

Why be a Free Presbyterian in 1930?

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"WHY I am still a Free Presbyterian" headed an article in this Magazine in 1906. The testimony given was needful then when Presbyterian denominations were jealously and zealously guarded. It is doubly needful in 1930, when all barriers are said to be down. To be rigidly faithful to one Church is to-day branded as narrow, hypocritical, uncharitable, even un-Christian. Why then should I, one individual out of Scotland's five million, of a Presbyterian stock and principle, give my sole adherence and support to the Free Presbyterian Church? I have read my Bible and a good deal of history and writings of the early Christian Church. It is clear from the Bible that for some years after the Saviour's ascension there was one, and only one, Christian Church. It had many congregations, its headquarters were at Jerusalem. There were deacons and presbyters (or elders), some of whom were set apart for preaching "by the laying on of hands of the Presbytery" (I. Tim. iv. 14). It had' councils or "General Assemblies" at Jerusalem to settle points of doctrine and to arrange where its preachers and missionaries were to go (Acts xv. 22). There were therefore no Plymouth Brethren among them. Every congregation had the same kind of "preaching." Some "ministers" who preached differently among the Galatians led these people astray from the Gospel of Christ, and had a woe pronounced against them by the Apostle Paul (Gal. i. 7, 8). The preaching was simple and narrow, containing nothing but Christ crucified, "all men, kings, or poor folks are lost, guilty sinners, the wages of sin is death, eternal misery, hell," "Christ came to save lost sinners, died for them, rose again," "repentance before God and faith upon the Lord Jesus," "all men are invited, few will accept," "they that believe shall be saved, they that believe not shall be damned." This is too simple and narrow for some, who, instead of forthwith leaving the Church, strove to impose their own doctrines upon it by the obvious process of seeking a majority of the congregations wherever they could. Hence arose divisions. Every time a new doctrine or innovation was brought forward, at least two "denominations" arose (1) those who held to the old doctrines of the Apostles; (2) those who desired to be more modern. Providentially, before the last of the Lord's original disciples left the earth divine revelation by the written and spoken word was completed and gathered together to form the Scriptures (later called the Book or Bible). In any dispute

about doctrines or practice, the Christians now went to the Scriptures, for they could not now appeal to the Apostles, and many of their heathen adversaries have left on record in their attacks that these Christians would have nothing to do with anything outside these Scriptures, nor would they listen to learned "reason." It is clear that the Church as planted by the disciples differed from all other religious systems and from many modern "Churches" in three main particulars, viz.:- (1) They pointed to the Scriptures as the unadulterated Word of God; (2) They took their authority for their very existence from these Scriptures; (3) They recognised none as Christ's who did not receive the Scriptures as God's Word. I see that those who had been with the Lord would have no dealings with any Church which denies the infallible Scriptures, or which harbours ministers or members who refuse these Scriptures. . I next consider what ministers broadcast from pulpit and press in these days to the effect that the Church of Christ must change its message with the times. They say that "the people (meaning themselves in the first place) will not listen to the old doctrines." Having preached that the Bible is largely "trash" they piously lament that their congregations fall away, in spite of the fact that they never mention to their people such awful things as sin, hell, depravity, atonement. What have I seen personally during 15 years in the late U.F. Church? Funerals, where the dead was described in prayer as "thy dear departed servant," although he was prayer-less, profane, or drunken, or sometimes quite unknown to the presiding minister. Congregations, where almost every adult was a communicant, rising from the Lord's Table to spend the week at the theatres, football matches, dancing, and sometimes at worse. Sabbath services of one hour, including 25 minutes of "sermon," read from paper, containing nothing about sin, salvation, or eternity, but plenty from Burns, Shakespeare, and Shaw, and making all heirs of God. Socials, with plenty of music and dancing, church football leagues, church parades with bands blaring out on the Lord's Day. Advertisements in the "Glasgow Herald" for organists and choir singers at a stated salary. All this, and more, done in the name of Christ and as the work of his Church on earth! Tell these things to the people of the United Church in Ross-shire and they will not believe you. Their ministers are busy among the young of the Free Presbyterian Church telling them, "your Church is old-fashioned and poor, come to us, we have all the same Bible." A layman has actually said to myself, "We are all the same in the Highlands, we have no hymns!" I ask myself, "What does the Bible say about these Churches and ministers?" It tells me that the majority of these ministers

may be ministers of the United Church, but they are not the sent ministers of Jesus Christ. It tells that what was necessary for the salvation of the humble Galilean fishermen, King David, Manasseh, and Paul will be necessary for the salvation of all men in all ages, whether they occupy a palace, pulpit, or poorhouse. The God of the Bible claims to be the one and only Jehovah God, merciful, gracious, and who will punish eternally unrepentant and unregenerated men for their sins. He is not the "God" who is preached from the pulpits of the big Presbyterian churches, and yet He proclaims "I am the Lord, that is my name" (Isa. xlii. 8), "and beside me there is no Saviour" (Isa. xliii. it). The Christ of the Bible is held forth as the coeternal Son of God, the atoning sacrifice, the High Priest for sin, the slain Lamb of God, the only Saviour, and yet ministers of these Churches tell their people that the Atonement is "a doctrine of the shambles." Let me look more closely at the ministers themselves. You see them regular attendants of the theatre, football matches. Burns' suppers. They seek favour among their people by their "sociability." They preside and speechify at concerts, "sacred" or "secular," and, above all, they are ever ready to "defend" the young against the solemn warnings of evangelical ministers like those of the Free Presbyterian Church. It is not unjust to say that the majority, outside their pulpits, are indistinguishable from the average irreligious, irresponsible man of the street save by their "clerical" collar. If there be one class they detest above all others, it is pious, God-fearing preachers. I heard a Ross-shire parish minister say concerning these latter: -"They will not allow a song - nothing secular - they are positively un-Christian." I ask myself if these worldly-wise ministers will ever bring one young man to Christ, will they fit their people for an endless eternity, will they be God's instruments for the overthrow of evil? The Bible tells of "many unruly and vain talkers whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. They profess they know God, but in works they deny Him (Tit. i. 10, 14). "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. xv. 8). If asked why ministers are constantly the subject of exposure, one replies that one of them will ruin whole families and congregations of one's fellow-countrymen. One Christless minister is more dangerous than a dozen professed infidels. "Like priest, like people" still holds good to-day. Let the pulpits be filled with men, who having tasted of the grace of Christ, who will preach nothing else than what Christ

preached, as did John, Peter, Paul, and whose experience will testify that God's plain Word will turn our people from Godless ways, outwardly at least (Jer. xxiii. 22). I feel it would be more honest if some ministers would frankly state that they preach "The Gospel according to the Rev. A-. B-." than to pretend to preach the Gospel according to Jesus Christ. Ministers have no authority to change the Church's message. They are called "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech" the people by their mouth. Ambassadors are not permitted to tamper with the commands of their sovereign. Ministers of Christ who professedly are called to devote themselves solely to the things of the Kingdom of Heaven, and their business is concerned with a world to come. It is their business to preach the Gospel in season and out of season, not to be found at the head of every form of worldly amusement. What a spectacle we see in Scotland when "Very Reverends" and "D.D.'s" are to be found eulogising the blasphemous "Immortal Memory" of Robert Burns, an immoral rake, whatever may have been his attainments as a poet. "But," you may say; "all ministers, in the United Church for example, are not like that." No, a few give evidence that they are not of the number, but remember that every penny put into that Church goes to support these men and to further their subtle influence. If they were to be salaried in proportion to their piety I fear they would starve or else flee to other fields. What Church in Scotland does the Bible direct me to follow? A Church which holds fast by the Word of God and the great doctrines of grace, whose preachers are presbyters in the true sense of the word, and who preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified. A Church which keeps itself apart from worldly practices, and which, while in the world seeking the salvation of the world, is not of the world, but calls men to holiness of life. A Church which will minister to the needs of my soul, and not to the bodily senses. A Church which will take joyfully to the spoiling of, its goods and suffer all men to speak evil of it, rather than it should betray one jot or tittle of the infallible Word of God. 'Where shall I find such a Church? I would not insult intelligence by crediting the great United Church with the above character, in spite of the fair words of its princes. The present Free Church? No. Some of the rank and file doubtless are genuine, but look at their leaders, read their record from 1893 onwards, see their bazaars and the treatment in their Assembly of petitioners to seek to make a clean sweep of its worldliness I personally take it as a bad sign that their men "at the top" have accepted the degree of D.D. from the hands of those who have it to give to-day. We say this with the full knowledge that in the past some eminent Christians have had a D.D. There is

one Church which I know to fulfil the Scripture requirements. I came to it as a Zacchaeus, out of curiosity, listened, bought a Bible, read it, and stayed in that Church. Its name is "The Free Presbyterian Church." It is relatively poor, yet has no lack. There is none known to me where the Scripture is followed so fully, and if any other Church should arise in the land like to it, I should not have to leave it, for the two would unite on scriptural grounds to become one.