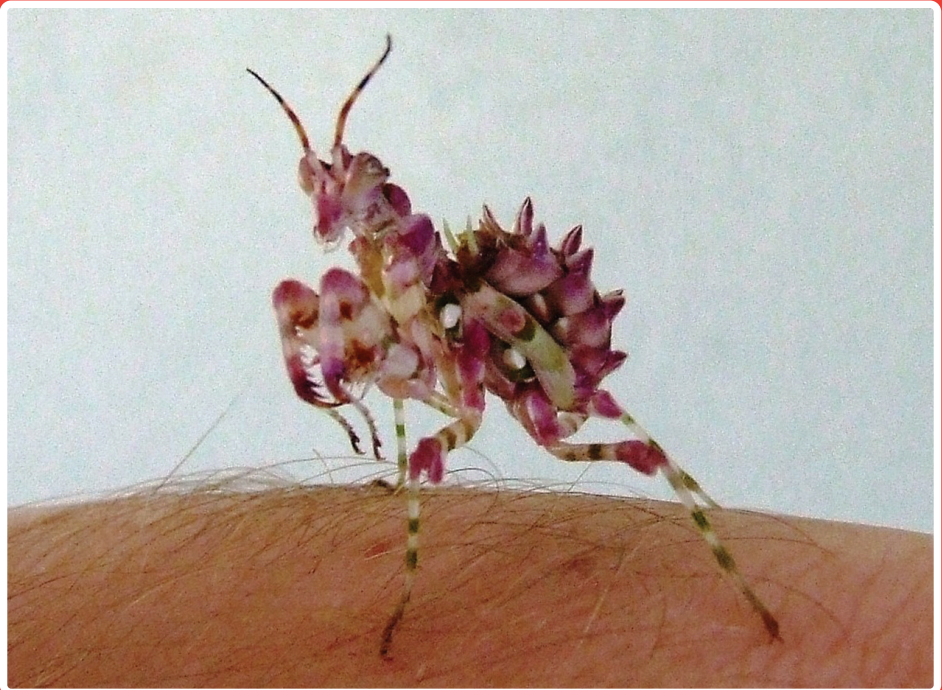


The Young People's Magazine

**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



June 2023

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The Young People's Magazine

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Volume 88

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Number 6

Life a Failure?

The businessman had made a very large amount of money during his working life. Perhaps he was still doing some work, but he was now getting old and probably frail. Someone asked him why he did not arrange to have his life story written. He was now, it seems, well known and it might well have been interesting to read about his success in whatever line of business he had followed.

But he answered negatively: "My life has been a failure". What had gone wrong? We are not really told, but there must have been some very serious reason for looking back so sadly on his life, which was now nearly over. It may possibly have been that he never married and had no children to encourage him in his old age. Perhaps too he had been so taken up with his business that he had little time to make friends with people who might now have offered him companionship and kept him from feeling lonely.

There is another reason that one might give for the man's sense of failure in life. It is that he may, in old age, have been regretting that he had not paid attention to the needs of his soul; he had not made time to seek the Lord, so that he might be prepared to die and to spend eternity in the blessedness of heaven. If he did leave this world unprepared for eternity – still responsible for his sins, still only fit to go to hell, never having trusted in Christ or done anything to God's glory – what a failure his life indeed was!

His main aim in life, it seems, was to make money, and in that he was successful. But what use would his money be to him when he would die and pass into eternity? So Christ asked, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

The answer is obvious: it would do him no good at all after he had passed from this life. Jesus also tells us: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). This is the first thing, the most important thing – to submit to Christ as our King and to enter by faith into God's kingdom, seeking to have Christ's righteousness put to our account before God. If we do seek the Lord, we will find Him, and all will be well when we die; we will go to heaven without

any sense whatever failure but rather we will be deeply thankful to God and His grace.

It was not too late for the man to seek the Lord, though he had neglected so many opportunities to find salvation. Christ calls even old men and old women to come to Him, to believe on Him for salvation. He makes clear that whoever is willing to come to Him, He will receive them and they will never go down to a lost eternity. Yes, while they are still alive, after conversion, they will regret how much of their lives they spent away from God and seeking worldly things. That would have been true of the businessman if he did come to Christ before it was too late.

There was once a man living in a village near Oxford whom, sadly, everyone knew for his quarrelling and fighting. But one day a minister from Oxford came to preach in a nearby village. Along with many others, this man went to hear the minister. He had no thought of getting good from what the minister might say; he only went to make fun of him. But God spoke to the man through what the minister said; that day he began to listen carefully to the preaching. It seems that he was truly converted; there was an obvious change in his life.

He began to learn to read, he wanted to read the Bible for himself and, no doubt, to get good from doing so. One day someone told him about a woman who gave a large amount of money to a Bible Society. At once the man replied that he was poor and badly needed money, but if someone was to pay him all that money *not* to learn to read the Bible, he would refuse it.

It shows how much he wanted to be able to read, and to profit from, God's revelation to sinners. However old he was, it was a tremendous blessing for him that he was converted before he left this world. He had probably neglected many opportunities in the past to hear God's Word preached, but in God's mercy, he was present at this service, which was an opportunity to get good for his soul. His life, in the end, was not a failure.

But what the Bible tells us is: "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). *The* time for remembering the Lord – and seeking Him – is when you are young. It is dangerous to put off seeking the Lord in your early years; even if you promise yourself that you will seek Him when you are older. It is so easy to put the duty off for another year or even for another day. Another danger is that, if you go on rejecting Christ and the salvation He has provided, God may just leave you to yourself, in your sins, for ever. God is commanding young people to seek Him while they are still young people.

The businessman had clearly reached a stage in life when he had "no

pleasure” in his days. They were “evil days” – a time when life did not seem good, when he was losing his powers – of sight or hearing, for instance (see Ecclesiastes 12:2-7). It was perhaps a time when it was less easy for him to concentrate on a sermon. It was a time when it was more difficult to focus on warnings about the seriousness of sin, on the danger of rejecting Christ and of not believing the gospel, on the danger of going down to a lost eternity and appearing, still unsaved, before the judgement seat of Christ.

It was also more difficult to take in the teaching in a sermon about the seriousness of sin and the suitability of Christ as a Saviour for sinners of every kind. And after all these years, the man’s heart was so much harder, so much more resistant to the call of the gospel: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Was the businessman’s life a failure in the end? We do not know, but we would hope it was no failure. We would hope that, after realising that his life until then was a failure, he began seriously to seek the Lord. We would hope that he found Christ before he died, believing on Him with all his heart, before all his opportunities were over.

What about ourselves? Are we making use of our opportunities to find salvation, so that we may be fit for heaven? Are we going to church as often as we possibly can? Are we listening carefully to the preaching of God’s Word – when it is explained to us? Are we seeking to put into practice what we hear, especially to repent and believe the gospel? Are we reading the Bible and seeking to learn from it? Are we going to God in prayer, asking Him to bless us in every way, especially in our souls?

But the most important question is: Do we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins? If we can answer, Yes, to these questions, especially the last of them, we can be sure that our life will be no failure, but in some degree it will be a life lived to the glory of God.

We still have an opportunity to seek the Lord. We cannot tell how many more opportunities we will have; we cannot promise ourselves that life will continue beyond this moment. We must not presume that all will turn out well in the end; no one can afford to continue careless about their soul. But let us seek to grasp the present moment and the opportunity it provides.

Let us seek the Lord now, as He makes Himself known in the Scriptures – especially as He makes Himself known through Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners. And let us pray earnestly that He would bless His Word to us, making us able and willing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, who will never turn away anyone who trusts in Him. He still calls to us: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

For Junior Readers

James Ussher and His Sins

Perhaps you have not heard of James Usher. He was born in Ireland long ago, soon after the Reformation.

When he was a child he was cared for by two aunts who had both been blind from infancy but who knew the Lord. Amazingly these ladies taught James to read by giving him a Bible and teaching him through the verses which they knew off by heart. The Lord blessed the teaching of these godly ladies. And James, like the child Timothy, learned the Scriptures, which made him also wise unto salvation!

By the time he was eight years old, James knew the Bible almost as well as his aunts. For the next five years he was placed under the care of two teachers in Dublin. He studied hard but he was also conscious of his spiritual needs. So he would often go to a quiet place where he would confess his sins to God in prayer.

At the age of 10 his heart was opened to the gospel message of Romans 12:1: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service".

Once he was converted, young James grew in grace by continuing to study the Scriptures and other good books. He was very gifted and did very well in his studies, graduating from university at the age of 19. He felt called to be a minister and was ordained by his uncle, Henry Ussher.

James Ussher's two aims in preaching were to win souls for Christ and to convince his hearers of the truths of the Reformation teachings. As well as preaching he wrote many books on church history and the Bible's teachings. Sadly he became almost blind and deaf in the last year of his life. He died in March 1655, aged 76. His last words were, "O Lord, forgive me, especially my sins of omission".

Do you know what is meant by "sins of omission"? Do you remember the answer to Question 14 in *The Shorter Catechism*, "What is sin?" It is, "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God". This answer teaches us that there are two kinds of sin:

1. The first kind is *not* doing what God commands, *not* obeying what we are told to do. That is a sin of *omission*. We are guilty because we have not done what God tells us to do;

2. The second is doing what God forbids, that is a sin of *commission*.

Perhaps, because you do not swear or steal or murder, you think that you

are not a great sinner. But do you ever think of the other type of sin, of not doing what God commands? The Bible tells us clearly, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Perhaps you should think more carefully of these two types of sin. So, when you are praying to God and confessing the sins you have committed, you should also remember to confess the good things you have omitted to do. And you should ask forgiveness for both. The Bible tells us that “the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s Son], cleanseth us from all sin” – sins of omission as well as sins of commission!

J van Kralingen

A Day for Our Spiritual Good

1. A Gift from God

Rev D A Ross

This is the first section of a paper about the Sabbath Day which was given at this year’s Youth Conference.

The paper has three sections: (1) The Sabbath Day was given by God and we need it; (2) Why should we remember the first day of the week as the Sabbath rest in New Testament times instead of the seventh? (3) The Sabbath should be a delight to us.

What follows in this paper is only a short account of a much larger subject, but I hope the paper will help us to understand the Sabbath Day and value it as a wonderful gift from God. The Saviour indicated this when He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). It is for his temporal and spiritual well being.

1. The Sabbath Day was given by God and we need it. God made us and knows our bodily and spiritual needs. An encyclopedia of the Bible speaks of it as “one day of complete rest each week for physical and spiritual refreshment”. The Word of God assures us that physical and spiritual blessings are obtained by keeping the Sabbath; it is to be regarded as “a delight” (see Isaiah 58:13-14). This strongly implies wonderful benefits for body and soul, for time and eternity.

Sadly, in spite of this gracious care of God for both body and soul; possibly none of the Ten Commandments is as much disregarded as the Fourth. This is often the case; even sections of the Christian Church regard the Fourth Commandment as only for the Old Testament period, not for New Testament times.

But the Commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is

the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Ex 20:8-11). It was given for the temporal and spiritual good of mankind from the beginning of time to the end.

We know from the Scriptures that God gave to the Children of Israel, indeed to the whole world, ten commandments in one unit directing what our moral behaviour ought to be. At times we refer to these as the Moral Law or the Decalogue, meaning the Ten Commandments. The command about the Sabbath is one of these.

Many people readily see the value of some commandments but question the need for the one about the Sabbath. They wrongly claim that it only applied to Old Testament times. This view is seriously opposed to the Word of God and tends to open the door to rejecting the other commandments also. In the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments were written on two tables of stone. Nowhere in the Scriptures are they reduced to nine, not even in the New Testament.

In the early New Testament period, the Apostle James wrote an Epistle to "the twelve tribes" – that is, to Jewish people who professed faith in Christ. Referring to the Ten Commandments, he says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). In the light of this statement, what grounds can there be to suggest that the commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy . . ." no longer has authority? To say so would have seriously upset the Jews; this commandment was in force from the creation and was confirmed to them under Moses.

James writes about "the whole law" – the complete moral law, all ten commandments. These are one unit and, when we break one part of the unit, we break the whole of it. B B Warfield tells us: "We might as well say, if we have broken the handle or the lip or the pedestal of some beautiful vase, that we have not broken the vase but only the handle or the lip or the pedestal of it – as to say that we have not broken the law when we have broken a single one of its precepts".

All groups in society understand the need for the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal". It is necessary for keeping our property safe. It ought also to be apparent that the Fourth Commandment is needed for the rest that body and soul require. Mankind could hardly need rest during Old Testament times but not in the New Testament age.

Indeed it is not difficult to apply the same reasoning to all ten commandments. We must not think we can function morally and spiritually with any commandment missing. We need to be under the direction of all ten, if we are to act spiritually and morally in an acceptable way toward God and our neighbour.

Imagine for a moment what our position would be without the moral law. Instead of the directions given in all the ten commandments, we would be left to do as seemed right in our own eyes. We shrink from such a prospect, as it would result in chaos and in an eruption of every form of violence and evil, which would become a spiral of increasing misery.

It should be obvious that these ten commandments are there to be obeyed. That is to state the obvious, but our depraved nature does not care for these directions. I tend to think that, before the flood, one of the first commandments to be almost totally ignored was the Fourth. I say this because the Sabbath Day tends to promote godly living. But if people ignore the rest and the worship commanded, they create a void and crave a substitute. This will inevitably be some sinful pleasure.

This may seem innocent to man, but to displace God's appointed day of rest and worship opens the door to sin and eventually to a tremendous degree of violence, as before the flood. See the ugly outcome then: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:11,12). So the Sabbath is necessary for all generations to the end of time.

To this day our life cycle consists of seven days; a seventh part of our time is to be used as a day of rest from our ordinary activities and for the worship of the Most High. The Fourth Commandment begins with the direction, "Remember". It is a means of highlighting what these people before the flood forgot. Similarly the Saviour tells us to *remember* Lot's wife, to help us escape the dreadful punishment that is the consequence of our sin.

"Keep it holy" calls us to separate the day from other days, as the day to be used for rest and worship. The other nine commandments require us to have a holy lifestyle, but the Fourth Commandment is designed, as none of the others, to help us live a holy life. But to reject it is a first step towards rejecting other commandments that demand holy conduct.

The dreadful extent to which this commandment is ignored in our time should leave us deeply concerned about the bleak future ahead of our nation and other nations. Ignoring the Fourth Commandment was one of the reasons why the children of Israel were sent into captivity. If we continue to ignore this command, there is no doubt that God's judgements will multiply.

Each commandment, including the Fourth, has its particular spiritual benefit. We need a day of rest for our bodies as well as a day when we are more free to think about the spiritual rest for our souls which is set before us and offered to us in Christ. On such a day we may profit from communion with our Creator. No day in the week is to be desired like the Sabbath Day, and whatever remarkable experiences we may have on another day, they can never take away from this reality.

Jejana

3. Living as a Faithful Christian

These articles were originally written in 1836 and reprinted in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* in 1926. They are printed here with editing. Jejana was one of the Khoikhoi people in South Africa. Last month's section told that she found mercy for her soul. Later, for a time, she became careless about sin, but God graciously brought her back to following Him faithfully. About that time, she found out that the house she lived in was to be given to someone else and she would have to look for another one. This is the last article in the series.

David, Jejana's husband, maintained his family by working for the farmers in the district and cutting reeds. But as his employment was rather uncertain, they occasionally had no money left, and yet God takes care of sparrows and feeds the tiniest insect. He provided for them in every time of need, and Jejana could point to the faithfulness of Him who declared that those who seek first the Kingdom of God shall not lack any good thing.

Once, when she did not know how to supply the next meal for her children, she went to a farmer nearby. His mother arrived and saw Jejana going away. She asked the servant to call Jejana and asked her if she feared God. She said, "God has sent you this [giving her a sealed envelope] to buy bread for you and your little ones. I dreamt of you and your distress last night, and God has sent me to relieve you."

Another instance of God's watchful care over His children happened afterwards. David and Jejana had lived three years in a mud hut, and they loved their little dwelling, for they had many proofs that God was there to bless and keep them. But now it was being given away, and where could they go?

Jejana sighed deeply as she saw the surveyor (Mr Melville) appear, along with the person to whom the land had been given. As she stood with tearful eyes, watching their progress, the farmer noticed her sorrow. He begged her to take comfort from his promise that he would never turn her out.

She thanked him, but said, "My trust is not in an arm of flesh, but in God".

The words, and the way in which they were spoken caught the attention of the surveyor, a kind man; he was a godly man and loved other people. He was one of the noble few who would exchange all selfish interests for the delight of doing good. He would consider that exchange as the greatest luxury of life.

He went to Jejana's little home and listened to her story. He left her with a promise to return soon; he did so, and gladdened the poor family by telling them of the success of what he had done for them. The plot of land on which they now lived was measured and secured to them.

The family now experienced a degree of prosperity. Jejana's children were now old enough to be useful; they had been trained to be upright and hard-working, and were now of great value to their parents. A hut was soon built and a garden planted. For many long years, the crops were poor, disappointing their hopes, though at last, through patient and persevering labour, it gave them good crops.

Later they owned an ox, and then another, and used to draw a cart, loaded with reeds and the produce of their garden, to the best market. Their little wealth increased till their present substantial and comfortable dwelling was built, and God has blessed their wealth. Her house has been the house of prayer to all around, and there the missionary loves to meet the little flock, for it has often proved to him the gate of heaven.

Jejana cannot read, but her knowledge of the Word of God might shame many a Christian who can. It is written on her heart and is a fountain of living waters always rising up to refresh her soul and the souls of those who approach her. But she has not only taken care that her family (all daughters) should possess the great blessing of being able to read, but has taught them to make good use of it. After the hard labour of the day, those young women used the evening to teach their poor neighbours.

Jejana's heart is full of those gentle acts of kindness that Christianity inspires. Her love to God her Saviour and zeal for His glory will never suffer her to let open ungodliness pass without a severe rebuke. The following instance is recorded here to show that such a practice may prove as helpful to the sinner as it is consistent in the Christian.

Once, while Jejana was looking after the oxen in the Downs, two Englishmen rode up during a dreadful thunderstorm. With oaths and curses, they demanded to be shown the road; they had lost their way. Jejana sharply rebuked them and advised them to take shelter till the storm was over; but in still worse language they defied the storm and God, who controlled it.

She told them to go, but warned them that the God whom they blasphemed

would stop them in their mad career. They left her with horrid curses, but one of them was struck down by lightning and carried into a house as dead. But he recovered and, years afterwards, he sought her out to thank her for her reproof, which he declared had reached his heart and had been the means of bringing him to submit to the Saviour.

Jejana still lives as a monument of what God's grace can do. She is a mother in Israel, warning and exhorting the ungodly, comforting and encouraging those who have repented, visiting those who are sick and dying. She is now white-haired, and her frail body must soon descend to the house appointed for all living, but with faith and patience she awaits the summons that is to bid her rise to the bright regions of purity and peace, there to join the song of the blessed: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen."

Reader, the first sermon Jejana ever heard reached her heart and produced results that will extend to all eternity. How solemn is the thought that the light of thousands around us has gone out in utter darkness, who might have believed and been saved, if Christians in this country had been worthy of the holy name by which they are called! Surely this solemn thought ought to arouse all our energies to assist in circulating the gospel among the people of Africa.

Christianity never intended that its sons and daughters should sit down in their selfishness, and draw around them this world's comforts, content with now and then giving a little of their substance to the poor. No, it demands the same mind that was in Christ, and giving time, talents, energies and substance to God. He has made it our highest happiness, as well as duty, to become fellow-workers with Him.

The ambition then of hoarding up treasure and adding field to field, should not be the ambition of a Christian. No, he is to act more nobly and to seek for glory and honour and immortality, not for himself alone, but for all the people of God.

The Spiny Flower Mantis

Rev K M Watkins

Being so near to the equator, it was not surprising to see exotic animals, birds and insects at the Church's Kenya Mission. It would be fascinating to watch a chameleon move its two eyes separately, and see its slow-motion, jerky way of walking, and to observe its ability to change colour when

on different surfaces. Quite often, we would see a praying mantis. The usual kind were lime-green in colour. But one day a colleague found a most beautiful mantis. His attention was drawn to a bush by the African sun reflecting off this insect's back like the flash of a diamond. He had found what is called a *spiny flower mantis*.

This mantis was in its nymph form, meaning that it was not yet mature. It was tiny. Even when full-grown, it would reach only about 4 cm. Despite its small size, it was spectacular. It had intricate bone-like details to what looked like its back, which is why it is called *spiny*. Actually that was its abdomen, turned upside down onto its back. Its pink and purple colours dazzled in the bright sun. The diamond flash came from an almost orange-coloured spot, imitating an eye that would warn predators to stay away. Being a praying mantis, it was itself a deadly killer, preying on insects for its food.

We have often thought about that mantis, and how it is a picture of sin.

1. The mantis looked incredibly *beautiful*. Left to ourselves, that is the way sin appears to us, and that is how we are enticed by it so easily. If we did not see anything attractive in it, we would not be drawn to it. It was part of Eve's temptation to see that the forbidden fruit was "pleasant to the eyes" (Genesis 3:6). It was when men from the families who worshipped God saw the beauty of worldly women that they married them, and so the Church and the world were mixed (see Genesis 6:2). Achan was tempted when he saw the beauty of the "goodly Babylonish garment" (Joshua 7:21). The warning words may be applied to all sin: "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids" (Proverbs 6:25).

2. The mantis was very *colourful*. In the advanced stage of the nymph form that we saw, there were the hues of pink and purple, along with the orange-like spot, all flashing in the sunlight like jewels. In an earlier stage of the nymph form, it would have been entirely black. In its adult form, more colours would appear: it would become basically white, but with green stripes on its legs, purple eyes, bright yellow inner wings, and a stunning yellow and black circle on both outer wings. Sin paints itself in many different colours, to attract our attention and to suit itself to our different corrupt desires at different times. We have favourite natural colours, and each one of us has "favourite" sins. Whilst we have all "gone astray" from God's law and gospel, "we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). The sin that attracts one person may not attract another so much. Just because some sins do not attract us does not make us any safer, for there are always other sins that entice us. There are as many kinds of sin to destroy us as there are shades of colour in the spectrum.

3. The mantis even gave the impression that it was *religious*. The way a mantis holds out its front legs makes it look like it is praying. That is why this family of insects is called the “praying” mantis. Of course, no mantis is ever really praying. Sin can look very religious too. The followers of false religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, may stretch out their hands in a posture that looks like prayer. But this is not true religion. However sincerely these people pray to their gods, their gods are idols and their prayers are sins of idolatry. Romanism is no better. Its followers profess to pray to the true God of Christianity, but they pray to Mary and the saints as well, and fail to rely entirely on the merits of Jesus Christ when they pray. Their religion is vain also. We Protestants too can appear very religious, but our prayers may be rejected by God. This will happen if we fail to “lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens” (Lamentations 3:41). It will happen if we pray for sinful things, to feed our sinful desires (see James 4:3). It will happen if we pray like hypocrites, just to be “seen of men” (Matthew 6:5).

4. The appearance of the mantis is *deceptive*. Whether in its nymph or adult form, this kind of mantis places itself in a bush or on a flower that resembles it very closely. This is why it is called a “flower” mantis. Using this camouflage, it lures in smaller insects, who, looking for nectar, think that it is a flower and settle on it or beside it. Then the unseen mantis, lying in ambush, suddenly seizes it for its food.

Scripture warns against “the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). In the parable of the sower, the thorns that choked the Word included “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). Sinful, worldly things are dangerous to our souls, but many times they do not look as if they are. Sin disguises itself and deceives us into thinking it is good and safe. So-called “white lies” are an example, when someone tells a lie to people in order to be kind. But that is sin. It can never be true kindness to anyone to deceive them. False teachers transform themselves to appear as “apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (verse 14), as he was when he tempted our first parents. When sin deceives us, our very souls are in danger of being seized and destroyed.

5. The mantis is very *strong*. Despite its tiny size, its powerful front legs (or forearms) can attack and kill prey that is large compared to itself. Scripture speaks of “the strength of sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56). We are foolish if we do not realise how powerful it can be. If we are not born again, our desires to sin are so strong that we cannot subdue them. Temptations come that we have no strength to resist. The devil is stronger than we are and we have no power to overcome him.

Some think that at some more convenient time in the future they are going to throw off their unbelief very easily, and will have it within their power to put their trust in Christ whenever they want. They do not realise how strongly the mantis of unbelief holds them in its grip. Nothing but the almighty grace of God through the operations of the Holy Spirit can set them free. Only Christ, who is stronger than the strong, can release them from the devil's captivity.

6. The mantis is very *defensive*. Its likeness to a bush or flower is also to camouflage it from being attacked by birds or other creatures. Also, if a mantis is threatened, it will raise its two outer wings to reveal the two "eyes", making it look much larger than it really is, as a threat to frighten off would-be predators. If we ever start to fight against our sin, we will find it does that too. If it is opposed, it rears up and fights back within the soul. The world threatens the soul that witnesses against it and separates from it. When a new believer seeks to leave the sinfulness of his old life, he will find that many will oppose his new life in Christ. All of this can appear very frightening, but the true believer has Christ for his defence, and he is to go on in strength of God the Lord.

Sin is a terrible enemy! We are very weak and small compared to it. Let us cry to Christ for deliverance from it, putting our trust in Him alone for our salvation.

A Reformation Tour

12. John Knox's Sermon in the Parish Church in St Andrews

Rev David Campbell

The previous article considered the destruction of the monasteries in St Andrews and other places at the beginning of the Scottish Reformation. This article looks at John Knox's famous sermon in the town, which led to great changes.

Out of the many sermons John Knox preached, there were three he delivered during a short period of time whose consequences were among the most significant and far-reaching. They were all preached in 1559 but none have come down to us in a complete form. In fact, only one sermon of John Knox was ever published.

The first of these three sermons was preached at Perth; it was mentioned in the opening article of this series. The third was in the Church of the Holy Rude at Stirling. This was at a time when the Protestants were greatly discouraged. John Knox's preaching on Psalm 80:4-8 was greatly blessed in stirring them up and encouraging them to press on, when they were ready to

give up in discouragement. The second very significant sermon preached by John Knox was in the parish church of St Andrews on Sabbath, 11 June 1559.

Following the events in Perth in the previous month, the Queen Regent (Mary of Guise) had negotiated terms of peace with the growing forces of the Protestant movement. But this was a subtle and deceitful ploy to disarm the Protestants; within three days of the agreement, its terms were broken and the people again threatened by the French troops at the Regent's command. This in turn made the Protestants who had wavered realise that the Regent was never to be trusted; so the Protestant movement benefited from the incident.

On the last day of May 1559, the Protestants entered into a Band or Covenant to pursue the aims of the Reformation together, and to defend one another. John Knox joined the Protestant lords and preached to them in Crail and Anstruther (on the Fife coast) and intended to go to St Andrews to preach again. This he had longed to do since his enslavement on a French galley in 1548, after the fall of the Castle of St Andrews to the French.

For fear of the town becoming Reformed, Archbishop Hamilton, with a company of 100 spearmen, went to meet the Protestants who were attending Knox's ministry. He threatened to have soldiers meet Knox at St Andrews with firearms to assassinate him. The Regent and her French troops were nearby at Falkland. It was not known which side the citizens of St Andrews would take, and these factors all suggested to Knox's friends that he should not go there at that point.

When Knox's own opinion was asked, he made his position very clear. In the words of David Hay Fleming, Knox made clear that "unless violently withheld, he must preach next day, for here God had first called him to the dignity of a preacher, and, when far from Scotland, it had been his assured hope that he would preach here again. . . . As for any personal danger which he might incur, he wished no man to be solicitous [anxious]; his life was in the hands of Him whose glory he was seeking and he desired no earthly hand, no worldly weapon, to defend him. All he asked was an audience."

On Sabbath, June 11, and for the three following days, Knox occupied the pulpit of the parish church. Hay Fleming summarises the preaching and its effect: "By pressing home Christ's example in ejecting the buyers and sellers from the temple, he so moved his hearers that the greater part of the inhabitants resolved, with the concurrence of the Provost and Magistrates, to remove the monuments of idolatry, which also they did with expedition [speed]". Another writer explains the context further: "No one interrupted him, and his audience – which was vast and included many scholars from the University – responded positively". It was one of the most momentous of

times in the life of Knox and for the nation of Scotland. A famous painting by Sir David Wilkie attempts to capture the scene.

Over the course of the next few months, the example of St Andrews, in casting out idolatry from the churches and removing the monks and friars, was followed by many other towns. In a letter written on 2 September 1559, Knox reveals his many labours over this period: “I have been in continual travel . . . and, notwithstanding the fevers have vexed me the space of a month, yet have I travelled through the most part of this realm where, all praise be to His blessed Majesty, men of all sorts and conditions embrace the truth . . . so that the trumpet soundeth all over, blessed be our God”.

Writing to someone else he enlarged further on the effect of the preaching and his comfort in seeing the fruit of his labours: “Thus far has God advanced the glory of His dear Son amongst us. O that my heart could be thankful for the super-excellent benefit of my God! The long thirst of my wretched heart is satisfied in abundance, that is above my expectation, for now, forty days and more has God used my tongue in my native country, to the manifestation of His glory. Whatsoever now shall follow, as touching my own carcass [body], His name be praised. The thirst of the poor people, as well as the nobility here, is wondrous great, which putteth me in comfort, that Christ Jesus shall triumph for a space here in the north, and extreme parts of the earth.”

It was in large part due to the labours of John Knox that these early Reformed churches were set up in Scotland over a short period of time and, under God’s blessing, brought the truth to the common people. The powerful working of the Holy Spirit on the souls of the people under the preached Word is what gave the Scottish Reformation its deep and lasting impact on the nation. This set it apart from reforms in some other places such as England, where the beginning of the Reformation was more among the rulers and only later affected some of the people, leaving many under the superstitions of popery, with only an outward reformation. The many political and social changes that took place were not the real cause of the Scottish Reformation – the Holy Spirit of God blessing the preached Word is what really brought about the change. Other things were secondary to that.

This is how we ought to view reformation today also. The great need of our nation again is that the Lord would send out to the people men such as John Knox, with the same fearless conviction and powerful preaching as were seen in places like St Andrews. With God’s blessing and grace, there is no power on earth that can resist the force of His truth, and no heart too hard for His Word to penetrate and subdue. We should pray earnestly that the Lord would do this for Scotland again. We should also make full use of

such preaching today if we have access to it, and we should earnestly strive to profit from it spiritually. Only this will make us true worshippers of God and followers of the same blessed Saviour that John Knox and his fellow Reformers preached and served.

The final article in this series will take us to the Market Cross, where the tour ended. We will there consider events at the dawn of the Reformation, and also one event nearer the close of the period, that points to one of its most enduring legacies in the sphere of civil and religious liberty.

For Younger Readers

When George Felt Angry

George was a young man. His father was not well; he could no longer look after the farms he owned. One day George was very busy. George asked his father to do some little jobs about their house, while he went to finish off some work on one of the farms. The father agreed to do these jobs.

It was late when George arrived back home. He felt very tired indeed. The father told him that he had not done what he promised to do. Probably he felt too weak.

George felt very angry and he was ready to speak in an angry way. But he stopped himself. He then told his father: "It's all right, Father". George obviously loved his father and did not want to speak to him in an unkind way.

George moved away to do what his father was not able to do. But his father called him back; he laid his hand on George's head and said, "George, you're the best son a father ever had. God bless you!" How glad George must have been to hear these words!

George did the various jobs that his father could not do. When he came back, his father was no longer able to speak.

But whenever George felt angry afterwards, he remembered his father placing his hand on his head. And I think his anger would have gone away every time.

We should ask God to keep us from becoming angry and from doing wrong in any way. God sees everything we do and everything we feel. He is able to keep us from all that is wrong.

Looking Around Us

Coronation

On Saturday, May 6, Charles III was crowned King of the United Kingdom and several other countries. He was already King, from the time that his mother Queen Elizabeth II died. But the Coronation, when the crown was placed on his head, was a formal ceremony before more than 2200 people in Westminster Abbey, recognising him as the new monarch.

During the Coronation ceremony, a reference was made to the “King of kings”. That is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; He is King over all the kings and all the chief rulers in this world. He has complete authority, not only over ordinary people, but over all who are in positions of influence throughout the world. That includes King Charles, though he does not have any great power, but he does have a degree of influence; it is the politicians, from the Prime Minister down to ordinary members of the various parliaments, who have power to make laws.

It is the duty of the King, the Prime Minister and every other politician and administrator to acknowledge the authority of Christ and to make all their decisions in the light of the Bible. That is true for everybody, in every area of their lives, but it is true especially for those who have influence over others; they are to make decisions in the light of Scripture teaching.

How often people comment that one area or another of a government’s policies is in a mess! Though governments cannot be expected to get everything right, we should realise that these problems are often the result of ignoring the Bible. For instance, when a government forbids parents to smack their children after they have done wrong, it should be no surprise if the behaviour of children gets worse – not only in the home, but in school and in the way they behave outside.

At the end of his life, God said to David: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Samuel 23:3). It is the duty of every king, including King Charles, to act justly and rightly in everything. When governing Israel, King David sought to rule justly and do what was right, in the fear of God – though he was not perfect. All rulers should act justly and do what is right. They should ask King Jesus to rule over them, keep them from evil, restrain them when going wrong, direct them in every decision, and act honourably always. They are to pray for His blessing in all they do.

Let us remember that we are to pray “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:1,2).

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2022-23

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