

Married to God!

THIS HEADING may surprise some people but it is really very Biblical. God considers His people as either married to Him or are His children. The Scriptures, in both Old and New Testaments, speak of God's people having this unique relationship with God.

For example, Isaiah says about Israel, "*Your Maker is your husband*" [Isa 54:5] and the final words of the New Testament depict the church "*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*" [Rev 21:2]. Again and again the Bible uses the symbolism and illustration of marriage as the relationship between God and His people.

Marriage is a covenant in which both parties have a role to play. The husband has to provide for all the needs of his wife, caring, guarding, loving, supporting and above all, being faithful. The wife in return must co-operate, obey and be faithful. The wife must respond positively to the love of her husband.

God chose Israel and poured out His love on her - but she was unfaithful to Him. God chose Israel when she was wallowing in her own blood. He said to her 'Live', and entered into a covenant with her [Eze 16:6cf].

There is no more loyal and more faithful husband than God. There is

no more loving husband than God. There is no more forgiving and patient husband than God. And yet, there is no husband that has been so badly treated than God. Listen to Jeremiah "*Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to Me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord*" [Jer 3:20]!

Yet, God, repeatedly forgave Israel and called her back to Himself. The constant refrain in Scripture is God calling His people back to Himself - so that they would not destroy themselves! God reminds Israel how He sees the relationship between them, "*I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me*" [Isa 1:2]. He reveals where His heart is "*return to Me for I have redeemed you*" [Isa 44:22].

It is the same today regarding God and the Church. All members in the Church are covenanted to God, whether covenanted as adults in baptism or as children in baptism. All baptised people are in covenant with God and have obligations to serve, honour, worship and be faithful to God.

Circumcision and baptism has the same effect as the marriage service. They change our status and relationship to God, whether we feel

something has happened or not. Just as in marriage, after the service and vows have been taken, our status changes. Whatever we may think or feel about the service, in God's eyes, we are now in covenant with Him and we must behave as faithful partners.

After marrying my first couple as a minister, the bride said to me after a few weeks, 'I don't feel any different from before my marriage I feel exactly the same.' I replied that no matter how she felt, she was now married and must behave as someone married. It is the same with the covenant of baptism. Some have said they do not feel anything special has happened during the service. But nevertheless a very solemn and important relationship has been formed that has obligations for all time. The promises made by parents must be kept, and the children told that they are God's children and they must love, serve and obey Him, and if they do, they will be blessed. God will be a faithful Father and Husband to them.

God's promises to His covenant people include their children. And what wonderful promises He makes to them. Listen to one of them: "*And the Lord your God will circumcise your **heart** and the heart of your **offspring** so that you will **love the Lord***" [Deu 30:6].

Of course, as in all covenants, there are conditions. One party makes the promise, the other fulfills the terms. The terms of God's covenant is that God promises to bless us in all sorts of ways - if we

are faithful to Him. We must be faithful to Him. If we walk in His ways then He will bless us and our children but if we forsake Him, we forfeit the blessings promised.

Just as many people today do not take marriage seriously, thinking it is only a 'piece of paper', so many do not take their covenant relationship (baptism, adult or child) with God seriously. It is a wonderful privilege to have a close and intimate relationship with God. The most vital part is the **response** we give to God's love and care.

How do we answer this question: 'My parents baptised me, but I do not love the Lord'? We answer as Christian counsellors answer those who come and say that they do not love their wives/husbands any more? 'You have to **learn** to love them!' God calls His people to love Him with all our heart and souls. We are even called to love our enemies?

As covenant children, we have promises of God's help and His Holy Spirit. At least five times in Deuteronomy alone we are called to learn to fear God. We can learn to love God through prayer, effort and God's Holy Spirit. Trusting in God's promises we strive together and work at our marriages. God promised to circumcise our and our children's hearts, "***so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart***" [Deu 30:6]

As in salvation, we obey His commands trusting in His promises. We come to God in all confidence for He says "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*" [Jam 4:8] □

A Visit to Thailand

Our Stornoway minister, Revd George Macaskill visited the Mae La Refugee Camp on the Burma/Thailand border and also some churches in the jungle during the last two weeks of October. Here is his report.

THE SITUATION in the Mae La Refugee Camp continues very much as before the recent demonstrations in Burma. The demonstrations ended predictably in that the military junta (the ruling regime in Burma), have simply and literally driven protestors from the streets, sometimes using gun-fire.

Many students in the Bible School and College had been repatriated to other countries such as Canada and New Zealand. While this, on the surface looks good, because it means safety, freedom, education and new opportunities, it is in effect, a sophisticated form of genocide in that they are isolated from other Karen people and will no longer be able to use their language or practice their culture. There is a 5-year programme in place to repatriate the whole refugee camp.

While we were there, other missionaries from America, Australia, Korea, Holland and Nagaland were teaching in the camp, so there is no shortage of people willing to teach – sadly, some are not very ‘sound in the faith’.

We stayed and taught up to 5 hours a day for 6 days before meeting up with Boon Chu Pongdamromgsap, a former pupil of

the Bible School in Mae La, who has been to Scotland for a year to learn English and visited Stornoway during that period.

We spent the rest of our time with Boon Chu who took us into the Jungle to visit one or two churches there. This was the highlight of the trip for me, personally, as there was a real need amongst these people.

We left Chiang Mai at 11am and arrived at the first church just after 6pm having travelled over some very rough terrain and some very shaky bridges to a place called Khun Yaum in Mae Hong Son Province. After introducing ourselves to the leaders, Ivor Macdonald preached a sermon to them and we had a meal together.

We arranged to meet with the elders at 7am in the morning to discuss a few problems and we were very thankful how they received our advice and how the situation developed. We also visited and prayed over a sick girl who had ‘returned’ to Buddhism and encouraged her to return to the Lord.

Boon Chu then took us to a very isolated village called Mae-Ork, which, (to quote his own words), he

said had all 'turned to Christ'. This place is not marked on any map and the nearest place to this remote church is Mae-Cheam. Sometimes it is impossible to reach the village in the rainy season.

It was here that I had the privilege of preaching to near 200 people. The whole village seemed to be most encouraged with our visit and said that it was the answer to two years of praying that God would send some preachers to them that would teach and instruct them in the Bible. They pled with us to return again.

One concern we all have is that Boon Chu himself is 'serving' these churches and has no income at all. When we asked him how he survived he said that his wife 'set-aside' 1,000 bhats each month for him to be able to travel into the jungle to minister to them. 1,000 bhats is equivalent to £15. Boon Chu was offered work in a factory in

Chiang Mai, but said he could not take it as it would mean he would not be able to make trips into the jungle. He also has turned down a 'Call' to another church because he feels his work is with the jungle people.

Personally, I feel there is a great responsibility upon us now, as a need has been made known, which, in many ways, we are able to meet. These people, among whom God is obviously working, do not see any Christians from one end of the year to the other apart from Boon Chu – that is why they were so excited about seeing us. They have great needs and it is the responsibility of their brothers and sisters in Christ, including ourselves, to ensure that they are supported both physically and spiritually.

It would be encouraging, if APC as a denomination, were to consider seriously supporting them in every possible way. □

KESWICK CONVENTION 2008

GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE from the Campbell Trust to enable ministers and full time Christian workers from Scotland to attend the Keswick Convention in 2008. The Convention offers life-changing Bible teaching, uplifting worship and great fellowship combined with the chance to relax and enjoy a holiday in the wonderful setting of the Lake District. It has been held since 1875. The Convention lasts three weeks, with the second two weeks being especially for families, with full alternative programmes for children and young people. The theme for next year is 'Creation Chaos and Christ'.

The dates for the weeks are 12-18 July, 19-25 July, 26 July-1 August. Each week is self-contained. The grant assists towards travel and accommodation for any week. The only stipulation is that those applying should not have been registered members of the Convention on a previous occasion. There is no charge for actually attending the Convention.

Full details are available from Revd John M F Butler, 2 Southview, Dalmuir, Clydebank, G81 3LA Email: jmfb@icscotland.net
Early application is advised as only a small number of grants are available each year.

A Jungle Preacher

By Revd George Macaskill

BON CHU Pongdamromgsap is a Thai-Karen product of the KKBBC in the Mae La Refugee Camp on the Burmese/Thailand border. He was one of their most promising students and was earmarked for training in Westminster Theological College, in Philadelphia, USA, but unfortunately, this did not materialise.

Although extremely disappointed, Boon Chu has been able to see the Lord's hand in Providence and has been visiting churches in the jungle about 4 hours drive from Chiang Mai city. He has been able to encourage churches that have virtually gone extinct and is now 'ministering' to them as often as he can get resources to go into the jungle to them. This is impossible in the rainy season as the roads are merely 'tracks' in the ground and many small rivers have to be crossed.

Boon Chu reports that at least two whole villages have given up Buddhism and converted to Christ in an area unmarked in a map. The nearest town is Mae Cheam. One village has only 100 of a population but the other has 800 souls. The wonderful thing is that they are keen to spread the gospel to other villages. This is something

they themselves have seen as a necessary part of the Christian life – nobody has told them they must testify and witness to others. Having no-one to evangelise in their own village, they are seeking ways to go to other jungle villages with the gospel.

These jungle villages provide no work, so the pastors are unpaid. The congregation may work most of the week, but they will only receive rice as payment – the jungle has no factories, shops or banks, not to speak of hospitals or schools! It is wonderful to hear Boon Chu say that the first request that the 'pastors' in these villages make is for 'teaching'. We need teaching on the Bible and instruction in Christianity.

Boon Chu, feels it is his duty to 'minister to these jungle people as long as he is able to do so, and has, so far, been able to visit them around once a month. Boon Chu has many skills and gifts in communicating the gospel to these Thai-Karen villages. He is unique in that he knows the culture and language of these people intimately, and all praise to God that he has a great desire to see the whole jungle proclaim Christ as Lord.

Boon Chu has made it very clear that there is very much more that could easily be done for these

jungle Christians, if the resources were available. The resources, however, are just not available in Thailand - they will need to come from the West in the short-term. Books, for example, are a necessity, but there are very few in the Karen language. Indeed, even if they were, many of the Karen tribe are not able to read.

Another way in which we may be able to help these isolated churches is to make them self-

supporting through finding suitable work that would generate an income for them. There are not many marketing opportunities in a jungle!

It is the duty of the church in the West to remember in a tangible way to support what Boon Chu is doing for the Lord in the jungles around Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son in North Thailand. It is wonderful to know and see that the Lord is building His church, even in the jungle! To God be the glory. □

The Aftermath of Torture

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS of my time with VOMC so far has been the opportunity to make contact with a fellow believer, whom I respect greatly for the dignity and gracious behaviour demonstrated since escaping from North Korea, a nation that remains tightly closed and incredibly hostile to Christ and His Church.

This person was imprisoned and endured much pain and suffering at the hands of torturers. Recently I received an e-mail from the interpreter who is facilitating our conversion, telling me that this dear believer was struggling with frail health which is a direct consequence of the treatment meted out while in detention. This person's body was described as **'mangled'** following the years of cruel abuse.

In spite of pain and physical disadvantage, this person persists in fulfilling speaking engagements so that the vital message of the Persecuted Church might be heard by as many within the Body of Christ as possible. As I think of this brave servant's physical condition and determination to serve Christ, my mind drifts to Paul's words in his letter to the Galatians, 6:17, *"From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."* As we continue to bear up in prayer those imprisoned in distant lands for their love towards Christ, let's not forget to do the same for those who have been providentially freed in order to testify before the world. Let's be sure to remember those who are dealing with the physical, emotional and psychological aftermath of torture.

Though I have not met this friend in Christ I feel a warm association - I long for a face to face meeting so that I can show my Christian love and solidarity. Till then I continue to pray for their healing, for their strengthening and for their rich blessing as a *good and faithful* servant of the cross. Will you join with me?

Revd Malcolm MacLeod, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

The Holy Scriptures

By Wayne Pearce

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” [2Tim.3:16-17].

I WANT US TO consider the doctrine of Holy Scripture in this article. I do so for it is of great and vital importance and something we need to be reminded of regularly. A solid understanding of the doctrine of Scripture is essential for a faithful and fruitful walk with God – individually and collectively for the church. At this time of the year many are agonising over the selection of a gift for a loved one or a friend at Christmas – what better gift could there be than God’s own word: the word in Scripture which leads sinners to the Word made flesh! It may just be the gift of life!

Recently I read Mark Dever’s little book ‘What is a Healthy Church?’ The essential marks he notes are: expository preaching; biblical theology; a biblical understanding of the good news; a biblical understanding of conversion; a biblical understanding of evangelism; a biblical understanding of membership; biblical church discipline; biblical discipleship and growth; biblical

church leadership. In other words Pastor Dever correctly reminds us that the health of the church and those who comprise her is dependent on our right understanding and application of the word of God!

Most of the problems we experience individually and collectively in the church are the result of our foolish neglect of or disobedience to God’s inspired, infallible and inerrant word. How often are we told today that doctrine and theology are the greatest barriers to health and harmony in the church! And yet Scriptures says the opposite is the case! It is the absence of and disobedience to biblical doctrine and theology that is the cause of the deep-seated malaise and disharmony which mars the church’s witness. Faithfulness leads to fruitfulness. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ or we are not His. He is both the subject and the object of Holy Scripture. We must *“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”* [2Tim.1:13].

Let us therefore first of all consider the origin and nature of Holy Scripture: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”*. **All!** Not just some Scripture but all. The 39 books that comprise the Old

Testament canon plus the 27 that makes up the New Testament. These 66 books that are contained in the Holy Bible, and these alone, are given by inspiration.

This immediately provokes the question are we reading, meditating upon and applying God's word to and in our lives. Do we read and Old Testament Scriptures as well as the New? As a minister I am called upon to preach the whole council of God. Yes, there is such a thing as progressive revelation but we impoverish ourselves if we restrict our diet to the New Testament. Just as we require a balanced diet for good physical health so we also require a balanced diet of Old as well as New Testament Scripture to ensure a healthy walk with God.

Let us beware that the Greek word *theopneustos* which is translated by the English word inspiration in the above text could be misconstrued by some. For we often say such and such a person was inspired to write a poem or song! We often claim to have found inspiration, when what we really mean is that we have had an idea! That is not what is meant by the word inspiration in Scripture.

Instead the original Greek conveys the meaning that Scripture is God-given, it is out-breathed by God. The NIV captures the sense best when it says that All Scripture is God-breathed. All Scripture is uniquely given by God – it is special revelation from the One who is infinitely wise and perfect in all His

ways. “*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” [2Pet 1:20-21]. There is a common refrain running throughout Scripture – we read time after time: thus saith the Lord!

Let us acknowledge that without the light of God's word man must ever remain in darkness. That is why the psalmist says: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” [Psa 119:105]. There is no pilgrim's progress without it! We cannot walk in the light without it! We cannot walk by faith without it! We cannot walk in love without it! We cannot walk the narrow road without it! We cannot look unto Jesus without it! We cannot follow Him without it! Let us truly acknowledge that all Scripture is given by God and is therefore fully trustworthy and must be believed and obeyed.

The evidence of its God-given status is irrefutable. Both Old and New Testament writers understood it to be the word of the living God as did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Consider the pinpoint accuracy of Scripture in the fulfilment of prophecy, particularly relating to the birth, life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus – the mathematical probabilities of these being mere coincidence are impossible. It alone reveals the way of salvation – a way which is beyond man's imagination and wherewithal.

Consider the witness of the church – of countless lives transformed by believing and applying this word.

Let us secondly recognise the authority of Holy Scripture: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”*. In other words because of its origins and nature it is wholly authoritative. It is the word of the one, true and living God: we are to read it and heed it. It is given by our Maker and Redeemer. We often refer to the canon of Scripture. The word canon means rule – it is a perfect rule in all matters pertaining to faith and practice. The Westminster Confession of Faith says: ‘The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.’ *“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”* [1The.2:13].

The authority and truthfulness of Holy Scripture is therefore not dependent upon the church but instead the church is wholly dependent upon the word of God – the church is made up of all those who are begotten again by the word of truth. Moreover neither must we allow experience to take precedence over the word of God but our experiences must be measured

and judged in light of God’s word. The word of God not personal inclinations, feelings, ideas or notions must carry ultimate and supreme authority in our lives. The word of God not tradition or what is expedient to the climate and culture of our day must be our rule and guide. We can have ‘churchianity’ but we can’t have true Christianity without the faithful preaching, teaching and application of Scripture. It is only in and through the Scriptures that God reveals Himself and all that we need know, believe and practice if we are to glorify Him and be faithful to Him and one another. *“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them [Isa.8:20]. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world* [1Jn.1:4:1]

Let us thirdly consider the sufficiency of Holy Scripture: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*. The Westminster Confession again rightfully notes: ‘The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.’

Nothing is to be added; nothing is to be taken away! Many

sadly would recognise the origin and nature of Holy Scripture but would refute its sufficiency. They add to the teaching of Scripture. They would teach Scripture PLUS tradition or new revelations or some such thing. Why? God's word not only makes us wise unto salvation which is through faith in Christ Jesus but it is given *That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

There are others of course who tragically claim to be Christians and yet they take away from the revelation of Scripture. They refuse to believe and practice the truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. They would have us discard anything that cannot be explained by so called natural means. Hence they refute the virgin birth, the nature of our Lord's atoning sacrifice, His physical, literal resurrection and ascension and so many other vital truths. They would have us believe that Scripture is not God-given but that men were inspired in their search for God to write these little stories!

God has issued a serious warning to those who would add to or take away from Holy Scripture: *"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy*

city, and from the things which are written in this book" [Rev.22:18-19]. Let us pay heed and rest assured in both the authority and the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

Let us finally consider the purpose of Holy Scripture: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"*. We need to understand that God has given His word to His elect - His people, the church. It should not surprise us that the world often ridicules and scorns God's word. The Scriptures are foolishness to the natural man (1Cor.2:14).

And yet the world desperately needs to hear the message of Scripture for unless fallen man believes and heeds God's word he will be condemned by it. The Holy Spirit, however, must indwell man and cast His light upon the Scriptures before he can read and hear aright and act thereupon.

The Scriptures are *"able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* [2Tim.3:15]. That is why we read in John's gospel: *"these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name"* [Jn.20:31]. It is through the preaching of the word that God has chosen to save them that believe. This is the way that God has chosen to save His people: *"Of his own will begat he us with the*

word of truth” (Js.1:18a). That is why we must **A**lways **P**reach **C**hrist a crucified and risen Saviour and Lord. *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*” [Eph.1:13a].

Also, the Scriptures contain all things necessary for us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Thus they are “*profitable for doctrine*”: yes doctrine – theology. The early church gave themselves first and foremost to the apostle’s doctrine for right thinking must precede and lead to right acting.

The Scriptures reprove and correct us. They reveal our sin - not only our sins of commission but also our sins of omission. However they don’t leave us there but they wonderfully correct u. Our thoughts, words and deeds are to conform to God’s standards. Hence we need to be constantly heeding and applying God’s word.

As George reminded us in the last edition of the APC News, we are to be *semper reformanda* – always reforming in light of the word of God. Just as a train cannot run without tracks, the Christian cannot function as God intends if he is not making faithful application of the word of truth. For this word provides *instruction in righteousness* – imputed and actual for we are being conformed to the image of Christ. We are to be holy as God is holy. We are not holy by nature but grace and nurture on the basis of reading and heeding the word of the

living God we are to show that we are truly members of the family of God; that we are new creatures, born from above and being prepared for glory. Let us read and heed the word of God.

I will conclude by citing a quotation that was found printed inside a copy of the Geneva Bible published in post-Reformation Scotland. The Bible, it rightly reminds us, contains: ‘the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers.

Its doctrine is holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter.

Here heaven is open, and the gates of hell are disclosed. Christ is the grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It is given to you here in this life, will be opened at the judgement, and is established forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its contents.’ Will you say amen to this? □

Congregational News

LAIRG/ROGART

Things continue pretty much in the same fashion since I last wrote. Our God has been wonderfully gracious and I personally have had numerous opportunities to preach and teach not only in these parts but much further afield.

Our Westminster Confession of Faith study group has resumed and is greatly appreciated by those who attend. I had the opportunity to teach in the local primary school back in September and will be doing so again in December, DV.

I am writing this on Tuesday 30 October and last night I had the great privilege of preaching to over 200 people in the Quality Hotel, Perth, at an outreach dinner organised by the Perth Christian Centre. I preached from the AV for well over an hour from 1 Timothy 1:15 and, glory to God, a number of people professed faith, while others were edified and were so enthusiastic. One lady in particular could not believe that I was a Presbyterian! She said that if that is the message that Presbyterians truly proclaim then we need many more Presbyterians in Scotland in these woeful times!

It was also a great privilege to minister at the Fort William

Communion season where I had the opportunity to meet some of our own folks but where I simply enjoyed excellent fellowship with the Revd and Mrs Mair and all members of the congregation. *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* [Psa 133:1].

As I write I am eagerly looking forward to my first visit to Canada. I am to minister in the word and prayer in our Vancouver congregation in November where we hope to keep the Lord's Supper. Please do pray that the Lord would bless all our labours to His praise and glory. [WP].

DUNDEE

We have been encouraged recently with more people attending. We are specially pleased to have some come both ends of the day and to the midweek meeting. One couple with a young daughter have come to Scotland a year ago from Hungary and have been living up in the north west until they came to Dundee in October. We pray that they will be blessed as they worship with us.

There was an excellent service one Sunday evening in Dundee when all the evangelical churches met together to form the

Dundee Evangelical Christian Alliance (DECA). This is a group of churches who want to show some unity among the Christian community in regard to the many issues which need addressed in the city. To have a united voice promoting God's Word and truth is the main object of our meeting together. It is hoped that an organised and faithful stand for truth, righteousness and justice will be made in the city.

Our autumn leaflets have been distributed around the church highlighting our need for thankfulness for the harvest and our need of food for the soul as well as food for our bodies.

Our annual meal out together is programmed for 29 November when we hope to have a meal in the church served by caterers - we are giving our congregational cooks a sabbatical! We have planned our 'Special Service' for the community at 4pm on Sunday 16 December. Please pray that many from the surrounding area will come to hear the message of salvation. Thank you for your prayers.

INVERNESS/DINGWALL

Our congregation in Inverness worship on a hill and a good ministerial friend from abroad who has preached for us, has written this short poem:

Lord, Give Us This Mountain

Lord, give us this mountain; Lord, visit this place;

Put forth as a fountain, your mercy and grace.

Remove sin and darkness, Reveal Calvary's Face

Lord, give us this mountain; Lord, visit this place.

Lord, you own earth's fullness, You rule over all.

You restore to wholeness, all who on you call.

Lord, stir up our spirits to pray and believe.

This mountain is Yours, Lord; to give – and receive.

Lord, cast down the powers that hinder and spoil,

Send life-giving showers to soften the soil.

Lord, visit this town and, its foundations shake.

Lord, give us this mountain, for your great name's sake...

(Ed Hughes *For Kingsview*)

EDINBURGH

First of all, we want to say a very sincere thank you to all who remember us in their prayers.

Undoubtedly, there are many situations to pray about in your locality and in the wider world, therefore we are humbled and very grateful that people include us in their prayers. The work here needs all the prayers you can offer. We firmly believe, that it is because of people praying, that progress has been made during our three years here. We hope, the following

information, will encourage and help you to continue or begin praying, as you are led by the Holy Spirit, for this work.

Satan has plans for our work, as he has for every individual believer and their work, but God also has plans and God's plan will prevail. Pray against Satan, that we would be shielded from his attacks, that we would be quick to recognise his influence, that we would get strength in the face of temptation and would not give into a spirit of discouragement or despair - how dishonouring to our almighty God.

Pray that we would be open to what God would have us say and do, day by day, in both the short and long term. Pray that we would have a winsome, fearless, humble, loving, faithful, clear, instructive, honest, wise, fruitful and above all God honouring witness in our preaching, lifestyle and especially conversation. In our own strength this would be a non starter, but like every believer that ever was or will be, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. The Triune God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Give thanks for: Gracemount parish church, the minister (Rev Iain Penman) and the congregation who have given us much support; all who attend our service at 5.00pm on Sunday and our Bible study on Wednesday at 7.30pm; the Blythswood Care shop and the mutual help that comes through this; the materials donated to the shop from the community

sometimes (though by no means always) so much that it is sent to other shops. We would love to see another Blythswood shop in or around Edinburgh, with another team running it, and more volunteers here and in Glasgow.

The need for a Christian witness, in this particular part of Edinburgh, is every bit as great and in some ways greater than we thought. We trust that our witness, in all its weakness, is part of God's favour for this area. Not because we are anything much, but because we represent the most wonderful One known to men or angels, and most importantly, known to our omniscient God, namely, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Numbers on Sunday and Wednesday are still encouraging, although small. Last Sunday, numbers were particularly low, but we were encouraged by the exceptional quality of the answers given by some of the children who were there. Apart from anything else, these occasional dips in numbers, which are a pattern in almost every congregation, should help to keep us from becoming complacent and challenge us to keep reaching out with the gospel in a prayerful spirit. However, the whole situation is ahead of what we had tried to realistically visualise in our mind, as we thought into the future three years ago.

Only God can further establish the work of our hands. Pray that, in his abundant grace, He would. Pray that we would see very

many souls saved and each believer growing, and all to God's glory.

Pray for Morag's health as her Polymyalgia and her bursitis continue. She has, by God's grace, amazing strength and cheerfulness in the face of such constant pain. My ministry, such as it is, is very much a team ministry with Morag. Just as many other ministers acknowledge that their wife is a huge support, I gladly acknowledge what a great source of strength, encouragement, inspiration and practical wisdom she has been and is. We give the glory to God.

Alana our daughter and her husband Martin, along with Jordan now eight years old and Ellie six years old have just been here for the weekend, bringing the very sweet pleasures that family and grandchildren can provide.

Jonathan, our older son, still suffers very severe pain from the industrial injury to his wrist which occurred over two years ago. This has resulted in his having to leave his trade as a cabinet maker and he is now into his second year as a full time student.

Graeme our second son has taken time out from studying, to work in a hotel. He enjoys this work but we don't think he has really found his niche, we trust that time will tell.

Nicola, our second daughter, continues along the road to nursing.

Melissa, our third daughter, is on her 6th year at school and hopes to gain entry to fashion, design and perhaps business studies.

When Alana was a baby, an old and late friend, who had professed Christ for many years, said, you are not a family until you laugh and cry together. Like families everywhere that has been our experience, and we give praise and thanks to God.

Our most recent encouraging development was that, Andy Chittock a youth worker in the neighbouring Liberton parish and his young wife Nyree said, they had a burden for our area and would like to do an outreach for children. So after some prayer and planning we had the first meeting of "Transformers" in the shop on Friday 9th November from 2.00pm-2.50pm for primaries 1-3, then from 3.00pm-3.50pm for primaries 4-7.

Seven children came, which was encouraging for a first meeting. A number of children, despite having leaflets distributed through the school mistook the time and arrived long after the event. We hope and pray that we will see them the next time. The children were very well behaved and there were a good number of helpers. They were taught about Daniel and how great and powerful God is and that He is well able to protect each one of us. This is to be a monthly meeting and our next meeting DV is planned for 14th December.

Pray for Eddie and Vilma Brito, missionaries in Mozambique and Malawi, and the very vulnerable children there.

May we all be helped by each others prayers. J.R. □

From the Moderator's Desk

Behold the Lamb of God

Mr Kenneth MacLean, Gairloch

AS THE END OF another year approaches our post-modern materialistic society is caught up in the frenzy of consumerism that is called Christmas. It is perhaps an appropriate time for us to be still and to reflect on the wonder of the Incarnation.

Two baby boys, born six months apart, whose anticipated births were a surprise to both sets of parents, were a fulfilment of prophecies given for generations. The voice of a prophet had not been heard for over four hundred years, and perhaps many had forgotten the promise and no longer looked for the Messiah.

But God's time had come and one of these boys, John the Baptist, is mentioned specifically in prophecy in the last book of the Old Testament, in Malachi chapter 3, where he is referred to as "*My messenger*". He could be regarded as an Old Testament prophet in the New Testament. Some consider him to be one of the most important people in the New Testament; where his name is mentioned about ninety times. He came to prepare the way for the One whose birth brought good tidings of great joy to all people.

John had the great privilege of introducing Jesus to the nation of Israel, but he also had the difficult task of preparing them to receive the Messiah. In chapters 3 of both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels we read about John's mission, urging his hearers to repent of their sins - and the great focus is on genuine repentance, not merely regret or remorse - and charging them to prove that their repentance was real, by being baptised and living holy lives.

People from all walks of life were drawn to hear John preach, including "publicans and sinners" who came in sincere humility. He had a problem, however, with the religious leaders of his day, who refused to repent and thought that they were good enough to please God.

We too can be in danger of thinking that because we attend church and are morally upright, we do not need to repent and seek the Saviour. John used very strong language calling them a "*brood of vipers*" - a term which Jesus Himself would also use. Like Israel, our nation has sinned against God, and needs to hear a strong voice from the church of the necessity of

repentance and returning to God. John's great message must be proclaimed: "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" The words used by John the Baptist, *the Lamb*, is significant and meaningful: the Saviour had to become the sacrifice. It is thought that John was preaching around the time of the Passover and so the people were very familiar with the sacrificial lamb. But this was something else: the spotless, sinless, Lamb of God, who would be a once-and-for-all sacrifice to take away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist also teaches us a lesson in humility, frankness and honesty. His honest and open answer, when asked if he was the One they were waiting for, the promised Messiah, was: "*I am not the Christ*". A preacher once called John the Baptist "*Mr Nobody*" - he made no great claims for himself, yet Jesus said there was no-one greater than him. John had nothing to say about himself, because he was sent to tell about Jesus, the One whose sandals/shoes he felt unworthy to untie.

John was the messenger, called to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. As another said "I am just a nobody telling everybody about Somebody who can save anybody". We, too, must not exalt ourselves but point our needy family, friends and neighbours to the exalted Saviour.

And that is how Andrew, one of the first disciples, went to tell his brother, Simon Peter, this great

news: "*We have found the Messiah, the Christ,*" and brought his brother to Jesus, the Saviour, the only Saviour.

We cannot rightly worship the Messiah, the babe born in a stable, the Saviour, without pondering why it was He came into the world - "*For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord*". The Saviour brings salvation, a salvation about which we read in Acts 4:12 that it is to be found in "*no other*"; it is a salvation that is unique, in that it is sure, it is secure and it will endure.

The Bible proclaims it as a present tense reality in Romans 8: 1: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...*" and in Hebrews 6:19 "*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast.....*". It is sure because the Lamb of God, sacrificed on the cross, became, through the shedding of His blood, the propitiation for the sin of all those who trust in Him - by this great sacrifice, the wrath of God against sin was appeased; God turned away His wrath.

This salvation is secure on the basis of Jesus' own words: "*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand*". A double assurance of our everlasting and enduring security in Christ when we

unreservedly put our trust in Him! At this time of year, we give and receive gifts. But we are reminded that *“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* God offers us this great, unique and incomparable gift - the Messiah - and through Him and from Him we are offered eternal life or everlasting life: something that will endure. This is a gift that we cannot do without.

There is a sentiment in Colossians 1:18 which seems so significant in the attitude of John the Baptist - *“that in all things he may have the pre-eminence”* This was the messenger’s one desire as he drew attention to the Messiah. And should this not be our desire as we consider the babe in Bethlehem, His life and example, His sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God, and

His resurrection?

How can we give Him the pre-eminence? By responding to John’s encouragement to repent and believe in Him, and to *“Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* If we do this for the first time as a New Year approaches, this will be a time that we will never forget. And if we have already looked to Him and trusted Him by grace through faith, why not reflect again on what He has done, and then praise His name all the more? No-one is too young, too old, too bad, or too good to seek Him or to find Him.

May we all listen to the messenger and look in faith to the Messiah and receive God’s unspeakable gift. Then this would surely be a blessed time for us! □

Fearing People v. Fearing God

PROVERBS 29:25 SAYS, *“The fear of man brings a snare, but He who trusts in the Lord will be exalted.”* **Fearing** man ultimately leads to **pleasing** people - and that indeed is a trap. People-pleasers find themselves more and more concerned about what others around them think, because they erroneously believe that their personal worth and happiness are dependent upon the acceptance or approval of others. Paul wrote *“Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ”* [Gal 1:10]. When we make it our goal to keep people happy, we end up becoming enslaved to them, and we remove ourselves from the safety and security of serving Christ alone.

Ultimately, we must all make the choice: Will I fear people and thus try to please them, or will I (stand in awe of) God and seek to please him? If we choose to be people-pleasers, we will inevitably displease God. If we seek to please God, we will not please **all** people, but we **will** please the right ones. Fear weakens us, it causes us to be self-centred. The fear of God is the fear that dispels all other fears.

‘Breaking the Bondage of Legalism’, Harvest House, ISBN 0-7369-1181-2

Marks of a True Church

By Jamie Gunn

IT HAS BEEN commonly accepted since the Reformation and by virtually all Reformed denominations that there are three fundamental and necessary qualities or characteristics of a doctrinally true church.

These are: 1.) Biblical, expository preaching and gospel proclamation, 2.) Proper administration of the sacraments and 3.) Church discipline. Some have proposed others in addition to these three. For instance, JM Boice argues that there are six marks of a true church.

My own feeling is that there should be, in addition to the three already mentioned, a fourth: **love**.

Now, before going any further, I'd like to say that I'm using this word love just because of its vagueness and lack of precision. It can stand well in the place of many other words which, in the Greek, have more particular meanings. In an earlier article, I argued for the use of the word "charity" rather than love because it was more precise and in the particular context was the better word as I was comparing it to what in the Greek is the word *agapao* or *agape*.

Agape is a fairly precise word as it is used in Scripture. For instance, it is defined very well by Paul in 1 Cor 13 in its general sense.

It is the word most often used by Christ. The English word love, on the other hand can mean very many things, depending on context. It is more fluid and free than other words. This is what makes it the very best of all words in the right context, but the very worst of words in the wrong context. The various Greek words—such as *agape*, *phileo*, *eros* and the like—have particular shades of meaning that a single English word does not capture.

But this is exactly why I like the word love. It is because it is imprecise that it can be used to translate these other Greek words in a variety of circumstances and contexts without doing harm. Now with all these words, it might seem to be the case that there are as many different kinds of love. And in a sense, there are. There are, legitimately, at least two, possibly three, kinds of Christian love, depending on the setting or circumstances in which the love is expressed or described.

One kind of Christian love is between the Christian and God; a second, between one Christian and another; a third, between a Christian and the non-Christian. Nevertheless, all three forms of love are nothing more than particular expressions of one underlying reality.

The foregoing is only just by

way of introduction to my main point, which is that the quality of love (in its three forms of expression) must be considered as a fundamental and necessary mark of a true Christian church and if it is lacking or absent in even one of its expressions, the purity and truthfulness of the church must be called into question.

Having said that, I acknowledge that the expression of love toward God is rarely lacking in the true church; if it is, we are not dealing with a church at all but rather some other kind of institution. Rather, it has been my experience that while love for God is typically evident, love in its other expressions is not always so.

My belief is that love in all three of its expressions must be in evidence if a church is to be considered Biblically true, *“anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother”* [1 John 3:10]; *“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* [1 John 4:8]; *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen”* [1 John 4:20].

There is no want of verses to validate my point, especially as it pertains to love for the brethren. One particular verse that I use as a proof-text is Rom 12:10, *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another”* [KJV]

In this verse, spoken to and about members of the Church, Paul uses two phrases to describe what he has in mind by the attitudes we should express toward one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The first is “kindly affectioned” (devoted, NASB, NIV) and the second, “brotherly love” (in all translations).

The English “kindly affectioned” and “devoted” are used to translate the Greek word *philostorgos* and which essentially describes the love parents have toward their children. What kind of love is that? It is tender, protective, and affectionate.

The other phrase “brotherly love” is the translation of the word “*philadelphia*” and which means the love brothers and sisters have for one another. But how should brothers and sisters love one another? Should their love not also be tender, protective and affectionate? This verse makes it evident that it should, for we express our kindly affection through our brotherly love. So we have here an admonition to be tender, affectionate and protective to one another.

And are these not emotional qualities? Of course they are! Therefore, Christians in both their practice as well as their doctrine should not be afraid to be emotionally affectionate to their brothers and sisters in the faith. It has nothing whatever to do with one’s ethnic or cultural upbringing or milieu. It has nothing whatever to do with one’s heredity or whether

you were abused as an impressionable child. It has simply to do with the quality of being a faithful and true Christian. Being kindly affectioned toward one another is fundamentally Christian.

As I mentioned there is no want of other verses which support my view. For instance, Peter says “*fervently love one another from the heart*” [1 Peter 1:22]; “*love the brotherhood*” [1 Peter 2:17]; “*keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins*” [1 Peter 4:8]; “*Greet one another with a kiss of love*” [1 Peter 5:14].

John says: “*For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*” [1 John 3:11]; “*...we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death*” [1 John 3:14]; “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” [1 John 4:11]. The best example from Paul is of course from the “love” chapter 1 Cor 13:1-8,13. These references all point to the necessity of loving our brothers and sisters as a condition of being truly Christian.

But of course our love cannot be limited to merely loving our brothers and sisters, for Christ has said to each and every one of us, “*For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*” [Matt 5:46]. No, our love must extend beyond ourselves and the brethren; it must go out into the

entire world beginning with our neighbour, “*And He said to him, ‘You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.* On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” [Matt 22:37-40].

And of course we know that by the term “neighbour” Christ did not mean our covenant brothers and sisters alone, but everyone in need whom we are in a position to help [Luke 10:25-37].

Nor is even this enough; we are to love even those we find unlovable. We are to love even our enemies, those who would seek to do us harm, “*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*” [Matt 5:44-45].

Finally, Christ expects us to complete or fulfill our love for others, to leave nothing undone in this regard, for immediately after saying we are to love our enemies, He goes on to say that we “*are to be perfect (or complete) even as our heavenly Father is perfect*” [Matt 5:48]. But perfect or complete in what? Why, our love of course!

And if we are to be complete in our love, how can we then withhold it from one another. We must be courageous in our love [1 John 4:18] if we are to be complete or perfect in it. If we have not love,

we cannot take any comfort in our salvation. Nor can we fall back on a dependency on the Law, for love is the fulfillment of the Law.

Let us therefore love one another. Let our love be warm, affectionate tender and sincere, *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good”* [Rom 12:9]. Let our love be fervent for one another.

Given all this, it only stands

to reason that love must be one of the marks of a true church and without love not only is our faith empty but we show by this that we are not God's children.

So whatever power to love is bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit, let us treasure it and nurture it and let us do whatever we may to express it fearlessly and without shame so that others, seeing our love may say, “Truly, this one is a child of God.” □

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