

The Young People's Magazine

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

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



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The Old Paths

The people of Judea in Jeremiah's time were called to stand – to stop and think. They were not to rush on without looking around them and without considering what they saw. They would miss so much if they did not look and consider. It was God who was speaking to them. So His words had total authority. He said, “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Often it is not best to go back to the old ways. It would be ridiculous in most places to use an old form of transport, such as a horse and cart, to travel from one place to another, rather than use a car or a bus or a train. It would usually be foolish to use the kind of remedies that a doctor might prescribe 150 years ago rather than tried and tested modern medicines.

But it is different with religion. Many people ignore the Bible because it is old; the most recent part of it was written more than 1900 years ago. Such people think it is out of date. But there is another reason why they reject the Bible: they do not like its accusing words; they do not want their consciences to be disturbed. For instance, they do not want to be told: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). They do not want to be made to feel uncomfortable; they want to go on through life feeling free to live as they please. If they think about God and His demands, their consciences might accuse them and they might feel obliged to give up their sins, and that is not a welcome option. It seems so much more pleasant to assume that an old book, like the Bible, is out of date and can be ignored.

Yet every attempt to ignore what God says about sin is altogether foolish. We *need* to know about sin, especially about *our* sin. And in His kindness He warns us about it. He does this so that we would seek forgiveness for all our sin and deliverance from its power.

But the Bible is not out of date. God calls the ways described in the Bible “old”, yet the word so translated also means “eternal”. Every part of the revelation was in the mind of God from all eternity. Yes, men like Jeremiah, Isaiah and David, and Matthew, John and Paul were human writers of various

parts of the Bible, but God was the author of the whole Bible. The whole Bible came from the eternal, unchanging mind of God. So the whole Book contains no mistake; it is perfectly true; it is perfectly reliable. It will never mislead us; we can always be sure that, if we follow the old paths, we will go in the right direction.

When we are told in the Bible about the old paths, there will be many varied responses – including: I do not know how to walk in it; or, I do not even know the entrance to the way; or, I do not like the look of the way. And many people do not give this way any further thought; they turn away from it and go on in the ways that lead to everlasting destruction. But in the verse we have already referred to, we are told to “ask for the old paths”. We are to ask the One who is giving us this advice: the Lord Himself. He is able to teach us. He is able not only to show us the facts about the old paths, but to apply these truths to our souls, for the Holy Spirit can come where we are and make us both able and willing to enter these old paths.

God also calls the old paths “the good way”. It is good for us to walk in these ways, the ways which God is showing us in Scripture. We must go back to the old ways because they are safe; they lead on to heaven, not to hell. And the more we study the Bible, the more likely we are to recognise the good, old ways that lead to eternal life. In heaven we will experience no suffering and no unhappiness, because sin will be totally a thing of the past. In heaven there is only the blessedness of being in the presence of God, and it will never come to an end.

If we walk in the old paths, we are promised that we “shall find rest for [our] souls”. Especially, we will find rest for a troubled conscience, a conscience that is disturbed by sin and guilt. *Outside* the old paths the warning holds true: “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). People may be saying very loudly and insistently, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). That is the near-constant message from the media: no one needs to worry about sin; instead live at peace with yourself; do not concern yourself about God and His commandments. Of course, these are not the exact words that media personalities use, but that is the general drift of their message and their outlook.

Jeremiah was referring to the message of the false prophets as they pointed the people away from the true God – telling them they could have peace even while they despised Him and followed idols. In the same way today, many preachers encourage their hearers to believe that they are at peace with God although, in reality, they are following idols, giving their hearts to someone else or something else, rather than God.

But how can sinners, against whom God is angry, be at peace with God?

How is it possible? It is because Jesus Christ became the substitute for sinners; He endured their punishment. Especially on the cross, He endured the anger of God against sin instead of those who believe on Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus can call, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). People are to come to Christ; they are to trust in Him, receiving as truth what the Bible tells them about Him – especially that He died for sinners. If they come to Him, they will find themselves walking in the old paths that lead to everlasting life. And they need no longer have a disturbed conscience because of sin – especially in eternity. This is the rest Jesus promises to those who trust in Him.

God works in various ways to bring sinners back to the old paths. Very often He uses the preaching of the gospel – the good news about Christ as a Saviour. Or He may bless words from the Bible to someone reading it. An Earl of Rochester was well known as someone who rejected the old paths; he would not receive the truth of the Bible. One day he was listening to someone reading Isaiah 53, the wonderful chapter which is a prophecy of Jesus Christ and His sufferings. Rochester said afterwards that he felt such an inward force upon him that convinced him of the truth of the passage in such a way that he could no longer resist it. He said that "he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour as if he had seen Him in the clouds". One hopes that his was saving faith in Christ and not just a conviction in his mind – that he truly trusted in the Lord Jesus for salvation and began to lead a godly life.

What was the response of the people to the message that God sent to them through Jeremiah? They said, "We will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16). They refused to stand and look; they insisted on rushing on away from God towards a lost eternity, where sinners will never have rest from an accusing conscience. They refused to look at what was ahead of them and at the right way, the good way in which they ought to have walked. They refused to ask for the old paths which it is safe to walk in. And this unbelieving refusal to listen to God did not stop with that generation.

Are you one of those who refuse to ask God to show you the good way, to apply the truths of the Bible to your soul so that you will trust in Christ and begin to walk in the old paths, the way that leads to everlasting life. Even if, all your life, you have been refusing to listen to God's call, he still says to you: "Stand . . . in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls".

This is the only safe approach to life. The ways of false religions may be old, but they are not eternal. Many aspects of today's godless ways and thinking are old, but none of them are eternal. The only safe way is the good way, the old paths. Ask God to make you want to walk in them.

The Favourite Chapter

Thomas had been a quarryman. From a boy he had worked in the stone pits near his home. But when I knew him, his working days were over. For several years he had suffered from a disease known in those parts as "the stone complaint", caused by the stone dust. It was very common among quarrymen. After some years of work in the pits, a cough began and the men became unwell. Many of them died before they became old.

Thomas was slowly dying of this complaint when I first knew him. He was tall, broad-shouldered and strongly built; he had been a powerful man when he was younger. But now he was very weak. His face was thin; his dark eyes were deeply sunk. As the disease gained on him, he was so weak that he found it difficult to sit up for the whole day. More often than not, I used to find him leaning forward on the table, his face resting on his hand and his elbows supported by a pillow placed on the table.

He was a man of few words, but of deep feeling. I only found this out slowly, for he said so little that it was not clear for some time whether or not he felt much. But as I came to know him better, I learned that Thomas thought much, and that his feelings were deeper than those of most men.

Sometimes I would ask him if he would like me to read any particular chapter. Whenever I did so, he was sure to ask for John 14. When this had happened two or three times, I could not help noticing it. "Thomas," I said, "you seem very fond of this chapter. It is a very beautiful chapter, but is there any particular reason why you always ask for it? Besides, I have seen more than once that your Bible was open at it when I came in."

"Yes," he replied, "there is a reason, which I will tell you soon. I can repeat nearly all the chapter." And he began in his deep, hollow voice: "Let not your heart be troubled," and quoted several verses.

"And why is it that you love this chapter so much?" I asked.

Thomas went on to refer to a minister who probably lived nearby. He began, "I'll tell you. One of my mates told me once (it is years ago now) that he had heard old Mr T . . . say that a man might get to heaven by the fourteenth chapter of John. Well, thinks I, if that's so, I will not rest till I know that chapter. I did not see any meaning in it then, no more than a babe, and I didn't know one letter from another. Never mind, thinks I; I'll do it for all that.

"And I did do it. First I had to learn my letters; that gave me a deal of trouble. But I stuck to it till I mastered them. However, the long and the short of it is that I never stopped till I could read that chapter; and as soon as I could read it, I began to get it off [to learn it by heart]; and then I never stopped till

I had done that. And now you know the whole of it [of what happened]. And to this day, though I've read many and many a chapter besides, and love them all, yet to my mind there's never a chapter like that. 'Let not your heart be troubled,' Christ said to them. What can be like that?"

I found it quite moving to hear him speak. I had never heard him say half so many words together before. But though his voice was husky and his breathing short, he seemed to warm to his subject, and spoke as if his whole heart was in what he said. His eyes glistened, his cheeks glowed, his whole manner was full of life, while he spoke of his favourite chapter.

"But", I said, "you said you did not understand the meaning of the chapter, though you learned it. You understand it better now, don't you?"

"Ay, a deal better. I was all dark then, and bad enough too. And long after I took to learning that chapter, I was as bad as any of them – drinking and swearing, and all the rest of it. God knows that. God forgive me!"

He stopped and did not go on for several minutes. "It was not till I was ill that I began to see the meaning. I used to say it over and over before, but it was only like words. There was not a worse one in the quarry than me; that there wasn't, not one – not a greater drinker among them all. But I used to have fears; and it was my fears that made me learn that chapter. If a man may get to heaven by that chapter, thought I, I'll try to get there. That is why I learnt it, but I was as blind and ignorant as a beast.

"But since I've been ill, everything seems different. I seem to see a meaning in it now. It's what Jesus Christ said to them [the disciples], when He was going to leave them – to comfort them. And it seems to comfort me. I love Him now, because I know that He died for my poor soul. And I love all He did and all He said. I never read that chapter but I seem to see more there than I did before. There's nothing makes me so sorry for my sins as reading that chapter. To think He should love us so, and I should go on drinking and swearing as I used!"

Then he told me, and often told me the same thing at other times, that sometimes he would sit for hours alone, while his wife was out at work, thinking over his past life, and that the tears would roll down his cheeks at the thought that he had "gone against Christ so". "And where should I be without Him?" he would add.

The end came at last. Again and again the favourite chapter was read. Again and again we talked about it and prayed over it. Thomas loved it more and more. More and more light came into his soul; more grace, more faith, more love. As his body became weaker, his soul grew and prospered. He was a happy man, though sorely troubled at times by thoughts of his past life. He was happy because he did believe – though with trembling faith –

that his sins were forgiven through the blood of Jesus, and because he loved his Saviour with all his heart.

And so he died. His Saviour came and fetched him and took him to that place which He had gone before to prepare. There the poor quarryman, poor no longer, will dwell for ever in the mansions of his Father's house. The old minister's words had come true.

Reader, perhaps you have no favourite chapter. Perhaps all the Bible is the same to you, both unthought of and uncared for. There is no chapter which you like better than the rest, because you do not care about any. Now, can this be right? Must there not be something very wrong with the state of your soul, when the word of the living God is nothing to you; nothing – when it is less than any useless book, less than a newspaper?

By way of a beginning, look at Thomas' favourite chapter, John 14. Consider what it was to him, how much it taught him and how he loved it. I do not say whether it is right to put one chapter above all others; nor do I say whether the old minister's words were strictly wise and proper. Perhaps he did not say them exactly as Thomas's friend said he did. I only wish to point you to this chapter for this simple reason: it was much blessed to one man, and therefore it may be to you. When once you have learned to love those words of Christ, you will not stop there. Other chapters will be read then, which will tell you still more about the blessed Saviour. And beginning with this one chapter, you will perhaps learn to love the whole of God's book.

Adapted from *The Family Treasury*

Justification

2. It Is an Act of God

Rev Roderick Macleod

The first part of a paper given at last year's Youth Conference explained what Justification is not. This part begins to explain what it is.

1 Justification is “an *act*” not a process. *The Shorter Catechism* describes sanctification as “a *work* of God” because it involves a process, over a period of time. Effectual calling is also called “a work of God” for the same reason.

Unlike sanctification and effectual calling, *justification* is called “an act of God”. Why? Because it is not a process involving many parts before one is completely justified; one is either justified or not justified. One can be more or less sanctified, but one cannot be more or less justified. Until one is, at death, made perfect in holiness, one is but partly sanctified; but one can

never be only partly justified. A believer on earth is as justified as a saint is in heaven. Being united to Christ by faith, he possesses the justifying righteousness of Christ, which God has imputed to him. God's act of justifying a sinner is done only once; it need never be repeated again.

Justification is an "act" like the final declaration that a judge makes about the accused who is tried before the court. To justify is to make a judicial declaration. This declaration sets the accused person free from condemnation. When God justifies a sinner, He is making a declaration, once and for all, that the ground on which that sinner can be condemned has been removed, and the ground upon which he must be justified now exists. Such a pronouncement brings about at once a change in the sinner's state – in his *relation* to God and His justice.

So justification is a *declaration* made by God as "the Judge of all the earth", about a sinner of mankind. It does not infuse righteousness into the person justified, but its effect on his *relation* to God is great. It is perfect at once. It is never repeated. It is an act of God.

2. It is an "act of God". "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33). If justification was a human act, it would be based on feeble human wisdom and judgement. But as an act of God, it is safeguarded on every side by divine wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. It is an act that displays the glory of God.

1. The justification of a sinner displays the unsearchable *wisdom* of God. A way has been found by which guilty sinners condemned to die for their sins can be set free, while at the same time their sins are punished.

John wrote, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). So we sinners are justly condemned for our sins. We stand condemned because of our guilt. No one, not even God, can change the fact that we have sinned; but God's "understanding is infinite", and He can remedy the fact that we are *guilty*, through the death of Jesus Christ as a substitute for sinners. We need not wonder that human beings cannot, without help, understand how a guilty sinner can be declared righteous, without violating the requirements of God's perfect justice. But when the human mind is instructed by God's Word as applied by His Spirit, it sees how this glorifies God's wisdom.

The Lord Jesus Christ is a Substitute and a Surety for His people. As their Substitute, He comes to the place where they are before God's law: He takes their law place. As their Surety, He meets all their obligations to the law, including all the punishment they deserve for breaking the law. As Substitute and Surety, He was arrested by the justice of God for the sins of His people. When He was charged with their guilt, "He opened not His mouth" and was

“brought as a lamb to the slaughter”. There He perfectly satisfied all the claims of God’s infinite justice because of His people’s sins. Thus He opened the way for the free grace of God to justify sinners while honouring the demands of strict justice because of their sins.

2. The justification of a sinner displays the unsearchable *power* of God. The right of God to exercise His power is seen when He justifies a sinner, for when God pronounces the sentence justifying the sinner, it cannot be contested for any reason, and no court can change it.

Also we read in 1 John 1:7 about the power of Christ’s blood: “The blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin”. This statement points us to the infinite moral power which the blood of Christ possesses. Because it is the blood of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, it possesses a power which no other sacrifice could ever possess: a power to satisfy God’s justice for our sins.

Nothing but the infinite worth of the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son could do this. Micah asks, “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (6:7). Paul answers for us: “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4). David says that no man can redeem his brother.

“Yet none of these his brother can redeem by any way;
Nor can he unto God for him sufficient ransom pay”.

(Psalm 49:7 metrical version)

But the Brother born for the day of our adversity, who is the God-man, can redeem and did pay the sufficient ransom.

3. In the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, the *holiness* of God is displayed so perfectly that it cannot in any reasonable way be challenged when the ungodly are justified. The law of God is a copy of God’s moral character. Nothing but a perfect mirror of that character will do for the justification of a sinner. God will never justify anyone unless the most absolute degree of perfect righteousness is involved. This is what the “holy, harmless and undefiled” Lord Jesus did in our nature: “The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isaiah 42:21). Paul understood that, if he was to be justified, he must have Christ’s perfect righteousness. His earnest desire was to “be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Philippians 3:9; see also Psalms 51:14, 145:7).

4. The justification of a sinner is an arrangement that is infinitely *just*. It sets free sinners who are justly condemned, and does so in a manner that

glorifies God's holiness and justice. The Father said, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd" (Zechariah 13:7). Blessed for ever be the name of the Lord that He is able and willing to "justify the ungodly" while at the same time meeting all the demands of avenging justice, in the suffering of His beloved Son. O what a price was paid to make salvation possible! It was by the most terrible suffering: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). It was by the "strong crying and tears" of Him who has full fellowship in the nature of Jehovah – of Him whom God the Father called, "My fellow" – that sinners can be justified. O how hateful sin is to God! We ought not to trifle with a sin-hating God by sinning against Him!

5. The justification of a sinner displays the infinite *goodness* of God. David says that "His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:9). In the act of justifying the ungodly, the glory of the goodness of God is made to shine more magnificently than all the other perfections of His nature. "Never did God go further", says an old Puritan, "in any of His excellent perfections than this" – in His goodness. We might add that God's goodness itself never went further, in any of its acts towards lost man, than in justifying the ungodly, by means of the blood of the sinless Son of His love.

6. In the justification of a sinner, God's *truth* – His faithfulness – is boundless. In it He is infinitely true to Himself, to His own nature. He is true to His beloved Son and the covenant of peace between Them. He is true to the covenants between Him and men. Justification declares the glory of His unfathomable goodness to sinners: that He is not only able but willing to justify the ungodly – for what is God not able to do, if He wills to do it?

Challenges in a Godless World

4. A Stealthy Challenge

Matthew Vogan

Last month's section of this Youth Conference paper spoke of the challenge the Church faces today from secularism, which is an attempt to live without any kind of religion. It showed how this attitude in society conflicts with God's commands.

When a culture like ours is so saturated in secularism, it is hard to identify secularist messages. They no longer stand out clearly because they have become normal. The less you hear voices in the media and in daily life giving a clear witness to the truth, the more it becomes difficult to filter

out what is harmful. This is our environment, the cultural air we breathe. It can be like a fish in water; the fish does not notice the water in which it is swimming, it seems natural. We cannot completely avoid the messages of our culture. Like a fish in water, it can even come to seem normal.

Sometimes we hear on the radio or read in a newspaper some clear, undisguised attack on biblical truth or Christianity. We are naturally shocked and brought up short. Not simply perhaps by this attack alone but also by the realisation that the same spirit lurks in unspoken assumptions below the surface of much of what we encounter in the media.

Without much effort we can consume thousands of messages every day through the media. These come from advertising and other sources. Whether we like it or not, such adverts are always clamouring for our attention when we are simply walking or driving along the street or taking public transport.

Advertising in particular has become very value-laden. One example from last year is one where the words *Self-Doubt* were crossed out and replaced with *Self-Worth*. It was a way of selling cosmetics by combining a message of self-obsession with appearance with one of diversity. In the end, the message was that you find real significance in yourself. Advertisers are conscious of their power in shaping the views of society and so are determined to include messages and images that normalise and celebrate LGBT.

It is hard to screen out all the subtle messages in the way that the news is reported or the adverts to which we are exposed. Sometimes our coping mechanism is to raise our pain threshold so that we are not constantly disturbed by what we encounter.

Social media is undoubtedly the area in which this stealthy challenge has greatest strength. Many today have become constant consumers of social media. In this case the messages are created or shared by others and may (whether intentionally or not) carry some of the values that undermine the truth. Things may be pushed in our direction because others like them and this adds some personal weight to a damaging message. There is a temptation to see what is new or viral. The question is not just whether they are positively sinful but whether they profit us in any way.

The danger is that such things set the priorities and agenda to which we must react. As you may know, Google and Facebook have processes to work out what they think is important to you. A Google search brings back, not what is on the internet, but what Google thinks you personally want to see on the web. The whole information culture we consume has one giant spiritual process behind it pushing secular humanist values.

The false but alluring message is that this world is all that matters and *you* matter most of all. The materialist message it proclaims is that there is

nothing important that cannot be bought, seen or touched. All this is stealthily, subtly shaping our thinking and behaviour. It has shaped us, even if it results in an increased focus on the things of time and sense or an obsession with news and current affairs. It comes below the radar. The drinking water supply could have a level of poisons enough to cause gradual widespread damage but not so much as to be detected. This is a good illustration when we use it to think about the possible dangers in the way that our minds are fed.

The Church faces a great challenge in counteracting this mindset and influence. How do you communicate eternal and spiritual realities when people are saturated and sedated with the immediate, material pleasures of this life? This was the Lord Jesus Christ's warning: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34).

This secularist culture is where those of us under a certain age have grown up. We do not have experience of a different cultural environment; we can only compare more or less concentrated versions of this one. Older people can recall a society where Christian values had a greater influence but we can barely imagine what that would be like. These secularist views are the values almost always assumed and urged in our society. They also seem to go hand in hand with medical and technological advances that make it possible to have sex changes, babies for same-sex couples etc. Clearly this is an abuse of such technological progress, but the impression given by those with influence is that the advances and the abuses fit together.

We are not likely to feel drawn towards religions from outside our culture, such as those that come from the Far East. Yet because we are continually exposed to secular humanism, we are more at risk from being drawn away by this particular false "religion". It has grown up within our culture and seems almost natural to it. It has twined itself like poisonous ivy around the institutions with which we are familiar. It has used the benefits of Christian influence in society to attack Christianity itself.

It is a constant, total and stealthy challenge. Francis Schaeffer, a Christian writer who died in 1984, sought to think carefully about these things (although he sometimes gave too much attention to worldly culture). Before he died he said, "I believe that pluralistic secularism, in the long run, is a more deadly poison than straightforward persecution". The Church would find it easier to deal with violent and outright persecution than this stealthy way in which it is constantly undermined by secularism.

The Church has always had this conflict with the world in various forms. The spirit of the worldly world is everywhere in the society and culture of

unregenerate mankind. It is in their ways, their thinking, their clothing, their preferences, their lifestyle, their religion, their irreligion. As we will come on to see (God willing) this can impact the Church in such a way that it becomes a worldly Church. The things that are in the world, such as the pride of life, the lust of the eye and of the flesh can easily come into religious things just as much as everyday things. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

We need to be on our guard. We must seek to serve and glorify God in all that we do. The worldly world is a constant enemy for the Christian. It seems always to be with us, clamouring for our attention and seeking to dazzle our eyes. We cannot avoid contact with this world but we can be careful about the influence it leaves with us. The Lord Jesus prayed, not that God would take the disciples "out of the world", but that in the world God would "keep them from the evil" (John 17:15).

We must not only reject the corrupt culture of the ungodly but also be careful with what is not obviously sinful in itself. This is because there may be underlying messages that we do not at once detect. The Scriptures warn us about being like children in our understanding, in relation to this world (1 Corinthians 14:20). We must not be easily led but rather on our guard. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

Christ says: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He has also given to His people the gift of faith as a mighty spiritual weapon by which they overcome the world (1 John 5:4).

For Junior Readers

Good Advice

Perhaps you have not heard of Lady Colquhoun. When she was a girl, her name was Janet Sinclair. She was born in 1781, and her mother sadly died when she was only 4 years old. After that she spent most of her childhood in the far north of Scotland where her grandmother looked after her and

her sister Hannah. They were taken to church every Lord's Day and they also learned Psalms and *The Shorter Catechism* by heart.

In their teens, the girls moved to Edinburgh and went to the church where godly Rev Walter Buchanan preached. While there they were convicted of their self-righteousness and learned to "receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation as He [was] offered to [them] in the gospel", as the *Catechism* describes saving faith.

Not long after this, when Janet was 19, she married Sir James Colquhoun of Luss. She was then known as Lady Colquhoun and moved to her husband's home on the shores of beautiful Loch Lomond. Luss was a small village where few people went, but this gave her more time for teaching and training her children.

There were three boys and two girls. Each Sabbath evening she would gather them round her and listen as they repeated the Psalms and *Catechism* answers they had learned. Then she would read to them from profitable books. She always prayed for them all and wished above everything else that they would each come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

She also wrote them letters full of advice about spiritual things and about everyday things – advice that is just as suitable for you today as it was for her children then. This is from one of these letters, with a few changes:

"Are you living to God? Are you trusting in Christ for salvation and obeying His commands? O my children, this is the one thing needful. I would urge you at once to take Christ as your Saviour, and God as your God. Blessed be His name, all His offers are free.

"I exhort you, my dear children, if any of you should at any future time think of marriage, that you will not allow beauty, or anything outward, to be the only thing you look for. In the choice of a wife or husband seek for one who fears and loves God. Pray to God, and He will direct your choice.

"Read the Bible carefully, and with a desire to be instructed by it. And pray for a blessing on it. Read also other good books. Never neglect private prayer.

"Wherever you may be placed, try to act as God would have you act. Be very cautious in your friendships. Shun, as the plague, those who do not have the fear of God, whatever other attractive qualities they may possess. You will meet with such people, but do not – O do not – make them your friends. Dread the world; dread its foolishness, dread its company. Place your happiness in religion. Keep the commandments of God. O fly to Christ for salvation! 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come. . . . And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.'"

Will you too not lay this to heart?

J van Kralingen

For Younger Readers

The Boy with the Gold Key

There was once a little boy whose father and mother gave him a key made from gold. It was not meant to be used to open doors; it was just an ornament. The boy was told to keep it and take care of it until he was older – until he was a grown up.

His parents told him not to take it outside. Do you think the boy obeyed his parents? Too often little boys and girls do not obey. They want to do what suits themselves. And this little boy did not obey. Ask God to help you do what your parents tell you to do. And ask Him to keep from doing what they tell you not to do.

The little boy took the gold key outside, and do you know what happened? He lost it; he could not find it anywhere.

He was very upset about losing the key, but he did not tell his father or mother about losing it. Day after day the boy went out to look for it, but he could never find it.

In the end, he remembered what he had heard his father say about God. The boy said to himself: "He knows where the key is."

So the boy went down a quiet lane, where he did not think anyone would see him. There the boy knelt down and prayed to God. He said that God knew everything, that He made everything, and that He knew when people lose anything. He went on: "I have lost my little golden key. Do show me where it is."

The little boy stood up and walked away. He did not walk far before he saw something gleaming in the sunshine. He hoped it was his key. And it was his key. God heard his prayer.

I hope he also asked God to forgive his sins and to make him holy.

The French Stonemason

1. Trying to Keep God's Commands

The stonemason lived in a village in the north of France. He was born in a Roman Catholic home and his priest had given him some teaching at the time of his first communion, probably when he was seven. But later in life he paid no attention to religion; he did not observe Roman Catholic

ceremonies; and he mocked the priests. He was an ungodly man. His lack of religion was typical of the tradesmen around him; they brought their children to be baptized, sent them to learn their catechism, asked the priest for his blessing on their marriage, and a priest was called to take their funerals.

The mason was known as a good workman, but he never asked himself the question: "What must I do to be saved?" Even if he had, Romanism could not give him a safe answer to that vital question. He never thought about his need for salvation, his state beyond death and what verdict Christ would pass on him at the last judgement. His mind was focused on earning money and on enjoying himself.

People believed the mason was an honest workman, and he would have been very angry if someone had told him that the wrath of God was hanging over him because of his sin. One day he was working alone, trowel in hand, and congratulating himself how successful he was in his work, when all at once a thought struck him forcefully: "To succeed in any line of work, one must study the rules carefully and follow them closely. To be a good mason, for example, I needed a long apprenticeship; I had to spend several years to learn the art of building; without this I should just have been a poor workman. But to be a good Christian must I not study, search out and follow the rules of the Christian religion?"

"Certainly," his conscience replied. "And you have not done this; you have not studied the Christian religion; you have not practised it. Then you are not a good Christian."

This sudden thought troubled his mind. The clear contradiction between his conduct and his Christian profession produced such strong feelings that he threw down his trowel and ran home to tell his wife the discovery he had made and to ask her advice. Though his wife was more careful to practise her religion, she was as ignorant as himself. She was glad to see that he was thinking about so important a subject, and tried to encourage him in his good resolutions. But she could not really advise him what to do. She just said to him: "Go and consult the priest; he is an intelligent, zealous man. He loves the people of the parish, and he will be happy to give you all the directions suited to your case."

The mason went at once to the priest and told him all he felt. The priest was glad to hear what the mason had to say; he assumed that he had a zealous convert, and he earnestly encouraged the mason to go on as he was doing.

"But I ask you", the mason answered, "what I must do to be a good Christian?"

"My friend," the priest told him, "you must observe faithfully the commandments of the Church."

"I understand, but what are these commandments?"

"Do you not know them?"

"No, I assure you; I have lived till now without religion, and I am in great need of being instructed."

"Well, my friend, this is what you are to do: attend mass regularly . . . fast on Friday and Saturday every week. And as you have to make up for the past, you must repeat for some days a number of prayers."

"I thank you for your good advice, and I shall not fail to follow it, for I wish to be a good Christian."

The mason then went away and, for several weeks, he observed very strictly all the priest had ordered. Attendance at mass, long prayers, fasting, penances – nothing was missed out. But, to his great surprise, he realised that his mind was no more enlightened and his conscience was no easier. He went on in doubt and anxiety, and began to suspect that he needed to do something more if he was to become a good Christian.

So he went again to the priest, and complained of the poor results of his religious activities. The priest was surprised at his earnestness; he even showed that he was displeased at the poor man. He asked the mason sharply if he had committed any serious sin which troubled his mind. But the mason had already told him everything. He had been as honest as others, the man replied, and no crime was weighing on his conscience. The priest then told him to go on obeying the commandments of the Church and added that he might rest easy if he faithfully performed these duties.

The mason made this new attempt with redoubled zeal, but with no better success. Indeed his uneasiness, instead of becoming less, increased from day to day. The efforts which he made to find rest for his conscience only made his anxiety worse. It was in vain that he repeated the prayers prescribed by the priest and submitted himself to the most rigid penances. These were useless, and his confidence in the priest's prescriptions began to be shaken.

He was constantly weighed down with a sense of his sins and complained that the Roman Catholic ceremonies were not enough to make him a good Christian. He told himself: "When I did not concern myself with religion, I lived at peace. No fear, no painful thought troubled my mind, but now all is changed. The priest makes me fine promises, which are not fulfilled. And how could they be? The more I reflect, the less I understand. I have not received any new light since I have attended mass and other acts of worship. If I should spend my whole life in these practices, I should know no more and be no better. On the contrary, at every new act of devotion my sins appear to be greater, and what ought to console me serves only to increase my torment. What will become of me if this state of things should continue?"

Looking Around Us

Whose Blessing Should We Seek?

Lama Geshe has died. Possibly very few, if any, readers have heard of him. But he was well known to people who have climbed Mount Everest, in Nepal. Few of them would dare attempt to climb this difficult mountain, almost 9000 metres high, without seeking his blessing.

Geshe was highly respected by the Sherpa community, the professionals who guide hundreds of climbers up Nepal's mountains each year. Sherpas consider Everest holy and call it "Goddess Mother of Mountains". They would not climb the mountain without first visiting Geshe to be blessed, and most climbers followed their example.

But people should not look to a man for protection, but to One who will never die, the God who controls everything and can take care of us wherever we are. Yet we are not to act rashly and presume that God will take care of us whatever we do. Do you remember how the devil came to Jesus and tempted Him to throw Himself down from a high point of the temple? It was possibly 150 metres above ground. Jesus refused. He told Satan: "It is written . . . Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:7). We ought to be very careful not to put ourselves in danger if there is no good reason for doing so.

"Sherpas believe that Geshe's prayers were extremely powerful in protecting them on Everest", said a sherpa who organises mountaineering expeditions in Nepal. He went on: "There will be a little bit of anxiety among the Sherpa going to the mountain this year, because they will be missing a vital ingredient for safety". Each year, Geshe would bless hundreds of mountaineers, repeating a mantra, or prayer, to another Buddhist goddess, who they believe lives at the top of Mount Everest. They also believe that all climbers must make an offering to her if they want to reach the peak safely. Geshe would also give climbers a mascot, with part of the mantra written on it, to wear around their necks as they climbed Everest.

Of course, Geshe's blessing was no vital ingredient for their safety. The gods to whom he prayed do not exist; so they had no power to protect anyone. Neither could the mascot do them any good. Sadly, some climbers have died on Mount Everest; no doubt most of them would have been blessed by Geshe and would have been carrying the mascot he gave them.

What people need in dangerous situations – and even where there seems to be no danger – is to have the Lord's blessing, for He is the true God, who has real power. And He will watch over those who sincerely commit themselves to His care – in other words, those who seek "first the kingdom of God,

