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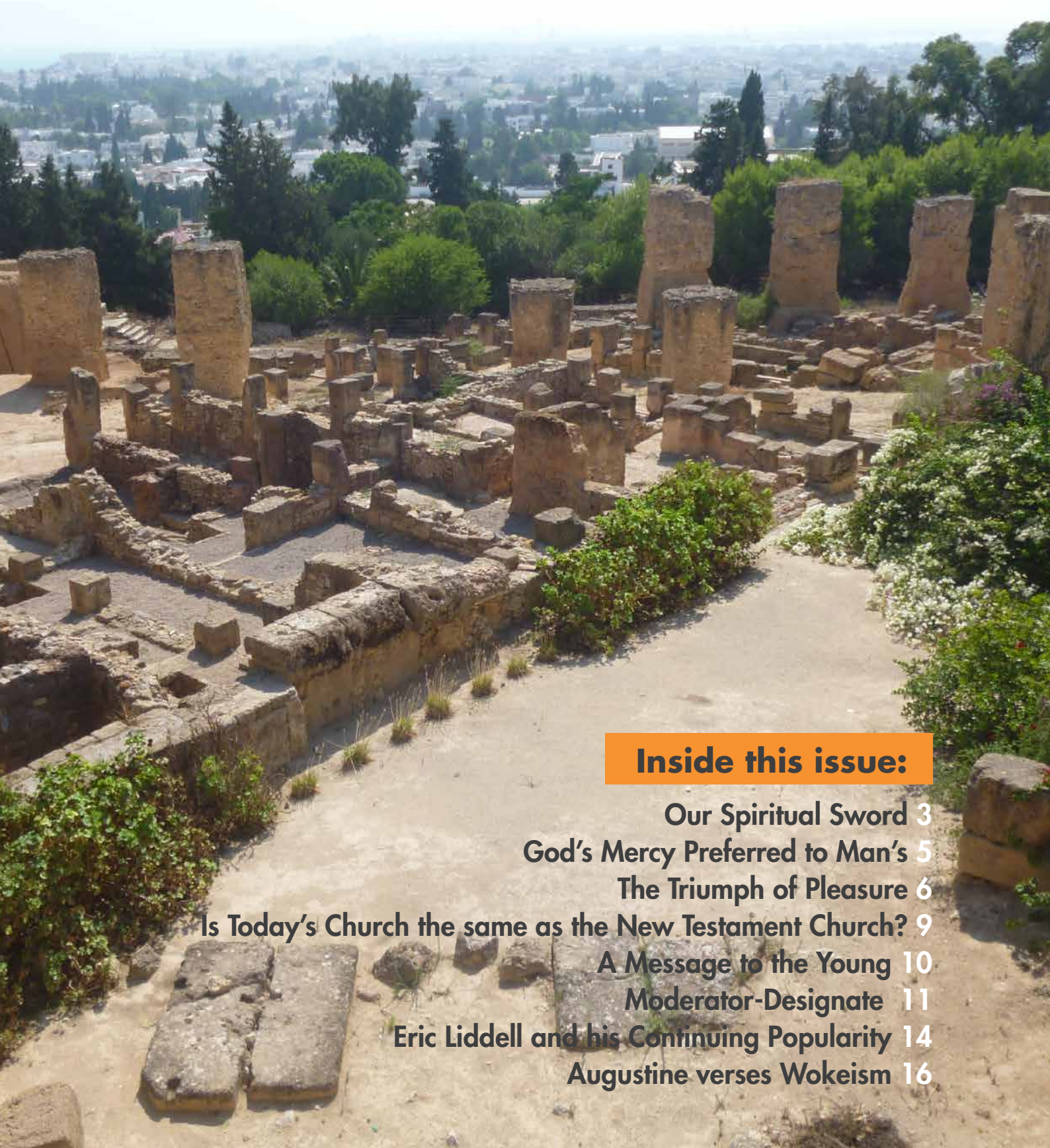

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**COVER IMAGE:** Ruins of ancient Carthage, in Tunisia, where Augustine of Hippo studied and later taught (©UNESCO). See page 16.

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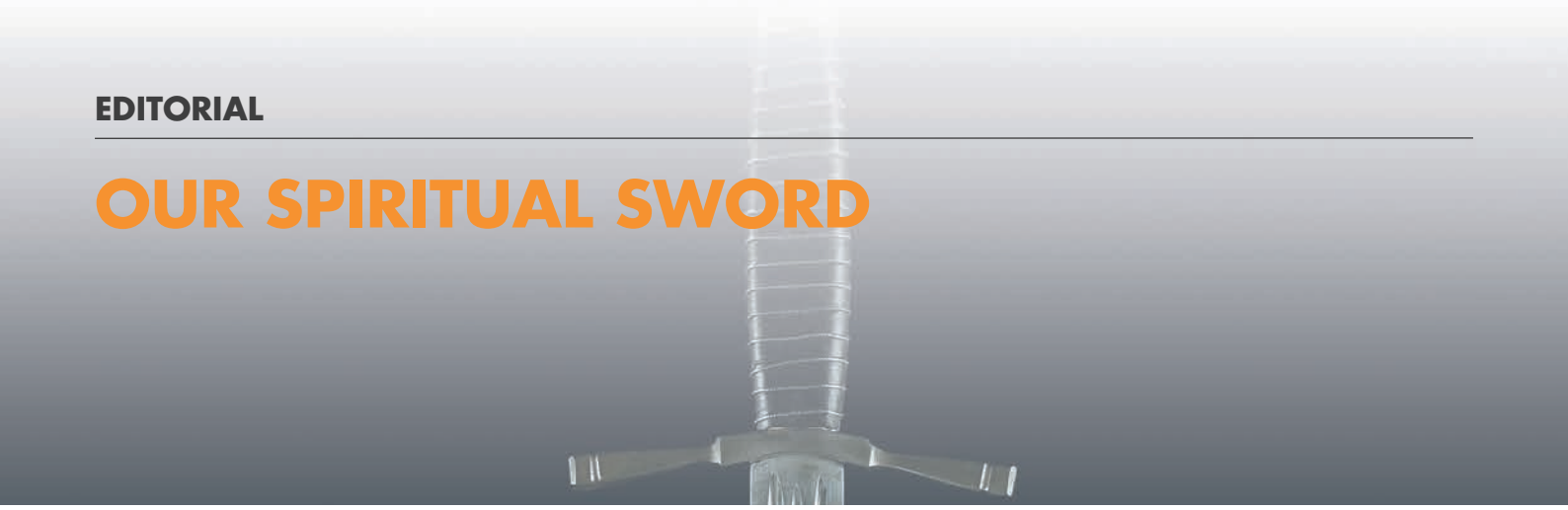
# OUR SPIRITUAL SWORD



Paul ends his Epistle to the Ephesians with the subject of the Christian's armour, which is related to our spiritual warfare. He begins with the exhortation, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil", and then identifies the various parts of the armour (Eph. 6:11-17). The first five pieces have a defensive purpose only. The final piece is different, as we learn from its description: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".

Paul does not give the Ephesians any detailed instructions as to what to do with this sword. The city of Ephesus was part of the Roman Empire, and the sword with which the people were familiar was the one carried by the Roman soldiers who were to be seen everywhere. It was a short sword, more like a dagger, but it had a keen edge and was very effective in combat.

Already we can see a similarity between a sword of this type and the Word of God. The Bible is not a lengthy book, but being given by divine inspiration it is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4:12). It is essential that we read it and hear it preached. What in particular can be said about this spiritual sword, and what use are we to make of it? Scripture shows us.

**A Symbol**

When our first parents sinned and fell, God judged them (and us) by driving them out of the garden of Eden. A return to paradise was impossible because the Lord placed at its entrance "a flaming sword which turned every way", keeping the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). The sword symbolises *justice*. God places it into the hands of civil rulers, to be used on His behalf. "But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:4). We are to fear the magistrate when we break the law of the land. How much more should we fear the great Judge, whose law we have broken countless times!

The wonder is that God has opened up another way to a more glorious paradise, through the suffering of Jesus Christ! The Son of God became man, taking the place of sinners, and God wielded the sword of divine justice against Him. Zechariah's prophecy sheds light upon this remarkable event. God says, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow...smite the shepherd" (Zech. 13:7). In love to His people, God punishes One who is His equal. Jesus, the great Shepherd, lays down His life for His sheep. Because God's wrath fell upon the sinless Saviour, it will not come upon those who trust Him, repenting of their sins.

**God's Mercy**

The sword of the Spirit is unique. It can kill, but it can also make alive. In His converting work, the Spirit makes the truth so sharp that it pierces "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Something of this is necessary if sinners are to appreciate their need of salvation. The law must arrest us, charge us and find us guilty before God, even in our desires and motives. In this way the spiritual sword 'kills' us, so that every hope of saving ourselves is taken from us. The 'religious' sinner needs this as much as anyone else – if not more. Paul certainly needed it: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom. 7:9).

When the Spirit applies saving grace to our souls, we are truly alive unto God. By means of the Scriptures, the Spirit leads sinners to God's *mercy*. He uses the law to convince us of our sin and misery, and the gospel to bring us to Christ. In the Redeemer's precious blood, the believer finds forgiveness. There is wholeness too. The Lord "healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). Our Physician does this kindly, wisely and patiently, through the Spirit's sanctifying work with the word. "The wounds which sin hath given our natures are so deep, that they take a long time to heal...But though the cure be slow, it is sure" (John Willison).

**Our Enemy**

There can only be one reason why the Lord has given us a sword. It must be that we have an adversary. We need to be sure of his identity – otherwise we will likely

either neglect to put on the armour of God or put on the wrong armour. Paul tells us that our enemy is not "flesh and blood". We are opposed by wicked men, but not *merely* by them. Behind them are "principalities" and "powers". Might these be ungodly civil powers – the Roman governors of Paul's day and the governments of our day? No, because we wrestle against *spiritual* wickedness in *high* places. This refers to the fallen angels, chiefly Satan (Eph. 1:19-21; 2:2) – confirmed by what Paul said at the outset about standing against "the wiles of the devil".

This is not open warfare. Our enemy is hidden and adopts multiple disguises (2 Cor. 11:13-15). We think of how terrorists operate, blending in with the population and seeking anonymity. The devil uses cunning rather than sheer force. He is methodical and tireless in his pursuit of believers (1 Pet. 5:8). He has great skill, being able to make this corrupt world alluring, even to the Lord's people. He persuades us that its pleasures are harmless. Our armour, and especially our sword, is designed by God to match this foe and help us overcome him.

> *"When God's word has a hold on us, we will keep a hold on it."*

**The Fight**

In fighting our enemy we have our Lord's example to instruct us. When Christ was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, His response was the same each time. He said, "It is written", and followed this by words from Deuteronomy opposing whatever the devil was suggesting (Matt. 4:4,7,10). In each case Satan was silenced by a single verse of Scripture. Jesus believed God's word to be *truth* (John 17:17) and acted accordingly. Do we have a good knowledge of the Bible's content and a firm conviction regarding its teaching? The "weapons of our warfare" are only "mighty through God" (2 Cor. 10:4), yet we should endeavour to be like Apollos, who was "mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24).

John Knox said of Christ: "that which is wanting in us, His sufficiency doth supply, for it is He that fighteth and overcometh for us". Satan cannot force anyone to sin. We are told, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). When we are tempted to sin, we should say to ourselves, "I belong to Christ and I am called to a holy life! I will not do anything inconsistent with that!" Our strength lies in our Lord and His word. When we refer to it, quote it or preach it, let us remember that it goes out of Christ's mouth (Rev. 1:16). It is this fact that gives the sword its power so that it subdues our sinful thoughts and fends off Satan's attacks.

**Faith**

What are we to do with this spiritual sword? According to Paul, one simple thing. We are to "take" it. We are to pick up this sword, grasping it firmly with the hand of personal faith. Without faith, we cannot please God, and cannot expect to accomplish anything with His word. When we fight the fight of faith, we must do so in the spirit of Gideon's three hundred men. They surrounded their enemy and cried out, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (Judges 7:20). Soon after that the Midianites were brought to confusion and started fighting each other.

How is your grip on this sword? Are you sometimes tempted to let go of it? Remember Eleazar, one of David's "mighty men", who carried on fighting when others departed. "He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the Lord wrought a great victory that day" (2 Sam. 23:10). A warrior who would not let go of his sword! Eleazar would rather let go of life than his trusty weapon, and God blessed his steadfastness. When God's word has a hold on us, we will keep a hold on it.

**Prayer**

It must not be overlooked that Paul joins "prayer and supplication in the Spirit" with our use of our sword (Eph. 6:18). The fight against Satan and sin is also carried on by prayer. "To call upon God is the chief exercise of faith and hope; and it is in this way that we obtain from God every blessing" (John Calvin). If prayer is left off, the hand that lifts the sword grows weak. The weapon is left in its scabbard, and its blade becomes rusty. The believer begins to lose his battles with temptation rather than win them.

Without prayer, we will not be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). The final petition of the Lord's prayer, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", is so necessary for us. We are asking our heavenly Father to so bless His word to us that we are kept from sinning. We must do that until the day our conflict is finally over and our sword is needed no more. ■

# GOD'S MERCY PREFERRED TO MAN'S

REV. JAMES CLARK

*"let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man"* (2 Samuel 24:14)

David had made a mistake, a wrong decision, a sinful one. He knew by experience how human nature worked – there was no mercy there. He also knew by grace how merciful God was to him, a sinner justified by faith, from his experience regarding Bathsheba and Uriah. "With the Lord there is mercy" (Ps. 130:7), but there is no mercy when you fall into the hands of man. There was a choice, but the Holy Spirit moved David to no choice but one, no hope but One (1 Tim. 1:1). History confirms that God will forgive when others will not. Mercy is in His Name (Exod. 34:5,6; Matt. 1:21). You cannot fall from grace, but you can stumble in grace. David encourages others to follow him in this enabled choice: "let *us* now fall into the hand of the Lord".

### *The Lack of Mercy in Man*

Having been taught by the Lord (John 6:45; 2:24,25), David knew what was in man. He also knew his own nature, how he had treated others. Man's mercy is limited by selfish interests and is always inconstant and limited. God's mercy is more than words, more than passing sentiment. His mercy is full, free and forever (Ps. 136:1). This lack of mercy is a mark and proof of man's fallen nature (Rom. 1:31; 3:16). Man is ignorant of his potential for cruelty, and even a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) is still a *sinful* man at his best in this world. The word 'punishment' cannot be applied to God's children with respect to their sin (Christ took all of that upon Himself) but chastisement can hurt, according to the severity required to restore the children to the path that leads Home (Ps. 89:29-34). There is a power in God's mercy that will not let the sinner go. Perhaps we only appreciate this when we commit 'big' sins, forgetting that we sin every day. Alas, familiarity has a way of desensitising us to the greatness of God's mercy. If we perceived it more, we would live more to Him.

### *An Example of Man's Lack of Mercy*

In Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan, the legalist was right to agree with the Lord regarding the one who showed mercy upon the man who fell among thieves (Luke 10:37). The representatives of religion, who professed to be merciful, nevertheless passed by the wounded man. He had been wounded by ungodly sinners and he was neglected by religious sinners. Christ was able to come to the man in his need, and He did. Christ personifies mercy in the case of the Good Samaritan. The parable speaks of more than morality. We cannot trust in man's resolutions to be merciful. Perhaps if there had been some reward, whether money or merit, the priest and the Levite would have stopped to help the wounded man. There was none, and so they selfishly passed by on the other side. Happily, God in His mercy comes to where we are and leaves nothing undone for our salvation.

### *When is God's Mercy Experienced in the Ongoing Christian Life?*

*Firstly*, God's mercy is experienced when we are suffering. Mercy enables us to suffer in hope. It is dreadful to suffer, but more dreadful to suffer without God. We suffer with hope when we realise that we do not suffer as we deserve (Job 11:6; Ps. 103:10). Likewise, when we understand that all suffering here is temporary (2 Cor. 4:17,18) and that it will have an end, to be followed by something better in "a better country" (Heb. 11:16). "Smite, Lord, smite, for my sin is forgiven" (Luther).

*Secondly*, our experience of mercy tempers our judgement of others. When we realise how unstable human nature is (including in the Christian) we take a more merciful view and suspend final judgement on many things and on many people (Matt. 18:22,23). Paul says that we are to "judge nothing before the time" (1 Cor. 4:5).

*Thirdly*, God's mercy is experienced when we do not know what to do, as David here, or Paul in his perplexity (2 Cor. 4:8,9). Sometimes we are safer to wait upon the Lord, and let events unfold in His mercy. It can be difficult to decide whether to intervene in something or abstain. However, duty is always plain for the conscience and ignorance is not a defence at law, whether man's law or God's law.

Sincere Christians repent for their sin and fall into the hands of God, like David. He will correct us in mercy and overrule our sin in wisdom. The impenitent sinner prefers to trust in men, including himself, to extricate himself from the consequences of some harmful choice. But God abhors sin and knows the guilt of each sinner. The Lord Jesus warned sinners that they would only find mercy in one Person – Himself – and by repentance. To think otherwise is delusion followed by destruction (Luke 12:4,5; Ps. 90:11). I know whose hands I would rather fall into! ■

# THE TRIUMPH OF PLEASURE

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

Paul declares to Timothy: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"* (2 Tim. 3:1-4). Pleasure and pleasures have always existed. Moses rejected sinful pleasures, choosing instead to suffer affliction with God's people (Heb. 11:25,26). Faced with two competing claims upon his life, namely Christ or Egypt, reproach or treasure, Moses chose Christ and reproach. This is to the amazement and shame of many contemporary Christians, for whom Egypt, pleasure and treasure are much more attractive than the narrow 'puritanical' attitude of reproach and affliction.

The Biblical record, however, throws into sharp relief the reality of the choice Moses faced – which was to suffer affliction with God's people or enjoy the pleasures of sin. It was either Christ or Egypt: to suffer affliction or enjoy pleasure; to bear the reproach of Christ or indulge in the treasures of Egypt. The options are unmistakably clear. Or are they?

In our worldly, shallow and sickly age, there can be little doubt that many would reject the choice Moses made and prefer what he rejected. To put it simply, Moses saw Egypt as a battleground between opposing world views and lifestyles. He considered the two alternatives, but significantly he weighed them in light of a coming eternity. In that light he rejected what was *"for a season"* or temporary. He preferred what was eternal – *"the recompense of the reward"*.

Astonishingly, many Christians do not want even to think of this world in terms of a battleground. They view it rather as a pleasure ground. The result is that the body is pampered but the mind is not exercised on the things of God. It is what the author and social critic Os Guinness termed "fit bodies and fat minds". People will find the strength to run a mile for charity but not manage to make it to public worship regularly. They will lavish time and money on earthly possessions and pastimes, but fail to give a reasonable, regular offering to the Lord's work. Many think that these basic Christian duties are too gloomy, too 'puritanical'.

**What has Happened?**

The American critic H.L. Mencken (1880-1956) is credited with the remark that Puritanism is "The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." This pejorative view prevails today. It is generally accepted that sourness and moroseness were the marks of the Puritans, and that it was their serious religion which made them mean-spirited people, or, in American terms, 'grinches'. Ironically, it took the American historian and apparent atheist Perry Miller (1905-63) to destroy the 'killjoy' view of the Puritans. His first student, Edmund Morgan, went further. He demonstrated that the Puritans were a people who understood not only pleasure, wealth and recreation, but knew both the dangers and benefits, the limits and responsibilities, the temptations and snares of these things.

At the same time, the Puritans demonstrated an authentic spirituality that outshines much of what we witness in our day of frothy worship, shallow piety and general sickly pursuit of something that may resemble Christianity. What dominates people's decisions and aspirations now is simple. Does it please? Does it bring pleasure? How many marriages have been founded upon pleasure and then crumbled because the pleasure factor is no longer realised. The 'Protestant' Church has very foolishly catered to that demand for pleasure.

**The Transformation of Worship**

The most obvious sign of catering to worldly pleasure is modern worship. We witness an astonishing array of 'niche' services (youth, holiday bible clubs, bring a neighbour, musical extravaganzas), and even once conservative congregations have succumbed to such fashionable activities. What is not an option, it seems, is mourning, sadness and melancholy. Besides, with their noise and din, the 'happy-clappy' crowd are too busy to think, let alone mourn. Thank God for the Psalms, especially that two-fifths of the Psalter which consists of lamentation and sorrow.

The loss of Psalmody has had a devastating consequence for contemporary Christians, who have lost the vocabulary for expressing the dark, foreboding experiences of life. We now see a generation raised on a surfeit of hymns, choruses and other songs, who as a result are incapable of giving voice to that range of experiences described so expertly by the Holy Spirit in the Psalms. That loss has created a gap in our thinking which has been filled by the world. The world has highlighted the issue of mental health awareness, and the Church is trying to catch up by hiring speakers and running classes for Christians to feel better about their interior life. What we really need is what the Holy Spirit has given, namely those Psalms which are lamentations. Yet even in psalm-singing congregations that section is often left out.

**The Transformation of the Meetinghouse**

Transformation continues even with the location of places of worship themselves. Historically, generations of worshippers made their way to the meetinghouse door passing their departed loved ones on either side. It was a pointed reminder that death and worship have an unusual juxtaposition in life. It is the living who worship, but the living shall die and no longer praise God with their lips. The Psalmist refers to this silencing by the grave (Ps. 6:5). As worshippers passed by those graves, it gave an added emphasis to the importance of worship.

It just will not do for potential worshippers and visitors to be put off by headstones on the way to the front door. You see, death marks the boundary of life – a boundary we all want to erase. Having a cemetery around the front door does the opposite of that, so we remove the cemetery as far away as possible. A recent extension to a local meetinghouse did two things. A wall was erected on one side of the building, so that the cemetery cannot now be seen. A car park was created on the other side, from which worshippers can come to the front door without any uncomfortable thoughts.

**The Irrelevance of Death**

The triumph of pleasure has conquered funerals. No longer is there mourning. Astonishingly, the Church has become complicit in this, having 'celebrations' or a 'thanksgiving' for the life of the deceased. No longer do we attend a *funeral*; rather we attend an occasion of joyfulness and festivity. Listen to the chatter before the 'celebration' begins. What banality is on display: talking about work, holidays, current events, sport and anything else that may serve as a distraction.

Eulogies are now centre stage, to entertain with amusing anecdotes. Someone else may mourn; the rest do the laughing. The minister is merely a 'master of ceremonies' to announce the next item on the programme. Death has given way to amusement. In fact, death is not allowed to remove pleasure but is made subservient to it. Funerals have become an opportunity to listen to a biography of the departed. The solemn message of death has been replaced with the (edited) story of a person's life.

**Not a New Problem**

This approach is not new. The church father Augustine noted that in 410AD, when the barbarians conquered the city of Rome, those who fled to Carthage for refuge, rather than seeking God, were attending the theatres. This is what Augustine wrote:

*"Oh infatuated men, what is this blindness, or rather madness, which possesses you? How is it that while, as we hear, even the eastern nations are bewailing your ruin, and while powerful states in the most remote parts of the earth are mourning your fall as a public calamity, ye yourselves should be crowding to the theatres, should be pouring into them and filling them; and, in short, be playing a madder part now than ever before?"* (*The City of God*, Book I, section 33.)

Remember Covid? Vouchers were given so that people could eat out in restaurants at a discount! Better that people should do that than hear about how many were apparently dying from the disease. It was time to cheer everyone up – when the nation should have been humbling itself before God.

> ***"But what was there for him to embrace?"***

**Moses' Reward**

This brings us back to Moses. Here was one who was raised in an Egyptian household and was taught all things Egyptian. Yet Paul tells us that when Moses was come to years, *"he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter"* (Heb. 11:24). This is crucial to all that followed. Moses rejected the Egyptian lifestyle. It was all over – he was having nothing more to do with it. This was the pivotal moment in his life.

Moses was doing what Christ has called all of us to do. "If any man come to me, and *hate* not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). But what was there for him to embrace? It was not health, wealth and happiness, but something greater: Christ himself. With Christ came affliction and reproach. In place of the Egyptians, Moses put God's people. This is one of the marks of saving faith. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:14-16).

In addition, there was the contrast between the present and eternity. In the present, Moses had wealth, honour and position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. What could possibly replace that? For Moses, it was the gracious reward he would receive in eternity. That "well done" from the lips of Christ (Matt. 25:31); that "crown of righteousness" which the Lord would one day place upon his head (2 Tim. 4:8). These things outweighed all that Egypt could give.

This was a true crucified life. Here was one who understood how things really are. He understood the antithesis between Egypt and Christ, between the pleasures of sin and the reward to come, and between the contemporary and the eternal. Heaven was in Moses' heart, and he exalted Christ above himself. ■

# IS TODAY'S CHURCH THE SAME AS THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?

REV. JAMES CLARK

*"I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18)

In many areas the answer to the question is NO! The doctrine, worship and moral standards of practice have been changed. But does the church have the right to change these? NO. So is this changed church the church which Christ is building? The answer must be NO, because the Word of God defines and characterises the true church. To knowingly contradict what God says disqualifies any hope of heaven, unless repented of. The Word of God identifies the true church. The church must not be measured by social popularity, pleasurable activities, wealth or numbers, but by the Word of God alone. Some churches boast of the number of activities they provide, but if you look closely you will see that they are non-worship activities.

**The Emphasis on the Word in the New Testament Church**

The church has no right to 'pick and choose' what shape it will have. "To the law and to the testimony..." (Isa. 8:20). On the Day of Judgement one Book in particular will be opened (Rev. 20:12), and just as Moses was warned to build according to God's clear verbal pattern, so we are also warned. It is Christ's church, not ours (Matt. 16:18). The early church, the New Testament church, believed and used the Word of God. Paul sums up their attitude: "Let God be true, but every man (who contradicts what God says) a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

The Reformers, Covenanters and Puritans had their doctrines and sermons steeped in the Word of God. This cannot be said of the vast majority of modern sermons and lectures. Men have a real fear of contrasting what *they* believe with what the New Testament teaches. Their attitude is, "We agree with the Bible when it agrees with us!" What does the modern church believe and teach? Is it the same as what we read in the New Testament? Sadly, no, and the practice of the modern church is according to what it believes. Paul said that true doctrine or teaching will bring forth true godliness (1 Tim. 6:3).

**God is Love, but Love is not God**

To reduce God to one attribute is wrong. The trend today is to emphasise God's love as a justification for tolerating sin, false teachers and false teaching. But love in the New Testament, like unity, is never divorced from truth. The Lord Jesus said to those Jews which believed on Him "the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32), but this does *not* mean that we are set free to contradict, defy and disobey Him! The modern teaching is designed to make people believe in a little God, so that they can take great liberties. Certain attributes of God are carefully concealed in presenting Him, certain unwelcome facts in the Gospel that Jesus preached are omitted. The supernatural work of the Holy Spirit is also dropped from 'appeals' and invitations.

Worship is also downgraded from the most important activity on earth (and in Heaven) to merely an option, and of course it must have a 'feelgood' emphasis! The solemnity of God's house is despised as "repelling people" from attending, and yet it is an evidence of grace (Heb. 12:28)! God's approving presence is taken for granted, no matter what the 'worship' contains.

Now compare all this with the New Testament church, as described in the New Testament. They ask us, "Why are you separate?" We reply, "Because we cannot both be right!" "Christianity is what Christ says it is" (A.W. Tozer).

**Our Duty to Preserve what Christ has Entrusted to us**

The Apostle Paul saw that many people had come into the church, including the ministry, with the desire to change things. He warned Timothy to "hold fast" what Christ had taught (2 Tim. 1:13). Few die with the confession of the Apostle, "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). If there is a revival it will bring the church back to the Word of God, and then hopefully God will dwell among us again with power, as in the days of old. Tozer wrote: "What shall we do to break the power of religious pragmatic methodology? The answer is simple. We must acknowledge the right of Christ to control the activities of His church." It is essential for the church to have once again the outlook of the Reformation – *Sola Scriptura*.

Let us beware of drifting away from the Word of God (Heb. 2:1). To the church in Thyatira, the Lord said, "hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25). To the church in Philadelphia, He said, "[thou] hast kept my word" (Rev. 3:8). May this be true of us also. ■

# THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

## WILLIAM ROMAINE

*(Romaine [1714-95] was a Church of England clergyman, who ministered mostly in London. This is the final part of a discourse entitled 'Upon Imputed Righteousness', based on 2 Corinthians 5:21.)*

Happy are you, my Christian brethren, who have received the righteousness of faith, and knowing whom you have believed. Since Christ's righteousness is yours, bring forth the proper fruits, and show publicly that there is an inseparable connection between justifying faith and sanctifying grace.

**The Fruits of Righteousness**

By justifying faith, the believer is united to Christ, and receives life from him, as a graft does from the stock upon which it grows. By virtue of this union, Christ liveth in the believer, and enables him to put forth the proper acts of spiritual life, as the stock upon which the graft grows supplies it with sap and juices to put forth leaves, and blossom, and fruit.

This is the certain effect of the abiding of a branch in the vine: it will bring forth fruit; and if any one fancy himself to be a believer, and neither brings forth, nor is seeking to bring forth, any fruit, he only deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. For whosoever has Christ for a Saviour, will have the Holy Spirit for a sanctifier, and will bring forth fruit to the glory of God. See, then, my Christian brethren, that ye value and prize this righteousness, and give it its proper honour, both with your hearts and lives. While you are bringing forth its peaceable fruits, you will continually find the comforts of it.

**Our Breastplate**

This righteousness is one of the pieces of Christian armour. It is called a breastplate, because it is the proper armour for the vital parts. Your life is always safe while you have your breastplate on; you need not fear the terror by night, nor the arrow that flieth by day. Let thousands fall, you are safe. You are defended from outward attacks: for although many be the afflictions of the righteous, yet the Lord delivereth him out of them all. And you are kept in inward peace: for the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.

In time of sickness this righteousness will be a perpetual cordial. It will not suffer the heart to sink, although the body grows weak and faint; for this breastplate is not only proof against the pains of sickness, but also against the weapons of death. "Righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:4); not by keeping the justified person from dying, but by keeping him from the fear of the first death, and from the power of the second death.

**Our Robe**

The righteous man, armed with this invulnerable breastplate, can challenge all his enemies. Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or death? Nay; clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness, I shall not be afraid to go through the valley and shadow of death, nor yet to stand at the awful bar of God's infinite justice. Why should he fear to stand there to be tried? For who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God himself that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen for their justification; and in his righteousness they shall stand holy and unblameable and unreproveable before the judgment seat of God.

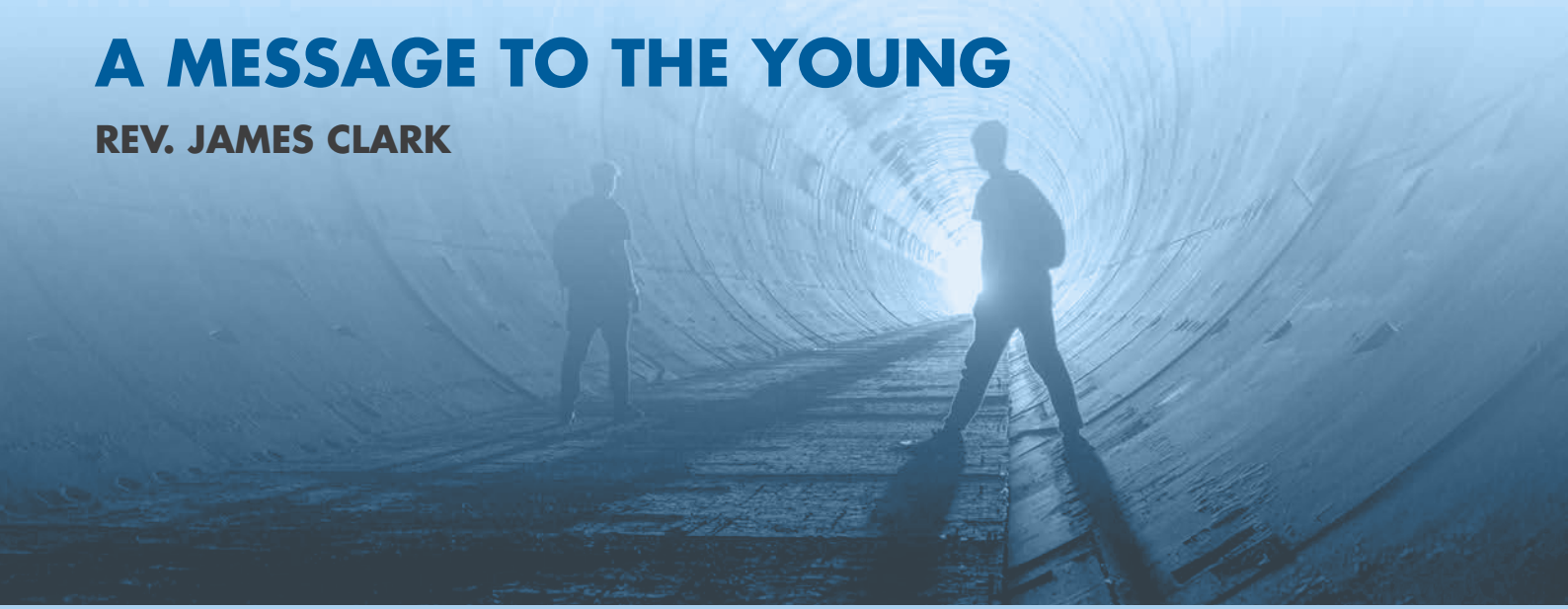
**Our Duty**

Since these are some of the benefits of having on the breastplate of righteousness, let us, my Christian brethren, keep it always in use. Since we are fighting under the Captain of our salvation, let us be ever armed with his righteousness. May we all wear it upon our breasts, that neither guilt within, nor troubles without, may ever separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. May we, in life and death, find the blessedness of this armour, by its protecting us from the threatenings of the broken law, and from the vengeance of almighty justice. And may we, in time and in eternity, live to his glory, who humbled himself to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Grant this, holy Father, for the sake of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ! To whom, with thee and the Holy Spirit, three persons in one Jehovah, be honour and glory, and blessing and praise, for ever and ever. Amen. ■

# A MESSAGE TO THE YOUNG

REV. JAMES CLARK



*"Run, speak to this young man"* (Zechariah 2:4)

One angel addresses another: there is an unseen interest in the young man. It was an act of kindness to speak to him, and direct him to measure the church which met at Jerusalem in particular, for there he would find the Word of God, and, by Christ's grace, the Spirit of God with it.

**The Message was Personal and Particular**

The message was to *this* young man, a particular individual. He was to measure the church, to see what was there among them; he was directed, for his own good, to take an interest. The message to him was inspired, and thus recorded in the Bible, for all times, for all young men and women. Alas, some measure what they see and hear with prejudice, instead of searching for the truth.

We live in the 'postmodern' world, where people are taught that the truth does not matter; it is *"what it means to you"* that matters. But there is no guarantee of truth in this. It sounds good, but it leads to nowhere. Truth should lead you to a definite destination and not just excite you about taking a journey. Truth becomes a matter of eternal life or death when you come to die... as we all must.

**The Message Came to this Man, but did he Neglect it?**

The parable of the Sower or Soils teaches us that few take heed to the truth as given by God. Yes, the church is imperfect, but Christ and His Word are not. Do not measure Christianity by the people you see professing it: they are all flawed. Look for Christ and His Word at Jerusalem, or wherever the church meets. If the truth is not there, then Christ is not there either (despite other 'ecclesiastical' things being present). Young people do not like duties, but where there is a saving interest in Christ, they will be active, searching for true spiritual experience.

The true church has the Word and Christ is present among them, even if they are only two or three. Pray that you will not be prejudiced by your education, your interest in *this* world, or by what you hear in your family. Some young men and women are indeed "taught by God", as promised by Jesus (John 6:45), and they will see that the true church will be glorious in heaven, although it is small and despised here (Ps. 48:8-14).

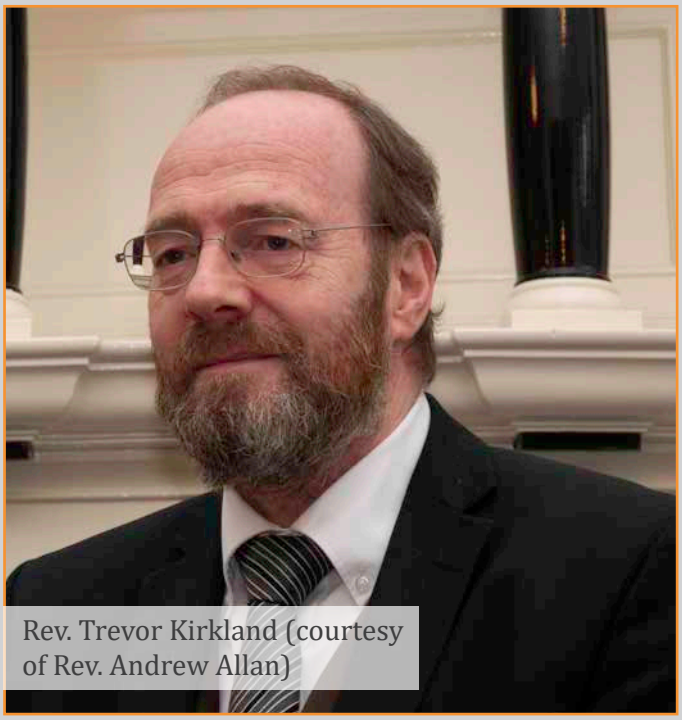
**An Urgent Message, for Time is Running Out**

The young say to themselves, "I have plenty of time ahead on earth." And Satan encourages them to do so – to give up the next world for this one, like young Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), so that they may join him in that dreadful place "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). It is not just the good angels that take an interest in the young! But the Word of God says, "*Today* if ye will hear his voice" (Ps. 95:7) – not *tomorrow*. You may not be here tomorrow.

Older men and women should pray for the young, and the young should pray for themselves, that the Holy Spirit would give them that saving interest in Christ that they need. Many have strayed, but the door is still open for prodigals. Do they still remember what they heard in the church, whether it met in Jerusalem or somewhere else? Many grow up to inherit despair, to find all their earthly gains were but hidden losses. Remember, young man, young woman, Christ is a Saviour and is able to save to the uttermost, no matter how bad we are!

Deal with this matter before any other. The angels look to see your response to Christ's Gospel. Pray for the grace that will give you a saving knowledge.

# CHURCH NEWS



Rev. Trevor Kirkland (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

## Moderator-Designate *(Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, Media Officer)*

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is pleased to announce that Rev. E. Trevor Kirkland, Ballyclare & Doagh, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, is the Moderator-Designate of the 2025 General Assembly. Mr Kirkland, a native of Northern Ireland, was born into a farming family and had the inestimable privilege of being raised in a Christian home. However, in the spiritual realm, more is needed than the faith of our parents – a fact Mr Kirkland would go on to discover for himself whilst still in his youth. Convicted of his own need of salvation he was led to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ whilst still at an early age.

Even in his youth Mr Kirkland was conscious of a call to serve the Lord in ministry and he made a vow that, being spared, he would dedicate his life to the service of his Lord and Master. This led him from school to university, from which he would graduate with an honours degree. Following his graduation he entered secular employment for a number of years.

However, the promise which had been made about serving the Lord was never forgotten, and, after some time, acknowledging the necessity of fulfilling the vow, he entered into ministerial training. In the process of time he was ordained and settled into pastoral ministry in a Baptist church in Templepatrick, Co. Antrim. Some time thereafter Mr Kirkland became convinced of the Regulative Principle of Worship, and this new understanding, that every aspect of worship requires the warrant of the Lord, altered everything entirely. For a time Mr Kirkland maintained his position on baptism, but a second change that subsequently led to an application to the Free Church (Continuing), was embracing covenant theology in its fullness.

At the General Assembly of 2014, Mr Kirkland was received into the denomination. At that same Assembly his congregation, a portion of what was by then known as Templepatrick Reformed Church, were also admitted. The Southern Presbytery held a recognition service for the minister and congregation on 1st July 2014. Since that time Mr Kirkland has become increasingly active in the wider denomination, serving as an assistant editor for the *Witness* magazine. He is also currently the Convener of the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee.

An avid reader, with a very retentive memory, he often contributes engaging and helpful book reviews for various journals. Mr Kirkland takes particular pleasure in taking visitors to local sites of special historical and religious significance. This keen interest in church history made him a fitting choice as Lecturer in Church History & Church Principles in the Free Church Seminary on the retirement of Rev John W. Keddie in 2019.

Mr Kirkland has been involved for many years with the work of the Trinitarian Bible Society and currently serves on its General Committee. Married to Diane, they have been blessed with four children, two daughters-in-law and six grandchildren.

Mr Kirkland craves the prayers of the Lord's people as he prepares for the duties of his Moderatorial year.

## European Conference of Reformed Churches *(Rev. Timothy J. McGlynn)*

In June 2019, an invitation to speak at the European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC) due to take place in the Netherlands in June 2020 arrived in my email inbox. The next day I confirmed my willingness to take a paper entitled, 'Preaching a Whole Christ from all the Scriptures'. However, a little later in the year, rumours started to spread regarding a virus originating in China (Covid), and before long all local and international travel was brought to a grinding halt.

As a result, the intended conference was delayed until September this year. In addition, the terrible financial effects issuing from lockdown, as well as the costly measures put in place following it, meant that much of Western Europe was no longer financially viable as a venue for such an event. Nevertheless, despite numerous difficulties, the meeting of the

EuCRC took place at Yarnfield Park Conference Centre in Staffordshire, England, from 10th - 13th September, and was thankfully deemed a success.

The EuCRC fulfils a couple of functions. Firstly it is a conference where speakers are invited to speak to a specific topic. The theme of this year's conference was 'Preaching', which was split into four parts:

Paper 1: 'Expounding the Word of God' was given by Rev. Simon Arscott of the International Presbyterian in Ilford, Essex. The speaker set a good tone to the conference and spoke clearly and ably on his subject.

Paper 2: 'Preaching a Whole Christ from all the Scriptures' was given by myself.

Paper 3: 'Doctrinal, ethical and catechetical preaching' was taken by Professor Maarten Kater, of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Apeldoorn Theological University. Professor Kater was clearly at home with his theme and delivered his paper with confidence and lucidity while conducting all in a most winsome manner.

Paper 4: 'Preaching to the heart' was given by Rev. Stephen Roger (retired), Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Although the eldest speaker, he was the only one who gave a PowerPoint presentation and did so with aplomb. In addition to the four papers time was given for an open discussion on Training Preachers, where initially those involved in theological training of men for the ministry gave a quick overview of their work and the challenges facing them. Amongst the speakers at this time Rev Graeme Craig, Ayr, who is the Principal of our Seminary, spoke regarding the endeavours of the Free Church (Continuing) in this area.

The EuCRC is also a regional meeting place for member denominations of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). As such, the representatives are afforded plenty of time between the lectures to speak at length with those of other denominations, and so get to know and pray for the situations in other like-minded churches throughout Europe. Mr Craig and I spent time talking to those who gathered and found it to be a most informative and useful exercise. The delegates were largely from the Netherlands and the British Isles. Many old friendships were renewed and new ones made. The churches shared concerns regarding the rise of liberalism amongst some of the continental denominations present or ones who had recently departed from the ICRC.

The conversations included one man speaking of the severe persecution he and his fellow believers had endured for the sake of Christ during the period of secular rule in Turkey. He then told an interesting story of a Muslim man who had recently come to faith because he had seen a television programme which had a female 'Christian' character. She was portrayed as an upright and commendable person, which made him wonder about the Gospel. The character was the mother in the American sitcom 'Young Sheldon'. God truly does work in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. Other men shed light on work being done in Hungary, Germany and Switzerland. It was a privilege for both Mr Craig and I to spend time with the representatives who gathered from around Europe.

The next EuCRC meeting is expected to take place in three years and it is hoped that it might be possible to hold that meeting on the continent to allow for easier access to those on the mainland of Europe. ■

### Southern Presbytery Family Conference

*(Rev. Andrew Allan)*

The third Southern Presbytery Family Conference will be held in Partick Free Church (Continuing) on Saturday 30th November beginning at 11.00am and ending approximately at 4.00pm (D.V.). Rev. John Coates from Kellswater RPC, Northern Ireland, will speak on Biblical Manhood in the morning and Biblical Womanhood in the afternoon. There will be a Q&A time after each session and bookstalls to browse during the breaks. Tea and coffee will be available from 10.00am and lunch will be provided. There will be a brief Psalmody Session after lunch. All are welcome.

It is hoped that Mr Coates talks will be live-streamed on Partick's SermonAudio site at:
www.sermonaudio.com/partickfcc ■

### Quote

"It is a greater mercy to be converted from sin, than to be glorified from holiness. It is more grace in a king to marry a poor damsel, than having married her to give her a crown." ■
*William Gurnall*

## Leave a Legacy

Please prayerfully consider the ongoing work of the gospel by leaving a legacy to the Church. A helpful information leaflet is available on request. Ask your local treasurer for a copy or email: **generaltreasurer@fccontinuing.org**

# SINGING THE PSALMS IN TAMIL

REV. JAMES MACINNES

Perhaps, like many other believers, your favourite portion from the Scriptures is found in the books of Psalms. There are 150 Psalms and sometimes the Psalter is referred to as a little Bible. This relates to the doctrinal and devotional richness of the Psalms. In the Psalms you find reference to every spiritual experience, and are provided with a healthy way to express what would otherwise crush a fragile soul. In the Psalms you find many references to the Saviour, and in the Psalms you often hear the Saviour's own voice. The Gospel writers provide a narrative of events, while the Psalms view things from Christ's own perspective, revealing the depth of His suffering and the delight of His triumph.

**The Present Psalter**

If you could only sing 25 Psalms, which would you remove to leave that total? You may be able to select 25 of your favourite ones, but never to to be able to sing the rest of them would be a huge loss. Presently the church in Sri Lanka has only 25 Metrical Psalms. They of course have access to all 150 Psalms in the prose form, and so can read and meditate upon them, but only 25 are set out for singing. The translation and preparation of these metrical versions was completed by Rev. Partheepan when he was first establishing the Reformed Protestant Mission over ten years ago. As the mission has developed other demands upon Parthee's time have prevented him from continuing this work.

**An Old Psalter**

It has been exciting to discover a Tamil language Psalter with 16 Psalms, published in 1755. The print font is very different to that used today, such that only a skilled scholar can read it. Through a contact with the Trinitarian Bible Society, it has been possible to identify someone to assist with this work. The quality of the original translation is unknown and there may need to be some adaption to deal with obsolete words. The potential benefits for the church in Sri Lanka are significant.

This Psalter dates back to when Sri Lanka was under Dutch influence through the activities of the Dutch East India Company. The translator, Philippus de Melho, was the first native from Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was formerly known, to be admitted to the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Psalms are set to the Genevan tunes. Some of these Genevan tunes are used in our own Metrical Psalter, and all of them are used by the church in France, Spain and the Netherlands, as well as in Poland and in other countries of southeastern Europe.

**Mission News**

Please continue to pray for the work of the Mission. There are many needs, practical and spiritual. A generous gift, recently received, has been set aside for solar panels – with the work to be undertaken when sufficient funds have been gathered. Solar panels have the potential to reduce utility costs and even produce some small feed-in tariff.

Plans are being developed to extend the theological training of Melville Theological Seminary into a more structured course. Ten full-time students will be invited to study over 24 months, receiving a diploma upon completion. A small allowance will be given to each man to enable him to focus his energies upon study. Recorded lectures will be translated live by Parthee, allowing him to interact with the students. The course will also include practical work and engagement in evangelism. It is hoped that this will help identify and prepare suitable men to share in the work of the mission, as well as benefiting the wider church in Sri Lanka. ■

# ERIC LIDDELL AND HIS CONTINUING POPULARITY

REV. JOHN W. KEDDIE

I would say that of all Scottish sportsmen who ever lived, it is not unlikely that the name of Eric Liddell is the best known. He is one of the few who is known outside both sporting circles and Christian circles. When names were sought of sportsmen and women to be inducted into the *Scottish Sports Hall of Fame*, the name of Eric Liddell was the most prominent. But Eric Liddell's continuing popularity in Scotland – as well as in China, incidentally, the place of his birth and death – is most remarkable. After all, he passed away in 1945, and the truth is that people rather easily forget the stars of the past. I just want to touch on three things about Eric Liddell and his continuing popularity and importance.

**1. The Fascination he Inspired**

There are several reasons for the continuing fascination for Eric Liddell (1902-45). He was of course a celebrity in his own day, in view of his surprising Olympic triumph at Paris in 1924. For Scots this has been an extremely rare accomplishment. Apart from Relay Races, there have only been three Scottish Olympic champions in track and field athletics in the 112 years of the Games: Wyndham Halswelle in the 400m of 1908 (by an unsatisfactory walk-over – but that's another story); Eric Liddell in the same event 16 years later; and Allan Wells in the 100m in 1980 (in the absence, unfortunately, of the Americans). In other words, the very rarity of the thing ensures continuing fascination. It goes without saying that this has been strengthened by *Chariots of Fire* (1981) which I suppose will ever remain one of the finest sporting films ever made. The continuing fascination, however, surely also relates to his sticking to his Christian principles, not least in foregoing Sunday sport, and in what he did afterwards in going as a missionary to China at a time of huge upheaval in that nation's history. In the story of Eric Liddell there is also this:

**2. The Character he Showed**

No doubt part of the continuing respect, admiration and affection for Eric Liddell also lies in the fact that he was a man who really stood for something. In a sceptical, secular age like ours, perhaps people will look wistfully on a man who had such certainties in his life. He believed in God; he lived for Jesus Christ; he lived by the Bible; he was a man of prayer. These things seem strange to our age, yet can also attract, for we are in a day looking for virtue, looking for good standards and looking for hope. Eric was a man of unsullied reputation, yet he wasn't a caricature. He was serious, but he was also full of the joy of life. He looked for heaven, but he loved life. What he showed in his running – seriousness and joyfulness – he also showed in his Christian living. We cannot but admire such characters, and such character. He gave and gives evangelical Christianity a good name. But, there's something else too:

**3. The Legacy he Left**

The obvious continuing popularity of this modest, self-effacing and in many ways ordinary man relates to the way his life has left a fragrance. He left a legacy in several ways. First of all, *he left a legacy as an exemplary athlete*. In an age in which there is a terrific intensity in international sport, and in which there is not a little suspicion of scandal and an apparent willingness to win at all costs – be it for personal prestige or national glory – Eric Liddell may still be held up as a model of simple honest endeavour. Sport was not his chief end, yet he always gave his all. His Olympic victory was a triumph of sheer honest endeavour, but it didn't turn his head. He is a wonderful role model for any generation. Another aspect of his legacy for sure is a religious one: *He was devoted to the Biblical faith*. His life in sport or otherwise cannot be understood without that perspective. He is a great example of living, purposeful faith in God, and encourages every succeeding generation to follow him, as he sought to follow Christ.

It was on 29th June, 1925, that Eric Liddell was taken by carriage drawn by fellow students and admirers from the Congregational College, then at 29 Hope Terrace in the Grange area of Edinburgh, to Waverley Station. There he set off on his long trip via London and the Trans-Siberian railway to Tientsin in North China. He would work for the Lord there in missionary service, until his passing from this scene in a Japanese Internment Camp on 21st February, 1945, thereafter to enjoy, by God's grace, "a fellowship immeasurably richer and a service more wonderful by far, than any which earth can know." ■

*[Two biographies of Eric Liddell written by Mr Keddie are available from Christian Focus Publications: 'Running the Race' (2020) and 'Finish the Race' (2014) – the latter belonging to the 'Trailblazer' series for young people.]*

# COMMENT

## WOMEN IN CHURCH OFFICE

### Scripture is clear on the subject

Scottish denominations were among the first to ordain women to the ministry. The United Free Church has permitted this since 1929. The Church of Scotland took the step in 1968, and now a third of its ministers are female. Denominations of a more conservative outlook have also given way on this issue. The Christian Reformed Church in North America began ordaining women in 1995, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) did so in 2017. Often the move has begun with the office of deacon, and then moved on to elders and ministers.

Scripture is our guide here, not the prevailing culture. The principle of male headship means that women are not eligible for the three church offices. Two verses make this clear: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3); and, "But I suffer not woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12). Women are excluded from teaching and ruling over men in the church.

Some suggest that these verses simply reflect the culture of the time, or Paul's personal prejudices. Consider this verse: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law" (1 Cor. 14:34). Calvin says that Paul's reasoning is simple – "that authority to teach is not suitable to the station that a woman occupies, because, if she teaches, she presides over all the *men*, while it becomes her to be *under subjection*." The reference to "the law" is to the Old Testament, and probably to the words God spoke to Eve after the fall: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16). The whole matter is tied in with God's created order.

It is a fact that the apostles were all men and that there is a specific requirement that bishops (i.e. ministers and elders) be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). The same is required of deacons (1 Tim. 3:12). Only when Scripture says that bishops are to be *the wife of one husband* will the church have a warrant to ordain women! Churches which do not ordain women are not disrespecting them. They are recognising their God-given roles in the church and society, particularly the running of the home, the raising of children and the performing of good works generally (Titus 2:5; 1 Tim. 5:14; 1 Tim. 5:10). These things may be belittled today, but should be valued very highly. ■

## A GREAT NATION

### The measure that really matters

The question is often debated: What makes a country great? To some it is simply a matter of size: a great country is one which has a large population, extensive territory and abundant resources. For others it is about power: a great country is one with a significant economy, a strong military and diplomatic influence. Yet others will view the matter more qualitatively: a great country is one with a stable, peaceful society in which the people's liberties are protected and individuals can flourish.

None of these things, however, taken individually or collectively, are the real measure of a country's 'greatness'. To know what makes a country or nation truly great we must turn to the Bible. It says: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). To exalt is to lift up. Nations commonly lift up themselves, taking pride in their achievements, but what every nation needs is to be lifted up by *God*. When His name is revered and His Word obeyed, His favour will be enjoyed. Such a nation is honourable in His eyes – and often in the eyes of other nations.

For a nation or country to be 'righteous' does not require that the majority of the people are true Christians. It results from Christianity being recognised as the true religion and its teachings having an influence upon the nation generally. This is how it has been in our country since the Reformation. Institutions such as the monarchy, parliament and the courts have acknowledged the truth of the Bible and the righteousness of God's law. It is still so in theory, yet sadly our country has moved far away from its foundations in practice. Christianity is being steadily erased from our nation's public life. The solemn truth is that the higher a nation has been lifted by God, the deeper its disgrace will be if it disowns Him. Scotland in particular was lifted very high!

Nations cannot be neutral in this matter. The only alternative to righteousness is sin, and sin always meets with God's disapproval. What is great about our country now is its *shame*. Our society has become profane in every sense. False religion, immoral behaviour of every kind, and unnatural lifestyles are tolerated and celebrated. The Lord sends warnings in providence but they are not heeded. If we are to avoid ruin, we must chart a new course. The 'change' most politicians offer simply makes things worse. What we urgently need is *repentance*. "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you" (Zech. 1:3). ■

# AUGUSTINE VERSUS WOKEISM

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

The wonderful and reassuring thing about Church history is that whatever anxieties and fears we moderns have, previous generations had them also. The difference is that they tried to analyse the problems, while our generation tends to medicate. They sought solutions, but we seek therapy. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our universities. Consider the books written in the last fifteen years describing the academic betrayal of our youth. Among the titles are: *Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating*; *What's Happened To The University?*; *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*; and, *The Coddling of the American Mind*.

Never have governments in the west devoted more attention, resources and effort towards education – and never has education been so lacking in proper content and purpose. It has come under the influence of the woke ideology that has spread through much of the western world. The term 'woke' is used to describe an alertness to every form of 'injustice' and 'discrimination' in society, especially when these things involve race and gender. Teachers and lecturers indoctrinate rather than inform, often distorting history in order to make their case. Students are left without the tools for coherent, rational thought.

There are things happening in academic circles that we need to know about, in order to resist, refute and ultimately reject them. This is where the church 'father' Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) comes in. A theologian and philosopher, Augustine had a key role in the development of Western Christianity. What can he tell us?

**The Beginning**

Every story has a beginning, and so does Augustine's. At the age of sixteen his parents sent him to study at Carthage, where he led an immoral life. At eighteen he discovered philosophy, and was enamoured by it. Like many others of a speculative nature, he was drawn to Manichaeism, a pseudo-religious sect. Aged 27, he published his first book. Augustine was on his way to fame, but five years later he had an existential crisis, more particularly an *intellectual* crisis. Was there such a thing as truth? Or even such a thing as knowledge?

Scepticism had wreaked havoc with Augustine's intellect. Then he read the Greek philosopher Plato (427-348 BC), who taught that true knowledge of some things is attainable. This was an advance upon Scepticism. Thereafter Augustine came into contact with an intellectual group of Christians, one of whom was Ambrose. His towering intellect and Christian convictions began to make headway in the thinking of a troubled Augustine. At the age of 31 he was converted to Christianity, and moved with family and friends to the countryside of Cassiciacum (now Casciago) outside Milan, to think, meditate and write.

The outcome was a four-volume set of books: *Against the Academics*; *On the Happy Life*; *On Order*; and finally, *Soliloquies*. The sequence of these volumes indicates what was going on. Augustine experienced an intellectual change, followed by a moral change and finally a religious change. In other words, Augustine discovered there is such a thing as truth, that truth has moral implications, and that since truth resides in Christ, submitting to and following Christ is the complete answer. So firm was his conviction that Augustine wrote: "Christ meets and refreshes me everywhere in Scripture".

**What Augustine Learned about Academics**

But what about the theme of this article? In his work *Against the Academics*, Augustine lays out the central issue. He is not against academic study, nor against academics in general. What he is against is the *scepticism* of academia, and the philosophical school known as 'Scepticism'. The essence of Scepticism was to suspend judgement on everything. It was a form of agnosticism – of not deciding one way or the other, and so in effect never deciding at all. By Augustine's day, Scepticism had been around for seven centuries, having arisen in the fourth century BC. It had developed into a seemingly sophisticated philosophy, with the appearance of cleverness, when in reality it was an intellectually and morally bankrupt way of thinking.

The main proposition of Scepticism was that the wise believe what is true, but since we do not know what is true, no assent can be given to it. The consequence is that we are in limbo, paused at a crossroads and unable to proceed. Of course, what the Sceptic could not grasp was that his entire position was absurd. If the main proposition of Scepticism is true, then we can assent to it; if it is untrue, then we can reject it. Thus, truth does exist. The very thing Scepticism denies is possible!

Worse was to come. The Sceptic is required to be sceptical about every possible argument to the contrary *ad infinitum* – that is, forever. No matter how ludicrous, bizarre, illogical or absurd the response is, it is to be validated by acceptance simply because truth cannot be known. While this technique comes across as clever, in reality it is designed to avoid truth itself; to avoid having to submit to truth and the consequences of truth. If there is no truth, then anything is possible. Every argument, idea, philosophy and ideology is legitimate, and who is to say otherwise? All is mere opinion. Everyone has their own truth and their own facts, and they are all valid. Such is the essence of Scepticism. In Augustine, it met a staunch opponent.

> *"It becomes crucial when we come to the matter of Scripture."*

**Scepticism Explained**

The Sceptics were most insistent that one should never accept or believe what was false. Yet this was a mere foil, because the pursuit of truth never arrives at truth, simply because there are so many variables, responses, objections and counter arguments. In effect, the Sceptic is in no better position than the one who accepts what is wrong (*Against the Academics*, 1:10,11). Yet it gets worse. Augustine argues: What if someone isn't seeking anything at all – neither truth nor error? In fact, what if someone took the position that it was night, when, according to everyone else, it was day? Would he in fact be wrong? By what criteria could the rest say that such a person was wrong? After all, the criteria themselves may be wrong!

While you may be thinking that the matter is very clear, and that it must be either night or day, consider the modern distinction between sex and gender. One person says that men who 'identify' as women are female, while another person says, no, by certain biological criteria they are male. Who is correct, the biologist or the psychologist? To complicate things further, yet another person may say that some people are neither male nor female, but 'non-binary'.

Augustine proceeds to illustrate his point by describing people who are on a journey to Alexandria. According to the signs, they are on the right road. Suppose they die along the way. Were they on the right road or not? The Sceptic is not in any position to determine. But there is more. In our current situation, can we even be sure that the *signs* were correct? It may be that the signage was the product of misogyny, white superiority or any number of other criteria. There may be any number of explanations and conclusions as to why the signage was in fact wrong.

**Why this Matters**

So far, the entire argument may seem purely academic. What has it got to do with us? It becomes crucial when we come to the matter of Scripture. Can we say that there is a true and a false reading of the Bible? Or is everyone's interpretation 'true', with the result that we are at the mercy of endless speculations concerning the Bible's meaning? Sadly, the latter view is now commonly held. Scepticism has entered the church through group Bible studies, where everyone present is encouraged to voice their opinion on a passage and no authoritative exposition is given. To assert that there is only one correct interpretation is regarded as dogmatism, or having a superior attitude, and worse, a dismissing of other valid interpretations and views.

Yet consider our *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In its opening chapter, the Confession asserts, "The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself", insisting that "the true and full sense of any scripture...is not manifold, but one" (ch. 1:9). In our post-modern, sceptical age, this is rejected. The 'truth' has multiple meanings for multiple people. The so-called Western interpretation is pitted against an African, Asian or Maori interpretation. And then there is the feminist interpretation. Throw into this mix a suspicion regarding the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures, and the outcome is obvious.

How often you see this worked out when churches set up panels or committees to look into some doctrinal or moral issue. The reports begin by asserting that Scripture has the final authority. That sounds fine, but when you read further this is qualified in all sorts of ways, with the result that in the end no clear, authoritative view on the subject can be presented. This was the very thing Augustine experienced as an academic, and resolutely opposed once he came to saving faith in Christ.

Augustine explains the spiritual reality of his position for us. "Moreover, no one doubts that we are urged on to learn by the twin weight of authority and reason. Therefore, I am determined not to depart ever, in any way, from the authority of Christ, for I find no authority more powerful" (*Against the Academics*, 1:43).

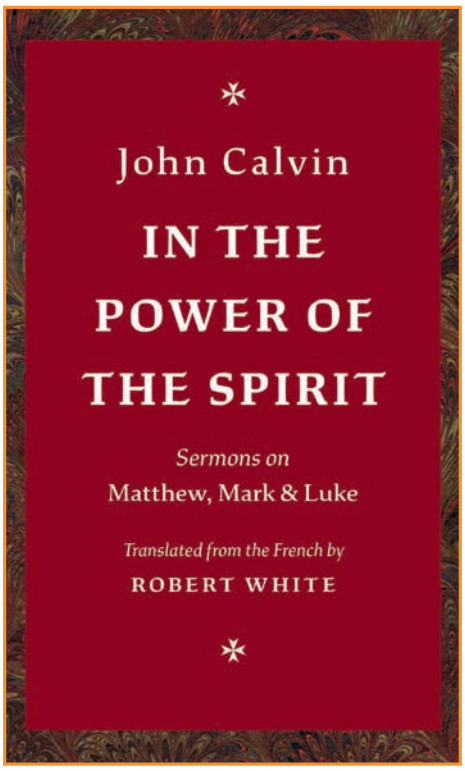
Augustine was not 'woke' and neither should we be, for one simple reason: Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). ■

*(Books for review should be sent to: Rev. David M. Blunt, 17 Knockline, Isle of North Uist HS6 5DT)*

## *In the Power of the Spirit*
## John Calvin, Banner of Truth Trust, hbk, 298pp, £15.00

The sermons compiled in this volume belong to a period when Calvin was approaching the end of his life, when he was physically frail but still spiritually active. There are eighteen sermons, drawn mainly from the early chapters of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which have been translated from the original French version of 1562 by Robert White. They focus on events of Jesus' early Galilean ministry – on His baptism, the temptations in the wilderness, the calling of the first disciples, and His work of healing. Calvin takes for granted that the basic narrative of these events is well known to his congregation and spends only what is strictly necessary of time on them. He focuses mainly on their historical, doctrinal and pastoral significance.

The doctrines which emerge are cast in a Trinitarian pattern, highlighting the Father's exact ordering of events in providence, the Son's authoritative majesty exhibited in word and deed, and the Spirit's empowering and enabling presence and guidance. The sovereign grace of God in His unspeakably great mercy and generosity to hell-deserving sinners is at the heart of His message. The need for faith and repentance is also central. Faith is defined as reception of and trust in the goodness of God. Repentance is defined as a consequent progressive turning from sin by the Christian with a holy disgust, as he is enabled by the Spirit to engage in a holy war. This is not only against Satan's promptings and temptations operating from outside, but also against the fifth columnist of indwelling sin which is so ready to collude with the exterior enemy. In this spiritual warfare the Christian is often brought to an end of himself, but Calvin delights in showing that, through Christ's redemptive work, there is forgiveness and reconciliation with God.




Calvin's expository skills and pastoral compassion are brought out in a very meaty sermon appropriately titled 'Bearing our Infirmities'. We see this, for example, in the account of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, where Calvin makes the following points:

(a) Christians have no right to claim immunity from illness and adversity, for, as Calvin himself puts it, "we have to be tried by many afflictions, if only because we need to be humbled and to be made aware of our misery. These prompt us to call upon God and are meant to test our endurance."

(b) Nevertheless, Jesus would also show particular compassion to this household because He saw that they were in straits, having lost their breadwinner when Peter gave up his occupation as a fisherman to follow the Lord. And so, He healed her.

(c) Jesus showed compassion also to Peter and Andrew and to James and John, because these disciples "were still very ignorant – novices really – who needed to be strengthened and to be convinced that it was not for nothing that they had given themselves to the One who had called them to be partners with Him."

One thing however that causes surprise in this otherwise excellent book is this statement by Calvin from his sermon on 'Led by the Spirit'. He says: "*God is righteous, and He cannot deny His righteousness. He must therefore hate us and regard us with abhorrence. This is our condition until the Lord Jesus Christ receives us to Himself. It is* ***then*** *that* ***we begin to be loved by God*** *[my emphasis]*: for our sins are wiped out, because they have been cleansed by the shed blood which is our spiritual washing. In this way the warfare and hostility between God and us comes to an end – that is when we are incorporated into Jesus Christ."

While readily acknowledging that the believer is a child of wrath, even as others, until he is closed in by faith with Christ, does not the question still arise as to how far this statement fits in with other Biblical statements, like, for example, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3)? ■

*Rev. John Macleod*

# COMMUNION DATES

Communions are held on the following Sabbaths. Visitors should contact local ministers for times of the main services and the preparatory and thanksgiving services. Contact details may be found on the Church website.

**November**
3 Arran, Edinburgh–St Columba's, Kilmorack & Strathglass
10 Aberdeen, Tarbat
17 Brora, Glasgow–Shettleston

**December**
1 Mebane
8 Auburn-Opelika, Hunt County
15 Pau

**January**
14 St Louis
28 Atlanta

# CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

| | CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2024 £ | ORDINARY REMITTANCES Sept 2024 £ | Total to Sept 2024 £ | Total to Sept 2023 £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Free Northern Presbytery** | | | | |
| Aberdeen | 0 | 2,150 | 19,350 | 18,900 |
| Assynt & Scourie | 0 | 0 | 12,853 | 8,323 |
| Brora | 5,490 | 1,000 | 14,034 | 10,727 |
| Duthil-Dores | 0 | 1,500 | 16,000 | 17,000 |
| Inverness | 0 | 2,000 | 23,888 | 23,802 |
| Kilmorack & Strathglass | 0 | 1,300 | 14,819 | 16,655 |
| Kiltearn | 0 | 0 | 500 | 1,000 |
| Poolewe & Aultbea | 13,920 | 980 | 8,820 | 8,775 |
| Tarbat | 0 | 1,000 | 11,487 | 9,976 |
| **Total Free Northern Presbytery** | 19,410 | 9,930 | 121,750 | 115,158 |
| **Southern Presbytery** | | | | |
| Arran | 0 | 0 | 5,814 | 6,705 |
| Ayr | 0 | 1,000 | 10,610 | 10,460 |
| Ballyclare & Doagh | 0 | 1,200 | 11,744 | 12,202 |
| Dumfries | 0 | 0 | 1,010 | 2,200 |
| Edinburgh | 0 | 1,950 | 19,633 | 20,119 |
| Glasgow - Knightswood | 0 | 1,650 | 19,592 | 16,924 |
| Glasgow - Partick | 0 | 2,000 | 35,000 | 30,000 |
| Glasgow - Shettleston | 0 | 1,000 | 8,197 | 7,624 |
| Rothesay | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6,000 |
| **Total Southern Presbytery** | 0 | 8,800 | 111,599 | 112,234 |
| **Outer Hebrides Presbytery** | | | | |
| Cross | 0 | 2,100 | 19,450 | 18,900 |
| Harris - Leverburgh | 0 | 1,700 | 16,560 | 17,204 |
| Knock & Point | 0 | 1,043 | 14,088 | 17,084 |
| North Uist & Grimsay | 2.130 | 1,050 | 9,079 | 11,942 |
| Scalpay | 0 | 2,300 | 23,857 | 23,348 |
| Stornoway | 0 | 5,690 | 69,620 | 70,552 |
| **Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery** | 2,130 | 13,883 | 152,653 | 159,029 |
| **Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron** | | | | |
| Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish) | 0 | 500 | 4,500 | 16,159 |
| Kilmuir & Stenscholl | 0 | 500 | 6,181 | 5,072 |
| Lochalsh & Strath | 700 | 1,500 | 22,940 | 18,973 |
| Portree | 494 | 1,500 | 16,606 | 17,676 |
| Snizort | 0 | 1,600 | 28,454 | 24,581 |
| **Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery** | 1,194 | 5,600 | 78,681 | 82,460 |
| Smiths Falls | 0 | 0 | 995 | 995 |
| **Total From Congregations** | 22,734 | 38,213 | 465,678 | 469,876 |
| Other Donations | 0 | 1,802 | 29,534 | 24,600 |
| Legacy | 0 | 0 | 1,000 | 10,000 |
| **TOTAL** | 22,734 | 40,015 | 496,213 | 504,476 |
| Included in the above: Tax | 354 | 0 | 71,386 | 73,175 |
| Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations | 22,380 | 40,015 | 424,826 | 431,301 |

**Gifts and Donations** - Donations and gifts for the Church should be sent to the Financial Administrator:

**Mrs Donna Norris**
**101 Young Road, Dunblane**
**FK15 0FT**
**financialadministrator@fccontinuing.org**

Cheques / postal orders should be made payable to "Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)".

**General Treasurer**
**Mr Murray Mackay**
**1 Lennox Road, Lennoxtown,**
**Glasgow G66 7HN**
**generaltreasurer@fccontinuing.org**
**(mobile) 07793 535227**

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is a recognised Scottish Charity (SC 030976).

A Liddell family photo, taken in 1927 in China.
Back row (L-R): Eric Liddell, Jenny Liddell and Ernest Liddell
Front row (L-R): Rob Liddell, Mary Liddell (with Rob and Ria's daughter, Peggy, on her knee), James Liddell, and Ria Liddell (Rob's wife)

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Hebrews 12:1-2

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