

Transformed Into the Same Image!

THE SOCIOLOGISTS are partly right. When they maintain that we are products of our environment, they are, up to a point, correct. What we see, what we hear, what we read, what we are told has a great influence on what we believe and what we actually become.

Many atheists challenge Christians by saying that they are only Christians because they were 'brought up' to be Christians and if they were fed and taught other doctrines, they would have believed these other doctrines. This is partly true. The fact of course is, the very same can be said for atheists - many of them are atheists because of what they have been taught and many of them are not at all familiar with the sound reasoning for Christianity. Many evolutionists for example are evolutionists because of the selected readings they have listened to and been taught and are unaware of the scientific 'evidence' for the Biblical position of a created universe.

In other words, it is true that 'We are what we eat'! This is very like what the Apostle Paul was saying to the Corinthians in [2 Cor 3:18]. We are all being transformed into the same image that we look at.

What we read and study affects not only what we believe, but what we become. As we behold the glory of the Lord, we will become more like Him! The Apostle John also states that we know we shall be like Christ when He is revealed "*for we shall see Him as He is*" [1 John 3:2].

We know that the young especially, read and study articles about the private lives of their heroes and then copy their habits, ie, what they eat and how they dress and the hairstyles they have. Advertisers also believe in this principle for they are quick to get the latest film star or football star or celebrity to promote their products and make positive statements about their Cornflakes or Soap Powders! The glossy magazines are full of famous people portraying certain brands of consumer items tempting the readers to make purchases.

Yes, we are all influenced by what we read and hear and see, and we believe much of what is presented to us in the media and in posters and magazines. We become like the images we study.

It is therefore so important that we fix our eyes on Jesus and not on the images of our age. David

desired one thing above all others - he wanted to go to God's house to "**behold** the beauty of the Lord" [Psa 27:4]. What makes you and I go to church - is it to look on the face of Christ and admire Him?

David of course, knew how costly it could be to look at the wrong things. He looked at Bathsheba. Many years after, he vowed "*I will set nothing wicked before my eyes*" [Psa 101:3], and he wrote "*Do not remember the sins of my youth*"...my eyes are ever toward the Lord" [Psa 25:15]., and "*Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things*" [Psa 119:37].

The Apostle John tells what made him a disciple of Christ, "**We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth**" [John 1:14].

The Lord Jesus knew that we are influenced by what we look at and therefore prayed to His Father for His disciples "*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me...may behold My glory*" [John 17:24]. He was asking that the eyes of His disciples would be open to recognise the special qualities of Christ's character.

Jesus knew that humans need a model to follow - in fact He Himself had a Model He always followed! It was His Father. "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do, for whatever He does,, the Son also does in like manner*" [John 5:19]. Jesus knew that if we did not follow Him, we would follow someone else.

When John beheld Jesus he

recognised that He was full of grace and truth. That is such a difficult act to follow. We may find someone who is one or the other but to get the two together is very rare.

What makes this subject so important is that we may not be aware when we are becoming like someone. Subconsciously, we adopt the habits, accents, values, ideals, of those we admire. We don't realise we are copying them. When Jesus told Peter "*Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men*" [Mark 8:33] he had no idea that he had become so unlike Christ.

On another occasion when the people of Samaria did not welcome Jesus, His disciples wanted to bring fire down from heaven to destroy them. Jesus told them "*You do not know what manner of spirit you are of*" [Luke 9:55]. They had become like the hardened, intolerant, revengeful, unregenerate world, without realising it.

In applying this truth to ourselves we have to ask how much time are we spending watching television compared to reading the Bible? It is not just reading Scripture that is important, but studying and meditating on the Person of Christ found in Scripture, that is vital to our becoming like Him? Meditating on the Bible is now a lost art - but it is well worth the effort to recover it?

Can we honestly say with Jeremiah "*Your words were found and I ate them. And your word was to me, the joy and rejoicing of my heart*" [Jer 15:16]?

Tell Visitors Why They Need a Church Family

THE DIFFERENCE between being a church attender and a church member is commitment. Attenders are spectators from the sidelines; members get involved in the ministry. Attenders are consumers; members are contributors. Attenders want the benefits of a church without sharing the responsibility. They are like couples who want to live together without committing to a marriage.

Yet one of the biggest hurdles you face as a church leader is convincing attenders they need to commit themselves to the church family and become members. Today's culture of independent individualism has created many spiritual orphans -- "bunny believers," who hop around from one church to another without any identity, accountability or commitment.

Many believe it is possible to be a "good Christian" without joining a local church. How can you convince them otherwise?

God is not silent on the issue. The Bible offers many compelling reasons why every believer needs to be committed and active in a local fellowship.

A church family identifies you

as a genuine believer.

I can't claim to be following Christ if I'm not committed to any specific group of disciples. Jesus said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" [John 13:35, NLT].

When we come together in love as a church family from different backgrounds, race and social status, it is a witness to the world. No one believer can be the Body of Christ on his own. We need others in order to fully express the shape God has given us. It is when we are together, not when we're separated, that we are his Body.

A church family moves you out of self-centered isolation.

The local church is the classroom for learning how to get along in God's family. It is a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love. As a participating member you learn to care about others and share the experiences of others: "If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor" [1 Corinthians 12:26, NCV]. Only in regular contact with ordinary, imperfect believers can we learn real fellowship and experience the New Testament truth

of being connected and dependent on each other.

Biblical fellowship is being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. God expects us to give our lives for each other. Many Christians who know John 3:16 are unaware of 1 John 3:16 (NIV): *“Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”* This is the kind of sacrificial love God expects you to show other believers -- a willingness to love them in the same way Jesus loves you.

A church family helps you develop spiritual muscle.

No one will ever grow to maturity just by attending worship services and being a passive spectator. Only participation in the full life of a local church builds spiritual muscle. The Bible says, “As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” [Ephesians 4:16, NLT].

Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrases “one another” or “each other” are used. We are commanded to love each other, pray for each other, encourage each other, admonish each other, greet each other, serve each other, teach each other, accept each other, honor each other, bear each other’s burdens, forgive each other, submit to each other, be devoted to each other and many other mutual tasks. This is biblical membership! These are the “family responsibilities” that

God expects every believer to fulfill through a local fellowship. We need to ask those who attend our services, “Who are you doing these with?”

The Body of Christ needs you.

God has a unique role for every believer to play in his family. This is called your “ministry,” and God has gifted you for this assignment: “A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church” [1 Corinthians 12:7, NLT].

The local fellowship is the place God designed for his children to discover, develop and use their gifts. Even those with a wider ministry need to understand that their first responsibility is to the local Body. Jesus has not promised to build anyone’s ministry; he has promised to build his Church.

You will share in Christ’s mission in the world.

When Jesus walked the earth, God worked through the physical body of Christ; today he uses his spiritual body. The church is God’s instrument on earth. We are not just to model God’s love by loving each other; we are to carry it together to the rest of the world. This is an incredible privilege we have been given together. As members of Christ’s body, we are his hands, his feet, his eyes and his heart. He works through us in the world. We each have a contribution to make. Paul tells us, “He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we

had better be doing" [Ephesians 2:10, Msg].

A church family will help keep you from backsliding.

None of us are immune to temptation. Given the right situation, you and I are capable of any sin. God knows this, so he has assigned us as individuals the responsibility of keeping each other on track. The Bible says, "*Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness*" [Hebrews 3:13, NIV].

"Mind your own business" is not a Christian phrase. We are called and commanded to be involved in each other's lives. If you know someone who is wavering spiritually right now, it is your responsibility to go after them and bring them back into the fellowship. James tells us, "If you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back" [James 5:19, Msg].

A related benefit of a local church is that it also provides the spiritual protection of godly leaders. God gives shepherd leaders the responsibility to guard, protect, defend and care for the spiritual welfare of his flock. We are told, "Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God" [Hebrews 13:17 NLT].

Satan loves detached

believers -- unplugged from the life of the Body, isolated from God's family and unaccountable to spiritual leaders -- because he knows they are defenseless and powerless against his tactics.

The Christian life is more than just commitment to Christ; it includes a commitment to other Christians. The Christians in Macedonia understood this. Paul said, "First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will, they gave themselves to us as well" [2 Corinthians 8:5, TEV].

We must remind those who fill our buildings each Sunday that joining the membership of a local church is the natural next step once they become a child of God. You become a Christian by committing yourself to Christ, but you become a church member by committing yourself to a specific group of believers. The first decision brings salvation; the second brings fellowship.

Until next week,
RICK
Article by Rick Warren

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"On the one hand we must, develop these attributes...humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering...in order to enjoy our unity. But perhaps the Lord leaves us with differences to work out in order to teach us how to love".

Richard D Phillips

The Passage of Time

By William Taylor from Thurso

A FEW THOUGHTS on what is one of the most important God-given natural commodities instituted by Him at creation, who said *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* [Gen 1:1]. That constituted the first 'tick' which will continue until the end of time.

This is an extremely varied subject. I remember reading of a preacher (a minister) who was asked 'Does it bother you when people look at their watch?' 'No' he said, adding 'What does annoy me is when someone puts his watch to his ear, wondering if it has stopped!' That's the lighter side of time!

There is also the familiar colloquial adage 'Time and tide wait for no man'. To that there is one exception in Joshua's time when there was war between all the kings of the Amorites and Israel. A serious situation confronted Joshua and his army. But he got a promise from the Lord *"fear them not; for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee"* [Josh 10:8].

At the same time, no doubt, he would have remembered with gratitude a previous promise that he got from the Lord when he succeeded Moses *"...as I was with Moses so will I be with thee; I will*

not fail thee, not forsake thee" [Josh 1:5].

As the battle raged and the Amorite armies were sorely discomfited Joshua, undoubtedly saw the advantage of daylight, and made an unusual plea to the Lord *"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon"* [Josh 10:12]. And his request was granted: *"and the sun stood still, and the moon stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies...so the sun stood still in the midst of heaven and hasted not to go down about a whole day"*. A most intriguing phenomenon!

A never-to-be-repeated event, according to verse 14 of the same chapter: *"And there was no day like that before or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel"*.

However, my theme on the subject 'Time' is of a different nature, centering on its importance in relation to eternity, focusing on: *"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord..."* [Hosea 10:12].

As a preamble to these words the theme is taken from the field of husbandry, ploughing,

sowing and reaping. Alas! The ground is described as 'fallow' or 'sour' having being left uncultivated for too long; necessitating urgent action if fruit is to follow.

That parabolic illustration highlights the low spiritual state that existed in Israel in Hosea's time. It is also symbolic of our nation today. *"He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein"* [Psa 107:34]. Hence the cry *"It is time to seek the Lord"*.

The Preacher (Solomon) in Ecclesiastes distinguishes between various aspects of time and their antonyms, eg *"To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up"* [Ecc 3:1-8]. From that large selection the first illustration: *"A time to be born and a time to die"* befits the exhortation, *"it is time to seek the Lord"*.

If a consensus were taken on the subject, the answers might vary from - in the days of one's youth, or in mid-age, with the procrastinators deferring to retirement when one has more time, or like Felix, to a more convenient season.

However, in view of the uncertainty of time, none of the above is sanctioned by God according to His Word, which is the determining factor in this important matter. His message is authoritative: *"Behold now is the accepted time;*

behold now is the day of salvation" [2 Cor 6:2]. That one word 'Now', makes void all man-made theories, which are only an escapist route from reality. *"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* [Isa 8:20].

With that in mind, the injunction *"it is time to seek the Lord"* has an imperative ring about it, indicating urgency, if heaven is to be gained and hell is escaped.

In that connection a memorable incident that I read of many years ago comes to mind. It concerns a young man who was dangerously ill with what was called a 'fever', residing in Germany (today his illness would probably be described as a 'virus'). His doctor who was also a young man, suggested that his bed should be moved away from the sun, and close to a partition near the bed of a man who had a young family.

It appears that one young member of this family failed to do his duty and was told to face the wall (this partition which was very thin).

He was told to repeat the words

Today thou livest yet

Today turn thee to God

For ere tomorrow comes

Thou might be with the dead

The sick man kept repeating these words to himself and when the doctor came the next day he thought he was havoring - but on taking his pulse found him to be improved.

Later on the doctor found the patient sitting in bed reading his Bible and greatly improved. The

doctor was so fascinated that he joined his patient in his Bible reading. And through the Holy Spirit's power both men found Christ - all as a result of a child doing his task. *"This is the Lord's doing' it is marvellous in our eyes"* [Psa 118:23]. Focus objectively on

the exhortation *"it is time to seek the Lord"*, bearing in mind what King David said to his son Solomon *"If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever"* [1 Chro 28:9]. Of these two options, choose the former.

Highland Theological College

By William Taylor, Thurso

ON FRIDAY 1st OCTOBER the HTC held their Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony in the Castle Street Church of Scotland, Dingwall at 7pm.

This year commemorates the College's tenth anniversary which began in a hut on the perimeter of the car park in Moray College in Elgin in 1994. For the past five years their new venue is a beautiful spacious building centrally situated in Dingwall.

An interesting feature of this building is a brass plate at the outside portal, inscribed "Alexander Murray Building". Revd Alex Murray has been chairman of the College since its inception, in close association with the College Principal Professor A McGowan who has about 19 staff, apart from part-time voluntary helpers.

At 7pm a large gathering from different airts were welcomed by Revd Hector Morrison the Vice-Principal, followed with praise, prayer and Scripture reading. Thereafter Professor A McGowan

gave the annual report; a comprehensive review of the work done during the past year.

Then came the presentation of the Awards by Revd Dr Alistair Wilson and Revd Alexander Murray. These consisted of 8 different Awards from Access Certificate in Christian Theology to Doctor of Philosophy. Of all the students who were handed their scrolls two were well known to some in the gathering. Mr Ross Macaskill and Malcolm MacLeod who gained Batchelor of Arts degrees. The highest degree went to Revd John Ross minister of Greyfriars Free Church, Inverness who became a Doctor of Philosophy.

This was followed by a sermon on the subject 'The Lordship of Christ' from [Mat 28:18-20] by Professor Richard Gaffin from Westminster Theological Seminary.

A fruitful evening was brought to a close with the singing of Psalm 72, the last 3 verses to the tune Effingham, the benediction and warm Christian fellowship over a cup of tea.

Newspaper Journalists and the 26 October!

By Revd G I Macaskill, Stornoway

ON TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER, three journalists in the Scottish National Press chose to write about the disintegrating state of society in our nation today.

Ron Ferguson wrote in the 'Press & Journal' an article entitled 'Childhood seems to have become a darker season'. In his article he speaks about a convicted paedophile and a number of high profile arrests in connection with child pornography.

He then goes on to look at government regulations, intended to protect children, where in a situation where a child grazes her knee, the teacher is not supposed to hug the child in comfort. Saddest of all, he states, the NSPCC has cautioned parents about letting children hug their grandparents. 'Does that not make you want to cry?' he rightly asks.

One result of such legislation is that people are now afraid to offer their services for youth and children's work out of fear of being labelled as perverts as all adults are now seen as potential paedophiles. Ron Ferguson quotes a headmaster of a fashionable fee-paying school when he said that 'family break-up was the biggest cause of distress in his school - much more so than drugs'.

How encouraging that national journalists are last seeing and acknowledging that society is indeed crumbling.

A second article in 'The Herald' on Tuesday 26 October was by Harry Reid, entitled: 'The Case for a new kind of Puritanism'. Again, it was pointed out that our society is not only changing but depreciating at a terrifying pace. He rightly illustrates that it cheapens and coarses our society in all sorts of ways to glibly present 'extreme violence as entertainment.'

'Gratuitous violence is all around us now, in advertising, in feature films, on our television screens, in magazines, in computer games. I am not arguing for organised censorship,' he maintains, 'just for sensitivity and restraint. Freedom is wonderful; licence isn't'. Again it is encouraging to read that our national journalists are realising the direction we are heading.

The third article on the 26 October was also in 'The Herald', indeed on the very same page. It was written by Melanie Reid and was entitled: 'We've never had it so good, so why are we so miserable?' Her conclusions could come from a Christian magazine. She says; 'We are unhappy and unfulfilled as a society because we lack the

intellectual and spiritual answer to our material problems. No matter how far we travel, we can't run away from ourselves.' How right. How true. How salutary. How Biblical!

However, it was very disappointing that none of the journalists pointed to a return to the Bible as a means of recovering our nation. As the oldest book in the world, the Bible teaches us a lot about bringing up families and maintaining societies. For example *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"*

[Proverbs 14:34]. Has no-one heard of the city of Nineveh repenting at the preaching of Jonah?

It is interesting and encouraging, that on the very same day that these articles appeared in print, the APC Presbytery in Scotland met for the specific purpose of placing a preacher of the 'Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ' in one of the more needy districts of Edinburgh. May God be pleased to use the preaching of the gospel to the upgrading of our society in our nation today.

and in America...

IN HIS DAILY "BreakPoint" comments of November 3, Charles Colson emphasised that America needed more than a Christian President to make America a better nation. Some are saying 'All is well because we have won'.

"If that's what you're thinking, it's time for a serious reality check. The kingdom of God will not arrive on Air Force One no matter how good the president's character or great his ability. Don't get me wrong: Elections are important; the law is a moral teacher. But all the laws and political victories will not help us if we lose the culture. Our job is the same no matter who is in office: that is, to make serious disciples and to bring Christian truth to bear in all of life.

"The first place to start is training our children in biblical worldview thinking. Statistics show

that many Christian kids lose their faith in college. (Not surprising, if you look at Barna's poll and see that only 9 percent of evangelical teens believe in moral truth.) In college, they are assaulted by secular relativism, and if we don't prepare them, they will be like lambs led to slaughter.

"Even with a believer in the White House, Christians are not released from our obligation to teach worldview and to work for righteousness. As agents of God's common grace, we are called to help sustain and renew His creation, to uphold the created institutions of family and society.

"In the final analysis, winning the culture is more important than winning elections. To paraphrase the Scriptures, what will it profit us if we win the presidency—but lose our children to a corroded culture?"

Congregational News

DUNDEE

Our minister has been in Canada for two weeks ministering to our congregations in Toronto and Edmonton. We had an encouraging time before he left, with new faces coming regularly. Along with our three Indian friends, there was a Christian lady from Nigeria and a Christian student from Singapore and a new family of five who were looking for another church. We ask for prayer that these new people will find our fellowship and worship a real blessing.

Our winter programme has started again with the Tuesday evening 'Drop-In' Prayer Time in the manse between 6pm and 7pm. Anyone is welcome to come even for 5 minutes, and pray between these times.

Andy has been going round the doors again with the same questionnaire as before trying to meet with the many who were not in the last time he visited them. He is having interesting discussions with the people living around the church. He hopes to be able to meet up again with the folk we had at the weekend away when we have a buffet immediately after the Bonfire on Guy Fawkes night in Baxter Park near by. Do pray that we will be able

to establish a sound relationship with these people as we try to introduce them to the Saviour. We also hope to have a lot of children on the 31st October and treat the children to a Hallelujah Party instead of a Hallo'ween Party!

Andy works late at night with the drug addicts and those coming out of the pubs and clubs. He provides a lollipop (something helpful for drug addicts) on condition that they take a gospel leaflet. He meets with all kinds of people - even backslidden Christians - and some of them have a very sad story to tell. This is a special work which not every Christian can do, and needs much prayer so we ask our readers to remember this aspect of Andy's work.

STORNOWAY

The congregation was pleased to have a 15 year old boy as a new communicant member during its August Communion. During the minister's absence in Canada for the month of September, the pulpit was well served by its own office-bearers.

Although the congregation has increased its office-bearers only last month, it is sorry to lose Malcolm Macleod as he has accepted

a Call to minister in the Toronto congregation. The Induction was held on 15 October and one or two from the congregation were able to go out and attend the service.

The minister and his wife were pleased to see Malcolm and Joan settle in Toronto and were very excited to hear that they were able to acquire a new home within a few days of arriving in Canada. Toronto is a vast city of 4 million people and there is a request for prayer that the Lord will direct seeking souls to their congregation in Victoria Park Avenue.

The congregation is contemplating running the Christianity Explored course once more this winter, but please pray that there will be those who are willing to attend. The course involves much work for the congregation and this year there will be fewer available to help.

Please also pray for the Good News Club which runs on a Friday night. This Club is very popular, but is short-staffed!! The Club has had to close on occasions because it has been unable to provide sufficient workers, and this is very likely to happen over the coming winter - we really are going to miss Malcolm and Joan Macleod!

EDINBURGH & TAIN/FEARN

At a Presbytery held in Inverness on 26th October, the Revd John Ross, spoke about his 'burden' to preach the gospel to the masses in our

cities. He felt this burden since his student days. He had enjoyed his time ministering in his congregation in Tain/Fearn, and felt very much his responsibility in this connection, but such was his 'burden' to preach the gospel to the needy in Edinburgh, he was asking the Presbytery for their approval and blessing for him to go to some needy area in Edinburgh, possibly Burdiehouse, and begin a work there. It was his desire that he preach in a place where there is no gospel witness at present.

He mentioned several scriptures and providences which had encouraged him to take this step and he was bringing it before the Presbytery for their consideration. Several members of Presbytery addressed the whole issue and its implications expressing their view that the 'hand of God' seemed to be in it. The Presbytery therefore granted his request and released Revd Ross from his duties in Tain/Fearn and appointed him to a missionary/minister in Edinburgh. These changes were to take place with immediate effect.

We ask our readers to remember the changed situation in Tain/Fearn and for the new work beginning in Edinburgh. Much prayer and hard work lies ahead as well as wisdom and discernment. While feeling very much for the congregation of Tain/Fearn the Presbytery were encouraged that God is still calling His people to preach the gospel to those who have never heard it.

Good Government and Correct Judgment

"God presides in the great assembly; He gives judgment among the "gods": How long will you defend the unjust And show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; Maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them from the hand of the wicked. They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said "You are 'gods'; You are all the sons of the Most High. But you will die like mere men; You will fall like every other ruler." Rise up, O God, judge the earth, For all the nations are your inheritance." [Psalm 82]

God in His word speaks to every class of people. No one is above God's word. In this psalm there is excellent advice for all rulers and judges and indeed anyone who has authority or power over his fellowman.

We need to look at this majestic psalm because it reminds us that God is interested in every government and every courthouse. All, regardless of political allegiance, should strive to rule according to God's standard.

When using the word ruler it

is best to think of anyone exercising authority however limited or vast their sphere. This psalm is reminding us that: God is in every gathering of rulers; they are accountable for how they use their time; they must care for the weakest; rulers can be very ignorant of God's standard; rulers are greatly privileged but like us all they will die. We should be praying to God to intervene.

This psalm should make us pray for rulers but also help us to understand the vast difference between good and bad rulers or judges and the great responsibility they have.

"God presides in the great assembly; He gives judgment among the "gods".

God is in every assembly whether local, national or international. There is no assembly however powerful or important that is beyond God's scrutiny or does not need His help. This covers everything from the smallest local committee to the largest government or UN meeting. All who hold office need to remember that they are accountable to God but also that God can and will help them however high or low their station or momentous their decisions.

"How long will you defend the unjust And show partiality to the wicked? Selah".

Time is running on and in this case it is badly used. They have spent too long defending what is unjust and favouring the wicked. This is the very opposite of good government and correct judgment.

"Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; Maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them from the hand of the wicked".

Here is God's mandate for rulers. The weak are those who cannot defend themselves, they have no power or authority. The fatherless have no one to provide for them or to defend them or to guide them. That the poor and the oppressed have rights is the clear teaching of this verse. Some of these rights are somewhere decent to live, the opportunity to make an honest living, justice, fairness, a fair wage, not to be kept down, ie, oppressed, but to be allowed to better themselves. The weak and needy are those who have not the necessary strength and means for life.

The strong can look after themselves they do not have the same need at all. The weak are vulnerable and the wicked can in various ways take advantage of them. Rulers and judges have a responsibility to do all in their power to see that this does not happen. People in authority are there not for their own glory or comfort but for the good of society and especially the weakest and most vulnerable in

society.

"They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are shaken.

This is a terrible indictment against bad rulers and judges. It reminds one of Isaiah chapter 5:20-25, *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, Who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent."*

These rulers may be very intelligent, able and experienced but they are wilfully ignorant of what God requires as regards caring for the weak and vulnerable. This shakes the very foundations of society because great numbers of people have no basis of hope for themselves or their families. However honestly and diligently they try to live a respectable life they will not get a fair deal nor can they be sure that they will not be falsely accused by the very ones that are meant to defend them. Such a situation is extremely demoralising.

It also shakes the foundations of: public decency and morality; respect for individuals and their rights; respect for human life; and living a "peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and holiness".

"I said "You are 'gods'; You are all the sons of the Most High.

But you will die like mere men; You will fall like every other ruler."

The fact that these rulers are referred to as 'gods' highlights: the privileged position they are in; the fact that people look up to them; that people are accountable to them; that they have power and influence over people; that they can reward or punish people. Rulers have been put there in God's providence. However they must not get carried away with their own importance at the end they will die just the same as the weakest and poorest of men. They should reverence and serve the Lord by faith in Jesus Christ.

"Rise up, O God, judge the earth, For all the nations are your inheritance."

In view of all the bad government in the world we should

be pleading with God to intervene. We should thank God for good rulers and pray that they would be kept and have an ever greater influence for good. We should be praying that bad rulers would change and if not that they would be replaced by better rulers. God can work in any nation. Every nation belongs to Him and is accountable to Him.

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." [1 Timothy 2:1-4].

Christian Involvement in the World

ALL AREAS OF LIFE are spiritual, even the realm of politics. 'We are so used to thinking of spirituality as withdrawal from the world and human affairs that it is hard to think of it as political. Spirituality is personal and private., we assume, while politics is public. But such a dichotomy drastically diminishes spirituality, construing it as a relationship to God without implications for one's relationship to the surrounding world" (Glenn Tinder).

Of course this is what the humanists hope Christians will continue to believe as they pursue the realm of politics with a vengeance. "The notion that we can be related to God and not to the world - that we can practice a spirituality that is not political - is in conflict with the Christian understanding of God" (Glenn Tinder). God created the realm of politics in the same way that He created the family and the church.

If the Christian is not involved in the transformation process with the Christian view of spirituality, then be assured that the humanists will be ready with their version. The rise of the New Age humanism is one indication that the faltering West is looking for a new spirit to breathe life into the decaying corpse of humanism.

Gary De Mar

Children in Church

This is the final part of the article which finished on page 18 of the October issue, by Catherine MacKenzie, Inverness

AND HERE IS another, perhaps radical, suggestion for how we can help. Do you go through the church doors to discover that the thirty people who have arrived before you have already filled up the back seats? Well consider adopting what is a simple but practical solution to the problem of wriggly little boys and girls – reserve the back rows of the church for them and their parents.

Fill up the church from the second row to the front – I know that nobody wants to sit on the front row – it's totally against our highland nature. But think about this - you might find that you will hear the sermon better if you are closer to the preacher. Parents will hear the sermon better if they feel more relaxed. It's easier to take a child out to the toilet if you're near the back. If you've had to blow three noses, change two nappies, a suit of clothes and your own shirt between your front door and the car – you're going to be late for church – that's all there is to it.

Wouldn't it be nice if you knew that even though you are going to be late you're not going to have to trail your brood down the aisle to the front of the church? Instead all you're going to have to do is nip into

the back. Simple. So reserve the back rows for the young families or for adults and the elderly that need extra physical help. It's the decent thing to do.

But I know that if you have a three-year old wriggler it is often easier for everyone concerned to let the child go to a separate Sunday school. And certainly once a child is five or six years old they are generally better able to sit still and listen. But I still think we do young children an injustice if we don't begin early to encourage them to listen to the preaching of the word. You expect a three year old to learn morals, obedience and values. You expect a three year old to listen. You expect a three year old to show love. You expect a three year old to show pleasure and wonder. Aren't these important parts of worship?

To be honest I sometimes suspect that children may actually be better at worshipping their creator than many adults. Jesus himself witnessed this – yet we neglect to include our youngest in church, with us, because of their inability to control spontaneous movement of their bodies as well as their voices. When we neglect to include them we neglect the church. I believe children included in the full

worship of God would teach us as adults so much. We would remember what enthusiasm was. We would rediscover awe. When you preach a sermon to a child you don't need to worry about whether they've heard the story before – they can have heard it a hundred times before and they'll still love it.

Maybe with children in church we would rediscover the actual skill of listening? Does that sound strange? Listening to truth is just as much about appreciation as it is about sitting still and being 'good'. When was the last time you as an adult laughed out loud with joy when you saw something yellow? When was the last time you gasped at a bible story? Children do both regularly and naturally. Adults have to work at it. Children in church are vital to the life of the church.

I'm certainly not advocating that there should be no specific, unique contribution for children. Sunday school is a wonderful opportunity for teaching children, socialising children with their own age group within the church, rewarding children for their work and contribution to the church family.

But the very best Sunday school material is not geared towards a 20/30 minute slot while adults are listening to the sermon. So if you want to achieve the best from Sunday school you must allow Sunday school teachers the time to accomplish this. A good teaching slot is at least 40 minutes to an hour – perhaps more. Within this

framework you can have time for children to socialise, learn scripture, listen to stories, have fun. Within this framework you allow teachers to teach and reinforce lessons with craft, visual aids, activities.

But let's get back to some biblical reasons about why children should be in church, as part of the congregation. Let's read Joshua 8:35, "*There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before the congregation of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers.*" Now read Psalm 78:1 "*I will utter dark sayings of old ... we will not hide them from the children.... That they might set their hope in God.*"

These verses give important instructions to us about including children in the worship of God, in church. With the correct teaching and guidance children from Christian families should be brought up within the complete church from an early age. We cannot expect them to attend a children's club from age 3 – 12 and then amazingly integrate them into church. Could it be that this very practice over the last fifty or so years is one reason that we can now talk about a lost generation and children who have lost their spiritual heritage?

It certainly accounts for a decline in church attendance I believe – but I think it is the spiritual famine, the neglect of God's word that we have witnessed in family life that is the real problem. Our families, localities and our

nation have rejected Christ. But there is no longer even a tradition of being under the preaching of God's word. Whatever way you look at it – that is an opportunity lost.

How we integrate children into church is vitally important however. In our Sunday club at Drakies children vote with their feet. In church children vote in other ways – switching off is the easiest. Thankfully you can generally tell when a child has switched off – but it won't take them long to learn how to hide it – that's a skill that adults are adept at. We have to do our utmost to stop our children learning this skill.

Leadership and those who are taking worship must be aware of the children. I don't mean that the eldership should attend lessons in how to speak in a patronising tone, (that's as off putting for children as it is for adults.) There's no need to go out and find ten games to play in the aisles in between singings. A simple, gospel message and basic bible teaching – that is all you really need. If you do public speaking – follow the rules every other public speaker does outside the church. We are not exempt from good practice. Make sure we are teaching something that a child can listen to, understand and apply to their lives. If you do this, rest assured, all of your congregation will understand.

Remember that children can be excluded from church in other ways other than putting them in a different room. Let's make it our mission this year that children are

catered for within the church, taught within the church, cherished within the church. *"Suffer the little children to come unto me."*

The apostle John said that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children were following the Lord. What a great joy it will be for us as families, believers, denominations, when we witness the conversion of the next generation.

Children and adults are the church of today and tomorrow. Jesus said to Peter, Feed my lambs, Shepherd my sheep. These were instructions to the same man – a man who would be a leader of the early church, an apostle. Christ was leaving instructions about the care of His church, His people. Peter accepted the responsibility of the sheep and the lambs together. Children and adults, together.

Perhaps you think that a good Sunday school is a better option for children and that it gives those who need it and want it peace and quiet. I value peace and quiet as much as the next person. I value good Sunday schools. But we are in church to worship God. Worship is not something for us – it is something we give to God. The preaching of the word is an important part of worship – it should inspire us to praising the name of God.

We should focus on the worship of God as something that we share. If our actions even subtly give the message that preaching is not for children, that the worship of God can be divided up into parts suitable for some and not for others, then we

are on dangerous ground.

In conclusion I would like to go over a little some of our responsibilities towards the children in our church.

1. We are to give counsel and advice to children. David advised Solomon, *"Show thyself a man and walk in God's ways. Obey him."* [1 Kings 2:2-3].

2. We are to pray for the children. David prayed for Solomon. Abraham for Ishmael. Job for his children.

3. We are to instruct them while also taking heed to our own spiritual lives. [Deuteronomy 4:9] – *"take heed to thyself and teach thy sons and thy sons son"*

4. We are to talk about God's law as a natural part of family life – as we walk along the road, at the table, anytime, anywhere.

We are to teach children to

1. Heed God's word and not forget it. 2. Praise God's name. 3. Listen to wise instruction. 4. Flee Sin. 5. Follow Righteousness.

I appreciate you reading this, and I appreciate that there will be some, if not quite a few, who disagree with some of the things that I have said. You are certainly showing great patience to let a single woman put across what she thinks

about bringing up children in church when I have no experience of bringing up my own.

All I can say is that what I have written has been in the light of what I have seen in scripture and my interpretation of it. As well as that I've seen friends and children from Christian families leave the church in droves. Some of them went to church services from day one. Many did go to a separate Sunday school. Both ways can exclude children. Ideally the preaching of the word, the gospel, the good news, should be something cherished and shared together. I really hope that this starts us all thinking about how we can do this – about how we can do our best for God and for the church and for our children.

Let's start by telling the next generation what church means to us, what Jesus means to us. All the children in the church should be given these blessings, these teachings, God's wisdom, and access to the wonderful knowledge that God forgives sinners through his Son Jesus Christ. We are the church of God in our families, in our communities, wherever we go. Lets pray to God that our children will be too and that we will not stop or hinder them in any way.

"IT IS NOT MORE MEETINGS that are needed, but more informal opportunities for faith to flow from one life to another. So we have to find ways to open up our lives to the young people we are working with. Jesus spent most of His time with his disciples...When He was doing things He took His disciples with him. He seemed particularly concerned that they should witness one of His greatest moments of suffering when He woke the three disciples in Gethsemane"! [See Mat 26:36cf]. Mark Ashton

THE ESSENTIAL of CHRISTIANITY

By Revd G I Macaskill, Stornoway

WHAT ARE THE essential beliefs of Christianity? What is non-negotiable in the Christian faith? What is it that makes Christianity quite unique among religions?

It is the error of some denominations to think that their particular brand of Christian belief and practice is the distinctive note that makes Christianity special. However, the Bible makes clear, that there is only one faith. So what is completely indispensable in the Christian faith? We suggest the following three truths.

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S REVELATION

Where does the Christian get his information? How does he find out the truth about God, the world, humankind? Is there anything that one can completely trust without reservation? One cannot simply think up a religion. In the last analysis, where does final "authenticity" reside? Is there nothing that can be totally trusted?

The Christian believes that God has given to humans a reliable trustworthy 'revelation' from heaven that he can totally trust. In that revelation (the Bible) humans are told the truth by God, the Creator of

everything. If the human race does not have a reliable source of information regarding life, then truly the human race is lost. In the Bible, the Christian has an infallible reference tool, totally trustworthy and fully sufficient for every spiritual duty in this world.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

How is someone forgiven and saved? There can surely be very few people in the world who claim they have never done anything wrong. How does one get right with God after doing wrong?

The Christian 'Gospel' (which means 'Good News') spells out that human beings can be completely forgiven for all their sins through faith in Jesus Christ. This faith unites people to Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ paid God for the sins of everyone who will be in heaven, these people who believe are instantly acquitted from the guilt and punishment of every sin they have committed.

They are, before God, the Judge of all the earth, free from any liability to punishment and are regarded as if they never did anything wrong. They are considered 'perfect' in God's eyes simply and only because they have

put their faith in Jesus Christ. This blessed state once entered is unchangeable.

This doctrine is called: 'Justification by Faith' and is a fundamental teaching of Christianity.

JESUS CHRIST IS GOD

A third essential truth is that Jesus Christ is God. The term 'Son of God' was well understood by the Jews and means "*making oneself equal with God*" and was, in fact, the reason the Jews decided He must die [John 5:18.

This teaching that Jesus is God is very important because if He was not God then His death could not atone for an innumerable number of sins committed by an innumerable number of people. If Jesus was merely human, then his substitutionary death could only atone for one person. It requires the death of an infinite Person to atone completely for a countless number of humans whose sins incurred eternal wrath. A finite sacrifice cannot satisfy an infinite debt.

These three doctrines highlight the uniqueness of Christianity.

Strong Doctrine Helps Reach Unchurched!

BASED ON A SURVEY of more than 350 formerly unchurched people, Thom Rainer writes that strong doctrinal convictions are a key ingredient in reaching unchurched people. Writing for the Church Central website, Rainer (Dean of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism at Southern Seminary in Louisville) observes, "Many indicated that their interest in doctrine was a consequence of their desire to discover absolutes in a culture where few absolutes are perceived to exist." He also notes that, "The formerly unchurched were attracted to churches that had doctrinal certitude."

Why is doctrine important? Rainer suggests that, "no one desires to be a part of an organization or cause based on uncertainty or ambiguity." In addition, he says, "In a world of relativity, many seekers desire to know that a black-and-white reality does exist. That same clarity of absolutes that attracted the unchurched keeps them in the church."

The full article can be read at:

<http://www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/Article.html/id/20817>

Thank you for Praying!

The Christian Institute have been working hard to assist the Hull Christian Union to be readmitted to the Student Union

THANK YOU for praying.

I am delighted to report that the Hull University Christian Union has been readmitted into membership of the Student Union. This follows a vote which was taken on Monday night. The vote was carried by 28 to 14.

This decision overturns the previous vote held in January which required the CU to abandon their 'Christians only' leadership policy or face disaffiliation.

In the Christian Institute we were so concerned about the case that our Trustees had already agreed to back a High Court legal action by the students. Prior to the vote it looked as though this would happen. Solicitors were already instructed and had already written detailed letters pointing out the breaches in the law. This no doubt influenced the vote along with many faithful people praying.

There are many reasons why the Hull CU case is vitally important for religious liberty.

First, because the Union and the University by their actions would be restricting evangelism on campus, whilst giving freedom to other groups such as Muslims, Jews and political parties. Hull CU is very active in evangelism. Evangelism

would have been made much more difficult if the CU had been banned from meeting in the Union or from attending the Freshers' Fayre or from advertising its meetings.

Secondly, because the University is under a statutory obligation to protect freedom of speech on campus and on the premises of the student union. As a public body the University is also under a legal obligation to protect the religious freedoms of the students under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Thirdly, because the level of secular discrimination involved was gross and obvious. No other society was being targeted in the same way. The Labour Society could have only Labour party members on their executive and the Muslim society could be run by Muslims.

Fourthly, because exclusion of the CU from the premises of the Student Union would inevitably lead to exclusion of the CU from the wider University campus. The same law covers both sets of premises. If the University could flout the law in one case, it could in the other. In the USA many Christian student groups have been denied the right to meet on campus. Christians have won several court cases to protect their

religious freedoms

Fifthly, because several other CUs up and down the country are experiencing difficulties. If Hull CU lost their case then it would be made much easier to discriminate against other CUs. Union affiliation can be very strategic on certain types of campus as is the case in Hull. It is perfectly true that some CUs are well able to operate without affiliation to the Student Union provided they have the cooperation of the University. It very much looked as though such cooperation was in doubt in Hull.

Persecution is like temptation. It is inevitable (John 15:18), but we are also to pray

against it. Indeed we are to pray for those in authority *"that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"* [1 Tim 2:2].

* Please give thanks to God that the CU has been re-admitted into membership of the Union.

* Pray that the new arrangements are dealt with quickly and without any difficulty.

* Pray for other CUs around the country that their freedom may be protected.

Thank you for your prayers.
Yours in Christ,
Colin Hart
Director

<http://www.christian.org.uk>

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