

The Young People's Magazine

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

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



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The Young People's Magazine

Volume 89

October 2024

Number 10

What Does God Think of Us?

As I walked along a street this morning, I passed a church and stopped to read a poster pinned to its noticeboard. It said, "God thinks you are amazing". The church was no doubt encouraging passers-by to think well of themselves and come to a church where their self-esteem would be boosted. But we have to ask, Is that what God really thinks of us? He has told us in the Bible that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. They are better. They are more accurate. Human beings must not presume to say what God's thoughts are unless He has told us, and it is in the Bible that He tells us about His thoughts. We should listen to what He tells us there.

Yes, part of a Scripture verse was quoted on the poster. The verse was Zephaniah 3:17, in a modern translation. We will keep here to the Authorised Version as it is still the best translation; there we read, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing". Our first question is: Who does God joy in? Or, Who does He delight in?

It is certainly not everyone who happens to read the poster. But we can find more than one answer in the earlier verses; for instance verse 12: "They shall trust in the name of the Lord". This refers to those who know they are sinners, who realise that God does not think well of them apart from His saving work in their hearts and lives. They trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners like them – they trust in Him to bring them safely through this world and bring them at last to heaven. They trust in Him to forgive all their sins, for His sake, and to make them holy.

God thinks well of them because of the Holy Spirit's work in their souls and, when they reach heaven, He will think well of them because they will be perfect, through the work of the Holy Spirit. When He begins to work in sinners, He undertakes that He will yet make them completely holy. But God cannot think well of the results of any human being attempting to make themselves holy. The results will always be imperfect, and any such attempt is full of sin because the human being is rejecting God's provision when he or she tries to do the work themselves.

We find another answer to our questions in verse 13: They “shall not do iniquity”. God is not saying here that these people never sin, because He says elsewhere in the Bible that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). And if people come short of God’s glory in what they do and say and think, they are sinning.

But what verse 13 means is that these people who do no iniquity, although they come short of God’s glory, they love God and His commandments and seek to obey them. That is because God has done an amazing work in the hearts of such sinners. What were they? They “were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1); they had no spiritual life; they could not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or do anything else that is spiritually good.

But what are they now? God has made them alive, which was something that they could not do for themselves. It is a work which only a person who is God can do. The Holy Spirit, one of the three Persons in the Godhead, does this work, and a wonderful work it indeed is. We should be earnestly asking that the Spirit would do this wonderful work in our souls, so that we would be spiritually alive, by God’s grace.

These people have been transformed. Though they were once spiritually dead and were careless about their souls and were living sinful lives, the Holy Spirit has changed their hearts. And they have been delivered from the punishment which their sins deserved. They were once “children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2); this means that if you asked yourself what was most obvious about them, you would have had to say, It is their disobedience to God. And they were “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3), which means that it was also very obvious that God’s anger was hanging over them; He was ready to punish them because of their sins.

So until sinners believe in Christ and find forgiveness in Him, no one ought to tell them that God thinks they are amazing – except, for example, that they are amazingly sinful and amazingly rebellious. This is especially so when you consider how good God is to them, and to us all: He gives us our food, our clothes and so many other blessings day by day. But God’s goodness is intended to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). But what is repentance? It is a turning – from sin against God to obedience, from rebellion against Him to submission.

Indeed God commands “all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). It is not an option; it is a *command* we absolutely must obey – or else we will remain in our sins, liable to God’s punishment in hell for ever and ever. And if we turn away from sin, we must also turn *to* Christ in faith; repentance and faith always go together.

The church on which the poster hung belonged to the Church of Scotland.

And if such an unscriptural message appeared outside, what can we expect of the message that is proclaimed from the pulpit? It is highly unlikely to be any better.

One lesson we should learn is to be very careful about the preaching we listen to. To listen to false teaching is dangerous; it can be very harmful to our souls. It may leave us thinking that all is well with us when, in fact, we are still spiritually dead, children of disobedience and children of wrath – still needing God’s saving work in our hearts and lives.

We might think it is good to go to church, and so it is; but only if the teaching to be found there is according to the Bible. Let us value sound, scriptural preaching such as is to be found in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. But the more important matter is to put these teachings into practice. We are sinners, and Jesus’ call to sinners was and is: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Assurance – the Lord Is My Shepherd

1. What Is Assurance?

Rev J R Tallach

This is the first section of a paper given at this year’s Youth Conference.

Speaking generally, assurance is the sense that something is true, that it is beyond argument and beyond doubt. In the sense in which we intend to use it here, assurance – speaking spiritually – is the sense a converted sinner has that he or she is a child of God and an heir to heaven and eternal life.

You remember Hannah, the wife of Elkanah (1 Samuel 1). She had been married for many years but had no children. This made her sad. When she went up to Shiloh to one of the feasts appointed in Israel, she went to the temple and brought this sorrow to God in prayer. While she was praying, the high priest Eli came into the temple and spoke to her. She explained that she was childless and was praying to God for a child.

Eli must have had a message from God while Hannah was speaking, because he told Hannah “Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thy petition that thou hast asked of Him” (1 Samuel 1:17). Hannah went her way, believing that God had heard and would grant her request, “and her countenance was no more sad”. She had received an assurance that the Lord would give her a child and her doubts and fears were removed. She was no longer sad. She was assured it would happen as she had asked in prayer. This illustrates the assurance of the sinner trusting in Christ that he is one of the Lord’s people and that Jesus Christ is his Shepherd.

You remember how the Ethiopian Eunuch, on his way home from worshipping in Jerusalem, was reading in his chariot from Isaiah 53. Isaiah writes there of the suffering of the Saviour on the cross, but this man did not know Jesus. He was troubled as to who this person referred to in Isaiah 53 was. The Spirit sent Philip the Evangelist, who "preached unto him Jesus" showing him that the words of Isaiah 53, "He was wounded for our transgressions", referred to Christ. The Eunuch believed in Jesus as Philip preached and afterward he professed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". He was baptized and went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8). His face was no longer sad. He had the assurance that Jesus had saved him, soul and body, for time and eternity.

This hope is not a mere maybe or perhaps, or, it could be so, nor is it founded on an empty opinion based on what may be false. Rather the Spirit of God, the third Person of the Godhead, seals the agreement Himself by setting up residence in the heart of the sinner who receives the "earnest of the Spirit". "Now He which established us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God. Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor 1:21,22).

You may not be familiar with the term *earnest* in an agreement, but the following illustration has been used to cast some light on that term. Suppose you received a letter informing you that you had become heir to an estate in New Zealand, and that you would inherit that estate when you came of age. One way of assuring you that the promise of the estate is genuine and that you actually possess the estate is for the person in New Zealand who is handling the transaction to dig up a clod of earth from the estate and send it to you. When you have it in your hands it is an *earnest* of the whole estate from which it comes. In the fulness of time, God willing, you will go to New Zealand and enjoy the land you have inherited but, in the meantime, you have an *earnest*, a genuine part, of that estate in your possession.

So Christ purchased a place in heaven for each of His children which they will inherit when they die. But in the meantime they have the *earnest* of the Spirit, in their hearts, for their eternal home.

This hope is not just a small, uncertain speculation, but it makes the believer able to rise above the trials and difficulties during a life of faith in this fallen world. Thus Paul says, "Hope maketh not ashamed" (Romans 5:5). You remember how badly treated Paul and Silas were in Philippi. They had come to preach the gospel and were beaten publicly, which was against the law, as they were Roman citizens. They were then handed over to the jailer who treated them as dangerous criminals and secured their feet in stocks. Yet, humiliated and pained as they must have been, their hope in the

gospel kept them from being ashamed. And by their praise and prayer in the prison, they showed a hope which rose above all discouragements.

The verse in Romans 5 goes on to say, “Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”. The love of God to His people is remembered here, and it is by the Holy Spirit that the love of God is poured into the heart. As with the sun rising and giving light to the whole country, so no area of the heart, understanding, affection or will is left untouched by the Spirit of God at conversion. Hope of eternal life is an anchor within the veil where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Heb 6:19).

How is this assured hope brought about? Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”. It is by the word of the good Shepherd that sinners are gathered and the flock of His followers is formed. Perhaps you have heard the report given by a traveller in biblical lands who tells of going down to a well early in the morning where a number of sheep were gathered. While they stood watching, a shepherd came near the well calling out to his sheep. He then turned and walked away still calling and some of the sheep followed Him. Other shepherds came calling their own sheep and leading them away until there were no sheep left at the well.

This is what Jesus was referring to when He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”. Apart from this, but along with the Word, the Lord gives His Holy Spirit, who sets up residence in the soul. He tells believers: “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” In Romans 8:16 we read, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”. The Spirit of God so operates on, and co-operates with, the spirit of the believer that the conviction of sonship is formed in the heart.

You remember how the Lord spoke to the woman of Samaria in John 4: “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water”. This living water is the Holy Spirit of promise who delights to take of the things of Christ and show them unto sinners. John 16:14 states of the Spirit: “He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and show it unto you”.

It is the Spirit that delivers the sinner from a mere outward obedience to the law, “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6). This verse refers to the time when the Israelites received the law from God at Mount Sinai. The Israelites were afraid when they heard God’s voice pronouncing the law, the Ten Commandments, and

asked that Moses would receive these fear-inspiring words from God and that they would receive it from Moses.

Moses went up Mount Sinai and came down with the two tables of the law, but Jesus came down from heaven and fulfilled the law and made it honourable. Christ fulfilled these same Scriptures and sent them out into the world after He had satisfied the law on behalf of His people on Calvary by His sufferings on the cross. This being the case His children, being His people, are to come boldly with assurance "unto the throne of grace that we may . . . find grace to help in time of need." (Heb 4:16).

An Unusual Message

A young man was working in a telegraph office in an English town. Such an office sent and received telegrams. A telegram contained a brief message which was printed out and then delivered to the person who was meant to receive it.

God had shown the young man that he was a sinner and he was very troubled about the matter. It seemed as if he was a poor lamb wandering on the mountains; he felt too that he had gone away from God's fold and was a lost sheep. But he did not know where to find the Shepherd or how to get to the Shepherd's fold. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knew where to find the lost sheep.

One morning, when the young man went to the office, he was perhaps more troubled than ever; he was feeling so much the burden of his sins. As he waited for a telegram to come, he was praying. In his heart, he was saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner".

Then the telegraph machine made a click, and he knew that a message was on its way. He looked up and saw that it was coming from Windermere, in the beautiful Lake District, in the North of England. Then came the name and address of the person for whom the telegram was sent. Then came the message; it had two parts, both from the Bible: first, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"; second, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." That was all, except for the name of the person who sent the message. (The texts come from John 1:29 and Ephesians 1:7.)

Why send such a message in a telegram? It was sent to a young woman working in the town. She too was troubled about her sins and trying to find Jesus. She had a brother who had found Jesus and he was working for a man who was spending the summer in the Lake District. She had written to her

brother, telling him about her trouble and asking the question that the jailer in Philippi once asked: “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The brother had no time to write a letter; so he sent the telegram.

God blessed the words in the telegram to the sender’s sister. But God did more than the sender expected; He blessed these same words to the young man in the telegraph office. Very likely the sender of the message prayed that God would use his telegram to show his sister the way of salvation. The message spoke about God taking away sin, through the Lamb of God. “The Lamb of God” in John 1:29 is Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as a sacrifice. (Remember that lambs were commonly offered as sacrifices in Old Testament times to show how sin could be forgiven: the lamb died instead of the sinner.)

God answered the prayer of the man in Windermere. But God did more: He blessed the message in the telegram to someone that this man probably had never heard of. God, through one message, brought two lost sheep to Himself. He hears prayer. He does so because of “the riches of His grace” – because of His very great kindness. If you are in trouble because of your sins, remember that Jesus Christ died to save sinners like you; remember that He calls you to look to Him, to trust in Him; and remember His very great kindness, even to those who are unworthy of anything good.

Conversion (3)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

This is the final part of a sermon from a book of M'Cheyne's preaching, called *Additional Remains*. Last month's section spoke about the difficulty of conversion. This sermon has been edited. It was preached in Dunipace in 1835, while M'Cheyne was assistant to the minister in Larbert.

Psalm 40:1-3. *I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.*

2. From this picture of a true conversion I conclude, not only the difficulty, but also ***the desirableness of conversion***. Can you imagine the delight of being lifted out of the horrible pit, where only wrath awaited us, and having our feet set upon the Rock, where our foundation is as firm and solid as the everlasting hills, and we are raised high above the reach of enemies? Then you have some idea of what it is to be taken out of wrath into peace, to be

moved from under the curse to the privilege of standing on the righteousness of Christ, where you are justified, so that neither man nor angel nor devil can bring any accusation against you.

Again, can you imagine the delight of being carried out of the miry clay, where your feet were continually sinking deeper and deeper every hour, and of having your goings established – a straight path set before you, and solid ground beneath you? Then you have some idea of what it is to be taken out of your worldly lusts, desires, cares, thoughts, anxieties and habits of sin, in which every new day found you sinking deeper and deeper, and always with less hope of recovery. You were also enabled to love God and the things of God, to “set your affection on things above”, to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”.

Still further, can you imagine the delight of exchanging the groan of the prisoner, bound in affliction and iron, for the song of the captive who has been set free, the emancipated slave? Then you have some idea of what it is to exchange the sullenness and cheerlessness of an unrenewed spirit for the joy of the redeemed and the new song of praise which only they can sing. But when you have imagined all these things, you will have merely an idea, and nothing more, of the desirableness of conversion.

The riches of Christ are unsearchable. I might ransack all nature for pictures. I might bring all conditions of misery into contrast with sudden peace and happiness; yet I would fail to give you a right idea of the blessings received in conversion, for “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared (in this world, even in the hour of believing) for them that love Him”. But leaving aside pictures borrowed from nature, which may only confuse, let me simply lay before you the realities which these pictures point to.

The *first* thing to be had in conversion is *peace with God*. “Justified by faith, we have peace with God.” This is the immediate effect of standing on the Rock, Christ. Sin-laden man, do you see no desirableness in peace with an offended, forgotten, despised God? Are you so fond of the horrible pit of enmity and condemnation that you have no desire to be out of it? Then it is indeed in vain to tell you of a Saviour; you can see no beauty in Christ.

The *second* thing to be had in conversion is *a holy life*: To as many as receive Christ, He gives power to become sons of God. Depraved man, whose heart is wrinkled with habitual sins, do you see no desirableness in a holy life? I do not ask you if it would be pleasant to you this moment to restrain and go against all your desires and lusts. I know it would appear intolerable to you; but I do ask you if you see no desirableness in having these very desires changed or their power taken away, so that strictness and

holiness of life would no longer appear irksome, but pleasantness and peace? Are you so delighted, not with the objects which please your feelings, but with these very feelings themselves, that you have no wish to be made new? Then it is indeed needless to tell you of the Sanctifier.

The *third* good thing to be had in conversion is a *joyful and thankful heart*: “We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is the song of the redeemed. The mirth of heaven is thankfulness and praise. The mirth of heaven on earth – that is, of the converted soul – is the same, even praise to our God. Cheerfulness and thankfulness will endure even the gloominess of the deathbed, the dark valley and the awful evidences of judgement. If these are desirable gifts, they all join to prove the desirableness of conversion.

But I know that I talk to many of you in vain of how desirable conversion is, for you do not yet feel the misery of being unconverted – the wretchedness of being a child of wrath and a slave of corruption. When we tell you that those not justified are in a horrible pit – that those not sanctified are sinking in miry clay – you tell us that you never felt any horror about your situation.

No, you have many pleasures; you are comfortable and at ease. Ah, most wretched of the unconverted, you are in the horrible pit; yet you do not feel its horrors. You are in the miry clay, sinking every step you take; yet you feel no alarm. You know that you never savingly believed in Christ; yet you have no horror when the Bible tells you that you are “condemned already”. You know that your heart has never been made new – born again – and yet you do not tremble when the Bible tells you that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord”.

You remind me of nothing so much as of a man travelling in a snowstorm. He wanders far from home and shelter. Every step he takes, his feet sink deeper in the drifted snow. A strange lack of consciousness creeps over his mind. Death itself has lost its horrors. As his danger increases, his fears lessen. A deep slumber is quickly descending on his mind, till he sinks down quietly to sleep, but never to rise again.

Likewise, your lack of consciousness, instead of being a sign that there is no danger, increases the danger and horror of your situation a thousandfold. As the Bible is true, the state of every unconverted man is so awful that if you could see it as God sees it, the words, “an horrible pit and miry clay”, would seem too feeble to express it. “The sorrows of death and the pains of hell” might perhaps come nearer your view of it. Strive hard then to know the misery of being unconverted. Be determined to know the worst of yourself, for only thus will you see how desirable conversion is – the excellence of Christ.

Now then, let us lay together the two conclusions which I have drawn from our text: (1) the *difficulty* of conversion; it is so great that God Himself must be its author; and (2) the *desirableness* of conversion; it is so great that peace, holiness and joy all depend on it. Suffer the word of exhortation. Seek it in the only way in which the Psalmist found it: "I waited patiently for the Lord". That is, I waited anxiously; "and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry". He is more ready to hear than you to ask. The rock is already laid. Christ has died, and you are this day called to stand on His righteousness. And if you come to Christ, you shall every day become more a new creature; and being a new creature, you shall sing a new song of praise to Him who loved needy sinners.

A few words to those of you who can look back upon an experience like that described in my text. They are spoken to those who can say that God has brought you out of a horrible pit and the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, and established your goings, and put a new song in your mouth.

Take heed that the following words also come to pass: "Many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord". How many round about you are yet unconverted – who are both in the pit and in the clay! Let them see how great things God may do for your souls, so that they may be afraid of dying unconverted, afraid lest this glorious change never come to them. Let them also be afraid lest they die *old creatures*, tenants of the horrible pit, to move on only to the eternal pit, and afraid lest they be altogether swallowed up in the miry clay. Let them see these things so that, moved by fear, they may be persuaded to trust in God as you have done – to rest on the Rock Christ for righteousness.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

For Junior Readers

Every Good Gift . . .

Many years ago in England, a lot of people lived in poverty and lacked what we would think of as being the necessities of life. One such poor family lived on the estate of a rich landowner. The father, a godly man, was having family worship one evening, in the small hut where he lived with his wife and a large number of children.

As he was praying, the rich landowner, who had no religion, was walking past. Hearing the man's voice, he was curious and stopped to listen. He heard the poor man, with great love, giving thanks to God for His goodness

to them, for allowing them some food to eat, clothes to wear – for supplying them with what was really necessary for this life.

The rich man was astonished and said to himself, “Does this poor man, who has so little and has to work so hard for it, give thanks to God for His goodness to him and to his family?” Then he thought about himself: “I who enjoy comfort and honour and everything that is pleasant and desirable, have hardly ever knelt in prayer, or ever acknowledged my Maker and Preserver”.

God blessed this incident to him. It was used to awaken him to a real and lasting sense of religion.

What about you? Do you remember to thank God for all the good things you receive? Do you realise that the good things you enjoy do not come to you by chance? What does James tell us in chapter 1 of his Epistle?

He says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” – from God Himself! And the Apostle Paul also tells us, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”.

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

God Changed a Bad Man

One day, a lady gave a Bible to a man who lived near her home. But he said he would throw it into the fire as soon as she left his house. It was a very bad thing to do.

God has given us the Bible so that we might learn the way to heaven. But this man would not listen to God.

The lady went away. The man was ready to throw the Bible into the fire at once. His wife begged him not to do so, but he would not listen to her.

So she went outside and, after a while, she came back. She found that her husband had torn up the Bible and burnt it.

Just one leaf of the Bible was left. It had fallen on the floor. The woman picked it up, but her husband grabbed it from her and threw it into the fire. Soon it too was burnt.

But before it caught fire, the man had read a verse that was printed on it. The verse was: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away”. That was God speaking. He was saying that everything will pass away, except what He has said in the Bible. It is very important for us to listen to what God is saying.

The next night, the man was very restless in bed, turning from one side

to his other side, and back again. He must have felt he did wrong in burning the Bible. At last he asked his wife: "Can you tell me where the woman lives who gave me the Bible?"

Yes, she did know. It was too early to go to her house just then. But when the time was right, he went to visit her. He told her how this one verse from the Bible had disturbed him. She gave him another Bible.

The man was now glad to have the Bible. He took it home with him. He kept it and read it. He found out from the Bible how someone like him could be saved from his sins. It was not long before God changed that bad man into a good man. God is kind.

Brought to Safety

I am sure you have heard of, or seen, one of the many lifeboats operated by the RNLI. These lifeboats are ready to go to sea to help those who are in danger. One of the most dangerous situations that someone can be in at sea is to have entered the water and be in danger of drowning. The lifeboat crews of the RNLI are trained to get someone out of the water.

One of the ways they do this is to tie the ends of a rope to two rails on the lifeboat. Two crew members then coil the line in their hands and, when they have enough line, they cast the rope around the casualty in the water, which forms a loop around him. The two crew members will then draw each side of the line in. This results in the line catching the casualty and drawing him to the lifeboat, where the crew can then lift the casualty aboard to safety.

This can be used as an illustration of the invitation of the gospel. In a word such as *whosoever*, we see a line that has been cast around all who are in danger of drowning and being lost in the great deeps of the wrath of God because of sin. It is a line that is thrown around sinners of every kind, including you.

What are you to do with this rope? Well, we read of two possible responses to us being included in the gospel invitation. There is the response of the bride in the Song of Solomon 1:4: "Draw me, we will run after Thee". That is the best response you can give to the invitation of the gospel: asking that, by God's grace, He would bring you to Himself in Christ.

And there is the sad and foolish response which we see in Psalm 2:3: "Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us". Many sinners who hear the invitations of the gospel are like the men spoken about in Psalm 2. They do not want anything to do with the cords of mercy from Christ that would draw them to Him.

Surely the wisest choice we can make is to act like the bride and say to Christ: “Draw me.”
(Rev) John Morrison

Looking Around Us

How Should One Take An Oath?

When a case is to be tried in court, witnesses must either promise to tell the truth – a secular affirmation – or to swear on a “holy book”. The Bible is the only such book that is really holy; any other “holy book” belongs to a false religion. But a man appearing at Snaresbrook Crown Court in East London wanted to swear a legal oath on a river. He produced a vial of water taken from the River Roding. He explained afterwards that his devotion for the river, which includes planting trees along its banks, removing litter and campaigning against water pollution, is like a religion.

The court usher gave him a surprised look and asked him to take a sip of water from the vial to show that it was not poisonous. The man told the judge that the river was effectively his god, and that he holds the river to be sacred. So the judge allowed him to take the oath alongside a secular affirmation. The man may treat the river as if it was his god, but it certainly is not. It is part of creation, and the God of the Bible is the Creator. He is to be worshipped; His law is to be obeyed; and we are to trust in Him as the One who has provided salvation.

In treating a river as a god, we have another example of British people leaving off true religion. Israel was told to “fear the Lord thy God . . . and swear by His name” (Deuteronomy 10:20). So those who follow the true religion will use the name of the true God to take an oath: “I swear by Almighty God . . .”. (when they *must* take an oath – in a court, for example).

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2024-25

General Information

There will be three exercises, the first in this magazine, the second next February and the third in May. Search the Scriptures, and may the Lord bless His Word to you so that it may be mixed with faith in your hearts.

Please read the following rules very carefully before you begin:

1. Your section *for the whole year* is decided by your age on 1 October 2024. Stay in that section for the three sets of exercises. You may miss a prize or award by changing sections.
2. Exercises are to be sent to correctors, by post or by e-mail, before November

30, March 31 and June 30. So you have about two months in which to do each exercise. Please send it in time in case you lose marks for being late.

3. If answers are sent by e-mail it is helpful to send a separate e-mail for each person who is submitting exercises. The name of the person doing the exercise and their section should be the subject of the e-mail. If you are able to scan the completed exercises that is preferred. If you need to take a photo of them instead, please make sure that the answers are clearly readable.

4. Each entry is to be the work of the person whose name is on it, except for beginners in the Lower Primary Section, who are allowed a little help, as is anyone in any section who has special needs.

5. Prizes will be given in all sections except Lower Primary, and awards of books will be given to everyone in each section who does the three exercises.

6. Teachers and others working with young people can arrange for groups to do the exercises, and correctors will be glad to hear from them.

7. The exercises are based on the Bible Reading Cards which will be distributed through the ministers of the congregations (or they may be obtained from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE). It is very important for you to read God's Word every day. The exercises this year are based on the Bible readings from cards A and B: *Exercise 1*: 1 Samuel 26 to 2 Kings 6, and 2 Corinthians 5 to Hebrews 13. *Exercise 2*: 2 Kings 7 to 2 Chronicles 18, and James 1 to Revelation 22, Matthew 1-11. *Exercise 3*: 2 Chronicles 18 to Job 26, and Matthew 12 to Mark 16.

8. The exercises are also to be found as pdf files, at <http://www.fpchurch.org.uk/spiritual-help/scripture-and-catechism-exercises/>. When they are printed out, space is available for the answers.

9. The names of those who complete the first two exercises and of the award and prize winners will be published in *The Young People's Magazine*. Because of data protection laws, those who are doing the exercises for the first time should indicate on their answer paper if they wish their name to be published.

Exercise 1

All answers from *overseas* should be sent to Miss Naomi Clemence, 60 Dougalston Gardens South, Milngavie, Glasgow, G62 6HT; naomi.clemence@gmail.com. The correctors should have your answers before the end of November.

Senior Section (15 years old and over)

UK answers to Mrs J Hicklin, 22 Lasswade Road, Eskbank, EH22 3EF; jmhicklin86@gmail.com.

Old Testament

Read 1 Samuel 26.

1. Why did Saul go down to the wilderness of Ziph? (2)
2. What did David decide to do in verse 6 and who went with him? (2)
3. What did Abishai ask David if he could do, and how did he justify this plan of action? (3)
4. Why would David not agree? (2)
5. What did David do instead? (2)
6. What do we read that shows that God was protecting David? (2)
7. When Saul realised what had happened what did he say? (1)

8. What was David trying to prove to Saul by what he had done? (2)
9. Look at verse 24. What did David desire as a reward for valuing Saul's life? (2)
10. What can we learn from this about our own duty towards unjust rulers? (2)

New Testament

Read Galatians 1: 1-12.

1. What is the main reason for Paul writing this letter? (see verses 6-7) (2)
2. What does Paul say ought to happen to anyone who teaches another gospel? Why do you think he repeats this? (2)
3. What reasons does Paul give for insisting that they listen to his teaching rather than someone else's? (vv 11-12) (2)

Read Galatians 3.

4. What was the error that the Galatian church had been taught? (See Gal 2:16 as well.) (2)
 5. What reasons does Paul give in verses 2-5 to prove this is unreasonable? (3)
 6. How does Paul say that Abraham was made righteous in God's sight? (verse 6) (1)
 7. The Jews considered themselves to be Abraham's children. What does Paul say in verse 7 is necessary to be a child of Abraham? (1)
 8. What promise did God give that proves this was not just a promise for Jews? (2)
 9. Paul uses Abraham's faith as an argument to prove that faith is what justifies, not works. Can you think why this was a powerful argument to use against the influence of Jews trying to impose their ceremonial laws on the Gentile church? (2)
 10. In verse 10 we read that we are under the curse if we have broken any part of the law. Find and write out a verse that explains how that curse is removed. (3)
 11. In verse 17 Paul says that the promise was given long before the law. How does this help prove that salvation is by the promise, not by the law? (1)
 12. Look at the second part of Galatians 5. Is Paul teaching that it does not matter how we live? (1)
- List the graces that should characterise a Christian who is walking after the Spirit. (6)

Memory Exercise

Learn by heart and write out from memory the answer to Question 86 in the Shorter Catechism: What is faith in Jesus Christ? (3)

Intermediate Section (13 and 14 years old)

UK answers to *Mrs M Munro, 3 Borve, Isle of Harris, HS3 3HT; morag.rothach@hotmail.co.uk.*

Old Testament

1. Read 2 Samuel 4:4.
 - (a) Who was Mephibosheth? (1)
 - (b) How old was he when he lost his father? (1)
 - (c) What was his disability and how was it caused? (2)
2. Read 2 Samuel 9.
 - (a) For whose sake did David wish to show kindness to the house of Saul? (1)
 - (b) Detail the kindnesses which David showed to Mephibosheth. (2)
 - (c) What instruction did David give to Ziba? (2)
3. Read 2 Samuel 16:1-4.

Explain in your own words what happened when Ziba went out to meet David. (4)
4. Read 2 Samuel 19:24-30.
 - (a) What are we told about Mephibosheth's outward appearance when he came to meet David on David's return? (3)
 - (b) What does this tell us about how Mephibosheth felt about the uprising against David? (2)
 - (c) Explain Ziba's deception and betrayal. (3)
 - (d) What was David's response? (1)
 - (e) Quote the words of Mephibosheth which prove that his loyalty to David was sincere. (2)

New Testament

1. Read Ephesians 5:15-21. The Apostle Paul instructs believers to walk circumspectly, not foolishly. He gives six further pieces of advice about how they should live. List them. (6)
2. Read Ephesians chapter 6.
 - (a) Paul gives detailed advice to four different groups of believers in verses 1-9. Name the groups. (4)
 - (b) In each of the four groups:
 - (1) say what the advice was (4)
 - (2) explain the reason for it. (4)
 - (c) Why are we advised to "put on the whole armour of God"? (v 11) (1)
 - (d) List two pieces of armour that are mentioned in verses 14-17 (2)
 - (e) State, for the two pieces you have chosen, what each one stands for. (2)

Memory Exercise

- Learn by heart and write out from memory the answer to Question 63 in the Shorter Catechism: Which is the Fifth Commandment? (3)

Junior Section (11 and 12 years old)

UK answers to *Mrs M Logan, 21 Leys Drive, Inverness, IV2 3JB; moira.logan@btinternet.com*

Old Testament

1. Read 2 Samuel chapter 9.
 - (a) To whom did David say "Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake"? (1)
 - (b) What two acts of kindness did David say he would do for Jonathan? (2)
 - (c) This son of Jonathan had a weakness in his body. What was it? (1)
 - (d) Look up 2 Samuel 4:4. How did this happen and how old was he at the time? (2)
2. Read 1 Kings 17-18 and complete the table. (6)

What Elijah said	Who did he say it to?
(a) "Fear not; go and do as thou hast said:" (middle of chapter 17)	
(b) "Go tell thy lord, Behold Elijah is here," (middle of chapter 18)	
(c) "I have not troubled Israel: but thou and thy father's house" (middle of chapter 18)	
(d) "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (middle of chapter 18)	
(e) "Cry aloud: for he is a god" (middle of chapter 18)	
(f) "Go up now, look toward the sea" (end of chapter 18)	

3. Now answer the following questions about (a) to (f) from question 2. (Q 3a matches Q 2a etc.) (6)
 - (a) What 2 food items did this person have in the house? (1)
 - (b) Who was "thy lord"? (1)
 - (c) In what way had this person and his father's house troubled Israel? (1)
 - (d) What were the "two opinions"? (2)

Memory Exercise

Learn by heart and copy out the answer to Question 86 in the Shorter Catechism:

What is faith in Jesus Christ?

(3)

Lower Primary Section (8 years old and under)

UK answers to *Mrs A MacLean, 67 Gogarloch Syke, Edinburgh, EH12 9JD*

mrs.a.macleam@proton.me

Old Testament

Read about Naaman being healed in 2 Kings chapter 5 verses 1-17 and then write the missing words:

1. Naaman was a captain in the king of Syria's army, but he was a l_____.
2 Kings 5:1
2. A little m_____ told Naaman's wife there was a prophet in Samaria who could heal him of his disease.
2 Kings 5:2,3
3. Naaman came and stood at the d_____ of Elisha's house.
2 Kings 5:9
4. Elisha sent a messenger to tell Naaman to go and w_____ in the river Jordan seven times, and he would be clean.
2 Kings 5:10
5. At first Naaman was angry, but after his servants spoke to him, he went and dipped himself in Jordan s_____ times.
2 Kings 5:14
6. Naaman's flesh came again like the flesh of a l_____ child, and he was clean.
2 Kings 5:14
7. Naaman returned to Elisha and said that henceforth (from then on) he would not offer sacrifices to false gods but only unto the L_____.
2 Kings 5:17

New Testament

In Philippians chapter 4 verses 6-8 we read what we are to do instead of worrying, and what things we are to think about.

Read the verses and then choose the correct words to fill in the gaps:

God Jesus peace lovely prayer

1. Be careful (worried) for nothing; but in everything by _____ and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto _____.
Philippians 4:6
2. And the _____ of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ _____.
Philippians 4:7
3. We are to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, _____, and of good report.
Philippians 4:8

Read Hebrews chapter 4 verses 14-16 and chapter 9 verse 26 and chapter 10 verse 12. Then choose the correct words to fill in the gaps.

one sin need Jesus mercy himself

1. We have a great high priest, _____ the Son of God.
Hebrews 4:14
2. He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without _____.
Hebrews 4:15
3. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain _____, and find grace to help in time of _____.
Hebrews 4:16
4. He put away sin by the sacrifice of _____.
Hebrews 9:26
5. After he had offered _____ sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God.
Hebrews 10:12

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