

Extraordinary Mercy

THE LORD IS extraordinarily merciful. No one can forgive and forget our sins like the Lord. We read that "*The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty*" [Num 14:18]. It is because of Christ, who was guilty in the place of His people, that God can forgive and forget our sin.

One of the best examples of God forgiving a great sinner is in the life of Manasseh, King of Judah. When we read about the greatness of Manasseh's sin, we realise the greatness of God's forgiveness. Lets look first of all at the greatness of Manasseh's sins, which we find in 2 Chro 33:1-20.

First, he completely **reversed** all the spiritual good his godly father Hezekiah had done. Hezekiah made unprecedented reforms in the land. Hezekiah was one of the most godly kings to rule in Judah. Manasseh had a privileged upbringing in the things of God. He was truly a covenant child - but he **rejected** his father's principles and godliness.

It is one thing to be apathetic towards the faith of our parents, it is far worse to deliberately reject and repudiate their faith. Manasseh was only twelve when he began to reign. How much authority and power he

had at that age we do not know. Could he demand what he wanted for breakfast, never mind what he wanted politically? But sadly, one thing was sure - he did not want his father's God to rule his life.

When a child does something wrong or wicked for the first time, a parent will **explain** to him why it was wicked. The child sinned in ignorance. When the child does it the second time, the parent punishes him for he sinned against knowledge - he knew he was doing wrong. Manasseh knew he was doing wrong - his father had explained to him the laws of God and Manasseh reversed these laws. "*He rebuilt the high places (of false worship) which his father Hezekiah had demolished... He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them*" [3]. It was not a sin of ignorance but of disobedience.

Secondly, Manasseh committed **sacrilege**, sins against the sanctuary. "*He took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple*" [7]. That was most insulting to God. He sinned against 'holy things'. Even the wicked have a fear, albeit superstitious, of sinning against 'holy things' - but not Manasseh.

It was bad enough to make an idol in direct contradiction of God's

command, but to put it into God's temple was the highest form of provocation. It was adding insult to injury. He was doing his best to demonstrate his hatred of God.

Thirdly, Manasseh "**sacrificed his sons in the fire**" [6]. Can you think of anything more perverted than making someone else, someone you love, of your own flesh and blood, suffer for you - and the more they suffer, the more 'good' they were doing! Your own 'innocent' child!

You know unbelievers say that God is a 'hard' God, His laws are too demanding. The reality is, that the gods of this world's demands are **far harder** than God's demands! False gods are cruel. Satan is a hard master and deludes his people into believing horrendous things.

But you see, Manasseh wanted to be like the nations around him - they did it, so he wanted to be up there in the same league with them! There is no end to what some people will do in order to be accepted.

Fourthly, Manasseh committed one of the worst sins in the world - he **led others astray**. He was the means of others going on the wrong path and making them **worse** than they were before. "*Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites*" [9].

To sin for oneself is bad enough, but to make others sin, is worse. Leadership is a very responsible task "**be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater**

condemnation" [Jam 3:1]. Jesus made this point in the sermon on the mount "*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so*" [Mat 5:19] - emphasising the accountability of those who teach others.

To **use our position** of authority and influence to get others to sin is a grievous sin in the sight of God. King Manasseh had tremendous power and influence but he used it for wrong purposes. Parents and educationists as well as preachers have a great responsibility in what they pass on to their children, pupils and congregations.

The final sin of Manasseh that we look at is his **refusing the offers of mercy** which God gave him. "*They spoke to Manasseh and his people but they paid no attention*" [10]. Earlier in this book we read "*Although the Lord sent prophets to the people to bring them back to Him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen*" [24:19]. Jeremiah had the same problem "*From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention*" [Jer 7:25,26].

What hope would you give of a person like this finding mercy? Well, our great God delights in saving sinners like Manasseh. A time came when Manasseh sought the Lord. Yes, this evil Manasseh cried to God - and heard him and saved him! God was "**moved by his entreaty and**

listened to his plea" [13]. Isn't our God wonderful when He can be moved with **compassion** for such an evil person as Manasseh?

Manasseh though he was so evil, came to know the Lord as God "*Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God*" [13]. And it was not simply knowledge - his whole life changed! He destroyed the false idols he had made and erected. "*He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple as well as the altars he had built on the temple hill*"...*Then he restored the altar of the Lord...and told Judah to serve the Lord the God of Israel*" [15,16].

How did Manasseh convince his Cabinet members to reverse the work they had done over the years? It would not have been easy as we can be sure many of them were like-minded with Manasseh himself. Did they think he had gone mad? Did he have to sack any of them?

We are not told about the struggles he must have had in reversing his own evil laws, but obviously he was able to remove and restore according to God's commands. Here was a true work of grace. The radical change that took place in his life must have been a great testimony to the power of God.

Can we imagine Gordon Brown or Alex Salmond reversing all the evil laws which their past governments enacted over the past 10 years? It is not easy to imagine - but that is the result of unbelief in the power of God to change people. The radical change in Manasseh's life is testimony to what God can do

in any generation. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Israel's history is left in Holy Scripture as an example for **our encouragement**.

There is of course the matter of repentance. Manasseh had great conviction of sin and distress of soul. But "*in his distress he sought the favour of the Lord and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers*" [12].

Before an individual or a nation will find the mercy of God there needs to be a real repentance and change of heart. There certainly was this change in Manasseh, for no one could have made such a massive reversal of their past life unless the Lord was with them. It takes nothing less than the Almighty power of an Almighty God to change people in that way.

What wonderful hope this passage in God's Word gives us. Let us call on God, let us make use of all the means possible to reverse the downward spiral of moral and spiritual declension that has taken place in our nation over the past years.

Let the Church take a lead, just as Manasseh did, and instruct those under their authority to turn from the false gods of our day. There is much evidence that the ills of our day are indeed the fruit of our moral and spiritual decisions.

Special prayer times are important, but it is also vital that practical measures be taken to inform and correct our generation in the truth of God's Word. God's Word will endure. □

Is the Christian life a Fast or a Feast?

By Wayne Pearce

IS THE CHRISTIAN life a fast or a feast? Should it be characterised primarily by gladness or by sadness? While God's word tells us that there is "*a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance*" [Eccl.3:4], we are left in no doubt that the Christian life, generally speaking, should be characterised by joy and gladness not misery and sadness!

Please read Mark 2:18-22. Here the Lord Jesus is questioned as to why His disciples are not fasting. John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Why? Fasting is abstinence from food and is first and foremost an expression of sorrow; of deep grief and mourning over sin and its consequences.

The people of God during Old Testament times were commanded to fast on the Day of Atonement. This was the only day when fasting was mandatory. However, we also know from Scripture that fasts were regularly appointed and held individually and collectively during dark and degenerate times [cf. Neh.1:4, Dan.9:3, Joel 2:12-13]. Fasting was similarly practised by those who earnestly sought the Lord's will –

especially at the outset of a new ministry, and we have the examples Moses, Elijah, and the Lord Jesus Himself to testify to this. We read that in the early church "*when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed*" [Acts 14:23].

Fasting here was not so much concerned with sin but with seeking after God and His blessing. Not wanting to be distracted by meals and earthly concerns the brethren fasted. And their abstinence here is reflective of self-discipline.

Now why were the disciples of John fasting? Possibly they did so in emulation of John himself. His fasting was reflective of his ascetic lifestyle and message – urging men and women to repent. There is also a strong probability that his followers were fasting because John himself was incarcerated in a dark, dank prison cell and would soon be martyred for his faithfulness to God. It was hardly a time for joy and rejoicing!

The Pharisees by contrast fasted not only on the Day of Atonement and on the irregular

occasions when it was appropriate but instead they fasted twice a week as we learn from the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:10-14. The Pharisees had tragically gone beyond the teaching of Scripture - adding to God's word and consequently laying burdens on themselves and the people of God.

Fasting had become a prominent part of their religion. They wallowed in their austere and ascetic practices to be seen of men (cf. Matthew 6:16-18). They had become obsessed with outward forms, with rites and rituals of their own devising and these had become a substitute for the true faith [Mark 7:1-23]. Worst of all their regular fasting was born out of the false belief that they could earn God's approval by such religious practices.

The disciples of the Lord Jesus however were noticeably different from the Pharisees and so must we be. And it is Christ who points out the inappropriateness of his disciples fasting like John's disciples or the Pharisees by way of three illustrations. First of all He says: "*Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day*" [19-20].

Can you imagine being at a wedding and everyone sitting around weeping and mourning; refusing to eat and drink and join in the celebrations? Of course the Lord

Jesus was not saying that there would never be a time for fasting expressive of mourning. His disciples would soon experience this – when the Bridegroom was taken from them and crucified upon a cross. The Lord Jesus had spoken to them of this day and of how their sorrow would be but brief and be turned into joy [John 16:16-22].

We too must live in light of the resurrection and His promise that He will never forsake us. There are evidently times in our own lives when we have occasion to be sad and to mourn and grieve but these things do not characterise the Christian life per se which should be a feast not a perpetual funeral. "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* [Rom.14:17].

Secondly the Lord Jesus says: "*No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made*" [21]. The Son of God did not come to match or patch up the man-made doctrines and traditions like those of the Pharisees – for their doctrines and religious practices were like filthy and tattered rags compared to the New Covenant which Christ came to ratify and seal with His precious blood.

The Pharisees were foolishly seeking to merit salvation by achieving righteousness before God by their religion [Phil.3:8-11]. We must guard against following in their

footsteps – it is the way that leads to destruction! Moreover we must not think like the Pharisees that salvation is to be found in and through the Law – the Covenant of Works! Christ did not come to merely show us the way by example – He came to save us and restore us to fellowship with God. He alone transforms us from being paupers to becoming princes in and through Himself and we must think and act accordingly. Christ has set His people free and there must be no returning to a life of bondage which is by the Law! “*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*” [Gal.5:1]. We keep the moral law because we love Him and we understand that it is holy, just and good.

Thirdly and finally the Lord Jesus says: “*And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins – and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins*” [22]. New wine placed in old bottles, which in our Lord’s day were made of leather not glass, would have caused the skins to split and burst apart as the new wine fermented. New wine skins were necessary for they had the elasticity in them to expand and swell with the new wine.

The Lord is making clear that it is unfitting for the new superior wine of the gospel to be associated with and connected to the old beliefs and practices of the Pharisees – or even with John the

Baptist who was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets. For the Old was merely anticipatory of and pointed to the New. It pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ who came to give His people life, abundant life, spiritual life and eternal life.

Therefore let us heed the words of the apostle Paul who had himself once been a proud Pharisee. He says: “*Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – ‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’ (referring to things that all perish as they are used) – according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh*” [Col 2:18-23].

Let us understand that the Christian life is a feast not a fast! It is about gladness NOT sadness. We must live in the light of the Incarnation – of Immanuel, God with us; and of the Cross, God for us; and of Pentecost, God in us, the hope of glory. This is truly a cause for rejoicing! □

Are We Involved in a War?

THERE ARE MANY festering places in the world, and also many places where the festering has erupted into open conflict. There is conflict between and within nations. Those who do not generally want God involved in their lives are often ready to ask '*Where is God in all of this?*'

Even archbishops, let alone lesser mortals, will be in deep trouble if they suggest that God may be saying something to us. What have bombs in London and Glasgow, or heavy rain forcing people from their homes, got to do with God? If you were alive in Egypt when God sent Moses to lead the people out to serve him, you might have asked the same question. What have frogs and lice and dead fish got to do with God? For those of us who believe the Bible to be true, the answer is simple. God does speak to us, not only in the Bible, but also in the events of our lives. The problems arise over our interpretation of these things.

Behind that lies a greater issue. There is a war between what is good and what is evil. Evil has gained apace because the Christians have largely lost their sense of wonder at the work of God. Robert Capon has summed up the situation by saying that we are in a war between **dullness** and **astonishment**. The most critical issue facing Christians is not abortion, homosexuality or the atrocities of

terrorism, but the dullness that results from our having lost our sense of wonder. In the gospel stories of what Jesus did we often read that the people were amazed. When last were you amazed at the work of God? What John MacArthur called *The Gospel According To Jesus*, changed lives. It gave **new** life. Much of today's message is life-enhancing, We finish up with nice people, but not radicals. We produce Christians who are no longer a threat to the ungodly world, because they cannot turn it upside down. I think it was Robert Capon who said, "I want to be dangerous to a dull and boring religion."

I am reminded of the challenge thrown out by AW Tozer when he said that culture is putting out the light in our souls. He went on to state that sin is not merely our turning our backs on God but on life, and the greatest enemies to Christianity are the people who say that they believe in Jesus but are no longer astonished or amazed. The television programmes control our lives, and even our response to the gospel of Jesus. You need a new vision. Our God is so rich in his grace offered to us, that we can afford to dream big dreams. The real war in your life is about your dreams. Have one from God and let no one steal it from you. Your big war is then over what gets your attention when Jesus should have it.

Calum MacInnes

Letter from a Prisoner in Zambia

The editor has been communicating with this prisoner for some years. Below is part of a letter he received recently.

Dear Rev Donald,

Greetings my dear brother in the name of Him who has set us free from all our spiritual bondage and has given us liberty in Christ Jesus. How we praise God for such a liberation! For there is no bondage like bondage to Satan. There are no chains like those chains of sin. There are no prison walls like those walls that separate us from union and communion with Christ. But the Lord of glory has entered our prison cell, and like Peter in Acts 12, He has awakened us from our sleep of death, broken the chains from us. And opened the prison gates that we may walk in liberty before Him. I do pray that the God of all comfort is at work in your life encouraging and strengthening your faith in Christ Jesus. I pray that the God who caused the dead to rise to their feet may continue to cause you to stand before Him and before the brethren there testifying of His undeserved kindness to sinners like you and me.

Thank you so much for your healing letter to me. God has made it possible for you and me to see things as they really are. So many people in today's world live as if there was no God and as if they did not have to love and obey Him. That is why so many people are so sad and without hope. It is why they are angry and hateful - but thanks to God we have hope and joy.

I have come to see that this life is just a day and a night, whether we live a very long time or short time. Because compared to eternity even the longest life is so short. In fact, this life is just a time to get to know and love Jesus more, and once we have done that we have done the most important thing - the rest is not important.

There are only a few of us and our little group consists of seven inmates just here. We have called ourselves the 'Little Lifeboat' in a sea of heresy because most of this country is teaming with apostate churches together with lots of heathen idolatries.. But the Lord was good to bring us together...If it were not for the grace of God we would likewise find ourselves abandoning a faithful testimony to the truth as well. May the Lord grant us all humility as we seek His mercy and grace to be faithful....may He also search our hearts and reveal to us the sin that yet remains within us and that we may turn from our own sin and defection to Christ.

May our Lord Jesus Christ watch over you, bless you, and keep you encouraged in the faith...stand strong.....

ELIAS

The Shape of Sola Scriptura

By Keith A Mathison

IF YOU ARE concerned about the number of factions within the church and the increasing number of ‘mavericks’ that are appearing on the ecclesiastical scene, read this book. If you are beginning to question your own confidence in the church, this book will help you get back to basics.

Essentially, this book is about the difference between Scripture *alone* and Scripture *only*. To quote from the Introduction: ‘Within evangelicalism, many professing Christians use *sola Scriptura* to justify endless schism.

Other professing evangelicals use the slogan *sola Scriptura* to justify every manner of false doctrine imaginable. The numerous ways in which *sola Scriptura* has been misused have provided its critics with further evidence of the ‘unworkability’ of the doctrine.’ The author’s short answer is that *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) is not the same thing as *solo Scriptura* (Scripture only).

However, this book goes much deeper than that issue alone and explores the origins of church authority. Keith Mathison explores the origin of the Christian church and its allegiance to Scripture particularly in its connection with

“tradition”. He has discovered that that there were at least three concepts of tradition. Tradition O, Tradition I and Tradition II. There was even a Tradition III!

Tradition I is the true biblical view of tradition which the early church believed and taught during the first three centuries. Calvin and Luther tried to turn the Roman Church back to Tradition I. This view is that Scripture is the sole and alone **source** of revelation. Scripture alone has authority.

However, Scripture must be interpreted, and it is the church’s role to interpret it according to the ‘rule of faith’ (*regula fidei*) and that ‘rule of faith’ is the apostolic faith. The faith handed down from the apostles. Paul warns the Thessalonians to withdraw from every brother who does not walk ‘according to the **tradition** which he received from us’ [2Thes 3:6]

However, during the middle ages, a two-source theory of tradition began to emerge in the church. An extra-scriptural source - **the church!** The church was not only to be the interpreter but a **source** of revelation (Tradition II) also! The struggle during the 16th century was effectively between these two views of tradition.

Protestantism was associated with Tradition I (the early church's view) while Roman Catholicism held to Tradition II (the two-source view of authority).

To complicate issues, during the Reformation, at the other end of the spectrum, there were the radical reformers who believed that Scripture alone had authority but that the church did not have any right to interpret Scripture at all. In their view (Tradition O) the church and the 'rule of faith' had no role whatsoever to play. Each individual was to interpret the Bible himself without any reference to the church, creeds or previous traditions. This view is effectively 'Scripture **only**' instead of 'Scripture alone'.

Mathison would argue that many evangelicals today hold to this Tradition O, and therefore the church is plagued with splits and factions and a glut of 'mavericks' and 'non-conformists' invade Christian thinking. He even shows that rationalists like Socinus (modern day Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, etc) have arisen because of this 'solo Scriptura' view and argues that the current emphasis on

individual interpretation of Scripture is more akin to Enlightenment rationalism than Reformed Theology.

Individuals are no more infallible than the Pope and Tradition I guards against individuals and groups tearing Scripture out of its context and twisting its meaning.

To summarise, while Mathison is very strong on Scripture having final authority, his whole argument is that Creeds and Confessions have a role to play in the interpretation of Scripture. Church councils have a God-given authority he argues, because the Holy Spirit indwells the church. It is not possible to separate Scripture from creeds, churches and 'tradition', which, Mathison defines as really Providence interpreted.

The Shape of Sola Scriptura”

by Keith A Mathison

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"MANY CHRISTIANS THROUGH the centuries have misinterpreted biblical holiness as being 'taken out of the world' - into a monastery or a Christian evangelical ghetto. Many would misunderstand holiness as 'having as little to do with the world as possible'. True holiness, however, is the opposite of withdrawal from the world; rather it is being set apart by God for the very purpose of being sent into the world, to encounter the world, to mix with the world, in order to fill the world with disciples of Jesus. ...It is in this context of going into the world that Jesus prays for us that we would be protected from the evil one."

David Devenish

True Intercession

by Richard Orr

INTERCESSION IS praying what is on the mind of God. The process works like this: the burden starts with the Lord, it then comes down to us, we receive His burden and return it to Him in prayer. This may sound elementary, but for this to be successful and brought to completion, we have to be available! We become a channel through which the Father's burden - His own concern for a situation - to be impressed on our spirit by the Holy Spirit.

This means we do not pray our own ideas, or our own opinions and certainly not what we think we should pray. We need always to seek the Lord in such a way as to receive His burden. We need to receive His cry on our hearts, His concern upon our hearts, and to express that concern in whatever way the Holy Spirit directs. This means allowing the Holy Spirit to separate us from our own thought processes. We are not to react out of sympathy but act out of empathy, as the Spirit of God enables us to identify in such a way that we actually feel God's burden for a Nation, the Church, a situation or for individuals.

Father knows where the greatest needs are at a given time. He knows where exactly the enemy's onslaughts are coming from. As we seek Him, we gain the mind of Christ, receiving spiritual

understanding and direction. Effective intercession that we require the higher thoughts, the higher way: "*for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways*" [Isa 55:8]. We need to be constantly seeking and obtaining the mind of Christ, seeking to be channels for the Holy Spirit to flow out over the nations, to breathe life in place of death through our prayers.

The Holy Spirit is an interceding Spirit, this is why we need His help to bypass our own understanding. If we allow Him, He will intercede through us in diverse ways. When we do not have a clear understanding of the situation that is presenting itself, it might be that the Lord is bypassing our natural thinking, or he is taking us to such a deep level that our dependence is totally on the leading of the Spirit. "*In the same way the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, we do not know what to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*" [Rom 8:26].

We must always remember that we who know Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, are the fruit of someone else's intercession - at some key time in our lives someone somewhere prayed for our salvation.

[Part of an article in 'Sword', Vol 2, No 4, printed with kind permission]

Congregational News

LAIRG/ROGART

While the average age and size of our congregation continues to give real cause for concern we are thankful to the Lord for His goodness and unfailing love. Although numbers were disappointing, we were greatly blessed through the ministry of Revd George Macaskill at our communion back in June. Our study group which meets in Migdale has gone into recess for July and August but has been greatly appreciated by those who attend which include ladies from the Free Church and the Church of Scotland. We have completed the first three chapters of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the feedback has been very positive.

I had the privilege of addressing the Highlands and Islands pastors and leaders meeting at the Drumossie Hotel, Inverness, in June which has led to further invitations to address a similar meeting in Perth in August plus an opportunity to minister at an outreach event in October. It was a real eye opener to me and did me much good to pray, worship and fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ from different local churches and denominations.

The earnest desire to see

God truly glorified and sinners saved was quite wonderful. Pastor Mervyn Milne of the Perth Christian Centre is certainly to be commended for his sterling labours in organising and leading these meetings and it must be our prayer that the Lord would continue to bless his ministry. I certainly aim to make the third Thursday at Drumossie a regular date in my diary and would urge others to do so too.

As I write I am preparing an address for an inter-church prayer meeting in Scourie which meets regularly to pray for revival in the North-West and throughout Sutherland and further afield. There are usually around 30 in attendance which is pretty encouraging. It is particularly good to see some of our own folks from Kinlochbervie at these meetings. In addition to taking the service on the 4th Sunday of each month, I also enjoyed ministering to the Kinlochbervie Church of Scotland Woman's Guild in June. Some of our ladies attend and I am thankful for the good relations we enjoy with the Church of Scotland in Kinlochbervie.

The third meeting of the Northern Reformed Fellowship was held in Brora in June when we were privileged to hear a truly excellent address by the Revd Maurice

Roberts on the subject of Justification. The fourth and final meeting of the NRF will be held in the APC Church, Tain, on Friday 12 October at 7.30pm when the speaker will be the Revd Prof. Andrew McGowan, DV. Do put this date in your diary.

Wayne

HARRIS

The congregation is mourning the loss of Neil MacCuish their former precentor, who was such a support and encouragement to the congregation. Neil was one of the best precenters of gaelic on the island and will be sorely missed. He was also the congregation's Treasurer for many years and a very consistent and regular attender at all the meetings of the APC. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Mary.

The congregation appreciate the preaching of the many speakers who take their services throughout the year.

STORNOWAY

The congregation has been saddened by the sudden death of a 47yr old woman who had lost her own son aged 17 years only two years ago. We commiserate with her husband and family who have known such sadness.

One of the congregation's members, Thomas Parkes, is expected back from London in July, after serving for a year with 'Youth for Christ' in conjunction with 'KICK' another outreach organisation that seeks to use one's

sporting talents in evangelism. Thomas is a very good footballer. Thomas has just celebrated his 18th birthday and has 'challenged' the congregation with his commitment to serving the Lord. His photograph is elsewhere in this magazine.

Around 9 people from Lewis are attending the APC Youth Camp in August and we ask for prayer that the campers may have good fellowship, safety, and be spiritually enriched as well as have a good time. Please also do pray for all the leaders, not least, Ross McFarlane who has made all the arrangements.

POOLEWE

The congregation's Communion week-end this year will be on the third Lord's Day of September and it is expected, God willing, that the Interim Moderator, Revd Dr Wayne Pearce, will conduct the services.

DUNDEE

The congregation continues to enjoy its regular programme. The twice monthly Praise Nights after the evening Service are very well attended with a very nice encouraging word from Mr Quinn. There is a strong sense of unity amongst us as we pray for each others needs and concerns. The mid-week meetings are also well attended and challenging studies keep us thinking.

We had a most enjoyable evening at the annual barbecue at the end of June in the manse, especially as the sun came out which it had not done all week! At time of

going to press we are preparing to distribute leaflets around the community inviting them to our services. We have had a few people come in to our meetings, mainly with problems, and we are thankful that we have been able to give them some help.

We had a nice communion at the end of June when we were able once again not only to remember the Saviour's dying love for us, but to feed on him by faith in the sacrament. We do pray that we will grow and mature in our faith and devotion to Him and that we will bring honour to His name.

We hope to make another elder. Mr Paul Scrimgeour, our treasurer, has agreed to let his name go forward for nomination, so we expect very soon he will be added to our local eldership number. We are so thankful that we are able to have a number of local elders that can make up a quorum. May God strengthen us further so that we will be a real spiritual beacon in our community.

EDINBURGH

Cammie Mackenzie has a very good job as a minister in Haddington. He is happily married with two children. **You would never guess that he spent two years in jail for stabbing someone.** As a young teenager he was full of anger, resentment and violence. Later he discovered that God was really interested in him and able to help him and could turn his life around.

'You are invited to come and

hear Cammie tell his story this Thursday (June 21) at 4.15 pm in the Blythswood Care Shop, 47 Southhouse Broadway. Take a friend it could be a time you will never forget. John Ross: 0131 466 6247 or 664 9353.

'Church: In the shop Sun. 5.00pm; Wed. 7.30pm. In KLM, 38 Gracemount Drive, Sun 11.00pm. Shop hours: Tue. & Wed 10.30 - 15.45. Fri. 10.30 - 12.30"

Thus read the last leaflet we distributed around the doors in the area. There were a number of things against the meeting. The time of day was not ideal but it was unavoidable. The meeting was arranged at very short notice but it was a case of strike while the iron is hot. The publicity had to be rushed and distributed around the doors at the last minutes. It didn't seem fair to ask too many people to help with the distribution at such short notice.

Because of yet another two very sad fatal tragedies in the area in which we work, an 18 year old man had his throat slashed in May, and another teenager was involved in a road accident, we felt it was more necessary than ever to press on and reach out with the gospel. Cammie Mackenzie had been mentioned to us on various occasions and Revd Iain Penman contacted him to do some outreach in the area through the schools and the shop.

The outreach in the shop (the schools are to be done after the summer holidays DV) was very encouraging, because of the interest shown beforehand, the number of

non church goers that attended, the number that almost came, the message that was given and the subsequent interest and how effective the leaflets were. We thank everyone who has been praying for the work in general and for this outreach in particular. Most of all we thank God. Fish that taste the bait are not fish caught, but they may yet be caught so please continue to pray.

Cammie is going to do another meeting in the shop on August the 14th DV. We very sincerely covet your prayers for this and the work in the schools. We suspect that the meeting was so encouraging because a number made a special effort to pray.

Cammie was brought up in Ferguslee Park in Paisley in a very violent family and was getting drunk by the age of eleven. He would seldom do a whole day in school, sometimes he would be sent home after half an hour or an hour or on a better day he would make it to mid afternoon. Then he became increasingly violent as a teenager. He very accurately described it as "mindless violence." For absolutely no reason he would break some poor unfortunate persons nose or inflict some other violent injury. Not once, but week after week there would be an orgy of violence.

He described how he waited in school for the police to come and take him away after he violently attacked his step father, fracturing his skull in three places with a hammer, because he had brutally attacked Cammie's mother. Would

the police come, before the morning break, before lunch or just after it? They never came even although Cammie's step father was in intensive care. Cammie's mother, in order to protect her son, said she had attacked the step father. Cammie escaped scot free.

Cammie didn't learn from this tragedy but went on to more violence. He got himself a job in an abattoir and stole the large knife he was meant to use for skinning the carcasses. He carried it but did not plan on using it unless it was a genuine case of self defence. One night they were in a fight three against three. Cammie's side won. All they had to do was walk away and boast about it as if it was something to be proud of. But Cammie didn't walk away, for absolutely no reason, he says, he went back and stabbed the man five times. He couldn't give one reason for this vicious and mindless act. He wasn't cornered, or afraid of revenge, he just did it.

Somebody grassed Cammie and he was very quickly arrested and admitted his guilt. Because of his ready admission he got the very light sentence of two years for attempted murder. He came out of jail eventually, not very much wiser (although now trained as a hairdresser) he was soon into a life of taking and supplying drugs. He tried every drug except heroine because he was scared of what it might do to his mind.

When Cammie was 27 years old one day he was desperate for

money and notwithstanding the fact he was high on drugs he got into his own taxi in order do some work ferrying some unsuspecting passenger's around. He says "I could hardly see the road in front because I was so high." He needed a few fares in order to get more drugs. The lady in his taxi was a spiritualist, (Cammie pointed out to us how wrong spiritualism is), nevertheless she spoke to Cammie along the lines that she could see nothing but a black cloud over him and he better seek God. This was a turning point. When he got home he got his Gideon New Testament out and soon made his peace with God. Amazingly, he didn't have the struggle coming off drink and drugs that many have when they become Christians, and he is quick to give God the glory. This was one of the most candid and

sad confessions about mindless violence that one could ever listen to. To hear the same person pointing people to Christ at the end of the talk, and answering questions that were very testing was a great privilege, and makes us hope and pray that Cammie might be used by God in this area of Edinburgh as well as elsewhere. We are not to make too much of any preacher, but it is wise to acknowledge if someone seems, by God's grace to be well equipped for a particular situation.

Of course, an outstanding occasion, doesn't lessen the need for the regular shop work and the services to be prayed for. So more than ever we thank you and urge you, please pray for us and pray that we would pray for you. Prayer is as necessary to God's work as oxygen is to the body.

John Ross

Spurgeon on Regeneration

C H SPURGEON CALLS REGENERATION 'a great mystery'. Part of that mystery is the inscrutable manner in which it occurs. It is a work at the inner springs of our being, below the level of our consciousness, a birth in which we do not consciously co-operate, 'the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes, so is every one who is born of the Spirit' [John 3:8].

Contrary to popular understanding, Scripture does not teach that Christians know the moment of their rebirth. Spurgeon says 'No man can describe his first birth; it remains a mystery. Neither can he describe his new birth; that is a still greater mystery, for it is a secret inward work of the Holy Spirit, of which we feel the effect, but we cannot tell how it was wrought'. 'I do not think you can tell with regard to yourself, when the first gracious thought was sown in you, when first you lived toward God. You can tell when you first perceived that you believed in God; but there was an experience before that. You cannot put your finger on such and such a place and say 'here the east wind began,' nor canst thou say, 'Here the Spirit of God began to work in me'.

M T P Vol 38, p362, Vol 35, p56

From the Moderator's Desk

Mr Roderick W M MacKenzie, Tain/Fearn

The Best Advice I Ever Received

ON LEAVING HOME to study in Glasgow in 1960, I was given a beautiful tapestry, which had been put together by my late aunt, Mrs Margaret Byers on which were written the words – “*In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths*” [Proverbs 3: 6]

Ever since this tapestry has been on the wall of my bedroom and whenever I hear the words I think of my aunt’s desire that I would take careful note of them day by day. It so happens that a good friend of ours, Revd John Huffman from St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, California, had the words of Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 and 6 as his text on June 3, 2007.

He entitled his sermon ‘The Best Advice I Ever Received’ and based his sermon on the words of Proverbs chapter 3 verse 5 and 6, which reads: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths.*”

I thought it entirely appropriate to quote from his sermon, as follows: ‘You are exhorted to “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart. . .*” You know what

“with all your heart” means. You have said those words to yourself in other contexts. You have said, “I love her with all my heart.” You have said, “I want to win that game with all my heart.” You have said, “I want that new car with all my heart.” You have said, “I want that promotion with all my heart.”

Do you know what it is to trust the Lord with all your heart? It means to believe in Him. It means to commit yourself totally to Him. I am trusting that this platform is secure. I trust that chair will hold me up. I trust that everything I have is from the Creator God of the Universe whose name is Jesus Christ. I have committed myself to Him. I am going to trust Him all of the way. I am not going to be like a leaf blown around in the wind.

Have you ever had anyone in this life in whom you could trust? I hope you have had parents worthy of your trust. That doesn’t mean they’re perfect, but that you could rely on them as being persons who would stand by you no matter what. Perhaps that was not the case. Then I hope you at least had a teacher or a coach along the way who saw promise in you, in whom you have been able to put your trust. I hope, if

you're married, you have a spouse in whom you can put your trust. No spouse is perfect, but thank God for those who are trustworthy. Or for you, it may be a friend or two you've found to be reliable.

Take that person who is most trustworthy in your life and remember the security that came in that trust relationship. Now realize that the God of the universe is much more trustworthy than that. He is all powerful. He is all knowing. He is all merciful. He is all righteous. He is never changing. We go right on down the list of those theological characteristics of God, which we read of in Scripture, which only begin to tap the nature of this sovereign God.

This One is worthy of all trust. The most trustworthy of human beings will let you down. This God of the universe is capable of walking through all of life with you. He is a friend. We are able to sing, "What a friend we have in Jesus!" Do treat Him as such, whether you are a teenager, college student, beginning a career, newly married, or whether you're at that transition point in middle life where you wonder about some of the decisions you have made. Trust Him. Cultivate your friendship with Him. Talk to Him in prayer. Bring

your business problems to Him. Bring your personal struggles and your temptations to Him. Bring your doubts to Him. If you are coming toward those retirement years, trust Him to make those some of the best years of your life. And if you are beset by the maladies of old age, trust Him to see you through to death and beyond into His eternal presence in Heaven. You have the option of trusting the God of the universe or trusting yourself and other human beings. Which will it be? Which is more worthy of trust?"

I am sure that as you read this, you will recognise in your own history, how verses of the Bible have from time to time, lingered with you throughout your journey and been a blessing to you. I trust that as you continue your journey through this life, you will find it a blessing to have been reminded once again of these words and "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths.*"

But lest you forget please also remember the words of James 1:22, as follows: "*Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only*" (AV) "*Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says*" (NIV). □

THE MORE CARNAL A CHRISTIAN is, the more sectarian he will be; and the more spiritual he is, the more loving and forbearing and self-renouncing you are sure to find him. And it is with Christian communities as with individual Christians. When the tide is out...[there are] little pools with little fish in them...They forget for a time that there is a vast and expansive ocean.

William Arnot in 'Life of James Hamilton'

Highland Year of Culture 2007

MANY EVENTS HAVE been arranged, and some have already taken place, in connection with the Highland Year of Culture; few have had Christian input - but one has been arranged for 1 September, 2007.

A Psalmody Festival will be held in the Free North Church, Inverness on that Saturday afternoon at 3pm. It is anticipated that upwards of eighty men and women, drawn from all parts of the Highlands, will form the Highland Harmony Singers choir which will lead praise to our God and Saviour.

The choir, which is inter-denominational, and includes members from the APC, will sing a selection of psalms to a variety of tunes. The congregation, which we trust will be numbered in hundreds, will also join in the praise in several psalms. Traditional Gaelic psalm precenting will also be included, with different precentors leading the praise.

This is a unique opportunity not only to continue what has been a major part of Highland culture for centuries, but to fulfil the injunction in Psalm 95:1-2: "*O come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.*"

Seventeen years ago a paper was delivered at the Free Church Summer School in Theology entitled

Improving Public Worship. On the subject of *Praise*, the speaker said: 'Important though preaching is, it is not all there is; but sadly the praise is often considered as a poor second - "the preliminaries", as if it didn't matter. This should be far from the case.' He went on to speak about not only **what** we sing, but **how** we (should) sing, and continued: 'However, as a plea for better understanding, improved singing, and greater relevance, I would like to see this business receiving priority attention; if we believe in our form of worship as prescribed by God, ought we not give greater attention to **how** we sing?'

That was seventeen years ago! However, a minister who heard a group of people leading a large congregation praising God with the Psalms in 2007 had this to say in the public press: 'When I hear the psalms sung with the human voice, in as near a perfect rendering as our sinful existence here will allow, untrammelled by the organ or any other instrumentation, then I think I am listening to the best that we can offer to God in our worship..... all I am saying is that when it is done well, it is unbeatable'.

He continues: 'It is tragic that many in our gathered congregations just don't sing, and leave it up to everyone else. But if everyone were to leave it to everyone else, nothing at all would happen. Our style of singing demands an

input from anyone who can sing, so that something, and not nothing, will happen'.

The encouragement and uplift he received there should encourage us to realise that all is not lost, and we trust and pray that this is what will prevail at the Psalmody Festival, and that praise will truly be ascribed to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

A Gospel message will also be included. Remember preacher and hearers, and pray for hearing ears and understanding hearts. The Festival will be recorded on DVD.

Please pray that this will not be just another 'event' or even a 'Praise Event', but that it will be a time of great blessing. And, if at all possible, be there to join in the praise! *KM*

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Thy Will be Done

FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, the biblical doctrine of hell has never been a favorite theme for Christian people, even amongst the most fervent of puritan preachers. The very thought of an endless separation from God and his presence, where communication and community are utterly negated, is an intolerable thought to the one who loves God. It is a doctrine we do not like and often do not understand, especially since scripture identifies our moral barometer as broken.

However, the doctrine of hell does not stand alone to be rejected. It holds serious ramifications for our understanding of God and his purposes, for the moral fabric of the universe He has created - indeed, for the very notion of salvation itself. This can be difficult to grasp, particularly given the ways in which these notions are both subtly and overtly undermined all around us. In our culture where we celebrate tolerance, God's sending of his Son to die seems an intolerable form of child abuse.

It is little wonder many struggle even more with the doctrine of hell, which seems terribly non-inclusive and even hostile to the lifestyle choices of many. Yet Jesus speaks repeatedly and in the starker of terms about hell (cf. Matthew 10:28, 11:23, 18:9, 23:15, Mark 9:43-47, Luke 12:5, 16:23), not to mention his many parables about a kingdom of

great rewards and terrifying punishments. The rest of the New Testament is equally clear and uncompromising. Clearly, we cannot dismiss the doctrine like an inconvenient parking ticket just because we do not like it.

What is particularly interesting to me as a Christian apologist is that I am very rarely questioned about the "immorality" or "injustice" of hell by non-believers. In fact, I find a remarkable recognition amongst non-Christians that if God is real, He must punish evil. On the contrary, it is usually struggling Christians who wrestle with the notion that God will judge sin in an ultimate sense with an endless separation from God.

Central to our modern crisis regarding the notion of hell and judgment itself is the problem of abstractionism in our thinking. We tend not to think of good and evil in terms of God's revealed law and character, but in abstract categories. In many of our minds, for instance, there is a typical lauding of "love" as good and "hate" as evil. But love and hate are not things in and of themselves. It is clearly good to hate injustice, blasphemy, and bigotry, just as it is obviously evil to love lies, murder, and fornication. All manner of sin today is routinely justified on the basis of "love." But this is putting the preference for abstractions to reality, and when we

regard good and evil in this way we will view the doctrine of hell as a monstrosity.

In this we may discover that hell is not just a place; it is also a condition of heart and mind, a state of fixed rebellion against God. C.S. Lewis notes that heaven is the abode of those that say to God, "Thy will be done," and hell is the dwelling of those to whom God will eventually turn and say, "THY will be done." In other words, hell is the rejection of relationship and meaning, the insanity of a self-imposed isolation where "man is the measure of all things." Having affirmed himself as his own god, man lives in hell with the full consequence of this faith.

Thus, hell assures us that there is an unbridgeable chasm between right and wrong as defined by God, and to deny it is to advocate the triumph of evil. If we refuse to believe Christ's doctrine of hell, we are denying that God is on the throne. Hell assures us justice is real and it is God's.

But finally and critically, hell assures us that heaven is home. We must remember that hell and salvation are related doctrines in the Christian faith. If hell is not real and Christ's teaching is some form of subtle illusion, then there is no damnation, and if there is no damnation, then there is nothing to be saved from, and nothing to be saved to or for. Far from this, the Christian faith cries out in need for the very thing Christ offers - forgiveness and a place within the kingdom. Heaven is indeed home to those who will have it, a place of community turned toward God with total meaning in Him, lived under his law and purposes.

Joe Boot
03/29/07
Thy Will Be Done
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Programme

Theme: Expecting great things from a great God

Chairman: Mr Kenneth MacLean

10.30 Coffee

10.45 Welcome and Devotions

11.15 ***Revd Hector Morrison (1)***

12.00 Questions and Discussion from the floor

12.20 Psalm singing

12.40 LUNCH

14.00 Psalm singing

14.15 Christian Focus Publications

14.20 ***Revd Hector Morrison (2)***

15.00 Questions and discussion from the floor

15.30 Summary and closing devotions

15.45 Coffee

16.00 Departure

Price £12.50 including lunch

Book: Ross McFarlane 01349 862420 drm@uwclub.net

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