



STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

August 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

Following on from last month, I'd like to continue considering why there ought to be a reunification of Scottish Presbyterians who share the same doctrine, worship, and government.

Last time, we traced the rise and fall of the Reformed Church in Scotland.

Her rise, beginning with the Scottish Reformation, culminated in the final settlement of her doctrine, government, and worship as they were expressed by the Westminster documents, approved by the governments of church and state, in the 1640's.

Her slow decline began before the close of the century in parallel with her fragmentation. Although these fragmentations were not the cause of her decline – indeed, in many cases, they were painfully necessary – nonetheless these divisions had accompanying elements to them which had repercussions for many years to come. Of course, the Lord's work continued, and sometimes gloriously so, but the fact is that since those days the Scottish church has never seen the blessing which she saw in those years when she was united around the truth of God with the full weight of the state behind her.

And, today, the number of those who hold to these precious truths is painfully small and, due to denominational adherences, their strength is weakened by their state of separation from each other.

THE STATE OF THE NATION

As to the state of the nation, there is little need to elaborate. Scotland's rapid rise to national prominence in the years following the Reformation has now been replaced by a lamentable fall. Her national decline is evident and alarming both in extent and momentum.

Although the declining trend was not difficult to project, even many decades ago, its rate has been a surprise to all: Civil partnerships were not on the agenda fifteen years ago and even when they were legalised, same-sex marriage remained unthinkable. It is now, in 2023, a largely accepted reality. Abortions are about to be on demand and, with the support of the First Minister, the unthinkable is about to become an abominable reality with the abortion being permissible up till the point of birth (irrespective of the health of either the mother or the child); sexual immorality, widespread pornography, drunkenness, drug abuse and dishonesty in public life are rife and, along with these, we now have the horrors of the LGBTQ movement and transgenderism.

As I highlighted recently, this is the flood which the Devil spewed out of his mouth in order to sweep the church away (Revelation 12: 15). All these, and many other iniquities, have mushroomed rapidly with the onset of the 21st century.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

First, we might need to rethink how we see the future:

Our national covenants and our Westminster Standards – both based, as they are, upon the Bible – remind us that our nation *will rise again and prosper*. Of course, it is up to each generation to follow the God ordained path of reformation and repentance which will secure such spiritual prosperity in its own time.

Of course, if we postpone these urgent spiritual duties, our Egyptian bondage will continue longer and while the appointed time for Zion's renewal will come to pass, we will have put that time past ourselves.

But it is vital to remember that we are to pray and to labour as those whose work will ultimately be successful – *on earth as well as in heaven*.

Second, we might need to rethink how we are to get there:

Crucially, *in a covenanted nation, the decline in society occurs in parallel with decline in the church and we can only expect the nation to rise and cleanse herself when the church does so first*. Certainly, on some levels, the rise and fall of nations may, largely, be unpredictable – but not so when the nation concerned is a covenanted nation: such a nation will rise or fall according to her covenantal obedience. Put simply, the nation will not recover unless the church reforms.

This places a requirement upon us all to make sure that repentance begins at home. Our unnecessarily fragmented condition is hindering our mission to the nation and our voice is not only unheeded but unheard.

Third, we need to rethink the seriousness and sinfulness of our ecclesiastical division:

We must be prepared to acknowledge, and confess, that the current state of division amongst those who believe in preserving and promoting the covenanted attainments of the Scottish Reformation is unacceptable, and that our unwillingness to be more active in healing this division is *itself a sin to be repented of* – and that it is, in fact, *contrary to the very standards which we are supposed to be maintaining!*

Ought we not to be very afraid that our insistence on remaining apart from one another might be more of a contributory factor to God's wrath upon our nation rather than a part of the process of averting it? And should we not realise that a significant part of our individual and corporate repentance lies in our willingness to participate in a corporate return on the part of ministers and elders, first, to the Standards which we were covenanted to hold without compromise?

Fourth, we need to move beyond thought and to act.

This would be best done by covenanting. Historically, once people covenanted with one another, they felt compelled to act before God. I could say more on this another time.

Second, since it is difficult, as well as probably unhelpful, to try to identify any one single denomination of Presbyterian Christians as the sole true and lawful heirs of the covenanted Scottish church, we need to consider whether it might not be more realistic, and more spiritually profitable, to be prepared to loosen our current denominational attachments and to re-gather with like-minded brethren in order to unite together on the old foundation as the *Reformed Church of Scotland*.

It seems increasingly clear that the only way in which such a corporate return could take place is by returning corporately to the *old* foundation – in a *new* church.

In this way, the Reformed Church of Scotland would not be seeking to add to the number of existing denominations but, rather, to reduce them. It would do so by recalling all ministers, elders, and people to the original basis of unity around which the covenanted church gathered.

And so, instead of some having to join with others, everyone would join together under the old banner. As for those unwilling to participate in such a corporate return, they must be brought to realise that they are the ones who have to justify remaining apart from all the brethren who wish to gather together under the old banner of the covenanted Scottish Reformation.

Of course, it is natural for everyone to wish that all others would join their own respective denominations – which all of us might view as having the strongest case for representing the reformed and covenanted church of 1647 and carrying that banner – but we need to ask whether this is really God's will or merely our desire, and to ask whether our motive might, sadly, be pride and self-justification rather than the glory of God.

And, while our churches are, largely, carrying signs of discouragement and decay, they also carry unmistakable signs of ecclesiastical pride. In this regard, it might be useful to consider matters in Hezekiah's day: When Hezekiah cleansed the temple and restored the worship of God to its purity, in both song and sacrifice, we read of those from the northern tribes who 'humbled themselves' and returned to worship in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:11).

Instinctively, in our understanding and application of such passages, all of us, irrespective of what denomination we belong to, tend to equate our own denomination with the Jerusalem which all others need to humble themselves to join!

However, is it not far better, in our rather different situation, to view our rallying point as being God's truth as enshrined in our Covenants and Confession (*produced in the aptly named 'Jerusalem Chamber' of Westminster*) as being the centre to which we should return?

If we are intelligent and reformed protestants, rather than merely tribal ones, surely we all need to feel our obligation to return to these truths and regather around that standard? Continuity of faith and practice should be the *only continuity* which matters to true protestants – not the meaningless and idolatrous continuity of linear descent, or denominational nomenclature, which savours more of Roman Catholicism than true Protestantism.

This would doubtless humble all of us – but we have no doubt it would gladden our forefathers who, contrary to current perceptions, were more grieved at division than we are and who would, we believe, have embraced such a return wholeheartedly *irrespective of the name of the denomination*. More importantly, it would also be pleasing to God who takes delight in fulfilled covenant obligation – of which unity is a part.

Is it the right time?

Well, the time for obedience and repentance is always right – and it's always 'now'!

As for those inclined to say, 'the time is not yet', as they did in Haggai's day, I would only say that it is always easy to say that – and to use such a sentiment to divest ourselves of present responsibility, leave future generations to inherit our mess, and to remain in the relative ease of our denominational comfort zones.

But why should it be thought that the time is not yet? The Lord's wrath is as bound to fall upon needless division within his own church as it is upon other sins – and it is, therefore, futile to call upon others to forsake the sins which bring the wrath of God upon them while we persist in sins which bring his wrath upon ourselves.

In a paper I wrote a few years ago, which some of you might be familiar with, I quoted the words of William Nixon at the General Assembly of the Free Church in 1883, spoken in a speech opposing the proposed introduction of musical instruments into the worship of God. The most significant part, I believe, appears in bold print:

'If, then, you persist in pressing, and succeed in carrying this motion...the hearts of many that long beat with such love for this church, will increasingly sink within them and the hands that have actively laboured for it will, for the time, fall helpless at her side...And, as the chief refuge left to them, remembering the prayers, labours and sufferings of past generations, and the Lord's providential goodness and gracious love to Scotland hitherto, they will endeavour to work and wait for the time when, **out of the midst of the confusions and upbreakings for which they look, He will gather His faithful out of all the existing churches to build the church of Scotland again upon her old foundations, but in a new and better form, and so perpetuate her still to coming ages.**'

SCOTLAND'S FUTURE?

Would such a re-gathering have any effect on Scotland's future?

In our covenanted land, there is good reason to believe that if the church would rise, even if, in her beginnings, she might still be 'small' (Amos 7:5), the nation would rise with her. The God of covenant faithfulness would see to that.

Such a renewed church, though still relatively small, would be *clearly demarcated from others* as well as *united on a clear and easily articulated foundation* (How refreshing it would be, at last, to be able to articulate easily why we differ from other churches!) and, by the grace of God, would be able to speak on any platform with a voice which would command a hearing in the nation without being subjected to the charge of being proud and divisive sectarians.

Even though God's wrath is being revealed from heaven in the very unravelling of the moral and spiritual fabric of the nation – so much so, that we can scarcely imagine this process being reversed – yet it remains true that he is abundant in mercy and grace, and we ought not to underestimate his almighty power and willingness to respond to the repentance of his people.

Who knows how powerfully he might visit us if the leaders of the church, followed by her people, show a clear lead to the nation by renewing their covenant obligations before God and reuniting on the old, covenanted foundation?

'Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning...return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness...who knows if he will turn and relent...blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders...let the priests who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar...then the Lord will be zealous for his land and pity his people'

And, if that is not enough, he goes on to give more:

'So, I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten...you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.' (Joel 2: 12-17 and 25-26).

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

AUGUST COMMUNIONS

The August Communion Services are due to take place in the congregation from 24th-28th August. Aside from the Lord's Day services, which will be held at the Bridge Centre, as usual, the rest of the services will be held at the Gospel Hall. The service details are, as follows:

Thursday 24 August 7.30pm—Rev Donald Macdonald

Friday 25 August 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Saturday 26 August 11.00am—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Saturday 26 August 6.30pm—Prayer Meeting

Lord's Day 27 August 11.00am—Rev Kenneth Stewart

Lord's Day 27 August 6.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart

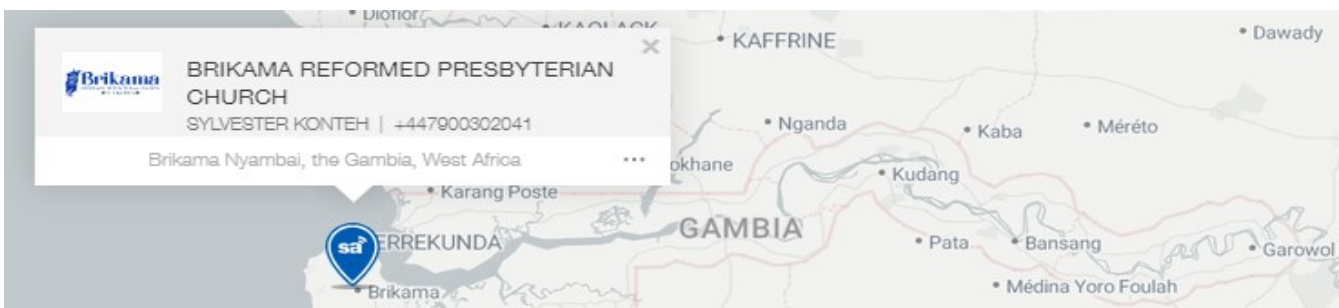
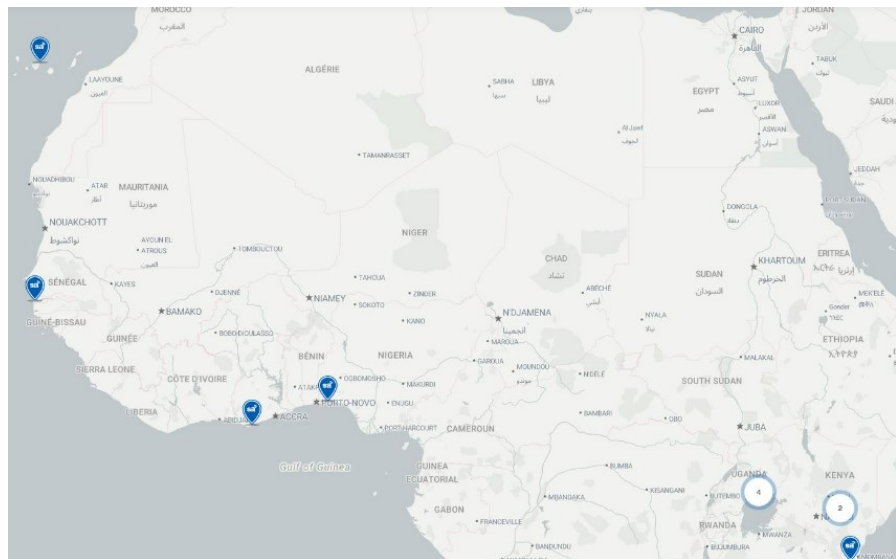
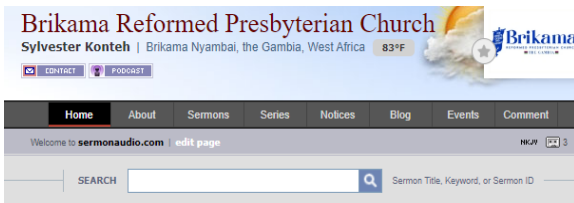
Monday 28 August 7.30pm—Rev Kenneth Stewart



BRIKAMA RP CHURCH—SERMON AUDIO

Following a grant received from a Christian charitable trust, Brikama Reformed Presbyterian Church, in the Gambia, have recently been enabled to set up a Sermon Audio page in order to broadcast their sermons online at www.sermonaudio.com/brikamarpchurch

They are one of only three congregations in West Africa broadcasting on Sermon Audio, with the other two congregations located further South in Ghana and Nigeria. Further afield, there are also congregations located in Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and South Africa.



FALSE PROPHETS—THE MORMONS



“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15)

In our day, and on our own Island, false prophets are all around us. It is a familiar sight to see well-dressed younger men or women, usually American, walking the streets in pairs, with a backpack and a badge bearing the name of *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS)*. They are missionaries better known to us as Mormons. They warmly introduce themselves as Christians. Their purpose is to engage people in conversation, to seemingly introduce them to Jesus Christ and invite them to their church. As commendable as this may appear to us, when we look a bit deeper, we find that we are actually faced with false prophets who appear in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

WHO ARE THE MORMONS?

In 1805, Joseph Smith was born in Vermont in the United States and moved to New York as a child. He attended Presbyterian and Methodist churches. In 1820, the fifteen year old Smith found himself confused as to who was right and who was wrong, amongst the various denominations. In his *Pearl of Great Price*, he later wrote, “the Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavouring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others. Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?”

In response to reading James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God,” which he said came with power to him, he withdrew to a wooded area near his home to pray for wisdom from God on this matter. He claimed that when praying for wisdom on this matter, he experienced a vision in which he asked God which of the denominations he should join. However, he claimed to have been forbidden to join any of them, as they were all corrupt.

In 1823, Smith said that he was visited by an angel named Moroni, who told him that he had been chosen by God for a great work. The angel also told him about a book with inscriptions written on golden plates. This book had supposedly been buried with the Urim and Thummim of the Old Testament. Smith claimed to have found this book and, using the Urim and Thummin, translated the golden plates with assistance from his associate Oliver Cowdery. He published a translation in English in 1830 as *The Book of Mormon*. In the same year, he founded a church, which he called *the Church of Christ*. In 1838, he

changed the name of the church to *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*.

Smith gained many dedicated followers throughout his lifetime. He died in 1844 at 38 years of age at Carthage Jail, Illinois. He had been arrested for treason against the state of Illinois. He was suspected of inciting a riot after he endorsed the destruction of the printing presses belonging to a newspaper who criticised him for polygamy and other controversial teachings. As he was awaiting trial, an armed mob stormed the jail, where Smith was shot a number of times before falling out of a window. Nowadays, there are thought to be around 17 million Mormons throughout the world, with the headquarters located in Salt Lake City in Utah. Mormonism continues to grow, largely due to its missionary efforts.

WHAT DO THE MORMONS TEACH?

Mormons believe that, following the death of the apostles, **the Church fell into complete apostasy** as it lost divine authority and true doctrine. They teach that when Joseph Smith founded the LDS Church in 1830, he restored the true church, which up until that point had been lost. As a consequence, Mormons believe that for almost all of its history, from the time of the apostles until 1830, Christianity was false and without truth. On that basis, **Mormonism rejects Church History**. In response, we can say that whilst the Scriptures speak of the apostasy of the church, this apostasy is stated as partial and not a complete apostasy, “now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times *some* will depart from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Mormons claim that **God is not eternal, rather that he was once a man and that He progressed to deity**. Smith stated, “we have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see” (*Spiritual Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.345). The Bible clearly rejects such a claim. God did not progress towards deity, He is eternal and He has always been God. “Even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Psalm 90:2).

Mormons **deny the trinity** and believe that they are three distinct gods. This contradicts Scripture, which teaches that there is one God (Deuteronomy 4:35), who exists in three persons (Matthew 28:19, John 1:1, Acts 5:3-4).

Moreover, Mormons believe that there are thousands of gods besides. They teach that **humans can progress towards deity and become gods**. The former Mormon President, Lorenzo Snow stated, “as God is now, man may become.” This false promise goes back as far as the Garden of Eden whereby, being forbidden of God to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent’s false promise of deity led to the fall of man. “In the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The notion of man somehow progressing towards deity is quite clearly contrary to Scripture, “before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after me” (Isaiah 43:10).

Mormons believe that Jesus is God, eternal and Saviour. They accept as true the accounts of His life in the Gospels and that He gave Himself to death on the cross as a sacrifice. They even declare Christ to be the head of the Church. Though they use language which is very familiar to us, once you delve a bit deeper, it becomes quite apparent that **the Jesus of Mormonism is not the Jesus of the Bible**. According to Joseph Smith, Jesus was an eternal spirit, who along with his brother Lucifer, became incarnate, in order to be tested and become a god. Therefore, Mormon theology teaches that Jesus is, “God the Second, the Redeemer.” Mormons have taught that the incarnation was as a result of a physical relationship between God the Father and Mary. Again, this contradicts the Scripture, which teaches that Christ’s human nature was conceived in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20).

Mormons teach that **the purpose of Christ’s death on the cross was not to make atonement for sin, but to guarantee the resurrection of all people**. Scripture, on the other hand, clearly teaches the atonement, “for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). 7

In Mormon theology, the idea of **salvation** is complex as they give many different meanings to the word 'salvation.' Essentially, someone who has a relationship with Christ is saved if they are obedient, where **the gift of the Holy Spirit** is conditional upon our continued obedience. On that basis, Christ's atonement isn't deemed sufficient in Mormonism, therefore it is a works based religion. Again this contradicts the scriptural teaching that salvation is not based upon our works (Ephesians 2:8-10) and that the Holy Spirit cannot be lost, as the Holy Spirit seals the believer until the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13).

Mormons do not believe that the Bible is inerrant (without error) or that it is sufficient without their own additions to it. They believe in **continuing revelation**, affirming the supposed inspiration of the book of Mormon and other writings. Mormons believe that they can receive authoritative interpretations and new revelations. In reality, the canon of Scripture closed with the death of the last apostle. The Bible is complete, Scripture is sufficient and nothing should be added or taken away from it (Revelation 22:18-19).

In terms of **heaven**, Mormons teach that there are three kingdoms in glory, with the particular level attained depending on your level of faithfulness. Aside from these three levels, they teach that there is a place called the outer darkness, set aside from the devil and his angels and those who have committed the unforgiveable sin. Some have suggested that the unforgiveable sin is apostasy from Mormonism. Yet, whilst there are degrees of reward in heaven, the Bible never states that there are different levels of heaven. Believers will go to be with the Lord and will be united with fellow believers from all ages. In the Old Testament, when a believer dies, he was said to have been, "gathered to his people" (Genesis 25:8; Numbers 20:24). In the New Testament we read that God "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," (Ephesians 2:6). There is no hint of varying levels of heaven, although there may be different degrees of communion with all believers.

PRACTICAL AND SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The idea of witnessing to a false prophet can be quite intimidating, particularly when we meet them as missionaries whose purpose is to gain converts to a cult. In addition, have you ever met a Mormon missionary who is anything but warm and respectful in the way that they conduct themselves? We may also know Mormons locally and may fear that our witnessing to them may result a broken relationship.

How then can we reach out to Mormons with the Gospel? As we have considered above, it is important to know what they believe and to be able to articulate a Biblical response to their beliefs. In doing so, we ought to speak to them directly, but graciously and prayerfully, in the knowledge that they are without Christ, in spiritual darkness, and heading towards a lost eternity.

Some of us well remember, in our own congregation back in 2018, when two Mormon missionaries attended our evening service, following meeting one of our church members in the town during the week. Their intention may have been to infiltrate the church, but whatever their intentions were, they came under the sound of the Gospel. As providence would have it, our previous minister, whilst working through a series on Matthew, had reached the text that evening, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He preached directly and even listed a number of false churches by name, which included *the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. Neither of them got up and left at that point. In fact, they both remained after the service and chatted with the congregation. Eternity will tell if the Lord saw fit to bless that service to the good of their souls. What better way to reach Mormons, than to bring them under the sound of the Gospel and to in turn remember them at the throne of grace?

Scott Maciver

RELIANCE ON MAN

As I was leaving the place of a morning prayer meeting, which was attended, in a time of revival, very early in the morning; a young man about sixteen years of age came to me, and asked permission to accompany me home; for “he wanted to talk with me.”

“What do you wish to say to me?” said I.

“Why—I want you to tell me what to do.”

“I have told you, again and again. I can tell you nothing different— nothing new. You must repent if you would be saved. You must give up your self-righteousness and flee to Christ. The Law condemns you. The sovereign grace of God only can save you. You must give up your miserable and long-continued attempts to save yourself. You must give God your heart, as he requires, and as I have explained to you already, many times.”

“Yes, I know that; but I am so distressed! I cannot live so! I want you to tell me something else.”

“I cannot relieve your distress. Christ alone can give you rest. I have nothing else to tell you. I have told you all the truth—all you need to know.”

“I thought,” said he, “perhaps you could say something, that would help me; if I went to your house.”

“So you have said to me more than once, and I have told you better. God only can help you. You must rely on him.”

“But I should like to talk with you again about my feelings, in your study.”

“It would do you no good. You have nothing to say, that you have not said before; and I have nothing new to say to you.”

“Well—may I go home with you?”

“No. Go home. Man cannot help you. The whole matter lies betwixt yourself and God.”

He turned away, the most downcast creature I ever saw. It seemed as if his last prop was gone. He walked as if his limbs could scarcely carry him.

I had not been at home an hour before he came to tell me, that his burden was gone. He said, that after I “had cast him off,” all hope forsook him, and he “had nowhere else to go but to God.” Before he reached his home, (about a mile,) he had given all into the hands of God; and he felt so much relieved of his burden of sin and fear, that he thought he “would turn right about, and come right back and tell me.”—“But,” said he, “I do not believe I should have gone to God, if you had not cast me off.”

Anxious sinners are often kept from Christ, by their reliance on men. A significant amount of religious conversation often diminishes their impressions. It tends to blunt the edge of truth. It keeps the heart in a kind of reliance on men. Conversation with judicious Christians and judicious ministers is vastly important for inquiring sinners, but there is a point where it should cease. All that men can do is contained in two things—to make sinners understand God’s truth, and make its impression upon their hearts and consciences, as deep as possible. If they aim at anything more, they are just trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit.— Visiting among

inquirers one morning, I called on five different individuals, one after another, in the course of a single hour, and in each case was sorry I had called at all: for in each case, after a very few minutes of conversation, I was fully persuaded that God's truth was deeply felt, and that anything which I could say would tend to diminish the impressions, which the Holy Spirit was making on their heart. I aimed to say just enough not to have them think I did not care for them; and got away as soon as I could, for fear of doing an injury. Every one of these individuals afterward dated her religious hope from the same day.—No man can preach so powerfully as the Holy Spirit. It is vastly important to know when to stop. The divine writers understood this. They are perfect examples. Their silence is to be imitated, as well as their utterance.

Rev Ichabod Spencer, A Pastors Sketches, Volume One

SATAN DOES NOT HOLD THE KEYS OF DEATH

We have different vocations with respect to the jobs and tasks God gives us in this life. But we all share in the vocation of death. Every one of us is called to die. That vocation is as much a calling from God as is a “call” to the ministry of Christ. Sometimes the call comes suddenly and without warning. Sometimes it comes with advance notification. But it comes to all of us. And it comes from God.

I am aware that there are teachers who tell us that God has nothing to do with death. Death is seen strictly as the fiendish device of the devil. All pain, suffering, disease, and tragedy are blamed on the Evil One. God is absolved of any responsibility. This view is designed to make sure that God is free of blame for anything that goes wrong in this world. “God always wills healing,” we are told. If that healing does not happen, then the fault lies with Satan—Or with us. Death, they say, is not in the plan of God. It represents a victory for Satan over the realm of God.

Such views may bring temporary relief to the afflicted. But they are not true. They have nothing to do with biblical Christianity. They are intended to absolve God of any blame, but they contradict His sovereignty.

Yes, there is a devil. He is our archenemy. He will do anything in his power to bring misery into our lives. But Satan is not sovereign. Satan does not hold the keys of death.

When Jesus appeared in a vision to the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, He identified Himself with these words: “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever-more. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Rev. 1:17–18).

Jesus holds the keys to death, and Satan cannot snatch those keys out of His hand. Christ's grip is firm. He holds the keys because He owns the keys. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. That includes all authority over life and death. The angel of death is at His beck and call.

World history has witnessed the emergence of many forms of religious dualism. Dualism affirms the existence of two equal and opposite forces. These forces are variously called good and evil, God and Satan, Yin and Yang. The two forces are locked in eternal combat. Since they are equal as well as opposite, the conflict goes on forever, with neither side ever gaining the upper hand. The world is doomed to serve as the eternal battleground between these hostile forces. We are the victims of their struggle, the pawns in their eternal chess game.

Dualism is on a collision course with Christianity. The Christian faith has no stock in dualism. Satan may be opposed to God, but he is by no means equal to God. Satan is a creature; God is the Creator. Satan is potent; God is omnipotent. Satan is knowledgeable and crafty; God is omniscient. Satan is localized in his presence;



God is omnipresent. Satan is finite; God is infinite. The list could go on. But it is clear from Scripture that Satan is not an ultimate force in any sense.

We are not doomed to an ultimate conflict with no hope of resolution. The message of Scripture is one of victory—full, final, and ultimate victory. It is not our doom that is certain, but Satan's. His head has been crushed by the heel of Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega.

Above all suffering and death stands the crucified and risen Lord. He has defeated the ultimate enemy of life. He has vanquished the power of death. He calls us to die, a call to obedience in the final transition of life. Because of Christ, death is not final. It is a passage from one world to the next.

God does not always will healing. If He did, He would suffer endless frustration, seeing His will being repeatedly thwarted in the deaths of His people. He did not will the healing of Stephen from the wounds inflicted by the stones that were hurled against him. He did not will the healing of Moses, of Joseph, of David, of Paul, of Augustine, of Martin Luther, of John Calvin. These all died in faith. Ultimate healing comes through death and after death.

Teachers argue that there is healing in the atonement of Christ. Indeed there is. Jesus bore all of our sins on the cross. Yet none of us is free from sin in this life. Likewise, none of us is free from sickness in this life. The healing that is in the cross is real. We participate in its benefits now, in this life. But the fullness of the healing from both sin and disease takes place in heaven. We still must die at our appointed times.

RC Sproul, Ligonier Blog



‘Our faith cannot be
supported in a better
way than by the
exercise of prayer.’

—*John Calvin*



Children's Corner



Dear Children,

I hope you are all enjoying your holidays!

At this time of year, people who grow potatoes start lifting them from the ground to check up on how well they've been growing. If your parents or grandparents grow potatoes maybe you've done that with them already?

In the picture, you can see some of the first ones we tried this year. They came from Ness – and they were very tasty! And what a size they were too – they were even bigger than they look in the photo!

Just like other vegetables and fruits, potatoes need four things to make them grow and three of them are quite easy to guess – can you try and see if you can guess one, two, or maybe even the whole three? Well, they need light, water, and food. They get their light from the sun, their water from the rain, and their food from the soil.

But what's the fourth thing they need so that they can grow? Well, it's God's kindness!

I was thinking about this when our minister mentioned a story that I first heard from Rev David Karoon, who was your first minister in this congregation. And it happened quite a long time ago, when people had a lot less food than we do.

One Sabbath day, there was a visiting minister preaching in a church and, after the service was finished, one of the elders invited the minister back to his house for lunch. The elder had just lifted his potatoes a few days before but they didn't look or taste very good that year and he was so disappointed that he didn't have better potatoes to give to the visiting minister.

So, after he put the potatoes on the table, he said to the minister that he was really very sorry that the potatoes were so poor.

Anyway, he asked the minister to say grace – and he was surprised to hear the minister saying 'thank you' to God for the potatoes because he could see the blood of Christ in every one of them!

Now, that sounded very strange to the elder – and I'm sure it sounds strange to you too! What did the minister mean?

Well, what the minister meant was that if Jesus had not shed His blood on the cross for our sins there would be nothing at all to eat in the world - not even a poor potato!

When you think about it, if Jesus had not died on the cross to pay the price for our sins and to make a way back for us to God, there would be nothing good in the world at all to enjoy. There would only be our sin and God's anger against it. There would be nothing good at all!

Many people don't realise that we wouldn't have anything unless Christ had died. It's because of his death that we have anything at all to eat – and how thankful we should be for having poor potatoes, never mind the good ones that you see in the photo!

Many people don't realise either that it is because Christ died that we still have a chance to find mercy and be saved. We are still living in a time of God's kindness and mercy – but if we don't confess our sins, ask God's forgiveness and become Christians, that time of mercy will soon be over and it will be time for God's judgment instead.

Don't leave it too late to do these things: You need to make good use of God's kindness and mercy while you can.



With my love and prayers,

Mrs S