

The 67th Free Church School in Theology met at its usual venue Carronvale House, Larbert, from 2nd to 5th September. It was encouraging to see five new faces including some from England and Wales. As always the fellowship was warm and discussion often went on late into the night.

The Evangelical Bookshop, Belfast, once again provided an excellent book table.

As usual the days began with a prayer meeting and ended with worship. The time for book reviews was interesting and gave a variety of perspectives, depending as much on the reviewers as the books themselves!

We were led in morning 'Devotional Times' by Mark Fitzpatrick, Simon Green and Trevor Kirkland.

A well researched first paper, was given by Rev John Keddie on **Thomas Chalmers**. His early life was covered, especially focusing on the means of his conversion through death in his family and personal illness. Even as an ordained man he lived carelessly, but at his conversion the need for personal piety became very important. Godly men like Turretin and Edwards now became his guides. His Ministry in Glasgow and Edinburgh was characterised by practical involvement with the physical needs of the people and especially in his use of the Diaconate. In two years in Glasgow he organised 11000 home visits. His erroneous views on the days of creation - 'Gap Theory' - was clouded it seems, like many others, by the new scientific influences of the day. However he was, according to Mr Keddie, a "phenomena" a man of his time.

The second paper was given by the Christian Institute's Nigel Kenny on '**Gender Ideology**'. The confusion of the day was shown to be largely due to the forgetting of the truth that 'man' is made in the image of God. Mr Kenny stressed the importance of the Bible teaching of the distinction between male and female and that surgery cannot change who or what a person is. The agenda to try and influence children to accept e.g. 'transgender' is deliberate so it becomes 'normal' to them as they grow up. It seems in some maths teaching in schools, aerial photos of LGBT marches are used to calculate numbers of people present or 'area' covered by so many people. Mr Kenny and his colleagues are owed a huge debt of thanks for their faithful work.

The third speaker was Rev Roy Mohon on the '**Order of Salvation**'. The teaching of the WCF clearly sets out the order of divine choice, effectual call, justification etc. The foreknowledge of God is clear; He knows his own. Mr Mahon showed how the application of redemption proceeds in a definite order. That order is always the same in the way the Lord works, although from man's perspective some may know different experiences in coming to faith. A difficult subject well handled.

The next Speaker was Rev Greg MacDonald on **Preaching through Malachi**. He set the address out under 4 headings. 1. Name 2. Time 3. Content 4. Malachi and Christ. Under the second heading he concluded that the use of 'table of the Lord' in 1:7 would indicate this was the period when the Temple was rebuilt. God's love, as the Covenant God, comes across from the very beginning, in opposition to man's continued unfaithfulness. The expectancy of those in the days of John the Baptist was seen as being linked to their continued hope in the covenant promises despite 400 years of silence. Mr MacDonald brought to our attention the titles in the fourth heading including 'the messenger of the covenant' (3:1) and 'Sun of righteousness' (4:2). The connection between the use of the title '**Lord**' and '**his temple**' and '**the messenger**' of the covenant'

brings out that this was none other than Christ, the Second Person. An enlightening address.

Rev James MacInnes gave an address on **The Gospel and the Sum of Saving Knowledge**. While mainly the work of James Durham and David Dickson, the document was mostly a reworking of sermons by Dickson. Mr MacInnes directed our thoughts to the 'Remedy provided by Jesus Christ through the covenant of grace.' He quoted Hodge as teaching that there was no doctrinal difference between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. Berkhof's view of the covenants was that while they were distinct they were not separate. The difference of the covenant of redemption being to do with 'holding up Christ' and the covenant of grace 'holding him out to be embraced' was very helpful.

Sacrifices of a Sweet Savour was the title of the address given by Rev James Gracie under the headings, 1. The significance of sacrifice 2. Evolution of sacrifice 3. The establishment of the Levitical sacrifices. Mr Gracie showed how God is speaking directly to man from Leviticus more than anywhere else in scripture. In the New Testament the overall theme is very much focused on Paul's statement, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1Cor 2:2). The sacrifices in the Old Testament are as unique in their purpose as the Cross is in the New. The importance of 'when I see blood ... pass over you' God providing the coats of skin in Genesis 3 are to be seen as to do with expiation. It is significant that blood was shed to provide this cover. The pre-eminence of the Burnt Offering was considered specially in the light of total consecration. A very edifying paper.

Rev Malcolm Watts, a favourite speaker at the School on many former occasions, gave a paper on **The Demise of Historical Protestant Interpretation of Revelation 13 - 17**. The weakening in more recent times of the recognition of the Church of Rome as the Antichrist is at odds with not only what Scripture teaches especially in the Book of Daniel and Revelation, but also the view of the vast majority of the Puritans and Reformers. This view determines to a great extent the purity of the Church. Mr Watts explained how this teaching was that of such great Reformers as Luther, Calvin, Knox and Cranmer. He showed how a weakening of belief in Scripture, the rise of humanism, loss of traditional Protestantism and therefore an unwillingness to identify the real enemy, the "great whore and beast" of Daniel and Revelation, as the cause for this demise. The Roman Empire is depicted in Daniel as distinct from the Church of Rome but it is also to be seen as arriving out of, following on from the demise of the Empire. Mr Watts concluded with the exhortation that we would not be ashamed of our Protestant heritage.

The concluding paper was given by the Schools excellent secretary Rev Andrew Allan on the subject **Practical Aspects of Sabbath Keeping**. He began by contending that the first commandment was given to Adam. God resting on the seventh day, though not an explicit command was nevertheless setting before Adam a clear commandment in the example. Adam's first full day was a Sabbath of rest. So if Adam in innocency needed a day of rest how much more fallen mankind! Part of the purpose of the day is to use it as a means of growing in holiness and a reminder of heaven itself. Mr Allan also emphasised how the Lord Jesus not only allowed but also promoted works of necessity and mercy. (Matt 12 - Mark 3) "We are" said Mr Allan, "to make it a delightful day not a dull day" not just for ourselves but also for our children.

A good exhortation to conclude the School.

The lectures may be found on the Partick FCC SermonAudio website. The 68th School in Theology is to take place on 7th to 10th of September 2020 at the same venue (D.V.)