

WHICH CHURCH?

FROM TIME TO TIME, we meet with those who ask about the position, doctrine and practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The following is an answer for such enquirers, and also to commend the Church to those who may be interested in joining her fellowship.

It has become common nowadays to hear people say, "What does it matter which Church one belongs to? They all worship the same God anyway. They just do it in different ways." The assertion falls easily from the lips, but what has the Bible to say on the question?

Let it be said, at the outset, that the most important thing is that one be a member of that Church which is made up of true believers — those who are born again, and whose sins have been forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18).

No particular Church on earth dare arrogate to itself the claim that it alone comprises the true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. To say, however, that it does not matter which particular Church one belongs to is not true. Scripture requires us to "prove all things"; to "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The choice of one's Church does matter. Plainly, a Church that does not, for instance, proclaim a pure Gospel, or that practises what is inconsistent with the Word of God, does not deserve our support, for Christ requires the Church to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you".

Our concern, therefore, should be to support a Church that comes nearest to the New Testament pattern, which is the divine blue-print for the Church of Christ in this world. If we turn to the Bible we shall find that certain fundamental principles are laid down for the conduct and government of the Church on earth. These principles are not optional — for us to take or leave as we please. They are stamped with the divine imperative. We are, therefore, bound to adopt them. The Church that does so most faithfully comes nearest to the New Testament model, and is the Church most worthy of our allegiance and most likely to promote our spiritual welfare. If we do not take the Holy Scriptures as our standard, in this as in other religious questions, we will go very far astray in our choice. God, let it be remembered, is not the author of confusion; He is the God of order, and His Word cannot sanction contradictory doctrines and systems.

The Word of God tells us that no flesh is to glory in God's presence; if any glory, he is to glory in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:29, 31). What is enjoined here with respect to the individual Christian may with equal propriety be expected of a body of Christians. There is no room for boasting. No Church on earth is so sound as to be free from imperfection.

With the above preface in mind, we would submit that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland shows by her doctrine and practice that she is a rightful and respectable member of the universal Church of Christ. But such a generalisation may be made of other Churches. We must, therefore, be more definitive; we must enquire more particularly into the characteristics which constitute a faithful Christian Church.

What are her attributes? First, she acknowledges none but the Lord Jesus Christ as her Head and King. Then, she takes the Word of God as her doctrinal foundation, and shows a determination never to permit any human writings or traditions of men to encroach upon the unique place of Scripture, as the standard of her faith and practice. She preaches the Word and administers the sacraments, her government and discipline according to the mind of Christ. What is of the world, or of man's invention, is not permitted to adulterate her worship. Of course, the more faithful she is to the voice of Christ, the purer she will be.

These are the basic principles for which our great Protestant Reformers, Calvin and Knox, contended, and it is in line with these principles that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland stands.

OUR CREED

IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, there have always been those who have objected to the use of creeds. Such objectors have become loud and clamorous today. Under the pretence of piety and greater devotion to the Bible, there is a widespread defection from the historic creeds of the Protestant Reformation. They are disowned because, as some allege, they are an infringement of the truth of God.

The proper object of a creed or confession, however, is simply to exhibit the truth of the Bible in a system, and to define and to defend the doctrines of Christianity in clear and precise language. So far from usurping the supreme place of Scripture, Bible-based confessions support and defend it; so far from obscuring the glory of Christ and His Cross, they define and reflect it. Those who call for their abandonment, it will be found, are either ignorant of their worth and usefulness, or wish to be free to hold loose views of Scripture, and nebulous opinions of the Christian Faith. A creedless Church is an absurdity.