

The Young People's Magazine

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

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



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Cover picture: Winter sunshine on the Sound of Harris.

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Volume 89

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Number 1

Balaam's Empty Desire

The Israelites had come to the end of their journey through the wilderness. They were approaching Moab, and Balak the King of Moab was afraid of them. So he called Balaam to curse them, believing that Balaam was able to harm them. But God had far more power than any devilish power that Balaam may have possessed. So he could do nothing but declare Israel to be a blessed people. Balak was not happy about what Balaam was saying and complained: "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times" (Numbers 24:10).

Balaam could only explain, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak" (Numbers 24:13). In spite of the wonderful things that Balaam said about Israel, he remained the same ungodly man that he always was, for he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). It seems that he would gladly have cursed Israel and obtained the large amount of money that Balak offered him for doing so. It was only the power of Almighty God that held him back from cursing His people.

Yet, among all that God gave him to say, Balaam expressed this wish: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Does it not sound like a good wish? But should Balaam not have wanted to be a righteous man at that very moment? Not just at the point of death, but always! All that Balaam wanted was to die as a righteous man would die and to go where a righteous man would go at death, without ever submitting to God and keeping His commandments.

Yet how can an ungodly man enter into heaven? How could he be comfortable there? Everybody else would be holy and he would still be wicked. He would feel out of place; he would feel uncomfortable; he would feel so different from everyone else; he would feel lonely; and he would feel guilty. He would want out of heaven as quickly as possible.

That was Balaam. But what about you? I assume that you want to get to heaven. Yet do you wish to be ready for heaven *now*? Do you wish to be

righteous now? Do you wish to be born again now, so that no matter when God would call you away from this world, you would be ready to go to heaven? But too often people do not want to give up their sins; they assume they can continue sinning against God and rejecting salvation until the very last moment. They assume that they can then turn to God, believe the gospel and slip into heaven.

One important fact is that we do not know *when* we will die, but we do know that we will die. Another important fact is that, when death is approaching, we may have no more inclination to turn from our sins or to believe in Christ. We may then have no more desire to confront our sins than we have now and no more willingness to acknowledge how offensive they are to God. We may be no more ready to love God or to submit to His commands than we are now. We need God to change our hearts completely: to make us willing to turn from sin, to trust in Christ Jesus as the one Saviour from sin, and to submit wholeheartedly to God and His law.

He is ready to do these things for us; He is calling to us: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). We are to believe what the Bible tells us about Christ Jesus coming into the world to save sinners – taking their place and dying instead of them to endure the punishment for their sins. And we are to entrust ourselves to Him as One who has promised, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37) – in other words, Christ will not turn away anyone who comes to Him – that is, who believes in Him, or trusts in Him. It is absolutely impossible that He will turn away any such person.

The Bible tells us that "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death" (Proverbs 14:32). Balaam was a wicked man; he did not love God; instead he loved the wages of unrighteousness – the money that Balak would have paid him for cursing Israel. And because he continued ungodly – because he went on in his sins until he died – he was driven away into a lost eternity in the same wicked state of soul.

But it is different for righteous people at the end of their life here; they are not driven away into hell; instead they have good reason to hope that God will bring them to a better place – into heaven. See how it was with Stephen, for instance: when he came to die, even by the painful death of stoning, he had a strong hope of being brought to heaven. He "called upon God . . . saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). He even asked God to forgive those who were murdering him; he "cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Stephen was not driven away; God received him into the eternal blessedness of heaven.

Among the men who were murdering Stephen was the future Apostle

Paul. God changed him from a wicked persecutor into a righteous man. He became earnest about his soul; he began to live a righteous life. He became earnest about keeping God's commandments; he wanted "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16); he wished to be free from guilt in what he did in relation to God and in how he acted towards other people. Paul knew he would die and he knew he must earnestly seek God's blessing always; he knew how necessary it was to go on trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he could look on to death with hope; he wrote, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). By "our earthly house of this tabernacle", he meant his body, thinking of it as a tent, a temporary home for his soul; and by "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens", he meant a place that God was providing for him in heaven, an eternal home, one that would last for ever. Like Stephen, Paul was received into eternal blessedness when the time came for him to die; he was not driven away.

Let us remember our need to be earnest about our souls. Balaam was not in earnest. Though he wanted to enjoy the blessedness of the righteous, he wanted to go on in sin; he had no thought about spiritual earnestness. The Bible tells us: "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding" (Proverbs 12:11). This verse is saying that the person who is earnest about ploughing his fields will normally have a good crop; he will have plenty food to eat; but they have no sense who waste their time in the company of those who are idle. It is the same spiritually: those who seek the Lord earnestly will find Him and be ready for death whenever it comes, but those who spend most of their spare time with worldly companions are very foolish.

It is not enough to have a desire like Balaam's – an empty wish to get to heaven just like godly people. It is completely senseless to think of going on in rebellion against God for as long as we dare, assuming that God will accept us into heaven at the point of death. How earnestly we should ask God to change our hearts now, to give us grace to trust in the Lord Jesus now, and make us willing to submit to God's commandments during all the time that is left to us in this world. Those who seek Him, God assures us, will find Him. But we must seek Him "*while* He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). Let us seek Him earnestly *now*, even if we are still young – before death comes, perhaps unexpectedly. No one who seeks Christ and finds Him when they are young will ever regret it, even if they live to a ripe old age. You will not be sorry if you spend long years serving Christ faithfully.

The Dying Soldier's New Testament

It may have been 1848. There was serious unrest in Paris. A huge barricade had been built across one of the streets. Soldiers were trying to get over the barrier so that they could subdue the rebels on the other side. Among the soldiers were some as young as 14 and 15. At last the soldiers succeeded, but the last shot fired by the retreating rebels hit one of the first soldiers to cross the barricade. He knew he was dying and fell into the arms of a boy soldier beside him. He told the boy to open his bag and take out the New Testament inside it. "Take and read it," he said to the boy, "and pray God that you may do so with His blessing."

About a year later, a godly man went into an inn a long way from Paris. He was surprised to find a New Testament in the landlord's room. It was obvious that it had been well used. "What!" he exclaimed, with surprise and gladness, "You read the Bible!"

"Yes, and with great benefit," was the reply.

"God be praised!" the visitor answered and remarked that this was different to the landlord's attitude in the past.

The landlord acknowledged that all the praise belonged to God. He then began to explain what had happened. He had taken into his family a nephew, called Paul, whose parents had both died. The boy behaved so badly that, when he was 13, his uncle made him an apprentice, in Paris, to a tradesman who, he believed, would see that he behaved well. But Paul disappeared, and his uncle was afraid that he would do something that would lead to him being arrested by the police.

But one day the stagecoach from Paris stopped at the inn, and Paul stepped out. His uncle fully expected that Paul would bring disgrace on the family. He was wearing a soldier's uniform and looked at his uncle with a calm, sad smile. He told his uncle that it was bad health that had brought him back and that he had documents which could prove that he had behaved well in the army. He also said that, as he looked back on the past, he hated his behaviour.

The innkeeper interrupted him to say, "All very fine talking!" And he blamed Paul's bad health on drinking too much. "Your pockets are empty," he went on; "and so you find it mighty convenient to palm yourself on me until you can get back health and money." Then, the uncle assumed, he would start a new course of wickedness.

Paul confessed quietly that he did not expect his uncle to be easily convinced that he had experienced a real change. And he knew that it would

be a waste of time to come as a hypocrite seeking refuge and help. He said, "All I now ask of you is to believe I am no longer the daring offender you once knew, and let time tell the rest".

"So be it", replied the uncle in a not-very-friendly tone. He then took Paul by the arm and led him into his home. Yet it was very soon obvious to the uncle that there was a very definite change in Paul's life. He was far from boasting about what he did in the army; indeed his uncle found it difficult to draw any information out of Paul about what he had done. Yet what he did hear made it clear that Paul had acted with courage, but that he wanted to praise his comrades more than himself.

The uncle put up a bed for Paul in his own room. He was completely taken aback when Paul asked him for permission to say his evening prayers. "Your evening prayers!" the uncle exclaimed with a loud laugh. He added in mockery that the prayer of a soldier from his regiment would be something worth hearing. The uncle explained afterwards: "I was then a mocker of all religions, a real heathen". And he was annoyed because he assumed that Paul was not sincere in speaking about praying.

Paul looked sadly at his uncle and pleaded with him not to make a joke of the matter. Paul told him: "There is no need for me to speak aloud when I pour out my heart before God; and soon, I trust, you will judge differently, not only of me, but of prayer, and learn by your own experience that it is no mere matter of form".

From that time, the uncle watched Paul very carefully and with continuing suspicion. He said, "I could not banish from my mind the idea that some sly purpose or unworthy motive lay at the root of his religious profession. Yet before long I was forced to acknowledge the injustice of this judgement."

Paul's illness, which affected his lungs, grew worse day by day, and it made those about him afraid that he would soon die. Often he suffered severe pain; then he would clasp his hands and look up, saying quietly, "Have pity, O my Father, and help me. Yet not my will but Thine be done"; or, "Precious Saviour, I know and am sure that all things must work together for good to them who love Thee".

The uncle went on to tell his visitor: "But what most of all affected me was his unchanging meekness and contentment. He was satisfied with every arrangement and grateful for the smallest attention to his comfort, so that we were all struck with it." One day the uncle told his wife: "Paul's change of character is the most extraordinary thing I have ever met with. More especially, the way in which he speaks of God's goodness to him, at the very time he is enduring such agony of body, expecting death, fills me with astonishment."

"True", she replied, "but I'll tell you a secret which accounts for it: Paul is a Christian, a true Christian!"

"What do you mean by that? Neither you nor I are heathens, I hope."

"Not quite heathens, perhaps, and yet not real Christians! For, I put it to yourself: has God been until now the chief subject of our thoughts, or His law the rule of our actions? We scarcely knew the name of Jesus before now. Or, at any rate, when we did pronounce it, no sense of benefit from Him, or dependence on Him for salvation, accompanied the word. But in my conversations with Paul I have learned things which make up my deepest joy."

"In your conversations with Paul you have learned new things! O, please, what are they?"

"Listen. Some little time ago, as I was one day trying to prop up the poor boy, in one of his sad fits of suffocation, a little book fell out from under his pillow. I afterwards picked it up from the floor and saw it was a New Testament. I had indeed heard of it but had never before seen one. The following day I mentioned my discovery to Paul. He then told me that a soldier, who had been fatally wounded close beside him, had given him this book and died immediately afterwards; that the dying man had told him to read it." This was at the barricade on the Paris street.

Paul had indeed read the Bible, the innkeeper's wife went on, and it became to him "the treasure of all treasures, the source of his change of character, his peace and his joy. Every day since then, when he and I have been alone, Paul has looked out passages of the Testament for me to read to him. And he has given me such plain and simple explanations of what I did not understand that I soon began to believe and to love the great good news that God sent His only Son into the world, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish, but receive everlasting life. Paul is anxious to speak to you also of these things, but he is afraid. Indeed the poor boy blames himself much for this cowardly fear to confess [Christ], which he calls treachery towards his Saviour. He is constantly praying that he may be strengthened to confess Him, not only before you, but before the whole world."

The landlord then spoke of the great impression his wife's words had on him. He said, "I went oftener than before to my nephew's sickbed and, blessed be God, he soon began to tell me also of the gospel of Christ. And God, who is rich in mercy, granted His effectual blessing on Paul's instructions, so that not only my wife, my son and daughter, but my own hardened self, received the truth. And I am able to testify, as the Samaritans did of old: 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world'."

The uncle went on, with sadness in his voice: “Paul is no longer among us; the Lord has called him home”. Then he placed his hand on the New Testament and spoke of it as a witness to God’s goodness, acknowledging that it had conveyed “that goodness to us. From this precious volume, read with attention and prayer, we have learned the testimony of God concerning His Son. And the written Word, being engraved on our hearts by the power of the Spirit, has become to us the source of constant peace and a calm happiness, such as the world can neither give nor take away. For this we have cause to bless God in both time and eternity.”

See what one New Testament is able to do, when it is applied by the Holy Spirit. Read the whole Bible and ask God to apply it to your soul, so that you would truly learn that you are a sinner and that Jesus Christ is a Saviour that is absolutely suited to you in your need as a guilty sinner.

Katherine von Bora

6. Her Last Days

F R Daubney

Last month’s article told about Katherine’s husband, Martin Luther, leaving home hoping to reconcile two important brothers, the Counts of Mansfeld, who had become involved in a bitter dispute with each other. He told Katherine in a letter that he had succeeded and wrote about his plans for coming home.

On Sabbath, 14 February 1546, the day he wrote that letter, he preached in Eisleben, finishing with the words, “Much more might be said about the gospel, but I am too weak. We will leave off here.” Three days later he was so ill that the Counts persuaded him to rest indoors. In the afternoon he was in pain but recovered sufficiently to join them for supper and was cheerful.

But, after going to his room, he felt pain and it was clear that he was seriously ill. Count Albrecht Mansfeld himself brought him medicine but it did not help. His sons Paul and Martin were by his side, with Justus Jonas and other friends. When he awoke and saw their anxious faces, he said, “Are you still here? Go to rest, my friends.”

When Jonas asked him how he felt, he said, “I am very ill; I think I shall remain here at Eisleben, here where I was born and baptized”. Later he quoted from Psalm 31, Father, “into Thine hand I commit my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth”. He died between 2 and 3 o’clock in the morning of Thursday, February 18. He was 62. The cause of death was thought to be a stroke.

When the Elector of Saxony (the son of Frederick the Wise) heard of the death of his lifelong friend, he requested that the body be taken to Wittenberg. Justus Jonas preached in Saint Andrew's Church on Friday, the day after Luther's death, and at noon on the Saturday the coffin was carried with great solemnity to the gates of Eisleben, followed by a large crowd, including princes, nobles and many ordinary citizens.

On the Monday, the procession was met at Wittenberg's Elster Gate by the whole town and the procession made its way towards the Castle Church. Behind the wagon bearing the coffin, Katherine and her daughter Margarita rode in a carriage, followed by her three sons and other relatives. Behind them rode the Elector and nobles, followed by a carriage bearing Luther's friends and fellow Reformers: Justus Jonas, Johannes Bugenhagen and Philip Melancthon.

Bugenhagen preached in the Castle Church from 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope". This was followed by a funeral oration by Melancthon. Luther's body was laid to rest near the door to which he had nailed his theses more than 28 years before.

In her grief Katherine said, "Who would not be sad and afflicted at the loss of such a precious man as my dear lord was? He did great things, not just for a city or a single land, but for the whole world. Therefore I am truly so deeply grieved that I cannot eat or drink, nor can I sleep. And if I had a principality or an empire and lost it, it would not have been as painful as it is now that the dear Lord God has taken from me this precious and beloved man, and not from me alone, but from the whole world".

After Luther's death, Katherine entered into deep trouble, because of a lack of money. She lost the income from her husband's salary, and a dispute over his will meant that she could not access the resources he had intended for her.

Also, between 1546 and 1547, the Protestant princes who had formed the Schmalkaldic League were at war with Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria, a staunch Roman Catholic (this is known as the Schmalkaldic War). The Protestant forces, led by Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Landgrave Philip of Hesse, were defeated by the Emperor. And with the Elector in prison, Katherine could not turn to him for assistance. But a time of peace followed, during which appeals were made to the Elector on Katherine's behalf, and provision was made for her and her children. The Elector also overruled the objections made against Luther's will.

At the outbreak of the Schmalkaldic War, with Wittenberg under attack, Katherine had to take refuge in the city of Magdeburg and later in

Braunschweig. When she returned to Wittenberg at the close of the war in July 1547, she found her house and property almost completely destroyed. The invading soldiers had smashed all the furniture, robbed the cellars and stolen all the produce from the storehouses. The cattle and other farm animals had been stolen or killed. In spite of this, Katherine insisted on remaining in her home.

In 1552 the situation in Wittenberg again became difficult, this time because the crops failed and there was an outbreak of plague. The Elector closed the University and instructed the teachers and students to go to safety in Torgau, 30 miles away. Katherine had learned from her husband to commit herself to the Lord's care, and to tend the sick whenever possible. For five weeks, the plague raged but Katherine's household was spared. Then one of her lodgers became ill and died. Katherine had no fear for herself but, for the sake of her children, she resolved to leave Wittenberg and go to Torgau.

She arranged for a wagon to carry the family and their necessary possessions. It was the beginning of a sad journey, when they went out of the gate of the town, past what remained of their former gardens. As they passed the outskirts of a village, a dog barked at the horses, startling them and causing them to panic and bolt. Katherine, in an effort to help, stood up and was thrown from the wagon. She fell into a stream and banged her head against a stone. The driver managed to calm the horses, and the stunned and soaking-wet Katherine was lifted into the wagon and kept warm.

Two hours later, they arrived in Torgau, where they were taken in by a friend of Luther's. Katherine was put to bed and a doctor was called. She was very weak and had a high fever. Sadly, she did not recover and died three months later, on 20 December 1552. It is reported that among her last words were, "I shall stick to Christ like a burr on an overcoat".

At the end of this account of the life of Katherine Luther, one feels sad still to know so little of her. That she was a strong, capable, courageous, intelligent, God-fearing woman there can be no doubt. She turned from the deceits and falsities of the Roman Catholic Church to the true gospel of the Scriptures. From being a cloistered nun, she became the wife of a strong-minded Reformer, a mother, a business woman, a succourer of many.

Perhaps she is best summed up in the words of Proverbs 31: "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth

a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. . . . She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. . . . She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.”

In these days, when so much emphasis is placed on outward appearances, on superficial beauty and on “having a good time”, perhaps there is more to learn from the sparse details we have of the life of Katherine Luther than we might suppose.

For Junior Readers

A New Year

A new year, a new beginning! An opportunity to think of time, the passing of time and the end of time. In a similar way you might think of these things on your birthday, as you start a new birth year. A godly lady called Ruth, who lived nearly 200 years ago, had a real care for the souls of the young people she knew. Some of her letters have been published – this one with the text, Ecclesiastes 12:1, written at the top: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”.

My Dear Friend,

I have been told that this day you have a special birthday. I hope you will accept an affectionate greeting from a pilgrim friend and will allow me to express the feelings of my heart.

You have reached another milestone on the pathway of life, and where does it find you? In a medium path between the world and Christ? Ah, there is no middle path. Consider it, and then “consider your ways”; for either you are serving the Lord, or serving His enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. I do think you sometimes long to be on the Lord’s side. . . .

And may it be soon, that I may have joy over you in the Lord, and that He may have the cream of your life, the flower of your days, for He is worthy. He who bled and died for sinners such as you and me, is worthy of all our powers, and of a thousand hearts if we had them. May the blessed Spirit make you feel deeply your need of Him, even this very day!

Most heartily I desire for you a spiritual birthday in the fulfillment of that precious promise, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you”. Then will you say, “My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth”; and only then will you find true happiness, for “the world passeth

away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Though not with you, I am bearing you on my heart before the Lord. May He guide you every step in life, and grant you the blessings of the upper and the nether springs. Forgive these poor lines from one who watches for your never-dying soul.

With tender love, your affectionate friend,
Ruth (Bryan)

Lessons from the Life of Aaron

5. When Aaron Went Wrong

Rev John Campbell

Last month's part of this Youth Conference paper spoke about two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offering "strange fire. It spoke too of Aaron's godly reaction, before going on to speak of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

T*he golden calf.* God had been speaking with Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, where Moses had received the two tables of stone. On them God had written the Ten Commandments, the summary of His moral law.

While Moses was away, the people of Israel became sinfully impatient at his long absence. They turned to Aaron and demanded that he make for them "gods to go before them". Sadly, Aaron was weak and yielded; and he made the golden calf for them.

This sin, although it was the people who prompted it, can scarcely be explained, given Aaron's position in the congregation and his reputation for holiness as God's ordained high priest. How then do we account for it?

It shows us firstly that "there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matthew 19:17). Even the very best of men, as we also see with David and Peter, have a fallen, corrupt nature. They are full of sin, have a deceitful heart, which is desperately wicked. Accordingly, we are told, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isaiah 2:22).

It also shows us that Aaron (very godly man as he was) was not so firm and strong in his faith as Moses was, in being faithful to his calling. Not only this incident, but others also, provide the evidence for that statement. Patrick Fairbairn, a Scottish minister says, "Like many who are fitted by nature for acting only a secondary part [that is, to Moses among the congregation of Israel], he was too easily moved by the circumstances of the moment."

So, when the people fell into idolatry in this dreadful way, Aaron sadly gave in to them. He went against his conscience and compromised his dearly held faith in the God of heaven. Being sinfully too weak, he failed when he

was required to make a stand for truth. He brought the anger of the Lord on the people and on himself. (The idolaters were slain, and Moses' intercession was required for Aaron.)

Some Jews and other writers have laboured to make excuses for what Aaron did. But he was at fault. Clearly so. Scripture tells us nothing that lessened his guilt, though he made excuses for himself (Exodus 32:21-24). Aaron's sin was not only his part in making the golden calf, but in showing sinful weakness in the face of temptation. He was overcome by the fear of man, which brings a snare – as so many often are.

He possessed God-given authority and influence among the people, but instead of using it, by God's grace, to withstand faithfully this prompting, he yielded. It was a sad backsliding into sin for such a great man. But God, in His sovereign purpose, sometimes permits such events. He does so in order that He alone will have all the glory – not any man, whoever he may be, or whatever position he may have.

In this case, it was Moses who made intercession for the people, and also for Aaron. We read about Moses recounting to the people their many rebellions: "I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also, and the Lord was very angry with Aaron, to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time" (Deuteronomy 9:19-20).

Aaron and Miriam. We also read, in Numbers 12, about an incident of backsliding, when Aaron and his sister Miriam yielded to a spirit of envy against Moses. Aaron joined with her in finding fault with Moses for having married an Ethiopian woman. They also alleged against Moses that he was assuming too much to himself. But Miriam appears clearly to be the ring-leader in this private, family dispute – as she is mentioned first. And it was on her, as the more guilty party, that God's judgement came down, when she was smitten with leprosy.

At the root of the spirit of envy is the sin of pride, that is not being put to death. It disturbs the harmony of the united life of God's people. It is a root of bitterness by which many are defiled. The guilt of someone who neglects the grace of humility is not any less than that of Miriam and Aaron. As with them, sooner or later it appears outwardly and hurts themselves and perhaps others. It is never a light thing at any time to destroy the unity of the Spirit and to disturb the bond of peace among the Lord's people.

In the Wilderness of Zin with Moses. The only other occasion when Aaron is charged with open sin was when he and Moses were forbidden to enter Canaan. This was toward the close of their journey there, in the wilderness of Zin. "The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me

not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12). We see that God is dishonoured and is much displeased when we fail to trust in Him – when we fail to glorify Him, which God requires us to do.

Even the stronger faith of Moses was overcome. In the heat of his anger at the complaints of the Israelites, because of a lack of water, he acted rashly. He lacked faith in God’s clear command, and lost his hope of entering the promised land. Patrick Fairbairn explains the incident well: “It betrayed a failure, if not in the principle of faith, at least in its calm and persistent exercise. And happening as it did at a comparatively late period in the wilderness sojourn, and too [obviously] indicating an imperfect sanctification in the two leaders, they were partly on their own account, and partly as a solemn lesson to others, alike adjudged to die, without being permitted to enter the promised land.”

Yet Fairbairn goes on to say that, in spite of “such occasional failures, Aaron was undoubtedly” for his time, a man of special “excellence, and is fitly called ‘the saint of God’ (Psalm 106:16)”.

Seek the Lord (3)

John Kennedy

This is another part of a sermon preached to young people in Dingwall in 1859; it has been edited. The minister’s text was “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). In last month’s part, the preacher told the young people that they should seek Christ because *He is worth seeking*, as He has three things – (1) beauty, (2) love, (3) riches – which are infinitely better than everything else. He then spoke about Christ’s beauty. He now goes on to speak about the other two.

2. There is no one like Christ in *love*. The greatest love is shown in giving one’s life for a friend. Christ is the only one that ever gave His life for enemies. Think of His shedding His blood for enemies. Think of Him, the great and glorious Son of God, shedding His blood for enemies, and such enemies – vile and worthless sinners who deserved to die ten thousand times and who hated Him with all their heart. He knew this, and yet He was willing to die the cursed death of the cross for them, and He did this with all His heart. When they were hating Him with all their heart He was dying for them with all His heart.

O if you knew this love! If you were Christ’s lambs, you would be just like the princess of old that was captured by a king, and when the king was to decide what was to be done with her, her husband rose up and offered to

give his own life as a ransom for her. When someone asked her afterwards what she thought of the appearance of the king, she said, "I had no eyes for anyone but the one who offered his life for mine". Is there no one here who would like to keep their eyes for Christ? Alas, alas that it is true of many here that they see no beauty in Christ that they should desire Him.

There is another thing: Christ's love can do what no other love will do. It will fondly embrace a vile, worthless enemy. If you would only come to Christ after all you have done against Him, He would embrace you in the arms of His love. Others will embrace friends. He is the only one that will embrace enemies. He will do as the father did to the prodigal son when he came back. The father went to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him. He hates putting away the vilest sinner that will come to Him. Hear Him say, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Something else is true of Christ's love that is not true of any other: it will never change and it will never end. His is the only love of which this can be said. Other friends will soon weary of showing kindness, but Christ will not. If He was your friend, His love begun would be always the same. It would follow you all your life. It would be about you wherever you went. You do not read of any human love stronger than David's to Jonathan and Jonathan's to David, but Jonathan could not do much for him; they had to part. But here is love that can do you good wherever you are – in sickness and in health, in the house or in the way, in your bedroom or among your family, in life or in death.

O dear friends, Christ's love is rare, rare love, and it can follow you when all other love will fail at death. Your best friends will then have to part with you. There is only one Friend that sticks closer than a brother at death. Friends may weep for you then, but they will dry their tears, and if they will not altogether dry their tears, they will very often forget you. But it is at death that Christ's love will be fully known. Every moment till then, Christ in His love remembered those whom He loved. And then Christ will bring them in to be for ever within the rest, the joy and the glory of the Father's house in heaven.

3. There is no one like Christ in *riches*. Christ has just three kinds of riches, and if you would find Him you would get them all. (1) *Riches of merit*. That was the price of His own blood which He paid to God for the redemption of enemies. Now you must have this price for yourself before you can escape the wrath and curse of God, and you must get this first of all. (2) *Riches of grace*. All fullness of grace in Christ Jesus to supply all your soul's needs. (3) *Riches of sanctifying grace, riches of guiding grace, riches*

of strengthening grace, riches of comforting grace. All this is in Christ, and will be yours if you find Him.

All the riches in heaven and in earth are Christ's. God is His God and Father. Heaven is His. The angels are His. The Church is His. All the earth and its fullness is His. Now if you find Christ, all things will be yours in Him.

Let us suppose a poor prisoner is in the hands of enemies or in the hands of the law and under sentence of death. A friend loves the one who is lying in prison and cannot escape. Besides, he is very sick and his disease is deadly. He has lost all that he had, and there is nothing he can call his own. He cannot call the room he is in his own; his clothes are not his own; the food is not his own until he eats it. Poor creature! Does he not need a friend?

But there is a Friend. And what can this Friend do for him? A great deal. He can do for him all he needs. But is He willing to do it? O yes. And what is He able and willing to do? (1) He is able and willing to buy his freedom for him. He has riches enough to do this and to recover his life for the poor prisoner. But this is not all. (2) He has power to heal him of all his diseases. He has such rich love that He will seek to do this, and He has such great power that He is able to do it. But this is not all. (3) He has a great and glorious kingdom to give him, and He can make him heir of it all at once and can put him yet on the throne in health and glory and honour.

Now, you are the prisoner, and Christ is the prisoner's Friend. By the price of His blood He can deliver you from your guilt, free you from condemnation, and give you eternal life. By the riches of His grace He can heal all your diseases and supply all your needs. He will secure His God and Father to you as your God and Father. All things will be yours if Christ is yours. All in heaven and in earth will be yours. You may think, Is this not wealth worth seeking?

If they who get Christ will be so rich, why do we see some of them so poor in this world? If they were the great and rich men of the world, if the earth was theirs, would they be so poor as we see some of them?

I remember coming out from seeing someone who had found Christ; he had Christ's riches as his own and was lying on a sickbed. Just as I came out from his bedside, a splendid coach and four horses was passing. The man who had this fine carriage had not found Christ.

I asked myself which of them I would prefer to be like: the sick man in his filthy bed or the rich man in his fine coach. Which would you have chosen? Which do you think was the richer of the two?

The poor man was indeed the richer man; the rich man was indeed the poorer man. You might see a rich man on a wet day very drenched and very weary passing by a comfortable house, and you felt at the time how much

better off those in the house were than he. But was it so? No. In a very short time he had reached a splendid house of his own. The house which he had passed was his own property, but he did not choose to stay in it; it was nothing in comparison with the second house he reached.

It is thus with Christ's people. You may wonder when you see them passing through this world because they do not have the outward honours and pleasures of the men of the world. But if you were to see the house that is awaiting them, and the honour and joy of it, you would, like Moses, esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Now all Christ's beauty would be yours to delight you. All Christ's love would be yours to embrace you, and all His wealth would be yours to enrich you – if only you would find Him for yourself. Will you then seek Him? Surely you should.

For Younger Readers

We Need to Know God

There was a man called Collins who did not believe what the Bible says. Remember that what the Bible says is what God says. So it is true. It is all true.

One day, Collins met a man going to church. He asked the man where he was going.

“To church”, the man told him.

Collins then asked, “What to do there?”

“To worship God”, the man said.

Then Collins asked, “Is your God a great or a little God?”

The man told him first: “He is so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him”, but he also told Collins that “He can dwell in my heart”.

Probably most people looked on Collins as a very important man who knew lots of things. But he did not really know God. Let us ask God to speak to us – through what He has said in the Bible.

Likely people did not think the other man was important. But he really knew God. That is more important than anything else in this world. God is able to teach us about Himself.

Ask God to show you who He is. Ask Him to show you how great He is. Ask Him to show you He can teach someone small like you.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2023-24

UK Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section. *Aberdeen:* Julia Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton. *Edinburgh:* Fraser Campbell. *Inverness:* Jenna Campbell. *Llanelli:* Carys Cran. *London:* Sarah Munns. *North Tolsta:* Uilleam Morrison. *Southampton:* Chloe, Jonny and Lydia Wilkins

Intermediate Section. *Dingwall:* D A MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Macintosh, Beth Dickie. *Glasgow:* Violet Marr, Shona Ross. *Inverness:* Susanna Jane Campbell, Anna McSeveney, James Maton. *Llanelli:* Carwyn Cran.

Junior Section. *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod, Cassia Soni. *Beaulieu:* Rebekka Fraser, Hudson Maclean. *Dingwall:* Iain MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Alec Cameron-Macintosh, Darcy Esson, Alice Hicklin. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh. *Llanelli:* Sarah Cran. *London:* Andrew Macleod. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie M Macdonald.

Upper Primary Section. *Dingwall:* Mairi MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Julia Cameron-Macintosh, Anderson Dickie, Joella Esson, Leah Hicklin. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *London:* Benjamin and Daniel Macleod. *North Harris:* Finlay Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison.

Lower Primary Section. *Aberdeen:* Philip and Kate Macleod. *Dingwall:* Charlotte MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Samuel and James Dickie, Teddy Esson, Matthew Hicklin, Genevieve MacLean. *Inverness:* Molly, Emily and Alfie Campbell, Harvey Dickie. *London:* Lydia and William Campbell, Peter Macleod. *North Harris:* Margaret and George Jardine. *Southampton:* Benjy Wilkins. *Staffin:* Grace Campbell. *Stornoway:* Murdo Maclean.

Looking Around Us

Schools in Scotland

Two issues have pushed news reports on Scottish education into prominent positions in the media. One of the issues is pupil behaviour in schools. Headlines drew attention particularly to pupil violence, especially against women teachers – as reported in a survey. The other issue was the drop in Scotland's performance, as measured at the age of 15 in an international survey of how pupils perform in three subjects: reading, maths and science.

This article is not going to make any attempt to trace purely educational causes for these changes. It will focus on moral and religious factors.

It should be obvious that conditions in schools will reflect conditions in wider society. In particular, Scottish society has become more and more godless over the years and is paying less and less attention to the Bible. Indeed the Bible and its authority are being more and more rejected. So as one generation of schoolchildren follows another, we can expect to see the effects, in the classroom, of increasing godlessness.

And we can expect to find greater and greater ignorance of what God's Book says – not least, ignorance of the commandments that God has given for the good of adults and of younger people. How many in Scotland today, young or old, are able to quote the Ten Commandments? Certainly many

fewer than when such things were taught in schools. And how tiny a number, one suspects, sincerely seek to *keep* all these commandments!

If adults are living chaotic lives – and that is too often the case – it is not surprising that the behaviour of their children is often chaotic in the classroom. If children are not being properly disciplined at home, what hope is there that pupils will behave themselves in school? God has said, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24). This verse is intended to encourage parents to use physical punishment when that is appropriate. Of course, it is not to be used in a cruel way; but it does have God’s authority.

There was a time when physical punishment could be used in Scottish schools. That time has passed, and more recently the Scottish Parliament has made it illegal for parents to smack their children. No wonder standards of discipline are falling so seriously! God’s wisdom is despised and there are sure to be serious consequences. If there is chaos in the classroom, it is certain that pupils will not be able to concentrate on their work and that their learning will suffer.

One would hope that all school pupils who read this magazine will behave well. That may be rather hopeful, but remember that God sees you wherever you are. If you misbehave – at home or in school or anywhere else – He will consider you guilty.

You should seek to take the principles of the Bible with you wherever you go, to school or any other place of study, as well as the workplace. You should pray that God would give you a new heart, so that you would want to obey Him always, and you should plead earnestly that He would make you able and willing to trust in Christ Jesus for salvation.

What Scotland needs, above everything, is that the gospel would reach every part of the country, that people would be ready to listen to it, and that the Holy Spirit would be poured out so that multitudes of sinners would turn to Christ. What a difference that would make to the behaviour of people everywhere and, not least, to the behaviour of pupils in school!

2024 UK Youth Conference

This year’s Youth Conference has been arranged for Tuesday, April 9, to Thursday, April 11, God willing, at Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perth, PH2 9EG. More information to follow.

Price £1.40