

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

February 2023 Newsletter



WHAT IS THE CONVICTION OF SIN?



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,

Although it is hardly the prevailing spirit of the times (which seldom sees people feeling ‘unworthy’ of anything but, rather, ‘deserving’ or ‘entitled’ to everything) it is nonetheless true that the Lord’s people are often prone to think themselves ‘unworthy’ when it comes to the Lord’s Table.

Of course, in one important sense, every believer should feel that way. Every worthy participant at the Lord’s Table should have a deep sense of unworthiness to be there – indeed, such a sense of unworthiness is an important part of what makes one worthy to be there!

Now this sense of unworthiness can sometimes arise from a lack of proper preparation for the Lord’s Table. As question 97 of the Shorter Catechism teaches us, this preparation requires intending communicants to ‘examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord’s body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves’. This requirement to examine ourselves is seriously overlooked in many churches and, God willing, we will consider it on another occasion.

Usually, however, this sense of unworthiness is connected to a lack of assurance as to whether we are true believers in Christ or not. Now this is a complex problem but, for the purposes of our meditation this month, it is enough to note that *lacking assurance is not in itself a sufficient reason to stay away from the Lord’s Table*.

I am fairly sure I alluded to this matter last time we held the Lord’s Supper, but the Larger Catechism (often overlooked in favour of the better-known Shorter Catechism – which, lest we forget, was itself devised for children and for those of ‘limited capacity!’) has a most interesting and insightful, as well as pastorally sensitive, question and answer regarding this very situation.

Question 172 asks, ‘May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord’s Supper?’ To be clear, this question is asking whether either a lack of assurance or a lack of proper preparation are sufficient reasons for staying away from the Lord’s Supper. The answer, carefully constructed to encourage the weak without encouraging the hypocrite, is as follows (containing some of my own remarks in brackets):

‘One who doubteth of his being in Christ (lacking assurance) or of his due preparation for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (due to insufficient self-examination) may have true interest in Christ (that is, be a true Christian) though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God’s account hath it (God sees that person to be a true believer, providing the following things are true); if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it (if he is genuinely troubled by his awareness of the lack of it) and unfeignedly (sincerely) desires to be found in Christ and to depart from iniquity (because, as we saw a few weeks ago in the prayer meeting, ‘let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’): In which case, because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians, he is to labour to have his doubts resolved; and so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord’s Supper that he may be further strengthened.’

As noted above, none of this is meant to encourage the careless to come to the Lord’s Table. As Thomas Ridgley, an English theologian from the turn of the 18th century, said, ‘This advice is not given to...such as are unconcerned about their state, or never had the least ground to conclude that they have had communion with God in any ordinance, especially...if they are more concerned about the dreadful consequences of sin, than about the intrinsic evil of it...but it is given to those, who, as formerly described, lament after the Lord; earnestly seek him, though they cannot, at present, find him; and have fervent desires for his presence, though no sensible enjoyment of it; and appear to have some small degrees of grace, though it be very weak.’ Indeed, there is nothing here to encourage unbelief or laziness either because the person lacking in faith is to ‘beware his unbelief, and labour to have his doubts resolved’.

However, there is plenty there to encourage the weak and, if we ponder it and act on it, it should greatly encourage us in coming to the Lord’s Table this month. Would it not be a real pity if those who lack assurance fail to use the ordinance appointed by a gracious Saviour partly to alleviate that very condition?

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

FEBRUARY COMMUNIONS

The Communion Services are due to take place in the congregation from 16th-20th February.

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

Thursday 16th February 7.30pm—TBC (at time of going to print)

Friday 17th February 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Saturday 18th February 11.00am—Rev Donald Macdonald

Saturday 18th February 6.30pm—Prayer Meeting

Lord's Day 19th February 11.00am — Rev Kenneth Stewart

Lord's Day 19th February 6.30pm— Rev Kenneth Stewart

Monday 20th February 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart



GAMBIA—NEW CHURCH SERVICE

Our congregation in Brikama, Gambia, have recently begun holding outreach services in Kabekel, a nearby village, at 6pm on Friday evenings.

Kabekel is well known to the congregation in Brikama, with a few of the members living in Kabekel. The village is comprised of Muslims and Roman Catholics and for some time the potential of holding services in Kabekel had been tentatively discussed.

The costs towards the construction of a lectern were provided by *the Gambia Partnership*. The first service was held on Friday 20th January, with 13 in attendance, where Pastor Sylvester Konteh preached from Genesis 3:15. Please remember these services in prayer, that the Lord might be pleased to establish a work in Kabekel.



GLASGOW CONGREGATIONAL MEAL

On the evening of Friday 13th January, Glasgow RPC gathered for their annual congregational buffet. All enjoyed a time of fellowship together, with around 80 able to attend. They were thankful to the Lord for His goodness towards them, after a 3 year hiatus due to Covid restrictions.



6 SHORT RULES FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS FROM BROWNLOW NORTH

The fruitfulness of Brownlow North's ministry led him to become known as the 'John the Baptist of the great awakening of 1859'. But this largely forgotten evangelist of the nineteenth century has much to teach us still today. Though these rules were written to help young believers, they remain relevant to Christians of all ages and experience.

(Banner of Truth)

1. Never neglect daily private prayer; and when you pray, remember that God is present, and that he hears your prayers (Heb. 11:6).
2. Never neglect daily private Bible-reading; and when you read, remember that God is speaking to you, and that you are to believe and act upon what he says. I believe all backsliding begins with the neglect of these two rules (John 5:39).
3. Never let a day pass without trying to do something for Jesus. Every night reflect on what Jesus has done for you, and then ask yourself, *What am I doing for him?* (Matt. 5:13-16).
4. If you are in doubt as to a thing being right or wrong, go to your room, and kneel down and ask God's blessing upon it (Col. 3:17). If you cannot do this, it is wrong (Rom. 14:23).
5. Never take your Christianity from Christians, or argue that because such and such people do so and so, that therefore you may (2 Cor. 10:12). You are to ask yourself, *How would Christ act in my place?* and strive to follow him (John 10:27).
6. Never believe what you feel, if it contradicts God's Word. Ask yourself, *Can what I feel be true, if God's Word is true?* and if both cannot be true, believe God, and make your own heart the liar. (Rom. 3:4; 1 John 5:10, 11).

BROWNLOW NORTH: THE ALL-AROUND EVANGELIST

It's fair to say that today's church doesn't read as much as previous generations. Moreover, the practice of recommending, and indeed sharing, spiritually enriching books is another area where we fall short these days.

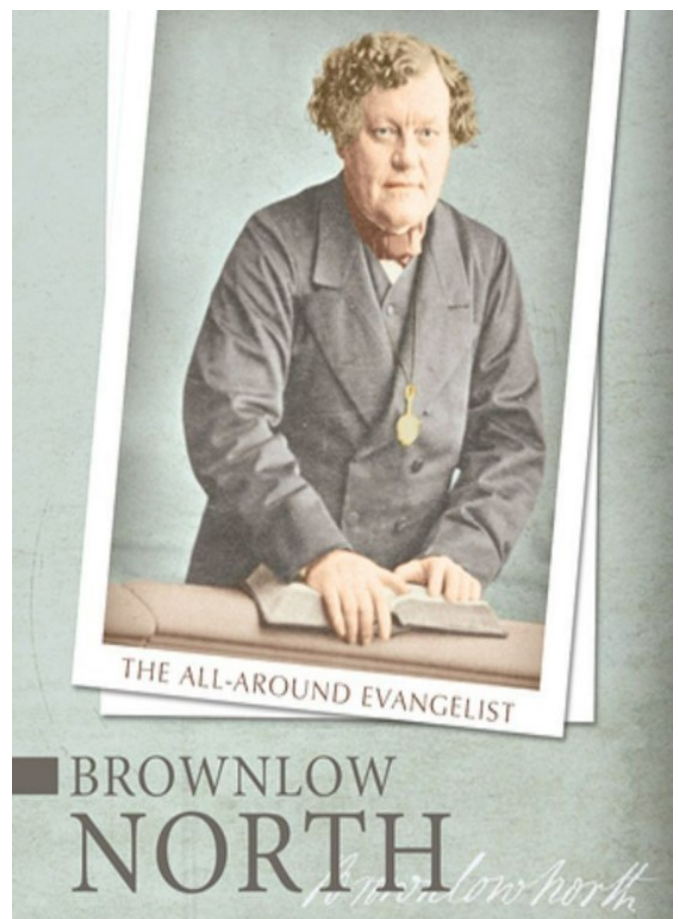
Last month, a copy of *Brownlow North: The All-Around Evangelist* by Geoff Thomas appeared inside my front door. Someone had taken the time, having read and profited from the book themselves, to drop off a copy for me to read.

Initially, I didn't know who had dropped off the book. Eventually, I received a text to say, "I dropped in the other day and left a book on the counter. I hope it will benefit you."

The book is well worth the read, including the above excerpt, "6 short rules for young Christians." North was a 19th century evangelist who was said to be the living embodiment of a man who had the conviction, "woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16)

When was the last time we recommended or shared a good book?

SM



WHAT IS THE CONVICTION OF SIN?

He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment!" John 16:8

1. Conviction of sin, by the Holy Spirit, issuing in conversion—is not the mere *smiting of the natural conscience*. Although man is utterly fallen—yet God has left natural conscience behind in every heart to speak for Him. Some men, by continual sinning, *sear* even the conscience as with a hot

iron, so that it becomes past feeling; but most men have so much natural conscience remaining that they cannot commit heinous sin, without their conscience smiting them. When a man commits murder or theft, no eye may have seen him, and yet conscience makes a coward of him. He trembles, fearing that God will take vengeance. Now that is a *natural* work which takes place in every heart—but conviction of sin is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God. If you have had nothing more than the ordinary smiting of conscience—then you have never been truly convicted of sin.

2. Conviction of sin, by the Holy Spirit, issuing in conversion—is not any *impression upon the imagination*. Sometimes, when men have committed great sin, they have awful impressions of God's vengeance made upon their imaginations. In the night-time, they almost imagine that they see the flames of Hell burning beneath them; or they seem to hear doleful cries in their ears telling of coming woe; or they have terrible dreams, when they sleep, of coming vengeance. Now this is not the conviction of sin which the Spirit gives: it is altogether a natural work upon the natural faculties.

3. Conviction of sin, by the Holy Spirit, issuing in conversion—is not a *mere head knowledge* of what the Bible says against sin. Many unconverted men read their Bibles, and have a clear knowledge that their case is laid down there. They know very well that they are in sin, and they know just as well that the wages of sin is death. One man lives a swearer, and he reads the words, and understands them perfectly: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless—who takes his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7; Deu 5:11). Another man lives in the lusts of the flesh, and he reads the Bible and understands those words perfectly: "No immoral person has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5). Another man lives in habitual forgetfulness of God—never thinks of Him, and yet he reads: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17). Now in this way, most men have a *head knowledge of their sin and of its wages*—yet this is far from true conviction of sin.

What—then, is this conviction of sin?

It is to *feel the loathsomeness of sin*. A child of God has seen the beauty and excellency of God; and therefore, sin is loathsome in his eyes. But no unconverted person has seen the beauty and excellency of God; and therefore, sin cannot appear dark and loathsome in his eyes.

It is a just sense of the *dreadfulness* of sin. It is not mere knowledge that we have many sins and that God's anger is revealed against them all; but it is a heart-feeling that we are under sin. It is a sense of the dishonour it does to God, and of the wrath to which it exposes the soul.

Conviction of sin is no slight natural work upon the heart. It is all in vain that you read your Bibles and hear us preach, unless the Spirit uses the words to give feeling to your dead hearts. If we could prove to you with the plainness of arithmetic, that the wrath of God is abiding on you—still, you would sit unmoved. The Spirit alone can impress your heart.



THE WILDERNESS WANDERER

"**They wandered in the wilderness** in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Psalm 107:4

The true Christian finds this world to be a wilderness.

There is no change in the world itself.

The change is in the man's heart.

The wilderness wanderer thinks it altered; a different world from what he has hitherto known . . .

his friends,
his own family,
the employment in which he is daily engaged,
the general pursuits of men,
the cares and anxieties,
the hopes and prospects,
the amusements and pleasures,
and what I may call 'the general din and whirl of life',
all seem to him different to what they were; and for a time perhaps he can scarcely tell whether the change is in *them*, or in *himself*.

This however is the prominent and uppermost feeling in his mind: that he finds himself, to his surprise a **wanderer in a world** which has changed altogether its appearance to him. The fair, beautiful world, in which was all his happiness and all his home—has become to him a dreary wilderness.

Sin has been fastened in its conviction on his conscience. The Holy Spirit has taken the veil of unbelief and ignorance off his heart. He now sees the world in a wholly different light; and instead of a paradise it has become a wilderness—for sin, dreadful sin, has marred all its beauty and happiness.

It is not because the *world* itself has changed that the Christian feels it to be a wilderness; but because *he himself* has changed.

There is nothing in this world which can really gratify or satisfy the true Christian. What once was to him a happy and joyous world, has now become a barren wilderness.

The scene of his former . . .

pursuits,
pleasures,
habits,
delights,
prospects,
hopes,
anticipations of profit or happiness,
is now turned into a barren wasteland.

What once was a blooming and verdant pasture, a glorious scene of hill and dale, trees and flowers, is now turned into sand and gravel, with the burning sun of God's wrath above, and the parched sand of his own desolate heart beneath.

He cannot perhaps tell how or why the change has taken place, but he feels it—deeply feels it. He may try to shake off his trouble and be a little cheerful and happy as he was before; but if he gets a little imaginary relief, all his guilty pangs come back upon him with renewed strength and increased violence.

God means to make the world a wilderness to every child of His, that he may not find his happiness in it, but be a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth.


"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were *strangers* and *pilgrims* on the earth." Hebrews 11:13

A close-up, grayscale photograph of a lion's face, looking directly at the camera. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark, moody tone. The text is overlaid in the center.

The fear of God is
the death of every other fear;
LIKE A MIGHTY LION,
it chases all other
fears before it.

C.H. SPURGEON

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A photograph of a bokeh light effect, where numerous out-of-focus light sources create a pattern of soft, glowing circles. The lights are primarily warm-toned (yellow, orange, red) with a few cooler-toned (blue, teal) lights. The lights are reflected on a dark, wet surface, creating a shimmering, rippling effect.

The fear of God will
swallow up the fear of man.
A reverential awe and dread
of God will extinguish the
creature's slavish fear, as
the rain puts out the fire.

JOHN FLAVEL

©CHALLIES

Children's Corner



Dear Children,

I am sure you've all cried from time to time? I'm told I used to cry a lot when I was a child – but I can't remember crying that often!

We can cry for very different reasons. Sometimes we cry because we are in pain. Other times we cry because someone has upset us. We can even cry sometimes because we are so happy!

But the crying I want to talk to you about is a special kind of cry – when we cry out to God for help out of fear and desperation. That's the desperate cry that comes when we know we can't help ourselves. Our minister was telling us recently about a King who ended up just about to be killed until he cried out to God for help (2 Chronicles 18:31).

The first time I remember crying like that was when I was about 4 or 5 years old and I'd like to tell you about it.

It happened one afternoon after the rain had been pouring down all morning and the ditches beside the road were overflowing with water. It seemed like there were pools of water everywhere. It was a great day to get our wellies and rain jackets on! My friends and I made up a game. Have you ever made up games? It can be more fun than board games or computer games! Anyway, we decided to challenge each other to make little sailboats out of small bits of wood to see if we could make them sail on the water. And that's when disaster struck for me!

I wanted to push my boat out really far, but I ended up pushing it a bit too hard – and I went head-first into the water! I can still remember the terrible fear I felt as my head went under the water, and I thought I was going to drown.

That's when I cried out to God. It was a silent cry – that's all I could do with my head under the water. I cried out to God to help me and save me from drowning. And He did help me! After I cried out, I found my hand being placed on a concrete verge and I was able to pull myself out of the water. All my young friends were so pleased and helped take me back to my mother – soaked to the skin!

I never forgot how quickly God answered my cry that day. I couldn't help myself and I knew that only He could.

Now, if you have not yet trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you are in a desperate situation too. What you need to do is to cry out to Him to save you – maybe even a silent cry like mine. This will be the greatest deliverance you will ever have!

With my love and prayers

Mrs S