully believed that the Ten Commandments had come from God. He said something close to this: “I have been trying to see whether I can add anything to the Ten Commandments or take anything from them, so as to make them better. I cannot.

“The *First* Commandment directs us to make the Creator the object of our respect. That is right. If He is our Creator, Preserver and Supreme Provider, we ought to treat Him as such.

“The *Second* forbids idolatry – the making of graven images or any likeness of Him. That certainly is right.

“The *Third* forbids unworthy speaking about God, taking His Name in vain.

“The *Fourth* fixes a time for religious worship. If there is a God, He ought surely to be worshipped. If God is worshipped, it is proper that some time should be set apart for that purpose. One day in seven is certainly not too long.

“Then come our duties towards our neighbour; and the second table of the Commandments is as admirable as the first.

“The *Fifth* lays the foundation of human relations. Society is impossible without it.

“The *Sixth, Seventh, Eighth* and *Ninth* are divided into offences against life, chastity, property, character. All this too is right.

“The *Tenth* completes the moral code, with a commandment forbidding every covetous desire about our neighbours.

“Where did Moses get that law? I have read history. None of the wisest Greeks or Romans ever gave a set of moral laws like this. Where did Moses get that law which is better than the philosophy of the most enlightened ages? He lived at a period when there was little civilisation. He could not have soared so far above his age as to have worked it out himself. I am satisfied where he obtained it. It came down from heaven.”

The examination had a good result. The unbeliever – an unbeliever no longer – remained for the rest of his days a believer in the truth of the Word of God. We trust that the man not only accepted that the Word of God is true and has authority, but that he obeyed this command particularly: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:7,8).

Job – Fearing God and Eschewing Evil

6. The Patient Man

Rev David Campbell

This series was originally a paper at the 2016 Youth Conference. Last month's article was on Job as a “persecuted man”. This final article gives a brief overview of the whole Book of Job.

This brings us to our final point – the view of Job which is highlighted in the New Testament – his patience. In James 5:11 we read, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.” Two things may strike us about this verse. Firstly, that Job seems

to have expressed much impatience and, secondly, that the Lord's dealings with Job seem at first sight to have involved Him withholding pity and tender mercy from Job.

In answer to the first, we are to see how the Bible covers the failings of God's people and highlights their graces. This is especially so when they are greatly tried, as Job was. The Lord saw his patience and commends it in spite of all his impatience. His patience is remarkable; it is an example for us and exalts the grace that God gave to him. We have much to learn about patience from Job.

In answer to the second matter, we are to see that anything less than hell is the Lord's tender mercy and great pity. We are also to see that, even when we cannot see and are not shown *how* all things work together for good to them that love God and to them who are called according to His purpose, yet we are to be sure that they do. In the end, we will be shown that "the Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him". When we consider all God's dealing with Job we should be silent before God's majesty, as Job eventually was. But we can also conclude that it was more for God's glory and for His people's good that Job was afflicted exactly as he was.

I want to conclude by touching on four areas where we are encouraged to learn from Job's affliction.

(1.) *Experiencing affliction.* Job was the man that had seen affliction. His afflictions were very many and varied. He suffered nearly everything a man can suffer. He was subjected to theft, murder, disaster, kidnap, hurricane, disease, sickness and pain, and to mental and spiritual suffering. He suffered from his wife, his friends and, as we discover, even from his servants and those whom he helped and those who were far inferior to him. There was hardly any area in life, or in his relations with others, where he did not suffer affliction. This teaches us that the people of God are subject to every kind of affliction, and they are not to think there is anything others are suffering that it is impossible for them to experience. However strange their afflictions might be, they can look at Job and conclude that they are not new or strange at all. This is itself a comfort.

(2.) *Making use of affliction.* However long it took him and however difficult the experience, Job made use of his affliction. To begin with, he was a wonderful example. While he mourned very bitterly, yet he weighed his own mortality – the fact that he must die – and he blessed God. He traced his affliction to the hand of God and acknowledged that he was as liable to it as to receive good from His hand. Mourning is a benefit from affliction. It is better to be in the house of mourning than the house of feasting, for there

the living lay their mortality to heart. How sad to think of many today at funerals being forced to hide their mourning and to celebrate and smile and laugh. It is both unnatural, unbiblical and harmful. We can acknowledge God in mourning, even the deepest and most painful mourning.

Another response to affliction is to engage the help of friends or to offer friendship and sympathy to those who are afflicted. While Job's friends were reproved, they did well to come to sympathise with him in his grief. A further response to affliction is silence. We do *not* mean a two-minute silence staged by many today as some kind of religious ritual designed to replace prayer. Rather we should be silent in the presence of God and in acknowledgement of our sins. We should also acknowledge our small minds, and so our weakness in understanding God's ways.

Making our trouble known to God is the best use of affliction. Job often complained of his affliction. There is a kind of complaining that is sinful, such as that of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 11:1 and Jude 16). But prayerful complaint to God is an activity of the believing soul (Psalm 55:2 and Psalm 142:2). We should seek to be submissive, but also to have the wrestling spirit of Job, who wished to "fill [his] mouth with arguments" before God. If God gives us a burden or affliction, it is certainly to send us to prayer, so that in the end we bring the affliction back to Him.

(3.) *Trial of affliction.* The whole narrative may be viewed as the trial of Job in his afflictions. One task was to answer Job. None of his friends did this properly. The other duty was to justify God and to show submission to Him. If these things were easy they would not involve the same degree of trial. The Bible teaches us that the trial of affliction is a precious thing. It benefits the person being tried and it glorifies God also.

Another purpose of believers' trials is to make their heart soft and broken and contrite. Hard-heartedness is always a plague for believers and it is good for them when they are afflicted. Under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, it helps them to further degrees of repentance and mortification of sin. They may even be brought, through trials, to discover and repent of sins they did not see or know. Job held fast his integrity as he answered the charges of men; but when he listened to the voice of God and saw his case in the light of God's greatness, he repented in dust and ashes. So affliction is sent to try the reality of grace and to empty men of themselves.

(4.) *Removal of affliction.* The last chapter of Job is taken up with the resolution of the matter that had been in dispute between Job and his friends. It does not give all the answers and that is part of the lesson – we do not have all the answers, nor do we need them. But it does give us a solemn caution about how we speak and act when we think we have the answers. Job's

friends were seriously rebuked and were sent to Job to ask him to pray for them. This places Job's case in a very clear light. God accepted him and received his offering for his friends. His prayer and sacrifice were accepted. Just as we find Job offering sacrifice at the beginning of the book for his family, so we find him here at the end offering sacrifice again – for his friends. Job depended on Christ and that is what his sacrifice expressed. He had come back to where he had formerly been – trusting entirely for acceptance on the merits of another, not on his own. He was like the Psalmist, waiting for the Lord “more than they that watch for the morning”.

The Lord “turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends”. This was a turning which involved the reversal of his afflictions and the restoration of prosperity to him. It magnified the goodness of God and it silenced the devil. Job was taken out of the bondage of Satan's doubting castle. He was delivered from the snare of the devil. He survived Satan's sieve. This is all due to Christ, his Redeemer. Christ is not untouched with the feeling of His people's infirmities and He ever lives to make intercession for them. The benefits of Christ's death and resurrection flowed to Job hundreds of years before redemption was accomplished at Calvary. These hundreds of years before Christ, Job believingly embraced Him. That is what all believers are encouraged to do in the time of affliction. Whether afflictions will be removed like this in time, or left until the time of death, it can still be said about the righteous that it shall be well with them. Young friends, will it be well with you?

For Younger Readers

The Longest Psalm

Do you know what the longest Psalm in the Bible is? It is far longer than any of the others. It has 176 verses. The Psalm I am talking about is Psalm 119.

I have read about a boy who learned the whole Psalm – all 176 verses. He learned it in his Sabbath school and he never forgot it.

Years later, he visited an old lady whose age was 99. She told him: “Sometimes at night, I can't sleep. But I never get weary, for I just go back over Psalm 119. She too had learned the Psalm.

The man asked her: “Can you remember the whole Psalm?”

She told him: “O yes, I learned it when I was a girl, 10 years old,

and I have never forgotten it since". She wished she had learned all the Psalms when she was young.

The lady must have learned other parts of the Bible too. When she was asleep, she often dreamed that she was reading the Bible. And when she wakened she could remember the parts she was dreaming about. What a help these verses and, perhaps, chapters must have been for her, because she was no longer able to read easily! She would have plenty to think about as the hours of the day passed.

You too should try hard to learn Psalms and other parts of the Bible. They could be very useful to you when you are older. And ask God to bless them to you even while you are young.

The Honest Miner

Seven miners in New Zealand made an agreement with a local storekeeper. He allowed them to take whatever they needed from his store without paying for it; but if they struck gold, a share of it was to be his. The miners did not do very well and, after some time, their bill reached £400.

One night they decided to leave the town. When they had walked some miles, one of the miners said he could not go any further. He would go back and face the storekeeper. His mates jeered at him, but he left them.

The storekeeper was angry at the way the miners had treated him; he thought they could at least have got jobs and tried to earn enough money to repay him. "As you were their partner," he told the miner who returned (whose name was McAlpine): "I shall hold you responsible for the whole debt". "All right," McAlpine replied, "if I can ever repay you, I will."

McAlpine got help from other men and went back to where they had been working and soon struck gold. Within a week or two he returned to the storekeeper with a bag containing over a hundred ounces of small nuggets and gold dust (an ounce of gold is now worth £1000). The storekeeper now refused to take more than McAlpine's share of the debt. But he insisted on paying.

Later on, McAlpine founded a successful bakery business in Melbourne. More importantly he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. From then on he tried to show that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come".

After McAlpine's funeral in 1911, the last of the seven miners confessed that all the other miners had died poor; he too was a poor man. "We made nothing by our dishonesty", he said. McAlpine lost nothing by his honesty.

Looking Around Us

A Permanent Change

For 14 years, from 1993, Neil Woods worked undercover as a policeman trying to arrest drug dealers in various English cities. It was a highly dangerous way of earning his living. Someone once held a samurai sword to his throat. At another time, criminals tried to run him down with a car; he later learned that they had a gun inside.

As a result of Mr Woods' work, various criminals were sentenced to a total of more than 1000 years of time in prison. This seems impressive, but he now considers that arresting drug dealers, or having them sentenced to a long period in jail, only interrupts the supply of drugs for a very short time.

It is right that such people, who cause so much harm to the health of drug users and bring so much more crime in the train of their activities, should be punished. But time in prison often does more harm than good to the prisoner. He may learn a lot about committing crime more effectively, but he probably will not learn that engaging in crime is a bad idea.

But committing crime is not just a bad idea; it is sin. To use the word *sin* brings out the fact that to do wrong not only involves doing harm to other people, but it is against God. But if criminals are not cured in prison, we have to ask ourselves: What will make a difference? What will cure them of their capacity to do harm to others or, more generally, to break the laws of their country?

What changed one of thieves who suffered with Jesus at Calvary? It was listening to the words of Jesus. He confessed his sins; he trusted in the Lord Jesus; and the Holy Spirit worked powerfully in his soul so that he was made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

If he had lived longer, we can be sure that this thief would never have gone back to his sinful, thieving ways. He would have lived an honest life, in dependence on the Saviour, who had died for him to deliver him, not only from sin's punishment, but also from its power. This points to how effective the saving work of the Holy Spirit is. True conversion is a permanent change.

True conversion is what we all need, for we are sinners; we need to be put right. And we need to have our sins forgiven, so that we may escape the punishment due to us because of our sins. The salvation we need is the same as what drug addicts and drug dealers need; it is the same as thieves and murderers need. If we saw how terrible is the sin of unbelief, of rejecting the gospel – the good news about the Son of God coming into the world to suffer and die – we would feel it more serious than any other sin.

Paul emphasised: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;” and added, “of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul considered himself the chief sinner because he had persecuted Christians; we should consider ourselves chief sinners if we still reject the gospel. It remains a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The Sands of Time (6)

This poem, by Anne Ross Cousin, turns into poetry some of what Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), the godly minister of Anwoth, wrote. Here are the last three verses.

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.

I have borne scorn and hatred;
I have borne wrong and shame;
Earth's proud ones have reproached me
For Christ's thrice blessed name:
Where God His seal set fairest
They've stamped their foulest brand,
But judgement shines like noonday
In Immanuel's land.

They've summoned me before them,
But there I may not come,
My Lord says, Come up hither,
My Lord says, Welcome home!
My King, at His white throne,
My presence doth command,
Where glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

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