

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

August 2019 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.....2
- What is the Reformed Presbyterian Church? Part 6.....3-4

CONTACT DETAILS

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

We are in the throes of packing up to move into the new manse. Whilst moving house is always an upheaval, we are deeply thankful to the congregation for purchasing this manse and are looking forward to settling in our new home. The Deacons' Court believes that by owning our own manse we will be that much more established as a congregation. Of course, we continue to pray for a church building of our own also.

Inevitably, we must ascribe glory to God for His gracious provisions towards us. We pray that the manse may be used to promote the cause of Christ in our community. A challenging text for us and for all is, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). In this case, "house" does not refer simply to the bricks and mortar of a building, but rather the family unit from generation to generation. Nevertheless, all that the family possesses must be included with it in how it may serve the Lord.

For yourselves, how might you use whatever the Lord generously has bestowed on you for His glory?

In Christ,

Stephen

NEWS & EVENTS

AUGUST COMMUNION SERVICES

The August communion services are due to take place in the congregation from 22-26 August. The visiting minister will be Rev. Tim Donachie (Rtd.) All services, aside from the Lord's Day (Bridge Centre), will be held at the Gospel Hall, Bayhead. The service times are as follows...

Thursday 22 August 7.30pm—Rev. Tim Donachie

Friday 23 August 7.30pm—Rev. Tim Donachie

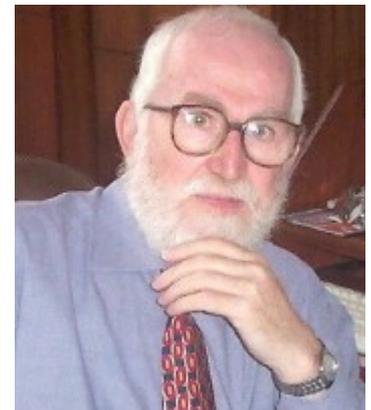
Saturday 24 August 11.00am—Rev. Tim Donachie

Saturday 24 August 6.30pm—Prayer Meeting

Lord's Day 25 August 11.00am—Rev. Tim Donachie

Lord's Day 25 August 6.30pm—Rev. Tim Donachie

Monday 26 August 7.30pm—Rev. Tim Donachie



Rev. Dr. Tim Donachie



PROPERTY FUND UPDATE

The Deacons' Court are thankful to the Lord for the provision of a manse, centrally located at 10 Springfield Road. The property was purchased through congregational giving, along with generous provision from out with our congregation. This included a £50,000 interest-free loan from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland Mission Committee, which will be repaid over 6 years. We are thankful to all who have given sacrificially, both from within and without our congregation, as we seek to further establish our witness here in Stornoway.

- 2 The Property Fund will continue to operate as it has been. It will be used for the purpose of accumulating funds, to pay back the loan from the Irish RP Mission Committee. Furthermore, we are seeking to build up the Property Fund in order that we might be in a position to acquire our own church building. This may seem out with our reach as a small congregation, but the Lord is able to provide.

As usual, each month, there will be a collection taken for the Property Fund. Envelopes marked "Property Fund," including your envelope number, should you be a tax payer, can be placed in the plate at any point during the month. Should anyone want to pay towards the Property Fund via bank transfer, please ask for the account details.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).



Stornoway RP Manse

WHAT IS THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH—PART 6

We have seen that covenanting is a duty warranted by the Scriptures, exemplified throughout Israel’s history, and predicted for the New Testament era. Why would Christians not wish, by God’s grace, to draw closer to Him and publicly pay homage to King Jesus? Surely our desire ought to be that the Body of Christ would do the same, promising to be faithful to her only Head. Would it not also be a wonderful thing if our land would “kiss the Son” legally and constitutionally? Since Christ is over both institutions of Church and nations, they should submit formally to Messiah the Prince.

The National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), are salient examples of precisely that. These compacts were signed by ecclesiastical and civil leaders, recognising that although Church and State are distinct, both are under Christ and ought to aim for His glory, particularly in Reformation. The question that this article considers is whether these historical covenants have any contemporary relevance.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church has long testified that they do, even as a lone voice at times. Historically, we have spoken of a “descending obligation” of the covenants; in other words, our generation is bound by the same vows even though they were taken in the 17th Century. Let’s substantiate this claim.

1—DO COVENANTS HAVE A “DESCENDING OBLIGATION?”

A covenant is in effect as long as the two parties live. Since we are referring to pledges made with the Eternal One, it is evident that He is still the same. What of the other party? The other party is human, by nature finite. If the covenant is a personal covenant between an individual and God, it cannot bind posterity. It would be ludicrous to suggest that marriage vows tie children to their parent’s marriage. Likewise, the obligation of ecclesiastical membership vows do not pass on to your children – they must profess their faith and take these vows themselves. But it is not always the case that covenants are individual. Many covenants are social, taken by a church or nation. It can be readily evidenced that the human party on one side of the covenant lasts longer than a generation and therefore the covenantal responsibility must continue also.

The very first covenant was made with Adam and “in him to his posterity” (WCF 7.2). The duties of this contract remain – perfect and personal obedience. This moral imperative has descended to all children of Adam, and thus by nature we have all stood guilty of the breach of this covenant and under its penalty.

What of God’s covenant made with Israel in which they promised obedience to their God as they adhered to His grace? The onus to obey the covenant descended from age to age, and not merely to individuals who made the vows for themselves. As one generation passed away, the next generation was obliged to obey what their fathers had sworn and to adhere to God’s grace. If the generation was unfaithful, then they were said to have broken the covenant. It is only possible to be guilty of breaking a covenant made by their fathers if they were party to the covenant, regardless of the fact that they did not individually swear to it (Deuteronomy 29:25, Jeremiah 11:10).

In other words, the requirement to obey the covenant descended to each generation so that they were just as bound to obey as their fathers were. The reason was that **Israel** was bound by the covenant as church and nation as opposed to just Moses’ generation within Israel. Because Israel continued to exist constitutionally from one generation to the next, Israel’s covenant obligations were perpetuated also.

Such a principle is clearly seen today in political treaties made generations ago that have a sustained effect for many years. If our Government were to declare war, then our country would be at war. Even if there were to be a subsequent General Election and a brand-new Government constituted, the country remains at war. Correspondingly, debts contracted by our nation in the past cannot be evaded in the present simply by arguing the liability belongs to those who went before us. A Biblical example of such a political treaty can be seen in the covenant made with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:15 and yet the obligation continued even to Saul who was guilty of their bloodshed (2 Samuel 21:1).

As William Symington says, “The descending obligation of covenants is thus no novel, unheard of peculiar principle, but one of old-standing- a principle which has been acted upon in every age, in things both sacred and common, and which is even now an established law in civil jurisprudence.”

Lest there be any confusion, any vows taken to perform something sinful can never bind subsequent generations, but rather should be repented of. Nevertheless, we are discussing morally right covenants taken by church and commonwealth before the eternal God. Since these institutions continue to exist as moral entities, remaining under Christ, therefore “Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay them” (Psalm 76:11a).

2—WHAT ABOUT THE NATIONAL COVENANT AND THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT?

We have looked previously at the history of these covenants. In each there were two parties, on the one hand the true God of the Bible and on the other Scotland and the three Kingdoms respectively. Both covenants have stipulations and promises, they are vows of obedience that swear adherence to the Covenant of Grace. Both covenants are public and social covenants, entered into with “joint concurrence.” These covenants, following the requirements of the Lord’s commands, are according to the examples of Old Testament Israel and are a partial fulfilment of the prophecies made of the New Testament period.

Do these covenants have any relevance today? Surely more than just relevance! These covenants have a continuing obligation for as long as the moral persons within the covenants exist. The National Covenant continues to bind the Scottish Kirk, throne, and parliament to the worthy cause of promoting and maintaining the Reformation. The Solemn League and Covenant likewise binds the three kingdoms (Scotland, England/Wales, and Ireland) to these same ends.

Just because we have lamentably broken “the covenant made with our fathers,” it does not remove our obligation, but rather makes it imperative that we return to the Lord, that he might return to us. Next time, we will consider some practical implications.

Rev. Stephen McCollum