

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Index

1. The Pastor's Letter (October 1975) – "Modern Men"
2. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 69
3. Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers – Hugh Latimer
4. Whitefield by Spurgeon
5. Electing Love by Robert Murray McCheyne
6. Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls



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"MODERN MEN"

The Pastor's Letter (October 1975)

Dear Friends,

One of the great misapprehensions that the Church of Christ in these days seems to labour under is that these are the days of the "modern men" and that, therefore, she must adapt her message and her means in order to make herself acceptable to this strange species. What many fail to realise, of course, is that man has always been "modern man" in whichever age he has found himself, and indeed, this is just the case. Sixteenth-century man was "modern man" in the sixteenth century; and seventeenth-century man was "modern man" until the eighteenth-century man came along to claim that title; and, in point-of-fact, first-century man was no less "modern man" (in his time) than twentieth-century man is at this present time. When the Church of Christ, therefore, imagines that she must turn somersaults in an effort to get to this phenomenon of modern man she is failing to appreciate that it is a phenomenon that just does not exist – or, at the most, no more exists in this twentieth century of this world's history from the cross than it ever existed right from the very beginning of time.

Now, there was no single group of people who imagined themselves more deserving of the title of "modern man" than those citizens of the ancient city of Athens that the apostle Paul visited on one of his great preaching journeys. If you read the 17th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles you'll see how the whole atmosphere at Athens just bristled with the idea of man at the very heights of achievement and ability. On every hand was the handiwork of man: in one place stood a great theatre, in another a great hall of learning; here was the massive statue of Minerva that rose sixty or seventy feet from base to head, and the stature of Athenia the warrior that showed the gleaming point of his spear for a distance of something like forty miles. Here was the court of the Areopagus where all the wisdom and learning and philosophy of Greece found expression and vent – where the feet of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and Euripedes trod. Here were

buildings that dazzled the eye with their architecture and grandeur and were a wonder for all to behold. Here was man, in fact, - first century modern man – at the very pinnacle of progress and polish in his own estimations and assessments; and here was man in the very depths of despair and hopelessness in the estimations and assessments of the servant of the Lord whom the Lord had sent into that great city at that time.

The summary of all that the apostle Paul saw in the city of Athens as he waited there for Timothy and Silas is curt and to the point, "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens ... he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." Idolatry! That's what the Lord's servant saw. And the Athens of Paul's day is but one of the best commentaries on the Bible's truth about the world by wisdom not knowing God. "He saw the city wholly given to idolatry." "Full of idols," as the margin of the Bible says; idols of Zeus, and Mercury, and Jupiter; of Beauty, and Love, and Music, and all the emotions you could possibly conceive of. So many idols, in fact, that it was said that there were "more gods than men in the streets of Athens." And that's what Paul saw.

Now, here is the point, of course, the position that the apostle Paul now finds himself in at Athens is a remarkable parallel to the position of the church in our own "modern" society today. "But, we don't see idols raised up today – at least not in our own land at any rate," says someone. But what we must bear in mind is this, that Athens' idols were only an expression of Athens' Godlessness, and Godlessness can express itself in a hundred and one different ways once it has settled itself in the hearts and minds of men and women. Athens' idols were the outward manifestation of Athens' thinking and Athens' thinking was dominated by the two schools of philosophy that minted the current coin of thought in those days. Acts 17 and verse 18 tells us what those two schools were, "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him ..."

The Epicureans were the disciples of a philosopher named Epicurus, and the things that most characterised their teaching was

that it was only this present life on this earth that really mattered. Man (and all matter in general) had come from nothing – there was no beginning: and, as there was no beginning, then there was nothing beyond this life; there was only the grave, and nothing beyond it. The emphasis, therefore, was the present; "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

The Stoics were the disciples of another philosopher named Zeno. In some respects, they seemed at the other end of the scale from the Epicureans. They more or less disdained this life in the flesh, and it was the great aim of the Stoic to overcome the baser elements. However, what bound him close to the Epicurean was the same general outlook concerning the origin and end of things, like the Epicureans, the Stoics also believed that there was nothing that originated life and there was nothing beyond the grave. Indeed, one of the greatest acts a Stoic could perform was suicide. When he felt that he was failing to conquer this life in the flesh, he would end it, and this he might readily do, for the grave was the end and there was nothing beyond.

Now then, into this situation comes the apostle Paul as the representative of our God and the bearer of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. What possible approach can the apostle make to these men of "modern" thought and achievement? These who have taken all the wisdom of their day and have pronounced once and for all on the origin and nature and end of all things? Listen well to the word that he preached from that same verse 18; "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbling say?" Others said, "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods;" - and then, their reason for speaking like that – "Because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection." Let that word sink well into our hearts and minds, my friends. Here stood the apostle Paul in the most up-to-date city of that day, with all the outward manifestations of the thinking of that day surrounding him in all their imposing might; in a place where the dominating nations was – live-it-up, there is nothing after you die; and what did he preach? Jesus and the resurrection." He preached about that day when each

and every inhabitant of that city of Athens would stand before the God with whom they had to do; "he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection."

If you want an expansion of that phrase, then read on down the chapter and into the words of the sermon which Paul eventually preaches on Mar's Hill before that august body of the court of the Areopagus. The men that constituted that court were among the very elite of the "modern" men of their day. Read that sermon well as Paul unapologetically declares the truth of "the God who made all things," - the Creator God; the God who sustains all things, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being;" and the God who will wind up all things "in that day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained ..."

Here is the church preaching in the modern world! And it is high time for the church of our day to awake out of her sleep and her ridiculous dream that she exists in a "unique" age of modern man. Epicureanism, or Stoicism – any ism of our day – are just the old natural theology of the human heart that "will not retain God in its knowledge." In that respect, man is always modern. And if the church, then, will be "modern" she will, indeed, be modern by combatting that old natural theology with the self-same message that God's inspired apostle took up during those days in "modern" Athens.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 69)



Title . "A Psalm of David." If any enquire, "Of whom speaketh the psalmist this? Of himself, or some other man?" We would reply, "Of himself, and of some other man." Who that other is, we need not be long in discovering; it is the crucified alone who can say, "in my thirst

they gave me vinegar to drink." His footsteps all through this sorrowful song have been pointed out by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, and therefore we believe, and are sure, that the Son of Man is here.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 1. "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul." "He saved others, himself he cannot save." With strong cryings and tears He offered up prayers and supplications unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared (Hebrews 5:7) Thus David prayed, and here his Son and Lord utters the same prayer. It is remarkable that such a scene of woe should be presented to us immediately after the jubilant ascension hymn of the last psalm, but this only shows how interwoven are the glories and the sorrows of our ever blessed Redeemer. The head which is now crowned with glory is the same which wore the thorns; He to whom we pray, "Save us, O God," is the selfsame person who cried, "Save me, O God."

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 3. "I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." He had cried to God for the ways of man; He had cried to man about the ways of God. He had not ceased from the very first to preach, and at last on the cross, He cried, "I thirst!" His eyes had grown dim, and His flesh was faint and weary with His sufferings, through the long passion of His life on earth. He had been waiting in poverty, and insult, and treachery, and scourging, and pain until He finally cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

From "A Plain Commentary"

Verse 4. "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head ... then I restored that which I took not away." crushing testimony against the Saviour in the eyes of His enemies was this – "Let him be crucified, for he hath made himself the Son of God." They believed that He was endeavouring to rob God of His glory, yet none was ever less guilty of this, and the very opposite was

the case; so, indeed, they "hated him without a cause." The devil tried to take away the glory of God when he boasted that he was like unto the Most High God; our first parents tried to take away the glory of God when they finally wilted to that enticing word, "... the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." But, Christ already possessed that equality of glory with the Father from before the world was, and by His death and endless life was "restored" that glory of God in the hearts of His believing remnant, so that the words are His alone in all their fulness, "I restored that which I took not away."

Verse 9. "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up ..." Zeal for true religion is a praise-worthy thing, even though it be out of favour with those men who sit still, and love to be at quiet rest. Yet, it is no disgrace for any child of God to have the zeal of the house of God to eat him up. It is slanderous to call it folly. Lukewarm men call it folly; God's Spirit calls it "a live coal" that has a most vehement heat. Was David rash? No, he was fervent; was Paul mad, when Felix said he was "beside himself"? Was Christ indiscreet when they said the same of Him. Is the judgment of such stolid men any disparagement to zeal? Nay, it is a commendation.

From David Wilson

Verse 9. "For the zeal of thine house" etc. Consider the examples of the saints of old, who have taken heaven by force. How industrious was Calvin in the Lord's vineyard. When his friends persuaded him for his health's sake to remit a little of his labour, saith he, "Would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes?" It is said of Holy Bradford, preaching, reading, and prayer, was his whole life. I rejoice, said Jewel, that my body is exhausted in the labours of my holy calling. How violent were the blessed martyrs! They wore their fetters as ornaments, they snatched up torments as crowns, and embraced the flames as cheerfully as Elijah did the fiery chariot that came to fetch him to heaven. Let racks, fires pullies, and all manner of torments come, so I may win Christ, said Ignatius. Those pious souls, "resisted unto blood." How should this provoke our zeal!

Thomas Watson

Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers

Part 2 - Hugh Latimer, 1480 - 1555

Popish historians have not hesitated to describe Latimer as extremely eccentric. Lingard says, "His eloquence was bold and vehement, but poured forth in course and sarcastic language, and seasoned with quaint low jests and buffoonery." This accusation is evidently made for the purpose of whitewashing Popery and blackening the Reformation. It is with pleasure that we read it, because it enables us to enrol the bishop amongst the noble army of the slandered servants



of God. We have no wish to deny that Latimer was exceedingly quaint, and intermingled with flashes of pleasantry with his earnest exhortations and serious arguments; but it was always with the view of confounding error and reaching the hearts of his hearers.

Here is an example of his shrewdness. Dr.

Buckingham, one of the Black Friars, undertook to confute Latimer, and in his sermon said among other remarkably wise things that the reading of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue would cause people to leave their vocations, and run into all sorts of extremes. "Thus," said he, "for example, the ploughman when he heareth this in the gospel, 'no man that layeth his hand on the plough and looketh back is meet for the kingdom of God,' will peradventure upon this cease from his ploughing. Likewise the baker, when he heareth that 'a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump of dough' may perchance leave our bread unleavened, and so our bodies be unseasoned." Latimer heard this sermon, and engaged to answer the arguments, which he did from the same pulpit in the afternoon, Dr. Buckingham sitting opposite him with his Blackfriars cowl upon his shoulders. After discoursing upon the figurative phrases of Scripture, Latimer said that such metaphors were in all languages, "as for example," observed he, looking towards

the place where the friar sat, "when the painters represent a fox preaching out of a friar's cowl, no one is so weak as to take this for a real fox, but only as a figure of caution to beware of the hypocrisy, craft, and dissimulation which lie hid many times under those cowls."

The general preaching of Latimer before and after he became a bishop was very plain and homely, and exactly suited to the manners and tastes of the people to whom he spoke. His sermons should be read by every lover of racy English. We have only space for one extract, which will show how very plain and colloquial he could be. "A good fellow on a time had another of his friends to a breakfast, and said, If you will come, you shall be welcome; but I tell you aforehand, you shall have but slender fare, one dish and that is all. What is that? Said he. A pudding, and nothing else. Marry (said he), you cannot please me better; of all meats, this is for mine own tooth; you may draw me round about the town with a pudding. These bribing magistrates and judges follow gifts faster than the fellow would follow the pudding." Latimer wanted his words to be remembered so as to work reform and he did well to put them in such a shape that they would ring over the land. We will warrant that this pudding story of his did more for justice than a dozen refined orations. His was practical preaching and it dwelt with the sins of the great as well as with those of the common people in tones too honest to be very polite.

The dauntless courage of this noble servant of God was seen in his conduct towards Henry VIII. One new year's day instead of carrying, according to the custom of that age, a rich gift to the king, he presented him with the New Testament, a leaf of which was turned down at this passage. "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." This might have cost him his life; but Bluff Hal, instead of being angry, admired the good man's courage. Upon a certain occasion, when preaching before Henry, Hugh, as was his wont, spake his mind very plainly, and the sermon displeased his majesty; he was therefore commanded to preach again on the next Sabbath, and to make an apology for the offence he had given. After reading his text, the bishop thus began his sermon: - "Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty

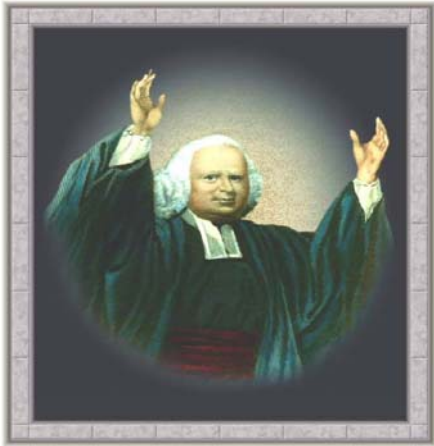
monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease! But then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest; upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God! Who is all present! And who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully." He then proceeded with the same sermon he had preached the preceding Sabbath, but with considerably more energy. The same sermon ended, the court were full of expectation to know what would be the fate of his honest and plain-dealing bishop. After dinner, the king called for Latimer, and with a stern countenance asked him how he durst preach in such a manner. He falling on his knees, replied, his duty to his God and his prince had enforced him thereto, and that he had merely discharged his duty and cleared his conscience by what he had spoken. Upon which the king rising from his seat, and taking the good man by the hand embraced him, saying, "Blessed by God, I have so honest a servant."

Under Edward VI Latimer had great influence, but the return of Mary soon called him to severer conflicts. Dauntless, honest, and simple-hearted, Latimer rejoiced when he was called upon to lay down his bishopric; and when he was summoned to be tried for his life the old man hesitated not to appear and defend our holy faith to the death. His words at the stake were characteristic of the man.

Addressing Bishop Ridley, who was to die with him, he said, Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." And by God's grace it never shall be.



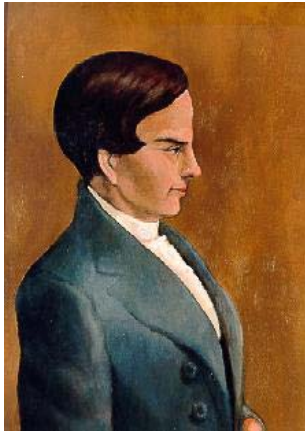
(Note – Bluff Hal was a nickname given to Henry VIII)



Whitefield by Spurgeon

If I turn to the pages of history to find out the best men who ever lived, do you know where I find them? Not among those who were called "respectable" in their time ... I see great names, Erasmus and others, mighty and learned men, but on a dirty thumbed page I see the name of Luther associated with such epithets as these – "dog, adulterer, beast," and everything else that the malice of Rome could suggest. And I say, "Ah, this is the man whom God has chosen, for he went without the camp." That list of great divines and of schoolmen and of theologians, you may wipe them all out without much regret! But this man, "without the camp," he is somebody ... Turn to another list of archbishops, bishops, deans, rural deans, rectors and curates ... There is nothing special about any of them. At last I find a picture by Hogarth – a caricature of a man preaching with devils coming out of his mouth, and underneath it is written, "Fire and brimstone." I look at the portrait and I say, "See, it is Mr. Whitefield." Ah! There is the man of the age, depend upon it, that man all black, charged with crimes that Sodom never knew ... this man here that is abused, that is laughed at, that is mocked; this is the man who is somebody.





Electing Love

by

R. M. McCheyne

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."

This is very humbling, and at the same time, a very blessed word to the true disciple. It was very humbling to the disciples to be told that they had not chosen Christ. And yet, it was exceedingly comforting to them to be told that he had chosen them. And then he told them that it was this love that would make them holy.

One – Men naturally do not choose Christ. "Ye have not chosen me." This was true of the apostles, this is true of all that will ever believe to the end of the world. "Ye have not chosen me." The natural ear is so deaf that it cannot hear; the natural eye is so blind that it cannot see Christ. It is true in one sense, that every disciple chooses Christ; but it is when God opens the eye to see him – it is when God gives strength to the bothered arm to embrace him. But Christ's meaning is, you would never have chosen me if I had not chosen you. It is quite true, that when God opens a sinner's heart he chooses Christ and none but Christ. It is quite true that a heart that is quickened by the Spirit, ever chooses Christ and none but Christ, and will forego all the world for Christ. But, brethren, the truth here taught us is this, that every awakened sinner is willing to embrace Christ, but not till made willing. If a physician were to come into your house, and say he had come to cure you of your disease, if you felt that you were not diseased, you would say, I have no need of you, go to my neighbour.

This is the way you do with Christ; he offers to cure you, but you say you are not diseased.

Another reason why you do not choose Christ is, you do not want to be made holy by him: "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin. But you love your sin, - you love your pleasure, therefore when the Son of God comes and says, He will save you from your sin, you say, I love my sin - I love my pleasure. So you can never come to terms with Christ: "Ye have not chosen me;" - Although I died, yet you have not chosen me. I have spoken to you many years, and yet you have not chosen me. I have sent you my Bible to instruct you, and yet you have not chosen me. Brethren, this accusation will meet you in the judgment, - I would have covered you with my obedience, but ye would not have me.

Two – Christ chooses His own disciples. "I have chosen you." Christ looked upon them with a look of divine benignity, and said, "I have chosen you." Every one whom he brings to glory, he chooses him.

The time when he chooses them. I observe that it was before they believed: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," as much as to say, I began with you, you did not begin with me. You will see this in Acts chapter 17 verses 9 and 10, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city." Paul was at this time at Corinth, the most lascivious and wicked city in the ancient world; they were given over to banqueting and grievous idolatry, and yet Christ said to Paul, "I have much people in this city." They had not chosen Christ, but he had chosen them; they had not repented, yet Christ fixed his eye on them. This plainly shows you that Christ chooses his own before they seek him.

But I come now to the reason of his love – "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Now, it is a very natural question, why did he choose me? I answer, that the reason why he chose you was, the good

pleasure of his will. You will see this illustrated in Mark chapter 3 verse 13, "And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him." there was a great crowd round about him: he called some, he did not call all. The reason here given why he did it is, "He called whom he would." There is no reason in the creature; the reason is in him who chooses. You will see this in Malachi chapter 1 verse 2, "I have loved you saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." Were they not of the same mother? Yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau. The only reason given, you see, is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." You will see this also in Romans chapter 9 verses 15 and 16. The only reason given in the Bible why Christ loved us – and if you study till you die you will not find another – is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" This is evident from all those that Christ chooses.

We read of two great apostasies – one on earth, the other in heaven. First of all, one in heaven; Lucifer, the son of the morning, through pride, sinned, and God cast him, and those that sinned with him, into hell. The second was on earth; Adam sinned, and was driven out of paradise. They were both deserving of punishment. Perhaps angels pleaded for their fellow-angels; yet Christ passed them by, and died for man. Why did he die for man? The answer is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." The same is evident in the individuals Christ chooses. You would think Christ would choose the rich and yet what says James: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him."

Again you would think Christ would choose the noble; they have not the prejudices that the poor have; but what says the Scripture "Not many rich, not many noble are called."

Again you would think he would choose those that are learned,. The Bible is written in difficult languages; its doctrines are heard to be understood; yet what says Christ. "I thank thee, O Father, that you has

hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Again, you would think he would have chosen the virtuous. Though there are not righteous, yet there are some more virtuous than others; yet what says Christ. The publicans and the harlots enter the kingdom of heaven, while the Pharisees shout out. "O the depth both of the riches and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Why did he take the most vile? Here is the only reason I have been able to find ever since I read my Bible – "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." "He called unto him whom he would." O, my brethren, be humbled under the sovereignty of God. If he will have compassion, then he will have compassion.

Three – But I hasten to the third and last point. "I have ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Brethren, Christ never chooses a man to believe, and then leap into glory. Ah! My brethren, how this takes away the feet from all the objections raised against this holy doctrine of election. Some here perhaps say, if I am elected, I will be saved, live as I like. No; if you live an unholy life, you will not be saved. Some may say, If I am not elected, I will not be saved, do as I like. Whether you are elected or not, I know not, but this I know – if you believe on Christ you will be saved.

Let me ask you, have you believed on Christ? Let me ask you another question. Do you bear his whole image? Then you are elected and will be saved. But are there any here who have not believed on Christ, and who do not live a holy life, then, whatever you think now you will find it true that you were among those who were passed by.

Ah! my brethren, those who deny election, deny that God can have mercy. O, it is a sweet truth that God can have mercy. There is nothing in the hardness of your hearts that will keep God from having mercy on you. Go away home with this truth, that God can have mercy. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Amen.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

I was recently reading a story about a young farmer in Canada who one day, as he was working in his field suddenly heard a swift rustle among the sheaves of corn. "Ah, good! He exclaimed, "Here's a hare for our dinner." He darted forward to grab the hare. Pushing his hand into the sheaf he caught hold of the thing that was making the noise. As he drew out his hand, the young farmer was almost frozen to the spot when he saw what he had in his hand. Guess what? - a deadly rattlesnake! Quick as a wink, he made an end to it with the farming tool he had in his other hand.

As he continued on with his work, he said to himself, "Had that rattlesnake got me first, instead of me getting it, I'd have had it." Immediately his mind went back to a little village on the banks of the river Clyde, where he had been born and brought up.

His parents feared God and taught their children the way of salvation. Alick (for that was his name) continued to remember how that, when he was a young boy at Sunday School, he had felt in his heart that he was a sinner, he had been told by his teacher that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and yet, had put off Jesus' offer of mercy and eternal life. So there, in that field far, far away from his home, shaken by the fright and the great truth of the uncertainty of life, Alick looked to Jesus for His way of salvation. He continued right through his life to serve God and glorify Jesus.

You know boys and girls it is very dangerous to put off thinking about God and His salvation. Boys and girls are inclined to "put off" because they feel they have plenty of time. To "put off" is just to play

into the hands of that great enemy – that old serpent – the devil. It is he who puts the "putting off" thoughts into our head, and this is more deadly than any rattlesnake bite.

Remember the story in the Old Testament about the children of Israel who were bitten by the serpents, and were dying? (Numbers chapter 21 verses 6) God told Moses to make a brass serpent, put it on a pole and tell the bitten Israelites to look at it. If they looked – then, they lived.

We are told about a remedy for Satan's bite, and that is by looking to Jesus, for Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Jesus had to be "lifted up" on the cross so that salvation could come to sinners.

Take the lesson of Alick, boys and girls; be wise; don't put off." Look to Jesus, and be saved.

Love,
Mrs Seaton