

The Faith of a Child?

FAITH IS A GIFT from God. It cannot be earned or merited. It is not the result of something we first did. It is simple a gift from God. It is an act of pure grace [Eph 2:8,9].

No matter the age of the recipient, grace and faith are undeserved. I struggled with this until a well-known American pastor reminded me that 'Adults need to become like children in faith, not children like adults!' Jesus Himself said that we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless we do so as a little child [see Luke 18:17].

Children therefore may be endowed with this gift of faith. An example is King David. We read that David had faith when he was on his mother's breasts *"You made me trust You at my mother's breasts.... And from my mother's womb You have been my God"* [Psa 22:9,10 ESV]. Since his earliest days, David was hoping in God.

Sometimes we are guilty of making faith a difficult thing - especially when it comes to children and those outside the church. In our concern to ensure a genuine faith we can actually enter into the realm of philosophy. In his search to discover truth, we can become like the French philosopher Descartes, with his well-known phrase 'I think, therefore I am'. Like hypochondriacs, we can

examine ourselves overmuch.

It is not enough for us to be satisfied that our children say they believe in and love Jesus, we must go further and ask 'Do you really really believe Him?' Like Descartes we ask 'How do you know that you believe?' A child has little difficulty believing supernatural things. The concept of a universe-creating God is for them, simple to believe, as is a Jesus who walks on the water.

In our desire to have real believing children, we subconsciously enter the realm philosophy when we begin to search further than is necessary, regarding the *"the simplicity that is in Christ"* [2 Cor 11:3 AV]. We may imagine we are being 'holy' when we insist on a deeper explanation and articulation of our faith but the Scriptures do not lay stress on the deep psychological and philosophical aspects of faith, but rather the simplicity of it.

We have ample evidence within Scripture that young children can have true saving faith. God may transmit faith when that child is in a 'passive' state. Faith may be given without the individual being conscious of what is happening. It is the outworking of faith that is a conscious experience.

We do not read of Moses having a conscious conversion experience - his parents 'saw' he was a proper

child and he grew up believing in his God from his earliest years. Before his experience of the burning bush, Stephen tells us Moses believed he was called to lead the Israelites [see Acts 7:25].

Jeremiah was called and sanctified to be a prophet in the womb [Jer 1:5], and John Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb [Luke 1:15]. And Samson was a Nazarite from the womb. None of these great heroes of the faith are recorded as having a dramatic conscious 'one-off' conversion experience. They did however, all have an awareness and a trust in God which was clearly a result of true saving faith - a gift from God.

While there may not be a dramatic initial experience, where true saving faith is implanted in the soul, there will always be an **outworking** and **evidence** of that faith. This is true regarding covenant children where the promise of God to be the God of our children takes effect.

God does 'speak' and communicate with children. Even the prayer of Hagar's child (covenanted), was heard when he called on God "*God heard the voice of the lad*" [Gen 21:17]. God has promised to bless the children of His people, "*I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring*" [Isa 44:3].

What is important regarding faith, is not that we are able to tell when it first began, or even how it began, but that the faith **develops**

and matures in the heart and life of the Christian. It is only as it develops that it will manifest itself. As Jesus said "*By their fruits you will know them*". It is a mysterious work as Jesus assured Nicodemus, you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes to, you only see the result of it as trees rustling in the wind is proof of the wind [John 3].

The vital thing regarding faith, especially in the case of covenant children, is that it is **nurtured** and **fostered**. As Peter insisted, we must **add** to our faith the different graces he lists, and as we do that we see the evidence and fruits of faith. Encouraging covenant children to trust the Lord who has promised to be their God and protector can produce very positive results. Where true faith exists it will develop under instruction and encouragement.

The tendency today towards children of Christians is first to demand an experience which the parents are satisfied is true conversion, but until that happens, many parents do not nurture their children as believers.

Children are far more responsive and tender-hearted to teaching when they are young. It is vital that Christian parents bring their children up in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

Treating children of Christian parents as believers, has nothing to do with genetics or blood relationships. It is spiritual. A promise that God had given to Christian parents to help them bring up children. We need to believe it.

My Testimony

By James Gunn

(a member in our Vancouver congregation)

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
[Rom 8:35 NIV]

My name is Jamie and this is my story.

I was born into a nominally Christian family and was christened at the local Anglican Church in the east end of Vancouver BC. While I was young, I attended the United Church of Canada, which had a congregation not too far from where we lived. And when I was about 6 or 7 years old, during a Sunday school Christmas play, Christ came into my life and called me His own, and I began to understand who God was and what it meant to be loved by Him. But being young and untutored in the Way, I didn't understand anything of salvation (though I was beginning to learn a lot about sin).

Without guidance, and exposed to the very real hurtfulness

of a dysfunctional family, I began to think that this love of Jesus was unreal or a chance encounter at best. As a youngster I became quickly confused, because what I was seeing all around me, up close and personal, had very little to do with the Kingdom of Heaven that I was hearing about in church. (There was love in my home to be sure, but also a lot of shame, anger, and guilt.) Whatever the final reasons, I did not stay in the church long enough for confirmation and within five years, I had turned my back on the church and (so I imagined) Jesus.

When I was growing up, there was a man in our neighbourhood, by the name of Murdo Mackenzie and he had a passion for Christ. He was a dedicated evangelist, small in stature but great in the Lord. He and his wife took a shine to me and hardly a week went by when I could not be found in their home sharing some tea and cookies or else sitting on the edge of a seat listening to Murdo talk about rebirth in the Spirit, and quoting from John chapter three. This man helped to keep Jesus alive for me through my early teens and he showed me how love can be shared with others without fear.

But in spite of Murdo's best efforts, as I grew older my heart

became hardened and I became an opponent of all things Christian. I fixed my thinking on the all too human weaknesses and injustices that have been so much a part of the Church since apostolic times.

I used the imperfection of Christianity and the Church as an excuse to hate it. In fact, what I was angry about was that the individual Christians I met all seemed to be motivated by love to an extent that non-Christians were not (at least so far as an immature, angry adolescent could tell). There was a huge amount of simple envy behind my self-righteous contempt. Yet behind all my objections and my self-righteous indignation, behind my outwardly-directed anger and behind my attempts to find an alternative spirituality, stood the quiet figure of Jesus: waiting, always haunting me with His compassion, His love, His mercy and His patient strength. Oh how often I did not want to love Him! Through the years, during my many vicissitudes, He was there and would not go away, no matter how much anger I felt, no matter how many people I hurt.

Though my heart was hardening and becoming harder with the passing years, still I had a deep yearning and a holy longing that would not go away. I felt alone and abandoned, forgotten. I began to seek solace where I could, all the time rejecting God's solace, for which I so desperately wished. Inevitably then, by the time I was in my early twenties I had turned to

alcohol as a way out of my dilemma, and had already determined my fate as an alcoholic. Booze did not fill the void in my heart, but it helped dull the pain.

Nevertheless, I grew to a semblance of manhood, fell in love, married and started a family. However, I was still too proud and too frightened to see that I had been known and loved even before I was born and that God had a plan for me, a plan to prosper and not to harm. The ache in my soul would not go away, and when I was not medicating my despair with alcohol I searched and searched.

I tried Sufism, Kabala, Tarot, Yoga and Buddhism. At one point, I gave serious thought to becoming a Buddhist monk, running off to a Zen monastery in California. And because I had this yearning that nothing else could fill, when all my attempts at self-salvation failed, I came to the conclusion that there really was no salvation to have, no truth to understand, no higher love to live. It was all just a big lie or worse, a joke. So over the years I gradually drifted deeper and deeper into anger, depression and alcoholism.

On the outside, I managed to hold it all together, but on the inside, my soul was becoming a bottomless pit. Things got progressively worse. By the time my son reached his middle teens our family had started to come apart at the seams and I was powerless to do anything about it. Without a strong spiritual centre, my family was

unable to find the healing it needed. As despair gained more and more ground in the landscape of my life, my wife Aryn was trying to be strong for all of us, keeping things from going entirely to Hell in a hand-basket. However, she could not provide the spiritual core that was missing from all our lives.

Finally, one day a few short years ago, after a growing state of anxiety only partially relieved by prodigious amounts of whisky, I found myself rendered completely helpless, in a daze. I remember a morning sitting on the end of our bed in a condition of frozen panic, half-dressed, unable to function at even the most basic level. I really thought I was dying. But Aryn, wife, best friend and supporter through all our difficulties, took me to the emergency ward of our local hospital where the ER doctor on duty diagnosed my condition as severe panic disorder. There I received some drugs to help me sleep and rest. And casually, the ER physician asked, 'Do you attend church?' To which I replied 'No.' Then he said, 'Well, maybe you should.'

Soon after this, I began to see a psychiatrist as well as my family doctor. And as part of a program for overcoming my depression and severe anxiety, as well as my addiction to alcohol, I began seeing a very compassionate psychologist who was also a wise and patient man. I had seen him only a few times, and one day he challenged me to participate in a kind of psychological game of self-

discovery. I had by now nothing to lose. However, Jesus had a different agenda.

Instead of discovering myself that day, I lost myself. Instead of discovering my own identity, I re-discovered Jesus. Instead of being cured by psychology, I was redeemed by Christ. During my session that day, I seemed to understand that He was with me, talking to me. It seemed as if He reached out and said to me 'Take my hand, I will not fail you. I have been with you all your days, and in all that time you have been mine though you knew it not.'

It was then that I began faintly to realize what God had intended for me all along and I knew whom I truly was and for what He had saved me. So on that day, May 24, 1999, I threw away all my hesitation, all my fear and all my pride. I knew that Jesus had claimed me this last time. I could no longer deny Him, I could not turn away from Him a second time. I could no longer live a backslider's life. He had come to claim His own, He who had died on the cross in order that I might be reconciled to God.

I took the Lord's hand immediately and I have not let go since. He is with me now and will stay with me through whatever trials life will bring. He will not abandon me but will lift me up, yes, even on the wings of an eagle, for I am His and He is my beloved and my heart's delight. For I was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Thank you, Jesus.

The Essence of the Gospel

By Jamie Gunn © 2006

God created us for His own glory.

God is the creator of all things. All things whatsoever are from Him, through Him and to Him. They are His possession and over them He has absolute claim. He created mankind in His own image in order to serve and worship Him and He decided in Himself to love beyond reason a people so that they could recognize Him as creator and love and enjoy Him.

In this, they bring glory to Him, which is His entire purpose. God favoured us above all His other creatures but we are wholly dependent on Him to be formed in His true image, just as the clay is dependent on the potter to receive its form. God has written on our hearts and minds a law to live by. He has made clear how we are to bring Him glory. But since the Fall that knowledge of God and understanding of His law has been corrupted.

Representative texts:

Genesis 1:1-2, 26-27; 12:3, Psalms 73:24-26, Isaiah 43:7; 48:11; 64:8, John 1:2-3; 17:22-24, Acts 17:24-27,

Romans 1:18-20; 9:21; 11:36, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

But because of our complete sinfulness, we're separated from Him and His love.

Mankind has fallen from God's favour through sinful disobedience, even unwilling to obey God's first law in the Garden of Eden (the Earthly Paradise) and as a consequence is now spiritually dead in sin. Our disobedience of His laws (sin) has not brought us peace or joy but has simply cut the bond that was between us, estranging us from His love and mercy. And because we are no longer under His mercy, we must, because of our sinful rebellion, come under the rightful judgment of His holiness and justice.

Moreover, because He is perfect in every way, His justice is such that only perfect obedience can re-establish our relationship with Him. Such obedience is beyond us however, being spiritually dead because of sin. Therefore, on our own we have no hope of being found innocent and must suffer the penalty

that God's hatred of sin demands. This penalty is to spend everlasting eternity in conscious punishment and torment in Hell, separated from our Creator because of our rebellion toward Him.

Representative texts:

Genesis 2:17; 3:6-8, 17-19, 22-24; 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 15:19; 25:41; 28:18, John 5:26-30, Romans 3:10-17, 23; 5:12; 7:5; 8:7, Colossians 1:21; 2:9, Ephesians 2:1, Hebrews 1:1-4; 5:8-9, James 1:14-15

Jesus alone has freed from sin those who believe, by His atoning death on the cross.

But because God still loves us and has made promises to us that He keeps because of who He is, He covenanted with His son, Jesus Christ, to do for us what we cannot do on our own. In order to pay the outstanding debt created by our sin, and to appease the just wrath of God against sin, a sacrifice was required. But such a sacrifice, in order to fulfil a perfect God's requirement for perfect justice, must also be perfect. This only Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead, could accomplish.

The Father and the Son decided in eternity past to save some out from all others through the sheer gift of grace, which is also God's perfect mercy. God decreed that He would save some through the penal and substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. These He gave to Christ as a kind of 'love gift' and who

would become His bride, the Church of all true believers. Jesus paid the price owed to God, by dying for His own people on the cross. He then guaranteed and sealed salvation for us by rising from the dead, ascending back to the Father and by sending the Holy Spirit who is Counselor, Helper, and Regenerator of our souls.

Representative texts:

Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 42:6, Jeremiah 31:33, Matthew 5:48, John 2:18-22; 3:16; 14:26; 16:7; 17:1-10, Acts 4:33, Romans 5:17-19; 8:3, 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, [read together Galatians 4:4, 1 Timothy 2:6, Romans 4:25] Ephesians 2:1-5, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 2 Timothy 1:9-10, Hebrews 2:10, 14:15; 4:15

Having been set free by Christ we are eternally reconciled to God.

Jesus' atoning sacrifice was not made for all people but only for those who would repent of their sin, believe in Him as their Lord and Saviour, proclaim their belief openly and without shame and become baptized in His name. These are enabled to do this entirely by the power of God through the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, who first regenerates the chosen sinner and gives the gift of faith.

He reckons the sinner not guilty because of the perfect and imputed righteousness of Christ and comes to

dwell in the heart, so creating a new person in Christ. We are given to believe, through Scripture, that God will draw to Himself all those who, in eternity past, He foreknew and foreloved: these then sincerely seek Him through genuine repentance of sin and acceptance of Him by faith.

Holy Scripture, which was written by God the Holy Spirit through the agency of certain men, testifies that by this the sinner is enabled to understand the predicament he is in as well as knowing for certain that only through the shed blood of Christ is the way to true freedom, lasting joy,

and eternal life in heaven. There is no other way.

When the sinner is made new through the regenerating power of God, he receives the assurance of salvation as well as the desire to do the will of God, knowing that his salvation can never be finally, utterly lost.

Representative texts:

Job 19:25-27, Ezekiel 36:31, Joel 2:12-13, Mark 1:15; 16:15-16, John 17:20-23, Romans 3:25-26, 28; 4:5-8; 8:28-30; 10:9, 17, 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, Galatians 2:20; 3:14, 22; 5:5-6, Ephesians 2:8; 3:17-19, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 John 5:13

Calvinistic Gospel Preaching

THERE IS A PERCEPTION ABROAD that such belief (Calvinistic gospel preaching) has no dynamic for reaching a lost world. I think it is better to concede that there is currently some reason for this perception, and to consider why it exists, rather than to deny its validity. Whitefield's Tabernacle in the eighteenth century and Westminster Chapel in Lloyd-Jones' day could be described as 'soul-traps' but the designation cannot be given to many churches of that tradition at the present time.

For the Puritans a saving conversion to Christ was **the** pre-eminent subject for the study and the pulpit. That is the point that needs a new priority among us. But I am not advising that we restrict ourselves to seventeenth-century mentors as though we had nothing to learn from others. Wherever gospel preaching has been much owned of God it has always had one great characteristic, and John Wesley can show us that as well as George Whitefield and the school to which the latter belonged.

Should we fall into a narrowness of spirit that forgets that the Holy Spirit has been given for **all** the body of Christ, we shall be unlikely to receive the fresh anointing that we need. Knowledge is a vital thing, but more love is the greater requirement. To be better Christians is the main need.

Iain H Murray

Congregational News

LAIRG & ROGART

Permit me to start by way of a special thank you to George, Isobel and the entire congregation in Stornoway for making my first APC Communion Season as minister such a memorable and joyous and edifying occasion. It also truly brought home to me the preciousness and importance of mutual prayer, support and encouragement within and throughout our denomination.

September and October promise to be busy, eventful and, I hope and pray, fruitful months for our congregation and for me personally. The month begins with the Sutherland Christian Convention in Dornoch which I have been invited to chair on the Saturday evening. The speaker this year is Dick Dowsett from OMF and his theme will be 'Living in a broken world'. This is followed by our own presbytery and conference in Inverness the following week which I pray will be a great encouragement to us all.

The third in my series of four addresses on the Scottish Reformation will be given, DV, in the Lairg Church at 7.30pm on Friday 29 September. There was a slight increase in numbers at the second lecture and I hope that this is

a trend that will continue. It is certainly good to welcome brothers and sisters from other churches and denominations. Many thanks to the ladies for providing food and drink: as a result everyone stayed behind for fellowship which was wonderful.

The fourth and concluding address will be given on the last Friday in October which is the closest to Reformation Day on the 31 of the month. While the world is tragically engulfed in Halloween we aim to remember our God's sovereign grace and power in turning our church and nation from darkness to light back in the 16 century. It is our earnest desire too that we witness and work towards Reformation and Revival in our own day.

We also look forward to welcoming Revd Donald Macaskill, Dundee who is to be the officiating minister at our Rogart Communion season. The services will be as follows: Friday 7.30pm; Saturday 7.30pm & Lord's Day. I myself am very much looking forward to participating in the Inverness Communion Season on the fourth weekend in September.

Thanks to all who were praying for me on 17 August. I passed my driving test! Therefore, take care on the highways and by-ways!

Please note that our Lord's Day

service times have reverted to Lairg 11.30am & Rogart 6pm.

Wayne

STORNOWAY

The congregation had a most enjoyable communion season with the preaching of Wayne Pearce from Lairg over the weekend and also from Kenny Macleod the Free Church minister in Carloway.

The congregation also enjoyed the preaching of Dr Joseph Pipa from the USA over the summer as he spoke on the dangers of the Da Vinci Code. The congregation is looking forward to a Congregational Meal in the church building.

Please remember one of the congregation's young members, Thomas Parkes, who has just been selected for one year's training programme with Youth for Christ. He left the island at the end of August for Worcester University where he hopes to receive training in Bible knowledge, public speaking and sports coaching. He will then be posted somewhere in the UK to put it all into practice.

The winter programme will soon begin to get underway with the Good News Club commencing in September. Please pray that more helpers will be found to enable this excellent work to continue. The 'Christianity Explored' and 'Discipleship Explored' courses proved beneficial during the last few months. These courses are very well received and have proved very fruitful in many congregations

throughout the length and breadth of the country, so hopefully we will find the same results.

EDINBURGH

Our hearts desire and prayer for the people who come to the services and others who come to the shop is that they would be saved. This is an inspiring desire and it helps to keep us going.

We had a wonderful week at the Keswick Convention, where among other memorable events we heard Louis Palau give a truly inspiring talk, encouraging us to evangelise. He gave us seven pictures of the evangelist:

- 1 The ambassador. Evangelists do a most noble work and don't need to make any apologies for the one they represent. Rather, they can hold their heads high not in arrogance but in gracious boldness, confidence and dependence.
2. The fisherman. The best fishermen are passionate and fanatical about catching fish. We need to be the same about catching souls.
3. The witness. A good witness has to be a person of character. However he can't do his job without speaking. We can't evangelise unless we open our mouths and speak. Tell your own story, (notwithstanding that you feel it to be very un-dramatic), how you became a Christian and what God means to you and speak God's word.
4. The farmer. Sow the seed of the gospel, but be patient. The farmer

has to wait for the right time to harvest. Sometimes it is a long wait but it is well worth waiting to see a soul saved.

5. The News anchor man. We have the best news this world can ever hear. It should be an absolute pleasure to give it.

6. The trouble maker. The apostles turned the world upside down. Louis Palau likes difficult questions from the media. If asked the divisive question, "Are Jews going to hell?" he replies, "We all are," and points everyone to the only Saviour.

7. The Priest. The Old testament priest prayed for the people, reminded them of the importance and greatness of God, the importance of: the sacrifices, the blood and the forgiveness of sin. We have to do all of these. Christ the Lamb of God is the centre of our teaching and work. Pray that we would develop these characteristics in a wise and God honouring way.

A fascinating aspect of our work is how you get caught up not just with individuals, rather with whole families. Pray that whole families will be converted. What a blessing for them and what a testimony to God's grace.

We now do the children's story before the sermon and then give juice and biscuits and they are free to head home or wait for the rest of the service. So far, this works better. Last Sunday the children were taught about the wisdom of God. Then how Solomon was allowed to ask God for anything. He did not ask for riches or long life or the death of

his enemies but for a discerning heart so that he would know the difference between right and wrong and consequently be a good ruler. God granted his request.

Then Solomon went on to judge in a dispute between two ladies who were both prostitutes. One lady's baby died tragically, and in her grief she stole the other lady's baby. Consequently both ladies are saying, "The living baby is mine, the dead baby is hers." No other witnesses. Solomon came up with the correct answer. His reputation as an excellent ruler spread far and wide.

Then the children were told some of the ways in which Jesus is greater than Solomon. Jesus never ever sinned. Jesus is able to save us from our sins. It is a huge privilege to have these children come.

Thankfully, Iain Penman the parish minister is well enough to be back at work. We hope to continue with our old routine, which is most helpful, of meeting for prayer each Wednesday morning if practical. Last Thursday he had to conduct three funerals, which was far more than normal, but it shows the volume of work and peculiar sadness that has to be dealt with by parish ministers from time to time. Mrs Linda Morrison, the parish church officer, is gravely ill with cancer and is in need of prayer for her health and also that by God's grace she would shine brightly for Jesus in the midst of all her suffering. It is a very hard time for her husband and family including the grand children.

Vilma Brito, whom we mentioned

in the last issue, has gone out to join her husband Eddie in Mozambique. The orphans and poor children that they help could only get a meal (which costs 27p) every second day because there simply wasn't the money to provide a meal every day. Wonderfully, and this should encourage us to pray, Blythswood was able to give even more money than we mentioned previously. The way appears to be opening for the children to be fed every day and for the community to be more self-sufficient.

Eddie and Vilma are greatly encouraged by the additional money and the prospect of continued support. Pray things work out as planned and hoped or even better. Our God is a wonderful God. If Satan and evil people had their way no help would be forthcoming and these poor orphans in Mozambique would not be learning about Christ, which is Eddie and Vilma's first desire for them.

JR

DUNDEE

We are still encouraged in the congregation and are enjoying our times of fellowship. We have arranged to have a Praise Night twice per month after the evening service. We look forward to this as we can learn new tunes and metres which we have not used before.

We still have the privilege, for privilege it is, to provide for those who come to the church looking for food supplies and counselling. We are so pleased that we do have some people in the congregation who have a wide range of experience in the areas which we are asked to give help in. This work brings home to us the value of a strong Christian upbringing in the principles and disciplines of God's Word and how thankful we ought to be to God for His grace towards us.

We have also decided to fix the dates of our communions. They are to be on the last Sundays in March, June, September and December DV. Please continue to pray for us.

PRESBYTERY - DAY of PRAYER

It was agreed at the last Presbytery that each congregation should hold a

Special Day of Prayer

concerning the low moral and spiritual state of our nation.

Each congregation should arrange which day of the

week beginning 3 December

will best suit their people

Things God Planned Long Ago

Mr R W M MacKenzie, Fearn

WITHOUT APOLOGY, I again draw your attention to the words of Isaiah chapter 25, verse 1, which have taken quite a grip on my mind and heart over the past months "*O Lord, you are my God, I will exalt You and praise Your name, for in perfect faithfulness You have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.*"

As most of you will know in our congregation in Tain and Fearn, we have been without a settled pastor for almost two years and while this has put a strain on us, we can trace God's hand in it, in-so-far as we have been blessed with a variety of excellent preachers who have been used to convey God's word to us in a wonderful and challenging way we believe planned long ago.

It would not be right to report in this article which of them was the best because it is not really up to us to judge! However, it would be only right to say that the preacher who stayed the longest with us was the Rev John van Eyk, from Cambridge, Ontario who with his family created an excellent impression on us during his seven weeks of ministry amongst us and he will continue to be prayed for by us

in the coming days and we look forward to continued fellowship with him, trusting that God has plans for him as he has for us. The encouragements and challenges from God's word, which John was the means of conveying, encouraged us all to believe that his visit was planned a long time ago.

Following his departure towards the end of July, we have had various ministers supplying. Recently we had the privilege of the Rev Bart Buell who preached on the 13 August on matters highlighted for us in Nehemiah chapter 2. Once again we believe that this was planned long ago and the following is my summary. We all want to thank God and acknowledge the insight afforded to us as a result of Bart's study and presentation of this subject.

1 Nehemiah had a sad face and sorrow of heart on account of the fact that Jerusalem was laid waste and on that account, he believed there was good reason to be sad. While Christians have reason to be glad in their hope, there are also reasons for sadness when we see brethren at war, fighting between nations, despising of the gospel and a general back sliding in so many areas while the fields are white and

ready to harvest and in need of the Lord's blessing (verse 2).

2 In his predicament, Nehemiah prayed and it is essential for us to pray as well. We are told to pray without ceasing and prayer includes thanksgiving, confession of sin and making our requests to God (verse 4).

3 His desire and intention was to build the waste places with gentle firmness and in love and it wasn't just others he wanted to see doing it but he himself was going to be involved as well and so for us, may our desire be to build the waste places in the land and not just look to others to put their hand to the task but ourselves as well (verse 5).

4 *"It pleased the king to send me"* - the Lord made the king willing and he is the same still and is able to make even enemies of Christ's kingdom to help. He has the hearts of all men in his hands and can change the heart of a nation in a day (verse 5.)

5 The King helped Nehemiah *"according to the good hand of my God upon me"*. A beautiful phrase – may it be true of you and me as well. In fact, it has been true for it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed and we have been, indeed, blessed when our minds are being focussed on His word and drawn to the King of Kings as our hope and portion (verse 8).

6 When those who hated the Jews heard it, they were *"grieved for a man was come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel"*. So be sure that where the Lord's work is going

to go on, there will be opposition and it is terribly sad when this comes from within the church, although we expect it from outside. However, remember the verse, which encouraged David the Psalmist *"by my God assisting me I overleap a wall"* (verse 10).

7 When Nehemiah examined the waste places he didn't just give a summary of what he found and grieve and complain but he remembered and retold the help he had received as the good hand of the Lord was upon him and told the people to rise up and build. Let us not just grieve and complain but remember the Lord has shown his kindness in the past, and also His promises, faithfulness and unchangeableness. May we respond as did the people in Nehemiah's time *"let us rise up and build, so they strengthened their hands for this good work"* (verse 17 & 18).

8 As to the response itself, it was not just physical but mental, spiritual and verbal. The Revd Gordon Fyles had a quote two weeks ago as follows: "many Christians are like Arctic rivers - frozen at the mouth!" We need to be willing with our mouths as well as by our lives to demonstrate the love and power of the everlasting gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May the good hand of the Lord be upon us so that we may be real and active in our response.

9 Where did Nehemiah's confidence come from? *"The God of Heaven, He will prosper us and therefore, we His servants, will*

arise and build". We must have all our hope and confidence in Him, for although Paul will plant and Apollos water, God alone gives the increase (verse 20).

10 Finally there are solemn words at the end of the chapter – to those who persist in opposition to the work - *"you have no portion right or memorial in Jerusalem."* That means that we must all hear the call, respond to the opportunity

and take up the challenge and so will you join with me, not only in being sad for the state of the cause of Christ in our land but encouraged to rise up as doers of the word and not hearers only (verse 20).

Thank you, and remember to expect God's blessing based on his promises and all in accordance with Isaiah chapter 25 verse 1 – *"You have done marvellous things, things planned long ago."*

Finding the Will of God

"FAR TOO MANY CHRISTIANS rely on faulty logic to divine the will of God. Their thinking goes like this: 'God has a plan, and therefore He intends that I find it'. That is a non-sequitur, a conclusion that cannot logically follow the premise. Simply because God has a plan does not mean that He necessarily has any intention of sharing it with you; as a matter of fact the message of Job is in part that the Lord in His sovereignty may allow terrible things to happen to you, and you may never know why....

"Not only is the logic of many Christians faulty, but their exegesis is terrible. Countless times I have heard people quote [Pro 3:5,6] as a basis for divining God's will: *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* [KJV]. Many people read the word 'direct' and assume that this verse means that God will give them special direction in the every decisions of life. But the Hebrew word literally means to 'go straight', so a sound exegesis reveals that if you trust God you will not go outside the bounds of what the book of Proverbs teaches. When it says that *"he shall direct thy paths"* it does not mean that God will offer you special revelation, but that He will make your track right because you are living your life in accordance with the words of Proverbs. Using a verse as a magic incantation does not mean that God is obliged to hand you the answer to your problem...

"Abraham did not seek a special message from God...he simply walked close to God and obeyed His word... Special revelation for guidance was not the normal apostolic experience...There is no place in the New Testament where we are taught to seek a special revelation".

Bruce A Waltke in 'Finding the Will of God - a pagan notion'

Christ's Church is One

By Wayne Pearce

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" [Acts 4:32-33]

CHANCES ARE THAT if you are reading this article then you are already a Christian and you know where you are going to spend eternity. Imagine for a moment you have reached your destination. You have arrived in heaven, all praise and glory to our God! You happen to gaze up and see a sign which reads Presbyterians straight ahead - we walked the straight and narrow way after all!

But there are other signs: Baptists this way, Congregationalists another, Episcopalians yet another and so on. You move ahead and encounter another series of signs. You take the one which reads Scottish Presbyterians. Finally! Home! Glory! But no! You look up and again a series of further markers. There are APs, FPs, FCs, FCCs, RPs, CoSs, UFs, not to mention the countless others of recent centuries! What was it our

Lord said? All people will know that you are my disciples by the countless contentions and divisions you have among one another? This is ridiculous of course.

The true church comprises all those whom the Lord Jesus saved through His life, death and resurrection. It is one in Jesus Christ. For this reason we give our assent to the words of the Apostle's Creed which categorically states: "I believe in the holy catholic church"! The catholicity of the church, however, is something we must seek to give expression to and work at within our own congregations, within our denominations and between churches and denominations as Bible-believing Christians. The Lord Jesus specifically says: "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" [John.13:35].

It is hardly surprising that our witness is so often ineffectual today and worse it is potentially damaging! What does the world see when she looks at the church? God's word leaves us in no doubt that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand! By contrast the Bible lays great emphasis on the unity, the oneness, the togetherness of the church. "*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul*". And this unity was

expressed and blessed by God with great power and grace.

With this in mind our own denominational mission statement gives cause for optimism. It commendably reads: 'The Associated Presbyterian Churches, part of the universal Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, exists: 1) to make known the Good News of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ [Mk 16:15]; 2) to edify and nurture His people in and through the Scriptures [2 Pt 3:18]; 3) and to seek to be effective in uniting Christians in the oneness which is inherent by virtue of the new birth - to witness to a needy world, as the Lord Jesus Himself prayed in John 17:21.'

That the early church is one in heart and soul is a powerful witness to the amazing grace of God in the New Covenant. God promised: *"And I will give **them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them.** I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God"* [Ez.11:19-20]. Note the plural 'them', but the 'one' heart and spirit. The true church is one in Christ and must worship, witness and work in light of this precious truth. Real unity when expressed is not only a tremendous blessing in and of itself but it leads to further blessing.

Why is the visible church in Scotland so weak, powerless, lifeless and so often petty minded at the

present time? Could one of the reasons be that we are no longer one in heart and soul and have no real desire or interest in healing the rifts that divide and stifle our witness to the grace, love and mercy of God? Generally speaking we now define ourselves not in relation to who we are and what we are in Jesus Christ as recipients of sovereign, elective, glorious grace but instead we define ourselves in relation to how we differ from that other congregation or denomination - whoever they might be! Tragically the church has allowed itself to become another marketplace in a consumer orientated society - we now compete for the odd stray sheep!

And we do so not on the basis of vital things but on matters of less importance and even on trivialities. We have, generally speaking, long-neglected our Lord's command in the Great Commission to go and make disciples and instead prefer to simply wait and pray for revival hoping that God will miraculously replenish our congregations without reference to the God-appointed means!

We need to repent and trust and obey the Lord. We exist to advance Christ's gospel. We exist to be a city upon a hill. We exist to be salt and light. Therefore we must stop looking to ourselves and our own self-interests and preferences and instead we must look solely unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. This is where true unity, power and blessing is to be obtained.

The unity of the early church

was blessed with power. *"And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all"*. The power and efficacy is of God through faith in Jesus Christ: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* [Rom.1:16].

We must understand afresh that there is no power in our own ideas and notions; there is no power in tradition; there is no power in innovation. The church today expends too much time and energy in argument and division between those opposed to change at all costs and those who appear to be continually in a state of flux. Tragically this often leaves the Christian with the stark choice of museum or prototype in some localities! Neither is acceptable because neither is biblical. We should not be divided over old versus new but should be more concerned about the false from the true! We are not called upon to be PC - politically correct; neither are we called to be TC - traditionally correct; but instead we must be BC - biblically correct!

True unity can only be found among those who believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It comes by faith in Jesus Christ; in truth and love. Moreover it is centred and rooted in the essential things. As Richard Baxter graciously put it: in essential things unity; in non-essentials liberty but in all things charity (love). Only when Christians accept that unity does not

necessitate uniformity in every conceivable thing will we be able to give true expression to the unity and catholicity of Christ's church. Only then can we hope to be one in heart and soul! God's word says: *"all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind"* [1 Pt 3:8].

Someone once said that to survive in the ministry you need a tender heart and a thick skin and try not to get them reversed! Since the Lord has given His church *pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (Eph.4:11) we all need to pay heed to this sage advice. Scripture says: *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins* [1 Pt 4:8].

We are to be *"standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel"* [Phil 1:27]. The early church was one in heart and soul and not only did great power accompany the preaching and teaching of the gospel but we are also told that *"great grace was upon them all"*.

This is not simply a reference to saving grace but to God's favour upon the church. Blessing follows wonderful blessing for those that trust and obey the Lord. Let us acknowledge these glorious truths and strive to be one in heart and soul that we would all know God's great power and grace and witness multitudes being saved through the proclamation of the gospel in our day to His praise and glory.

A Quiver of Contradictions

IT IS PERHAPS the most dramatic scene in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: Christian enters the Valley of Humiliation where he meets the dreadful Apollyon, a "foul fiend;" the dragon-like creature makes a mighty attempt to frighten him from the path of faith.

In rereading this scene not long ago, the thing that most struck me about Apollyon's strategy was that it is always changing. He doesn't pick one tactic and stick with it. He starts out reasoning with Christian and then promises him all sorts of good things if he will turn back. When that doesn't work, he starts threatening Christian. He next accuses God of abandoning Christian, then he starts accusing Christian himself, telling him that he has been a failure as a pilgrim.

This attack from all sides is exactly the sort of strategy Satan uses against believers when he tempts and accuses us. One of the basic differences between God and Satan is that Satan has no qualms about contradicting himself. One minute he will inflate you with pride; the next he will debase you with shame. It doesn't matter to him which attack gets through as long as you take your eyes off God.

A non-Christian recently pointed out to me what he considered to be a Bible contradiction. Satan attempted

to turn Jesus from the path that led to the cross [Matthew 16:21-23]. Satan also incited Judas to betray Jesus (see John 13:2) because Satan considered the crucifixion of the Son of God to be a great victory for the powers of darkness. Isn't this a contradiction? Yes, but the contradiction is Satan's not God. He willingly works toward conflicting objectives all the time, as long as he sees it as in some way opposed to God's glory.

Sometimes it is difficult to recognize the attacks of Satan precisely because he so often contradicts himself with his own lies. He may start out reminding you of all your failures, making you doubt whether you are truly a Christian. If this doesn't work, he'll try to puff you up, drawing your attention to all your successes, goading you to compare your track record to others and give yourself a self-righteous round of applause. Or he may start out trying to entice you to love the world and live like it is your home. If you resist this temptation, he'll encourage you to notice all those who haven't been so steadfast and subtly shift your hope from resting in God's mercy to relying on your own faithfulness.

The good news is that our strategy for resisting Satan's advances is far less complex. No matter what lie he may aim at you,

the gospel is broad enough to deflect it. If he makes you feel unworthy, the gospel tells you that you are not worthy, but Christ is. If he makes you feel invincible, the gospel humbles you and reminds you that apart from God, you can do nothing. Our exemplar in this method of battle is Christ himself. When Satan tempted him with half-truths, he not only rejected them, but sent back arrows in the form of God's own Word (see Luke 4).

Satan is not only the prince of this world; he is also the prince of contradiction. He cannot stand before the one who is Truth, and he cowers at the Word of God.

Although it may seem archaic and unpopular to talk about our enemy, those who have felt his

attacks know that he is real, and his tactics are formidable. He is, however, no match for the Son of God. We can sing with confidence the words of Martin Luther:
'And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.

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The Corporate Sin of a Nation's Guilt

'THE GREATEST WOUNDING AGAINST mankind is the result of sins committed by a corporate body - governments, institutions, churches, etc, - not by individuals. The problem is that even though we are part of the corporate body, we tend to excuse ourselves from taking personal responsibility. The sins then are never owned and confessed'. Even though we may be part of those bodies, often we have no say in what is done on our behalf, and frequently we are unaware of the effects... 'Unless someone identifies themselves with the corporate body who perpetrated the sins and confesses them...(they) become like festering wounds in the victims who cry out for justice to be done. A festering wound in one part of the body eventually poisons the whole body. As these memories linger, bitterness deepens and multiplies...increasing resentment, hatred, anger and is passed down from generation to generation'.

How can we deal with those wounds? 'Those who have died can't repent of their sins, the ungodly won't, but we a Christians can confess our corporate sin and ask for forgiveness'. We are part of a royal priesthood, and like Aaron and Moses of old, we are expected to stand before God on behalf of our people.

Quoted in '[After the Locusts](#)' by Meg Guillebaud

New Scottish Secretary for Lord's Day Observance Society

THE REV IAN McNAUGHTON has replaced Major (Ret'd) Iain A Macdonald as the Scottish Secretary of Lord's Day Observance Society in May this year. He has joined the Society after nearly 30 years in the pastoral ministry when he held two pastorates in Scotland and two in England.

He is married to Violet and they have one son, Mark. The Bible text more than any other that was laid upon Ian's heart when praying about the invitation by the Scottish Council to become Secretary was "*redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" [Eph. 5:16]. Ian writes 'because we are living in evil days when the love of money and the desire of pleasure are driving our nation into the rejection of the Christian Sabbath, part of the Christian response to this spiritually declining situation is to "*redeem the time*". Christians are to make the most of the time given to them, as it will soon be past. They must not allow time to pass unused for that would be unwise'.

The Society now operates under the new name of *Day One Christian Ministries*. This incorporates the Lord's Day Observance Society, Day One Prison Ministries and Day One Publishing. It is committed to promoting and defending God's Word and His day.

Rev Ian McNaughton was converted at 19 years of age after reading a Gideon New Testament for three years. Once converted he immediately felt an inner call to Christian service but was advised to wait until he was sure this was of God. During this 'waiting time' the Lord confirmed a call into the Christian ministry through his local church and so he left work and entered the Free Church of Scotland College, Edinburgh, as a private student and he gained their Diploma in Theology after 4 years of study.

In 2005 he gained a Master of Theology degree in Historic Theology from Westminster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania, USA, while studying through the John Owen Centre at the London Theological Seminary. His thesis was entitled 'The Spirit and the Lord's day'. Ian has been an accredited minister with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) Pastors' Association since 1980 and this allows him to say that he fully accepts, without reservation, the FIEC's *Statement of Faith*.

Ian believes the issue of the Lord's day (the Christian Sabbath) is not to do with living in the past, but obeying God's Word today and every day. This is especially true for the people of God who of all peoples should respect and love both the

Lord's day and its Giver. The Lord's day is a sign to the whole world that God is Creator and that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead on the first day.

It is not until God's people give way to His will by honouring and keeping His day holy that the sign of the Lord's day (the Christian Sabbath) will again have its impact upon the lost of our nation.

Ian considers it a great privilege to be joining the staff of Day One Christian Ministries and the Scottish Council of Day One Christian Ministries (Scottish Association).

Please remember Ian and Violet in prayer (Col 4:2-4; II Cor 4:5). He is more than happy to speak, lecture, debate and encourage. You can contact him on 0151 633 2655.

The PLACE of CHRISTIANITY in the PUBLIC SQUARE

A One-Day Conference at Hamilton College on Saturday 28 October.
Speakers: Revd Prof A T B McGowan, Dr Desmond Birnie, Stephen C Perks
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(They start in January for a year)
The cost is **£10** for the 6 issues,
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See page 24 for details

THE NEXT ISSUE of APC News!

It is due out on the

1st WEEK in DECEMBER

Parenting Children!

ONE DAY A BOY asked his dad how much money he earned in an hour. His father was a very busy person and brought a lot of work home at night. His father replied that he earned about £30 per hour. About two weeks later the son came to his father and said 'Dad, here is £30 - I would love if you would spend an hour with me playing this game I got for my last birthday!'

James Dobson says 'Children are not guests in our home. They have been loaned to us, temporarily for the purpose of loving them and instilling a good foundation for life'. This means spending quality time with them. Children grow up very quickly and it is not long before they leave the home. We have to give an account of how we brought up our families.

GENERAL TREASURER'S POST

As the present APC General Treasurer would like to retire from the position, any person interested in undertaking these duties is invited to contact:

Kenneth MacLean, PO Box 2, Gairloch, IV21 2YA

either by letter or by e-mail for further information, at

kendunedin@aol.com

We apologise for the difficulties some may have had getting on to our website. We are doing our best to rectify the matter and hope before long the problem will be overcome.

Please note that the APC website address does NOT have 'uk' at the end.

Also note that to contact our ministers by email [from our website](#), please do not put the 'uk' at the end of the address. eg
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Congregations can, if they so wish, charge for their own distribution of the magazine, or give them away free.

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Please state if acknowledgement of donation is required.

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