

The Young People's Magazine

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

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Volume 85

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Atheist, Christian and Hopeful

In his *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan follows his pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The City of Destruction is where people live who are still unconverted and so are only fit for eternal destruction, unless they repent. The Celestial City is heaven. Bunyan gives his pilgrim the name *Christian*, for he is a sincere believer, a true Christian. In his book, Bunyan is illustrating what happens to believers on their pathway to heaven. On that way, Christian meets people of various kinds; some are true believers like himself and others are not, but Bunyan gives each of them a name which reflects their character.

One of those whom Christian meets, Bunyan calls Atheist. Here was a man who claimed to believe that there is no God. When Christian saw him coming to meet him, he said to his friend Hopeful: "Yonder is a man with his back towards Mount Zion".

When they met, Atheist asked the two men where they were going. "We are going to Mount Zion", Christian replied. And Atheist found the answer very funny. Today – though perhaps no more than in Bunyan's time – those who reject God completely are very apt to mock true believers.

Atheist accused Christian and Hopeful of being ignorant, telling them that they were on a tedious journey. How many are still ready to believe that a believer's life is boring! Atheist went on to claim that the two men were likely to be none the better of their religious efforts and that there is "no such place as you dream of in all this world".

"But there is in the world to come", Christian answered firmly. He was completely right. No matter how difficult some parts of the way to heaven may be, a moment's perfect blessedness there will make up for them all. Heaven is no dream, and all who look to the Saviour will most certainly reach it when their life in this world is over. We must *not* accept the lie that there is no profit to be had from seeking to serve God in this world; David assures us in the Bible: "In keeping of [God's commandments] there is great reward" (Psalm 19:11). God's people will have His care in this life and they will be brought to perfect blessedness at last. Ask God to keep you from

turning your back on heaven and to protect you from the influence of people like Atheist, who refuse to believe in God and ignore the truths He has revealed in the Bible.

Thinking of Atheist, Hopeful reminded Christian of the words in Proverbs: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27). It would be good for us too to pay attention to this warning: not to listen to teaching of any kind that would cause us to wander away from the words of true knowledge in Scripture.

There are plenty atheists around today, who claim not to believe that God exists. Psalm 14 tells us that it is a fool who says in his heart that there is no God. But now many people, showing their great foolishness, are prepared to deny God's existence out loud; they are not ashamed to tell everyone.

We read in the Bible that "the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Because of the things that God has so wonderfully made, we should understand that He exists. Not only do we clearly see the sun and the stars above us, and the mountains and plants and animals around us, but through them we should clearly see that there is a divine Creator. And because these things can be clearly seen, those who deny that God exists will have no excuse when they come to judgement at last.

Atheist claimed to Christian and Hopeful that he had been searching for heaven for 20 years. One cannot believe that he was looking very hard or that he was looking in the right place. Where should he had been looking? The answer is: in the Bible. Christ Himself said, "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39). It was by faith in the truths which God has revealed in Scripture that Christian and Hopeful knew about heaven. We should be clear that everything revealed in Scripture is truth, absolute truth; so we have no right to reject anything revealed in Scripture.

The theory of evolution has done great damage to very many people; it has helped to turn large numbers into atheists. Because there is a conflict between evolution and what the Bible's teaches about creation, these people reject everything that the Bible says. We should take Paul's attitude: "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4) – in other words, if God speaks, it must be true, whatever the consequences are for human beings. If they contradict God, they *must* be wrong.

It is by faith we are to understand that God made the universe (see Hebrews 11:3). It is by faith that we should receive all the testimony of God's Word – not only about creation, but also about God Himself and His law, about sin and salvation, about heaven and hell. It is *all* true. So it is our

duty to submit to Him in all that He has revealed; no one has any right to be an atheist.

In our time, many people think of themselves as atheists. Others may think of themselves as Christians, although they do not take God's revelation seriously. They do not consider the seriousness of breaking any of God's commandments; they do not seek salvation through Jesus Christ. They are practical atheists. In the most fundamental matters of life they are living just as atheists do; they are likely to be living only for the things of this world. If they do not worship success or possessions, their main aim in life likely is: to be entertained. Even if they have not given up on outward religion – they may still attend family worship and go to church – yet religion has no real influence on the way they think and what they really want to get out of life.

God does exist; so we must take Him seriously. We are sinners; so we need to seek salvation earnestly. We must come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for sinners. And the Bible tells us that “he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

We should ask the Lord to make us like John Bunyan's Christian, to make us true believers on our way to heaven. Hopeful was another true believer, who had joined Christian and shared his hope of arriving at last in a better world. But Atheist had no hope for anything beyond the uncertain pleasures of this life, which will so soon come to an end – just as this year will soon be over. Which do you most closely resemble: Christian and Hopeful, or Atheist, or the practical atheist?

Losing the Load of Sin

He was a prisoner in America. He had been involved in a murder. Although he did not actually kill the victim, he was present, whatever else he did or did not do. It was the prisoner's employer who had wanted this other man killed; the prisoner did not at first agree, but he did not refuse. An out-and-out refusal would probably have brought the matter to an end, but the employer felt that he could persuade his worker to get involved. So the employer plied him with strong drink – not so much as to make him totally drunk but enough to make him much less resistant to sinning. The two others involved in the murder were sentenced to death – according to the direction of Scripture: “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man” (Genesis 9:6).

The third man was sentenced to a long stretch in prison. He acknowledged that, although the man who was killed was wicked, this was no excuse for murdering him. The prisoner, it seems, had no education; he did not know properly how old he was and he was not able to read. But the chaplain of the jail had a real concern for the souls of the prisoners. He knew that the Bible was the only means of reforming them and gave them a copy of God's Word. If they could not read, he took the trouble to teach them. He began with the first word in the Bible, *In*, and the next day he taught the prisoner the second word, *the*. The chaplain's efforts were successful; after some time, his pupil was able to read well.

A man called Abbott visited the prisoner and talked with him about the crime that had brought him to jail. Abbott asked, "How does this [sin] and all your other sins now appear to you?"

"Very great", the prisoner answered. But he knew that there were also "my other sins against God: cursing and swearing, and getting drunk. When I first began to reflect in my cell [on what I had done], I saw my sins so great that I felt I could not be forgiven. I was sitting down one day at my work in the prison, and the chaplain came along and asked me my crime. I told him."

The chaplain said, "That is one of the greatest crimes, but then you may remember David's sin, and he was forgiven". He went on to tell the prisoner that, no matter how great his crimes had been, he was to pray to God and trust in Him, and he would find rest for his soul.

When the prisoner spoke about the chaplain's offer to teach him to read, he added, "I shall ever love him while God gives me breath". This was because learning to read the Bible led to him finding salvation. The chaplain had persuaded the prisoner to go to God and seek mercy. "And yet", the prisoner went on, "I had a doubt in my heart – my sins were so heavy – whether I should be forgiven. The chaplain soon left me, and I went into my cell and poured out my heart to God to have mercy on me. But the more I prayed, the more miserable I grew. Heavier and heavier were my sins."

The prisoner was not yet able to read very well. So when someone came to visit him, the prisoner asked him to read a chapter from the Bible. The visitor began to read Isaiah 55, which begins, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price". The man read on to the words: "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. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord."

The prisoner said, "I found this gave me great encouragement to go on to

pray, to see if I could find relief from my troubles – the load of sin that was on my heart”.

He went on: “A night or two after that, the chaplain came to my cell and asked me how I felt. I told him my sins were greater than I could bear – so guilty, so heavy. He asked me if I thought praying would make my sins any less. I gave him no answer. He soon left me, and I went again to prayer.” The prisoner felt as if he was about to die. But he commented, “In all my sorrows I had not a right sorrow. My sorrow was because I had sinned against man” – not because he had sinned against God.

The next Sabbath, when he had just carried his dinner into his cell, he put it down and started to pray. When he rose from his knees, the chaplain came to his cell. “We are all guilty creatures,” he told the prisoner, “and we cannot be saved unless God, for Christ’s sake, will save us. If we pray and go to God, we must go in the name of Jesus Christ. If we expect to be saved, we must be saved through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.” This encouraged the prisoner. Then the chaplain went on: “The sins which you have committed are against your fellow creatures, but they are much more against God”.

“Now I never knew before”, the prisoner confessed, “that they were against God. When the chaplain left me, I went to prayer again. I could eat nothing that day; I did not eat a mouthful.” Then he remembered that a minister had once told him that, whenever someone was willing to read a chapter to him, he should ask for Psalm 51. But there was no one he could ask to read it, and he did not know where to find it in the Bible.

The next Sabbath, he got up and went to pray before the prison officer unlocked the door. He told the Lord: “Thou knowest I am ignorant, brought up in ignorance. Thou knowest my bringing up. Nothing is too hard for Thee to do. May it please thee, O Lord, to show me that chapter, that I may read it with understanding.”

So the prisoner picked up his Bible and began at Psalm 1. He obviously could not yet read numbers, but he counted the Psalms as he turned over the pages. He said, “It appeared to me that God was with me”. He counted till he reached Psalm 51, and God did help him, in answer to his prayer; he did not make a mistake in his counting. He could now read, though with difficulty; he had to spell out every word.

When he had reached the end of the Psalm, he put his Bible down and went on his knees and prayed in the words of the Psalm: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my trans-

gressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.”

But when he came to the words, “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness”, he could say no more at that time – the thought of the murder in which he was involved was too much for him. Yet he said, “I fell upon my knees and prayed to God to have mercy upon me, for Christ’s sake. But I only grew more and more miserable. The load of my sins was heavier and heavier. All that I had ever done came plain and open in my sight and I was led to see that I must perish. There was no help for me; all my sin was upon my own head.”

The prisoner went on in this state for some time. But one day when he was praying in his cell, he felt that he might hope for pardon through Jesus Christ, and he felt that his burden of guilt was taken away. “And ever since that,” he said, “this place where I have been confined has been to me more like a palace than a prison.” Yet he confessed, “I find I have a deceitful heart, but Jesus tells me if I lack knowledge, He will always [give it], if I cast my care on Jesus and not forget to pray. It is my prayer, morning and evening, that I may hold out. If I die here, let me die, Lord, in Thine arms.”

The prisoner had sinned greatly, but Christ “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25). It is the same salvation that each of us need. Let us seek it earnestly before it is too late.

What We Should Learn

Here are some lessons we should draw from the previous article. These points are in the same order as the incidents in the article.

1. However strong the temptation, we must always be definite in refusing to commit sin. But we must never trust in our own strength to resist temptation; we are too weak. So we must always seek God’s help.

2. The danger from alcohol lies not only in getting drunk but in losing any degree of self-control. When people lose some self-control, they lose more or less of their resistance to sin.

3. Some sins may seem only to affect other people. But every sin is against God. That is what makes sin so serious.

4. However great our sins, God is commanding us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We must never say that our sin is too great for us to be saved. God’s thoughts in these things are so much greater than ours (see Isaiah 55:8). His mercy is greater than we can imagine.

5. We should be thankful that we can read. We should not waste our

reading skills on material – in books, for example, or on the internet – that will do us harm. Especially, we should read the Bible. Christ tells us: “Search the Scriptures”. And we must persevere in doing so, whatever difficulties we may experience.

6. How important it is to pray to God, especially for the salvation of our souls, and to do so for the sake of Christ, who died to make the salvation of sinners possible.

7. We may make use of the very words of Scripture in our prayers, as the prisoner used the words of Psalm 51.

8. Salvation, as Jonah said, is from the Lord, and only from Him.

For Junior Readers

Time to Seek the Lord

John Macaskill was born in Carbost, on the Isle of Skye, a long time ago. In those days, children did not have to go to school, but when John was old enough, he had to learn a trade. His parents sent him to Portree, the main village on the island. He became an apprentice shoe-maker. He had to learn how to make and repair shoes and other leather articles like saddles and luggage. He did not enjoy the work, which was a pity, but the Lord had a more important purpose for John during his stay in Portree.

He was a respectable boy and did not fall into the sins of those around him. But at the same time he was careless about his spiritual condition, perhaps even self-righteous. He did not think about his sinfulness in the sight of God.

Then he was blessed to hear a wonderful preacher of the gospel, Rev Roderick Macleod, Snizort, in Skye. The text was, “It is time to seek the Lord” (Hosea 10:12). These words made a deep impression on the young man. The Holy Spirit used them to awaken him to a sense of his lost condition and to convince him of his sin. He went on his knees and prayed earnestly as a lost, guilty sinner before God; he knew that he deserved the wages of sin, which is death. He was deeply convicted of his sins and of his lost condition.

This went on for some time, until he again heard the same godly minister preach, this time from the words, “That ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). The Holy Spirit blessed these precious words and enabled John to look by faith to Christ crucified alone for salvation. He indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious!

Throughout a long life he lived as someone should who professes to be a Christian. He was a faithful follower of the Lord, who spoke to him through these words, "It is time to seek the Lord".

What about you? As you come to the end of 2020, what is most important to you? Yes, your studies. Yes, your family. But what about your soul? Your never-dying soul? This year is almost over – is it true of you as it was of the Jews in Jeremiah's day, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved"? Should you not then seek "first the kingdom of God and His righteousness"? "It is time to seek the Lord."

J van Kralingen

On the River Clyde

Rev Alexander McPherson

This was "The Editor's Page" in *The Young People's Magazine* for August 1975, and has been abridged. The holiday journeys described were probably in the 1920s.

When we were boys and the time came to exchange city life for the joys of the seaside, we often went from Glasgow by boat. As far as we young boys were concerned, the down-river sail was an exciting adventure.

From Glasgow to Clydebank, the Clyde was then a busy river. Ships of all sizes from all parts of the world lay beside the quays and in the various docks. On the river itself, a variety of vessels were on the move besides our own. Within a short distance of each other, shipyards created a noise which had to be heard to be believed. It was a scene full of colour, movement and sound calculated to delight any boy, and it was with some regret that we saw it fall away behind, and our vessel put on more speed as it came in sight of the green fields and hills that flanked the lower, broader reaches of the river.

A trip a week ago revealed many changes. The point of departure was only half-a-mile downstream. The morning was sunny and warm, and we found comfortable seats from which to view the passing scene. A large part of it consisted of silent, deserted quays. Ships were few. Strangest of all was the fewness of the shipbuilding yards and the small number of ships being built. It was all so different that I just had to ask myself why?

World trends in shipping explained the situation in part. And as our vessel quietly sailed down the rather dirty river past the deserted wharves and yards, I could not rid my mind of the words, "For sins of those that dwell therein, fat lands to barrenness". One has to apply these words figuratively to industrial Clydeside before they fit. But there was a time when industry did flourish along the banks of this river. A grimy and, in some ways, a grim sort of flourishing it was, yet it provided a livelihood for multitudes and in great

measure contributed to the prosperity of the city and land. Today the area is marked by desolation. Men's sins played a great part in making it so.

Sabbath desecration stands in the forefront of these sins. Before 1939 little Sabbath work was done in the shipbuilding. The Second World War changed that. So much work had to be done, and religion and morals were in such decline, that there was no hesitation about devoting the Lord's Day to much secular activity. During the First World War, it had been found that seven-day working in munitions had the effect of reducing productivity, but this lesson was largely ignored when the later conflict began.

In the Clyde shipyards, Sabbath work became the practice and, when the war ended, it continued. Order books were full because shipping companies had to replace their war losses. But now the men chose Saturday as their rest day and Sabbath became a full working day with the advantage that work done then qualified as overtime, and also was in many cases a more leisurely affair. This did not make for competitive pricing, and when the boom ended, the higher costs created by Sabbath work helped to lose orders to competitors in Europe and Japan.

So we see that men in a Christian land cannot desecrate God's day without bitter consequences. God has said, "Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest". And to make it clear that the ban applies also to work that some would call necessary, God goes on to say, "In earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest" (Exodus 34:21). Even in so important a matter as producing our necessary food, the Sabbath is to be observed. If this is done, the Lord will in providence ensure seedtime and harvest.

Pressure is being put on more and more people to do secular work on God's day under the pretext of necessity. So I wish to warn readers to be careful in their choice of occupation, and to be steadfast at all times in resisting both commands and appeals to turn out on Sabbath to do something termed necessary, but is in fact only convenient. God does not recognise such necessities but regards them as among the "many inventions" which man seeks out since his fall from uprightness (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

I could go on to write also of the part which the widespread failure of workers to perform their tasks diligently and conscientiously played in the decline of the Clyde.

"For sins of those that dwell therein, fat lands to barrenness." To that we can couple another verse, "Be sure your sin will find you out". Even though men forget Him, there is a God in heaven who has many ways of enforcing the claims of His holy moral law and of teaching us that "the way of transgressors is hard". Yet He is merciful and calls upon sinners to return to Him and He may be gracious to them. Individuals, you and I, need to do so,

and so do communities and nations. The God who forgives sins for Christ's sake can also turn wildernesses to fertile fields.

For Younger Readers

Praying Always

There was once a man working in a shop who was very busy. I am sure he went on his knees to pray to God every morning and evening. But even when he was busy, he kept on praying as he did his work.

So when he was arranging the candles for sale in his shop, he would pray, "Lord, let my light shine before men". He wanted to live to the glory of God. Perhaps when washing his face, he would ask God to wash away his sin. And when someone came into the shop, he might pray for their soul.

Children Walking in Truth

1. Knowing the Truth About Sin

J C Ryle

Ryle directed this sermon to children; probably he was including young people. But everyone, young and old, should be able to read it with profit. It is taken, with editing, from Ryle's *Home Truths*, volume 5.

2 John 4. *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth.*

The book from which my text is taken is the shortest in the Bible. Look at it when you go home, and you will find that it is so. It has only 13 verses. But, short as it is, it is full of important things, and I think the verse I have just read is one of them.

This book is an Epistle, or letter, written by the Apostle John. He wrote it to a good Christian lady, whom he knew. This lady had children, and some of them were the children spoken of in the text.

It seems that John found some of this good lady's children at a place where he went, and you see how well he found them behaving. He was able to write a good report of them to their mother, and that is the report of our text: "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth".

Now, children, there are only two things I want to tell you about, from this text. Some of you are perhaps thinking this very minute: What does walking in truth mean? Others are perhaps thinking: Why did John rejoice so greatly? I shall try to answer these two questions.

Firstly, I shall try to show you when it can be said that children walk in

truth. Secondly, I shall try to show you what were the reasons that made the Apostle John rejoice so greatly.

Children, let me ask you all one favour: let me ask you all to try to pay attention. I shall not keep you long. Listen to what I have to tell you. May the Holy Spirit open all your hearts and bless what I say.

1. I told you I would first try to show you this: ***When can it be said that children walk in truth?*** Let me set about it at once.

What does “walking” mean here? You must not think it means walking on our feet, as you have walked here tonight. It means rather our way of behaving ourselves – our way of living and going on. And shall I tell you why the Bible calls this walking? The Bible calls it this because everyone’s life is just like a journey. From the time of our birth to the time of our death, we are always travelling and moving on. Life is a journey from the cradle to the grave. So a person’s manner of living is often called his walk.

But what does “walking in truth” mean? It means walking in the ways of true Bible religion, and not in the bad ways of this evil world. The world, I am sorry to tell you, is full of false ideas and of untruths, and specially full of untruths about religion. They all come from our great enemy, the devil. The devil deceived Adam and Eve in Eden, and made them sin by telling them an untruth. He told them they would not die if they ate the forbidden fruit, and that was untrue. And the devil is always at the same work now. He is always trying to make men, women and children have false ideas about God and about religion. He persuades them to believe that what is really evil is good, and that what is really good is evil; he persuades them that God’s service is not pleasant and that sin will do them no great harm. And, I am sad to say, he deceives vast numbers of people who believe these untruths.

But those people who walk in truth are very different. They pay no attention to the false ideas about religion that there are in the world. They follow the true way which God shows us in the Bible. Whatever others may do, their chief desire is to please God and to be His true servants. Now this was the character of the children spoken of in the text. John writes home to their mother and says, “I found [them] walking in truth”.

Children, would you not like to know whether you are walking in truth yourselves? Would you not like to know the marks by which you may find out? Listen, every one of you, while I try to set these marks before you in order. Let every boy and girl listen to what I am going to say.

(1.) I tell you, for one thing, that children who walk in truth *know the truth about sin*.

What is sin? To break any command of God is sin. To do anything that God says ought not to be done is sin. And God is very holy and very pure,

and every sin that is sinned displeases Him very much. But, in spite of all this, most people in the world, both old and young, think very little about sin. Some try to make out they are not great sinners and do not often break God's commandments. Others say that sin is not so terrible a thing after all, and that God is not so particular and strict as ministers say He is. These are two great and dangerous mistakes.

Children who walk in truth think very differently. They have no such proud and high feelings. They feel themselves full of sin, and it grieves and humbles them. They believe that sin is the abominable thing which God hates. They look on sin as their greatest enemy and plague. They hate it more than anything else on earth. There is nothing they so heartily wish to be free from as sin.

Children, this is the first mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. Do you hate sin?

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

6. The Purpose of the Church

Rev J D Smith

Last month's section of this Youth Conference paper described the present state of the Church. This article brings the series to an end.

3. The Purpose. What is the purpose of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland? Why does it exist today? As Rev Hugh Cartwright stated, "the ultimate reasons for the existence of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland are the reasons for which the Church was established by Christ: the worship and glory of God on earth, the nurture of the people of God, the proclamation of the gospel to sinners". We must never forget that this is the reason why the Church exists: the glory of God and the good of souls. And it should always be our desire to honour Christ as the Head of the Church and seek the eternal welfare of never-dying souls.

You will have noticed long before now that the title of our paper is not, "The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Past, Present and Future". That is because we are not prophets and we do not make predictions. Only God knows the future of our Church. But we do know that God has given grace to the Church to be faithful in the past, for which we should be thankful; and it is only if we are faithful in the present that we can expect to be a witness to the truth in the future. Being faithful and persevering are key to the future of any particular Church.

There is one universal Church, the Church of Christ on earth, but there

are various branches of the visible Church; or to use the language of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, there are different *particular Churches*. And some particular Churches are purer than others. “Particular Churches, which are members [of the universal Church] are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them” (25:4). We do not claim to be a perfect Church. But we recognise certain distinctives that our Church has stood for in the past and which still call for a separate position from others.

Why do we continue as a separate body from other Churches? Why does the Free Presbyterian Church have a separate position? One answer to that question is that, as a Church, we profess to be Reformed in doctrine, worship and practice.

We hold to the entire *Westminster Confession of Faith*. No statement in the *Confession* is an open question. All ministers, elders and deacons sign the formula of unqualified subscription to the *Confession of Faith*. The Church is not at liberty to decide what enters into the substance of the Reformed faith. Each office-bearer professes that the *Confession of Faith* is the confession of *his* faith. And it is that doctrine, agreeable to Scripture, which is faithfully proclaimed in our pulpits.

According to the Regulative Principle – which means that all worship is *regulated* by the Word of God – we sing only the Psalms, the inspired book of praise. Uninspired hymns are excluded by the principle that the worship of God must be the worship that He Himself has *prescribed*. This means also that no musical accompaniment is allowed in God’s worship. Psalms of praise must be sung without any musical instruments in the New Testament worship of God. In English we use the Authorised Version of the Bible, which was translated from the original languages, Hebrew and Greek, using the uncorrupted text of the Old and New Testaments.

We base our conduct and practice on the Word of God, seeking to live our lives according to it, in obedience to God’s law – which is revealed in the Ten Commandments, the teaching of Christ in the Gospels, and the Epistles of the Apostles. It is our duty to seek first the kingdom of God and to be faithful to the end. We must adhere to the whole Word of God and persevere in the path of obedience.

We are not an exclusive sect – we do not try to be different for the sake of being different, making up our own rules for the sake of a unique identity. We only try to keep to the principles of God’s Word, inviting others to join with us and follow the old paths, not merely because they are old but because they are divine, established from eternity. God is calling His people to come

out of the world and the taint of sin. The call is ever to repentance, to continue to seek reformation in our hearts and our lives.

We ought to be grateful for the heritage that has been passed on to us. To quote the words of Rev Donald MacLean: "The tide which had been rising in the Free Church had now come to its full expression in the Declaratory Act, the passing of which had indeed brought to an end the Free Church of 1843. It had only taken 50 years for the lamentable backsliding to reach this sad state. By his Protest and separation from this body, Mr Macfarlane had in view the preserving of the constitution of the Free Church, and passing of it on to generations following."

We are one of those generations. We are in a Church that has embraced the *Confession of Faith*, unchanged from when the Church of Scotland first approved it by its General Assembly in 1647. What cause of thanksgiving that this legacy has been known and embraced in the present generation! As the Psalmist says, "Thou, O God, hast heard my vows: Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear Thy name" (Psalm 61:5).

And if we are truly thankful for this heritage, what are we doing to share it with others outside the Church? Are we ready to convey to others the sound doctrine, worship, and practice that we have been taught? Are we seeking opportunities to do so? We must not hoard the treasure for ourselves; we have an obligation to pass it on to others. As Moses said to Hobab: "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel" (Numbers 10:29).

Yet we need grace to be steadfast and humble. The editor of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* wrote in 1933, 40 years after the stand was made, "Boasting in our own attainments and achievements is always a dangerous thing especially where the honour and glory should be given to God". The Church will not receive the blessing apart from humility. But we must also be thankful. Later the same writer continues, "We have no reason to be proud of ourselves as Free Presbyterians, but neither have we cause to be ashamed of the truths we stand for; and if we, through grace, remain faithful to God He will not leave us in the future any more than He has done in the past."

The future of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is in the Lord's hands. It is for us, by His grace, to be faithful. Let that be our purpose. And the Lord who has helped in the past will help us in the present and go with us into the future. That is not only for our Church, but for every particular Church that desires to follow Christ fully. "The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron" (Psalm 115:12).

The Young People's Magazine

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Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod

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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The Syrian's Arrow

This poem refers to an arrow fired in a battle between King Ahab's army and the Syrians. The arrow was not fired at anyone in particular, but in God's providence, it hit Ahab, and he died from his wound. See 1 Kings 22:29-40.

A bow at a venture from a Syrian hand,
With a careless abandon to a target unplanned,
See the arrow speed on; unerring it flies,
Searching out Ahab, a king in disguise,
To the joints of the armour, a target so small,
Directed by Him who is God over all.

His truth finds its mark however men try
To hide in their sin from His all-seeing eye.
He weighs every motive in all that men do;
He searches the heart and his judgements are true.

And though, like King Ahab, the heart may devise
To feign in the folly of sham and disguise.
Like the Syrian shaft in the battle that day
His judgement will come on a false, evil way.

J Slater

Looking Around Us

Covid-19 and Christmas

“Traditional Christmas Is Cancelled”, cried the main headline on the front page of the *Scottish Daily Mail* a few weeks ago. It was reporting what Scotland's national clinical director had said, a doctor who advises the Scottish government.

This year, Covid has interfered with much of life, including education, work, entertainment and even church services. But, for many, nothing should interfere with Christmas, especially the family gatherings that take place in many homes. For some, Christmas time is the one point in the year when they take part in any religious activity, when they make their one trip to church – for a Christmas Eve service.

No doubt they think they are commemorating the most important event in Christianity. Yes, the birth of Jesus Christ was hugely important; yet the death of Jesus Christ was even more important. The Bible does not tell us to remember Christ's birth by holding a festival; it does not even tell us when

He was born, not even the season of the year – though, it is very unlikely that shepherds were outside with their sheep on a winter's night.

The fact is that what is called Christmas was taken over from a heathen midwinter festival, which is a very good reason why we should have nothing to do with it. We should observe the Sabbath every week, because God has commanded us to do so. Believers are to remember Christ's death in the Lord's Supper, because God has commanded them to do so. But God has not commanded us to keep a midwinter festival in memory of Christ's birth.

Should We Be Serious at Funerals?

Looking through my daily newspaper today, my eye caught a request in a death announcement: "Cheerful everyday clothes and no solemnity". To this was added the statement: "It is a Humanist funeral".

Should a funeral be cheerful or solemn? Well, a funeral is marking someone's death. And death is serious. Very likely there will be at least one person, perhaps several, who were very close to the one who has died – perhaps a wife or a husband – and they will feel very sad. It is very thoughtless to be laughing when a close relative is in tears. But even if the request for cheerfulness and the ban on being solemn comes from the family, as in the newspaper announcement, solemnity is appropriate. Death is not the end of our existence, though a humanist would tell you that it is.

The website of a humanist society states that they believe the only source of knowledge, and of a moral code to live by, is human experience and thinking. If we were dependent on human thinking for religion, then surely my thinking is as good as anybody else's. But we cannot all be right; if some are right, then obviously everyone else is wrong.

Contrary to what humanists claim, there is a God, a God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. That is where we must go to find out the significance of death – in particular, that it is not the end of our existence. After death, our souls must go either to heaven or to hell and, at the end of the world, Christ will judge what we have done in the body.

Surely all these things are solemn. So, at a funeral, we should think seriously about where we are going: is it to heaven or to hell? And this should bring us to think about the only way of salvation – through Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose again, and who is now calling to sinners: "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).

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