



# **Christian Today Digest**

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# **Christian Today Website Articles**

**Sometimes we include an article of interest in Christian Today Digest, which is not necessarily a news item but rather one that we have included for readers to pray about.**

**Unless otherwise stated, articles in this magazine are transcriptions of material selected by the editor at Christian Today and were first published recently on [www.christiantoday.com](http://www.christiantoday.com).**

# **Scientology is back in the news. Here are 6 things Christians should know about this dubious 'Church'**

**By James Macintyre**

**Scientists, never far from the headlines, are once again in the news this week after the 'Church' of Scientology opened a £4.2 million headquarters in Birmingham, and the ex-wife of Elvis Presley denied she had left the religious sect.**

**In the Moseley suburb of Birmingham, the organisation opened its HQ in an extravagant ceremony at the Grade II listed Pitmaston House, which was bought in 2007 by the group, founded by science fiction author L Ron Hubbard.**

**The building will supposedly house a training centre and a chapel.**

**Meanwhile, publicists for 72-year-old Priscilla Presley said yesterday that she remains a member of the Church – which counts the actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta as members – after a source told The Mail on Sunday that Priscilla said she’s ‘had enough’ of it.**

**Here are six things Christians should know about Scientology.**

## **1. The two ‘faiths’ are mutually exclusive**

**According to one former member, despite what the ‘Church’ claims, in practice you cannot be a Christian and a Scientologist. ‘I remember listening to an advanced teaching where Hubbard**

**said Jesus was just a hologram projected onto the earth to trick people into following a lie,' said the former member.**

## **2. Scientology's founder was opposed to Jesus**

**In A PIECE OF BLUE SKY, the author Jon Atack writes, 'In confidential materials, Hubbard attacked Christianity as an "implant," and said that Christ was a fiction.'**

**The former member wrote of Scientologists' attitudes: 'Their definition of Jesus changes as you move up in the system and goes from good teacher in the basic teachings to a fraud in more advanced lectures.'**

### **3. A different view of life and mankind**

In the basic tenets of Scientology, 'man is basically good', experiences multiple lifetimes (reincarnation) and increasingly develops control over his or her own life.

### **4. Disdain for all people outside the sect**

Where Christianity emphasises the dignity of every human person, Scientology looks with disdain on non-Scientologists.

Hubbard used the term 'wog' to describe anyone who is supposedly not clever enough to be a Scientologist, and those in the group still use the term today.

## **5. Higher value on celebrities**

**Scientology is always looking to recruit high-profile celebrities, who it appears to value over ordinary people. As the former Scientologist writes: ‘When I worked on staff at the Celebrity Centre there was always a huge push to draw in celebrities, or “opinion leaders” as they were called, because they could draw so many more new recruits into the organization simply because anything they did was deemed “cool” by their followers and copied.**

**‘The more a celebrity gets sucked in, the more dirt the Church has on them from notes from counselling sessions. That is used as blackmail to keep them from ever becoming antagonistic towards the mission and goals of the “Church.” The threat of personal, intimate, potentially**

**embarrassing facts about the celebrity being made known to the public is an effective weapon to keep these opinion leaders positive towards the organization and silent about their concerns.'**

## **6. Emphasis on the individual – not on God**

**Unlike the three monotheistic faiths, God is not central to the Scientology 'religion'. In Scientology, according to the 1998 book, SECTS, CULTS, AND SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES, 'vastly more emphasis is given to the godlike nature of the person and to the workings of the human mind than to the nature of God'.**

# **Why God lets His people experience spiritual darkness**

**By Jay Freeman**

**Many Christians all over the world wonder why God allows His people to experience spiritual darkness. Some ask, “how could God allow me to experience this?”**

**If you’re that person, let me encourage you: there’s a purpose for that.**

## **A world of darkness**

**Friends, it’s a fact that the world we live in is marred by sin. From the time Adam and Eve sinned, the world, which was put under their dominion (see Genesis 1:26–30), began seeing death**

**and decay. Simply put, we are living in a fallen world.**

**Because we live in a fallen world, we can't and must not expect that there's no darkness around us. Where sin is, there will always be darkness.**

**Think about what the Lord Jesus says about sin and darkness in John 3:19–20, saying:**

**“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”**

**Friends, the Lord Jesus Himself said that sin loves to hide. Where there is sin,**

**either unconfessed or cherished, there will always be darkness.**

## **Spiritual darkness**

**But what if you, a Christian who lives a repentant life devoid of intentional and cherished sin, experience darkness? Does that mean that you love sin and want to hide it from God? No, it doesn't mean that!**

**Again, we live in a world of darkness that is continually being ravaged by sin. Satan still tries to cover the earth in darkness even when he knows he was already defeated and put to shame by Christ on the cross!**

**“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He (Jesus) made a public**

**spectacle of them (the devil and his minions), triumphing over them in it.”**

**Colossians 2:15**

**So why does God allow His people to experience spiritual darkness if Christ has already defeated Satan? Let me give you two reasons:**

## **1. For His people to seek Him**

**First, it's for His people to seek Him. Did you know that Jeremiah 29:11, one of the most quoted verse in the Bible, was mentioned at a time when the people of Jerusalem were captive in Babylon? In their captivity, God promised them,**

**“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity . . .”**

**Jeremiah 29:11–14**

## **2. For His people to shine for Him**

**Another very important reason for this is so that we would shine! Did you know**

**that in Christ, we are lights that should shine in this world to the glory of the Father? Think about what Jesus said:**

**“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

**Matthew 5:14–16**

**REJOICE!**

**Friends, when God allows us to experience spiritual darkness, it's an opportunity for us to seek Him and shine for Him. It's a win-win situation when we have faith in God!**

**I leave you with this passage that all Christians must take to heart:**

**“Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”**

**Isaiah 60:1–3**

# **How a megachurch tragedy nearly destroyed 'Prince of Preachers' Charles Spurgeon**

**By Joseph Hartropp**

**The famed, fiery Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon was a celebrity pastor of his era – and continues to inspire today – but one tragic megachurch event nearly ended his ministry completely.**

**Converted at age 15, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was rapidly catapulted into ministry as he discovered a special gift for preaching. The 'Prince of Preachers', gained a reputation for his prophetic energy, poetic voice and sometimes provocative irreverence – and soon caught a vast following.**

**He began his ministry career at age 19 at London's New Park Street Chapel, but**

**the overflowing crowds he attracted meant his church was soon too small – even though it could seat 1200 people.**

**He upgraded to a larger building and then another, but outgrew both. He then leased the Surrey Gardens Music Hall in London’s Royal Surrey Gardens, a venue that held 10-12,000 people. As Christianity.com explains, it was a controversial move since some saw the venue as too worldly – a public amusement hall that resembled more a circus than a church.**

**Passionate to preach and reach the masses, Spurgeon went ahead – though he would come to deeply regret it after the Sunday of October 19, 1856. As Spurgeon biographer Lewis Drummond noted, the pastor had an eerie premonition the night before, and had said: ‘I felt over-weighted with a sense of responsibility, and filled with**

**a mysterious premonition of some great trial shortly to befall me.'**

**On Sunday night the hall was filled, with another 10,000 eager to hear him crowding outside. A few hymns into the service, cries emerged from the congregation: 'Fire! Fire! Fire! The galleries are giving way! The place is falling! The place is falling!'**

**Suddenly the crowd was in a mad, violent panic. As one witness described: 'The cries and shrieks at this period were truly terrific, to which was added the already pent-up excitement of those who had not been able to make their exit. They pressed on, treading furiously over the dead and dying, tearing frantically at each other. Hundreds had their clothes torn from their backs in their endeavours to escape; masses of men and women were driven down and trodden over heedless of their cries and lamentations.'**

**There had been no fire, but Spurgeon's attempt to keep the peace couldn't hold back the chaos. It was a tragic tumult that saw seven killed and 28 seriously injured and taken to hospital. Wracked with guilt, Spurgeon was thrown into a deep depression.**

**As he wrote: 'I refused to be comforted; tears were my meat by day, and dreams my terror by night. I felt as I had never felt before. "My thoughts were all a case of knives," cutting my heart in pieces, until a kind of stupor of grief ministered a mournful medicine to me . . . "Broke in pieces all asunder," my thoughts which had been to me a cup of delights, were like pieces of broken glass, the piercing and cutting miseries of my pilgrimage.'**

**His many critics didn't hold back either. The Daily Telegraph wrote on October 20: 'when the mangled corpses had been carried away from the**

**unhallowed and disgraceful scene – when husbands were seeking their wives, and children their mothers in extreme agony and despair – the chink of the money as it fell into the collection-boxes grated harshly, miserably on the ears of those who, we sincerely hope, have by this time conceived for Mr Spurgeon and his rantings the profoundest contempt.’**

**But in two weeks Spurgeon had recovered enough to preach again, and his crowds continued to expand.**

**In his final sermon at the end of his career, Spurgeon declared that Christ ‘is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill.’**

**However he came to terms with the tragedy at Surrey Gardens, it can’t be said that Spurgeon never knew grief.**

**Most painfully of all, he had to live with a pain borne of his own popularity.**

# **Reformation 500: With the ‘fundamentalism, terror and religious violence’ should we really celebrate?**

**By David Robertson**

**An awful lot of Protestants seem to be somewhat embarrassed by the Reformation. Many more are not really sure what it is. Some seem to regard it as the true Pentecost, the real beginning of the Church – a kind of reboot Church 2.0. What should we make of it?**

**As yours truly will be heading to Wittenberg next week to speak at**

**the 500th anniversary celebrations organised by the World Reformed Fellowship, you will be able to work out that I regard this as a significant anniversary – well worth remembering and learning from. The list of speakers from many different denominations all over the world indicates the success of the Reformed churches who are now to be found all over the world. Dutch, American, English, German, Brazilian, Indonesian church leaders are among the speakers . . . and of course one Scotsman! Brazil and South Korea are two examples of non-European countries that now have large Reformed communities.**

**Meanwhile some of our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are attempting to heal the breach – suggesting that the Reformation was an unfortunate, if understandable blip in the history of the universal Church.**

**But what does our secular culture made of it? The BBC had a recent documentary entitled Reformation: Europe's Holy War presented and narrated by the historian David Starkey.**

**It was a fascinating programme and gave an insight into how some perceive this notable anniversary. The programme itself was well produced and presented, and had some good history and interesting facts but the overall impression is well summed up in the advertising for it: 'David Starkey tells the story of the Protestant Reformation and how it transformed the face of modern Europe, unleashing fundamentalism, terror and religious violence.'**

**The Reformation as Jihad which unleashed 200 years of bloodshed in the name of God? Is this a credible and legitimate interpretation of the facts or is it reading back into history what we**

want to see from today's zeitgeist? The narrative is that Christianity used to be violent and oppressive, had its Reformation, then Counter Reformation and then thanks to the Enlightenment, the Protestant churches became the nice cuddly, cute and culturally ineffective organisations we see today. Lesson for today? If only Islam could have its own Reformation, (preferably without the bloodshed), then we would all be able to progress forward to our secular Nirvana.

It is at best a simplistic view of history and at worst a distortion that fails to take account of some of the key issues – most notably the spiritual ones of how we get to heaven, what the church is, and how we know what God is saying. Secular historians tend to work on the narrative that because these issues are not important to them, then they could

**not have been really important to others. But what about the Church?**

**What should we make of the Reformation? Should we celebrate it? It was after all a spiritual as well as a political and cultural revolution that was foundational in the making of modern Europe (and America). My view is that we should certainly learn about it, and yes celebrate the good, whilst acknowledging the bad. But we need to be as careful of our own preconceptions and biases as we expect others to be of theirs. Carl Trueman, the Professor of Historical Theology and Church History at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, has an important warning for us all:**

**‘But when all you see in the past is your own reflection, you cannot really learn very much from it. The 500th anniversary will have been a wasted opportunity for real theological and**

**ecclesiastical reflection if it becomes merely an exercise in semi-fictional hagiography in the service of self-affirmation.'**

**If we can avoid the hagiography, cynicism and point scoring, then remembering the Reformation could turn out to be a key element for the whole Church today – as we seek renewal, revival and yes, a new Reformation.**

## **Hell House: The evangelism strategy that aims to scare people into heaven**

**By Joseph Hartropp**

**Outreach is often urged on evangelical Christians, but maybe most of us have been doing it all wrong?**

**Some evangelists will point to the love of God and the hope of eternal life, but one US church has for decades been promoting salvation through a fiercer, more fiery means: an ‘experience’ known as a ‘Hell House’.**

**The Hell House riffs on your Halloween-inspired ‘haunted house’ funfair-ride, with a more theological slant – where non believers are taken on a dramatic tour of human depravity that supposedly inspires you to turn to Christ.**

**As the Friendly Atheist summarises: ‘The rooms in these houses typically include scenes of a woman having an abortion, a school shooting . . . a former beauty queen descending into prostitution, a gay person dying of AIDS . . . It’s why, by the end of your journey, you will hopefully commit to Christ to prevent all these awful, awful things from occurring.’**

**It's the 27th year that Trinity Church in Cedar Hill, Texas is hosting a Hell House event. And why stop? Just last year saw 9,249 visitors, 640 conversions and 1,165 recommitments to Christ. Isn't God clearly at work?**

**One visitor was less positive, detailing the graphic horror that awaits at this hellish youth-centric experience in a Vice exposé.**

**Jeremy Donovan, the youth director at Trinity Church says the Hell House is ultimately about encountering the 'love of Jesus', but I have questions.**

**This may just be a whacky outlier even in US evangelicalism (it would never fly in the UK), but as a clearly established and quite successful event it demands to be challenged.**

**However well-intentioned, at its heart the Hell House appears to centre on a gospel pitch that relies on fiery**

**damnation for its rhetorical spark. And theologically, this is a far more popular idea – that you can't preach Jesus until you've preached the terrifying hell he saves us from. Otherwise, why did Christ come? Skipping out on the eternal conscious torment awaiting unbelievers is just liberal weakness, say the hell-raisers.**

**But you don't have to be a Rob Bell-adoring revisionist to think that's wrong. Did you know that in the entirety of Scripture, the words 'heaven' and 'hell' never appear in a verse together? And yet evangelical theology has ridden for decades on a rhetorical paradigm that says that life is about just that: choosing heaven or choosing hell. We're worthless, doomed sinners – but God punished Jesus so we can escape eternal judgement. That's a caricature, but one not far from what many promote.**

**The love of God, the restoration of all things, the cost of discipleship and the call of the Church to serve the world – these themes are often omitted from evangelical preaching. And that’s tragic, because they really are essential to Scripture’s story. Christ talked about hell, absolutely, but it wasn’t just a scary set-up for his Gospel preach. And his gravest warnings of judgment came not for unbelievers but for the religious who claimed to be speaking for God.**

**And if Christians ‘speaking for God’ today end up terrifying outsiders with a mentally traumatic, emotionally abusive and theologically inaccurate picture of the Gospel – one more likely to deter them from faith than attract them to it – then woe unto them. The gospel literally means ‘good news’. We should start preaching like it is.**