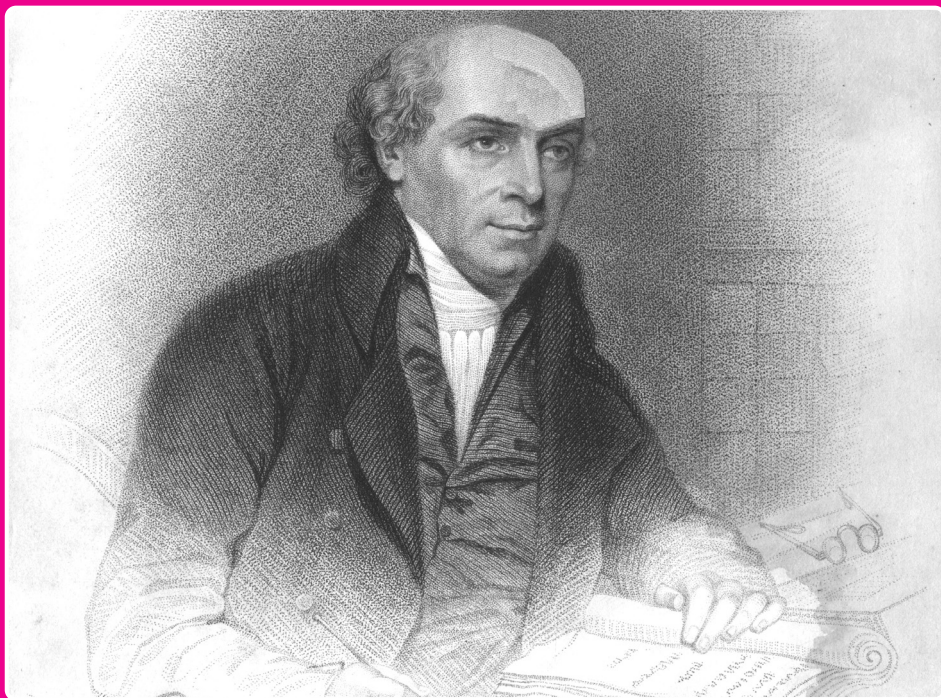


The Young People's Magazine

**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



November 2009

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Two Great Obstacles

The two teenagers were apprentice shoemakers; their names were William Carey and John Warr. Neither of them was converted but they argued a lot about religion. William usually won their arguments. It was not that he was better at presenting reasons for what he said; it was just that he made claims that he could not prove and got away with it. He confessed later that he had “a share of pride sufficient for a thousand times my knowledge”. He realised that he lacked something, but he had no idea that he needed a complete change of heart and that nothing else could do him any real good.

William gained some useful knowledge by reading books which John lent him. He tried hard to make himself better, giving up “lying, swearing and other sins”. He went to three church services on a Sabbath and to a prayer meeting in the evening. Surely, he thought, all this will make me acceptable to God. He still did not realise that he had a bad heart. He needed a new heart but he did not recognise it was only God who could do that for him. Then his master caught him cheating, and all William’s hopes of earning God’s favour by his good works disappeared.

But God had mercy on him and he was “brought to depend on a crucified Saviour for pardon and salvation”. And he began to seek his religious beliefs in the Bible, not from his own ideas. He now had a new heart, and one small indication of that change was that, when others were speaking, he listened hard and said little – though he occasionally asked a suitable question.

William lived in a time when men from Western countries were exploring various far-away parts of the world. Among these explorers was the British seaman James Cook. As William got on with his work of making shoes, he could give some of his attention to whatever book lay open in front of him. And as he read *The Voyages of Captain Cook*, he would pray for people in those parts of the world who had never heard the gospel. He also began to study other languages – including Hebrew and Greek, in which the Bible was originally written.

In 1791, when William Carey was about 30, he wrote a little book with a long title: *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for*

the Conversion of the Heathen. The next year he was one of a group of ministers who set up a society which, they hoped, would send out missionaries to countries where no one knew the true religion. Then, in early 1793, Carey offered himself as a missionary and prepared to sail for India.

After spending more than three years in north-west India, he noted two great obstacles which stood in the way of people profiting from the gospel. One of these obstacles was not having the Bible in their own language; that applied in most parts of the world. The other was the wickedness of the human heart; that applied everywhere.

The first obstacle is one that *you* do not have. You can read English, and you have an excellent translation in the Authorised Version. But the people of India in 1793, except for the few who had learned English, could not read – or even listen to someone else reading – God's revelation in their own language. So Carey set to work translating the New Testament into Bengali, one of India's many languages. The date 7 February 1801 must always have had an important place in Carey's mind; on that day he printed the last page of the newly-translated Bengali Testament. One group of Indians now had a significant part of the Scriptures in their own language. It was a vital step in bringing them the gospel.

But many others, in India and in other countries, still did not have the Bible in their own language. Much has been done since that time to translate the Scriptures for the benefit of various peoples throughout the world. Carey did a great deal to show the way, throwing himself into the work of translation. With the help of Indian teachers, he made tremendous progress; he turned the whole Bible into six different Indian languages, and parts of the New Testament into nearly 30 others. It was a remarkable achievement!

Yet many people, belonging to relatively small groups, speak languages into which the Bible has not yet been translated, even more than 200 years after Carey's first efforts. This lack of the Bible still remains an obstacle to such people coming to know Christ and salvation through Him. What a great blessing it will be for the world when every language group has a high-quality translation of the Scriptures!

But the other obstacle still stands in the way of the progress of the gospel in all parts of the world today, for everyone begins life with a hard, wicked heart. Because of their sinful hearts, they do not love God and, as they grow up, they all want to go away from God; they want to get as far away from Him as they dare. Even if they have a Bible which they are able to read, they resist the truth which they find in its pages. And if they are able to listen to good, scriptural preaching, they resist that too; they do not want to repent or to believe the gospel – though it speaks of God sending His own Son into the

world to die for sinners, and though it tells of the wonderful blessings all will have, in time and eternity, who trust in Christ.

Yet some of those to whom Carey preached did trust in Christ. By 1803, just 10 years after they had reached India, 25 people had been baptized; these were men and women who professed to have been brought to believe in Christ. And by 1818 about 600 had been baptized.

Something wonderful had taken place in every one whose profession was sincere. Their hearts had been changed. They were no longer wicked; there were now the beginnings of holiness. Their hearts were no longer hard and resistant to the gospel; they had now submitted to it.

What had happened? God the Holy Spirit had come to work in their hearts. His is the only power that can change anyone's heart. Human hearts are so wicked and so hard that no one can change another person's heart or even their own. But God can. Nothing is impossible for Him. He can overcome the greatest of obstacles. And, let us be quite clear, the wickedness and the hardness of the human heart *is* a tremendous obstacle to the salvation of sinners. It is only because God has complete power over sinners' hearts that anyone is ever converted. It is only because the Holy Spirit can reach the heart of even the worst of sinners that this obstacle can be overcome.

Think of Manasseh, the wicked King of Judah. His heart was so hard that he resisted all of his godly father's teaching and all the messages that later came to him through God's prophets. Yet, in the end, the Holy Spirit softened his heart and made him willing to repent and trust in God. I am sure you have not sinned in all the ways that Manasseh did, but – unless you have already believed in Christ – you too are going down the same broad road that leads to a lost eternity. You must realise that your wicked, hard heart is a tremendous obstacle in the way of your salvation; it will keep you from forsaking your sins and looking to Christ. And you can never deliver yourself by your own efforts; your hard heart is too big an obstacle.

So you need the Holy Spirit to come and work in your heart – to cleanse it, to subdue its wickedness, and to take away its resistance to the truth of the Bible. How suitable are the words of Psalm 25 for you to turn into a prayer:

Let not the errors of my youth, nor sins remembered be:
In mercy, for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord, remember me.

If you are thus forgiven and if the Holy Spirit comes to work in your heart to take away the dreadful obstacle of a wicked, hard heart, you will have every reason to sing, to God's praise, the next verse of the Psalm:

The Lord is good and gracious, He upright is also:
He therefore sinners will instruct in ways that they should go.

God's Abundant Mercy

A young American with godly parents left home to spend four years training to be an army officer. His parents gave him a Bible; they told him to read it often and to make it the rule of his life. He put it in his trunk with all his other belongings, and away he went to the military academy. But he confessed that, during the four years he spent as a cadet, the Bible mostly stayed hidden away in his trunk; probably he did not read it more than six times; even then he wanted to keep it out of sight from his room-mates. So it is not surprising that, in spite of his parents' advice, the cadet followed a thoroughly-worldly lifestyle. Occasionally one of his fellow cadets would unsuccessfully try to convince him that the Bible is false; he could not get rid of the conviction that it is indeed true.

His four years of training over, the cadet returned home. A huge change had taken place: his father and brother had both died. The cadet was told that both of them, just before their death, had spoken of their concern about him. The father was asked if he had a message for the cadet. "No," he answered, "only to read my letters." Again and again he must have included good, scriptural advice for his son. None of this, impressive though it probably was, made any real impact on the cadet's soul.

Again the time came to leave home. This time his sister gave him a Bible, writing in it her wish that he "would make it the rule of his conduct and the guide of his life". As before, it was placed in his trunk. And, as before, it was rarely, if ever, taken out. Indeed, two years later he lost it and never thought of buying a new one. He was just as careless about going to church; in any case, for much of the four years after leaving the academy he was serving with the army in places far away from any church. Still he had not given up his belief that God exists, and other soldiers would argue with him and laugh at him because of what they called his "early prejudices". He himself read unbelieving books and continued in his ungodly lifestyle, yet he did sometimes feel the Holy Spirit striving with him because of his sins.

On his next visit home, the officer noticed on his mother's face the calm, submissive expression he had always known. He later commented: "The same sweet smile of welcome still showed the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit on her heart". He was conscious that he had never completely lost the influence of what she had taught him when he was young. And he imagined that, every time she looked at him, she offered up a prayer for him.

When he left home again to return to the army, the officer was rather more serious than before. He now had some sense of the emptiness of the world's pleasures. And he had recognised something in his mother which perhaps

had never particularly struck him before: a calmness, a peace and a happiness that made him want to have her religion. Now, more than before, he wanted to read the Bible; another sister had given him a New Testament, and he tried to read a chapter every evening. He thought of it as a first step to making himself better. But he had to learn that, like everyone else, he was completely unable to make himself better.

Yet, clearly, he was not yet really serious in his attempts at religion. He still attended parties and dances and, if he returned late, he would leave off his Bible reading until the next morning. And if it was the bell ringing for breakfast that wakened him, he would again put off reading his daily chapter – until the evening. Yet he would argue for good principles of behaviour and oppose evil principles. “But”, he later acknowledged, “all my ideas of virtue were founded on a wrong basis. I believed that it was in the power of every individual to do good and forsake evil.”

Even then, he knew he was not a real Christian. He often tried to feel “the overshadowing presence of a God above me”. But all seemed to be hard and dark; he could not penetrate into God’s presence. He could not feel properly conscious that there is “an all-merciful Saviour”, and so he could not pray.

Now he attended church at least once every Sabbath. But what was his attitude to the sermon? “I heard or read it,” he confessed, “more with the feelings of the critic than of a humble follower of the lowly Jesus desiring the sincere milk of the Word.” He did not even realise that people are to do what is right because *God has commanded* them to do so; it just seemed a good idea that made for good relationships between people. He enjoyed reading sermons by Thomas Chalmers, a noted Scottish preacher, but it was the way Chalmers spoke that attracted him rather than the truths he taught.

Things went on like this for nearly a year. Then he began to feel very uneasy and discontented. He came to realise that God had let him come into this state so that he might learn something: “that all my hopes of happiness from earthly things were vain”.

One day he threw himself on a settee and picked up a Bible which was lying nearby. He opened it at the first chapter of 1 Peter and started to read. He felt deep repentance. He said, “I felt the love of God shed abroad in my whole being. I was convinced that I had the Holy Spirit at work within me.” As he thought of God’s goodness he cried like a child. He knew that he had been a sinner and felt deeply sorry for how unthankful he had been to God for His goodness to him.

Now the officer did feel deeply grateful to God for His mercy. “I rejoiced in the thought”, he said, “that, though I had been a wanderer from Him, yet He was a good and kind Saviour and was ready to forgive me all the injuries

I had done to Him.” He could now use, as if they were his own, the words of verse 3 of the chapter he began to read: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”. And, even more, he enjoyed reading verse 8: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”.

He noticed a change in his whole character, which is what you should expect if someone is converted. He was conscious of a strong love to God, and to everyone around him, even to his worst enemy. He felt so happy. He felt he should go and tell his minister what had happened, but he put off doing so. He was afraid of worldly people making fun of him and so he did not feel able to confess that he was now on the Lord's side. Indeed he says, “I had relapsed into my former forgetfulness of the Lord”.

Does that mean that the officer was not converted after all, that his experience was not genuine? It is obviously very difficult for us to decide correctly with our limited information. And it may even be very difficult for people to recognise whether or not it is a saving change that has taken place in those they know very well – until it has been proved by a period of consistent godly living, or disproved by going back to an ungodly way of life. It may also be difficult for the person who has had some kind of spiritual experience to know if it really is genuine. This shows the need for us to examine ourselves prayerfully in the light of the Bible, so that we may have good grounds for deciding if we have passed from a state of spiritual death to one of spiritual life. After all, it is not every instance of religious excitement that turns out to be a true conversion.

But the Lord did not leave the officer to himself. It was in the Lord's providence that the army sent him to serve in some other place, where several godly officers were stationed. One of them spoke to him about God's goodness in bringing him back after two occasions of backsliding. That very day, our officer's new friend took ill with a fever and, only five days later, he died. His death had a great influence on all the other believing officers in confirming them in their resolve to turn away from the world and follow Christ. Not many months later, our officer made a public confession of his faith and took part in the Lord's Supper. He must have found it helpful to have had sufficient time to examine himself so that he could see that his was a genuine experience of conversion.

And not long afterwards, this officer had a further reason for happiness: his wife too was converted. It is a great blessing for a husband and wife to be able to make their way *together* towards heaven.

Baptism

2. How Is It to Be Performed?

Rev Donald Macdonald

The first part of this Youth Conference paper dealt with the question: What does Baptism mean?

There are three methods of applying Baptism in the Christian Church – immersion, sprinkling and pouring. Baptists hold to the mode of immersion; they argue that this is the only scriptural way to baptize; they do not accept that any other form of Baptism, such as sprinkling, is valid. The Presbyterian and Reformed position does not deny that immersion is a valid method of baptizing, but they consider it unnecessary. They argue from the Scriptures, from the time of the Apostles, and also from the meaning of words as expressed in the original language (Greek), that the best mode is to pour or to sprinkle.

Baptists believe that the only right way of administering this sacrament is total immersion in water. But is it simply a question of method? It is wrongly supposed that the controversy between Baptists and the rest of the Christian Church is about whether to sprinkle or not. The real Baptist position is that the command to baptize is a simple command to immerse, in order to symbolise the death, burial and resurrection of the believer with Christ (relying on Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:11,12).

But the rest of the Church maintains that Baptism is a simple command to wash with water, in order to symbolise the purification wrought by the Holy Ghost. They further believe that the burying with Christ in Baptism signifies the union of the believer to Christ by the Baptism of the Spirit, not the burying of the body and covering it over in the Baptism of water.

When Baptists use these verses in Romans and Colossians to establish their argument, they depart seriously from the Apostle Paul's intention in writing them. What he means is that, when sinners are truly united to Christ, their baptism is into His death, not His burial. And what is symbolised in the external washing and purifying points to Christ's death on the cross, and to the newness of life in all who are truly regenerate, which corresponds to the resurrection.

The Baptist interpreter does not agree with this; for him the real baptismal idea is expressed in going down into and coming out of the water. His view is that the Greek word for *to baptize* always signifies to dip, "never expressing anything but method". But the significance of Baptism does not lie in how the water is applied, whether by immersion or sprinkling; it has to do with washing or the application of water.

Baptists believe that only those immersed should be accepted as members of the Church. They deny that sprinkling is real Baptism and many of them declare that all those thus baptized are living in open sin and should not be regarded as members of the Church of Christ, or admitted to the Lord's table. For them Baptism by sprinkling is not only irregular, but also null and void, so that those Christians who are not immersed remain outside the visible Church.

For Junior Readers – Lessons from the Life of John G Paton

38. Namakei – the Old Chief of Aniwa

Among the Aniwans who had come to know Christ as their Saviour was Chief Namakei. He was an old man and greatly respected on the island. It was he who had spoken in praise of Paton and his God after the sinking of the well. He had been a fierce warrior and a cannibal; but the gospel spoke to his heart and he became a true believer in Jesus Christ. His only living child, Litsi, was the first of the local girls to live with the Patons and she too was converted.

Namakei became a true friend to the Patons and, when a son was born to them, Namakei was thrilled. He claimed the baby boy as his heir, as his own son was dead, and brought people to see the “white Chief of Aniwa”. Chief Namakei and Paton's son could be seen walking round the island hand-in-hand, chatting freely together. As a result, other people were drawn to hear the gospel.

He was a diligent Christian. When he was well, he would take Paton's Bible and lay it on the desk before the start of each service on Sabbath and Wednesday. And, before the church was built, he would organise the people and get them ready for the evening worship under the large banyan tree near the mission house.

Namakei had heard about the once-a-year mission synod, when all the missionaries from the islands would gather and discuss their work. He wanted to go to one of these meetings. This would not really have been a problem except for the fact that Namakei was now very old and quite frail. Paton was concerned that the exertions of such a trip would be too much for him and that he would die away from home; Paton was afraid that this would cause the people of Aniwa to turn against himself and his God. So he refused to take Namakei with him. But Namakei insisted that he should go, and everyone in his family supported him. At last Paton gave in and agreed that Namakei could come.

A small basket carrying all Namakei's worldly belongings went with him onto the boat as they set sail for Aneityum, the island where the mission synod was to take place that year. He had gathered his people together to give them a loving farewell, pleading with them to be "strong for Jesus", whether they ever saw him again or not, and to be kind and loyal to Paton. The people wailed and wept bitterly, suspecting that they might never see their dear chief again.

He seemed to cope well with the voyage to Aneityum and was pleased with the welcome he got there. He was thrilled to hear how the work of the Lord was prospering on each of the islands, and how island after island was learning to praise Jesus. His heart glowed and he told Paton: "Missi, I am lifting up my head like a tree. I am growing tall with joy!"

But, several days after arriving at the synod, his health failed and he sent for Paton. Paton describes what happens next:

"On the fourth or fifth day, however, he sent for me out of the synod and, when I came to him, he said eagerly, 'Missi, I am near to die! I have asked you to come and say farewell. Tell my daughter, my brother and my people to go on pleasing Jesus, and I will meet them again in the fair world.'

"I tried to encourage him, saying that God might raise him up again and restore him to his people; but he faintly whispered, 'O Missi, death is already touching me! I feel my feet going away from under me. Help me to lie down under the shade of that banyan tree.'

"So saying, he seized my arm; we staggered near to the tree, and he lay down under its cool shade. He whispered again, 'I am going! O Missi, let me hear your words rising up in prayer, and then my soul will be strong to go.'

"Amidst many choking sobs, I tried to pray. At last he took my hand, pressed it to his heart, and said in a stronger and clearer tone, 'O my Missi, I go before you, but I will meet you again in the home of Jesus. Farewell!'"

And so the first Aniwan convert to Christianity died. He was buried the next day. Here was a man who, not long before, had been a heathen cannibal, and he was now receiving a Christian burial. His death caused sorrow amongst the white missionaries as well as the local people, as they wept together over his grave.

It was with great fear that Paton set off for Aniwa. How would Namakei's family and his people react to his death? But, although Litsi his daughter was upset, she accepted the death of her father with true Christian grace and said to Paton, "Truly, Missi, we will remember my dear father's parting word and follow in his steps and help you in the work of the Lord".

The people of Aniwa were also greatly saddened by the loss of their beloved chief. The following Sabbath Paton spoke to the people about

Namakei's life and conversion, and many of them were brought to seek Christ for themselves.

In God's providence what Paton feared would be a difficult situation was turned into a positive one as the people took to heart the advice of their dead chief. Paton, no doubt, would have been praying earnestly to God to bring good out of this sad event. So we, when we are faced with difficult situations beyond our control, should ask God for help and guidance in them. He may answer our prayers beyond what we can imagine. He may not take away the difficulty completely, but He will bring about what is for the good of His trusting people. David the Psalmist had experience of this, and he went on to praise God for His help: "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

S M Campbell

Martha and Mary

1. Introduction

Rev H M Cartwright

This is the first part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference.

When I was asked to speak to you about Martha and Mary I wondered what the purpose of the paper was intended to be. Our reading of the Bible should be with purpose and, of course, in general our purpose should be that of the psalmist: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak" (Psalm 85:8). "The Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man" (*Shorter Catechism*, 2,3).

When we come to consider Biblical characters we must recognise that they have significance, some more than others, in the developing of the revelation God has given of Himself throughout the history of redemption. But we should also enquire into the ways in which they are patterns to be followed in their following of the Lord or beacons to warn us away from some sinful and dangerous course. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus lived in Bethany, a village not far from Jerusalem, on the other side of the Mount of Olives, on the road to Jericho. Its one lasting claim to fame is that it was "the town of Mary and her sister Martha" (John 11:1). Speaking of Dundee, Robert M'Cheyne said: "In heaven our town is known as the town of our Marys and Marthas. Perhaps

some poor garret where an eminent child of God dwells gives this town its name and interest in the presence of Jesus.” The interest of heaven is not in the places which boast great men or events or structures but in the places where the redeemed of the Lord are: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me” (Isaiah 49:16).

It is usually assumed that they lived together, that Martha was the eldest of the family and that the home belonged to her. We have every reason to believe that these three people had a place in the everlasting love of the triune God, but they obviously also had a special place in the affection of the man Christ Jesus. Their home seems often to have been a welcome haven for the Saviour – a rare place where He received a warm welcome from friends. It was, says Robert Candlish, “the nearest approach, for Him who ‘had nowhere to lay His head’, to the warm heartiness of home”. He was there during the week leading to His crucifixion.

All that we really know about them comes from the Biblical reports of three events. The first event is recorded only by Luke (10:38-42) – the occasion when Martha became exasperated with Mary, and indeed with the Lord, because while she was busy in the kitchen preparing food for the Saviour, and most likely also His companions, Mary was sitting listening to the words of Jesus. The second event is recorded only by John (11:1-53) – the death and resurrection of Lazarus and what took place before and afterwards. The third event is recorded by Matthew (26:6-13), Mark (14:3-9) and John (12:1-9) – the anointing of Jesus by Mary with very precious ointment, which took place in the house of Simon the leper. There have been various guesses as to who Simon the leper was and what his relationship to Martha, Mary and Lazarus was, but the most we can say with a measure of certainty is that he is likely to have been recovered from his leprosy by Jesus.

I would like in this talk to visit each of these scenes in turn and try to see what we can learn about Martha and Mary and what we can learn from them. The incidents reveal to us much about Christ Himself and about His dealings with His people. That is what believers find most edifying. But they also instruct us in what our attitude to Christ should be – how devotion to Christ should find expression in our lives.

The main lesson which we learn from our first encounter with Mary and Martha is the importance of having our spiritual priorities right.

The main lesson which we learn from our second encounter with Mary and Martha is the need for complete confidence in the grace, wisdom and power of Christ.

The main lesson which we learn from our third encounter with Mary and Martha is the benefit of concentrating our attention on what honours Christ.

For Younger Readers

The Stolen Bible

Two ladies took their car to the beach and left the windows open. A young man came up to the car. He looked carefully around him to see if anyone was watching. He saw a basket on the back seat with something in it. He did not see anyone watching; so he took the basket and ran away.

When the ladies came back, one of them said to the other: "I thought I left my Bible in the car". Then they realised that someone stole the basket; the Bible was in the basket. They prayed to God that the thief would read the Bible and that God would speak to him through the Bible.

After some months, a young man came knocking on the ladies' door. In his hand was the stolen Bible. "I am very sorry", he said. "I needed money and thought there was some in your basket. I have been reading your book. It is wonderful. May I keep it, please?"

The ladies were glad to let him keep it. God heard their prayers.

The man asked them many questions. It was God that made him know that it was wrong to steal the Bible. And God could teach him much more from His wonderful book. God could teach him that he was a sinner. And God could teach him that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners like him.

I hope God did all that for him and that He saved the man from all his sins – not just his stealing. And I hope God will save you from all your sins. You must ask God to do it for you.

The Good Portion

Part of a letter from Jonathan Ranken Anderson, a Glasgow minister, thanking a friend for her sympathy after his wife's death. It has been edited.

We needed all the tender concern which dear friends could give to us, but our souls had wholly dwelt in silence amidst it all unless the Lord had been our help. He has in many ways been very gracious to us, not least in the solemn scene which closed the earthly course of my beloved wife. She had been in great darkness and trouble the whole of the previous night and the day that followed, till less than an hour before her death. She asked me to

read Psalm 8 and then exclaimed, “His name is excellent in all the earth”.

I repeated some scriptures – among others that one in Isaiah: “Fear not, for I am with thee”. Then she said, “That will do; do not leave me any more”. She next asked me to sing or repeat Psalm 24. I was too sad to sing, but I began to repeat, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof”. She said, “That is not it”. I remembered some delightful views she had had of the last verses, and said, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in”. Then she said, “That is it!”

When I finished she said with great emphasis, “Now I know He gives great deliverance”. I went on repeating passages with a heart bursting with grief, and my hand resting on her pulse that told me that her life was ebbing quickly away. She said soon afterwards: “He is here; He is come to take me to Himself; I stand ready to receive Him”. I went on quoting passages from the Word, though little able for the task, and again she said, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly”. In a few minutes, the darkness of death seemed to come over her eyes, and she asked for more light. But though it was brought she took no notice of it, and at 9 o’clock she drew her last long breath, and all was still and motionless. Who can tell the anguish of that hour, and yet I could say, “It is well”. I left the room feeling that God had put great honour on this family in allowing us to be witnesses of such a scene.

I shall not trouble you with the griefs I have had since. The Lord has dealt kindly with me in the midst of them all, and at times I have felt happy in Him. My friends are in heaven; my possessions are there; my home is there. I am but a stranger here, and I feel as if everything around were strange to me. I almost count the days and hours that pass and I hope to welcome the end, that I may rest.

May you choose the good portion which shall never be taken from you!

For Your Bookshelf?

John Calvin, by Simonetta Carr, published by Reformation Heritage Books, hardback, 63 pages, £13.95 from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

This book, with a larger-than-normal page size, is the first in a series called “Christian biographies for young readers”; it is aimed at children aged 7-10. It tells the story of John Calvin, a godly minister who was born in 1509 – exactly 500 years ago. Rev David Campbell wrote about him in this Magazine in July and August. Now you have the chance to read about Calvin’s life in a simpler form. The story is well told and there are many illustrations.

A Call from God

W S Plumer

Taken, with editing, from the book, *Short Sermons for the People*. Plumer was a minister in America. His text was: "Unto you, O men, I call" (Proverbs 8:4).

Will you now listen to some plain words? They shall be kind. They shall be true. They relate to the most weighty things. They concern your well-being now and for ever.

1. *There is a God.* All nature says so. The heavens declare His glory. The earth is full of His goodness. In Him we live and move and have our being. God is one. He is almighty and all-wise. He alone is good. There is none like Him. There is none beside Him.

2. *This God is holy and just.* He is a ruler among the nations. He is a great King. He cannot deny Himself. He hates sin. It is not certain that He hates anything else. But it is certain that He hates sin with all His heart. To Him sin is horrible and abominable. With Him is no iniquity. Just and right is He in all His ways and in all His works.

3. *This God has given us a law.* This law, like Himself, is holy, just and good. Its precepts require our thoughts, words and deeds to be holy. They forbid all sin. They require all righteousness. Everything we think or say or do must be either right or wrong in the eye of this law, which never changes and is the rule of conduct to angels as well as men.

4. *The penalty of this law is death.* God is displeased with those who break it, and it is right that He should be. The death threatened to the sinner includes the full penalty due to sin, both in this world and the next. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." It deserves to die. For one sin many angels were hurled from heaven down to hell. For one sin our first parents were driven out of Eden. For one murder many a man has been hanged. For one lie Gehazi became a leper as white as snow. For one foolish speech God would not permit Moses to enter the land of Canaan. In the punishment it inflicts, God's law is as righteous as in the duties it demands and the sins it forbids.

5. *You have a soul that will live for ever in happiness or in misery.* You have just one. You have two ears; if one of them is deaf, you may hear with the other. You have two eyes; you may be blind in one of them, yet you may see well with the other. Yet you have only one soul; if you lose it, all is lost.

6. *That soul is worth saving.* It shall exist as long as there is a heaven or a hell, as long as there are people or angels or a God. That soul may be as happy as an angel, and it may be as miserable as a devil. It can rise high and shine gloriously in the presence of God. It can sink to low vices, to deep ruin – yes, to the lowest hell. It is worth so much that no one can tell its value.

Someone may be worth tens of millions of dollars, and you can tell exactly how much would buy him out; but if the whole earth were solid gold, one soul would be worth a thousand times more than it all.

7. *Your poor soul needs to be saved.* It is lost. It is dead in trespasses and sins. By nature you are without Christ, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. Without God's grace, no one loves Him, fears Him, trusts Him, obeys Him or lives unto Him. God's Word says that you need salvation. Your conscience says you need salvation. Your best friends know you need salvation. You need salvation more than anything else. You may be weary and need rest; you may be poor and need money; you may be sick and need medicine; you may be hungry and need food; you may be cold and need heat and clothes; but you need salvation more than any of these things.

8. *It is possible for you to be saved.* Salvation is provided. It is offered to you by the Lord. Other sinners are entering the kingdom of heaven. Some, once as lost as you are, have sought and found mercy. Many who are still on earth were once in the bond of iniquity and in the gall of bitterness; but God called them and they ran after Him. You may be saved! This cannot be said of the angels that fell. This cannot be said of men who have died in their sins. But it can be said of you. You may be old and have the sins of 50, 60 or 70 years resting upon you. Yet if you will turn to God, He will save you. You may be young and rash and foolish and thoughtless, but if you break off your sins, you shall obtain mercy.

"Unto you, O men, I call," says God. He calls on you all. He calls loudly and tenderly. He invites. He warns. He threatens. He reasons. He persuades. He lifts His hand to heaven and swears, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel" (Ezekiel 33:11). You may be saved. O that you believed it in your heart! God has set before you an open door. O that you would enter in!

9. *A time has been set for your soul to be saved.* That time is *now*. There is a right time for doing everything that is lawful. There is a time to eat, a time to sleep, a time to sow and a time to reap, a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to get and a time to lose, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to save your soul. And, alas, there is a time to lose your soul. There was a time when Hannibal, an African general, could have captured Rome, and he did not want to. Then there came a time when he wanted to take Rome, but he could not. There was a time when Jerusalem might have known the things which belonged to her peace, but at last they were hid from her eyes.

No amount of sails will carry a vessel onward unless the wind blows. All

our efforts will be in vain unless we make them in God's strength and His Spirit's help. O that men knew the worth of time, the value of their present opportunity. A great price is put into their hands to get wisdom. Yet how many waste it and deliver themselves to sin and folly. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray" (Proverbs 5:22,23). Live no longer in sin, lest "thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me" (Proverbs 5:11-13).

10. *There is only one method of salvation.* This way is so good that there is no need of another. It suits all. To the poor it brings unsearchable riches; to the meek the kingdom of heaven. To the sad it brings joy unspeakable and full of glory. To the guilty it extends peace and pardon through atoning blood. To the vile it offers the cleansing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. It opens the blind eyes of the soul so that they may see the glory of God. It opens deaf ears so that they may hear the voice of mercy. It gives a voice to the dumb so that they may praise the Lord. This way of salvation is by Jesus Christ, and by none other. As there is one God, so there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). If you neglect this salvation you are undone for ever. No one can go on despising Jesus Christ and escape damnation. Many scriptures teach this.

Some final remarks. (1.) What do you say to these things? Are they not true? Are they not urgent? Can anything be more important? Does your conscience not say they are worthy of your earnest and immediate attention? Do not let your heart deceive you. Do not let the world ensnare you. Do not let the wicked deceive you. Do not let Satan tempt you. Be a man. Dare to obey your conscience. Obey God.

(2.) Let the goodness of God lead you to repentance. He has long borne with your evil ways. He has many a time heard your cry in a time of distress and sent you relief. He is constantly granting you great favours. Jesus Christ is standing at the door of your heart and knocking for admittance. He has stood there until His locks are wet with the dew of the night. The Holy Spirit often strives with you. The ministers of the gospel bring salvation to your very doors. Christian friends pray for you. There would be joy in heaven if you would repent.

(3.) This may be God's last call to you. I pray it may not be, but the last call will soon come. The longest life is short, and much of your life is gone. Awake to righteousness, and Christ shall give you life. Awake now.

The Power of Prayer

In themselves, as weak as worms,
how can poor believers stand,
When temptations, foes and storms,
press them close on every hand?

Weak indeed they feel they are,
but they know the throne of grace;
And the God who answers prayer
helps them when they seek His face.

Though the Lord a while delay,
succour they at length obtain;
He who taught their hearts to pray
will not let them cry in vain.

Wrestling prayer can wonders do,
bring relief in deepest straits;
Prayer can force a passage through
iron bars and brazen gates.

Hezekiah on his knees
proud Assyria's host subdued;
And, when smitten with disease,
had his life by prayer renewed.

Peter, though confined and chained,
prayer prevailed and brought him out;
When Elijah prayed, it rained,
after three long years of drought.

We can likewise witness bear
that the Lord is still the same;
Though we feared He would not hear,
suddenly deliverance came.

For the wonders He has wrought,
let us now our praises give;
And by sweet experience taught,
call upon Him while we live.

John Newton

Looking Around Us

Pensioner Prisoners

Two old-age pensioners from Glasgow have been sent to prison for 18 months. They went into a shop on the city's Byres Road in October 2008. One of them distracted the shop assistant, who was working on her own. He asked her to help him find light bulbs, which were on display at the back of the shop. Then the other man helped himself to £750 in cash and £7500 worth of stamps, top-up cards for mobile phones and similar items.

A lawyer for one of the men told Glasgow Sheriff Court that his client got a thrill from stealing, which reminded him that he was still alive. Clearly the robber enjoyed this kind of sin, but he was taking what did not belong to him – what God, in His providence, had given him no right to have. One of the men was going to spend his share of the money on alcohol. Very often, one sin leads to another. All the more reason for not committing the first sin.

Most people stop some of their sins as they get older, but there is no certainty that this will happen. These men had a history of crime, and old habits die hard. It is much easier to start doing something wrong than to give it up. Young people, and those who are older, should earnestly ask God to keep them from starting sinful habits. A man named Jabez, about whom we know very little, asked God: "Keep me from evil". And was he heard when he prayed like this? We are told that he was: "God granted him that which he requested" (1 Chronicles 4:10). It should encourage us to ask God to keep us from sins of every kind and, especially, to keep us from starting sinful habits.

But even if people give up some sins when they get older, their heart is not cured by doing so; they may well turn to other sins instead. The fact that these people enjoyed sinning shows how much they need the Holy Spirit to work in them a complete change of heart. All sinners need to have their attitudes changed; they need to be changed from the core of their beings so that, instead of loving sin, they will hate sin and love holiness. And the sooner this takes place, the better. God tells us: "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).

Was there a hint in the lawyer's excuse for his client that he no longer had much pleasure in his days and years? Certainly both men have health problems. But we should be clear that life lacks real point unless we have new hearts – and so are seeking to live our lives to the glory of God.

Price 70p