



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

"The earlier the better" A WORD TO THE YOUNG

By Rev Ivan Foster

The story of Obadiah that we read in I Kings 18:1-16 contains three witness to the godliness of this man.

The witness of God the Holy Ghost -- *Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly* , verse 3.

The witness of his works -- *when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water* , verse 4.

The witness of his own mouth -- *I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth* , verse 12.

The first witness tells of the CHARACTER of his godliness-- he feared the Lord greatly. His name means 'the servant of God'. Even in the court of such an ungodly king as Ahab, a man may serve the Lord. Undoubtedly, the honesty, industry, ingenuity and trustworthiness of Obadiah is what attracted Ahab to him. Joseph and Daniel are further examples of the world's acknowledgment that the God-fearing are most fitted for faithfulness and honesty.

The second tells of the COURAGE of his godliness -- he hid an hundred prophets from the fury of Jezebel. Notice that he did not betray his king when he did this. He hid them from Jezebel. Ahab, a man dominated by his wife, may not have been party to the persecution of the prophets on this occasion. They that fear God will use all their power and influence to assist the ministry of the Word of God, even to the endangering of their lives.

The third tells of the COMMENCEMENT of his godliness -- he feared God from his youth. From young manhood he stood on the Lord's side. His high position showed that his fearing the Lord did not hinder his advancement in life.

Youth is the time that the direction of our life is manifested. God says, the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, Genesis 8:21. The sin of the heart becomes evident in the youth. It is at this age that it will be seen whether he is on the Lord's side or the side of sin.

My text is Ecclesiastes 12:1. "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". I wish to apply the text particularly to the young, but it will be seen that there is an application for us all, irrespective of our age.

I. YOUTH IS THE MOST FAVOURABLE TIME IN WHICH TO START FOR HEAVEN

All Christians will testify of this, though, before conversion, they had no such view. I recall leading a man to Christ in a mission I held some years ago in Belfast and the first words he uttered when we arose from praying were, I wish I had done this years ago!



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Youth is the time with the least opposition.

True religion is never easy. Modern evangelism tells sinners that seeking Christ is an easy thing. That is not the case. God places no difficulties in the sinner's way but the world, the flesh and the devil certainly do. The Word of God clearly sets forth the difficulties the soul encounters in seeking Christ for salvation. Those difficulties increase with the years, however, as the depravity of the human heart brings forth its full harvest. In our youth, we have not seen established the routines, the habits and the patterns which hedge us about in later years and make a change of direction very difficult. The saying, It is hard to teach an old dog new tricks, is certainly true on the question of changing the direction of life in later years. Commitments, ties, obligations, connections -- all are as the thread-like ropes which held down Gulliver in the story, Gulliver's Travels. The heathens of old put it like this -- to cure a dead man and to teach an old man are tasks equally hopeless. In youth the soul is more capable of taking impression, the affections more easily moved. There is an energy to undertake a new enterprise which is lacking in later years. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil, Jeremiah 13:23. That is what happens as we grow older; we become accustomed to do evil and are less and less inclined to consider eternal truths.

Youth is the time most appropriate for embarking in the service of God.

A special place is given to the first-born in the legislation covering our worship of God. The first-born were required by God. The first-born man, the first-born of the beasts, the first-fruits of the field. (See Exodus 13:2, 22:29, 34:20.) There is only one time in our lives when we can so honour God by giving Him the first of our being. In later life we may come to God but we come empty handed. Sin and the flesh and the world has had the first of our years, our strength, our reason, our talents. We may come to Christ, but we come only with the feeble remnant of our life. The prodigal came to his father because hunger and poverty and the consequences of wasted years drove him there. The young Christian serves God first rather than waiting on the world, the flesh and the devil spoiling him and then giving God the shell of his life.

Youth is the time we can gain most advantage from true religion.

Holiness pays well. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, I Timothy 4:8. The sooner we embrace Christ the longer we enjoy Him and the blessings that flow from His hands. If the way of the transgressor is hard and the paths of godliness pleasant then common sense dictates that the sooner we forsake the one and enter the other the better. What a difference there is in the physique of the child of a western society and that of a famine-riven African country. One has grown up enjoying the benefits of an advanced society. The other shows the marks of deprivation.

II. EARLY PIETY GREATLY BENEFITS THE REST OF OUR LIFE

Youth is the spring time of life.

Its character determines the nature of the rest of our lives. It is the seed-time and what is sown is reaped throughout the remaining days of our lives. Everything of importance will be affected by the religious disposition of our youth.



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The health of our bodies. Sin tends to the injury of health. Sin is the forerunner of death. The wicked reap the consequences of their sin in their bodies first. Late conversion cannot and will not alter the harvest of bodily distresses due to early sins. I remember talking as a young Christian to an old warrior for God, Pastor Willie Mullan and he told me, Ivan, I am reaping the consequences of youthful abuses. He had lived as a tramp in his early years and the neglect and the hardships of those years came back on him in later life.

A firm foundation for true prosperity.

The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it, Proverbs 10:22. What glorious promises are attached to holiness! Them that honour me I will honour, I Samuel 2:30. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine, Proverbs 3:9-10. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you, Matthew 6:33. Early godliness shall act as a wise guide and keep us from the pitfalls that we would otherwise fall into: greed, evil company, and deceit. A good and lasting foundation will thus be laid for our future activities. Youthful holiness shall bring us to the right company. (See II Cor. 6:14-18.) The wise Solomon put it well, He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed, Proverbs 13:20.

It will prove especially helpful in the battles of life.

All men face trouble. Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward, Job 5:7. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble, Job 14:1. But how much more successfully you will be in facing it with the Lord beside you! (See Psalm 37:3-11, 112:4, Proverbs 4:18.)

It will be a great blessing in old age. Early piety is a guarantee for our old age. It is an insurance policy unequalled. *O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come*, Psalm 71:17-18. *And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you*, Isaiah 46:4.

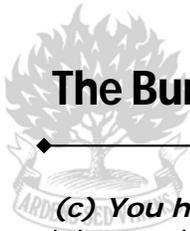
III. THE DREADFUL CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD DELAYED .

To you who are engaged in procrastination and who are determined to leave the matter of repentance to as late a moment as you deem possible, I wish to say a final word. I want you to consider the only two conclusions to your life that are possible.

1. You finally do repent and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ . What are the results of such a delayed conversion?

(a) You have lived your life offending a longsuffering God . You delay because you believe God to be merciful.

(b) You have lived to accumulate an enormous multitude of sins . In refusing to come to Christ you have lived to engage in sin. The fruit of those wasted years is sin. That is all you will have to show.



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(c) *You have lived to injure others* . By example and deed you have been a source of injury and harm to others. How many will you have tutored and assisted in rebellion against God? How many will name you as the one who introduced them to some evil practice?

(d) *You have robbed yourself of the joys of true religion* . Not the least of these is a deep assurance of sins forgiven and peace with God through the blood of the Lord Jesus that He shed at Calvary. Late conversions are often vexed with uncertainty and perplexity. They certainly are pierced through with many a regret at the deeds of former years. Old age is not the best soil to bring forth a new crop.

2. You may not finally repent.

This is, of the two, the more likely thing to happen. Does not God warn against presuming upon living to old-age? Does He not warn of the withdrawal of His Spirit's strivings from the rejecter of Christ? It is not absolute rejection that damns so many souls but delaying on the part of those who intend one day to get saved, but death catches up with them before they seek God. The old promise themselves weeks, the middle-aged, months and the young, years. These promises, vain promises, are the fuel of damnation. *Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth* , Proverbs 27:1. *Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* , 2 Corinthians 6:2. You can only be sure of NOW. *Seek the Lord today. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon* , Isaiah 55:6-7.