



The Church of Scotland

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Maxine and I returned to Australia on Tuesday after eight weeks overseas.

We were five weeks in the UK, first at the Word Alive convention. This is like the Easter convention for the UK, this year held in North Wales. Word Alive has a solid commitment to expository ministry, each day started with sermons from Romans and the day ended in week one on Matthew and in week two on the book of Revelation.

We then travelled to St Andrew the Great, Church of England in the middle of Cambridge. I spoke on the Sunday following their evangelistic mission. As a result of the mission, 40 people joined a group for new converts or seekers.

Then on to St Helen's Bishopgate, in London, what a blessing is this church to the city of London, the Word of God is declared at every opportunity, the ministry is persistently evangelistic with a strong emphasis on Bible study groups and one to one ministry.

Both these churches are very well led, a reminder that leadership is key. The failure of the church, like Israel, is usually due to a failure of leadership.

You can access the excellent sermons and resources at both the churches through their websites: www.stag.org and www.st-helens.org.uk.

We then spent six days in Singapore where a group of like-minded pastors, Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren and independent church planters have developed a strong network promoting Biblical ministry, this is called Project Timothy. Pastors' seminars were held in the mornings on preaching Acts and at night, public meetings were held at which Acts was preached (see www.projecttimothy.com).

Finally we spent two weeks in Malaysia. The Klang Valley Bible Conference committee will launch its Centre of Expository Preaching next July and this visit was to conduct pastors' preaching seminars on Romans, Acts and discipling, in preparation for next year's launch. www.kvbc.info will give you a taste of the strategic work being done in Malaysia.

While we were away I was represented at the opening of the building for the Dili congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Timor Leste by Kevin Murray. I am looking forward to speaking at a teaching week at this church next May.

I was represented by David Burge at the Governor General's visit to the Allowah Presbyterian Children's Hospital. This invitation was given by the former manager of Allowah, the entrepreneurial Colin Llewellyn, who was present for the visit. What an impressive initiative this hospital is and Sir Peter and Lady Cosgrove were enthusiastic visitors and all were encouraged by Sir Peter's speech. It is gratifying to have such a fine Vice Regal couple who show obvious interest in the work of the church.

That brings me to Scotland. Each year I am invited to attend the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May. This last Assembly voted 309 to 182 in favour of

allowing those in same sex civil partnerships to be called as ministers and deacons of the church. The outgoing Moderator, Very Rev John Chalmers, is reported as saying, "there's something else we have to learn as a church and that is the power of harmony...it's time to play for the team".

There are many issues which are disputable, that we can have different convictions about, and yet still be in fellowship, but this surely is not one of them.

Just as the reformation was about more than the indulgence issue, so the malaise of the Church of Scotland is wider and deeper than this one issue. The majority has rejected the authority of God Himself in admitting to Christian ministry those living in such relationships.

Seeing it as a "team harmony" issue is nonsense, a more accurate analogy would be that the body of Christ has separated itself from the head, the branch from the vine or the building of God from its foundation.

I recognise that faithful congregations have left the Church of Scotland and that others have remained and opposed such abuse of the Word of God, but I see no point in

symbolically representing the Presbyterian Church of Australia at such an Assembly, when the basis of our fellowship, the Lordship of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, is so disregarded.

At the conclusion of that warmest of chapters, Romans 16, Paul appeals to the believers at Rome to avoid those who "create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught" (Romans 16:17).

Thus, harmony and unity are vital, but never at the cost of truth. We are called to speak the truth in love.

The sad direction of the Church of Scotland is yet another example of that

which is popular and approved in the world, is always in danger of becoming popular and approved in the church.

The concern of our denomination for unity in fellowship with truth is seen in our recent active participation with like-minded believers at the World Reformed Fellowship international meetings (www.wrf.net.org) along with 67 other denominations and 145 organisations.

Our mother church has tragically left the family home.

The majority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has rejected the authority of God Himself.

The Right Reverend David Cook is the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

