

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: Near Kinlochbervie, in the far north of Scotland. Mackintosh Mackay belonged to this area. See page 218.

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Volume 89

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A Brother Who Cannot Die

Robert Murray M'Cheyne was born in 1813. He was to become a well-known minister. He went to Larbert, in central Scotland, in 1835 as the assistant to the minister there before moving to a new church in Dundee almost exactly a year later. He was an earnest, faithful pastor, and there were many conversions as a result of his ministry. One might expect that the Lord would have left him to continue his work for many long years, but instead the Lord took him away at the young age of 29. But we can be sure that God knew exactly what He was doing and that He is always working for the good of His Church in this world.

Robert would have been going to church while he was young, yet he also followed a worldly lifestyle. But he speaks of an event in 1831, when he was 17, that was, "the first overwhelming blow to my worldliness". He was referring to the death of his brother David at the age of only 26. David was older than Robert and had become a lawyer, but the Lord used David's death to begin the work of Robert's conversion. As Robert put it, "I lost my loved and loving brother and began to seek a Brother who cannot die".

As a dear brother, David could help Robert. He could warn his younger brother about the dangers of going on in worldly ways; he could remind Robert of the need to seek and find Christ, the Brother who cannot die. Robert needed Christ as His Saviour if he was to reach heaven at last and escape the danger of going down to a lost eternity.

We too need to seek the Brother who cannot die. Brothers and sisters in our family can help us, as David could help Robert. But they cannot save us. Even if they can point us towards the way of salvation, they cannot change our hearts; they cannot give us faith in Christ; they cannot give us a love to God and His ways.

On the other hand, Christ is able to supply all our needs. He did so for Robert, and He can do so for us. We are ignorant, and Christ can teach us all we need to know so that we may get safely through this world and on into heaven at the end of our days on earth. Our prayers are poor, but Christ stands between God and sinners like us. He is the One who makes intercession

for sinners, presenting their poor petitions, stained by sin, to His Father, so that they can be answered. We are constantly liable to go astray; so we need Christ to direct us, to protect us, to defend us. He is the Brother who will never die, who will always be with those who trust in Him; He will never leave them to themselves.

Robert had to seek the Lord Jesus Christ. David's death made him realise that he needed to do so. So do we. But where will we go to seek Him? Where can we hope to find Him? Where does Christ come to meet sinners? Let us note three places where we may hope to find Christ.

First, we may hope to meet Christ at the throne of grace; in other words, we can hope to meet Christ in prayer. He sits on His throne; He rules there as a King, and He comes to show mercy, or grace, to sinners when they go to pray in His name. *Second*, we may hope to meet Christ when we read the Bible. He tells us there who He is and what He has done for sinners, as the Saviour whom God sent into the world. *Third*, we may hope to meet Christ when we are listening to the preaching of the Word of God. In the preaching, the teachings of the Bible about Christ as a Saviour are explained and applied to those who are listening. Let us seek Christ earnestly in those three places in particular.

Light dawned slowly in Robert's soul. The Holy Spirit was convincing him that he was ungodly, that his whole nature was polluted – because he needed to see his need of the Saviour. He did not give up his worldliness in a moment. Even after he had begun to study for the ministry, people could persuade him to take part in worldly entertainments; yet these things were now leaving him uncomfortable.

So Robert wrote in his diary: "I hope never to play cards again"; he was realising that it was an activity from which he could get no profit for his soul; it was a complete waste of time. And what he most needed was to find Christ and salvation through Him. If David had been still alive, he might have guided Robert away from such worldly things. Yet the Brother who can never die was gradually and wisely guiding him in the right direction.

A month later, Robert notes that he stayed away from a dance, but he found it difficult to endure what others were saying – perhaps they were making fun of Robert or telling him how much he was missing, as they would have assumed. But Robert was learning that he was much better away from these things and that he could make much better use of his time; he might even find Christ when others were absorbed in worldly things.

He added, "I must try to bear the cross". And no doubt he did, for his own good and for the sake of Christ. These are things that today's young people need to learn also, though worldly entertainments may now be different in

some ways. Yet for the good of their souls, they need to turn away from the world although it will mean bearing the cross of Christ.

No doubt Robert was hearing about the way of salvation from the minister in the church he attended, as he preached. But it was in reading *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* that Robert came to a clear understanding of how God accepts sinners. (You can find it in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* volume which also contains the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*).

He would have read, among many other helpful statements: “So soon as [sinners] are brought by faith into the covenant of grace (1.) [God] justifies them, by imputing unto them that perfect obedience which Christ gave to the law, and the satisfaction also which upon the cross Christ gave unto justice in their name. (2.) He reconciles them, and makes them friends to God, who were before enemies to God. (3.) He adopts them, that they shall be no more children of Satan, but children of God, enriched with all spiritual privileges of His sons.”

We find Robert praying, “Lord, purify me and give me strength to dedicate myself, my all, to Thee”. He now had desires which only a godly person would have. So Robert had passed from death to life, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.

After he was clearly converted, Robert was noting, with appreciation, a comment of John Bruce, his minister in Edinburgh, on the seriousness of the charge to be made against someone who was not born again. Bruce was saying that this person may have “affection for his earthly parent, but none for God”. Robert was understanding now the sin of not loving the Creator, who has full authority over every human being.

And Robert was now thinking of the Sabbath as a complete test of a person’s heart. He was thinking of how he had been breaking the Sabbath before he was converted: it was “spent in weariness, as much of it as was given to God’s service. How I polluted it by my hypocrisies . . . my worldly thoughts and worldly friends!” These attitudes showed that Robert did not then have a new heart. And now that God had given him a new heart, we can expect that he now loved and valued the Sabbath; he would have seen it as an opportunity to get good for his soul and to worship God.

Let us test ourselves by our attitudes to the Sabbath. Do we have a new heart or not? Let us seek to be sure that we have found Christ for ourselves. And if we fear that we have not found Him, let us seek Him earnestly, for we are called: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”.

The information for this article is from Andrew Bonar’s life of his friend: *Robert Murray M’Cheyne*, which is part of *Memoir & Remains of Robert Murray M’Cheyne*. Both are recommended reading.

Assurance – the Lord Is My Shepherd

2. What Is the Basis for Assurance?

Rev J R Tallach

This is another section of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. The first section began to answer the question, What is assurance? A first answer is: The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. It comes from Romans 8:16.

Another way of coming to assurance is by considering what the marks, or special features, of God's children are and examining ourselves as to whether we have these marks. For example, a love of God's Word is a mark of the child of God.

One of the passages used, at communion seasons in our Church, to distinguish between spiritual life and spiritual death, includes Galatians 5: 22,23, verses which show evidence of spiritual life. The first three virtues identified are "love, joy, peace". These three blend into that holiness without which it is impossible to see God. They describe the affections, or emotions, of the renewed heart. Love is mentioned first as the primary force in the believer's life. Peace arises from a sense of reconciliation with God.

The second class of virtues mentioned, "longsuffering, gentleness, goodness", describe the believer's attitude to the outside world: he is patient and gentle toward others and shows kindness to all. The last three, "faith, meekness, temperance," define the settled character of the believer, which he maintains to the end. Faith adheres to the Word and its divine witness; meekness speaks of humility among men and before God; temperance is the quality of self-control, reasonableness and control over our heart rebellion.

As they are all fruits of the Spirit, these virtues give evidence of a state of grace and assure the believer that he is in Christ. The Psalms of David are full of such expressions, with Psalm 119, the longest in the Bible, dealing at length with the blessings and beauty of the Word. "Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

The Word of God is like the manna given as the bread of heaven to the Children of Israel in the wilderness. As the manna was food for the body, so the Bible is food for the soul. While the Israelites were satisfied with the manna, it was a good sign that they were content to be under God's care and protection as His children. When they began to weary of the manna and to loathe it (Numbers 21), they showed a rebellious spirit and that their hearts were turning back to Egypt.

Another mark is to be found in Ruth's choice: "Thy people shall be my people" (Ruth 1:16). The choice of the company, life and prospects of the

Lord's people over those of the world is another sign of grace. Again we read in 1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren". Jesus speaks as the Good Shepherd of His sheep, who follow Him. This is a picture of the child of God obeying the Saviour in following His Word: "If ye love Me keep My commandments" (John 14:15-18). This is another mark of a believer.

Not every believer is assured of being an heir of heaven and of eternal life. The strength of this assurance will also vary in any individual believer from time to time. It is not an essential part of the new creation, which occurs at conversion. John Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* has several characters who obviously have something less than full assurance, but they were still true pilgrims. For instance he has Mr Despondency (the name means that he was depressed) and his daughter Much-Afraid, and a man on crutches called Mr Ready-to-Halt – all of whom are genuine pilgrims and making progress on their way to heaven.

As evidence of this, when Mr Despondency came to the River of Death, he said, "Farewell night, welcome day". His daughter Much-Afraid went through the river singing, but no one could understand what she said. Probably Bunyan was referring to the "new song" to be sung in heaven. Mr Ready-to-Halt left his crutches on this side of the river, indicating he would have no need of them in heaven. He was saying, "There are plenty horses and chariots in heaven". In other words, a full assurance and full ability would be his in eternity.

But assurance is commended in the Word of God, and many difficulties may lie in the way of the believer who is searching for it. Yet it remains very desirable and is among "the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). We are commanded in Hebrews 6:12: "Be not slothful but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises". And in 2 Peter 1:10 we are told to "give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure".

At the Reformation many of the leading men were of the opinion that assurance of salvation was part and parcel of salvation itself. They believed that all true believers received an assurance that they were members of the Lord's family. John Calvin's definition of faith included a clear sense of this assurance in the heart of the believer – that he was one of the Lord's people.

The Reformation was a time of spiritual revival. The Holy Spirit was given to believers in a large measure and so they were able to overcome the persecution they suffered from the Roman Catholic Church. They felt assured, even while passing through great suffering, that the Lord loved them and that He Himself would be with them in glory. The presence and power of the

Spirit of God which was true of the Reformation may go some way towards explaining why Calvin and other Reformers gave such a central place to assurance in the exercise of faith.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that all sins are removed by baptism but that sins committed after baptism can only be removed by confessing sin to a priest; forgiveness, they say, is given by a priest or by spending time in purgatory after death. This means that a Roman Catholic can never be sure of his standing before God and is always dependent on his Church. Indeed it teaches that it is wrong to claim personal assurance of God's forgiveness and love, and shows spiritual pride.

This drives the true believer back to the basis for his own assurance which is the Word of God. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" (Romans 8:32-34). Our assurance is on the basis of God's Word and what it tells us about what Christ has done for His people.

John Welsh: a Man of Prayer

1. Youth and Early Ministry

This is the first section of a longer version of a paper which was read at this year's Youth Conference.

John Welsh's ministry in Ayr has been described as "one of the brightest times of spiritual enlargement that the Church" in Scotland "ever enjoyed". But we must remember that Welsh's preaching was the preaching of a remarkably godly man. Especially, there was his persevering in prayer and the extent to which God answered him.

It is thought that Welsh was born in 1569. He was the second of three sons born to another John Welsh, a small proprietor in Dumfries-shire. As a boy Welsh is described as "wayward and reckless", a truant who in the end left home and joined thieves on the Scottish-English border. When his clothes were worn out, he realised that home was not such a bad place after all. John made his way first to the town of Dumfries to visit his aunt, partly to get food and a change of clothes, but also in the hope that she would plead for him with his father.

He was not long in the house when the father himself arrived, but young John was at first kept out of sight. The aunt began by asking the father when he had last heard of his son. "O cruel woman," was the reply, "how can you mention his name to me? The first news I expect to hear of him is that he has

been hanged as a thief.” Later, young Welsh was produced. In tears he pleaded for forgiveness from his father and many were his promises of leading a better life. With his aunt’s help, his request was granted, and father and son made their way home together.

It is not known when Welsh was converted, but it was a different John Welsh who spent some further time at home before being sent to the Grammar School in Dumfries, when he was possibly still only about 11. But this may suggest that he was born well *before* 1568.

From Dumfries, Welsh was sent to the newly-founded University of Edinburgh. He was required to do an extra year of study there as his Latin was not good enough, and Latin was the main subject. His education was disrupted by an outbreak of the plague; in a short time 1400 Edinburgh people died – when the city was very much smaller than it now is. But Welsh did make satisfactory progress in his studies and graduated MA in 1588.

The next year Welsh became minister of Selkirk, when he was only about 21 if the traditional date of his birth is correct. His heart was so much set on proclaiming the gospel that nothing could keep him from accepting the call from Selkirk. Young as he was, one must assume that he was already noted as remarkable for his godliness and his preaching.

It was a time in the Scottish Church when godly preachers were few; so, though Welsh’s base was in Selkirk, his charge was enormous; it covered four parishes besides Selkirk. Among them was Ettrick, later to be blessed with the ministry of godly Thomas Boston. Welsh was called to cultivate barren soil, for the whole district was irreligious and immoral. The leading families had either continued to follow Romanism, or they had gone back to it. And most of the people were ready to follow them back.

Probably one of those exceptions was a small landowner by the name of Mitchellhill who gave lodgings to Welsh in his home, as Selkirk had no manse. Welsh shared a room with a young boy of the family, who even in old age recalled with great affection the young minister who came to stay with them. He used to tell of how, as Welsh went to bed, he would lay a plaid over his bedclothes, and how, when he would waken through the night, he would throw it over his shoulders before he began to pray. It is the first record we have of the extent to which, throughout his life, he gave himself to prayer. From the beginning of his ministry he reckoned the day ill-spent if he did not give seven or eight hours to prayer.

While he did not neglect preaching the gospel in its freeness, it is not surprising that in his situation he laid much greater emphasis on the law. While some appreciated Welsh’s preaching, others hated him – among them especially were many of the more influential men of the area. He kept two

good horses so that he could get around fairly easily, and every day he preached to some part of his huge congregation. Few cared to come to listen to Welsh, at least in Selkirk; he laboured diligently but many scoffed. Yet when, many years later, a minister called James Kirkton visited Selkirk he found a man who spoke of Welsh as an example of Christ. But, the man added, Welsh had to leave Selkirk “because of the malice of the wicked”.

Welsh left Selkirk in 1593 after a ministry of only four years. A James Scott, who had been appointed a reader of the Scriptures in part of Welsh's congregation, was deposed by the General Assembly for encouraging the Romanist superstitions of the people. He harboured a deep grudge against Welsh, and showed it by cutting the rumps of his two valuable horses, which were left to bleed to death. It would seem that Welsh himself was in danger of something similar happening to him. But we are told that even the ministers of that area were more ready to pick a quarrel with him than to follow his teaching.

It was possibly before his ministry in Selkirk ended that Welsh married. His wife Elizabeth was no ordinary woman – strong-minded and faithful to her principles, she was a true daughter of Scotland's greatest Reformer, John Knox, by his second wife Margaret.

Welsh's second charge was Kirkcudbright in south-west Scotland, not too far from where he was born; he was probably inducted there in 1595. It was only with difficulty that Welsh could find someone able and willing to transport his belongings to his new home. At last he found a young man who was prepared to help. Though poor, he was the owner of two horses. It must have been a long, difficult journey, all these years ago, to reach Kirkcudbright. Welsh gave the young man a gold coin and, what was better still, his blessing. He exhorted the man to fear God, assuring him that, if he did so, he would never be in need. And the young man did indeed prosper; he was clearly no loser for helping the despised minister.

The previous minister of the parish was David Blyth, an able, zealous man who was murdered, as was another neighbouring minister. Kirkcudbright was in fact a centre of opposition to the Protestant order of things, but it was a hopeful sign for the future that a Christian society had been set up in the district, in whose membership there were at least six elders.

Welsh was one of the 400 commissioners to the General Assembly of the Scottish Church in 1596 and so he would have joined in their solemn confession of the sins of all kinds of people in the country, and especially the sins of ministers. They renewed with uplifted hands their covenant with God, promising “to walk more warily in their ways and more diligently in their charges”. Many were in tears. Welsh saw this Assembly as the high

point of the Reformed Church in Scotland. “O Scotland,” he exclaimed, “what nation was like unto thee, that had the gospel so freely preached, Christ’s sacraments so purely ministered . . . as thou hast had?”

The Assembly appointed Welsh a member of a “Commission for the Visitation of Kirks”, whose duty it was to visit the churches in the most spiritually needy parts of the country, for there were large areas where the impact of the Reformation was very limited. Welsh was assigned to a large district of the Borders, along with five other ministers.

For Junior Readers

The Praying Soldier

Owen was a young Christian soldier many years ago. The soldiers lived in large rooms where they had no privacy. The other soldiers hated him for being religious. Their swearing and taking the Lord’s name in vain made him so sad that he used to try to find quiet places away on his own, where he could read his Bible and pray.

Gradually the other soldiers and the officers began to notice that he was away a lot from the room where he slept. As they were involved in a war they suspected that the reason for him disappearing was to speak to the rebels. This unjust accusation was probably passed on by his wicked comrades. At last he was summoned to be tried by a court martial and he was condemned to die.

When the commander heard of this, he asked for the record of what had happened at the trial. He was not satisfied with what he read and sent for Owen so that he could question him personally. Owen solemnly denied any contact with the enemy, declared his loyalty to the King and his willingness to live and die in his service.

Owen then explained that the reason for his absences was that he needed a quiet place to pray. The commander realised that he would not have any chance to do this in the company of his godless, mocking companions. Owen made it clear that he had explained his actions at the trial, but the officers paid no attention to what he said.

The commander then decided that, if what he said was true, he must have some ability in prayer and that he would like to hear him. Poor Owen replied that he had no ability of his own. But when the commander insisted that he kneel down and pray in front of him, he was helped to pour out his soul to God so sincerely and earnestly that the commander was convinced he was genuine.

He took Owen by the hand and told him that he was completely satisfied that only a man who lived close to God could pray like that! He then used his authority to reverse the death sentence. He also made Owen one of his personal attendants and told him it was possible he might be promoted further!

Do you pray? Do you pray that the Lord would save your soul? Should Owen's story not encourage you to pray, even when you are in a difficult position? The Bible says, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him [that is, God], and He shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

J van Kralingen

White Lies

Caroline was Captain Richard's daughter. The whole family loved her. But she was sick, very sick. And the doctors gave strict orders that nothing must be said that would upset her.

Her father was away on a long voyage. His family should have heard, some weeks before then, that the ship had arrived at its destination. But they had heard nothing. They tried to convince themselves that no news was good news. But they did not really believe it.

At last news came. The family found it in a newspaper: just a few words, the ship was "lost, and all on board perished".

The Captain's wife was naturally very upset. Her first thought was for her daughter. She said, "Keep it from Caroline; the news will kill her". Her doctor agreed; he said, "Better not tell Caroline". He was afraid of what might happen if she heard the truth.

That night her cousin Lucy was watching by Caroline's bedside. Lucy was told again and again not to tell Caroline what had happened.

"But if she should directly ask me?" asked Lucy.

"Conceal it in some way" her brother told her; "tell her a white lie."

Lucy was upset.

"There is no harm in such lies," everyone told her. "White lies are innocent enough." Most people consider a white lie to be harmless because it is often about something not very important and is meant to keep someone from feeling hurt. But it is still a sin, and really there are no small sins.

Lucy tried to argue in favour of telling the truth. She did not believe that white lies were innocent. She believed that the devil, whom Christ described as "the father of lies", was trying to deceive people by making such lies appear white.

Lucy was in a difficult position, but she saw that she must say nothing but

the truth. The night hours passed slowly. Caroline said little; she tossed restlessly on her bed. About midnight she called Lucy to her bedside. She looked earnestly at her cousin and asked, "Have they heard from Pappa?"

"Not directly from him", Lucy answered.

"Is there news of the ship?"

"Yes", Lucy answered.

"What?"

"Your father is in heaven", Lucy answered in a kindly voice.

"Thank God; I *know*." The uncertainty was over for Caroline. She told Lucy: "Pappa is safely anchored, for ever anchored in the heavenly court". Caroline felt sure her father was safe in heaven.

"Lucy, I felt something had happened in the family, but no one would tell me. Thank God I know – for ever safe." Lucy kept to the truth but spoke as gently as possible.

Soon Caroline asked Lucy to pray with her. Though they were sad, they found it good to cast their burden on the One who could care for them.

The next morning it was Caroline who was able to comfort her mother. Clearly no harm had come from telling the truth.

It is not always our duty to tell everything we know. But when it is our duty to speak, we must speak the truth. If we stick to the truth, we leave the result of what we say to God, and we can pray to Him to protect us from harmful consequences. But, whatever our motive, if we stray from the truth, we take the matter into our own hands, and that is dangerous. We should ask God to keep us from telling lies of any kind.

Adapted from The Family Treasury for 1860

For Younger Readers

How Could the Little Boy Be Safe?

A lady was driving along a busy street in London. She saw a man and a little boy walking along the pavement hand in hand. The man was carrying a letter and he stopped to put it in the post box.

As he did so he let go the boy's hand. It was just for a moment, but the boy at once ran towards the road, with lots of cars and vans, and perhaps buses and lorries, rushing along.

The boy did not think of the danger, I am sure. And I am sure the man moved very quickly to grasp the boy's hand again. That was the only way the boy could be safe.

You are going through a very dangerous world, where there are lots of things to put you in danger – many things to make you do what is wrong, to make you sin against God. How can you be safe? It is by asking God to take care of you. It is as if you would ask God to take you by the hand and lead you on. He is able to do so.

But the danger is that you would pull away your hand and try to run away from God. You must ask Him to keep you, to lead you on safely and bring you at last to heaven.

Harry's Sin and Its Consequences

John Ashworth

A chapter shortened from Ashworth's *Life and Strange Tales*

Harry was a bookkeeper; he was one of those who wrote up the account books of the firm he worked for. A lot of money probably passed through his hands. For several years he patiently toiled on, receiving each year a small increase in his salary, and was more and more trusted with work requiring the strictest honesty. Each Sabbath he went to church, and when he looked to the future, all seemed well. But one thing was wrong. He was not converted, and so he was less prepared for temptation.

There was a young man in the same office with Harry who was impatient to make money and was not careful about God's commands. One day the two were alone in the office; Harry was busy at the desk, and the other man standing near the fire.

Harry's colleague quietly pointed out to him how hard they had to work, while their employers had plenty money and even had houses in the country. He was wanting to make money quickly. He invited Harry to come with him that evening to a room where they found several men drinking alcohol. They were also betting on horse races. Harry realised at once where he was, and soon left for home. But his interest was kindled a little.

The head of the firm heard that the new clerk often went to such a place – at a time when betting was illegal – and at once dismissed him. Harry took his colleague's dismissal as a warning. But a few weeks after, the dismissed clerk met Harry at a railway station and told him that he had made a lot of money by betting, and offered to give him information secretly when the chances of some horse winning were good, and to be his agent for any amount he wished to stake.

Harry had £5, part of his salary for three months – no doubt, a significant

part of his salary – and in a moment of weakness he handed it to the other man. A few days afterwards £12 was brought back, a profit of £7, made at the York races. But those involved in betting can make a serious loss as well as a big profit. Besides, he was fulfilling Paul's warning, "they that will [that is, wish to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare" (1 Timothy 6:9). Harry should have been "content with such things as" he had (Hebrews 13:5).

Harry was hooked; he continued betting, sometimes winning and sometimes losing. In the end he lost more than he could pay; someone lent him the money he needed for six months, but charged him a huge rate of interest: 30%. From then on, Harry had a troubled conscience; he did not know how to meet the bill when it fell due, and he worried about being exposed as a gambler, when he would probably lose his job. His wife noticed that he was often silent and thoughtful, and troubled in his sleep, but just urged him to take a little more exercise in the open air; she did not realise what her husband had done.

If Harry had listened to just one sentence of the Bible: "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Proverbs 1:10), he would not have suffered like this, especially if he had sought the Lord and found Him. As a new creature in Christ Jesus, he would then have sought guidance in prayer, and God would have directed his paths. No godly person wants money without earning it, or without giving something in exchange, or receiving it as a gift.

As the time approached for his debt to be repaid, Harry got more worried. All hope was gone that the man who first led him astray would help him, for he had to leave the country to escape the consequences of his gambling. He joined the Southern army in the United States during the Civil War and lost his life. So Harry was left alone to meet the coming trouble.

At his firm, he had to help in stocktaking and hid a valuable article. In the dark he had it taken to a receiver of stolen goods; he used the money to pay his betting debt. It was nearly a year and a half before the theft was detected, and during those 18 months it would be impossible for anyone to describe the extreme mental suffering that Harry endured.

After being sent to prison for his crime, he spoke to me of this fearful period. He said, "I believe there needs no hell to be more terrible than a guilty conscience – to know that you have committed a crime for which terrible revenge may overtake you any moment; to feel . . . when you rise in the morning you may be in jail before evening

"All this I have passed through and seen my darkest prophecies fulfilled. I thought of emigration; I thought of suicide; I thought of prayer, but I dared not pray; and when my two little ones have knelt at their mother's feet saying [the Lord's Prayer] I have often left the room to weep in secret. I

could not bear the sight; and sometimes when kissing them I have long held them clasped to my heart, fearing it might be the last time. I then saw the beauty of early piety as I had never seen it before, and if I had known God when my heart was tender; if I had been strengthened with religion when the temptation came; if I had sought shelter near the cross when the enemy [Satan] assailed me, I should have saved others untold sorrow and never have come to this place.”

The day of reckoning had come, as it will for all crimes, sooner or later – if not in this life, certainly at the Day of Judgement. As Harry said, his darkest prophecies had been fulfilled. But one sentence he uttered made a very deep impression on my mind: that he did not dare pray. I think he was wrong here; he ought to have prayed. If he neglected at the proper time to pray in earnest the petition, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” then after he had fallen into sin, he ought to have prayed for power to go at once and confess his guilt to the person he had wronged, ask for time to pay and for forgiveness.

No doubt there would have been a risk in doing this, but it would have been the best option. I believe that to pray and not intend to act is to mock God, when we are in a position to put right a wrong which we have done. Repayment, if possible, must be made.

The following account may explain what I mean: someone near here bought a pair of stockings at a draper's shop. The price was 2 shillings and 6 pence. In payment he put 10 shillings down on the counter; the draper thought it was a pound (then 20 shillings) and gave him 17 shillings and 6 pence as change, and the man walked away with the stockings and 10 shillings of the draper's money. Not long afterwards, the man came under deep conviction for sin – not only for this sin but all his sins. He besought the Lord, for Christ's sake, to pardon him and give him peace of mind.

But every time he knelt down to pray, the 10 shillings rose up in his thoughts. He believed he could not obtain forgiveness until that money was returned. He went to the draper and asked to speak to him on his own. He was taken into a back room, and there, with shame and sorrow, he laid down the 10 shillings. Nervously confessing his wickedness, he told the draper his state of mind and asked for pardon.

The draper was a good man and at once forgave him, and joined with him in prayer that God would blot out all his iniquities. Their prayers were heard, and the man, like the publican in Jesus' parable, went down to his house justified. But the man who bought the socks still believes that, if he had not taken back the money, he could never have found mercy. Had Harry taken the same course, though he could not have at once paid back what he owed,

he would probably have been given time to do so and might have been saved from prison.

I was talking with Harry about his family, his present condition and his future prospects. While doing so, I told him that, until his sentence was finished, he must consider himself an outlaw; yet that the Lord never refused to receive those who repent. He who could take the repentant thief with Him to paradise would always prove a friend to the burdened and heavy-laden.

Harry's answer was: "It is kind of you to try to comfort me; as for this world it now seems to me a blank. Ever since I took the first wrong step, the sunshine of this life departed; spring and summer came and went, but I never seemed to see or feel them; the flowers bloomed, but not for me; the birds sang, but not for me. O if the innocent only knew how priceless their innocence is, that no wealth could purchase it! The value of our blessings are best seen when they are lost! I felt for my poor disgraced parents; I feel deeply for my dear wife and dear children. I have often been tempted to wish I had not one relation to share this bitter cup."

"Yes, Harry, I can to some extent understand your condition. Your relations will hang down their heads, and the memory of you will be to them painful; but the deed is done, and cannot now be called back; and if He that reads all hearts sees that you truly repent, and that your breaking heart yearns for the help of the only hand that can bind it up, then, yes, even in prison, an unspeakable peace shall be yours. 'Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest,' are Christ's blessed words."

Harry rose from the bench on which he had been sitting, and after walking quickly several times across the small cell, he stopped in front of me and said with intense earnestness, "I believe there is mercy, even for the chief of sinners, and I will seek it. But tell my friends, and especially my relatives, that though I am suffering the just penalty for my crime, yet I will work night and day to pay back what I have taken if I am spared to have my liberty. I am no thief at heart. I hate my crime and trust the time may yet come when at least some degree of happiness may be my lot, and the lot of my sorrowing wife and children."

I left Harry with the conviction stronger than ever that, without saving and restraining grace, no one is truly safe from falling into temptation. There is a weak place in every soul that only God can guard. Harry fell where many have stumbled. Strict honesty would have shielded him from the betting man, and from stealing his employer's goods. Honesty is truly the best policy, and the best security, for this is true religion. It will ever be true: Religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace". Some think lightly of this fact, but among them cannot be reckoned poor Harry.

William Calder's Advice

Macintosh Mackay was once a well-known minister in Scotland, but he also spent 10 years preaching in Australia. He was born in the far north of Scotland and went to school in the village of Tongue which was quite a distance from his home. He would have had to stay away from home for some months at a time while he attended the school.

During his times away from home, he often visited a godly man called William Calder. When his time in Tongue school was finished, Mackintosh went to pay one final visit to his friend. He found Calder working in a field. Looking kindly at young Mackintosh, he gave the boy good parting advice. It was good advice because it came from the Bible.

He used the words of King David to his son Solomon: "My son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Obviously Mackintosh's father was himself converted; he was seeking to live a godly life, to obey God's commandments. It was important for Mackintosh to know his father's God. Calder meant that Mackintosh ought to be like his father, learn about God from the Bible and trust in Him as the One who has provided salvation for sinners. Then Mackintosh would serve God sincerely and willingly, seeking to keep God's commands, like his father. That was what David had wished for Solomon.

Then David warned his son, and Calder was reminding Mackintosh that God could search his heart; God could see what was happening in the boy's heart and was able to search everything that was happening in his mind – his thoughts and his imaginations. In particular, God could see Macintosh's wishes and his motives. Not only could He see them; He could also understand them, and He could understand them completely.

Calder was telling the boy to follow his father's example. Calder assured him that all would be well if Mackintosh would seek God: he would find Him. But if Mackintosh would forsake God – if he would give up religion; stop reading his Bible, praying to God and going to church – then the Lord would forsake him; He would leave Macintosh to himself, to his own carelessness. The great danger was that the Lord would forsake him *for ever*.

The advice that William Calder gave to young Macintosh is relevant to young people today, especially those who have, or had, godly parents. Especially when you start off on a new stage in life, remember your responsibility to seek the Lord and to do so earnestly and urgently.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2023-24

Overseas Prizes and Awards

Senior Section

Prizes: *Auckland:* Peter Campbell, Amelia Smith. *Chesley:* Isabel Bouman, Kara Zekveld.

Awards: *Auckland:* Aaron Smith. *Calgary:* Kharis and Khloe Chang. *Grafton:* Levi Kidd.

Intermediate Section

Prizes: *Gisborne:* Shona Hembd. *Münster:* Clara Rösner.

Awards: *Auckland:* Joseph Campbell. *Gisborne:* Brooklyn Hembd.

Junior Section

Prizes: *Chesley:* Angela Tuinier. *Gisborne:* Preston Hembd. *Grafton:* Harrison Kidd. *Sydney:* Ethan Macdonald.

Awards: *Auckland:* Keith Smith. *Calgary:* Karsten Chang. *Maine:* Kayla Crum. *Wentworthville:* Sarah Steel.

Upper Primary Section

Prizes: *Chesley:* Meleah Tuinier. *Edmonton:* John Mun. *Gisborne:* Ashley Hembd. *Sydney:* Abigail and Lachlan Macdonald.

Awards: *Auckland:* Marion Campbell. *Carterton:* Lana de Boer. *Maine:* Leah Crum. *Münster:* Conrad Rösner. *Wentworthville:* David Steel.

Lower Primary Section

Awards: *Auckland:* David Campbell, Daniel Smith. *Calafell:* Valentina Nayach van Essen. *Carterton:* Mila de Boer. *Edmonton:* Anna and Isaiah Mun. *Fountain Inn:* Catherine Kerr. *Gisborne:* Andrew Hembd. *Sydney:* Jackson Campbell, Oliver Campbell, Hugh and James Macdonald. *Wentworthville:* Emily and Lachlan Steel.

Looking Around Us

An Attempt to Hide

A man was suspected of some crime and hoped that the police would not find him. So he went home and hid inside a sofa.

Officers from Bedfordshire Police turned up at a house in the town of Potton with a warrant to arrest the man at about 07.20 one morning. After searching the property, they thought there was nothing to be found except a friendly dog.

They decided they needed to search the house more carefully. During their first search of the property, they overturned a large sofa. Now they looked more carefully and found the man hiding inside it.

The man's attempt to hide from the police was unsuccessful. No doubt many criminals have been successful in hiding to avoid arrest. But no one can hide from God, no matter how clever their attempt might be. He sees everything that everyone does.

And when God will bring to judgement all who have ever lived, no one

will be able to hide. The Bible tells us: “God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Nothing can be kept secret from God.

So we need to have our sins forgiven. And the wonderful thing is that God calls sinners to come to His Son, Jesus Christ, to receive forgiveness freely, “without money and without price”.

God goes on to ask people why they waste money (and time) on what is useless – what can never profit us. He says, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isaiah 55:2). God tells us to listen to what He says in the Bible, so that we may find what is good, what will truly profit us – not only for this life, but throughout eternity.

Can Everyone Live Smiling?

Japan has a new prime minister. Probably very few people in, for example, the United Kingdom are very interested in this development; after all, it was reported in my newspaper in a very small article.

The new leader of Japan’s government is Shigeru Ishiba. He declared that he would put every effort into making “Japan a safe and secure country where everyone can live smiling”. But can he possibly succeed in making everyone smile all the time? In a world of sin, this is just not possible. For one thing, death followed sin into the world. And when people lose loved ones, they may find it very difficult to smile; they may be too sad..

Politicians too often promise far more than they can hope to deliver. We should look to God Himself to help us when our circumstances become difficult. If we take our sins seriously and realise that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) – eternal death – we should find it hard to smile.

Politicians can do nothing for us in a time of spiritual trouble. But God can help us. So we should go to Him, in the name of Jesus Christ, asking for forgiveness and a new heart. We should remember that God is very gracious, even to those who have rebelled against Him. Think of His great love in sending His Son into the world so that spiritually dead sinners might be delivered from their sins and from all the consequences that flow from sin. Let us listen to Christ’s call: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

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