

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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Micah and His Priest

The Book of Judges contains much sad reading: it is a record of the people of Israel going away from God into the ways of sin, especially the sin of idolatry. They did so again and again. The Book itself describes more than once, in just a few words, what was fundamentally wrong: “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). They did not think about what God was telling them; they did not think whether what they did was right or wrong, good or bad; they just did what suited them best, what they thought was likely to make them happiest.

These words from Judges are also a very good description of how most people live today: they reject God; they ignore the Bible; they assume it has nothing relevant to say to those who live in the twenty-first century.

The Book of Judges tells us about a man called Micah (not God’s prophet who wrote the Book of Micah). This Micah had some images in his house and some other religious objects, and he set apart his son to be his priest. He was paying no attention to the commands that God had given to Israel about how they should worship Him.

Then a young man came to Micah’s house who was a Levite – the tribe that God had set apart to take part in the worship of God at the tabernacle, where sacrifices were offered. Yet it was the descendants of Aaron who, God said, were to be set apart as priests; they were the only men who were to offer up sacrifices to God for the people of Israel. But Micah’s son was not a descendant of Aaron; Micah and his son did not even belong to the tribe of Levi. Now Micah decided that he could have a better priest than his son; he made an arrangement with the Levite who came his way, and set him apart to be his priest. Then he said, “Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest” (Judges 17:13).

How wrong Micah was! He was following his own thinking, not paying attention to what God had revealed in Scripture. For one thing, God had said in the Second Commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Exodus 20:4), and Micah had a graven image. He was disobeying God, because he was assuming what he had no right to assume: that he could

ignore what God had said. Another point, God had appointed priests in Israel; yet Micah thought he could twist what God had said in any way he wanted. He assumed he could appoint as his priest anyone that was willing to act for him. It was a false assumption, and false assumptions are likely to be dangerous.

Most people have their false assumptions, but some assumptions are more dangerous than others. They are specially dangerous if they influence our thinking away from what God has told us in the Bible about how sinners like us can be saved.

One false assumption is that we will be saved because of *who* we are. So John the Baptist warned the Pharisees and Sadducees: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father" (Matthew 3:9). They were in danger of thinking that, no matter how they lived, no matter how sinful they were, all would be well with their souls – because they were descended from Abraham. They assumed that, when they would die, they could not be punished for their sins because they were related to Abraham. It was a very dangerous assumption.

People today may assume that, no matter how sinfully they live and no matter how much they neglect Christ Jesus as the one and only Saviour, all will be well with them, even when they die. But what does the Bible say? On the one hand we are told: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life". Those who trust in Jesus as the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners, will be saved from hell and will go to heaven when they die. On the other hand we are warned, "He that believeth *not* the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36), and that holds true, whoever we are related to.

It is not enough to have a godly father or a godly mother, a godly grandfather or a godly grandmother – though to have such godly relations may be a great benefit to us. It is a great blessing to have relations and friends who will pray to God for us. But to *rely* on their godliness or on their prayers is dangerous. We ourselves must believe in Christ Jesus, and we are called to do so *now*. We must seek to live godly lives; we must not rely on the godliness – or the prayers – of anyone else.

Jesus once told about a Pharisee who went one day to the temple. He too had his false assumptions. He thanked God that he was better than other people: he did not take money from other people unfairly; he did not commit adultery; he was not like the publican – someone who gathered taxes – who came up to the temple at the same time. Then he went on to tell God what he assumed were his good deeds: he fasted, denying himself food, two days a week, and he gave God a tenth of everything he owned.

But Jesus also made it clear that God did not accept this Pharisee, who was trusting in himself and what he did to please God. But, in fact, he did not please God. What he thought were good works were full of sin – he was proud of himself and he despised others, including the publican.

But the publican was trusting in God, not in himself. The publican could see at least the smoke rising up from the sacrifices at the temple. The sacrifices showed him that God provided a substitute that died instead of the sinner. This pointed forward to Christ coming to die instead of sinners. The publican knew that God was merciful and he prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). God did not accept the Pharisee, but He accepted the publican, who was not trusting in himself but in God and His way of salvation. The publican was not making false assumptions; he was relying on the truths that God has revealed.

We can also make false assumptions about how long we will live. We may tell ourselves: “Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isaiah 56:12). That is just too hopeful, in a dangerous way. Sometimes tomorrow may turn out to be as good as today, or even better. But we should never promise ourselves that this is what will actually happen. Some day each of us will die; life always comes to an end, and we do not know when. Surely then we should seek the Lord before it is too late. So when should we begin? We ought to begin seeking God, through Jesus Christ, *now* – not tomorrow, and not some day away in the indefinite future.

People who use the words of the verse quoted last are making another dangerous assumption – that they are free to live in whatever way suits them best. No, our chief aim in life should be to glorify God in everything that we do and to begin doing so now. Of course, we must ask God to make us able and willing to seek Him now, and He hears such prayers, just as He heard the publican praying.

Micah was expecting God to bless him because he had a Levite as his priest. But perhaps it was not very long afterwards that a band of 600 armed men came by. They knew about the images and the other religious objects in Micah’s house. They stole them all and persuaded Micah’s priest to go with them and be their priest instead.

Where were Micah’s hopes of God’s blessing now? They had disappeared with his priest. He needed a better foundation for his hopes. He needed to follow the way of salvation God has revealed. He needed to follow Abraham, who looked forward to the Messiah coming to save sinners like himself. Micah needed to say, like the publican: “God be merciful to me a sinner”. That is what we need too. If we trust in Jesus, God will certainly do us good; He will take us safely through this life and at last bring us to heaven.

The Soldier and the Officer

The Peninsular War was fought in Spain between 1807 and 1814, with Britain on one side and France, under the Emperor Napoleon, on the other. During one of the major battles, a godly soldier was wounded and was dying. A few of his comrades carried him away to a quieter spot and laid him down under a tree. They did not want to leave him alone; he was suffering so much. They stayed around to see if there was anything else they could do to help him. He could no longer speak properly, so they could not understand his answers to their questions. But he made signs to them, which they understood, to show that he did not wish them to stay with him and neglect their duties on the battlefield. Reluctantly they returned to the fight.

Shortly afterwards an officer rode past; he had been called from a distance to come quickly to the battlefield. When he saw a British soldier alone, bleeding to death, he stopped his horse and asked if there was anything he could do for him. The dying soldier indicated, perhaps by shaking his head, that he did not need anything. Then he made signs to encourage him to go on his way to help in the battle. But the officer said kindly, "My good fellow, if you are so far gone as to be beyond the reach of help yourself, perhaps I could do something for your friends at home. Is there no message I could carry for you to your wife or your children?" When he heard his family mentioned, the soldier thought of something he wanted. He said clearly, "Yes. Knapsack. Book."

The officer came off his horse and open the bag, which was lying beside the soldier. He searched for the book and pulled out a Bible. The soldier went on: "Read John 14:27".

It was with some difficulty that the officer found the verse; he was not used to reading the Bible. But at last he found the right page and began to read the words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid".

A bright smile lit up the dying soldier's face as he listened. "There", he exclaimed, "is all I want. I have peace. I'm going home. My Saviour is waiting to receive me."

The officer looked at the soldier in amazement; he could not say a word. Then he remembered that he ought to have been on the battlefield before then; so he put the Bible back in the soldier's bag. He jumped back onto his saddle and was away at once.

In less than an hour, the officer was being carried by a few of his men from the battlefield. He too had been wounded and was dying. The men laid

him down under the tree, beside the now-dead soldier. He remembered their little conversation, just a matter of minutes before then. He passed his hand over his forehead, and echoed what the soldier had said – but in a negative way. His words were full of feeling: “I have no Bible. I have no peace. There is no saviour waiting to receive me.”

Soon the officer too would have died. Perhaps he did not realise how near the soldier's Bible was to him. But how near he had been to salvation when he had that Bible in his hand! Could he not, as his horse galloped on to the battlefield, have thought of the words that he read to the dying soldier? Could he not have prayed to the God who had saved the soldier, whose soul was so soon to pass into the blessedness of heaven? Perhaps if he had known that death was so near, the officer would have done so.

One man had sought the Lord while He could be found; the other did not. One man had called on the Lord while He was near; the other did not. One man had trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from the guilt and power of sin; the other probably never felt his need of that salvation until his life was slipping away.

Do not leave off seeking the Lord until it is too late. Seek Him now; seek Him earnestly; take to heart your need of salvation; think of how uncertain life is; consider the contrast between the blessedness of heaven and the awful punishment to be endured in hell. Then call on the Lord, asking Him to save you for the sake of Christ and of the wonderful work that He did in this world as the substitute for sinners. And remember God's gracious words: “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).

Advice About the Lord's Supper

Ashbel Green

This article is taken, with editing, from Green's *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism*, vol 2. It is the last section of a talk about the Lord's Supper. Green (1762-1848) was a prominent American minister.

Let me counsel those of you who are not at present church members, never to withdraw from church when the Lord's Supper is being observed. Stay to witness this part of the service. Watch attentively, and meditate closely and solemnly on what you see and hear.

Consider that the blessings represented in this ordinance are as necessary

for you as for those whom you see receiving them. Consider that unless you have a personal interest by faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, which you now see displayed in the symbols He has appointed, you will certainly perish eternally. Ask Him earnestly for strength to give yourselves no peace till you belong to the people of God, and then become a full member of the Church.

Think on the command of the dying Saviour to His children: "This do in remembrance of Me". Think on the ingratitude, as well as the danger, of continuing to disobey this command. Think of your sins, as concerned in the crucifixion of the Lord of life and glory. Think of His love in making atonement for these sins, on behalf of all who truly repent and believe in Him. Let earnest petitions ascend to the throne where God reigns in mercy, asking Him to make you able to devote yourselves truly to him. Then ask Him further to make you heartily willingly to take part with His people in commemorating the Saviour's dying love.

Again, I counsel such of you as indulge some hope – even if it is but a faint and trembling hope – that you have passed from death unto life, not unduly to delay coming to the Lord's table. I would indeed persuade you against a rash and hasty approach. Do not take some lively impression of divine things, recently received and little examined, as a sufficient preparation for so solemn a matter as professing yourselves the sincere followers of the Redeemer. Take time enough to put your present excited feelings to the test of some endurance, and of much inquiry and examination.

But after investigation and suitable delay, and much prayer to God for light and guidance, you may find you have a prevailing hope that you have chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you. Then do not hesitate, even if your hope is mixed with many fears, to turn your back on the world, and bind yourselves to the Lord by coming to His table. This decided step will save you at once from a thousand temptations to forsake the path of duty, to which you will otherwise be exposed.

He who wishes to be safe, should place as many guards around his virtue and faithfulness as he lawfully may; he should not remain where he may easily return to a dangerous course of sin. Then he would constantly be liable to temptations to do so. Besides, the sacraments are means by which grace is increased, in those who have any measure of it. The Lord's Supper was meant for those who are weak in faith and babes in Christ, as well as for those whose faith is strongest.

Believers, beware of being ashamed of the Saviour, who bore so much shame, scorn and suffering for you. Remember His own solemn declarations to all His children. Disregard the sneers and ridicule of the openly sinful and be determined to obey the call: "Come out from among them, and be ye

separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”.

Finally, I counsel such of you as have already made an open profession of religion, by coming to the table of the Lord, to be careful not to dishonour it. Do not yield to any of the temptations to which you are specially liable because of youth and inexperience. Show the utmost kindness to all your young friends, from whom you have been separated, to some extent, by your profession of religion. Try to recommend religion, by showing them that it is not that gloomy and forbidding thing which its enemies say it is, but that it is the highest possible excellence.

Yet beware of injuring yourselves, even by carrying out this duty. Be cautious; guard against showing approval to any sinful pleasures by taking part in them yourselves. Instead bear your testimony against all these things, by showing – more by your conduct than your words, and yet occasionally by your words – that you cannot in conscience take part. For your experience has shown you that they are inconsistent with loving God and serving Him.

Again I say, Beware that the world does not win you from the Saviour when you attempt to win it to piety. Try to live much in communion with Him. Youth is the time when your feelings are strongest; and it is best for your happiness in time and eternity if you apply these strong feelings to your precious Redeemer and His holy cause. Especially make use of every communion season for this purpose. Attend at every such season, so far as your circumstances will permit, all the preparatory exercises that will make it most impressive and most delightful.

Try to derive from every such season a greater depth, as well as a greater flow, to your religious feelings; and a firmer and more lively purpose to carry out every Christian duty faithfully. In this way you will be sure to make your profession of religion most satisfactory to yourselves, most honourable to your Saviour, most useful to the world. It is then most likely to lead to a triumph over death, and a joyful entrance on the rest and the rewards that the great Captain of salvation gives His faithful followers.

For Junior Readers

God Provided

Have you ever heard of Hudson Taylor? He was born in Yorkshire in 1832. His parents had committed him to the Lord before he was born. They trained him to read the Bible, to pray and to go to church. He came to

know the Lord when he was 17 years old. From that moment he longed to do some work for the Lord, and he felt convinced that the Lord was calling him to China.

Very little was known about China at that time. A few missionaries had already started to work in some of the towns on the coast, but very few Europeans had ever travelled into the vast interior. Yet Hudson managed to borrow a book about China written by one of the early missionaries. He also obtained a Gospel of Luke in the Mandarin dialect of Chinese. He could not afford to buy either a dictionary or a book about Chinese grammar. But by comparing verses from the Chinese Gospel with the same verses in English, he began to teach himself the language!

He knew that once in China he might well be on his own, far away from anyone to support him. "My only claim" he said, "will be on God. How important then for me to learn, before leaving England, to move man, through God, by prayer alone." How often he had to do this you probably cannot imagine, both in England before he left and, even more so, once he got to China. So Hudson Taylor was a man of prayer.

His voyage to China by sailing ship took five and a half months! Landing in an unknown country, arriving among strangers, his comfort was in God's promises, "Lo, I am with you always," and, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". Many trials lay ahead of him, but time and again he proved that God was with him and that, both in practical and spiritual matters, He answered prayer.

One such time he was worried about his clothes. Just recovering from illness himself, Hudson heard that one of the other missionaries was seriously ill with smallpox. This was a really deadly virus for which there was no known cure, but it was easily spread. For that reason the patient had to be kept away from other people. So his sister, with whom he lived, could not nurse him, as she had her own little children to look after.

Hudson felt that he should help his friend. Day and night he cared for the dying man, so that others would not have to risk infection. In the Lord's kindness he did not become ill himself – but he was faced with a problem. He had needed to change his clothes often while nursing the sick man and now all the clothes worn in the sick room had to be thrown out or burnt for fear of spreading infection.

What was he to do? A Chinese tailor could soon have made him new outfits, but the young missionary could not afford to pay for them. The money he was receiving he shared with other missionaries, and he had no money to fall back on. But the infected clothes had to be destroyed – so what could Hudson do but pray? He prayed to God, who tells us in His Word, "In every

thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”.

And then, just at the time of his need, an unexpected box was delivered to the missionary. What could be in it? It was a long-lost box of his things which had been left behind in Swatow 15 months before. He did not expect to see it again. Among other belongings were a lot of his clothes!

The box had been on its way before he realised he had a difficulty. Has God not promised, “Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear”? Will you not remember that too? Whatever problems you may face, you can take them to the Lord in prayer! *J van Kralingen*

Why We Go to Church

2. What Does the Bible Say?

Rev D W B Somerset

Last month’s section of this Youth Conference paper began with some thoughts on children being taken to church. It went on to describe what is said about public worship in the Bible, about synagogues in Old Testament worship, and churches in the New.

3. How the Bible commands church-going. When we come to the New Testament, we have much more definite authority for public worship in churches than the Old Testament believers had for their synagogues. The Bible records that Christians were gathering in churches, and this fact itself imposes an obligation upon us. The example of the New Testament Church, when approved by the Apostles, is a pattern for us to follow. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:42,46). If New Testament Christians assembled in churches, as they did at Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Corinth and other places, so should we.

Also Scripture assumes that Christians will be gathering together: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2). As Charles Hodge argues in his *Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, the assumption here is that they were to make a collection when they met together on the first day of each week, so that the money was already gathered when Paul arrived. Presumably he wanted to spend his time teaching them when he was with them, rather than gathering money. Again it is recorded

that, at Troas, “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them” (Acts 20:7). It was evidently the practice of the Christians to gather together on that day.

Again Scripture warns Christians not to neglect or desert this gathering together: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). A warning like this amounts to a command for us to attend a place of worship if possible.

4. The believer desires to go to Church. The idea of assembling together because it is commanded or required, while correct, is rather alien to the Christian spirit. In going to church, the Christian is not reluctantly following a command while his heart is elsewhere, but he is doing what he wanted to do anyway. He does not think in terms of a command so much as in terms of following his spiritual instincts to assemble with the people of God and with Christ. To give an example, it is a command not to kill ourselves; and we eat food to preserve our lives in obedience to that command, and yet that is not generally the reason why we eat food. It is an ill man who has to force himself to eat food to stay alive, or else the food must be very tasteless.

Christians live their lives out of obedience to Christ, but it is an obedient love, and (as was the case with Christ Himself) the element of obedience only becomes prominent when they are required to do something that they do not naturally want to do. Christ “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8); that is, He learned what obedience was by obeying His Father’s will in painful and difficult matters, and especially in laying down His life on the cross.

When it comes to public worship, the believer is not generally in the position of reluctance. Perhaps occasionally this may be the case, as when there is someone in the congregation whom he does not wish to see, and then there may be a need to exercise obedience. But generally the Christian wants to be present, and his heart fully concurs with the will of Christ in the matter.

We want now to think why Christians want to assemble to worship God.

1. Because they want to appear before God. David says, “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:2). In the Old Testament, the appointed meeting-places were (1) “between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony – and there will I meet with thee and commune with thee from above the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:22; 30:6); and (2) at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation (Exodus 29:42,43): “This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there

I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory.” We might think of the first of these meeting-places as referring to private worship, or the believer’s soul and God – “thee”; and the second as referring to public worship – “you” (plural).

In the New Testament, the meeting-place is wherever God’s people are gathered: “the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:21,23). Where they are gathered, there Christ is: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). God is meeting with His people in private, of course, but He regards public worship as better still: “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (Psalm 87:2). If there is an appointed meeting, then the Christian wants to be present.

2. *Because they want to praise God.* They want to be part of “the great congregation” in heaven and earth that Christ speaks of in Psalm 40:9-10: “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained My lips. . . . I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth in the great congregation.” And again in Psalm 22:22: “I will declare thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee”. They want to “give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: [to] worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2). God inhabits “the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:3).

3. *Because they love the saints:* “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). They want to meet Christ, but they want to meet their fellow-Christians as well. Human beings are naturally gregarious: we like to meet others, and we need to interact with others; and the Christian wants to interact with his fellow-believers.

This world is a lonely place for Christians. They are “strangers and pilgrims” here, and they like to go to a place where they are not strangers but “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). One of our elders at a question meeting made the remark: “God’s people are a peculiar people. And they are becoming more peculiar.” He meant that, in Britain, society is becoming more secular, so believers are feeling their separation from the world around them all the more.

4. *Because they want to support the cause of Christ.* In the world, support for things is measured by the time and the money that people are prepared to contribute towards it; and Christians want Christ to be honoured before men. It is a sign of dishonour to Christ and of abandoning religion when congregations become very small, or close altogether: “The ways of Zion do

mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts” (Lamentations 1:4). When religion is flourishing, on the other hand, multitudes assemble: “when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord” (Psalm 102:22). It is a grief to the people of God when they cannot assemble, as was the case with the children of Israel in Babylon: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning” (Psalm 137:4-5).

The Reformation in Europe

1. Martin Luther in Germany

This is the first part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. Several European countries are considered, some of them more briefly than others, but not Scotland or England.

The Reformation, 500 years ago, was a wonderful blessing from God to countries where the pure gospel had been obscured by the false teaching and superstitions promoted by the Church of that time. In its early stages, the most prominent individual God used in Germany was Martin Luther. After five years as a monk, he was transferred to the monastery in the small town of Wittenberg. Later he was to become famous all over Europe as the leading Reformer of his time.

As yet he was still seeking the way of salvation; he too was suffering from the prevailing ignorance of how sinners may be delivered from the wrath to come. But in 1510 he was appointed professor of theology in the new Wittenberg University. He was to teach from the Bible, which meant that he could spend a large amount of time reading what had become to him a precious volume.

It was not till 1517 that he was suddenly to become famous. A friar called Johann Tetzel appeared in the neighbourhood of Wittenberg and was busy selling indulgences. These documents, so Tetzel and others falsely claimed, guaranteed deliverance from the penalties due to people's sins. Especially they could ensure deliverance from purgatory – but at a price. (Purgatory is – according to Roman Catholicism – the imaginary place between heaven and hell where people can suffer for their sins if they do not quite deserve to go to hell. After a time they are able to go to heaven. The Bible says nothing about such a place; so we can be sure that it does not exist.)

Tetzel was brazen enough to claim, “When the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs”. In his sermons he declared, “Don't you hear the voices of your wailing dead parents and others [in purgatory], who say,

Have mercy on me, because we are in severe punishment and pain". He promised his hearers that their parents and others would be delivered from the pains of purgatory for a small fee. If this was true, it was clearly a very easy way to obtain forgiveness, and crowds from the Wittenberg area were flocking to buy these indulgences.

The sale of indulgences was a clear pointer to much that was wrong with the Roman Catholic Church at that time – its teachings had, over the centuries diverged seriously from the teachings of the Bible. Tetzel did not even ask the people to confess their sins before he gave them their indulgences. The Pope was badly in need of money at the time; he wanted to build St Peter's Basilica in Rome, in an extravagant fashion. It is claimed to be the biggest church building in the world. Yet to pay for it, poor people were being encouraged to give good money to buy deliverance for their relatives from a place that has never existed.

As Peter insisted in Samaria, none of God's gifts "may be purchased with money". Forgiveness comes only through the work of Christ, offering Himself up as a sacrifice in the place of sinners. Sinners are only forgiven when they look by faith alone to Christ alone – not through works or payments of any kind. These truths were of fundamental importance to the Reformation.

Luther was seriously concerned for the people in Wittenberg, who were being so seriously deceived, being offered forgiveness without any call for repentance. So Luther drew up 95 statements about indulgences – his 95 theses – which he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church. At this stage, Luther was only looking for a discussion among scholars. In any case, he did not yet oppose indulgences as such, just their misuse. He had a great deal yet to learn. For instance, he did not yet object to the collection of relics that the Elector Frederick of Saxony had gathered (Wittenberg was a town in Saxony, part of Germany – though Germany was not then a single country – and the Elector was the ruler of only one part of Saxony).

The relics in Wittenberg included, so it was claimed, part of Jesus' swaddling clothes, 13 fragments from His manger, a piece of gold brought by the wise men from the East, a piece of bread from the first Lord's Supper, a thorn from the crown of thorns and a twig from the burning bush which Moses turned aside to see; besides, this collection of relics included 19 000 bones said to have come from various Christian "saints" and martyrs.

Luther was only feeling his way gradually towards biblical truth; indeed he was only feeling his way towards an understanding of how a sinner may be saved. In his thinking, influenced by Roman Catholic ideas, he could see that God was a judge but he could not see any love in Him. Every time he entered the church in Wittenberg he could see a carving above the gate

showing Christ seated on a rainbow as judge of the world, but so angry that His veins stood out on His forehead.

This was the way of thinking that made people feel that they needed mediators between sinners and Christ, and who better than Mary, the mother of Jesus? “Surely Christ would listen to His mother”, people were saying; so Mary attracted more and more attention and Christ seemed more and more remote. But such mediators as Mary are completely useless, and they are completely unnecessary, for Jesus Christ is man as well as God. So He is the one Mediator between us and God. This last sentence summarises what the Bible teaches on the subject, but in the centuries leading up to the Reformation, the unscriptural teachings of the Church had more and more influence, and the teachings of the Bible were more and more ignored.

For a long time Luther lived with a very troubled conscience. When he thought of the righteousness of God, he could only see God as the righteous judge who condemns the unrighteous. Do what you can – this was the teaching the sinner was given at the time. Then, having done what he could, the sinner could expect to receive grace through the sacraments, as dispensed by the Church. But it was clear to Luther that God was so great and holy that no sinner could do anything that was free from sin; the poor man could see no way to escape from condemnation.

In the end, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of his soul to see the true meaning of the expression in Romans, “the righteousness of God”, which had so much troubled him. He saw that it means God righteously providing for man’s salvation. “I began to understand”, Luther stated, “that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous [person] lives by the gift of God, namely by faith.” Gradually Luther learned the great Scripture truth that sinners are justified by faith alone – not by their own works. This great matter of justification by faith – of how sinners can be accepted by the great and holy God – became the centre of Luther’s teaching, and of the teaching of the whole Reformation movement.

After Luther had posted his 95 theses on the church door, he sent a copy to the local Archbishop urging him to restrain those who sold indulgences. The Archbishop merely forwarded a copy to Rome, and the Pope assumed that this was just part of an unimportant dispute between groups of monks. How wrong he was!

When he changed his mind, Luther was summoned to the Vatican within 60 days to give an account of himself. But the Elector Frederick insisted that Luther must be tried by a German court. So in October 1518 Luther travelled to Augsburg, in southern Germany, to appear at a meeting of Parliament. There Cardinal Cajetan, a representative of the Pope, questioned him over

three days. Luther told a friend that Cajetan only wanted to hear from him something along the lines of, “I confess that I erred” – nothing else. And Luther knew that he had *not* erred. He also complained that Cajetan made no reference to Scripture. This was significant because the Bible had become central to Luther’s thinking.

On the night of October 20, Luther fled secretly from Augsburg on a borrowed horse, in fear of his life. Back in Wittenberg, Luther was safe because, on the human level, he had the Elector’s protection. But more importantly, he had God’s protection, for in God’s purpose he had a great work to carry out as a prominent leader in the Reformation.

For Younger Readers

The Sad Lady and the Happy Man

The lady wanted to be happy. But she did not go to God for her happiness. Instead she tried to enjoy herself in various other ways. She had lots of money and there were many things she could buy in the hope of making herself happy. But none of these things were making her happy any more. No matter what she did, her sadness would not go away

One day, she sent for a shoemaker. She wanted him to make new shoes for her. So he came along to her house.

He measured her feet, so that he would know how big to make the shoes. As he did so, the lady looked at his face. She saw that the shoemaker was happy, while she was still sad. She asked him: “My friend, are you happy?”

He told her: “I am the happiest of men”.

The lady wanted to know what was making him so happy. So the shoemaker told her about Jesus Christ. I am sure he spoke about Jesus as the Son of God, who came into the world to save sinners like us. He would have told her about Jesus dying on the cross to suffer the punishment of sin. And he would have told the lady that she must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

She listened to what the shoemaker told her. She believed in Jesus. And God delivered her from her sadness. She was happy in this life, and we can be sure that she is perfectly happy now in

heaven. It is really important for us to believe in Jesus and be ready to go to heaven.

Christ Is the Best King

The old man lived on Rarotonga, the largest of the Cook Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. He wanted to become a member of the church there.

He told the missionaries: "I have lived during the reign of four kings. In the first we were continually at war, and a fearful time it was. Watching and hiding with fear were all that we did.

"During the reign of the second we were overtaken with a severe famine, and everyone expected to perish. Then we ate rats and grass, and this wood and that wood.

"During the third we were conquered and became the prey of the two other settlements on the island. Then, if a man went to fish, he rarely ever returned. Or if a woman went any distance to fetch food, she was rarely ever seen again."

These were obviously very difficult times to live in. Then the people did not know God; they did not know to pray to Him for help; they did not know that they ought to love their neighbours as themselves; they did not know how their sins could be forgiven.

The old man went on: "But during the reign of this third King, we were visited by another King, a great King, a powerful King, a King of love, Jesus the Lord from heaven. He has gained the victory. He has conquered our hearts; so we now have peace and plenty in this world and hope soon to dwell with Him in heaven."

Clearly there had been a wonderful work of grace. God had revealed Himself to them through the teaching of the missionaries. Now they knew Him and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into the world to suffer and die for sinners; they knew to pray to Him for help; they knew that they ought to love their neighbours as themselves; they knew how their sins could be forgiven – through Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners.

Perhaps the peace and plenty did not last. God's children will experience troubles in this world – some more, some less. But they know what they should do in their troubles, and that is to go to God in prayer. They are to ask the great King to take away their troubles, or else strengthen them to bear these troubles and use them for their spiritual good. But however difficult the troubles of God's children, it is certain that they will be with Him for ever, enjoying the blessedness of heaven, where there will never be any trouble.

Looking Around Us

Help From Above

London's Air Ambulance is a charity that sends a helicopter to accidents in the British capital where someone has been seriously injured. It is not a government body; it is supported by donations from the public.

To make known its need of money it has to advertise. One advert in a daily newspaper shows a young girl looking up at a helicopter in the sky above her. The slogan is: "Sometimes you need help from above. London's Air Ambulance can be by your side in minutes."

No doubt this air ambulance provides a very useful service to Londoners who have been badly injured and a very useful service to visitors to the city also. But Christians may feel that the expression *help from above* should be used only to describe help from God.

Whatever our situation, we need God's help. Of course, we need God's help – not just human help – if we are seriously hurt in an accident, or if we are facing a major operation, or if we sense we are in danger of being assaulted, among many other possibilities. But, in fact, we should feel our need of God's help no matter how safe we may feel, however free from danger, however little we seem to need help from other human beings. We always need help from above, from God in heaven. We should always look up to the One who has everything under His control, who is able to supply all our needs if we are trusting in Him. He tells us: "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:4). So, if we are not yet trusting in Him, it is our duty to do so now.

We should always be committing ourselves into God's care; we should always be trusting in Him – for everything. We may not be able to see danger ahead, but God sees everything. He sees the dangers that we cannot see. Especially He sees the spiritual dangers that surround us, even when they are completely hidden from us. Here is another reminder that we always need help from above. We must look to the Lord who can protect us from Satan, who is so much stronger than we are, but God is infinitely stronger than Satan. And God is infinitely stronger than every human being who might tempt us to sin, and stronger than every group of people in society who might influence us to adopt sinful ideas or to depart from the teachings of the Bible.

If you are still wandering away from God, you need help from above so that you may begin to follow Him. Ask Him to draw you to Himself, for Jesus' sake, through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in your soul, applying to you the truths of God's Word, especially about the Saviour.

Full Barns, but What Then?

A poem by John Newton, based on Luke 15:16-21.

“My barns are full, my stores increase,
and now for many years,
Soul, eat and drink, and take thine ease,
secure from wants and fears.”

Thus while our worldling boasted once,
(as many now presume)
He heard the Lord Himself pronounce
his sudden, awful doom:

“This night, vain fool, thy soul must pass
into a world unknown;
And who shall then the stores possess
which thou hast called thine own?”

Thus blinded mortals fondly scheme
for happiness below;
Death destroys the pleasing dream,
and they awake to woe.

Ah, who can speak the vast dismay
that fills the sinner’s mind,
When torn, by death’s strong hand away,
he leaves his all behind?

Worldlings, who cleave to earthly things,
but are not rich to God,
Will feel that death is full of stings,
and hell a dark abode.

Dear Saviour, make us timely wise,
Thy gospel to attend;
That we may live above the skies
when time and life shall end.

Price £1.00