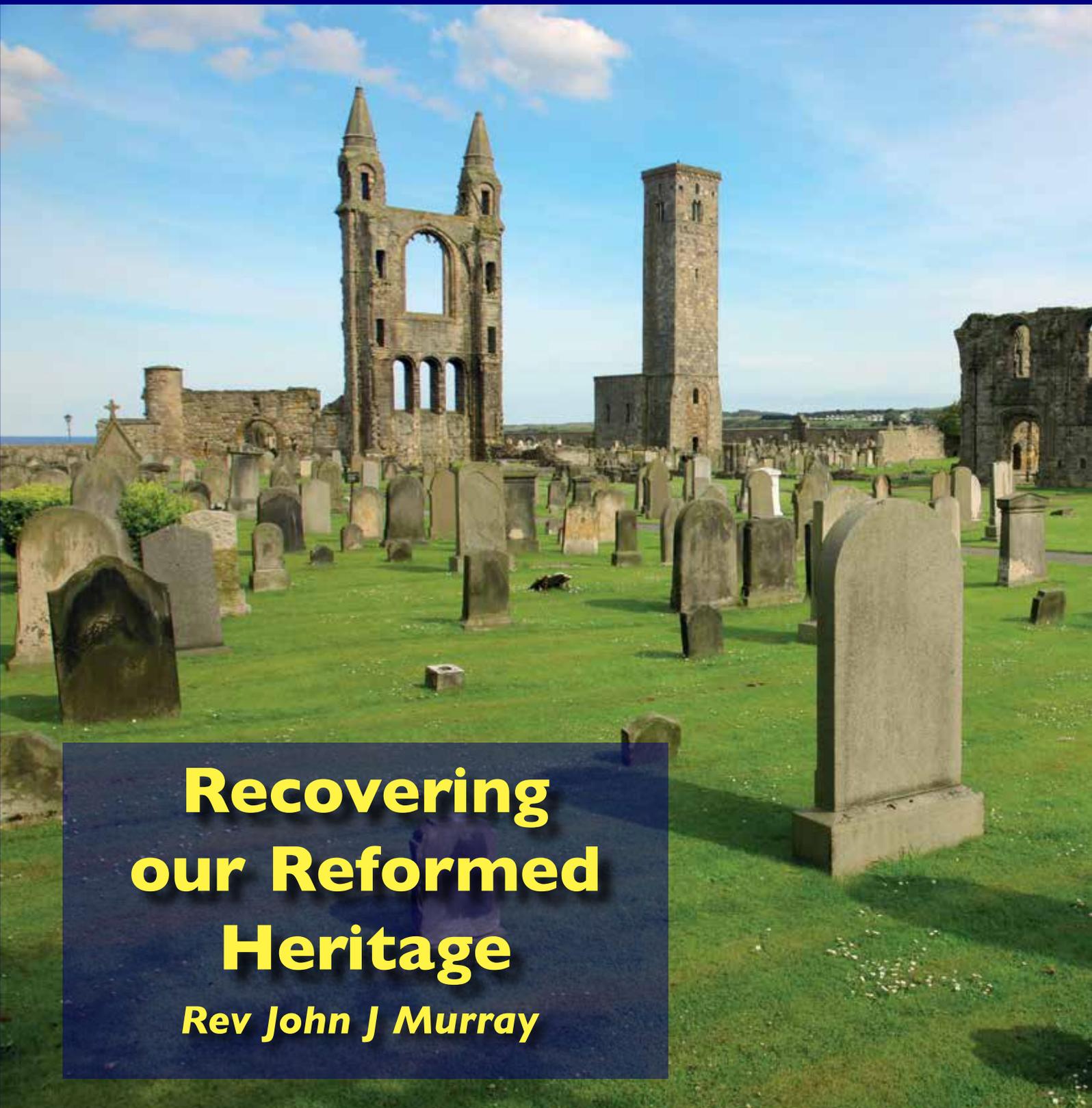


Free Church **Witness**



FEBRUARY 2016 ISSUE



Recovering our Reformed Heritage

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Design and Layout: Alasdair Macleod
Cover: Ruins, St Andrews (Dollar Photo Club)

Subscription Details

Subscription rates (including postage) for a year's issues of the two magazines mailed to one address are:

U.K. £27.50
Europe (Airmail) £30.00
Overseas (Airmail) £35.00

The congregational rate is £24.00.

We would like to encourage churches to make bulk orders. The *Explorer* may be ordered separately for Sabbath Schools.

Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to: "Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)"

Subscriptions and orders should be sent to:

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Inverness IV2 6XF
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from whom further information may be obtained. Cheques should be made payable to "Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)".

The Church is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. 030976).

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Published by

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)
25 Branklyn Crescent
Academy Park
Glasgow G13 1GJ

COMMUNIONS

February:-

21 Stornoway
28 Harris

March:-

13 Cross, Portree,
20 Knightswood,
27 Inverness, Assynt, Scalpay

Printed by

DM Design & Print
25 Loch Lann Road
Inverness IV2 7HB



Godliness

Godliness is vitally important. Paul writes to young Timothy: 'Refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance' (1Tim.4:7-9). Godliness gives us the best of both worlds. 'Bodily exercise' profits a little. It makes you feel good, the body stronger and healthier and you may live a few years longer, but then you will die. Godliness, however, brings God's blessing and happiness to you now in this world and after you die you will go to heaven to be eternally blessed. This is a faithful saying, comes with apostolic authority, and should be accepted by all.

But what is godliness? In this article I would like to note fourteen of its characteristics.

1. Fear of God

'The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov.9:10), ie, central to wise living. Awe and reverence for God, giving Him His place, is where godliness begins. It is having God as the biggest person in your life. In contrast, it is said of the wicked, 'There is no fear of God before

their eyes' (Rom.3:18). Can you say that God is always there to you and that you are aware of living out your life in His presence? Is it becoming increasingly the case with you, the older you grow?

2. Holiness

The English word 'godliness' means 'God-likeness'. God says, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy' (1Pet.1:16). But what is God like? The Ten Commandments describe His character. He even kept the first Sabbath as a pattern for us to follow. We must not covet, tell lies, steal, lust, hate, disrespect authority, break the Sabbath, use God's name irreverently, worship God in a way that He has not commanded, nor be devoted to anyone or anything as much as Him.

3. Love

Godliness is essentially loving God with all our soul and strength and mind. This relates to the previous point in that Christ stated, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' (Jn.14:15). It also involves piety, devotion and enjoying God: 'Delight thyself also in the Lord' (Ps.37:4). Be satisfied with none but Him. We are to desire fellowship with Him and His felt presence in our lives.

4. Faith

Faith is essential to salvation: 'Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him' (Heb.11:6). Christ has earned salvation for us and we must constantly look to Him for it. It's not just a matter of believing at the beginning of our Christian life, but rather a walk of faith. There must be no trust in our own works, but a constant resting upon the finished work of our Saviour. Each day we must look afresh to God for help. The godly life is a life of dependence on the Lord.

5. Repentance

For sinners like us, repentance must always go along with faith. They are two sides of the one coin. Sin is natural and easy, even after conversion. Daily we must search our hearts, confess our sin, claim the blood and seek grace to never sin again. A godly man has a sensitive conscience, knows growing conviction of sin, mourns over his failure and cries to the Lord for mercy.

6. Prayer

Prayerfulness and godliness go together. In prayer we express our faith and repentance, we praise and glorify God, we give thanks to the Lord for His providence and grace, we plead for our needs and intercede for others. Enoch walked with God and surely a large part of this is awareness of God and talking constantly to him. Spurgeon said that he seldom prayed for a quarter of an hour, but seldom did a quarter of an hour go by without him praying. Closely related to prayer is singing Psalms of praise to God. God Himself supplies the best words.

7. Bible

We talk to God in prayer and He talks to us through His Word. If you love someone you will read their letters with great interest. How much more should we study the Scriptures! We want to be godly and God-pleasing; how important then to read His Word where He gives us directions to that end. The Psalmist could say: 'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day' (Ps.119:97). Feed upon it, be constantly asking for light and understanding and seek the grace to apply the Word to your heart and life.

8. The Means of Grace

The public worship of God, the preaching and teaching, the prayer and sacraments, and church discipline are all designed to produce godly men and women. The weekly prayer-meeting is not as well attended as it should be. Spurgeon called it the central heating of his church. The writer to the Hebrews warned, 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching' (Heb.10:25). There are special blessings connected with the gathering of at least

two or three together in the name of Christ.

9. Good Works

Paul exhorted Titus, 'Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful' (Tit.3:14). Good works will not save us, but also as James reminds us we will not be saved without good works: 'But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' (Jas.2:20). Our Lord Jesus taught that even a cup of cold water given in His name will be rewarded: 'For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward' (Mk.9:41). Sometimes the question is asked as to what the role of women is in the church. Paul gives a partial answer to Timothy when he commends certain ladies: 'Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work' (1Tim.5:10). And this should not be limited to women.

10. Rejecting Worldliness

Worldliness is the opposite of godliness. John exhorts, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1Jn.2:15-17). While we have duties in this world, and there are good things of God's providence to enjoy, we must be heavenly-minded with our hearts set on the things which are above.

11. Humility

Pride is taking the glory which belongs to God and giving it to ourselves. God hates pride. There are few things which He loathes more. Peter writes: 'All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time' (1Pet.5:5-6). The godly with whom the Lord loves to dwell are described in Isaiah: 'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' (Is.57:15).

12. Spiritual

Godliness is to be spiritual, which in biblical terms means being filled with the Spirit. We are exhorted, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Eph.5:18). Some have more of the Spirit than others and at some times we have more of the Spirit than at other times. We should seek to be dominated

by the Spirit more and more. This will mean that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit in greater abundance, 'Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance' (Gal.5:22-23). The godliest are the most loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, gentle, good, faithful, meek and temperate. That last adjective means exercising self-control, not being carried away by anything that belongs solely to this world.

13. Witnessing

The godly have a certain radiance about them. They do not hide their light under a bushel. In fact they cannot be hid for they are like a city set upon a hill. Their face shines as Moses' did, though they cannot see it themselves. I heard of a certain lady who struggled with assurance. Her pastor said it was as if she had a great light on her back but she walked in the shadow of it. All others could see whom she served and to whom she belonged. The godly, in loving their neighbours, long for their salvation and do all they can for it.

14. Waiting for Christ

Those characterised by godliness are not building a heaven in this world. Their heart is set on heaven and they long to be with Christ in that state where they will serve Him perfectly, with no sin ever again. Paul could say, viewing his death, 'To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better' (Phil.1:23). In another place he wrote: 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing' (2Tim.4:6-8). Do you love and long for His appearing?

Bodily exercise, walking, running, the gym, profits a little, 'but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance' (1Tim.4:8-9). Are you striving after godliness?



Obituary

Alasdair MacKenzie, Elder, Aultbea

The isolated congregation of Poolewe & Aultbea lost a faithful stalwart elder when Alasdair MacKenzie died in February 2015.

Alasdair was the youngest of a family of three and was a native of Mellon Charles, near Aultbea. When his sister Helen died, he reflected and commented, 'who will pray for me now that she is gone?' Alasdair married Moira in Inverness in 1966 and after staying for a brief period in Inverness, the couple eventually built a house and set up home in Mellon Charles, where they remained for the duration of their married life.

Alasdair worked for the Ministry of Defence at the boom located in Mellon Charles. He was the last to be employed there and stayed on long after it ceased to function. He received a long service award for over thirty years service in 2010 at a ceremony held in Cameron Barracks, Inverness, shortly after he retired.

Alasdair professed faith during a Communion when Rev William Macleod was the visiting preacher in June 1983. Ever since, he maintained a lively Christian witness and testimony. Alasdair was ordained an elder during the ministry of Rev Alasdair Ferguson on 5 June 1994. Alasdair found himself being called upon to preach in various Free Church congregations before the division and preached very acceptably. After the events of 2000 Alasdair was an important member of the Poolewe & Aultbea congregation and regularly occupied the pulpit during their long vacancy.

Shortly after their first minister was inducted in 2008 Alasdair was diagnosed with cancer. He received treatment and was eventually given the all-clear. However, he was warned to expect that the cancer would most likely return. Early in 2013 Alasdair became unwell again and

finally it was diagnosed that the cancer had returned with a vengeance. From this time till his death Alasdair maintained a bright Christian witness despite his failing health, and frequented the means of grace as much as his flesh would permit. During his long and protracted illness he was devotedly cared for and supported by his wife. Finally he entered into his eternal rest on 11 February 2015. He is survived by his wife Moira, and nieces and nephews whom we commit unto the Father of all mercies. His elder brother James passed away recently also.

Rev Andrew Allan



Recovering Our Scottish Reformed Heritage

John J Murray

I A Lost Heritage

We have only to look around us today to see how our Reformed heritage has been eroded. The Russian dissident and author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, said: 'To destroy a people you must first sever their roots'. This has an application to

the Christian Church today. The influence of liberalism and modern evangelism in the United Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century led to a disconnection with our Protestant and Reformed heritage.

The change that came about in the spiritual and theological climate in England in the mid decades of

the nineteenth century culminated in the 'Downgrade controversy' with C H Spurgeon fighting a battle for the historic Christian Faith. There was no sign of a recovery for over half a century. Dr J I Packer noted the change that took place in the mid-twentieth century. In an article on 'Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones: A Kind of Puritan', he said: 'It was in fact given him (Dr Lloyd-Jones) in the post war years to see the quality of evangelical teaching in England and Wales change for the better through his own weaving back into it the binding thread of Reformed theology – a thread which had snapped after Spurgeon was defeated in the Downgrade controversy, and Keswick teaching swamped Anglican Calvinism, and liberalism and the social gospel captured the pulpits of Wales'.

In Scotland the downgrade became evident in the decline of the Free Church of Scotland towards the end of the nineteenth century. The widespread acceptance of the theory of evolution and Higher Critical thought resulted in the infiltration of theological liberalism into the churches. The adoption of modern evangelism, introduced through the campaigns of D L Moody, accelerated the decline. It was not so much 'the thread which snapped' but the binding thread became very thin. The thorough-going Reformed theology of the Geneva-inspired Scottish Reformation was relegated to a secondary place as far as the majority of Christians in Scotland were concerned.

Let us look at what happened at the time of the Reformation in Scotland.

2 Pre-Reformation Scotland

Scotland at the beginning of the sixteenth century was in spiritual darkness and moral decay. The Church was in a corrupt condition. During the medieval period the human authority of the Pope and the fallible teaching of the Church replaced the unique authority of God in the Scriptures. Reliance on man's works had taken the place of the sovereign and irresistible grace of God in salvation. The result of such apostasy was idolatry, typified by the cult of Mary and of the saints, the worship of the Eucharist, the pseudo-magical power of the priests in the use of the sacraments, the efficacy of relics and so on. It was John Calvin's view that at the very centre of the Roman Church was a form of Christianised idolatry. There were glimmers of Gospel light in the nation. John Wycliffe's Lollards had preached the Gospel in Scotland since the late fourteenth century. Patrick Hamilton brought Luther's teaching to Scotland and as a consequence suffered a gruesome martyrdom before St Salvator's College, St Andrews in 1528. That effort to suppress the truth had the opposite effect. Archbishop Beaton was advised to burn other heretics in deep cellars 'for the reek (smoke) of Patrick Hamilton has infected all it blew upon'. Luther's teaching was also

making its way into Scotland through pamphlets and books and was penetrating the universities. In 1543 the reading of the Bible in the vernacular was sanctioned and it became a popular book.

It was into this situation that John Knox was called by God. He trained for the priesthood but then he was converted – 'It pleased God to call me from the puddle of papistry'. His call to the ministry while taking refuge in the Castle at St Andrews was dramatic. His first sermon on Daniel 7:24-25 was a powerful attack on the errors of Rome. After 18 months as a slave on the French galleys he landed in England where he joined the emerging Protestant movement under the reign of young Edward VI. He found himself to be the leader of the Puritan party in the Reformation. The commencement of persecution under Mary Tudor caused Knox to flee to the Continent. He studied under John Calvin in Geneva and ministered to an English-speaking congregation there. He said of Geneva, 'It is the most perfect school of Christ on earth since the days of the apostles'. Thomas Carlyle said of Knox, 'He was the chief priest and founder of the faith that became Scotland's, New England's and Oliver Cromwell's – that is of Puritanism'.

We need to consider the kind of Reformation that was accomplished in Scotland.

3 The Reformation in Scotland

1 It was God-centred.

True religion is the reaction of the human soul in the presence of God, coram deo. It is the reception of the message of the supremacy and glory of God in Christ in the heart that makes the man of God. It was true in the experience of John Calvin and John Knox. This is what lay at the heart of Reformation movement. The Reformation could be said to have been the blossoming of this fundamental religious consciousness on a wide scale. As the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to bring the individual to this consciousness, so it was manifestly a work of the Spirit to bring multitudes to it. T M Lindsay in his work on The Reformation states, 'I have adopted Dr Merle d'Aubigne's view that the Reformation was a revival of religion, and cannot be described successfully unless this its essential character is kept distinctly in view'. George Smeaton writes in similar vein, 'Considered in its origin, the Reformation was itself a great work of the Spirit of God, and the men who bore a leading part in it were fully conscious of this fact'. Knox attributed it to the fact that 'God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance'. The Reformation was a movement from heaven that turned attention from a man-centred religion back to God.

2 It was Scripture-centred.

The Reformation was also a movement from the authority of the Church back to the authority of the

Word of God. The medieval Church raised the tradition of the Church to a place of authority equal to that of Scripture. 'Holy writ' and 'holy tradition' were both accepted as authoritative sources of divine truth. Over both stood the Church's magisterium, an infallible teaching office, to which belonged final authority in interpreting both tradition and Scripture. The Roman priests were largely ignorant of Scripture. The Bible was not available to the common people. When Luther took his defiant stand against the Roman Church with the words 'my conscience is captive to the Word of God', it set alight the Reformation. The Scripture says, 'The entrance of thy word giveth light (Psalm 119:130). Sola Scriptura became one of the watchwords of the Reformation.

'Everywhere the Reformation made an impact', says Carl Trueman, 'it did so via the production and proliferation of vernacular Scriptures and the preaching (the verbal proclamation of the Word of God)'. That Word entered Scotland in 1527 through the availability of the translation of the New Testament into English by William Tyndale. The Scripture became the basis for the Reformation work and John Knox saw his vocation as a preacher of that Word. His main duty he said was 'to blow my Master's trumpet'. There was a profound sense of the divine majesty of the Author of Scripture: 'What Scripture says God says'. It was affirmed that 'nothing pleases God but what He has commanded in His Word; and the true principle of piety is the obedience which we ought to render to Him'. Calvin says in the Institutes: 'Now in order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no-one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture'.

3 It was salvation-centred.

It was also a movement that moved from man's merits to God's grace. The doctrine of man's radical corruption was denied by the Pelagians and the Roman Catholics. John Calvin wrote in the Institutes: 'It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy – this pride is innate in all of us'. In Calvin's view the volitional inability of sinners to love God, obey God, or believe in Him, was the heart of the doctrine of depravity. To magnify human free will or minimize the extent of human depravity is to downplay the need for divine grace, and so undermine every aspect of Gospel truth. The Reformers re-discovered that salvation was a work of sovereign, distinguishing grace. It was centred in Christ. Everything lacking in us by nature is given to us by Christ; everything sinful in us is imputed to Christ; and

all the judgment merited by us is borne by Christ. Union with Christ was at the very centre of the application of redemption. We come to receive and enjoy the benefits purchased by Christ by the secret energy of the Holy Spirit working faith in us. All the glory of salvation belongs to the triune God alone. It is by Christ alone, by grace alone and through faith alone.

The Reformers' quarrel with the religion that went before them was that it did not bring men into the presence of God. The teaching of the Reformers, like Knox, removed the barriers which divided the common man from God. The special powers of the ordained priesthood were broken and the teaching of the priesthood of all believers was restored. There was the recovery of the true knowledge of God and the consequent effect in the life of the individual. Early in the Institutes Calvin says: 'Indeed we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety'. The truth of the Gospel is only rightly believed in the extent to which it is embodied in life. In the words of Professor John Murray: 'Theology that does not promote encounter with the living God and encounter with Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the unity that belongs to Them in the mystery of the Trinity, and in the particularity of relationship which each Person sustains to us in the economy of salvation is not Christian theology'.

4 It was Church-centred.

The Reformers saw clearly that the medieval Church was no longer the gathering of the faithful but a worldly institution whose status derived from the authority and traditions of men and external connections with clergy, sacraments and buildings. For Calvin, the Church was crucial to a full understanding of the nature of God's redemptive purposes in this fallen world. Calvin took up the words of Cyprian: 'You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the Church for your mother'. Reintroducing the concept with considerable zeal he said: 'For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keeps us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like angels'. He held the view that the salvation of sinners does not happen in a vacuum, but in the crucible of the visible church. It is no accident therefore that Book IV of the Institutes occupies about a third of the length of the whole.

John Knox and his fellow Reformers had to lay a new foundation for the Church in Scotland. 'They took not their pattern from any Kirk in the world', said historian John Row, 'no not from Geneva itself, but laying God's Word before them, they made reformation according thereunto, both in doctrine first and then in discipline'. As Dr David Hay Fleming said, if the story of the

Reformation in Scotland had to be characterised in one word, that word might be 'thorough'. In the First Book of Discipline, Knox declared, 'Whatsoever He proves (by His eternal Word) that shall be approved, and what He damneeth, shall be condemned, though all men in the earth should hazard the justification of the same'. This is what has become known as the Regulative Principle and revealed the Puritan element that had been burned into the soul of John Knox and manifested itself in him in England and in Geneva before Scotland. Everything in the Church had to be according to the pattern God Himself has given. Knox insisted that Christ was the only Head of the Church and that no bishop nor King could arrogate to himself this claim without doing dishonour to Christ. The supreme court of the Church met on the authority of the sole Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. Knox said, 'Take away from us the freedom of assemblies and you take away the evangel'.

In connection with the Church, the Reformers saw the vital importance of the instruction of children in the family and in the Church. John Calvin, in the dedication of his Catechism, appealed to the King of France: 'Believe my Lord that the Church of God shall never be conserved without catechism, for it is as the seed to be kept that the good grain perish not but that it may increase from age to age. Wherefore if you desire to build a work of continuance to endure long, and which should not shortly fall into decay, cause that the children in their young age be instructed in a good catechism'. In this respect Geneva had a great influence on Scotland. In the First Book of Discipline explicit directions are given for the conduct of the congregation, including preaching, catechetical instruction, examination for the admission to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, prayer and teaching in the home. It enjoins instruction of children

and youth 'especially in the Catechism as we have it now translated in the Book of Common Order, called the Order of Geneva'. On the Lord's Day afternoon 'must the young children be publicly examined in their catechism in the audience of the people'.

5 It was nation-centred

The Reformation was concerned with the recovery of the crown rights of Christ in the nation. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that the Lord Jesus is not only King and Head of His Church but also King of the nations. He is described in the Book of Revelation as 'the prince of the kings of the earth' (1:5) and 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (19:16). He has been given all authority in heaven and in earth. In Psalm 2 the rebellion of the nations against God and His Christ is answered by the declaration of the Lord: 'I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion'. Christ is given the earth for His inheritance and possession, and the kings and the judges of the earth are advised to kiss the Son. They are to do so not only in their private capacity but also in their public office.

There are two kingdoms, the Church and the nation, but one King over both. They are distinct, but it is the duty of the state to support the Church and it is the duty of the Church to show the state how to apply the laws of Christ in their jurisdiction. This is necessary because heresy and idolatry cause the murder of souls, as Calvin pointed out to the King of France and as Knox testified by mouth and pen. It also invokes the wrath of God. False worship had always led, could only lead, to one end: the destruction of the nation that practised it. That is why Knox feared one Mass more than if ten thousand armies had landed.

To be continued





News



Rev Murdo Maciver



Rev James Haram

Licensing of New Ministers

Two students, having successfully completed their training for the ministry in the Free Church Seminary, have been licensed by the Southern Presbytery. Mr Murdo Maciver grew up in St Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh where his father, a policeman, was an elder. Murdo himself joined the police, eventually rising to be Superintendent, Deputy Divisional Commander for the

Scottish Borders. Retiring from the police, he studied for four years at the Seminary. On 22nd June 2015, following the sustaining of his trials for licence, he was licensed to be a preacher of the gospel and suitably addressed by the moderator of the Presbytery, Rev Andrew Allan. On 14th December, 2015 Mr James Haram was similarly licensed by Rev Andrew Allan, moderator of

the Southern Presbytery, following the sustaining of his trials. Mr Haram comes from South Africa. He worked for some time as a youth leader in a modern evangelical church in Glasgow. As he developed theologically, he became a member of the United Free Church in Drumchapel, worked as an evangelist and began studies for the ministry through the Highland Theological

Desk



College, from where he graduated with a BA in Theological Studies. As his course there drew to a close he became increasingly concerned about the liberalism in many United Free Churches and in the denomination as a whole. Also he began to grasp purity of worship and the importance of worshipping God only as He Himself has commanded. As a result, he joined Ayr Free Church (Continuing), applied to be accepted as a candidate for the ministry within our Church and completed the course at the Free Church Seminary.

Both men are now open to receive a call and we wish them God's guidance and His rich blessing upon their ministries.

Rev Iain Smith

Rev D Blunt

At the meeting of the Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides on 24th November, Rev Iain Smith was formally admitted to our denomination, the Commission of Assembly having received his application for admission when it met in October. Mr Smith, who was minister of the Partick congregation in Glasgow from 1994 to 2003, when he left to join the Southern Presbyterian Church in Hobart, Tasmania, is presently residing in the Isle of Lewis. After Mr Smith had signed the Formula the Moderator Rev Graeme Craig publicly intimated that he was now a minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and led in prayer. The members of Presbytery



Rev Iain Smith

then gave Mr Smith the right hand of fellowship. His name has now been included on the Register of Ministers Eligible for a Call.

Church Youth Work Examined?

Christian Institute

In England, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) would be given powers to investigate non-school education settings such as church youth work under new Government

proposals. The Department for Education has launched a consultation on the subject. As well as church youth work, out-of-school settings such as music lessons, driving schools and first aid courses could all be caught by the plans. The plans are part of the Government's effort to combat 'extremism', but The Christian Institute has said the proposals are aiming at the wrong targets.

Colin Hart, Director of The Christian Institute, said: 'Churches do not radicalise children.'

In fact Christians are most likely to be the victims of extremist actions around the world. We are law-abiding citizens who support democracy and are taught to love our neighbour. It's only in countries like China that the state regulates churches' teaching and activities'.

The Government envisages a nationwide registration scheme for any out-of-school setting providing instruction to under 19-year-olds

for more than six hours in any week. This would cover holiday Bible clubs, church weekends, summer camps and in some circumstances may cover youth clubs. In its plans, the Government states: 'We propose that Ofsted undertake the investigative function for out-of-school settings'. The consultation paper says that 'undesirable teaching' – such as that which 'undermines or is incompatible with fundamental British values, or which promotes extremist views' – would be prohibited.

Sanctions would include banning people from working with children and closing premises in order to address 'the harm caused by extremism', including 'emotional harm'. The consultation paper also says the Government wants to 'avoid imposing unnecessary burdens' on settings which are 'positive' for children's education, but is seeking to take action against settings where children could be harmed by 'extremism'.

At the beginning of the year, it emerged that primary-aged pupils at a Christian school had faced questions from Ofsted inspectors about homosexual practice, under 'British values' rules. Parents objected to questions including if they knew what lesbians 'did' and if their friends felt trapped in the 'wrong body'.

We have here a further threat to our liberty to preach and teach the Bible.

Street Preacher wins appeal

Christian Institute

A street preacher has won his appeal against a public order conviction and said he is thankful to God for the decision.

The Christian Legal Centre, which represented Michael Overd, stated that the case was a warning of what could happen if the Government pressed ahead with its 'anti-extremist' plans.



Street Preacher Michael Overd

In March, Mr Overd was fined £200 and ordered to pay £1,200 costs. In court the judge criticised his use of a particular Bible passage when he made a point about homosexuality.

The National Secular Society has previously spoken out about the case, raising concerns about free speech being threatened.

Speaking after the Taunton Crown Court appeal decision on 11th December, Mr Overd said: 'I give thanks to God for today's vindication. I have known God's peace and presence throughout this difficult time'.

Warning of a 'chilling effect', the preacher cautioned: 'Rather than prizing freedom of expression and protecting it, the police and the prosecutors risk undermining it, because they've become paranoid about anyone who might possibly feel offended. My motivation in all my preaching is to share God's message of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. To do that I have to talk about the reality of life, including our sinfulness'.

Uganda Martyrs

E Kendal

We need prayers', a source tells Morning Star News, 'as the Muslims are out to destroy people who converted to Christ in this area, especially those of us who have sacrificed to share the love of Christ to our fellow Muslims'. Patrick Ojangole (43), a Christian convert from Islam, cared not only for his own five children, but for ten convert children rejected and abandoned by their Muslim families. On the night of Wednesday 2nd December 2015 Ojangole and a companion went to the aid of two burka-clad women only to find it was a trap. The women drew swords and handed them to the Muslim attackers who killed Ojangole. His companion who escaped said one of the attackers was

berating Ojangole for his refusal to stop his Christian activities. On Tuesday 8th December a mob of more than 20 Muslims similarly entrapped, ambushed and murdered Ismail Kuloba (43), a policeman who had left Islam for Christianity and was leading other Muslims to Christ. On 9th December a group of Muslims kidnapped three children aged five, seven and ten, from the home of Madengho Badir (42), another Christian convert from Islam. Unable to trace his children, Badir is distraught. 'I know the Muslims are doing this to frustrate my hope in Christ and to make me return to Islam ... my only hope is in Jesus'.

Pakistan's Poor Christians

E Kendal

Between 2007 and 2012 some 100,000 settlers arrived in Islamabad from Taliban-infested, war-ravaged Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as well as from Balochistan and Punjab. This pushed Islamabad's population to two million, with the growth occurring predominantly in slums. In July Pakistan's Capital Development Authority (CDA) launched a demolition campaign. Citing the threat of terrorism, the CDA demolished a mostly Pashtun [Muslim] slum, triggering an outcry. In August, the Supreme Court issued a stay order, stopping the demolitions. Since then the CDA has changed its strategy. On 4th December 2015 the CDA told Pakistan's Supreme Court, 'Most of these katchi abadis [slums] are under the occupation of the Christian community. It seems this pace of occupation of land by the Christian community may increase. Removal of katchi abadis is very urgent to provide a better environment to the citizens of Islamabad and to protect the beauty of Islam'. Impoverished and persecuted, Christian families migrate to Islamabad in search of work and security. Some 80,000 Christians live in Islamabad's Christian colonies/slums, comprising 4 percent of Islamabad's population. Many of these colonies have existed for 15 to 50 years. As the CDA presents its case for demolition to the Supreme Court, residents of about 30 Christian colonies have been issued with eviction notices. Should the demolitions proceed, these many tens of thousands of poor Christians have nowhere else to go. Please pray for the Christians of Islamabad. Pray that the Supreme Court will rule justly and wisely and that Muslims will not respond to any incitement to take matters into their own hands.

Vietnam

E Kendal

On Sunday 6th December 2015 internationally acclaimed Christian advocate Nguyen Van Dai was attacked while returning to Hanoi after running a human rights information session in Nghe An Province. Some ten masked assailants – security personnel on motorbikes – ambushed Dai's taxi. Dai, his three colleagues and the driver were dragged out of the car and beaten with clubs. Though his colleagues managed to escape and make their way back to Hanoi, Dai (the main target) was beaten severely, robbed and left on a bench. A passerby lent Dai his phone so he could call for help. Friends collected him and provided first aid. After being alerted that police were lying in wait to ambush Dai yet again, his friends drove him back to Hanoi by an alternative route. In May 2014 Dai was beaten by plain-clothed security personnel while he was meeting with colleagues and students. A courageous religious liberty

advocate and devout Protestant Christian, Nguyen Van Dai has already spent five years in prison for 'propagandising against the state of Vietnam'.

Yemen

E Kendal

Two converts from Islam have been murdered in Taiz, south-west Yemen, both of whom had reportedly been professing Christ openly. One of them was assassinated, shot multiple times by an AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) operative. Details surrounding the killing of the other, who was shot to death in his home, are as yet unconfirmed. The martyrs' names have not been released. Yemen has grown increasingly lawless due to war and is essentially a failed state. The killings, which occurred in September and October 2015, have shaken the convert community in Yemen, contributing to a growing sense of vulnerability and insecurity. On Wednesday 9th December militants detonated explosives in the Church of the Immaculate Conception (built 1960s) in the Al-Ma'ala area of Aden. The church and adjoining priests' residence were totally destroyed. In September masked assailants believed to be linked to AQAP torched St Joseph's Catholic Church (built 1855) in Aden. Christians in Yemen are mostly foreign aid workers, African refugees (many Eritreans) and converts from Islam. Pray for the church in this land.

Ireland

E Kendal

On Tuesday 1st December 2015 the Dail (Irish parliament) voted unanimously to pass the new Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which replaces the Employment Equality Act, and which comes without religious exemptions. Previously, specific exemptions gave 'religious, educational or medical institutions' the right to act 'in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution'. Without these exemptions, religious, educational and medical institutions will be obliged, by law, to respect and advance 'diversity'. The move is profoundly discriminatory, for while political institutions will be permitted to act to preserve their ethos, religious institutions will not. Whilst LGBTI employees in religious institutions will be able to 'come out' without fear of retrenchment, religious institutions will not be able to preserve their own values without fear of a law suit. As well as being anti-religion, the law is also anti-diversity, for it will ultimately result in the loss of distinctively Christian schools and hospitals. According to Ireland's equality minister, this measure will not be the last, and is but one of many reforms to come. The move is indicative of rising hostility against Biblical Christianity in Ireland. So-called equality legislation is the modern way for atheists to persecute the church, sadly with the support of the liberal church.



Books

Opening up Job

Ian S McNaughton

DayOne, pbk, 176pp, £7.00

This book's author is now fairly well known, having written other similar-style books for DayOne. He studied theology in the Free Church College but is now retired, having served as a pastor in FIEC churches for a number of years.

While Job is never the easiest book to understand, the author writes as one who has grappled with the book's difficulties and gives us a balanced, and not difficult to follow, explanation of the doctrinal points and arguments found in this book.

He brings out the dangers of hasty judgements, and makes interesting comparisons between the sufferings of Job and the greater suffering of the Lord Jesus.

He has interesting comments to make on 'behemoth' (Job 40), which he argues was a dinosaur, and made as all other creatures, by God.

Likewise the word 'leviathan' (Job 41), we are told, is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that literally means 'twisted animal' and seems to refer to some sort of 'terrifying serpentine sea creature'. It cannot be a mythological creature as many would state, seeing that, as Mr McNaughton says, Job is not to be able to do battle with such: 'therefore how can he stand before God?'

There are 'for further study' sections at the end of each chapter, which some like, but may not be to everyone's taste. The Scriptural references are from the NKJV.

All in all an excellent book, especially as a

primer to other weightier commentaries on Job, of which there are not too many.

Rev Kenneth Macdonald

Reformation Scotland Booklets:

Scotland's Greatest Revival,

8pp, £0.30

Reformed Worship,

30pp, £1.00

Family Worship,

30pp, £1.00

The Suburbs of Heaven,

8pp, £0.30

Truth You Must Believe,

8pp, £0.30

Reformation Scotland Trust, Whiteside House, Bathgate, EH48 2RX

Too rarely do we find short, clear and sound messages regarding Reformed teaching in this age. I was delighted to read through these five booklets produced by Reformation Scotland Trust. The goal which the booklets has sought to achieve is 'to promote the Biblical understanding attained at that time' (referring to the Second Reformation of the Christian Church in Scotland). I feel the approach taken is commendable as they appeal to both young and old in a time when Christians need to embrace doctrines given to us by men who experienced a powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

The first of these 'tracts for believers' is entitled Scotland's Greatest Revival, an eight page booklet explaining the events surrounding the Second Scottish Reformation, particularly its origin in prayer, its power and its extent. It contains a clear message that revival



can only come in a similar way to the past, causing one to question the methods of much of the church today. Would we have the courage to throw a stool at a compromising pastor while shouting 'Villain!', as Jenny Geddes did in St. Giles?

The second booklet, *Reformed Worship*, I highly recommend. Even with only 30 pages of content, it goes far to establish the need for Biblical warrant for the different aspects of public worship. The emphasis on the holiness of God in worship is immensely important. The regulative principle is seen by many as a 'vain tradition' today. Christians do not like being told how they should worship the Lord, even if it comes from the very pages of His Word. This leads to the abandoning of biblical doctrines such as unaccompanied Psalm-singing, head covering, etc. A good quote from Thomas Watson stands out: 'It dishonours His name to bring anything into His worship which He has not instituted; as if He were not wise enough to appoint the manner in which He will be served'.

The two booklets *Family Worship* and *The Suburbs of Heaven* soundly and beautifully deal with the importance of worship in the family home. I particularly enjoyed the family being referred to as 'little churches'. They also touch on the frequent neglect of family devotions on the Lord's Day, arguing that worship should increase on the Sabbath, rather than decrease.

Finally the short booklet *Truth You Must Believe* is a simple yet powerful Gospel message which can be a useful witnessing tool, steeped in Reformed theology.

I found these books edifying and I think this sort of literature should be found at every church door and in Christian homes, available for all to read and pass on to others who may not know much about such things. They should remind us what a privilege it is to be under Biblical teaching and worship, equip us to defend our denomination's convictions, but also warn us not to abandon them, adopting man-centred principles.

Kevin Macdonald (Scalpay)

What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way you Get Things Done

Matthew Perman

Zondervan, 327 pp, £3.99 Kindle edition

As someone who recently entered pastoral ministry, I now have the responsibility of using my time and energies effectively in the Lord's work, and for that reason I was drawn to read this book on productivity, drawing from the secular literature on the subject, but written from a distinctly Christian perspective.

I would never have expected that any book would

make me reflect on my personal mission statement, yet Perman builds so robust an argument for this, drawing from Scriptural and Puritan examples, that he compels response. He points out that it does not matter how efficient you are if you are doing the wrong things, and therefore that every individual requires a clear sense of their purpose in life, and to see all their activities as flowing from and centred on that purpose. As believers, we recognize that God defines our purpose, but that we seek His wisdom as individuals to know how that purpose is to be worked out in practice – hence the importance of our values and beliefs informing our goals in life, whether professional or personal.

Perman demonstrates that Scripture consistently teaches that our goals in life must be directed towards the benefit of others, and that this concern for others is invariably presented as the path both to effectiveness and also to true and lasting happiness. He emphasizes that this Christian love must be felt in all the 'roles' that we have, both in individual, family, social and working life, and urges sustained reflection on how effective we are in each role as part of our weekly planning for productivity and effectiveness.

The book is also helpful in terms of the practicalities of productivity, emphasizing that 'to-do' lists are not enough, that we require careful scheduling of our time, to allocate our energies in a balanced way to the different tasks and activities of our lives. He stresses that planning can be as much about excluding tasks that are trivial and unproductive, as about defining and scheduling what is crucial to our purpose for each week. The examples he gives of this, and of how technology can assist in the practicalities of working life, are useful and helpful. As Christians, we must believe in excellence, and shepherd our time and energies accordingly. This leads to the central question of the book, from which it derives its title: 'What's the best thing I can do next with my time?'

Reservations about the book would stem mainly from its New Calvinist origins. I really wish that, with all the focus on planning the week in this volume, the importance of Sabbath rest to true effectiveness had been stressed; and thus a vital Scriptural lesson on productivity was ignored. Furthermore, as a thoroughly Old Calvinist, I would appreciate a greater stress on the reality of the battle with daily sin and repentance as key to the difficulties of productivity, and I think this emphasis would have added a richer spiritual dimension to the book. Laziness is a product of the Fall, and so is ineffectiveness. I do appreciate that Perman stresses the need for daily devotions as essential to a productive walk with God, and warns against neglecting this from our planning.

Rev Alasdair Macleod



The Christian at Work (Part I)

Rev James MacInnes (Lochalsh & Strath)

Work is not the opposite of happiness, but it is often spoken about in this way. Paradise is often portrayed as the absence of work and responsibility while every sense is being satisfied. Yet the Bible reveals that Adam was given work to complete in paradise; 'the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it' (Gen.2:15). It is hard to imagine what this work was like – the garden was complete, everything grew perfectly: there were no weeds to pull, no frustrations to experience, no breaking of sweat. Yet there was work to be done, and completing it was a vital aspect of man's satisfaction in Eden. Remembering that man was created to work, it should not surprise us that there is no satisfaction to be found in idleness. Yes, there is sweet satisfaction in a time of rest after work, but not in rest without work.

However, the harmonious perfection of paradise was shattered as a result of sin. Now Adam, his wife, and his entire race would experience frustration and futility in their work. 'And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow

shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen.3:17-19).

In mercy the creation, broken and cursed as a result of sin, will still prove fruitful for fallen man. God did not withhold this provision made for man, but man's experience in encountering and enjoying this would change. Frustration and futility, thorns and thistles, sweat and sorrow, and yet, graciously, an abiding correlation between work and satisfaction (a now lesser, temporary satisfaction – not the spiritual fulfilment of Paradise). This relationship between work and satisfaction is emphasised in the book of Proverbs, to give one example, (Proverbs 10:4) 'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich'.

While the relationship between work and satisfaction applies to all mankind there is a specific application in the life of the Christian. That is the intimate and inseparable tie between redemption and good works. No one can attain heaven through good works – yet no one can

reach heaven without good works. Notice that in this passage that emphasises the fullness of the gracious sovereign work of God in redeeming sinners, man has work to do:

'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them' (Eph.2:4-10).

The Christian's work is so intrinsic to salvation that the Epistle of James (James 2:14-26) flatly condemns any claim to saving faith that is not confirmed by good works which follow as a consequence.

I want to identify four aspects of work that one must consider: Balance, Vocation, Diligence, and Joy.

I The Need for Balance

One effect of the fall has been to disrupt the balance that ought to characterise a healthy and productive life. No doubt, you are familiar with the 4th commandment and its continuing relevance: (Exodus 20:9,10) 'Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work'. There was a change following the resurrection; the day of rest moved from the end of the week to the beginning. No longer was it something simply to be looked forward to, but now we are to look back and remember what Christ has achieved. The sequence changed, not the need to rest. The day of rest is a teacher instructing us week after week, about the perfect and completed work of creation and redemption. It also teaches us that our work is not everything, and there is a need for balance. You might like to identify yourself by your present or previous employment (I am a tinker / tailor / soldier / sailor ... etc). But what you 'do' or 'did' is only one aspect to who you are – it is not all that you are. One day a week you are to put all that you 'do' down, and without distraction consider who God is, what He has done, and who you are before Him. There are four areas of life that must be balanced: Work, Worship, Rest (including sleep, relaxation, leisure and holidays), and Family Life. These are not listed in any sense of priority. You might want to argue that the Bible simply identifies two areas for balance – Work and Rest, but it is helpful to recognise the differences between aspects of work (employment, chores, family responsibilities, etc), and aspects of rest (worship, sleep, relaxation, etc).

To be off-balance in any of these four areas is to dishonour God. The danger is that some of us have been

limping along for so long that we have begun to consider our wrong emphases to be 'normal'. It would be foolish, and wrong, to prescribe a time allowance for each of these four areas. Each person has some responsibility in each area – though the proportion of time required will vary depending upon our stage of life. It is generally easy to criticise the mistakes that other people make, even though we are unlikely to be aware of all the demands and responsibilities that they have. There will be significant differences between someone who is not married, someone who has a family with young children, and someone who has retired from paid employment. And so many of our circumstances are liable to change. The primary question is: are you balanced?

Work or employment

Generally society commends over-work, and few people are ashamed when they are off-balance in this way. 'He lives for his work'. 'He lets nothing get in the way'. 'He gives 110%'. 'He is there 24/7'. 'He is very ambitious'.

Within the church we have a tendency to compliment this over-commitment, without ever considering that underlying it may be fear, greed, pride, and disobedience. **Fear:** It is far easier, and far safer, to be 'busy' than to do less comfortable or less attractive work. For example, not only can it be stressful and frustrating, but also few people will notice or commend a man who helps change and bath his children. Plugging away where you think you are strongest (and feel safest) may actually reveal far more insecurities than you realise. Maybe you find it easier to stay late at work than run the risk of being called upon to pray at the weekly prayer meeting.

Greed: 'The more I work the more I'll get, and the more I'll enjoy myself when I stop working'. Really? When will you have enough? If you dishonour God in the process of obtaining your wealth – will you really have His blessing when you decide to 'enjoy' your ill-gotten gains? If it takes such time and effort to make your living that you are neglecting to rest, worship God, and interact with your family – then you can't afford to earn that money; it costs too much, and it will bring no satisfaction.

Pride: There is always a temptation to make a name for yourself. 'I want people to see what I do, and to see that I am indispensable'. Of course you would never be so crass as to actually 'say' this, but it is often the unspoken truth. This is a risk in every sphere, but perhaps particularly in the Christian ministry when we put a 'biblical spin' on it – 'Are we not meant to live our lives as living sacrifices – poured out and spent in the Master's service?'

The Christian is to find their identity in Christ, not in what he or she may or may not do for Christ. Remember the rebuke which will be given to those who boast in their works for God: (Matthew 7:22,23) 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many

Congregational Remittances - December 2015

CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2015	ORDINARY REMITTANCES			
	2015 Dec	2015 To Dec	2014 To Dec	
Presbytery of Inverness				
Aberdeen	370	1,300	21,543	21,491
Duthil-Dores	22,533	555	26,105	25,657
Inverness		5,800	36,016	28,990
Kilmorack & Strathglass		2,415	22,500	22,421
Poolewe & Aultbea	459	1,322	12,509	12,273
Total Inverness	23,362	11,392	118,673	110,832
Northern Presbytery				
Assynt & Scourie	562	2,943	8,148	9,361
Brora	620	0	15,233	17,058
Kiltearn	879	2,000	10,012	8,012
Tarbat		8,191	19,292	20,514
Total Northern	2,061	13,134	52,684	54,944
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	498	357	9,650	8,833
Ayr		500	14,383	12,495
Dumfries		0	100	0
Edinburgh	20,396	2,000	30,683	32,742
Glasgow - Partick	10,213	1,400	24,000	28,000
Glasgow - Shettleston	64	1,800	27,462	27,200
Glasgow - Knightswood	331	1,770	27,084	30,233
Rothsay		0	3,130	2,000
Total Southern	31,502	7,827	136,492	141,503
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross		3,918	25,431	26,542
Harris - Leverburgh	400	1,800	20,464	19,494
Harris - Scalpay	500	4,000	29,567	30,033
Knock & Point		2,900	21,906	16,111
North Uist		6,926	113	14,000
Stornoway		5,187	11,830	94,333
Total Outer Hebrides	13,013	24,561	205,702	214,030
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish		1,100	13,694	19,788
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	160	1,300	16,814	20,316
Lochalsh	490	3,150	18,482	18,968
Strath	55	1,450	9,170	8,799
Portree		1,000	6,200	19,400
Snizort			5,600	28,995
Total Skye	1,705	18,800	106,556	117,609
Smiths Falls		0	0	2,000
Total Congregations	71,643	75,714	620,107	640,919
Other Donations	346	1,957	27,960	28,748
Legacy		0	0	111
TOTAL	71,989	77,671	648,067	669,777
Including Gift Aid	2,704		122,319	130,773

Continued from previous page

wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity'. Over-work in the Christian ministry is sometimes justified by observing that so many souls are heading to a lost eternity, and if I don't do something no one will. Yet the disciples were to address manpower issues in prayer not by over-work: (Luke 10:2) 'Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest'.

The time you spend at 'work' is not an effective measure of productivity, and burn-out is not a mark of grace. It is humbling to accept limits, particularly when there is always someone else with far greater ability and capacity. The preacher is to practise as well as to preach on rest and balance. The preacher should be ashamed to overwork and ashamed not to be seen enjoying time off. The farmer, after sowing the seed must leave it and wait. He will have to water and fertilise the growing crop, but if he is always working on the field ultimately he will hinder the growth and the harvest. (James 5:7) 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain'.

Worship (particularly public worship)

When it comes to finding the right balance with public worship you are probably familiar with this text:



"The preacher should be ashamed to overwork and ashamed not to be seen enjoying time off."

(Hebrews 10:25) [don't be] 'forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching'. It is important to understand that this means – don't avoid going to church. It does not mean hide at church, which is what you might be tempted to do, particularly because we live in a hostile world. Monks and nuns hide at 'church' – and

as a consequence have a horribly distorted view of and impact on the world.

Public worship is vitally important for each believer, but it is not the sole forum for Christian life. It is not even the primary forum for Christian life. The Lord instructs His people to gather together one day every week. One aspect of the ministry of his Word is to strengthen His people for the other six days when they will not be gathered together. This is not to undermine

the helpfulness of a regular midweek prayer meeting, and even other occasional midweek services, but to demonstrate that an unbalanced approach to public worship hinders the believer from serving the Lord as the Lord Himself requires. It deprives the 'world' that desperately needs the influence of the Lord's people, (Matthew 5:13) 'Ye are the salt of the earth'. Without salt decay accelerates.

To be continued

An Incident In The Life Of Stephen Grellet

From the Friendly Companion April 2013



Once Stephen Grellet (1773-1855) had a powerful persuasion from the Lord that he was to take a journey into the backwoods of America and preach the gospel to the woodcutters whom he knew were cutting timber in a very remote part. Looking to the Lord to guide his steps, he came to the place where he believed the Lord would have him preach the gospel. To his surprise he found that the camp was empty and a profound silence reigned in the forest apart from the wind in the trees and the sound of wildlife. The timber men had gone deeper into the forest to another site to cut more wood. A strange persuasion came over him that despite the lack of a congregation, he should still preach the gospel. So finding a large empty shed where the meals were usually served, he entered, and standing in the empty room preached the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Having finished, and having the answer of a good conscience, he then departed home, leaving the outcome to His Heavenly Father who had sent him.

In the providence of God he eventually came to Europe to preach. One day in England whilst crossing London Bridge, a stranger accosted him and said: 'I have found you at last!'

'You must be mistaken, my friend', said Stephen.

'But I am not', persisted the man. After several more times contradicting each other, the stranger said: 'Did you not preach on a certain day at a certain place in the backwoods of America?'

'Yes', replied Stephen, 'but I saw no one there to listen'. 'I was there', replied the stranger. 'I was the ganger (leader) of the foresters. We had moved several miles deeper into the forest and were putting up new sheds to live in. I had left one of my tools at the old site and had come back for it, when I heard a voice speaking in the large shed we had left. Through the cracks in the timber, I listened to your sermon. The arrows of the Almighty entered my heart and I was deeply convinced of my sinful life. The arrows stuck so firmly I was miserable, miserable for many days and weeks. I had no Bible, no book of any kind, and no one to speak to me on the things of God. 'My men were grossly immoral, as I had also been. I felt more and more wretched. At last, through God's mercy I was able to obtain that rich treasure, the Holy Bible. I read it and read it until I came to words which under the power of the Spirit brought the eternal life promised in the gospel into my soul. I told my men, and to my amazement, under the sound of the truth, one by one they also became true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Three of them also became God-sent ministers and have been used of God in the conversion of many other sinners. I had a strong desire to come to England, and to search for you, that I might tell you the fruit which your sermon in the empty shanty had borne!' Surely, 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform'. How true are the words of Solomon, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days'.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:
but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;
but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

I Corinthians 10:13