



# TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

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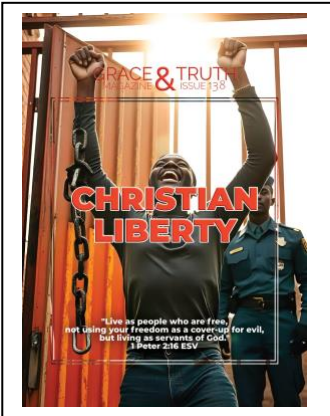
2024

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### 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, 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](http://www.trinity.or.ke)

### Murungi Igweta



**Cover:** 1 Peter 2:16, echoes Paul's word in Galatians 5:13 which reminds us of our freedom and counsels us to live accordingly. Both texts encourage us to use the freedom in at least three ways: (1) Not to gratify the flesh or as a cover up for evil but (2) for serving one another. And (3) as servants of God. Our freedom charter while on earth is a real one, even though we have not fully realized it, but we shall in glory.

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# EDITORIAL: GOD WILLING

*Murungi Igweta*

Men want to be like God – knowing the end from the beginning. People exude such a brazen confidence about seeing tomorrow yet, they cannot add themselves a span of life. They take it for granted that they would be alive, or healthy, or financially stable. James 4:15 warns us against presuming on God’s will. This is what Dr. John Blanchard calls ‘practical atheism’. The Lord has a warning for those who live and speak in a proud manner.

## **We must never forget God’s providence in**

- a) Plans – “*Today or tomorrow we will go ...*”
- b) Places – “*...to such a town...*”
- c) Period – “*...spend a year there...*”
- d) Purposes – “*...and trade...*”
- e) Profits – “*...and make profit.*”

This is to be ignorant of the future – “*...yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.*” (v.14). Life is short – “*What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*” Life is compared to “the flowers of the field” (Isa. 40:6-7); to the wind (Job 7:7); a leaf before the wind (Job 13:25); and a shadow (Job 14:2).

**Faith and dependence on God** – “*If the Lord wills we will live and do this or that.*” Children of God depend on the Lord for the next heartbeat. The Word of God puts it this way:

- But I will come to you soon, *if the Lord wills*, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. (1Corinthians 4:19)
- For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, *if the Lord permits*. (1Corinthians 16:7)
- always in my prayers, asking that somehow by *God's will* I may now at last succeed in coming to you. (Romans 1:10)
- *I hope in the Lord Jesus* to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. (Philippians 2:19)
- Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “*If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear in Genesis 28:20.*”
- And this we will do *if God permits*. (Hebrews 6:3)

It is in vain that we promise ourselves great things without the permission of God's providential will. How can we do this?

- Undertakings without prayer
- Confidence in the future without God's permission – like Benhadad in 1 Kings 20:10-11.
- Procrastination on repentance.
- Denounce all boasting because “*All such boasting is evil!*”

Some people may have objected to James' teaching in James 4:15 saying that they know that life is short and that God's providence rules everything. So he deals with this thinking by telling them that since they know, all the more why they should submit to the will of the Lord. In this James reveals the nature and effects of sin (C.f. John 9:41, 15:22).

**Through God's will, salvation is wrought.** We were adopted into God's family and became children of God not because of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of the will of God (John 1:13). This election to salvation by the Father's love and mercy depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy (Romans 9:16).

**Our prayers should submit to God willing.** Therefore we ought to pray, “*Our Father who art in heaven...“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*” In this third petition we pray that God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things, as the angels do in heaven. There is no will better than the will of God, because it is good, pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2). God being holy and omniscient, disposes only good things to his people. His will is the best and we would be wiser to trust his will more and never to distrust his care or doubt his royal promises.

In conclusion,

1. To know God's will while still on earth is to know the best.
2. To do God's will here on earth is to bring the best benefit to ourselves.
3. To experience the will of God is to be in heaven while still on earth .
4. We express our yearning for heaven where our God is when we seek the will of God in all our affairs.

We should sign off all our plans by the Latin phrase, *Deo Volente!* God willing!

# EPHESIANS 3:7-8

## HOW THE GOSPEL COMES TO YOU

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

*Keith Underhill*

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, is writing a letter to the church in Ephesus. He is in prison and in chapter 3 of the letter he explains that it is because of the gospel that he is suffering. He makes it clear that it is God who has called him to preach this gospel, having revealed it to him as an apostle (verses 5-6). Just as God used Paul in the lives of the Ephesians (and so many others), so God has continued to call men to preach. Let us learn what God does in bringing salvation to sinners. He does two things.

### 1. GOD APPOINTS A MINISTER (verses 7-8a)

There are two things about the man God appoints.

(1) He is a “minister”. Paul does not call himself an apostle here. Nor is he a general at the head of an army to conquer his enemies, nor a king for others to serve him. He is a minister, a servant, one who works in the interest of and for the benefit of another. This word is used of all Christians (Matthew 20:26, 23:11), of Phoebe (Romans 16:1), and is the word used for deacons (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8,12). It is even used of Satan's spokesmen (2 Corinthians 11:14). There are both earthly ministers, the governing authorities (Romans 13:4), and spiritual ministers (2 Corinthians 6:4, 11:23, Colossians 1:7, 1 Timothy 4:6). Even today we call those in high office in government ‘Minister’. Such a minister or servant is only given authority if he is faithfully doing the work entrusted to him. He is under orders, so not serving for his own benefit but for the Master in His kingdom. It is a great privilege to be such a minister, but the service is not for one's own honour but for the Master's honour. As a servant there is nothing beneath the dignity of the Minister to do and each one has a different work. God's people are commanded to esteem such ministers who are leaders “very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). But do not exalt them as if they are like priests, between you and God, almost beings of a different nature. No, ministers are only servants, at the call of the Master, to do joyfully whatever He appoints.

(2) He is an unworthy minister. Note the following two things Paul writes about himself.

- “I am the very least of all the saints.” Paul could never get over the reality that he, of all people, had been given this ministry. He emphasizes the words, “to me” (verse 8), by putting them first. Literally, he writes, ‘more least than least’, as the very lowest of all people set apart to God. But we

might ask how Paul could truthfully write this, as to us he is such a great Christian (see also 1 Corinthians 15:9 and 1 Timothy 1:15 for similar statements). Let us never forget what Paul used to be, a proud Pharisee, a violent persecutor of the church, and even a blasphemous opponent of Christ Himself (1 Timothy 1:13). Humanly speaking, there was no more unlikely candidate to be a Christian, and certainly not a minister. We could look back at our lives to our rebelliousness against knowledge, to years of stubborn refusal to believe, to living as a hypocrite, to abandoning ourselves to sin, and we would be rightly greatly humbled.

- “According to the gift of God’s grace.” Note the repeated insistence that it is God, and not himself (Paul), who has made him a minister. “I was made”, “the gift”, “God’s grace”, “given me” (verse 7), and “this grace was given” (verse 8). Paul became a minister, not because of anything in him, but because God decided it should be! No credit is to be given to Paul for deciding to become a Christian, for having such deep insight into the Christian message, for being such a powerful preacher and having amazing success. Rather, it was by “the working of His power.” Paul would never have become a Christian unless God had worked powerfully in his heart to change this raging persecutor; he would never have served the gospel he once hated; he would never have been able to fulfil the commission to go to the Gentiles (see Colossians 1:29). This teaches us that it is God who raises up ministers of His choice, that whatever ability they have is from Him, that whatever they accomplish is His doing, and that to Him therefore is all the glory (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Never praise the minister. Only praise the Lord of the minister. Rejoice in the Lord when you see God raising up such ministers.

## **2. GOD INSTRUCTS THE MINISTER TO PREACH** (verse 8b)

(1) What he is to do. “To preach to the Gentiles.” When God purposed to bless the Gentiles He raised up a ... preacher! Men who have changed the spiritual map of the world have been preachers. Just think of the Reformation with Luther and Calvin, the Puritan era with a host of preachers whose sermons we read even today, great missionaries such as William Carey, and the East African revival. There is a message, and it needs to be told to the world (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8). There is no power to change the hearts of sinners by messages about good governance and anti-corruption, of development and especially of education, as important as these are. It is the message of the gospel alone that can change individuals and so the world. Just consider what the message did for Saul of Tarsus, the Philippian jailer, and untold multitudes of others (1 Corinthians 6:9). It is this gospel that you need, a message that when received will totally change your life, from a guilty conscience, enslaving habits, a lack of purpose, hopelessness, and failure, and all by the working of God’s power.

(2) What he is to preach. “The unsearchable riches of Christ.” These are riches that are unsearchable. Imagine you go into a vault where a nation’s gold reserves are stored. You go from room to room, but there is always another room to search. What are these riches?

- Preaching is centred in Christ, not in the preacher, not in the church, nor in duty or works. It is about Christ the God-man, who is fully God and at the same time fully man. “In Him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Think of the greatest man, or all men together: they cannot solve our problems, for the problem of sin is just too difficult. Rather let a leopard change its spots, and an Ethiopian his skin colour (see Jeremiah 13:23). In fact, unity only brings rebellion, as at the tower of Babel. Only Jesus Christ is able to get to the root of this problem of sin. We mortals may have some success in dealing with our fellows, but who can deal with a thrice holy God? Our Lord can, because He IS God, and as man He understands and represents us before the Father.
  - Preaching tells us of Christ who has unsearchable riches, all for our benefit! This is the good news, the gospel. There is much preaching today about the right of a Christian to be prosperous in this world. Yet Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matthew 6:19), and the apostle writes, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation” (1 Timothy 6:9). Such riches are ‘searchable’, but the riches Christ has to give are “unsearchable”. They are not just for time, but go on into eternity. What good are those riches you must leave behind when you exit this world? In Christ there are riches of election, predestination to adoption, redemption, revelation, glory and the gift of the Spirit (remember Ephesians 1:3-14). Do present earthly riches guarantee joy and peace? Do they give you sure hope in sickness and bereavement? The richest persons die despite the expertise of the best medics. Millions may be spent on a funeral but they cannot restore the deceased. Christ gives you all you need, and beyond, what He calls ‘abundant life’ (John 10:10). His blood cleanses from sin so that now there is peace of conscience and the assurance that there is no future condemnation. His righteousness imputed enables us to dwell in God’s holy presence. The Spirit of God indwelling gives the necessary understanding and strength for daily living and until the end. None have ever gone to Christ and been turned away empty (John 6:35,37). Today Christ says: ‘Come to Me in all your deepest need, as you acknowledge your emptiness, and I will satisfy you in the depths of your soul. I will give you a new heart and put My Spirit within you. Come, and call on My name.’ May the Lord be pleased to raise up more and more of such preachers today and use them to bring untold blessing on multitudes of sinners.
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# THE LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1689

*Keith Underhill*

We continue a chapter by chapter study of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Issue # 137 dealt with Jesus Christ. The Confession now progresses to the question of Free will. Each section in the article begins with the text of the Confession in italics. Much help was found in *Samuel E. Waldron, A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1989).

## CHAPTER 9 OF FREE WILL

1 God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is a neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil. (*Matthew 17:12; James 1:14; Deuteronomy 30:19*)

2 Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but yet was mutable, so that he might fall from it. (*Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 3:6*)

3 Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto. (*Romans 5:6, 8:7; Ephesians 2:1,5; Timothy 3:3-5; John 6:44*)

4 When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he doth not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil. (*Colossians 1:13; John 8:36; Philipians 2:13; Romans 7:15,18-19,21,23*)

5 This will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only. (*Ephesians 4:13*)

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# **CHAPTER NINE: FREE WILL**

## **The Nature of Free Will**

1. *In the natural order God has endued man's will with liberty and the power to act upon choice, so that it is neither forced from without, nor by any necessity arising from within itself, compelled to do good or evil.*

The Biblical teaching about the will of man is central to the teaching about salvation. If we go wrong here we will go wrong everywhere. During the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther wrote a book called 'The Bondage of the Will', which he considered to be his most important writing next to his translation of the Bible into German. The Confession defines freedom (liberty) of the will to consist in "the power to act upon choice". What we choose to do we have the power to do. This is the experience of every man – we freely choose what we want to choose – and this is the basis of our responsibility. God always addresses us in His Word as those who are responsible for what they do. We are not forced to do what we do not want to do by external factors. For example, a thief may demand that you hand over your money or be killed. If you decide to hand it over rather than face death, it was your free choice. Many other have refused and have been killed.

## **The Will Before the Fall**

2. *In his state of innocency man had freedom and power to will and to do what was good and acceptable to God. Yet, being unstable, it was possible for him to fall from his uprightness.*

Adam and Eve were created upright (Genesis 1:31, Ecclesiastes 7:29). There was nothing evil, nothing lacking in their nature that would make them choose evil. Yet, although we cannot explain it, it was possible for them to choose evil. We know this because that is what they did! This is why the tree was called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). They were unstable creatures, under a test, not confirmed in their uprightness, liable to fall before external temptation.

## **The Will After the Fall**

3. *As the consequence of his fall into a state of sin, man has lost all ability to will the performance of any of those works, spiritually good, that accompany salvation. As a natural (unspiritual) man he is dead in sin and altogether opposed to that which is good. Hence he is not able, by any strength of his own, to turn himself to God, or even to prepare himself to turn to God.*

The Fall so changed the nature of man that sinful man is totally unable to will anything “spiritually good”. The Confession describes such things as those that “accompany salvation”. Whatever is required for salvation, such as faith and repentance, is impossible for man in sin. This because man’s nature is totally depraved = every faculty has become corrupted by sin (see chapter 6, sections 4 & 5). How can a person whose heart is deceitful, who is blind to the truth, and who loves his sin, ever have the will to turn to God? Therefore, no man can do anything to save himself, nor can he do anything even to prepare himself for that salvation. Man is helpless and thus without hope in himself. This **total inability** with regards to salvation is proved by the following arguments:

- a. The Bible describes man as “dead” in sin (Ephesians 2:1,5), a “slave” to sin (Romans 6:17-20) and “blind” to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). No dead man can raise himself; no slave can free himself; no blind man can open his own eyes. So the Bible uses three words to describe what happens when a person becomes a Christian, words that imply that only God can make a person a Christian: birth (John 3:3,5), resurrection (Ephesians 2:1,5,6), and creation (Ephesians 2:10).
- b. The Bible clearly says that no man has any ability to please God (Romans 8:8), or to do His will (Jeremiah 13:23, Matthew 12:33-37), or to come to Christ in faith (John 6:44,65), or to enter the kingdom (John 3:3,5), or to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- c. The Bible does not attribute salvation to the will of man, but rather to the will of God (John 1:12-13, Romans 9:16-18, James 1:18).

To this doctrine of total depravity there have been **objections**. Some say that man can only be responsible for what he is able to do. So, they argue, if God commands faith, men must be able to believe. But the same Bible that commands faith (Acts 16:31) also teaches that men cannot believe by their own power (John 6:44, see Acts 13:48). The inability is not physical but spiritual. And the inability arises from men’s sinful nature for which men, not God, are responsible. A drunken driver is not excused for bad driving by pleading he was unable to drive properly because he was drunk! Some object that total inability produces helplessness and despair. This is exactly what needs to be produced in the sinner so that he no longer looks to himself, but to God with whom his only hope lies. This doctrine is a great preparation for the gospel.

## **The Will After Conversion**

*4. When God converts a sinner, and brings him out of sin into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage to sin and, by His grace alone, He enables*

*him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good. Nevertheless certain corruptions remain in the sinner, so that his will is never completely and perfectly held in captivity to that which is good, but it also entertains evil.*

When a person becomes a Christian he receives a new heart so that he is no longer in “his natural bondage to sin”. As opposed to the non-Christian he is able “to that which is spiritually good” (Philippians 2:13). This is as Adam was before the Fall. God’s purpose in conversion is to enable the sinner to do His will and so to be holy (see Romans 8:4). We must live as those who are able to do what God says in the Scriptures and not make any excuses. However, because “certain corruptions remain in the sinner” it is impossible to live a perfect life. There is always a struggle between the new man and the flesh (see Galatians 5:16-17). This is different from Adam before the Fall, as he was able not to sin.

### **The Will in Glory**

*5. It is not until man enters the state of glory that he is made perfectly and immutably free to will that which is good, and that alone.*

This is the final goal of creation, and of salvation. In glory the Christian will receive that perfection Adam would have received if he had passed the test in the garden. Then, it will not be possible for the Christian to sin, because he will have a new body like Christ’s glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21). Then the will of the Christian will be as free as God’s is free, free to do good and to never sin. True freedom does not necessarily consist in the ability to do evil as well as good, otherwise God and the angels would not be truly free. Thank God for that hope we have in glory.

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## **John Calvin on Free Will**

*"We are all sinners by nature, therefore we are held under the yoke of sin . But if the whole man is subject to the dominion of sin , surely the will , which is it's principal seat , must be bound with the closest of chains. And indeed if divine grace were preceded by any will of ours, Paul could not have said that, "it is God that worketh in us to will and to do ' (Phil. 2:13)*

# CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

*Oliver Allmand-Smith*

How important do you think the doctrine of Christian Liberty is? Where would you place it in a list of doctrinal distinctives that matter most?

John Calvin claimed: “**Christian Liberty is a matter of primary necessity, one without the knowledge of which the conscience can scarcely attempt anything without hesitation, in many must demur and fluctuate, and in all proceed with fickleness and trepidation. In particular, it forms a proper appendix to justification.**”<sup>1</sup>

Puritan Samuel Bolton stated: “*There are two great things Christ has entrusted into the hands of his church: First, Christian faith. Secondly, **Christian liberty**: and as we are to contend earnestly for the maintenance of the faith, as the Apostle saith, Jude 3, so also for the maintenance of Christian liberty, **against all oppugners and underminers of it.***”<sup>2</sup>

Finally, John Owen: “**The second principle of the Reformation** whereon the Reformers justified their separation from the Church of Rome was this, that Christian people were not tied up unto blind obedience unto church guides, but were not only at liberty but also obliged to judge for themselves as unto all things they were to believe and practice in religion and the worship of God.”<sup>3</sup>

According to these three fathers in the faith, Christian liberty is a matter of primary necessity, an appendix to justification, second only to faith in Christ himself, the second principle of the Reformation and a bulwark against “*the dunghill of vain confidence*”<sup>4</sup> in false religion. Clearly, this doctrine is very important indeed.

The Second London Baptist Confession (2LCF) presents a masterful summary of this glorious doctrine in the opening sentence of chapter 21:

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, The Institutes Of The Christian Religion, 3.19.1a.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Bolton, The True Bounds Of Christian Freedom, p9.

<sup>3</sup> John Owen, Works, Banner of Truth, 15:402.

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *ibid.*

*The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the law, and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation: as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.*

Our fathers in the faith begin by highlighting the cost of Christian liberty. Paul says in Galatians 3:13, “*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)*”. Christ purchased freedom from the severity and condemnation of the law by embracing the fullness of the curse in his own humanity on the cross. If such a price has been paid to liberate his people, how can we return to the slavery of the law’s rigours?

Consider five wonderful truths about this liberty here stated:

- 1) ***Freedom from the guilt of sin.*** The believer is assured that God does not hold his sin against him anymore! He will be able to stand before God on the last day, free from the guilt of sin, freely justified. No-one will be able to get any mud to stick, since God is for him, who can be against him? (Romans 8:31-39). Every Christian is free from the fear of God’s wrath, since the lamb of God has taken away all his sin (John 1:29) and so there is freedom from all condemnation (Romans 8:1).
- 2) ***Freedom from the power of sin.*** Sin no longer has control over the life of the Christian. He is liberated from its power over him. He has been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18). He has been delivered from the authority of the evil one and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Colossians 3:13). He died to sin’s power as he went into the waters of baptism, and rose again to newness of life by the power of the risen Christ (Romans 6:1-14).
- 3) ***Freedom from the punishment of sin.*** Not only are we free from punishment in the age to come, but even here and now. As 2LCF states, although we are not freed from all afflictions in this age, we *ARE* freed from “the evil of afflictions.” In other words, God never punishes his liberated children (in a judicial sense), rather chastising them in love, for their good (Hebrews 12:5-11, Romans 8:28). Everything that comes to pass in the life

of the liberated Christian is ordained by God for blessing and glory in time and in eternity, so that there is no fear of death, or the grave, or destruction (I Corinthians 15:54-57, 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

- 4) ***Free access to God.*** The believer is invited to enter into the presence of God unhindered. Through Christ, every Christian has free access to the Father by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). There is no timidity or terror as the liberated believer comes before his Father, but boldness and confidence and assurance, purchased by the blood of Christ and guaranteed by the work of the Spirit (Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 10:19-22).
- 5) ***The freedom of child-like obedience.*** Christian liberty frees the believer from unwilling slavery – now we *WANT* to obey God, like a child devoted to his Father, not in fear of condemnation, but in the assurance of loving devotion by the Spirit (Romans 8:15). Since the believer knows he is loved with an everlasting love that stretches back before the worlds began, he has no fear, but is empowered by that love, to respond in love (1 John 4:17-19)

There is much talk of liberty in our culture today, but who is there that even claims to have a liberty like this? How should we respond? Study this liberty more fully; defend this liberty against all-comers, whatever their claims; glory in this liberty – it is our greatest privilege; make use of this liberty – live in the light of its glorious freedom from sin; and share the news of this liberty with all – it is the fruit of the gospel.

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# CONSCIENCE –

## GATHERING DATA AND DEFINING WHAT IT IS

Gary Brady

*Gary Brady the pastor of Child's Hill Chapel London. He has written many books, including Heavenly Wisdom (a commentary on Proverbs by EP). He is married to Eleri (Geoff Thomas' daughter) and speaks for African Pastors' Conferences. He was in Kenya in April 2024.*

An obvious area of pastoral theology, often neglected, is that of conscience. In order to understand conscience we first need to gather the scriptural data and attempt to define just what conscience is.

### ***Gathering data***

The idea of conscience is familiar enough. Everybody, it seems, has one. Your conscience speaks to you, it gives you a hard time. Different writers in different fields with different viewpoints have written many different things about it. Our ideas must be from God's Word.

### **Old Testament**

The Old Testament makes no reference to conscience, not if you use an old or original version. If you use a modern version the translators may have decided to introduce the word where the idea is present, even though the word is not. It appears that the ancient Hebrews had no use for the term, perhaps because, as God's chosen people, they received direct revelation so were, in some ways, less immediately aware of conscience.

Old Testament believers spoke more readily of their *hearts* reflecting on revelation. So, for example, David says in Psalm 16:7 "I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my *heart* instructs me". See also Psalm 40:8 ("your law is in my heart"), Ecclesiastes 7:22 ("you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others") and Psalm 19:11, which speaks of God's servant being warned by the law.

#### **1. Adam**

The *idea* of conscience is certainly there almost from the beginning. When, after their sin, Adam and Eve hide in fear at the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8, 10) that is surely the earliest example of conscience at work.

William Bates says that Adam's "conscience began an early hell within him". "Paradise with all its pleasures could not secure him from that sting in his breast, and that sharpened by the hand of God". Adam's soul was racked "with the certain and fearful expectation of judgement."

Conscience is still at work a little later when Adam then Eve both try to put the blame for their sin elsewhere (Genesis 3:11-13). Even today our first instinct when sin is discovered is often the same. First - try to cover it up; if that fails, try blaming others!

John 3:20 "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed". Genesis 4:14, Cain says that he "will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me" which sounds suspiciously like the terror of a guilty conscience, as several commentators notice.

## ***2. Joseph and his brothers***

At the other end of Genesis you have the story of Joseph and his brothers. Several writers single it out as a story where conscience plays an important role.

Genesis 37: first Reuben, then Judah, appeal to the consciences of the brothers. Reuben argues against killing Joseph, saying "'Let us not take his life ... Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him". Judah says they will gain nothing by killing their brother and hiding the fact. He suggests they sell him to the Ishmaelites instead, adding a direct appeal to conscience, "for he is our brother, our own flesh."

Joseph's brothers act on a common fallacy. They figure it will be enough simply to take suitable precautions against their crime being discovered. What they forget is the conscience.

Despite great efforts to hide their sin, even wickedly brazening it out before their father, the truth eventually comes out. It is a striking story full of interesting twists and turns and it reminds us how dramatic God's providence can sometimes be. Their guilty consciences seem to sleep for many years but it is like a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. When they are unexpectedly forced to return to the very land into which they had sold Joseph and stand before him, unrecognised at first, their consciences suddenly awake again and began to speak at a volume they cannot ignore and with an authority they cannot resist.

Genesis 42:21 tells us the very mention of youngest brother Benjamin stirred their consciences so that they said to each other "surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us." Matthew Henry observes how "guilty consciences are apt to take good

providences in a bad sense; to put wrong meanings even upon things that make for them.”

Suddenly, the brothers vividly recollect the all but forgotten scene of yesteryear. Now it is as if it had happened the day before. A long time has passed but suddenly one event, one that took up just one day, looms exceedingly large on the horizon. They are forced to watch the replay in high definition and hear it in surround sound, the button set to replay. “The imperishable records of conscience” are unexpectedly and unwillingly brought into the light of day. A bolt of lightning illuminates the sky as conscience abruptly breaks through the dark clouds of suppression and denial.

Conscience is often active before any other informant, witness or judge speaks. It has the power to connect events in its own unique way, combining things otherwise distant, dissimilar and apparently detached from each other.

Later, a cup is found in Benjamin's sack and they say “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt.” (Gen 44:16). The reaction is prompted not by guilt for having stolen anything but guilt over what they'd done to Joseph.

When Joseph finally reveals himself, they are terrified, a terror again borne of a guilty conscience (Gen 45:3). Even after reconciliation, Jacob's departure again stirs conscience and they are fearful (Gen 50:15). As one writer puts it, a guilty conscience casts a long shadow.

Joseph suffered a great deal after being sold into Egypt but one burden he never had to carry was that of a guilty conscience. He knew that he did not deserve to be suffering as he was. Under God, this no doubt gave him a good deal of peace and consolation. In contrast, what a sense of condemnation his brothers laboured under. When Joseph himself was faced with temptation at one point, he stood firm because he kept conscience on the throne. He wisely traced the likely consequences of sin and responded to Potiphar's wife and her advances with a sincere and wise “how then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9b).

The pain of sin's sting consists very much in the recollections of an awakening conscience. Suddenly, the enchantment is broken, the illusion is over. Conscience wakes, like a giant from slumber, and the individual is forced to hear accusations he cannot answer, charges he cannot counter, reproofs he cannot repel.

### **3. Other examples**

There are many other places in the Old Testament where the idea of *conscience* surfaces. In Job 27:6 Job says “I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.” In Genesis 20:5, 6

Abimelech tells God “I have done this with a clear conscience and with innocent hands” and God replies, “Yes, I know that you have done this with a clear conscience, ....”. (NET).

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart can also be related to the subject of conscience. Moses' own conscience is seen to be at work in Exodus 2 when, having killed an Egyptian, he is distraught to find that his act has been observed.

On at least two occasions we see David's conscience at work. In 1 Samuel 24:5 we read how he was conscience-stricken “for having cut off a corner of” Saul's robe, and in 1 Samuel 24:10 after he counted the fighting men. Also see Abigail's words “my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself” (1 Sam. 25:31). In Psalms 32, 38 and 51, conscience is seen to be active too.

It was on the basis that everyone has a conscience that the Law was given and the prophets preached. A striking example is seen in the way Nathan dealt with David following his adultery with Bathsheba (1 Sam 12).

The idea of conscience is in many places in the Old Testament. How it may have operated in man as originally created is debatable. What was the significance for conscience of the knowledge of good and evil? Puritan Richard Bernard asserts that conscience was in Adam before the fall but did not function as it later would. Instead, it witnessed to his goodness and bore sway so that he was obedient and able to know joy in God's presence. He suggests that conscience will function in a similar way in the glory of heaven.

## New Testament

1. **Gospels:** Turning to the New Testament, we find that the Gospels again make no direct reference to conscience. Again, however, even though the term is not used, there is again reason to believe that Jesus has conscience in mind in some places. For example, Luke 12:57, when he asks, “Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?”. That is an appeal to conscience. In Mark 3:5 Jesus rails against the *stubborn hearts* or hardened consciences of the Pharisees.
2. **Paul and Peter:** Most New Testament references to conscience are made by Paul. In fact, of the 30 or so that exist, around 21 are in his letters (three in Romans, 12 in Corinthians, six in Timothy; two others are in sermons of his [Acts 23:1, 24:16] and five are in Hebrews [9:9, 14; 10:2, 22; 13:8], which if not by Paul reflects his style. The only other person to use the word is Peter (1 Peter 3:16, 21).

It is very much Paul's word, then. Where did he get it? Some suggest it was a specialist word taken over from the Stoic philosophers but it has been

demonstrated to have been an everyday word among the Greeks, going back, in one form or another, to at least the sixth century BC.

In a 1955 study, *Conscience in the New Testament*, C A Pierce suggests that it was a *catchword* in the Corinthian church, a popular word used to encapsulate an idea. Paul, it seems, took up their word and used it first in correspondence with them and, subsequently, as part of his usual Christian vocabulary. Certainly Paul and other NT writers took up other Greek words and fill them with Christian meaning. E.g. *Saviour*.

The New Testament, like the Old, is perfectly able to speak about conscience without using the word. Galatians 6:4 “Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else”. Conscience is not named but how else does one test one's own actions without making comparisons? In 1 John 3:19-21 the word *heart* is used where the word *conscience* would fit equally well. “This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”

When we speak of conscience, we are really speaking of the heart or soul. The word is useful, however, for speaking of a specific function of the soul, namely its moral workings.

## **Romans 2:14, 15**

The nearest the New Testament comes to a definition of conscience is Romans 2:14,15. “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

A number of things emerge from this statement.

1. That everyone has a conscience, even pagans. The conscience belongs to man as man.
2. These verses help us to distinguish the various elements involved in making a moral decision. Although we use the word *conscience* in a general way to refer to the whole business of making moral decisions, there are, in fact, at least three clearly identifiable strands in the process.

(1) The requirements of the Law of God, which are written on every man's heart.

(2) The conscience itself, which makes its judgements on the basis of the preceding element.

(3) There are a person's thoughts or opinions. These come as he makes a decision on the basis of the mediation of conscience proper.

The Puritans and others noticed the correspondence between this threefold distinction and the practical syllogism, a way of reasoning found in the writings of Aristotle. The practical syllogism is an argument in three propositions - 1. A major premise stating some universal truth 2. A minor premise stating some particular truth. 3. A conclusion derived from the two premises.

So it may be that a man, 1. From his moral record, learns the fact lying is wrong (major premise); 2. His conscience, therefore, tells him that to make up a story about why he'd not completed the task he was required to complete would be a lie (minor premise); 3. In his thinking or opinion, therefore, he decides to tell a lie would be wrong (conclusion).

Similarly, 1. In his moral record he may know that bank robbers deserve punishment (major promise) 2. His conscience may acknowledge that he has robbed a bank (minor premise) 3. In his thinking or opinion, therefore, he has to see he deserves to be punished (conclusion).

We will need to say more about Romans 2;14, 15 but first we simply note the significance of the verses and the fact there is a good deal of material on conscience in the Bible, more perhaps than we might expect. This underlines the importance of the subject.

### ***Definition***

Philosophers, psychologists and theologians down the ages have wrestled with the problem of conscience and have arrived at divergent conclusions. In any study of the subject it is good to seek to give a clear definition of what conscience is.

### **Confusion**

We have noted already that people are fairly familiar with the idea of conscience. They say "my conscience is bothering me"; "my conscience pricked me" or claim to have acted "in good conscience". They know what it is to have something "on their conscience". They know about a bad or a guilty conscience and, hopefully, a good one too.

Pierce has pointed out, however, that "of the number that make use of the word 19 in 20 perhaps may be ignorant of its true meaning". This is no exaggeration. Think how other Bible words are employed in everyday language. People still speak, for example, of a thing being "as ugly as sin" or of being "more sinned

against than sinning” but how often is the word understood in its biblical sense? It is similar with the word *conscience*.

Confusion over what exactly conscience may be is not something new. A number of Puritans comment on this. Westminster Divines John Jackson and Robert Harris speak of it having “a thousand definitions and descriptions” it being “a word of infinite latitude and great dispute” and “much talked of, but little known”. Other Puritans similarly observe the difficulty of definition.

There is evidence to suggest that in many ages the word has been given such a wide range of meaning in everyday language that, though people are familiar with it, they rarely gave it an accurate biblical definition.

Writers on conscience disagree, for example, on whether to think of it primarily as a human faculty or power, an act or habit or a created quality. If it is found in the human soul, where is it found? The understanding, the will? Surely, it is something we can speak of as distinct from these. Not only do we tend to distinguish it from them but so does the New Testament. 1 Timothy 1:5 distinguishes conscience from heart and Titus 1:15 distinguishes it from the mind. In experience too, conscience demonstrates an independence not observed in those other faculties.

### **Clarification - Etymology**

The New Testament Greek word is *syneidesis*, which appears to be made up of two parts.

1. *syn/sun* suggests *with/together*. Synchronised swimmers co-ordinate their movements *with* each other, a *symphony* is performed by a number of instruments playing *together* at the same time.

2. The second part, *eidesis*, is from one of the Greek words for *to know*.

Conscience enables a certain knowledge – not the usual sort found in the understanding but a reflective knowledge over and above mere head knowledge.

Richard Bernard defines it as “a certain, particular, applicatory knowledge in man’s soul, reflecting upon himself, concerning matters between God and him.”

The root meaning, then, seems to be *to know together, joint knowledge* or *knowledge shared (with another)*. The Anglo-Saxon word for conscience *inwit* suggests inward knowledge but the Latin based word that superseded it, as in the romance languages, is from *con-scientia* and is made up in exactly the same way as the Greek. Other European languages, though not all, are similar. Eg Swedish *samvete*, Russian *sovest*. (The Swahili word *dhamira* appears to be from an Arabic word simply meaning *hidden*. Kikuyu *thamiri* also).

This does not bring us directly to a biblical definition as there has been much debate over who shares the *joint knowledge*. Obviously, on one side is the person himself, but who is on the other? Many assume it must be God.

The only biblical arguments advanced for this view are dubious references to Elijah's *still small voice* and appeals to 1 Pet 2:19, "it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God". However, Peter clearly has in mind only Christians.

Some suggest that the word's etymology proves conscience must reveal a knowledge shared with God. Thus we have definitions such as that first given in 1933 by Ole Hallesby "that knowledge or consciousness by which man knows he is conforming to the moral law or will of God". While not without merit, such definitions are premature and potentially misleading.

### **Clarification - Usage**

It is unwise to define a word in light only of etymology. The way a word is *used* is far more important.

There is some disagreement about the usage of the word *synedeisis* and related words. It is clear, nevertheless, that when the Greeks used this and related terms, it was not always in the context of *moral* judgements.

Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the NT* Christian Maurer points out a famous example where Socrates' young disciple Alcibiades speaks of being *conscious* that he could put up no resistance to the power of his teacher's arguments. There is no moral element involved. Least of all, in Greek thought, is there any necessary connection between conscience and God.

Even in the NT we find a related word being used in a context where conscience is clearly not intended. Acts 5:2 tells us Ananias *with his wife's full knowledge* kept back money from the Apostles, while claiming it had been handed over. The word is *synoida*, "to know with another". Ananias knew what he was doing and his wife knew too.

Then Acts 12:12, 14:6 (ESV) Peter "realised" and Paul and Barnabas "learned" a thing. Words from the same family are again used. At their most basic, then, such words can simply mean "to become conscious of", "to realise".

Hebrews 10:2 is very interesting. The ASV speaks of worshippers who "would have had no more consciousness of sins". The word used is the same as that found in 10:22, *having our hearts sprinkled to save us from a guilty conscience* (NIV. TCNT ... *purified by the sprinkled blood from all consciousness of wrong*). It is really only the words "for their sins" that brings in the moral element.

## Concise Definitions

- 1) Several Puritans, tending to lean to a greater or lesser extent on the Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, attempted to define conscience concisely. For example
- 2) A man's judgement of himself, according to the judgement of God of him. *William Ames*
- 3) A part of the understanding in all reasonable creatures determining of their particular actions either with them or against them. *Samuel Ward, following William Perkins*
- 4) The judgement of man upon himself as he is subject to God's judgement. *William Fenner*

Like Ames, Fenner refers to 1 Corinthians 11:31, which he uses more simply to say, harking back to Perkins, that conscience is "a man's true judgement of himself".

Jim Packer sums up, conscience is "a rational faculty, a power of moral self-knowledge and judgement, dealing with questions of right and wrong, duty and desert, and dealing with them authoritatively, as God's voice."

From what we have already said, however, it is clear that we must not think of the conscience as a *department* of man's personality or a *faculty* of his soul. It can be useful to speak in such terms for the purpose of study but it is important to realise that, in reality, conscience is simply one aspect of man's personality, one function of his soul.

We have also seen that the "joint knowledge" is not necessarily shared with God himself. In fact, put simply, the conscience is man's power of self-reflection and, particularly, self-criticism. Rehwinkel noted that the English word *consciousness* is made up in the same way as the word *conscience*. Consciousness is "awareness of"; *conscience* is narrower in meaning and refers to "a moral or ethical awareness". "Conscience" he suggests "is a moral consciousness accompanied by a feeling of obligation and duty."

*The conscience and its problems* (Kenneth E Kirk 1933) has a similar reminder that though we may write of conscience as a distinct entity, we must not forget that in fact "conscience is myself so far as I am a moral man".

Milton L Rudnick, similarly calls conscience "the self in the process of ethical deliberation and evaluation .... It is not someone or something else working in or upon man, but he moral self at work, involving all of a man's rational and emotional faculties."

## 1. Conscience in Romans 2:14, 15 again

Given the threefold division that we saw in Rom 2:14, 15, it is clear that when we use the word *conscience*, we should really restrict it to the second aspect of making moral decisions, the making of judgements on the basis of what is in the moral record.

Some would suppose that this conscience only acts in a negative, condemning way. Emil Brunner *Divine Imperative* speaks of it as a “sinister thing” that “attacks man like an alien, dark, hostile power”. Russian poet Pushkin, in his play *Miserly Knight*, called conscience “a sharp clawed animal, which scrapes the heart ... an uninvited guest, annoying discourser, a rude creditor; and a witch, which dims the moon and graves.”

This may have been the Greek view but Paul points out that there are times when even the Gentile conscience can provoke thoughts that *excuse* as well as *accuse*. The Pagan can have *a bad* or *a good conscience*. Strictly speaking, of course, it is not conscience that is good or bad. We do not say a barometer is bad if it correctly predicts stormy weather; we merely say it is accurate.

Certainly the Christian can have a good conscience, as is clear from e.g. 2 Cor 1:12, 1 Tim 1:19. Rom 2:14, 15 teaches the moral responsibility of all men. Walter Chantry “Conscience alone has witnessed sufficiently to the moral law, so that everyone is without excuse. Since the fall man’s heart has become a moral battleground.

### Complexity

It is important not to think of conscience simplistically. Perkins talks of mind and memory assisting it, one being the storehouse and the keeper of rules and principles and the other the recaller of omissions and commissions.

John Bunyan (*The Holy War*) is quite elaborate.

Bernard calls it a Director or Judge in the understanding and a Register and Secret Witness in the memory. It also works in the will, heart and affections. All the other faculties work with this one “as it commands the whole man in the execution of its offices”.

Many Puritans pictured it as a court where the roles of registrar, witnesses, prosecutor, judge and executioner are all carried out by conscience.

Such pictures are fine, if we remember the mysteries involved. The workings of conscience include the whole process of perceiving the requirements of God’s Law, assessing them, then deciding how to proceed or what judgement to give. The over-riding impression is one of “ought” or “ought not” but includes a whole host of mental perceptions and emotional feelings – comprehension of

right and wrong; use of memory, mind and will; complacency or disquiet; shame or pride; delight or pain; anticipation of reward or punishment.

The sheer breadth of mental and emotional interplay involved can be gauged from the array of legitimate illustrations employed by different writers trying to bring out the varied character of conscience. E.g. spy, watchdog, bloodhound, window, mirror, sundial, compass, barometer, plumbline, sail, lash, sword, alarm bell, GPS system, flight recorder or black box, sense of taste.

## Characteristics

Christopher Ash (*Pure Joy*) has helpfully singled out five features of conscience. The list will help us to draw things together.

1. Conscience speaks with a voice that is independent of us. We are able to stand outside of ourselves and look at ourselves objectively. Hallesby speaks of “a sort of doubling of our personality”. We are, in a sense, able to stand outside ourselves and pronounce judgement on ourselves. We are able to some extent to offer an objective and unbiased judgement of ourselves.
2. Conscience speaks with a voice that looks backward and forward. Indeed, the judgements of conscience can concern past, present or future. In this latter role conscience acts more like a guide than a judge. Hallesby observes how it is generally at its weakest during sin, in the present, but at its strongest after the event is past.
3. Other people can appeal to my conscience, as Paul does Romans 13:5 when he tells believers that they must submit to the powers that be, not only because they may be punished but also “for the sake of conscience”.
4. God can appeal to my conscience. Luke 12:57 and Isaiah 5:3, 4 are examples. God, referring to Israel as a vineyard, says “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?”
5. One does not need a Bible to hear the voice of conscience. Ash notes how Joseph rejected the invitations to her bed extended by Potiphar's wife in Egypt (Genesis 39). Even before the law was given, Joseph knew that adultery was wrong. Another example is the opening chapters of Amos where the surrounding nations are declared guilty not on the basis of the law but accepted morality.

## Conclusion

Richard Sibbes says *what is conscience, but the soul itself reflecting upon itself?* He says it is “the property of the reasonable soul and the excellency of it, that it can return upon itself.” Samuel Rutherford has a catechism that similarly speaks of conscience as “the principal part of the soul”. When we speak of the workings of conscience, then, we are speaking, clearly, of *the moral workings of the soul itself*.

Despite what rationalists may have us believe, the conscience is not the result of evolution or a mere interiorisation of cultural norms or social mores. The conscience undoubtedly bears witness to the culture and morality around about us but this in no way explains its origin or function.

It is not “the voice of God” as such. Spurgeon once warned that there is no more atrocious mistake made by divines than to tell people conscience is God's representative in the soul.

Having said this, we must say that it is important to listen to its voice for it is what Raymond Opperwall correctly called “the internalised voice of those whose judgement of a person counts with him. It is the inner voice that testifies for the moral authorities that we recognise.”

Conscience is not the voice of God but what A M Rehwinkel calls “man himself speaking as a moral being to himself”. It is God given and cannot be removed. God himself has ordained and fixed it as a monitor within. We do not always like the witness conscience bears. Sometimes we disagree with it. It is important to see, however, that the voice of conscience must not be ignored. We must learn to listen to our soul within.

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# CHRIST OUR PRIEST

*John Miller*

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The work of our Lord Jesus Christ is rich and multi-faceted, and its beauty is capable of being viewed from a variety of different angles. One of the well-known lenses through which to view Christ's work is his three-fold office, the *munus triplex* of prophet, priest, and king. The previous article in this brief series sought to herald forth the work of Christ as our Prophet, the One greater than Moses who reveals the Father to us and the way of salvation. But our Lord Jesus not only reveals the way of salvation to us, He also fulfills all that is necessary for our salvation, particularly in His work as our priest, the focus of this present article.

**What is the significance of seeing Christ's work as a priest?** Once again, a summary of its significance can be found in the Church's confessions and catechisms. For example, concerning our need for Christ's work as a priest, the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith explains, "in respect of our alienation from God, and imperfection of the best of our services, we need his priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God" (chap. 8, para. 10). The confession points to at least two problems that we have before God. First, because we are sinners defiled by our sin, we are alienated from God and unable to come into the presence of our Holy God. Second, even the best of what we offer in service to God falls short and is tainted by our sin, and therefore is unacceptable. It is Christ's priestly work that restores us to God and makes us acceptable and able to appear before Him. Christ's priestly work is filled out further in the Baptist Catechism answer to question 28,

"Christ executes the office of priest in his once offering up himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us."

This answer points to the way Christ reconciles us to God, through His sacrifice, and highlights His ongoing priestly work of intercession. These are rich summaries of Christ's priestly work, yet once again it is necessary to grasp how these summaries are rooted in the richness of the Biblical revelation concerning Christ's priesthood.

***First, consider how the work of a priest in the Old Testament foreshadows and typifies the work of Christ as our priest.***

Just as Adam, a type of Christ, was the very first prophet, Adam was also the very first priest. This priestly role of Adam is hinted at when viewing the text of Genesis in the light of later revelation in Scripture. First, it is implied by recognizing that later Scripture points to the garden in Eden as the first temple – the meeting place between God and man. Revelation concerning the construction of the tabernacle and temple in Israel shows that they were constructed with garden imagery incorporated into their design (cf. 1 Kings 6-7), including palm trees, open flowers, pomegranates, gourds, and lily blossoms. This imagery is reminiscent of the garden. The lampstands in the temple were also designed like trees, with many theologians considering the lampstand in the tabernacle to be representative of the tree of life in the garden in Eden. Furthermore, the statement in Genesis 2:15 that God put Adam “in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” points to priestly work. The verbs *work* and *keep* when used in close proximity in later passages in the Old Testament refer to the work of priests or Levites serving and guarding the temple (cf. Num. 3:2-8; 2 Chr. 23:32, Ezek. 44:14). Adam, thus, as the first priest was to serve God in the temple garden in Eden, and to guard it from defilement.

Before the fall, Adam was to lead his family in the worship and praise of God and to guard the garden, which points to how Adam should have cast the serpent out when he entered! Of course, as we know, Adam did not cast the serpent out of the garden, and the fall of man ensued as Eve was deceived. The reality of the fall led to two things. First, Adam and Eve are cast out of the presence of the Lord, out of the garden in Eden, and unable to come back in as the way is guarded by cherubim with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). Second, Adam and Eve would now need God to make a way for sinners to be cleansed and redeemed in order to be allowed back into His holy presence and live. God points to the way he will do this both by his promise of a coming seed of the woman who will crush the serpents head (Gen. 3:15) and by clothing Adam and Eve with animal skins (Gen. 3:21), in which God himself serves in a priestly role to Adam and Eve pointing to the blood sacrifice that will be required to restore them to fellowship with Him.

In the period of time between the fall and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood there are several men who functioned as priests, particularly for their families. For example, we read in Genesis 8:20, “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” The patriarchs also offered sacrifices to the Lord upon altars: Abraham (Gen. 12:6-8; 13:14-18), Isaac (Gens 26:25), and

Jacob (Gen. 35:1, 6-7). Job, who likely lived around the same time period as Abraham, also offered sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of his family: “And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, ‘It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did continually” (Job. 1:5). Another priest figure from the time (who also was a king) is Melchizedek, who was “priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18) and who functioned as a priest by blessing God and blessing Abraham (Gen. 14:19-20). These men who function in a priestly way show that a priest will represent people before God through sacrifices and represent God before the people through blessing.

The work of a priest as a mediator between God and His people is filled out further with the establishment of the Levitical priesthood at Mount Sinai. As those who were to represent God to the people and the people before God, the priests had to be set apart as holy unto the Lord, since they would be approaching the Holy God on behalf of the people. The Lord gave Moses specific instructions on Mount Sinai for setting apart the priests, as recorded in Exodus 28-29. The priests were set apart in an elaborate ordination service with many sacrifices and the use of holy anointing oil. Furthermore, when they were serving as priests, they were to wear special garments “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2). The words “glory” and “beauty” are also used in Scripture to refer to God’s glory, revealing how the priests were not only to represent the people before God, but also to represent the honor and glory of God before the people.

Among those who served at the tabernacle and temple, there were differing levels of consecration along with different duties. The Levites were consecrated to guard and move the tabernacle (Num. 3:6-9) and to sing praises before the temple (1 Chron. 16:4), but they were not allowed to enter the holy place or the most holy place. The priests were the ones who were consecrated to enter into the holy place in order to tend to the shewbread and the lampstand and the altar of incense. They were the ones to properly handle the sacrifices offered on behalf of the people (Lev. 1:1-6:7), and they were tasked with teaching God’s people to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10-11). But they were not allowed to enter the most holy place, the inner sanctuary where the Lord dwelt above the ark of the covenant. Only the high priest could enter the most holy place, and even then, only one day of the year: the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). There the high priest would enter on behalf of the people, interceding for them, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the precious stones on his breast-piece, representing that he bears them on his heart (Ex. 28:29-30). There the high priest would offer the sacrifice for the sins of the people and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. And yet,

even after the high priest completed this act on the Day of Atonement, none of the other Israelites were allowed to enter the most holy place. There remained a distance and separation between the holy presence of the Holy God and His people. This reality points to how the priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Covenant were only a type and a shadow pointing to a greater reality to come.

***Jesus Christ is that greater reality, our Great High Priest, who does all that is necessary for our salvation to cleanse us and bring us back into the very presence of God.***

While Jesus is not called a “priest” during his earthly ministry (since he was not born of the tribe of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah), he nonetheless does work that is similar to the work of the priests that foreshadowed him. For example, like the Levites, Jesus was concerned to guard the temple from uncleanness. In part, this is what occurs when Jesus clears the money changers from the courtyard of the Gentiles in the temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22). The courtyard of the Gentiles was meant to be a place where the Gentiles could come and pray to God; it was to be a house of prayer for the nations. Jesus would not even allow them to carry anything through the temple, because he was guarding the temple and protecting it from what should not be there (Mark 11:16). Jesus also taught the people to regard the regulations still in force at that time, such as instructing the cleansed lepers to go and show themselves to the priests (Luke 17:11-14). Jesus also did the priestly work of intercession while on this earth, which we see when he prays for Simon Peter (Luke 22:31-32) and in his prayer the night before his crucifixion in John 17. In these ways the work of Jesus is similar to those priests who came before Him.

**The superiority of Christ’s priestly work.** But of course, Jesus’ work as our Great High Priest is also different from the priests who came before, for Jesus’ work is superior to their work for several reasons, which are most clearly detailed in the book of Hebrews. Some of the main highlights include,

- 1) That Jesus is a superior priest because his priesthood is of a better order, an eternal order. Jesus is high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the order of Aaron (Hebrews 7). As a priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus’ priesthood is not based upon bodily descent from Aaron, but upon the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), which means the priesthood of the resurrected Jesus will never come to an end, unlike the Levites (Heb. 7:23-24). Thus, Jesus our Great High Priest is able to continue his priestly work of intercession forever, for “he always lives to make intercession” (Heb. 7:25).

- 2) He is our Great High Priest who offered himself on the cross as the perfect once-for-all all-sufficient sacrifice that actually atones for our sins and cleanses us as his people all the way down to the very depths of our being in our consciences (Heb. 9:14). The sacrifices of the Old Covenant only made the worshipper ceremonially clean on the outside (Heb. 9:13), but Jesus' sacrifice perfects the worshipper and makes the worshipper acceptable to God. In this way, our Great High Priest has opened up "a new and living way...through the curtain, that is through his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). Through Christ's sacrifice, all who believe in Christ, are cleansed and now "have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19).
- 3) Jesus, by His priestly work, is the one "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Rev. 1:5b-6). And now we delight to worship our God as "a holy priesthood" that offers "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). And we look forward to the day when Christ returns and brings heaven and earth together in the new heavens and new earth, and we will dwell in the special presence of God and the Lamb forevermore (Rev. 21-22). Let us praise our Lord Jesus Christ who is our Great High Priest! Amen.

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***He ever lives to make intercession (Hebrews 7:25)***

***Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea;***

*A great High Priest whose name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me.*

*My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart;*

*I know that while in heaven He stands, No tongue can bid me thence depart.*

*When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells me of the guilt within,*

*Upward I look and see Him there Who made an end to all my sin.*

*Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free;*

*For God the Just is satisfied To look on Him and pardon me.*

*Behold Him there, the risen Lamb! My perfect, spotless Righteousness,*

*The great unchangeable I Am, The King of glory and of grace.*

*One with Himself, I cannot die, My soul is purchased by His blood;*

*My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ my Savior and my God.*

*Charitie L Bancroft 1841-86*

# COMMON QUESTION NO. 19

## DO WE HAVE FREE WILL?

*Keith Underhill*

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.

Many people believe that any person at any time can choose to believe in Christ. They believe that there is nothing that hinders their will from choosing to be saved. In other words, the will is totally free to do whatever it wants. So in evangelism the preacher addresses the will, and every pressure is used to get a 'decision' for Christ. Is such thinking about the will according to the Bible?

As with all questions we must first understand what is being asked.

- Is the question about whether we make the choices we do freely, and without external compulsion? If so, then our wills are free. For example, I am writing this article because I want to. No one is forcing me against my will. If someone puts pressure on me, even putting a gun to my head, it is still my decision whether to give in or not! In theology we call this 'Free Agency'.
- Or is the question about whether our wills are independent of our nature? Then our wills are **not** free. We choose according to our nature. We are integrated beings, our mind/thoughts, desires and will working together. If I know that the glass of orange coloured drink before me is mango juice, and I feel hot and thirsty, I will choose to drink it. But if there is a label on the glass that it is poison, I will hate it, and refuse to drink it.

So we shall narrow the question down to whether, today, any person may of his own free and independent will choose Christ unto salvation.

### **(1) Biblical Evidence**

The Bible very clearly states that salvation is not due to the will of man.

“... to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, **not** of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the **will** of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

“So then it depends **not** on human **will** or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Romans 9:16). In the context Paul is writing about the true spiritual Israel within the larger nation (verse 6).

Then there are those texts of the Bible that tell us there are certain things we cannot do. This is very humbling, but true.

We have no free will to come to Christ, to believe on Him, unless God first draws us. “**No one can** come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44, repeated 65). This is the explanation of Jesus as to why the crowd murmured against Him refusing to believe.

No one can know the Father, unless the Son first reveals Him. “... no one knows the Son except the Father, and **no one knows** the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). This again is Jesus’ explanation why He was largely rejected.

It is impossible to understand spiritual things, unless the Spirit reveals them. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is **not able** to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Once again, in the context, this is the reason why the message of Christ was almost universally rejected.

Once more, the non-Christian will not and cannot choose to obey the law of God, which includes the command to believe on Christ. “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it **cannot**. Those who are in the flesh **cannot** please God” (Romans 8:7-8).

Why is the will not free to choose these things? It is because sin rules in our nature and so influences everything we want to do and so choose to do. This is what we call Total Depravity. We might give the example of death, which affects the whole person. Lazarus was dead, and he was not able to choose to become alive. Jesus had to give him life through His life-giving word. Jesus clearly teaches that what we decide to think and do depends on the condition of our heart (see Matthew 12:33-37, 15:17-20). Just like the fruit on a tree, an evil heart only produces a bad life. Note that Jesus says such a person **cannot** speak good: “How can you speak good, when you are evil?”

## (2) Historical Evidence

The question of free will was a central one in the Reformation. Martin Luther wrote a book titled, ‘The Bondage of the Will’, which he highly valued. He believed it dealt with the real problem between Roman Catholicism and Biblical Christianity. The question is whether salvation is all of God’s grace, or whether the sinner cooperates with God as Catholicism teaches. But because salvation is all of grace, it cannot be anything of man. Therefore the will of man cannot be a cause of salvation. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). So this denial of free will is not a new doctrine, but one which has been taught by many churches since the Reformation, and back to Augustine in the early church. See the article in this issue on the teaching of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith on Free Will.

### **(3) Questions**

1. Don't the invitation passages imply that I have free will? Why would Jesus say to the crowd, "Come to Me" (Matthew 11:28) and they were not able to come? But Jesus did not have this problem that you have. He had just said that no one can know the Father unless He reveals Him to the person. Also in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Jesus both makes coming to Him dependent upon a person being given to Him by the Father, and assures anyone who comes that he will be received. The truth is that through the invitation the Lord works sovereignly in the hearts of those He chooses. So with Lydia only, amongst other women, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Paul was speaking to them all, but she alone received his word because the Lord opened her heart.

2. If God commands me to believe does it not imply I have the ability to believe? This is not true. Responsibility does not necessitate ability. For example, I am required to work tomorrow, but I have a hangover so that I cannot. I am responsible for my inability. So it is with sin. I am responsible for sin, but sin makes me unable to come to Christ. God commands us to be without sin (as in 1 Peter 1:15), yet no one is able to live a sinless life. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

3. Doesn't the Bible show that even sinful people can do good things? Yes, all people do things which are good in our sight. Even tax collectors love those who love them (Matthew 5:46)! But the Bible says clearly that "no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12), and "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). God is not pleased with anything unless it is done with faith in Him (Hebrews 11:6). It must be done because He commands it, and for His glory. This no unsaved man does or can do.

### **(4) Conclusion**

We do have free will in the sense that we choose according to our nature. Before the fall into sin in the Garden, Adam and Eve had the freedom to choose to obey or to disobey.

After sin came into the world, having a sinful human nature, neither Adam nor his descendants have the freedom to choose good, that which pleases God. Sin prevents us from choosing Christ. Why would someone who loves sin choose Christ who hates sin?

When we become Christians we have both the Spirit and the flesh (indwelling sin) and we may follow the one or the other (Gal. 5:19, see Rom. 7:14-25).

In glory we shall not be able to sin, praise God. We shall be like God who cannot sin. We will always choose the good because we are given new glorified bodies.

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## THE LIFE OF DAVID (13)

### GOD'S PLAN FOR DAVID

*Keith Underhill*

*This article concludes the study on the Life of David from issue #136*

David is one of the most important people in the Old Testament. His life is recorded at great length in 1 Samuel 15-31 into 2 Samuel 1-24, and then 1 Kings 1-2; and again in 1 Chronicles 11-29. He also wrote many of the Psalms, from which we learn much more about him, especially his inner spiritual life. In this article there are many, many verses for you to look up, and so see the vital importance of David in the Scriptures.

#### 1. WHAT DID DAVID'S LIFE ACCOMPLISH?

(1) *David was a model king to whom subsequent kings were compared.*

God made him the example for his son Solomon (1 Kings 3:3,6,14, 9:4).

- Solomon – “His heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 11:4, see verses 6,33,38).
- Abijah – “You have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart,, doing only that which was right in My eyes” (1 Kings 14:8).
- Abijam – “His heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 15:3).
- Asa – “And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 15:11).
- Jehoshaphat – “He walked in the earlier ways of his father David” (2 Chronicles 17:3).
- Amaziah – “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not like David his father” (2 Kings 14:3).
- Ahaz – “And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done” (2 Kings 16:2, see 2 Chronicles 28:1).
- Hezekiah – “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done” (2 Kings 18:3, 2 Chronicles 29:2).
- Josiah – “And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father” (2 Kings 22:2, 2 Chronicles 34:2).

(2) *The covenant with David determined subsequent history.*

See, *The Life of David* (9), in *Grace & Truth* 133. This is what God promised David in the covenant: “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). So again and again the southern kingdom of Judah, with David’s descendant on the throne, was spared deserved judgement. God kept on saying, I will not do it “for the sake of David”.

- To Solomon – the division of kingdom would not be in his days (1 Kings 11:12-13,32,34).
- To Abijam – his son would sit on his throne (1 Kings 15:4-5).
- To Jehoram – the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah (2 Kings 8:19), the house of David (2 Chronicles 21:7).
- To Hezekiah – Jerusalem would be delivered from the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:34, 20:6, Isaiah 37:35).

David’s line must be preserved for our Lord was to be ‘the Son of David’. The prophets looked forward to One to come from David (Isaiah 9:7, 16:5, Jeremiah 17:25, 22:4, 23:5, 33:15,17,21-22, Amos 9:11 see Acts 15:16), even as if David himself (Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25, Hosea 3:5). The New Testament sees Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises made to David (see Acts 2:29-31, 13:22-23,34). He is the Son of David (Romans 1:3, 2 Timothy 2:8).

(3) *David established Jerusalem as his capital.*

God told Moses that when the people came into the land of Canaan, “you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there” (Deuteronomy 12:5). When his throne was established, the first thing recorded that David did was to conquer Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-9). God later revealed that this was where the altar and temple was to be built (2 Samuel 24:18-25, see 2 Chronicles 3:1). It became the place associated with the dwelling of God in the Old Testament (Psalm 135:21). Jerusalem (and Zion) came to stand for the people of God. So central is the thought of Jerusalem (as in Psalms 122, 137, for example), that the church of the new covenant is called the new Jerusalem, or the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22). Many prophecies have Jerusalem as the people of God surrounded by God’s enemies in the final days and the subsequent victory of God (Joel 3 and especially verse 16, Zechariah 14, Revelation 20:9). The eternal dwelling of God’s people is also pictured as the city of Jerusalem/Zion (Revelation 3:12, 14:1, 21:2,10).

(4) *David had victory over all his enemies*

When the covenant was made with David, God said, “I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you” (2 Samuel 7:9, see verse 1). Some of these victories are described in 2 Samuel 8 and 10. So his son Solomon inherited a kingdom at rest with the borders including all the land that was promised to Abraham (1 Kings 4:21, see Genesis 15:18-21).

(5) *David was a man of faith*

We are prepared for this by being told that “The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, ...” (1 Samuel 13:14). David was an example of what the king must be like. He is one who will keep God’s commands because he trusts in Him. This is first seen in his defeat of Goliath. David was sure that “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37). He defied Goliath with these words: “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (verse 45). Then, when pursued by the murderous intentions of Saul, David did not take things into his own hands and get revenge when he had the opportunity (1 Samuel 24:1-7, 26:6-20). Above all, he was a man who trusted in the Lord’s mercy and steadfast love, the only way he was able to live a life of faith. He was conscious of his sin, especially in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. So we have the Psalm of confession (51), where he traces back his sin to his birth, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). The blessed man is the one “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1-2, see Romans 4:6-8).

(6) *David has given us many Psalms*

What a unique contribution the Psalms make to the Scriptures! We can identify with the spiritual longings and struggles of this man of God as they are revealed there. This is the hymn book of the church and should be used in our worship. He has his times of victory and defeat, so his times of rejoicing and anguish before the Lord, and times when he is assured and other times when he is in doubt with serious questions. We have in the Psalms a picture of the godly man in the various seasons of his spiritual pilgrimage.

## WHY DID GOD PLAN HIS LIFE THIS WAY?

One good explanation of the word ‘history’ is that it is ‘His story’, i.e. God’s. Since God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11), this includes the life of David in all its details. Nothing happened by chance, outside the will of God. So to ask God’s purpose in the life of David is a necessary question. Why did there have to be someone exactly like David? God planned that he would be an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the purposes of the book of Ruth (4:17-22).

The basic answer to this question above is that, as Israel’s great model king, He is a type of Christ. Note the following things:

1. David’s lowly origin. When Samuel arrived at Jesse’s house to anoint one of his sons as king, David was totally overlooked. To the question are all your sons here, Jesse replied: “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 16:11). He was dismissed by Saul as a worthy opponent to Goliath with the words, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth” (1 Samuel 17:33). Jesus likewise was born of obscure parents, Joseph a carpenter, and Mary probably a young teenager. They lived in Nazareth in Galilee of which it was said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Jesus was born in an overcrowded hotel (inn), and laid in an animal’s feeding trough (manger). His first visitors were despised shepherds. Truly, for our sake “He became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9). He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7).

2. David’s exaltation through suffering. He was anointed as king but it was years before he was actually crowned king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5). During those years he was pursued by Saul “like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains” (1 Samuel 26:20). He waited until God removed Saul from the scene. At first only his own tribe of Judah made him king over them, and it took more than 7 years for him to be crowned by all Israel. Stephen points out that God’s appointed servants were typically rejected – Joseph, Moses, the prophets (Acts 7). [It is interesting that some of his most loyal followers were Gentiles – the Chelethites and Pelethites were Cretans/Philistines (2 Samuel 8:18), Ittai

the Gittite (2 Samuel 15:19), Hushai the Archite was a Canaanite (2 Samuel 15:32), Shobi the son of Nahash was an Ammonite (2 Samuel 17:27).] Likewise, Jesus “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). Finally, they succeeded in getting Him crucified. This had so often been God’s way, humiliation as a preparation for exaltation. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him ...” (Philippians 2:8-9). It is also the way that all God’s people must tread (Romans 8:17). A number of Psalms where David speaks of his sufferings are seen in the New Testament as referring to the suffering of Jesus. Jesus used Psalm 22:1 as the darkness was about to finish and to yield up His spirit. There are other words and phrases taken up in the New Testament from Psalm 22. For Psalm 22:7-8 see Luke 23:35-36, and for Psalm 22:18 see John 19:24. Psalm 69 is another Psalm of David in his suffering which points forward to Christ. Just as David was ‘hated without cause’ (verse 4), so this is ultimately true of Jesus (John 15:25). For Psalm 69:9 see John 2:17 and Romans 15:3. For Psalms 69:22-23 see Romans 11:9-10. For Psalm 69:25 see Acts 1:20.

3. David’s kingship. As noted at the beginning, David as king was the one against whom all subsequent kings of Judah were compared. The godly characteristics of his reign with the multiple failures of later kings to be like him gave rise to the expectation of a king like him, the Messiah. David’s reign was characterized by “justice and equity” (2 Samuel 8:15). He was the man ‘after God’s own heart’ who “kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes” (1 Kings 14:8). Yet he was not the one who could be the Saviour of God’s people, because he failed in the matter of “Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:5). The king to come, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will have no such blemish. He will rule with justice and righteousness for ever (see Isaiah 9:7, 11:3-5). He Himself has no sin so is fully qualified to be our eternal Saviour (Hebrews 7:26-28).

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# WORSHIP

Murungi Igweta

*Murungi Igweta is a Pastor with Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. In this article he is continuing with his writing on aspects of the life and ministry of the local church. He seeks to adorn the Bride of Christ in her primary business of worship, which is the primary task of the church.*

The primary business of Christians, and particularly the church is to worship God. Surely we are called to be an edification body. But we are to love, and live with another harmoniously so that we can be united in the worship of God. Certainly, the church has a task of missions and evangelism. But “mission exist because worship doesn’t!” (John Piper). In evangelism and missions, we seek to invite sinners to be saved by Christ so that they can worship God!

**But is what is worship?** Worship is to ascribe worthy and honour to God. It is the reverent attitude, desire and action involving the whole being in the guidance of the Word of God and actuated by the Spirit of God to ascribe honor, and glory to the Triune God, as the Supreme Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of the universe. Worship is far more than singing, although it includes it. Worship is far more than going to church, although it is part of it.

This is what the Lord God told His chosen community in Deuteronomy 6:4,5:

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your might.”*

This statement is addressed to the redeemed of the Lord, not just His creation. What this means is that worship is especially commanded, demanded and expected by God from the people whom He has graciously given His redeeming mercy. Why did He not say, ‘hear all the earth?’ It is for this reason that He revealed His covenant name – YHWH, translated in English as LORD (all letters in the upper case). There is One God for all the earth, not just for Israel – this is the truth that the worshippers acknowledge and disseminate to all the earth so that they also may be part of the worshipping community. But the point is that those who have received the power of God in salvation are expected to worship God, even more and possibly better than the angels!

**The Lord who deserves worship is One.** Yes, there is but one only, the living and true God. He is Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice goodness and truth. Yet, the rest of the

*It is the reverent attitude, desire and action involving the whole being in the guidance of the Word of God and actuated by the Spirit of God to ascribe honour, and glory to the Triune God, as the Supreme Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of the universe.*

Scripture teaches that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but these three are one God, equal in power and glory. This is the eternal Being who deserves and commands all worship from all His creatures.

**Is He worthy?** *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.* (Rev. 4:11). God is worthy of worship, adoration and praise. He deserves worship because He created everything. He deserves worship from us because this is why created us. He commands this worship, because this is the right thing to do since He sustains us. He commands worship because, it is in the worship of God that we find meaning of life for which He made us. He commands worship because He is sovereign. But most importantly God desires worship from those that He has redeemed by the blood of His Son. Let the redeemed of the Lord praise Him. Let the chosen of the Lord praise His holy name.

*He sent His Son with power to save from guilt, and darkness, and the grave;  
Wonder of grace to God belong – repeat His mercies in your song.*

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

**How is this worship to be done?** It is to be expressed by a genuine love from the heart. It is spiritual. It is internal and deep, coming from the heart, which is the wellspring of life. It extends to the strength of man. True worship begins from within the heart. The heart, that is, the first thing to be dealt with in salvation, and this extends to the rest of the members of the body. The heart is to find its full delight in the worship of its Creator, Redeemer and Benefactor. The heart is the wellspring of life. It is the seat of the soul. Without the heart, one is not alive. Heart worship is the only true worship. Yet this heart worship, though spiritual, is visible – it would be manifest, it is seen!

**But what is love?** Love is the outworking of the saving faith. Love is saving faith in action! But what brings about this saving faith? It is the truth as revealed by God that brings about the saving faith. What God has spoken in His Word informs the mind and the Holy Spirit moves the heart to believe, and obey – and in this way love is expressed. So loving the Lord is actually, believing His truth well enough to obey without reservations, but with all affection. Love endures forever, it is perfect and it will not pass away. This means that the love we are speaking about is objective love – not just emotional, sensual or subjective love.

Love is more than emotion – it is the obedience informed by the truth of God. The Lord Jesus reiterated this requirement to His disciples as recorded in the first three gospels to show its importance. See Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27. This is why this summary of the Ten Commandment is the called the Great Commandment by the Lord:

*"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*

*and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40)*

**What is to love with all?** What is the Lord saying here? That a human being has four parts, i.e. heart, soul, mind and strength? Absolutely not! The Lord is saying that we love God absolutely, totally, and completely with all that we are! We are called to love God unreservedly. Love for God is our number one priority.

We are to love the neighbour according to the measure that we love ourselves. Loving God means obeying the first table of the Law (i.e. the first four commandments) and loving the neighbour is outworked in obeying the second table of the law (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> commandments). Therefore, we read,

*"For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom 13:9-10)*

Therefore, true worship demands a total loving response of the person from the heart, to his mind – this is to say that it is not irrational worship. Heart, soul, mind and strength is the sum total of our being.

It is the requirement of God Almighty that His worshipping people give total and unqualified submission to His sovereign demands, as revealed in His word. To come to worship this great God is to come with unreserved commitment to please Him, with every part of our being. With all our powers, we purpose to ascribe to Him the praise that is His due to Him, as the only God just as He has revealed this through His written Word – the Bible.

The demand laid upon us by God to worship Him is that the whole of our being must be involved in this worship. Any worship that does not involve the heart for example is a hypocritical worship, and it is unacceptable before the Lord. We should be very careful not to neglect any part of our being in the worship, hence the emphasis in these passages, to love Him with all of our heart, soul, spirit, mind, and strength. This does not mean that these are the only these parts involved in the worship, but this is used for the sake of emphasis, to show the totality of the whole being. We are integrated human beings and not just parts or a collection of faculties. We are expected to respond to God in worship with all of powers and abilities<sup>5</sup>.

Love is the new commandment our Saviour left with us. Having loved us, He called us to love another so that all people may know that we are His disciples (John13:34). Since Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, we also are to demonstrate our total devotion to God by our sacrificial love and service to

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<sup>5</sup> Halleluyah, Herbert Carson.

others. At the same time John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8,16) – if our heavenly Father is love how do we show ourselves to be His children except by loving others? So the implications of the verse stated are obvious – if anyone does not love, then he does not know God.

*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1Jn 4:11-12)*

Therefore, when people visit our churches, they ought to find and experience warm love, friendly environment of infectious love, welcoming affection, caring community of ‘love saturated saints’ who wash the feet of other saints. The church ought to be a demonstration of the love of Christ and so a Christ-like compassion, kind community, and a loving family of people who are filled with the love of God. This is indeed an edification church.

As we think of corporate worship, we must begin with the warmth of our hearts as we lift our voices in song and praise. Unless our hearts are truly tuned to sing the praise of our Saviour in love, our tongues cannot be employed in nobler powers of singing our dear Redeemer’s praise.

What this means is that worship is more than the meetings and singing we have when we gather as churches. Worship begins in the heart – affecting the will. It goes on to the mind, actuating the rest of the body to bring it to the lordship of Christ, by the help of the Spirit. It is all of the Christian living. It is the evangelical obedience and submission to the Creator and Saviour. Worship is the lifestyle and attitude of a believer. Lest you think that this is a menial task, the heavenly convocation is actively engaged in this public worship, in the presence of God. It must not be assumed that worship is an earthly engagement. In fact earthly worship is only a rehearsal of the heavenly reality. Earthly worship is only temporary, heavenly worship is eternal.

As much as earthly worship appears to be only a short rehearsal of the heavenly worship, both must be done according to the prescription of the Lord. The standards for the heavenly eternal worship are the same as the ones for the earthly since heavenly worship will be the culmination. It is important that we rehearse according to the standards of God. Worship is of critical importance in the life of a child of God. This is why everyone is worshipping something or someone. Rampant idolatry in materialism is a corollary of misdirected worship. Do you worship the Lord God, the only one worthy of worship?

Church worship is supposed to be the climax of Christian worship on earth. When the church of God gathers on Sunday, the one business is to worship God. Corporate worship is the most important business on earth. How would a church know if they have prioritized the worship of the true and living God in their Sunday worship services? For many churches, this important principle has been forgotten. Tragically, there is great appetite for entertainment instead of worship.

## **Recapturing the vision of true worship.**

I aim to help the worship leaders, to recapture the vision of true worship of God in their respective local churches. I desire and pray that those who benefit from this book will be those who are first and foremost concerned about the glory of God. The purpose of worship is first and foremost to glorify God and to abase all human pride. Unless the primary purpose of gathering under a roof on a Sunday morning is to ascribe glory and honour to the Lord, and unless men and women know that they have come before the presence of God, and are before His glorious throne in His holy presence, that gathering is not engaged in the primary business for which it exists! If the holy cherubim cover their faces before God, and the holy seraphs bow before the presence of God, and the angels cast their crowns before Him, shall we do anything less? Shall we gather to entertain men?

*I aim to help the worship leaders, to recapture the vision of true worship of God in their respective local churches.*

**Woes to vain worship!** Woe to those who gather to offer man-centred worship. Woe to those who gather to entertain men in the name of worship! Worship belongs to God alone. To God (alone) be the glory. *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* (Psa. 115:1) The priority of worship is the glory of God.

Unless we capture the right vision of God, we cannot worship Him properly. Who is the God that we worship? Is the infinitely holy God? Is it the sovereign Lord of lords and King of kings? The reason why the deterioration of worship has been gathering momentum is because the church is no longer interested in theology. God is not preached as the sovereign ruler of the universe. Many preachers teach a god who is no different from an ATM – visit him only when you are needy and he will give you all you want. He will give you health and wealth. But this is not the true God, the true God is in the heavens He does all that pleases (Ps. 115:3, c.f. 135:6).

When prophet Isaiah saw the Lord sitting high and lifted up, he describes the seraphs' worship:

*Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (Isaiah 6:2-5)

The seraphim, as holy as they are dare not expose their creatureliness to God. They cover their face with one pair of wings and their feet with the other pair of wings and flew by their last pair of wings. Then we are told that they sing – they

call out to another. The worship song is recorded for us. From this song we observe three things:

- 1) The sing of the holy character of God. Of all the divine attributes, even the angels are overwhelmingly awed by the holiness of God - "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD...*"
- 2) The object of their worship is the LORD. Yahweh is the object of the glorious heavenly worship.
- 3) The state the vast extent of the influence of the majestic glory of the LORD – "*... the whole earth is full of his glory!*"

This is a place to begin as we examine our worship. When true worship is offered, it is pleasing and acceptable to God. Isaiah records that God responded to this worship by speaking in such a voice that shook the foundations of the threshold. Then the house was filled with smoke! God was pleased and so accepted the seraphic worship.

**Christian worship is Christ-centred.** Christian worship is singing the gospel. Unless we realize that the trumpet call to gather for worship is the gospel, then we would not understand why Christian worship is to be Christ-centred. It is the gospel that invited us in the first place to gather for worship. Therefore, we sing the praise of Him of who died, of Him who died upon the cross. The sinners' hope, who bears our sins upon the tree. He brings us mercy from above. How can we fail to sing of the cross? The cross takes our guilt away. The cross holds the fainting spirit up. It cheers with hope the gloomy day and sweetens every bitter cup. The gospel makes the coward spirit brave and nerves the feeble arm for fight. It takes the terror from the grave and gilds the bed of death with heavenly light. Yes, Christians sing the gospel because it is the balm of life, the cure of woe. It is the measure and the pledge of love. It is the sinner's refuge here below and it is for this reason that it is the angels' theme in heaven above.<sup>6</sup>

This is what angels sing in heaven,

*And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:7-10)*

The new song of the Four Living Creatures and the twenty-four elders is the redemption song of the gospel of our Saviour. They sing of the worthiness of

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Kelly (1769-1854), Words taken from the hymn, *We sing the praise of Him who died.*

the Lamb because He was slain and by His blood He ransomed a people for God. The heavenly hosts celebrate the redemption purchased by the Lamb, even Christ. They prostrate themselves in worship before the Lamb.

Shall we, then, who are the first fruit of this redemption, do anything less? Shall we not sing gospel centred songs following the pattern of the heavenly worship? While we shall speak further about the content of the songs, it must be clear that the Christian singing must be singing the gospel. If you grasp this in your worship, you cannot fail.

Every gathering of the saints is another glorious opportunity to sing about the only Redeemer of God's elect, to sing of His cross, to glory in our Saviour, to praise Him for the gospel that we are indeed redeemed. Let those who gather with us, even if unbelievers, see the delight of our praise as we marvel and bask in the presence of our Redeemer so that they also may want to truly and sincerely come under the same eternal privilege of worship. But we must not entertain them.

On this point, of glory of God and gospel saturated worship, Kevin Deyoung, the pastor of University Presbyterian Church, says it better than I can:

In corporate worship, the focus should be on the gospel and the all-surpassing glory of Jesus Christ. If the guitars are out of tune, and the sound system screeches, and the preacher fumbles over his sentences, and those leading up front make everyone else feel a bit nervous, then our focus will be in the wrong place. Because doing things decently and in order is helpful to others and pleasing to God, we should seek to “do worship” with excellence (1 Corinthians 14:40). But it must be *undistracting* excellence (to borrow John Piper’s phrase). If the guitarist goes off on some fantastic riff, and the sound system includes sub-woofers under every seat, and the preacher waxes overly eloquent, and those leading up front make everyone else feel a bit like they are enjoying a performance, then our focus will be equally in the wrong place. The goal is to lead in such a way that we are neither so clumsy nor so clever that the glory of God is all but forgotten.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.universityreformedchurch.org/documents/worship.pdf>

# TROUBLE-SHOOTING MARITAL PROBLEMS: *RELATIVES*

Murungi Igweta

*This is the eighth of a series of articles on marriage matters.*

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

(Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31)

A high view of marriage is not an ordinance of Christianity but of creation. It is not given as the order for redeemed humanity, but for created humanity, and for that reason we must affirm marriage in society at large and not just within Christendom.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas the matter of relatives may not be a big problem in the West, it is a big challenge in Africa, where people are more communal, and extended-family-oriented in their mindset. Looking at how African marriages and weddings tend to involve the family and relatives, it is necessary to bear in mind that ability to handle relatives well, especially close family members, is crucial in building a healthy marriage. In most weddings that I have attended or officiated; I have always heard parents of the groom claim that they have now “acquired a son”. My efforts at informing them that they have lost their son, thanks to the new family that has been formed, often fall into deaf ears!

But what does the Bible say? It can be argued that Genesis 2:24 is the most definitive verse on marriage as a creation ordinance. It has the following characteristics:

1. It identifies the normal circumstances of any unmarried man as being under their parental care – they have parents who are here referred to as father and mother.
2. It isolates the number of the parties involved, it is a man, and a woman. Therefore, marriage is distinctively monogamous. A married woman is called a wife. A married man is called a husband.
3. It categorizes their gender in a divinely sanctioned marriage. That it is between a man and woman – it is heterosexual in nature.
4. It specifies what they do in two action terms;
  - they **leave** their parents, i.e. father and mother and
  - they **cleave** or hold fast to each other.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Price, [Matthew: Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Fearn, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 239.

5. It punctuates what they become in their union – they are no longer two but one flesh.

This aspect of leaving one's closest relatives – father and mother, is that we are going to consider in this third article on troubleshooting marital issues. The question of leaving the parents, includes leaving the siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins, inter alia, with an aim of establishing another family. Families give birth to new families. In as much as there are many cases of persons who have been raised by single parents, this is not the norm but the exception. The normal circumstance is for two consenting adults who come together, under the care and guidance of their parents to form a new family unit, by leaving their parents.

One of the sources of many troubles in marriage is how the husband and his wife handle their relatives. Being supported financially by the parents or supporting financially the parents (and siblings, nephews and nieces, among others) can easily become acrimonious in the home as one regards their spouse to be in inordinate favour with their relatives and neglect theirs. How easy it is for the wife to say that the husband is giving such support to his parents or sister/brother to the detriment of the family? How easy it is for the husband to feel neglected by the wife because she is too concerned about the affairs of her own kin? This accusations and charges have too easily crippled or paralyzed, even worse, killed too many marriages. It is my prayer that you would be all the wiser in navigating this landmine in your own marriage.

There are two important matters that we must deal with as we tackle this subject:

- ❖ Leaving
- ❖ Cleaving

## A. LEAVING

The word translated leave, is Hebrew word, לָזַב (‘*ā-zāb*) means, leave behind/over; but can also mean, let go, or give up, or abandon! And so, it is a very serious word that show an aspect of letting go of the close relationship with the parents as one forms the new relationship with the spouse, with whom the two become one flesh.

Why does the verse say, “... a man shall leave ...? Why man and not woman? It is assumed that both will leave, but because man is the primary mover, and finder of a wife, the Lord apportion this responsibility of initiative to the man. Once the woman has been found to become a wife, she will also have left her people to be with the man. This is what we see throughout the Bible. Rebekah left her folks. Ruth left her people. Women who have been found to become a wife, are those who have left having been sought and found by their men who then become the husband.

## **What does this leaving the father and mother (and by extension all other relatives mean?)**

There is so much that can be said on the matter, but because of time and space, I will only give a list of dos and don'ts as a general road map to help you navigate it with your relatives.

### **a) Don'ts**

- 1) Do not depend on your relatives anymore for primary emotional support in the form of;
  - Attention
  - Affection
  - Appreciation
  - Accommodation
  - Acknowledgement
- 2) Do not depend on your relatives for financial relief, unless there has been good discussion and a decision on what is happening.
- 3) Do not depend on your relatives for wise counsel, with no regard to your spouse.
- 4) Do not think that you are the financial saviour of your relatives if your spouse (who ought to be more objective) thinks otherwise.
- 5) Do not assume anything but be deliberate in establishing various principles in handling the relatives so that you both can read from the same script.

### **b) Dos**

How do you maintain a healthy relationship with your relatives without ruffling the feathers of your own marriage?

- 1) Honour your father and mother. Obedience/submission to your parents is no longer the priority, but rather honouring them, and seeking to care for them as they age more and more. You have a responsibility to show biblical love and care to your father and mother.
- 2) Be your brother (and sister)'s keeper in your dealings with your own siblings.
- 3) Discuss and seek to agree with your spouse regarding anyone, (and especially your close relatives), whom you might want to bring to your home. Then work out the period of their stay before they come and after they have come. Never allow for a blank cheque hosting.
- 4) Make sure to discuss with your spouse before any of your relatives visit. Never think that it is okay, because they may also have other ideas for the family.

## B. CLEAVING

On the other hand, the word translated cleaving is קִבַּץ (*dā·bǎq*) which means to cling to or fasten oneself to another, stick to, or join with another, or be stuck together, speaks of being in close proximity in a close association of a normal continuing and sustainable relationship being bound by bonds of love. This word group is very close to קִבֵּץ (*dā·bēq*), which means pertaining to being faithful, steadfast, and obedient.<sup>9</sup> The point I am making is that marriage radically changes the relationship between adult children and their parents when they get married as seen in the word study and meaning of the words used in Genesis 2:24 and quoted in many other passages of the Scriptures. The man cleaves to his wife and the wife cleaves to her husband. The two hold fast to each other.

### What does cleaving to one spouse entail?

1. **It is a divine union.** It was God’s idea that the man should not be alone. It was God’s idea to create the woman for man, so that she can be a helper suitable for him. It is God who brought the first woman to the first man. It is God who gives favour when the two come together to be one flesh. God blesses the marriage union with children. God unites the two – “*Did He not make them one...?*” (Malachi 2:15). **It is a blessed union:** God blessed the two with “*Be fruitful and multiply.*” God blesses a marriage union with children. *And what was the one God seeking, Godly offspring.* (Malachi 2:15)
2. **It is a physical union:** *They are no longer two but one flesh* (Matthew 19:6). Since it is physical union, they are counted not as two as they usually are, but one. Thus, they must be together. Husbands sleep on the same bed with their wives to show this reality. But this is further demonstrated in the act of sexual intercourse where the two are united together to be one flesh. And God has so designed our bodies to be suitable for this holy union which happens between a husband and a wife so that there is no sin committed. Instead, this is the recommended sexuality and anything less or more than this is called sexual immorality, which seeks to pollute what God calls holy.
3. **It is an emotional union:** Husband and wife depend on each other. And so the Lord said that it is not good that the man should be alone and so He went on to make a helper suitable or fit for the man. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:28–31, “*In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever*

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<sup>9</sup> James Swanson, [\*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew \(Old Testament\)\*](#) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

*hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Therefore the wife is her husband's body! He is expected by the Lord to love his wife by nourishing and cherishing her.

4. **It is a blessed union:** God blessed the two with "*Be fruitful and multiply.*" God blesses a marriage union with children. *And what was the one God seeking. Godly offspring.* (Malachi 2:15). God blesses all marriages, and one of the way he displays his blessings is by giving children. This is not to say that those who are without children are not blessed of God, but that God has blessed them that way – by closing their wombs. But the usual way in which God displays his blessing to the marriage union is by giving children. *Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.* (Psalm 127:3–5)
5. **It is a single financial ambition:** Husband and wife should work together towards building their family wealth with the time and talents that God has given them. *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil (Ecclesiastes 4:9).* Husbands are called upon to love, lead as head of families, work to provide, and to protect their wives and father their children. Wives are called upon to submit, respect, help, support, their husbands; they are to conceive, bear, nurture and mother their children. This is what makes each family a blessing not only to the adults but also to the children and the society. *Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.* (Psalm 128:1–4)
6. **It is a spiritual union:** Husbands are united to their wives spiritually in the sense. The husband is the head, providing spiritual leadership to his wife. He has a responsibility of ensuring that her sanctification is progressing. He uses the Word to cleanse her to be more Christ-like. They have a *portion of the Spirit* in their union (Malachi. 2:15).
7. **It is a visional union:** Any normal man has a vision for his wife (and of course the whole family) and the wife on the other hand supports and contributes towards that vision as the man's helper. The two ought to always have one ambition of building their family. Children are thus to be raised by their parents together in such a manner that honours them

(Ephesians 6:1). This is one of the visions that every husband and wife want to undertake together of raising a godly offspring (Malachi 2:15). The two have a holy ambition to be closer to God, in communion with God. This is the ultimate vision of a husband and wife. The mystery of marriage ultimately refers to Christ and his church and so each Christian marriage should display the eternal reality of the wonderful and holy marriage of Christ and his bride, the church.

This means that the husband and the wife are not two flesh but one flesh as the Lord explains it in Matthew 19:5-6:

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'*

Commenting on these two verses, Charles Price writes,

The result of marriage is described as 'they are no longer two but one'. This is more than the physical oneness of sexual union, but the deeper oneness of soul and spirit as well as body. That union is described as a divine act fulfilling a divine purpose, 'What God has joined together let man not separate.' The description of marriage as the union of two people 'God has joined together' does not refer only to marriage between two people who have concluded this to be God's specific will for them, but to marriage itself. It cannot be argued that a marriage is invalid because God had not joined the two together! The institute of marriage itself is by God's decree and in accordance with his will, and in that sense all marriage is a joining together by God. Therefore, as marriage is ordained by God, he says, let man not separate'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Price, [Matthew: Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Fearn, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 239–240.

# 1689 LBCF CHAPTER 21

## OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

*1 The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the law, and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation: as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law for the substance of them; but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of a ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of. (Galatians 3:13; 1:4; Acts 26:18; Romans 8:3; 8:28; 1Corinthians 15:54-57; 2Thessalonians 1:10; Romans 8:15; Luke 1:73-75; 1John 4:18; Galatians 3:9,14; 1John 7:38-39; Hebrews 10:19-21)*

*2 God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also. (James 4:12; Romans 14:4; Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1Corinthians 7:23; Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:20,22-23; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2Corinthians 1:24).*

*3 They who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practice any sin, or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives. (Romans 6:1-2; Galatians 5:13; 2Peter 2:18,21).*

**BELOW IS THE EXPOSITION OF THIS CHAPTER.**

# CHAPTER 21: CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

## The Freedom that a Christian has

1. *Christ has purchased for all believers a liberty inherent in the Gospel. It comprises freedom from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation that follows upon guilt, from the wrath of God, and from the severity and curse of God's law. It also includes deliverance from this present evil world, and from all such things as bondage to Satan, sin's dominion, the hurtfulness of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and eternal damnation. Furthermore, it includes free access to God and the yielding of obedience to Him, not as it were with the fear of a slave for his master, but with a childlike love and readiness. All these blessings were more or less enjoyed by believers in Old Testament days, but under New Testament conditions Christian liberty becomes more extensive. It includes freedom from the burdens imposed by the ceremonial law to which the Jewish church was subjected, greater boldness in approaching to the throne of grace, and a larger measure of the free Spirit of God than was normally granted to saints in the pre-Christian era.*

**The background of this chapter** must first be understood as this subject of liberty is not one that is much heard these days. Three different views are dealt with that are very dangerous:

(1) **Church authoritarianism** – Especially the Catholics claim total authority over men's consciences to believe whatever it teaches even when it is not in the Bible, e.g. about Mary.

(2) **State authoritarianism** – This is the other extreme where it is believed that the State is the final human authority. Even leaders like Martin Luther appealed to the state for religious reform.

(3) **Libertinism** – The throwing off of all authority in a false liberty which becomes indulgence.

**(a) Freedom under the Gospel** – It is expressed both negatively and positively.

1. What the Christian is freed from:
  - Sin's guilt and condemnation (lines 1-3) – Jn. 3:18, Romans 8:1,33, so that there is no expectation of God's wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10) as the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13).
  - Sin's power over our lives (lines 3-5) – the world (Galatians 1:4), the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15), and the flesh or indwelling sin (Romans 6:12-14).

- Sin’s punishment (lines 5-6) – afflictions that no longer hurt (Romans 8:28), death and the grave that no longer damn (1 Corinthians 15:54-57), not afflictions or death themselves.
2. What new freedoms the Christian has (lines 6-7):
- Free access to God (Ephesians 2:18, Hebrews 10:19).
  - Childlike obedience – not out of fear but out of love because God is now our Father having adopted us as sons through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:15).

**(b) Compared with Freedom under the Law (Old Testament times)**

– Basically the same freedoms because the OT saints were also justified by faith (Abraham in Rm. 4:1-5). But in the following ways our freedom is more “extensive” than under the law (lines 8-12).

- “Freedoms from burdens imposed by the ceremonial law” (see Acts 15:10, Galatians 4:3). We are no longer burdened by dietary laws, laws about contact with gentiles, sacrificial and temple worship laws, which would be a great hindrance to the missionary work of the church (see Galatians 2:11-21, Colossians 2:16-17).
- Greater boldness in prayer, because of the full revelation of God in Christ.
- Fuller supplies of the Spirit as a baptism, outpouring, river (John. 7:37-39, Acts 2:17).

**Freedom of Conscience**

2. *God alone is Lord of the conscience. He has set it free from all obligation to receive or obey any such doctrines or demands of men as are in any respect in opposition to His Word or not contained in it. Indeed, to believe and obey such doctrines and demands is tantamount to a betrayal of true liberty of conscience. It is against all reason, and nothing less than the destruction of liberty of conscience, when men demand of their fellows an implicit faith, in other words, an absolute and blind obedience.*

Freedom of conscience depends upon the spiritual freedom in Christ by the gospel. Christians are free from the necessity of obedience to any command of men not in the Bible.

- (a) Basic principle** – “God alone is Lord of the conscience” (line 1). Read the following verses in their context: Romans. 14:4, Galatians. 5:1, James. 4:12. It is only to the commands of God in the Bible that we must give “implicit faith” and “absolute obedience”.
- (b) Implication** – We have been “set free from all obligation to receive or obey and such doctrines or demands of men as are in any respect in opposition to His Word or not contained in it” (lines 1-3). The teaching and commands of men, unless contained in the Bible, should not be submitted to as if they were the commands of God. Read the following verses in their contexts: Matt. 15:9, Acts 4:19, 5:29, 1 Cor. 7:23. For example, the Bible commands that we must submit to church leaders

(Heb. 13:17), so that this must become a matter of conscience with us, but only if what they command is true to the Word of God.

(c) **Requirements** – Obey men in the family, work, state and church relationships of authority because such authority is from God and from the principle of seeking to please men in order to win them to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23). This is why Paul had Timothy circumcised, but refused to have Titus circumcised (Acts 16:3 & Gal. 2:3). But men must never be required to give to us an “absolute obedience” as if our commands are the commands of God, or a “blind obedience” because there is no Scripture proof.

(d) **Applications** – This section was written against the background of the authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church that demands belief in doctrines (e.g. purgatory) and obedience to practices (e.g. prayer to Mary) that are not in the Bible. The State has often ‘lorded’ it over men’s consciences, such as in Scotland when it sought to impose prelacy (bishops) as the only method of Church government, or in England when it sought to impose the Prayer Book as the only way of worship. Our cry must be, “What says the Scripture?” (see Is. 8:20, Acts 17:11). Do not believe anything, or obey anything, unless you are convinced that it is the Word of the Lord in the Scripture. Do not let your conscience be brought again into bondage.

## Christian Liberty Corrupted

3. *To practise any sin, or harbour sin’s evil desires, on a pretence of enjoying Christian liberty, perverts the main purpose of gospel grace, and imperils those guilty of such an offence, for thereby they destroy the very purpose of Christian liberty, namely, that the Lord’s people, ‘being delivered out of the hand of their enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all their days’.*

Christian freedom must never be an excuse for following our own evil desires. This is because Christian freedom is first of all deliverance **from** sin in order to serve God. ‘Freedom’ is not the right to do what I want, but to do what God wants. Such an abuse of freedom was an ever present danger in the early church (see Romans. 6:1,2, Galatians 5:13-15). The example of the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt is helpful. They were freed from Egyptian slavery with the purpose that they might serve God and Him alone (for example read Deuteronomy 6).

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# SALVATION STORIES

*Irene Peter Mumba*

I was blessed to be born and raised in a Christian family, where attending church was as natural as breathing. I was instilled with the values of faith, compassion, and service from a tender age. As I grew, I diligently followed the path of faith, participating in every church activity and endeavoring to live a life that aligned with Christian values. I used to faithfully attend church and perform good deeds, yet I was still entangled in a life marked by sinfulness. I knew Gods Holy law and I tried to meet it in and of myself but I fell short every time.

In September 2022 ,after the loss of someone very dear to me there was a longing within me, a yearning to comprehend the deeper truths of faith and to discover the true purpose of my existence .It was during this time that I came to Trinity Baptist Church Donholm. I remember the sermon that day was about a wise and foolish hearer ,the doer and the hearer of the word and we sang the hymn ‘Almost Home’ and it dawned on me very clearly that we were pilgrims in this world. I kept on attending church and got the message to pursue the unchanging Christ.

Through the sermons taught here, I began to grasp the profound truth that salvation is not attained through human effort or merit, but is a free gift of God's grace. This was the start of a big journey for me. It was like a fight inside me. Though I understood the concept of grace, my heart still clung to the notion that my salvation was dependent on my own righteousness. I struggled with the idea that I didn't have to earn God's love and it was hard for me to let go and fully embrace the liberating truth of Gods unconditional love.

In His infinite mercy and providence, God continued to work in my life, patiently guiding me along the path of redemption. During a sermon on ‘A sick nation prepared for healing’ that was preached here in church, God's mercy quickened my heart, and I became aware of my own spiritual poverty, how bound I was by the chains of legalism, and it dawned on me how incapable I was of helping myself. I was convicted of my sins and my need of a Savior and in my helplessness I was driven to my knees in repentance, confessing my sins and entrusting my life to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. I now know that faith is entirely God’s gift and I have seen the evidence of it in the conviction of my own sinfulness and the assurance of total forgiveness.

Since then my journey of faith has been marked by a newfound sense of freedom and joy. I have learned to take it all ( my sin, my doubt and my unbelief) to God in prayer, having faith that He will not only forgive me but He will also draw me nearer to Him. No longer bound by the chains of my sin and legalism, I walk in the

light of God's grace, secure in the knowledge that my salvation is not dependent upon my own merit, but upon the finished work of Christ on the cross. I trust in God's grace to guide me and preserve me until eternity.

### *Immanuel Kamau*

I was raised in a Catholic home where church attendance was a regular part of life. I went through catechism, identified as a Christian, and served as an altar boy and youth leader in the church. However, when I left home for college, my priorities shifted. Church attendance became less important to me, and I began to engage in worldly pleasures and grievous sin. In the freedom and vigour of youth, I participated in sinful behaviours, straying from the path of God's righteousness. I now see that I was not merely engaging in sinful acts but was actively rebelling against God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

My moment of clarity came when I heard a sermon titled "Biblical Worldview." Although I had listened to countless sermons before, this one profoundly convicted me of my sins and made me realize that, despite identifying as a Christian for most of my life, I had adopted a secular worldview and was living without true faith. Through God's grace, faith in Christ was granted, leading me to repent of my sins to Christ. By God's help I have committed to live according to God's law while rejecting sin. This transformation began and has since become a daily journey of reliance on God's unfailing grace. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ my Saviour!

### *Zoe Ngari*

I am being raised by Christian parents and go to a Christian school. When I was little, I believed that having Christian parents makes me one too. I was clearly wrong. In a sermon here in T.B.C, I learnt that having Christian parents, doesn't make me a Christian.

I was not ready to change my ways and so I continued to live in darkness. I always felt like there was something wrong with my life but I did nothing about it. When watching a video about the last days, I believed and repented of my sins to Christ. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, I was saved from sins and from the wrath of God. I know I have been adopted into God's family and I am a fellow heir with Christ. I hope to bring other children to faith as the Lord enables me.

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# HOW TO LIVE WITH THE WEAKER BROTHER

## ROMANS 14:13-23

Murungi Igweta

*This is a sermon preached at Trinity Baptist Church Nairobi on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024 as part of the exposition of the Book of Romans for about 5 years. The sermon is available on You-Tube under the title "How to Live in the Kingdom of Peace".*

*Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

*Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

First, it is clear that we are to judge others on the essential matters. All the matters that are clearly expressed in the Word of God, we must use the Bible as the basis of our judgement. To Put it differently, we judge what has already been judged and determined by the Lord. Therefore, if anyone teaches a different gospel, other than that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, because of God's grace and all these for the glory of God alone then we are to judge and reject it. Paul told the Galatian church in Galatians 1:8-9

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

Secondly, we are not to judge our weaker brethren on matters indifference. All those things that have not been legislated, or stipulated or regulated by the Law of God, or the Word of God, we are to be charitable. The kingdom of peace has a very basic rule which is well captured by what Phillip Schaff calls the watchword of Christian peacemakers.

*In essentials Unity; In non-essentials Liberty; In all things Charity.*

This is because the kingdom of God which is also the kingdom of the Messiah/Christ is the kingdom of peace. And so we are told, “*Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding/edification.*” (v. 19). How do we to deal with the weaker brother? There are four principles from this text;

- ✓ Charity
- ✓ Sensitivity
- ✓ Christlikeness
- ✓ Concerned care.

Therefore, then we are called to be:

## **1. Charitable Brethren**

Christians, having been chosen by the love of God the Father before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him, are to be a people of love. We are a charitable lot. Express that love to the weaker brother. The call to love is communicated in the following verses in prohibiting judging others and to remove any stumbling blocks.

### **a) Not passing judgement on one another**

*Therefore, let us not pass judgement on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.* It is very easy to judge others, by our own standards, and move forward to condemn them. To judge is not just to observe and evaluate, but also to pass a sentence which determines the person to be guilty. Mostly, it is becoming the prosecutor, the jury, the judge and the prison warden at the same time. This is what is condemned. But we are told not to judge any longer. We must not continue to do this – here is a call for the Lord to you, where He is telling, “Sin no more.” Stop judging others by your standards.

### **b) Not putting stumbling blocks on the way**

Instead of passing judgement on each other, and condemning them, we are called upon not just to stop putting stumbling blocks or hindrance on their ways, but to never ever do so. We are to be careful to promote our brethren, not to injure their names or reputations, or their property or to hinder their spiritual progress. Why? Because they are our brothers in Christ. We have a faith of equal standing. More than being created by God in his image, He has given us the gift of his Son to be our Saviour and we all are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are part of his body the church. In Ephesians 4:1–7 we are urged to *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through*

*all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

Here is a call to be those who walk in love. We walk in love because the Lord first loved us. And so we love him with all our soul, heart, mind and strength. But he has also called us to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are therefore to pursue love with everyone and to pursue for what makes for peace and edification.

## **2. Conviction with Sensitivity**

### *a) Make sure you are fully persuaded in the Lord*

Paul states in verse 14, *"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."* We all are people of conviction. But we must make sure that our convictions are first informed by the Word of God. Any conviction that is not based on Scriptures alone is bound to fall. But if you know from the Bible, and you are persuaded by the Bible in the Lord, then you are safe. Remember that it is only the Word of God which will not pass away. The grass withers, the flowers fades and falls but the word of the Lord endures forever.

### *b) Nothing is unclean in itself but conscience matters*

The Lord made everything good. But we fall into sin by our first parents, Adam and Eve brought all sorts of difficulties which affected us. There are people with tender consciences and we need to be sensitive to their needs. Conviction without love does not take into consideration, the sensitivity and tenderness of other people's consciences. We tend to think that if it is true, then everyone should toe the line. But it is more complex than that. Yet we must never forget that the Word of God is the standard, not human conscience or emotions and feelings.

Human conscience cannot make any wrong thing to be right but it can make a right thing to be wrong. What do I mean? If one thinks that something is unclean, then to that person it is unclean, even though there is nothing wrong or evil in that thing. This is because whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Therefore, if your brother is grieved by what you eat, don't eat it! This is what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:13, *"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."* This is not because the weaker brother is right, but because he has still not come to the knowledge which will give him the liberty in such matters that the Lord has freed us.

### *c) Walk in love in whatever you eat*

Having been justified by grace, we are called upon to live in love. We are to care for the neighbour's needs and cares and not to do anything that could bring

about the slightest injury. Love is patient and kind. Love is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. Love builds up.

We understand that, there are people who have various sensitivities because of their former associations and so they see certain foods as evil, because their conscience being weak is defiled. But we must remember that food will not commend us to God. We are not worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we eat. But we are to take care so that our liberty in eating or not eating does not become a stumbling block, or a hindrance to the spiritual progress of our brethren who are of weaker faith. (c.f. 1 Corinthians 8).

### **3. Christlikeness in his Kingdom**

What is the kingdom of God? It is generally the rule of the sovereign God over all the universe (Psalm 103:19; Daniel 4:3) and God institutes every governing authority (Romans 13:1). More narrowly, the kingdom of God is His spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God's authority through His Son. Those who defy God's authority and refuse to submit to Him are not part of the kingdom of God. In contrast, those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ and gladly surrender to God's rule in their hearts are part of the kingdom of God. In this sense, the kingdom of God is the spiritual kingdom of his Son. So the Lord said that His kingdom was not of this world in John 18:36. He preached that repentance is necessary for a person to be a part of the kingdom of God in Matthew 4:17. The kingdom of God can be equated with the sphere of salvation in the new birth (John 3:3-7). Finally the kingdom of God is used in Scripture to refer to the literal rule of Christ on the new earth and new heavens, where righteousness dwells, after His return in glory. This is in the future, when the kingdom of God will be revealed with the King of kings reigning forever, and it will be the "kingdom of glory" and the present, hidden manifestation of the kingdom of God as the "kingdom of grace." Then we shall reign with the Lord forever.

#### *a) It is not about foods*

The verse here tells us that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. It is not about outward and immediate gratification. It is not simply a manifestation of here and the now. Eating food likemeat, or drinking wine may have brought a division between the weak who would abstain and the strong who would embrace the liberty to eat and drink. But both must consider not just their own individual convictions/appetites in what they eat and drink, but also the care and love for the brethren near them who may see them and be stumbled. We may eat what we want to eat and drink, but does it have adverse effects on those who are near us? We must be careful with what we do with what God has given us.

*b) It is about righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit*

What we do or any outward activity is not what makes us part of the kingdom, but we are in the kingdom on the account of what Christ has done. Christ's grace in us goes to the heart, which is the seat of all evils (Mark 7:21). Remember the Lord looks at the heart, not just outward appearances as Samuel told Jesse. He has given us His righteousness for free through justification by His grace. He has given us peace because He is the Prince of peace. He has given us joy in the Holy Spirit who has been shed abroad in our hearts. All these matters are brought out in Romans 5:1-2. Therefore, since we have been **justified** (declared righteous on the account of Christ's righteousness) by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we **rejoice** in hope of the glory of God.

Our faith in Christ which gives us the righteousness of Christ, gives both peace with God (reconciliation through Christ, the Mediator) and the peace of God so that we can be peaceful children of God. And this comes with joy inexpressible. It causes us to experience what Peter describes in 1 Peter 1:8-9, *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

*c) Service to Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men*

Being in the kingdom means that we have that which is good. The gospel is good. Our faith in Christ is good. Grace has brought us so much good. But we must not do anything that could cause pagans to speak evil or blaspheme what we have which is good. Christians have what is inherently good, because it is from God. So as Christians do not let what God regards as good, and you regard as good, being God-given be spoken of as evil by the world or even by others.

*Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men (v.18).* We were called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship in Romans 12:1-2. When we serve Christ, with no hypocrisy, God accepts and is pleased by our service and people are built up in our most holy faith and thus approve it. We are thus to do everything that makes this possible. So what is your service to God? Does it please Him? Is it approved by men?

*d) Pursue what makes for peace and edification*

To pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding or edification is our duty. We are to strive for peace with all men and for holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). We should pursue peace and strive for it. This is what makes for mutual edification. As we serve, we are also served. As

we edify others, we are also edified. It is a mutual edification. It serves everyone, even us!

#### 4. Concerned Care

##### a) *Do not destroy the work of God for food*

There is a strong command in verse 20 – *Do not, for the sake of food destroy the work of God.* Do we live to eat or eat to live? So food is not something that should be too highly regarded if it brings spiritual ruin upon others. The word translated destroy here is a strong word, but it is not talking about destroy a person, but the work of God. Can we do something that destroy God’s work? The Bible tells you do not! Of course we cannot undo or destroy what Christ Jesus did – dying for the sinners. *Do not destroy the one for whom Christ died* (v.15b). If Christ died for him, nothing can be done to undo that, and such a person will certainly be saved because Christ died for the ungodly to save them.

However, it is possible for one to conduct himself in a manner that can harm another person for whom Christ died. When we remember the divine investment in any Christian, we must be well motivated not to do anything that would harm God’s work in that person for whom Christ died. This is out of love for God and a loving care for those whom God has done his Work.

##### b) *Do not make any brother to stumble*

You may not have thought or sought to destroy a person, but what about causing them to stumble? Look at verse 20b, *“Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.”* It goes on to say, *“It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.”* We all know what can make a brother to stumble. Something things are debatable, but others are clear. We must not engage in anything that has a potential for jeopardizing God’s work in another Christian, young or old, mature or immature, weak or strong. Eating meat or drinking wine should not be a reason to cause anyone to stumble. I would not pass through a bar, if I knew that a younger Christian will be offended or will stumble. If I know playing *Rumba* or *Ohangla* music in my car will be a stumbling block to my brother, I must not play that music (even though I thought that there is nothing wrong with it). Even if I enjoy eating pork, but if it is going to be a hindrance to you I must not eat it!

Sometimes it is not just what we eat which causes others to stumble, but the manner of eating. Maybe you eat too much, or too little or you do not eat at all. It may be because of illness or allergies, and thus we should labour to explain ourselves to our hosts when we visit and they offer food that we cannot eat. Or it could be that we are too indulgent in eating in a manner that is gluttonous, and thus sinful. Consider all these matters and seek to deal with them in a godly manner, because they can cause trouble to others by being stumbling blocks and hindrances.

c) *Check your faith with God and remove condemning doubts*

The faith that you have is a gift from God. The faith that you have is the means for your salvation because we are saved by faith alone. Therefore, the faith that you have, keep it between yourself and God. Your assurance in the faith on both essential and non-essential matters should be regarded as God-given. While this should give us all the confidence, yet it should make us more patient and also and humbler.

Our faith should be such that it is both acceptable to God and approved by men. Why? Because “*Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgement on himself for what he approves.*” To obtain God’s blessing we must wait upon him to give his judgement. His judgement in all matters is the best. Do not be quick to approve matters that you know others do not approve, and so speak to them in a manner that either demeans their position and elevates yours, or speak in a manner that shows your position to be a better position in your confidence and assurance especially when it is matters indifferent, what is called *adiaphora*. Before we judge our positions positively, or favourably, or rate ourselves more highly, we should be sure that it aligns not just with the Word of God, but also with the call to love our neighbour as ourselves.

But this could work in the opposite direction as well, “*But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For what does not proceed from faith is sin.*” If you ignore your scruples and eat or drink what you don’t believe or think you should eat or drink, because of the pressure from the stronger-faith-brother, then you are sinning against your own conscience and convictions. Sinning against yourself is still sin. Peer pressure, even when one’s conscience is not convinced is sinful. Never sin against your own conscience, for this sinning against oneself and thus it is sinful.

In conclusion, we have been called with a holy calling to live as royal priests of our God. We are to serve the Lord with a clear conscience and so then whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must do it all to the glory of God. We must realize that there is more to life than eating and drinking. There is more to life than quarreling over what to eat and drink. We need to cultivate a considerate sensitivity and a concerned care to the needs of others. This is what it means to walk in love. This is what it means to pursue what makes for peace. This is what it means to be in the kingdom of peace, under the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord help us to truly care for the weaker brother in our Christian liberty.

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## NEWS & REPORTS

The poster features a dark green background with a large, stylized red and orange shape resembling a Christmas stocking or a musical instrument. The title 'THE MYSTERY & MAJESTY' is written in a large, gold, serif font, with 'THE' appearing above 'MYSTERY' and 'THE' above 'MAJESTY'. Below the title, 'A CHRISTMAS CANTATA' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The date 'FRIDAY 6TH DEC' is on the left, and the time '5.30PM-8.30PM' is on the right, both in white. A red treble clef is on the right, and a red musical note is on the left. The venue 'TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH | DONHOLM' is at the bottom center, with a logo of three blue circles. A yellow 'FREE' badge is on the bottom right. Social media icons for Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter are on the bottom left, with the handle 'tbcnairobi'.

THE MYSTERY & MAJESTY  
A CHRISTMAS CANTATA

FRIDAY 6TH DEC

5.30PM-8.30PM

VENUE  
TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH | DONHOLM

FREE

@tbcnairobi

**MYSTERY & MAJESTY** was the theme of 2024 Christmas Cantata held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024 at Trinity Baptist Church, Donholm.

# TRINITY PASTORS COLLEGE (TPC)

The TPC held its third graduation on 12th November 2024 with five graduands. The graduation was led by the TPC Board members – Pastors, Murungi Igweta, Nate Davidson and Paul Gachungi, along with Dr. Gachara and Francis Mwenda. The following men were awarded Diploma in Theology:

1. **Kabaria Dominic** – Pastor, Trinity Baptist Church Donholm.
2. **Katana Ibrahim** – Pastor, Utakaso Baptist Church, Mombasa.
3. **Kimathi Ebenezer** – Church planter in Isiolo Town.
4. **Mucheru Joseph** – Pastor, Trinity Baptist Church Miathene, Meru.
5. **Mwirigi James** – former pastoral intern at TBCD, aspiring to gospel ministry.

Pastor Nate Davidson gave the charge from 2 Timothy and urged the graduands, the students and the prospective students to ...



**Figure 1.** Murungi Igweta praying during the graduation and the TPC Board Members: Nate Davidson, Francis Mwenda, Dr. George Gachara and Paul Gachungi.

## 2025 Admissions

During the November classes, 16 men were interviewed, and audited the class. We are likely to admit 12 of the 20 prospective students interviewed last year and in 2024. TPC is becoming internationally known and so there were 4 brothers from Rwanda. We plan to have 2025 modules administered separately. The first year students will be taught Prolegomena to the Systematics and the Doctrine of Scripture by Pastor John Vondoloski from Grand Rapids and Stephen Silamo of Korr (Marsabit).



**Figure 2.** TBC Board Members with the five graduates.

Do you sense a divine call to be a gospel minister or a pastor? Are you a theological student in another institution where you are either disillusioned by the shallow teachings or it is too expensive and costly? It could be that the theological books you are expected to buy are too expensive or even not available! Or could it be that the requirement to board in the institution, away from your family and church is making theological education inaccessible to you? These considerations & other benefits make Trinity Pastors College a theological institution of choice.

The full curriculum of the TPC studies is available on our website – [www.tpc.or.ke](http://www.tpc.or.ke).

## **Application Process**

If you believe that the Lord is calling you to pastoral ministry and your church considers you elder-qualified, then you may need to contact us. You will send your application letter and your academic credentials through the address below, along with a recommendation letter from your pastor. Since we believe that we are training you for the church, there should be tangible support from the church, both morally and financially. We offer 90% scholarship through the contributions of other churches. Your church is expected to give at least 10% of the total training, which includes giving the students such books and resources that would make them effective pastors in years to come as they would have enough reference materials to build their own personal library.

## **Prayer Points**

Please know that your prayers go a long way. To pray more specifically, below are the prayer points:

- Thank the Lord for His grace and kindness in granting us success in the January-November modules in 2024. We pray that 2025 classes will progress well.
- TPC is a faith-based ministry, in which we depend on the Lord to provide financially so that men can have sound theological education for their local churches. If you are willing and able to financially support the TPC you may do so by contacting us by email on [tpcnairobi@gmail.com](mailto:tpcnairobi@gmail.com).

For more info go to website at [www.tpc.or.ke](http://www.tpc.or.ke)

# DOXOLOGY

**Psalm 133:** A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1. Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!
2. It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!
3. It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.

## **HYMN: HOW GOOD A THING IT IS**

Based on Psalm 133 BY *Jim E. Seddon (1915 - 1983)*

How good a thing it is,  
How pleasant to behold –  
When brethren learn to live at **one**,  
The law of love uphold.

As perfume, by its scent,  
Breathes fragrance all around  
So life itself will sweeter be  
Where **unity** is found.

And like refreshing dew  
That falls upon the hills –  
True **union** sheds its gentle grace,  
And deeper love instils.

God grants His choicest gifts  
To those who live in **peace**;  
To them His blessings shall  
abound  
And evermore increase.

**JAMES EDWARD SEDDON:** *Born in Southport, Lancashire, 24 August 1915; died in London, 19 September 1983. He was educated at Southport Grammar School, Tyndale Hall, Bristol, and the University of Durham (LTh, 1939). He was ordained (deacon 1939, priest 1940), serving curacies at Everton (1939-41), Toxteth (1941-43) and Southport (1943-45). He was a missionary with the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (now Crosslinks) in Morocco (Tangier 1945-50, Marrakesh 1950-55); fluent in Arabic and French, he began writing hymns there for Arabic-speaking congregations to enlarge their Sankey-based repertoire. He was based in London as Home Secretary of BCMS (1955-67); then incumbent of two Essex parishes,...*