



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

March 2023 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,

On the Sabbath evening of our communion, based on Psalm 2, we considered how the 'Kings' (the legislature) and the 'Judges' (the judiciary) combine themselves together against God and, particularly, against the Son of God (Psalm 2: 2-3).

I suppose few of us suspected that the following morning would bring such a clear example of this when, after announcing her candidacy for the SNP leadership (and, thereby, for the position of First Minister), Kate Forbes was immediately attacked from all sides, combined together in their determination that, whoever else may be qualified to lead a nation, an evangelical Christian is clearly not. Any king but Christ.

There should be no doubt that this highlights what should have already been obvious – that our country has moved from being a nation which once *required* its rulers to be practicing Christians (see our national covenants) to one which, effectively, *forbids* them from being so. Some shift! And despite tolerance being trumpeted as the greatest virtue nowadays, here is yet another reminder that tolerance has its own pale – and that practicing Christians are well and truly beyond it. Surely, by any meaningful definition of the term, that makes our nation anti-christian?

None of our political parties are immune from this anti-christian intolerance – ask Tim Farron, once leader of the Liberal Democrats. Significantly, William Hague has apparently stated that someone with Kate Forbes's views would no longer be able to lead the conservative party either (one can't help wondering what exactly it is that the 'Conservative' party are trying to 'conserve' anymore).

Of course, and in line with what we saw on Sabbath evening, it appears that no-one else comes under quite the same level of scrutiny, not Humza Yousef in this particular race (a Muslim) nor, at other levels of government, Sadiq Khan (a Muslim) or Rishi Sunak (a Hindu). Again, anyone but Christ.

However, one thing is overlooked and, in fairness, we ought to concede it. In one important respect, our opponents in this matter are right: At least they are looking beyond party affiliation to see what the individual morality of the candidate is and, what is more, they are prepared to reject the candidate if the candidate's morality is not right. And, by doing so, even if they are coming up with spectacularly wrong answers, they are at least engaging in the right process. Most professing Christians, sadly, fail to engage in this process at all. Everyone has become so used to voting for parties rather than people that they seldom stop to think what the morality of the candidate is like.

So, for example, over many years now, a Christian who preferred, say, the Green party, because of its overriding commitment to environmental issues (hence its name) – just as the Scottish National Party has an overriding commitment to national sovereignty (hence its name) – would hardly stop to consider the personal morality of the candidate. What mattered was the colour of the rosette – even if the candidate would willingly violate the seventh commandment (by relaxing divorce laws, voting for same-sex 'marriage' or protecting pornographic publications), the fourth commandment (by relaxing Sabbath trading regulations) or the sixth commandment (by voting for, or abstaining, on abortion).

But how far removed is that from the standard God requires? Far too often, Christians overlook that the Bible gives clear instructions concerning the qualifications for *civil* government officials. These qualifications can be summed up in the words of David 2 Samuel 23:3, where we read that, 'he that rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God'; in Exodus 18:21, where we are informed that officers in civil government – not the government of the church – are to be men of ability, who fear God (that is, honour him and his Word), men of truth (not liars) and men who hate covetousness (not seeking their own gain); and in Deuteronomy 1: 13, where we note that, although the people choose their own rulers, they are obligated to choose men possessing wisdom and understanding, a wisdom which begins with 'the fear of the Lord'. According to the Bible, then,

those qualified for civil office (as distinct from office in the church) must fear God and that ‘fear of God’ can’t be parked at the door of the legislature on the way in: Rather, it must find its outward expression in the legislative chamber in serving and upholding the law of God. *Do you consider these things when you vote?*

The fact is that the personal morality of the candidate does most certainly matter – and it is here that Kate Forbes is in danger of making a fatal mistake, much as Tim Farron did before her. Disappointingly, she has said that she would not consider rowing back on the same-sex legislation and that she would defend ‘to the hilt’ the rights of everyone, in a ‘tolerant’ society to ‘live and love’ free from harassment and fear. She has said that she would defend gay marriage and is ‘happy to support’ the legal right to same-sex marriage (on the basis that it is now supported by law) and that whether or not gay sex was a ‘sin’ was between the individuals concerned and God.

But, aside from the serious error in the last statement, it is simply impossible to privatise belief in this way. Individuals, as well as the governments they belong to, must govern morally. The only question regards the morality they choose to follow. While democracy may be the best form of government only because, as Churchill once said, it is not as bad as all the others, we need to be careful not to fall under its tyranny. There are two problems here – one concerns majority thinking while the other concerns law.

“It might be better for her not to reach out too hard for the office before her but, instead, to remain absolutely true to God’s law.”

Regarding majority thinking, no Christian can accept the idea that the standard of morality is determined by what over 50% of people believe. (Abortion, for example, does not suddenly become right once 51% of the population supports it.) As regards law, no-one has a right, in public office, to protect moral evils, or not to seek to overturn them, just because they have become law. How can a Christian say that they would not seek to overturn what is morally evil or that they would uphold ‘to the hilt’ the right of people to engage in sinful behaviour just because that sinful behaviour happens to have become legal? Incidentally, would that protection extend to those who decide to end the lives of their children in their wombs? In that respect, it was doubly disappointing to hear her say that she would support a ban on protests at abortion clinics. Christians have no right, in public office, to protect evil even when it has been legislated for.

None of this is meant to be seen as an attack on Kate Forbes: I hope by the time this is printed and read that she has not stumbled further and we would like to believe that the answers she gave do not perhaps properly express her views and we would do well to pray for her in an environment fraught with danger.

However, it might be better for her not to reach out too hard for the office before her but, instead, to remain absolutely true to God’s law. Who knows, first, how it might all pan out? Yes, all too probably it might do so in vilification and the possible end of her political career – but, then again, perhaps not: Perhaps there are as many SNP members as weary of current immorality as we are.

In any case, there’s always the question of timing: Daniel was effectively relegated into obscurity under the reign of Belshazzar but was suddenly brought out of the wilderness and thrust back into prominence on the very evening the empire changed hands from Babylonian to Persian control. Much more recently and locally, Churchill moved overnight from being unwanted in government to being indispensable. And back to Persia, it was all a matter of timing for Esther as well. Better to go down, for now, with integrity intact and use the time for prayerful reflection rather than end up like Tim Farron who ended up compromising too much – and, unsurprisingly, ended up satisfying neither his enemies nor his friends.

Your minister

THE WRONG KIND OF FEAR



Anxieties are rising as people are struggling to respond to a complex combination of problems. The cost of living crisis, fuel costs, the war in Ukraine, the discontent that has led to so much strike action, the weaknesses of the NHS and the social care system – there are plenty reasons for concern.

Fear is an instinct which can sometimes helpfully prompt us to avoid danger, yet other times damagingly paralyzes us. In spiritual terms, fear can get the better of us when we forget both how great and how good God is. According to Matthew 14, the disciples in the boat in the storm cried out for fear. In the following updated extract, William Guthrie discusses the debilitating effects of fear in the Lord's people, before suggesting ways to avoid being wrongly fearful.

The people of God are very prone to the wrong kind of fear, when new difficulties appear to them.

WHAT IS THE WRONG KIND OF FEAR?

God's people are troubled with a fear that is sometimes called "slavish fear." It arises from various sources, including the misbelief of what God has said, and forgetting what He has said concerning them. It flows also from fixing on His providence [instead of His Word], and putting the worst possible construction on it.

Another source it flows from is despondency of spirit and heartlessness. That weakens their hands in the use of lawful means for bearing their own trial and working for their own deliverance. Their faith and hope and all goes to wrack and ruin. Then there often arises an inclination to follow some unlawful means for deliverance, and even if they do not actually follow it, still the heart is naturally laid open for such a temptation. Ordinarily, complaints are the fruits of slavish fear.

To summarise, slavish fear consists in an atheistical putting of created things in a channel of independency on God, as if the creature could come and go of its own accord without commission from Him. "It is God who comforteth: who art thou that art afraid of a man that shall die, &c.?" (Isaiah 51:12). The truth is, the Lord's people had forgotten the omnipotent power and sovereignty of God, and thought that mere humans could do with them what they pleased without God. When you are so minded, it is a hundred to one if you don't attempt to get out from under the trial in some unlawful way.

WHY DO GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE THIS FEAR?

First, there is the great ignorance of God's care for His people.

That is the cause of all their slavish fear, and it is what He challenges His people for. "Thou hast feared every day, and hast forgotten me: who art thou that art afraid of a man that shall die?" (Isaiah 51:12-13) We imagine ourselves as standing alone without God. "There feared they, where no fear was."

The second reason is unbelief.

Thirdly, there is atheism, a growing sin, i.e., when His people think of God as like some creature, and created things like God, as if created things can work what they wish without Him. They put God above the creature in some things, and the creature above Him in some other things.

The fourth reason is, because his people yield to this fear too soon. You think that you never have a fear without reason. Yes, but you are obliged to shut out those things that look like reasons, when they come in on you. When slavish fear begins to mutter in our bosom for us to harbour it, it makes it prevail.

WHY IS THIS FEAR SO DAMAGING?

This fear weakens the hands of God's people in all duties. When they begin to fear out of measure, they lose all, and grow indifferent whether they do duty or not. No one will bide by their duty when their faith fails them; or if they do go about any duty, it will be just as if they are doing it by rote.

This fear also brings discouragement of soul. Nothing can comfort the people of God, where this fear prevails.

Also it brings discomposure of their countenance, which damages the reputation of their religion. Whenever slavish fear gets the upper hand, it makes people look as if they served a hard master, who makes his people undergo things that he will not allow them expenses for.

This fear also disoblige God to work for their deliverance from whatever it is they are afraid of. As it says, "He could do no mighty works, because of their unbelief."

This fear makes them incapable of understanding their own mercy, when it begins to appear. This is what left the Israelites in Egypt unable to understand what Moses said about their deliverance. When people succumb to this fear, all duty is a burden to them.

Although God may do anything for His people in His sovereignty and mercy, there is no promise we can look to in the Bible that God will help someone who has yielded to slavish fear. James 1:6-7, "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord, because he asketh not in faith."

HOW CAN THIS FEAR BE CURED?

The thing that cures the disciples' fear in Matthew 14 is Christ approaching to them in favour. Behold, he is coming, but they mistake him. Only bring Christ and the believer together, and whoever they are, He will heal them of all their disputes and diseases. Christ approaches the disciples, and speaks friendly to them, until they heard the words, "It is I, be not afraid," together with His approaching. What completely allays all their fear is Christ coming in to them, and nothing else does it.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO AVOID THIS FEAR?

All the people of the Lord should be aware that they have this kind of infirmity. Then, when difficulties are renewed against you, and slavish fear labours to take possession of you even though you have fled to Christ, guard against it, and know why it is so damaging, and encourage yourselves against it.

In a cloudy and dark day, when your fear grows, remember what a care God takes for His people. They are set as a seal upon His heart, and written upon the palms of His hands. He has said, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." Would we be afraid, if we believed that any who trouble the people of God, it is as bad as if they took on God?

Believe this also, that whatever the Lord does, or allows others to do, it shall work together for the good of His people. It is a common truth in everybody's mouth, certainly, but I may say the least believed truth in all the Bible! You may not question the truth of the promise, but yet you stop short of applying it to yourselves. I offer you that promise, and you put it to yourselves, and solidly acquiesce with it in your heart, that all the distresses and afflictions His people are under in Britain and Ireland shall work together for their good. If it is so, why then do you not believe it, and find peace from fear?

Believe also that nothing befalls His people, except what comes by His providence. You say, "That's true, but there are many things that we meet with, that God does not allow." I say there is nothing you meet with, but it comes either by His active or permissive providence. There is no evil done in the city but what the Lord knows. That the ministers in Britain and Ireland are put out of their houses, kirks, and lands, and banished out of the country, is all His providence, and shall work together for their good. If so, then your fears can be quieted.

Know that there is nothing to be feared, except God and an evil conscience. As a man in Ireland said to a bishop, when he threatened to imprison him, he answered, "I know no prison worse than an evil conscience." If you resolve to fear nothing but the God of heaven and an evil conscience, you need not fear people, for the fear of these will quiet all your other fears.

Reformation Scotland Blog

THE WAY OF SALVATION

What must I do to be saved? Saved from what? What is it you wish to be saved from? Hell? That proves nothing. Nobody wants to go there. The issue between God and man is sin. Do you wish to be saved from it?

What is sin? Sin is a species of rebellion against God. It is self-pleasing: it is utter ignoring of God's claims: being completely indifferent whether my conduct pleases or displeases Him.

Before God saves a man He convicts him of his sinnership. By this I don't mean that he says with everybody else, "O yes we are all sinners, I know that." Rather do I mean that the Holy Spirit makes me feel in my heart that I have been a life-long rebel against God, and that my sins are so many, so great, so black, that I fear that I have transgressed beyond the reach of Divine mercy.

Have you ever had that experience? Have you seen yourself to be totally unfit for heaven? For the presence of a Holy God? Do you now perceive that there is no good thing in you, nothing good credited to your account, that all the way through you have loved the things God hates and hated the things God loves?

Has the realization of this broken your heart before God?

Has it made you mourn that you have so despised His Sabbaths, neglected His Word, and given Him no real place at all in your thoughts, affections and life? If you have not yet seen and felt this personally, then at present there is no hope for you, for God says, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" -Luke 13:3. And if you die in your present condition you will be lost forever.

But if you have been brought to the place where sin is your greatest plague, where offending God is your greatest grief and where your deepest desire is now to please and honour Him; then there is hope for you. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" -Luke 19:10. And He will save you providing you are ready and willing to throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him, bow to His Lordship, and surrender yourself to His control.

His blood can wash the foulest clean. His grace can support and uphold the weakest. His power can deliver the tried and tempted. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" -II Corinthians 6:2. Yield yourself to Christ's claims. Give Him the throne of your heart. Turn over to Him the regulation of your life. Trust in His atoning death. Love Him with all your soul. Obey Him with all your might and He will conduct you to heaven.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31)

A.W. Pink, Banner of Truth Blog



Children's Corner



Dear children,

As spring comes round, you will notice a change in the gardens with trees beginning to bud and plants beginning to flower.

Trees are quite amazing things. Some of them are enormous: The biggest tree in the world is called 'General Sherman' and it is 35 metres to walk around it and it is nearly 34 metres tall (it isn't the tallest tree in the world although it is the biggest – do you know the difference between being big and being tall?) It is also a very old tree. How old? Well, it started growing long before Jesus was born, around the time Daniel was in Babylon!

Now, when you look at a tree, it's easy to forget that the most important part of it is hidden out of sight. After all, what you see is the trunk, the branches, the leaves, and the fruit. What you don't see are the roots under the ground, and these roots go deep and very wide, sometimes eight times as wide as the tree – including the branches!

Here are two important facts about the roots which might help you.

First, these roots reach deep under the ground to get food (special nutrients in the ground) and water. It is that food and water that makes the tree grow so big and strong that it doesn't blow over. Now, do you know that the bible tells you to be 'rooted' in Jesus (Colossians 2: 6)? That's God's way of telling you that every time you read the Bible and pray – providing you are reading and praying in faith – you will be putting your roots down so that you will grow as a Christian.

But there's something else about the roots which is very important too. As they stretch out underground, they go very wide and start to meet the roots of the other trees around them. And then, something wonderful happens: the roots of the trees start to twist around each other! And that means that every tree helps another tree to stand!

Now, isn't that a beautiful picture of how we should be as Christians? As we put our roots deep down into Christ, so we start to help each other to grow big and strong!

And always remember that the best time to put your roots deep down into Christ is while you are still young. That's when you take in the special nutrients of God's Word best!

With my love and prayers,

Mrs S