

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

August 2022 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

Being faithful is more important than we might realise. Our Lord tells us that he requires his stewards to be faithful (1 Cor 4:2) and that only faithful servants go to heaven (Mt 25:21). And if we are tempted to think that faithfulness only matters in the big things in life, he also tells us that those who are unfaithful in smaller things will also be unfaithful in bigger things (Lk 16:10). But, despite such clear, solemn, and searching teaching, it seems that faithfulness is something that matters little these days – even in many churches.

That is partly because being faithful is often mixed up in people's minds with being perfect and since perfection is obviously unattainable, they seem to conclude that faithfulness is unattainable as well. And so, they say, maybe we shouldn't really expect it of ourselves or each other. But, in the light of Christ's words above, this is a serious mistake. After all, while imperfect servants get to heaven, unfaithful ones do not.

But this confusion between perfection and faithfulness abounds and it comes to the fore quite often when people talk about a 'perfect' church. You will often hear people say – usually when they are trying to justify their own church in some way – that there is no perfect church. Or, as the saying goes, 'you won't find a perfect church and, if you do, don't join it because it won't be perfect anymore.' Now, certainly, that is very true and insofar as it reminds us not to expect perfection in ourselves or in others – even when we are called by our Lord to strive for perfection (Mt 5:48; 1 Jn 2:1) – it is very important to bear in mind.

But that is about all that saying does. If you try to do more with it and make it the last word on what church we should join or stay in, it doesn't really work. It would mean that every church, including the most liberal church down the road, is a viable option for belonging and supporting simply because, like the rest, it is 'imperfect.'

But the fact that there are no perfect churches misses the real point. When someone says to you that there are no perfect churches, you should consider responding by saying, 'That's right, but there are *faithful* churches.' And that is the real issue: we certainly should not expect churches to be *perfect*, but we should expect them to be *faithful*. But what's the difference? An unfaithful church is not a church which fails to do everything right and neither is it a church which does something wrong. Rather, it is a church which willfully breaks promises and, far from repenting, tolerates or even defends or promotes what it has done.

It is helpful, I think, to make a comparison with marriage. When two people marry, they form a relationship with mutual responsibilities which they publicly promise to respect. Respecting such promises is what we call faithfulness. Obviously, there will be imperfections and shortcomings and, admittedly, these are a failure to live up to promises, but we do not consider either of them to be unfaithful just because of these. However, if one of them – let us say the husband – begins a relationship with someone else, we immediately recognise that as being more than just a failure to live up to a promise but a plain and serious breach of it – and that is no longer an imperfection but unfaithfulness. And that can only be healed by the process of confession and change which the Bible calls repentance. *And without such repentance, there is no further obligation on the wife regarding the marriage.* (It should be pointed out, *in this case*, that even repentance itself doesn't oblige the wife to continue the marriage).

Similarly, you may be in a church where the overseers don't do their duty as well as they could (or promised to do) in pastoring and preaching. Sometimes, indeed, they may fall significantly short. But that does not necessarily mean that you are in an unfaithful church. And great care must be taken here – because faithful people are not perfect! And we must beware of a spirit that finds fault in others too readily, imputes false or imagined motives to them or gives them no opportunity for repentance when lovingly confronted with their deficiency. And, as always, considering our tendency to see the sin in others before we see our own, let's bear in mind that it is vital for us to be faithful ourselves if we try to ensure the faithfulness of others (Mt 7:3-5).

However, if your church overseers, locally or nationally, *willfully break* their promises on what to teach you (biblical doctrine) and how they will lead you in worship (biblical worship), and if they persist in deliberate neglect of their pastoral duties (biblical oversight), then they are not just guilty of *imperfections* and *shortcomings* (which we gladly bear in love) but the greater sin of *unfaithfulness*. And while these overseers continue in that situation, you are no longer under an obligation to be under their oversight. It would be just as wrong to require you to be subject to an unfaithful church leadership as it would be to require wives to remain subject to unfaithful husbands (even though the church leadership will tell you, often and perhaps forcefully, that to leave *their* leadership would be a sin).

Indeed, in such a situation, you would come under an obligation to seek out faithful oversight. And how many of the Lord's people put themselves through grief of spirit and pain of conscience, and all the evils which follow, because they have mistakenly thought that it was their duty to continue in an unfaithful church when it was, in fact, their duty to leave!

So, yes, it is a waste of time to look for a *perfect* church – or a perfect spouse for that matter! – but it's time well spent looking for a *faithful* one.

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

AUGUST COMMUNIONS

The Communion Services are due to take place in the congregation from 25th-29th August. The preachers will be Rev Kenneth Stewart and Rev Donald Macdonald.

The Lord's Day services will be held in the Bridge Centre. All other services will be held in the Gospel Hall, Bayhead. The service times are as follows:

Thursday 25th August 7.30pm—Rev Donald Macdonald

Friday 26th August 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Saturday 27th August 11.00am—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Saturday 27th August 6.30pm—Prayer Meeting

Lord's Day 28th August 11.00am—
Rev Kenneth Stewart

Lord's Day 28th August 6.30pm—
Rev Kenneth Stewart

Monday 29th August 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth
Stewart



SYLVESTER KONTEH GRADUATION

Pictured to the right is Pastor Sylvester Konteh, the Gambia, West Africa, with his degree received from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, United States.



Pastor Sylvester Konteh

THE CHURCH IN AFRICA



“...and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, from an estimated population of 140 million, there were around two million Christians in Africa. By the end of the twentieth century, the population had grown to around 810 million with around 380 million Christians.

In Africa, as a whole, Christianity and Islam are split relatively equally, each representing around 45% of the population with the remainder represented by indigenous African religions. Christianity is more dominant in the south, whilst Islam is more dominant in the North. Africa’s population grew hugely in the 20th century, yet at the same time, Christianity saw a tremendous growth during that period.

Africa is one of the world’s richest continents, in terms of natural resources, yet it has some of the world’s poorest people. Poverty has a long history in Africa and the continent has a disturbing past, associated with colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. At the same time, Africa is a continent of thousands of languages and cultures, with a vibrant and innovative people, along with some of the fastest growing economies in the world, including Rwanda and Tanzania.

Having said that, when we consider Africa, what significance, if any, does the African church hold in our thinking?

AFRICAN EARLY CHURCH

Christ said to his disciples, “you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). For Western churches who are engaged in missionary work in Africa today, perhaps few realise that African theologians, from the first to third century, played a significant role in responding to heresy and establishing the doctrines of the early church.

It has been suggested that the reformation in Europe had its roots in Africa, due to the fact that some of the reformers were strongly influenced by African theologians, including Tertullian (155-220) in Tunisia, Athanasius (c296-373) in Egypt and particularly Augustine (354-430) in Algeria. It has been noted that the most quoted theologian by both John Calvin and Martin Luther was Augustine.

Augustine was involved in a controversy with Pelagius, who was thought to have been born in Britain, as he threatened the doctrine of grace. Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin and said that grace was not necessary to be saved. Augustine silenced the heresy of Pelagius by emphasising the doctrine of original sin and God's grace.

Augustine is the greatest theologian of the first thousand years of church history, and stands out as the man upon whose shoulders the Reformers stood. Moreover, he has the most well documented life of the ancient church, through his autobiography, entitled *Confessions*. The opening prayer reads, "oh Lord, thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." The church at large owes a great deal of debt to the African church, due to the influence of first century African theologians. The idea that Christianity is a white man's religion, as some attempt to assert today, can certainly be dismissed.

AFRICAN MISSION

At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, African theologians didn't directly impact, as they did in the first century. Africa, as a continent, was in conflict and Islam had become dominant in North Africa. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a great deal of Western missionary endeavour in Africa from, for instance, Africa Inland Mission in East Africa and Scottish Presbyterianism.

Africa Inland Mission (AIM) which had its roots in Scotland, along with American support, was founded by Peter Cameron Scott, a missionary born in Glasgow in 1867. He had served two years in the Congo, before returning to Scotland, due to health issues. During his recuperation, he developed a desire to establish a network of mission stations in Africa, to reach Africans untouched by the gospel. In 1895, the first mission group, including Scott himself, arrived and in little over a year had four mission stations in Kenya. Scott died in 1896, but the work expanded to other countries including Tanzania, Congo and Uganda. Nowadays, Africa Inland Mission serves in over 20 African nations. The fruit of the Africa Inland Mission work in Kenya was noted by Rev Ken Mbugua, currently ministering in Nairobi. Mbugua traces the gospel in his family back to the conversion of his grandfather, who through the efforts of Africa Inland Mission, under the blessing of God, was one of the first converts in Kijabe, Kenya.

As far as Scottish Presbyterianism is concerned, the Free Church of Scotland established work in South Africa through James Stewart (1831-1905), a medical missionary. Stewart landed in Cape Town in 1861, eventually becoming the principal of a school in 1867, maintaining his position for 40 years. Stewart, at first, was said to have had many negative views about the locals, but did not treat them as inferiors, rather sought to help them as best he could. Looking back on his experiences, in later life, Stewart stated, "It still remains true that the most valuable asset in Africa is the African himself. We cannot do without him." Likewise, Dr Robert Laws (1851-1934) of the United Presbyterian Church served as a medical missionary in Malawi for many years.

Nowadays, the church in Africa is largely Charismatic, imported through American influence. The majority of pastors have not been trained and little emphasis is placed on the Word of God and expository preaching. Conrad Mbeve, a reformed pastor in Kabwata, Zambia, has spoken out against charismatic excesses in many African churches. He has said, "We need to sound the warning that this is not Christianity. I know that this approach is filling our church buildings to overflowing, until we have to multiply church services in order to accommodate the crowds. But this is not Christianity. It does not lead to heaven."

AFRICAN REFORMATION

The African church is full of zeal, yet the reality is that, often, it is a zeal without knowledge (Romans 10:2). The church in Africa is in need of reformation, in order that the pastors would know the Scriptures and rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). If African pastors were exposed to sound theology, grasped the sovereignty of God, were thoroughly trained and convinced of reformed doctrine, worship and practice, it would massively impact the church in Africa. If the pulpit and expository preaching were to become central to the life of the African church, along with praying for the Lord's blessing upon their labours, it would bring lasting transformation to Africa. Pastors in Africa need to be trained in Reformed theology in order to preach the life giving doctrines of the reformation.

Many churches in the West fail to realise that what Africa needs is not some watered down gospel, due to a misplaced belief that Africans cannot accept Reformed truth. Yes, Africa has its particular cultures and vices, which are different to the West, but the same God who can overcome Western depravity can overcome African depravity. We may have different skin colours, but we have the same deceitful heart, which is desperately wicked and in need of the saving grace of Christ.

Again, Conrad Mbewe has noted, "There is a growing view that Christianity in Africa must be different from Christianity in the East or West. I think this view is wrong because it creates a divide that the Bible knows nothing about and would not even want to encourage. For instance, it wants us to deliberately and intentionally worship differently from our brethren in the West."

Having said that, whilst few and far between, there are a few small sparks of reformation to be seen in the African continent. In addition to Reformed churches in Kenya and Zambia, there are Reformed churches to be found throughout the continent in countries including Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Gambia. For instance in the Gambia, Sylvester Konteh, an indigenous pastor ministering in Brikama, has recently graduated from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. Edrissa Colley, from the Presbyterian Church in the Gambia, another indigenous pastor, is involved in running a reformed pastoral training programme in Lamin village.

If we in the church in the West are to involve ourselves in African mission, let us seek to encourage and equip African pastors in reformed truth, rather than by hindering them with some form of diluted Christianity. Let us, who historically owe a debt of gratitude to the African church, where we have opportunity, seek to prayerfully equip indigenous pastors to reach their own people. Let us, through the Lord's blessing, seek to play a part in equipping them with a full-orbed Reformed theology, translating into a lively Christ-centred faith impacting upon the lives of those in their communities. As the African church continues to grow, let these small sparks of reformation grow into a wider reformation throughout the whole continent so that Africa is won for Christ.

Scott Maciver

AUGUSTINE: THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE

Speaking of the grace of God, Augustine once said that no greater gift has been bestowed by God. Tucked in near the end of the City of God, that great book of his, Augustine says,

6 *"For 'the Lord knoweth them that are His;' and 'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God,' but by grace, not by nature. For there is but one Son of God by nature, who in His compassion became Son of man for our sakes, that we, by nature sons of men, might by grace become through [Christ] sons of God. For He, abiding unchangeable, took upon Him our nature, that thereby He might take us to Himself; and holding fast His own divinity, He became partaker of our infirmity, that we,*

Being changed into some better thing, might, by participating in His righteousness and immortality, lose our own properties of sin and mortality, and preserve whatever good quality He had implanted in our nature, perfected now by sharing in the goodness of His nature. For as by the sin of one man we have fallen into a misery so deplorable, so by the righteousness of one Man, who also is God, shall we come to a blessedness inconceivably exalted.”

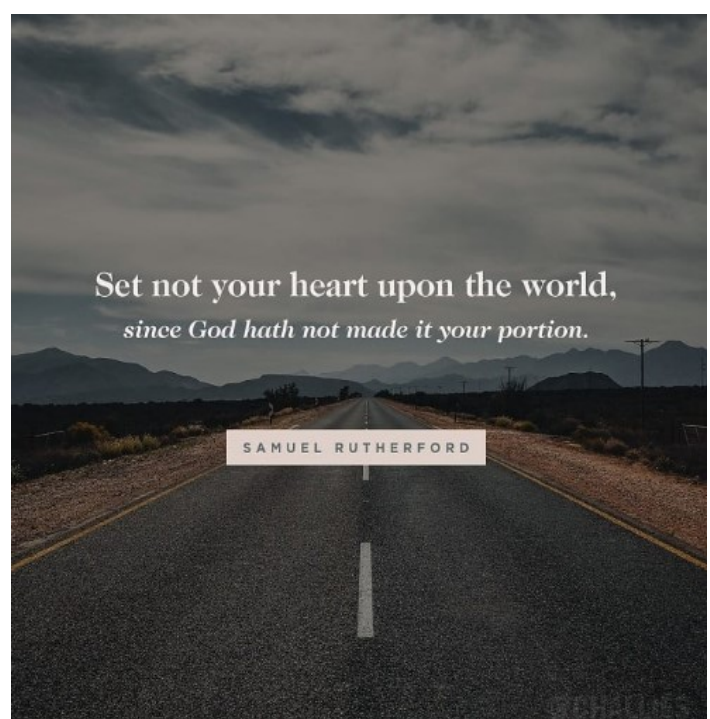
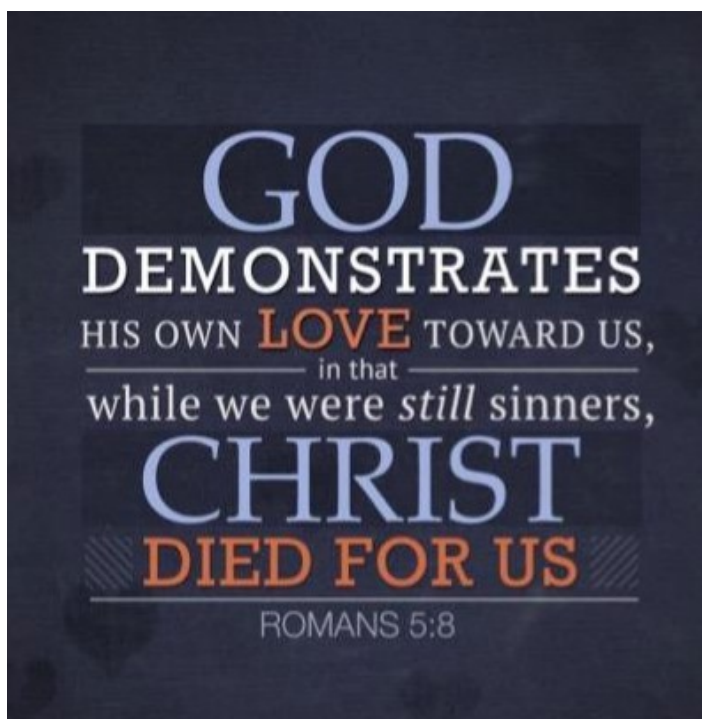
That is the grace of God. Augustine says in our fall, in our connection to Adam, we are in a misery so deplorable. But through Christ, who is a gift of God to us, God’s Son, and through our salvation, which is a gift of God, and through our faith, which is a gift of God, we enter into a blessedness, again as Augustine says, “inconceivably exalted.”

That is Augustine on the doctrine of grace. It comes both from a significant controversy that he dealt with in his life and from his own life’s journey. The controversy has to do with Pelagius, a Britain who went to Rome around 380. In the first decade of the 400s, he began to teach that Adam is more of an example to us than any real connection to us. We are not born sinful, Pelagius argued, but we have a natural capability. Pelagius said, simply, we are able not to sin.

That controversy ricocheted for decades through the church, and Augustine spilled much ink responding to Pelagius. He simply says back to Pelagius, quoting Romans 9:16, that it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God’s mercy. For Pelagius to be right, Augustine said, we have to flip that around. Imagine if Romans 9:16 read this way: it depends not on God’s mercy, but on human will. Augustine said if that were the case, we would all be doomed. But that’s not the case. And our God is a God full of mercy and full of grace. Our salvation does not depend on human will or human exertion, but it depends on God’s mercy.

Augustine taught this through the controversy of Pelagianism, but he also saw the triumph of grace in his own life. In fact, his life is a testimony to the triumph of grace. Augustine said if it were up to us, the world we would create would simply be “a barren waste.” But enter the grace of God into a life, and a beautiful, glorious, majestic landscape comes into being. By the grace of God, there goes Augustine. And by the grace of God, there go we all.

Dr. Stephen Nichols, Ligonier Blog



Children's Corner



Dear Children

Have you ever lost something precious to you? If you have you will know how deeply upset you will feel. Then, if you do find it, oh what joy you will feel that you now have it back again. It will be doubly precious to you from then on.

In the Gospel of John chapter 15 we have three instances of things that were lost. The first one was a lost sheep. The second one was a lost coin. And the third one was a lost son. In the first story, the shepherd was so concerned about the sheep he had lost that he went out in search of it and didn't come home until he found it. In the second story, the woman who had lost a silver coin lit a lamp and swept everywhere in the house looking for it until she found it. In the third story, the father whose son had left home was on the lookout for him every day until he returned.

If you read these three stories then you will see how all the different people reacted to finding what they had lost. Their joy was so great that they gathered their friends and neighbours to celebrate the return of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. That shows us how much they valued getting these items back into their possession.

All these stories are illustrating for us the joy there is in heaven when a lost sinner repents of his or her sin and returns to God for forgiveness. We are all lost sinners and were lost sinners even before we were born. There was only one person ever born into this world who was without sin. I'm sure you all know who that was – the Lord Jesus. As sinners we have gone astray from God and need to return to Him but we can never find our own way back. God is searching for us every day and calling to us to turn to Him. Are you hearing His voice? Where is He speaking to you? It is in His Word, the Scriptures.

Remember when Samuel heard God's voice calling to him: "Samuel! Samuel!" He ran to Eli the priest thinking it was Eli that was calling him. Eli recognised that it was God speaking to Samuel so he told Samuel that when he would hear that voice again he should respond by saying: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." See that you too respond to God's call in the same way.

I do pray that each one of you will hear God's voice calling to you: "Come unto Me." I also pray that you will respond to that call as David did in Psalm 27, verse 8:

"When thou didst say: Seek ye my face,
Then unto thee reply
Thus did my heart, Above all things
Thy face, Lord, seek will I."

What joy there will be not only in heaven but here on earth when you return to the Lord from a path which does not lead to heaven and when you then begin to walk in the paths of righteousness which is the path to heaven! You too will have joy in your heart and peace and great blessing in your life. Don't wait any longer. Come to Jesus NOW. "Now is the accepted time; Now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 2

An unknown author wrote the following verse. It is good to memorise it.

*Be in time, be in time, While the voice of Jesus calls you, Be in time. If in sin you longer wait
You may find no open gate And your cry be just, ' Too late! Be in time.*

May God bless each one of you.
With my love and prayers
Granny M