

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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Volume 89

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Number 12

We Need a Mediator

One of Solomon's proverbs begins, "The Lord is far from the wicked" (Proverbs 15:29). That does not, of course, mean that God is far from wicked people in every sense. The Apostle Paul told the people in Athens about the true God: He is "not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27,28), for God is everywhere.

But God is far away from wicked people in a spiritual sense; their sins are still separating between them and their God (see Isaiah 59:2). Whatever other sins they may have, they do not love Him; they are not seeking Him. Yet He sees them and he sees their sins; He knows everything about them; nothing can be hidden from Him.

But who are the *wicked*? Are they obvious sinners who have committed murder, for instance, armed robbery, or have cheated other people out of a large sum of money? Obviously such people are included among the wicked, but many more are described by that word. Often, when the Bible describes people as wicked, all are included who are not born again, who do not seek to be made holy, who do not wish to glorify God in all that they do, who do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Their sins have not been forgiven (at least, they have not been forgiven *yet*) and so their sins are still separating these people from God.

We should all want to be near to God. Then He will watch over us and keep us from harm and danger, especially from spiritual harm and danger. We should remember that we cannot watch over ourselves as we make our way through this world. We need God's care; we need Him to be near us wherever we are and wherever we may go. And if God has brought us near to Himself, all will be well when we die – in spite of the solemnity of passing away from this world and entering into eternity. If we have been brought near to God, we will be brought to heaven – where we will be for ever near God, with all the blessings that implies.

But how can we draw near to God? The answer is that we need a *mediator*, someone to stand between us sinners and God, and to bring us to Him. And who can function as a mediator? It cannot be another human being. If that human being is unconverted, he or she is far away from God and cannot

bring any other human being nearer God. And even if that human being has been converted, he or she lacks the power to bring anyone else nearer to God. But what about an angel, an angel who never fell into sin, who is perfectly pure and holy? Even that perfectly pure and holy angel lacks the power to bring a sinful human being near to God.

The only one who can function as a mediator between sinful human beings and the Most High God is the Son of God. He can do so because He took a human nature into union with His divine Person, and so He is both God and man. This is not something that we can fully understand, but it is revealed in the Bible; God has revealed it to us through the Bible. So we must believe it; everything that God says is absolutely true.

To say that Christ is both God and man is to say what is perfectly true – because God has said it in His Word. It cannot be difficult to believe that Jesus in this world was a man. Yet when Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”, the Jews who heard Him understood that He meant “that God was His Father, making Himself *equal* with God” (John 5:17,18). And if He was equal with God, He must have been God.

So we must believe that Jesus Christ can stand between sinners and His Father to bestow blessings on sinners. To use words in the Bible, He can “lay His hand upon us both” (Job 9:33) – on both man and God. He stands between the sinner and God, for on the one hand, He has taken the same nature as the sinner possesses (but without sin, for He is perfectly holy, even in His human nature) – and on the other hand, He has the same divine nature as God the Father.

Especially, the Lord Jesus became Mediator so that He might provide salvation for sinners. He stood between sinners and His Father when He came to die in the place of sinners. He took their guilt and suffered instead of fallen human beings; He even died instead of them. He stood as Mediator between them and God, so that whoever will believe in Christ will not perish but have everlasting life.

Christ as Mediator calls to sinners: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He still calls to sinners, and everyone who trusts in Him will be saved; the punishment that they deserved was transferred to Him. They will have God’s blessing throughout this life and they will be taken to the eternal blessedness of heaven when they die. He is the Mediator that we all need. How important it is to seek Him, and to seek Him earnestly *now*.

Legh Richmond was a minister on the Isle of Wight; he was one day preaching at a meeting in Edinburgh. It was in support of gospel work that was being done among sailors. Richmond told the congregation about a

young man who went to sea, although he was not fit to face the dangers of a seafaring life. The major danger was to be shipwrecked and to drown.

Then the sad news reached his family that the ship the young man sailed in had been wrecked and that he was dead. The great concern of the man's parents was that they had not heard anything about the condition of his soul before he died. Then they heard that he had been saved from the shipwreck, which must have been a great relief.

Afterwards they heard even better news: before the young man's ship had been wrecked, he had begun to read the Bible which his father had given him when he left home to go to sea. Obviously it was not possible for that young man to go to any church services while he was at sea; he had nothing but the Bible to guide him, not even another sailor. They were all ungodly; none of them could give him the least spiritual help.

But God found him and drew him to Himself. We are not told the details of the young man's conversion. But we can be sure that he learned that he was a sinner and needed a mediator to stand between him and God. He would also have learned from the Bible that the mediator he needed was the Lord Jesus Christ, who died in the place of sinners.

We can also be sure that Christ, the great Prophet, taught him what he needed to know about how a sinner can be saved. And how can a sinner be saved? The best answer is the one that Paul and Silas gave to the jailer in Philippi: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Jesus Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the young man; so he received a new heart and was made able and willing to believe in Christ as the Saviour of sinners.

The young man would also have begun to pray and, having believed in Christ, he could be sure that God was hearing his prayers. Why could he be sure? Because the Mediator makes intercession for His people; He presents their petitions to God. As Mediator, He takes their imperfect petitions and, on the basis of His saving work for them, He can purify these petitions and claim an answer to them. So Christ "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him [Christ, who is the Mediator], seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

We all need a mediator, and the mediator we need is the One whom God sent to be the Saviour of the world (see 1 John 4:14). As the Saviour of the world, sinners everywhere – sinners of every kind – are called to take Christ as the Mediator between them and God. You are to trust in Him as the One who is able to reconcile all sorts of sinners to God. No one is to imagine that they are too sinful to be accepted; they can be assured that Jesus still says to sinners: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

“Left to Prosper”

It seemed a strange thing to say but, “Left to prosper”, is what Somers said to Hunt after someone died whom the two men both knew. Somers added, “He gathered property very fast and died before he found time to enjoy it”.

Hunt replied with a highly significant question: “Did he die without hope?” He meant a hope of salvation, a hope of reaching heaven.

“He was sick only two days and was delirious the whole time.” He had a fever, Somers was telling his friend; he could not think clearly. All that the man who had died was saying had to do with a business venture in which he had recently become involved.

Hunt then commented, “Another sad illustration of the danger of delay” – delay in seeking salvation and trusting in Christ.

The two men had just reached a point where their ways parted, when a third man, called Ames, caught up with them. He was struck by the words he overheard: “left to prosper”. To *prosper* would usually be thought of as a blessing. As Somers had used the word, it seemed to indicate God’s judgement. Ames asked who the two men were speaking about.

Somers explained, “I was speaking of a Mr Johnson, a man who lived near me before I came to this place”.

“Does the blessing of God not cause prosperity?”

“It does,” Somers answered, “but prosperity is not always a blessing. No, it is often a great evil.” And he went on to refer to a letter that someone had written to one of his children; the writer believed that we should be most concerned about a long course of prosperity in this world. He felt that God sometimes gives people what they most wish for, although it results in their ruin. No doubt he was especially thinking of the ruin of the person’s soul.

“You think that was the case in regard to Mr Johnson?” Ames asked.

“I do.” Somers said that Johnson was taught his duty when he was a boy. His father died when he was young, but an uncle – a good man – brought him up. The Holy Spirit worked conviction of sin in his mind several times before he became an adult. At one time most people who knew him thought he was a true believer; for over a year he came regularly to all the meetings in his congregation.

Somers went on: “He told me afterwards that he could not, at that time, make up his mind to forsake all for Christ. He had a course of life marked out, and the object of that course was wealth. He was afraid that, if he became a Christian, it would be his duty to become a minister.” That, of course, was not true. *If* God had called him to become a minister after he had been converted, then it would have been his duty to go and preach the gospel.

But his attitude shows that he was making a god of money; he was worshipping wealth rather than the God who made all things. God has a right to demand that all should believe in Christ and follow Him always, giving God the first place in their lives.

Some years later, Johnson heard a sermon which spoke about God calling some people to be lawyers, others to be farmers, others to be businessmen, as well as some to be ministers. Yes, God does in His providence order the occupations that people will follow, but the call to be a minister is very different. God does not make it someone’s duty to be a lawyer or a farmer or a businessman, but He does convince the men He calls to the ministry that it is their *duty* to preach the gospel.

After hearing that preacher, Johnson said, “If I had heard that sermon a dozen years ago, I should have become a Christian”. He seems to have been saying that he only needed to make some decision and automatically he would become a true believer. But no, he needed the saving power of God’s Spirit. He needed to believe, and Paul tells us in the Bible: “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that *not of yourselves*: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). We need to trust in Christ for salvation; so we should pray earnestly that God would indeed work in our hearts, for Jesus’ sake, and give us the grace that we need to believe in Him.

Ames then asked, “Did no one urge him to become a Christian when he discovered his error?”

Somers was able to assure him that someone had so urged Johnson. “But his excuse was that he had so many things to think of that he could not give religion the amount of thought that was necessary. He said he would like to do thoroughly what he did, and he could do only one thing at a time. If he was to undertake to attend to religion, yet he would not have attended to it, for he had a world of other business on his hands.

“He was asked when he would have less, and he said that he did not expect to be always as busy as he was then. Some time afterwards he was awakened to a concern about his soul, but his seriousness often passed away. And while others pressed into the kingdom of God, he stayed outside.”

In God’s providence, Johnson suffered serious difficulties, which should have made him loosen his grip on worldly things – which Somers believed were “dragging him down to hell”. Some of his best-laid plans did not work out. At that time, a friend went to warn Johnson that God had given him time to take care of his soul.

But Johnson replied, “You were never more mistaken in your life, for I am harassed night and day. [Even] if I was sure of being lost, I could not attend to religion while my affairs are in their present state.” Clearly, he had

his priorities completely wrong. He was paying no attention to the Saviour's call, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these [other] things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Johnson now gave all his attention to his businesses and was successful in almost everything he did. He did have a further time of concern about his soul and he did experience one further difficulty in his business affairs. But these passed, leaving his soul harder than ever before – more resistant to the truths of God's Word. He avoided all conversation about religion and only came to church for one service on Sabbaths.

He became far richer than he ever imagined he could be. He prospered in this world but, it seems clear, he lost his soul. Somers was right: God left him to prosper, and he refused Christ. And "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). These questions are to be pondered seriously, especially by those who are ambitious to get rich or to have some other kind of worldly success. Do not delay seeking salvation.

For Junior Readers

Samuel Medley (1)

Nearly 300 years ago a boy called Samuel lived in Enfield, North London. His parents were godly and he was well brought up. He attended a school run by his grandfather, also a godly man.

When Samuel finished his schooling he became an apprentice in the cloth trade, but he was not at all happy. Both his brothers were already serving in the navy and he really wanted to do the same. But in those days it was very difficult for apprentices to break their employment agreements and move to another job.

Then, in 1755, war broke out between England and France, and a law was passed allowing apprentices to transfer to the navy. Samuel was delighted at getting this opportunity and he was keen to have a glorious naval career. So, aged only 17, he was placed on a large gunship, and the Captain was so impressed with his enthusiasm that he promised to help him make progress in his career.

He then spent the next few years sailing in the Mediterranean Sea. Sadly he soon forgot his Christian upbringing and he spent a lot of his time in sinful pleasure.

A few years later, his ship was involved in a sea battle in which many were wounded and many died. In spite of a cannon ball hitting two sailors

close by him, Samuel was unmoved. Then he heard someone shouting his name, telling him he had been wounded. "I think not," Samuel replied! But, when he looked down, he saw that most of the calf of one of his legs had been shot away and he was losing a lot of blood.

As he was now an invalid he had to spend a lot of time in bed, but the wounded leg did not heal. The ship's surgeon warned him that gangrene was setting in and that he might have to cut off his leg. As you can imagine, this was a dreadful prospect in those days before there were any anaesthetics to prevent him feeling the pain in his leg when the surgeon was cutting it off.

Samuel was so afraid that he could not sleep. He was really terrified at the thought of losing his leg. He thought about his godly father and grandfather, who had often encouraged him to pray.

Then he remembered that there was a Bible in his chest, where he kept his belongings. He sent a servant to find it and spent the rest of that long night reading God's Word and praying that his leg would be healed. When the surgeon came round the next morning, he was truly amazed at the improvement. "There is no need now for an operation", he said!

For the first time Samuel realised that there was something real in true religion. But sadly, as his leg healed, his religious impressions wore off, and soon he was as bad as before.

J van Kralingen

John Welsh: a Man of Prayer

2. Minister in Kirkcudbright and Ayr

This is a further section of a longer version of a paper which was read at this year's Youth Conference. The first part dealt with Welsh's young years and his studies, and then with his ministries in Selkirk and Kirkcudbright.

From 1596 onwards, the King, James VI, interfered more and more in the affairs of the Scottish Church, with drastic consequences for her purity, liberty and peace. The King took the opportunity to begin putting into effect the project which was so close to his heart – of removing the Presbyterianism of the Church of Scotland and replacing it with Episcopacy, which, he rightly judged, would make the Church more willing to submit to his desire to have everything in Church and state under his control. He had no regard for Christ as the Head of the Church.

The first victim of the King's new policy was David Black, minister of St Andrews, a man, we are told, mighty in doctrine and very faithful and diligent in the ministry. Shortly afterwards Welsh was appointed to preach on the Sabbath in the pulpit so long occupied by John Knox, his father-in-law – that

of St Giles'. One of Welsh's fellow-ministers, John Forbes of the Aberdeenshire town of Alford reported, "Mr John Welsh both gravely, wisely and solidly, in great liberty and freedom of the Spirit . . . uttered the counsel and will of God to His Majesty and his counsellors, not sparing to rebuke their known enormities" – though the King was not, in fact, present.

But news reached him the next day that Welsh had asserted "that His Majesty was possessed with a devil, and that after the outputting of that devil, there joined to His Highness seven devils, which were His Majesty's Council". This report was probably made by one of the court spies, who was unlikely to be too careful about his accuracy. Orders were at once given for Welsh's arrest, but he fled in time, to some now-unknown hiding place.

The Government soon despatched a messenger to Kirkcudbright to summon him before the King and Council; he was charged "touching certain speeches given out by him in the pulpit" of St Giles'. He was also charged with involvement in a disturbance which had taken place the day before Welsh preached the sermon that was falsely reported to the King. Welsh could not expect justice in these circumstances; so he did not appear. He was then proclaimed an outlaw, and his possessions were confiscated. Six months later he was declared to be no longer an outlaw, after a painstaking inquiry had shown that there was no conspiracy behind the disturbance in Edinburgh.

The General Assembly which met at Montrose in March 1600 appointed men to investigate whether a call to Welsh from Ayr should be presented to him. After visiting Kirkcudbright, the commissioners decided that Welsh should go to Ayr as soon as possible. They would have recognised the great importance of Ayr, for at that time it was second only to Glasgow in the west of Scotland. Welsh mourned over how little he had achieved in Kirkcudbright. Yet a report from that time tells that his labours there were very much blessed by God, "for many were brought by his ministry to see the error, superstition and idolatry of Popery, and to embrace the truth; and many were really converted to God, and others were edified and built up, confirmed, comforted and strengthened; so that he, as a shining and burning light, did enlighten that whole country, which at that time was in many places destitute of pastors".

It was when he was about to leave for Ayr that Welsh met young Robert Glendinning, just back from his travels on the Continent. A thoughtless young man, Glendinning was fashionably dressed in scarlet and silver lace. Welsh told him that he must give up his bright clothes and his present way of life, which was so lacking in true seriousness, and he must begin to study the Scriptures. In fact, Glendinning later became the minister of Kirkcudbright and was, we are told, "eminent for grace and gifts, for faithfulness and success".

Ayrshire was one of those districts in Scotland which embraced the Reformation most heartily. It was there too in a previous century that the Lollards preached. They were followers of John Wycliffe, a reformer before the Reformation, and people came to listen to their teachings. Welsh came to Ayr in August 1600 as assistant to the ageing John Porterfield. His fellow-ministers seem to have given Porterfield a degree of respect, but he was not distinguished by his zeal or by anything else. When Welsh arrived, he found some true believers there, but the town as a whole was sunk in ignorance, superstition, lawlessness and immorality; many still had leanings to Roman Catholicism. Welsh once addressed Scotland, but perhaps with his eye especially on Ayrshire: "Alas, sinful nation, laden with iniquities, who is so sinful as thou art?"

One of Welsh's first objectives was to put an end to fighting in the streets. Whenever he heard that a fight had begun he would rush unarmed to the scene. But he did take the precaution of covering his head with a helmet. He would get himself between the opponents in an attempt to separate them. On at least one occasion, after stopping the fight, he brought around a table in the street those who had been fighting. Welsh prayed and then tried to get them to affirm that they were now friends. Then as a token of their reconciliation he had them eat together, and he brought the proceedings to a conclusion by singing a Psalm. And his efforts were successful. Difficult as his task was, he saw the town transformed into a peaceful community.

Welsh also attacked the Sabbath-breaking which was such a prominent feature of life in the town. Apart from the times of public worship, the Sabbath was treated as a weekly holiday, and the place set apart for sports such as archery was right beside the church. Even Porterfield, Welsh's colleague, joined in the sports when the afternoon service was over. Welsh himself had begun to spend a considerable part of his Sabbaths in prayer and fellowship with two godly men. Welsh succeeded in diverting his brother-minister from desecrating the Sabbath, by inviting him to join the little meetings for prayer and fellowship.

Welsh spent all his spare time in study, a habit that followed him all his days. We have already noticed him as, in an exceptional degree, a man of prayer, and his prayers are described as "frequent, fervent, importunate, occasionally prolonged, and often accompanied with strong crying and tears". Sometimes he become so engrossed that he would forget himself and lose all track of time. Among the petitions overheard on one occasion was the earnest cry, "O God, wilt Thou not give me Scotland!" And he had his reward; his heavenly Father, who sees in secret, did indeed reward him openly, for his ministry in Ayr was richly blessed.

Besides his two services every Sabbath, Welsh also preached twice every weekday. In his preaching he spoke with much simplicity, with deep earnestness, often with many tears, and the impression produced was correspondingly great. Yet Welsh did not go to his labours brimful of self-confidence. He sometimes felt so much the responsibility of taking a service that he would say to his elders on his way into the vestry that he was afraid to enter the pulpit; he would ask one of them to pray for him before he would venture to begin.

Talk Between the Bible and a Sinner (1)

Bible. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways" (Haggai 1:5).

Sinner. I am not so bad as some others.

Bible. "They that compare themselves among themselves are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Sinner. I hope I am not so bad as to go to hell.

Bible. "The wicked shall be turned into hell" (Psalm 9:17).

Sinner. But God is merciful.

Bible. "Let every man take heed how he buildeth . . . for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:10,11).

Sinner. Is there no mercy out of Christ?

Bible. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus saith . . . I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me (John 14:6).

Sinner. I hope I do some good.

Bible. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3).

Sinner. Is every thing that I do wicked?

Bible. "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 15:26). "The ploughing of the wicked is sin" (Proverbs 21:4).

Sinner. I am sure I have some good thoughts.

Bible. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "Out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders" (Mark 7:21).

Sinner. If my heart is so wicked, what shall I do?

Bible. Repent, and turn from all your transgressions . . . and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 18:30,31). "Give Me thine heart" (Proverbs 23:26). "They gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Sinner. I try to be honest and pay my debts.

Bible. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law” (Galatians 5:4).

Sinner. What is the law?

Bible. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37,39).

Sinner. Surely I have kept the law in some measure.

Bible. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Sinner. But did not Christ do away with the moral law?

Bible. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law . . . I am not come to destroy the law . . . but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10).

Sinner. How then shall I be delivered from the curse of the law?

Bible. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13).

Sinner. Will all then be saved!

Bible. “He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Sinner. I do believe.

Bible. “The devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

Sinner. How then shall I go to work?

Bible. “This is the work of God; that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent” (John 6:29).

Sinner. What is it to believe?

Bible. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:10).

Sinner. I have been trying to do my best.

Bible. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Sinner. I have been praying and reading my Bible.

Bible. “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

Sinner. Ought I not to pray?

Bible. “Men ought always to pray” (Luke 18:1). “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8).

Sinner. But will not God hear if I pray the best I can, though I have not a new heart and do not believe?

Bible. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).

Taken from *The Christian Treasury* for 1852

Assurance – the Lord Is My Shepherd

3. True and False Assurance

Rev J R Tallach

This is the final section of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. Last month's section continued to answer the question, What is the basis for assurance? It ended with a glance at Roman Catholic errors on assurance.

There are others who speak against the doctrine of assurance and teach that the fallen human heart has the power to trust in Christ. This error is called Arminianism and teaches that we might choose to follow Christ today and thus become a sheep in His flock. But we might choose next week to stop following Christ and so cease to be one of His disciples.

This error is directly against the teaching of Christ: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them" (John 10:27). This applies to all His sheep. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. . . . And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:16,28-29). Texts such as these are the basis for the body of doctrine called Calvinism, which is biblical and is opposed to Arminianism.

At the same time, believers have the remains of the old nature within them and will never be rid of them until they get to heaven. When faith is not active, or they neglect the Bible or fall into sin, the lamp of assurance burns low and goes dim for a time. In Psalm 27 David declares, "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

At other times, as in Psalm 42:9, he weeps, "I will say unto God my rock, Why . . . go I mourning?" And he prays in Psalm 51:8: "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice". John, the beloved disciple, wrote to those "that believe on the name of the Son of God; that [they] may know that [they] have eternal life" (1 John 5:13) – to establish them in their faith in the Son of God. Again Isaiah, that great prophet of the gospel in the Old Testament, states, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord" (Isaiah 50:10). These examples show that the Lord's people may have their assurance shaken.

Assurance may be assaulted by Satan. This is to be expected, as one of Satan's names is, "The Accuser of the Brethren". The assurance of believers is strengthened by the means of grace. In Psalm 73 we read about Asaph's assurance being shaken; he said, "My feet were almost gone". Asaph then went up to the house of God and saw how insecure the wicked were. Then

his love to God was revived, so that he asked, “Whom have I in the heavens high but Thee, O Lord, alone?” Prayer and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper commonly have the blessed effect of strengthening assurance of the Saviour’s love.

We are also taught in God’s Word that a false assurance is not only possible but common. Thus the Lord says (Matthew 7:22-23), “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord. . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.” Half of the virgins waiting for the coming of the heavenly bridegroom (Matthew 25:2) had a false hope, and they were shut out of heaven at last.

In our own day, this false assurance is largely the result of teaching called “easy believism”. According to this doctrine, all that is required to become a follower of Christ is to repeat a few sentences about sin and redemption, and salvation will follow. The faith that is required is no more than the faith that we may have in any historical figure, but this is not the faith of God’s elect. The Bible requires us to show our faith by our works – of separation from the world and living unto righteousness.

Christ told a parable of Himself as the true vine and His disciples as the branches. The branches needed to bear fruit, otherwise they were cut down and burned. Saving faith will always be accompanied by repentance: “fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:22)

A A Hodge, an American theologian, makes four points of difference in this important matter:

1. True assurance gives true humility. Paul the apostle had persecuted the followers of Jesus before his conversion and knew much of remaining sin in his own heart. He thought of himself as the least of the apostles. He goes on to say, “By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). True assurance of his call to become an apostle and the gift of grace for this work made Paul a humble man.

2. True faith leads to increased diligence in the practice of holiness. King Hezekiah was delivered by God from a serious illness and given the promise of 15 more years of life. Hezekiah says “Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption” (Isaiah 38:17). Arising from this thankfulness to God he states, “I shall go softly all my years”.

3. True assurance leads believers to examine their own hearts and a willingness to be searched by the Word of God. Following the miracle of the catch of fish the Lord had performed, Peter fell at His feet, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). And David says,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . and see if there be any wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:23,24).

4. True assurance desires nearness to God. John the beloved disciple was nearest to the Lord at the Last Supper, when he leaned his head on the bosom of the Saviour. He writes, “Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

We will let John Bunyan have the last word on encouragements and directions for assurance. Bunyan's Pilgrim, while in the Palace Beautiful, was asked what he had found that would resolve doubts about the pilgrimage journey he was on. He said, “When I think what I saw at the cross, *that will do it*; and when I look at my embroidered coat (Romans 13:14), *that will do it*; and when I look into the roll that I carry in my bosom, *that will do it*; and when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, *that will do it*”.

“Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

For Younger Readers

Which Is Worth More?

One day a little boy was playing with a vase. It was worth a lot of money. As little boys and girls are rather likely to do, he put his hand into the vase.

It was easy to put his hand in the vase, but it was not at all easy to get his hand out. Indeed he could not pull his hand out, no matter how hard he tried.

Then his father tried to help him, but he could not get the boy's hand out of the vase. Then they began to talk about breaking the vase to get the boy's hand out. You see, the boy's hand was worth more than the vase.

The father said, “Now, my son, make one more try. Open your hand and hold your fingers out straight, as you see me doing, and then pull.”

Everyone was surprised when the boy said, “No, I couldn't pull my fingers out like that. If I did, I would lose my penny.”

But his hand and the vase were both worth more than the penny. Remember that to know God is worth far more than everything else.

The Young People's Magazine

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Editor: Rev Kenneth D Macleod

*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)*

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus climbed the tree,
And thought himself unknown:
But how surprised was he
When Jesus called him down!
The Lord beheld him, though concealed,
And by a word His pow'r revealed.

Wonder and joy at once
Were painted in his face:
“Does He my name pronounce,
“And does He know my case?
“Will Jesus stoop with me to dine?
“Lord, I, with all I have, am Thine.”

Thus where the gospel's preached,
And sinners come to hear,
The hearts of some are reached
Before they are aware:
The word directly speaks to them,
And seems to point them out by name.

'Tis curiosity
Oft brings them in the way,
Only the man to see,
And hear what he can say;
But how the sinner starts to find
The preacher knows his inmost mind!

His long-forgotten faults
Are brought again in view,
And all his secret thoughts
Revealed in public too.
Though compassed with a crowd about,
The searching word has found him out.

While thus distressing pain
And sorrow fills his heart,
He hears a voice again
That bids his fears depart:
Then, like Zacchaeus, he is blest,
And Jesus stoops to be his guest.

John Newton

Looking Around Us

Religious Freedom

How thankful we should be that in the UK and similar countries we can go freely to church when circumstances are normal. We should spare a thought for professing Christians in China, where the Government is trying to increase its control over churches in that country. The Government is even prepared to demolish church buildings when orders from the state authorities are not obeyed.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which rules over the country has a new policy on religion, described as “sinicisation”; it aims to force religious groups to become “more Chinese”. The Chinese Government wants to bring churches and other bodies completely into its political plans, which would mean the Government having control over the Church – even to the extent of demanding that a new version of the Bible should contain statements favouring Communism.

This sinicisation policy has led to calls, from a body which recommends policies to the United States Government, for China to be described as a “country of particular concern”. This is because it has been interfering with religious freedom. Other results of the policy on Christianity are requiring churches to display CCP slogans at their entrances, censoring religious materials, and instructing those who conduct services to include CCP ideas in their preaching.

Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, the Government of China has banned online evangelisation; it has tried to impose control over Christian activities outside places of worship registered with a government body; such religious buildings are effectively under government control. It has shut down churches that refuse to register, but to remain unregistered is the only way that a congregation can maintain anything like a scriptural position. Authorities have also arrested prominent church leaders, and it is reported that some Christians have been held in internment camps.

Again we should thank God for religious freedoms, though such freedoms may be weakened. One has only to think of laws forbidding even private prayer near abortion clinics to see that our precious religious freedoms are beginning to be restricted, and who knows how far that trend may go. We need to ask the Lord to have mercy on our nations and peoples, and to protect His people in China and other countries where they are persecuted.

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