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Mr D M Fraser,
Publications Treasurer,
'Stratharris',
Daviot, by Inverness, IV2 5XQ
Telephone 01463-772253
Email:
donald@stratharris.freeserve.co.uk

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Postcode.....……....

Tel No.....…….....

Email…….

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Editor:
Revd Donald C Macaskill
238 Arbroath Road, Dundee DD4 7SB
Tel 01382 451798
macaskilldonald@googlemail.com

EDITORIAL

Being Born Again

JESUS SAID *"You **must** be born again"* [John 3:7]. He said it to an Israelite who had been taught to believe in God and was a member of the Sanhedrin, *"a ruler of the Jews"* - Nicodemus by name.

Nicodemus had a lot of knowledge about God and the Holy Scriptures (such as was written and known at that time). He believed Jesus was sent from God and that God was with Him. He had a certain amount of convictions, He believed Jesus was a *"teacher come from God"* and had a general faith in God. But he was not *"born again"*!

What is it to be born again? It is coming to faith in Jesus Christ as the promised Saviour of the world. It is having our understanding enlightened in regard to spiritual realities. It is putting our trust in God and in His Word. It is believing everything Scripture says.

Only God can bring us to this point. No amount of teaching can enlighten a soul in spiritual things. Only the Holy Spirit can change a person so that he believes in his heart what the Scriptures say. Being born again is the secret and mysterious work of God; the Holy Spirit blessing the Word to the soul. As Peter says we are born again *"through the living and abiding **Word** of God"* [1 Pet 1:23].

Nicodemus believed in an intellectual way, was 'exercised' in his mind about Jesus and came looking for greater understanding, wanting to know more. We believe Nicodemus ultimately found the Lord, and followed Him. His life afterwards confirmed this. He stood up for Jesus in the Sanhedrin [John 7:50], and he anointed Jesus' body after the crucifixion [John 19:39]. We are not told of any more personal experiences Nicodemus may have had.

Being born again can happen in many different ways. It can be very sudden and dramatic as was the Apostle Paul and the Philippian jailor's conversion. It can be very clear-cut in regard to time and experience. But all conversions are not as clear and precise as the Apostle Paul's or the jailor's.

Writing many years later, the Apostle John wrote about the common belief of many Jews regarding Jesus, saying *"many believed on His name when they saw the signs that He was doing"* [John 2:23].

John was here describing a belief among the Jews, which was

not saving faith - but it could, and in Nicodemus' case, it did, lead on to saving faith. John was **contrasting** the faith of many Jews with the faith he was now to write about regarding Nicodemus.

It would seem Nicodemus' came to saving faith gradually and undramatically. Most people brought up with teaching from the Bible are brought to saving faith in this way - ie, **slowly** and by **degrees** - even perhaps without themselves being able to specify the time or place when they precisely passed from death to life.

It would also seem that many of the disciples came to faith slowly, as there is no record of any dramatic conversion but a slow dawning of light as they listened to Jesus.

We believe that many of them were taught from early infancy about the Lord. They were children who were blessed with parents who passed on the promises which God made about the seed of the righteous. They were instructed in the way of the Lord and were told that their God was the only living and true God.

Nicodemus is an example of a child who held on to what he was taught and continued in hope. In God's grace and mercy, the time came when he fully believed. If Nicodemus had not continued to believe in God and to seek spiritual and saving understanding, he would not have been blessed with salvation. In time, God's Spirit worked on his mind and heart, so that he came to true and saving faith. What an encouragement to all who have been brought up in the teaching of the word of God.

God has made a wonderful promise to His people *"The Lord your God will circumcise your heart* ***and*** *the heart of your* ***offspring****, so that you will* ***love*** *the Lord your God with all your* ***heart****"* [Deu 30:6]. But if people reject such teaching and turn away from the Lord, that promise will not be fulfilled. The promise does **not preclude** people abandoning the godly upbringing of parents.

Simple childlike faith requires constant nourishment and instruction in the Truth. At least four times in Deuteronomy, God told the Israelites, to *"**learn** to fear"* the Lord [Deu 4:10, 14:23, 17:19, 31:13]. Learning to fear God includes learning to love Him. The more we know about God, the more we will love Him.

Whether we are born again in a gradual or sudden way, it is all the work of God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit works secretly and it can only be discerned by the **fruit**. As Jesus said to Nicodemus *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.* ***So it is*** *with everyone who is born of the Spirit"* [John 3:8]. There are no preconditions. We cannot earn salvation - it is entirely, fully and freely, of 100% free grace. ❐

sight- 'justified'.

Justification is an act of free grace. There are no strings attached. Justification cannot be earned because we could never be able to do enough to merit it. This is because as sinful creatures we are so unrighteous that all our righteous acts are as filthy rags before God. We can never earn forgiveness and the right of justification; it is an act of free grace accomplished at Calvary, not something that is our due.

The forgiveness of sin comes through believing in Jesus as the Author of our faith and also as the Just and the Justifier of those who trust in Him. Not only has God a part in justification, but we as his people must do our part.

Once God imputes to us Christ's righteousness, we must receive, believe, embrace and trust in Christ's justifying work. Faith is the sinner's receiving hand. But we cannot do this on our own – faith itself is a **gift** of God.

We are only able to accept it because God graciously gives us the gift of faith in our hearts to be justified. True faith is the required link for God's people to have the forgiveness of sins, but we must accept it by grace through faith and this is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God.

So what is justification? It is an act of free grace by the Father through the Son whereby God the Father imputes Christ's righteousness to us and we receive it with open arms through the gift of faith.

Justification consists of the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of the right to eternal life. Finally, it is a legal standing in Christ, declaring a person to be 'just as if they had never sinned'. The result of the justification process is so wonderful that it is almost past conception!! ❐

Justification/Forgiveness/Pardon

"Forgiveness only deals with a man's acts, justification with the man himself. Forgiveness respects the claims of mercy, justification, those of justice. Pardon only remits the curse due unto sin; in addition justification confers a title to heaven...Pardon is the remission of punishment, justification is the declaration that that no ground for the infliction of punishment exists. Forgiveness may be repeated unto seventy times seven, justification is once for all....Just as 'condemnation' is not the execution of punishment, but rather the formal declaration that the accused is guilty and worthy of punishment; so 'justification' is not merely the remission of punishment but the judicial announcement that punishment cannot be justly inflicted..."

A W Pink in 'The Doctrines of Election & Justification'

Justification

This article was written by Grace McFarlane, the 13 year old daughter of Revd D Ross McFarlane, Conon Bridge

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION? This is a question that many people have posed when seeking the truth. Many think that justification is only a motive or circumstance that justifies an action or outlook. Others view it as merely an adjustment of the lengths of spaces between and within words in text in order to make both left and right margins align.

Actually 'justification' has an extremely magnificent meaning that comes from biblical theology and it has a wonderful result that is almost beyond comprehension.

There are two main components to justification. These are the forgiveness of sin and the right to eternal life. We were included in Adam's sin because as his children, we have inherited both it and the guilt that comes from that original sin. At Christ's death on the cross, our sin is forgiven and because of his work of regeneration we are incorporated into Christ's righteousness, free from guilt.

He is our substitute, taking our place and bearing our punishment. We change states from being guilty to being innocent in God's sight. The right to eternal life is then given to us and we are adopted as His children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The gate of Hell is closed and communion with God is restored and we are his forever.

These two parts to justification are basically summed up in one sentence: If we believe that Jesus died for us we will be made one with the Father and it will be just as if we never sinned. These two main parts to justification: forgiveness of sin and right to eternal life are the first things we need to know about justification.

Justification is imputed to us by God's gracious work of regeneration. This means that He justifies us by renewing us - making us new people. We are spiritually dead and we cannot help ourselves. God makes us alive in Christ by implanting spiritual life within us and then freely clothing us in Christ's righteousness. This righteousness comes from Christ's perfect obedience - both His active obedience and passive obedience to the Law. At the moment of regeneration God the Father lawfully declares us clean in His

The Dangers of Virtual Church

THERE IS A REAL danger that congregations will lose more and more people to the new medium of our age, 'the internet', providing an online church or virtual church.

Already the God Channel on television, has drawn many hearers and even strong Christians, away from the gathered church to their firesides watching and hearing sermons on screen at home.

But now, with many people desiring more participation in worship, there is a real danger that a virtual church will emerge, with bloggers encouraging interaction and even seeking somehow to have the Lord's Supper online!

Watching the God Channel is no replacement for worshipping God together with His people. It is fine as an 'extra' to the weekly services, but it cannot take the place of true worship. To try and replicate the Lord's Supper online is to defeat the very purpose of its institution.

The weekly meeting of the church is special to God. It was His idea to have a place where He could meet with His people. God promised His covenant people that if they built a sanctuary for Him, it was to be a place where He would meet with them, speak with them and bless them. The Tent of Meeting was that special place where *"the Bread of His Presence"* was. *"And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may **dwell** in their midst...and there I will **meet** with you,...and I will **speak** with you...and I will be your **God**"* [Ex 25-30].

God desires to come among His people and has promised to meet with them when they **assemble together** to worship Him and to hear what He has to say to them. His presence is there in a special way. That is why we are warned not to forsake the *"assembling of ourselves together"* [Heb 10:25].

God truly wants a 'face to face' meeting with us - that is why He sent His own Son to come and meet us in **human flesh**. Jacob met God at Peniel *"face to face"* [Gen 32:30]. God met Moses *"face to face"* at Horeb [Ex 33:11]. It was on earth, and not in cyberspace, that God sent His Son to speak with us to bless us, and to die for us. The Cross of Christ was real - the crucifixion could not take place in cyberspace!

True fellowship with eye-to-eye contact, cannot be enjoyed unless there is the personal physical meeting of one another. Church is a real worship. ❐

Our Spiritual Roots

THIS IS THE fifth article in a series of 'Our Spiritual Roots'. In this issue **Wayne Pearce** writes about the rediscovery of the gospel at the time of the Reformation.

Spiritual Roots (5)
The Reformation and the rediscovery of the gospel

2010 MARKS the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation. It is an event that ought to be remembered and commemorated by us with deep gratitude, joyous celebration and a renewed resolve to accentuate our Reformed roots.

Sadly however for many in our day, even among some who belong to Reformed churches, the word 'Reformed' itself carries a number of negative connotations. Lamentably instead of rejoicing in the appellation for some it has become an odious or pejorative term. Our history or heritage they believe is consequently best left uncelebrated and forgotten. Such people want to be seen as contemporary and relevant and equate the designation 'Reformed' with being antiquated and or an irrelevance.

This is both a tragedy and a travesty for it is predicated on an erroneous understanding of what the Reformation represented and ought to represent for us today. While anti-Reformed sentiment is widespread in the church and nation we ought to be doing all in our power to counter-act and dispel such thought and feeling. While such negative views are more often than not fuelled by ignorance and bad theology they are also however precipitated by the poor presentation and practice of some Reformed churches which appear to equate mere traditionalism with being Reformed - *"thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down"* [Mar 7:13].

Johannes Vos was surely correct when he wrote last century '...This process of Reformation must be continuous until the end of the world. At no point may the church stop and say, "I have arrived. Thus far but no further!" Only in heaven can the church triumphant say that. ...Not only is advance in study of the Scriptures required, beyond the landmarks of the past, but

minster Standards and is known for the manner in which it conducts its business without acrimony in the spirit of a large family. It has an active church planting programme and a significant commitment to world mission.

In 2007, Rev. David Court and I met with Dr. John Carson in St Andrews, Scotland to share our vision for a new presbytery of churches committed to reformed doctrine, cultural engagement, and radical church planting.

In Scotland, ten men with the same vision from three denominations formed an advisory committee called Reformission Scotland. Two of the committee are from the APC. We asked First Presbytery to help with this mission, and on September 24, 2009 our first church planter, Athole Rennie, was licensed to preach the Gospel. He was ordained in Scotland by a commission of First Presbytery on November 3. Athole will be working in the Leith area in the northern part of Edinburgh.

It is our prayer that this would be the first of five church plants in the next five years. Reformission Scotland will be responsible for seeking prospective church planters within Scotland, raising finance, strategic planning, and on the ground supervision. The new church plants will be part of First Presbytery, North Carolina until such time as a Scottish Presbytery can be formed. Pray that God will bless us as we work together for better days for the Gospel in Scotland. ❐

GRANTS for KESWICK!

GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE from the Campbell Trust to enable ministers and full-time Christian workers from Scotland to attend the Keswick Convention in 2010. 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 'Christ-Centred Renewal' and the dates are 17-23 and 24-30 July and 31 July - 6 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 registered members of the Convention on a previous occasion. There is no charge for actually attending the Convention

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

What is
Reformission Scotland?

by Ivor MacDonald, Chairman, Reformission Scotland

REFORMISSION SCOTLAND was born out of two convictions. Firstly, that modern day Scotland is a mission field. Secondly that the planting of new churches is the most effective means of evangelism given by Christ to His church.

Within the Church of Scotland the evangelical policy has for 50 years or so been one of "quiet infiltration" Notable ministries from the 1950s onwards led to a rebirth of interest in expository preaching. However, despite the fact that today there are now more evangelical ministries than before in Scotland, there are very few evangelical congregations. In addition, a willingness to embrace the notion of a "broad church" and make the necessary adjustments has greatly weakened evangelicalism.

The reality has been that instead of evangelicalism quietly infiltrating the national church (as had been hoped), evangelicalism has been infiltrated by Biblical liberals. In England a more radical strategy has been employed for some years. The reformed church is growing through the planting of new, missional churches committed to the doctrines of grace. Some of us longed to see that happen in Scotland, but we knew that it could not happen through our own denomination.

We started to think of a partner church to work with us. Working alongside another reformed church would provide a number of advantages including the doctrinal anchor and accountability needed.

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of the USA is in many ways a uniquely suitable partner. It traces its origins to two branches of the Scottish church - the Covenanters and the Associated Presbytery that was led out of the Church of Scotland by Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine. Many of the ARP churches were founded by Scots emigrants and Scotland supplied much of the ministry.

There is a clear affinity for Scotland today manifested in a lovely servant spirit in our work together. And of course one of the ARP's largest congregations, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia is now pastored by Dr Sinclair Ferguson. The denomination has a firm commitment to the West-

searching self-criticism on the part of the church is called for. The church's subordinate standards must always be subjected to examination and re-examination in the light of Scripture.

This is implied in our confession that only Scripture is infallible. If only Scripture is infallible, then everything else must be constantly tested and re-tested by Scripture. Not only the church's official standards, but its life, its programmes, its activities, its institutions, its publications, must be subjected to a searching self-criticism on the basis of Scripture...'

It is crucially important then that we understand that the reformers were contemporary and relevant without being innovators or pioneers. And so must we be. We are called to be disciples after all; followers of Jesus Christ. We are to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We need not be seeking after novelties that will appeal to an indifferent and narcissistic world.

Neither however are we to be the Reformed Amish stuck in a bygone era perpetuating past practices and preferences which have little or no sanction from the word of God. We need not look and sound as if we belonged to the distant past speaking in unintelligible and antiquated language which only confirms people's worst fears that we are an irrelevance.

Let us learn from the reformers while understanding that we live in the 21st century. They sought to reform the church and nation on the basis of the word of God. Their faith and practice was modelled in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and the example of His church in the New Testament scriptures. The way forward for them was to go back – back to the authoritative word and therefore their message was supremely relevant for it was founded and grounded in the living and abiding word which is solely contained in the sacred scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We are not to go back to 1560 or 1690 or 1843 or 1893 or some other landmark date in the history of the church in our nation, although we must learn from such. Instead we are to be constantly re-forming in light of the word of truth.

To be Reformed thus means to be biblical; to recognise and submit oneself to the supreme authority of God's word. Therein does man require knowledge of the one, true and living God and of himself; therein is the true and only way of salvation revealed; for therein do we discover the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and all else required in order for us to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Surely one of the greatest and most wonderful truths about the Reformation was the rediscovery of

the true gospel for the word in Scripture directs us to the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ and reveals Him as our Lord and Saviour; our Prophet, Priest and King.

For centuries the gospel had remained hid or obscured due to the traditions and novelties introduced by the Medieval Church. They acted like bleak black cloud blocking out the light of the Sun and the way of salvation. Something similar is happening in our own day. The Reformation however marked the rediscovery and recovery of Christ's gospel. The true gospel which declares that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. What greater need or relevance is there for the world today? We have the truth, we have received the call and commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. We are to go make disciples.

And yet today many people argue that being Reformed is inimical to the proclamation of the gospel; they would say that it is a hindrance to evangelism. This is quite simply erroneous. It was no hindrance to Luther, Calvin, Bucer, Wishart, Knox or countless others who have followed in their footsteps.

It was no hindrance to Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, George Whitefield, William Chalmers Burns, John MacDonald, Charles Spurgeon and many, many others. The problem is not with being Reformed for therein we possess the word of truth and the biblical gospel, the problem rather lies with US, in our apathy and loss of confidence in the truth.

We would do well to learn from our Reformed forebears whose ministry was altogether Christ-centred and Christ-focussed. Scotland's first Reformed martyr, Patrick Hamilton, went to the stake for his believe in the authority and sufficiency of the word of God which we possess in Holy Scripture and for the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ's gospel.

Permit me to conclude this brief article by citing an extract from Patrick's Places which was published after Hamilton's death. He wrote under the heading 'of the gospel':

Christ is the Saviour of the world.
Christ is our Saviour.
Christ died for us.
Christ died for our sins.
Christ offered himself for us.
Christ bore our sins upon his back.
Christ bought us with his blood.
Christ washed us with his blood.
Christ came in the world to save sinners.
Christ came in the world to take away our sins.
Christ was the price that was given for us and for our sins.
Christ was made debtor for our sins.
Christ hath paid our debt, for He died for us.
Christ hath made satisfaction for us and for our sins.
Christ is our righteousness.

And in 3 John 5 the apostle commends the church to which he is writing for showing hospitality to "the brothers, even though they are strangers to you."

Remember what Jesus says: *"I was a stranger and you took me in."* See also Hebrews 13:1-3: *"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."* The train of thought here is how we are to keep on loving one another as brothers, and sharing in the suffering of our fellow believers.

There are plenty biblical references to the poor to which relief and prison ministries can refer in support of their priorities. Matthew 25 is not one of them. Rather, it seems to me, there is a much more appropriate application.

For several years now churches around the world have joined together in the International Day of Prayer, held in November. This year it was on the 8th. It is to a day such as this, rather than relief ministries in general, that Matthew 25 applies.

We may not have as much opportunity to do the kind of things Jesus talks about as people did in the early church and still do in countries where the church is actively persecuted, but the least we can do is pray. How we seek to share the love of Christ with persecuted brothers and sisters in this as well as in other ways is evidence of how we have received Christ himself. ❐

The author is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

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to the poor and needy in general as his brothers, but twice in Matthew's Gospel, he refers to his disciples as "my brothers" [12:48-49; 28:10]. Note especially [12:50] where he says *"whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."* He also tells his disciples in [Matthew 23:8] that they are *"all brothers"*.

Notice further that in the parable *"all the nations"* are gathered before him [25:32]. Bandstra says, "This phrase suggests that the real point of the parable is about how the Gentile nations receive the disciples of Jesus as they go out into the world preaching the good news about the kingdom of God [24:14]. After the resurrection, the apostles are to make disciples of all nations [28:19]. What is assumed in the parable is that those good deeds are not general works of morality and care, but deeds of kindness shown to Jesus' disciples when they would arrive in town preaching the gospel. Sometimes hungry or thirsty, sometimes sick, alone, and unclothed, sometimes imprisoned for the sake of the gospel."

Back in chapter 10 of Matthew, Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the good news, heal the sick and cast out demons in his name [10:5-23]. Here they weren't to go to all the nations, not even the Samaritans, but this has to be understood in terms of the development of Jesus' ministry.

He came first to the Jews and when they rejected him, he later sent his disciples to all the nations. So Matthew 25 is looking forward to that later development, but it's still helpful to see how Jesus instructed his disciples when he first sent them out to witness to their fellow Jews.

The point of the Matthew 10 passage is that these brothers of Jesus were to be totally dependent on the hospitality of those to whom they were sent. Whether or not a particular individual, family or village took them in, fed and clothed them, visited them in prison, was an evidence of whether or not they had received the message these brothers of Jesus proclaimed.

In this context Jesus promises a reward to those who give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple [10:42]. Later in chapter 18:6, 10, 14, Jesus uses the phrase *"the little ones"* three times to indicate those who believed in him. He is not saying that all little children will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who are like little children [3], who have child-like faith in him. These are the 'little ones' he is speaking about.

All of this was before the gospel was sent to 'all nations', but if you read Paul's description of his experiences in 1 Cor 4:11 and 2 Cor 11:23-29, you'll notice they're remarkably similar to what Jesus describes in chapter 10 of Matthew.

Christ is our wisdom.
Christ is our sanctification.
Christ is our redemption.
Christ is our satisfaction.
Christ is our peace.
Christ is our goodness.
Christ hath pacified the Father of Heaven.
Christ is ours, and all His.
Christ hath delivered us from the law, from the devil, and hell. The Father of Heaven hath forgiven us for Christ's sake.'

Let us then resolve to recover our confidence in the word of the living God and in the power of Christ's gospel. This is surely what the Reformation has to teach us. Far from being an irrelevance it is the greatest need of our day. Let us be Reformed and always reforming in light of the inspired and infallible word of God. ❐

HOPE for the FUTURE

DAVID WAS NOT A BELIEVER in the theory that the world would grow worse and worse, and that the dispensation would wind up with general darkness and idolatry. Earth's sun is to go down amid tenfold night if some of our prophetic brethren are to be believed. Not so do we expect, but we look for a day when the dwellers in all lands shall learn righteousness, shall trust in the Saviour, shall worship thee alone, O God, 'and shall glorify thy name.' The modern notion has greatly dampened the zeal of the church for missions, and the sooner it is shown to be unscriptural the better for the cause of God. It neither consorts with prophecy, honours God, nor inspires the church with ardour.. Far hence may it be driven.

C H Spurgeon on Psal 86:9 "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before the, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name'

'OH, WHAT PROMISES ARE ours, if we had only faith to grasp them! What a promise is that in the great commission - Go and do so, and lo I am with you, even to the end of the world! We go forth amongst the hundreds of millions of the nations, we find gigantic systems of idolatry and superstition consolidated for 3,000 years, heaped up and multiplied for ages upon ages, until they tower as high mountains, mightier than the Himalaya...but what does faith say? Believe and it shall be. And if any Church on earth can realize that faith, to that Church will the honour belong of evangelizing the nations, and bringing down the mountains.

Rev Dr Alexander Duff on Foreign Missions and America

What God Has Done for His People

by Archie McPhail

PITH SAYINGS ARE popular. They often express something important. They can be persuasive, and influence the way people think. They also help us to remember things.

The early church seems to have had some important sayings. The Apostle Paul mentions five of them in his letters to Timothy and Titus. He calls them "faithful", or "trustworthy". Some are short, e.g., *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* Others are longer, the sort of thing a child might be asked to memorise. One of them is this (taken from Titus chapter 3): *"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* ***The saying is trustworthy****, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people."*

That's a lot for just three sentences. So lets break it up. The main thing is the statement, *"He saved us."* Then Paul refers to the reason he saved us, the method he used, the basis for what he did, his purpose, and what all that implies for how we should live.

The fact

Paul is speaking to Christians here. He would never say that to someone who did not believe in Christ. The idea that everyone is going to heaven is a myth.

Believers in Christ need to remember the difference between what God did **for** us, and what he has done **to** us. Christ died for our sins. That was before we were born. But what he does to us is something in our lifetime. When Paul says, *"He saved us"*, he is speaking about something in our life.

These Brothers and Sisters of Mine

by J Cameron Fraser

WHEN BARAK OBAMA was still president-elect of the United States, a Newsweek article on his faith referred to the importance of Matthew 25 for Christian social action. The Last Judgment, as described in the parable of the sheep and the goats told there, seems to be based on whether or not we feed, clothe and visit Christ in prison as he appears to us in the form of the world's poor.

This passage is often quoted by relief and prison ministries, and it has provided the title of at least two books called The Least of These, one dealing with the world refugee crisis, the other with abortion, arguing that the unborn are the least or the smallest and most vulnerable of Christ's brothers.

Mother Theresa used to say that she saw Jesus in the faces of Hindus and Muslims as well as Christians with whom she worked. She said when she received the Nobel Peace Prize that her aim was not to make people better Christians, but better Hindus or Muslims or whatever.

Tony Campolo, a popular evangelical speaker in the United States, tells about a time when he was visiting a very poor country in Latin America and a woman came up to him asking him to adopt her baby whom she was unable to feed. Campolo told her repeatedly that he couldn't do that and as he was leaving in a helicopter, this woman ran alongside holding out her baby for him to take. As the helicopter took off, Campolo says he realized who that baby was. It was Jesus.

Well, it's a heart-wrenching story and perhaps Tony Compolo should have offered to take the baby, but was this baby really Jesus in disguise? Is that what Jesus intended us to understand by this parable of the Last Judgment? I don't think so.

While others have made the same point, I found help some time ago from an article by Dr. Andrew Bandstra, formerly Professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary. It appeared in the November 14, 1983 issue of the Banner (denominational magazine of the Christian Reformed Church). Bandstra makes the point that nowhere else does Jesus refer

Join the Choir?

Do you enjoy praising the Lord in the singing of Metrical Psalms? If so, **Highland Harmony Singers** would welcome you into its membership. This is an opportunity to join with others in singing Psalms, unaccompanied, in four-part harmony.

Now is a good time to come along, as a new programme of Psalms has just been started in preparation for Highland Harmony Singers' Tenth Anniversary Festival of Psalmody to be held in Inverness on 4 September 2010, God willing.

Practices take place on the last Saturday of each month (except December) at 3.00pm in North Kessock Free Church (kindly granted). These take place in a relaxed atmosphere and they also give the opportunity to enjoy wonderful fellowship. You will get a very warm welcome!

Currently folk travel from Ellon, Fort William, Wick, Skye and most places in between. It's only once each month!

Further information is available from:
Kathleen Nicolson on
01463-798938
e-mail:kathleen.36@btinternet.com

or Kenny MacLean on
01445-712050
e-mail: kendunedin@aol.com ❐

First Minister & Churches

On Wed 4 November 09, First Minister Alex Salmond met with senior figures from 12 Scottish Churches to discuss some common concerns around Social Cohesion and End of Life issues.

The conversation was open and cordial, while addressing difficult issues and sharing examples of good practice from across the country.

This annual meeting illustrates the increasingly active engagement between Churches and Civic Society in Scotland, both nationally and locally.

Rev Alexander Murray represented the APC. During a discussion on End of Life issues he referred to the death of Jesus, including the facts that he had 'chosen' the death of the cross, and that he had to obtain authority from the Father to offer up his life (John 10:17-18).

Part of the church's duty is to proclaim God's Word as it relates to important national issues. Other voices are insistent, and our civic leaders need to hear the voice of God as they make decisions that affect society. This meeting is one of many that have taken place over the years.

Pray that God would guide those who take part, and that his Word would have its desired effect. ❐

Changes have taken place. The relationship with God has changed. Instead of being hostile to him (and in danger of his punishment) the believer has become a child of God. No longer on the road to hell there is now the expectation of heaven. He describes what we used to be – "foolish, disobedient" etc. The believer's character and conduct is not all that it used to be, for the image of Christ is beginning to appear.

The change was God's doing, and it was a great act of mercy. *"He saved me."*

The reason

We make a huge mistake if we think we can earn his favour by doing good. Our best work is imperfect, it is erratic, and is no more than we ought to do. It is also a mistake to think it's all our doing – as if we could reform ourselves, or make ourselves his children. No.

He does not save us *"because of works done by us in righteousness"*. Instead, *"the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared."* It is *"according to his own mercy."*

He took pity on us. He saw us suffering from a spiritual disease – sin. He saw us accumulating punishments. And he took pity on us.

That led him to make his Son our Saviour and send him into the world to die for us. It led him to accept Jesus' offering. And it led him to apply the benefits of Jesus' obedience, and change our lives.

The method

How does God make someone a *"new creation in Christ Jesus"*? It is *"by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"*.

People talk about old urban areas being 'regenerated'. It means they are brought back to life again. That is how God saves us. No one can define life, but we usually know it when we see it. There is a new awareness of God. The person begins to love what is holy, and hate what is sinful. They have a longing for God they did not have before. There is an appreciation of Jesus Christ and what he did at Calvary for sinners. He becomes their only hope, and in gratitude they are eager to obey him.

This new life is the result of the Holy Spirit starting to work in their soul. When humanity fell into sin in Adam's day we lost the Spirit of God. In a sense, that is what distinguished us from animals – do you notice how atheists emphasise our similarity to animals, as if that is all it means to be human? But Jesus spoke about being *"born of the Spirit"*.

It is a *"washing"*. Newly alive to the things of God the person receives Jesus in his capacity as the Saviour. In that way they become 'clean' in God's eyes – their guilt is washed away. The new birth has a cleansing effect in other ways.

Conscience is no longer in denial. Mixed motives give way to sincere love of God. Liking for sin is replaced by loathing of sin.

The basis

People have asked, "How can a good God turn a blind eye to sin?" The answer is – he doesn't. He saves people on the basis of what Christ did for them.

God appointed him a representative, to act on behalf of others. He was so much one of them that he could also suffer on their behalf. Calvary was an act of human wickedness. Allowing it to happen was a judicial act on God's part. As Jesus said, "Now is the judgement of this world."

He *"bore our sins in his own body on the tree."* He offered himself to God for others, and God accepted that. God is not turning a blind eye to sin. Justice has been done. And God can freely forgive anyone who comes to him in Jesus' name. They are then *"justified by his grace"*.

The purpose

Since God's mercy is so great we must believe that he has a great purpose in mind. Our writer tells us it is that we *"might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life"*.

An heir is someone who will inherit what someone else possesses. The Spirit is telling us that if God has saved someone, that person will be blessed with all that God is. His wisdom, goodness, power, will be used on that person's behalf. And God is unlimited – there is no end to what they will receive. He is incomparably better than his gifts, and to know the love of God should be our great aim. *"No good thing will he withh*old from them that live uprightly" [Ps. 84:11].

It involves being a *"son of God"* [1 John 3:1]. It includes resurrection, and a place at the side of Christ [Rev 3:21].

The implications

If God has saved us, that should motivate us and constrain us to do good. *"I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works."* Doing good is more than not doing bad – a dead donkey doesn't do anything bad!

If God has saved us we should make it our aim in life to follow Jesus in cheerful faith and obedience to God, and to share his love for others. *"These things are excellent and profitable for people."* The spirit of a child of God should be the opposite of discontented, mean, quarrelsome, or selfish.

If our experience of God's grace does not impel us to do good, then we need to pray for the Spirit of Christ, and make these things a matter of conscience. ❐

strategic" (our words) work that they do. When we think about having a visiting speaker it can be a real concern as to how the children will behave, obviously some speakers might find it very distracting. Well that Lord's Day evening, the children excelled in good behaviour – to God be the glory. The six Gideons who came were a real blessing to adults and children. The speaker Geoff Mann and his wife Jane very generously presented each child with a New Testament. Quite "coincidentally" some children had asked for a bible that very morning.

Marion MacKrell, needs prayer as it is less than three months since Jimmy died. She is currently recovering from the shingles. Give thanks for: the adults and children who come regularly to the various church meetings, the customers, callers and volunteers who come around the shop, the hundreds of shoe boxes (what a practical witness) that arrived at the shop en route to Blythswood's Glasgow depot and then foreign fields, the never ending stream of donations for selling in the shop. Pray that we would yet see even greater works of God here. May you also enjoy the blessing of God where you live, work and worship.

It was very encouraging to read today, *"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time"* [Jonah 3:1]. The servant who so blatantly disobeyed, miserably failed, brought deep trouble on himself and on the ships crew. Then from the fishes belly Jonah promises to pay his vow to God, who miraculously saves him, and so very graciously commissions him a second time to go to Nineveh.

What an amazing God and Master to persevere with such a servant as Jonah and He is the same God still. So when you and I fail in doing what God has clearly prompted us to do, may we know the blessing of repentance and the word of God coming a second time or however many times it needs to come, until we go on in faith and obedience.

We have been blessed with another most gorgeous (as always an impartial verdict) grand daughter, "Sophie." After a very anxious pregnancy it was an especially glad and thankful time when she arrived. Mum, dad and family rejoice as does her only brother after the initial shock of a third sister.

It is always a great pleasure when old friends or acquaintances call at the house at 6 Frogston Grove, 0131 466 6247 or at the shop or services at 47 Southhouse Broadway, 0131 664 9353. If you can make it we will be delighted to see you. As ever, our very sincere appreciation to all who support and pray for the work here and those who remember our family in prayer. We are humbled and deeply indebted to you all. *JR.* ❐

for a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit in all the activities. We work, but we want God to work in us and through us.

Pray that for us, and whoever you are, pray that for your own congregation, because apart from such divine intervention, there is no life and no progress worthy of the name. We have God who is good and Saviour who is gracious.

Calum MacInnes

EDINBURGH

Many thanks for taking time to read this update. May God guide you in all your prayers.

What we pray for everyone who reads this is, that you would be able to say with the late Rhea Miller:

"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, ...

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,.....

I'd rather be true to His holy name,.....

He's all that my hungering spirit needs,.....

I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."

Two years have passed since we had our first Transformers Club and it is a real source of encouragement how it has carried on, grown in frequency, maintained very good numbers and has attracted helpers with a heart for reaching children with the gospel. At the most, 20% of the children in the area have come to one or more meetings, so there are a lot of children who have never come to even one meeting, and this should and does challenges us.

We had our second annual Holiday Club in October. Again, it was well led by Andy Chittock. A very good number of helpers came from various local congregations plus two faithful helpers from Germany! Teenagers and adults gelled very well together in working with the children. We think it has a very positive effect on the children that attend and is a good public witness of the churches interest in and care for the children. One girl excelled in good behaviour and in answering questions, she got an extra prize. Pray that these children would come to know Jesus as their best friend and most wonderful Saviour.

We have applied to the local community centre to have our various church activities in their premises, we would need to get it at very favourable rates (which is permissible) if it was not to be too costly. A number of people are praying about this, we hope that we will be pleasantly surprised by the eventual outcome. It would make running the shop much easier, provide an attractive place of worship, and it would give much needed time for "prayer and the word."

We had a memorable meeting on the 27th of September when the Gideons who were having a Bible Blitz in Edinburgh came to tell us about the "wonderful and

Points for Prayer

FREE SPEECH

DESPITE THE wonderful victory for free speech in the House of Lords on 11 November, there is still a great threat to free speech. Lord Waddington's 'free speech clause' ensured that opinions on religious ethics may be given without any threat of legal action in the UK. However, the European Union (EU) have issued an 'Equal Treatment' Directive which will overrule the UK's decision, should there be an appeal.

'Harassment' is vaguely defined in the EU's Directive. This will allow an individual to accuse someone of violating the law merely for expressing something the individual allegedly perceives to be offensive.If someone decides to perceive the Christian's expression as creating an offense, that individual can commence legal action. Do pray that free speech will be protected. For more information, telephone 020 7464 5427 or www.CCFON.org.

SHARI'A SANCTIONED

ISLAMIC LAW has been officially adopted inBritain, *The Times* reported in September. The government has quietly sanctioned power for judges of *shari'a* law to rule on cases ranging from financial disputes to domestic violence and divorce..Rulings of Muslim courts in London,Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester, with headquarters in Nuneaton, can be enforced by the county courts or the High Court. Further courts are planned for Scotland. Concerns have been expressed that there will be parallel legal systems.

Prayer Digest

DROP GOD?

THE FOREIGN OFFICE may tell two of Britain's overseas territories to cut references to Christianity from their constitutions, it was reported in October.

The elimination of Christianity from the documents is being urged by a committee of MPs that looks at foreign affairs issues. An updated constitution for the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean, finalised in February, states that the territory is a 'God-fearing country based on traditional Christian values, tolerant of other religions and beliefs'.

The territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha islands in the South Pacific has a constitution stating that the islands wish to respect 'Christian and family values.'

Christian Institute

Congregational News

DUNDEE

Starting on the practical front, we were very encouraged with the proceeds from our annual Charity Sale. The sale brought in over £1,250 - much more than we had anticipated. It will be a real help to us in the months ahead.

During the sale we met a lot of the public who live close by the church, and each person was given a bag with a leaflet and an invitation to church with the times of our services. We are most grateful to those in our congregation who gave up some of their time, and holidays to help with all the work that was required. May God reward you for your kindness to His Cause.

Mr Quinn has been in hospital for several weeks now, and is slowly recovering but still has a long way to go. He is so lovely in accepting so graciously whatever the Lord has in store for him. Please pray that he will be raised up again.

We have started our Christianity Explored Course and have found it very helpful. It has enabled us to discuss the important points of hearing the gospel and what we really believe.

At out Bible Studies we have looked at the subjects of The Last Judgment, The Trinity, and Angels. We are encouraged at our various times of fellowship in encouraging one another in the Lord.

We look forward to our congregational meal, which this year we hope to have in the Invercarse Hotel. We also look forward to the annual joint service with the DECA members (Dundee Evangelical Christian Alliance) and the Lord's Supper on the last service of the year on 27 December.

STORNOWAY

The congregation now have a weekly prayer meeting held in the traditional format plus a fortnightly Bible Study led by the elders.

A Ladies Group has commenced meeting when a speaker or a Mission Presentation is made. The winter programme is under way with 'Fellowships' twice a month and a Christianity Explored course has started as well as the Good News Club on Friday evenings. We are thankful that we have been able to continue this very popular outreach having had to find several new leaders. We are thankful to God for His provision.

During November we have a Communion and the Gideons hold their Annual Rally in the church. Along with the rest of the island we

hold a Thanksgiving Service on the last Thursday of the month.

We are very conscious that 'activity' is one thing, God's blessing is another. We need to humble ourselves before God to seek His blessing on all that we do.

HARRIS

Please pray for the Harris congregation as supply is increasingly difficult to find, as they try to come to terms with their disappointment in failing to get a minister.

INVERNESS/DINGWALL

What is a pastor expected to report on his work and the worship of God in the congregation where he has the care of souls? Perhaps I should reframe that question, and rather ask, What does the pastor expect to happen to himself and the people to whom he ministers the Gospel?

Of course, the expectation ought to rest on and spring from what God says in His Book. In our Inverness and Dingwall meetings we do what probably most Christians group do at theirs. We read the Bible, we pray, we sing praises, and on most occasions there will be preaching.

At some of these meetings, the preacher senses a touch of the hand of God as the Holy Spirit makes the word preached a sweet and heart-softening instrument. Sometimes, people will express appreciation, and for both of these we are thankful to the Lord.

But, as the minister, I ask myself the question– is that the 'sum and substance' of what is to happen, and I sometimes conclude that there is something not happening – at least not happening as is recorded about time of revival. With that I cannot settle with the 'status quo' – I yearn for the conviction of sinners and the evident new-found passion of saints. I long for a fresh sense of the power of God at work in my own heart and life.

Recently I told the congregation about what Charles H. Spurgeon said in one of his sermons. He was pleading with the people for the conversion of their lives to Christ, and proceeded to say that he had preached so often and seemed to have had not effect spiritually on them, so they were no changed by his preaching, and he was now urging them to *try praying* to see if that would bring about the necessary change in them.

I reflect on my years of preaching, and realise that the major defect among many others has been in the area of prayer. It was Robert M. McCheyne who said that 'what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more'.

We enjoy fellowship, we enjoy worshipping together, we enjoy Bible Studies and time of social mingling. For all of which, we thank the Lord, as for drinks of water in a dry wilderness – but how we long