



GRACE & TRUTH
MAGAZINE & ISSUE 132

THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD

Pardon from an offended God!
Pardon for sins of deepest dye!
Pardon bestowed through Jesus' blood!
Pardon that brings the rebel nigh!

Samuel Davis 1723-61

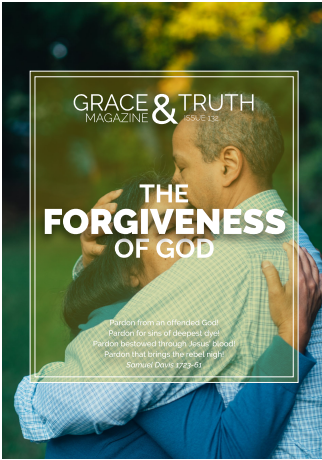


TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
N A I R O B I

Editor’s Desk

We welcome you to read and profit from ‘Grace & Truth’, a publication of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. We believe there is a very great need for serious Biblical literature to be produced in our country of Kenya. We trust your soul will be fed and that you will be challenged from the Word of God. We welcome feedback from you by letter, phone or email. Please also visit us on the web at: www.trinity.or.ke

Keith Underhill



Cover: The testimony of Scripture is that, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). So, how can a Holy God forgive sin? “The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). God made Jesus to be sin for us “so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (1 Corinthians 5:21).

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Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible.

IF YOU, O LORD, SHOULD MARK INIQUITIES

John Muketha

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul states, “*We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*” Jesus says in Matthew 12:36-37: “*I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*” God has a record of everyone who has ever lived and, on the Day of Judgement, people will be judged by what is written in the books according to what they have done (Revelation 20:12,15). Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will escape this awful judgement.

Christians are in danger of losing the sense of guilt that comes from realizing who we are in the presence of a Holy God. Spurgeon in his autobiography points out that, ‘Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed’ (Vol. 1, page 54).

In **Psalm 130** we are encouraged to come out of the depths of guilt and despair to the heights of joyous hope in the Lord as we cry out to God for forgiveness, knowing that He delights in abundant redemption. This is a prayer from the heart to the Lord for mercy. “*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*” (v. 1). The holiness of God creates an awareness of the depth of sin and guilt. When Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne, with the seraphim crying out “*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,*” he said, “*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*” (Isaiah 6:3,5).

The Psalmist calls upon God to give attention to his prayer but he is also aware that his is a plea for grace and undeserved favour. He knows that God who is holy has pronounced Himself as: “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, ...*” (Exodus 34:6-7). We come to a King on a throne with reverence, fear and awe, yet as we do we are encouraged to come because it is a throne of grace where we find sweet relief.

Without God's forgiveness we are doomed! "*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared*"(v. 3). God keeps a record of all our iniquities. If the Lord were to add up all my sins and hold me accountable for them, I am undone. Any sin is a grievous offence against a holy God. The record of my sin would include every wrong thought, word, and deed; sins of commission and sins of omission; all the direct commands of God that I have broken, and all of those that I have ignored or failed to get around to doing. Have I loved God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength all the time? Have I loved my neighbour as myself, with no hint of selfishness or anger? Have I destroyed immediately every wicked thought? Have I been faithful in prayer and in the study of God's Word? God knows all that I have done or not done throughout my whole life! Without God's forgiveness, I am doomed!

"*If You O LORD, should mark iniquities O LORD, who could stand?*" What would we do if God merely judged sin and there was no forgiveness at all? God is under no obligation to forgive and if He were to judge and condemn everyone He would not be unjust! The God who is holy is bound to take note of our sins and therefore only punishment would follow since none could stand at His judgement bar. There is no righteous person who can come forward and stand before God. No one can withstand His fierce judgements.

"*But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared*"(v.4). What a crucial declaration: "But with You, there is forgiveness." Without forgiveness, I am doomed, but with forgiveness, I learn to fear God, because I know that He has every reason to condemn me. I fear Him because I know that He rightly could have cast my body and soul into hell for all eternity (Matthew 10:28).

Forgiveness is God's offer of pardon to the sinner. Forgiveness is part of the nature and being of God. Forgiveness is not just something that God can do; it is a vital part of His whole being. He is a pardoning and forgiving God. "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love*"(Micah 7:18).

With God there is this forgiveness because in Jesus "*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*"(Ephesians 1:7). This forgiveness is found in Christ because He came into the world and took upon Himself, our sin, guilt and condemnation. He paid the penalty for our sin and guilt by His death as He suffered and became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him(2 Corinthians 5:21).

Forgiveness leads to a change in lifestyle as the one forgiven comes to ‘fear’ the Lord. When one is forgiven some believe there is the danger of thinking that we can go on sinning. Might were as on that since we are saved by grace and God is so rich in forgiveness, He will always be on hand to forgive our sins? No! If we have received forgiveness it is to give us a deeper awareness of God and a greater sense of His holiness, honour and glory. *“And if you call on Him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile”* (1 Peter 1:17).

The Christian can’t take sin lightly because forgiveness is at cost the precious blood of the Son of God. This is why Paul can say in Romans 6: 1, *“How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* *How can we*, being what we are, the sons of God, people who have been forgiven, still live in sin? A glimpse of God in His holiness should plunge us into the depths of guilt and despair and cause us to cry to Him for mercy. May the Lord by His word cause us to hate our sin and cry from the *“depths”* to be forgiven.

African Pastors’ Conferences 2020 in East Africa

APC provides training for Pastors in the form of one to two day conferences in partnership with churches in different towns in Africa. Most of these Pastors are unable to attend seminary or undergo any formal training owing to their being engaged in full-time employment in addition to their pastoring duties. The Pastors who attend need only to affirm that the Bible is their sole authority for determining right doctrine and practice. Therefore, APC is interdenominational in outlook.

The primary speakers at APCs are, themselves, African Pastors, most from South Africa, Zambia and Kenya. This is to ensure that the delegates understand that what APC is teaching is the Christian understanding of the Bible, not just a Western understanding.

This year, the Kenyan APCs will be in April and in July: in **Machakos** (April 16-17), in **Meru** for the first time (April 21-22), and in **Nakuru** (April 24 -25). They then move to **Mwanza**, Tanzania for the second time (April 28-29).

In July, the first conference will be in **Mombasa** (June 30 – July 1), then move to **Nairobi** (July 2-3), **Eldoret** (July 6-7) with the last in **Mumias** (July 9-10).

The next team will move to Uganda and have the first conference in **Kampala** (July 17-18), **Jinja** (July 21-22), **Mbale** (July 24-25), **Fort Portal** (July 28-29), and **Hoima** (July 31 – August 1).

Please do pray for Pastor Irving Steggle as he struggles with ill health and yet has to help in leading this vital ministry, along with Nico Van Zyl the conference manager and other brethren.

<https://www.africanpastorsconferences.org>

HOW TO COME NEAR TO GOD

Keith Underhill

This article continues the verse by verse exposition of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 2:11-13

Most people just assume that God is near them to bless them. Everywhere people are praying to God, crying out to Him in their need. Even those who do not make a specific profession of religion pray. In today's pluralistic world it is so often said, 'We all worship one God' and 'All roads lead to God, to heaven', as if God will hear any prayer no matter what. You are free to believe this if you want to, but it is not the teaching of the Bible.

It is very clear that before becoming Christians the Gentiles of Paul's day were "far" from God (see 2:13,17). It is specifically such Gentiles that Paul is addressing, Christians who were not Jews by blood, who formed the majority of Christians in Ephesus. As he blesses God for the common salvation (1:10) he also reflects on the great obstacles to their unity in Christ. It was perhaps the greatest problem in the early church. Did Gentiles need to be circumcised to be saved was the question discussed and settled in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's letter to the Galatian Churches was written to combat the false teaching that keeping the law, including circumcision was necessary for justification. The typical Jewish attitude towards Gentiles is seen in the following quotation:

Every day the Jew thanked God he was not born a Gentile. The Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell... God loves only Israel of all the nations He had made... It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile into the world... If a Jew married a Gentile the funeral of that Jewish boy or girl was carried out.

Let us remember that we are almost all Gentiles by birth, so we are in the same condition that these Gentiles were.

1. WE ARE NOT NEAR TO GOD BY BIRTH (2:11-12)

It was a privilege to be born a Jew in Old Testament times. God had revealed Himself to them alone (Psalm 147:19-20, Romans 3:1-2). In that word it was said, "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises... the patriarchs, and from their race... is

the Christ” (Romans 9:4-5). The Gentiles were excluded because they knew nothing of these things. Yet these privileges did not automatically bring saving blessings to every Jew. There had to be the working of the Spirit in the heart (see Romans 2:28-29). These privileges pointed towards real spiritual blessings which none of us have today by birth.

(1) *We were not circumcised.* God commanded all the male offspring of Abraham to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). This was not the African circumcision at puberty, but when the son was only 8 days old, done in obedience to God. So uncircumcised Gentiles were contemptuously called the “uncircumcision” by Jews, being no better than dogs. Before Christ came such circumcision was the mark of being in covenant relationship with God. But Paul also spoke to Jews who merely boasted in this mark in the flesh as if it guaranteed all spiritual blessing by itself! He reminds them that it is only “made in the flesh by (human) hands”, a sign of the need for heart circumcision or regeneration (see Romans 2:28-29) in order to keep the law (Romans 2:25-27). God does not look upon marks on the body, but upon the heart. If there is no new, circumcised heart, then you are not in the kingdom. Remember what Nicodemus was told, that without the new birth he was outside, he could not see or enter the kingdom (John 3:3,5). There is the children’s story of a goat that wanted to become a lion. It tried having a sign declaring ‘lion’, roaring, eating and walking like a lion. Obviously, the only way to become a lion was to be born a lion. We are born far from God and His people, and there must be radical ‘heart surgery’ if we may come near to God.

(2) *We had no right to any saving blessings from God.* We need to be initiated, for we are not ‘insiders’. Five things are listed as totally lacking in those not near to God.

- Christless – “separated from Christ” or from “the Christ” the Messiah. He had not been revealed to these Gentiles. Those who have never heard the word of God know nothing about a promised Saviour. Even today, 2,000 years on, there are those who have never heard so that they have no true remedy for their sins. They have had religious ceremonies, animal and even human sacrifices, good works, self-denial, but what can these accomplish? But you who read this, you have heard, you have this great privilege (as the Jews, Romans 3:2), but it will do you no good unless you believe.
- Stateless – “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel”, aliens amongst God’s people. If you are not a citizen of the country in which you are living you cannot partake of the peculiar rights and privileges of such citizens, such as voting. In the Old Testament God had chosen Israel as His people

and the Gentiles were not part of them. Today that Israel is the church (see 1 Peter 2:9-10). You are not born a member of Christ's church, so you are treated as an alien, outside the community. This is why the Lord's Supper should only be for those who have the evidence that they belong to the community of God's people.

- Promise-less – “strangers to the covenants of promise”. The great covenant promise is ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’. It was first given to Abraham, then repeated to Isaac and Jacob, and them to the nation at Sinai. It is the great blessing in heaven (Revelation 21:3). The promise is only to those who are in the covenant, who are part of God's covenant people, i.e. not to Philistines and the like. Life depends upon promises made, teaching in school, wages from work, government policies. God is a God of promise, and the life of faith depends upon the promises He makes (Hebrews 6:12, see Ephesians 1:13).
- Hopeless – “having no hope”, because of having no promise, especially of the Messiah. There is no life without hope, but this hope is much more than a wish, for it must have a secure foundation. The great hope in the Bible is the resurrection from the dead of all of God's people to eternal life (see Acts 23:6, 24:15, 26:6-8), because of the resurrection of Jesus. The world of Paul's day had no such hope. For them death ended all togetherness as seen in the many inscriptions on tombs bidding an eternal farewell. Do you have a firm and clear hope that steers you through life as you await that coming Day?
- Godless – “without God in the world”. The Gentiles had many so-called ‘gods’ (see Acts 17:23, 1 Corinthians 8:5). Yet they were without God as they were not near the true and only God. No other ‘god’ exists, as the Baalists found out (1 Kings 18). In their extremity even the wicked can call out to God, but how terrible when there is no answer! They have no God to befriend, to bless, to guide or to save them, all things that God does for His people (as in Psalm 23). There is only ONE God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reject Him and you have no god. This is how the Bible evaluates all non-Christian religion – as “without God”.


2. WE ARE BROUGHT NEAR TO GOD BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST (2:13)

The language of “far off” and “near” is from the Old Testament (Isaiah 57:19, see also Acts 2:39, 22:21). The Gentiles lived far away from the temple in Jerusalem where God manifested His presence. So how did Gentiles in Ephesus come near to God? Not by going to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, not by

becoming Jews by submitting to circumcision, but in the very same way by which Jews themselves became Christians.

- ★ By a divine initiative, not something that we work out for ourselves. He brings us to God by what He has done.
- ★ Not by the sacrifice of an animal, but by the blood of Christ the Son of God (1:7, Hebrews 9:12-14, 10:19, 1 Peter. 1:19, 1 John 1:7).
- ★ By being “in Christ Jesus” by faith, united to Him, and so receiving all the blessings that are in Him.

This is the **only** way to be near to God. You either come to God as you put all your trust in the cross of Christ, or you cannot come. Consider what is already proclaimed in heaven, that it is by the blood of the Lamb of God that sinners have been ransomed for God (Revelation 5:9). In Old Testament times Gentiles could not enter the tabernacle because they did not belong to the people of God. Lepers had to stay outside the camp, but if cleansed and blood was sprinkled then they could come (Leviticus 14). Israelites themselves could only come with a bloody offering for the forgiveness of their sins. Even priests had to have blood shed for themselves in order to ‘draw near’. The very high priest could not come without blood (Hebrews 9:22). It is through the blood of Christ that the new covenant is established, as we remember in the Lord’s Supper. So as we come to God we sing, “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling”. Let us remember this so that we constantly give thanks that by grace we now have Christ, that we are numbered among God’s people, that we are in secure covenant relationship with God, that we have great hope, and that God is ours, through the blood of Christ. Let us build our Christian life on this and this alone.

 <p>NEW RELEASE</p> <p>—What does the Bible Teach about— SPIRITUAL GIFTS? KEITH UNDERHILL</p> <p>KES 100</p> <p>What does the Bible teach about SPIRITUAL GIFTS? Keith Underhill</p> <p>To order visit www.sky.garden/shop/reformation-hub</p>	<p><i>Spiritual discernment is one of the crying needs of the church of Christ. False claims are always ringing in our ears. This book provides readers with a brief but careful and sane examination of three crucial chapters of Scripture. Going verse by verse through 1 Corinthians 12-14 key issues are dealt with, including the nature of spiritual gifts and whether they should all be in exercise today, and with the role of women in the church. The aim of the book is to determine what the Scripture actually says. Only then can the church be discerning. (Austin Walker)</i></p>
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PRAYER: THE FUEL FOR THE CHURCH

Murungi Igweta

Murungi Igweta is a Pastor with Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. In this article he is continuing with his writing on aspects of the life and ministry of the local church.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

Is it not remarkable that God; the almighty God, the King of kings, the eternal Creator of all things visible and invisible, the infinitely holy God, has provided access for us into His throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need? Is it not a great wonder that God has time and space for such worms as we are? What is man, O God, that you are mindful of him? Who are we that you care to listen to our poor prayers? Yet, the Lord hears and answers our prayers. Therefore, this is a call to pray – ceaseless prayer.

The early church devoted themselves to *the prayers*. They knew that apart from God they could do nothing. Although they had been with Christ, and had seen the Holy Spirit descend upon them in the form of tongues of fire, yet they still devoted themselves to the prayers. They had the ministry of the apostles, who had been personally commissioned by the risen Lord, yet they devoted themselves to the prayers. How much more should we?

What is to devote? The word translated ‘devote’ means, to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of success despite difficulty. These dear brothers and sisters who constituted the early church, who met locally in Jerusalem, persisted in prayer.

What is it to pray? It is to make requests to God. To pray is to plead with God to act on your behalf. It is to ask God to undertake for you. It is to submit to God’s will, power and grace knowing that He is able, He is God, He is worthy and He is near. He hears, He knows, He is willing and He is able. When the church gathers to pray, they are humbly looking to God to show them such favour as to act on their behalf, for His glory. John Bunyan, the 17th Century pastor has defined prayer this way:

Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to His Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.

Why do we pray? We pray because of God. God commands and expects us to pray. Jesus taught us how to pray. In Matthew 6 He taught, “*And when you pray... And when you pray... Pray then like this...*” (vv. 5,7,9). The Lord himself prayed (Luke 11:1) and this gives us sufficient example and motivation to pray. His disciples prayed and he chided them when they did not pray. His church devoted herself to prayer.

We pray for our own good and advantage. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord encouraged his disciples to pray when he said, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*” (Matthew 7:7). The assurance that God answers prayer is enough motivation for us to pour out ardent prayers. “What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit! O what needless pain we bear! All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer! (Joseph Scriven, 1820-1886).

Yet, one of the sad characteristic of our prayers is that they are not saturated with God enough. They are full of petitions and very little of God. Clearly our understanding of what makes prayer is so wanting... and why so? Could it be because of ignorance of God’s word?

I draw your attention to an Old Testament prayer, a prayer of David. Yet we know that David did not know as much Scriptures or revelation as we have now. He did not know of the immense privileges we have in Christ at this time. He greeted most of our blessings from afar (Hebrews 11:13,39-40, 1 Peter 1:12). Yet the way he led the national prayer meeting cannot be compared with our church prayers today! We have to ask ourselves once more, ‘What is prayer?’ and ‘How may we pray?’

How may we pray? *Biblical example: 1 Chronicles 29:10-19*

Here is an inspired example of corporate prayer. Using this passage, I want to point out three characteristics of what corporate prayer is, in order to encourage our churches to be more prayerful. This is not a private prayer – it is a corporate and national prayer led by David. It is true, this prayer was not poured in the context of a local church. But there is a sense in which the national Israel was the Old Testament church.

One of the aspects of our prayer is that many of us are content to pray at home and think that home-prayers or private prayers are enough – they are not! We have to spend time with people who pray well to be able to pray. This means that those who lead in prayer have to prepare well so that others may learn from them!

1. Prayer is the open heavenly window into the exceeding majestic glory of God (vv. 10-13)

In this prayer David tell us what it means to pray and so He begins by beholding heaven. Yes David spoke with God, but it was not like a one-sided phone call. Heaven is opened up for him so that he could see God, the Lord of heaven who is worthy of worship and praise. Therefore, David beheld the throne of grace of God and outpours praise to God. He said,

Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.

David here celebrates with earnest reverence the attributes of God. He acknowledges that though he was a king, he was a subject of a greater King, the King of kings who has the world-wide and eternal kingdom to which everyone ought to belong. What a blessing to have such a leader of a nation who knows that the hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord. In a language of memorable beauty, eloquence and propriety he reveals a heart of a man who truly loved the Lord and is not ashamed of pouring himself out before the Lord even in the assembly of his subjects.

From this David confesses the divine sovereignty, infinite dominion and absolute supremacy of God. God's sovereignty is neither delegated nor assumed. His dominion is not usurped or arbitrary. God is the only one who is sovereign and has sovereign control and determination of all things. He is the Father by right since everything originated from Him.

Therefore God is most blessed for greatness, power, glory, victory and majesty belongs to Him. This is heavenly worship for this is what all the heavenly hosts sing to the Lord. See Revelation 4:8,11, 5:9-10 etc. There are no nobler words in which human reverence has found expression before the Divine Sovereign than in these. We ought to take these words and take them to our hearts and on to our own lips to express God's majesty. They perfectly voice our own hearts' reverence. All joy before God should be profoundly reverential, and here David gives it simple but admirable utterance.

When we draw near to God, it is not simply to bring our sin, needs and wants before him; it is to bring His holiness and greatness and benevolence before

our minds so that we are all consumed by the glory of His presence in order to worship Him appropriately. The Lord Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer, has given us the same pattern of such adoration before presenting petition. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*" This is the way Paul prayed when he gave a testimony of his own gracious conversion to Timothy (see 1 Timothy 1:17).

In this prayer David acknowledges God for who He is. God is the Creator of everything. Who is God? *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.* In this we can behold God's incomprehensible greatness and his superlative transcendence. You notice that this language of seeking to describe the indescribable Almighty is the language of angels in offering worship to God:

"...saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:12).

This is where our Baptist forefathers did us such a great service in giving us such a solid Confession of Faith that lifts up God high and enthrones Him in heaven with the same Biblical language, and shall we confess less? Listen to this:

There is but one, and only one, living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in His being and His perfections. None but He can comprehend or understand His essence. He is pure spirit, invisible, and without body, parts, or the changeable feelings of men. He alone possesses immortality, and dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men. He never changes. He is great beyond all our conceptions, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty and infinite. He is most holy, wise, free and absolute. All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will, and for His own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate. He abounds in goodness and truth. He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently. But He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgement. (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, chapter 2/1).

It is not until we realize that prayer is a window that God has graciously opened for His people to behold Him that we can truly turn our times of prayer into a time of sincere worship of God. Therefore, pray to God beginning with praise and worship to God. Worship to God is basically served in words, which tells us that words are so important. Is the time of prayer a time of worship and adoration? Are we tempted to leave worship to the time of

singing? Prayer is worship. And so when you pray, begin by offering meaningful, substantial and reasonable worship to God. Worship the Lord in the splendour of His holiness.

Our Father art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

2. *Prayer is the perfect heavenly mirror in which we view our finiteness (vv. 14-17)*

The second section of David's prayer is a description of his reflection of himself for who he truly is under the scrutiny of the glory of God. The radiance of the glory in His presence leaves us all humbled because of our unworthiness before God. His unapproachable light leaves us naked in our depravity. We see ourselves as ugly, dirty, sinful and completely unworthy to say anything to God. This is what David realized when he said,

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.

Genuine prayer before God will be accompanied with a sense of our own littleness and unworthiness in the presence of the infinite God. Whatever angelic, heavenly piety may be, that of man on earth always includes humility. In the conscious presence of God we must feel

- our own nothingness
- the exceeding smallness of our brief span of life, "*We are strangers before you and sojourners,*" etc.
- our unworthiness to do anything for the holy and eternal One, "*Who am I?*"

The sense of our own insignificance is one of those marks of genuineness which we should see with satisfaction in ourselves and others, the absence of which may well lead us to ask serious questions as to the genuineness of our Christianity. This is where modern Christianity has failed miserably, in teaching people that they are 'gods' instead of impressing upon them that true

piety is assessed in humility before God. This humility is seen in two ways in the life of this man, who though a king, yet had nothing to claim before the Almighty about his own worthiness:

a) God expects us to acknowledge that everything we possess is from Him

We notice that David acknowledges that God owns everything universally, absolutely and eternally. Therefore God has exclusive rights over all that exists both in heaven and on earth so that He can give to any creature whatever He pleases and can withdraw from any creature in any way or at any time whatever He thinks best. For indeed the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be His name (Job 1:21).

b) God expects us to respond to his goodness with gratitude and generosity

Genuine prayer has to express itself in thanksgiving, and in thankful acknowledgment of the benevolence of God. God expects that we will be glad to receive from his gracious hand, and we shall also be eager to express gratefulness. Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be grateful, and worship acceptably with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28). It is the will of God for us to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). How can we not give thanks when we come to pray?

How careless we can be before God in that we are sometimes so full of petitions and supplications without any thanksgiving (see Philippians 4:6)! We are to express to God that what He gave us previously was good, sufficient and undeserved before we dare to say we need more. In this way, we can be willing to give generously to God's work, His people and to the needy. We must always know what we have is from God and is better given away, because, if hoarded it will soon rot.

David himself stood "*before all the congregation*" and "*blessed the Lord God of their fathers*". He and the national assembly thanked and praised God profusely. David freely and truthfully acknowledged that, in giving to God, they were but presenting to him that which was His own (v. 14). When we contribute to the cause of God we should bear in mind that God claims all that we have. And remember that at any time God may be pleased to receive it back. We are to willingly contribute to God's work from what He has entrusted to us for His glory and the well-being of his children. In the manner David gave thanks we have a lot to learn.

3. Prayer is the telescope into the riches of God (vv. 18-19)

Finally prayer is also a gracious telescope that God has given His children to behold His riches so that they may request accordingly.

O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision.

David has two petitions that he presented before God at the close – one for the people (v. 18) and one for Solomon (v. 19).

- 1) Prayer for the people: It is worth noting that He did not begin with his son – He began with the assembly. He prayed for the congregation, that God would keep them ever in this frame of heart, of being willing, joyful, and in whole-hearted surrender of themselves and all they had to God. His desire is that the hearts of the nation of Israel might be ever set towards God himself, and not man, nor king, nor themselves nor anything else created.
- 2) Prayer for Solomon: David prayed that God would give him an undivided heart. And this whole-heartedness would show itself **first** in relation to God and his truth – "*To keep your commandments, your testimonies, your statutes, and to do all these things*"; and secondly, "*to build the palace for You which I have made provision.*" This is ever the Divine order in David's mind – **God and his truth first**, and **the work of God** next. While David had Solomon in mind, yet this was fully realized in Christ.

In both he is neither interested in a form of religion, nor a short-lived religion but in a heart religion and a religion that is forever: "*Keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people...*". You notice that while many kings would pray for people to be subject to their rule, David prayed that people's hearts may be directed toward God! You notice that David after prayer called upon the whole assembly to praise the Lord, which they did, bowing before the Lord and the king, and worshipping.

In order to seal their confession thus made in word and deed, they proposed a great feast on the following day, consisting of a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with drink offerings and thank offerings to correspond. Thus ended the consecration, the prayer and praise, in joy and "*great gladness*". These are ever the results, and there never will be joy and gladness in the Lord without them.

Earthly example: Prayer

Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of your covenant people and our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.

But who are we... but mortal, finite, unworthy and wretched sinners. You have opened up heaven for us to behold your glorious beauty yet we fail so miserably to come consistently to you. Clearly in this we see that we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding, and we know that our home is in your glory and so help us to delight more in prayer when we commune with you.

But Lord remember your church. The people whom you have redeemed at the cost of your Son. Help us in our weaknesses. Help us especially in our prayerlessness. Oh, loving Father, help us to pray and to pray aright with reverence and with fear. Give us the spirit of supplication. Let the people of God find prayer meetings and all opportunities for corporate prayer a sweet relief. Give us supple knees. Give us the strength to pray without ceasing. May the prayers of your people come to you as pleasing incense, with a sweet smelling aroma. May this fragrance never cease to come before you every second, every hour, every day, every week, every month and every year. And when we shall be in eternity, may our prayers turn to praise.

We acknowledge that we do not even need to ask for anything for in Christ you have provided all things – He is our Saviour, Mediator, High Priest, King of kings, Prophet, He is our Friend, our Brother, our Physician. Immortal praises belong to Him. We can be able to give nothing except to thank you for your kind and extensive, vast and unmeasured generosity in what we continually enjoy in Christ. Please guide our hearts to be kindled in love, honour and praise to you and your glorious grace in your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen!

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH: A MIGHTY DEFENCE AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE (2)

Oliver Allmand-Smith

Oliver Allmand-Smith is a Pastor with Trinity Grace Church in Ramsbottom, U.K. He visits Kenya annually to teach in the Trinity Pastors' College (TPC) and serves on its Board. He is also a Trustee of the U.K. charity TRAIN (Kenya). This is the second of 3 articles on the very great usefulness of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, or the Second London Confession.

SECONDLY, the Confession helps us with *the cult of personality and the destruction of real leadership*. These two dangerous problems are clearly shown in our obsession with how people look, speak, and present themselves with their achievements, 'niceness' and personality. Churches are constantly searching for someone who has what we call the 'wow-factor', embracing the idea that if our churches are to thrive in the here and now then they must follow the spirit of the age. Which institutions, organizations, clubs and societies do well in our culture? It is often those who have leaders with pizzazz, so even though this is completely incompatible with the biblical model, we adopt it for the sake of success.

This ideology of 'pizzazz-filled' leadership is utterly destructive of the real thing, resulting in a succession of entirely unsuitable leaders. In our culture, authentic leadership is disintegrating because we have embraced this unbiblical approach. The people we follow, who dictate how we dress, what we deem moral, our lifestyle and interests are 'celebrities' – people who are famous for being famous! The celebrity culture is the greatest influence on the people of our society. It is these same celebrities who are largely immoral, arrogant, godless, perverted and wholly undeserving of exercising any influence whatsoever on other people. The Confession is what brings us back and establishes us, rooting and grounding us in a Biblical approach to leadership that wholly destroys this manifestation of the spirit of our age.

An apt example of this can be found in the Confession at Chapter 26, paragraph 7, which speaks of how leadership is to be established in the each local church:

To each of these churches thus gathered according to the divine will made known in His Word, the Lord has given all the power and authority requisite for the carrying on of the forms of worship and discipline which He has appointed for their observance. This

extends to the provision of such commands and rules as are needful for the right and proper use of the power conferred on the churches.

In other words, when the members of a local church gather together, the authority of Christ is manifest and he is enthroned in their midst. This paragraph should excite us each time that we have church members' meetings because it shows that every time we meet, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, is there! It doesn't matter whether or not we have leaders with pizzazz, it doesn't even matter if we have all the duly constituted leadership that we would desire because ***authority resides in the body of the Church***. As the membership gathers together, they have the mind of Christ. What excitement there should be at every single members meeting! What joy, what privilege there is here, with all the members and leaders united by the Spirit of Christ who reigns amongst them, with that same Spirit guiding, leading, and giving oneness of mind.

Moreover, how are the officers to be appointed? Paragraph 8 of Chapter 26 tells us:

A local church, gathered and fully organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. By Christ's appointment the officers to be chosen and set apart by the church as called and gathered, are bishops (otherwise called elders) and deacons. It is their special responsibility to arrange for the carrying out of what the Lord has ordained, and to use the powers entrusted to them for the execution of their duties; and such arrangements are to continue in the church until the world ends.

There are leaders, and there are members, and the mind of Christ guides the members to the leaders that Christ himself has prepared, duly gifted, and graced as laid out in the scriptures. The result of this is that the leadership is accountable to Christ as well as to the body of Christ, where the authority of Christ is manifest in this age. There is no conflict between a church leader's accountability to Christ and his accountability to the local church, because the mind and will of Christ is made manifest in and through each local church as the members gather. This beautiful synergy is in great contrast to the spirit of our age and our 'modern' approach to leadership.

Paragraph 9 shows the fitting solemnity of the process, and the essential accountability of what is a team of leaders to Christ, and to the church gathered in his name:

By Christ's appointment, any person who has been qualified and given the necessary gifts by the Holy Spirit for the work of bishop or elder in a church, must be chosen and called to that office by the common suffrage of the church itself. He must be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with the laying on of hands of the existing eldership, if there be such. Similarly, deacons are to be chosen by the common suffrage of the church and set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands.

As clearly shown here, accountability to Christ as well as to the people of Christ simultaneously is not in contradiction, it is in harmony.

Over and above all of this, ***the simple reality of a church being confessional*** is sufficient to undermine the cult of personality. A church being confessional brings the minister in the pulpit under the authority of the church's doctrine as defined by that particular local congregation and not by the minister. Recently, a Christian asked me why we made the Second London Confession so prominent in the life and teaching of our local church. I countered with another question, "What would you rather was prominent, the Confession or the ministers? How do you know that the preaching at present is orthodox and biblical?" The reply I received was, "Because it is in line with the ministry previous preachers here." The vulnerability of the church to the whims of the preacher become all too clear on this model, but if there is a definite confessional commitment then every member is able to hold the ministers of the word accountable to the testimony of the ages.

Add to this the much misunderstood and misapplied teaching of Chapter 26, paragraph 15. This paragraph comes just after the afore cited paragraph 14 which speaks of the way in which churches should meet together, associate together, encourage one another, and pray for one another. This is what is stated:

When difficulties or differences occur in respect of doctrine or church government, and peace, unity and edification are at risk, one church only may be involved, or the churches in general may be concerned. Again, a member or members of a church may be injured by disciplinary proceedings not agreeable to truth and church order. In such cases as these it is according to the mind of Christ that many churches in fellowship together should meet and confer together through their chosen representatives, who are able to give their advice on the matters in dispute to all the churches concerned. It must be understood, however, that the representatives assembled are not entrusted with any church

power properly so called, nor have they any jurisdiction over the churches themselves to exercise discipline upon any churches or persons, or to impose their conclusions on the churches or their officers.

What the forefathers of our faith are relating so beautifully in that paragraph is the need for our churches to have mutual encouragement and accountability while at the same time preserving their own individual autonomy and independency. This is a wonderful balance which, if performed properly, will work to build up our churches.

For example, if in a particular church, a leadership is being unduly heavy-handed, not exercising appropriate gentleness, and as a result members are being bruised and wounded, then the ways and honour of Christ are being undermined and brought into disrepute. This then is a matter of concern for the other churches with whom they are associated. Although those other churches have no absolute authority, biblically speaking, to muscle in and take over, they do have a responsibility in their prayerfulness to give advice, teaching, encouragement, and in some cases even to publish their conclusions that all the other churches might know. This system does not allow an individual to lord it over others and is destructive for the cult of personality.

The spirit of Acts 20 as Paul called the Ephesian elders is what we see displayed in the Confession. It is a spirit of unity and togetherness in the mission of caring for the churches of God. He says this to the elders in verse 28:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

What a vision of leadership this is! Our Confession helps us to counter the spirit of our age.

THIRDLY, *pragmatism and the elevation of the ends above the means.* Our evangelical culture is overwhelmed with pragmatism: everything seems to be kept in subjection to the great objective of reaching the lost with the gospel message. Our whole approach has become seeker-sensitive, and since the spirit of our age is so incredibly selfish and man-centred, our evangelism and worship appears to lower the bar so far as often to undermine the gospel altogether – we will almost do anything if it will increase the chances of ‘converts’.

It is true that there are many instances where the gospel itself is preached, but everything that happens before and after it can so easily undermine the message that is proclaimed, because ecclesiology (that is, the doctrine of the church) has not just been made secondary, it has been rendered at best irrelevant and at worst a troublesome obstacle to winning converts. How can one have the true gospel without a biblical doctrine of the Church since it is the Church that Christ is redeeming and it is the Church that Christ is preparing to be his bride? How can we even understand what the gospel is, never mind preach it, if we don't understand what the Church is? The answer is clear: we can't! Having an objective of 'getting converts' over and against building biblical churches has devastating consequences, chief amongst them being an ever-increasing proportion of unregenerate professing Christians in the evangelical community.

As a young and inexperienced believer at University I simply did not know how to handle the College Christian Union, which seemed to be full of professing Christians who looked, sounded and behaved just like all the other students. A wise and experienced believer in the local church advised me to consider them as unconverted and preach the true gospel to them, inviting them to come to the church and sit under biblical preaching. I will never forget his words when he said: "What makes you think they are really saved?" It was a lesson I have never forgotten: the horrible truth was that the majority of those attending the College CU and claiming to be believers were not regenerate and showed no sign of sanctification in their lives. Nearly 30 years on, perhaps what was then true of professing Christians in a student body may now be true of increasing numbers in our evangelical churches. If so, this is nothing short of devastating for the cause of the gospel – yet it has come about in large measure because of a sincere desire to win as many converts as possible. Surely this is proof that 'sincerity is not enough' and in fact the one who is full of zeal in his sincerely-held but unbiblical convictions presents the greatest threat to the cause of the gospel that he seeks to promote.

By adopting the Confession as a church, by teaching its doctrines and adhering to its message, we can keep the great truths of scripture in balance and thus be delivered from the siren-call of pragmatism. I have taught through the Confession in the midweek meetings more than once and it is astonishing to find how believers of ten, twenty, and even thirty years, who have sat under constant, consecutive, expository ministry in good solid churches, come forward and say, 'I never understood that, that was never clear before. Thank you so much, that all fits together now'. There was one person in particular, who had been involved in other Reformed Churches for decades, who constantly came up to me after teaching on the Confession and said, "I have

never heard anyone teach that doctrine before.” This has happened over and over again.

How can this be? Because it is so easy to preach through the scriptures in a consecutive, expository way and yet skip things, fail to cover things, or unconsciously continue axe-grinding from the pulpit. Yet all the while thinking you are being faithful because you are going through the scriptures consecutively. I know from personal experience because I face this challenge constantly in my own ministry.

Take for an example of the comprehensive nature of the Confession in Chapters 22-26.

Chapter 22 is titled ‘Religious Worship and the Lord’s Day’. No Reformed believer who knows and embraces the scriptures could deny that worship and the Sabbath day are absolutely essential. Yet how many evangelical churches have a clear position on these doctrines and teach on the importance of keeping the Lord’s Day and the Regulative Principle of worship? Indeed, how many of the members of our churches understand why these things matter and how we must defend these doctrines as critical to the life and health of any believing community of God’s people?

The natural reaction towards Chapter 23 of the Confession titled, ‘Lawful Oaths and Vows’, is probably a dismissive one – ‘who cares?’ Nevertheless, this is an extremely important topic – I have found in meditating upon this subject that there is great wisdom and clarity and practical help to be found here. Again, from my own personal experience, understanding the difference between oaths and vows and God’s purpose for his people especially in the making of vows before him has saved me from one very significant pitfall in my own ministry that could have cost me my calling as a pastor to God’s people.

Chapter 24 ‘Civil Government’ is also essential for we need to understand the relationship of the believer to the civil authorities and the relation of the Church to the state.

In our present context, who can afford to neglect the content of Chapter 25 ‘Marriage’? And if only every member of a Church that considered itself to be Baptist and Reformed got hold of Chapter 26 ‘The Church’, understood it and lived it out in their church lives, then the spirit of the age would be overcome and pragmatism would be a thing of the past in our churches.

We need *the whole counsel of God*. It is as the apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:26-27:

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

The Confession helps us greatly with proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

FOURTHLY, the spirit of our age is *sound-bite short-termism and superficiality*. Uncertainty and superficiality are almost considered to be virtues today, while confident assurance and depth of understanding are frowned upon as dangerous. This is affecting our churches in that we no longer state what we believe emphatically and confidently, but rather we give our beliefs as an opinion on which we are not at all sure. To be certain is not permitted and to suggest to someone else of a differing view that we are sure of our ground is seen as unacceptable because that would imply that they might be wrong. This spirit is of the evil one who will find it so much easier to deceive and destroy those who are fed on this kind of sound-bite Christianity. When churches have superficial mind-sets, then it becomes very easy for Satan to deceive. If we are uncertain of our ground, if we make a virtue out of being insecure in the name of being open-minded, if we build upon the shifting sands of the possibility that we may have been wrong all along, then Satan's aim to shake the faith of church members and cause them to doubt or even deny the faith altogether will be made all the more easy.

What we need is clear, profound, well-considered, carefully analysed, historically informed statements of biblical truth that say everything that must be said in the clearest, most succinct way in which it can be said. Where can this be found? Chapter 11 paragraph 1 of the Confession embodies exactly the kind of astute statement which our churches need:

God freely justifies the persons whom He effectually calls. He does this, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting them, and accepting them, as righteous. This He does for Christ's sake alone, and not for anything wrought in them or done by them. The righteousness which is imputed to them, that is, reckoned to their account, is neither their faith nor the act of believing nor any other obedience to the gospel which they have rendered, but Christ's obedience alone. Christ's one obedience is twofold – His active obedience rendered to the entire divine law, and His passive obedience rendered in His death. Those thus justified receive and rest by faith upon Christ's righteousness; and this faith they have, not of themselves, but as the gift of God.

Do we really want to persevere to the end in the faith? Do we really want to be convinced and to stand against all-comers? Do we really want to overcome every device and every wile of Satan in this age and generation? Then we must be rid of all the sound-bite short-termism and superficiality which has infected our churches. It is our duty to say, ‘This is what we believe, this is the faith we confess in all its fullness, depth, wonder, glory and we are not ashamed of any aspect of it. We declare it from the housetops, and we do so together!’ That is what it is to confess the faith.

How many of us will be able to say with Paul at the end of our lives:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith... (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

‘I have fought **the** good fight, I have finished **the** race, I have kept **the** faith’ – it is not ‘I have fought **a** good fight in life’, it’s not ‘I have finished **my** own race’, it’s not, ‘I have kept **my** faith/**a** faith/**a** belief’. No! No! There is only one fight to fight; there is only one race to run; there is only one faith to keep – the body of apostolic faith. It is the truth that Paul received from the Lord himself and taught to Timothy, who then taught ‘faithful men’, who in turn passed it on to ‘others also’ (see 2 Timothy 1:8-2:2). Are we not included in the category of ‘others also’? What then is our calling? It is to be faithful to the apostolic word, since this is the truth that was committed to our charge by the Lord himself, through the ages of the Church. That same torch of truth, the whole counsel of God, has been handed down the generations of believers in glorious succession, and the torch is now in our hands, the ‘others also’ of this present generation.

What if the flame goes out in our hands? How shall we answer to the Lord? Or what if the flame that burned brightly when it was passed to us is but a faltering and flickering shimmer when we pass it on to our children in the faith? Surely we must give careful heed the words of Jude verse 3:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Is it not time to abandon the sound-bite short-termism and superficiality which has infected our churches and embrace a robust confession of the faith? How greatly we might be helped if we all took seriously our stated commitment to the Second London Confession.

This study continues our examination of the life of David, as found in 1 & 2 Samuel. While the history is the foundation of our study, our concern is to find out what the Lord is saying to us today about our Lord Jesus Christ to whom the whole Old Testament points.

THE HOLY LORD DEMANDS HOLY WORSHIP (2 Samuel 6)

David loved the Lord with all his heart, and his great priority was his worship of his God. Saul, on the other hand, had neglected the ark of God for decades, the very symbol of His presence with His people (1 Chronicles 13:3). Perhaps this is why Michal, David's wife and Saul's daughter, could not understand why David was making such a big thing about bringing the ark to Jerusalem. What knowledge did she have of the ark? Yet, David himself had humbling lessons to learn, which also give us serious instruction today.

1. BRINGING THE ARK TO JERUSALEM

(1) *David's carelessness.* How joyful David was at the thought of the ark of God's presence finally coming to its rightful place in Jerusalem (v. 5)! But in his enthusiasm he neglected to fulfil the specific instructions of the law of God concerning how the ark must be transported. It may be noteworthy that there is no mention of him consulting the Lord.

- David had the ark carried on a new cart pulled by oxen, just as the Philistines did when they returned the ark to Israel (see 1 Samuel 6:7). To carry the ark in this way was to make God like an exhibit, or like a lucky charm, instead of a king ruling over and guiding His subjects. The Lord did not want to enter Jerusalem in a heathen way, but as it was carried over the Jordan in Moses' day.
- But the law commanded that the ark be carried by the Kohathites, the family of Levites who were put in charge of carrying the holy things out of the tent of meeting (see Numbers 4:5-6, 7:7-9). There was the specific warning not to touch such holy things lest they die.

(2) *Uzzah's sin.* Neglect invariably leads to sin. Because the ark was on a cart there was always the possibility of it falling. What was Uzzah to do if he saw the oxen stumbling and the ark likely to be dashed to the ground? To us Uzzah's immediate death seems a very harsh punishment, as he only had a

good motive of seeking to protect God's ark. But death is what the law pronounced (Numbers 4:15). To touch the ark was to forget the Lord's holiness, His exalted majesty. God is God and not man, and so we cannot deal with the holiness of God as with the things of daily life. The very same lesson had to be learned by the men of Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel 6:19).

(3) *David's repentance.* First he was angry and wanted nothing more to do with the ark, for he was afraid of God's holiness. Of course, it is wrong to be angered by any of the Lord's doings. However, when he heard of the blessing on Obed-edom's house, where the ark rested, he realized he had no need to fear God's holiness so long as God's holy will was followed (1 Chronicles 15:2,13,15). The process of bringing the ark to Jerusalem was repeated, this time in God's way. When there was success after the first 6 paces, sacrifice for past sins was made, with great thanksgiving. David did this with humility as seen in his laying aside his kingly robes, and dressing like a Levite, so showing his thankful dependence upon the Lord as any other believer.

2. THE HOLINESS OF GOD

(1) *The God we worship is great in holiness.* Mark the need for great reverence before God! God is not an object to be gazed at, or to be displayed as a trophy, or something that is ours that we boast in. Especially when coming to worship remember that God is the One who is high above all. "Exalt the Lord our God; worship at His footstool! Holy is He!" (Psalm 99:5). This is the only true posture. Remember the following:

- Moses was told to remove his shoes in God's presence (Exodus 3:5).
- Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up with even the holy seraphim covering their faces, and thought himself to be undone (Isaiah 6:1-5).
- Peter fell at Jesus' knees when he began to realize how great Jesus was, and even told Him to depart from him (Luke 5:8).

Do you have any fear of God like this? How careful are you in worship, remembering that you come to worship God Himself? Does it make you rejoice in Christ through who you can come to God with boldness? If the ark that represents God is so sacred, then what about the blood of the covenant (Hebrews 10:29)?

(2) *God must be worshipped as He has commanded.* God's holiness demands strict obedience. This is where Uzzah failed, as did Nadab and Abihu before him (Leviticus 10:1-3). Yes, David was doing a noble thing in bringing the ark to Jerusalem, the city that God has chosen. Yes, Uzzah was only trying to help. But they were doing it in a way that God had not commanded, and they

paid the price for their disobedience. It is clear that God requires obedience in all things, not just some things, things seemingly small (to us) as well as those that are great. Zeal before the Lord is good as far as it goes, but it must be expressed according to God's will. This is where Jews of Paul's day failed (so Romans 10:2). All that we do in worship must have Scriptural authority. It is not acceptable to do something out of expediency by giving such reasons as, 'Others do it', or 'It has always been done this way', or 'It works'. So drama gets introduced into worship, a physical response is demanded (such as the so-called 'altar call'), or the whole assembly prays out loud their own personal prayer all at the same time. Where are such things sanctioned by the Scriptures? It has gone further when what Scripture clearly commands or prohibits is ignored or even changed. It is so clearly stated in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (the context is in church, 3:15). Yet countless women have taken up this role! Timothy is commanded to devote himself "to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Timothy 4:13), yet many are the services when there is no such public reading! Are you committed to following the Scriptural patterns, without apology, because you fear the Lord? Brethren, how can we expect God's blessing unless we seek to do everything God's way?

(3) *Rejoicing in worship must be joined with reverence.* Are you thinking, 'If these things are so then true worship must be a very miserable thing'? This is so far from the truth. David was able to rejoice with great joy (see 6:14-16,21). What joy there is to know that I can approach God without being struck down, as David found out after 6 paces. This is the most deep-seated joy, which of necessity is joined with reverence. An obvious example is when you wish to see a person high-up in Government. When you finally get the opportunity you rejoice but you enter into the office with great respect. Do not seek joy for joy's sake, for then it is no more than light-hearted froth, mere entertainment. Remember the absolute greatness of the One to whom you are coming in worship, and that you are totally unworthy first as a creature, and then as a sinful and rebellious one. So remember that you deserve to be expelled from His presence, with no inherent right to come to Him. There is no just claim you can give for Him to receive you. Your only hope is that God accepts you through the sacrifice of His Son that He Himself has provided. If that causes you to rejoice as you humble yourself at His feet, then rejoice indeed! It would be wrong NOT to so rejoice in the Lord for His grace in Christ that takes away all fear of judgement.

CHOOSING A SPOUSE

Murungi Igweta

This is the second in a series of articles on marriage matters.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the LORD
(Proverbs 18:22)

Identifying a potential spouse is both very hard and very easy at the same time. It is very easy when the Lord providentially guides you to the right person with whom you build natural friendship and learn to love even before you realize that he/she could be that special person with whom you would want to spend the rest of your life. This guidance requires patience. It works best when the two involved are not 'pressed for time'. It is easy when there are not many sources of pressure.

On the other hand, when one is desperately looking for a spouse, the whole exercise can turn out to be very draining, difficult and nightmarish. When love becomes elusive so that you opt out of one relationship after another, until time catches up with you, then identifying a potential spouse becomes very hard. Those who have been in many relationships find it harder and harder to know the potential spouse, perhaps because they have been heart-broken so many times.

Undoubtedly the omniscient God knows everything about His creation. He is especially concerned about the welfare of His children. He knows us wherever we may be, whatever we may be doing, and whenever it is. He providentially guides us in the direction where our paths will cross with the person that He has prepared to be the best companion for our eternal good. God does not simply look for a person who will be the best for you in the 'physical realm.' He is especially concerned that your wife will be instrumental for your sanctification. Therefore, trust in the Lord and do not lean on your own understanding.

Men: How do you know that such and such a lady who has drawn your attention is 'wife material' so to speak? How do you know that a woman will make a good wife? **Women:** How do you know that this man who has swept you off your feet may make a reasonable husband? How do you know that he is indeed, the 'Mr. Right'?

When it comes to searching for the right spouse, the world has lots of advice, such as, look for the person that you are most attracted to by their physical appearance. In this worldly wisdom, the world forgets that *charm is deceitful*

and beauty is vain (Proverbs 31:30). There is also the common advice to seek them for what they have, that is, their material possessions. How often we forget that one's *life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions?* (Luke 12:15). Do not fall in love just because of outward, physical/material, temporal things, for they will soon be gone.

How are we to identify a suitable spouse? The Bible has not left us in darkness regarding this matter. And so we read,

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the LORD (Proverbs 18:22).

Three things could be said from the dose of divine wisdom in this verse:

1. The Lord Puts the Responsibility of Finding a Spouse into the Hands of the Man.

He (masculine singular) *whofinds a wife*... Men are to be deliberate in taking leadership in the matter of initiating the process of marriage. To 'find' is to deliberately seek in order to have. It is not to stumble upon or to receive. Although some may do almost nothing, the norm is for men to find wives for themselves. Even where parents help, they should only help in the finding aspect. To 'find' expects and requires some effort and skill. Hopefully some of the skills will be sharpened as we consider this verse. A man is to be on the lookout for the one who is to be his wife.

Women, on the other hand, need to be available and willing to be found by such men as are worthy the name. If the cogs are going to turn, then the man is to initiate, by igniting the engine and hopefully the wheels will turn, and the wheels on their part need to be oiled and ready to move. Dear unmarried Christian ladies, I beseech you in the name of the Lord, do not make it your ambition to be 'lost' in order to be found by Mr. Right! Be found in the company of the righteous, in the narrow and the strait path, in biblical churches, in the company of the Master and his church, so that Mr. Right may come from among the number.

Dear Christian men, you should not go to Vanity Fair or down to Timnah among the Philistines, or among the heathen to look for wives. For there you will find Madam Fair Uncouth, and Delilah and Jezebel and what will become of you but what became of Samson?

Notice that the verse says, ‘... *finds a wife.*’ It does not say, he who finds a girl, or a virgin or a lady or a woman! The consideration is that by the time the man finds the lady, she is already worthy the name of ‘a wife’ even if she is yet unmarried. Or do you suppose that this verse means that men are to snatch married wives from their husbands? Clearly, the Lord does not say that you take a wife from her husband! This would be adultery and contrary to the seventh commandment. Rather, to find a wife is to obtain a woman who is wife material. Matthew Henry puts it this way:

A good wife is a great blessing to a man. He that *finds a wife* (that is, a wife indeed; a bad wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so much honour), that finds a help meet for him (that is a wife in the original acceptation of the word), that sought such a one with care and prayer and has found what he sought, he has found a *good thing*, a jewel of great value, a rare jewel; he has found that which will not only contribute more than anything to his comfort in this life, but will forward him in the way to heaven.

Find a wife wherever the Lord providentially sends or places you. It is true, that wives, like rare jewels, are not found anywhere. Yet, the gracious hand of providence leads God’s sons to where God’s daughters are to be found. Therefore, as men carry out their business, as they work, as they study, as they go to church for worship, they need to have their eyes peeled. They need to pray with their eyes open. They ought to see such women who are worthy to be called by the name ‘wife’ in their conduct. Good wives can be found in all sorts of places, if you are walking by faith and trusting in the Lord to guide you. Some obtained good wives from school, some from work, and especially from church. The Lord is daily guiding you towards the direction that he has ordained for you with the purpose that your needs may be met, even as you meet a helper suitable for you.

Marry a person that you know. Where are the ladies with whom you fellowship at church, or went to school, or lived in the same neighbourhood, etc.? I remember asking the men in the church where I serve, ‘Brothers, why do you not marry one of the godly, mature, lovely sisters we have in the church?’ Their response was, ‘Precisely, because these godly, mature, lovely ladies are our sisters!’ I thought that the statement sounded super-spiritual, but when I thought further about it, I realized that the men are being super-unwise. The wisest thing to do is to marry a person who is well known by mature brethren that you fully trust, and that can be vouched for by a number of brethren so that you do not have to do the CIA work of background checks to know who they are.

Pray for a God-given spouse. God is mysterious in His ways, His wonders to perform. Yours is to pray that the Lord may guide your steps, and give you a discerning heart to know which of the ladies that you have known is the right one. I remember passing by Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology in Juja with a Christian couple and the husband told me that he did not only get his degree out of JKUAT but also a godly wife!

2. A Wife is a Good Thing

“... *finds a good thing* ... “ Do you notice that the woman who is a wife material is called ‘a good thing’? How has the wife changed from being a person to being a good thing? Well, she has not changed at all! It is only her description that has obtained a wonderful adjectival phrase which extols her value and worth. A wife is being compared to such good things as a rare jewel of great value. The wife is given to the man as a helper suitable for the man and such is a good thing for the man.

Consider the delight a man draws from of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. It begins with a question, “*An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels*” (v. 10). Please note the language of the man finding such a rare jewel and the delight that ensues. The clear implication of this question is that just as there are not many rare jewels lying around, so there is a considerable difficulty of finding this type of a woman. Good women are very rare and scarce! Remember Jacob? He easily found Leah for seven years but had to work seven more years to find Rachel! Well, the truth is that even for Leah he had to work for seven years.

The description of this *virtuous wife* (Proverbs 31:10-31) is designed to show the kind of wives the women should strive to be. It is also designed to show what women the men should look for, to convert them into wives, and as such the ‘*good thing*’! Therefore, this is a very significant passage for both men and women who are thinking about marriage. Very practically, if there is a list you should make about a woman you are thinking about, then it should be informed by this passage. The passage is acrostic, consisting of twenty-two verses, each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, just as Psalms 119. The beauty of such a wife deserves poetical lines to extol her worth and to praise the Lord God who made her. This is because a wife is a good thing. Therefore, she should be loved and adored by her husband. My dear brother, cherish your wife, value her, do everything you can to demonstrate your love for her. Let everyone know that your wife is a good thing and especially let her always know how precious she is to you.

The New Testament, in such passages as 1 Timothy 2:9-10, 5:10, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Peter 3:1-6, agrees with this passage as to what the duties of wives are. They show a woman who knows how to manage her own household. She is both reverent and industrious, so that is indeed a helper meet for a man. When a man finds such a wife, will he fail to love and cherish her, who is of such worth and value? *Her price is far above rubies*, and all the gold ornaments with which vain women may adorn themselves. The more rare such good wives are the more they are to be valued and cherished.

3. A Good Wife is Evidence of God's Favour

"... and obtains favour from the LORD." Is it possible to obtain favour from the Lord? Favour is grace and it means unmerited favour. We do not deserve to marry the women that we eventually marry! Why should God give us the privilege of calling a grown up person 'the bone of my bones and the flesh of my flesh'? Yet when you get married, you are given the wonderful favour and privilege of 'owning' someone to be yours. And this in and of itself is a great favour from the Lord who created the person who is your spouse.

A good wife is from the Lord. It is God who decided that Adam should not be alone. It is God who made Eve to be Adam's helper suitable for him. It is God who brought Eve to Adam. Clearly, Eve was God's gift given to Adam by God. It is the Lord who allows us the privilege of being married, and we know it when we appreciate the beauty of the woman God gave us. We do not deserve it at all. Yet the Lord out of his grace, sends us in the direction that we find a person who becomes the 'helper' suitable for us.

House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord (Proverbs 19:14).

A good wife is a great and wonderful divine gift of God's providence to a man. In talking about a good wife we are speaking of a virtuous wife, a prudent wife, a worthy woman. Such a wife is quiet-hearted and of a gentle spirit. Such a woman is very precious in the sight of God. Such a woman is neither found by a keen eye nor by human wisdom. She is found from, rather, she is given by the Lord. It is God, out of his goodness and love, who can give you the wife who will meet your deepest need and so be the helper suitable for you. Your wit and your skill or your relatives cannot. God, who knows what you need in this life and in the one to come, is the one who unites the right man with the right woman.

Happy marriages are made in heaven by God. The servant of Abraham knew this and so he prayed with this understanding in Genesis 24:12.

And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water (Genesis 24:12-13).

He directed his petition to the God of covenant, the Triune God, the infinitely gracious God.

Notice that the verse tells us that a prudent wife, coming from the Lord, is far more precious than houses and wealth. The reason is because, by her efforts, she can help in building houses and in creating wealth, yet houses and wealth cannot bring or make a prudent wife. They may attract some kind of women, but they cannot make a good wife! You may rely on your parents to give an inheritance of houses or wealth, but they cannot give you a prudent wife and for such we must seek from the Lord.

Who may you marry?

Marry in the Lord. *The Bible forbids marriage between a believer and a non-believer* (1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15). Christians must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers in marriage, because there is no partnership between righteousness and lawlessness just as there is no fellowship between light and darkness. What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? None!

Therefore, do not try to justify marriage with a non-believer. Do not think that you may be in a better position to evangelize them. God says, don't do it for you will pierce yourself with many sorrows. You will drown yourself in misery if you disobey God's word and disregard his divine counsel. Have you been dating a non-believer? Have you been getting attracted to a non-Christian? I plead with you in the name of the Lord not to enter into a marriage union with them.

Practical Advice on Choosing a Spouse

Rely on the Lord. Therefore, it behoves you to pray that the Lord will give you the necessary wisdom to this end. Be sure to rely on God to help you identify the most suited person to be your spouse. More often than not, believers would pray and sometimes even fast for better academic marks, job promotion, etc., and yet would not do the same for such a life-changing thing as looking for a spouse! For this reason, many rely on their sight more than on their faith to find a spouse. This careless approach need to be banished to the abyss!

Pray for a good spouse. Dear men, you need to spend time in prayer, and consideration before approaching a woman to seek her hand in marriage. In the same way, you women need to have prayed enough to respond with a yes, to the man who seeks your hand in marriage.

A woman/man relationship should have marriage as the goal. You should only begin a relationship when you are sure that you are well (not necessary fully) prepared and have found one who you think is also ready for marriage. Men, it takes time investment in prayer and fasting, much energy in effort, in order to seek the one whom to love. Therefore, before you can be sure that a lady is ready spiritually and vocationally to be your wife, make sure that you are yourself ready. Begin a relationship, only with marriage in view.

Not all relationships lead to marriage. While the intended goal is clear (marriage), being in a fallen world, we should know that our roads here on earth are full of ups and downs, twists and turns. You are not sure that he is the Mr. Right or she is the Ms Right until you walk down the aisle and say, ‘I do.’ When you are in the relationship you may discover things that makes question the other person’s faith in Christ. When you consider the fruit of their profession of faith and find them wanting, then run for your life and seek the Lord to guide you to another woman.

Summary of How to Choose a Potential Spouse:

- 1) You should **only** look out for a Christian of the opposite gender, never otherwise (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14). Non-Christians may marry amongst non-believers. While marriage is for everyone, it is not between believers and non-believers, for thus says the Lord! Marriage is heterosexual and monogamous.
- 2) The Lord is clear that while marriage is to be considered honourable and desirable (Hebrews 13:4), it will be such if you will look for a person that you initially like, and highly regard. As you get to know her or him more, you will indeed love the person so much as to give your life to the person. Jacob loved Rachel, enough to work not just for the stipulated 3 years by the society, not even as demanded by her father, 7 years, but 14 years! Love gives sacrificially! Don’t let pressure of time or and from your parents to push you into marrying whom you do not fancy. Be attracted to her enough to want to give your life for her.
- 3) Much consideration must be given before moving into a relationship. This is because once married you must remain with the partner for life (1 Corinthians 7:12). (We shall consider the exceptions in another article.)

- 4) Don't just go for outward beauty, for such will fade away with time. *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised* (Proverbs 31:30). Look for inner beauty of godliness (1 Timothy 2:9-10). This beauty for a woman is found in the heart and it is imperishable. It involves a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It is daily demonstrated by a willingness to submit (1 Peter 3:3-6).
- 5) Begin first by your personal knowledge of her godliness, then consult with respectable people, preferably your pastor and parents, before talking with friends. Request her hand in marriage when you are persuaded that she is the right one for you.
- 6) Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Nonetheless, one should be sure that you are attracted physically by the person that you will spend the rest of your life with, even though this should not be given the first priority. A level of beauty must be in the eyes of the beholder. I must confess that the beauty of my wife makes it easy for me to love her. I sometimes feel even infatuated by her lovely physical beauty, and even with the passage of years, I still consider her the most beautiful woman I know.
- 7) Do not marry for your parents or relatives. Do not marry because you are forced by circumstances of life. Marry because you are fully convinced that she is the one and the time is rife for marriage. However, don't wait until such times that external pressures make it hard for you to be objective. Yes take your time, but do not think that your life and your times are in your hand – it is all in the hands of the Lord. I beseech you not to waste too much time waiting for Miss Perfect, for then you will wait in vain. Be realistic.
- 8) Those who are around you are the most eligible than those whom you do not know yet! Those you have known over the years at college, at church, etc. Do not allow familiarity to breed contempt!

Conclusion

You notice that in my argument, I assume the biblical position that it is the man who looks for the woman, not the other way round – *man shall leave his father and mother* (Genesis 2:24). *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains a favour from the Lord* (Proverbs 18:22).

COMMON QUESTION NO. 13

MAY A WOMAN BE A PASTOR?

Keith Underhill

Find this series of 'Common Questions' at <https://www.trinity.or.ke> in a format that can be printed as an A5 size leaflet of 4 pages for distribution.

Is this really an important question? Should we not just be thankful that there are those who will lead God's people and preach His word? Does the gender really matter?

- Women pastors are found everywhere today. Yet it has only become common place in the last 50 years or so. Did the Church have it wrong for all the previous centuries?
- This development is parallel to the rise of feminism and the 'equal rights' movement in the world. It is not the world that is following the church, but the church is following the world.
- As Christians, the most important consideration is to find out what God says in the Scriptures. His word is final.

1. The Apostle Paul says No!

Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy as an apostle of Christ Jesus (1:1). As such an apostle, Paul has all the authority of the One who sent him. To refuse what Paul writes is to refuse the Lord Himself (see 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, 2 Thessalonians 3:6,12,14). Paul clearly states the purpose of the letter, that "you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (3:15). He is giving instructions to Timothy on what should and should not happen when the church meets. In 2:11-15 he addresses the role of women in the church.

- How women are to learn in church (v. 11). "Quietly with all submissiveness." The next verse makes the meaning quite clear.
- What women are forbidden to do (v. 12). "Quietly" means not to teach publicly when men are present. "With all submissiveness" means not to be engaged in any activity in church which is authority over a man. See also 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. How can a woman be made a pastor (elder) when the work of such an office is to teach (see 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17)?
- Two reasons why women are forbidden to teach men (vv. 13-14). Firstly, he notes the order of creation, first the man, and then the woman from the

man. Secondly, he notes that in the fall of the human race into sin it was the woman and not the man who was deceived. It is she who led the man into sin, thus overturning the natural order. Many seek to avoid what the Bible so clearly forbids by claiming that the reason is to be found in the culture of Ephesus where Timothy was. This is untrue for Paul's reasons are rooted in what is true for the whole world, in the creation and fall.

○ The role of women (v. 15). In the context women are instructed where to find their usefulness before God in their lives. It is not in the teaching office in the church, but in the home in connection with "childbearing". "Saved" is a word that is often used in the Gospels for well-being or wholeness, as when a person is healed (for example, Luke 18:42). God has granted women the unique privilege of bearing children and then bringing them up (1 Timothy 5:10, Titus 2:4-5). She is to do this in a peculiar Christian way, "in faith and love and holiness, with self-control". It is in this role that the Lord has greatly used good women (see 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-15).

[At <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/chantry/motherhood.htm> you will find a detailed exposition of this passage.]

2. There were no Women Pastors in the New Testament Church!

We know of Timothy and Titus, and of Silas who was one of Paul's close companions. We are given the qualifications of those who may be appointed as pastors (elders or overseers). The person must be "the husband of one wife" and "must manage his own household well" (1 Timothy 3:2,4) – this can only be true of a man. It should be noted that our Lord Himself, when choosing His 12 apostles, chose only men. It is not that the Lord despised women, as if He accommodated Himself to the prevailing culture. Luke's Gospel especially emphasizes the importance of women in Jesus' ministry, against the culture (Luke 8:2-3). Nor must Paul be branded a misogynist. Consider his appreciation of the following women, as found in Romans chapter 16:

Phoebe (1-2), Prisca (3-5), Mary (6), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (12),
Persis (12), the mother of Rufus (13), Julia and Nereus' sister (15).

Yet none of them were pastors. It could also be pointed out that in the Old Testament there were no women priests, no women who authored Scripture, and none were legitimate rulers (queens).

3. Is this really the Biblical Teaching?

Although the teaching we have so far considered is so simple and clear many are unwilling to receive it as God's word.

Objection 1 – Can it be wrong if so many churches have appointed women pastors? Truth is not always on the side of the majority, especially when it is a new development the church. We ask, 'What do the Scriptures say?', rather than, 'What do the Churches do?'

Objection 2 – Hasn't God greatly used women? Yes He has, and even men who were not pastors. Many women leaders in the church today are false teachers even if they have a large following. Godly women like Elizabeth Elliot and Joni Eareckson Tada, so greatly used, are not pastors.

Objection 3 – The Gospel has destroyed the distinctions between male and female (Galatians 3:28). This is to take the verse out of its context which has to do with redemptive privilege. Whether male or female (Jew or Greek, slave or free), justification is through faith in Christ, and all such are equally Abraham's offspring. Elsewhere, Paul continues to distinguish between the roles of wives and husbands (Ephesians 5:22-27).

Objection 4 – Women prayed and prophesied in church (1 Corinthians 11:5-6). It cannot be demonstrated with certainty that this instruction has to do with church gatherings (the instructions that follow about the Lord's Supper certainly do, v. 18). However, praying and prophesying are one thing, holding to the office of pastor and prophet is another thing! There is the same teaching about the relationship between men and women (see 11:3,8-9).

Objection 5 – There have been women leaders amongst God's people. Deborah was a prophetess and a Judge (Judges 4:4-5). Huldah was a prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20). Priscilla, together with her husband Aquila, privately explained to Apollos the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:16). Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). But none of them held the office of teacher.

4. Conclusions

- ✓ Women should not preach publicly to men. They cannot be pastors. They may teach women and children (Titus 2:3-5).
- ✓ Men and women are equal before God, but have differing roles. The woman was created to be "a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18).
- ✓ Men have the very heavy responsibility to lead in all aspects of church life (see James 3:1).

BOOK REVIEW: THE VALLEY OF VISION

Michael Haykin

This article was first published in the March 2003 edition of the *Gospel Witness* magazine and is used with permission. Many have found this book of prayers very useful in their devotions.

Traditionally, Baptists have been very wary of written prayers. Our Baptist forefathers strenuously objected to the liturgical format of the Church of England, in which the corporate recitation of set prayers was a major element. For instance, a prominent item at the trial of John Bunyan (1628-1688) in 1661 was Bunyan's adamant opposition to the use of the Book of Common Prayer (which contained the order and prayers for every Church of England service). Genuine prayer, he maintained, could only come from 'the motions of the Holy Ghost within our hearts.' Indeed, one of Bunyan's earliest works was his *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, written in 1662, in which he developed at length the position he had maintained at his trial. Set forms of prayer, Bunyan argued, hampered and impeded the Spirit's work in the believer's heart. Rightly, he asserted that only 'the Spirit can lift up the soul or heart to God in prayer!' By and large Bunyan's plea for extemporaneous prayer has been heeded by successive generations of Baptists.

However, while Bunyan was certainly right to stress the need for the Spirit to generate genuine prayer, even extemporaneous prayer has a way of becoming rote. Who among us has not had the experience, sometimes for a number of days, or even longer, of stale, lifeless prayer that repeatedly expresses itself in the same way and manner? Although we as Baptists do not have a liturgical tradition, our individual prayer-lives all too frequently do, for often they fall into the same patterns of expression and petition, patterns that easily can become ruts.

It is a times like these that we could use some outside help, a boost to get moving again. Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision* is ideal in this regard. In print since 1975, it was reprinted in the early 2000s in a handsome cabra bonded leather edition that is the perfect size for carrying in one's jacket pocket. Subtitled *A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, it contains prayers from the works of fourteen Puritan and Evangelical authors, including three Baptists: the Welsh evangelist Christmas Evans (1766-1838), the great Victorian preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), and, surprise of surprises, John Bunyan!

The word ‘Puritan’ in the subtitle is clearly not meant to be taken in a strictly chronological sense, for Puritanism was historically a phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rather, Bennett employs this term to refer to a form of spirituality that dominated English speaking Christianity from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, in which there was ‘the same spiritual language, ... the same code of values, ... the same attitude towards the Christian religion ... the same God-centred aspirations’ (Preface, page ix).

Bennett emphasizes that the book is not intended ‘to be read as a prayer manual.’ The prayers are best used as springboards for a believer’s ‘communion with a transcendent and immanent God who on the ground of his nature and attributes calls forth all the powers of the redeemed soul in acts of total adoration and dedication’ (Preface, page xi). The division of the prayers into a number of categories, such as ‘Redemption and Reconciliation,’ ‘Holy Aspirations,’ ‘Service and Ministry,’ and the fact that each prayer is given a title, greatly facilitates the use of the prayers. Moreover, Bennett has structured the prayers in such a way that they easily become the springboard for deeper reflection and worship that he desires them to be. As Dallas Theological Seminary historian John Hannah has commented about the book: ‘A wonderful aid in expressing our personal thoughts to God, a spiritual classic, both sober and inspiring.’ It is little wonder that this book has been the Banner of Truth’s best-selling volume in North America.

We hope that this brief book review of a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions has aroused your appetite for learning more from the Puritans who lived in the seventeenth century in England. Many their books are classics and are still avidly read with much profit today. We would direct your attention to the following to start with, all of which can be read online / downloaded for free from such sites as <https://www.monergism.com>.

- ★ Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*
- ★ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*
- ★ John Flavel, *Mystery of Providence*
- ★ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*
- ★ John Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers*
- ★ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*
- ★ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*
- ★ Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good*

THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL Tonny Karwa

Tonny Karwa has been set apart as a pastor with Grace Baptist Church, Kisumu.

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:37-39)

The life we have here on earth is transient, meaning, it will soon fade away and we will be faced with the reality of life after death. Some people will, after death, go to be with Christ forever, while others will go to hell to suffer the torments of eternal fire. In this passage, Peter explains the wonderful promise of the gracious God to the sinful human race to save them from this sinful age and deliver them to His everlasting kingdom.

1. The Promise Stated

The promise is that everyone whom the Lord calls to Himself—those who would repent of their sins and be baptized—will be forgiven and be freely given the Holy Spirit as a gift from God. Notice at the end of v. 39 that this promise is for “...everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” Such people that the Lord calls to Himself will respond to His voice through the gospel and come to Him in repentance. They are those that have been powerfully and effectually drawn to Christ by God. The language with which the promise is expressed is that of certainty of its benefit.

2. The Promise Explained

(a) Its conditions

➤ *Personal Conviction of Sin.* Notice in v. 37 that those who heard the message of the gospel preached by Peter were “cut to the heart.” They recognized the enormity and seriousness of their sins. They knew henceforth that they were guilty of their sins and were candidates for God’s divine judgement. According to the passage, the gravity of their sinfulness is manifested in their final rejection of Jesus as their Messiah—sent by God to deliver them from the bondage of sin—to the point of condemning Him to death by crucifixion. The entire human race is under the curse of sin right from the fall of Adam (Romans 3:23). This means you are under the wrath of God by the virtue of your Adamic nature unless you repent and put your faith

in Christ (Ephesians 2:3, John 3:36). It is for this very purpose that Christ came to the world of sin. He lived a perfectly sinless life and died on the cross of Calvary in order that men may be forgiven their sins and be reconciled back to God. Those who are convicted of their sins are saved from their terrible situation by putting their faith and trust in Christ. Conviction leads to:

➤ *Repentance and Baptism.* Once a person is convicted of his sins, he must repent and be baptized. Repentance means completely changing the principles and practices you have set to govern your heart and life. It is a complete overhaul of your life. It is an inward transformation in your heart. It means recognizing your horrible condition of sin and the fact that nothing you can do will save you from this situation. You have therefore to repent by forsaking your sinful ways and turning to Christ for salvation by believing in Him. Baptism is, on the other hand, an outward manifestation of the inward transformation. Notice that baptism itself doesn't save you. By being baptized, you declare to the world that you have been inwardly transformed by the wonder-working power of the gospel and that you are henceforth, a follower/disciple of Christ. To be baptized in the name of Christ is to be brought into God's covenant community through faith in Christ. It is a baptism that is different from that of repentance [John's baptism] (Acts 19:1-5). It is the baptism in connection with which one receives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to belong to Him (Romans 8:9). You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born of the Spirit (John 3:5, 6).

(b) Its scope

Notice in v. 39 that the promise was made to both the Jewish hearers in Peter's audience and their coming generations. Notice again, that the promise was also extended to the non-Jews or Gentiles (those who are far off). The call of the gospel runs through all the generations and to all people universally. This means that God—being rich in mercy and grace—is calling everyone in the world to repent and turn to Him through Jesus Christ.

3. The Promise Applied

In v. 38 that Peter responds to the question of those convicted of their sins by telling them "Repent and be baptized *every one of you...*" By this important little phrase "every one of you," Peter implies that whoever hears the message of the gospel and is convicted of his sins, who repents thereupon, and is baptized, will be forgiven [all his sins] and he will receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ Jesus. This is the ageless promise of the gospel to everyone who hears it.

THE LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1689

Keith Underhill

CHAPTER TWO: GOD AND THE HOLY TRINITY

The Attributes of God

1. There is but one, and only one, living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in His being and His perfections. None but He can comprehend or understand His essence. He is pure spirit, invisible, and without body, parts, or the changeable feelings of men. He alone possesses immortality, and dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men. He never changes. He is great beyond all our conceptions, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty and infinite. He is most holy, wise, free and absolute. All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will, and for His own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate. He abounds in goodness and truth. He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently. But He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgement.

(a) “There is but one, and only one, living and true God”: Deuteronomy 4:35, 6:4, Isaiah 43:10, Jeremiah 10:10, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Timothy 2:5. This is opposed to polytheism. There can only be one Being called ‘God’. He is “living” as opposed to idols that do not have life (Psalm 115:3-7). He is “true” as opposed to gods of men’s imagination (Deuteronomy 32:17, Galatians 4:8).

(b) God is “self-existent”: Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 48:12, Acts 17:24-25. God is independent of every other being, and needs no creature to supply Him with anything. It is wrong to say that God *needs* us in any way whatsoever; it is we who are totally dependent upon Him!

(c) God is “infinite in His being and perfections”: 1 Kings 8:27, Psalm 90:2, 1 Timothy 1:17. He is unbounded, unlimited, both in space = omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12, Jeremiah 23:23-24), and in time = eternal, and is without beginning or end (Psalm 102:25-27, Isaiah 57:15).

(d) God is “a pure spirit”: Deuteronomy 4:15-18, Luke 24:39, John 4:24, Acts 14:11,15, 1 Timothy 1:17. God is without “body” or “parts”. So if the Bible says God has a mouth, for example, it is ‘anthropomorphic’ language = referring to God as if He is a man. This is the only way we can understand God. It is said that God reveals words to us, but the only way we know that can be done is through a mouth. God is also without “the changeable feelings of men”. So that when Scripture says God is angry, for example, it is referring to the passion men would have if they are in the same situation.

(e) God cannot be fully understood: Job 11:7-9, 26:14, Psalm 145:3, Romans 11:33-34. We only know as much about God as He has been pleased to reveal. As creatures it is impossible for us to understand Him fully. How can finite creatures understand One who is infinite or eternal or triune?

(f) God is “most holy” and “dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men”. God’s holiness is first His separation above His creatures: Isaiah 6:3, 57:15, 1 Timothy 6:16. Everything about God is holy because He is infinitely exalted above us in everything; for example, His Name = God as He reveals Himself, is holy (Psalm 111:9). Second and specifically, God is holy because He is separated from all sin: Habakkuk 1:13, 1 Peter 1:15-16. We must always approach God with reverence because of His holiness.

(g) God “never changes”: Exodus 3:14, Numbers 23:19, Malachi 3:6, James 1:17. God Himself does not change. His purposes do not change (Psalm 33:11). What then does it mean when the Bible says God ‘repented’ or ‘relented’ (Exodus 32:14, 2 Samuel 24:16, Jeremiah 26:19, Jonah 3:10)? God is the lawgiver and ruler of men, and He rewards those who obey, and punishes those who disobey. If men change towards God, then God’s dealings with them change accordingly (Jeremiah 18:5-11). God Himself is not changing, but He is doing what He promised He would do in those particular circumstances. If God never changes, then His promises never change, and this must encourage us to always trust in Him.

(h) God is “wise”: Daniel 2:20, Romans 11:33, 16:27, Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 2:3. God is all-wise because He is omniscient = knows everything (Job 37:16, Psalm 139:1-6, Isaiah 40:28, Romans 11:33). Wisdom is the application of knowledge, knowing the best thing to do, and the best way of doing it. God is wise because He receives the greatest glory from all that He does, both in creation (Psalm 19:1), and in redemption (Romans 11:36). Was God wise in letting sin come in to spoil His good creation? Even if we cannot get a full answer, we must admit that God is wise because He will be glorified both in those who are saved and in those who are lost (Romans 9:22-24). Since God is wise in all His dealings let us learn to trust Him in everything for

all things will glorify Him and will thus be to the good of His people (Romans 8:28).

(i) God is “free and absolute”: Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11. God is free because He does what He wants to do (Psalm 115:3). His will is absolutely free. “All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will.” God is absolute because He has the right to do whatever He pleases, and there are none who can successfully challenge Him. This is further explained in section 2 of this chapter (below).

(j) God is good. “He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate”: Exodus 33:18-19, 34:6, Psalm 100:5, Luke 18:19. God’s goodness is the perfection of His nature so that there is nothing lacking in Him and nothing that can be added to make Him better. All that God does is good, in creation (Genesis 1:31), provision (Psalm 145:9), and especially salvation (Titus 3:4). The various aspects of His goodness are clearly seen in salvation: God’s *love* is His goodness in giving Himself in His Son (Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10); God’s *grace* is His goodness in showing free and unmerited favour to hell-deserving sinners (Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:8-9); and God’s *mercy* is His goodness in giving help to sinful creatures in their misery (Ephesians 2:4, Titus 3:5). We must learn to praise the Lord in our worship for His goodness in its various aspects (Psalm 100:4-5).

(k) God is just = God acts agreeably to His own nature and perfections. God is just in giving His law, for it is righteous and perfectly suitable to our ability as He created us (Romans 7:12). Especially, God is just in the way He deals with people according to His law, as He gives to everyone what they deserve (Romans 2:6-11):

1. Positively – “He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently”: Exodus 34:6, Hebrews 6:10, 11:6. In forgiving the sinner God is just because Christ has fully propitiated God for the sins of His people (Romans 3:25, 1 John 1:9).
2. Negatively – “He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgment.” God must inflict the punishment that is due to sin, either in the sinner, or in Jesus as the substitute (see Exodus 34:7, Acts 17:31, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8, Revelation 16:5-7).

The Relations of God to His Creatures

2. *God is all-sufficient, and all life, glory, goodness and blessedness are found in Him and in Him alone. He does not stand in need of any of His creatures that He has made, nor does He derive any part of His glory from them. On the contrary, He manifests His own glory in and by them. He is the fountain-head of all being, and the origin, channel, and end of all things. Over all His creatures He is sovereign. He uses them as He pleases, and does for them or to them all that He wills.*

His sight penetrates to the heart of all things. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. No single thing is to Him at risk or uncertain, for He is not dependent upon created things.

In all His decisions, doings and demands He is most holy.

Angels and men owe to Him as their Creator all worship, service and obedience, and whatever else He may require at their hands.

(a) God's **self-sufficient independence** from His creatures (lines 1-4). It is because God is eternal and the creator of everything, that He exists by Himself and has no need of His creatures (Acts 17:24-25, Exodus 3:14, John 5:26). It is we creatures who are totally dependent upon Him. He is the originator of everything, the One through whom all things live and the One to whom everything gives glory (Romans 11:36). So everything begins and ends with God.

(b) God's **sovereign dominion** over His creatures (lines 5-6). God has made everything and therefore He owns everything, and so He has the right to do what He wants with what He has made (Psalm 109:13, 115:3, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11). Scripture uses the illustration of the potter and the clay (Romans 9:20-21, Jeremiah 18:1-6).

(c) God's **absolute knowledge** of His creatures (lines 7-8). God's total knowledge is seen in the many detailed prophecies of the Old Testament that depended upon so many people for them to happen yet they happened exactly as they were spoken. For example, all the details surrounding the suffering of Christ in Isaiah 53. God knows even all that is in the heart of a man (1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 139:23, Hebrews 4:13). Therefore nothing happens that is a surprise to God; and nothing can be hidden from him. This is a great encouragement to the Christian especially when we cannot understand what is happening.

(d) God's **complete holiness** before His creatures (line 9). God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), so that we must not judge His ways by ours. His ways are far above ours and always in line with His perfect character. He is never wrong; He never deceives; He is always wise (see Psalm 145:17, Revelation 15:3-4, 16:4,7).

(e) God's **total claim** upon His creatures (lines 10-11). All men belong to God because He made us, so that we exist for His glory alone (Revelation 4:11). Christians doubly belong to God because they have also been purchased from their sins by Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This is true of every aspect of our lives: in the family, at work and school, in recreation, in every place and situation; and of all the things God has given us, our lives, our possessions and our abilities.

The Trinity

3. Three divine Persons constitute the Godhead – the Father, the Son (or the Word), and the Holy Spirit. They are one in substance, in power, and in eternity. Each is fully God, and yet the Godhead is one and indivisible. The Father owes His being to none. He is the Father to the Son who is eternally begotten of Him. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

These Persons, one infinite and eternal God not to be divided in nature or in being, are distinguished in Scripture by their personal relations within the Godhead, and by the variety of works which they undertake.

Their tri-unity (that is, the Doctrine of the Trinity) is the essential basis of all our fellowship with God, and the comfort we derive from our dependence upon Him.

(a) The doctrine of the Trinity **stated** (lines 1-5). This doctrine will ever remain a mystery to the minds of men because we cannot understand how as to 'essence' God is one, but as to 'persons' God is three. False teaching has always sought to get rid of this mystery either by making God one person (Monarchianism, like the modern-day Branhamists), or by teaching that the Son and the Spirit are not God as the Father is God (Arianism, like the Jehovah's Witnesses). The Nicene Creed refused this easy way out, and so must we.

1. There is only one God: Deuteronomy 6:4, 1 Corinthians 8:6.
2. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equally God:
 - The *Father* – no one doubts that the Father is God.

- *The Son* –
 He is called God (John 1:1, 10:33, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8)
 He possesses the divine attributes (Matthew 28:20, John 2:24-25, 5:17, 8:58, Hebrews 13:8).
 He performs the divine works (John 1:3, 5:22, 10:28-29, Colossians 1:15-17).
 He receives divine worship (John 5:23, Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 1:5-6).
- *The Holy Spirit* –
 He is called God (Isaiah 6:8-9 & Acts 28:25-26, Acts 5:3-4).
 He possesses the divine attributes (Psalm 139:7, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 12:11).
 He performs the divine works (Job 33:4, John 3:6, 1 Corinthians 12:9-11).
 He receives divine worship (2 Corinthians 13:14, Revelation 1:4).

3. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate Persons.
 Sometimes all three are together but separate (Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). They are involved with each as Persons, speaking to each other (John 14:16, 15:26), loving (John 17:23,26).

(b) The doctrine of the Trinity **explained** (lines 6-8). The three Persons of the Godhead share the same nature or essence, but as Persons they are distinguished from each other by certain personal properties. These can only be stated but not explained:

1. The personal property of the first Person is seen in the title ‘Father’. He is eternally the Father of His only begotten Son (Ephesians 1:3).
2. The personal property of the second Person is seen in the title ‘Son’. As a person He is eternally the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:14,18).
3. The personal property of the third Person is seen in the title ‘Spirit’. He is sent by, acts for, and reveals the Father and the Son (John 15:26).

(c) The doctrine of the Trinity **applied** (lines 9-10). The Church came to define the Trinity, not out of philosophical considerations, but out of very practical concerns. Above all they were concerned with salvation. As “basis of all our fellowship with God” the very existence of the Trinity is essential for our salvation. For example, see under the following Trinitarian passages: Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 Peter 1:2. Note that a denial of the Son involves a denial of the Father also (John 5:23, 17:3, 1 John 2:22-23).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MAMMON'S WORLD

Huston Malande

Huston is himself an entrepreneur, and so writes out of his own experience. He is a member of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi.

Life is hard; you don't have to be a Christian to know it. Life is just hard, for everyone, everywhere: the rich are dying of cancer while the poor fight off hunger; the women are fighting patriarchy while the men are committing suicide; the parents are looking for school fees while their kids are finding themselves transitioning into adulthood—and across to the opposite gender while at it; and the politician is stealing public funds while the hawkler who's trying not to be a thief in order to feed her family is being chased with her wares across town by city council officers.

It's a hot mess. Indeed the ancient curse doth hang over our every endeavour, like a dark oppressive cloud.

However, it doesn't always seem like *everyone* is struggling, does it? As a matter of fact, people who don't care about Jesus seem to thrive, most of the time. Is this not the Psalmist's chief complaint to God in Psalm 73? He says of them in verse 5:

They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

You see the only thing harder than living in a dark world, is being a living sacrifice and living as the very light that darkness hates. It's harder to be honest in a world full of liars and lies. It's harder to be generous in a world full of greed. And it's a lot harder to be profitable in entrepreneurship when the rules of the game (or lack thereof) are skewed against you in favour of the one who lives as if they won't have to answer to God (or anyone else for that matter) at the end of it all.

How then can a Christian venture into entrepreneurship and expect to survive—let alone thrive—in such a cut-throat business environment? If it is accurately estimated that 95% of all new businesses fail (!), why would believers risk their time and money jumping into a pool of sharks, the odds being stacked against them in every conceivable way?

The subject is broad enough to fill the pages of a book, but I'll give you 5 thoughts that by God's grace have been helpful thus far on my own 11-year entrepreneurial journey.

1. Trust your Lord

In every sphere of ordinary life—from science to art—it is often assumed, sometimes even by Christians, that a belief in God has a fettering rather than empowering effect. This is why the "wicked" in Psalm 73:11 are bold enough to say:

How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?

By asking how He can know, they are essentially saying that He *can't* know because He doesn't exist in the first place, just like they say in their hearts according to Psalm 14:1. This supposed casting away of godly shackles "frees" them to engage in entrepreneurship in a way that doesn't have to conform to morality or give an account, so long as human authorities don't catch them in their fraud. Because of this, you will sometimes feel disadvantaged, as if you're boxing while one arm has been tied behind your back. If only you could be unleashed and give them a taste of their own medicine! Do not be like them, godless and vain.

But you might say to me, "Come on, I can never be like them. I can never deny God!" To that I'll say, "Are you really sure about that?"

We are tempted to deny God as entrepreneurs every single day! What's the first thing you do when you run into a crisis? Do you instantly switch into problem-solving mode, or do you take a step back and ask the Lord for wisdom and help and grace? When you're defrauded, do you immediately think of ways to get your own back, or do you extend mercy and seek to win hearts more than winning court cases? When you're broke, do you kick into 'hustle mode', or do you first ask your Heavenly Father for your daily bread before setting out to find it? And when your boss wears you down, do you seek liberation through entrepreneurship, or do you humble yourself first and work as unto the Lord and not unto men? Trust your Lord, Christian.

Whether you stay in employment or go into entrepreneurship, the only way to be in control is ultimately to give up control to the One who truly has it: God. Otherwise, you will seek to muscle everything according to your will and the only thing that will change is not the situation, but yourself ... for the worse. Proverbs 3:5 and 6 say:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Trust in the Lord completely.

2. Learn from your Generation

Now, just because you are not of this world doesn't mean that you don't need to learn anything from it, or from those who've gone ahead of you in the same field. Christians don't have a monopoly of wisdom, especially the worldly kind that is as a result of God's common grace to all His image-bearers.

In Genesis chapter 4 we read about our ancient forefathers who invented various things, from cities, to musical instruments, to pastoralism and metallurgy. They weren't necessarily godly people—Lamech for example, who's mentioned in that passage, killed a young man and went on to write about it in what reads like a typical gangsta rap song—and yet David's harp and sword were both used to worship and serve God in equal measure; the man after God's own heart used skills and inventions developed by godless predecessors.

Looking at the New Testament, we're reminded of the words of Christ in Luke 16:8:

For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

It wasn't his main point, but it still illustrates how believers handicap themselves on either side of the divide: we don't invest fully in this world because we're not of it, and we likewise don't invest in eternity with our worldly possessions because we can't see that which we hope for. The shrewdness we need in entrepreneurship is that which enables us to make the best use of the time because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).

Observe how unbelievers operate their companies and businesses. Think carefully about why they do what they do. Borrow the best things and discard the rest. In it all, seek first the kingdom of God and don't chase food and clothing like unbelievers do. It behoves us to find the right balance, for it exists, and it is profitable in every way.

3. Cherish your Freedom

I hope that by now you've already divested yourself of the idea that entrepreneurship will liberate you from a 9 to 5 existence and give you a lot of free time. Far from it! Entrepreneurship will take a lot more from you than you may be willing to give: time, peace of mind, money, and energy will all be drained faster than a normal day job will require from you. So you won't have freedom in that sense. 39 lashes await you. What you have is the freedom to

choose when and how you'll take your lashes. This is a unique stewardship that Christian entrepreneurs have.

Think of it this way: imagine that your team has a deadline to deliver a product in 3 days' time. If you work on it 7 hours a day, you'll beat the deadline. However, a brother in the faith just had a serious difficulties with his wife and he'd like you to help them talk through things. As an entrepreneur, you don't have to seek permission to do this in the way that an employee would. However, after spending 4 hours with the couple, you still have a deadline to beat, meaning that you'll have to stay up late or wake up earlier than usual for the remaining 2 days.

Cherish that freedom and spend it wisely for the glory of God and for the joy of your brethren in Christ. Spend it in missions and acts of mercy for the salvation of the lost. Spend it in reading God's word and in praying for the saints. Spend it cheerfully.

And be careful of making commitments which threaten that freedom. I would advise that you avoid bank loans and mortgages and anything that will tie you down for years such that you *need* to earn a certain amount of money or avail yourself somewhere for a certain period of time *without fail* in order to meet your obligations. When you commit to such things, you will be forced to think and act like a slave and not as the free entrepreneur you can be. Better to go without and be free, than to have an abundance tied to a ball and chain.

4. Love your Neighbour

Think of the phrase "Human Resources." What image does it bring to mind? In the commercialized times we live in, almost everything is measured in monetary terms, right down to human beings themselves. It's as if each company is a factory where you put in raw materials and out, comes a product that you can sell. And one of the raw materials, or resources, is human resources. It's just another factor of production. Don't see people like that, much less treat them that way.

A Christian entrepreneur has the unique opportunity to truly love his neighbour as he loves himself. Each person that you work with (or work for) is an eternal soul. They are made in the image of God, and they are either going to heaven or to hell. But in between those two extreme ends of their lives (creation and final destiny) they live in the present where they experience life in a fallen world and perform work in a cursed ecosystem. Will your conduct painfully remind them of the reality of the fall, or will you be the kind and gracious master and worker who makes their eternity antennae in their

hearts perk up? Will you demand results and tear down non-performers, or will your speech be seasoned with salt, imparting grace to the hearers?

The fact is that even the business world is starting to adopt humanity, compassion, and empathy. But for them, it's just another experimental variable to maximize results; they have no actual basis for the ideological things they encourage. But as for you who has experienced the grace of God, you have every reason to be truly Christ-like in your approach to handling the precious people in your enterprise. I assure you, they know the difference.

5. Guard your Heart

As Proverbs 4:23 says:

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Your heart is the essence of who you are, and entrepreneurship has the potential to amplify both your strengths and weaknesses. If there is envy in your heart, the success of others in your industry will draw it out. If there is impatience, your interactions with your team will bring it out. Likewise, if there are any good virtues such as kindness and diligence, entrepreneurship will bring those out as well.

But the scary thing is that entrepreneurship not only amplifies the virtues and vices that you already have, it can also turn virtues into vices and create entirely new vices that you never thought yourself capable of. Consider 1 Timothy 6, verse 9 and 10.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

If you don't keep a close watch over your heart, you will look back after a few years and your shrivelled self will not recognize the Christian you were when you started out. However, if you abide in the vine, you will face many trials, yet steadfastness will have its full effect (James 1:4).

In Conclusion

So can entrepreneurship be successfully done in a godless age? Absolutely. Should you do it? Probably not. But if you do, then do it according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned to you.

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR WOMEN (2)*Patty Owen*

These articles first appeared in Grace & Truth nos. 73-76 (1995). At that time Patty Owen was a member of Trinity Baptist Church. In 1995 she relocated to the States with her husband and children, where Sam became a Pastor with Grace Baptist Church, East Haven, Connecticut. They are also recirculated at <https://medium.com/@refhubkenya>.

In Grace & Truth 131 we concluded with the command of the apostle Paul that the older women in the church be teachers of good things. But who are they to teach? Answer: **"the young women"** (Titus 2:4-5). Older women, take note – in all of your speech and actions, both in and outside your home, you must make yourself a pattern of holiness for the younger women. Seven instructions are given to the older women that clearly teach the duties of young women. May you be greatly encouraged by this Word of God. In an age when so many are confused about the role of a wife, God has spoken! Pay attention to what you are to be like as a young married woman. Older women are to teach the younger women the following:

1. To love their husbands

What a wonderful first duty to be taught! Before the wedding the bride would laugh to be told that love is a "duty to be learned". But it is not long before many long to be taught how to love their husband above all others, above relatives, family, and even self. Why should you love your husband like this? The Bible says that it is because of the union between the husband and his wife, for they are no longer two, but one.

- a) In creation, God took a part of the man, fashioned the woman, and gave her back to him to have as a part of himself (Genesis 2:21-23).
- b) They are united in all the law of God and of man.
- c) They both choose and agreed to be man and wife, entering into a covenant relationship under God.
- d) They have become one flesh in sexual union.
- e) Should God bless them with children, these are the fruit of their union."

‘But there is the house to look after, the food to prepare, the children to care for; I have to work, and then there are the relatives – I do not have the time or energy to love my husband as well.’ Young woman, what you say is true, but if you neglect this, your chief duty, your life and marriage will be a mess. You are to take more delight in your husband than in other men. You are to have an affection for him which you hold in your heart and express to him. Pray for

this. Let your love begin in God first. Ask him to deepen your love for your husband and, where you are able, to help him not to sin but to do good. Study your husband and learn what pleases him; care for him, seek his comfort in health and sickness. These self-denying actions make up the true love of a wife, from which the more romantic emotions are to continually get on fire. There is much written also on the love of the husband for his wife (Ephesians 5:22-33), out of which this response of love in the wife flows, but here you as a wife are given this duty to love your husband.

2. To love their children

This is another duty of love, one you owe to any children the Lord has given you. It is not only given to the woman, in the sense that the father has nothing to do; but while the children are young the mother's proper place of work is to be in the home, whereas the father's work is usually outside the home. This love is not just having a natural, fond affection for them, but the seeking after what is best for them. It is not giving them everything they want; but caring for their needs. This is done in the following ways:

- a) It is the mother who should nurse and care for the child herself, unless her health or strength would keep her from being able to do so, or some other major obstacle should prevent her.
- b) The mother loves the child by teaching him about God and His Word from an early age, and by being an example as she seeks to love and obey God in her own life.
- c) The mother loves by correcting and disciplining her child when he needs it, and not letting him have his own sinful way.
- d) The mother loves when she prays daily for her children.
- e) A mother loves all her children from the oldest to the youngest, seeking God's grace for this, especially in the difficult stages.

3. To be self-controlled

A young woman is to be careful and moderate. This means that you will learn to control your affections and desires and rule over them with reason and sound judgement. You will seek to bring your thoughts captive to the Word of God and not to let your mind dwell on things that He forbids. This is a guarding grace for your mind, keeping it from both sinful pleasures, and excessive lawful pleasures. A young woman must learn to watch over her emotions and control her passions. She must be wise in her conduct around men, in controlling her temper and her tongue, not giving in to childish behaviour or acting in ways that draw too much attention to herself. The entire household is

in problems when a woman gives into her emotions, rather than acting ‘sensibly’.

4. To be pure

We tend to think of purity (= being chaste) as a virtue to be held on to before entering marriage, and this is very true. But here it is listed in the duties of young married women who have the ‘remedy of marriage against impurity’. This purity, marriage faithfulness, begins in the mind and then is carried out in speech and action.

Adultery is a terrible sin and is condemned throughout the Bible. By the Old Testament law, both adulterer and adulteress were to be put to death. Unlike any other sin, this is one done against one’s own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). Read through Proverbs 5 and 6 and note how the curse of God follows this sin. Though its temptation and pleasure seem strong for the moment, the awful consequences that follow last the rest of one’s life.

Young woman, keep yourself pure. May the following suggestions help you:

1. Love God and fear Him. When you recognize that you live in light of His presence and know His great love for you, then would you commit such a shameful act before Him?
2. Love your husband, as we learned earlier. Safety comes from loving, not from just having a husband.
3. Guard yourself. Be careful what you watch on TV, what you read in novels and magazines, and what music you listen to. Chastity is not a virtue encouraged by this world — in fact it is scorned as old-fashioned and seen as a hindrance to your fulfilment. Guard where you go, who you spend your time with, and where you turn your gaze — adultery is first committed in the heart.
4. Resist lustful thoughts as soon as they come by remembering your call to holiness, and flee away from the temptation to God in prayer.

Consider chastity as your main marriage duty, and the undefiled marriage bed as your high honour (Hebrews 13:4). Do not let this world twist you into its mould, but renew your mind with the truths taught in the Word of God (Romans 12:1–2).

5. To be working at home

How wonderful to hear the Word of God telling women to stay in their homes, that this is a good and proper place for them to be! In order for a woman to

love her husband and children, to be sensible and chaste, the best place for her to devote her time, energies and talents is in her home.

It is not being taught that a woman is not allowed to go out of her house; rather that she should never view her home as a prison, nor her calling as a burden or an interruption in her life. That constant running out of her home, away from her responsibilities, in order to satisfy her own pleasures and be about other people's business, is wrong. It is also dangerous, as it takes you out of your natural protection and leaves you open to all sorts of temptations and unchristian actions which you will surely later regret.

6. To be kind

A young woman is to be kind and full of goodness. What sort of influence are you in your home? Are you cheerful and good-natured? You may be well-organized, able to do many things at the same time, neat, active in ministry. But are you pleasant to be with? Or are you moody, bitter, fretful, contentious? Do you build up your house or tear it down (Proverbs 14:1)? “She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life” (Proverbs 31:12). Kindness in a woman adds much sweetness to marriage, home and society.

7. To be submissive to their own husbands

“Wives, submit to your husbands”, that is, yield yourselves to the will, direction, and discretion of your husbands, “as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). What are the reasons behind this final command to young women, which make it so fitting, so necessary?

(1) The law of creation is that the man was a created first, and then the woman (see 1 Timothy 2:13 in context), as a help, not a head, to him.

(2) The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23–24). So as the church is subject to Christ, wives ought also to be to their husbands. The wife must show by her attitude and actions that she accepts him as head in her life and in their home.

‘But I am married to a fool’, or, ‘You do not know my husband — he is proud, does not care about me, and is unfit to rule anyone...’. But consider these things:

(1) Think seriously before you marry a man, whether he is wise or a fool. Once you have married him he is your husband and you are to subject yourself to him. No matter how unworthy he is in your eyes, God considers him worthy to rule over you.

(2) Even if you think you are wiser and more qualified to lead in your home, you may not be the head over him. Remember your place and seek to influence and persuade him by your goodness and wisdom and prayers (see 1 Peter 3:1–2). Should a man beat his wife? No. She is a part of him and he is to love and cherish her (Ephesians 5:28). Then is the wife the servant of the husband? No. She submits to him as a member of the body listens to the head.

This role of the wife is right and necessary. If the hands do not take, the eyes do not look, and the feet do not go when the head directs, then the whole man must die. So, also, the life of the family and the marriage rests on the partners in the marriage being willing to take up the roles given to them by God in obedience to Him.

That the Word of God may not be reviled

Is it true that the world still judges churches largely by the character of its women? Paul has more to say to women here in this passage than to the men. The effect of the lives of women has a great impact on what unbelievers will think of them, and what they will think of God and His Word. God’s Word is blasphemed when we do what He forbids and when we do not fulfil the duties He has given us to do. Older women, be diligent to teach and train the younger women in these things, and young women, learn and joyfully accept the duties given to you by God for His glory and your greatest good. May God help us all to shine as lights and so to exalt the Name of God in our being women.

Commenting on these verses, Sharon James writes: The *content* of the training for young mothers is arranged in three pairs. The first (loving husband and children) has to do with our relationships. The second (self-controlled and pure) has to do with our inner character. The third (working at home and kind) has to do with our day-to-day activities. The portrait is framed: that is, the list begins and ends with the foundational marriage relationship, and the final command to submit to husbands stands alone.

‘*You must be joking!*’ might be the response today. For now we are told just the opposite. Marriage is a 50-50 partnership, and neither partner leads nor submits. If we do have children they must not interfere with our careers, we can pay someone else to care for them. Self-fulfilment rather than self-control is in vogue. Purity sounds alarmingly Victorian – after all, if we fall in love with someone other than our husband we have to follow our heart. The only element of this teaching tolerable to modern ears is ‘kindness’, provided it does not involve too much sacrifice.

(*God’s Design for Women*, pp. 188-189)

MY PERSONAL CONFESSION

John Kimani

Growing up I always had a longing for God but I never had an understanding of the gospel. I always thought we had to fulfill the whole law and obey all the commandments to get to heaven.

It was in 2017 that I prayed to God and asked for Him to guide me on the right path. Not soon afterwards I was seeking for answers online that God directed me to a Baptist preacher who was preaching about salvation and presented the gospel clearly. I heard the gospel and I understood that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again and that whomsoever believes and put his faith on Him will have everlasting life. I also understood that we are saved from our sins and from the wrath of God by Christ's own righteousness and that not by our good works or by obeying the whole law, but by His mercy and His sacrifice for us on the cross.

That's when I saw myself as God saw me, a hell-deserving sinner. As the scripture says in Romans 3:23-25a: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

So, I repented of all my sins and unbelief and trusting in my own works. I put my faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in His finished work on the cross. I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour, as the scripture says in John 3:36: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* Also in Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

This is the only basis upon which I seek to be baptized, as a sign of death with Christ to sin and to the newness of life in Him. I hope then to be added to the membership of Trinity Baptist Church, which is a local expression of the body of Christ. It is my prayer that the Lord will use this church for my edification and that I would be used of Him to serve His people, for the glory of His name.

AMEN.

John was baptized and added into the membership of TBC on 12th Jan. 2020

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Chief Editor:
Keith Underhill

Editor:
John Muketha

Producer:
Murungi Igweta

Design
RefHub

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