



Working to see what Christ will do in Scotland tomorrow.

**Stornoway
Reformed Presbyterian
Church of Scotland**

part of a global church with a glorious heritage



June 2018 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Word from the Manse.....	2
News & Events.....	3
Hide Not the Offence of the Cross.....	4

CONTACT DETAILS

Stornoway RPCS
Bridge Community Centre
Bayhead Embankment
Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,
Scotland, HS1 2EB

www.stornowayrpcs.org

info@stornowayrpcs.org

Scottish Charity No: SC043043

WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

Stornoway has made the national news yet again, this time for the opening of a mosque on James Street. The response within the Reformed Church has been diverse. The Free Church (Continuing) called it an “unwelcome development” and outlined Islam’s various incompatibilities with Biblical Christianity as well as showing how it was a threat to religious and civil liberties. The Free Church response, however, supported the religious liberty for Muslims to build a mosque, while disagreeing with Islam fundamentally. Thomas Guthrie was cited who, appearing before a select committee of the House of Commons said, “I would grant a site to any man who desired to worship God according to his conscience.” When pressed if he would grant this liberty to Jews, Muslims, or idolaters, he replied, “Yes, I have no right to stand between a man and his conscience.” What should our thoughts be on this matter?

First, we agree with our brethren on both sides that there is no salvation to be found in Islam. Christianity and Islam are fundamentally opposed. Christianity offers salvation by grace alone, through faith in Christ. Islam only gives a life of bondage to works in order to merit Paradise. With both denominations we should pray for the salvation of Muslims, as indeed we have been doing.

But the point of tension comes as to whether religious liberty should be granted to Muslims to build a mosque in a Christian community. Is it hypocritical for a Christian to expect religious freedom for himself and yet deny it to others? Guthrie pleaded liberty of conscience. But is a man’s conscience the final authority?

Our Confession of Faith teaches that “God alone is the Lord of conscience” (WCF 20.2). This liberty of conscience is not an unrestrained liberty so that we can live and worship however we please. Rather it is a glorious liberty purchased by Christ (WCF 20.1) which sets us in the way of His commandments which are broad (Psalm 119:96). Could we really conclude that Christ has purchased liberty of conscience for any form of worship? Far from it!

True liberty is based upon God’s Law. That may seem counterintuitive, yet it is the case. Let me give some examples. Why do human beings have the right to life? It is because of the commandment of God, “You shall not murder.” This law negatively prohibits unjust killing and simultaneously upholds the value of human life created in the image of God. This law is evident, even to natural man. God’s law provides a glorious liberty that protects the weak and vulnerable, indeed all human life, and we ought not to take it for granted. Why does our society believe (contrary to Communism) that we have a right to own private property? Again, it is because of the commandment of God, “You shall not steal.” The law negatively prohibits theft and simultaneously upholds individual rights to own and possess. The fact that many societies protect these two liberties (life and private property) shows that God’s law is written on their hearts (Romans 2:14-15). All too often God’s Law is seen as restrictive by society, yet it actually is the foundation of liberty.

How then should we conceive of religious liberty? We must go to the Law of God to see what liberty it opens for us. God’s Word shows how we are to worship. We often call it the Regulative Principle of Worship, as it regulates what worship is permitted. We could consider this negatively: certain forms of worship are forbidden. Alternatively, we can see that God’s Law sets before us the glorious liberty of worshipping Him in righteousness and truth. The Law gives no freedom to worship God contrary to His Word, nor to worship a false god. Yes, there is a greater liberty under the Gospel, purchased by Christ. But it is not a liberty to worship God in any way according to our whims. It is a liberty of bolder access to God and fuller communications of the Spirit to worship Him with child-like love, without the shackles of the ceremonial law.

Can we agree with Guthrie? Can a minister say that he has no right to stand between a man and his conscience? Does the minister not rather have the duty to testify against a conscience bound to sin? If God alone is Lord of the conscience then even the conscience must be brought in submission to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). While our society might grant freedom of religion to all, God's Word does not.

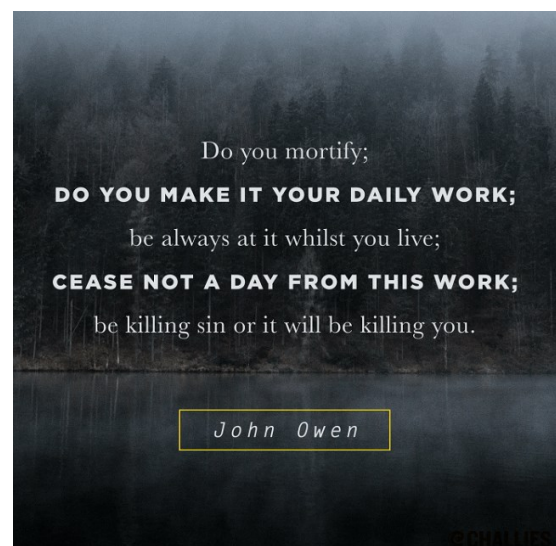
Furthermore, it is our duty as Reformed Presbyterians to testify against both Church and State for our apostasy from Biblical faithfulness and our Covenant obligations. One of the reasons that RPs have remained separate from the Church of the Revolution is that we believe that the National Covenant is still binding on Scotland (church and state) and that the Solemn League and Covenant is still binding on the three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland (again, both church and state). In these covenants the true religion is defined and the signatories promise that, "we shall defend the same, and resist all these contrary errors and corruptions, according to our vocation, and to the uttermost of that power that God hath put in our hands, all the days of our life." Our Larger Catechism agrees when it lists the duties required by the Second commandment, "the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship"

The modern British notion of religious freedom is not in accordance with the Biblical bounds of Christian liberty as expressed by these Standards, but rather it is a direct violation of solemn Covenant promises made before God and which we are still bound to fulfil today. Yet the modern notion is so ingrained in our society that many Christians bristle against the language regarding idolatry in our Confession, Catechisms, and Covenants. Do we not know that to be true? How often do the office bearers in the Church at large speak of how we are obliged to detest and abhor false religion? Yet in Reformed churches, office bearers declare that they own the Westminster Standards as their confession of faith. This view is not a popular view, but I believe it to be the Biblical view and consistent with the Standards of the Reformed Church. Until we return to examine our failure to honour God in our Covenant obligations, the Church at large will continue to weaken to the extent that our message will be indistinguishable from the world around us.

And yet, please do not misunderstand my point. I am not attempting to enter into ecclesiastical hostilities with local churches nor am I seeking to encourage hatred of Muslims. It would also be easy to take my words out of context, and I can only imagine what could be said - heartless, austere, bigoted. That is far from what I intend. As we have considered in our studies on the Sermon on the Mount we are called to love as our Father loves, even our enemies for "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good." If we are unprepared to love individual Muslims, do we know the love of God ourselves? If we only condemn Islam and feel no compulsion for spreading the Gospel to our Muslim neighbours, has the love of Christ really constrained us?

While I believe our nation is bound by Covenant to God, our conduct is far from honouring these solemn vows. Yet it is not inconsistent to call the nation and church to repent of their failure to detest false religions and defend the true religion, while at the same time also speaking the truth in love to those in need of salvation.

In Christ, Stephen

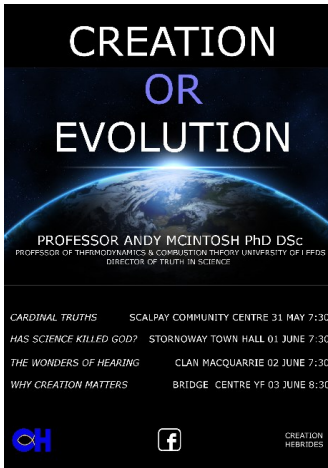


NEWS & EVENTS

GIDEONS ANNUAL RALLY

The Western Isles Branch of the Gideons will be holding their Annual Rally on Friday 1st June at 7.30pm at the APC Church on Keith Street. The main speaker will be Iain J Mair, Executive Director of the Gideons International in the British Isles.

CREATION HEBRIDES



There will be a meeting of Creation Hebrides held, also held on Friday 1st June, at Stornoway Town Hall at 7.30pm. The speaker will be Professor Andy McIntosh, Professor of Thermodynamics and Combustion Theory at the University of Leeds. The title of his address will be, "Has Science Killed God?"



GIDEONS
INTERNATIONAL

HIDE NOT THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man" — Galatians 1:11

A gospel which is after men will be welcomed by men; but it needs a divine operation upon the heart and mind to make a man willing to receive into his inmost soul this distasteful gospel of the grace of God. My dear brethren, do not try to make it tasteful to carnal minds.



Hide not the offense of the cross, lest you make it of none effect. The angles and corners of the gospel are its strength: to pare them off is to deprive it of power. Toning down is not the increase of strength, but the death of it.

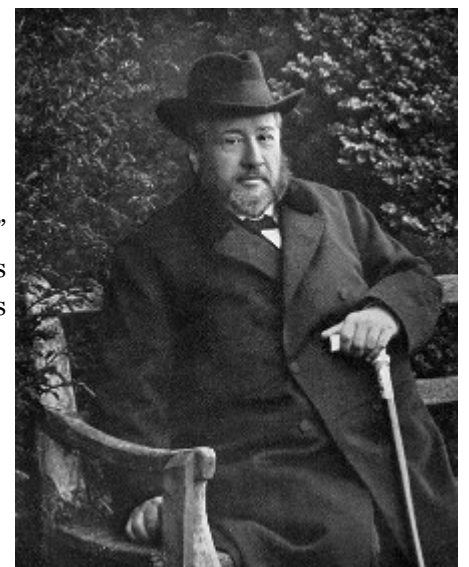
Why, even among the sects, you must have noticed that their distinguishing points are the horns of their power; and when these are practically omitted, the sect is effete. Learn, then, that if you take Christ out of Christianity, Christianity is dead.

If you remove grace out of the gospel, the gospel is gone. If the people do not like the doctrine of grace, give them all the more of it. Whenever its enemies rail at a certain kind of gun, a wise military power will provide more of such artillery.

A great general, going in before his king, stumbled over his own sword. "I see," said the king, "your sword is in the way." The warrior answered, "Your majesty's enemies have often felt the same." That our gospel offends the King's enemies is no regret to us.

From Charles H. Spurgeon, "Galatians 1:11 - Our Manifesto." Preached on April 25th, 1890, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

4



CH Spurgeon