

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



January 2021

Vol 86 • No 1

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Cover Picture: The piece of wood covered in goose barnacles that is described on page 6.

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Published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Scottish charity number SC003545.

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Material for the magazine should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous month.

Subscriptions, Renewals, Changes of Address should be sent to the General Treasurer: Mr W Campbell, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE; e-mail: wc.fpchurch@btconnect.com; tel: 0141 332 9283. The subscription year ends in December, and subscriptions should be sent in January each year for the following 12 months. Subscription rates, including postage, are: F P Magazine £26.00 (£2.00 per copy); Y P Magazine £15.00 (£1.00 per copy); both magazines £39.00. All queries should be directed to the General Treasurer, not to the printer.

Free Presbyterian Magazine: The Church's main magazine is *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. Send to the General Treasurer at the above address for a free sample copy. See above for subscription rates.

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Number 1

Trifling with the Things of Eternity

John Howe was once a well-known minister, though probably not many know about him today; he lived from 1632 to 1705. He was a humble man whom God had taught not to trust in himself for salvation. One day, when he was suffering terrible pain, he said, "I expect my salvation, not as a profitable servant, but as a pardoned sinner". He could not think of himself as someone who was profitable to God, but he could believe that the Most High had pardoned his sins.

Howe began his ministry in the small Devonshire town of Torrington. An older minister called George Hughes, of Plymouth, was a good friend of his, and they wrote to each other regularly. One day a letter arrived from Hughes which ended with the prayer, "May the dew of heaven be upon your dwelling!" Probably Hughes' wish was that the blessings of God would rest on Howe's home and those who lived in it. But that very day Howe's house went on fire. Where was God's blessing now? In fact, rain began to fall so heavily that it put out the fire. No doubt Howe was specially thankful that day for his friend's prayers and saw the heavy rain as a blessing from God. And when Howe married, it was Hughes' daughter who became his wife.

In one of his many books, Howe encouraged his readers to pray, "Lord, keep me from trifling with the things of eternity". We are all bound for eternity; our journey through this life will take us either to heaven or to hell. We should think of eternity in the light of Scripture, which tells us that our existence beyond this world will last for ever. Neither the blessedness of heaven or the awfulness of hell will ever come to an end. So we should take eternity seriously. Howe took it seriously; so he prayed that his readers would take it seriously, that they would not treat it as a trifle, as something trivial, something of little importance.

We trifle with eternity if we do not think about it, if we do not do anything to prepare for it. We trifle with eternity if we do not consider the fact that, whatever our spiritual state is when we leave this world, so we must continue for ever. There will be no opportunity for salvation after we die.

Jesus spoke about the "great gulf fixed" between the rich man in hell and

Abraham and Lazarus in heaven; no one could pass from the one place to the other (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man was well off in this world but how very poor he was in hell. In hell he was asking for what was very much less than salvation. Yet it was impossible for him to have what he asked for; it was even more impossible for him to be saved when his life in this world was over. Clearly he had trifled with eternity when he was alive, enjoying great feasts day after day. He had not considered that he was a sinner and that he must be punished for his sins unless he would take eternity seriously and seek earnestly for salvation in the way that God had appointed.

Lazarus had taken eternity seriously; he did not trifle with it, nor with the fact he was a sinner. He also took seriously the fact that God forgives sinners. Although he was so poor, and suffering so badly from lots of sores on his body, Lazarus took seriously the call, "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). Lazarus sought the Lord and found Him; he called upon Him and his prayers were answered. He turned from his own ways and thoughts to the Lord. God had mercy on him and pardoned him abundantly.

God is still the same. How urgently and earnestly we should seek Him! We must not trifle with these things, especially when God is so ready to show mercy – even to the extent of pardoning *abundantly*.

Think of Felix, the Roman governor of Judaea before whom Paul appeared as a prisoner. Paul reasoned with him about, among other things, the final judgement. There, as Paul wrote, "we must all appear . . . that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10).

Paul spoke seriously; he was not trifling when he spoke about the things of eternity. But Felix was trifling, even though he trembled when Paul was speaking. He did not want to take Paul's warnings seriously; he wanted to go on living in sin. So he promised Paul that he would call for him again at some convenient time. But Felix only made that promise to get rid of Paul and what he had to say. What made Felix so uncomfortable and caused him to tremble? It was his conscience; he knew that Paul spoke the truth. But he went on trifling. Yes, he often spoke with Paul again, but only in the hope of getting a bribe from him, and Paul did not give bribes (Acts 24:25,26).

What about you? Do you take ministers seriously when they speak about eternity, about death, judgement and everlasting suffering? Perhaps what is uppermost in your mind is the hope that the sermon will soon stop, or that the minister will move on and speak about something else – something that

will not disturb your conscience so much. But that is to trifle with what is tremendously serious. Eternity is serious and what the Bible says about it is true. It is a reality; the judgement seat will be a reality; heaven and hell are realities, and each one of us must spend an unending eternity in one place or the other. Let us not trifle. Let us pray, as John Howe did: "Lord, keep me from trifling with the things of eternity". Let us pray, in particular, that we would not trifle with what we hear about the things of eternity in preaching.

Think now about Agrippa, a King before whom Paul appeared. As Paul was explaining why he had been arrested, the Roman governor Festus – who was with Agrippa – claimed that "much learning" had made Paul "mad". The Apostle denied that he was mad and asked, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" before adding, "I know that thou believest".

Agrippa's conscience no doubt answered silently, Yes, before confessing, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian". But he was still trifling. Yes, he accepted that what the Old Testament prophets wrote was true and that Paul spoke convincingly when he showed that these prophecies spoke of the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ. But he did not take these things seriously. He did not feel his need as a sinner, who had yet to face death, judgement and eternity; he did not seek the Lord.

What about you? Do you take seriously what the Bible – Old Testament and New – says about sin and about its consequences, especially in eternity? Do you take the Bible seriously when it speaks about Jesus as the Son of God, who became man, so that He might die in the place of sinners? You probably know about these things and about much more that the Bible teaches. But do you *believe* these truths? Perhaps you sometimes feel influenced by them, perhaps almost persuaded.

Yet if that is as far as you go, you are trifling with your soul, trifling about eternity. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; you must trust in Him for the salvation of your soul. That is what the Bible tells you, and it is God who is speaking to you in the Bible. He is totally serious in what He says. Christ is serious when He calls you to come by faith to Him, when He tells you: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". If you almost feel your need, if you almost come to Christ, if you are almost persuaded, that is not enough. You are still trifling. How much you need to pray, "Lord, keep me from trifling with the things of eternity" – as they are brought to your attention in the Bible.

This *Magazine* comes to you about the start of another year. Every new year should remind you forcefully of the passing of time, that you are coming closer to eternity. It is a reminder that you ought not to trifle but ought, with all seriousness, to seek the Lord and eternal salvation through Him.

Washed up on the Beach

Rev K M Watkins

We did not know what it was when we first saw it, washed up high on the beach after a stormy few days. Even when we came right up to it, we still did not recognise it, although we later discovered that it was not very unusual. It was a colony of goose barnacles, all attached by their long “necks” to a large piece of timber. The colony numbered many hundreds, but now that they had been out of the water for a time, they were all dead.

In a shipwreck, it might be a good idea to catch hold of some floating debris from the broken ship. When Paul’s boat sank off the coast of Melita, that is what those who could not swim did: “some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship . . . they escaped all safe to land” (Acts 27:44). But for goose barnacles, their habit of sticking to driftwood floating in the sea is a dangerous policy. Once attached, they cannot remove themselves, so they just go where the driftwood goes, floating on the surface of the ocean, feeding on the plankton which they catch by waving their “legs” in the sea. This seems to work well enough for a time, but if a storm drives their adopted home onto a beach, they will be stranded and will die in the dry air.

It was sad to see so many dead creatures. But it illustrates something much more distressing. The stranded barnacles are a solemn picture of people who perish in their sins, without faith in Christ.

1. Goose barnacles *attach themselves to something* that passes by in the ocean currents. It might be to a piece of timber or to a piece of worthless plastic. This is what sinners do. They attach themselves to something in life that catches their attention.

Many people attach themselves to entertainments: sport, drama, films, music, and so on. They cannot stop themselves latching on to such things. The celebrities and stars make a fortune out of their besotted fans, but these deluded followers cannot let go. For other people, it is social media and its addictive need to know and be known. Instead of living in the real world, they live out their lives in the make-believe of distorted pictures and unbalanced accounts of life given by themselves and others. Others attach themselves to the most unwise friendships and relationships. Even though these connections rarely work for good, but almost always for harm, they cannot disentangle themselves. Then there are people whose covetous hearts drive them to seek money, prestige and power. It does not matter how much of these they acquire, they always need more, even to their last breath.

2. Goose barnacles are actually *quite attractive* – not their long, rubbery necks, nor their actual bodies, but their pearl-white shells with yellow edges.

Sinners too, although wedded to their sins in a spiritually ugly way, and altogether corrupt within, can nevertheless appear outwardly beautiful to the eyes of others.

Many sinners seek to lead quiet, peaceable, respectable, dependable lives, as caring family members and helpful neighbours. But that is only the outward shell. Underneath, their hearts are “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), just like every other fallen sinner. And what of the unsightly neck? Careful and troubled about many things, and full of earthly cares, these sinners spend all their days in pursuit of some ideal life in this world, neglecting the true beauties of the spiritual world, in the loveliness of Christ and His grace.

Others seek to clothe themselves with religion – by which we mean false religion, any religion that is not the true religion of saving faith in Christ as revealed in Scripture. However well they may achieve the standards set by their religion, and however attractive their temples and rituals may appear to many, they can form no true protection for their souls. The ugly, rubbery neck of pride shows what all the followers of false religion are attached to: their own self-righteousness. However zealously attached they are to their religious dogmas and duties, they are clinging to worthless pieces of flotsam. This is true of Roman Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, so-called Jehovah Witnesses, and all the rest.

3. When things are going well, the goose barnacles *seem to have everything*. Their chosen home carries them through the ocean, transporting them to the food they need in order to live. So it is with sinners. For a while, in their own eyes their chosen course of life seems to provide them with everything they need. Putting out the “legs” of their sinful desires, they feed on their interests and activities to their hearts’ content. They are like the prodigal son in the far country, before his money, friends and food came to an end.

It takes the grace of God, by the working of the Holy Spirit in the soul, to open a sinner’s eyes, and show him that his godless, sinful life cannot satisfy his soul’s needs. “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isaiah 55:2). Across the whole ocean of worldliness, in its pleasures, profits or promotions, there is nothing that can meet the needs of a never-dying soul. The prodigal’s money, friends and food all ended before “he came to himself” (Luke 15:17). Then his eyes were opened and he realised that he needed to repent and return to his father’s house, casting himself on his mercy. So the sinner needs to be brought to see the emptiness of living only for this present world.

4. The goose barnacles are *not in control of the direction they are going*

in. They are carried here and there, up and down, backwards and forwards, according to the winds, tides and currents. Sinners are like this too. Like barnacles in the sea, they wander aimlessly, driven to and fro by any current that carries them along. Without faith in Christ, they are “like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6).

Sinners often think that they are in control of their lives. Indeed, that might be part of why they resist Christ, for they do not want to give up their perceived freedom to live in any way they please. This, they promise themselves, is their liberty. What they do not realise is that they are controlled by the sinfulness of their own hearts and the influences of the devil. The Jews rejected this when the Lord Jesus told them, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). They said, “We . . . were never in bondage” (verse 33). But like all sinners, they were slaves to their sins, driven up and down by their sinful desires.

5. In the end, the lives of the goose barnacles *ended in disaster*. The piece of timber they had attached themselves to, solid enough in itself, was no help to them when storm and tide washed them up on the beach, leaving them to perish. So it is with sinners. However strong and sturdy their attachments may appear, and however well they may seem to serve them for a time, lives without Christ will eventually end in disaster. The broad way of sin, even though teeming millions travel along it, always ends in destruction if people persist in it.

For the eternal safety of our never-dying souls, we need something much firmer than a piece of wood or plastic to latch on to. We need a fixed and solid foundation that will never let us down. We need a solid rock that can be depended on in all weathers, whatever temptations and attacks are made upon it. We have such a foundation set before us in the gospel. God has said: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16). This is a sure and steadfast foundation stone that has been tried and tested. Whoever believes on this rock shall never be forced into a hasty panic to find a better foundation, for it will never fail. “And that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

We must flee all our false hopes, for they are vain and useless when the storm of death comes. If we go on trusting in them, we will be washed up on the beach of a lost eternity, cast away in our unbelief. We must look to the power of the Holy Spirit to make us willing to let go of them. We must turn to Christ, as He is offered to us in the gospel as the one and only sure hope. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The Covenanters: What They Teach Us

1. What Is a Covenant?

The first section of a paper given at a New Zealand Youth Conference, at Hunua Falls in New Zealand, in 2019.

1. Introduction. One early morning in May 1685 in Scotland, a crowd of onlookers gathered near the Solway Firth, a large estuary where the sea level rises and falls several metres each day. Two wooden stakes were driven into the sand, and then two women were bound to them to be drowned in the rising tide. These women, both called Margaret, were Covenanters being put to death for refusing to promise total obedience to a King who was persecuting the Church.

One of the women was only 18 years old and was forced to watch the other woman, who was 63, struggle in the rushing waters. Someone asked the young Margaret: “What do you think of your friend now?”

“What do I see,” she answered, “but Christ wrestling in one of His members there? Think you that *we* are the sufferers? No, it is Christ in us, for He sends none a warfare upon their own charges.”

Then the waves swept over her head. Just before she was about to drown, they pulled her out of the water. The head soldier asked if she would pray for the king. She answered, “I wish the salvation of all and the damnation of none.”

Someone standing nearby pled with her, “Margaret, just say, God save the king.”

She replied calmly, “God save him, if He will, for it is his salvation I desire.”

“There!” cried the crowd to the soldier, “She has said it, she may go free.” The soldier was not satisfied. “Take the abjuration oath”, he demanded. (The abjuration oath was a promise never to resist the King in any matter.)

The 18-year-old replied firmly, “I will not, I am one of Christ’s children! Let me go.” Immediately she was thrown into the water and drowned.

In another place, some soldiers found a man sleeping on a riverbank. A Bible lay on the ground near him. They awoke him and asked, “Will you pray for the King?” The man said that he would pray for him with all his heart. They were about to let him go when one of the soldiers asked, “But will you renounce the Covenant?”

The man hesitated and then firmly replied, “Indeed, sir, I’ll as soon renounce my baptism”. They immediately shot him on the spot.

All these Scottish martyrs were called Covenanters. They were Christians who had solemnly entered into a covenant with God. But what exactly is a

covenant? And why did they place so much emphasis on making covenants with God? To answer these questions, we must first look briefly at what the Bible says about covenants.

2. The biblical basis for covenanting. The Bible teaches that God is a covenant God. That is, He has always dealt with man through covenants. A covenant is an agreement that binds two parties together. It contains a condition and a promise. In other words, one party is asked to do something, and the other promises to give something in return. It is therefore similar to a contract: a builder promises to build a house for someone, who promises to pay him a certain amount of money.

But there is one key difference between divine covenants and human covenants. God's covenants have authority over us; we *must* agree to them. But with human covenants, we can either agree to them or refuse them. That said, both divine and human covenants establish a relationship between the two parties.

God has made two covenants that involve mankind. The first was with our first father Adam and was called the Covenant of Works. In this covenant, the condition was perfect obedience and the promise was eternal life. As we all know, Adam broke this covenant by eating the forbidden fruit. It became impossible for him or any of those who descended from him by ordinary generation to earn eternal life by obeying the law.

But God then revealed another covenant – the Covenant of Grace, which He had made with His Son, Jesus Christ, before the world began. In this covenant, Christ agreed to obey the law in the place of elect sinners and endure the punishment they deserved. In return, He would obtain all blessings needed for their eternal happiness.

The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, unfolds this glorious Covenant. The phrase “the book of the covenant” (2 Kings 23:2) aptly describes the whole Bible. It is divided into the Old and New Testaments, which describe the two ways in which God has administered the Covenant. In the Old Testament, He administered it by promises, sacrifices, prophets, and circumcision. In the New Testament, He administers it through the preaching of the Word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace. When a person is baptized, he or she enters into “an open and professed engagement to be [entirely] and only the Lord's” (*Larger Catechism*, Answer 165). There is now an outward bond, or covenant, between the Lord and the baptized person – a covenant which should never be broken.

Now someone might object, Baptism by itself cannot bind me to the Lord. How can I be really and truly bound for ever to the blessed God?

The answer is, By obeying the call of Christ in the gospel. “Incline your ear,” the Lord says in Isaiah 55, “and come unto Me, hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” In another place, this same offer is compared to an offer of marriage, which is somewhat like a covenant: “I will betroth thee unto Me for ever” (Hos 2:19). Accept this gracious offer, and you will be bound for ever to the covenant God, who will give you grace here and glory hereafter.

Let us pause here and summarise: God is a covenant God. The Bible is a covenant book. The gospel makes a covenant offer. The sacraments are covenant seals that illustrate and confirm the covenant. Simply put, the Bible is full of teaching about the Covenant of Grace.

Children Walking in Truth

2. Knowing Christ and Doing Right

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. The first section, last month, explained what “walking in truth” means. Ryle then asked, “When can it be said that children walk in truth?” The first part of his answer was, “Those who walk in truth *know the truth about sin*”. This article gives three further parts of his answer.

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

(2.) I tell you, for another thing, that children who walk in truth *love the true Saviour of sinners and follow Him.*

There are few men and women who do not feel they need in some way to be saved. They feel that after death comes the judgement, and from that awful judgement they would like to be saved.

But how few of them will see that the Bible says there is only one Saviour, even Jesus Christ, and few go to Him and ask Him to save them! They trust rather to their own prayers, or their own repentance, or their own church-going, or their own regular attendance at the Lord's Supper, or their own goodness, or something of the kind. But these things, although useful in their place, cannot save any soul from hell. These are false ways of salvation. They cannot put away sin. They are not Christ.

Nothing can save you or me but Jesus Christ, who died for sinners on the cross. Only those who trust entirely to Him have their sins forgiven and will go to heaven. Those alone will find they have an almighty Friend on the Day of Judgement. This is the true way to be saved.

Children who walk in truth have learned all this and, if you ask them what they put their trust in, they will answer, Nothing but Christ. They remember His gracious words, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not". They try to follow Jesus, as the lambs follow a good shepherd. And they love Him, because they read in the Bible that He loved them and gave Himself for them.

Children, this is the second mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. Do you love Christ?

(3.) I tell you, for a third thing, that children who walk in truth *serve God with a true heart*.

I dare say you know that some people think it is very possible to serve God with outward service only. Many try to do so. They will put on a grave face and pretend to be serious, while they do not feel it. They will say beautiful prayers with their lips and yet not mean what they say. They will sit in their places at church every Sabbath and yet be thinking of other things all the time. Such service is outward service, and very wrong.

Bad children, I am sorry to say, are often guilty of this sin. They will say their prayers regularly when their parents make them, but not otherwise. They will seem to listen in church when someone is watching them, but not at other times. Their *hearts* are far away.

Children who walk in truth are not like this. They have another spirit in them. Their desire is to be honest in all they do with God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. When they pray, they try to be in earnest and to mean all the words they say. When they go to church, they try to be really serious and to give their minds to what they hear. And it is one of their chief troubles that they cannot serve God more heartily than they do.

Children, this is the third mark of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. Is your heart false or true?

(4.) I tell you, for a last thing, that children who walk in truth *really try to do things right and true in the sight of God*.

God has told us very plainly what is right. Nobody can mistake this who reads the Bible with an honest heart. But it is sad to see how few men and women care to please God. Many break His commandments continually and seem to think nothing of it. Some will tell lies, swear, quarrel, cheat and steal. Others use bad words, break the Sabbath, never pray to God at all, never read their Bibles. Others are unkind to their relations, or idle, or gluttonous, or bad-tempered, or selfish. And all these things, whatever people may choose to think, are very wicked and displeasing to the holy God.

Children who walk in truth are always trying to keep clear of bad ways. They take no pleasure in sinful things of any kind and they dislike the

company of those who do them. Their great wish is to be like Jesus: holy, harmless, and separate from sinners. They try to be kind, gentle, obliging, obedient, honest, truthful and good in all their ways. It grieves them they are not more holy than they are.

Children, this is the last mark I shall give you of walking in truth. Look at it. Think of it. Are the things you do right or wrong?

You have now heard some marks of walking in truth. I have tried to set them plainly before you. I hope you have understood them: knowing the truth about sin; loving the true Saviour, Jesus Christ; serving God with a true heart; doing the things that are true and right in the sight of God. There they are, all four together. Think about them, I plead with you and, each one of you, ask yourself this question: What am I doing at this very time? Am I walking in truth?

I can be sure that many boys and girls here know well what answer they ought to give. And God knows too, for He sees your hearts as plainly as I see your faces this minute. The all-seeing God sends you a question tonight, by my mouth. He asks, Are you walking in truth?

Why should you not? Thousands of children have walked in truth already and found it pleasant. The way has been trodden by many little feet before your own. Thousands of boys and girls are walking in truth at this moment. And there is yet room. Children, think tonight: Why should *you* not?

The Message of the Rainbow

Matthew Vogan

Have you seen lots of rainbows over the past several months? Many houses are displaying in their windows rainbows painted by children. Perhaps you cannot help noticing them as you go for walks. It has been happening all over the world. It was first started in Italy and Spain and it has been called "The Rainbow Trail".

Why are they doing this? They are using the rainbow as a symbol of hope during times of difficulty and trouble. Sometimes people use the rainbow in a very wrong way to make it a symbol of a lifestyle that God condemns. That makes those who love God doubly sad, because of the sin being promoted and because the rainbow is misused, being removed from its original meaning.

Who made the rainbow that we see in the sky? God, of course. Can you remember what the Bible says the rainbow means? It speaks of God's promise never again to destroy the world by a flood. There is much more to the rainbow than a general symbol of hope in stormy times. God made it for a purpose

and gave it a particular meaning. But the Bible speaks about the meaning of the rainbow in other places as well as in Genesis.

God says to Noah: "I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth (Genesis 9:13-16).

God makes the rainbow special, He says it is "my bow". God's glory is shown in its beautiful bright colours that attract our attention. He is still working in all the things that He has made. They all point to the one who created them. It is also a special token or sign of His covenant. It helps remind us of His promise, a covenant is something that contains promises. It reminds us that God is faithful and keeps His promises. Perhaps someone made a promise to you but then they forgot about it or things changed and they could not keep it. This does not happen with God. After thousands of years God is still keeping the promise He made to Noah. It is not because people are less sinful that God has not destroyed the earth by another flood but only because of His promise.

Why does God call it a bow? It is like a bow without any arrows. It has no bowstring. That is a bow that cannot be fired at anyone. But have you thought about where it is pointing? It is pointing not down towards the earth but up towards heaven. It speaks of mercy and peace. It speaks not just of the mercy of the world being preserved but of grace in Christ. In Isaiah 54:8-10 the covenant made with Noah is connected to the covenant of grace made in Christ. In Revelation the rainbow is also a sign of grace. Christ sits on the throne with a rainbow round about it (Revelation 4:3). This shows that the throne of Christ is surrounded with mercy.

In Revelation 10:1 Christ is presented in a vision described as a mighty angel. He is crowned with the rainbow. He is the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6) and His crown is the rainbow, representing peace (Genesis 9:13-14). The rainbow has a variety of colours and is all glorious. The "manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10) has a variety and a glory; the word translated manifold originally means many-coloured. The rainbow begins with red and in the Bible this colour often reminds us that it was necessary for the Lord Jesus Christ to shed His blood and die so that the sins of His people would be forgiven. The last colours in the rainbow are purple or indigo and then violet. In the Bible purple is often associated with royalty. So we can think about

Christ's kingdom of grace that will never come to an end. The heavenly throne is surrounded by a rainbow to show that it is a throne of grace to those who have obtained mercy (Revelation 4:2).

All the colours blend together in a spectrum. Can you tell exactly where one colour ends and another begins? It would be very difficult. In the same way there are many glorious and unsearchable mysteries in the grace of Christ.

We cannot see a rainbow without the sun shining. The light of God's Spirit and truth must reveal His mercy through His Word.

It is "the bow in the cloud in the day of rain." (Ezekiel 1:28). The darker the cloud, the more vividly the colours of the rainbow stand out. So it is with God's mercy and His just wrath against sin. When we think of God's judgment against sin on the cross, we see mercy and truth met together against the dark backdrop of sin being punished in the Saviour's sufferings. The cloud of infinite judgment had to be poured out on Christ's head.

The rainbow reminds us of God's faithfulness and mercy, and it reveals much to us of His grace in Christ. It speaks to us about the gospel if we have a spiritual understanding of it. You have this mercy of God in Christ and an eternal hope revealed to you. It is a sure and certain hope that is a perfect provision. It deals with the nature and consequences of sin, a disease infinitely worse than the coronavirus.

Faithfulness in Madagascar

Madagascar is a very large island off the coast of south-east Africa. Men from the London Missionary Society went there and God blessed their work; some of the local people were turned from their own ways and truly trusted in Christ.

But the missionaries had to leave when Queen Ranavalona, who ruled the island, would no longer allow them to spread the gospel. She also persecuted the local Christians. The persecution was specially severe in 1849, when the authorities used torture and death in an attempt to get rid of Christianity.

On March 14 that year, an officer was examining some Christians. He asked them: "Do you pray to the sun or the moon or the earth?"

One of them, whose first initial was R, answered, "I do not pray to these, for the hand of God made them".

The officer then asked, "Do you pray to the 12 mountains that are sacred?"

R told him: "I do not pray to them, for they are mountains".

"Do you pray to the gods that make the kings sacred?"

"I do not pray to them, for the hand of man made them."

"Do you pray to the ancestors of the kings and queens?"

"Kings and rulers are given by God so that we may serve and obey them and give them honour. But they are only men like ourselves. When we pray, we pray to God alone."

Then the officer asked about them keeping the Sabbath day. R told him: "That is the day of the great God, for in six days the Lord made all His works. But God rested on the seventh and He caused it to be holy." R went on to say that *he* rested on that day, so that he could keep the Sabbath holy. And the other Christians gave similar answers.

One of the Christian men had kept away from the others. He noticed that one of them, a woman, made the same confession. He then remembered that to deny God would result in a bad conscience; so he came forward and spoke in the same way as the others.

After the Christians were tied up, the husband of one of them came over and said, "Do not be afraid, for it is well if you die for that". He was a soldier from another part of the island. Then he too was questioned and made the same confession. So he also was arrested. Ten Christians were now under arrest and each of them was placed in a separate house. But at 1 o'clock in the morning they came together to pray.

Some days later, people heard one of them saying, "Jehovah alone is God, and above every name that is named, and Jesus Christ is also God". But, sadly, the people just mocked them.

The officer said to another of the Christians about the Queen: she "is our god, but not your god".

He answered, not only faithfully but wisely (using another name for her): "The God who made me is my God, but Rabodo is my Queen".

The officer and others tried to get him to give a different answer, but he refused. Then they said about him: "Perhaps he is an idiot or a madman".

The Christian then replied, "I am not an idiot and have not lost my understanding".

Then there was a disturbance and the people demanded, "Take him away". So he was taken to prison.

The next day, while it was still dark, some people gathered at another place. They took 18 Christians, who were faithful to God, and tied their hands and their feet and then tied each of these men and women to a pole. These Christians were then brought to join the others. After the officers, soldiers and judges arrived, their punishments were read out: some were to be fined and their goods confiscated; others were to become slaves; others were to be put in chains in prison and to be beaten. The other 18 were to be

put to death – four to be burned alive and the other 14 to be thrown over a cliff and their bodies to be burned afterwards. Such can be the cruelty of the enemies of Christ and of His people.

The sentences were carried out. As the 14 were being carried to their death, some of those who saw them said that their faces were like the faces of angels – which, the Bible tells us, was true of Stephen, the first martyr for Christ. The Lord who supported him when he met a cruel death was able to support the Madagascar Christians also – and He did. The four who were burned alive prayed in the fire: “O Lord, receive our spirits, for Thy love to us has caused this to happen to us. And do not lay this sin to their charge.” They no doubt were thinking of Stephen’s prayer when he was put to death.

God is able to give grace to His children no matter how difficult their situation is, and to bring them through it all to heaven. But apart from His grace, we will never get to heaven. Let us seek it earnestly and seek it now.

For Junior Readers

The Wrong Way

A minister called Rev Alexander Macleod was once travelling by train to a town called Newburgh, in Fife, Scotland. The train reached a place called Ladybank Junction where railway lines crossed and the train was divided into two parts. He heard the guard shout, “Change here for Dundee”, but he did not catch the second part of what he said, “Change for Newburgh and Perth”.

He asked another gentleman in the carriage, “Are we right for Newburgh?”

“Yes,” the man replied, “all right, sir; I’m going your way too.”

The train moved on and the next station on the way to Newburgh should have been Collessie. But when the train stopped, the sign said, Springfield. Realising something must be wrong, the minister pointed the sign out to his fellow passenger.

“Don’t worry,” the man said; “Springfield and Collessie are two names for the same place.” After Collessie he should have arrived at Newburgh, the small town where he wanted to go. Instead he saw a big, spread-out town with towers and church spires rising up above the houses.

The man beside him now seemed alarmed and said very loudly: “We’re wrong sir; we’re in the wrong train; we should have changed carriages at Ladybank! This is Cupar, on the way to Dundee!” They had to get down hurriedly from the train and wait for the next train back to Newburgh, which was not due for another three hours.

As Mr Macleod sat in the station waiting room, he began to think of mistakes on journeys, of wrong directions, of the hardships and losses caused by taking wrong roads and of the great need to be sure of being on the right road. It reminded him of the verse in Proverbs which says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death". He thought of the great journey of life, and also of the roads on that journey that may seem to be right, but are actually wrong.

What about you at the beginning of a new year? It lies ahead of you like a road, a journey which you have not taken before. There may be signposts suggesting you go one way, other signs suggesting you go a different way. The wrong roads must be avoided at all costs.

Do you not need a guide book to help you find your way and make correct decisions? What about the Bible? What did David say? "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." God's word helped him to avoid the wrong roads and to choose the right roads on his journey.

So you can pray: "Thy ways, Lord, show; teach me Thy paths; / Lead me in truth, teach me; / For of my safety thou art God; / all day I wait on Thee". There is also a promise for you to carry with you: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." *J van Kralingen*

For Younger Readers

God's Care

A good man long ago left home to go to the city of Bristol to buy goods to sell in his shop. I am sure he asked God to take care of him. On the way to Bristol he became ill; it was some time before he was fit to go home.

Several years later he was present when a prisoner was to be put to death for murder; he had killed someone. The prisoner noticed the good man and called him over. He asked, "Do you remember when you were going to Bristol to buy goods and were taken sick on the way?"

"Yes," answered the good man, "I remember that very well. But why do you ask?"

The prisoner wanted to tell the other man what he had planned to do. He knew that the good man was going to Bristol with a lot of money. He planned, with two other wicked men, to steal the money and then kill him, so that no one would find out who had stolen the money.

It was not nice for the good man to become sick. But it was God's way of keeping him out of the hands of these bad men. Remember, God hears prayer.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2020-21

UK Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section. *Barnoldswick:* Claudia van Essen. *Brighton:* Katharine Hills. *Dingwall:* Lydia Ross. *Edinburgh:* Fraser Morrison. *Glasgow:* Cameron Ross. *Llanelli:* Abigail and Jonathon Cran. *London:* David and John Munns. *North Harris:* Hannah Jardine.

Intermediate Section. *Barnoldswick:* Isaac Fisher, Calvin Middleton, Daniel van Essen. *Dingwall:* Catherine Campbell, Thomas Ross. *Glasgow:* Hugh Ross. *Halkirk:* Annelise Hymers-Mackintosh, Donald Maclean, Sarah Stewart. *Inverness:* Jenna Campbell. *Llanelli:* Carys Cran. *London:* Sarah Munns. *North Tolsta:* Angus and Uileam Morrison. *Southampton:* Chloe Wilkins. *Trowbridge:* Samuel Broome. **Junior Section.** *Aberdeen:* Julia Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton, Samuel van Essen. *Glasgow:* Elena MacLennan, Violet Marr, Shona Ross. *Halkirk:* Grace Maclean, Fraser Stewart. *Inverness:* Susanna Campbell. *Llanelli:* Carwyn Cran. *London:* Anna McSeveney. *Southampton:* Jonny and Lydia Wilkins. *Stornoway:* Naomi Morrison. *Ullapool:* Tacita Angell.

Upper Primary Section. *Barnoldswick:* Alexia van Essen, Ruth Fisher, Susannah Middleton. *Beaulieu:* Rebekka Fraser, Hudson Maclean. *Dingwall:* Neil Campbell, Donald Allan MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Mackintosh, Finlay Morrison. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Catriona Maclean. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie, James Maton. *Llanelli:* Sarah Cran. *London:* Andrew Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie MacDonald. *Stornoway:* Emma Morrison.

Lower Primary Section. *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod, Cassia Soni. *Barnoldswick:* Talitha and Matilda Fisher. *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell, Iain, Mairi and Charlotte MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Anderson and Samuel Dickie, Alec and Julia Cameron-Mackintosh, Darcy and Joella Esson. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh, Sophie Stewart. *Inverness:* Molly Campbell, Campbell Dickie. *London:* Ernest and Lydia Campbell, Daniel and Benjamin Macleod. *North Harris:* Finlay and Margaret Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison. *Portree:* Murdo Macraill. *Tandragee:* Joseph and Aaron Brown.

Looking Around Us

“Fake News”

This has become a familiar expression. Fake news is information that either is not true, or else it is meant to mislead the reader or listener; it is probably commonest on the internet. Or the expression may be used to discourage people from believing what is indeed true; what is said may be dismissed as fake news, perhaps unfairly and dishonestly. We should certainly not believe everything we read or hear; a lot of what we come in contact with may be very misleading. And we should be careful to present information to others in an honest way and ask God to keep us from deceiving anyone.

Yet many ideas are circulating not only on the internet and social media, but also in conversations between individuals and among groups of people, which should be rejected just as you would reject “fake news”. Let us note some of the *false ideas* that are influencing people today.

The *first* false idea is that *there is no God*. This idea is very attractive to many people. Even though their conscience may tell them otherwise, they

do not want to submit to a Being who has the right to tell them how they should live, although He is great and glorious and we should worship Him.

But God has revealed Himself, especially in the Bible. He has done so for our good, so that we may know the truth about Him, know how He expects us to live and worship Him in a proper way.

The *second* false idea is that *you can live just as you want*. This might be true if there was no God. But there is a God and He has a right to tell us how we should live. He gives us, in the Bible, a lot of detail about the way we should think. He tells us too about how we should speak and act, not only to other people, but also to Himself. He tells us that there are consequences if we do not live as He tells us.

The *third* false idea is that *everything in the universe*, including all the various forms of life on earth *came into existence through evolution*. If people were less concerned to believe that there is no God – One who can tell them how to live – they would be far less likely to believe in evolution.

But it is only reasonable to believe that this great universe, and all the wonderful things that live and grow in this world – especially human beings – could only come into existence through a Creator. Surely nothing in the universe could exist apart from huge power and intelligence. And the Bible confirms that the all-powerful, all-wise God did create everything. Indeed the Bible is the best source for this information; God is speaking through it and so it is totally reliable.

The *fourth* false idea is that *it does not matter what religion you believe*. Too many people believe that all religions are equally true – or equally false. But the Christianity we find in the Bible is true, absolutely so; every other religion is false. We must believe what God has revealed about Himself and about Jesus Christ, whom He sent into the world to save sinners. We must not only believe what is said about Him; we must trust in Him, to be saved from all our sins and be made pure and holy. Only then can we be fit to go to heaven when we die. So religion is something that very much matters.

2021 UK Youth Conference

This year's Youth Conference has been arranged for Tuesday, April 7, to Thursday, April 9, God willing, at Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perth, PH2 9EG. An assessment will be made later as to whether it will be safe to hold the Conference. If the Conference goes ahead, the papers intended for 2020 have been rearranged for this year.

Price £1.00