

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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Cover Picture: Rainbow over Leverburgh.

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Volume 86

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How to Find Happiness

A radio programme explored the idea of happiness and what we can do to help make ourselves happy. The presenter quoted a professor who, possibly in the 1970s, had stressed that, while people were then wealthier and healthier than their forebears, they were not necessarily happier – which was perfectly true, at least for many in the Western world. People may earn more money but become more greedy and less happy because, as the years go by, they want more and more – but what they have cannot keep up with what they want to have.

Most of the programme examined the ideas of an Egyptian whose first name is Mo. He has worked for Google in the United States and has made a great deal of money. He has given a lot of thought to the idea of happiness and has concluded that we are happy when the events we experience are better than what we expected.

He spoke about a time in his life when he had “a beautiful family”, “a wonderful wife” and had made a lot of money, yet he was “horrendously unhappy”. He had obviously been expecting life to feel far better than it actually seemed. This is just one more example of what has so often happened over the centuries: possessions and other good things in this life will never themselves make us happy.

Mo had enough money to order, not one, but two Rolls Royces. And he did so, but afterwards he realised that, when you are sitting in the driver's seat, all you can see is the road in front of you. Yes, a Rolls Royce is a more comfortable car; it is perhaps smoother than every other make of car; it may have many wonderful gadgets; but it cannot bring happiness. Any car takes you from one place to another. A Rolls Royce takes you along the same road – more comfortably and perhaps more quickly – but you have to face the same traffic jams, the same delays – and the same irritations.

Mo believes that if we train our brain, it will help us to be happy, but he acknowledges that this brain-training is not going to help someone who suffers from depression. The brain-training has a lot to do with managing our expectations. It is bound to help if we realise, as Mo put it, that life is some-

times amazing and sometimes tough. This way of thinking, he said, helped him to cope with a very sad event in his life: the death of a son, during a hospital operation, at the age of just 21.

It is all very well to be realistic about life, to realise that there will be times when the going may be very difficult. To be realistic may help, but how much better if we realise that God exists and is in control of everything that happens, even our most difficult experiences! How much better still if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners! Then we will, more or less firmly, trust in Him as One who has promised to help us as His children, whatever our situation. And we will know our way to the throne of grace and pour out our hearts before Him there in prayer, realising that He is able and ready to help us.

We need various things in this world if we are to stay alive, such as food to eat and water to drink. Yet not everything we would like is necessary; we can be happy without all the things we might want to have. But Christ asked the vital question: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

There is something we very much need for our souls, or else we will continue as lost souls, not only in this life, but also in eternity. We need Christ; we need to believe on Him, who came into the world to save sinners. If we do not have Christ, then – no matter how many Rolls Royces or other possessions we might have, even if one could be the owner of the whole world – death will take us to that place where there will never be any happiness whatever. How earnest we should be to seek salvation from sin and all its consequences – what only Christ can give us!

God makes demands that you may not like. Yet it is He who has created you; so He has a right to tell you to keep all His commandments, and these commands are good for us. Yet you may resent being told how you should live; you may even want to get as far as possible from religion and throw off all the restraints that God's commands impose on you.

But take another look at the awfulness of a lost eternity and ask God to give you a new heart, so that you would want to obey Him in everything He sets before you in the Bible. Ask Him, in particular, to make you willing to listen to what He has to say to you, willing to seek Him earnestly, and willing to give up all dependence on your own ideas and what you think you could do to earn the salvation of your soul.

If you have found Christ, ask Him to keep you from going back to the world's way of thinking, seeking lasting happiness in sinful activities – especially the entertainments from which so many people seek enjoyment. Today these entertainments are so easy to access – on television and the

internet, for instance. But does the enjoyment match what you expected? Certainly it cannot last. And if you indeed are one of God's children, He may chastise you severely to bring you back to a holier way of life.

Remember that this is a sinful world. It is a world where you can never expect to find perfect happiness. After all, not only are other people sinners; we are sinners ourselves. Our own foolishness will likely interfere with the happiness we might otherwise experience.

Christ warned His disciples: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". They must expect to meet various difficulties and troubles. But the Saviour did not stop there. He went on to say, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Here is real, solid encouragement, what should cheer God's children in every age: that Christ is ruling over everything, and at last He will bring believers to heaven, the place of never-ending happiness and blessedness. He is more powerful than Satan; He is more powerful than anyone who may do us harm; and He will bring safely those who trust in Him through the temptations they meet. He will at last deliver them even from the imperfections and sin that they find in their own hearts.

Mo believes that "happiness is the number one priority of life". But there is something altogether more important than our happiness, and that is God's glory. He is the infinite, eternal Being who made all things. He is worthy of our worship, and we ought to worship Him with our whole heart. We are directed to give to Him the glory that is due to Him (Psalm 29:2). If we are to give Him that glory, we must obey Him in all things. And God directs His children to glorify Him by praising Him: "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (Psalm 97:12).

Where can we get better advice than in the Bible? We are, for instance, told to "be content with such things as ye have" (Hebrews 13:5). We are not to be annoyed, rebellious or sad if we do not get things that we want. But believers have a very good reason to keep them contented; the last quotation continues: "for [God] hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". God's promise is that He will always be with His children to lead them on, step by step, along the way that leads to eternal happiness. He is faithful; He will never let them down.

It is significant that, in the whole radio programme, there was only a passing reference to religion of any kind. It shows how much British society today has given up religion, and especially true Christianity. This is all the more serious when, unless we have true inward religion – unless we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – we cannot have a happy, blessed eternity. Even in this life, there is no one but God who can help us in every kind of situation – no matter how difficult. So flee to Christ now. Do not delay.

Never Alone

The old man was sitting alone in his armchair. His eyesight was no longer good; he could not read any more. His hearing also was very poor. When he tried to speak, he could only whisper. And hours might pass when he had no one to speak to. You are probably saying to yourself that it must have been a very boring way to live.

One day a young girl came into the silent room and put her arm around his neck. It was his granddaughter. She told him that she was afraid he would be lonely; so she came to sit with him. "Are you not very lonely here," she asked, "with no one to speak to or to love?"

The old man thought for a moment and then placed his hand on the girl's head. "I am never alone, my child," he told her. "How can I be lonely?" he asked, and he explained that God was with him, the Holy Spirit was coming from the Father to dwell in his soul, and Christ was always near him to cheer him and teach him. He went on: "I sit at His feet and learn of Him". Though, as he said, pain and sickness often came to warn him that he must soon die, he knew that there was a mansion in heaven prepared for him – one which was so glorious that no one could describe it or imagine it.

"The love of God is like living water to my soul", her grandfather told her. He advised her to seek, while she was young, the fountain from which that living water came to satisfy his soul. By the living water he meant the saving blessings that come from Christ. He told her to drink deeply of these living waters, and then, when she would be old and all sources of earthly enjoyment might be taken away, she too would be able to say, "I am never alone".

You too ought to seek the Lord while you are young. You may have plenty friends now, but ask God to keep you from following them into sinful ways, even though you may find them very attractive. The Lord says that, if you seek, you will find (Matthew 7:7). Many people find it difficult to be alone, but how awful to leave this world alone – without Christ and without salvation, with nowhere to go but a lost eternity.

The One-Footed Gull

Rev K M Watkins

Recently we began to notice a gull near the manse. Sadly, one of its feet was missing. Clearly the gull was finding it difficult to get food. We started to give it a few scraps here and there. It stayed even closer to the house, and stayed for longer too, once we did that. Other gulls spotted this

and they were not slow to swoop down and take the poor gull's food whenever they could. Then they would go away again. But the one-footed gull spent a lot of time near the manse. We thought that there were many spiritual lessons in this.

1. The gull had *lost his foot*. Somehow it had been torn away from his leg. Sinners have lost things too. "All mankind by their fall lost communion with God" (*Shorter Catechism*, answer 19). Before a sinner is born again, he does not know God and has no relationship with God. He has lost spiritual life, for he is dead in sin. He has lost the promise of eternal life, because the law of God curses him with eternal death on account of sin. He is in danger of losing his soul for ever, "for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

2. Although the gull had lost a foot, he *had one good foot*. This pictures a converted person. An unconverted sinner is like Mephibosheth, "lame on *both* his feet" (2 Samuel 9:13). That means that he is completely unable to walk in God's ways. He cannot walk in the way of God's law, nor can he come to Christ for salvation. But a converted person has been born again. Having come to Christ by faith, he seeks to walk in the paths of God's commandments. However, he does not do that perfectly. It is as if he has a missing foot as well as a good one. While by grace he delights in God's will and wants to walk in it, yet sin still remains in him, which means that like the gull he cannot walk as well as he would like.

3. The gull could *still fly*. Once he was soaring on the wing, you would hardly know anything was wrong. The child of God is like that. Sometimes his soul seems to fly upwards with spiritual desires, with his affections set on things above, where Christ is (see Colossians 3:1,2).

4. The gull had trouble *landing*. After a child of God has been "flying high" in fellowship with Christ, he can start to lose the sense of His presence, and sin can come back in. Then he comes back down to earth with a bump. Think of Peter soaring up with the revelation given to him by the Father from heaven, causing him to say to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". But then think of his clumsy landing when he looked on things from man's point of view instead of God's, forbidding Christ to go to the cross. What a heavy landing he had!

5. The gull had particular trouble when *taking off*. Getting into the air was difficult. When a Christian has been grounded through unbelief and sin, he finds it very hard to get up on the wing again. But when the Holy Spirit revives his spiritual life, he rises up with renewed faith and love and new obedience. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31).

6. Usually gulls stand on their feet, but this one-footed gull could *only sit*. That pictures a believer in Christ. Unconverted people think they can support themselves and stand on their own two feet – on their own righteousness and strength. But the Christian knows himself to be weak, without any strength or goodness of his own to rely on. He has to keep coming back to Christ, to sit down under His shadow and to rest on Him by faith. He has learnt by experience that if he tried to rely on his own works, there would be no answer to the question in Psalm 130:3, “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”

7. The gull *stayed close* to the manse as much as he could. He would wait where he could see the back door, waiting for us to come out with some food. The least sound from within the house would get his attention. A person with spiritual understanding does the same, only it is the doors of Christ that he stays close to. The Saviour says, “Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors” (Proverbs 8:34). These gates and doors are the means of grace – the Bible, preaching, prayer, the Lord’s Supper. Out of these the Lord Jesus Christ loves to come forth, bringing spiritual food for His people.

8. Thus the gull had come to *need us*. He had come to depend on us for daily survival. It was as if he could not go a day without seeing us. The person who has been saved by Christ needs Him, and feels that he cannot go a day without seeing Him. Like Job, he says, “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). He has to hear the voice of the Saviour; His Word has to be blessed to him. He needs Christ’s presence. He is glad when he has it and sad when he does not.

9. The gull had *trouble from the other gulls*. They were aggressive towards him and tried to stop him getting the food. But none of that stopped the gull or drove him away. It made him even more determined to get our help. The Christian soon finds that he has enemies. The world, the flesh and the devil are aggressive towards him, fighting against him, seeking to stop him having fellowship with Christ. But this makes him seek Christ’s food and fellowship all the more. Blind Bartimaeus was crying out to Christ for mercy. When the people told him to be quiet, it did not make him stop, but rather he “cried the more a great deal” (Mark 10:48).

10. We often saw the gull putting its beak to the injured leg, as if he was *licking his wounds*. It was probably very painful to him. That is the way the child of God is. The sin that remains in him is painful to him. The wounds from sin are sore in his conscience. He has sinned against the Lord, and although his sins are forgiven, they cause him grief. The hypocrite, who says he is a Christian when he is not, is not troubled by his sin like that. He thinks

that he is whole. But the sincere believer confesses, “I am feeble and sore broken” (Psalm 38:8). This makes him cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). We almost felt that the poor gull was crying out for us to relieve his pain. We could not do that, but Christ relieves the pains of a stinging conscience for everyone who goes to Him in faith.

For Junior Readers

The Honest Farmer

A farmer had a field near a forest. He was growing wheat in that field, but the Earl Fitzwilliam often gathered his horses, their riders and the hounds in the forest before they went off to hunt – probably foxes. The result was that the horses caused damage. The young wheat growing in the field was badly cut up and destroyed in some parts of the field. The farmer expected to lose a lot of money because of the damage.

So he went to speak to the Earl about it. Fitzwilliam admitted that he and the hunters had often gathered there and had done a lot of damage. He invited the farmer to work out how much money he had lost.

The farmer had already worked things out, with the help of a friend, and they thought he would lose £50. (It would have been a lot more at today’s prices.) The Earl at once gave him the money he asked for.

The months passed by and the wheat grew. In fact, it grew best where there had been most damage. The farmer was an honest man, so he went to Earl Fitzwilliam to pay him back the £50.

When the farmer arrived, the Earl assumed that it was because he had not paid the farmer enough. But the farmer told him that he was not going to lose any money at all and had brought back the £50. The Earl was very pleased with the farmer’s honesty. He started to ask the farmer various questions – about, for instance, how many children he had. The Earl then went away to another room and came back after writing out a cheque for £100. He gave the cheque to the farmer and told him to look after it until his oldest son was 21. Then he was to give the cheque to his son and to tell him what had made the Earl give it to him.

The farmer could see how much better off his son would be because he himself had been honest. Yet sometimes we may lose money because we have been honest. But we should look at such things in this way: if we are not honest, we sin against God; if we are honest, we do not sin in this way. It should be obvious which is better.

Ask God to make you honest; ask Him to keep you from sin; ask Him to work in your soul to make you holy. Ask all these things for Jesus' sake.

The Seaman's Hope

A ship was sailing along the Cornish coast in a storm. Something went wrong and the ship was wrecked. But, thankfully, all the crew got safely ashore.

The next Sabbath, the sailors attended a service in the nearest church, where the minister thanked God that no lives had been lost in the disaster. Near the end of his sermon he spoke about the shipwreck and used it as an illustration of spiritual things. He had already spoken earnestly about the sinner's danger and the Saviour's love. He now asked the congregation to imagine the situation of a drowning man who feels that all his own efforts are doing no good and that he is quickly sinking in the sea. He then asked the people to imagine what the man's feelings would be if a plank – a plank that would bear his weight – was to float near enough for him to take hold of it.

Then the minister compared everyone present to the drowning seaman and said, "Christ is the plank of safety. This plank will bear" – because Christ will support every sinner who believes in Him. And he called on the people not to refuse to seize it – to believe in Christ and not to delay doing so. Then he repeated his assurance, "This plank will bear. Yes, sinner, this plank will bear." The minister spoke with unusual earnestness, but he heard no more about this sermon than he usually did. And gradually, as the years went by, he forgot about it.

Then 14 years later, an urgent message came to him, pleading with him to come and see a dying man in a village that was quite some distance away. He went at once. As he entered the man's room, the minister could see that the man was someone he did not know and that he had very little time to live. The minister knelt down beside him and said, "You have sent for me, and I have come". He commented that the man was on the verge of passing away and asked, "Will you tell me on what hope you are resting for eternity?"

The man was still conscious, but it seemed that his power to speak had gone. So the minister asked, "If you can no longer speak, will you give me a sign to tell if your hope is now in Christ?"

Then the dying man seemed to make one last effort to speak. He got out three very significant words: "The plank bears". No doubt the minister's mind went back to the service, many years before, in that Cornish church. The old sailor, it seems, was telling the minister that he had found Christ,

that he had cast the whole weight of his soul on the Saviour, that he had trusted in Christ as a sailor near to drowning would take hold of a plank floating near him. He had taken hold of the plank and the plank had held him up; in other words, he had trusted in Christ, and Christ had never failed him.

You have probably heard much about the plank, about Christ as the Saviour for sinners. You have probably heard much about laying hold of the plank; you have probably been called on many times to believe in Christ for the salvation of your soul. You have probably been repeatedly assured that “none perish that Him trust” (Ps 34:22, metrical). But have you done so?

William Hewitson and Madeira

1. Early Life and Conversion

This is the first section of a paper given at the online Youth Conference this year. Its sub-title was, “Gospel Blessing and Persecution”.

William Hewitson was born in 1812 near Maybole in Ayrshire. Later, the family lived in Dalmellington, 13 miles away. In his teens he studied hard, focusing on Latin, Greek and history. Instead of going to school, he studied on his own, with university in mind, but his father, who became the teacher in the village school, may have supervised his studies. As a young boy, William wished to be either a minister or a king after he would grow up. No doubt, before long, he dropped the idea of becoming a king as totally unrealistic. And, whatever his motives for continuing to think of being a minister, he told a friend that he would never be a minister unless he was converted.

William did not keep well, and that kept him out of university for some years, until he was 21, when he began his studies at Edinburgh University. He finished his Arts course in 1837, having won two prizes. He used to study well into the night and was up again in the morning after perhaps four hours of sleep. Yet, while it is wrong to treat one’s studies carelessly, it was not wise for Hewitson to restrict his sleep so much; after all, God designed human beings in such a way that they need to sleep longer than he did.

A few years later, Hewitson confessed how desperate he had been to be more successful than others in his studies: “I was burning to enter the arena of learned competition, and thought life without fame not worth the having”. Afterwards he was to recognise that he was then under the influence of what he called “the demon of ambition”, which had a damaging effect on him. That influence, he said, “was working so effectively the ruin of my soul that Satan ceased to harass me with fears, as he had done for years before”. He

acknowledged that Satan would have accomplished his “final destruction” by tempting him to be quite at ease on the broad way that leads to eternal destruction, if God did not begin to disturb his conscience.

Later he became troubled about “unholy thoughts that come uncalled and fill the soul with horror”, but there was also a new consciousness “of God’s presence and holy character”. He spoke of “a heart that seems to grieve for sin, but yet is so hard that it looks not like the grief of repentance, and then the prayer of that hard heart, the unprofitable prayer – and the grief that it has been unprofitable”. Clearly Hewitson found it difficult to understand what was going on in his soul, and many others have been in the same position.

After leaving university, Hewitson spent the next winter as a tutor in a family in Leamington Spa in the English Midlands. There he met a young man who spoke of Christ’s love to sinners and His obedience unto death for their salvation, and did so with tears of joy. But the young man was ill and soon died. Hewitson asked himself: “Could I thus calmly pass into the immediate presence of the holy and just Jehovah? Am I, like [the young man], sheltered from the terrors of ‘the wrath to come’?” Hewitson had now to face up, in a new way, to the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

November 1838 saw him begin a divinity course at Edinburgh University, although he was not yet formally studying for the ministry. And it was 1840 before he obtained a clear view of the way of salvation. He wrote to his father: “For long the painful feeling still preyed upon my mind that I must do some good works myself, or God would not accept me in Christ Jesus; and my misery was that, while Satan thus blinded my eyes, I found myself unable to do the good works that I would. Now I see that the gospel is quite different – that it is free and full and wholly of grace.”

He also wrote, “I am now convinced that, after hearing it preached a thousand times over, we still remain ignorant of the gospel, unless we see clearly . . . that Christ is offered to us wretched, lost sinners, in all His fullness, as the free gift of God”. He was now clear that it was his duty to continue his studies with a view to becoming a minister.

One more year of study completed his course. That spring of 1841, he was clearly unwell, probably from tuberculosis (TB). He became a tutor in a family in Fife; but by November, doctors warned him that, for a whole year, he must not do anything that required effort, and that included studying. Robert Murray M’Cheyne, the godly young minister in Dundee, several times invited Hewitson to become his assistant, but he had to refuse.

He spoke about being drawn into a situation of “so-called harmless amusement”. He commented, “No amusement is innocent which takes away the soul from Jesus, or does what it can to take it away”.

In 1842 he was licensed as a preacher of the gospel and took a service the following Sabbath in Dalmellington, but it was clear to him that he did not have the strength to preach often. Two years later, though his illness did not seem worse, he still felt unfit to preach.

At the Disruption in the Scottish Church in 1843, Hewitson had joined the Free Church. Now a committee of the Church felt it would be good to send him to Madeira, islands off North Africa that were administered by Portugal. The hope was that he would learn Portuguese and so be able to preach the gospel to the people of the islands, who were Roman Catholics. He believed that, if the Lord was calling him to go there, it was his duty, he said, “to deny myself through His grace and to take up my cross and go”. He wrote to his parents to tell them what he had said to the Committee: that he was willing to go. He also told them that he wished this would be “glorifying to God and a means of salvation to perishing souls”. He very much wished that *Christ* would make him a fisher of men.

He was ordained to the ministry on 7 November 1844 and sailed from London three weeks later; his health was now better than it had been for some years. He was aware that the gospel was already being spread in Madeira and that there had been conversions as a result. But there was also persecution – 26 people, previously Roman Catholics, were then in prison because they were reading the Bible and believing its truths.

Assurance of Being Saved

5. Can It Be Lost?

Rev George Macdonald

This is another section of a paper given at a Youth Conference, in Australia. The previous two articles addressed the question: “How Can the Believer Be Assured?”

Assurance can indeed become very much less, and the comforting sense of it lost to a great degree. In *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, the subordinate standard of our Church, we read:

“True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted [interrupted]; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God’s withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet [it goes on encouragingly to add] are they never left utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience

of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair" (18.4).

Neglect of watchfulness, sinful backsliding, failure to engage with and use the means of grace, falling into temptation, and other faults on our part, can and do lead to a loss of assurance. Just as, when we live in a disorderly way, our body and mind are stressed and we may become sick, so spiritually, when we do things we ought not to do, or live in a disorderly way spiritually, we may lose that great blessing of an assured and comforting hope of salvation.

There is an old saying, often said to be spoken by the godly Scottish minister, Samuel Rutherford: "For a single look within, take a thousand looks to Christ". If we concentrate, as we are prone to do, on ourselves and our own hearts, we will be discouraged, for we come short every day, in thought, word and deed. A consciousness of our sinful shortcomings should drive us to Christ. And in coming to Him, as He is presented to us in the promises, we may find relief. He assures poor sinners: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

In Bunyan's classic book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it was the key of promise that opened every locked door in Doubting Castle. So too, the doubting Christian must turn to the promises of the Word of God. Naturally such promises, however precious, will not have the desired effect to revive the soul, unless the Lord blesses them to the doubting soul by His Holy Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Fisher's *Catechism* draws a helpful distinction between the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense. In Question 36.8 he asks, "What is the difference between the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense?"

Answer. "The object of the assurance of faith is Christ in the promise (James 2:23); but the object of the assurance of sense is Christ formed in the soul" (2 Timothy 1:12); or, which is the same thing, the assurance of faith is founded on the infallible Word of God, who cannot lie; but the assurance of sense upon the person's present experience of the communications of divine love".

God, in His sovereignty, can greatly lessen the believer's sense of assurance in order to humble them. They are ever, like Peter, prone to rest on their emotions. Peter had no doubt that he loved Christ, and he did; indeed, he claimed to be willing to die with the Saviour and stand by Him, and at that time he would have done so. Though all the other disciples would forsake Him, Peter felt he could never do such a thing; and so far as we can judge, he felt this sincerely. But Peter underestimated the strength of inward

corruption. Though his feelings were true, yet his strength was too much placed on his feelings rather than on Christ. Peter needed to learn that Christ was all his salvation.

Hugh Martin was a godly and spiritually-minded minister in Scotland. In his book, *Simon Peter*, he concludes his chapter on Peter's denial of Christ with a warning: "Therefore 'watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation'. And if God has graciously given you sincerity, carefully avoid security; and seek that God, for Christ's sake, would also give you strength."

For Younger Readers

Hunt and His Oxen

A man called Hunt had a bad temper. He very easily got angry. He used to get angry with his oxen, probably when they did not want to move, or when they were moving along the road more slowly than he wanted them to move.

He would beat the oxen hard on their heads, perhaps with a big stick. All the people who lived near him treated their oxen in just the same way, but that did not make it right for Hunt to do so. In any case, beating the animals did not work. They did not move any more quickly for him after he gave them a beating. Perhaps they went even slower.

Then Hunt was converted. And there was a change in the way he behaved. He no longer beat his oxen without mercy.

That is how it should be when God gives someone a new heart and they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There should be a change in the way they behave. They should even treat their animals better. They should not be cruel any longer. The Bible says that a good man is careful about "the life of his beast".

People noticed that Hunt was no longer cruel to his oxen. They saw that he did not get angry with them any more. Instead of beating them, he would just sit down and sing a psalm, and he would probably have prayed to God about what was happening.

Others should be able to notice when God turns bad people into good people. Others should be able to notice the change in the way they behave.

Duties of Husbands and Wives

W S Plumer

Taken, with editing, from *Short Sermons for the People*. The text is Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage is honourable in all".

When God drove man out of paradise because of his sins, He allowed him to take with him both the Sabbath and marriage. God has always put honour on marriage. It is generally agreed that both men and women are bad in proportion as they are unfit to be good husbands or good wives.

Marriage is both natural and religious. Every country, if it is wisely governed, has good laws about marriage. But we are now to think of it as God's Word regulates it. There we learn that marriage is a solemn and continuing covenant between one man and one woman to live together in the most loving state. It is a solemn covenant. It is not a bargain for a day but for life. Nothing can dissolve it but death or some great crime. This relationship is above all others. A man is to forsake his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Of course, a wife is to forsake her family and cleave to her husband. God says they are one flesh. The law of the land says the same.

Only bad men speak or write against marriage. The text says, It "is honourable in all". The meaning is, it is honourable in all persons of suitable age and condition. Some would forbid ministers of the gospel to marry. But the Bible says that a bishop (any minister) must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2), thus teaching that it is lawful for ministers to marry. The text says, "Marriage is honourable in *all*".

Marriage is a great blessing to the husband. It secures sympathy for him. God Himself says, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). And the woman needs a strong arm to lean on. She is too feeble to bear comfortably the burdens of life alone. When marriage is properly regarded and managed, it is a great blessing to the Church. It secures a good religious education for children. It is also a blessing to the country. It prevents much crime. It promotes good order.

Seeing these things are so, ***What are the duties of husbands and wives?*** This is a great question. It should be well considered.

1. *Husbands and wives ought to love each other.* This love ought to be sincere, tender, strong and constant. It must have its root in solid respect. Nothing can take the place of love. On this point, the Scriptures are clear: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Colossians 3:19). "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies" (Ephesians 5:25,28). If a man fails here, he cannot possibly live

joyfully with his wife all the days of his vain life. Paul exhorts Titus so to teach and train the Church that the aged women may teach the younger women to “love their husbands, to love their children” (Titus 2:4). So whatever lessens the love of husbands to their wives, or the love of wives to their husbands, is wrong and should be put away. He who would take away the heart of husband or wife from each other is an enemy to both.

2. *They owe honour to each other.* No one who is rude can be a good husband, and no one who is bad-tempered can be a good wife (1 Samuel 25:17; Proverbs 21:19, 25:24). When honour ceases, love and peace depart. Both husband and wife are commanded to give honour to each other.

3. *They should try to please each other* in all lawful ways. Paul mentions, as a mark of a good husband and a good wife, that they try to please each other (1 Cor 7:33,34). If they do not try to serve and please each other, they must be unhappy indeed.

4. *They should try to carry each other's burdens.* The cares of life are crushing. They are too heavy for many a strong spirit. If a husband cannot get help from his wife, or a wife from her husband, who shall care for them?

5. *They should tenderly sympathise with each other* and plead for each other (1 Samuel 1:8, 25:18-28). It is noble for a husband or wife to cling to each other, they have chosen each other as the dearest of earthly friends.

6. *They must be faithful to each other.* They have promised to be so. It is vile to break their vows. When a man prefers the company of another to that of his wife he is already half ruined. When a woman prefers the company of another to that of her husband she is on the road to a bad reputation.

The husband, as the stronger, owes to his wife protection in her person, reputation, health and comfort. He is not a good husband who leaves his wife to face the waves of sorrow alone. The wife, as the weaker vessel, owes to her husband respect and obedience. She does not owe the obedience of a servant, nor even of a child, but of a friend and companion. The Bible is clear: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:22,23). “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). Yet a good husband will rather suggest than command. Husbands have no right to be tyrants. Nothing is more cruel than for a husband to use his power to make his wife unhappy.

There are good and bad husbands in the world, and good and bad wives. Let us look at the character of *a bad husband*. Some think him a fine fellow, but his wife knows him to be mean and suspicious. He lords it over her. He loves to make her feel his power. He thinks his own fireside dull and goes elsewhere for pleasure. Outwardly all is smooth to strangers, but to his wife

he is greatly lacking in tenderness. He does not love her company above that of others. He wishes her to toil for the family, but he freely indulges himself in what interests him. He tells his wife nothing about his affairs, and is so awkward that she is afraid to speak to him. He takes no part in the work of the house. He neither weeps nor rejoices with her.

He seems blind to his own faults, but has a keen eye for those of his wife. Sometimes he comes home glum and sometimes in a rage. If his wife helps the poor, he is not pleased. When she would do good, he has no heart to help her. If she wishes to go to church, perhaps he wishes her to stay and provide him a feast. When she is nervous, he laughs at her fears and makes a joke of her sorrows. If she is really sick, he says nothing kind, and perhaps says there is nothing wrong with her. If she dies before him, perhaps a regard to public opinion makes him appear to mourn. But in his heart he is really not sorry, except as he has lost one who might serve him.

Let us now look at the character of *a bad wife*. She has honeyed words, but it is not safe to trust her. She looks on her husband as useful to her as long as she can live in luxury. She is lazy, and sleeps late when she needs to rise early. She spends money, but she never makes any, or saves what her husband makes. She may give something to the poor to get rid of them, but she is never truly kind to them. She has many excuses for the discomforts of home, but they remain. Her husband is known by his careworn look. He seldom dares take a friend to his house. If he does, he will be made uncomfortable. When she talks, she talks foolishly. If she has children, they are neglected or ignorant or rude. When her husband is sick, she shows no tact in nursing him or providing comforts for him. When she dies, not many are really sad. She does not know how to pray; she is not a widow that trusts in God. She has no resources in herself, and she seeks no help from on high.

Very few husbands or wives have all these bad qualities, but some have many of them. One or two of them may make the married life very wretched.

But there are many *good husbands and good wives*. They fear God. They study his law. They keep his commandments. They look to Jesus. They love prayer. They love the house of God. They love one another. They honestly do their duty. They are happy in each other. They delight in serving each other. If they have good health, they give their strength to God. If one is sick, the other watches and is sad. Each wishes the other to enjoy as much as possible. If they have children, they are a joint care. In company, they are kind to each other, but in private they are full of tenderness. When one dies, the other mourns and feels that a lasting wound has been made. Surviving relatives cherish their memories, rise up and call them blessed. Such a union was blessed indeed. *Marriage is honourable in all.*

Looking Around Us

Boris Johnson's Marriage

A writer in *The Herald* newspaper claimed that it is “none of our business” to have an opinion about British Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s marriage, his third. They “got married”, the writer said, “because they love one another – so leave them alone”.

A lady wrote to the paper shortly afterwards, pointing out the enormous distress caused to children when a marriage breaks down. She mentioned, in particular, Prince Charles’ unfaithfulness to Princess Diana, “his then wife, and the distress this caused to her and their children”.

The lady is, no doubt, right in what she says. But there is more to be said – because God has spoken about such matters. He has said, in the Bible, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”. If a man and a woman decide to marry, they must indeed love one another. But what if, as in this case, the man has already been married to another woman? When he married her, he vowed – and a vow is made before God – to love that woman until death would part them. So to transfer to another woman that special love, which there ought to be between a man and his wife, is to break a vow made before God.

What damage the breaking of marriage vows has caused to families, and to society in general, in Britain and elsewhere! What a difference it would make if people – not least those in high positions – were faithful to their marriage vows!

Biblical Events

Some weeks ago, the BBC news website reported that, on a day of intense thunderstorms over Wales, people on social media described the hail as “biblical”. They were no doubt thinking of the plague of hail in Egypt.

Today there is a report, on the same website, about a US lobster fisherman, who has been describing how he escaped being swallowed by a hump-back whale. He says “he was diving when he ended up in the marine giant’s mouth for about 30 to 40 seconds” off Massachusetts. Then “the leviathan spat him out” and the fisherman “was left with nothing more than a suspected dislocated knee”. Again the report uses the word *biblical*. It is difficult not to be reminded of Jonah, though this prophet did not get away as quickly as the fishermen.

The Bible speaks of amazing events – miracles, which God brought about directly, by His own power. They are quite different from unusual events, such as the two mentioned here. But far more wonderful than these two is the work of the Holy Spirit in giving a new, holy nature to a sinner.

The Vanity of Life

A poem by John Newton based on Ecclesiastes 1-2. The fifth verse is, of course, a reference to Jonah 4.

The evils that beset our path
Who can prevent or cure?
We stand upon the brink of death
When we seem most secure.

If we today sweet peace possess,
It soon may be withdrawn;
Some change may plunge us in distress,
Before tomorrow's dawn.

Disease and pain invade our health,
And find an easy prey;
And oft, when least expected, wealth
Takes wings and flies away.

A fever or a blow can shake
Our wisdom's boasted rule,
And of the brightest genius make
A madman or a fool.

The gourds, from which we look for fruit,
Produce us only pain;
A worm unseen attacks the root,
And all our hopes are vain.

I pity those who seek no more
Than such a world can give;
Wretched they are, and blind, and poor,
And dying while they live.

Since sin has filled the earth with woe,
And creatures fade and die;
Lord, wean our hearts from things below,
And fix our hopes on high.

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