

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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Cover Picture: The initials of Patrick Hamilton embedded in the roadway in St Andrews, where he was martyred. See page 113.

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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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Fixed in the Mind

The Children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for a very long time. Now the time was approaching when they were to be set free. Meanwhile Moses was looking after his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness. One day he noticed something very unusual. A bush was on fire, but that was not what caught Moses' attention, because lightning could easily set a bush on fire. What was highly unusual was that the bush was not being burnt up; he had never seen that before, and he would never see it again. It was a miracle. So Moses turned out of his way and from the sheep to look more closely at this most unusual sight.

God had something special to tell Moses, for God had chosen him to lead his people out of Egypt. Among other things, God told him to tell the Children of Israel that it was God who had sent him to them. So when Moses would say something to the Israelites, they ought to recognise that he was speaking with God's authority.

It was as if Moses was an ambassador to them from God; it was something like the British Government sending an ambassador to another country such as the United States. He speaks in the USA with the authority of the British Government; he does not speak his own ideas; he says what his government wants him to say. So Moses did not bring his own ideas to the Israelites, he did not tell them what he had thought out himself; he told them what God had said to him.

In the same way Paul was an ambassador; he told people in Corinth: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ". As a messenger from Christ, he went on to say, "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). He was speaking to the Corinthians in the place of Christ, as an ambassador. So Christ's authority lay behind his words when he commanded them to be reconciled to God – to receive by faith the message of reconciliation, which is: to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and so be reconciled to God.

Yes, Paul was one of Christ's apostles; yet every minister whom Christ has sent out to preach the gospel goes out as an ambassador. It means that

when your minister calls on you to be reconciled to God, or to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he speaks as Christ's ambassador. So he addresses you with real authority. You are to listen to him just as if Christ Himself was speaking to you.

When Moses was speaking to the Israelites, they were to treat very seriously what he said; they must not treat it lightly, because he was God's ambassador. Similarly, no one should have treated lightly a sermon from Paul or what he said to them individually about spiritual things. The same is true when a minister speaks about these things today, as Christ's ambassador. He is not to present his own ideas; he is to present the truths that God has revealed. He is to explain them and apply them to his hearers. So the hearer is to receive these truths as what God has revealed; he is not to reject them or to forget about them. He must ask God to help him *fix* them in his mind. He must think about them seriously; he must pray over them. Let us notice just a few of the points we should fix in our minds.

1. Because the minister is God's ambassador, he must speak about *God*; he must make known what kind of Being God is. God is eternal; He had no beginning and He will never have an end. He is infinite in every other way also: there are no bounds to His wisdom, power, holiness or any of the other ways in which He has revealed Himself. In particular, He is our Creator; He brought everything into existence. These are matters that we must fix in our mind; they are highly important. The God who has revealed Himself in the Bible rules over everything and we will have to meet Him when we leave this world. So we must obey Him and trust in Him – while we are spared in this world, before we pass into eternity.

2. The minister must speak about *sin*. Sin is serious because it is a serious matter to disobey this great God, not least because He must punish sinners – for He is perfectly just; He cannot ignore sin. People generally do not want to be told that they are sinners; they want to have a positive self-image – they do not want to feel bad about themselves. But how much better to face up to reality and to have the truth fixed firmly in our minds than to be sent down to hell for ever, when we leave this world. And if we fix our minds on the truth, we will want, not only to be delivered from the guilt of sin, but also from its power – because sin is such a terrible thing. We should seek grace to hate sin, to confess it before God and to turn from it – to repent. Every true ambassador must emphasise the seriousness of sin, because it is highly offensive to God.

3. But the minister who presents, not his own ideas, but the ideas he finds in the Bible, will also speak about the one remedy for sin: *Christ Jesus*, who “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He will direct his

hearers as Paul and Silas, speaking on behalf of God, directed the jailer in Philippi: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). The jailer took these words seriously; they became fixed in his mind; he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so he was saved. No one has any reason to despair, however serious their sins have been. The devil may do his utmost to bring people to despair, but Christ still assures them: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). We must ask God to fix firmly in our minds the truth about Jesus Christ as the Saviour.

Daniel Baker was a minister in the southern states of the USA. One of his sons – perhaps it was William – had been under strong convictions of sin when he was young. Now he was 16 and studying law. He was careless about his soul and no longer believed that the Bible was true. He told his father one day that he could never believe in a religion that would send a famous ungodly poet, whom he named, to hell. Clearly the truths about sin and salvation had not become fixed in his mind, even although he had felt such strong convictions of sin.

His father tried to reason with him but without success. He ended up saying: "Well, my son, I hope you will be converted yet; aye, and became a preacher too".

William was very annoyed; he answered forcefully: "I had rather be a ditcher [someone who digs ditches] than a preacher".

Only about four weeks after this, William came under deep conviction again; he was almost in despair.

One day, when he came home from church, he went straight to his bedroom. After praying for a time, he entered the dining room and told his father sadly: "I can't be converted".

But his father told him: "O yes, my son, you can".

"No, my heart is so hard I can't be converted", William argued.

Then his father assured him: "The blessed Jesus is able and willing to do everything for you". It seemed a new thought to him.

The Holy Spirit soon opened his eyes to the way of salvation through Christ Jesus. The truth, not only about sin, but also about salvation, was fixed in his mind. So he believed and was saved; he was no longer a rebel against the authority of God speaking in the Bible.

A little later, his father asked, "Are you willing to be a preacher now?"

Very much moved, William answered, "I would be willing to be a ditcher for Christ's sake". Such is the power of God to fix a sense of divine authority in the mind of a sinner. Ask God to make you willing to submit to His authority in everything, not least when one of Christ's ambassadors brings the truths of Scripture – about God, sin and salvation – before you.

For Junior Readers

The Boy Who Wanted to Be with Jesus

William Salisbury lived in the south of England about 200 years ago. Sadly his parents had no religion; they did not keep the Sabbath or attend church, even though many more people did so in those days than now. William's parents were very poor and he had to wear ragged clothes and shoes with holes in them – and sometimes no shoes at all.

We do not know how William first found his way into the local church, but what he heard there made a great impression on him. The minister was called Mr Dymott, and the words he preached on, which impressed William so much, were from Isaiah 55: "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." Although William had no religious privileges like you have, he began to realise how important the truths were that he heard that day. And he was determined to learn more.

From then on, William tried to get to the church whenever he could. But it was not easy for him. If his mother realised he was going out, she would try to stop him. This was partly because she saw no reason for him to attend church. Also she was a bit ashamed of his ragged clothes and bare feet. Indeed she would beat him when he got home, if she found out he had been to church again.

In spite of all this, William kept going. He would sneak in at the back of the church, and the minister did not even realise that he was there. Such was his desire to learn more about Christ and the gospel that he did not go home between the services. He was afraid his mother would stop him going out again; so he would miss his lunch and loiter near the church until it was time for the next service.

It was clear that the Holy Spirit was teaching William about his sinfulness and need. But He was also teaching William about the way of salvation through Christ crucified, the only Saviour for lost sinners.

Then, sadly, William took ill and it seemed as if he was going to die. He kept asking for Mr Dymott, the minister. In the end, his mother asked where the minister lived. She went to his house, knocked on his door and asked him to go with her to visit her boy. The minister spoke with him and prayed with him. He was amazed at William's faith and his desire to be with Jesus.

"Would you not like to get better and be able to attend the church meetings again?" he asked William.

“O no,” was his reply; “I want to die and get out of this wicked world.” Later that night William died, and Mr Dymott conducted his funeral.

After William’s death, his mother also was convinced of her sinfulness. She began to attend church and to pray the prayer of the publican: “God be merciful to me a sinner”. She too was converted and later became known for her godliness.

What about you? You have, I hope, parents who read the Bible with you and bring you to church. But do you realise what a privilege and blessing that is? Will you not learn by heart the verse from Isaiah 55 that was blessed to William? And will you not pray that the Lord would help you to leave your sinful ways, your sinful friends and even your sinful thoughts. Remember the words about God: “He will have mercy . . . and . . . He will abundantly pardon”.

J van Kralingen

Thomas Boston

7. Taken up with Eternal Realities

Frank Daubney

In last month’s section of this Youth Conference paper, we saw Boston putting some of his sermons into book form. The process of printing did not go smoothly, but at last the book, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, came from the press. It is still in print and has been very useful ever since it was first printed. This is the last article in the series.

By the mid 1720s the state of religion in Scotland was declining, partly due to the influence of the Union with England. Attending the General Assembly in 1726, a minister called “Honest” Wodrow later commented that he had never seen so many young faces in the Assembly. Their dress, habits and seriousness were not what one would expect. He questioned what they were being taught in the divinity colleges and feared that the following years would reveal its sad influence. It was not long before this became evident.

In 1729, Professor Simson of Glasgow University, who had been admonished previously for unsound doctrine, became even bolder. He was now teaching his divinity students the error of Arianism, which maintains that the Son of God was created by the Father and was neither eternal nor had the same substance as the Father. Arianism also denies the Trinity. Simson was subtle and skilful in his arguments and difficult to pin down. But despite this, he was suspended by the General Assembly from preaching and teaching. Several members of the Assembly thought he should be deposed but went on to accept the Assembly’s decision.

Boston could not let this pass. He rose to his feet and dissented, arguing that Professor Simson should have been deposed from the ministry for the dishonour done to "our glorious Redeemer, the great God and our Saviour". He was alone in his dissent; no other member of Assembly stood by him. The Moderator persuaded him, for the peace of the church, to have his dissent simply marked, so that it could be raised again at another meeting if he was still of the same mind. After speaking to friends that evening he did not insist on it being raised again.

Several worthy ministers deeply regretted that they had not stood with Boston in his dissent. Some went further and said that it was their greatest sorrow that nothing further had been done against the Assembly's decision. But Professor Simson never preached or taught divinity students again.

As a student of divinity in Edinburgh, Boston had learned Hebrew, and when he was in Simprin he began to study the Hebrew Bible, which he did for the rest of his life. He became interested in the use of the Hebrew accents, which are dots and other marks under each line on the page. The accents are guides to pronunciation and help the reader to understand the true sense of the text. They were not in the original Hebrew text and they are not to be found in the Old Testament of the Jewish synagogue, nor did the early Christian Fathers refer to them. It seems that they were an invention of Jewish scholars in the early centuries of our era, which is something known to modern scholars but was not known to Boston.

In 1713 he began to study the accents and, after three years, he could understand them a little. With persistence he became quite expert in interpreting their use and felt that they helped him to understand difficult passages. He was convinced that God had given the accents and that they were necessary to grasp the true sense of Scripture. They became a passion to him and he worked on a book on the accents, which was printed in Amsterdam six years after his death. His conviction that the accents had God's authority was a dream, and sadly his work never had any influence on Hebrew scholarship.

It was during the last years of his life that he preached the sermons on affliction which were published as *The Crook in the Lot*. It seemed to those who heard him that his preaching was sweeter than ever. But the people of his congregation could clearly see that the health of their minister was failing and they expected that the communion season of 1731 would be his last.

People from all around came to these solemn days. Writing in his *Memoirs* about the occasion, Boston tells us that 777 tokens were distributed to communicants. One of his elders gave hospitality and accommodation to 80 people, he had baked for them half a boll of meal for bread (a boll was 140

pounds, or 64 kg); he had bought 4 shillings and 10 pence worth of wheat bread and killed 3 lambs etc, and had made 30 beds. Just imagine feeding and accommodating all of those people, with all that food and 30 beds! All of this great assembly came together to remember the death of the Saviour and to honour His well-known ambassador, Thomas Boston.

Boston was never a robust man. He suffered from fainting attacks and vomiting from his youth. In later years he suffered from scurvy, which is caused by a lack of vitamin C; this resulted in chronic tiredness and his teeth falling out. He suffered from gravel – tiny kidney stones which, when passing out of the body, result in extraordinary pain. In addition to all that, he developed a shaking of his head and occasionally of his whole body. Apart from his poor health, he had the care of his wife and suffered the death of six of his 10 children, yet never once did he miss an opportunity to preach on a Sabbath day. He sat when he was too weak to stand in the pulpit, and in April 1732, when he was even too weak for that, he preached from the manse window. His last two sermons were on the need for self-examination.

On 20 May 1732, he died at the age of 56 and was buried in the churchyard at Ettrick, where there is now a large monument in his memory. Mrs Boston lived for only a few years after her husband. Their son Thomas, one of the four surviving children, was 19 and a divinity student when his father died. He was licensed at that young age, and in April 1733, 11 months after his father's death, he was inducted and ordained to the Ettrick congregation.

How shall we sum up Thomas Boston? He was frail, timid, tried and unwell. His life, walk and conversation were entirely taken up with eternal realities. His preaching and writing were blessed to multitudes of souls in his own day and in succeeding generations. He furthered the cause of truth, and often stood alone against the downgrading of biblical doctrine. Truly "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us".

At the outset of his ministry, when considering his calling, Boston wrote in his *Soliloquy on Man Fishing*, "What an honourable thing it is to be fishers of men! How great an honour shouldest thou esteem it, to be a catcher of souls! We are workers together with God, says the Apostle. O my soul, bless thou the Lord. Lord, what am I, or what is my father's house, that Thou hast brought me to this?"

How can we possibly begin to follow in the footsteps of such a man? Would it not be by following the command of the Saviour, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God", and then the command of Paul, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth"?

*For Younger Readers***“I Don’t Want the Money”**

A minister in Holland went to stay in a hotel. He spoke to a maid in the hotel and asked her if she prayed to God.

She answered him: “I have scarcely time to eat. So how can I have time to pray?”

If there was any truth in what she said, she must have been kept very, very busy. But the minister knew she could not have been quite as busy as she said. No matter how busy she was, she surely had enough time to say a short prayer to God every day. Probably she did not want to pray.

The minister taught her a prayer. It was a short prayer, a very short prayer. It had only three words, “Lord, save me”. No matter how busy she was, she would have time to say that prayer.

And the kind minister promised to give the maid a little money. The next time he would come to stay at the hotel, she would have to tell him that she had said the prayer every morning and every evening. Then he would give her the money as a reward.

For two weeks she repeated the words, “Lord, save me”, without thinking of the meaning of the words. Then she wondered what they meant and why the minister wanted her to say them again and again.

The maid then thought that she might find an answer to her question by looking in the Bible. She did so and liked what she read. The next morning, she read a little more.

When the minister went back to the hotel, he spoke to the man who owned the hotel. He asked where the maid was.

“She’s got too good for my place”, the man said. She had gone to be a maid in a local pastor’s house.

The minister went to find her. She told him: “Is it you, you blessed man? I shall thank God through all eternity that I ever saw you. I don’t want the money. I have reward enough for saying those words.” She went on to tell him how God showed her, through the Bible, how to be saved through Jesus Christ.

He answered her prayer. Now she really wanted to pray to God and tell Him about everything she needed.

Young People's Tour of St Andrews

Rev D W B Somerset

The Young People's Conference visited St Andrews on April 12, on a tour led by Rev Douglas Somerset, assisted by Mr Matthew Vogan.

1. St Andrews Castle. The first and longest visit was to the Castle, which was built about 1200, and then destroyed and rebuilt several times. What visitors now see is the ruins of the Castle as rebuilt by Archbishop John Hamilton in about 1550, with the impressive front that was then added. The Castle had been severely damaged during the French siege of 1547, which involved John Knox.

(1.) *The Sea Tower and Bottle Dungeon.* The Sea Tower was the Castle prison, with some prisoners being lowered into the fearful Bottle Dungeon. John Knox says that "many of God's children" were imprisoned there. Among those known to have been imprisoned in the Sea Tower are Patrick Hamilton, Henry Forrest, John Roger, George Wishart, and Walter Mylne. The salted body of Cardinal David Beaton was kept in a chest in the Bottle Dungeon for seven months after his assassination in 1546.

(2.) *Martyrdom of George Wishart.* George Wishart was born about 1513 in Pitarrow, south of Aberdeen. He fled to England to avoid persecution in 1538 and went to Cambridge University, where his godliness made a great impression. He returned to Scotland about 1543 and engaged in preaching tours south of Edinburgh and around Dundee. He was captured in 1546 and imprisoned in the Castle, where he administered communion after the Reformed practice, probably the first such occasion in Scotland. He was tried in the Cathedral, condemned to death, and burnt outside the Castle on 1 March 1546. Cardinal Beaton and the Archbishop of Glasgow watched his death from the middle window of the tower, reclining on cushions.

(3.) *Death of Cardinal Beaton.* On the morning of Saturday, 29 May 1546, major building work was going on in the Castle. In the bustle, the conspirators, Norman Leslie, Kirkcaldy of Grange, James Melville and several others, slipped in, killed the porter, and turned out about 100 workmen, and another 50 servants. They then went up to the Cardinal's rooms, where he had just woken up, and killed him. He died saying, "I am a priest, I am a priest; fye fye, all is gone". His body was hung over the wall for the townspeople to see, and then stored in the Bottle Dungeon till the end of the siege.

(4.) *The Siege of 1547.* After the death of Cardinal Beaton, the assassins remained in the Castle and were joined by others. The following April, John Knox came to live in the Castle. It was in the Chapel (which has now fallen over the cliff) that he gave lectures, and it was there that he was called to the

ministry. The “Castilians” (as they were called) were often free to go out into the town, and it was in the parish church of St Andrews that Knox preached his first sermon, on Daniel 7. It was also in the parish church that Knox had public debates with the Romanists John Annand and John Winram (who later became a Reformer). The parish church, called Holy Trinity Church, is still in use, but was not open to visitors at this time.

The siege of the Castle started in June 1547 and ended when the Castle surrendered at the end of July. In an attempt to break into the Castle from below, a “mine” was dug from the town, and the defenders of the Castle dug a “countermine” to intercept this. The mine and the countermine were re-discovered in 1879, and they are the most important example of medieval siege-works in Europe. Most of the young people on the tour made the claustrophobic descent to explore them. After the surrender of the Castle, Knox spent the next 19 months as a slave in the French galleys.

2. *Martyrdom of Walter Mylne.* The second site visited was the place of martyrdom of Walter Mylne (pronounced *Mill*). Mylne had been priest in the picturesque village of Lunan, but had fled abroad during the 1530s when he was accused of heresy. Returning to Scotland, he was captured in April 1558, tried and burned to death at the age of 82. He was the last of Scotland's Reformation martyrs. Fourteen months after his death, the Reformers burned the images from St Andrews Cathedral at the place of his martyrdom.

3. *The Cathedral.* The third site visited was the ruins of St Andrews Cathedral.

(1.) *The graves of Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Halyburton.* For many years, the professors of Divinity at St Andrews were buried in a corner of the graveyard surrounding the Cathedral, known as “Divinity Corner”. The two most eminent professors were Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) and Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712). Samuel Rutherford is famous for his ministry in Anwoth, for his work at the Westminster Assembly, and for his *Letters*. Charles II was restored to the throne shortly before his death, and Rutherford received a summons on a charge of treason. He sent back a message: “Tell them I have a summons already before a superior Judge and judicatory, and I behove to answer my first summons; and ere your day come I will be where few kings and great folks come”. The quaint poem on Rutherford's grave was composed about 70 years after his death by William Wilson, who set up gravestones for a number of martyrs and Covenanters.

Thomas Halyburton is famous for his theological writings. He died at the early age of 38, and on his deathbed he said to some friends: “I was just thinking on the bonnie spot of earth that I will get to lie in, beside Mr Rutherford, Mr Forrester and Principal Anderson, and I will get my pleasant George [his dead son] in my hand; and O, we will be a knot of bonnie dust!”

(2.) *The Cathedral ruins.* It was in the cathedral that Patrick Hamilton was tried in 1528 and George Wishart in 1546. The cathedral was purged of its images by the Reformers in June 1559. It is often said to have been “destroyed” at the time of the Reformation, but of this there is no historical record. What almost certainly happened was that the cathedral was neglected, because the parish church was sufficient for the congregation on Sabbath, and it soon started to fall down, as large buildings do when they are not maintained. It became a quarry for every builder in St Andrews, and stones from the cathedral have been recovered from the harbour pier and from a pigsty.

(3.) *David Hay Fleming’s grave.* David Hay Fleming (1849-1931) was one of Scotland’s greatest Church historians. He was buried in the family plot near the Cathedral, his gravestone being readily identified by its white paint. His epitaph is in the beautiful words of *The Shorter Catechism*: “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection”.

4. Patrick Hamilton. The final visit of the tour was to the site of Patrick Hamilton’s martyrdom, outside the entrance to St Salvator’s College. Patrick Hamilton was burned on 29 February 1528, for preaching Lutheran doctrine. He was aged 24.

Other interesting sites in St Andrews include St Mary’s College, where Samuel Rutherford was Principal; St Salvator’s Chapel, which has a pulpit from Holy Trinity Church whose base dates back to the days of John Knox; and the University Museum (MUSA).

Repentance

1. Its Meaning and Importance

Rev W A Weale

This is the first part of a paper given at this year’s Youth Conference. Its sub-title was “encouragements and motives”.

We are to consider (1) what is meant by repentance, (2) its importance as highlighted by examples from the Bible, (3) the encouragements we have for repenting, (4) the motives for repentance and (5) a word of conclusion on the evidence, or fruits, of true repentance.

1. What is meant by repentance? In his excellent book, *Repentance*, John Colquhoun of Leith speaks of three kinds of repentance: natural repentance, legal repentance and evangelical repentance. “Natural repentance”, he writes,

“is that natural feeling of sorrow and self-condemnation, of which a man is conscious for having done that which he sees he ought not to have done.” It arises from seeing that it was improper, “or from reflecting on the disagreeable consequences of it to others, and especially to himself. This feeling of regret frequently occurs. When a man, especially a proud and vain man, is convinced of his having been guilty of some glaring instance of improper conduct, either against, or in the presence of a fellow creature, it is sometimes very keen and painful.”

“Legal repentance”, Colquhoun goes on, “is a feeling of regret produced” in someone trying to earn salvation by keeping the law, “by the fear that his violations of the Divine law, and especially his gross sins, do expose him to eternal punishment. . . . He is extremely sorry, not that he has transgressed the law, but that the law and the justice of God are so very strict that they cannot leave him at liberty to sin” without having to face punishment. “His love of sin and his hatred of holiness continue in all their vigour. And yet, under the dominion of his legal attitude, he presumes to expect that such repentance as this will in some measure atone for all his crimes against the infinite Majesty of heaven.”

Colquhoun then comes to evangelical repentance, which is the repentance that we are concerned with here. He says that it is “altogether different from either of these. It is a gracious principle and habit implanted in the soul by the Spirit of Christ.” In acting according to this principle, “a regenerate and believing sinner, deeply [conscious] of the exceeding sinfulness and just [guilt] of his innumerable sins is truly humbled and grieved before the Lord, on account of the sinfulness and hurtfulness of them. He feels bitter remorse, [sincere] sorrow, and deep self-aborrence for the aggravated transgressions of his life, and the deep depravity of his nature.”

This is mainly because the sinner has, by all the countless ways he has provoked God, “dishonoured an infinitely holy and gracious God, transgressed a law which is ‘holy and just and good’, and defiled, deformed, and even destroyed his own precious soul. This godly sorrow for sin and this holy [hatred] of it arises from a spiritual discovery of pardoning mercy with God in Christ, and from . . . trusting in His mercy. And these feelings and exercises are always accompanied by [a sincere] love of universal holiness, and by fixed resolutions and endeavours to turn from all iniquity to God and to walk before Him in newness of life. Such, in general, is the nature of that evangelical repentance, to the habit and exercise of which the Lord Jesus calls sinners who hear the gospel.”

Question 76 of *The Larger Catechism* asks, “What is repentance unto life?” The answer is: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the

heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with Him in all the ways of new obedience".

Perhaps the most compact definition of evangelical repentance, or "repentance unto life" is given in answer 87 of *The Shorter Catechism*: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience". It is good to have this answer before our minds as we look at this subject.

2. The importance of repentance. This is especially brought out in the New Testament Scriptures. It is also to be found in the Old Testament, where the word "turn" or "return" is the equivalent. For example, in Jeremiah 3:12, God, through the prophet, exhorts the people of Judah: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you". Again in verse 14: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord: for I am married unto you". We have the same language in Hosea 14:1, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity". Many such examples could be given.

But it is when we come to the New Testament that the importance of repentance becomes especially clear. When John the Baptist began his ministry, he exhorted the people: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (see Matthew 3:1,2, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). When Jesus began His ministry, He began on the same note. And He later made it clear that, unless people repented, they would perish (Luke 13:3,5).

Among the Apostles we find the same emphasis. The people asked Peter in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, when they were convicted of the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus: "What shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Later Paul told the people of Athens, "God . . . commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

This was also the message of the Lord to several of the churches of Asia (in Revelation 2 and 3). The church of Ephesus was told to "remember . . . from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (2:5). The church in Pergamos, after being told of a guilty

group that was permitted in that church, was exhorted: “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth” (2:16). Similar warnings and exhortations were given to the Churches in Thyatira and Sardis and Laodicea (2:21;3:3,19).

So it is abundantly clear from such parts of the Bible – and more instances could be given – that repentance is vitally important.

“I Know God Loves Me, Because . . .”

Rev K M Watkins

“I know God loves me, because I am healthy.” That is what the lady in Kenya had written. She did not stop there. She would say that God loved her because she had a good job. God loved her because her family was doing well. She was so convinced of this that no one could persuade her differently. But was that the right way to think? Were those outward blessings really a proof that God loved her in a special way?

These ideas are common, not only in Kenya, but in many parts of the world. The preachers of the so-called “prosperity gospel” promise “health and wealth” to those who believe their teachings, provided they send them money. The system certainly brings wealth to those who preach it. Many “Christian” television networks and websites are full of this kind of thing.

But if the woman and those who spread these teachings are right, what of those who are not healthy, wealthy and outwardly “blessed”? They would have to say, I know that God does not love me, because I am sick. Or, God does not love me, because I am poor and do not have a good job. Or, God does not love me, because my family is full of trouble. Is that the right way to think about people who have difficult lives?

Coming back to the woman, what would she write when she became ill herself? She would have to say, God does not love me any more, because I am sick. What if she lost her job? She would have to say, God’s love for me is gone, because my job is gone. What if difficulties appeared in her family? She would have to say, God’s love has turned to hate, because of these troubles in my family. Would it be right to come to these conclusions based on such changes in her life?

No, it would not be right. The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot tell from our outward circumstances whether God loves us or not. If the things of this life are going well for us, that does not necessarily mean that God loves us. If things are not going well for us, that does not necessarily mean that God is against us.

When Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was so ill that he was close to death, the message that his sisters sent to Christ showed that they did not think like the woman in Kenya. They said: “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick” (John 11:3). They did not say, Our brother is sick, so that means the Lord does not love him. On the contrary, they thought: Our brother is sick – seriously sick – but that does not change for a moment the truth that the Lord loves him; therefore let us send for His help.

In Luke 16, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about another Lazarus, one who was very poor and used to lie at the gate of a rich man. If the woman’s thinking is right – if the “health and wealth gospel” is right – then the rich man could say, I know that God loves me, because unlike Lazarus with his sores, I am in good health. He could also say, God loves me, because unlike Lazarus in his poverty, I eat lots of luxurious food from a full table every day. Again he could say, God loves me, because my five brothers keep visiting me, and we have a good time together.

If the woman and those who think like her are right, then Lazarus would have to say, I know that God does not love me, because I am full of sores, and I do not have the strength to move, but have to be laid at this gate every day. He would have to say, God does not love me, because I am nothing but a beggar, and so hungry that the rich man’s crumbs are the best food I can get. He would have to say, God does not love me, because I am left at the rich man’s gate, my family are not there for me.

But the woman and the “prosperity gospel” are not right. When Lazarus died, he went straight to heaven. All his sufferings in this world could not prevent that. He was a child of God, with the same faith that Abraham had. But when the rich man died, he went straight to hell. All the good things he enjoyed in this world could not prevent that. Their outward circumstances did not show which one God loved. In fact, it was the opposite of how it looked! The rich man in the pains of hell was told: “Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented” (Luke 16:25).

So we cannot tell from our outward lives whether God loves us or not. But is there a way to tell? Is there a way to know if God loves us with that special love that He has for His people?

To know if God loves us or not, we have to start with the gospel. We have to come to an experience of God’s saving love in Christ. We have to come to this: “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). This is how God shows His special love to sinners: not by sending them good health, or good jobs, or other good things of this life, but by sending His Own Son to die for them. We have to

come to this: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). This is where God's special love to His people is found: not in providing the good things of this life, but by providing His Son to suffer wrath for their sins.

The Lord's people have a right to say, I know that God loves me, because He sent His Son to die for sinners like me. They can say, God loves me, because He provided Christ to be the sacrifice for sins. To show His love, God could not have done anything greater than that. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This saving love of God was the love that Lazarus knew, despite all his sufferings. This was the love that the rich man knew nothing about, despite all his blessings. This is the love that brings souls to glory, and it lasts for ever.

To know if God loves us or not, we have to continue with the gospel. That means being faithful to Christ because of His love. It means living, not for ourselves, but for Him who died for His people. Paul spoke of this: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because . . . He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Those who are loved with God's special love have a special love that goes back to God. They love Him because He first loved them, and they show that love by seeking to obey Him in all things. He gave Himself for them, and they are made willing to give themselves for Him. So they may say, I know that God loves me, because I find myself loving Him back; I know that God loves me, because He is making me love His commandments; I know that God loves me, because I find my heart hungering and thirsting after a life of righteousness.

In this world, good and bad things can happen to everyone. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked" (Ecclesiastes 9:2). God "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). You cannot tell from outward things whether you are included in or excluded from God's eternal, saving love in Christ. You can only know that God loves you when you find the fruits of the gospel being produced in your heart and in your life. Therefore pray to be included in that love!

"Remember me, Lord, with that love which Thou to Thine dost bear;
With Thy salvation, O my God, to visit me draw near:

That I Thy chosen's good may see, and in their joy rejoice;
And may with Thine inheritance triumph with cheerful voice."

(Metrical Psalm 106:4,5)

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2016-17

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Looking Around Us

How to Change People's Lives for the Better?

Readers, at least in United Kingdom, will surely know that the country is in the middle of General Election campaigns. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the policies of the various parties fighting the election, although it is sadly clear that none of the major parties allow the Bible to influence their policies. In fact, few MPs would want anyone to think that they are much influenced by Christianity.

Jeremy Corbyn is the leader of the Labour Party, which is, at present, the second-biggest political party in Britain. He was speaking today about their manifesto, the document that tells the British people how they plan to govern the country if they are elected. He said, "I believe the policies in it . . . will transform the lives of many people in our society".

But, however successful a government might be in improving the lives of its people in outward things, we need to look beyond that. Governments may try to influence people so that they will stop sinning in some ways – so that they will not commit crime. But governments have no remedy for sin, for sin has its root in the heart. The only effective remedy is the gospel: the good news that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". This salvation not only provides for the forgiveness of their sins; it begins the work of making them holy – so that their love for sin is subdued. And at last, when they pass into eternity, they will no longer commit any sin. What a change!

Yes, lives are wonderfully transformed when the gospel is applied to their souls by the Holy Spirit. Think of Saul of Tarsus, that determined persecutor of Christ's followers. When he met the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit worked in his soul, how thoroughly changed he was! He then wanted to follow Christ more and more closely. He wanted to have a clear conscience before God and before other people. And he is now perfectly holy.

Think of Zacchaeus, who seems not to have been too honest when he was gathering in taxes. Jesus called him and saved him. Now, with a new heart, he wanted to return fourfold whatever money he had cheated people out of.

This is the kind of transformation we all need. Politicians may promise wonders, and then fail miserably. But whenever God begins to transform a sinner, He will always be successful. He always completes the work He begins. That is what you need to pray for: ask God to transform your heart and life, for Jesus' sake. You may use David's words: "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10).

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