

newrestalrig

an evangelical church of scotland

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PARISH NEWSLETTER

MAY 2006

FROM THE MINISTER

Dear Friends,

The month of May traditionally heralds our denomination's General Assembly. This year is of course no exception. The Assembly meets here in Edinburgh from the 20th to 26th of this month. Over the course of the week there will no doubt be many reports received, speeches made, motions proposed, deliverances framed and votes taken. If you are really keen you can turn up and sit in the visitor's gallery and watch the proceedings. You can even go on-line and follow the business of the Assembly by web cast.

However amidst all the 'business as usual' reporting there is at least one report that is guaranteed to cause a major stir. It comes from the 'Committee on Legal Questions' and relates to the issue of civil partnerships and same-sex relationships. This committee will report on Tuesday 23rd May at 3.30pm.

The report of this committee is asking the General Assembly to pass an Act that will ensure that no minister may be disciplined for presiding over a religious ceremony marking a same sex union. The legislation is permissive in tone and states that no minister will be forced to undertake such a ceremony against their conscience (at least for now!). The committee will also ask the

Assembly to agree that civil partners may ask another minister or deacon who is willing to conduct the service to do so if the parish minister has declined.

What are we to make of all this? Well I think that the implications of this report are far reaching indeed. It is vitally important that we understand the consequences for our church of the General Assembly enacting such a piece of legislation. Let me highlight just a few of these.

1) This legislation will permit ministers of the Church of Scotland to publicly endorse and approve of what the Bible clearly and unambiguously calls sin. This therefore constitutes a rejection of the Kirk's supreme standard, the Scriptures, and its subordinate standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith.

2) This legislation if passed would mark out the Church of Scotland as the only major denomination in the UK to sanction such a radical departure in practice from the clear Scriptural teaching that recognises the sanctity of marriage only between one man and one woman.

3) This legislation will mean that it will be 'illegal' for a minister to preach the gospel or baptise in another parish, but perfectly 'legal' for a minister to go into that parish and carry out a ceremony endorsing same sex partnerships!

4) With such unions welcomed and endorsed by the church, it will also by default remove any obstacle to clergy entering into same-sex unions themselves, and living publicly in manses as practising homosexual couples.

Friends, this is no small matter; it is one that goes to the heart of who and what we are as a Christian church. If this legislation is passed then we will belong to a denomination that openly and publicly accepts and endorses the legitimacy of same-sex relationships as an appropriate Christian lifestyle. I, and many others, believe that this is a step too far. It is not that we wish to be 'homophobic' or dismissive of those who struggle in this area of sexuality; it is rather that we wish to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to the gospel – a gospel that brings with it forgiveness and moral transformation.

When Christianity first burst onto the historical scene in Roman times, the Romans were amazed at the radical purity displayed by Christians. The Christians believed in no sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Of course the Romans thought the Christians were very strange. The historical writings of that time reflect how the Romans were astonished at the moral purity of Christianity, yet at the same time were also very dismissive.

Yet in the end, Christianity won the day as people experienced the power of the gospel firsthand in their own lives. Christianity swept the world of its time. Those first Christians didn't change their ethics they changed their culture.

This challenge is still there for us in Scotland in the 21st century. Amidst the pressure of a secular and increasingly pagan world, what are we to do? Are we

simply to change our ethics? Or are we through the preaching and living out of the gospel aiming to change our culture? Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom.12;2).

Please pray for the General Assembly in May and for the decisions it takes, these may have far reaching implications for all of us, and not least for the cause of the gospel in Scotland.

Yours in Christ,
David L Court

P.S. A statement on the General Assembly Act re Civil Partnerships has been published on the Rutherford House website www.rutherfordhouse.org.uk. You may read that statement and add your support on-line if you so desire. At the time of writing there are already in excess of 150 ministers of the Church of Scotland who have signed up to the statement and many hundreds more from other denominations within Scotland and across the world.

RESPOND!

The message of the Gospel is one of forgiveness. We all know that in Christ, God has forgiven us for all the wrong things we've done and for all the right things we haven't done. But there's more to being forgiven than that.

Matt 18:32-25 tells the parable of a King who wants his servants to settle their debts. The first one owes an astronomical sum, perhaps as much as two billion pounds in our money, and is obviously unable to pay. His life and the lives of his family are forfeit, but he begs for mercy and is pardoned completely. It's easy to see the parallel here. Christians are in exactly the state that this servant has reached. We owed so much to God that we couldn't ever hope to pay it and He's cancelled the debt of sin completely.

But the parable continues with the pardoned servant's encounter with someone who is indebted to him. This time the sum is a more manageable £600 in modern money, but the wicked servant takes the other by the throat and demands payment and when it's not forthcoming, has him cast into prison.

The lesson is very clearly that if we've been forgiven we're expected to forgive. But there's more to this parable than that. It shows what drives our forgiveness. The wicked servant's problem lies in the fact that he doesn't appreciate his forgiveness, he behaves like he's only been given the time of day, not release from a burden the size of the national debt! The danger when we read this is that we'll feel that forgiving is our duty, and do it from a sense of obligation (if at all). But our calling is to forgive from a sense of gratitude, in response to the extraordinary blessing God has given us. We often fail to recall how much peril we were in before God called us to Himself, how much suffering it cost Jesus to bring about that forgiveness and how much more than simple forgiveness He's brought about for us.

Our challenge, our calling, is to 'Go and do likewise' in response to that.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GUEST PREACHER

The guest preacher for Sunday 4th June will be Rev Bob Thomas, Moderator General of the Australian Presbyterian Church, 'Treading Where the Saints Have Trod, in the Footsteps of the Son of God.'

CHURCH BARBEQUE

Please keep the evening of June 8th free so you can attend the church barbeque. More details will follow.

GIFT DAY

Gift day will be happening this month on Sunday 28th of May.

SOUP AND SANDWICH LUNCH

On Sunday May 14th – it is planned to hold a soup and sandwich lunch after church to raise funds for the Assemer project in Brazil. One of our members Alistair Macmillan will be going out there in the summer.

JUNE NEWSLETTER

The June issue of the Church Newsletter will be available the first week of June. Please deliver any submissions to David Urminsky by 26th May or email editor@newrestalrig.

