

# The Young People's Magazine

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**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland  
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

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*“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*



***July 2018***

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**Cover Picture:** Baobab trees in Madagascar (iStockphoto). See page 135.

## The Young People's Magazine

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# The Young People's Magazine

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## The Wolf and the Lamb

**I**t is a remarkable statement: “The wolf . . . shall dwell with the lamb” (Isaiah 11:6). They seem to be most unlikely companions. You would expect that, if the wolf came near the lamb, it would make the lamb its next meal. Yet the passage in Isaiah goes on: “The leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den” (verses 6-8).

Perhaps the scene reminds you of the pictures that appear on tracts and magazines published by the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses. But notice something that follows on from these verses: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain”. But what is God’s holy mountain? It refers to Mount Zion, where the temple was built. It was at the centre of the worship of God. Thus God’s “holy mountain” represents the Church of God; so what is said about, for instance, a leopard lying down with a young goat describes something that happens in the Church of God. So the pictures of lions and lambs and other animals along with happy human families miss the point. The real point is God’s power to change the nature of men and women, boys and girls who are enemies of God, and to make them the friends of those who are already His followers.

Think of Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. Wolf that he then was, he left Jerusalem for Damascus “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1); he intended to arrest them and “bring them bound unto Jerusalem”. Indeed he is described as making “havoc of the Church” (Acts 8:3). The followers of Jesus would have been as much afraid of him as of a lion, a leopard or a bear.

Yet by the time Saul reached Damascus, his nature had been changed and he could no longer be compared with these animals. He was no longer dangerous. Somewhere on his journey, the risen Christ met him and stopped him in his tracks. The Saviour spoke to him and convinced him of his great

sin in persecuting the followers of Christ, His lambs. The Holy Spirit was powerfully applying the words of Jesus to Saul's soul.

What is more, the Saviour brought Saul to understand that He was the Messiah – that is, the Christ (for the two words mean exactly the same thing). Saul was expecting the Messiah to come in the future, but in fact He had already come and Saul was rejecting Him. It was a very serious sin. What tremendous power was needed to change Saul from a wolf into a lamb, from a leopard into a kid! And that power could be nothing less than God's power. Now that change had taken place in his heart and life.

God spoke to one of his lambs in Damascus – his name was Ananias – and told him to visit Saul in a house on the street called Straight. Ananias was afraid; he told the Lord that he had heard from many people about "this man". He pointed out "how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem", and he knew that Saul was coming to Damascus like a wolf to arrest as many lambs as possible. But the Lord assured Ananias that He was going to use Saul as a preacher of the gospel.

And to show that the lambs could now lie down safely with Saul, the Lord told Ananias that the persecutor was now praying. He was not praying like the Pharisee he used to be, but as a follower of Christ. This was evidence that he now had a new nature – that he was no longer a lion but had become a lamb, one of Christ's sheep. Now, instead of Christ's followers wanting to get as far away as possible from this dangerous wolf, they would consider it a privilege to be in Saul's company and have fellowship with him. They would thoroughly enjoy talking with him about the wonderful truths of the gospel, the good news about Christ as the Saviour of sinners.

Let us now think about Manasseh, that wicked King of Judah. In some ways, he was an even more furious, dangerous wolf or leopard than Saul of Tarsus. We read that "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 21:16). He was a mass murderer and, besides his own sin, he was guilty of making other people sin. It was a very dangerous way to behave, for himself and for others. His sin is even described as being worse than that of the heathen. And when God spoke to this wicked King, he would not listen.

Manasseh was so rebellious that God brought him into very difficult circumstances. Because the King and his people would not listen, "the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon" (2 Chronicles 33:11). There God exercised His power; He gave Manasseh a new nature, changing him from a lion into a lamb. "When

he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him”.

Like Saul of Tarsus, Manasseh would, throughout the rest of his life, have continued to pray sincerely to the true God; he would no longer have worshipped idols. Now Manasseh’s wolf-like and lion-like fierceness would disappear, and a little child could lead him. It is not impossible to think of Manasseh, after his conversion, asking a child for an answer to some spiritual question and accepting the child’s explanation.

In any case, children were not in danger from Manasseh encouraging them to worship false gods after his conversion. One picture we have in Isaiah 11 is of a little child playing safely where a poisonous snake might appear at any moment – but the snake is no longer poisonous; the little boy or girl is now in no danger of being bitten by the snake. Similarly a little child in contact with Saul of Tarsus was in no danger of being given wrong ideas about Jesus of Nazareth, after Saul recognised Him as the true Messiah and began to love Him and serve Him.

So today many people will teach children, older and younger, false ideas about religion – denying that the Bible is true, denying its teachings about creation, sin, and salvation through Jesus Christ, and denying the relevance of most of the Ten Commandments. But when, for instance, a Jehovah’s Witness is truly converted, he will give up his dangerous ideas about Jesus; he will no longer deny that Jesus is truly God; so a little child can be safely in that person’s company, listening to what he has to say about the Bible.

This is also true when someone turns sincerely from Roman Catholic ideas about the mass, about purgatory, about salvation through good works, or about prayer being sent up to God through saints. It is also true when somebody turns sincerely from a false religion. And it is true when someone turns sincerely from denying religion altogether, from thinking that people can live a satisfactory life without any thought of God as their Creator, although they are duty bound to trust, worship and obey Him.

Can we expect such wonderful conversions to take place today? Of course we can. God still has the same power as He had in Bible times. But we are also to look for a special time of worldwide blessing; such a time is described in these terms in Isaiah 11:9: “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” – when great numbers of people in every part of the world will know the Lord, trust in Him, worship Him and obey Him, when great numbers of lions will lie down safely with lambs.

But do *you* trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you seek to obey Him and worship Him sincerely? He tells you: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

*For Junior Readers*

## Alan and Robert

**F**or Alan and Robert, it was nearly the end of their journey through life. They had known each other when they were young. In fact, Robert used to work in Alan's successful business. But Robert was a Christian and he had left the business to serve Christ. He was now facing death with peace of mind; he was trusting in his Saviour: the One who had come into this world "to seek and to save that which was lost".

Alan was now a millionaire – he had lots and lots of money. But do you think that made him happy? No, far from it – his life had been taken up with work and making money. But he was not saved! When Robert's daughter visited him, he spoke to her of his feelings: "You may wonder", Alan told her, "why I cannot be as happy and peaceful as your father. But just think of the difference between us! He is going to his treasure, but I – I must leave mine behind."

Who does Alan remind you of in the Bible? What about the rich man who Jesus spoke about in Luke chapter 16? He enjoyed the good things of this life – a grand house, expensive clothes and plenty food. At the gate of his property lay Lazarus, a poor beggar. He had none of these good things, he even had to beg for scraps from the rich man's feasts to eat.

But what happened to them at the end of their journey in this life? The man who was rich in this life went to a lost eternity. Jesus said, "In hell he lift up his eyes being in torments". In contrast, poor Lazarus was taken to heaven. He joined all those other people of God, who are described in the Book of Revelation: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb . . . they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes".

Should this not teach you what is most important for you as you set out in life? Jesus clearly explained in His sermon on the mount: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also". Pray that you would not be one of those who, like Alan, "have their portion in this life" (Psalm 17:14), not in heaven. So he had to leave his treasure behind when he died.

Instead, Jesus calls you: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [the food and drink and clothes that you

need] shall be added unto you.” Robert had obeyed this call; so, when he died, he went to receive his treasure in heaven. *J van Kralingen*

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# Challenges in a Godless World

## 7. A Fruitful Challenge

*Matthew Vogan*

Last month’s section of this Youth Conference paper spoke of the futile challenge we face today from secularism. The article stated, “We might be tempted to think that this constant, total, subtle challenge is unstoppable but in fact it contains the seeds of its own destruction. Such moral lawlessness and the absence of shared values cannot provide any society with sufficient stability.”

We have seen how the challenge of a godless and secular society is oppressive to the Church. Yet this opposition can also be a fruitful challenge. It challenges the Church to maintain its identity, know its purpose and believe the message it has received – and to do so more firmly than ever. If we keep our identity and know what we believe, we will also be in a position to help those who see the emptiness of secularism and that it is in danger of destroying itself.

It can be extremely sad to hear how individuals have been entirely cheated by its false promises. One documentary interviewed a woman who had been encouraged to think of herself as a man and to change her body through surgery. She was now full of regrets and depression. Her life had been ruined as well as her body. She made the painfully-sad reflection that she could now see that she actually had been an attractive female.

Scripture requires us to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Every single word of that verse ought to be weighed carefully. Peter is speaking in general – not just to ministers or particular individuals, but to all those who name the name of Christ. We must be God-centred in our hearts and have the fear of God uppermost. We must also be ready to speak – that is to know clearly what we believe, why we believe it, and how it is plainly taught in Scripture. True readiness also means praying for opportunities, so that we are ready for them when they are provided by God.

There is “a time to speak”. Be ready “*always*”, believers are told, because they do not know when such opportunities will arise. They ought to know why they have “the hope” in them. They ought to be able to communicate that with meekness and fear, which of course is the opposite of being

aggressive and proud. Believers have something to offer those who have nothing with which to make proper sense of the world in which they live. Those of you who are in university may well find that you will never find people as open and ready to talk about these things as they are now.

Let us look again at the initials T-A-K-E-S. In the article in the March issue, we saw how everyone has views and assumptions about life and its meaning, about God and man. We will see this time what it takes to give an answer to those who ask it from us. This is what it takes to have a biblical understanding of the world in which we live. If you have learned *The Shorter Catechism*, you know all these things well. That is vitally important but they must also become real in our own experience.

The T in TAKES stands for Theology, what we believe about God. This is not merely believing that God exists, but believing in the triune, personal, infinite, sovereign God revealed in Scripture. Above all, believing in God in Christ. Are you united to Christ by faith? Are you among the children of the living God?

The A in TAKES stands for Anthropology, or our view of man. We need to view mankind according to biblical revelation. This is mankind made in the image of God – given a unique dignity and significance that sets us apart from animals. “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps 8:4-5). We are not biological machines governed by mere random chance; we have been created in the image of God. But we need to remember that we are also fallen creatures, dead in trespasses and sins, and in need of new spiritual life. In this work of grace “we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God” (*Shorter Catechism*, Answer 35).

The K in TAKES is Knowledge. Scripture is the sufficient revelation of what we need to know about God, ourselves, our duty, and the world in which we live. We need, not only to know the Scriptures, but also experience the power of God together with them, so that we love them.

The E in TAKES is Ethics. God’s absolute values are clearly revealed in His Word, especially summarised in the Ten Commandments. He has made us moral creatures, to obey His will. Without this we only have the baseless, changing and changeable opinions of men concerning what is right and wrong.

The S in TAKES stands for Salvation. The only true and real, everlasting salvation is salvation from sin through the finished redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by grace alone, through Christ alone, and received by faith alone. Whatever else we may have, without this we are ruined and self-destroyed.



In a very brief way, this set of initials sketches out for us a full and orderly view of reality that is consistent with the way that God has made us and with everything else. It is a view of reality that is fully satisfying to the mind and heart. It provides reliable meaning for our lives in this world and in view of the world to come. It is not merely intellectual but spiritual.

The Church in our day needs to be able to give such an answer to sinners who are destroying themselves. We need prayerfully to seek opportunities where we can engage such needy souls with the reason for the hope that is in us. Of course we must do this faithfully and without compromise. Many are looking to man-made methods because they have lost confidence in the fullness and the power of God's Word.

"We do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

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## What the Bible Says About Itself

### 6. More Prophecies About Christ

*Charles Hodge*

Last month's article spoke of the Old Testament prophecies about Christ, beginning in the Garden of Eden. He was to come through the line of David; He was to be a Prophet, a Priest and a King. And His kingdom was to extend to the whole world. This series is taken, with editing, from *The Way of Life*.

**T**hough the prophets describe in strong language the excellence, glory and triumph of this Redeemer, they also distinctly predicted His rejection, sufferings and death. "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground . . . He is despised and rejected of men . . . we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isaiah 53:1-3).

The people in Israel, it was foretold, would not only reject Christ, but betray Him and sell Him for 30 pieces of silver. "If ye think good, give Me My price, and if not, forbear. So they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto Me, Cast it unto the potter, a goodly price at which I was prized at of them" (Zechariah 11:12,13). He was to be grievously persecuted and put to death. "He was", said the prophet, "taken from prison and from judgement [cut off by an oppressive judgement]: and who shall

declare His generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of My people was He stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death" (Isaiah 53:8,9).

Even the way Christ died was foretold in detail. "They pierced My hands and My feet. . . . They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture" (Psalm 22:16,18). But He was not to continue under the power of death. "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer Thy holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10).

The consequences to the Jewish people of rejecting the Messiah were also predicted distinctly. "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image . . . . Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord . . . and His goodness in the latter days" (Hosea 3:4,5). "Though Thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return" (Isaiah 10:22).

Of the rebellious portion of the nation it was said, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other . . . and among those nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the soul of thy foot have rest . . . ." (Deuteronomy 28:64-66). Though thus scattered and afflicted, they were not to be utterly destroyed, for God promised, "When they be in the land of their enemies I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God" (Leviticus 26:44).

Another prophecy states that, after a long dispersion, they would be brought to acknowledge their crucified king. "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). This same prophet foretold that, after the people had rejected and betrayed the Good Shepherd, they should suffer oppression from their enemies. Most of them would be destroyed, but the rest of them would be restored after a long time of suffering.

We have only quoted a very small part of what the prophecies of the Old Testament say about Christ and His kingdom. It would be impossible to say everything without explaining the whole Old Testament. It is not just in separate predictions that the Old Testament pointed forward. Its main purpose was to prepare the Jews and the whole world for the coming of Christ. It was to represent faintly the glories of the New Testament age, so that people who lived before then would have an object of faith and hope.

Separate passages from such a scheme of history and prophecy are like

the scattered ruins of an ancient temple. To understand it properly, the plan must be viewed as a whole. It can then be seen that the history of the Jews was the history of the line from which Christ came; that the sacrifices pointed to the Lamb of God, who was to bear away the sin of the world; that the tabernacle and the temple, with their complicated services, pointed to spiritual and heavenly things; that the prophets, who taught and corrected the people, were sent mainly to keep the eyes of the people directed upward and onward to the great Deliverer and the final redemption. Short passages on their own cannot give a sufficient idea of this great scheme of preparation and prophecy, running through thousands of years, and its lines all pointing to one common centre – the *cross of Christ*.

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## The Wind Fulfilling God's Purpose

This article is taken from *Cheering Words*, with slight editing. It is not said who wrote it or where the incidents took place, or when.

One evening a Jewish convert to Christianity came to me at the end of our evening meeting asking me to call at his house to talk with his wife. He thought I could perhaps persuade her to give up her prejudice against Christianity in general and the New Testament in particular. He was troubled very much, for when she saw him reading the New Testament, she snatched it away from his hands and threw it in the fire.

Next morning I prayed to the Lord specially for that Jewish family and afterwards went to their house. When I sat down I noticed there, lying on the table, a special prayer book for the Day of Atonement. I took that book in my hand and turned to the page which contains the following: "Our Messiah turned away from us; we trembled, for we have none to make us righteous . . . but He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities . . ." (It gives nearly the whole of Isaiah 53). Then at the close it says: "O Lord, create Him anew and send Him the second time to gather us to the Mount Zion. Amen!"

I called his wife to the table and read it to her, but she was astonished to find this in her own prayer book – which, holy as she believed it to be, yet contained one of the main Christian doctrines. I was disappointed in my effort, in spite of my strong hope for success, for the woman began to curse the hand that wrote this page in the holy book. "A Jew", she said "could not have written such a thing, but most likely some apostate put it there." After quite a talk I left the house and took courage in the Lord and said: "O Lord, lift up Thyself because of the rage of mine enemies."

And now, behold, I must praise Him for His marvellous ways, for my labour, even with that spiritually-blind woman, was not in vain. At my next meeting I happened to tell the audience this story. There was someone present just as blind and ignorant as that poor woman. After he left the meeting, on his way home, he talked with some other Jews about the subject and said, "Well, if I could see what that prayer is printed on coming right down from heaven, then I would believe it, but not until then".

As he went home, he passed by the house where that woman lived. The husband was just sitting and arguing with his wife, in the hope that she might believe in Christ. He started to read to her that portion from the prayer book. In her anger she seized the book, tore out the leaf containing that prayer about the Messiah, opened the window and cried, "Down with it!"

He that gathers the wind in His fists, even He, caused a strong east wind to catch this leaf and carry it wonderfully right down to the Jew passing by (who only a few minutes before had said that he would never believe it unless it came right down from heaven). It just blew against his eyes and covered his face. The Jew was surprised, seized the page, unfolded it, and read it carefully, and behold, this is the page coming from heaven! Although at first inclined to look on it as a natural coincidence, he gradually came to see it as the hand of God stretched out to convince him of his unbelief. Then he was able to say, "I believe that the Lord Jesus is our Redeemer and the Messiah".

On hearing him relate this story I once more visited the woman and learned from her how she had in anger torn out and thrown away the leaf. This gave me an opportunity to tell her again of the wondrous doings of the Saviour. She was filled with amazement and has begun to attend our meetings.

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## Justification

### 5. God Accepting Sinners by Faith Alone

*Rev Roderick Macleod*

Last month's part of this Youth Conference paper was about God pardoning sin. This final article looks at the last three phrases in the *Shorter Catechism* answer on justification.

**5.** *"Accepteth us as righteous in His sight."* There are two parts in the justification of sinners. The first is the gracious pardon of all our sins. God says, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me" (Jer 33:8). The other part of justification is God graciously accepting the sinner who is

united to Christ “as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to [him] and received by faith alone”.

Paul spoke highly of the grace of God which receives sinners – writing of the “praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6,7). The pardon of sin we have already considered. Here we consider God accepting “us as righteous in His sight”.

In extraordinary circumstances, a king might grant a royal pardon to a criminal who is justly condemned to die. But he will not accept him as righteous in his sight, neither will set him among his princes, much less take him into the number of his children and make him an heir of all he possesses. But God, seeing sinners stand in the righteousness of Christ, not only pardons them, He rewards them according to the merit of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them – that is, the righteousness put to their account.

When He says, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Corinthians 6:16), He engages everything He is and everything He has to ensure their eternal happiness. His infinity becomes the boundlessness of their blessedness; His eternity shows how long it will last; and His unchangeableness becomes the security of it. Well might Paul exclaim, “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:8,9).

**6. “Only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us”.** Those who discard the Bible say that it is impossible to think of God being infinitely just in dealing with someone’s sins and, at the same time, infinitely merciful in dealing with the person who has sinned. Indeed it is true and reasonable to say that God cannot accept a righteousness which is described as “dung” (Philippians 3:8,9) and “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), as the ground of anyone’s justification. The Bible alone supplies the light we need when it says that, when God accepts sinners, they are “accepted in the Beloved”.

The doctrines of the righteousness of Christ and the imputation of it to sinners for their justification have been considered before, and I will not go over them again. Only remember that God will never justify a sinner without a perfect righteousness. The sole ground on which we can be justified is that the righteousness of Another is imputed to us, or put on our account. This is the great theme of the Bible: the glory of God in the justification of sinners because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.

**7. “Received by faith alone”.** There are three things here: (1.) It is received; (2.) It is received by faith; (3.) It is received by faith alone.

(1.) *It is received.* We do not say to a kind person who offers us a gift, How much must I pay you for this gift? No. A gift is freely given and it must be freely received. Christ's righteousness cannot be bought with money, nor earned by merit. It is freely offered to us sinners in the gospel; we must be justified by faith and not by merit.

In Romans 5:12-21 Paul shows that condemnation came by Adam, but justification came by Jesus Christ. This is called "the gift", "the free gift", "the gift by grace", "the abundance of grace" and "the gift of righteousness" (verses 15-17). It follows that this great gift must be received freely by sinners "without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

(2) *It is received by faith.* Is this righteousness imputed to all sinners then? No. This justifying righteousness is freely offered to sinners of all kinds, but it is imputed only to those who, by the grace of God, receive it. It is received by faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Faith believes testimony. Justifying faith believes the whole Bible, and believes that the whole Bible – and nothing else – is the Word of God. It is clear that not every kind of faith is saving faith. We read of faith performing miracles, but we are warned that is not sure evidence that someone has saving faith (Matthew 7:22,23). The Lord also spoke of a temporary faith (Matthew 13:21), but we are warned that it has no living root in Christ or true union to Him. James tells us that the "devils also believe" (James 2:19) – that is, they give a reluctant assent in their minds to the truth that there is one God.

What then is the faith that receives "the abundant grace" in the "gift of righteousness"? In his sermons at Corinth, Paul held forth the particular object of the faith which justifies: "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). This is what justifying faith receives. As many as have the faith which receives Jesus Christ and Him crucified, God accepts them as righteous in His sight, pardoning all their sins. I think it is important today to say that faith rests, not on the promise alone, but on Christ in the promise. One Puritan writer says, "Promises are dead branches [if] severed from Christ". The same preacher says, "Saving faith is that act of the soul whereby it rests on Christ crucified for pardon and life" because of "the warrant of the promise".

(3.) *It is received by faith alone.* Paul labours to move men away from the idea that we must bring something of our own to God before we can be justified. He labours to show that looking to our own merit is against "the grace of God that bringeth salvation", and depending on good works is against faith in Christ's finished work. Therefore *The Shorter Catechism* says that Christ's justifying righteousness is "received by faith alone".

**Conclusion.** We have viewed justification in a doctrinal way to emphasise such things as these: that justification is an act, not a process; that one's justification is grounded entirely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ as imputed to us, and not at all on what we can do, which the Bible compares with filthy rags; that it is all of God's grace towards those who are in themselves miserable sinners unworthy of the least favour from the God they have vilely offended.

Our great need is to be sure that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Seek with all your heart to make sure of this. Our seeking will not save us, but it is by seeking that we shall find. God tells us: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6,7).

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*For Younger Readers*

## A Few Words of David

Mr Ellis was a missionary in Madagascar, a very large island near Africa. One night, two men came to visit him after walking 100 miles. Have you the Bible? he asked them.

"We have seen it and heard it read," one of the men said, "but we have only some of the words of David. They do not belong to us; they belong to the whole family."

"Have you the words of David with you now?" Mr Ellis asked.

One of the men put his hand under his clothes and brought out a roll of cloth. He unrolled it and took out a few old, torn pages of the Psalms, from the Bible. So many people had read them so many times that they were almost worn out.

Then Mr Ellis asked, "Have you ever seen the words of Jesus or John or Paul or Peter?"

"Yes," they said, "we have seen and heard them, but we have never owned them."

Mr Ellis showed the men a copy of the New Testament with the Psalms. He said, "If you will give me your few words of David, I will give you all his words and all the words of Jesus and John and Paul and Peter besides".

The men were very happy, but they wanted to see if their words of David were the same as those in the book. Of course they were. Then they went away home with their wonderful book. I hope you will love the Bible too.

## Saul's Disobedience

*W S Plumer*

Taken, with editing, from *Short Sermons for the People*. The text was 1 Samuel 15:14: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Saul had been sent against the Amalekites, to punish that people for their sins. He was ordered to spare nothing: neither an ox or a sheep, a camel or an ass. He hastened to obey. With an army of 210 000 men he invaded their country. He was fully successful. But he spared the wicked king and the best of the sheep, of the oxen, of the fatlings, of the lambs and all that was good. He just destroyed what he despised and what was worthless.

Of course God knew this error and sent Samuel to him. As the prophet approached, Saul said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord". And Samuel said, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Like other hypocrites, Saul could put in some sort of a plea. He said he had found the sheep and oxen very good and thought he would save some of them to sacrifice to the Lord. But Samuel said, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king."

Thus we see that one may make solemn professions of obedience to God and may in some things obey Him, while rejecting His clear commands. Saul was not the last who did such a thing. Some dark sign hangs over many a religious profession. It is not idle to ask a question.

***1. How does it come about that people can live in sin and yet talk smoothly and make fine promises?*** This is a fair question. It can be answered. Similarly one might ask: Why was Saul not convicted by the sight of the sheep and oxen? How can sin rest on the conscience and people not see it?

(1.) One reason why many sin so easily is that they do not know God's law – at least they do not think about it as they should. They forget God's commands, and so they do not condemn themselves. Few have a constant sense of the truth that God's eye is on them and that His law binds them by day and by night, at home and away from home. They are not in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Their minds do not turn to the Most High. They think, speak and act carelessly, because "God is not in all their thoughts".

He that has slight thoughts of sin never had great thoughts of God. A proper sense of God's presence and of the binding force of His law would prevent us sinning in the careless way so common today. Many seem to look



on God's law as mere advice, which they can take or not, just as they please; whereas it is an unbending rule. If God reveals His will in anything, we are as truly bound in the smallest as in the greatest matters. We are not to change His laws. We are not judges, but servants. Our simple duty is to obey. Many choose how far they will keep the commandments. Like Saul, they kill the worthless animals, but they save those that seem good.

(2.) Some live quietly in sin because they see others going on in a wrong course. As a king, Saul had full command of the army; yet he partly blamed others for his sins. He said, "I feared the people, and obeyed their voice". The encouragement which one sinner gives another has great power. Many a man has no safer rule than this: "It is the fashion; it is the custom". But even if all men forsake their duty, that will not excuse us. Bad company is a great source of temptation. But it cannot make wrong right. The presence of Samuel made Saul talk very piously. His mouth was full of good words. The absence of Samuel and the presence of wicked men made him careless about sinning.

(3.) Others are kept quiet in sin by a vain hope or a vague intention of future repentance. Wise people never buy or sell lands, take journeys, or do anything if they expect to be sorry for it. But thousands would be wretched if they thought they would never turn from their present sins. Perhaps they think they will be able to repent at any moment. But repentance is a gift of God. And they do not know how very hard their hearts now are. Saul said, "I have sinned", but he never truly repented.

(4.) Some are thoughtless in their sins, because they think it will be easy to obtain pardon in the future. This is to tempt God. It is to rely on God's mercy when there is no warrant for doing so. God says, If any man "hear the words of this curse [and] bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him" (Deuteronomy 29:19,20). God is indeed merciful, but He is no less just. "God is not mocked." He will not allow people to trifle with Him. Though God is merciful, despisers wonder and perish.

(5.) So vile is the heart of man that it perverts all the mercies of God to support a false quiet. Long life, firm health and much prosperity are abused to the worst ends. People say, We shall never be moved. "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Often nothing can shake this blind confidence until it is too late. The man who will not cry for mercy when all is going on well will not plead in faith for grace in the day of distress.

**2. God is kind when He holds us back from rebelling against Him.** Some restraints are common to good people and bad people; some are special to

good people. God is able to put His hand on the heart of any of His creatures. Even Satan can go no farther than God permits. If God put no restraints on bad people, they would be much worse than they are. If He did not hold back good people, they would go astray all the time. David was very glad when God held him back from shedding Nabal's blood (1 Samuel 25:32,33). God sometimes restrains us by the advice of others. Sometimes He gives great power to conscience and makes it a terror to evil-doing. The sting of death is sin. Some have such sorrow and distress for past sins that they dare not repeat them. Then the law comes with great power and stands with a drawn sword, as the angel did in the path of Balaam the prophet.

Sometimes God keeps back what is necessary if we are to act out the evil that is in us. Some wish to be proud and enjoy luxury; in mercy God keeps them poor. Some would be drunken, but God takes away the love of strong drink through disease. Men would be lazy, but God compels them to exert themselves. People are bent on one thing, and God gives them a call in another direction. Saul was ready to pounce upon David, and the news came that he must hasten away against the Philistines.

In other ways also God restrains His people. He puts a godly fear within them. He leads them to hate sin. He subdues their iniquities under them. He stirs them up to fervent prayer. The Holy Spirit is a Sanctifier as well as a Comforter. So no renewed man makes a trade of sin. He hates vain thoughts. He delights in the law of God after the inner man. When tempted, he asks, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

**Conclusions.** 1. All high ideas of our own strength or holiness are vain and false. They have no basis in truth. Because they deny the truth of God, they are wicked. Better people than any of us can claim to be have gone out of the way completely, when left to themselves. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." In other things he may be wise, but in this he is a fool. "When pride cometh, then cometh shame."

2. Let everyone look at his own state, search his life and speech and heart, to see if there is any dark sign there. Saul said he had performed the commandment of the Lord, but the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen all around showed his guilt. Unless someone considers sin to be his greatest burden, sorrow and trouble He is no true believer. Do you love Christ? Does your life prove it? Is your speech sound, seasoned with grace? Are you just? Are you kind? Why are you not a better Christian?

3. As far as people are under the power of sin, they are under the power of madness. You have a great work to do, and only a little time to do it in. The guilt of one sin is a greater misery than the burden of a thousand crosses. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God."

# Looking Around Us

## God is No Man's Debtor

In the June issue of *Evangelical Times*, Christopher Baxter writes about his fiancée's father and the garage he planned to build. The father came to an arrangement with the Mobil Oil Company, who agreed to provide a 15-year loan which would pay for building and setting up the garage, provided he would only sell Mobil petrol and oils.

The agreement worked well for 10 years, but then Christopher's father-in-law, as he now was, took a severe stroke, which meant that he was no longer able to work. So Christopher had to take over the administration of the business. Every part of the business was successful, but there was one big problem: to keep the business profitable, it was necessary to sell a large amount of petrol, and up till then the petrol pumps had been operating seven days a week. It seemed obvious that if the petrol pumps were closed on Sabbaths, the garage would sell much less petrol and the business would bring in a lot less money. This would create a huge difficulty – especially because Sabbath was the busiest day of the week.

But Christopher was in no doubt where his duty lay: he must keep the petrol pumps closed on what he knew was the Lord's day, a day that was not to be used for what could be done on some other day. His father-in-law was very concerned about what would happen, but Christopher believed God's promise: "Them that honour me I will honour" (1 Samuel 2:30).

So what happened? Did it turn out to be a disastrous decision to cut down on the number of days on which petrol was sold? Absolutely not. The amount of petrol sold did not change; customers came to buy either on the previous Saturday or the next Monday instead of on Sabbath. This meant that the business took in just as much money as before, but the expenses were less – staff costs were lower, as were the costs of heating and lighting the premises. So the result of closing on Sabbaths was good for the business; more profit was made.

When the 15 years were up and the loan had been paid off, the business was sold. The new owners began to sell petrol again on Sabbaths (as well as opening for longer hours on weekdays). In fact, their decision meant that, over the next year, costs increased and profits went down. Christopher was right to conclude that "God is no man's debtor".

Many young people, as well as those who are older, will find many difficulties about Sabbath work. They may feel that they are faced with impossible choices: that they must work on Sabbaths, at least occasionally, or else find themselves out of a job. The problem is real, yet let them commit

their ways to the Lord, who is able to provide for them, even if it means that they lose their present employment. Yes, people may undertake works of necessity and mercy on a Sabbath – nurses and doctors, for instance – but it is not everything that an employer might describe as necessary that is really so in the sight of God, and that is what really matters.

### **The Danger of Falling**

Najib Razak was the Prime Minister of Malaysia until recently; he was defeated in a general election. Soon after his defeat, police in Malaysia reopened an investigation into the disappearance of huge amounts of money from a government fund. They seized hundreds of boxes of luxury items and handbags full of foreign money from properties linked to Razak and his wife. Items seized include 284 boxes of designer handbags and 72 bags of cash, jewellery and watches. It is pointed out that Razak's yearly salary was \$70 000, while one handbag might cost up to \$300 000.

If he is convicted of dishonesty, the ex-Prime Minister is likely to face a long period in prison. He would then have experienced a huge downfall in a short period of time. He occupied a high position for many years, and he would then be brought very low.

Something similar happens to many people – though normally, in this world, on a very different scale. People may lose their desirable job and find life very difficult in a number of ways. Or after enjoying good health for many years, they become seriously ill. How good it then is to be able to cast all one's cares upon the Lord, who is able to supply all our needs!

But think of the sinner who has always ignored God, and the Scriptures in which He has revealed Himself, and who is suddenly called from this world into eternity. How far such a person has fallen! Or think of the sinner who knew about God, was familiar with the Bible, and often listened to the preaching of the gospel, but did not believe in the Saviour. How much farther such a person has to fall! Paul warns, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

How necessary for us to be serious about our souls and obey the call, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). How necessary also to obey the call, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). How necessary too to "give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall *never fall*" (2 Peter 1:10). All will then be well in the end, especially in eternity.

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