

The Young People's Magazine

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

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



June 2026

Vol 91 • No 6

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Cover picture: Beach in Ness, Isle of Lewis.

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Published by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Scottish charity number SC003545.

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Material for the magazine should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous month.

Subscriptions, Renewals, Changes of Address should be sent to the General Treasurer: Mr W Campbell, 133 Woodlands Road, Glasgow, G3 6LE; tel: 0141 332 9283; e-mail: william.campbell@fpcoffice.org. The subscription year ends in December, and subscriptions should be sent in January each year for the following 12 months. Subscription rates for 2025, including postage, are: *Free Presbyterian Magazine* £36.80 (£2.95 per copy); *Young People's Magazine* £20.00 (£1.50 per copy); both magazines £55.20. All queries should be directed to the General Treasurer, not to the printer.

Free Presbyterian Magazine: The Church's main magazine is *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. Send to the General Treasurer at the above address for a free sample copy. See above for subscription rates.

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Volume 91

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Number 6

We Must Obey

It was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He, His disciples and His mother were invited to a wedding in Cana, a place on the Sea of Galilee. At some stage, the wine ran out. Mary the mother of Jesus, no doubt expecting that He would do something to supply the lack of wine, told the servants: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it" (John 2:5). Mary was right; Jesus worked a miracle to turn water into wine. When He asked the servants to fill six pots with water, they did so.

It is a reminder to us that whatever Jesus tells us to do, we must obey Him. But how will Jesus speak to us? In the Bible. So let us consider some of Jesus' directions that we find there. Most of them are directed to everyone, but the last two are only directed to believers.

1. Jesus said, "*Thou shalt love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). This is a summary of the Ten Commandments. And it is our duty to keep them all perfectly.

2. Yet we are all in the sad position that we cannot really keep these commandments, unless we have been converted. We may be able to keep them outwardly to some extent, but we certainly cannot keep them with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind. We are doing what is wrong; we are saying what is wrong; we are thinking what is wrong. And we need to turn from our own ways; Jesus tells us to "*repent*" (Mark 1:15). We are to be sorry for our sins and turn away from them. Those who are converted are beginning – only beginning – to keep God's commands.

3. But how can we obey the command to repent when we are so unable to keep any of God's commandments? We need the power to obey that comes from God for the sake of Jesus Christ. And His command in Mark 1:15 is not only to repent, but also to "*believe the gospel*". The gospel is the good news that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). That is what we are commanded to believe, but we are not only to believe that wonderful fact; we must also trust in Christ Jesus as the

One “that the Father sent . . . to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).

4. Jesus commanded, “*Search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39). He said this because in the Bible we can find “eternal life”. There is a great deal of teaching there which shows us how we may go to heaven when we die and escape eternal death in hell. But we must read the Bible seriously, asking for the Holy Spirit to apply its truths to our souls. And believers are to go on searching the Scriptures so that they may grow in grace and live more to the glory of God.

5. We are to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6). Jerusalem, of course, was the place where the temple was built, and so this city was considered the centre of Old Testament religion, the centre of the Church of God at that time. The prayer was not only that there would be peace between all those who professed the true religion. That was part of what was meant, but the prayer was to express to God a desire for the *well-being* of His Church. That is what we should be praying for in our time: that the Church would be kept from falling away into false doctrine and sin (though much of it has already so fallen), and that the Word of God would be very much blessed as it is proclaimed in the Church. Yet a desire for this spiritual prosperity of the Church cannot really have a place in an unconverted heart.

6. Another command is: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). (It was not given directly by Jesus but through Paul, His messenger.) We need to know if we have believed in Christ or not – if we are on the way to heaven or not, if we have submitted to the authority of Christ or not. If we have believed, by God’s grace, we will be blessed for ever; if we do not believe, we will be under God’s curse for ever.

7. Christ tells His people: “Abide in Me” (John 15:4). They are to continue in union with Him by faith, so that they may receive blessings from Him – just as the branch continues in union with the vine, so that it may bring forth fruit. Yes, the people of God will continue to believe in Him, but they must consider it their duty to seek that God would keep them united to Christ.

8. The last command we notice in this article is: “*This do in remembrance of Me*” (1 Corinthians 11:24). It is very much addressed only to those who have believed in the Lord Jesus. So those who go to the Lord’s table should first examine themselves. They are to remember the Saviour’s death there by taking the bread and wine, the symbols of His broken body and poured-out blood. They are to do so “for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace” (*Shorter Catechism* Answer 96).

Christ as the Son of God has authority over every one of us. So let us seek grace to obey all His commands. He says, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Lessons from the Life of Joseph

2. Diligence and Patience

R W van Kralingen

This is another section of a paper given at the 2025 Youth Conference. The first section provided an introduction to Joseph's life, and its context. We now move on to the *lessons* we should learn from the life of Joseph.

If we hold that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” then we are duty bound to learn the lessons provided by the last 13 chapters in the book of Genesis. Some of these lessons are practical and some are spiritual. Most, if not all, practical lessons from Scripture have some spiritual teaching in them, and most, if not all, spiritual lessons have some practical consequences.

Practical lessons. Let us look at some of the practical lessons which we might learn from the life of Joseph. To provide pegs on which we may hang what we learn, I have given each lesson a name and attached a Scripture verse that summarises that lesson. I have deduced six such lessons:

Lesson 1. Diligence. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

We read that Joseph, at the age of 17, was shepherd over his father's flock (as “feeding the flock” may be interpreted), in preference to his older brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

Then we read of Joseph making diligent search for his brothers (Hebron to Shechem was about 50 miles and Shechem to Dothan a further 13 miles). He might have given up and returned home, but he persisted until he had found his brothers and their herds.

The earlier part of Genesis 39 is full of references to Joseph's progress. A challenge might be made: this was not Joseph's diligence; it was because the Lord “was with him, and made all he did to prosper in his hand”. The Lord's blessing is without doubt necessary in making progress, but it cannot be argued that the Lord acts contrary to His Word. In Proverbs 10:4 we read that “he becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich”.

Then we read later in chapter 39 that “the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not at anything that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.”

When diligence is followed by success, it prompts greater diligence – expecting more success. But here we have Joseph being diligent, where there was little prospect of personal reward. That is indeed worthy of praise. But how readily we slacken our hands when we meet opposition and discouragement, and when we are not thanked for what we have done.

In chapter 41 we find Pharaoh saying to Joseph: “There is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled. . . . See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” This prompts us to ask what being diligent means. The term certainly suggests effort, perseverance, application and dedication. We may add discretion and wisdom to that list.

Later we read that “the dearth was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread”. Joseph opened up all the storehouses and provided food in exchange for money, then food in exchange for herds and lastly food in exchange for lands, whose owners were then employed to provide a stream of revenue to Pharaoh. No enterprise of this scale could have been achieved without diligence.

We have no right to expect the Lord's blessing in the absence of diligence, in either the temporal or the spiritual realm. We read in 2 Peter 1:10,11: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Lesson 2. Patience. “Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Romans 2:6-7)

The narrative of Joseph spans a little more than 13 chapters in the Book of Genesis. If we read it straight through, we might absorb it in little more than half an hour. These chapters cover all of Joseph's life, which amounted to 110 years.

Many of those years were trying years, in which Joseph's patience was undoubtedly exercised. He was sold into slavery by his brothers when he was 17. He was at first forced to perform very ordinary work in Potiphar's house, tempted by Potiphar's wife, falsely accused of sin against the Seventh Commandment, imprisoned for an extended period, and forgotten by the cup-bearer. Finally he rose to a position of authority in his thirtieth year.

Yet for all that, we do not find evidence of bitterness. At each point in his life, when he began to make marked progress, and unpromising beginnings began to fade into the background, we find that the progress was abruptly halted through no fault of his own. In spite of this, no bitterness appears.

Joseph gave early evidence of being singled out by the Lord. He dreamt of his brothers' sheaves bowing down to his sheaf, which was reinforced by a further dream in which his parents also paid respect to him. If Joseph was conscious that these dreams came from the Lord, what must he have thought, as disappointment after disappointment seemed to frustrate what might have come about as a fulfilment of the dreams? We find Joseph calmly possessing his soul in patience.

Some others in Scripture did not show such patience. We find Joseph's own father Jacob proclaiming bitterly at the prospect of losing Benjamin: "All these things are against me". And Elijah, in anguish of soul, sat down under a juniper tree and requested that he might die. He said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers". And what about Jonah under the gourd? "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" the Lord asked. "And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death."

What about ourselves? What is our response when we meet with disappointment? Does tribulation in us work patience? How do we react if we suffer injustice?

What should the Christian response be? This can be seen in Luke 6:27-31: "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Mary's Story

Taken from *The Christian Treasury*, volume 17. It has had some editing. The comments have been added by the Editor.

It was my first winter in London. I had been at the theatre, but I had come home sad, with no enthusiasm for anything. It was almost the first time I had been there and I had followed, with burning excitement, all that had been performed on the stage. I was dazzled. I was bewildered. But when the curtain fell and the scene closed and all was over, a strange, sad feeling came over me; and I felt unsatisfied.

A voice within me whispered, "Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (Isaiah 55:2) and I thought of the time when the curtain of death would close over the last scene of my life. Several times recently, the vanity of the life of

pleasure on which I was entering had flashed across my mind, but tonight it sank down and took hold of me and would not go away. Tender words and words of flattery, that I had listened to before with pleasure, now fell unheeded on my ear, for a power stronger than myself was at work within me.

When I reached home I could not sleep, so I sat by the fire thinking, "I am casting in my lot with those whose days are all vanity, whose works are nothing, whose molten images are wind and confusion". The words that kept ringing in my ear were, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate". But how could I obey them? How could I give up the world that was just opening before me? How could I give up the glittering cup of pleasure while it flashed and sparkled even in my hand?

I walked to the window and looked out. The great city lay around me in deep sleep. All was dark except for, at distant intervals, a lonely lighted window here and there; and the monotonous tread of the policemen, as they kept their lonely watch, was the only sound that broke the stillness.

I had often looked on the same scene afore, but tonight it had a different significance. The dark, sleeping city seemed to me to represent the world asleep in sin. The lighted windows represented those few waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom (see Matthew 25:1-13). I thought, How happy they must be. Would that my light was shining [in my soul]! Would that I could hear the watchmen that stand upon the watchtower calling one another, Another lamp is lighted; another star is shining! But then, I felt, the world is so attractive.

Two o'clock struck. I heard the roll of carriage wheels, which stopped below my window. Soon a light tap came to my door.

"Come in", I said.

"Why, not in bed yet?" said my aunt brightly as she entered, dressed in her dancing clothes. "What have you been about since you returned from the theatre? Something interesting it must have been, to have kept you sitting here all this time."

"What is this?" she said, as she lifted the book that lay before me. It was my Bible. Her eye fell on the title page, her cheek grew pale, the smile left her face, and she looked at me in silence for a minute.

"Have you been reading this, Mary?" she asked me.

"Yes," I said, "that is the verse I have been thinking over." I pointed to 2 Corinthians 6:17: "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate".

"And may God grant you grace to listen to the voice and to obey the call", was the solemn reply. "Mary, listen," she said, as she sat down by me. "It is the Saviour that is knocking at the door of your heart. Open, and let Him in."

He is calling you now; He is waiting for you, but He will not call always. The last summons will come some day – and what if you pay no attention to it?

“Mary,” the aunt went on, “it has come to me. Long and patiently the Spirit strove with me and called me to come away from the world. First, from my mother’s deathbed, the voice of warning came, but I soon forgot it. Again, as they carried an aged loved one to the churchyard, a voice from her lonely grave whispered in my ear: ‘Arise and depart, for this is not your rest’; but I said, ‘Let me alone – sometime I will come’.”

“Then in a revival time, when many were being converted, a sweet voice called me. ‘The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. . . . take the water of life freely’ (Revelation 22:17). But I drank from earth’s flashing fountains, and cared not for the river whose spring is with the Lord on high. Again the Saviour had knocked and again His appeal had been disregarded.

“But the last call came. One night, death stole across our threshold and smote, before we even saw the sword – and I was a widow. It was a loud, solemn voice that called to me as I sat in that darkened room by the side of the shrouded, pale form of my young husband: ‘Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh’ (Matthew 24:44). I trembled; I shook; I even put my hand to the plough; but I looked back. I saw the glitter and the sparkle, and I heard the music and the song and the revelry of the scenes I had left. Winning smiles beckoned me to come, hands were extended to me, and I turned and joined them once again.

“And a voice came from above: “She is joined to her idols; let her alone”. I bowed and worshipped at the world’s shrine that day, and since then I have served no other god: I have given up for it an incorruptible kingdom, that does not fade away. And has it repaid my devotion? Am I happy even now? Mary, could the young man in the parable satisfy his hunger with the husks which the swine did eat? No, far less can I satisfy the hunger of the soul with the wealth, or the pleasures, or the pomp of this world.

“I have drunk long and deeply from each gilded cup that it can bestow, but I have turned from each of them unsatisfied. Even while I drink, I feel a thirst arising within me for something nobler, something better. Often I feel the truth of these words: ‘Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness’.

“But still I bow at the world’s shrine. It has entwined itself round my heart; it has enslaved me. I love it, though I know its worthlessness. I cannot give it up now; once I might have, but that is over. I strive to enjoy the present and to close my eyes on the future. That is all my comfort.”

The fire had faded in the grate. She rose to leave me.

“O Aunt,” I said, as the tears streamed down, “if you have found the well

of earthly happiness so empty, leave the broken cisterns that can hold no water and come; we will go together to the fountain of life and 'with joy . . . draw water out of the wells of salvation'. We shall be satisfied and never thirst again."

"I have made my choice," was the reply, "but may God grant you grace to make yours with more wisdom."

She closed the door, and I was left alone. I bowed my knee and prayed for strength to leave the cisterns that could hold no water, and for grace to bring me to the river of life. The Lord heard my prayer and whispered, I will lead thee by the still waters.

When I lay down to sleep at last, the night was over. The darkness was gone; the grey dawn was breaking – breaking into the more perfect day.

Many years have gone by since then – years of happiness, gilded by the rays of a better sun, the Sun of righteousness. They were years in which I have experienced the fullness of the joy of those who abide in Jesus, with my treasure safe in heaven. I am happy here.

And how have these same years been spent by the poor worldly woman? Still in the pursuit of the pleasure which always escapes from her grasp. With her feet trembling on the brink of the grave, her place is still in the crowded ballroom, and in other scenes of entertainment. These are everything to her. Losing them, she has nothing left – nothing to rescue her from the gulf of blackness, darkness and despair.

Some comments. 1. For someone who was so determined to cling to the world and its ways, Mary's aunt had a remarkable desire for her niece to obtain spiritual blessings. But it is terribly sad that she put away from herself the benefits of salvation and set herself on a course that could only end in a lost eternity – unless she would seek the Lord before it was too late.

2. How dangerous for the aunt to resist so often, when God spoke to her! How dangerous for her to put away from her the Bible verses that spoke to her conscience! The fact was that she loved the world and had no love for God. But unless we love God, we will never get to heaven. She knew that, but she refused to seek a gracious Saviour.

3. Beware of Satan's lies. No one who still has access to the Word of God should tell themselves that it is too late to find salvation; that is what Satan would have people believe.

4. What a mercy that God spoke to Mary's soul and made her willing to stop going to worldly entertainments! But remember how easy it is today to find worldly entertainments without leaving your house, by just going on to the internet, for instance. Watching television drama or downloaded films is likely to be as dangerous as watching plays in the theatre.

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5. How necessary to seek the Lord earnestly now!
 6. How necessary for the Holy Spirit to make a sinner willing to leave worldly things and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!
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The Great Prison

5. Chained Ankles and Hard Labour

C H Spurgeon

Another section of the first chapter in Spurgeon's book, *Words of Warning for Daily Life*. It has been edited; some explanations have been added in square brackets by the Editor. Spurgeon imagined being in a prison and, in the previous section, in April, he described being in the silent cell. The sinners confined there said they could not pray. If they could pray, by faith, they would be free. Spurgeon continues with what he calls his "daydream".

I passed on from that cell and came to another room. This room, marked number five, was large and had many in it who were trying to walk to and fro. But every man had a chain round his ankle, and a huge cannon ball fixed to it – an army punishment, they said, for deserters from the ranks of virtue. This cannon ball troubled the prisoners very much. I saw some of them trying to file their chains with rusty nails, and others were attempting to rust away the iron by dropping tears of penitence on them; but these poor men made but little progress at their work.

The prison officer told me that this was the chain of Habit, and that the ball which dragged behind was the old tendency to lust and sin. [The prisoners were chained to the habits of a lifetime. Even if they tried to get rid of them, they could not succeed; they needed the power of the Holy Spirit to make this possible.]

I asked the prison officer why they did not get the chains knocked off. He said they had been trying a long time to get rid of them. But they never could do it in the way they went about it, since the proper way to get rid of the chain of habit was, first of all, to get out of prison.

The door of unbelief must be opened, and they must trust in the one great Deliverer, the Lord Jesus, whose pierced hands could open all prison doors. [Faith in Jesus Christ, who died for sinners, is the one way of escaping from the prison of sin.]

After that, on the anvil of grace, with the hammer of love, their chains could be broken off [Believers are set free to keep God's commands and lead a godly life.]

I saw a drunkard led out of his prison, rejoicing in pardoning grace. He

had before then laboured to escape from his drunkenness, but some three or four times he broke his pledge to stop drinking, and went back to his old sin. I saw that man trust in the precious blood of Christ, and he became a Christian. And, becoming a Christian, he could no more love his drinking; at one stroke of the hammer, the ball was gone for ever.

Another was a swearer; he knew it was wrong to blaspheme the Most High, but he did it still, till he believed in Christ. Then he never blasphemed again, for he now hated that wicked practice.

In almost all prisons where they do not want to make criminals worse than when they entered, they have hard labour for them. In the prison I went to see, there was a hard-labour room [where people were trying very hard to earn salvation by their works]. Those who entered it were mostly very proud people; they held their heads very high and would not bend; they were like birds with fine feathers and thought themselves quite unfit to be confined. [They felt their works were very good works; they did not deserve – so they thought – to be considered guilty before God because of their sins.]

But, being in prison, they resolved to work their own way out. They believed in the system of human merit and hoped in due time to purchase their liberty. They had saved up a few old counterfeit coins, with which they thought they could sometime set themselves free, though the prison officer plainly declared their folly and mistake.

It was amusing, and yet sad, to see what different works these people were about. Some of them toiled at the treadmill; they were going to the stars, they said, and there they were, tread, tread, tread, with all their might. But though they had been labouring for years and were never an inch higher, they were still confident that they were mounting to the skies. [These people were not succeeding, for their works did not deserve anything, in the sight of God, who judges everything perfectly.]

The Disruption in the Scottish Church

3. Relations Between Church and State

Rev A W MacColl

Last month's section of this Youth Conference paper spoke of the gospel blessings that were poured out from heaven on Scotland before the Disruption

Erastianism. The most important aspect of the Disruption was the stand that was made for the truth that Christ alone is Head of His Church. So His Church is, in spiritual matters, to be free and independent of the state – that is to say, of the civil government.

This is clearly seen from the Word of God when, for example, Christ told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. Christ has appointed a spiritual government in the Church through elders and ministers, to rule, administer and oversee the spiritual concerns of His kingdom, such as doctrine, discipline and spiritual oversight. In this the state has absolutely no authority to interfere. As a result of the position taken by the Free Church at the Disruption, this principle was powerfully asserted, and an important witness was raised for the spiritual freedom of Christ's Church and people.

There are different views about how the Church and the civil government should relate to each other. The Church of Rome holds that the Church ought to exercise control over the state, that the Pope has temporal supremacy over civil rulers throughout the world.

Rome does not openly assert that position today – because it would be too unpopular to say it. But everywhere that Rome has held real sway, she has ever sought to bring the power of civil government under the control of the Papacy and the priesthood. The Pope is actually the head of a civil government – that of the Vatican City – and this is to ensure the Papal claim to temporal rule remains intact.

The Church of England holds, on the other hand, that the Church should be subject to the control of the civil government. This is called “Erastianism” – after Erastus, a German who advocated this theory. This Erastian view is the reason why the King is called the Head of the Church of England. In that Church, it is actually the Prime Minister who recommends to the King who should be appointed as bishops and archbishops. (This takes place after the leading candidates are proposed by the Church authorities.) That is a very unbiblical practice and we believe it is very dishonouring to Christ. He only is the King and Head of the Church both on earth and in heaven. Erastianism therefore brings the Church under the control of the state.

Now this view, Erastianism – that the state should hold ultimate power over the Church – was a key factor in the events leading up to the Disruption. We may remember, from an earlier article, that the ministers were presented by local landowners, and sometimes even by the Crown itself. These men felt that, because they had legal rights over the property of the Church, they should also have the right to decide who enjoys the benefits of what they did as patrons. It was argued that the patrons' rights were more important than those of the congregation, so that they might have a man settled in the parish, even if he had been rejected by the congregation.

The Moderates were content to continue with this arrangement. The Moderate view was that the Courts of the land had power over the Church Courts when any dispute arose between Church and state. In practice, this

meant that the Moderates were prepared to accept that the Civil Courts could control who was appointed to the office of the ministry. To the Evangelicals this was unacceptable. The Evangelicals rightly recognised that this denied to the Christian people the freedom to choose their own ministers.

Another view, called the Voluntary idea, is that the Church and the state should not co-operate and that the state establishing a particular Church is wrong. Those who favour this idea, called *Voluntaries*, reject the idea of a “national Church”. Many modern Evangelicals, especially Baptists, hold this view, and the constitution of the USA is founded on this idea of complete separation of Church and state.

But what is the proper, Scriptural view of the relationship between the Church and the state? It is that which was held by the Church of Scotland in its better days and it is still held by the Free Presbyterian Church. The Church and the state are two distinct kingdoms; one deals with spiritual matters and the other with secular matters. Their responsibilities are different and therefore they should not interfere with each other's affairs but rather should seek to help and support each other to fulfill their God-given role in the nation. This is called “the Establishment principle”.

The state should recognise and establish the Church, and the Church in turn should seek the Christian good of the nation. If both Church and State keep to their own spheres, there ought not to be a clash between them. But, with the unscriptural system of patronage in place, the Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland would either have to accept the evil, or seek to have it overturned and thus have to face the conflict this would certainly provoke.

For Junior Readers

Good Advice for a Son

Perhaps you have heard of Henry Venn. He was a godly minister in England during the time of the revival in the 1700s, when many people were converted. It was a time when the Reformation themes of justification by faith alone, and the need for personal salvation and faith were being more clearly emphasised.

Venn ministered in three different congregations during his life: Clapham in London, Huddersfield in West Yorkshire and Yelling in Cambridgeshire. He was a caring pastor; he was also a loving father to his five children, giving them sound advice at each stage of their lives.

When his son, John, left home to study in Cambridge University, his father was very concerned about the temptations he would face there.

Although he had been brought up to know how he should live before the Lord, his father impressed on him the importance of avoiding sin and of praying to be kept from temptation. The father's advice was:

To be modest and to avoid impurity of any kind;

To be sober – not only to avoid drunkenness but too much of anything;

To be humble and meek and to avoid pride;

To be cheerful but to avoid foolish mirth;

To love God and His Word and to avoid, as far as possible, those who scoff and sneer at true religion;

To love diligent study of the Word of God, meditation on it and secret prayer;

And to study with attention the characters of those who, the Bible tells us, “pleased God” – people such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Job, and to pray that you be a follower of them who are set before you as examples as to how you should live.

His advice is just as relevant today as it was all these years ago. And whatever stage you are at in your life, it is good advice for you! Should you not pray every day to be kept in the fear of the Lord all the day long?

J van Kralingen

Preaching the Truth

It was a time when some people were afraid that a great deal of the preaching was making too much of the human element in salvation. The sermons – presumably by visiting preachers – were paying too much attention to what the hearers ought to do and too little to what *God* must do.

So a minister preached a sermon on the sovereignty of God in regenerating the sinner – that is, in bringing about the new birth. (The *sovereignty* of God means that He has the right to do as He pleases; but remember too that God is absolutely holy in all that He does. A *sovereign* is a king or a queen, and “God is the *King* of all the earth” (Psalm 47:7).)

The main points of the sermon were: (1) No one can regenerate himself; (2) only the Holy Spirit can bring about regeneration; (3) God gives the Spirit to whoever He wills to give Him. Because these points were true, the minister went on to show that: (1) man must perish in his sins unless he is regenerated by the Spirit; and (2) as God may give or hold back His Spirit as seems good to Him, man is helpless and he is completely dependent on God's sovereign mercy.

The people in the church who understood well the teaching of the Bible

received the sermon as an encouragement to pray for God to work in the hearts of sinners. Those who were not well instructed spoke of being afraid of the dangers such preaching would bring. They were afraid it would hinder the work of conversion in the congregation. And in some who were feeling convictions of sin, the sermon aroused bitter feelings; this showed itself in the remark, "Well, if that sermon is true, I have nothing to do but wait God's time. And I will do it."

The next evening, a man in the minister's church called on him, and brought someone with him who was seeking salvation. He began the conversation by saying, "I had always thought of you as someone who preaches a free gospel. But yesterday's sermon staggered me, and had a depressing effect on my friend."

The minister assured his visitor that he had good reasons for preaching the particular teaching of the sermon at that time. He then asked, "What is your difficulty with the sermon?"

The visitor answered, "If it is true, I have nothing to do but to wait for God to convert me".

"Have you anything to do?"

"Yes, I think that, before I can be a Christian, I have to repent and believe."

"Have you done these?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Why don't you?"

"Well. Well. I don't know."

"This is rather strange. You object to my sermon because you think it leaves you no opportunity for doing. You say that you ought to repent and believe, and yet you have not done so, and you don't know why you do not."

"Well, it is rather strange. The fact is: I am all cut up by that sermon. It seemed plain sailing into heaven before I heard it. But now I don't know anything. I am all in a muddle. Can you not give me some light?"

"Listen to me, and pardon my frankness, for I wish to aid you. You have thought too much of what *you* ought to do, of what you can do, and too little of what *God* has done and what He must still do, if you are ever to be a Christian. Though interested in the subject of your soul's salvation, yet you have put off repentance toward God and faith in Christ, because you thought they could be easily performed at any time.

"Yesterday's sermon disturbed that impression and you are alarmed and vexed – vexed because you cannot work out your own salvation just when you please, and alarmed because you see that you are more dependent on God for power to repent and believe than you thought."

“That’s just it. But then, if I can’t help myself and God doesn’t help me, what am I to do?”

“You are a helpless sinner. You will be lost unless you repent of your sins and put your trust in Christ. But your sins have made your powers so feeble that, unless God aids you by His Spirit, you never will repent and believe.”

“I believe that; I feel it to be all true; but will God aid me?”

Listen. I am about to preach that sermon over again, with additions. God has chosen a vast number to whom He proposes to give His Holy Spirit, that He may draw them unto Himself through Christ. Those to whom He gives the Spirit do repent and believe; the rest do not. It may be that God has chosen you and that He will bestow on you the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is your hope, your opportunity; you are absolutely at the mercy of God. If He puts forth His hand and plucks you as a brand from the burning, you will be saved; if He refuses, you will be lost.”

“I don’t know where I am. What shall I do? How shall I know if God will aid me?”

“Have you asked Him?”

“I have said my prayers; but then, they were not much.”

“Do you now feel your dependence on Him so that you can, as a helpless sinner, come to Him and ask for mercy?”

“I do. If you will pray, I will too.”

The minister recorded what then happened. “We all three knelt before God. I prayed. He prayed, the words of weakness striving for the aid of the Almighty One. He went out of that room a converted man and has since lived a Christian life. Six persons afterwards professed faith in Christ; they dated their convictions of sin from that sermon. My members learned, from what they heard about these people’s experiences, not to be afraid of the truth.” They did not need to be afraid that their minister’s sermon would hinder the work of conversion in the congregation.

People need to become totally dependent on God for salvation. So they need to hear about this fact in the preaching, though it must be presented wisely – which is true of everything else that is said from the pulpit.

Adapted from The Christian Treasury, volume 17

For Younger Readers

Remember Old John Clark

A man called John Clark never got angry; he was an easy man to live with. Other people might get angry, but John Clark never did.

Someone asked him how he always kept himself from getting into a quarrel.

His answer was that he would always leave an angry person to carry on the quarrel alone. He did not argue back. It was a very good thing to do. It meant the quarrel did not get worse and worse.

People in the town of Frome, where he lived, used to think of him when someone got angry. They would say, "Come, let us remember old Mr Clark and leave the angry man to quarrel with himself".

You should ask God to help you follow John Clark's example".

Godly Answers

Chrysostom was a well-known Christian minister in Turkey in the early centuries after Christ. He lived from 347 to 407 AD. He was given the name Chrysostom, which means "golden-mouthed", because of how well he could speak. His appearing before the Roman Emperor is a wonderful example of true Christian courage.

The Emperor threatened him with being sent away from where he lived, if he would remain a Christian.

Chrysostom replied, "You cannot, for the world is my Father's house. You cannot banish me." Wherever in the world Chrysostom might be sent, he could not be banished from God's presence.

"But I will kill you," said the Emperor.

"No, but you cannot," said the noble champion of the faith; "for my life is hid with Christ in God." Though the Emperor could kill Chrysostom's body, he could not kill his soul. That was safe in the hands of Christ.

"I will take away your treasures."

"No, you cannot do that," was the answer, "for, in the first place, I have none that you know about. My treasure is in heaven, and my heart is there." Chrysostom's only treasures were in heaven; they were all spiritual.

"But I will drive you away from men, and you shall have no friend left."

"No, and you cannot do that," said the faithful witness once more, "I have a Friend in heaven, from whom you cannot separate me. There is nothing you can do to hurt me." The Emperor might hurt his body, Chrysostom knew that, but he could not do God's servant any real harm. Wherever he might be in heaven or on earth, Chrysostom could have fellowship with God. He could pray. And God is the Friend who will never leave anyone who puts their trust in Him.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2025-26

Names for Exercise 2

Senior Section: *Barnoldswick:* Bethan Middleton. *Dingwall:* Donald Allan MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Macintosh, Beth Dickie. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie. *Glasgow:* Violet Marr. *Halkirk:* Grace MacLean.

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Junior Section. *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell, Mairi MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Julia Cameron-Mackintosh, Anderson Dickie, Joella Esson, Leah Hicklin. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *London:* Daniel Macleod. *North Harris:* Finlay Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison. *Portree:* Murdo MacRaild.

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Looking Around Us

British Elections

This article is a comment on the elections held in the United Kingdom at the beginning of May. Elections took place in Scotland and Wales for their parliaments and for some of the local councils in England. They resulted, particularly in England and Wales, in a large swing away from the Labour Party. (Note that this is not intended to be a political article, but one that tries to apply biblical principles.)

The Labour Party came to power in the UK Parliament less than two years ago, with a huge majority. They had campaigned on a promise to bring about “change” in the country. The feeling in large parts of the country is that the change which people were looking for has not really happened. What were voters looking for? It would seem that they expected a very noticeable change in their standard of living.

Why should people expect such a change? Is there any good reason for the answer, Yes? Let us remember that it is God that gives the rain and the

sunshine that causes crops to grow, some of which we eat and some more feeds the animals which will provide meat for our tables. But scarcely anyone thinks of that today. They assume that governments should be able to run the nation in such a way that there will be ever-increasing prosperity.

How little there is of thanksgiving to God in any nation! Indeed He is very largely forgotten. He has said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). When God is forgotten; when He is not worshipped; when His Commandments are ignored and broken, it is not because the majority of people in, say, the UK are worshipping idols made of gold or silver or stone. It is because they are setting their hearts on their possessions and entertainments and wishing for possessions and entertainments that they cannot afford.

But do we deserve increasing prosperity? Do we even deserve to continue in our present level of prosperity? No, we do not. What we deserve is that God would meet us in His anger, to punish us – especially for our sin of ignoring God, trying to live as if there is no God. And if we would think seriously about the teaching of the Bible, we would realise that we cannot expect God’s blessing.

The change that people hoped for, when they elected the present Government, has not come and they feel let down. But how few realise that God is ruling over everything, including the obstacles to further prosperity. God is not blessing the UK because of its godlessness.

In fact, the UK is under God’s judgements. Within recent years, we have experienced the Covid epidemic, which had a great effect on work patterns. Now the Iran war has sent the cost of fuel shooting up, which has a great impact on most other prices. This is especially because of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which many oil tankers have to pass.

Such matters are not under the control of the UK Government, but they have a big effect on the cost of living; they have a great effect on family budgets. Such events, and their consequences, are under God’s control and are a loud call to repentance. God is saying to the people of our generation, as He did in the time of the prophet Hosea: “It is time to seek the Lord” (10:12). But very few people listen.

These events are also a call to the people of God. They are to pray that the Bible may have an influence on people everywhere. And they are to ask that the Holy Spirit would be poured out wherever a sinner is reading God’s Word and wherever a group of people are listening to pure preaching.

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