

GRACE & TRUTH

MAGAZINE ISSUE 134



CREATION



GENESIS 1:1 "IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH."





TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

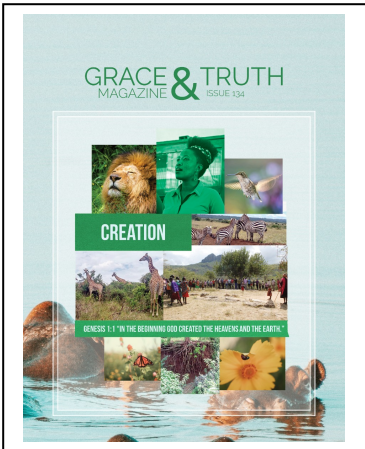
N A I R O B I

No. 134 2021 Contents

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: Creation

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

(Revelation 4:11)

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

(Psalm 121:2)

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

THINKING OF DEATH IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

Murungi Igweta

*Musings on death are necessary since Covid-19 has infected more than 3M deceased people globally by the end of April 2021. This encouragement to have a biblical view of death is taken from C.H. Spurgeon's sermon **Precious Deaths**.*

Psalm 116:15 – Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints

There is a day of death for you and for me. We shall die, if the Lord tarries. We are to learn to number our days, to get a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12). God has sent Covid-19 to remind us of this reality. As Health Ministry announces the number of infections and deaths and recoveries daily, we are to realize that it could be me! But the question is, ARE YOU READY TO DIE? No non-Christian is ready to die, for to die is to meet with God, for it has appointed to die once and then face judgement (Hebrews 9:27). But sadly, there are even many professing Christians who are not willing to think about the possibility of death.

The verse before us is God's word.

First, notice what it does not say:

- 1) It does not say, precious in the sight of men is the death of his saints. It is precious *in the sight of the Lord...!*
- 2) It does not say that death is good, or beautiful. It simply says that a death of particular kind of death is *precious* in God's sight.
- 3) It does not say that God loves death, or that He loves people to die. Death is regarded by God as our enemy, and therefore He sent Jesus Christ to save his people and to defeat death. It simply says that *the death of God's saints* is precious in his sight.
- 4) It does not say that all deaths are precious to Him. It is the death *of His saints* that is precious to him. We know that the wages of sin is death and that the soul that sins shall surely die. God does not regard the deaths of the wicked as precious – he only regards the death of his saints as precious in his sight.
- 5) It also does not say, that precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of a pastor, or a bishop or a Christian worker or a theological teacher. It simply

says, precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of *His saints*. They may be young Christians or old Christians, they may be theologically astute or not, but if they believe in Christ, they are His saints.

- 6) It does not say that the death of his old saints is precious, rather it is that the death of *his saints* (whether young or old, men or women, rich or poor, etc.) is precious in his sight.
- 7) It does not say that those who die in a certain way, (may be road accident vs. sickness, or young age vs. old age) are better than others and therefore their death is precious to God. Instead, any death of his saints, whether from Covid-19 or of cancer, whether from road carnage or any other accident, is precious in God's sight, if it is to do with his saints.

In conclusion, when we read God's word and we must seek to understand what it says and what it does not say. Clearing what it does not say makes it easy to understand what the Lord is telling us.

Second, notice what it does say of the death of God's saints:

Two clear lessons that the Lord would have his saints learn about the death:

1. God regards the death of a Christian as precious.

Please note that death never seems to me or you, under any circumstance to be a *precious* thing. But we need to review this understanding. Now it is true that death is our enemy. Death is a loss... but it is only a loss to us who are left and not to God or to the one who has died in the Lord.

The New Testament understanding of death is **gain** – Paul preached and taught, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is **gain** ... for me to depart is **to be with Christ, for that is far better***” (Philippians 1:21,23). If you believe in Christ and have the right relationship with God, then you would gain.

Since death for a Christian is regarded as precious by God, then it must be. For then, all those who die in the Lord, die to be with the Lord. They depart out of this realm of sin, fallenness and brokenness to be with their Maker and their Saviour. For this reason, **death is precious** to God, and it should be precious to us too.

What should we understand by the word precious? It simply means something that is valuable or expensive, rare, or costly. It does not necessarily mean something that is loved or adored.

The word means the thing in question is not something to be undecided about or to be taken lightly. It shows then God does not take the death of His saints lightly. God values His saints and their death is a costly thing in His

sight. Which is why, in the case of Psalm 116, God preserved the life of His saint from death, which is the context in which we get this verse.

2. God has good reasons for regarding death of Christians as precious in his sight.

Death, if rightly viewed is a blessing from the Lord's hand. It is to be with the Lord – is this not a great blessing? C.H. Spurgeon preaching on this verse in his sermon, 'Precious Deaths,' gave this story:

“A boy once found a bird’s nest in which were eggs, which he considered as a great treasure. He left them and would go to look at every now and then. But then once he went back again, there were only shells. He returned to its mother grieving: “Mother,” said the child, “I had some beautiful eggs in this nest, and now they are destroyed; nothing is left but a few pieces of broken shell. Pity me, mother, for my treasure is gone.” But the mother said, “Child, here is no destruction; there were little birds within those eggs, and they have flown away, and are singing now among the branches of the trees. You see the eggs are not wasted, child, but have answered their purpose. It is better far this way.”

Therefore, to die is to sow a seed which shall germinate in eternity. It is to rest from our earthly labours to begin heavenly labours. It is to be sown perishable in order to be raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonour to be raised in glory, it is sown in weakness to be raised in power; it is sown natural to be raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). So, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, when we look at the body of our departed brother in Christ, let us remember that he “...is among the birds of paradise, praising his Saviour and God with unwavering powers." It is not a loss to die, it is a gain, a lasting, a perpetual, an illimitable gain, where the saints are transported to the presence of Christ.

As Spurgeon rightly concludes:

To die is to be clothed with immortality. It is to be relieved of all the ills, and evils, and pains of this world. It is to be healed – yes it is to be freed from all loss. The man is at one moment weak and cannot stir a finger; in an instant he is clothed with power. Can you not call this a gain? That brow which was aching; it shall wear a crown within the next few ticking of the clock. Is that no gain? That hand is palsied; it shall at once wave the palm branch. Is that a loss? The man is sick beyond physician's power; but he shall be where the inhabitant is never sick. Is that a loss?

To die is to cross the river, and to be transported to the celestial city, the paradise of God. I would rather a person lives in the city which is designed by God, than that he lives in the best mansion in Beverly Hills, California. I would rather to

be in heaven, whether there is no sin, no misery of sin, no pain, no sickness, no accidents.

Applications

1) Christians ought not to be afraid of death.

A certain pastor called Richard Baxter, lay dying, and his friends came to see him, almost the last word he said was in answer to the question, "Dear Mr. Baxter, how are you?" "Almost well," said he, and so it is. Death cures; it is the best medicine, for they who die are not only almost well, but healed for ever. Where they go, there is no sin, no pain, no tear, no mourning, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4). Death to the saints is not a penalty, it is not destruction, it is not even a loss – it is gain and it is precious in the sight of the LORD.

The Psalmist declares, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me; for your rod and your staff, they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4). Christian do not fear death because Christ, by his death killed death. Those who are in Christ can even mock death and shout, “Death is swallowed up in victory! O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The pangs of death are forever defeated ... God has given every Christian victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2) It is necessary to be a Christian since everyone will die.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Ladies and gentlemen, I have a personal question to each one of you: **are you His saint?** Preacher, you who speak to others are you sanctified by Christ and by the Holy Spirit? Answer this in the silence of your soul.

Officers of the church, are you saints or mere professors? Members of this church, are you truly saints, or are you hypocrites? You who sit in different congregation Sunday after Sunday, have you been washed in the blood of Jesus? Are you made saints, or are you still a slave to sin and in the bonds of iniquity? Casual reader of this magazine, the same question would I press on you, **are you a saint of God?**

If not, earth and hell combined could not utter a shriek that would be shrill enough to set forth the unutterable woe of the death that shall surely come upon you in hell. Oh! here on earth, death shall surely overtake you. Fly NOW to Jesus. Trust Him now! He will save you! If you trust in Him before this day's sun goes down to set, you will be a blessed receiver of eternal joy and bliss. The Lord grant it, for his name's sake.

EPHESIANS 2:17-18

THE MEANS AND RESULT OF RECONCILIATION

Keith Underhill

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

Paul continues to write about the wonderful reconciliation between God and sinners and, as a consequence, between Jewish and Gentile sinners who believe. He has made it clear that it is through Christ. Now the question arises, 'How do we get to experience that reconciliation in our own lives?' And once again the answer is centred in Christ, the preaching of Christ. The cross as an historical event does not automatically reconcile. It must be preached. This Paul's burden as he writes to the Corinthians Church. He refers to his preaching as "the word of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). He preaches "Christ crucified" (verse 23). Indeed, that was the sum and substance of his message: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

1. RECONCILIATION IS THROUGH PREACHING (2:17)

(1) **Who is hearing?** *"You who were far off ... those who were near"*

The language of 'far off' has already been used (verse 13) to refer to Gentiles (they are the subject of these verses, see verse 11). They are 'far off' because they live outside Israel and Jerusalem where God's temple was situated. "Far off" and "near" is a reference to Gentile and Jew respectively, and so to *all* the people of the world. The message is preached to everyone irrespective of who they are. As Jesus commanded, "... that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

(2) **Who is preaching?** *"He came and preached"*

The amazing thing is that Christ Himself is the preacher! We know that He spent three years preaching, but when did He go to cities such as Ephesus to whom this letter is written? Note well what Jesus said when He sent out the seventy-two: "The one who hears you hear Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). He repeated this when He sent out the twelve (Matthew 10:40) and when He talked with them about their mission once He returns to His Father (John 13:20). The one sent by Christ with a message from Him is to be received

as if Christ Himself is the speaker. He has all the authority of Christ. For example, King Ahasuerus made a decree and proclaimed it in every province his kingdom (Esther 3:12-15). Of course he did not proclaim it personally, but the satraps, governors, and officials did. What they said in the name of the king, as they read the decree, came with all the authority of the king. To refuse it was to refuse the king himself. So when you hear a true preacher, one like Paul who came to Ephesus, one sent by Christ, then you are hearing Christ.

Paul possibly states the same truth in that series of questions about how a person can be saved. “And how are they to believe Him whom they have never heard?” (Romans 10:14). [See the footnote of the ESV for this translation.] He repeats it in his conclusion: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (verse 17). This is not the word about Christ, true as that is, but the word spoken by Christ, through His appointed servants.

What an honourable work the preacher has. What an awesome responsibility to declare only what Christ has appointed him to say. What a blessing to hear Christ speak. No doubt you have heard many preachers and have read many words like the ones before you now, and perhaps to date you have you have not received the message into your heart. Just think of the day of judgement when the Lord will tell you that you refused to put your trust in Him and the message of His cross. If you were to reply, ‘Lord if only *you* yourself in person had spoken to me I would have believed.’ Do you know what he will respond? ‘I did speak to you through the preachers that I sent to you!’ The truth is that if you will not hear the words that are before you on this page, then you would not hear Him were He to speak to you personally, for they would be the same words.

(3) What is the message? “*Peace*”

The message is not about economic development, or personal success in this world, or long life. You may be the richest and most successful person and yet not have peace. Imagine a man who has the most luxurious home and every possession one could wish for, yet there is no peace in that home. Better to have poverty with peace, than riches without peace (so says Proverbs 17:1). Good relationships with others are so important, and above all with God. It is peace with God through Jesus Christ that is the greatest blessing. In the name of God this peace is proclaimed to you as you read this. If you will put your faith in Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God then you will “have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). More than that, you will have peace in your own heart: “... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the *peace* of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Further, you will have peace with others (verse 15). Do not refuse the only way to knowing this fullness of peace, through receiving the message of the gospel that you read in the Bible as explained in Grace & Truth.

2. RECONCILIATION IS ACCESS TO GOD (2:18)

Christ died to reconcile us to God. What is the purpose of this reconciliation? What does reconciliation enable us to do in relation to God, that we cannot do if we are not reconciled? Think of a person who has fallen out with another so they are no longer friends. They no longer enjoy each other's company, and so cannot be a blessing to each other. The highest privilege is to come into the presence of God and to worship Him. But if you are not reconciled to Him, then you are not accepted, and nothing you bring to Him is acceptable. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him" (Proverbs 15:8).

It is possible that the words of verse 18, introduced by "for", are the content of the preaching and an expansion on the word 'peace'. This is the high point of being a Christian.

(1) "We both have access ... to the Father"

We always count freedom of 'access' a great blessing. We talk of access to credit so that we can have what we want; and access to some important person so we can get favour when we need it. We have access to GOD! This is the most incredible privilege. Though unworthy sinners we can actually come into God's most holy presence. Although Esther was queen she could not come into the king's presence unless invited by him (Esther 4:11). With God we have an open-ended invitation, at any time, in any circumstance. Many people are deceived into thinking that just because they are human beings they can come to God and be accepted. How little such people understand God's terrible holiness as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Think of Moses at the burning bush where God told him, "Do not come near!" (Exodus 3:5). Think of Peter when he came to understand that the Jesus standing before him is none other than God in the flesh so that "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord'" (Luke 5:8). Think of John in the Spirit when he saw the glory of Jesus he "fell at His feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17). Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden when they sinned. Cain's offering was not accepted because he did not approach God in faith. So many restrictions were put on the Old Testament people of God, so that even the High Priest could only come into the Holy of Holies once a year, and then only with the blood of sacrifice. Even the most religious and outwardly respectable Pharisee was rejected.

The purpose and result of salvation is to bring us into God's presence. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). We specifically come to God as "Father". So in the so-called Lord's Prayer we pray, "Our Father" (see John 4:21-24,

14:6). It is a beautiful picture. We do not expect to come to one who is our father and there still be a distance between us. Our Father in heaven cares for us in every detail so that even the hairs of our head are all numbered. As the Father of our Lord He loves us as He loves the Son (John 17:23). Do you know anything about this relationship? Do you pray to God as Father, not because you have learned the words from when you were a child, but because He really is a father to you? How is such a privilege and blessing possible?

(2) “Through Him (Son) ... we both have access”

It is through Jesus Christ the Son who has opened the way and cleared every obstacle. “Through Him we have obtained *access* by faith into this grace in which we stand, ...” (Romans 5:2). “... in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and *access* with confidence through our faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:12). How has He done this?

- By His humiliation, “the blood of Christ” (verse 13), “the cross” (verse 16). Sin is the great obstacle that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus takes the liability for our sin, the punishment we deserve falls on Him, so there is now no condemnation for us. If we have a great debt and another pays it for us, now we owe nothing and we are free from debt. Jesus has done by His one offering what the endless repetition of animal sacrifices could never have done (see Hebrews 10:11-14). Because there is real forgiveness there is no longer any offering for sin (verse 18). This is the reason why Christ is the only way to God. Mary did not take our sins and die for them, nor did Mohammed. And you cannot do anything yourself. “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).
- By His exaltation, “He came and preached” (verse 17). He rose from the dead on the third day, triumphant over sin, because death is the wages of sin. He was received victorious into heaven at the Father’s right hand, and He sent forth the Spirit who enables preachers who preach in Christ’s name. Those who believe in this message of peace are brought to experience this access to God the Father. Christ is not dead but alive in heaven as our great High Priest on our behalf.

When you draw near to God in worship, do you consciously come relying on Christ alone? Are you conscious of your sin and that unless it is dealt with you cannot come into God’s holy presence? Is the blood of Christ and His intercession in heaven your only hope?

(3) “We both have access in one Spirit”

True worship is also dependent upon the help of the Holy Spirit. We do not think much about this. Do we automatically have the proper feelings and thoughts? The sad thing is that we can repeat written prayers without thinking about the words, such as The Lord’s Prayer. The Spirit must enable us to speak from our hearts (see Matthew 15:8-9). We can have energy and noise but without the Spirit of truth it is unacceptable as our worship must be according to the will of God (see 1 John 5:14). It must be “in” the Spirit: “praying at all times in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18), and “pray in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). This is not a reference to praying in tongues as ‘spirit’ in 1 Corinthians 4:15 refers to the human spirit. It is the work of the Spirit in us that is absolutely essential. He must teach us what to pray for, giving us both the thoughts and the inexpressible feelings (Romans 8:27). It is His work to convict us of sin (John 16:8), to give us a new heart and a new understanding of Scripture, to show us more of the glory of Christ (John 16:14), and to give the desire and freedom to come to the Father (Romans 8:15-16). It is this dependence upon the Spirit that marks out a Christian. “God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4:24). “We are the real circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God” (Philippians 3:3).

There is only “one” such Holy Spirit, the same for Jew and Gentile alike. This is the Spirit who indwells each and every child of God, without Whom you cannot truly have access to God. So our worship is not tied to any particular place as if it is ‘holy’. This is how the Jews considered Jerusalem, and the Samaritans considered Gerizim. We will depend rather upon the Spirit who has given us the Scriptures, and pray that He will illumine our minds to understand them. Do you know anything of this?

Please note that our worship is Trinitarian. Each Person of the Trinity has a different role to play. The Father planned our salvation, the Son came to accomplish it in the world, and the Spirit works in applying it to us. It is amazing that the Triune God should be so interested in us so as to do all this for our salvation. This is the great glory of the Christian faith. What other so-called ‘god’ has claimed to do such? And this is available to anyone and everyone, for “we both” includes Jews and Gentiles, which is another way of saying the whole world. Such access can be your privilege, but you must first look to Christ to deal with your sin, and you must rely on the Spirit to have the wisdom and power to pray. How terrible to spend a whole life in religion but never having had real access to God.

THE LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1689

Keith Underhill

We continue a chapter by chapter study of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The previous study of chapter 3 of the Confession was about God's Decree, which is all the things God has ordained. The corresponding Catechism asks, 'How did God bring to pass the things He had ordained?' (Q. 39). The answer given is, 'By His work of creation, and by His work of providence'. It is God's works of creation and providence that are explained in the next two chapters of the Confession (chapters 4 & 5). Each section in the following article begins with the text of the Confession in italics. Help was found in *Samuel E. Waldron, A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1989).

CHAPTER FOUR: CREATION

Creation in General

1. In the beginning it pleased the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – to create the world and all things in it in six days. All was very good. In this way God glorified His eternal power, wisdom and goodness.

(a) **Time** of creation: “in the beginning” – before anything else existed, because God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing by His word (Genesis 1:1, Psalm 33:6, 90:12, 148:5, John 17:5, Hebrews 11:3).

(b) **Author** of creation: “the triune God” – the Father (1 Corinthians 8:6), the Son (John 1:2-3, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2), the Spirit (see Genesis 1:2, Job 26:13, 33:4, Psalm 104:30).

(c) **Purpose** of creation: to glorify God's “eternal power, wisdom and goodness” – God does everything for His glory (Romans 11:36, Revelation 4:11). That God created everything in the universe by a word shows His power (Psalm 33:6-9, Jeremiah 10:12, Romans 1:20). That everything, both small and great, perfectly fits together just as He purposed, shows His wisdom (Psalm 104:24, Proverbs 3:19, Jeremiah 10:12). That God made so many things in such a pleasing variety of colour, shape and size shows His goodness.

(d) **Extent** of creation: “the world and all things in it” (Genesis 1:1, John 1:2, Acts 17:24, Colossians 1:16).

(e) **Duration** of creation: “six days” (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11).

(f) **Result** of creation: “all was very good” (Genesis 1:31, Ecclesiastes 7:29) – Everything was in perfect order just as God had planned it. Sin came into the world from outside.

Questions: What about the theory of evolution? Is Genesis 1-2 literally true? Note the following passages that demand the historical accuracy of these first chapters of the Bible – Exodus 20:11, Matthew 19:4-5, Luke 3:38, John 5:17, 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 15:45, Hebrews 4:4, 11:3, James 3:9, 2 Peter 3:5.

Creation of Man

2. *All creatures were made by God, the last to be fashioned being man and woman who received dominion over all the other creatures on earth. God gave man and woman rational and immortal souls, and in all respects fitted them for a life in harmony with Himself. They were created in His image, possessing knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. The divine law was written in their hearts and they had power to obey it fully. Yet, being left to the liberty of their own mutable wills, transgression of the law was a possibility.*

(a) **Position:** As the last of God’s created works, man is the supreme creation. Man has been given dominion (= power to exercise control) over the rest of creation (Genesis 1:26,28-30).

(b) **Nature:** Man is made of two aspects, body and soul (Matthew 10:28, 26:41, 1 Corinthians 7:1,34, 2 Corinthians 12:2, James 2:26). This is most clearly seen at death when the body goes to the ground and the soul/spirit enters the intermediate state. Man’s body was formed “of dust from the ground” and God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). It is as such a “living being” that God has fitted us to have fellowship with Him. Our bodies are good, and we are to glorify Him in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20). It will be unnatural for us to be without our bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1-5), and this is why God will give us a new resurrection body.

(c) **Likeness:** We are created in His image (same meaning as the word ‘likeness’, Genesis 1:26-27). An image of something has a visible resemblance of that thing. It is interesting that while we are forbidden to make any images of God, man is a living image of Him. The greatest problem with an idol is that it is lifeless (see Psalm 115:3-8). There are at least 3 things included in the image – knowledge, righteousness and holiness (see Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). Like God, man is a *thinking* being (rational), so able to communicate and have fellowship; and man is a *moral* being, responsible for his actions. Fallen man remains in the image of God (Genesis 5:1-3, 1 Corinthians 11:7, James 3:9) although it is a distorted image (as in a broken mirror) and needs renewal.

(d) **Freedom:** They had God’s law “written in their hearts”, a blessing Christians receive when they are renewed (Jeremiah 31:33). It means that they had a natural understanding of the law and a love for it. Yet God did not so create man in a state where sin was an impossibility; man was free to sin. How such a good and holy man could choose to sin we cannot understand, but we know it happened.

The Probation of Man

3. The law of God in general was written in the hearts of the first human pair, but at the same time they were placed under a special probation not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their happiness and fellowship with God depended upon their yielding obedience to His will, as also did the continuance of their dominion over the creatures.

Man was given a specific test as to his obedience to God. “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was in itself no different from any other tree, except that God had said ‘Do not eat from it’ (Genesis 2:16-17). “Death” would be the result of disobedience, and we assume therefore that ‘life’ would have been the result of continued obedience to the end of the period of probation. The fullness of that life is what we shall experience in glory, with no possibility of choosing sin. Our Saviour Jesus was also put under probation in His earthly ministry, and particularly in the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness.

CHAPTER FIVE: DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Definition of Divine Providence

1. God who, in infinite power and wisdom, has created all things, upholds, directs, controls and governs them, both animate and inanimate, great and small, by a providence supremely wise and holy, and in accordance with His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable decisions of His will. He fulfils the purposes for which He created them, so that His wisdom, power and justice, together with His infinite goodness and mercy, might be praised and glorified.

(a) The **Author** of providence: the God of infinite power and wisdom who created all things (Nehemiah 9:6).

(b) The **Definition** of providence: “upholds, directs, controls and governs” (see Daniel 4:35, Hebrews 1:3).

○ Negatively, God preserves His creation, otherwise it would turn into chaos.

○ Positively, God governs His creation, by making sure that His will is done. Providence ought to be tied with the Decrees of God – what God has decreed in eternity comes to pass in time by His works of providence (Ephesians 1:11).

(c) The **Objects** of providence: “all things ... both animate and inanimate, great and small.”

○ Inanimate objects such as the sun (Joshua 10:12-14), the star over Bethlehem (Matthew 2:2,9,10), storms (Luke 8:22-25), and vegetation (Psalm 104:14).

○ Animate objects such as ravens that fed Elijah (1 Kings 17:4,6), Balaam’s ass (Numbers 22:28), mouths of lions (Daniel 6:22), fish (Jonah 1:17, Luke 5:2-9), the heart of even kings (Proverbs 21:1), and the sinful actions of men (2 Samuel 16:10, Acts 4:27-28).

(d) The **Harmony** of providence with creation: “He fulfils the purposes for which He created them.” God has a plan for everything He created, and by His providence that plan comes to pass. For example, the sun and the moon to give light on the earth (Genesis 1:14-18).

(e) The **Goal** of providence: “His wisdom, power and justice, together with His infinite goodness and mercy, might be praised and glorified.” God’s glory is the goal of all that He does (Romans 11:36). It is by His wisdom that all the events of providence work together to glorify Him. This can only be accomplished because He has the power to do what He wants, yet everyone is treated justly according to what they deserve; those who are saved are monuments of His goodness and mercy.

The Relationship of Providence to the Use of Means

2. Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God’s providence. As God is the First Cause of all events, they happen immutably and infallibly according to His foreknowledge and decree, to which they stand related.

Yet by His providence God so controls them, that second causes, operating either as fixed laws, or freely, or in dependence upon other causes, play their part in bringing them about.

3. Ordinarily, in His providence, God makes use of means; yet He is free to work without them, to give them efficacy above what they normally possess, and even to work contrary to them, at His pleasure.

(a) Paragraph 2, lines 1-3 teach that all events, without exception, are included in God’s providence. Whatever God has purposed must come to pass (see Psalm 33:11, Lamentations 2:17). This might appear that we are only like toys

that God plays with; rather it shows that the very means God has ordained (including what we do) make a difference and are thus important.

(b) Paragraph 2, lines 4-5 teach that these means themselves are under the providential control of God. Many events which are done by men and seem unrelated yet produce a result predetermined by God. Ruth was a gift of the Lord to Boaz (Proverbs 19:14), yet she met him by ‘chance’ (Ruth 2:3). Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews all did what they wanted with Jesus yet it brought about the plan God had “predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28). This should teach us 3 things:

1. To cease from anxiety and complaining. Everything is under God’s control so that to be anxious is to doubt God, and to complain is to accuse God.
2. To reject the idea that what we do makes no difference (use of means). It does make a difference because God has ordained the use of means. For example, although victory in war has been predetermined by God (Proverbs 21:31), I must prepare my equipment and seek wise guidance (20:18).
3. To avoid the presumption that God will do what He has said without the use of means. We cannot expect God to save our loved ones if we do not pray for them. No one can be saved except through repentance and faith.

(c) Paragraph 3 teaches that God is free to work apart from means if He wants to. We can define such works as ‘miracles’.

God worked *without* means in the conception of Christ without a father (Luke 1:34-35).

God worked *above* means when Isaac was conceived by such old parents (Romans 4:19-21).

God worked *against* means when the bush was not burned (Exodus 3:2-3), the iron floated (2 Kings 6:6), and the furnace did not burn His servants (Daniel 3:27).

But it is a presumption to expect a miracle when the means are at hand as, for example, when medicine is not used in sickness. To demand a miracle is to tempt God (Matthew 4:5-7).

The Relation of Providence to the Fact of Sin

4. *God’s almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness are so far-reaching and all-pervading, that both the fall of the first man into sin, and all other sinful actions of angels and men, proceed according to His sovereign*

purposes. It is not that He gives His bare permission, for in a variety of ways He wisely and powerfully limits, orders and governs sinful actions, so that they effect His holy designs. Yet the sinfulness involved in the actions proceeds only from angels and men and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

5. *God, who is most wise, righteous and gracious, frequently allows His own people to fall for a time into a variety of temptations, and to experience the sinfulness of their own hearts. This He does in order to chastise them for sins which they have committed, or to teach them humility by revealing to them the hidden strength of evil and deceitfulness remaining in their hearts. His purpose is also to cause them to realize their need to depend fully and at all times upon Himself, and to help them guard against sin in the future. In these and other ways His just and holy purposes are worked out, so that all that happens to His elect ones is by His appointment, for His glory, and for their good.*

6. *God, as a righteous judge, deals otherwise with the wicked and ungodly men. He awards them blindness and hardness of heart for their sins. He withholds from them the grace which might have enlightened their minds and exercised their hearts, and in some cases recalls the gifts He had bestowed on them. Also, He sets them in situations which their evil hearts seize upon as opportunities for sin. In other words, He abandons them to their own innate corruptions, to the temptations of the world, and to the power of Satan, with the consequence that they harden themselves by the use of the very means which God employs for softening the hearts of others.*

(a) **Sin in general** (paragraph 4). There is no attempt made to explain the origin of sin. This section simply states the relationship of providence to sin as it is revealed in Scripture.

1. God not only permits, but actually directs and controls sinful acts. If it is said that God ‘permits’ then he permits only because it is according to His purpose, as it has been predetermined (see Genesis 45:4-5, 2 Samuel 24:1, Acts 2:23, 4:27-28).
2. God is not thereby the author or approver of sin (James 1:13-14). This is obvious, but it must not be used to cancel the truth under no. 1, as both are clearly revealed in Scripture.

(b) **Sin in Christians** (paragraph 5). Four purposes are listed in this section under the general heading of God allowing His people “to experience the sinfulness of their own hearts”.

1. “to chastise them for their sins which they have committed” – so David when he numbered the people, as if victory depended on numbers and not on the Lord (2 Samuel 24:1 & 1 Chronicles 21:1).

2. “to teach them humility by revealing to them the hidden strength of evil and deceitfulness remaining in their hearts” – so with Hezekiah who proudly boasted before the Babylonians of the riches he had (2 Chronicles 32:24-25,31); God also sent Paul “a thorn in the flesh..., a messenger of Satan” to keep him from pride (2 Corinthians 12:7).
3. “to realize their need to depend fully and at all times upon Himself” – so Peter, James and John that they might see the need to watch and pray so they might not enter into temptation (Mark 14:38,72).
4. “to help them guard against sin in the future” – so the experience of the Psalmist when he was envious of the wicked (Psalm 73).

(c) **Sin in the ungodly** (paragraph 6). God often hardens men for their previous sins (Romans 9:18, see also John 12:39-40, Acts 28:26-27, Romans 1:24-28, 11:7-10, 1 Peter 2:7-8). He does this, not by wicked influence, but

- by withholding His grace (Deuteronomy 29:4), which He is free to give or withhold as He wants;
- by letting them continue in their lusts (Romans 1:24,26,28);
- by exposing them, in His providence to such circumstances that they will harden themselves (Deuteronomy 2:30).

All this God does as “a righteous judge”.

The Relation of Providence to the Care of the Church

7. God’s general providence reaches out to all creatures, but in a very special way it is directed to the care of His church. All things are controlled providentially for the good of the church.

Who, if anyone, enjoys God’s special care? Is it the famous, the great, the political leaders, the Jews? No! It is the church. In what special place does God exercise this special care? Is it Jerusalem where the temple was? Is it Rome at the Vatican? Is it Mecca? No! It is where we, the church, are. It is for the sake of the church that everything in life happens (Ephesians 1:22, see also Romans 8:28, 1 Timothy 4:10). We must be encouraged by this even if we cannot see at present how God is working it out for good.

COMMON QUESTION NO. 15

DID GOD MAKE THE WORLD IN SIX DAYS?

This series of Answers to Common Questions can be found as an A5 size leaflet of 4 pages at <https://www.trinity.or.ke> in a format for printing and distribution..

Throughout the centuries Christians have believed that God created everything in just six days. As you open the Bible to the first chapter (Genesis 1) you read of six days and then God resting on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. It is only in the last 150 years or so that this view has been challenged with the rise of the theory of evolution. Is the Bible true? Has it been properly interpreted? Does it really teach creation in six 24-hour days? Here are some reasons for believing that the traditional understanding of the Bible is correct.

1. Genesis chapter 1 is written as history.

(1) There are the marks of historical writing (prose) and not of poetic style. The book of Job starts with history. In chapter 1-2 Job really did lose everything and he really did get sores all over his body. But from chapter 3 the style is poetic as he curses the day of his birth. There is a poetic account of Genesis 1:9-10 in Job 38:8-11 which is quite different! Hebrew poetry is marked by parallelism, for example “prescribed limits” and “set bars and doors” (verse 10), which say the same thing. But in Genesis 1 there is nothing poetic. The verbs are in the typical form of Hebrew narrative. The first verb (created) is in the Hebrew perfect tense, then the following verbs have ‘and’ with the Hebrew imperfect tense. We are told what the earth was like at the beginning (verses 1-2). Then God speaks and everything comes into being from nothing (ex nihilo) in six successive days.

(2) The rest of the Bible understands creation as history.

- God spoke everything into being – Psalm 33:6,9, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 11:3, 2 Peter 3:5.
- God made all things by His power and wisdom – Jeremiah 10:11-12, Acts 14:15, 17:24, Romans 1:20.
- Creation of man and woman – Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6, 1 Corinthians 11:7.

(3) The relationship of Genesis 1 with the rest of Genesis. Genesis is written in 10 sections, with the words, “These are the generations of ...” (2:4, 5:1, etc.). Every section is historical, and Genesis 1 is the introduction to the whole book.

Chapter 2 (from verse 4) is not another account of creation, but of what came from the earth, and in particular, man. It is a preparation for chapter 3 and the fall into sin.

(4) The use of the word “day”. The word is very commonly used in the Bible and almost always means a period of 24 hours, or that part when it is daylight. This is always true when used with a number, or morning/evening. Consider how it is used, both singular and plural, in Genesis 3:8,14, 4:14, for example. Occasionally ‘day’ is used for a period of time, and the context makes this meaning very clear. Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 are not exceptions, for to God the long one thousand years is as our ‘yesterday’.

(5) The words ‘evening and morning’. A clear indication that normal 24-hour days are being referred to in Genesis 1 is the repetition of the words, “there was evening and there was morning” (verses 5,8,13,19,25,31).

2. Six days of work and one day of rest is the pattern for our lives.

The pattern established by God at creation of six days of work and one of rest is the basis of the 4th. of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:8-11). It clearly states, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day”. This seven day week is universal. The command is to “remember” this Sabbath (or rest) day which takes us back to the days of creation.

3. Evolution is a theory which has fatal flaws.

If the Bible is so clear why do many people not believe it is true? It is not because such people have seen that we have wrongly interpreted the Bible, but it is because of the claims of science that puts God out of the picture from the beginning. It is obvious that no one was there when the world began so there are no witnesses to give testimony! Of course God was there! He knows what happened and He used Moses to record it in Genesis.

However, there are well meaning Christians who have sought to ‘reconcile’ the Bible and the theory of Evolution. The particular problem has been that whereas Genesis 1 speaks of just 6 days, scientists began to talk of millions and billions of years. Was there any way to fit in so much time into Genesis so that we could both believe the Bible and much of science?

First, there was the Gap Theory. The millions of years is put between Genesis 1:1, which is interpreted as the initial creation, and 1:2ff. It was popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. During the so-called gap everything was ruined

by Satan, and the following six days of ‘creation’ are God’s reconstruction. Among the many problems is that death would have been in the world before the Fall for it is in the gap that all the fossils were formed. It further contradicts the clear statements that God made *everything* in 6 days (e.g. Exodus 20:11, where heaven and earth includes all things).

Second, there is the Day-Age Theory, by which each ‘day’ is made a very long period of time. This may allow for the millions of years needed, but it is shipwrecked on the rocks of the order of creation. Much of science insists that the sun was former before the earth, but Genesis 1 has the sun created by God on the 4th. day.

Third, there is the Framework Hypothesis. This denies that the days are in any sense historical, however long. The claim is that ‘six days’ are a literary device to teach the theology of six days of work and one of rest. ‘Days’ 1-3 are seen as parallel with ‘days’ 4-6. For example, days 1 and 4 both have to do with light. But such parallels are superficial. The “expanse” in which the sun was put was made on the 2nd. day and not the 1st.

4. Conclusions

(1) The age of the earth. The earth is young, thousands and not millions of years old. The dating methods that scientists use have presuppositions. It is significant that there are rocks formed in recent decades from volcanoes that give dates millions of years old!

(2) Science and the Bible. Are they really contradictory? Scientists cannot demonstrate by experiment that the earth is millions of years old. There were no human witnesses, and it cannot be tested in a laboratory. There are only rocks and fossils, which have no labels, and differing interpretations depends upon differing presuppositions.

(3) Is this really important? If we cannot trust the Bible in its very first chapter, why should we trust it anywhere else? There is nothing more fundamental in the Bible than the teaching that the Triune God is the creator of everything. This is the basis of His absolute sovereignty, and of our total moral responsibility to Him.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Eric Abwao

Many Christians think that the Bible's teaching about Creation, as found in Genesis 1-2, is not that important. More attention is paid to the shifting theories of secular science as if they are more reliable. Eric Abwao, one the pastors of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi, shows us in this article how fundamental Creation is to the Bible's teaching.

Wagonloads of perspectives that contradict the Christian teaching on the origin of things – and especially that of man – have been adopted over the centuries. In these anti-Christian perspectives, human beings are seen as animated machines that just happened to come into existence for no intelligent reason and with no meaningful future.

The Bible presents a very different picture. It says that man is the very handiwork of God and in fact the jewel in the crown of God's creation. The Bible teaches the origin, duty and destiny of man.

“So **God created** man in his own image,
in the image of God **he created** him;
male and female **he created** them.” (Genesis 1:27)

The emphasis here seen in repeating the word ‘created’ has an impression of God putting exclamation points to not only communicate that He is the Creator but also that there is something special about man.

Why is the Christian doctrine of creation important?

Many important and biblically convincing reasons can be put forward to underscore the importance of this doctrine. This is a doctrine that has sadly suffered from neglect and compromise among many who profess the faith. In this brief article I would however like to focus on one of the important reasons for creationism – ***the importance of this doctrine to the Gospel.***

What the Lord Jesus Christ said is our model in His perspectives on this subject. Listen to what He says about Genesis.

“If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.
But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”
(John 5:46,47)

The Lord here says that one who believes in what Moses wrote would believe Him because he wrote about Christ. Among the writings of Moses is the book

of Genesis where the creation account is recorded. Moses wrote about Christ in Genesis 3:15 – about the coming Redeemer who would be pierced in the process of crushing Satan’s head. Genesis 12 talks about the great transformation that would come upon this world as a blessing through Abraham. Genesis 49 in which Judah is told that from him would come a world-ruling law-giver. As you go through other writings of Moses you keep seeing this point. Moses wrote about Christ. He did so in Deuteronomy 18:18, for example. The simple point is this; Christ has revealed Himself through the earliest books of the Old Testament.

We need to realize that Christ is here reminding us that Moses did not write from his own mind or experiences. He was simply an amanuensis – a penman for the Holy Spirit of God. It wasn’t that Moses was so brilliant. Moses was not even there when the world began but Christ was. The Holy Spirit of God told Moses this secret about the ultimate origin of all created things. The Holy Spirit told Moses about Jesus Christ. And so infinite authority can be attributed to Moses because He wrote the mind of God about Christ when he wrote Genesis 1. The six day creation time block, the order in which things happened and the manner in which things were created.

The Lord then asks a rhetorical question, “*If you don’t believe the writings of Moses, how will you believe my words?*” Moses and Jesus are both in the ‘truth speaking business’. You are not going to find Moses contradicting Christ or Christ contradicting Moses. Believing the words of Jesus is a life or death, heaven or hell issue. His words are life (John 6:63) and, “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” (John 3:36). If you reject the writings of Moses you will not believe the words of Christ.

Are you one who has given-in to the temptation to think that the doctrine of creation is one whose benefit is primarily or even only intellectual? That this doctrine is an area of vigilant study reserved for the intellectual Christians who debate the atheistic and agnostic thinkers of our day? Alas, the Lord here shows the importance of the doctrine of Christian creation for all who are keen on believing His words!

What is this doctrine?

Biblical creationism tells us that God created a perfect world within six literal twenty-four hour days. The Christian doctrine of creation does not accept that animals were dying and destroying one another (to say nothing of evolving) before Adam and Eve were created, and before they sinned. When man was created he was created perfect and given dominion over a perfect creation. Sadly

Adam sinned against God and experienced the fall and the curse of God upon himself and the entire world. His dominion was drastically affected when he sinned. We therefore read in Romans 8:19-22 that the whole creation was subjected to vanity, frustration, pain, suffering and death. The whole creation groans and travails in pain until now and that is because it was not created this way. It was a perfect work from the beginning.

Redemption deals with the whole question of sin and its accompanying consequence of death both in man and the rest of creation – a creation that is groaning for the restoration of things. Death was because of sin and it can only be dealt with by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

The doctrine of creation is witnessing

Paul's outreach to the gentile world with the Gospel clearly shows that the doctrine of creation is very important when we preach to the unbeliever.

“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” (Acts 14:15)

Here Paul, in bringing the Gospel to gentile unbelievers, quotes Exodus 20:11 and hinges his call to repentance unto faith in Jesus Christ in the doctrine of creation. Creation is a foundation to catch the attention of the unbelieving gentile. This doctrine of creation reminds us that we are accountable to the God who created the world and who cursed it because of our sins.

An important balance

In bringing up the importance of the doctrine of creation in evangelism, we need to be balanced. This doctrine is not a replacement for the Gospel. It is an essential doctrine but it is not sufficient for salvation. It is an opening wedge for the Gospel that shows people that we are not just end products of time through chance. We were designed and created by God and are therefore accountable to God. We must believe in His Son for our salvation from sin and ultimate death.

The Gospel must not be neglected in our efforts at understanding the doctrine of creation. And yet on the other hand, the doctrine of creation must be seen for the important role it plays – a necessary foundational role in understanding the Gospel. What should we therefore do in today's culture when we want to share the Gospel with people who are thoroughly indoctrinated with evolutionism and who have little to no understanding of the young earth creationism presented in the Old Testament? In preaching to them do we include

creationism or do we side-step it because of a concern that it will distract them from hearing the Gospel?

In Acts 17 Paul is dealing with pagan philosophers. We must not forget that these pagan philosophers have already heard him preaching the Gospel. In verse 17 we are told Paul had been preaching in the market place every day. The philosophers said Paul was a preacher of strange deities or gods because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection (verse 18). In other words Paul was telling them who Jesus Christ really was; God incarnate as confirmed by the fact that He died and rose again from the dead to prove that He was what He claimed to be. These pagan philosophers then asked Paul, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean” (verses 19,20).

Now take note of how Paul shows the importance of the doctrine of creation in preaching the Gospel as he basically tells the pagan philosophers, ‘You don’t know whom you are worshipping.’ *The God who made the world and everything in it*, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, *since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth*, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,... (verses 24-26).

In evangelism it is not enough to simply say that there is an ‘intelligent designer’ behind creation. We must also tell our hearers who is this ‘intelligent designer’. Paul shows us that the doctrine of creation is necessary but not sufficient when we present the Gospel. He does not just stop at this foundational teaching of creation. He is not satisfied with only saying that there is a Designer or Creator while failing to discuss who He really is. His attitude towards the hearers is not one that says, ‘it is just enough for you to know that the world was created by somebody.’ It is indeed essential to start with the doctrine of creation but at the same time we must remember that it is not enough to stop there if we will witness conversions to Christ that the apostle Paul saw at Mars Hill. So what additional thing did Paul say? Look at verse 30: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,...”

Paul tells them to repent – change their fundamental way of thinking and acting – because they will be judged by the God-man they were told about earlier (in verses 17-20). In other words, Paul began explaining the Gospel as the final outcome of the doctrine of creation. When Paul did this, God saved people; “...some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” (Acts 17:34)

I have two questions to ask you. Would these people have been saved if Paul only spoke about the doctrine of creation and not the Gospel? Secondly, would these people have given Paul their attention and listened to the Gospel of Jesus Christ if he had not taught them the doctrine of creation? The doctrine of creation is beautiful because it is perfectly matched and bonded to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of creation is part of a bridge that must not be broken. To emphasize it as if it is sufficient for salvation is wrong. On the other hand to compromise on it because we want to only focus on the Gospel is to say it is not essential. Both are wrong extremes today. We need to see creationism as an essential part of a beautiful bridge that runs from earth to heaven and from history to eternity.

In preaching the Gospel, we like the apostle Paul should always end up saying, “*in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). When Paul writes this he is foundationally (but not exclusively) dealing with the Old Testament. One has to have an Old Testament foundation in order to understand who Christ is. Paul in this statement shows us that we need the whole Bible, as our frame of reference, background and foundation, in order to know who Christ. In order to understand the true nature of Christ, His purpose of coming to earth and what it means when the Bible says He died, what is sin and who are sinners. The whole connection of the doctrine of creation and the Gospel is powerful.

Put another way, the book of Genesis is as equally inspired and important as the Gospel of John and the Letter to the Romans. In fact the latter build upon the former. If the writings of Moses are not literally true then we have no solid foundation upon which to build our understanding of who our Creator and Redeemer Jesus Christ truly is. No super-structure is more stable than the foundation upon which it is built and Jesus constantly appeals to Genesis. He confirmed Noah and the Ark in Matthew 24. He confirms Lot’s wife in Luke 17. Christ refers to, emphasizes and endorses the things recorded in Genesis. He knew in advance that people would have a problem with Genesis and He goes out of His way to endorse it. Even after rising from the dead, Christ appeared to utterly frustrated disciples who were walking on the way to Emmaus as they were mourning the death of the One they hoped would redeem Israel. Jesus drew near to them and beginning with Moses and all the prophets spoke to them the things concerning Himself. “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. *But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*” (John 5:46,47) Please take time to read the Bible – the only book that God has ever written – and discover Him as the Creator and yourself as the creature who owes your life, obedience and ultimately accountability to Him.

THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSY OF THE 21ST. CENTURY

Andy McIntosh

This article first appeared in the *Evangelical Times* of September 2008, and is used here with permission. At the time of writing the author was Professor of Thermodynamics at the University of Leeds and wrote in a private capacity. The thesis of the article is that Christians who fully follow the secular teaching of Evolution are downgrading the Bible from a book that is the Word of God, to a book that is at best inaccurate and not therefore to be relied upon in every respect if at all.

I have just finished reading Denis Alexander's new book *Creation or Evolution; do we have to choose?* and have realised just how sophisticated we evangelicals have become in justifying our disbelief. I have no doubt that Denis is sincere in his view that Genesis 1-3 is some sort of theological essay, but he is seriously in error regarding both the Scripture and the science.

Death before the Fall?

Like many before him, Denis Alexander tries to maintain that death has been with us since the creation of life, which he believes occurred some billions of years ago via some evolutionary mechanism under God's sovereign control. But this flies in the face of Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15 — which, of course, are predicated on the historicity of the Fall in Genesis 3. His treatment of 1 Corinthians 15 in particular is extraordinary.

In a chapter entitled 'Evolution and the Fall' he admits that Paul has to be referring to *physical* death in verse 26 ('the last enemy to be destroyed is death'). But he then tries to explain away the obvious implication, namely, that just as Adam brought sin and *physical* death into the human race, so Christ (the second Adam) brings resurrection and eternal life to the believer.

Verses 21-22 of this famous resurrection chapter read as follows: 'For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive'. Yet Alexander takes these important verses as referring to Adam by his rebellion introducing not physical death but spiritual death, thereby allowing for physical death in Alexander's view to be in human experience before the Fall.

But the seven-times repeated phrase 'it was good' in Genesis 1 (culminating in v. 31 with 'very good') is highly significant and the New Testament passages cited above demonstrate that human physical death was absent in God's original created order.

If physical mortality did not really begin with Adam's rejection of God's command in Genesis 2:17, then neither can we have confidence that 1 Corinthians 15 means what it says when it asserts: 'so in Christ shall all be made alive'. The hope of the physical resurrection is lost.

Extraneous to God's Word

How do we know when Scripture means what it says if we have to perform mental gymnastics to understand not just the text of Genesis but the New Testament as well? This is a serious matter and Alexander has followed many others who have wrenched the obvious meaning out of the passage to justify the assumptions of evolution.

If none of us had been exposed to the evolutionary philosophy that is pumped at us daily from every quarter, would anyone try to 'read' evolution into the Bible? The honest answer is no. Evolution is not in Scripture; the concept is foreign and extraneous to the Word of God.

That mankind knew no physical death in the beginning is integral with the gospel. Remove this and the gospel itself is weakened. Why did Christ die physically if the wages of sin is not physical death?

The author makes no reference to those who have written on the biblical arguments concerning this matter, such as Douglas Kelly in his book *Creation and Change*. By writing this book, Alexander has placed himself on the side of liberal theologians and, in this reviewer's opinion, has departed seriously from the evangelical faith.

Creation by the Word

Creation occurred by the spoken word of God — a fact which Alexander skilfully sidesteps in the opening chapters of his book. Christ is the pre-eminent person of the Trinity involved in Creation (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2-3) and elsewhere uses the same agency (his spoken word) to heal the sick, calm the storm and raise the dead.

These miracles occurred immediately he spoke — no prolonged process was involved. Why, therefore, should we not accept that the miraculous creative acts of Genesis 1 were similarly expedite? It is as written — God spoke and it was so.

Significantly, Alexander does not believe in the worldwide Flood. Quite apart from the specific testimony to a global flood in Genesis 7, his stance puts him in conflict with Matthew 24:37, where Christ states: 'As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man'. Christ's second coming will be global, so by the same token the Flood was global.

What is astonishing is his bald statement on p. 242 that there is no geological evidence for a global flood! Clearly, he is unwilling to engage with the great wealth of technical papers and books that have been written on flood geology.

The Grand Canyon; the vast Cretaceous layers across Southern England and Europe; the fossils of the Jurassic Northeast English coastline — where ammonites can be picked off the beach where they have been crushed by piles of sediment — all speak of catastrophe.

He may choose to interpret the sedimentary rocks as being laid down over millions of years, but to state baldly ‘there is no evidence’ for a world-wide flood is blinkered. No creation scientist claims to have all the answers, but Alexander ignores the serious scientific work that has been done over decades, producing a good body of evidence that actually fits better within the flood-geology paradigm than into a uniformitarian scenario.

Alexander doesn’t even mention the RATE project in which geologists Steve Austin, Andrew Snelling and others have shown that helium in the zircons of biotite in granites contains significant amounts of radiogenic helium — which should all have diffused away if the rocks were millions of years old.

Genetics

Neither does Alexander refer to other writers such as A. E. Wilder Smith who wrote the classic *The Natural Sciences Know Nothing of Evolution*. He even fails to engage with creationist literature in his own field of genetics, there being no reference to John Sanford’s masterful book *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome*.

Though we may not yet have the answer to the author’s proposal that what he calls ‘pseudogenes’ and ‘retroviruses’ are evidence of our common ancestry with the apes, Sanford presents important evidence on the nature of mutations. According to neo-Darwinian theory, random mutations are the source of variety on which natural selection works to select those that are advantageous, thereby gradually transforming a species. But Sanford shows that the vast majority of mutations are deleterious and that the human genome, for example, is fast picking up serious deficiencies which affect the phenotype negatively rather than positively.

Far from being an engine for beneficial change, mutations are a downhill slope. There are also implications in my own discipline of thermodynamics which (contrary to Alexander’s assertions on pp. 138-139) also shows that new biological machinery cannot simply arise by mutations.

Walter ReMine’s *The Biotic Message* and Thaxton and Bradley’s *The Mystery of Life’s Origin* both address these issues in depth, and yet no reference is made to these books in the author’s cursory treatment.

The genetic code

Alexander argues for the origin of the genetic code entirely by natural means but fails to grasp that information in systems is not the same as the matter and energy involved. There is no reference to Professor Werner Gitt's brilliant writings (see for instance *In the Beginning was Information*).

Gitt shows that information in biological systems — which is encoded by nucleotide triplets — *transcends* the matter and energy in the system. The code is not defined by the molecules of DNA/RNA, neither is the message (constituting instructions) defined by the code. A good analogy is that this article is not defined by the letters of the alphabet used to construct it, nor is the alphabet defined by the paper on which the article is printed.

Alexander also turns the design argument into a straw man, claiming that it simply amounts to a 'God of the gaps' hypothesis. But he fails to understand the design position. Evolution is a *paradigm* within which evolutionary biologists seek to explain their findings. Contrary to Alexander's assertions, the Design position is also a paradigm — an alternative to the evolutionary framework and one which often provides superior descriptions of biological systems.

Design cannot be a god-of-the-gaps argument because it is based on what we *know*, not what we don't know. Romans 1:20 states: 'His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead'.

The design thesis now gaining ground in the scientific world is precisely the reverse of Alexander's perception — the gaps arise in the just-so stories of the evolutionary camp. What can be understood from 'the things that are made' testifies to the awesome power of the Creator.

Creation and the Bible

In his postscript, Alexander weighs in heavily against Young Earth Creation and Intelligent Design, arguing that it is a waste of limited resources to give creationist lectures and build creationist museums. This money, he says, would be better used on direct preaching of the gospel.

I commend his emphasis on the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ, but how wrong he is to disparage the Creation issue and those who promote Creation! If he were to join me in preaching the gospel in the open air in any city centre, it would quickly become clear that the issue of origins is much in the mind of young people.

Such questions as: 'What about the dinosaurs?' 'Evolution has disproved the Bible, hasn't it?' and so on, are constantly asked by young people today. To

give uncertain answers to these questions is to lose credibility. To get a hearing for the gospel it is often necessary to first show people how Creation fits the known facts of science. Rather than Creation moving people away from the gospel, the reverse is true.

Many enquirers recognise the validity of a Bible-believing position where the early chapters of Genesis are shown to be entirely consistent with the scientific evidence. Added to this, many Christians have been blessed and encouraged to know that truth does not begin at Genesis 12!

Foundational Issue – Biblical Infallibility and Inerrancy

Creation is such a foundational issue that it has become increasingly important to address it within our churches and our evangelism. The Creation-Evolution debate will not go away as long as we proclaim Scripture as the Word of God. Why not? Because Scripture is clear in its testimony to creation and silent about evolution.

The vacuous philosophy of evolution is an enemy to the gospel, and for believers to embrace and endorse it represents the re-emergence of the downgrade controversy of Spurgeon's day — albeit on a different front. Genesis is infallible history and inerrant even in chapters 1-11.

To stand by the veracity and authority of Scripture cost Spurgeon and other faithful pastors of his day much, in terms of ridicule, even within their own denominations. In a similar way, scientists today who believe *all* the Scriptures, need to stand up and be counted on this important issue. It is the way of Christ, who calls us to stand for truth against error — to take up our cross and follow him.

Adam and Eve

To close, according to Alexander, Eve was not created out of Adam's side but they were simply a pair of Neolithic farmers whom God called to follow his ways. What is more, he believes that some humans were around at that time who were not part of what he terms '*Homo Divinus*'.

He even suggests (p. 275) that some Australian Aborigines may still languish outside the God-called community of humanity because they are not descendants of Adam and Eve! But Scripture makes it plain that 'He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26).

Significantly, there is one verse Alexander never quotes, namely: 'All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another' (1 Corinthians 15:39). This verse encapsulates the harmony of the whole Bible on this subject. Any notion of a common descent of all creatures

from some primordial soup of chemicals, not only contradicts Genesis but also undermines key statements in the New Testament

Robust response

I have every respect for Denis Alexander personally (we have debated each other on more than one occasion, the last being at the UCCF Word Alive conference in 2007). But in writing such a public denunciation of belief in Creation, the Fall and the worldwide Flood he undermines foundational truths in Scripture.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are witnessing the downgrade controversy repeated in our day — hence my robust response to this publication. Denis Alexander needs to rethink both his theology and his science.

He is right in saying that true science can never disagree with the Bible, but he has failed to realise that there is much that claims to be science that is actually speculation. When one separates out the scientific facts from their interpretation, there is nothing in the science that contradicts the straightforward statements of Genesis 1-11 — special *ex-nihilo* creation; the creation of animals and man without common descent; a real garden of Eden; the fall of Adam and Eve; and a worldwide flood consistent with the burial of fossils all over the world. Genesis is far, far more than a ‘theological essay’.

Creation Resources

1. Websites

Answers in Genesis – <https://answersingenesis.org>

Biblical Creation Trust – <https://biblicalcreationtrust.org>

Creation Ministries International – <https://creation.com>

Institute for Creation Research – <https://www.icr.org>

2. Books

Burgess, Stuart, *Hallmarks of Design* (DayOne, 2000)

Burgess, Stuart, Brian Edwards, and Andy McIntosh. *Wonders of Creation — Design in a Fallen World* (DayOne, 2017)

MacArthur, John, *The Battle for the Beginning* (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

Meyer, Stephen, *Signature in the Cell* (HarperCollins, 2009)

(there are so many more resources for the truth)

‘THE HALLMARKS OF DESIGN’

Stuart Burgess

This is a summary of his book, *Hallmarks of Design* (DayOne, 2000). This article was published in the Evangelical Times of May 2000, and is posted on their website with pictures. It is used with permission. Burgess is a professor of engineering design at the *University of Bristol*. The creation all around us shows unmistakable marks of design, which this article ably demonstrates.

The Bible teaches that God has left his hallmark on creation so that all people may know that there is a Creator. The apostle Paul says: ‘His [God’s] invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse’ (Romans 1:20). The appeal to design in nature as evidence of a Creator is sometimes referred to as the ‘design argument’. The design argument is very relevant and important today because so many people believe that there is no Creator and no Judge.

Our increased understanding of the complexity of nature means that the design argument has never been as strong as it is today. Many people do not realise how much the theory of evolution is restricted by its reliance on incremental change and natural selection. In contrast, an intelligent designer has no such limitations and can create extreme levels of order, complexity and beauty.

There are particular hallmarks of design in nature that provide strong evidence for a Creator. These include irreducible mechanisms; complete optimum design; added beauty; extreme similarity; extreme diversity; and man-centred features.

Irreducible mechanisms

An irreducible mechanism is one that must have several parts present simultaneously if the mechanism is to have a useful function. One example of an irreducible mechanism is the human knee-joint, because it requires at least four complex parts to exist simultaneously and in a complex assembly.

The femur and tibia bones are required to form a rolling joint, and the two cruciate ligaments are required to form a precise linkage system. It is extremely difficult to explain how the knee-joint could have evolved gradually by a series of random genetic mistakes, each affecting only one component of the structure. All the parts had to be present before a functioning joint could exist.

Irreducible mechanisms like skeletal joints not only give evidence of design but they also reveal the infinite power and wisdom of God. Solomon spoke of the

wonder of the growth of bones in the womb: ‘As you do not ... know how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything’ (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

Complete optimum design

Evolutionists often claim that optimum design in nature is evidence of natural selection at work. However, optimum design in nature is so complete that it actually provides evidence of intelligent design rather than evolution.

Evolutionists admit that if life had evolved there would be many vestigial (i.e. non-functioning) parts in humans and other creatures. Yet no indisputable vestigial parts have been found! Indeed, engineers have voiced so much praise for the design of living things that it is starting to become a source of embarrassment for evolutionists.

The concept of non-functioning parts is completely inconsistent with biblical teaching on the wonder of creation. If the human body contained vestigial parts, then the psalmist David could never have said: ‘I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14).

Added beauty

Beauty that has no physical function can be termed ‘added beauty’. An example in man-made objects is the intricate form of classical columns. Such columns need only a plain cylindrical form to perform their physical functions, but the designers embellish them with intricate patterns and shapes to produce a high degree of beauty. In a similar way, it is clear that there are features in nature that have been put there deliberately to provide beauty rather than function.

One striking example of added beauty are the feathers of certain birds, such as the peacock and birds of paradise. The evolutionist claims that these features evolved because birds with beautiful plumage compete best for mates.

But this theory relies on birds having a highly skilled aesthetic appreciation, which is very difficult to explain by evolution. Also, many species of birds survive quite happily without beautiful feathers. If colourful plumage were important for survival, all birds should be colourful.

Beauty in nature not only gives evidence of design but also reveals the goodness of God, because it is clear that beauty has been put in place for the pleasure of mankind.

Extreme similarity

Evolutionists claim that the similarities between different species in nature is evidence that all species are related through an evolutionary tree. However, similarities are just what would be expected from a Creator, so they cannot be assumed to be an evidence of evolution.

It is well known that there is deliberate similarity in the components of man-made products such as bicycles, cars and trains. The similarities between unrelated species in nature are often so extreme that they actually provide evidence of intelligent design and not evolution.

An example is the facial layout of humans, mammals, birds and fish. These different classes of creature have such different anatomical features that it is amazing how much similarity there is in the layout of their faces.

To explain these things, evolutionists appeal to ‘convergent evolution’, that is, creatures with completely different ancestors acquire similar characteristics (like flight in insects and birds). But where does this leave the evolutionary theory that similarity points to a common origin?

Extreme diversity

Evolutionists also claim that the diversity of life is evidence of evolution. But, as before, diversity is just what one would expect from a Creator. So the crucial question is whether the evidence points towards evolution or creation.

The diversity in nature is so extreme that it once again points to intelligent design and not evolution. For example, there are many creatures in nature that have unique features that could not have evolved from antecedent features.

One example is the hummingbird. This type of bird has a specialised wing structure and movement that enables it to perform extraordinary aerodynamic manoeuvres. It is so unique that evolutionists have found it impossible to hypothesise an evolutionary tree for the hummingbird.

Other examples of unique features are found in the platypus, camel, bombardier beetle and penguin. The psalmist aptly described the great diversity of life that God has made: ‘O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your possessions — this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great’ (Psalm 104:24-25).

Man-centred features

Since the theory of evolution is based on random processes, it could never produce a world containing so many features suitable for human survival and comfort. Examples of such features are a climate that allows human life to

prosper; fruits and vegetables remarkably well suited to the dietary requirements of humans; horses and other animals to provide transport; animal skins and wool for clothing; wood and stone for shelter; and so on. Natural processes such as the water cycle are highly suited to the needs of man.

The Bible often speaks of how the earth has been specifically designed for man. For example, the psalmist says: ‘He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart’ (Psalm 104:14-15).

The witness of creation

The witness of creation is summed up in the book of Job: ‘He does great things which we cannot comprehend’ (Job 37:5). Modern discoveries have shown that the order and beauty in nature are indeed too great to be comprehended by the human mind.

As we learn more about the awesome complexities of nature, the impossibility of evolution becomes more apparent. In Psalm 14 we read: ‘The fool has said in his heart there is no God’ (Psalm 14:1). Only a fool can look at the stars of heaven and the diversity and intricacy of life on earth, and say ‘there is no God’. Only a fool can look at the wonder of the human body and mind and really believe ‘there is no God’.

Matthew Henry summed up the foolishness of atheism in the following way: ‘Let us learn hence that atheism is folly, and atheists are the greatest fools in nature, for they see there is a world that could not make itself, and yet they will not own there is a God that made it’.

Pointing out the foolishness of evolution is both biblical and necessary today. There is a great need to tell our neighbours and friends that ‘all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens’ (Psalm 96:5).

The truth of creation should also be a great encouragement to Christians. Creation reminds us that God is infinitely wise and caring and well able to provide for our needs. It also reminds us that God is infinitely powerful and well able to save sinners. How we need to follow the advice of Elihu who told Job: ‘Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God’ (Job 37:14).

THE LIFE OF DAVID (10)

Keith Underhill

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

THE KINGDOM OF DAVID (2 Samuel 8)

The Lord had elevated David to the throne over His people Israel. This was according to His gracious promise, and by His powerful preserving. It is on this very throne that the Christ was to come and sit for ever (Isaiah 9:7, Luke 1:32-33). Therefore, all that happened to David in establishing this kingdom points forward to Christ Himself, who came to establish the kingdom of God. Right from the beginning of his ascension to the throne David faced the most hostile and general opposition from the heathen nations surrounding Israel. 2 Samuel 8 gives a detailed summary. We shall call them ‘the wars of the Lord’, for it is the Lord Himself who “gave victory to David wherever he went” (8:6,14).

1. THE WARS OF THE LORD

(1) Their Course

David was not the aggressor seeking to build a vast empire for himself. It was the nations that attacked Israel, stirred up by their hatred of the Lord and His people. They did not want to see a united Israel becoming strong. It was the Philistines who immediately attacked David when he was anointed as king over all Israel and Judah (5:17). Twice David defeated them. Chapter 8 is a summary of David’s many military victories.

- The Philistines to the west (8:1). By subduing the Philistines David achieved what Saul only started to do (1 Samuel 9:16, 2 Samuel 3:18).
- Moab to the east (8:2) became servants to David and paid tribute.
- Zobah and Syria to the north (8:3-8) were likewise defeated.
- Hamath further to the north (8:9-12) gave gifts and so came under David’s protection.
- Amalek to the south (8:12) was subdued and the spoil, together with that from other defeated enemies, was devoted to the Lord.
- Edom to the south-east (8:12-14) became subservient to David.
- The Ammonites to the east (ch. 10) became subject to David.

(2) Their Results

The wealth of the nations came to the Lord's people in preparation for the building of the house of the Lord (8:11-12).

David's kingdom came to include all of the land originally allotted to the 12 tribes. David ruled from the Gulf of Aqaba (south-east) and the river of Egypt (south-west) to the Euphrates river in the far north. This was what God promised Abraham, "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18-21). The promise was repeated to Israel through Moses (Exodus 23:31, see also Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 1:3-4). It is this land that David's son Solomon inherited from his father: "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 4:24).

David ascribes this victory wholly to the power of the Lord (see 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18). The Lord has faithfully fulfilled His promise made in the covenant, that "I will give you rest from all your enemies" (2 Samuel 7:11). In David and his kingdom God was revealing what would be the pattern for Christ's kingdom.

2. CHRIST'S KINGDOM

Why is this recorded in such detail? Is it no more than interesting (perhaps) historical information? It is much, much more. God is setting up an eternal kingdom over which His own Son rules. In the Old Testament kings, and in David in particular, God is prefiguring, or giving a shadow (type) of that kingdom to come. He shows so clearly that no earthly king, however great, can fulfil that role. All failed, to one degree or another. The great need is for the Messiah, His Son from heaven, to come and rule.

(1) Christ's Kingdom in the **Psalms**. The Psalmists speak of the dominion of the king in far wider language than was true of David, something only true of Christ the King. God speaks to the Son and tells Him, "I will make the *nations* your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (2:8). David writes that God made him the head of the *nations* (Psalm 18:43). Paul quotes from this Psalm 18 (verse 49) to the effect that these nations = Gentiles must praise the Lord for in Christ Jew and Gentile have been united (Romans 15:11). Psalm 22 describes the suffering of the king in language Jesus used (verse 1 in Matthew 27:46), and at the end declares, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the *nations* shall worship before you" (verse 27). In the great psalm of Solomon the king is to have "dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of earth" (verse 8), true of Jesus the greater than Solomon but not of Solomon himself. So Psalms

look forward to that time when the kingdom of God will encompass the whole world!

(2) Christ's Kingdom in the **New Testament**. The great theme of Christ's teaching was about the kingdom of God. It is how He started His public ministry, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). He taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). He said the kingdom had already come with Him, as evidenced by His casting out of demons (Matthew 12:28). His power over demons, over all manner of sickness and even death, showed the kingdom had come. But now He is exalted at the right hand of God that kingdom is continuing to come ever more gloriously. He is now ruling over absolutely everything for the sake of the people of God (Ephesians 1:20-22). On the last day every knee will bow before Him as the Lord, the King (Philippians 2:9-11). What the victories of David over all his enemies foreshadowed, Christ will accomplish at the last day.

(3) Applications.

- The reign of Christ always faces *opposition*. The history of the world is one of the constant opposition of the offspring of the serpent (devil, Revelation 12:9) and the offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15). As Stephen surveyed the history of Israel as recorded in Acts 7, he concluded that persecution has always been there, and it finally showed itself in killing "the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered" (verse 52). Think of how the devil and the hosts of evil spirits did their utmost to defeat our Saviour. From the beginning he tempted Jesus for 40 days in the wilderness. He thought that getting rid of Him through putting Him to death was the answer. Failing to defeat our Lord the devil now goes after the church (see Revelation 12:13-17).
- The reign of Christ shall certainly *triumph* against all opposition. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (the church)" (Matthew 16:8). All the enemies even if gathered together can only succeed "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:28). It is this very thing that Daniel foresaw as he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream: "... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (2:44). Many a time in history the enemies of God have wanted to totally destroy the people of God, the subjects of the kingdom. First it was the Roman Empire, then Islam, then the Inquisition, and most recently Communism. But, 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'. Spill the blood of Christians, and it only seems to result in there being more Christians! The final victory has been so clearly recorded before-hand for our encouragement. This is what the Revelation is all about, the casting of all

enemies into the lake of fire. What an encouragement this is to holy living without which we shall not see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) and participate in the final victory. It is a strong motive to fearless witnessing for the Lord, for who can be ashamed to be on the victory side?

- The reign of Christ is *universal*. It will include everyone, including everyone who reads these words. Now, through the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, those who willingly and believingly submit to Jesus as Saviour and Lord will enter the kingdom. But at the end none will be left defiant, refusing to submit to the King. Every knee will bow. If you will not do it willingly now, you will be forced on that day when he comes in all His glory. Hear these awful words: “Then the kings of the earth, the important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and all the slaves and free people hid themselves in caves and among the rocks in the mountains. They said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us, and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the anger of the lamb, because the frightening day of their anger has come, and who is able to endure it?’” (Revelation 6:15-17). This is the King we proclaim to you with urgency. Today He holds out mercy to you if you will but bow the knee to Him, laying down your arms of rebellion, and suing for peace because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He promises to be a true King to you, providing for you and protecting you from all enemies to the end. But, my friend, if you refuse, one day His patience and grace will come to an end, and he will break you as with a rod or iron and as easily as a potter’s vessel. He is King. Willingly acknowledge it!

The KINGDOM is a very big theme of the Bible:

- God promised David an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16).
The coming Messiah will govern David’s kingdom (Isaiah 9:7, see Luke 1:32-33).
Daniel looked forward to the coming of this kingdom (2:44, 7:14).
- Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven is “at hand” (Matthew 4:17).
The kingdom had come with Jesus, as the King had come (Matthew 11:28)!
Jesus’ parables were about the kingdom of God (e.g. Matthew 13).
Yet Jesus told us to pray for the future coming of the kingdom (Matthew 6:10).
- We enter the kingdom of God when we become Christians – by being born again (John 3:3,5), being humble like a child (Matthew 18:3-4), and are freed from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13).
- When Jesus returns, “the kingdom of the world (will) become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).
He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14, 19:6).

ESTABLISHING A NEW LOCAL CHURCH

Murungi Igweta

Establishing churches is part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). When the gospel has been proclaimed and a sinner has believed in Christ and saved from his sins, he needs to be baptized and added to a local church. If there is no existing local church, then it is necessary to plant a church where such persons would be added. After the preaching of Peter at the Day of Pentecost we read, “*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*” Added to the existing number to belong to the church in Jerusalem.

1) How do you begin the process of planting a local church?

1. *The involvement of the church and the man to be assigned the task of church planting.*

The first thing to note is that churches plant churches. Just as sheep give birth to sheep, never to goats. Yes, men have their calling but these men are to bring their gifts to the church. At their churches (if they are biblical, godly and healthy) their gifts will be noticed and nurtured. The saints led by their pastors will recognize the godliness of character and the giftedness of these men and will want to commission them for the task of church planting. The men who are to be sent out to church plant ought to be men who are elder-qualified. The qualifications for pastors laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are also to be demanded of those who plant churches. These qualifications are in three areas of life:

- i. Personal piety and godliness of character – blameless.
- ii. Domestic integrity – respectable.
- iii. Ministerial aptitude – trustworthy.

Unless a man has these qualifications, and is attested, and vouched by those who well know the man, he must not be called to any form ministry (let alone church planting work). The fruit of his faith must be tasteful by those who are near before it is recommended to others who are far. Let him be an example in conduct, in love, in faith and purity (1 Timothy 4:12) to those under his charge, keeping a close watch on himself and on his teaching (1 Timothy 4:16). The success of church planting is very tightly tethered on the godliness and

faithfulness of the man. These need to be keenly cultivated. This way the name of Christ will be glorified.

The involvement of the church in establishing another church is not just in the vetting of the church planter but also in praying for him. The work of church-planting must be begun by praying and watered in prayers (Ephesians 6:18-19). The growth of the seed of the gospel depends on God who also causes the harvest. The church is also involved in financially supporting the church planter so that he does not neglect the work of the gospel ministry to meet his immediate needs. The sending church ensures that the man who has been sent to church plant has his needs as well as the needs of the ministry met. Finding a house to live and a place from where to minister is a burden that must not simply be borne by the church planter. Moreover, the sending church should also be faithful in encouraging and upholding the man by constant and regular visitation. During some of these visitations, evangelistic efforts should be made.

2. The gathering of contacts to be a congregation.

The second thing about church planting is that it is about gathering people together for Christ. All the contacts known in the area should be established. Whether the *mama mboga* (greengrocer) or your cashier at the bank, or the M-pesa guy or your mechanic... whoever it is who is in your contact list in the area should be included in this objective. Visiting them in person and let them know of your plans to begin a church in their area. Invite them to the Bible study and prayer meetings. Beginning with the people you know; you are likely to know more people through them. It is also advisable to have gospel tracts, and contact cards which have your address and contacts. These are to be given to strangers as you share the gospel. Be deliberate about informing all the people that you come into contact why you are in the area.

When you have more than 5 regular people coming for the Bible study or prayer meetings, then you may as well begin the conversation of starting Sunday services. By this time, there is a possibility that some of them will want to have the Sunday ministry to commence. At this point you could begin studies with them about what a local church is. Show from the Scriptures and the confession of faith what is a local church. Build the house of God on the rock of God's Word. Let Christ Jesus be enthroned as the Lord and the only Saviour of sinners.

Children ministry should be started as soon as possible – even before the Sunday services! Sunday School ministry aims at bringing the gospel to the children, who are readily available, especially if you offer constructive activities that would attract their attention. This ministry is especially crucial in reaching out to their parents since they surely would want to know the adults who are

interacting with their children. As all this happens you continue building and increasing your contact list.

3. The teaching of the Scriptures must be central.

Begin multiple Bible studies and prayer meetings. Do not shy off from door-to-door evangelism or even open-air preaching – preach the word in and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). Consider Paul’s ministry in establishing the church in Ephesus and you will see that he did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, and teaching them in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20-21). Efforts towards teaching God’s Word are primary in the establishing of a local church. By beginning this way, you will more easily find out who is really interested in the Word of God, and who is committed from the heart to a biblical church.

Those who regularly attend Bible study or prayer meetings are more likely going to be members of the church. Their commitment to these meetings will be a fair thermometer of their possible commitment to the demands of a new local church. Preaching, teaching, and evangelism should be with the aim of getting people to come to the regular Bible study and must be both expository and evangelistic. The Bible study should always be based on a specific passage of the Bible, and preferably should go through a book of the Bible, such as John’s Gospel, or the letter to the Romans or should deal with basic gospel themes, such as sin, Christ’s death, faith and repentance.

4. The Public Worship

It is advisable to begin the worship services exactly as you would desire them to be and this can only be done based on how you worshipped at the sending church (unless you want to establish a different kind of a church, which need to be discussed with the sending church). It must never be forgotten that the central activity must continue to be the teaching and preaching of the word of God. Preach the basics of the faith – the authority of the Scriptures, the supremacy and holiness of God, God’s law and sin, the saving work of Christ, the demand of faith and repentance, the necessity of holiness. Preach from specific passages of Scripture, even a book of the Bible. Seek to promote the regulative principle of worship and do not fall into sensuality.

5. The location address of the church

The location address of the public meetings is necessary. Do not hide the church in backstreet and without a signpost or without contacts – phone numbers, email address and website. On this point I would gladly sit at the feet of the charismatic preachers. They know the best location for their churches, and they

are not ignorant of branding and advertising and promotion of their churches. I don't see anything wrong with this principle as it is drawn from what the Lord said, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven..."* (Matthew 5:14-16). Surely we want many people to profit from our ministry, and so it is right to have large signboard, or a well-designed banner and a functional website and anything that would make the church visible. We however need to be careful not to be like the world. The motive of advertising must not be to make a name for ourselves, by printing our images or our names on these banners, rather we are there to spread the honours and the glories of Christ's who is the Saviour.

2) How do you constitute the new church?

The final step is to constitute the local church. This may happen as soon as you have some who have been converted and who desire to be baptized. Or when most of those who attend the Bible study wants to be part of the new church. I could also add that if 10 people or more is a good number to begin with. The reason for this last reason is that if they are all faithfully going to tithe, then they can easily pay their pastor about similar amount they earn.

a) Membership

Constituting the church means that there are those who are true Christians, who recognize each other to be such, and who want to formally join as a church, promising to be faithful to God and each other. At the point of constituting the church, the sending church need to be involved. The Elders of the sending church should be called to help with interviewing those who want to join the church. They are also to lead in the covenanting service. To prepare the believers for this the following things should be done:

- Go through all the Bible studies on "Distinctive Doctrines."¹
- Study the church constitution together to see if you agree with it. If there are areas of disagreement with the sending church, this should be discussed openly with the leaders of overseeing church.
- Be sure you well know each other and are fully persuaded of the full commitment of everyone.

¹ https://www.trinity.or.ke/wp-content/themes/tbc_lite/assets/documents/literature/distinctive-doctrines.pdf

b) Covenanting service

The constitution service may include a solemn covenanting together of all the members, either by repeating or signing a written statement, or both, in which each member promises to carry out the responsibilities of church membership as outlined in the constitution. The objective is to seek to get this congregation to be together and to have things in common (Acts 2:44). It is meant to promote the unity of unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

c) Leadership

Although leadership is not part of constituting a local church, yet it is necessary to mention that after constituting the new church, it is necessary to think of the leadership next. Therefore, when the church has a membership of whatever number of people, the next step would be to establish an eldership. Begin by teaching them on what the Bible has to say on church officers. Do not assume that people know how the church is to be governed – you have to teach them that Christ is the Head (Ephesians 5:23) and that he has appointed under-shepherds, or pastors also called elders or overseers/bishops (Acts 20:17-28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7) 1 Pet. 5:1-4). This offer spiritual oversight in the church. They are to be assisted by deacons (Acts 6:2-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

d) The recognition of leaders

This is another step that is to be done with the help of the overseeing church. The elders of the sending church would come and conduct a members' meeting which is to appoint their pastor(s). They then would lay their hands on the man and set him apart for the gospel in the presence of the whole gathering so that they may recognize the man (or men) as their pastor(s). The newly appointed man should work towards adding more men into the eldership. In fact, because local churches in the New Testament always have multiple elders this should be considered from the very outset. Once the church has a functioning eldership, which means the men work well together, consulting with each other and make decisions together, then the process of establishing a local church is complete.

Trinity Baptist Church Nairobi began meeting in 1978 and many local churches in different parts of Kenya have been planted in God's providence. This article has been written out of these experiences in which there have been both successes and failures. Keith Underhill is presently writing a book on the history of the ministry in Kenya and the principles on which it is based. There will be much detail about the different efforts at church planting. There remains so much to be done in Kenya and around Africa and the world.

WE WON'T CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER UNTIL WE ARE TOGETHER

Brian Borgman

Brian Borgman is one of the pastors of Grace Community Church, Minden, Nevada in the US and this article was published on their website, on March 31, 2020: <https://www.gracenevada.com/why-we-wont-celebrate-the-lords-supper-until-we-are-together/>. Brian explains the necessity of the personal presence of the saints in gathering to partake of the Lord's Supper as one of the essential aspects of doing church - Christ's way, even under the adverse conditions brought about by Covid-19. This is important for our Biblical doctrine of the local church.

During this time of physical-distancing and isolation, some have asked about having communion during the live-stream service. Since we live-stream the singing and the sermon, why not live-stream the communion service and allow each family to observe it in their own homes? This sounds reasonable, but our New Testament ecclesiology will not allow us to do it. First, there is a general principle we have been pounding away at, and it is this: what is being live-streamed and participated in via the internet is not truly church, or the ecclesia. In order for the assembly (*ecclesia*) to be the assembly, *assembly is required*. This assembly cannot be a virtual assembly, it must be in person, a physical assembly. In our remarkable digital age, we miss something when we think we can duplicate things electronically. We cannot. We can no more reproduce the church virtually than the incarnation of the Son of God could have been a virtual incarnation. Flesh and blood requires flesh and blood (John 1:14, Hebrews 2:14). So although we are thankful for the technology that allows us to sing God's praise in our homes, hear God's Word in our homes, and connects us in an indirect way, what we are doing is not what the N.T. calls assembling. If that is true, then we definitely *could not* virtually participate in true *koinonia* around the bread and the cup.

The bread and the cup are one of the reasons the church gathers. We cannot miss this, especially in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Luke had already emphasized the corporate nature of the church in the book of Acts (Acts 1:6, 2:6, 20:7). There is an emphasis on the gathering of the church in one place. Paul emphasizes this in 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33-34. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the body of Christ, by the body of Christ, within the assembled body of Christ. John L. Dagg argues in this way, "The rite was designed to be social... [it] requires that it be celebrated by a company... The rite should be celebrated by the church, in public assembly."

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance that Jesus gave the church which underscores not only His sacrifice for our sins, but the church's unity with each other. Paul emphasized this in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, the one loaf represents the unity of the body. Bobby Jamieson makes this point:

The Lord's Supper enacts the church's unity. It consummates the church's oneness. It gathers up the many who partake of the same elements together, in the same place, and makes them one. So to make the Lord's Supper into something other than a meal of the whole church, sitting down together in the same room, is to make it something other than the Lord's Supper. So, it's not the case that a virtually mediated, physically dispersed Lord's Supper is less than optimal: it's simply not the Lord's Supper.

Our ecclesiology, the doctrine and practice of the church, requires us to think corporately (which is contrary to our individualistic culture). Our ecclesiology demands that we think about the nature of the Supper and the particulars of its observance. What the N.T. teaches and our forefathers confirmed is that the Supper is never an ordinance for individuals or families. It is for the gathered local church. (By the way, this is why we do not administer the Lord's Supper to the sick, or at a wedding. When we administer it to the sick, we reflect a sacramental view of the Supper which is unbiblical. When it is administered to a couple at a wedding, we inadvertently do the same thing).

As sad as it is, the Lord's Supper is one of the critical areas of church life that we are simply going to sorely miss. It is our prayer that it will indeed be missed, its absence painfully felt. But here is something to apply to your own heart: if you are not in the habit of being present at the Lord's Table under normal circumstances, then your heart will not long for it under these unusual circumstances. To not miss the Supper is an indisputable reflection that the words, "Do this in remembrance of Me," have not gripped you.

During this time of COVID-19 there are things that we are going to miss and should miss. We should miss seeing each other face to face, giving each other warm greetings, hearing the Word *together*, singing *together*, praying *together*. We will do our best using the means that we have for the Word to still go out, for the songs to still be sung. But we all know it is not the same. But there are other aspects of life together that cannot and should not be done by using any means possible, and the Lord's Supper is one of those things. So, let your heart yearn for it, look forward to it with eager anticipation, and let its felt absence drive you to a greater appreciation for it. May the next time you hold the bread and cup, next to the believers seated on either side of you, may you eat and drink with tears of joy for a wonderful Saviour who has reunited you to your family around His table.

THE CHRISTIAN WEDDING

Murungi Igweta

A public wedding ceremony is conducted so that two people, a man and a woman, can begin to live together as a new family unit, for companionship and, if God is willing, to raise a family. The institution of marriage is under severe attack in our day, although it is instituted by God from creation (Genesis 2:18-25). This is a further reason why the doctrine of Creation is so important! The attack is on two fronts:

- (1) The persons who may marry each other. Same-sex ‘marriage’ is being recognized widely although such sexual relationships are an abomination to God.
- (2) The institution itself is seen as not necessary. Many couples begin to cohabit and for various reasons do not go through any kind of wedding ceremony. They may have a ceremony later. Many women prefer to live as singles yet bear children as they have liaisons. The Bible calls this immorality, whatever the world may say.

We include this article so that as Christians we are not conformed to this world, but do everything to the glory of God, including and especially our wedding day. (Editor)

This is the fourth a series of articles on marriage matters.

We know that the Bible is sufficient for every aspect of the life a Christian. However, it should be noticeably clear from the outset that the Bible does not have much to say directly about weddings. So we have to draw principles from the Scriptures in this discussion. There is no clear text in the Bible to teach us what a Christian wedding looks like. However, the Bible has a lot to say about marriage!

What this means is that you must not lose your vision in planning for the wedding because it is a one-day event while marriage is the goal and is life-long. Many courting couples fight over the details of their wedding and yet it is something that does not last even twenty four hours. Therefore, I will not devote much of my ink on the subject of the wedding. There are enough firms that help with wedding preparations so that I do not need to say much. However, I desire to inject objectivity and reason in the matter so that you do not begin your marriage, which is what matters, with regret out of burdens of debts, disrepute and anxiety.

A wedding is not:

- 1) An occasion to indulge in worldliness, but a God-given opportunity to thank him and glorify his name for his gracious provision of a spouse. God says, *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the*

Lord (Proverbs 18:22). Greed and drunkenness are to be banished in Christian weddings, and all worldliness.

- 2) An exhibition of pride and vainglory. Many people do weddings to parade their wealth and their financial muscle. Do not try to outshine your classmate in your wedding just because you have got money. Materialism has crept into the church in the name of presenting something glorious and beautiful. Although I understand that parents can exert a lot of pressure on their children to have weddings of a particular kind and size, the above perspective must be maintained..
- 3) A five-star restaurant. People go to great lengths in displaying their rich tastes for a variety of cuisines in weddings. People do not have to eat white rice, *Biriani* and *Pilau* all at once, since ultimately it is all rice! There should be no pressure to slaughter five bulls, and 10 goats, and 12 lambs, and 200 chickens, and still have *tilapia*, and Nile Perch, and *omena*, and still have lobsters, and cat fish, and mud fish, and still have *mutura*! After we have had all these types of food at your wedding, a week down the line, we shall not remember what we ate!
- 4) A melting pot for culture. You do not need to obey all the cultural demands to have a wedding done their way. In fact you do not have to pay your dowry for a Christian wedding! If it is a traditional wedding, then cultural demands have to be honoured but for Christian wedding, no one can stop it just because you did not pay the dowry – even the parents!
- 5) A discotheque. Do not feel the pressure of hiring a live-band. You do not need to hire Churchill to be the Master of Ceremony for your wedding. Sensuality in dancing in the name of celebrating is worldly. The dress-code of believers should remain modest. Showing one's flesh and curves is not for believers. It shocks me how believers dance in all sensuality at weddings! It is as if all Christian modesty is removed and people turn into something else! Do not let the DJ or the MC choose songs for you. Choose the songs you want played before the wedding day and make it clear that you have good reason for choosing those songs. Otherwise, they may shame you by playing sensual and wicked songs.

Pastoral Counsel

What I am advising you is DO NOT FALL INTO DEBTS trying to please the crowd. Do not take a loan (either from a bank or Sacco or your parents or other relatives and friends) for your wedding! Even if your parents and relatives make demands, do what you can afford. Live within your means. You do not need a fundraising committee in your place of work and another one at church, and yet

another in town for your colleagues and then in your parents' rural home have a pre-wedding to raise funds.

It is morally wrong to decide all the things that you want in your wedding and then ask others to pay for it. If you must have such fundraising, then lots of discretion in giving needs to be encouraged. People must not be coerced to give. I remember a wedding planning committee where we were told, all the committee members to give 10K and if you can't then leave the committee. The following week there was not one committee member remaining, even the chairman who made the demand!

A wedding is for:

- 1) Marking the beginning of your marriage. You exchange vows and commit to marry each other in the presence of God and many witnesses. You do not have to do a church wedding if you are Christian, but it is a most fitting thing to do where possible. It is alright to do it at the Attorney General's office with just two friends. I believe that the reason the Lord does not legislate how weddings are to be done, is precisely because all you need to do is make it public.
- 2) Your wedding day is a day to glorify and praise God. Thank the Lord God who has given you a husband or a wife. It is because you have obtained favour from the Lord that you can have your wedding. Let the whole occasion be a time of thanksgiving and praise to God. Be deliberate in choosing good hymns and Christian songs that will promote His glory. Therefore, let the day be filled with reverence and holy joy. Do not allow for course joking and jesting. Make sure that your MC is not going to be a man given to simply wanting people to laugh at the cost of God's glory.
- 3) It is an occasion for the gospel to be preached. Make sure that the Word of God is given priority over anything else. Many Christian weddings give priority to singing and dancing, to eating and drinking, to photos and videos, but you must seek to have the word of God given all the priority. Do not identify a man to preach who does not preach the gospel. You surely want your folks and friends to hear the gospel and be brought to the knowledge of Christ, don't you? Therefore, ensure that the preacher is going to have any of the texts that amplify the gospel in the best way possible.
- 4) It is an occasion to honour and thank your parents. Do not do what amounts to dishonouring your parents according to the Word of God. I do not mean that you honour each one of their whims, but that you be deliberate in not bringing any shame to them. If your parents prefer that you do a church wedding in preference to the civil wedding at the AG's, please do it. If they

ask you to do certain things that are not in accordance to the word of God, then you must obey God rather than men.

- 5) It is an opportunity to set record straight on what marriage is from a biblical standpoint. Let the minister officiating use the occasion not only to instruct you but also to remind the audience on what Christian wedding is. Do not ask someone to officiate who you are not sure how he is going to do things – if this is not your pastor you should attend another wedding which he would be officiating lest you be surprised.

Weddings in the Bible

It is interesting to notice that there was no wedding ceremony for Isaac and Rebecca in Genesis 24 even though elaborate instructions are provided on how Abraham sent his servant to look for a wife for his son! There are the following references to weddings.

1. Song of Songs 3:11
2. Matthew 22:2
3. Luke 12:36
4. Luke 14:8
5. John 2:1

We have wedding illustrations used over and over again by the Lord in the New Testament. He compared himself with the bridegroom in Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19, and Luke 5:34. However, no elaborate instructions are given in Scripture as to how it is to be done. What is clear is that weddings were public occasions. Since this is a public institution involving more than one party, it does involve families (the father and the mother of both the groom and the bride) giving away their children to marry. Clearly this is a public occasion and so the couple must not begin living together before the following:

- 1) The groom-to-be is granted consent (without any coercion or duress) by the bride-to-be. This is a decision that must be made and communicated in the clearest terms not only to the man but also to the parents and the pastors and other brethren, relatives, friends, and colleagues.
- 2) The parents of the bride give permission, unless they are being unreasonable, such as requiring that the groom must have certain education or complexion, or from a particular community or tribe or race, etc. The choice of the spouse is a right reserved to those getting married.
- 3) Counsel should be sought before firm commitments are made from all the people who in your life matter. Make sure that your parents and your pastors give their counsel before you begin the relationship, and even while in it and after marriage. In the multitude of counsellors wisdom is not lacking.

What does a Christian wedding look like?

Priority in a Christian wedding is not in the glamour, pomp and colour. Rather it is in godliness, purity and supremacy of Christ. More than your joy and fulfilment seek the glory of Christ in your wedding. The clamour for glamour to impress your former and present classmates, your former and present colleagues at work, your former and present friends is an evidence of being self-seeking and vain-glorious.

What is the place of make up on the bride? It is my judgement that we should seek to be deliberate to be as natural as possible, for we are fearfully and wonderfully created. I do not find it amusing that some of the brides would have such heavy make-up that it would be almost impossible to recognize them, so that when the groom sees her, he is shocked! The Lord is clear that external adorning is not preferred, instead he prefers the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in his sight is very precious (1 Peter 3:3-5).

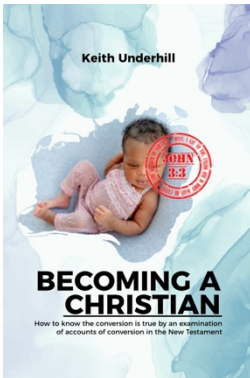
Is it right for brides to wear white gowns when they have not been chaste? Should white gown only be reserved for the virgins? The answer is a resounding YES! The white gown communicates a message that the person has kept herself chaste and pure. It should also be noted that if the girl has been chaste ever since she was converted, that this is also acceptable. Common grace teaches that it would be hypocritical to have been involved in fornication and sexual immorality and still want to send the message of purity. The gentleman should also dress in such a way that he does not send any hypocritical message to the people.

Another aspect of the wedding is the need to be punctual. On this I have been the most discouraged. On one occasion, I was told that the wedding will begin at 10.00 am and the bride turned up at 1.30 pm! It is dishonouring to the name of the Lord when our words cannot be trusted. It is also disrespectful to the people attending the wedding that you told them that the wedding will begin at a particular time and it does not. Is it fair to expect the pastor to apologize to the people for your lateness?

Finally, we live in a very materialistic culture, which is influenced by the media and other companies that wants to make business. Wedding planning companies have multiplied in the last 10 years. Catering companies are also making a killing trying to get as much profit from their clients. Photography and videography companies are not left behind and the glamour is exaggerated, thanks to their high end editing programs and applications – but all these my friend come at a cost.

‘BECOMING A CHRISTIAN’

This article is the Foreword to a new book published by Grace & Truth Media and distributed by Reformation Hub in Nairobi. We want this page to whet your appetite to read and spiritually benefit from the book. Please go to the Reformation Hub website at <https://www.trinity.or.ke> or click on <https://wa.me/p/4037438959651260/254700456363> to order the book.



Stories of God’s abounding grace to sinners are always a welcome music in a believer’s ear. I love listening to testimonies of conversions when interviewing people for church membership. But when these stories are told by God himself in his own Word, they become life to others. This book *Becoming a Christian* captures nineteen biblical testimonies of salvation of various people in the New Testament. Some people were indeed brought from death to life like Zacchaeus while others had spurious faith like Simon Magus – it is a very surgical analysis.

The book divides into three parts: Conversions in the Gospels, Conversions in Acts and Part III covers Conversions in the Letters. Each testimony deals with different aspect of salvation so that this would make an excellent read in straightening any one’s theology on the doctrine of salvation. For instance, if you consider the Conclusion which gives the order of salvation (*Ordo Salutis*) then you will see the rich and biblical soteriology that he presents so powerfully.

Education is all about grouping of information and classification of data. Keith Underhill, who is himself a trained educationist, has done a great job in helping us see how God moves in mysterious ways as he saves different individuals and groups of sinners in providence. There is no doubt that God turns around lives of different people graciously, yet in time and space, by the power of his gospel to bring them to the feet of Christ. It helps to see that while some people may remember the hour of grace and may rejoice like Saul of Tarsus, yet the vast majority of believers may never really know with certainty when the Spirit replaced their hearts of stone with that of flesh like Timothy.

The author is himself a recipient of God’s grace and an experienced pastor with over 40 years ministry in Kenya. He was both a pioneer missionary and a church planter, having planted Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi in 1978 by God’s help. Therefore, his wise counsel on a true testimony of conversion in the appendix is so helpful and practical. Questions such as, “What does a Biblical testimony of conversion look like? How can you know if your testimony is genuine?”

What should you listen for in a person who is giving a testimony in order for them to be brought into church membership?” come in handy, not just for a young believer examining one’s own conversion, but also for a young pastor who is planting a church and even for a pastor who wants to panel beat a church that wants to move in a more biblical direction.

The book tells these stories with crystal clarity and toddler’s simplicity and yet with deep insight, tightening each thought by a careful exegetical hermeneutic. He carefully admits the danger of getting our doctrine from experiences recorded in the Bible, and labours to back up any conclusion made with specific doctrinal statements through exposition of passages. The end result is a breathtaking tapestry of God’s grace in the salvation of sinners.

May this book be used of God to draw his elect from every corner of the earth to Christ. May the church of Christ be strengthened as people see how God saves sinners. But most importantly, I pray, that all these will be to the praise of God’s glory.

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HOW CHRIST SAVED ME

Martin Kimiti

We bring you a testimony of someone who has recently been received into church membership to be a concrete illustration of what it means to be a Christian. Sadly so many are deceived into thinking they are Christians when they are not, as Martin found out. The Bible has many warnings about deception – read some in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 15:33, Galatians 6:7, Titus 3:3, 1 John 1:8, 3:7.

The first step in becoming a Christian is when you see yourself as lost in sin and know there is nothing you can do about it yourself. That is when you go to Christ and put all your trust in Him who died for sinners. This is what is clear in Martin's testimony. It is what is explained in detail from the many reported conversion in the New Testament. You can read these in Keith Underhill's book, *Becoming a Christian*. There is no more important subject about which you must be certain you have it right! (Editor)

Martin was baptized along with his wife, Lilian, on the 13th of March 2021 morning and together were received into the church membership at Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi on the same day.

My name is Martin Kimiti raised in a religious family, so I was surrounded with Christian beliefs and church activities. I followed through the dos and don'ts and everything I was supposed to do though still rebellious and naughty as I grew up. There was no explanation of why we do what we do... we were raised to know that's just how we should act, believe and follow as a Christian family. So I didn't have a close walk with God nor know about him, I just knew about Him as the reason we do what we do.

I grew up branding myself a Christian without commitment to Christ or in-depth belief. But one Sunday during a preaching on the love of God I was convicted and responded to an altar call and repeated a prayer and again that reaffirmed my brand of a Christian without discipleship or anyone to guide me on what had just happened, what next and why was it important to do so. I later went back to my ways and again I would respond to another altar call and still relapsed to my old ways of sin and this became a pattern to occasionally repaint myself and rebrand as a Christian.

Still in my involvement in church activities I was one day invited to a Bible study and like any other Christian activity I agreed. The teaching was different and somewhat new as it centered on Christ and not, 'Five keys to the kingdom', or 'the eight principles of making it in life as a Christian', 'Six ways to access kingdom prosperity', and other teachings I was used to in the Charismatic world. I found myself convicted of how vile my sins were and how far I was

from Christ despite Christian work for Jesus as I thought. What it meant to be a believer and to be a follower of Christ was aptly explained from the Bible.

Day by day as those brothers shared with me I was more and more convicted of my ways and my fallen nature and my need to put my confidence in Christ to make me his disciple than my own efforts and activities. At that point I confessed and acknowledged that I am a sinner and in need of the mercies of God to forgive me and make me His child. I asked him to forgive me for the deception of thinking my works made me acceptable to Him without His pardoning mercy or saving grace. I acknowledged that He sent Jesus Christ as the Redeemer to die on the cross so that I can be saved from my sin and have eternal life. I believed in Jesus Christ as my only Saviour. I committed to living for God and to do the things I do out of worship and not to try to impress God or earn His love points or Christian points. But I never publicly confessed my sins to a body of believers nor was I baptized.

Since revealing himself to me and helping me know Him, God has showed me and is still showing me that being a “Christian” isn’t about doing good works. He made it clear that I do not have to earn my salvation or His love but only through himself alone and by his sacrifice on the cross. He has given me assurance, confidence and joy. I am not perfect and I am still a messy sinner, but God loves me despite my flaws and imperfections and sees me through his son Jesus Christ who has credited his righteousness in my account and so God doesn't see me in my bankruptcy of his standards but through the immeasurable richness, perfection and righteousness of His Son who has paid my debt and continually looks at me and deals with me through His Son’s account.

He has graciously shown Himself to me and still is in His Word day by day. He loves me and has loved me even at my lowest point and has rescued me from my deserved punishment, my carnal self and eternal separation from Him.

I am eternally grateful and I can only respond in repentance, worship and prayer that he helps me seek him, walk with him and helps me stand upright in this walk until He can present me to the Father as his blameless child.

I am seeking to be a member of TBC to be attached to a body of believers who are of the same belief as myself and an army of Christ to who I shall be accountable, to love, to learn and encourage each other in this journey of faith until we enter the gates of glory.

THE REFORMED BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF KENYA (RBAK)

Murungi Igweta / Keith Underhill

What is an Association of Churches?

A *church* is an assembly, a gathering together of Christians in one place to worship and serve the Triune God. We call this a local church. There are thousands of such local churches all over Kenya, and indeed all over the world. Should there be a relationship between these various local churches, and if so, what should that relationship look like? Generally speaking, there are three responses:

- **Isolation.** The local church considers itself totally independent from all other local churches and carries on its life and ministry by itself. This is possible for larger, mega-churches to do.
- **Association.** The local church considers itself independent, but wants to be in fellowship and co-operation with other local churches without compromising its independency. Advice, help, and joint ministry is received, but the final decision on all matters lies with each local church.
- **Denomination.** The local church is not independent, but is joined with other local churches in an organized structure where decisions are made at the top to be carried out by all the local churches in that organization. The top may be called the General Assembly where decisions are made that are binding on all churches involved.

As Reformed Baptists we believe in Associations of Churches, whether they be regional, national or even international Associations. We believe it is wrong to be isolationist, acting as if there are no other local churches with which we can be in fellowship. We also believe that the denominational structure is not biblical as it compromises the independency of each local church. For example, it is wrong for the 'Headquarters' to send a pastor to a local church without the agreement of their members, or to require that offerings from every local church be centralized.

Are there any Biblical examples of Associations?

The precise form of an Association may differ, but there is Biblical evidence that there ought to be fellowship and co-operation between local churches:

- ★ Christ prayed for unity. It is the clear will of the Lord of the churches that His people be one (John 17:21-23). It is an observable unity, for the purpose is “so that the world might know...”.
- ★ The church in Antioch looked for help from the church in Jerusalem over false teaching (Acts 15:1-2).
- ★ Paul organized Churches to help needy brethren in other churches (Romans 15:25-27, 2 Corinthians 8:1-7); gospel workers from one church were supported by others, whether financially, or with hospitality (Romans 16:1-2. Philippians 4:10-20, 2 John 5-11, 3 John 8-10).
- ★ There was communication between churches (Colossians 4:16), and greetings were sent from one church to another.
- ★ Local churches in a particular region are called ‘churches’ (plural) and not ‘church’ (singular) (Galatians 1:1,22).

What have Reformed Baptists done in past History?

The Reformed Baptists of the later seventeenth century (then known as Particular Baptists) wrote the following in their Confession of Faith of 1689, chapter 26, sections 14-15:

All members of each local church are engaged to pray continually for the good and the prosperity of all churches of Christ, wherever located, and upon all occasions to assist all other believers, within the limits of their own areas and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces. It follows, therefore, that churches should seek fellowship with one another, so far as the providence of God provides opportunity for the enjoyment of such benefits.

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.

The Northampton Baptist Association in England is well known for its involvement in sending William Carey as a missionary to India in 1793. In America the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

What is the Purpose of the Association?

The RBAK has 6 purposes stated in its constitution:

1. **Strengthening churches.** The general purpose of the Association is the strengthening of the local churches who are members. There is one formal gathering of all members in the year over a number of days, called the General Assembly.
2. **Fellowship.** The Association seeks to provide the local churches with a formal fellowship for mutual encouragement, assistance, edification and counsel, through which they can better fulfill the purposes for which they exist. All member churches have the same confession of faith and so are expected to do things biblically. For example, any churches struggling in matters of leadership and membership could request help from representatives of other churches. Sometimes such issues are so difficult to deal with from within the local church.
3. **Teaching.** The Association seeks to provide a forum through which doctrinal positions can be articulated, propagated and differences settled. This may be through ministerial training and publications, all of which are often beyond the ability of one local church to fulfil. For example, the issue of the attitude of local churches to seeming Government interference in the functioning of churches during the pandemic.
4. **Ministry.** To strengthen the individual churches' efforts in evangelism, missions, church planting and any other projects beyond the ability of a single local church to fulfil. For example, various local churches might agree to support a church planting project together.
5. **Resources.** The Association seeks to make resources available for the churches. It may be literature, Sunday School materials, or helpful contacts.
6. **Non-political.** It is important to state that the Association is non-political and will not engage in political activities.

We hope you can see the need for like-minded churches in Kenya to work together while preserving the independence of each one. The requirement for membership of the RBAK is adherence to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Are you part of such a like-minded church? If so, as the present co-ordinator of

RBAK, wish to extend invitation to our 2021 Annual General Assembly on the **7th to 11th of October** at the premises of **Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi** in Donholm. Should you wish to know more about these meetings, please feel free to contact the Coordinator on either email – migweta@gmail.com or by phone – 254726067369.

The idea of an Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in Kenya began in the early 1990s. A number of churches had been planted and it was at this time that a group of churches (called Bible Faith Church) asked to come under our registration as they could not secure their own. We were willing to do this but at the same time it put us in a difficulty. If a church came under our registration with the Kenya Government then they had to abide by our church constitution. On the other hand, we did not want to start a TBC denomination. Starting an Association on the basis of a common acceptance of the 1689 Baptist Confession avoided the denominational trap but also helped in ensuring churches followed the constitution, for by virtue of registration TBC Nairobi is ultimately responsible for all such churches. A constitution for the RBAK has been approved by member churches, but the Association is not yet formally registered with the Government because of a dispute over the word ‘Baptist’.

The first gathering of church representatives took place in 1998, and there has been a general assembly almost every year to date. Although Nairobi held the registration, is central and TBC has the best facilities we purposed not to hold it constantly there to seek to minimize the ‘mother church’ conception. We ask local churches to volunteer to host it. Out of about 20 Nairobi has hosted one-third, and various places in west Kenya also one-third. The first meeting saw 7 constituted churches represented. We also encourage church plants which have not yet reached the stage of constituting as local churches to be in attendance. There are now about 20 member churches and there are 30-40 participants at the meeting.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for the Association is that it has members widespread over the country. Most churches are cash-strapped so travelling great distances becomes a problem unless proper forethought is given. It makes local churches hesitant to host the meeting although we always say we have not come to feast! This has also tended to hinder getting together in each other’s churches during the year, unless churches are in the same County. With almost universal phone network keeping in contact should now be much easier. So the RBAK is still a work in progress.

THE NEW CREATION

The theme of this issue of Grace & Truth has been ‘Creation’. God made the heavens and the earth and He pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). He made Adam, and his wife Eve, and put him under probation. If he passed the test he would have been blessed beyond imagination. But he fell, and with him the whole creation was put in “bondage to decay” (Romans 8:20-21). God’s great plan of salvation is much more than saving individual sinners; it is to completely restore the whole of this decaying creation. And this restoration is not just to what it was like at the first, but to what God had intended had Adam been faithful. Watts, in the hymn, Jesus shall reign where’er the sun, wrote:

*In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost*

So as the prophets looked forward to the coming of the Redeemer the promises were far greater than the salvation of individuals. It was to be nothing less than a total renewal of all things. Isaiah wrote that God would “create new heavens and a new earth” (65:17, 66:22).

We do not have to wait until the very last day to get a taste of this glorious future. The last days have arrived with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world! “In these last days God has spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). Christ has “appeared once for all at the end of the ages” (9:26). There are those who have already tasted “the powers of the age to come” (6:5).

Jesus Christ Himself is the first in this new creation by His death and resurrection. He is the Author of the first creation (Colossians 1:16), and “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (v. 18) by His resurrection. He was raised, never to die again. From His exalted throne in glory He gets to work making all things new. Every person who I saved is a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15). Our spiritual conversion is called a resurrection, because it is the giving of new life (Ephesians 2:4-5,10).

This sure process goes on day by day and ends on the final day with the glorious bodily resurrection of all the saints and their inhabiting a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells (Revelation 21:1, 2 Peter 3:14). It is sure, it is guaranteed, because the process has already started. Christ has come and finished His redemptive work. He now sends His Spirit to apply the fruit of His redemption to all His people. The finishing touches are when that same Spirit “gives life to your mortal bodies” (Romans 8:10-11). Praise God, the new creation is done.

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or by mail to

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Published by:

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