

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 9

Acknowledging God Always

God is the Creator. He made everything, including this world and all the human beings in it. This means that we should acknowledge Him as God and as *our* God. So it is our duty to worship Him: to give Him the glory that is due to Him as God. As individuals we should pray to Him – and true prayer is part of giving Him the glory that is due to Him as God. And we should listen to what He has to say to us in the Bible. We should worship Him too as families and, not least, we should gather together to worship Him in public – normally in a church. There we will sing and join in prayer together (as one man speaks out loud, everyone else should repeat his petitions in their heart, assuming they are consistent with the Bible). And, as we hear the Bible read in church and listen to preaching, we should worship God in our hearts.

But there are other ways in which we must acknowledge God. In fact, the Bible tells us: “In *all* thy ways acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:6). God is telling us that we are to acknowledge Him, not only in some things, but in *everything*. We are always to remember, whatever we are doing or are planning to do, that God rules over it all and has a right to our obedience. And we should ask Him again and again to direct us in everything.

And how are we to acknowledge God? First, we must realise that He is in control of everything. So we should conclude that He can help us. He can help us in every situation; He can protect us from making a complete mess of what we plan to do and from doing harm to ourselves and others. Especially He can keep us from doing what is sinful.

As so often with God's commands, there is a promise attached when God tells us to acknowledge Him always; it is this: “He shall direct thy paths”. Whatever way we are taking through life, God will direct us all along that way if we always acknowledge Him.

But are we not liable to forget God a lot of the time? We are, and that is our sin. So we must ask God to teach us to acknowledge Him always; we must ask Him to make us willing to remember Him and ask Him to help us whatever we are doing or hope to do. We are very limited in our capacity to

know what to do, but God is perfectly wise; His wisdom is infinite – it is totally unlimited. So when we do not really know what to do, He knows perfectly what is best. We should turn to God in prayer and ask Him to help us decide what is the proper thing to do. His wisdom is such that He always knows what is best for us in every situation.

Do you remember how God appeared to Solomon in a dream one night, just after he had become king? God said to him: “Ask what I shall give thee” (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon could have asked for anything he wanted; he could have asked for a long life, for great riches, to own lots of beautiful things, or to win many battles.

But he asked for none of these things, for he knew he needed something much more important, what only God could give him. So he asked, “Give . . . Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad”. Solomon knew he needed God’s help if he was to rule the country wisely and to judge the various difficult disputes that people would bring before him. He asked, “Who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?” Solomon acknowledged God, and God gave him a wonderful answer: “I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee”. God promised to give him the wisdom he needed so that he would make the right decisions.

So it is right for us to go to God; He has perfect wisdom. But there is another reason: He is always able to help us because He is all-powerful. So Jeremiah acknowledged before God: “There is nothing too hard for Thee” (32:17). We should never imagine that we are asking God for something that is beyond His power to do; nothing is beyond His power. On the other hand, we should never assume that God will do exactly what we ask Him; He is too wise to do what is not for our good, or what is not for His glory.

But how can we live for God’s glory? We must acknowledge God and make use of what He has revealed in Scripture. When we come into this world, we are governed by a bad principle; sin is the ruling power in our heart. Unless we get a change of heart, we cannot glorify God in what we do. It is God Himself that must work this change of heart in sinners, and that happens when God the Holy Spirit puts new life into their heart, so that they begin to love God and to do His commandments. Then they begin to live for God’s glory.

It is because this change is so important that Jesus tells us: “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” – that is, all the other things that we need (Matthew 6:33). We must acknowledge God as the One who saves, and we must acknowledge

Jesus Christ, God the Son, as the One who came into the world to suffer and die in the place of sinners. And God directs us in the Bible: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

We need to acknowledge God, not only in salvation, but also in all that we do. We must pray about all the ordinary things of this life, for nothing is too trivial to bring before God. And we must pray about all the extraordinary things of this life, for nothing is beyond the power of the Most High.

One of the most important matters in life is the choice of friends. In whose company will we spend most time? Friends can have a great influence on us – for good and for bad. It is very easy to make serious blunders in this matter. So people very much need God to direct them in their choice. They very much need to keep asking God to make them decide wisely who their friends should be. No one should question that He is able to do this.

The most important human friend that anyone can have is their husband or wife. So it is especially important to acknowledge God in making this choice, to be asking Him to show who you should choose and who you should not choose. In the choice of someone who may be so close to you for many years – while God will spare you both – it is absolutely vital that you acknowledge God in this matter and ask Him to direct your choice.

But you are to acknowledge God in everything. That includes your studies: what course you will follow, where you will study and every part of your learning experience. Again you must acknowledge God in your work: where you will work, the particular employment you will take up and every part of your duties in your job. The same is true of how you use your leisure time. Remember God’s promise: if you acknowledge Him, He will direct your ways always.

A godly soldier moved into a barracks; he could find no place where he could pray to God alone. Very likely he acknowledged God by asking Him to direct him to a suitable place where he could pray without being disturbed. It was a dark night when he went out into a large field nearby. He thought no one could see him or hear him there. But he was wrong.

Two men from the same regiment hated each other and wickedly decided to fight a duel. They both went into the field, intending to fire their guns at each other. They were most surprised to hear a voice in the field so late at night. They were even more surprised when they came closer and heard their fellow soldier praying. They stopped and listened, and the prayer had the effect of removing their hatred for each other (though we do not know what the godly soldier was saying to the Lord). We can believe that it was He who directed the godly soldier where to pray and what to say in his prayer. God did indeed direct his paths. May we commit *all* our ways to Him!

Repentance

4. Its Results and Its Evidence

Rev W A Weale

Last month's section gave several motives for repentance. This article contains the last two main points of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. While focused on the results and the evidence of repentance, this article also points out some further motives.

5. The results of repentance. In considering the motives to repent, as well as the benefits of repentance, it may be helpful to consider these against the background of the parable of the Prodigal Son as described in Luke, chapter 15.

The prodigal was where we all are by nature: in the far country, far from grace and from God, with his plight becoming ever more serious. And he would certainly have perished at last unless, by God's grace, "he came to himself" – that is, until he came to see the folly of remaining in the "far country". So he resolved to return to his father's house. Here was repentance: he was deeply sorry for his foolish life, which involved squandering his father's money, and he was ready to tell his father this.

Then we have the touching scene of his father seeing him when he was yet "a great way off" and running to meet him and kiss him (which speaks of the willingness of God that "all should come to repentance"). Here we have the first motive for repentance in the parable to encourage us: *reconciliation* with God the Father. And that is a great motive. We are naturally estranged from God. He is angry with us "every day" as sinners. But when we "repent and believe the gospel", there is reconciliation, which implies peace of conscience, among other things.

Secondly there is *justification*. The father in the parable called his servants to "bring forth the best robe and put it on him". Surely the best robe is Christ's righteousness, which makes the sinner just, as if he had never sinned. And what a great motive to repent this is! Then a ring was put on the hand of the returned and repenting prodigal; it has been compared to the earnest of the Holy Spirit, a continual reminder of the father's love and kindness.

Again there were "shoes on his feet". In those days slaves went barefooted, but those in the household, the family, wore shoes. So the prodigal was back in the family. And those who repent are adopted into God's family; they are "sons and daughters" of the Almighty. Well, what motives these are for repentance! And we must not forget the feast. For "the fatted calf" was killed and prepared. It is a reminder of the ongoing provision for the repentant sinner.

But, of course, all these blessings are in this life. What of the life to come? In the Book of Revelation we have a brief glimpse of heaven and the eternal enjoyment there. And while most of what is described there is in negative language, it enforces the motives for repentance: “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16,17).

6. The evidence of true repentance. From what has been said, it is surely clear that repentance is vital and also that the believer continues to repent. This is obvious from the fact that sin is ongoing in this life. The Apostle John tells us that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8), and everyone taught by the Spirit of God will acknowledge that it is so.

But further questions may trouble the child of God: Have I truly repented? And am I truly repenting? Let us then look at the question of the evidence or fruits of true repentance.

In his book, *Repentance*, referred to in an earlier article, John Colquhoun calls attention to the demand John the Baptist made to those who came to him for baptism: “Bring forth . . . fruits meet for repentance”. After listing a number of cases of false repentance, such as that of Pharaoh, Ahab and Judas, Colquhoun goes on to list 10 marks, or evidences, of true repentance. We look at these:

(1) *Carefulness*, or vigilance, is one of the fruits of true repentance. Here Colquhoun quotes from 2 Corinthians 7:11: “Ye sorrowed after a godly sort; what carefulness it wrought in you!”

(2) Another of the fruits of these penitents was *clearing of themselves*. “The believers in Corinth cleared themselves, not by denying the fact of their sin, or defending it, but by confessing their [blameworthy] neglect.” They declared “that they did not approve of the sin, but abhorred it, and that they complied willingly with the Apostle’s directions”.

(3) *Holy indignation* against sin is a fruit and evidence of evangelical repentance. “Yea, what indignation!”. “Godly sorrow for sin”, writes Colquhoun, “makes the heart of the penitent rise and swell with indignation at sin, and at himself as a sinner.”

(4) True repentance includes *fear*. This is the reverent fear of a child of God which causes the soul to stand in awe of God and holds it back from what would offend and dishonour Him.”

(5) *Vehement*, or strong, *desire*, is one of the fruits of gospel repentance. “A false penitent may pray in secret, but the true penitent must” do so. “His

vehement desire cannot be shut up within him; it must have" a way of getting out.

(6) In this passage, Paul tells us that godly sorrow produces *zeal*, and Colquhoun comments that this holy zeal is made up of both love and anger. "It is an enlightened and prudent eagerness of spirit to honour God, to promote true holiness, and to oppose error and wickedness." The person "loves the Lord, and therefore hates evil. It is not the persons of transgressors that he abhors but their sins. His zeal begins at home. He diligently strives against, and suppresses, these sins in himself" which he speaks against "in others around him".

(7) Another fruit of true repentance is *revenge* on sin. "It disposes them to take a sort of holy vengeance on themselves" – such revenge on their sin "as aims at the complete destruction of it".

(8) The penitent *pays back in full* what he borrowed, or took from others dishonestly, which is evidence of true repentance. Colquhoun gives Zacchaeus as an example.

(9) Another fruit of gospel repentance is to *compensate* people for the harm done to them when it is not possible to restore what was damaged.

(10) *Diligence* in carrying out all our duties in a spiritual way is one of the fruits of true repentance.

Conclusion. Evangelical repentance, or repentance unto life, is a vital grace and, as with all graces, the Word is the standard we must go by to determine our possession of it. How important it is then with repentance, that we, with all the encouragements and motives that we have to repent, come to God daily in the penitent spirit of the Publican and with his humble prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

God Is My Salvation

1. A God Far Off

Eily grew up in Dublin, the capital city of Ireland. One day, when she was about 5, she was visiting somewhere in the centre of Ireland, perhaps on holiday. She joined another little girl at the back of a procession of "the Children of Mary". As these Roman Catholic children walked round and round the grounds of a convent, they were singing in praise of Mary, the mother of Jesus. They called her the "spotless dove, Queen of earth and heaven above".

They were being taught to worship Mary as if she was without sin and as if she was a god. But Mary would never have accepted such worship; she

spoke of God as “my Saviour” (Luke 1:47). She was a sinner; she knew that she needed God to deliver her from her sin. Yes, she is in heaven, but most certainly she is not to be worshipped.

Back in Dublin, Eily used to watch the nuns in the convent across the road from her house, as they walked up and down at their evening devotions. Her mother made it a rule that everyone had to get up early each day for early mass. At the age of 5 Eily began to go to school in the convent, and soon she was preparing, with some other children, to go to confession and to her first communion, when she would reach the age of 7.

Then a woman and her daughter Beatrice, who was about 6, came to stay with Eily’s mother. They were Protestants, but Eily and Beatrice became close friends. They both felt very clever when they discovered at the same time that Santa Claus does not exist. One day, the nun who was teaching Eily’s class told them: “No little baby can ever see the face of God if it dies before it is baptized. It goes to a dark place called Limbo, and is for ever banished from the presence of God.”

In fact, Limbo does not exist. This was false teaching, for the Bible has nothing to say about Limbo, and we ought to treat the Bible as our one source of religious knowledge – the only book that we can rely on.

Eily was at once concerned about Beatrice. Then Eily remembered the Roman Catholic teaching that, “in case of necessity”, any man or woman can baptize. So she decided to “baptize” her Protestant friend. Beatrice thought this would be “nice”, and Eily took a bowl of water and poured it over her friend. Clearly Eily needed the Lord to teach her and, as we will see later, He did so.

The day came when all the children in Eily’s group went to confession for the first time. They were to confess to a priest all their sins – all their sinful thoughts, words and actions. But again, as with so many other Roman Catholic practices, there is no support in the Bible for confessing all our sins to another man; instead we are to confess our sins to *God*. It is against Him we have sinned, and we must ask forgiveness from Him, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for sinners. No doubt the priest who heard the little girl’s confession pronounced her forgiven, but it is only God, who sees into the heart, who has the right to forgive sin.

Eily seems to have enjoyed her childhood, but one Monday in April 1916, as the Dubliners were enjoying the bright spring sunshine, Eily was playing outside with some of her friends. Then the sound of gunfire rang out. It was the beginning of an uprising against British rule in Ireland. Eily’s father and mother looked so serious and her grandmother became very upset. She was concerned about her son who, she knew, would be involved in the uprising.

Eily and her family were very frightened. All of them made full use of their rosaries – a rosary is a set of beads strung together; each bead represents a prayer, most of them addressed to Mary. Of course, Mary was totally unable to help any of these frightened people; from heaven she could not hear anyone trying to pray to her. And, as a mere human being, she certainly could not hear hundreds or thousands of people seeking to pray to her at one time. We are not to pray to Mary, but to God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who can hear needy sinners and has the right to present their petitions before God.

Much of Ireland became independent of the UK in 1922. During the civil war that followed, Eily became “strangely discontented”. She often found herself “thinking about God and life and the meaning of things”. She went to confession almost every week but, no matter how hard she tried, she always had the same sins to confess. She could not overcome her sins. Her school friends told her that “nearly everybody feels like that at some time or another and that it was better not to mind these thoughts”.

Her mother blamed the devil, and she was partly right. But there was another reason: Eily needed to be born again; she needed a new heart. Not that she would ever be free from sinful thoughts in this life but, through the work of the Holy Spirit in her soul, she would trust in Christ Jesus for salvation and would gradually become more holy. Neither confession, nor any work of penance or prayer to Mary can help anyone; instead they keep people from considering their need of the saving work of Christ.

Eily's mother was enthusiastic about the Irish language and wanted her daughter to learn it. She found a teacher for Eily, her sister and brothers. He came to the house on Saturday afternoons for a lesson that lasted for an hour and a half. Eily found his lessons fascinating and she and the teacher became firm friends.

One evening they spent some time watching the lights of the harbour, which were reflected in the water. They talked “about life and love to the great Creator and Giver of these things”, and they shared some kind of longing “for a deeper knowledge of God”. But to Eily and her friend, brought up as Roman Catholics, with no Bible to direct them, God seemed very far off and impossible to approach except through the saints. To them such a way of approach seemed highly unsatisfactory.

In that they were right, but they needed to learn what Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6) – not by the saints in heaven, nor by priests, nor penances, nor anything else. There is only “one mediator” (someone who can stand in the midst) “between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). That is what Eily and her teacher had yet to learn.

The Five Solas of the Reformation

3. Christ Alone

Rev K M Watkins

This is the third part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. *Sola* is a Latin word that means *alone*. Five essential doctrines of the Bible were at the heart of the Reformation: Scripture alone, faith alone, Christ alone, grace alone, God's glory alone. All these were and are denied by Roman Catholicism. We have seen how Luther came to understand the first two. Now we see how he discovered the third: Christ alone.

Luther knew that he had wronged God, through his sin. He needed something to put that right. But what could be good enough to please God? The Roman Catholic Church claimed to have the merit that he needed. It taught that the Virgin Mary and eminent "saints" had done more good works than were required for their own salvation. These works, supposedly done over and above what they needed for themselves, were called works of "supererogation". They were stored up in a "treasury of merit", which was available for others, like Luther, who did not have enough good works of their own.

The Romish system promised people that they could obtain a share of this merit. They could go on "pilgrimages" to holy places, or shrines. They could visit "relics" – things like pieces of wood claimed to be from Christ's cross, or drops of liquid claimed to be Mary's tears. They could pay for "masses" to be said for them or "requiem masses" for their dead relatives. They could buy "indulgences" – certificates issued by the authority of the Pope promising fewer years of suffering in the fires of "purgatory" before moving on to heaven. Actually, there is no such place as purgatory. According to the Bible, when people die, they go immediately and permanently to either heaven or hell.

Requiem masses (mass for those who are already dead) are part of Popery's corrupt soul-deceiving system. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland has often protested against attending them. You see how right it was for the Church to discipline one of its ruling elders in 1989 for attending a requiem mass. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (29:2) says that "the popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect".

Millions were – and still are – cheated by these Romanist deceptions, really thinking that they are earning merit before God. Would Luther go on believing such delusions? No, he would not. In 1510, he had the opportunity to visit the city of Rome. According to Romanist teaching, more merit was

available there than anywhere else. Luther set off, eager to get relief for his burdened soul. He visited every shrine and relic he could, seeking to build up the merit he needed. But it was all a massive failure.

Luther recorded: "In Rome I was a frantic saint. I ran through all the churches and catacombs and believed everything." He ascended the 28 steps of the *Scala Sancta* (Sacred Steps) on his knees, praying the *Pater Noster* (Our Father) on every step. These steps were said to have been transported from Jerusalem, the very steps in front of Pilate's palace, upon which Jesus had been condemned to death. Of course, no deliverance came to Luther's burdened conscience. On the top step, rather than being assured that he had released 28 souls from purgatory, he exclaimed, "Who knows whether it is so?" Luther returned from Rome a disillusioned man. For all its talk of merit, Rome could not provide what he needed.

What Luther actually needed was Christ. And Christ was all that he needed. All the merit that sinners need is in Christ. Everything necessary to meet the demands of divine righteousness is in Christ's perfect obedience. Everything necessary to satisfy divine justice is in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. The only mediator needed is the one God-Man Mediator provided by God. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

It is not, as in the Romish system, Christ plus other things, but Christ *alone*. In Latin, this is *Solus Christus*, the third Sola of the Reformation. Everything a sinner needs is provided in the Person and work of God's dear Son. Christ is all. Christ is sufficient. Christ has finished the work needed for the salvation of all who believe in Him. "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon *Him alone* for salvation" (*Shorter Catechism*, Answer 86).

Luther came to understand this by studying the Bible. At the University of Wittenberg he lectured on the Psalms. He saw that Psalm 22 described Christ as forsaken and rejected by God, as he felt himself to be. But there was this difference: Luther deserved it because of his sin, but Christ had no sin – only merit. What mercy and love in Christ to be willing to suffer that! Then he lectured on Romans. There he saw that the gospel provides the righteousness which God demands – and that righteousness is the merit of Christ. Thus Luther was brought to rely on Christ alone for his whole salvation.

His next lectures were on Galatians. The third Sola comes through loud and clear in the commentary, as the following quotes show: "We are

saved by *Christ alone* without any law.” Again, “How then can these two contradictions stand together: I am a sinner and most worthy of God’s wrath and indignation; and yet the Father loves me? Here *nothing* comes between, but *only Christ* the mediator.”

“A true and steadfast faith must lay hold upon nothing else but *Christ alone*; and in the affections and terrors of conscience it has nothing else to lean on, but this diamond Christ Jesus. Wherefore he that lays hold on Christ by faith, although he is much terrified by the law and oppressed with the weight of his sins, yet he may be bold to glory that he is righteous. How, or by what means? Even by that precious pearl Christ Jesus, which he possesses by faith.”

“The heart must behold and lay hold of nothing but Christ the Saviour . . . Whosoever shall be found having this confidence in Christ . . . him will God account for righteous. This is . . . the merit whereby we attain the remission of sins and righteousness.”

“Faith . . . does not say, What have I done? What have I offended? What have I deserved? But, What has *Christ* done? What has *He* deserved? Here the truth of the gospel answers you: He has redeemed you from your sin, from the devil, and from eternal death. Faith therefore acknowledges that in this one person, Jesus Christ, it has forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”

Luther had come to understand Christ alone. But what of others? How would this be made known to them? In 1517, the Pope needed money – a lot of money – so a special indulgence was issued. Those who paid were promised that they would be completely forgiven all their sins and would be relieved of all the pains of purgatory, and that their dead relatives already there would be rescued.

Tetzel, a Dominican friar and experienced seller of indulgences, entered town after town with great pomp, cheating foolish souls with the deceiving words of the religion of the Middle Ages. Standing before a raised cross and the signed indulgence lying on a velvet cushion, he would say: “Listen now, God and St Peter call you. Consider the salvation of your souls and those of your loved ones departed. . . . Visit the most holy cross erected before you and ever imploring you. Have you considered that you are lashed in a furious tempest amid the temptations and dangers of the world, and that you do not know whether you can reach the haven, not of your mortal body, but of your immortal soul? Consider that all who are contrite and have confessed and made contribution will receive complete remission of all their sins.”

Tetzel would continue: “Listen to the voice of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, ‘Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for such a small amount of money.’ . . .

Remember you are able to release them, for 'as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs'."

Tetzel could not come to Wittenberg itself, but he came close enough for people from Luther's parish to hop across its border and return with their indulgences. This provoked Luther into action. It was too much to bear, to see sinners deceived and Christ's once-only sacrifice denied by this too-good-to-be-true scam. As if divine forgiveness could be bought with money! He wrote in Latin a list of statements, intended for theological debate among Roman Catholic scholars, contradicting the claims made for indulgences. On 31 October 1517 Luther nailed it to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The list came to be called *The 95 Theses*.

The Lord used this to trigger nothing less than the whole Protestant Reformation. One of its rallying cries was "Christ alone"! Not the merits of saints dispensed by the Church, but the merits of Christ alone. Salvation does not come through honouring relics, paying for indulgences and relying on the imaginary merits of the saints, but through faith in *Christ alone*.

For Younger Readers

"Don't You Feel Lonely?"

A good minister was visiting some poor people one day in a city in Scotland. He went up some stairs and then many more stairs. He was looking for a poor old lady somebody told him about. And no one else seemed to know anything about her.

The minister found her in a room at the top of the building. He went into the room and looked around.

He saw a bed and a chair, and the old lady sitting in the chair. On a table sat a candle giving out a faint light. Although it was a winter evening, there was just a small fire burning in the fireplace. In the chair was the old lady he was looking for, and she had a large New Testament on her lap.

"What are you doing?" the minister asked her.

"I am reading", she told him.

"Don't you feel lonely?" he asked.

"No, no," she told him. She did not feel lonely.

So the minister then asked her: "What do you do here these long winter nights?"

"I just sit here," she told him, "with my light, and with my New Testament on my knees, talking with Jesus."

She was reading and praying. She was trusting in Jesus to take care of her.

So she did not feel lonely. She was one of God's children. And in the end, He would have taken her to be with Himself in heaven for ever.

For Junior Readers

What Jabez Asked in His Prayer

Have you heard of Jabez? There are only two verses about him in the whole Bible. They appear in a long list of names in 1 Chronicles, chapter 4. And what are we told about him? We are told that he was more honourable than his brothers and we are told that he prayed. More than that, we are told the words of his prayer:

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" Then we are told that "God granted him that which he requested". Was that not wonderful? God heard his prayer and gave him what he desired.

What about you? I hope you pray – and I hope you know that you can pray to God about any of your needs and concerns. I hope you know that you can pray for spiritual blessings and pray also about practical things in your daily life. Perhaps some of you are starting in a new school this month or moving to another class. Well, you can pray about that too!

"*Bless me indeed.*" That is a good petition to start with: to pray for God's blessing. If you look in the Bible you will find many different blessings that the Lord can give you. What about the Psalms? As you read through them, you can take note of the different blessings which the Psalmist prays for or refers to. Psalm 32 starts:

"O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned

All the transgression he hath done, whose sin is covered."

To have your sins forgiven would be a great blessing, would it not? So should you not pray for that?

Then in Psalm 40 we are told: "O blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies". So you can pray for faith in God, to be able to trust Him at all times and in all circumstances. That would be a wonderful blessing!

"Blessed are they in Thy house that dwell, they ever give Thee praise," the Psalmist says in Psalm 84. So to attend God's house, to sing His praises and to hear His Word preached is a very great blessing which you should really value. You should always pray that God would bless your soul when you go to church.

"*Keep me from evil*" – this is another short petition for you to pray

every day. There are many evils around us in this wicked world, but David tells us clearly in Psalm 37: "Depart from evil, and do good, and dwell for evermore." So how are you going to keep away from evil, from bad company, from doing things that are wrong? Well, we are told in Psalm 119:1:

"Blessed are they that undefiled, and straight are in the way;
Who in the Lord's most holy law do walk and do not stray."

To keep from evil is to obey God's commandments and follow the Bible, which tells us how we should live. Pray to be kept from straying in any direction from God's ways. There are so many temptations to do this in our day – but even in Bible times that was the case.

You can see that in Psalm 101, where the Psalmist makes a resolution:

"I will endure no wicked thing before mine eyes to be:
I hate their work that turn aside, it shall not cleave to me."

Will you not also resolve not to look at, or watch, anything sinful and to have a real hatred for sin in any form! Psalm 128 tells us: "Blessed is each one that fears the Lord, and walketh in his ways". If you are to keep away from evil, you must pray for God to bless you. Then you will be able to fear the Lord and to walk in His ways, however difficult that may seem!

Will you not pray like Jabez, and ask God every day, "Bless me indeed", and, "Keep me from evil"? *J van Kralingen*

What the Bible Says About Itself

1. Where Does Its Authority Lie?

Charles Hodge

This is the first article in another series taken, with editing, from *The Way of Life*.

Those who hear the gospel may doubt that it is really from God. They may have been taught from infancy to regard it as a revelation from God; and because they have no good reason to reject it, they submit to its claims in a general way. But there are times when they would gladly be more sure that the Bible is not a cunningly devised fable. They think that, if they were sure, they would at once submit to all the gospel demands.

Yet there is plenty evidence that the Scriptures have God's authority behind them; nor would these doubts be removed by any increase in that evidence. They have their origin in the state of the heart. No one can properly appreciate even the most important evidences of Christianity unless their heart is right in the sight of God. The same display of truth that produces clear conviction

in one mind leaves another in a state of unbelief. And the same mind often passes rapidly from a state of disbelief to one of faith, without any change in the outward evidence presented to it.

No amount of mere outward evidence can produce true faith. The Israelites had seen many wonders in Egypt; they had passed through the divided waters of the Red Sea; every day they received food from heaven by a miracle; they had trembled at what they saw of God's majesty on Mount Sinai. Yet within sight of that mountain, they made a golden calf and called it their god. Those who saw miracles performed by Christ, again and again, cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him". So He said that those who do not hear Moses and the prophets [through their writings in the Bible] would not be persuaded, even if someone would rise from the dead. So we may confidently conclude that those who now do not believe the gospel would not be persuaded, even if they had seen all the miracles which Christ performed.

It is important that the attention of the doubting should be directed to the fact that their lack of faith is the result of their own moral state, and not any defect in the evidence of the truth. "If our gospel be hid," says Paul, "it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ . . . should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:3,4).

If our moral sense was entirely destroyed by sin, we could not distinguish between right and wrong. If it is damaged, we will not see as true what *is* true in itself and what the pure in heart will see is true. Someone who has no proper sense of the evil of sin cannot believe in the justice of God. If his conscience is awakened, he is convinced at once; he does not need any further proof.

It is obvious that the Bible calls on all who read it to believe at once what it says. It may lie neglected in a philosopher's study, or in the chest of a sailor; or a missionary who does not yet know the language of the heathen to whom he has come may give it to one of them. But the moment the Bible is opened, it calmly states, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (Jn 3:36).

If this demand was confined to educated people, we might suppose it rests on evidence which only the educated can understand; or if it was made only by ministers, we might suppose it rests on their authority; but it is not so. The Word of God has as much authority when it is read by a child to a company of heathen as when it is proclaimed in a church. But if this demand for faith goes everywhere with the Bible, it must rest on evidence contained in the Word itself.

There are two obvious reasons why we cannot use other people's testimony to the truth of Christianity as the ground for faith. (1) It is not extensive enough. Many are required to believe who do not hear the testimony of Christian believers. (2) It is not sufficient. There is no way of justifying the demand which the Bible makes with authority, on everyone, to believe – unless we admit that it contains within itself what proves that God gave it.

It may not be easy, or perhaps possible, to demonstrate the nature of this proof to those who claim not to see it. But enough may be said to show that it is a reasonable ground for full confidence. Every work bears the mark of its maker. It is hard for one man successfully to forge the work of another. Is it surprising then that the works of God should show His mark – one that cannot be imitated? Do the heavens not declare His glory? Does the body of an insect not as clearly show the workmanship of God? Why then should it be thought incredible that His Word should contain evidence of its divine origin?

The Lawyer and the Bible

He was a well-known, successful lawyer. But he had never read the Bible; he doubted that it was really the Word of God.

The lawyer asked a Christian friend to recommend to him some books that would take away his doubts. He wanted to be sure that the Bible truly is what it claims to be.

His friend's answer was: "Read the Bible itself".

The lawyer assumed that his friend had not understood his question and explained that he wanted books that would say something about the Bible.

"No," replied his friend, "I will not send you to other books. Read the Bible for yourself."

When the lawyer had a Bible, he asked his friend: "Where shall I begin?"

The answer was: "Begin at the beginning and read it through."

This is what the lawyer did. His friend kept visiting him and was glad to know that he was continuing to read God's Book. One day his friend found him full of thought, walking up and down in his room. He asked what was occupying the lawyer's attention so completely.

"I have been reading the moral law in the Book of Exodus," he explained.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"I have been trying whether I can add anything to it, but I can't. And I have considered whether there is anything that can be taken from it, and I can't. It is perfect."

The Bible had spoken for itself. Let *us* always be ready to listen to it.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2016-17

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Looking Around Us

Thinking Ahead

The Isle of Skye is one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland. So lots of people wish to visit the island and see its sights for themselves. But in the height of summer, the number of visitors looking for accommodation is greater than the number of beds available, and police are appealing to those who expect to spend a night there to book in advance so that they will have somewhere to stay.

Let us note a couple of spiritual lessons. First, we must think ahead about eternity. Will we have a place ready for us in heaven when we leave this world? We must seek the Lord while He may be found (see Isaiah 55:6). Too many find, when it is too late, that there is no place for them in heaven.

Second, Christ will never turn away a sinner who is seeking Him. The message that His servants (ministers) are to give must always be: “Yet there is room” (Luke 14:22). Christ will never turn anyone away.

Feeding Hungry Young Minds

Beside the article on Skye, in *The Herald*, from which the information came for the previous note, was a small piece quoting an actor campaigning to have the Leith Theatre (in Edinburgh) re-opened. He claims, “I know Leith Theatre has great potential to foster and feed the hungry young minds of the city”.

Just now shops are clearing off their shelves sandwiches containing eggs which may contain small amounts of a substance used illegally to get rid of insect pests on hen farms. Yet the risk of damage to one’s health seems to be very small indeed.

But there is a significant risk to one’s moral well-being from theatres and the plays that are performed in them. There will often be bad language, immoral behaviour, a thoroughly secular outlook and more. None of this is good for those – all of us – who are making our way towards eternity. But the danger is rarely recognised. The same danger also exists in drama that is broadcast on TV, or shown in cinemas, on DVDs or on the internet. The danger from acting out wickedness is real; it is far more serious than anything that causes danger to our bodies; it damages souls and that may have eternal consequences.

What is needed to feed hungry young minds, and old minds, in Edinburgh and elsewhere? The Bible directs us to “the sincere [pure] milk of the Word, that [we] may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). In contrast with drama, the Bible gives a right perspective on life; it shows us, by giving us commandments and showing us examples of people who lived godly lives and others who lived evil lives. It shows what is the wise way to live in this world – to the glory of God. Especially it shows us how to prepare for eternity.

No one suggests that the Bible should be our only reading matter, but to read the Bible is necessary. With God’s blessing, it can indeed feed the soul. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. . . . The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. . . . Moreover by them is Thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7-11).

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