

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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The Way of Peace

Paul the Apostle begins a long series of verses in Romans 3 by emphasising the fact that no one is righteous – apart from God's grace. The other verses in the series back up the statement that no one is righteous. This first statement refers back to Psalms 14 and 53. Even more emphasis comes with the further words, "No, not one" (Romans 3:10). Absolutely no one is righteous. Indeed not only is the first statement quoted from the Old Testament, but all the other, supporting statements refer back to Old Testament verses. This shows us how important the Old Testament is, when even the most prominent of the apostles supports what he has to say, in writing a book in the New Testament, by quoting from the Old.

Among these supporting statements is this: "The way of peace have they not known", which is a quotation from Isaiah 59:8. As we start off life, no one is on the way of peace. We are sinners; so we are not at peace with God. He is angry with us; He cannot tolerate sin. He will punish us – indeed He will punish us for ever – unless we repent.

But there is a way of peace, and all who go along that way are safe; when they die, they will be safe for ever in heaven. Yet no one will ever find that way by their own efforts, though it is everyone's duty to seek it. No one will ever think out a way of peace with God, by their own powers. If there is to be a way of peace, it is God who must provide the way. And He has done so. Jesus Christ said, "I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). It is also God who must lead sinners into the way of peace.

Jesus did everything that was necessary so that there might be peace between sinners and God. He became the substitute for sinners; He took their place and suffered the punishment due to them because of sin, instead of them having to suffer it themselves. Jesus suffered in various ways throughout His time in this world, but He suffered especially on the cross of Calvary. And His sufferings were not only what He endured in His body, painful and terrible though they were.

He suffered more seriously in His soul; that is expressed in the fearful cry He uttered on the cross to His Father: "My God, My God, why hast Thou

forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, quoting Psalm 22:1). He was enduring the anger of God, which was coming out against Him instead of the sinners whom He was representing, those for whom He was the substitute. He endured God's anger instead of them; He endured the punishment they deserved, so that they might be saved for ever from the terrible consequences of sin.

Because Christ, through His sufferings and death, turned away the anger of God from sinners, there is a way of peace that leads at last to heaven. Sinners can be reconciled to God. Christ sends out preachers to call them to be reconciled to God. Preachers are to tell those who are still not walking on the way of peace to be reconciled. Paul put it like this: “As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

When a preacher is calling on sinners to be reconciled to God – calling them to enter the way of peace, the way that leads to everlasting life – he is pleading instead of Christ. It is as if God Himself was beseeching them, or pleading with them. What authority the preacher has when he is calling his hearers to be reconciled to God! But it is not his own authority; it is the authority of God, who sent him out to preach. And we are to think of him as God's messenger to us. This assumes, of course, that the preacher keeps to the teaching of the Word of God in what he says.

So God is calling us to be reconciled to Him, to receive the provision He has made in Christ to turn away His anger from us. To use another form of words, God is calling us to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” – to trust in Him as the One who made it possible for sinners to be saved, who opened up the way of peace. We cannot afford to delay; we may be taken away from this world very suddenly and have no further opportunity to trust in Christ, no further opportunity to start out on the way of peace.

How will we know if we are on the way of peace? One point is that, if we are on that way, we will be God's friends. We will love Him; and Jesus explained that, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). If God has reconciled us to Himself – if we are on the way of peace – we will love Him and we will want to do what He commands us. Another point is that we will want to be friends to those who are God's friends, to be friends of those who also are on the way of peace.

Robert Moffat was born in Ormiston, near Edinburgh, in 1795 and became a missionary in southern Africa. His daughter married the better-known African missionary, David Livingstone. At one time, Moffat and some others had been travelling all day and all night. When they at last reached a village, they had no food or water left and they were very tired. Someone they met warned them that it would be dangerous to enter the village. He pointed out

some higher ground beyond the village and said they could sleep there for the night.

The group waited for some time and then a man came along. They asked him for water, but he would not give them any. They asked him for a little milk, and again he refused. They did not feel safe, but they prayed to God and no doubt committed themselves to His care. They just sat where they were and, after some time, they saw a woman coming towards them from the higher ground. She had a jar of milk in one hand and was also carrying a bundle of wood, probably on her head. She put everything down on the ground, turned round and went back the way she came. Soon she returned with a jar of water in one hand and some meat in the other.

The woman sat down on the ground and cut up the meat. They asked what her name was and also if there was some relative of hers to whom they had shown kindness; but she did not reply. Moffat again asked her for her name, and once more there was no answer. After repeating his question four or five times more, she answered. She told him: "I know whose servants you are, and I love Him who has told me: 'He that gives a cup of cold water to one of His disciples shall in no wise lose his reward'". (She was quoting Christ's words, in Matthew 10:42, from memory.)

"Her words", Moffat said, "seemed to glow while she wept profusely to see one of the servants of Christ." Here was a woman walking in the way of peace and she was very much moved to meet someone else who was walking on that way.

Moffat asked her about her life and discovered that she was shining as a light in the world (see Philippians 2:15), the only light in her village. He asked her to tell him how she had kept the light of God alive in her soul – that is, how she had kept on walking in the way of peace. She pulled out a book from under her clothes and held it up. She said, "That is the fountain from which I drink. That is the oil that keeps my lamp burning in this dark place." Over those years, God was keeping spiritual life alive in her soul, feeding her soul through His Word and keeping the feet of her soul from wandering away from the way of peace.

Moffat looked at the book and found that it was a New Testament in Dutch. She had attended a school run by a missionary (presumably from the Netherlands), who had given her the Testament when she left the school. God had blessed His Word to her, Moffat said, without any teacher except the Holy Spirit and her only Christian fellowship was communion with God.

No doubt we have far more opportunities to get good for our souls than this woman had. Let us be diligent in making use of our opportunities and pray that God would bless the Bible to us and lead us into the way of peace.

The Power of the Bible

3. By the Bible Alone

This is the third and final article about a family from Calais, in France. The older daughter went to England and came in touch with Protestants. The last article told about a conversation the younger daughter had with a priest. She then went home and prayed. She concluded that it was God alone who could give her the light she was seeking. This is the final article in the series.

The younger daughter never saw the priest again and never afterwards entered a Roman Catholic church. The next Sabbath the two sisters went to a Protestant church for the first time. The younger sister particularly appreciated what she heard. They were both sure that the Bible must be their only guide in spiritual things, but their mother still had many doubts. They asked the minister to visit them, in the hope that he would be able to help their mother and the daughter who stayed in France.

That evening, the older daughter told her father about her new views. He listened to what she had to say and told her that she was old enough to decide for herself about these things. But she told him that the Bible, which was now her guide, told her to honour her father and her mother. So she wanted his agreement.

The father accepted the situation but he insisted that she would not openly confess her Protestant beliefs – which were, really, biblical beliefs – while she was in France; she could do what she liked in England. But he stated that he had no objection to any of the others reading the Bible. Perhaps she later realised that the Bible did *not* require her to obey her father when it was her duty to do what God commanded. To obey God is much more important than to obey any human being.

When the older sister reached England soon afterwards, a letter had already arrived from her father. He explained to her that he had readily agreed to her request because he had seen such a change in her behaviour. It was clear to him that it was God's work. Although as yet he scarcely understood anything about God's work in a soul, he realised that if God was working in his daughter, she would show him respect.

Another letter from France arrived two days later. This too was from her father, telling her that by publicly becoming a Protestant she would be separating from her nearest and dearest friends. So she must bring an end to her engagement to a young Frenchman.

But his daughter had carefully considered these things already and was prepared to go on with the Bible as her guide, no matter what it cost. Soon afterwards, she became a member of a Protestant church in England. Mean-

while her sister and mother in France were learning more and more of biblical truth from the visits of the Protestant minister and from his preaching.

Rumours began to go around Calais, where they lived, that the family were heretics, that they had turned their backs on Romanism. The father was a teacher; he had his own school. But now it was likely that parents would withdraw all his pupils from his school, and he would be left with no income. He followed the advice of a friend to stop his wife and younger daughter going to church. Some time later, after his son had moved to America, the mother became depressed and he allowed her to attend church again, hoping it would cheer her up. And some months later, he gave her permission to make a public profession of faith in Christ. Then the school had to close; there were no pupils left.

At this point, a priest in the local cathedral preached a very strong sermon against the family. He spoke of the older daughter as an instrument of the devil – because, he claimed, she had caused the souls of all her family to be lost. He declared that she and all her family were cursed. The family had to move away and they settled in another town, where there was a Protestant church. Almost all their friends and relations abandoned them, but God provided for them. What is more, the father and the younger brother were also converted.

God had begun His work in this family through the Bible alone. It was only later that God used ministers to help members of the family. Whatever else we do – including attending church – let us make good use of the Bible, asking God to bless it to our souls.

A Reformation Tour

3. Dundee to St Andrews

Rev David Campbell

This year's Youth Conference took place at Strathallan School, near Perth. The Conference included a tour of Reformation sites, mainly in St Andrews. The first article recorded remarks that were made, during the bus journey, as we passed the city of Perth heading towards Dundee. When we stopped at Dundee, we recalled aspects of its history connected with George Wishart. These aspects were covered in the second article. Later articles, God willing, will detail some things about events at the Reformation in St Andrews itself.

4. Travelling to St Andrews. As we get nearer St Andrews, two places connected with the ministry of the great leader of the Second Reformation – Alexander Henderson – should be noticed.

(1) *St Fillan's Church, Forgan*. In a little church, now derelict, amidst the

fields, the Lord's blessing on the preaching of the famous Robert Bruce is to be remembered. During the period after 1600 – the Scottish Church was being gradually conformed to the worship and practice of the English Church favoured by the king – James VI. Among these changes was the imposing of bishops on Presbyterian Scotland. Many refused to acknowledge the bishops or to practice the changed worship. Some suffered greatly for their faithfulness.

But in one congregation – Leuchars – a young minister was imposed by the bishops on the people against their will. His name was Alexander Henderson and in the first period of his ministry he was both unconverted and inclined to the episcopal form of government. On the day of his induction to Leuchars, the congregation not only deserted the place of worship, but also locked the door, so that the ministers involved in appointing Henderson to his charge had to climb through the window of the Church to conduct the service.

Yet this sad beginning to Henderson's ministry was to be an instrument in a great change on himself and, through the blessing of God, by his ministry afterwards, to Scotland. Alexander Henderson heard that the great Robert Bruce – whom King James VI harassed and persecuted also – was to preach in a nearby church, in Forgan, and made his way to hear him, slipping in at the back of the Church unobserved.

When Bruce rose to announce his text, its impact on Henderson must have been very striking, and the sermon was to be the means of his conversion and reformation. The text was from John 10:1: "He that entereth not in by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber". The events of Henderson's induction were thus vividly pictured and no doubt the character of his ministry was also described. One can still visit the old church in Forgan, now only a ruin, where that wonderful and eventful sermon was preached by the great Robert Bruce.

Robert Bruce is buried in Larbert churchyard. He had been minister in Edinburgh before being banished to Inverness. His preaching there, and in the latter years of his long life at communion seasons, was greatly blessed. He was among the ministers who preached at the famous communion at Shotts, when the Lord abundantly blessed the preaching of young John Livingstone.

(2) *Leuchars*. As we pass through Leuchars on our way to St Andrews, we should pause to enlarge on the contribution made to the Reformation by the godly Alexander Henderson in the rest of his ministry. He was among a number of ministers who, in 1637, drew up petitions to the government to stop imposing Episcopacy by law and end the oppression of the Lord's people. This led to the famous resistance to the changes sparked by Jenny

Geddes in St Giles church in Edinburgh, when a new prayer book was first used in July 1637.

Henderson was also central in drawing up the National Covenant in 1638. This renewal of the old bands or covenants, made earlier in the Reformation, bound all who signed it to the Reformed faith and worship and to the mutual defence from violence and oppression of those who adhered to it. It was subscribed throughout Scotland during a time of great spiritual awakening.

A learned and sober minister, Henderson was appointed Moderator of the General Assembly at Glasgow in December 1638, which abolished Episcopacy and the new practices in worship and established the foundations to what we call the Second Reformation. He was also appointed to the responsible position of being one of the ministers of Edinburgh, where he and other ministers were at the very centre of the stirring events of the period during which Charles I was at war with his subjects.

Alexander Henderson was one of four ministers from Scotland appointed to be commissioners or helpers at the famous Westminster Assembly between 1643 and 1647. This Assembly of the best Reformed theologians produced *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government* and *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, all of which were approved by the Church of Scotland and became the creed and constitution of Presbyterian Churches all over the world.

This Second Reformation produced a fuller development of the doctrines that all the Reformed Churches adhered to. More particularly, it was a wonderful revival and recovery of the great principles, doctrines and worship established at the First Reformation. It was a remarkable deliverance, which was brought about by the same Spirit of God that stirred the early Scottish martyrs and the great preachers like John Knox and Robert Bruce in the previous century. Under God's blessing, we owe a great debt to the faithfulness of all these worthy Scottish ministers.

But our tour of St Andrews will mainly recall the early period and in the next article we will introduce the martyrs and speak more about their contribution to the Reformation from Roman Catholic error in the sixteenth century – a contribution which cost them so dearly. The four best known martyrs are remembered on a very large monument overlooking the sea on the north side of the little town of St Andrews.

This is a good spot to begin a walking tour of the town. The names mentioned on the memorial are those of Patrick Hamilton, George Forrest, George Wishart and Walter Milne. We will refer to them all more fully, God willing, in the next article.

*For Junior Readers***William Tyndale**

As you pick up your Bible to read it, or as the minister reads it in church and explains it to you, have you ever thought what a wonderful blessing it is to have the Bible in your own language? What a treasure is in your hand! What a treasure to have the very words of God in a language you can read and understand!

You may not realise that this was not always the case. Before the Reformation in England in the 1500s, the Bible was only available in Latin! Could the people read Latin? No!

These were years of great spiritual ignorance and darkness. The Church did not want ordinary people to read the Bible. Anyone caught translating it into English was likely to be burned to death. Was that not unbelievably sad?

So how did this situation change? The Lord used a man called William Tyndale, who gave his life to have the Bible translated into the language of the people. He was born in the south of England in 1495 and studied in Oxford. He longed to learn more of God through the words of the Bible.

As he was brilliant with languages, he learned to speak and write eight of them, including Greek, which he was able to use to study the New Testament. (Greek was the language in which the New Testament was first written.) As Tyndale studied and translated more of the Bible, he realised something very important. A lot of the truths he was reading were not taught by the Roman Catholic Church. This made him long more than ever that all the people of England, right down to the ploughboys on the farms, would be able to read and understand the Scriptures.

But he could be punished for translating the Bible into English; so he had to work secretly. This meant that, for the rest of his life, he was basically a fugitive, on the run. When the bishops began plotting to capture him, he decided to move to Germany so that he could fulfill his calling from God. He made his way to Cologne, which was the biggest city in Germany at that time, and continued his work.

Another advantage of being in Cologne was that there were printing presses within reach. Once his translation progressed, he was able to get some copies printed. Then there was a raid on the printer's premises, and he fled to Worms, another city in Germany.

While he was in Worms he was able to study Hebrew and he began to translate parts of the Old Testament as well. (The Old Testament was first written in Hebrew.) In 1534 he released his final translation. By that

time copies of Tyndale's translations were being smuggled into England, many of them hidden inside bales of cotton which were sent by ship from Germany. The people who obtained them were able to read the Bible in their own language for the first time! Yet, as this became known, the King and the Bishops were very angry. The Bishop of London employed people to go out and look for the Bibles and Testaments and buy them up. Then he would burn them!

Before long, Tyndale was betrayed, arrested, sent to Belgium and thrown into a dungeon. On 6 October 1536 he was sent to be burnt at the stake, aged only 41. When he was given one last opportunity to speak, he made a plea, but not for his life. He prayed, "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England!" The English Bible had cost Tyndale his life – but it was not in vain. The work that he died for would be used in the creation of the English translation known as the Authorised Version or King James Version of 1611, which we still use today!

God has wonderfully preserved His Word for us, despite all the attempts made by His enemies to destroy it: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Should you not value your Bible then, and also the preached Word, and should you not pray that the Lord would bless them to your soul?

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

Asking God and Thanking Him

A little girl knelt down to pray. She prayed to God every evening. But this evening was different from every other day. She no longer had a father. He had died. God had taken him to heaven.

She always thanked God for taking care of her that day and asked Him to take care of her through the night. Then she said, "God bless Mother and . . .". Then she stopped because normally she would have said, "God bless Mother and Father".

Now Father was no longer there. So she stopped. She looked at her mother. She did not know what to do. She said, "I cannot pray for Father any more". She was right. He did not need anyone's prayers any more; he was in heaven. Everything is perfect there.

Someone urged her to go on. Then she said, "O Mother, I cannot leave him all out. Let me say, Thank God that I had a dear father once. So I can still go on and keep him in my prayers." And that is what the little girl went on doing night after night.

You need lots of things. You need God to care for you every day and night. You need Him to keep you from sinning. You need to ask Him to make you obey your father and mother. He is able to do all these things. You should keep praying to Him.

And you should thank Him every time you pray, for all the good things He gives you. You should thank Him for your father and mother, for the food He gives you, and many other things.

The Law of God

2. Rules of Interpretation

Rev K M Watkins

In the first part of this paper given at this year's Youth Conference, we saw that there is an absolute difference between right and wrong, and that difference is made by the moral law of God, which is summarised in the Ten Commandments. But we can still find it hard to know what is right and wrong in certain situations. So it is very helpful to follow *The Shorter Catechism*, which gives an outline of what is required and forbidden in each Commandment. It is even more helpful to follow *The Larger Catechism*, because it gives much more detailed answers. Also, in Answer 99, it sets out eight Scriptural rules for interpreting and implementing the Ten Commandments, as follows:

1. "*The law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever, so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.*" This explains what is meant by saying that the moral law is an *absolute* standard. We must not deviate from the moral law to the smallest degree. "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Psalm 19:7); so keeping it requires absolute perfection, like the 700 men of Benjamin who "could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss" (Judges 20:16). The Hebrew word used there for "miss" is usually translated "sin". To avoid sinning against God, we must keep all His laws perfectly – to miss the target of perfect obedience, even to the smallest degree, is sin.

2. The law *“is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures”*. The Ten Commandments take to do with the inward life of our hearts and our inmost character, not just our outward lives. When we are taught by the Spirit of God, we come to “know that the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). For example, the Third Commandment requires us to draw near to God with the worship of our hearts, not just our lips. The Sixth Commandment forbids hatred as well as the outward act of murder, and the Seventh Commandment forbids unclean lusts in the heart as well as outward acts of uncleanness.

3. *“One and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.”* There is sometimes an overlap. For example, in Amos 8:5, people say, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?” Here, covetous greed (which breaks the Tenth Commandment) involves weariness with keeping the Sabbath Day (which breaks the Fourth Commandment) and involves cheating in weights and measures (which breaks both the Eighth and the Ninth Commandments – not to steal and not to lie). Covetousness is called idolatry in Colossians 3:5, because it involves loving the world more than God, and so the First Commandment is broken at the same time as the Tenth.

4. *“Where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded; so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.”* Is a commandment given negatively, to forbid a sin, as the Ninth forbids lying? Then the same commandment positively requires the opposite duty – telling the truth. The Eighth forbids stealing – therefore it requires the opposite duty of seeking gainful and lawful employment. “Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour” (Ephesians 4:28). Is a promise attached to a commandment, as the Fifth promises a long and good life to those who keep it? Then the same commandment threatens the opposite to those who break it – a shortened life plagued with evils.

5. *“What God forbids, is at no time to be done; what He commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.”* These distinctions are important. The Ninth Commandment forbids lying; therefore it can never be right to lie, whatever the circumstances. We should never do evil, that good may result. On the other hand, the obligations laid on us by the commandments are always our duty, yet that does not mean we could or should be actually performing every duty at all times. The Second Commandment requires us to worship God according to His appointment, which includes attending the public means of grace, “not forsaking the

assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). But we are not required to be in church every moment of every day. God’s law requires us to attend public worship when we are called to it.

6. *“That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded together with all the causes, means, occasions and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.”* Again, this is very important. Each commandment represents a whole family of sins and duties. The Second Commandment expressly forbids worshipping God with graven images, but that takes in worshipping “in any other way not appointed in His Word” (*Shorter Catechism*, Answer 51). The Fifth Commandment requires honouring not only our immediate parents, but also all others who are in superior positions to us. Likewise, it includes our duties in the opposite direction, towards those in inferior positions to us, and also towards those who are in equal positions. It deals with our relations to one another – so it covers our whole duty in all our relationships. Also, every commandment reaches to “all the causes, means, occasions and appearances” connected with any sin or duty. Dressing immodestly can provoke lust and adultery; therefore it is forbidden by the Seventh Commandment. So are unclean books, songs, films, videos, company and conversation.

7. *“What is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.”* In this sense we are indeed our “brother’s keeper”: we are to do all we can to ensure others perform duty and avoid sin. Eli failed in this, by not restraining his sons in their abuse of the Lord’s worship, and thus he shared in the guilt of not reverencing the Lord, contrary to the Third Commandment (see 1 Samuel 3:13). Joshua behaved in the opposite way, when he committed his family as well as himself to keeping the First Commandment: “As for me *and my house*, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). The same commandment requires civil rulers to use their lawful authority to see that the whole nation serves the Lord and not idols. The Fourth Commandment requires us to ensure that others keep the Sabbath holy as well as ourselves, whether they be children or employees or animals or anyone else “within [the] gates” of our sphere of influence.

The duty of loving our neighbour forbids us to turn a blind eye to his sin. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him” (Leviticus 19:17). It is not love, but hatred, to approve of the perversions of sodomites and so-called “trans” persons. According to the Seventh Commandment, love means reproving their sin and exhorting them to repentance. Banning “conversion therapy” is utterly opposed to God’s law when it includes a ban on gospel conversion,

for there is nothing such people need more. “He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

8. “*In what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.*” We are required to help others keep the law, and we are to avoid joining them when they break it. In Psalm 50:18, God condemns a sinner for breaking the Eighth and Seventh Commandments because he joined others who did so: “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers”. Approving other people’s sins makes us partakers in their guilt. In Romans 1:32, after a long list of heinous sins committed against the moral law, the Apostle Paul adds this to all the rest: “Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them”.

For a clear and full application of these rules, we can do no better than study the Bible itself. Next to this we can work through the extensive answers in *The Larger Catechism* to what is required and forbidden by each of the Ten Commandments. There the detailed difference between right and wrong, according to Scripture, is applied to every aspect of our hearts, our speech and our behaviour.

Felix Neff: Pastor of the High Alps

8. Progress Among Roman Catholics

In 1823 Neff became pastor of a large mountainous area in the High Alps district of France. He began his work energetically, seeking the good of souls. Last month, we saw how Neff set up a local Bible society. He made efforts to spread the gospel in the nearby district of Champsaur and he tried to give some basic education to young men who he thought might become preachers of the gospel.

A new church was being opened in Violin, in Neff’s district. Among the Protestant ministers who came was Antoine Blanc, a Waldensian pastor in Piedmont in north-west Italy. These Waldensians had survived cruel, Roman Catholic persecution, particularly in the 1600s. A lasting friendship developed between Neff and Blanc. When Neff felt exhausted in 1826, it seemed obvious that he needed a break from his work, and he accepted an invitation from Blanc to go with him on a visit to the churches in the Piedmont valleys.

After crossing the Alps, Neff looked down into the valleys where the

persecuted Waldensians had lived and died. He could see how suitable the area was for persecuted people who had to hide from their enemies. But he was conscious that very little of their religion was left. He asked God to remember His mercies, to restore true religion in that district, and to "revive the zeal of the fathers in the hearts of the children".

On his trip, Neff and Blanc preached the gospel whenever they found an opportunity; Neff hoped that the preaching would help to revive true religion in the area. Yet, while on his way home, he heard that the government had ordered those he had just left behind to hold no more services. One local minister praised from the pulpit those who had been present with him at a dance during a carnival and criticised those who did not attend. This showed how strongly such ministers were opposed to a godly way of life.

In Neff's area there were several districts where the people were nearly all Roman Catholics. But he did not know of any of them who had been converted. Even in Mens, where Neff had preached for some time, very few had forsaken the false teachings and practices of the Roman Church "to come to the true Fountain of living waters". Yet Bibles and New Testaments were distributed, not only among the Protestants, but also among the Roman Catholics. Besides, they must also have seen the gospel tracts that were spread about the district, and Neff assumed they would have often spoken with their Protestant neighbours who had been awakened to a concern about their souls. Some young converts did what they could to spread the gospel in Champsaur, a district where most of the people were Roman Catholics.

A priest asked one of these young men: "On what foundation do you Protestants build your faith, since you acknowledge no human authority?" The Romanist position is that the Church gives authority to the Bible.

So the young man answered, "On the Bible", for everyone should take the Bible as the only authority for what they believe in religion. The man added that the Apostles themselves did not believe that those who came after them "would be infallible"; they would not be free from error. Otherwise the Apostles would not have left so many written epistles for future generations, to give them guidance and teaching.

The priest went on to ask, "Why do you place greater confidence on the Apostles than on their successors?"

"Because the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit."

The priest then claimed that the priests of that time were under the same influences as the Apostles.

"What! Are you inspired?"

"Yes."

"O indeed! Why then do you go to college?" Surely, the young man was

suggesting, if Roman priests were inspired by the Spirit, they would not need human teaching in their college.

At another time, the priest questioned Mary, who was a member of the church at a place called Queyras. Who, he asked, did she trust in? In all her answers to such questions, she mentioned the Saviour. He became very impatient and exclaimed, "What! Always Jesus Christ! Always Jesus Christ! Do you believe then that Jesus Christ is everything to you?"

"Yes, I do," Mary replied, in her usual mild way; "we are in 'Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). What more do we need?"

And a few days later, the priest spent a long time trying to put across to her the belief that not all sins deserve to be punished in hell; Roman Catholics call them *venial* sins; they are to be punished – so Rome claims – in purgatory. More serious sins, deserving to be punished in hell, are called *mortal* sins. But the Bible in no way supports this distinction; nor does it ever mention purgatory. Mary asked him what he thought about Adam's first sin: was it mortal or venial? The priest realised that Mary's question could land him in serious difficulties. So he told her that he would answer her question at some time in the future. Probably he never did.

Neff once had a discussion with this priest. Those listening included both Protestants and Roman Catholics. Even the priest's friends accepted that he had lost the argument and passed on to their neighbours all that they could remember of what was said.

Another district where most of the people were Roman Catholics was the lower part of the Freissinière valley. Some of them were in the congregation most times that Neff preached there. The district of Champcella lies at the entrance to the valley; it is a district made up of scattered villages, between which are rocks and ravines. Most of the few Protestants in the district lived in Palons and Champcella, two villages very close together

The father of a large family fell out with a Protestant pastor. They stopped coming to his services; the eldest son married a Roman Catholic woman and the whole family began to attend mass regularly, even although the mass is blasphemy against God. This is because the priest claims to be offering up Christ all over again each time he says mass – although the Bible says that "Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28). But when a new church was being opened in Freissinière, the father and his two youngest sons, and several Roman Catholics, came to the service.

Neff found the eldest son and his wife very unfriendly. But another preacher persuaded this son to attend a service; the son was powerfully affected by the sermon and the prayers. When he reached home, he told his

wife that they were both lost for ever – unless they would begin to live a better life. When Neff used to try to visit them, they would leave the house. But now, when he came to call, he was amazed to find them very friendly.

The husband now came regularly to church, but at first his wife only came to Protestant meetings held in nearby houses. Then she started coming regularly to church, in spite of being attacked by her family and the priests, who had been boasting that, through her, they had brought a family of Protestants into the Roman Church. This woman had a lot to do, with four little ones to look after. They lived on a large farm, and she had much to do in the farmhouse; yet she found time to read the Bible and learn by heart parts of the Gospels.

The local priest became suspicious of several young Roman Catholics from Champcella when they began to take their New Testaments to their services. Whenever the priest read a passage from the New Testament, they looked it up and also compared it with other verses referred to in the margin of the Testament. They also spoke against the teachings he put forward. Often, after the service was over, people asked these men what they thought about the priest's preaching that day. Then one day he told his congregation that, if anyone had any objections to make, they should do so when he was present. The young men then arranged meetings to discuss the priest's teaching. He came along, but only to the first meeting; presumably he found the discussions difficult. And soon afterwards he left the district.

Something else happened to help on the progress of biblical truth in the district. One of the Protestant women became ill; it was her son who had distributed many New Testaments, Bibles and other religious books and tracts among the Roman Catholics. When this woman was dying, Roman Catholics were among those who gathered to her room. They were amazed at the faith, patience and joy she showed during her sufferings.

The evening before she died, Neff invited her neighbours to the next house to pray with them. On the evening after the woman's death, there was another meeting for prayer. And after the burial, Neff addressed the people who had gathered, many of them Roman Catholics. Among the Roman Catholics were Mary's mother, brother and sister-in-law; all of them seemed to be deeply moved by what they heard. They showed an earnest desire to know the truth

And a poor, blind man, from a nearby village, began to get his neighbours to lead him to the Protestant service. He was soon praising God that he was now able to understand "His holy Word". Neff could see that God was working in that district even among Roman Catholics. It would be good to know that many of them truly believed in Christ and were saved.

Looking Around Us

The Strait and Narrow

The local newspaper here in Inverness reported on a man who was said to have an “appalling record for housebreaking”. He was in court after being caught on CCTV looking around a garage with a view to breaking in.

The Sheriff (the judge in a lower court in Scotland) warned him to “get back on the straight and narrow”, the paper said. If he would go on in his criminal activity, he would likely be dealt with more severely on his next visit to court. No doubt the Sheriff meant that the man should get back on the “*strait* and narrow”.

I hope most readers of this article will recognise a reference here to the Bible, to Matthew 7:13,14: “Enter ye in at the *strait* gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because *strait* is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”. The word *strait* here just means narrow, as in the *Straits* of Dover, where the English Channel narrows towards Dover before broadening out again into the North Sea.

Jesus was warning the people listening to Him to follow the narrow way of true religion if they were to reach everlasting life in heaven. And they were to enter into that narrow way through the narrow gate of faith in Jesus Christ. Or you could say that Jesus Himself is the gate; He said, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9). It is through Him, who died for sinners – it is by believing on Him, trusting in Him – that we can be saved, and in no other way.

The Sheriff was telling the man to reform himself and give up his criminal activities. Let us put it another way: the man was to keep the Commandments (or at least some of them, such as, “Thou shalt not steal”), to live a moral life. But it is not enough to live a moral life; that might please the Sheriff and those who would otherwise be the victims of the man’s robberies. But it will not please God.

For one thing, God requires us to keep all the Ten Commandments. It also means that we must keep all these Commandments perfectly. We must not just keep them outwardly, but our attitudes and motives must also be perfect in all that we do. And no one keeps any of God’s commandments properly. Morality should keep you out of prison, but it will not keep you out of hell.

Is there then any hope for anyone? Yes, there is. God is able to give us a new heart, so that we may begin to keep His law sincerely. And He calls us: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”. Only by believing in Christ can we find the way to everlasting life.

The Treasure of Holy Scripture

This poem appeared in the Geneva translation of the Bible, first published in 1560.
It is taken from *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* for October 1922.

Here is the spring where waters flow
to quench our heat of sin.

Here is the tree where truth does grow
to lead our lives therein.

Here is the judge that stints the strife,
when men's devices fail.

Here is the bread that feeds the life
that death cannot assail.

The tidings of salvation clear
come to our ears from hence.

The fortress of our faith is here,
the shield of our defence.

Then be not like the hog that hath
a pearl at his desire,

And takes more pleasure in the trough
and wallowing in the mire.

Read not this Book in any case
but with a single eye.

Read not, but first desire God's grace
to understand thereby.

Pray still in faith, with this respect,
to fructify therein,

That knowledge may bring this effect:
to mortify thy sin.

Then happy thou, in all thy life,
whatso to thee befalls.

Yea, doubly happy shalt thou be,
when God by death thee calls.