



SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

SAMUEL RUTHERFORD

“many coals make a
good fire, this is part
of the communion of
saints”



The Second Reformation in Scotland was a revival born out of prayer. Alexander Henderson regarded the Covenants as God's answer to "those fervent prayers uttered and sent up to heaven at those most profitable edification meetings when the public meetings were for the most part corrupt". Such meetings had also played an important role during the first Scottish Reformation.

There were strong bonds of fellowship amongst those who opposed unbiblical practices. They often met for united prayer. In 1637 Samuel Rutherford wrote to encourage believers not to "slack" in holding such meetings. "Double your meetings; cease not for Zion's sake, and hold not your peace till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth".

John Livingstone tells us that there were "great meltings of heart" among the people of God at that time. Such meetings were also of great profit during the times of revival in Ulster in the 1620s. They involved prayer and discussion of spiritual things in a practical way. Where necessary there might also be counsel and reproof.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was evident. James Wood, a resolute episcopalian was converted after attending one such meeting. Another episcopalian, James Guthrie was also converted under the influence of Samuel Rutherford. This included the prayer meetings that Rutherford organised in St Andrews.

01 Controversy

Once reformation came there was some concern about continuing such meetings. The issue came before the 1639 General Assembly. Some were inclined to discourage all such private meetings. Others such as Rutherford were firmly in favour of them if carefully managed. There was a danger of other views about the Church creeping in. Congregationalist ideas were particularly feared. These undermined parish churches in favour of a gathered church of only professing believers.

Regular gatherings of many families could create division if they promoted unbiblical teaching. There was concern about potential attempts to set up separate congregations. These could arise if the meetings took place at the same time as public worship. It is true that divisions of this kind have sometimes arisen from such groups.

It was also necessary to prevent undermining the biblical office of the minister of the Word. No one had authority to set themselves up as a teacher apart from the ways appointed by God. Another danger was that the meetings could encroach upon and replace family worship. It could mean that something meant for the family by itself was longer confined to them.

Yet there were also great benefits in spiritual fellowship which was itself commanded by God's Word. A delicate balance needed to be struck. Unity had to be preserved within the Church.

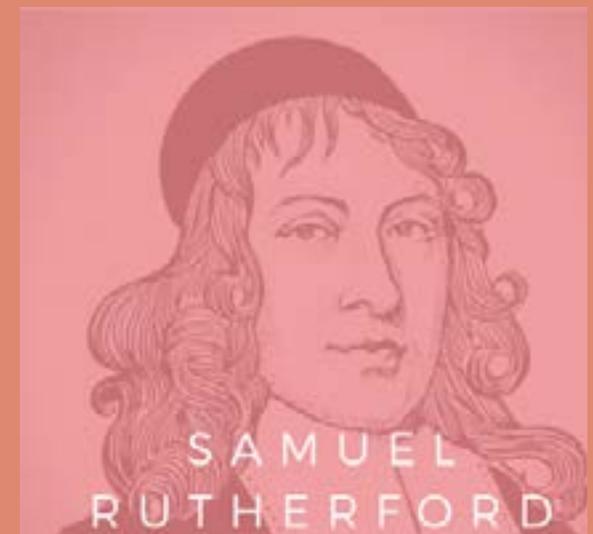
02 Resolution

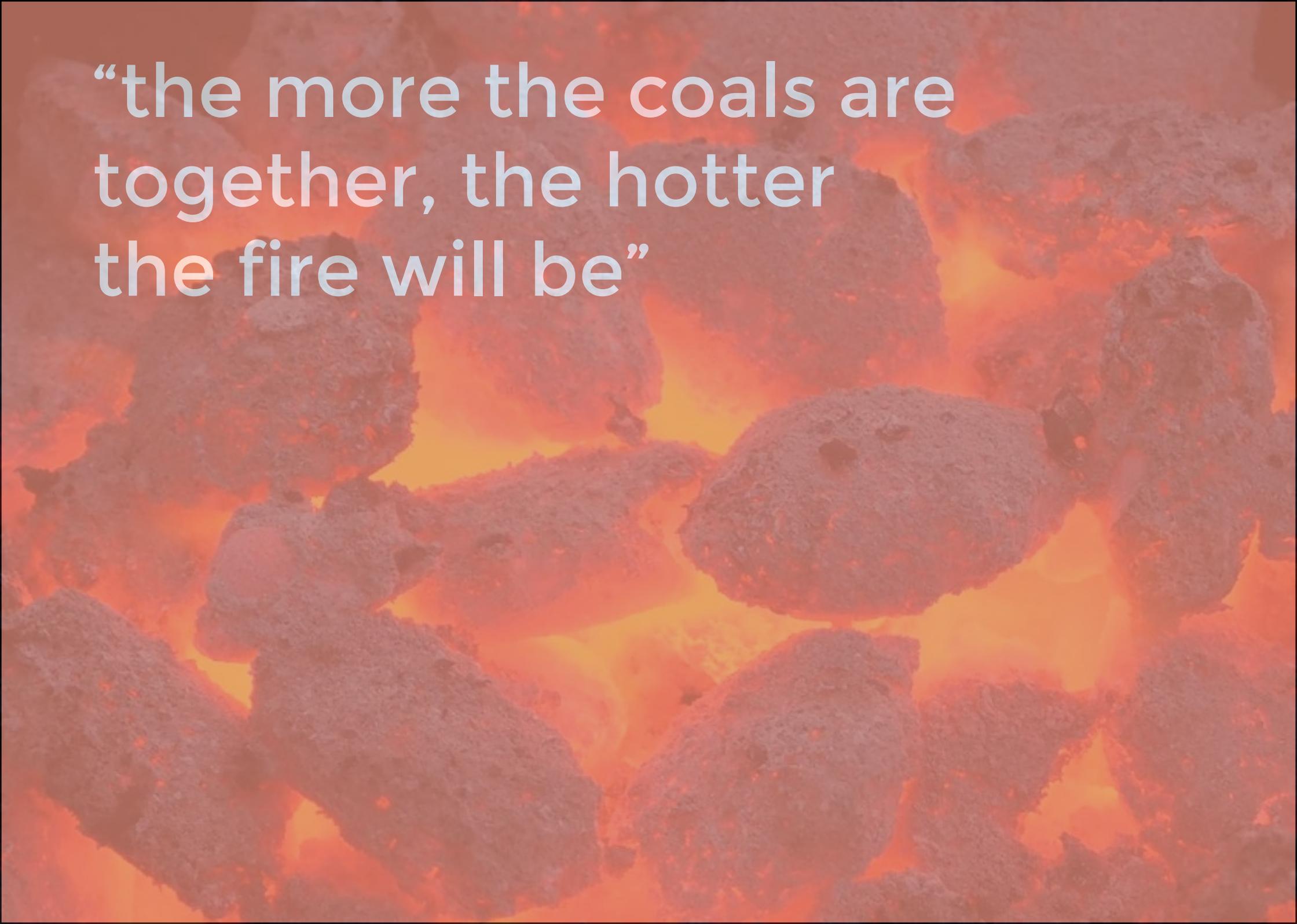
The issue returned over several years and by 1641 the position was clear. The Assembly showed wisdom in handling such a thorny issue. They discouraged firmly the dangers and abuses. They still encouraged meeting to mutually edifying one another. The Directory for Family Worship of 1647 reasserted this.

James Durham later said that we should not disclaim "Christian fellowship" because it is sometimes done in an unedifying way. Instead we should make sure to engage in it correctly and wisely. He referred to Hebrews 10:24 and 3:12-13.

03 Rutherford's Biblical Case

Samuel Rutherford believed this Act encouraged such meetings on an occasional basis. He believed there was a strong biblical case for such gather-





“the more the coals are
together, the hotter
the fire will be”

“This is not so much
expounding Scripture
as applying it correctly”



“All saints...have
communion in each
other’s gifts and
graces”



“to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland”

Reformation Scotland Trust



The Second Reformation was a period of radical reformation and rediscovery of Biblical truth in the Church of Scotland. It was also the period of greatest revival throughout the whole nation that Scotland has ever experienced.

We aim to promote the biblical understanding attained at that time.



The attainments of this period were covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship and church government.

This includes the biblical standards for faith and worship produced by the Westminster Assembly. Amongst these is the Westminster Confession of Faith, which remains the doctrinal standard of the Scottish Presbyterian Church.



We are convinced that the Christian Church needs to re-engage with these teachings once more. The Biblical truths reclaimed in the Second Reformation are the only safe foundation for the future of the Scottish Church.

Our aim is therefore to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland.

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