

# The Young People's Magazine

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

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



***January 2022***

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**Cover Picture:** Lake Annecy. Felix Neff would have passed fairly near here, walking from Geneva to Grenoble. See page 10.

## The Young People's Magazine

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# The Young People's Magazine

Volume 87

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Number 1

## Christ as Prophet

When young people in school have to learn science or maths, or a language like French or Spanish, they need a teacher. When they have left school and want to become nurses or lawyers or plumbers or car mechanics, they need people to train them; they still need to be taught.

If we are to have a happy eternity, we need to get to heaven, and we might think of the verse: “The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Ecclesiastes 10:15). It should remind us of foolish sinners, who do not know the way to the place John Bunyan called the Celestial City, by which he meant heaven.

In Old Testament times, God sent prophets to teach people the way to heaven. There were many prophets in Israel, from Moses onwards – men like Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah. The duty of a prophet was not so much to foretell the future – though they did that – but it was more to bring a revelation from God to their people. They were to teach the people how they should live and how they would get to heaven.

The most important teaching that the prophets brought from God was about the Saviour who was to come into the world, so that sinners would be delivered from their sins and made fit for heaven. So Isaiah told the people: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). The name *Immanuel* means “God with us”, and Matthew tells us in his Gospel that this was Jesus (1:23).

One thing that prophets like Isaiah could not do was to speak in such a way that their words penetrated into the hearts of those who heard them. So, very often, what the prophets said had no effect on their hearers; they went on in the ways of sin and paid no attention to the way that leads to heaven; they continued down the road that leads to a lost eternity.

The Pharisees, for instance, tried hard to please God by keeping His commandments, at least outwardly, and they even added their own rules to the commands that God had given. No doubt the labour of trying to keep all these commands and rules was wearying to every one of them, but it brought them no nearer to the city which is heaven; they did not know the way. It

was not enough to know God's law and the various messages that God had given; they needed a prophet who had access to their hearts, who could speak in such a way that his words would have a saving effect on them.

Moses, as a prophet, spoke to the Children of Israel, just before they crossed the River Jordan into the promised land. He told them: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Many centuries later, soon after Jesus went up to heaven, Peter was speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem about Him. Peter and John had healed a man who had been lame since he was born, and Peter explained that they did not have power themselves to heal him. The miracle, Peter emphasised, had happened because of the power of Jesus, the Son of God. And then Peter went on to quote Moses' prophecy about the great Prophet who was to come.

As Peter assured them, the Prophet that Moses spoke about was Jesus Christ. He was the One these people in Jerusalem needed to teach them the way to heaven. And He is the Prophet that we need to teach us, for He has access to our souls and can so teach us that we really learn how to go to heaven, the city that God has prepared for those who trust in His Son.

Peter and John were speaking as ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador goes to another country to represent his own Queen or the President. Peter and John were representing the great King of heaven when they were speaking in Jerusalem. It is the same when ministers are preaching to a congregation today; they are speaking in the name of King Jesus, the great Prophet. They do not have any authority of their own over the people when they speak, but if what they say is according to the truth of the Bible, the authority of Christ lies behind their words. This especially is how the great Prophet speaks to sinners today – through the ministers whom He has sent out to preach from the Bible.

Today's ministers have no more access to the hearts of their hearers than the prophets of the Old Testament had. But Jesus has. Working by the Holy Spirit, He can apply the Word of God with power to people's souls, with saving effects. Of course, He can also bring the Word to bear on our souls when we are reading it, or reading some other good book. How earnest we should be in asking Him to work in us as the great Prophet who can apply Scripture truth to our souls, so that we would set out on the way to heaven and keep on that way for the rest of our lives!

Think about the Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way home after being at Jerusalem to worship God (you can read about him in Acts 8). As he was travelling along in his chariot, he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, but he could not understand what he was reading. He needed a teacher if he



was to get good for his soul from the Word of God. God had His own way of helping him; He sent Philip, a preacher, to be his teacher. Philip asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading.

The eunuch answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?"

So Philip began with what the eunuch had just read – part of Isaiah 53:7-8 – and "preached unto him Jesus". God gave him a teacher, and he now understood what he had been reading. Not only that, but he believed in Jesus and his soul was saved. It was not that Philip was able to make him believe; a more powerful teacher than Philip was needed for that. And that teacher was Christ, the Prophet who had access to the eunuch's soul.

*The Shorter Catechism* sums up the work of Christ as Prophet, in this way: He reveals "to us by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation" (Answer 24). That is what He did to the Ethiopian eunuch, using Philip as His instrument. It is because Christ acts as Prophet, teaching sinners by His Word and Spirit that people are converted today.

And Christ continues to act as a Prophet to those who have believed, applying Scripture truths to their souls for the rest of their lives. He teaches them how to live out their lives as they make their way towards heaven. He goes on revealing to them by His Word and Spirit how they should behave, how they should think, and especially that they are to go on trusting in Him.

A soldier was badly wounded in battle. He was dying, and a comrade carried him from the scene and laid him down under a tree. The dying soldier asked his comrade to open his backpack, take out his little Bible and read to him a small part of it. What did he want to read? he was asked.

He asked for John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Christ was his Prophet, and we can believe that the soldier looked to Him as the Good Shepherd to bring him safely into heaven. He told an officer who was passing: "Now I die happy. I desire to have peace with God, and I possess the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Then he died.

Soon afterwards, the officer was shot in the battle. He was dying and he knew it. He cried out: "I would give 10 000 worlds, if I had them, to possess that peace which gladdened the heart of a dying soldier whom I saw lying under a tree; for he declared that he possessed the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. I know nothing of that peace. I die miserable, for I die in despair."

How much *we* need to have Christ as our Prophet! How earnestly we should seek to have Him as our Prophet, our Priest and our King! And we need to seek Him at once, before it is too late.

## Five Commands

*Rev K M Watkins*

**O**ur blind dog has come on in leaps and bounds over the weeks. For his own good and safety, he has had to learn a number of commands.

The first is not really a command, but it has the effect of one. It is simply to say the dog's name. This never fails to get his attention. It does not matter who or what else is around, when he hears his name, he knows that he is being singled out. Each of us should receive the Word of God like that; we should recognise that it speaks to us as individuals, as if there was not another person in the whole world. David felt that when Nathan said, "Thou art the man". Now David saw that Nathan's parable was all about himself. It had become personal. When the Lord opened Lydia's heart, the gospel spoke to her so personally that "she attended unto the things which were spoken" (Acts 16:14). It was not that the name *Lydia* was actually spoken in the preaching, but the message became relevant to her as an individual.

The Saviour pictured this when He said of the shepherd, "The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (John 10:3). Each sheep knew its name, and could tell when the shepherd called it. So do those who become Christ's sheep. A day comes when they know that the Good Shepherd is addressing them personally. It feels as if He is singling them out, speaking to them only. It is almost as if He is using their very name.

The second command is *Come!* To begin with, the dog was not sure about this. He could not see what was between him and us. But he soon learned that it would not hurt him to come. Instead, it was for his good, because a treat would be waiting for him. So he began to trust the call and usually he comes if we tell him to.

This is another picture. The gospel tells us to come to Christ for salvation. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, *come* ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; *come* ye, buy, and eat; yea, *come*, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). The Lord Jesus invites, "*Come* unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). "*Come* unto the marriage" (Matthew 22:4). But sinners can be afraid to come. They cannot see what is involved, and they fear what might happen. But when they trust Christ's call, they always find that the Saviour never meant them any harm. He came not to hurt and destroy but to save and bless. He welcomes the repenting sinner with joy, like the father received the prodigal son.

The third command is *Careful!* As the dog became more confident, he began leaving the path and exploring to the right and left. Soon he would go anywhere, as far as his long lead allowed. Being blind, he needed to be warned when danger was in his way. We have to be his eyes, constantly looking out for troubles in his way. When we see something, we call out “Careful!” He learned the meaning of this command very quickly. As soon as he hears it, he slows down, he sniffs, he puts out his paw, exploring the obstacle ahead. Carefully he finds his way around it, or changes direction to avoid it. It could be a rock, or a bush, or a tree, or a fence, or a gate, or a parked vehicle, or an abandoned piece of farm machinery, or driftwood on the beach, or a stream, or a rabbit hole. He cannot see these things, but we can. Trusting us to warn him of danger, the rest of the time he goes on his way without fear.

In our spiritual blindness we cannot see all the harmful and dangerous things laid in our way by the world, the flesh and the devil. But the Lord can. His eyes keep a constant watch for His people, and through His Word He warns them to be careful. When temptation is coming, He warns, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). When they are about to trust in themselves, He warns, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). When false teaching is about, He warns, “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4), and, “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24). When faith is under attack, He warns, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). This is the all-seeing Saviour saying, “Careful!”

The fourth command is *Step!* For a blind dog, steep steps are difficult. If he does not know a downward step is ahead, he could stumble and fall right over with a jolt. If he does not know an upward step is coming, he will walk or even run straight into it and bash his nose. So we warn him, saying, “Step!” When he hears that, he slows down and puts out his paw, to feel if the way ahead is up or down, and then he moves forward very carefully.

Steep steps can be very difficult for us too. Some changes in our lives take us steeply downward, like serious illness, losing loved ones, and other disappointments that cast us down. We can stumble by complaining against God. There are downward steps in spiritual things too, especially when the Lord brings us down from pride and self-righteousness. We are to hear the Saviour’s voice at such times, and seek grace to submit to the downward step. Walking softly and humbly before the Lord, we will keep making progress, without getting hurt.

Even upward steps can cause harm. When things are going well for us

outwardly, it is a time of spiritual danger. God's people can easily forget their dependence on the Lord. Anyone can be tempted to praise themselves for their achievements, instead of acknowledging God as the source of every good gift. That was Herod's downfall when "he gave not God the glory" (Acts 12:23) after his big speech. Even spiritual blessings can be dangerous, if God's people try to go on in their own strength. This was Uzziah's downfall: "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chronicles 26:16).

A fifth command is *This Way!* A blind dog is like other dogs – it has a will of its own. If left to himself, who knows where he would end up? It is all darkness to him! Rather, when we come to a fork in the path, or a junction, we decide which direction he will take. We say, "This way!" He knows the command now, and most of the time he is quick to follow.

So it is with God's people. Being spiritually blind by nature, how can they choose the right path? They need the Lord to guide them, and this He has promised to do. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21). They are in danger of straying from the right path into the wrong way, whether to the right or to the left, but the Lord guides them by His Word. How precious! In themselves they are blind and cannot see the best way, but the Lord promises, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them" (Isaiah 42:16). Become one of His people, and you will have a Guide for life.

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*For Younger Readers*

## **The Lad Who Was Good to His Mother**

**K**ing Frederick rang his bell to call his servant. But his servant did not come; no one came. So the King went to look for him and found him fast asleep in a chair. It must have been very serious not to obey the King, but he seems to have been a kind man.

He went over to the servant, and was going to waken him. Then he noticed part of a letter hanging out of his pocket. The King wanted to know what was in the letter; so he pulled it out and read it.

The letter was from his servant's mother. She was thanking her son because he sent her part of his wages. He knew that she was very poor and needed money. She ended her letter by telling him that God would reward him for showing such love to her.

The King went back quietly to his room. He picked up a bag full of coins and came back to where the servant was. He slipped the bag and the letter into his servant's pocket. He was giving the servant a lot of money.

Then he rang his bell again very loudly. The servant wakened up at once and came to the King.

"You have had a sound sleep", the King told him.

The servant did not know what to say. He put his hand into his pocket and was very surprised to find there was a bag of coins in it. Again he could say nothing; he burst into tears.

"What is the matter?" asked the King.

The servant was afraid someone wanted to accuse him of stealing when the coins were put in his pocket. He went on his knees before the King. He said, "I know nothing of this money, which I have just found in my pocket".

The King told him to send the money to his mother and to give her his greetings. He told his servant: "I will take care of both her and you".

God says, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". He wants children to honour their parents: to love them, to be nice to them and help them. He wants children to obey their parents.

God wants children to be kind to their parents even when they grow up. He has promised to bless children when they honour their parents. So God blessed the King's servant who honoured his mother, who had so little money to live on.

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*For Junior Readers*

## Light

We are at the beginning of another year, and none of us knows what lies ahead of us. It would be good to have David's confidence when he said, "I trusted in Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand" (Psalm 31:14,15). God knows the future, but you do not. So what do you need as you look ahead? We live in dark days, when not many people fear God or keep His commandments. So do you not need a light on the way ahead?

The Saviour tells us twice in the Gospel of John, "I am the light of the world". He only is the true light, the One who came into this world to save sinners. He then tells us: "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you . . . While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John 12:35,36).

J C Ryle, a godly minister of the past, wrote about these words in John 12: "Our own time for getting good is short and limited; let us take heed that we make good use of it. Let us walk while we have the light.

"Have we Bibles? Let us not neglect to read them.

"Have we the preached gospel? Let us not linger, halting between two opinions, but believe to the saving of our souls.

"Have we Sabbaths? Let us not waste them in idleness, carelessness . . . but throw our whole hearts into their sacred employments and turn them to good account.

"Light is about us and around us and near us on every side. Let us each resolve to walk in the light while we have it, lest we find ourselves at last cast into outer darkness for ever!"

Is that not solemn? Will you not seek the Lord now, while you have the light of the gospel shining around you? Then you will be able to say with David in Metrical Psalm 36: "And in that purest light of Thine we clearly light shall see."

*J van Kralingen*

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## Felix Neff: Pastor of the High Alps

### 2. In Grenoble and Mens

Neff was born in Switzerland in 1798. He was converted while serving in the army. After leaving the army, he began visiting the villages round about Geneva to read the Bible to people and explain it.

Neff went back to Geneva in 1821, when he was 24. Just then a minister in Grenoble, in south-east France, wrote to Geneva, asking for someone to come and take his place for a few months. Neff offered to go. He would have had to walk all the way, over mountainous country, taking him up to 30 hours, not including time for eating and sleeping.

In Grenoble, Neff was upset because his teaching was having little effect; most people seemed not to care about their souls. But he benefited by being reminded that if only human power is at work, no spiritual good will be done. He was reminded too that he must pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those who listened to him.

After six months, the minister returned to Grenoble and Neff was about to return home to Switzerland when a request came to him from the town of Mens, 50 kilometres away. The minister there had to go away for some time. So Neff answered the call for help. Some time after he came to Mens, he wrote, "Yesterday I preached on the parable of the ten virgins and saw that the people listened with great attention. Then they began to ask me some

questions on my sermon and wished to discuss the doctrine.” He thought there may have been some signs of a revival, but he knew he ought not to “rejoice too soon”.

Soon he gathered a large number of young people, who came four times a week to the house where he lived, so that they could learn the teachings of Scripture. After explaining a passage of Scripture he would point the young people to some other verses from the Bible, and they would learn them by heart. He wrote about his activities: “I visit no place but where I can preach the gospel; and wherever I go for this purpose I am joyfully received”. In many places he spoke out strongly against dancing, reading novels and playing cards.

Neff stayed in Mens for almost two years. Wherever he went to preach, the church building was crowded and the people paid earnest attention to Neff’s preaching. The people came, not only from the town of Mens, but also from villages round about the town, some of them quite remote. Neff was no doubt glad to learn that people were losing interest in novels. Instead, many were now reading the Bible carefully. And young people in a village near Mens came together in groups to read the Scriptures and to discuss what they had read; quite possibly many of them were not themselves able to read.

But many of the old Christians in the area used to recall a time of persecution when, during severe winter weather, the people walked several kilometres in the darkness to pray and praise God in the open air, even at the risk of losing their lives. And the old Christians felt that the present standard of religion came well short of what it had been in the past.

Neff sometimes spent his whole day speaking, from 5 am to 9 pm; probably for most of that time he would be talking with individuals or small groups of people, rather than preaching. But on Sabbaths he was usually preaching six times and would often walk several kilometres, to get from one village to another to conduct services. God was blessing his efforts and Neff was clear that it was through the Holy Spirit working, in the hearts of those who were converted, that his preaching was blessed to them. They included people who were openly wicked, but also others who had lived moral lives, who were now brought to seek the application to their souls of the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin.

Neff was well aware that “all have sinned” and so are under God’s condemnation. He found that most of the poor people in Mens assumed that the gospel is nothing more than a beautiful story, and he tried hard to show them what the gospel really is. One of his difficulties in that area was that he did not know the local dialect well; it had a lot of words which were not used in standard French. But he set himself to learn the dialect of that district

and succeeded, not only in making himself understood clearly, but also in persuading the people of their need of the gospel.

The local people used to consider the Sabbath a day for worldly pleasure, especially the evening. But as Neff taught them from the Scriptures, he noticed that the people paid less attention to the entertainments that they previously enjoyed. Over a period of months, people of all kinds were brought to seek the Saviour. Neff was particularly glad to see the change in the young people he was teaching.

He wrote about a very intelligent girl called Emily, who used to take part in all the dances in the district and watch all the plays that were performed there. Yet she also came to every service. Often she promised herself that she would turn from her sins, and she prayed, as Neff had taught her, that God would show her her sins. In one sermon, Neff repeated several times: "Go to Golgotha, and there you will see the hateful nature of your sins". The Holy Spirit applied these words powerfully to Emily's heart. She was very upset and bitterly regretted having prayed to be shown her sins. This went on for some days, during which she did not speak to anyone.

At last Neff persuaded her to read a few passages of Scripture which he hoped would help her. Emily turned up the words of Jesus in the text of the sermon which had convinced her of sin: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). She then said, "It is very true that our righteousness does not exceed that of the Pharisees of old; alas, it is very much worse".

Neff answered, "But Paul says that no flesh living can be justified by the works of the law". He showed her various other verses that suited her state of mind at the time. He went on to speak about the motives of love and thankfulness, which encourage true believers to obey and serve God. He asked if she thought that those who are influenced by such motives could find any pleasure in worldly things.

Emily answered honestly: "No, but I do".

Neff then tried to convince her that the truths of the gospel should make us serious.

She told him: "But they do not make me serious", and she burst into tears.

Neff was thankful for how Emily was thinking; she was probably more serious than she realised. He spoke to her about the Comforter whom Jesus promised to His disciples: the Holy Spirit. It is He who works in the hearts of sinners so that they can believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved.

The next morning, Emily told Neff: "I am too proud; I can never be saved". But he was glad to see that she had some knowledge of her own



heart, and he spoke to her about the wonder of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

Neff spent two days in other places and then returned to Mens. He was very anxious about Emily, but as soon as she saw him she exclaimed, "How happy I am!" She went on: "You did not leave me in the hands of a Judge. O how gracious He is! How truly He is called a Saviour! But what agonies, what sufferings the Lord must have endured when He drank up this cup of bitterness, even to the very dregs! I now begin to understand what He meant when He said, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death'."

From then on there was a real change in Emily's attitude and behaviour. There was obvious holiness in what she did and what she said. She spoke about God and Christ to her friends, and many of them were brought to know the truth for themselves.

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## Scriptural Teaching on the Family (1)

*Matthew Vogan*

This is the first section of a paper given at the online Youth Conference last year. The full title was: "Scriptural Teaching on the Family in An Age of Attack".

**I**t is important to consider the teaching of the family in our particular context. There are of course biblical principles that are the same in different cultures and time periods, but we are in a particular setting where, as never before, the family is under severe and sustained attack. If we fail to consider this we will not be aware of the particular places where it must be defended. We can consider: first the age of attack, then scriptural teaching on the family, and finally we will apply it briefly to ourselves. We will do this by asking three main questions

1. *Does the family have a future?* In considering this question we will seek to understand the attacks on the family in our own context. How much further will such assaults cause the institution of marriage to decline?

2. *What future should the family have?* The only future in which the family can be honoured and flourish safely is one that follows the purpose and plan of God, who originally instituted it.

3. *Which future for the family will you follow?* This is not just a question of interest for those who study social trends. It affects us personally, not just in relation to the society and communities we can expect to experience in the future. It has great personal relevance; will we follow the selfish destructive course of this world in the way we form and shape our families in the future, or will we be conformed to the way that God has marked out for our good?

**1. Does the family have a future?** During the lockdowns and restrictions of

2020-21 most families have spent much more time together than usual. Surveys identified some issues, including an impact on mental health, but on the whole, at least during the first lockdown, and – as long as they were not struggling with money or health pressures – most parents reported benefits. They said it resulted in more family time and they felt more connected to their children. Apparently many young people were disposed to agree. Does this offer hope? Will this lead to a new appreciation of the family in a society which often places it under acute pressure? Time will tell. Of course, it depends how representative the group surveyed was. Whatever the reality, it certainly ought to focus our attention even more on the importance of the family and its wellbeing.

Another prominent feature of 2020 was the protests organised by Black Lives Matter. Although the main issue being protested against was racism, it advocated a wide-ranging platform of change. It stated the following amongst its beliefs: “We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another”. This was later removed from the website when it created controversy.

The idea of abolishing the family goes right back to the 1800s, to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who believed in an evolutionary myth that originally there were no families. But anthropology, the study of mankind, tells us that the family is, in fact, a consistent feature of societies. Abolishing the family was one of the key objectives of their Communist Manifesto. It was put into effect in Russia after the revolution of 1917. But it had to be reversed around ten years later, because it led to social chaos with so many abandoned illegitimate children. They were not being raised communally; they were not being brought up at all. That is usually the case in communes; when raising a child becomes everyone’s responsibility, it becomes in reality no one’s responsibility.

Since the 1960s and ’70s, abolishing the family has been a key aspect of feminist and homosexual campaigning, as well as being a key item on the agenda of Marxists (people who claim to follow Karl Marx) and anarchists (people who reject all authority). It fitted well with the promotion of immorality from the 1960s onwards. The idea is that the family is a conservative institution, training people up to embrace conservative values. It reproduces a conservative view of society. If people want to abolish traditional views of authority, morality and gender, they attack the family as a key pillar of this. It may seem a fringe idea, but it is in fact a position taken up in more than a few mainstream publications.

Yet it is also possible for people to undermine the family even though they

have no desire to abolish it. Simply doing nothing to preserve and promote the family undermines it. This is because trends in society have contributed to weakening the status of the family; so doing nothing allows the downhill momentum to continue.

Since the 1960s, the family has undergone significant change. In many countries, the extended family has all but disappeared, and the traditional family consisting of a married couple with children has become much less widespread, as divorce rates, a man and a woman living together, couples “living together apart”, single parenthood and same-sex partnerships have all increased. Families have seen more mothers entering the employment market with more working hours and responsibility. Birth rates have plummeted. And the elderly members of the family live longer and, increasingly, alone.

Marriage is now seen at best as more of a capstone to life than a foundation. It is seen as a lifestyle choice to consider once you have established your personal success. This can be the case even amongst many of those who identify as Christians. So marriage is both less common and more often delayed. It also means that fewer children are born. Thus, across many nations, marriage rates are at an all-time low, according to the latest statistics.

Research shows that, while rates of marriage are higher amongst Evangelicals, they are following the same downward trend. In his book, *The Future of Christian Marriage*, Mark Regenerus examines the trends among young people identifying as Christians across different nations. It reveals that marriage is seen as more something nice to have than what is really to be desired. Regenerus writes, “As a researcher, studying the demise of marriage has been like watching an invasive fungus slowly destroy a stately old oak tree”.

Trends continue to go in this direction, so we can expect the following:

- *Fewer children.* Most countries globally will see a decrease in the number of children per household between 2000 and 2030. This trend will be stronger in developing countries (seeing a 33.8% decrease) than in developed countries (a 26.5% decrease).
- *Fractured families.* Divorce rates are surging globally, with people who are divorced forming by far the fastest growing section of society over 2000-2030. One of the factors behind rising divorces is that marriage is seen more as a social contract.
- *Evolving habitats.* A larger number of couples without children and single-person “families” in the largest cities

## Let Something Be Settled

*W S Plumer*

Taken, with editing, from *Short Sermons for the People*. It is the final sermon in the book. The text is from Joshua 24:15: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve".

Everyone serves something. Some worship idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. Some serve sin and Satan by lying, stealing, robbing and cheating. Some are given over to pride, luxury, ambition, filthy thoughts. Many are terribly decided in the ways of evil. They seem never to waver.

But others have no mind of their own. At times they seem almost to be Christians. Then something bewitches them. One day they promise well. The next day they forget it all. They vow, but they do not pay. They say, We will serve God, but when temptation comes they yield to it. They are unstable as water. They are carried hither and thither by every wind. With them nothing is settled. Their face is not set as a flint. Their heart is not fixed. Let such people heed the voice of warning. Let them change their course completely. There are good reasons why they should.

1. This indecision is *unnecessary*. All things are now ready. All the truths of Scripture are clear and settled. God's will is known. All the facts, motives, and arguments for a right course have already been given to us. We cannot expect God to reveal His mind any more clearly. He has told us all we shall know till we stand before Him to be judged. If by delay we could learn better what we ought to do, it might be reasonable to put off these matters. But God's Word reveals His whole mind and will about us and about our duty.

2. It is *very painful* to be unsettled in our minds. This is specially so when the matter is of great weight. It is, above all, true in matters of religion. Conscience is on the side of God and of right, and it makes its demands in clear, deep tones. Nothing can hinder us from obeying it but strong evil desires. People's hearts are vile, and that is why their lives are wicked. They know better than they do. Of course they are unhappy. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Is 57:20,21). No scourging on earth is worse than that of a guilty conscience. It has often made cowards of the bravest. It converts all that is good into gall and wormwood.

3. It is *foolish* to remain in doubt when we have all the facts before us. That applies to our duty to God. There will never be any change in the terms of salvation. No one expects any. There will never be any other Saviour than the Lord Jesus Christ. There can be none better suited to our case: more kind, more tender, more mighty to save. When I was a lad, I read of a fool who came to a river and sat down. Some one found him and asked him what

he was doing. He said he was waiting till all the water ran by. Are you playing the fool in the same way? The hindrances to your salvation are not less or fewer the longer you wait. On the contrary, they are increasing every day. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by delay.

4. It is *wicked* not to believe in Christ at once. God's will is known. Your duty is speedily and heartily to obey. His command is clear: "My son, give Me thy heart". You rebel against God till you give Him your heart. When you tell a child to do something and he sits still, and you speak to him about it, is it enough for him to say, I was thinking about it? You did not tell him to think about it. You told him to do it. All that comes short of obedience is wicked disobedience to God. When you put off the call to everlasting life, you sin against all God's offers, warnings, mercies and invitations.

5. In matters of religion it is *very dangerous* to be unsettled. No one knows what a day may bring forth. A paper was handed to a great man, saying it required his serious attention. He put it away, saying, "Serious things tomorrow". The next day he was killed, because he did not pay attention to the message. It is human nature to be more set in good or evil ways the longer we walk in them. Custom and habit are powerful. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). Every time metal is melted and allowed to grow cold it becomes a little harder. Every time the heart is melted and does not yield to God's demands it becomes harder. Every time the will refuses good it is a little more stubborn.

6. If you remain in doubt a little longer, your indecision will be *ruinous*. A young lady heard a preacher say that some of his hearers might be hearing the last call of mercy. As she walked out of church, she said she had often heard the same thing. At sunrise next morning she was a corpse. People have only a wicked reason for not being firm and decided Christians. All such conduct is caused by pride, laziness, contempt, unbelief, or unthankfulness. All these things, if they reign in us, are ruinous.

7. The great secret of success is *prompt and hearty action*. When the blind man heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he knew that now was his time. He cried aloud, and nothing could restrain him: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me". He was healed and saved. Till Noah's ark was closed up, any poor, penitent sinner might have entered it. After that, it was too late. Blessed is he who knows his time and uses it to seek salvation.

**Lessons.** 1. In religion it is not enough to know the truth. We must love, accept and practise it. We must, from the heart obey God's will, as made known in His Word. The sin of many is that they know their duty and never do it. The misery of many lost souls is that, when on earth, they knew their

duty but they did not do it. Unless we obey the truth, our knowledge of it will but make us more guilty. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

2. Nor will it save us to make an uncertain resolution, or a resolution that we do not keep. Many are great at promising. They say, "We will serve the Lord". But they make promises in their own strength, and they are soon forgotten. They vow, and break their vows. They say, "I go, sir," but they never go. They act like a bankrupt government, that calls in its old bonds, to pay them off with others that are just as worthless.

3. Nor does a public profession of religion save a soul if the heart is not in it. Such a profession is a public vow, and sinned against publicly.

4. Therefore no one is safe until he gives his heart to God, renounces all sin, casts his soul on Jesus Christ, and accepts eternal life as the gift of God through the Redeemer.

5. Now, poor dying sinner, will you not turn to the Lord? While you live in sin you are gathering fuel to burn up your soul. You are toiling hard to be miserable for ever. A preacher once said, "A certain tyrant sent for one of his subjects, and said to him, 'What is your employment?' He said, 'I am a blacksmith'. 'Go home', said he, 'and make me a chain of such a length'. He went home; it occupied him several months, and he had no wages while he was making it. Then he brought it to the king and he said, 'Go and make it twice as long'. He gave him nothing to do it with, but sent him away. Again the man worked on and made it twice as long. Each time he brought it, there was nothing but a command to make it still longer. And when he brought it up at last, the tyrant said, 'Take it, and bind him hand and foot with it, and cast him into a furnace of fire'. These were the wages for making the chain.

"Here is a meditation for you, you servants of the devil. Your master, the devil, is telling you to make a chain. Some have been 50 years welding the links of the chain, and he says, Go and make it longer still. Next Sabbath morning you will open that shop of yours and put another link on; next Sabbath you will be drunk, and put another link on; next Monday you will do a dishonest action; and so you will keep on making fresh links to this chain. And when you have lived 20 more years, the devil will say, More links on still! Then at last it will be, Take him and bind him hand and foot, and cast him into a furnace of fire. For the wages of sin is death.

"There is a subject for your meditation. I do not think it will be sweet, but if God makes it profitable it will do you good. You must have strong medicine sometimes, when the disease is bad. God apply it to your hearts."

There is no folly like serving sin and Satan. There is no madness like men following their idols and iniquities. Lord, have mercy on us all.

# Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2021-22

## UK Names for Exercise 1

**Senior Section:** *Barnoldswick:* Calvin Middleton, Claudia van Essen. *Brighton:* Katharine Hills. *Halkirk:* Annelise Hymers-Mackintosh. *Inverness:* Lois Maton. *Llanelli:* Jonathon Cran. *London:* David, John and Sarah Munns.

**Intermediate Section.** *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton, Daniel van Essen. *Dingwall:* Catherine Campbell. *Glasgow:* Elena Macleannan, Hugh Ross. *Halkirk:* Donald Maclean. *Inverness:* Jenna Campbell. *Southampton:* Chloe, Jonny and Lydia Wilkins. *North Tolsta:* Uilleam Morrison. *Ullapool:* Tacita Angell.

**Junior Section:** *Barnoldswick:* Samuel van Essen. *Beaulieu:* Anna McSeveney. *Dingwall:* Donald Allan MacColl. *Dungannon:* Hannah MacLeod. *Edinburgh:* Beth Dickie, Anna Cameron-Mackintosh. *Glasgow:* Violet Marr, Shona Ross. *Halkirk:* Grace Maclean. *Inverness:* Susanna Campbell, Murray Dickie, James Maton. *Llanelli:* Carwyn Cran. *Stornoway:* Emma Morrison, Naomi Morrison.

**Upper Primary Section:** *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod, Cassia Soni. *Barnoldswick:* Susanna Middleton, Alexia van Essen. *Beaulieu:* Rebekka Fraser, Hudson Maclean. *Dingwall:* Neil Campbell, Iain MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Darcy and Joella Esson, Alice Hicklin, Edinburgh postmark but no name. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh, Catriona Maclean. *Inverness:* Campbell Dickie. *Llanelli:* Sarah Cran. *London:* Andrew Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie Macdonald. *Portadown:* Nathan Macleod. *Tandragee:* Joseph Brown.

**Lower Primary Section:** *Aberdeen:* Philip Macleod. *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell, Mairi and Charlotte MacColl. *Dungannon:* Sarah Macleod. *Edinburgh:* Julia Cameron-Macintosh, Anderson and Samuel Dickie, Leah Hicklin. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *Inverness:* Molly Campbell. *London:* Lydia Campbell, Daniel and Benjamin Macleod. *North Harris:* Finlay and Margaret Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison. *Portree:* Murdo Macrauld. *Southampton:* Benjy Wilkins. *Tandragee:* Aaron Brown.

## Looking Around Us

### Germany's New Chancellor and Acknowledging God

Germany has a new Chancellor, equivalent to Britain's Prime Minister. He is Olaf Scholz. It seems to be traditional for new chancellors, when they take their oath of office, to add the words, "So help me God". The previous Chancellor, Angela Merkel, did so, but Mr Scholz did not.

Mr Scholz is said to have no religion; so he does not acknowledge God, who rules over chancellors and prime ministers and presidents. They have many difficult decisions to make; many serious problems come their way. How can they hope to succeed in their responsible positions without God's help? King Solomon recognised this early in his reign. He acknowledged to God: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." (1 Kings 3:7). He felt he did not know how to do anything properly; he needed help from God. So he asked God for wisdom, rather than all the other things that

he could have asked for, such as riches. He was right to have done so, and God gave him wisdom.

So it is sad when we see rulers stumbling from one difficulty to another, and even from one blunder to another – and it seems clear that they are not asking God for wisdom and for help. How different things might be if nations had godly rulers, rulers who would ask God to show them the way they should take in governing their country – to make wise decisions in the face of difficult problems! And they would do all they could to pass laws that reflect the teachings of Scripture – especially God’s commandments. They would know that these commandments are not only holy but also good – good for themselves and for their people (see Romans 7:7).

Yet an ungodly nation will not take readily to the standards of the Bible. In a democracy, it is likely that the next election would see godly leaders voted out of office. Nations need rulers who are able and godly. We should ask God, in His kindness, to raise up such leaders for every nation. At the same time, we should ask God to turn the multitudes of ordinary people to Himself, giving them a new heart and right attitudes, so that they would appreciate godly laws, based on Scripture. He is able to do this. Nothing is too hard for Him. But a time will come when it *will* be fulfilled: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15).

We must also think about ourselves. We have serious decisions to make, whatever our situation. So we must seek wisdom from heaven in order that we may decide things wisely. We must not trust in ourselves; instead we must look to God to direct us always, to help us in everything that we do. He tells us: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). Especially we need wisdom to turn from the ways of ungodliness to Christ and follow Him along the narrow way that leads to everlasting life.

### **2022 UK Youth Conference**

This year’s Youth Conference has been arranged for Tuesday, April 5, to Thursday, April 7, God willing, at Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perth, PH2 9EG. More information to follow.

**Price £1.00**