



GRACE & TRUTH

THE SURE FOUNDATION

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.
Psalm 119:160



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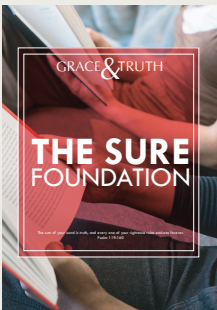
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Contents

Editor's Desk

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

Keith Underhill

GRACE & TRUTH Magazine



Cover: The Word of God, the Bible is the only sure rule of faith and life. It is the foundation of our faith. Every believer should learn the treasure of wisdom that God has given us in the Scriptures. It is the means by which we are made wise for salvation. It is the only way God speaks to us today.

2	Our Breaths are in the Hands of God
4	The Good Works of a Christian Ephesians 2:10
8	Tithes and Offerings
15	The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith: A Mighty Defence Against the Spirit of the Age (1)
20	The Life of David (7)
23	Creation: The Blue-Print for Human Relations
26	Common Question #12: How Can I be Sure I Am Born Again?
29	Book Review: Hell's Best Revealed Secrets
33	The Church and the War on Corruption
35	The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689
41	The Mightiest False Prophet
48	Sound Doctrine for Women (1)
52	Will God Always Open Another Door for You When One Closes?
54	The Christian and Social Media
58	Personal Testimony

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

OUR BREATHS ARE IN THE HANDS OF GOD

Geoffrey Thomas

Geoffrey Thomas was 50 years Pastor of Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, UK, until his retirement in 2015. He has been a frequent visitor to Kenya.

Men and women breathe between 12 and 20 breaths a minute. If I take an average of 15 breaths a minute, then that means when I had reached my 80th birthday, I had breathed about 630,720,000 times.

Where did those breaths come from? Not from luck. Not chance. Paul the apostle told the philosophers in Athens that God himself gives to all mortals life and breath (Acts 17:25). Daniel calls Jehovah the God in whose hand our breath is (Daniel 5:23). In the book of Job we are told, “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10). Isaiah says that God is the One who has “spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it” (Isaiah 42:5). Exhale . . . inhale . . . exhale . . . inhale . . . Every minute every living creature lives and moves, and breathes in its Creator.

My mother’s first child was a little girl. The midwife came and checked her the morning of her contractions and complemented her on the liveliness of the daughter in her womb, but a few hours later my mother delivered a still-born child. Mam was tender and God-fearing, modest and affectionate. Every year on the anniversary of the birth of her late daughter she grieved especially. Humanly speaking, I owe my Christian faith firstly to her influence.

When I took my first breath, I cried lustily and eighty years later I have breathed over 630 million times and continue so to take each breath that God gives me quite unthinkingly. My little sister failed to breathe a single breath. God discriminated between us. He took her to heaven, and one day I shall see this glorious person and we shall hold hands together with our Mam and Dad and bow before the One who does all things well. We shall sing with joy, “Even so Father for so it seemed good in your sight,” and we shall be given assurance that it was not chance or the devil that took so precious a gift from us so mysteriously and perplexingly. We shall be satisfied eternally. He will lay our fears to rest and we will respond, 'It is well, it is well with our souls', for ever and ever.

But what of you who as yet do not confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord? Daniel told a godless emperor named Belshazzar that he depended on his Creator Jehovah for every single breath he took. Your every breath is in God's hand. The reason you took your first breath on the day of your birth as well as your first waking breath this morning and all the breaths in between is because that breath was given you by God. He created you. He also sustains you, every minute of your days. Every breath you take.

When is the last time you thanked God for the air you were breathing? Have you ever blessed God for your ability to breathe? A doctor told me of trying to help a person with a bad case of asthma; that seeing his struggle to breathe was like breathing through a straw, sucking in each breath fearfully.

Belshazzar took his last breath later that same day that he had heard Daniel's words. God had numbered his days as he numbers our days and appoints our last breath. There will be a final breath; Belshazzar's last one was that night. Maybe tonight will be the time for yours too, but if not tonight, then certainly and unavoidably another night or day.

As David Maxson wrote, 'God does not owe any of us another breath. What is remarkable is that some are going to use their breath today to curse God's holy name. God ought to stop our hearts right then - when we blaspheme Him in such ways. To think that God allows us to continue breathing after doing that! What a testimony to God's patience and longsuffering toward us. The goodness of God to us is to lead us to repentance. None of us deserves to breathe any more than Belshazzar did. Maybe you should take a deep breath now (and feel the air rush into your lungs and then rush out) and then humbly thank God for the ability to do so.'

God's mercy . . . Jesus' gift. What would it profit us if we gained the whole world but stopped breathing?

*As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labour and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? **So teach us to number our days,** That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.*

(Psalm 90:10-12)

THE GOOD WORKS OF A CHRISTIAN

Keith Underhill

This article continues the verse by verse exposition of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. At this point the exposition shows that although good works have nothing to with becoming a Christian, they are absolutely essential for Christian living.

EPHESIANS 2:10

Having reached this point in the letter we should all be convinced that **works** of any kind can contribute nothing whatsoever to salvation. Rather, salvation is of God's grace, in Christ, and through faith alone. But such is the deceitfulness of sin, there may be one of at least two wrong conclusions drawn from this:

- *Works for a Christian do not really matter.* This conclusion may be made because, after all it may be reasoned, 'It is faith and not works that saves me. If I have no works but I become a Christian, then works do not really matter.' From Ephesians 2:10 we shall see that this is fundamentally wrong.
- *Works for a Christian contribute to final salvation.* It is reasoned, 'Such works are called good, God is pleased with them, and I cannot enter into heaven without them. Judgement is according to works' (Romans 2:6). Although no one will enter heaven without good works, to believe that such good works, together with the saving work of Christ, are my ticket into heaven, is another gospel! Similarly, it is false to claims that some Christians have so many good works (called works of 'super-erogation') that they have a surplus of merits that may be given to other Christians to build up their merits (as in Roman Catholicism). This is why Paul adds 2:10 to make sure that there is no reliance on good works as a basis for any part of salvation.

1. THE UNSAVED ARE UNABLE TO DO GOOD WORKS

Paul has used the language of resurrection from the dead to describe what happens when a person becomes a Christian (vv. 5-6). Now he uses the language of creation. A Christian is one who is "created in Christ Jesus", God's "workmanship". Think of a potter working with clay to make a pot. Here is the most beautiful clay pot, perfectly rounded, properly hardened, exactly fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. Once it was just an unformed mass of clay in the ground much to the annoyance of the person whose foot got stuck in it! What part did the clay have in it being brought from the ground and made into such a pot? Obviously none. God is the potter (Romans 9:21, Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:6), and He has made us what we are. By definition, the creation cannot create itself. "Created" is a very strong word, implying out of nothing like the original creation (Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:11) – if Christ made everything, then there were no materials at

the beginning that he used. The Christian is not a renovation, an improvement of the old, but like someone totally new, a new man (2:15, 4:24), a new-born baby (John 3:3,5), “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God is not passive waiting for the clay (the sinner) to form itself, to pray, to believe; He is proactive. How may you know that God has created you a Christian? You become aware that you are new, you are different, because you have new thoughts and desires, a new strength that you did not create.

The clear implication of this is that before you were created in Christ you were totally unable to do anything good before God. However, the unsaved are very active, walking in trespasses and sins (2:1-2), busy serving not God but the world, the devil and the flesh (2:2-3). As far as God is concerned not one thing done is good before Him (Romans 3:12). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). This is so humbling. Paul once thought he had loads of good works before God but on becoming a Christian he saw them as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). As with Paul, nothing was more detestable to God than the supposed good works of the Pharisees done in self-confidence and pride (see Luke 18:12). It would be like looking at a most beautiful leather bound book only to open it up and find that it is torn and mildewed, only fit to be thrown out. The unsaved do not love God, they have no true faith, they want to please themselves, and they will not submit to God’s commands just because they are God’s (Romans 8:7-8). How can such a person be changed? Nothing less than God’s mighty creative work is needed (see 1:19). This is impossible without Christ.

2. GOOD WORKS ARE THE FRUIT OF SALVATION

Although “good works” have nothing to do with being saved (see 2:8), they have everything to do with the life of one who has been saved. They are not the root, but they are the fruit. God creates us in Christ Jesus for one great reason, “for (the purpose of doing) good works”. When God comes to us in salvation He finds no fruit on our tree, so He graciously saves us through faith in Christ. But He saves us in order that we might start producing this fruit on the tree of our life. Please note that these good works are produced by God so that we cannot take any credit for them. There are the following lines of evidence:

- ★ The connective “for” at the beginning of verse 10 connects it with the previous sentence. The emphasis that salvation is not by works (vv. 8-9), so that there is no possibility of boasting, is proved by the fact that Christians are the creation of God.
- ★ The first word in the sentence is “His”. The emphasis is on the fact that we are *His* workmanship, and not our own or anyone else’s.
- ★ The created thing is totally dependent upon its Creator. If your TV gives such good quality pictures and sound you do not praise the TV but the brand name, i.e. the manufacturer.

But good works are **necessary** as the evidence or fruit of salvation. What if the TV does not work? Then there is something very wrong with it; you may even have to get a new one. Sometimes it is objected that if salvation is by grace then we may sin and it does not matter, we need not be so cautious about sin (this is the objection imagined in Romans 6:1). The truth is that anyone who is not really interested in good works as the purpose of the Christian life has never experienced the new creation in Christ Jesus.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me (John 15:4).

faith working through love (Galatians 5:6),... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,... (Galatians 5:22).

faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17).

When God found you, you were walking in trespasses and sins. He saved you so that you might walk in good works, a totally different life. This what we call repentance and conversion. The evidence that you are a Christian is that you are now concerned about good works as a priority. “Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Remember that God chooses us to be saved “that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (1:4). If this describes you, then you want to know exactly what these good works are so that you can do them.

3. GOD ENABLES GOOD WORKS TO BE DONE

There is much emphasis on good works in the New Testament. Consider the following.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your *good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

There was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, ... She was full of *good works* and acts of charity (Acts 9:36).

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, ... you may abound in every *good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

... so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every *good work* (Colossians 1:10).

... but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with *good works* (1 Timothy 2:10).

Let a widow be enrolled ... having a reputation for *good works*: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every *good work* (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

As for the rich in this present age, ... They are to do good, to be rich in *good works*, to be generous and ready to share, ... (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable ... that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every *good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Show yourself in all respects to be a model of *good works*, ... (Titus 2:7).

Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for *good works*(Titus 2:13-14).

Remind them ... to be ready for every *good work*, ... (Titus 3:1)

I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to *good works* (Titus 3:8).

And let our people learn to devote themselves to *good works*, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and *good works*, (Hebrews 10:24).

What are these good works? They are the opposite of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Very simply stated, good works are whatever works God has commanded us to do. They are good because it is God Himself who has commanded them. So there are three things that make our works good:

- ✓ They are works that God has commanded us in the Scriptures to do.
- ✓ We perform them willingly and joyfully from the heart just because God has commanded.
- ✓ We do them for God's glory and not to earn salvation. Then it is a 'good' work.

For example, you come to a prayer meeting. You have read that this is what the apostolic church did (Acts 2:42) and you know this is an example given by God to follow. You do not find it a burden but a delight, although you might be tired, and you have to push other important things out of the way. You do not attend in order to be seen by others but to commune with your God.

Such good works cover the whole of life, both our outer actions and our inner thoughts. We are to glorify God in our bodies in all that we do, even in our eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31). In every step of life that we take there are two possible ways forward. We either walk in the path of good works, or in the path of trespasses and sins. Thank God that the way is clearly marked before us. It is the way God has "prepared beforehand". The light of His word shines on that way directing us to walk along it. In other words, God has already built the road that leads to glory. We are not trail blazers but followers. All that is revealed in the Bible, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, is the way (see Ephesians 4 – 6 for example). Perhaps you say that it is so hard to do good works, my life is so busy, and there is so much opposition. Actually His yoke is easy and His burden is light; He has given you His Holy Spirit. And it is precisely in your busy life where you are to do good works. It is in these good works that you will show that you are different from the world. Your light is to shine in the darkness.

TITHES & OFFERINGS

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.

Introduction

We have noted with concern that biblical giving is one neglected subject. There is a lot of talk about it from many pulpits, but actually the neglect is both from the pulpit and from the pew. At the same time there are lots of excesses in the actual practice of giving. Many church members give very little towards the work of the Lord and the effect is that the church remains stagnant because it is unable to support its own pastor and the ministry. Others have wrong motives in giving that they miss the actual blessings in the grace of giving.

How did the Chief Shepherd intend the running of His church? Christ demands and expects you to give **thoughtfully and proportionately** (not necessarily 10% – but more than that, out of **generosity and gratefulness** to Him!). The proportion in question is as the Lord has prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2). Whatever income you have, there must be some relationship with what you give.

He expects you to give **generously and cheerfully** (2 Corinthians 8 - 9). The Lord taught secret giving when he said:

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4).

We live at a time when preachers and churches are raking in huge amounts of money collected from Christians and those who attend their churches. The old saying, ‘as poor as church mouse’, needs to be reviewed! Many churches preach that Christian believers should tithe and give offerings – thanksgiving, freewill, first-fruits etc. So many preachers have jumped on the bandwagon of “*Panda mbegu ubarikiwe*” (Plant a seed to be blessed). It is possible that this may be too appealing or appalling so that we go to the one extreme or the other and do not preach giving at all. If we went to this other extreme, then we are ever in financial needs!

- ❖ Do you think this is in agreement with the New Testament?
- ❖ What about planting seed so that God can bless your labour?
- ❖ What proportion of income should I give to the church?

The grace of giving

We need to go back to the Bible and see the Biblical principles of giving. The following passages are the most basic when it comes to New Testament giving: Matthew 6:1-4; Acts 11:28-30; Romans 15:25ff.; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 – 9; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15. Please study them well at your convenience and you will find these basic principles therein:

1. *Priority of giving to other Christians (Romans 12:13)*

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” Christians give and especially do so to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. In doing this, they give towards the work of the gospel for the building of the kingdom of God, as the saints are helped. While giving to the saints is a priority, we should also give to the needy. The Lord taught, “Give to the one who begs from you... (Matthew 5:42, Luke 6:30). This is the way to demonstrate true faith, for James asks, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and the one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

Therefore we are to take a special care of the brethren in faith when they are in need. For this reason Paul took it upon himself to provide materially for the Jewish brothers. This was a God-provided opportunity for the Gentile Christians at Philippi (Philippians 4:15) to show that they were united with Christ and were one in the same body of Christ by supporting the needy Jews. Remember that many Jewish Christians considered the Gentiles as second rate (or even third-rate) Christians since they were not in the initial covenant of God with its privileges. But the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

They thought that all God’s blessings must pass through the Jews. How mistaken they were! [*This is the same principle behind prosperity preachers, that they have a better access to the throne of God so that they can pray for you in a manner that you cannot pray for yourself so that you may be blessed!*]

But when those in Jerusalem were in financial distress the Gentile Christians came to their rescue.

You know the Mosaic Law could not allow Jews to take anything from Gentiles since they could be defiled. Though we must, “as we have opportunity, ... *do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*” (Galatians 6:10). This was the time for Paul to prove to his Israelite brethren that the Gentiles had been admitted into the commonwealth of God.

The first Biblical principle here is that *we are to give towards the needs of others and especially the brothers in faith* (Galatians 6:10). No poor must be neglected, but God’s poor must particularly be regarded. Though we are to love everyone, yet a special brotherly and Christian love is to be extended to those of our faith. This is the reason why we are to show a special concern for the needs of other fellow believers because we belong to one another.

This principle may mean that the pastor may not necessarily be the most needy in order to be supported by the church financially – the pastors who are supported are first of all those “*who rule well,*” so are worthy of “*double honour*” because they “*labour in preaching and teaching*” (1 Timothy 5:17). A church might have members who are needier than the pastor – I served in a

church that had so much need so that I opted not to request for any financial support but laboured with my own hands to support the church.

By this principle, much caution need to be exercised in giving to beggars on the street, while failing to give to meet the needs of our own brothers in the church. With the present drought in Northern Kenya, we should be sure to give first and foremost to those who are suffering in the local churches in these areas. Relief, should be collected and disbursed for the distribution to the brethren there, and hopefully, there will be something remaining for the rest of the people in the area.

2. Give according to your ability

The second principle is that we are to **give according to our ability**, as they did in Acts 11:29. *“So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.”* No one ought to give beyond his ability so as to leave himself in debts or in poverty. We have been given different abilities and possessions. The measure of our giving is ‘as God has prospered you’(1 Corinthians 16:2). Every man determined to send something, according to his ability, what he could spare from the support for his family and of himself. What may be said to be according to our ability we must judge for ourselves. However we must be careful to make a righteous judgment so that we do not give God what is left-over as many are in the habit of doing. At the other extreme are the preachers who demand for their congregations to give to the last penny until they demand even their personal effects like watches, cell-phones, jewellery, clothes and shoes! Such is completely unwarranted by Scripture and only serves to show the greed of the preachers (and the greed or generosity of the givers).

It should yet be noted that there is a place of giving beyond your ability. The Macedonian churches are commended, *“For they gave according to their means ... and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints”* (2 Corinthians 8:3-4).

Based on this principle, is it true that ‘no one should appear before God empty-handed’ as many preach?

3. Give through the hands of trusted men

The third principle is that we are to **give through the hands of trusted men** who will neither defraud those who are needy, nor rob from the givers. These churches sent the relief through the hands of Paul and Barnabas, and Titus and *our brother* (2 Corinthians 8:16-24) – trusted men, whose integrity in financial and spiritual matters was above reproach. Again the gifts were not sent by one man since there is always a need for one to check the other and to be accountable for the same. Further, this would be helpful for witness since money is a big area where many are tempted to deceive. This is seen further because it was to be given to the elders who would be held accountable as they give the money to the needy through the deacons of the church.

The deacons are the specific officers in the church in charge of money (Acts 6) – not the pastors. Therefore, should pastors sign even the check-books? Well, only in the sense of providing oversight in all matters in the church. It is no belittling, in an extraordinary case, for ministers of the gospel to be messengers of the church's charity. However, to undertake the constant care of that matter would be too great a distraction from more needful of prayer and the ministry of the word. This is why the deacons have to take that role.

Every church should endeavour to have these two offices occupied by faithful, trustworthy, diligent and tested men. These men have a responsibility to serve the saints by stewarding the resources given so that the needs of the church are met. It is the duty of members to make sure that those men who are entrusted with this responsibility are men who are qualified from 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

4. Give cheerfully, without grumbling

Fourthly, we are to *give cheerfully, not reluctantly or under compulsion* (2 Corinthians 9:7). Christians are not to do any service under compulsion because they are serving God who can see all that is done from the heart. We are, therefore, to give liberally and in love since God loves a cheerful giver. Please bear in mind that all that you have is from God and to complain while giving to Him is behaving like a child who as soon as he gets the toy from the father, is not willing to hand it back to the father so that he can be given some food! It is the cat or dog spirit and it should not be among mature believers.

This is one of the ways of showing *genuine love* taking the example of Christ. Readiness in giving should be taught and encouraged among the saints. So Paul urges the Corinthians, “*So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead of you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exertion*” (9:5).

It is for this reason that *each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*. God blessed you with your possessions liberally and generously. Therefore, he expects that we would give in the same spirit.

5. Give thoughtfully

Fifthly, we are to *set apart what to give in the heart before giving* – even store it up so that it is not impulsive giving (2 Corinthians 9:7). It should be deliberate with thought and design and not by accident. No one should give more than they intended, and then regret afterwards. Or possibly, had they duly considered all things, they would have given more. There ought to be due deliberation about our own circumstances and those of the persons we are about to relieve. This will be very helpful to direct us how liberal we should be in our contributions for charitable uses.

Persons sometimes will give merely to satisfy the importunity of those who ask their charity, and what they give is in a manner squeezed or forced from them, and this unwillingness spoils all they do. Others give to be seen, and

congratulated by others. But the Lord taught secret giving. “*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you*” (Matthew 6:3-4).

We ought to give more freely than the modesty of some needy persons will allow them to ask. We should give freely with an open hand, and cheerfully with an open heart, being glad we have ability and an opportunity to be charitable.

Is tithing binding for believers?

Christians are much more blessed and privileged than Old Testament believers. Consider this passage to prove this:

*And all these (the heroes of faith listed before), though commended through their faith, **did not receive what was promised**, since God had provided something **better for us**, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40, emphasis mine).*

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that **they were serving not themselves but you**, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12, emphasis mine).*

We know that a greater privilege demands a greater responsibility. Since the Old Testament believers were expected to give a minimum of 10% do you think we would be required to give anything less? They were required to give by commandment a set figure, but for us we are expected to give joyfully for much has been given to us! It should also be borne in mind that there many other offerings and sacrifices that were demanded under the law, which are no longer binding for the New Testament believers. Essentially, if we were diligently to work out how much was offered and given by the Old Testament saints, it was far more than a tithe.

For these reasons below, I believe that tithes are not binding for Christians today:

1. There is no direct command to give tithes in the New Testament. We give out of love for the Lord. It is true that the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:23 mentioned tithing. But note that while he was condemning the Pharisees for their hypocritical religion, He was neither affirming nor condemning tithing. All he said was that *justice and mercy and faithfulness* are ‘*weightier matters of the law*’ that must not be neglected. This verse does not sufficiently prove that tithing is binding for us. In Hebrews 7:4-10 Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, so is this not a proof text for tithing? Does it not give us a precedence and example that we must follow? The text gives an example that we must not ignore since we are children of

Abraham. It gives us the principle, that while our giving is not to be bound by tithing, it must not be less than a tithe. How can we give anything less than what our father of faith gave? Yet, if Abraham gave an earthly king 10% can we give our heavenly King and Saviour anything less?

2. There is no single example of Christian tithing in the church. It is the Pharisees who gave tithes of all they had publicly to display their religion. And for this the Lord condemned them. Christians give their all in generosity, cheerfulness, regularly, secretly and thoughtfully.
3. Christian faith is of the heart and is according to what the word of God and the Spirit engraves upon the heart of man. Volition in giving shows cheerfulness in giving.
4. Christians are to give more than 10% for we see the early church with people who were giving everything to other Christians that they had planned well before hand. This shows generosity.

Therefore, is tithing biblical? How many times do you expect monthly income earners to give in a month? As they may prosper (that is once a month corresponding with their income).

The example of generosity

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:34-37).

They sold houses and lands to give to the needs of others because they had gotten a greater treasure in Christ (Matthew 13:44). Whatever gain they had, they counted as loss for the sake of surpassing worthy of Christ (Philippians 3:7-11). So they sold what they could not keep (temporal earthly possession) to gain what they could not have gotten, that is, *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 1:4), *the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for us* (1 Peter 1:4). After all it is the Lord who had given them all they had! Does this mean that we sell all we have and give it all away? Not necessarily! It means that we should consider that, although we might think that tithing is too much, God expects His stewards to bring everything to Him, like Joseph Barnabas did (Acts 4:36-37)! In glorious eternity, we shall not find it too much to cast our crowns before him and worship as the (Revelation 4:10)!

What was given by those who had, was not given to the Apostles for their personal use – it was to meet the needs of others and ministry. Therefore, preachers should not simply jump to the conclusion that everyone should sell everything and give to the church.

A note to the pastors:

Dear pastor, I care that your church does not give enough to support you. It is true that the Law says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads the grain,” and it is for you that the Lord is concerned. For who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruits? Or who tends the flock without getting some of the milk? (1 Corinthians 9:7, 9). If you labour in preaching and teaching then you are worthy of double honour (1 Timothy 5:17). If they do not give enough to keep you, there is the way to deal with it. The Biblical way to change this is to teach them the word of God and to pray for them. Leave the rest to the Lord to work in their hearts. Do not manipulate their minds. Do not twist the Scriptures so that they can give more. Be faithful, be diligent, work hard at cultivating this grace in their hearts, and leave the Holy Spirit to deal with them. Plant and let the Lord give the rain and the growth, and then in due course you shall reap!

A note to the members:

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, you have duty to care for your pastor. If he has sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if he reaps material things from you? Remember that the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14). *The one who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches* (Galatians 6:6). Give generously. Don't impoverish the one who is watching over your souls.

There are so many needs in the church: Apart from paying the pastor(s), there are the needy among you to help (mercy ministry), church bills to pay, training and sending of pastors and gospel efforts in missions across the world to be concerned about. These require faithful giving from you and it is one of the reasons why God gives you income. Invest part of your earnings into the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

Finally you need to consider these statements:

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold **all** he had and bought that field.”* **Jesus Christ** (Matthew 13:44)

“I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands that I still possess.” **Martin Luther**

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” **Jim Elliot**

“The currency of this world will be worthless at our death or Christ's return, both of which are imminent.” **Randy Alcorn**

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH: A MIGHTY DEFENCE AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE (1)

Oliver Allmand-Smith

Oliver Allmand-Smith is a Pastor with Trinity Grace Church in Ramsbottom, U.K. He visits Kenya annually to teach in the Trinity Pastors' College (TPC) and serves on its Board. He is also a Trustee of the U.K. charity TRAIN(Kenya). This is the first of 3 articles on the very great usefulness of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, otherwise known as the Second London Confession of Faith. They were first delivered as an address in London on 21st. April 2018 at a Day Conference with the theme: Renewing the Present with Help from the Past. This address was: Confessional Church Life, How the Confession Fosters Reformation Today. These 3 articles will serve as a fitting introduction to our regular studies of the content of the Confession, begun in this issue of Grace & Truth. The address has been edited with permission for this publication. Please bear in mind that the original audience was in the U.K.

What is the greatest need of our generation? If we were to make a list of potential answers it might be quite long! Here are some possibilities:

- ⇒ To bring in revival through earnest prayer.
- ⇒ To live holy and God-honouring lives that will have a real impact.
- ⇒ To preach Christ to the lost and see many conversions.
- ⇒ To hold fast to the scriptures as the inspired word of God.
- ⇒ To hold our society to account and call for national repentance.
- ⇒ To win the young for Christ and thus secure the next generation.
- ⇒ To take the gospel to the unreached and hasten the return of Christ.

All of these things are biblical, all of them are necessary, all of them are critically important priorities, and we should be concerned about each one. However, there is one thing which rises above all the others because it is the foundation of all the rest. If we focus upon this one thing, it will equip the saints for effective ministry and will encourage and motivate God's people to do all the things that are listed. It is *the building of biblical churches in our generation*.

Paul made this his great objective and was deeply concerned that the next generation of church leaders should understand the priority given to the Church. When directing Timothy in what his priorities should be Paul writes: "... if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church, then, and its confession of the faith, is the pillar and buttress of truth in our generation. If we want to proclaim the truth, the Church needs to be built. If we want to send men out to preach to the lost, as we read in Romans 10, we need biblical churches to be established.

The whole purpose of the Church and its ministry is that all the saints should be built up and strengthened for the task of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). The Church is the edifier of the saints as the truth is spoken in love:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

If we focus on building genuinely biblical churches, then all the above things will flow from that. Instinctively we know that this is right. We know it is true from scripture, we know it is true from plain logic, and we know it is true from experience. If churches are disintegrating and/or becoming unbiblical, then all these other objectives will fail. If our own local church begins to be unsteady, we become profoundly concerned. Equally, when our churches are built up and strongly rooted and grounded in the faith, then we are encouraged in all the other things we seek to do for God's glory in this age.

This emphasis on the priority of building biblical churches is obvious from the Bible. Ephesians 5:27 shows the concern Christ has for the perfection of his Church that it should be without spot or wrinkle. 2 Corinthians 11:2 demonstrates Paul's deep desire to labour that he might present the Church glorified, perfected, pure, and chaste as the bride of Christ. Acts 20:28 reminds us that the blood of Christ was shed to purchase the Church. Revelation 19:7-8 displays the Church as the bride to which Christ will be wed.

The building of biblical churches must then be our first priority in preparing for the return of Christ.

Yet as we seek this worthy goal, there is a great mountain in our way: ***the spirit of our age***, which is completely and implacably opposed to the building of biblical churches. Everything in our generation seems to work against the accomplishment of this objective. Consider just seven things that come from the spirit of our age, which manifest the magnitude of our difficulty:

1) Hyper-individualism and the sovereignty of self

It's all about me, about my needs, about my opinions, about my desires, about my family, about my beliefs, about my holiness, about my relationship with God, about my worship preferences, about my ministry, about my contentment, about what Jesus can do for me.

2) The cult of personality and the destruction of real leadership

Who do we want leading our churches? We want men with personality, men with glamour, and men with dynamism, men who can speak and carry people along with them. When considering men for leadership in our churches, we are not so concerned about their character, their convictions or their godliness – it is much more about their personality, their niceness, their abilities and their presentation.

3) Pragmatism and the elevation of the ends above the means

We need to reach our nation for Christ, so making as many institutions and meetings which gather as many people together as possible as the objective. Whatever tools, whatever schemes, whatever methods can be brought in to help us achieve this goal are utilized: café church, coffee church, messy church, pizza church, kid's church, junior church, drama church, fun church, family church, emergent church, alternative church, now church, progressive church ...

4) Sound-bite short-termism and superficiality

As long as somebody can come up with **THE** remedy, preferably with a three or seven point plan, to revitalise, transform and renew, as well as a website to go with it, and the indisputable personality to drive it home, we will surely find our way forward. How many more 'ministries' do we need, each one of course with its own founder, its bishop or apostle?

5) Chronological arrogance and historical ignorance

The arrogant assumption that everything old is out of date, faulty and relatively worthless, while everything new is scientific, relevant, accurate and trustworthy. I remember being challenged early in my ministry about the wisdom of reading church history – what can we possibly learn from the ignorant people of the past, they question? Do we not have the Holy Spirit and direct access to God, they claim? One wonders which Bible these people are reading – clearly not the one with all the history in it!

6) Soft sentimentalism and the denial of absolutes

We must be emotional, we must warm people up and make them feel comfortable and we mustn't be too strong on the distinctives. Feelings trump facts, relationships railroad reality, and desire determines doctrine. But what about God's will, God's kingdom, God's glory?

7) *Navel-gazing selfishness leading to compassion burnout*

People are so obsessed with their own needs and problems, so preoccupied with staring in at themselves that they don't even notice when others are falling to pieces. They don't even notice a world that is going to hell because all they can do is manage to keep themselves going.

That these seven things are so common in our age is undeniable. We can all see them in our own experience, and none of these things are going to help us in building biblical churches. The question is: *where can we find help to fight against the prevailing spirit of the age?* Where can we find the biblical counsel and wisdom that we need to strengthen us to persevere in the whole counsel of God and triumph over the spirit of our age? We certainly need all the help we can get, because far too many evangelical churches are losing this battle, either sacrificing the gospel to survive as institutions or just closing down. The situation is desperate.

Might the great Confessions of the Faith that our fathers constructed in the great days of the Reformers and the Puritans be the greatest help? Might not our own Confession, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, prove to be a mighty defence against the spirit of our age? Let us consider how such a Confession of Faith might prove to be the very thing that we need today.

FIRSTLY, how is the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith an antidote to *hyper-individualism and the sovereignty of self?*

What happens when churches gather together and say, 'We are going to commit ourselves unreservedly to a Confession of Faith that is thoroughly biblical and historically tested? We are not satisfied with a half-page summary of what we believe. We need a complete statement of the faith which is as short as it possibly can be, but also as long as it needs to be, to declare Biblical truth on all the things that matter?' This immediately establishes a fraternity of trust and respect, encourages us in what we know we believe, and gives us a foundation for our labours. As a result we know where we stand over against the perpetual and inevitable shifting sands of personal interpretation. We are able to labour for the glory of God knowing that we stand shoulder to shoulder with brothers on all the things that matter, and we don't have to keep looking around to wonder whether or not we are at one.

For example, let us suppose that two churches agree on chapters one of the Confession on Scripture. Both these churches will know that they share a common belief in all the fundamentals of this critically important doctrine. They mutually understand what scripture is, not only as the fully inspired revelation of God, but also as the sufficient declaration of all that we need for

our faith and practice. Consider the opening statement of the whole Confession, to which we most heartily say AMEN:

The Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith and obedience that constitute salvation.

Thus we do not have a unity which is only skin deep, like the so-called unity of some which allows them to keep their own individualism, go down their own path, and adhere to a form of words which is as ambiguous, vague and unexact as possible. Indeed, we have a unity in the truth that tracks back through the history of the church even to the apostles themselves.

Chapter 26 paragraph 14 of the Confession completely blocks hyper-individualism and the sovereignty of self:

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

This paragraph leaves no room for individualism. There is no need for it when we genuinely love one another, genuinely stand together, and meet in association together for the encouragement of one another. Furthermore, we are able to fellowship with churches in the broader evangelical fraternity, even though they do not stand with us on all doctrines, because we know where we are in relation to them, and we can pray for them in the knowledge of that. This is not an exclusivity which decidedly disconnects our churches from all others, it is rather a glorious unity which invites. I warmly recommend Robert Strivens' paper at the 2018 Carey Conference (see <http://reformation-today.org/talks-2018>, also published in Reformation Today, No. 283) where he gives us a vision of this kind of unity, cohesion, and associational life which is far from dismissive and exclusive.

The 1689 Baptist Confession blows away hyper-individualism and the sovereignty of self and establishes the kind of unity described by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16.

Three of the great Confessions of Faith in the Seventeenth Century were word-for-word in most sections:

- The Presbyterian Westminster Confession of 1646
- The Congregationalist/Independent Savoy Declaration of 1658
- The Baptist Confession of 1689

This shows how very similar the churches were in doctrine.

THE LIFE OF DAVID (7) Keith Underhill

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

DAVID BECOMES KING OVER ALL ISRAEL AND JUDAH (2 Samuel 1-5)

JERUSALEM: THE CITY OF GOD (2 Samuel 5-7)

The long-awaited promise of God to David had finally been fulfilled. He had become king over all Israel. The first thing he did was to establish a capital, not just as a seat of government, but also as a religious centre for the kingdom of God (the theocracy). We shall first look at the earthly Jerusalem, and then the spiritual reality to which it points.

1. THE OLD JERUSALEM

(1) First, David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-10). Neither Judah nor Benjamin had been able to completely dislodge the Jebusites (see Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:8,21). Their citadel was on the mountain peak of Zion with unapproachable cliffs on three sides. There were good and wise reasons for David to choose Jerusalem as his capital. It was a good site; it was centrally located on the border between Benjamin and Judah; there would be no jealousy as it had not been an Israelite city until this time. David made it his capital by having his house built there (5:11).

(2) David brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). The ark was to be in the temple, in the holy of holies, as the great symbol of God's presence. It had earlier been captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4), and was brought back to Israel by the men of Kiriath-Jearim (= Baale-Judah) (1 Samuel 7:1-2). The presence of the ark showed that the Lord, not David, was the true King of Israel. Israel was a theocracy, where God ruled, and David was only blessed as he lived in dependence upon the Lord.

(3) David desired to build a temple (2 Samuel 7:1-2). The temple was to house the ark of God as David already had his beautiful palace. However, the project was left to David's son Solomon. But David did make provision of the materials needed (1 Chronicles 22), and carefully organized the Levites for their future temple duties, to assist the priests in music, gatekeeping, and the treasury (1 Chronicles 23-26). So David

established Jerusalem as the centre of religious activity in Israel. The Lord had centuries before promised that He would choose such a place in which to put His Name, to make His habitation there, as opposed to many places for idol worship (see Deuteronomy 12:2ff.). Jerusalem was the Lord's choice (Psalm 78:68, 87:2, 1 Kings 14:21). All males were to come to worship here three times a year (Deuteronomy 16:16).

(4) What was the significance of Jerusalem for the Old Testament people of God?

It was both their political and religious centre, both being under the direction of the Lord, Israel's King. It was the dwelling place of God symbolized by the earthly king reigning there (1 Chronicles 23:25, Psalm 135:21), and by the temple with its priesthood and elaborate ritual. The purpose was for the Lord to reveal Himself there in these things in order to show what He expected of His people in their conduct and worship.

2. THE NEW JERUSALEM

(1) In Old Testament prophecy.

The earthly and geographical Jerusalem never lived up to its exalted purpose, for example in Manasseh's reign (2 Chronicles 33:4). So God threatened to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:27). As a result, there developed an expectation of a new Jerusalem, redeemed and renewed, that would truly reveal the name of God. It would be a place of holiness where He would dwell (Isaiah 4:2-6). God's word would be truly taught so that the nations would come and hear and obey (Isaiah 2:2-3).

(2) In New Testament fulfilment.

God's people make up the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem. She is the bride of Christ, God's special dwelling place (Revelation 21:2-3,9-10,22-23). This is not just future, because believers have already come to the city (Hebrews 12:22), as opposed to Sinai (v.18). But there will be a full revelation in the future.

(3) What this symbolism tells us about the Church

The 'Church' is not to be identified with any denomination, but is all those Christ has loved and died for, the redeemed.

★ The church is chosen of God as His special dwelling place, where He reveals Himself as believers gather together (Matthew 18:20, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Timothy 3:15). What a privilege to dwell in the church where the Lord reveals Himself in His grace as nowhere else. And what a frightening thing it is to do anything against that church. It is holy, belonging to God, for which he is greatly jealous (Zechariah 8:2-3).

★ Christ is head of the church (Colossians 1:18), as David was king in Jerusalem. As the Head, His word directs all things in the church – worship, organization, singing, evangelism, preaching. Remember the very detailed arrangements that David made for the temple and its worship. Are you so dependent upon Christ’s word that you are committed to doing whatever He says? Yes, we are free as Christians, but free in order to fully serve our Lord, but not to please ourselves individually or as an assembly of God’s people.

★ Rejoice that God’s people for ever dwell in a ‘city’. What does a city make you think of? Of permanence, of companions, of safety and protection, of riches and beauty. Consider the description in Revelation 21.

★ The church must be the chief desire of Christians and the centre of their activities, just as David’s Jerusalem was. Absence ought to make the heart grow fonder (Psalm 137:5-6). We are to give the Lord no rest until Jerusalem is a praise in the all the earth (Isaiah 62:6-7). What place does the church, your local church, have in your life? What place does it have in your learning of and obeying God’s law, in your prayers, in your daily activities, in your friendships, in your service for the Lord? Would you rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked (Psalm 84:10)? Think of what the church is, although it is not yet perfect. It is that for which Christ died. It is the people amongst whom God delights to dwell in the most special way. It is those who will dwell with God in eternal glory. Does your life give evidence that you are truly a citizen of this new Jerusalem? Repent of your neglect, even your despising. Have you ever said or thought that ‘church is boring’? Your attitude to the church is your attitude to Christ, for it is His church.

Question: What are we to say about modern-day Jerusalem? Some Christians think it remains a special city and they believe another Jewish temple will be built there. Of course, it is possible it will be built but it would not be in fulfilment of anything in Biblical prophecy. The only way to have true understanding is to consider the New Testament interpretation. Paul contrasts the present Jerusalem with the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:25-26). He makes the present Jerusalem to correspond with Sinai and the law which brought the people into slavery. The Jerusalem above, to which Christians belong, brings freedom (see also Galatians 5:1). Christians are already part of that heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). Spiritually, we have nothing to do with the present Jerusalem, it is a city like any other, except for its great historical interest. That Jerusalem above is going to come down from heaven and describes the eternal state of the people of God (see Revelation 3:12, 21:2,10-27).

CREATION: THE BLUE-PRINT FOR HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Murungi Igweta

This is the first of a series of articles on marriage matters.
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Wikipedia tells us that ‘a blueprint is a reproduction of a technical drawing using a contact print process on light-sensitive sheets. Introduced by Sir John Herschel in 1842, the process allowed rapid, and accurate production of an unlimited number of copies. It was widely used for over a century for the reproduction of specification drawings used in construction and industry. The blueprint process was characterised by white lines on a blue background, a negative of the original. The process was not able to reproduce colour or shades of grey’.

We can take creation to be similar in the sense that it gives accurate guidance in our human relations but fails at the point where sin entered hence the need for redemption.

From the first two chapters of Genesis we learn that it all begins with God. We also learn the following:

1. **You were created by God.** You did not create yourself.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:1, 26, 27)

2. **You were created for a purpose.** And you were created by God for a purpose greater than yourself. You were created by God for God. The purpose for which you exist is to bear his image and glorify God. Therefore, you must not live for yourself; rather you ought to live for God. “*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

3. **You owe it God.** Because the Lord God Almighty created human beings (Genesis 1:26-31), therefore all people owe allegiance, gratitude, love and service to God. It should be clear that you do not exist for relationships, even for that of marriage. Rather, the most important and first relationship is with God. There are people who regard romance and relationships as the most important thing, but they are greatly mistaken.

4. God created us to be social beings. After creating man God said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”* (Genesis 2:18). It is because of this statement that we pursue the most intimate horizontal relationship (between man and a woman in marriage). The emphasis of Scripture is not self-love, but love for God and for others (Matthew 22:37-39). Love is the best glue of every true relationship.

5. God created us equal. Men and women are equal before God. This is shown in Scripture in four different ways, both in creation and providence; but especially in redemption. From creation we see the following:

- 1) God made man and woman in his **image** (Genesis 1:27). We are equal image-bearers of God, whether male or female. We are created after God’s likeness in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24).
- 2) God **blessed** man and woman equally (Genesis 1:28). We read, *“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ...’”* The blessing of bearing children and multiplication shows that God brought the woman to the man with the responsibility of propagating His creation as a blessing. He did not need to mould the clay again or carve out another rib. His image-bearers were well blessed to carry on with the responsibility of pro-creating.
- 3) God created man and woman to have **dominion** equally over the creatures (Genesis 1:26). *“And let them have dominion ...”*

In these three cases we see that the Lord God deliberately includes both man and woman in the privileges of image-bearing, blessing and dominion. This clearly and powerfully demonstrates the equality of man and woman and will shape our discussion as we consider the different gender roles, which in no way undermine this divine-given equality between male and female. Gender roles promote the God-ordained purpose of all human relations, including marriage, since man and woman complement each other in marriage as they execute their God-given roles.

Since we are created by God, we cannot do as we wish with ourselves or with others. We cannot do as we wish in our relationships; we must care for what God says. Since marriage is God’s idea, then we must listen to Him in His word. It is God who should tell us how we are to relate with each other, bearing in mind that we belong to God by the right of creation and preservation.

But there is a fourth equalizing factor between men and women, found in redemption. Christ purchased all the saints by his own blood.

- 4) We are equal **heirs of grace** (1 Peter 3:7). Men and women are equally sinners. Adam and Eve equally fell into sin and both experienced Genesis-3-effect of curse and God’s wrath. They fall sick equally, and suffer and die as a result of the misery of sin. But the good news is that those who are

believers are equally redeemed by the blood of Christ. Men as well as women are in need of a Saviour. The only Saviour of God's people is the Lord Jesus Christ. He saves men as well as women out of their sins. Eventually when Christ shall return, we shall equally have glorified bodies and inherit the salvation ready to be revealed in the last day. We shall have the *inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven* (1 Peter 1:4) as co-heirs of grace of God in Christ.

6. Human equality is what informs the dignity and sanctity that we attach to human life. As humans relate, they need to see each other, not as robots, or sex toys but as what they truly and really are – God's handiwork, image-bearers and heirs of grace so that we treat people with the dignity they deserve. The dignity and sanctity of human beings, women as well as men, is a fact that the Christian faith highly regards.

7. There is a higher level of fulfilment in human beings than in anything else. Man, being a social being, did not find fulfilment in other creatures, or in the garden-work or in himself, but in God and then in other human beings and especially in his wife. And so the Bible categorically states that, "*Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'*" (Genesis 2:18). And when Adam saw Eve, he exclaimed: "*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*" (Genesis 2:23).

Adam had deeper satisfaction in Eve than he had ever found in the beauty of the tulips and the lilies in the field. While he enjoyed the gracefulness of deer and the loveliness of does, and the strength of stallions, yet he found satisfaction and fulfilment in his wife. Therefore marriage is ordained by God for His glory and man's good.

8. The ultimate satisfaction is in and with God. From the very beginning, before making man, God spoke about him and when He made man He spoke with him. He did not speak with any other creature! Not that God was lonely, but man is in need of God, being the divine image-bearer. Man cannot find peace and rest in anything or anyone else other than God who made him. Without a real relationship with God, a deep void in the human heart remains that can never be filled by anything else.

This gap can only be filled by God through His Son who gave Him to show His divine love for His people. Those who trust in Christ find true meaning in life. Their marriages find true direction for we know that marriage is a profound mystery that refers to Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32). Unless you are in Christ, by believing in Him and repenting of all your sins, your marriage remains in a conundrum that can only be resolved by being found in Christ, having not a righteousness of your own but that which comes through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9).

COMMON QUESTION NO. 12

HOW CAN I BE SURE AM BORN AGAIN?

Keith Underhill

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

One way of describing a Christian is to say he or she is ‘born again’. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus as recorded in John 3:3-5. No one can truly claim to be a Christian unless born again. It is so important to know what this new birth means, and then to be sure it is true of you.

1. Is it possible to be very religious and yet not “born again”?

See how Nicodemus is described.

- ★ A Pharisee (3:1). Pharisees were leaders in the Jewish religion, dedicated to keeping the law of God as strictly as possible. Paul testified “that according to the strictest party ... I have lived as a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5). Here is a man who thought he had totally given himself to God.
- ★ A ruler of the Jews (3:1). He was very highly respected so a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest legal court for Jews.
- ★ Very positive about Jesus (3:2). What made him so different from many other Pharisees is that he believed Jesus was “a teacher come from God” because of the miracles He performed.
- ★ The teacher (3:10). He is called “the teacher”, and as such Jesus expected him to know about the new birth, but he was completely ignorant.

Yet he was not born again. It is very possible to be full of religious practices, have great knowledge of the Bible, and even believe Jesus is from God, and yet not be born again. So it was also with Saul of Tarsus.

2. What does being “born again” mean?

Jesus explains that the being “born again” (3:3) is the same as being “born of water and the Spirit” (3:5). Because Nicodemus ought to have known this from the Old Testament it seems that Jesus is referring to Ezekiel 36:25-26 where the blessing promised is of water to cleanse from uncleannesses (sins), and of the Spirit dwelling in the people of God. Note that the Spirit and a new heart guarantee that the person will certainly be careful to obey God’s law (36:27). So this new birth is becoming a new person spiritually. When the Spirit brings life to a stony heart everything is changed. The darkened mind is enlightened. The desires for sin are replaced with desires for righteousness. No longer is life lived selfishly but now for the glory of God. This is why the picture of birth is used; it represents a new beginning, a new life. Peter uses

the language of “born again” in 1 Peter 1:3,23. John uses the language of “born” for the Christian in John 1:13, and in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1,4,18.

So Jesus is telling Nicodemus that, despite all his achievements in religion, in education and in society, he must start his life all over again if he is to enter the kingdom of God. And this is something only the Spirit of God can do. No child can give birth to itself! Jesus emphasizes that only the Spirit can give birth to “spirit” (3:6). He likens being born of the Spirit to the wind (wind and Spirit are the same word in the original languages), that “blows where it wishes” (3:8).

3. How can you be “born again”?

Our Lord does not give any instructions to Nicodemus how to be born again. He does not teach that if you believe then God will respond by giving a new birth. Faith belongs only to the new heart; the stony heart is one of unbelief. You cannot appeal to John 3:16 for it says that the one who believes receives eternal life, not the new birth. Faith is the result of the new birth, as taught in John 1:12-13 and 1 John 5:1. The new birth is a sovereign and powerful work of the Spirit of God in connection with the hearing of the word of God. Jesus called upon dead Lazarus to come out of his tomb. He could not; he was dead! But the word of Jesus had life giving power, raising him from the dead, so that he did come out. In the same way, the message of the gospel is powerfully used by the Spirit to give a new birth so that the person comes to Jesus = believes. If you ask, ‘Why are some born of the Spirit and not others?’ then the only response is in the words of our Lord, “The wind blows where it wishes.”

4. What is the evidence of being “born again”?

What is the evidence a new baby has come into the world? It moves and makes noise. In the case of the one born of the Spirit you cannot observe the birth taking place. Likewise you cannot see the wind, but “you hear its sound” (3:8). Jesus says “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. What is this “spirit”? These are things that only the Spirit of God can produce; the “flesh” cannot produce them, for it can only produce “flesh” (3:6).

★ Faith in Christ (John 1:12-13). John very clearly writes that those who believe give the evidence they “were born ... of God”.

[**John’s first letter** was written to give assurance to Christian believers who had been troubled by false teachers, those who John calls “antichrists” (2:18-19). They can be assured if they are ...]

★ Practising righteousness (1 John 2:29). The new birth by the Spirit brings a life that loves righteousness instead of sin. This is because the Father of the new child is righteous Himself. The son is like the father. This is true repentance.

- ★ Not sinning (1 John 3:9, 5:18). Although translations have “make a practice of sinning” (e.g. ESV) this is more of an interpretation. In the context, it seems to be a reference to the fact that one born of God cannot be “lawless” (3:4), like the devil (3:8). This is because “God’s seed” abides in one born of God, probably a reference to the Holy Spirit.
- ★ Loving one another (1 John 4:7-8). There are many exhortations to love the brethren. This is grounded in the very character of God, “God is love”. If God is your Father you will love like Him.
- ★ Believing in Jesus (1 John 5:1). Believing that Jesus is the Christ is the result of being born of God. The false teachers denied this (2:22). Those born of God receive Jesus as the long promised Messiah, their anointed Prophet, Priest and King.
- ★ Overcoming the world (1 John 5:4). The world are those desires and values that are opposed to God (see 2:16). The one born of God has a new nature that does not seek to satisfy such sinful desires, and is therefore free to keep God’s commandments.

5. So how can you be sure you are “born again”?

It is not difficult to tell if the new born is alive. It is obvious when a tree bears fruit. Ask yourself the following questions.

Have you received Jesus Christ? Have you believed in His name? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Is your faith sincere?

Are you devoted to a life of righteousness because you know that God is righteous? Are you serious about keeping the commandments of God (1 John 2:3-6)?

Are you being kept by Christ from turning away from the faith? Your perseverance in the face of many trials is a great evidence that you are born again (see Hebrews 3:6,14).

Are you genuinely loving other Christians? We have a special love for fellow Christians, as Christ loved us (1 John 3:16-18).

Is your life one of overcoming the world? Has God changed your inner life, your thoughts and your desires?

If you have never been born again, one day you will wish you were never born.

(Steve Lawson)

BOOK REVIEW

Geoffrey Thomas

HELL'S BEST REVEALED SECRET, BY ELLY ACHOK

Elly Achok has an article on our use of the social media elsewhere. This book on the phenomenon of the 'altar call' and 'sinner's prayer' is presently being reprinted. Please write to Grace & Truth if you would like to purchase the book. This review may also be found on the website of The Banner of Truth, <https://banneroftruth.org>.

I'm not too keen on the title of this book, though I understand the context in which it was chosen, but I do love the author unequivocally. I had the privilege of teaching him a few times in the Trinity Pastors' Course (TPC). I think of him as a fourth wave Calvinist.

Let me explain, taking my life into my hands because I am bound to inadvertently leave some of the most important names and institutions out in this suggestive summary . . . the first wave consisted of such individuals and institutions as Dr. Lloyd-Jones, Louis Berkhof, Westminster and Calvin Seminaries, William Hendriksen, Arthur Pink, Lorraine Boettner, the Sovereign Grace Union, G. C. Berkouwer, the Evangelical Library, the Free Grace Record, I. B. Davies, Kenneth Macrae, R. A. Finlayson, W. J. Grier, Adam Loughridge, Principal John Macleod, the Puritan Conference, the Inter-Varsity Press and so on.

The second wave consisted of such men and institutions as the Banner of Truth, Iain Murray, J. I. Packer, Erroll Hulse, Reformation Today, the Carey Conference, Ernest Reisinger, the Evangelical Movement of Wales, the Bible Rally movement, the South Wales Bible College, Reformed Seminary Jackson, Jay Green, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing company, the B.E.C., Morton Smith, Evangelical Press, the Pensacola Conference, the Aberystwyth Conference.

The third wave consisted of those affected by those kinds of men and movements as the above – though some were born out of due time and came by reading the Bible and prayer alone. They are my contemporaries: Stuart Olyott, Sinclair Ferguson, Conrad Mbewe, Paul Helm, Al Martin, Joel Beeke, Donald Macleod, Ted Donnelly, Douglas Macmillan, Walter Chantry, Peter Masters, John MacArthur, Keith Underhill, Brian Ellis, David Kingdon, Baruch Maoz, Irfon Hughes, Jay Adams, Derek Thomas, Alistair Begg, Andrew Davies, Day One, Christian Focus, London Seminary, and Evangelical Times.

The fourth wave are the people to whom such men as the above have preached, who have learned the whole counsel of God from these institutions and people, whose books and magazines they have read, whose websites they have visited. Many attend those particular conferences in the USA and the UK where such men are the preachers.

Gratifyingly, *Hell's Best Revealed Secret*, comes from this new wave of Reformation men that God has raised up, and the first-time author of this particular book lives in Kenya. The book chronicles the revolution that took place in the life of the writer, Elly Achok Olare, when he grasped the height and depth of the grace of God in saving sinners. It is a testimony to the great change that he has experienced.

He has called it *Hell's Best Revealed Secret* (published 2014 by Gospel Missions Agency Church – Kenya, P. O. Box 956, 50102 Mumias, Kenya, 90 pages, ISBN 979 9966 07 051 7). This is because of the phrase of the evangelist Ray Comfort 'Hell's Best Kept Secret'. By this Comfort is referring to the disappearance of the Law of God from evangelical preaching. Without the Law there cannot be knowledge of sin; for where there is no Law, sin is not imputed. Without the Ten Commandments there can be no genuine conviction of sin, and if there is no genuine conviction of sin, there can be no genuine repentance. Multitudes who supposedly repented never had an idea of what they were repenting. Sinners had no awareness of how sinful they were in the sight of God. Hell did what it could to hide this message of God's law from sinners, but Elly declares that hell also released a deadly gift to the churches of Christ and that is the invitation system.

Mumias, where his congregation is found, is dominated by Muslims and he and his congregation have suffered harassment and the burning down of two of their buildings. He is also surrounded by Protestant congregations where the invitation system, or altar call, is a dominant part of every Sunday evangelistic service and he is facing fierce hostility for this book.

The big Reformation Conference they organise and his preaching contain solemn warnings of the unbiblical nature of calling people to walk to the front and repeat a prayer put on their lips by a 'counsellor' and then receive the assurance that henceforth all is eternally well between themselves and God. This calm and reasoned book is full of the passion and desire for the glory of God, and Elly adds this: "This is one of the hardest things I have had to do in my life. I am going to be attacking a system which I gloried in for close to 17 years as a crusade speaker."

Elly describes hell's revealed secret in the Invitation System thus:

They will print posters to advertise the evangelistic meetings. Such posters will bear the image of the preacher – sometimes with a brief testimony that God has mightily used the evangelist in performing miracles. Many a time, images of crippled people carrying their crutches or wheel chairs after being healed will be displayed to increase the appeal. On the poster a famous singer or band will be advertised so that those who do not desire to come because of the miracle working preacher will be lured by the popular singer or the group.

Church members will be taught on the tactics of 'soul winning' before attending the crusade. One of the most common tactics is to tell the church members that when the preacher calls for hands to be lifted they should be the first to lift their hands in order to encourage the sinners to lift theirs also (in psychology this is called the 'herding instinct'), and when those professing they have become Christians are asked to get out of their seats and walk to the podium, it would be incumbent upon the same church members to initiate such a walk so that the timid sinner can be encouraged to follow suit. It is more like the animal world – such as the great wildebeest migration across the Mara river in Kenya. There is nervous reluctance, the herds stand on the bank, but when one wildebeest makes the jump the rest will follow suit at the exact spot the first one crossed the river. This is the psychology employed to get the timid masses to come forward and 'receive Jesus' (op cit pp. 1 & 2).

Most crusades are timed to end as the sun sets. This is to take advantage of the cover of darkness so that the people who feel like getting up and going to the front may not feel embarrassed, since no one is seeing them. Over and above that, but even during day time, such psychological tactics like saying, 'everybody close your eyes', will be used in the service. This is to ensure that those being urged to come forward may feel that no one is looking at them. The first step having been secured with every eye closed (probably under cover of darkness) the second step is put into place. With a soft, sombre and emotional voice carried melodiously over notes of soft music, the preacher asks those who want to make a commitment to Jesus to lift up their hands. There will follow a protracted encouragement, prodding and appealing to them all not to be ashamed of the Lord. Then closed eyes will be urged upon everyone ('they need not worry, no one is watching them').

When sufficient hands have gone up, ushers and counsellors will be instructed to stand next to lifted hands. Then they will be told to walk forward and the ushers will be at hand to prod them along. At the same time such appeals as, 'Jesus came all the way from heaven for you, can you not walk a few meters for Him?' will be pressed upon the sinners present. Such a guilt trip often works and at times it is buttressed with

statements like this, ‘If you take the first step, my friend, then Jesus will take the rest’. I have seen meetings where the crowds are asked to clap for the hesitating sinner, applauding his ‘bravery’. This is done to make the sinner feel he is a champion if he makes the move. In other meetings people are urged to get out of their seats before they all count three and so all shout out, ‘ONE, TWO, THREE’ and then the congregation is told to applaud as some people beat the count and come forward (pp. 2 & 3).

These are some of the horrors of the crudities of the invitation system as witnessed and practised for many years by the author.

Elly then tells his readers where such a system came from: the philosophy and system of thought of Charles G. Finney. He proceeds to ask some fundamental biblical questions: What actually is coming to Christ? Have men and women the ability – utterly unaided by God – to come to Christ? No. Man is dead in sin and at enmity towards God. How then does man come to God? It is by the Father drawing him, making him willing, giving him a new birth which is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Hell’s most feared message is the gospel of the righteousness of God. Readers are urged to repent and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. All this careful exegesis takes the majority of the book, the next nine brief chapters.

Finally in the ultimate chapter seven reasons are given by Elly for rejecting the Invitation System.

1. It is unbiblical.
2. Its failure rate is incurable.
3. It obscures the gospel of God’s amazing grace.
4. It inoculates people against the true gospel.
5. It produces tares.
6. It brings shame and dishonour on the name of Christ.
7. Christ can build his church without it.

Well done Elly Achok Olare for your perceptive book. It is next to Iain Murray’s booklet *The Invitation System* (Banner of Truth), and W. R. Downing’s booklet, *Why We Don’t Use the Invitation System (Altar Call)* (Firstlove Publications) on my shelf.

The Invitation System is the Trojan horse of our day, a poisoned chalice which has the potential of bringing down the churches of Christ. There is as we speak an enemy within our walls and that enemy is letting in enemy combatants, tares and planters of tares.

(Elly Achok)

THE CHURCH AND THE WAR ON CORRUPTION

John Muketha

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

A just and righteous administration of the government that guarantees impartiality and equity in the service of the people will truly exalt the nation. When evil, like corruption, rules a nation, it puts disgrace upon it and makes it despicable among its neighbours. It is therefore the duty of all those in leadership to use their power to deal with evil and promote what is good for the nation.

The 2010 Kenya Constitution ushered in a new dispensation that demands a high degree of integrity and accountability of the leadership at all levels of governance. The rampant corruption in the country undermines economic growth, security, and service delivery. Although the war on corruption has been waged for a long time, Kenya continues to post a poor score in the global Corruption Perception Index. In 2017, for example, Kenya was position 143 out of 180 countries with a score of 28 out of 100 compared to Ruanda at position 48 with a score of 55. Corruption persists in spite of the existence of a complex legislative framework. This is because corruption is rooted in the heart and nature of human beings and there are no laws that can change the heart. The Bible considers corruption as a spiritual issue caused by sin.

According to the 2009 population census, 82.5% of Kenyans indicated that they were Christians. Christians as the salt of the earth and the light of the world should serve as God’s agents who bring values to bear on society. The church by assuming its prophetic role as the conscience of the nation and the mouthpiece of God, can respond to corruption by teaching Biblical principles to help guard against the temptation of covetousness and greed.

The world was created perfect but man through his depravity corrupted it (Genesis 1:31; 6:12). God, through Moses gave the following instruction: *“You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit... And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right”* (Exodus 23:6,8). King Solomon puts it, *“The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice”* (Proverbs 17:23). Isaiah further pronounces a woe to those *“who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!”* (Isaiah 5:23). Taking a bribe is, therefore, a grievous sin against God and an offence against the weak, the innocent and the nation as a whole.

Greed is the root cause of corruption. The Scripture warns that *“those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangas”* (1

Timothy 6:9-10). The word of God recognizes contentment as the virtue that would counter this greed: *“Better a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice”* (Proverbs 16:8). *“There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world”* (1 Timothy 6:6-7). To the Christian, God is the source of true contentment.

The pulpit must be used to teach and preach righteous and honest living. The message of prosperity must be preached with caution and moderation. To preach that one can acquire wealth without labour is deceitful and a call to corruption. We must be careful in believing and celebrating every testimony of miraculous blessing, otherwise we end up being hoodwinked into celebrating corruption. The current debate on politicians contributing generously in churches is perceived by some to be undermining the fight against corruption. The Bible encourages giving in the church, but this is supposed to be in secret (2 Corinthians 9:7, Matthew 6:1-4).

The Church has the duty of teaching the right values and rebuilding the value system as it encourages its members to imbibe those values and moral principles. To be able to stand on the high moral ground and speak out against corrupt leadership and poor governance, the ministers of the gospel must heed Paul’s counsel to Titus: *“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us”* (Titus 2:7-8).

The hope for our country lies in the faithful preaching of the gospel through which, even the thieves, the greedy and the swindlers are transformed as they are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:11-12). As members of a church where God’s word is faithfully proclaimed, we must reject the lure of quick riches and as we confront corruption that comes our way. In our homes, we have the duty of teaching our children the values of honesty and hard work, even as we, ourselves live out those values. As the light of the world, we must let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14,16).

While we recognize that those in authority are there by the sovereign will of God, still we have a duty to pray to God to grant us leaders like Daniel who was a paragon of integrity. The Bible testifies: *“Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him”* (Daniel 6:4). May Christ, who indeed is the light of the world, shine through His Church to transform His people into shining lights that will dispel the gloom of corruption in our land.

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Keith Underhill

The Bible is the fully inspired Word of God and so does not change from one age to another. Therefore the truths contained in the Confession, because they are wholly based upon Scripture, are as relevant today as when ‘the Elders and Brethren of many congregations of Christians, baptized upon profession of their Faith’ stated them in 1677. King Charles II was then upon the British throne. It was a time of persecution.

This London Baptist Confession was based upon the Westminster Confession (Presbyterian) of 1646, and differed from it only on such important matters as the nature of the Church, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and Church Government.

In 1688 a new King was on the throne and religious freedom came to Britain. In 1689 this Baptist Confession was re-issued in London by 37 leading Baptist Pastors. In England and Wales it became the official Confession of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptist Churches and remained so for the next two centuries. In 1744 the Confession was adopted by the Calvinistic Baptists of North America, and called by them the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.

The Confession written out below is a version in modern English, published by Carey Publications in 1975.

With this issue of Grace & Truth, no. 131, we intend to begin a chapter by chapter study of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The article in this issue on the need to have a Confession of Faith has begun to explain to you the vital importance of Confessions of Faith in the history of the church. Each section in the following 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 ONE: THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Necessity of Scripture

1. *The Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith and obedience that constitute salvation. Although the light of nature, and God’s works of creation and providence, give such clear testimony to His goodness, wisdom and power that men who spurn them are left inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient of themselves to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary for salvation. In consequence the merciful Lord from time to time and in a variety of ways has revealed Himself, and made known His will to His church. And furthermore, in order to ensure the preservation and propagation of the truth, and the establishment and comfort of the church against the corrupt nature of man and the*

malice of Satan and the world, He caused this revelation of Himself and His will to be written down in all its fullness. And as the manner in which God formerly revealed His will has long ceased, the Holy Scripture becomes absolutely essential to men.

(a) For what Scripture is necessary – It is necessary for godliness (2 Timothy 3:15-17); but not, for example, for agriculture.

(b) Why Scripture is necessary.

1. General revelation is insufficient – It is unable to bring sinners into a saving relationship with God; although it does leave them inexcusable for their unbelief (Romans 1:19-21).
2. God has put His special revelation in writing – Hebrews 1:1, Proverbs 22:19-21, Romans 15:4, 2 Peter 1:19-20. Note what the Confession says are the reasons for this. Scripture is now the only way to know God's saving will.

The Identity of Scripture

2. The Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, consists of the following books which together make up the Old and New Testament (the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament are listed). All these books are given by the inspiration of God to be the rule or standard of faith and life.

3. The books commonly called the Apocrypha were not given by divine inspiration and are not part of the canon or rule of Scripture. Therefore they do not possess any authority in the church of God, and are to be regarded and used in the same way as other writings of men.

(a) What the books are (paragraph 2) – 2 Timothy 3:16.

(b) What the books are not (paragraph 3) – “The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” correspond to our Old Testament (Luke 24:44, see v. 27). Why is the Apocrypha not included? Here are some reasons:

- The Apocrypha is never quoted in the New Testament, although so many Old Testament books are quoted.
- They were never considered to be part of the inspired Jewish Scriptures.
- None of the books of the Apocrypha claims to have a divine origin.
- There are historical inaccuracies, and false teachings, such as praying for the dead.
- There is not much spiritual value in the Apocrypha.

The Authority of Scripture

4. The Scripture is self-authenticating. Its authority does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but entirely upon God, its author, who is truth itself. It is to be received because it is the Word of God.

5. *The testimony of the church of God may influence and persuade us to hold the Scripture in the highest esteem. The heavenliness of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement between all its parts from first to last, the fact that throughout it gives all glory to God, the full revelation it gives of the only way of salvation – these, together with many other incomparably high qualities and full perfections, supply abundant evidence that it is the Word of God. At the same time, however, we recognize that our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is the outcome of the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.*

(a) Why the Bible is authoritative (paragraph 4) – 2 Peter 1:19-21, 2 Timothy 3:16. Because all the words of the Bible are the very words of God. The Bible never criticizes itself as if it is mistaken. The New Testament teaches the authority of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21, Matthew 5:17-18, John 10:34-36, Matthew 4:1-11), not only in general, but even of the words written (see Matthew 22:32,41-46, Luke 16:17, John 10:35, Galatians 3:16). The New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and so is united to it (Hebrews 1:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:10-11). Those who wrote it have the same authority as the Old Testament writers (Romans 16:25-26, 2 Peter 1:16-21, 1 Corinthians 14:37, 15:3-11, 2 Peter 3:1-2, John 2:22).

(b) How we know the Bible is the authoritative Word of God (paragraph 5) – John 16:13-14, 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, 1 John 2:20,27. This section is directed against Roman Catholics who believe that it is the Church that has the infallible authority to declare what is Scripture. Although the testimony of the Church does have a certain value, it is the divine excellencies of the Scripture itself, as the Holy Spirit reveals them to our hearts, that convince us that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. If the Scripture itself shows it is the Word of God why do we need this ‘inward work of the Holy Spirit’ or ‘testimony of the Spirit’? It is because of our sin which always suppresses the truth (Romans 1:18). The Holy Spirit removes our blindness; He does not give a new revelation in addition to that of the Scriptures. There can be no higher authority than God Himself speaking in His Word.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture

6. *The sum total of God’s revelation concerning all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scripture. Nothing, whether a supposed revelation of the Spirit or man’s traditions, is ever to be added to Scripture. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that inward enlightenment from the Spirit of God is necessary for the right understanding of what Scripture reveals. We also accept that certain aspects of the worship of God and of church government, which are matters of common usage, are to be determined by the light of nature and Christian common sense, in line with the general rules of God’s Word from which there must be no departure.*

(a) What the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean. It does not mean that everything is stated explicitly. Some things are “implicitly contained”, e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity.

(b) For what purpose the Scripture is sufficient. It is sufficient for “all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men.” This is not to be defined in a narrow religious way, for the Scripture is sufficient to be the basis and starting point for every human effort. For example, while not sufficient as a biology textbook, it does provide infallible teaching about creation and particularly the nature of man in relation to God.

(c) The Scripture is sufficient by itself without “a supposed revelation of the Spirit or man’s traditions” – 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Galatians 1:8-9 (see also Deuteronomy 4:2, Acts 20:20,27, Psalm 19:7, 119:6,9,104,128). This is a rejection of anything in addition to the 66 books that claims to be of the Spirit or from church tradition.

(d) Cautions about the sufficiency of Scripture.

1. The individual must also exert mental labour – Proverbs 2:4.
2. The Spirit must also teach – John 6:45, 1 Corinthians 2:9-14.
3. “Christian common sense” must also be used – 1 Corinthians 11:13-14, 14:26,40.

The Clarity of Scripture

7. The contents of the Scripture vary in their degree of clarity, and some men have a better understanding of them than others. Yet those things which are essential to man’s salvation and which must be known, believed and obeyed, are so clearly propounded and explained in one place or another, that men educated or uneducated may attain to a sufficient understanding of them if they but use the ordinary means.

(a) The Bible is clear – Psalm 19:7, 119:130. Reasons: because it cannot be sufficient without being clear, and because it cannot be ‘firmly believed’ unless it can be understood (2 Timothy 3:14). Clarity extends to “those things which are essential to man’s salvation”.

(b) The Bible is not equally clear in all its parts – 2 Peter 3:16. This is only true of ‘some’ things, and it is only ‘the ignorant and unstable’ who ‘twist’ them ‘to their own destruction’. The fault is not in the writings but in the persons.

(c) The Bible is not equally clear to all. The Scriptures are clear enough to give a child the wisdom that leads to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). They are clear enough to equip the man of God ‘for every good work’ = the whole range of his duties (2 Timothy 3:17).

Application 1 – The Scriptures are central in Christian guidance, for here we discover the will of God for our lives. We must learn to study the Scriptures practically.

Application 2 – We must never think that it is impossible to understand the Scripture because great men of God have differed in their interpretation. The source of error and confusion is always human sin.

The Availability of Scripture

8. *The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek (that is to say, in their original languages before translation) were inspired by God at first hand, and ever since, by His particular care and providence, they have been kept pure. They are therefore authentic and, for the church, constitute the final court of appeal in all religious controversies. All God's people have a right to, and an interest in, the Scripture, and they are commanded in the fear of God to read it and search it. But as the Hebrew and Greek are not known to all such readers, Scripture is to be translated into every human language, so that as men thus acquire knowledge of God they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and 'through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope'.*

(a) The fact of its availability – God has preserved the Scriptures “pure”. We do not have the original autographs, but thousands of copies which do not differ in any points of doctrine, with only slight differences. This is why the Scriptures are the final authority (Isaiah 8:20, John 5:39, Acts 15:15).

(b) The necessity of its availability.

1. The need for its translation: “as the Hebrew and Greek are not known to all”.
2. The warrant for its translation: “all God’s people ... are commanded ... to read and search it”, and cannot do so unless it is in a language they understand.
3. The extent of its translation: “into every human language”.
4. The purpose of its translation: “worship”, “hope” (Romans 15:4, Colossians 3:16).

The Finality of Scripture

9. *It is an infallible rule that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, that is to say, one part by another. Hence any dispute as to the true, full and evident meaning of a particular passage must be determined in the light of clearer, comparable passages.*

10. *All religious controversies are to be settled by Scripture, and by Scripture alone. All decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient writers, and doctrines of men collectively or individually, are similarly to be accepted or rejected according to the verdict of Scripture given to us by the Holy Spirit. In that verdict faith finds its final rest.*

(a) Scripture interpretation in particular (paragraph 9). The basic rule of interpretation is “Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture”. Note the following 4 applications:

1. The New Testament must interpret the Old Testament (Amos 9:11-12 with Acts 15:15-18). The Old Testament must always be read in the light of the New.
 2. Primary references to a subject must interpret secondary references. Hebrews 4:12 has been interpreted to teach that man has 3 parts to his nature, but it is not primarily dealing with man's nature. The primary references are Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7.
 3. Teaching passages must interpret historical narratives. For our teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit we must not first go to the narratives of Acts, but to John 14-16 and Romans 8. A historical narrative can be unique, or record something that is evil.
 4. Never interpret one passage so that it contradicts another. We must harmonize Paul on justification by faith (Romans 3:28), and James by faith and works (James 2:24).
- (b) Religious questions in general (paragraph 10) – Matthew 22:29,31-32, Acts 28:23, Ephesians 2:20. The Scripture is the final court of appeal (paragraph 8) as opposed to:
1. Reason as the final authority. We must use our reason, but only to examine the evidence in Scripture so as to understand and accept it.
 2. The Church as the final authority, whether popes, councils or pastors. The Church has often erred. The Church only has authority to command what God has revealed. All Christians are commanded to search the Scriptures and judge the teaching they hear (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, 1 John 4:1-2).
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The Word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See you that lion. They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools, and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries. (C. H. Spurgeon)

‘THE MIGHTIEST’ FALSE PROPHET

Huston Malande

We do not like to have articles that just call out an individual as false. It appears judgemental and some might think we are in danger of grieving the Spirit. But this is Biblical. We are called upon to ‘test the spirits’. Jesus warned us against false prophets. Paul named certain individuals. And when such an individual has a mass following we owe it to the ignorant and deceived to expose what is false. This article first appeared as a blog posted on March 23rd. at <https://afrocalvinist.com/7-reasons-why-dr-owuor-is-the-mightiest-false-prophet>, and has undergone slight revision for Grace & Truth.

Have you ever read Psalm 19? It starts by saying ... “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork”. Such a simple but profound verse. Imagine ... literally **everything** in the sky exists to declare the glory of God. Every morning, when that great orange orb rises from the east to the sweet song of chirping birds, it’s supposed to make us think of the glory of the One who spoke it into existence, who calculated its rhythm, who outlined its orbit, who hand-picked its hues, who calibrated how warm it would be when its golden rays gently touched your face.

The sun is indeed glorious. And so is the moon ... likewise the stars. But no one goes stargazing when the sun is up in the sky. It takes darkness for stars to shine, and there’s no place full of darkness right now than one East African country called Kenya. Just check the news: corruption, theft, murder, adultery, pornography, drunkenness, vulgar language, dishonour of parents, broken marriages, rape, homosexuality, and on and on ... But worst of all, we are plagued by a false prosperity gospel, propped up by all kinds of false teaching and heresies. For a country that’s supposed to be 80% Christian, we sure are a far cry from what Jesus lived and taught.

We’re walking in darkness.

Is it any wonder then, that in the deep spiritual darkness of our night, a ‘morning star’ has risen proclaiming a new dawn? It is no surprise at all. And Oh! what a bright star he has become! Prophet Owuor needs no introduction. His distinct appearance, academic credentials, opulent wealth, shocking message, devout following, massive meetings, and purported miracles are all reflections of the titanic reputation that precedes him. He is larger than life.

The question then is ...

Is Prophet Dr. David Owuor legitimate?

The answer to that is a resounding **No!!**

But why?

Look ... the only reason why his movement has picked up so much speed in our neck of the woods is because the true gospel is lost and the Jesus of the Bible is absent from most so-called churches. The Son is not in the sky, and

so like moths drawn to a candle, hundreds of thousands of people have flocked to an enigmatic preacher who has managed to very effectively disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). This has always been one of Satan's great tactics.

That's a bold statement to make, right? It's a very bold indictment. My intention though, is not to stir up controversy, but rather to give clarity—for even true Christians have struggled to sniff out the poisonous lies in this clever man's bowl of half-truths. I plead that you please bear with me as we dismantle the giant statue that he is. In the end, you will find that his feet are of clay, and he will ultimately not stand against the Biblical boulder that is rolling downhill towards him.

1. HE CLAIMS TO SPEAK DIRECTLY FROM—AND FOR—GOD

Just like every other self-respecting false teacher, Dr. Owuor claims that the Lord personally called him by voice and sent him to be His messenger. This is a foolproof template adopted by most of today's false teachers, from Kenneth Copeland all the way to Reverend Teresia Wairimu. Like them, he apparently hears directly from God, but his specific mission is to become the 'emissary' proclaiming the return of the Messiah (or an earthquake, or a tsunami, or post-election violence, or some other similar calamity). This means that no one is allowed to question him, because ... who would question the mouthpiece of God? As such, he is so bold as to assert that if anyone doesn't listen to him, they shouldn't expect to enter heaven. I'm not kidding. [You may take a look at this 2 minute clip of him speaking: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6l_2Bnnnz4.]

Please remember what the Bible actually says. There are too many Scriptures to quote, so I'll instead just list the facts and mention one or two verses for each point:

1. God spoke in times past in many ways, including prophecy, but now he has spoken to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).
2. The only mediator between God and men is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).
3. The Scriptures contain all the revealed knowledge and promises of God for men, so only Scripture should be the authoritative word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3-4).
4. We should not be fascinated by mysteries but rather ponder what God has revealed in His word (Deuteronomy 29:29, 1 Timothy 4:7).
5. In the same way that Malachi sealed the Old Testament and predicted the coming of John the Baptist, John the Apostle sealed the New Testament and predicted the return of Christ. Inspired by the true Holy Spirit, at the end of the book of Revelation, he prohibited anything being added to the authoritative word of God (Revelation 22:18).

6. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit (whether or not they speak in tongues—which is only one of the gifts by the way), and does not need men like Owuor. What God expects is fellowship in a local church which has proper leadership—I’ll explain this further in point #7—not submission to one man shows (Romans 8:9, 1 John 2:26-27, Matthew 18:17, Hebrews 10:25).

If you are a follower of this prophet, you are in grave danger. What he teaches and commands you to do is in direct opposition to what God’s holy word actually say. Run!

2. HE EQUATES HIS PRESENCE WITH THAT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When the “Mightiest Prophet” lands in a city, he is so revered that his followers have been seen on national television, washing roads where he’ll pass. Perhaps it’s an attempt at making the ground hallowed? I don’t know ...

What’s more concerning than the street washing, is that the crowds chant, “Man of God, welcome! Holy Spirit, welcome!”

You can’t make this stuff up. [You watch the crowds welcoming him to the town of Eldoret at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emRkQxUV9Oo>.]

Surely no true man of God would allow this to happen.

Remember when Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra and healed a lame man? It’s recorded in Acts 14, and it’s such an interesting and relevant passage that I’ll just paste it here, starting from verse 8:

And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Guys, if Paul and Barnabas didn’t even want to be confused for lower pagan gods, how much more should Owuor tremble and do everything in his power to stop his followers from equating his presence to that of the Holy Spirit Himself?!

3. HE BRAZENLY CALLS HIMSELF ‘MIGHTY’

It’s unbelievable just how much this man gets away with. Which prophet (or prophethess) in the Bible ever called themselves mighty? Prophets never declared their own might. For those that we know to have been greatly used by God, it’s God who called them great, not their own selves.

It is said of Moses (so not Moses himself):

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

And yet, Moses wrote of himself in Numbers 12:3:

Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.

That’s the character of true men of God. That’s how every prophet and apostle was. That’s how Jesus carried Himself. He even said that of those born of women, none is greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28), and yet John emphasized that he must decrease so that Christ can increase—and in the end, died a most humiliating death. Is Owuor like that? By no means.

4. HE PREACHES A LEGALISTIC REPENTANCE & HOLINESS

Simply put, Dr. Owuor preaches repentance ... but he twists it. He’s really good at it, I must say. You see, from the Biblical standpoint, repentance is only one side of the salvation coin. Yes we must repent, which means we must turn away from our sin. But ... we must also turn **to** Christ. The other side of the salvation coin is faith, not holiness. Holiness is only an outcome of turning away from sin and turning to Christ in faith. That faith enables all of our actions to be done with the right perspective. In other words, when we know and believe that it is only the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for us that can make us acceptable to God, we stop trying to achieve our own holiness in order to see God.

Romans 14:23 tells us that whatsoever is not done by faith is sin. That includes “acts of holiness”. You don’t have to wear a suit to go to worship. You don’t have to wear dresses that sweep the floor in order to be considered pure and modest. You don’t have to attend a Super Mega Historic Mighty Meeting in Nairobi to hear from God.

Oh foolish Kenyans! Who has bewitched you?!

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not

handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (Colossians 2:20-23).

5. HE SELLS A FALSE INSURANCE POLICY AGAINST THREATENED CALAMITY

Dr Owuor is the quintessential prophet of doom. He shocks and scares and rattles and threatens, all in the name of God. A few weeks ago, the mighty prophet was exposed in the media for underhandedly using a rich woman’s wealth under duress. You can watch the typical response at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=18&v=5OiZvS7je7s. He claims Israel blackmailed the Lord. What kind of God is he speaking for? Anyway, the point is that instead of him speaking the truth so that he might be free of the allegations and be above reproach, he comes down hard breathing fire and brimstone upon those who “blackmail the Lord”.

Every prophecy of his follows this pattern. The question is, if his prophecies are given in order for people to change their ways to avoid physical calamity, and yet those calamities are somehow supposed to be related to the coming of ‘the Messiah’, why is he asking people to repent if that will avert the coming events, including the coming of ‘the Messiah?’ Shouldn’t we hasten the day? Contradiction.

6. HE TRAMPLES ON THE LOCAL CHURCH TO PROMOTE HIS OWN MASSIVE REVIVAL MEETINGS

Dr. Owuor has made himself an enemy of “the church”. I wish he—and quite frankly all the “woke” people on social media—would tell us what they mean by “the church”. Does he mean the National Council of Churches? Or the Catholic church? Or people who write “Christian” in official forms that ask for their religious standing?

That’s not the church!

The church is the true people of God, who love and fear Him, who read His word as if their lives depended on it, who trust in Jesus and not in their own works for their righteousness, who fellowship with other believers in the local church and who seek to spread the good news of salvation to all while serving the poor and hurting of the world.

Dr. Owuor has excluded everyone else, and pointed to himself and his movement as the only way. If only it were true! The sad and demonic fact is that it is meant to destabilize the weak minds that follow him in hope of pleasing God. One day, he will crash and burn in spectacular fashion. Or he will simply die like the rest of us. What will happen to the hundreds of

thousands who followed his way? Who believed that every other church is rotten? They'll have nowhere to turn. He's telling his followers to jump out of the frying pan, but he and the spirit behind him are the proverbial fire.

7. HE UTTERLY FAILS THE BIBLICAL TEST OF AN OVERSEER

The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 3, from verse 2:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Owuor is hardly any of these things.

1. He is not above reproach. Scandals abound. So much for repentance.
2. He divorced his wife, a pattern that apparently pervades his leadership ranks. So much for holiness.
3. He is neither sober-minded, nor self-controlled.
4. He is not respectable and hospitable. He dominates conversations. Men I know who have met him say they find him domineering and overly assertive. He doesn't deal with people with gentleness and respect as we are instructed in 1 Peter 3:15.
5. He is unable to teach, at least rightly. His use of Scripture is misguided at best, and deceptive at worst. I can almost hear the ancient serpent's hiss in the way he handles God's word.
6. He is a lover of money, even though he constantly denies it. Jesus said we shall recognize them by their fruits.
7. He is not well thought of by outsiders, and it's bringing shame to God's name. He does not speak for God, nor for his people.

IN CONCLUSION

I could keep going, but I think the point is made. Dr. Owuor is false prophet who is leading many astray. He has neither the personal holiness nor Biblical aptitude to teach children, let alone the men and women that follow him. The fact that he's enjoyed so much airtime should scare you ... a force of spiritual delusion is behind him, blinding his followers to the truth.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:23-25,

Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Jesus doesn’t deny that great signs and wonders will be performed. What matters is the teaching. He warns us to not believe anything that contradicts what he has already told us, and what is written in the Scriptures.

Have you noticed that Dr. Owuor keeps saying, “Messiah is coming”?

Ummm ... sorry, but when Jesus comes back, he is not coming as a Messiah, that is to save the world. He is coming to judge it. If a “Messiah is coming”, it’s not the Jesus of the Bible. The Messiah has already come. What Dr. Owuor is referring to is the Antichrist, who will appear to solve all the world’s problems. That’s the Messiah that Dr. Owuor is preaching.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:1-3).

Owuor may sound like he is preaching Christ, but by stating that Messiah is coming, he denies that the Messiah has already come. The world is ripe for a false messiah: politics are polarized, governments are failing, terrorism is on the rise, financial markets are unstable, gender and family identity is eroding, education is atheistic, and on and on ...

Only God’s elect will survive the tough times that are coming. Hold fast to Christ in his unshakeable word, and run from men like Dr. Owuor who will devour you.

May God Almighty, who is ever on the throne and in control, keep His people. Even the devil is God’s devil, he cannot touch God’s true people without permission, and ultimately for our good.

Everything is created for God’s glory. Owuor might continue to shine like a star, or he might eventually burn out like a meteor. Either way, he too will serve God’s ultimate purposes. Hallowed will be His name, and the sun will rise again, never to set.

Lord Jesus, it’s a mess down here ...

Come quickly!

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR WOMEN (1)*Patty Owen*

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

It is a privilege to write to you who read Grace & Truth concerning women. I am a wife and a mother, not a writer. In my own opinions and thoughts I place little trust but on the words of God, the Bible, I can stand firmly. Why? Because the Bible is true. It is authoritative and sufficient. It contains all things necessary for our faith and daily living in order to live lives pleasing to God. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

But still you may be asking, ‘Why a special section for women?’ It is because men and women are different, and it was God who in His wisdom created us differently. True, we are equal in our salvation by grace and in our position in Christ. We are equal in our chief end of glorifying God in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. The same Spirit seals us and works in us to teach and lead and comfort and make us holy. But men are men and women are women. We, as women, are to bring glory to God as women.

As we look together at the duties of and commands for women, and the qualities of godly women taught in the Scriptures, we will gain appreciation of our created femaleness. We will understand the tremendous sphere of influence given us in our homes, in the church, and in society. We will feel the weighty responsibilities that rest on us. And we will be better able to stand firm and not be swayed and led astray by the subtle false teachings which are all around us in this world.

Thus, the first truth which must grip you is that God has created you a woman. It was no accident, but a calling. In the short time that we have to live on this earth, we must be busy doing the good works for which God, in his wisdom, created us. Throughout Scripture there are various commands and instructions given to believers in general—but in addition, He gives specific duties to particular groups and individuals. In searching the Scriptures we learn what instruction and duties are for women. Then, we must do them, for “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

This directive to obey God’s commandments is not a burden for those of us who love Christ. As it says in question and answer #1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Our obedience brings Him glory and us great joy. But there is such a lack of sound doctrine being taught today that women are ignorant of the duties required of them by God. Knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. Let us consider some of them together. We will begin with Titus 2:3–5.

Paul had left Titus in Crete to set in order what was left unfinished and to appoint elders in the churches in every town. There were many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, who needed to be silenced because they were ruining whole households by teaching things that ought not to be taught for the sake of dishonest gain. Titus was instructed by Paul to teach the things which were fitting for sound doctrine. In verses 3–5 he writes:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”

Women were divided into two groups, older and younger. The older women were to be instructed “to be” certain things. Having instructed Timothy that older men are to be “temperate, serious, sound in faith in love, and in steadfastness” (v. 2), he turns to the older women. In using the word “likewise” he means that they are also to have the same qualities. He adds two more duties they are to perform, and two evils they are to avoid (v. 3). Their lives were to be characterized by specific traits and that by so being they would also be having an extremely important teaching ministry to the younger women. By their lives and words they were to be teaching what was good. The eyes of the younger women around would be upon them and so the first duty referred to was that they be –

1. Reverent in behaviour.

All that characterizes her life—her thoughts, her words, her dress, her action—should be as becomes a holy woman; a woman set apart from the standards of this world, who does what is right because she fears God more than she desires the praise of people. Who are the older women? In one sense we are all older than someone else—older sisters over younger, young married over single teens, etc. And in this regard we have a duty to live a godly life always and everywhere so we encourage these younger girls to do as well. But then there are women who are older in years. Their lives have spanned longer periods of time and have experienced the seasons of life, childhood, teen years, marriage, children, grandchildren, widowhood, sufferings and joys. These are women whom the younger ones watch for they have already passed through the times which the others are just beginning. If you are one of these older women, you have an essential work to do with the younger women you find around you and it begins with you being holy.

All Christians must pursue reverence/holiness (Hebrews 12:14), but the Holy Spirit, knowing us thoroughly, specifically applies this to older women. How easy it is, when around certain people, to put on a show of holiness. But Paul is urging an inner habit of holiness that begins in the heart and spills out

continually in speech and action. Here are three tests for you to see if your behaviour is according to holiness:

· *What does your face show?* What is in the heart is generally shown on the face! If your heart is humble before God it will be reflected in how you look. When proving that his heart was not proud, David said, “My eyes are not raised too high” (Psalm 131:1). When your heart and mind are pure it will be shown in your gaze and behaviour: do not have ‘wandering eyes’, ‘full of adultery’, full of envy.

· *What does your speech show?* What comes out of your mouth? Is your speech full of gossiping (everyone else’s business), with unkind words, in maliciousness? Do you make yourself out to be someone by tearing down others? Or do you open your mouth with wisdom, knowing when to speak and when to remain silent, using words of grace and words that encourage and build up?

· *What do your clothes show?* The “hidden person of the heart” is what is expressed in dress and outward decoration. It is so easy to desire to follow fashion, to fit in with culture in order to feel good about ourselves, without thinking of the guidelines God gives in His *Word*. While the Bible does not give specifics like, ‘you must not wear tight skirts with slits up the back’, it does give general rules by which the current fashions are to be judged, so that we can dress accordingly. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). “... women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire” (1 Timothy 2:9). Fashions are determined by men and women who have no fear of God, and would you just spend money and feel great pressure so that you look like what ‘someone says’ you ought to look? Neither should you go to the other extreme and be careless about the way you look, but ask, ‘Am I expressing by my outward appearance an inner holiness?’

2. Not slanderers.

Who does not know the sting of an evil tongue! But the Bible teaches us the wickedness of one who speaks false accusations against another. The devil is named the “accuser” so that when we take up this evil we are doing his work. This sin is condemned in all believers but once more the Holy Spirit directs it to women, for this is the inclination of older women especially, for the following reasons:

· Older age gives many opportunities to be the ‘speaker’ and more freedom to speak while the younger women listen.

· Their example has a powerful influence over the listeners for it is their duty to be holy as a pattern for godliness in younger women. This is equally true when theirs is an evil example. A ‘slanderer’ is one who says, in public or private, to the face or behind the back, things that are false. This sin can also be committed by saying things that are true, but for no good reason, or when love would have rather covered the sin. Gossiping can even be done by remaining silent, by hiding the truth when it ought to have been spoken—especially when

one's good name is called into question. This sin is also committed by *listening* to the gossip of others. Beware of it, giving it no opportunity. Do not spend time with other women in idleness just for the purpose of chatting about the news of others. If gossiping is going on, get the subject to be changed, or excuse yourself from that company. Beware of envy, for it never speaks well of anyone else. Do to others what you would have them do to you. If you value your good name, learn also to value the good name of others.

3. Not ... slaves to much wine.

To be a 'slave' is to be the servant, to perform at the command of the master. Many people live under the command of strong drink and wine, instead of being master over themselves. This is sin. The Bible commands that we must not be drunk with wine (Ephesians 5:18), and that no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10). It is especially shameful in older women.

It seems that in Paul's day women used to gather together and drink, to discuss matters and gossip. What are the consequences if you older women do this? First, you become under the bondage of a created thing; when it calls, you answer. Secondly, instead of leading the younger women to holiness, you break down their restraints and lead them into sin. And thirdly, think of the disgusting and wicked words and actions that flow out of a drunken woman. She lowers herself to the level of a beast rather than the high calling of a godly woman dearly loved by God.

What is urged of you here is this—do not let yourself become enslaved to anything that this world holds out to you, whether it be wine, riches, special foods, beautiful clothing, lovely homes. Your lusting after these things will only make you forget your God (Deuteronomy 8:14). Such things that you think will bring you so much pleasure will, in the end, be your harsh masters.

4. Teach what is good.

The previous three duties for older women concern being or not doing certain things. That in this they are to be living examples to another group is now brought out clearly, and the identity of this group revealed. If women are not allowed to teach in the church assembly (1 Timothy 2:11–12):

- Where are these older women to teach? In the home.
- Who?—young women (and children).
- What?—their womanly duties.
- Why?—so that they live godly lives.

Is this a need in the church today? YES. What are you teaching those around you? Dishonest things? Gossip? Or good things?

WILL GOD ALWAYS OPEN ANOTHER DOOR FOR YOU WHEN ONE CLOSES?

Tonny Karwa

Tonny Karwa is Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Kisumu, Kenya. You may read his testimony of the Lord's dealings with him at <http://trinitybaptistkenya.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Tonny-Karwa.pdf>.

Over the recent years, many preachers have sought to give false assurance to their hearers that “if one door closes, another one will open”. This is in relation to their loss of jobs, income, wealth, health and other material needs. I am not in any way saying that we ought not to give some assurance to our brothers and sisters in such situations as loss of income, sickness, bereavement etc. I am rather asking what kind of assurance ought we to give believers who are undergoing such difficult circumstances in their lives? In fact, we are instructed in the Scripture to bear one another's burdens and weep with those who weep. A closer look at this common teaching by these preachers of prosperity would, however, reveal that their aim seems not so much to present their congregants as a holy, blameless, and spotless bride before the Lord; but rather to build a name for themselves, to soar higher in the realm of fame and self-aggrandisement as they hope their hearers prosper. However, we need to ask ourselves this question: “Is this cliché always true in all cases?” Will God always restore our deteriorating health when taken ill? Will God always restore our lost wealth, riches or jobs/income? The correct teaching of the Bible is that when God closes your door, he has lots of options for you, for He is God, and He does what He pleases (Psalm 115:3; 135:6).

1. He Can Open A Window For You

An open window means a comparatively little relief for you following the difficulty that ensues from the closed door. In other words, the Lord can move you from your former high state to a comparatively low state. Paul, having experienced this in his life, learnt to be content, both in little and in much. He knew how to be brought low and how to abound. He thus says he could do all things through Christ who strengthens him, which means, he learnt the secret of facing whatever situation or circumstance that came his way; whether in plenty or hunger, whether in abundance or need (Philippians 4:11-13). Therefore, in your current low state as a believer, the Lord is teaching you about contentment as one of the precious virtues required of a true Christian (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

2. He Can Open Another Door For You

He can reinstate you to your former state or even better state than the previous one. When Job lost everything, his children, wealth and possessions, the Lord later restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. We read that the Lord blessed his latter days more than his beginning; with much livestock and many daughters and sons. In fact the grandeur of his daughters was unparalleled in all the land and, for the first time, their names are mentioned (Job 42:10-17).

3. He Can Choose Not To Do Either Of The Above

When John the Baptist was thrown in prison, he didn't get out. In fact, he was executed while in prison (Matthew 14:1-12). Before his execution, John sent messengers to ask if Jesus was the Messiah, or if they should look for another (Matthew 11:1-2). It seemed to him that Jesus was not doing what the Messiah was to do; setting captives free (Luke 4:18). According to John, if Jesus was the Messiah, he would have set him free. Yet it pleased the Lord to have him remain in prison until his execution. The Lord didn't have him freed from prison.

The question every believer must ask himself when one door closes therefore is, "What should be my attitude whether God opens a window or another door or even when he chooses not to do either?" A true believer should be content in whatever situation in which he finds himself. He should always rejoice and give thanks to God no matter the prevailing circumstance. He should learn the heart of obedience and faithfulness to God in all circumstances, to the praise of His glory. For all things work for good for them that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

AFRICAN PASTORS CONFERENCES IN KENYA JULY 2019

July 2 – 3 Machakos – Grace Baptist Church (George Wambua)

July 4 – 5 Nairobi – Trinity Baptist Church, Donholm (Murungi Igweta)

July 8 – 9 Mombasa – Gospel Missions Agency (Barnabas Olare)

July 12 – 13 Nakuru – Covenant Baptist Church, London (Victor Oduru)

July 16 – 17 Eldoret – Grace Baptist Church (Naphtally Ogallo)

July 19 – 20 Mumias – Gospel Missions Agency (Elly Achok)

THE CHRISTIAN AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Elly Achok

This is an edited version of a blog, used with permission, and first posted on April 7th, 2019 at <http://reformedgospel.org/the-christian-and-social-media>. As Christians we must learn to harness the power of the social media and not let it control us.

The Christian and social media is a relationship we must face fairly and squarely. Its impact in our lives and upon the Christian faith is huge and keeps growing by the day. In the last two weeks our Television Stations have brought up saddening stories of young people who committed suicide after posting Facebook messages. Worldwide research has now confirmed that social media contributes to the rate of suicides across the world. Friendships have been formed between underage children and would be paedophiles on social media. Relationships have sprouted, grown and followed up with meetings which have proven heart breaking. This much we can say; the social media is increasingly becoming a major concern. I am not prepared to call Facebook and other social media platforms ‘silent monsters’, but I can understand why some have felt that strongly about the social media.

But mine, in this little piece, is to offer my observations as a user of social media and one who interacts with those who use these platforms positively and not so positively. Here then are the good, the bad and the ugly sides of social media.

Social pressure

Social media creates pressure for anyone, regardless of how noble the intentions were in entering this space. It soon becomes apparent it is a place where vanity plays out and people massage the ego. Every profile picture is flattering, most of them highly edited to smoothen our rough edges, block out those blemishes, and present a perfect impression. High end smartphones have become a must have, not so much as a tool of essential communication, but as an accessory to this raging battle to look one’s best. A young man recently asked me for a soft loan to hire a tractor to till his farm. Next day I saw him with a smartphone and he was all selfies and ‘facebooking’. It is what his peers are doing and it is what that age group expects of him. Instagram and Facebook, among other platforms, have become the place where people compete for beauty, glamour and economic show off. Relationships are glamorized on social media and even where they are dysfunctional, they are buried beneath carefully edited selfies.

Not many know that these are fake lives, people dressing their fantasies in the language of reality. This make-believe life gets to a point where frustration builds because others are showcasing what one cannot attain to. Feelings of inferiority and failure sets in. Suicide is one of the products of this growing Facebook trend.

The emergence of ‘keyboard warriors’

We find many today who in real life are shy and timid, hardly able to express an opinion. Yet on social media these same Individuals have an opinion on every matter. They are bold, opinionated and even extremely combative. It is on these

platforms, by reason of detachment from real people, where men and women tend to be very insensitive to one another. Families communicate through WhatsApp and Facebook groups. There are women who would say the only time they heard the words, “I love you,” from their spouses was via a social media app or sms. People seem to gain the courage they otherwise do not have.

An addiction which is yet to be seen as one

It is telling that in a poor country like Kenya statistics show that a great percentage have some sort of smartphone. Recall the young man who borrowed a loan to farm and ended up buying a smartphone instead. It is now a must have for many. Research indicates again that very productive hours are wasted by many in the workforce to social media engagements. I believe it is Finland which sought to regulate the use of smartphones at work and this was the rationale. I have seen posts from married women I know on Facebook in very unholy hours of the night. What does that say about the marriage situation? How do we explain the situation of someone posting the pastor’s sermon on the Lord’s Day as it is being preached? Wouldn’t that person need be on Facebook to be able to post those events in real time? Is that person really being part of the service or merely a reporter of it? Then one has to manage the tricky balance between the necessity of using technologies and staying true to one’s core convictions. We now have Bible apps on smartphones so that when the preacher asks us to turn to a certain book, we turn on our smartphones and God knows what else we do with them in the pretext of reading the Bible.

So this is no doubt an issue which is live for our times and we must acknowledge that much harm has come to the cause of Christ and spiritual welfare of many from social media.

CAN IT BE A TOOL FOR INFLUENCE OR EVEN GOOD?

No doubt, social media is the new mission field and anyone ignoring it does so out of sheer denial of reality. The large percentage of the enlightened population wakes up and the first thing they do is go to their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. This is where the people are, this is where they spend a good amount of their time. This is especially true for the younger generation which constitutes by far the largest segment of the world population. The titanic global conglomerates and A-list business brands are leveraging the unprecedented power and reach of social media. Political campaigns across the world are winning or losing hearts (even elections) on social media. Therefore to shy away from engaging this massive sector is in fact to narrow your mission field unreasonably.

To a spiritual man all things are spiritual. That includes social media and our engagement with it. I believe as with everything else, there can be a right and a wrong use. Take the larger Internet space for instance. It is here cheap and easily accessible pornography can be accessed. Hackers have used network algorithms to exploit and steal from many. Allegations have been made in the USA that Russia used social media platforms to meddle in American elections in 2016. We know for fact that Cambridge Analytica, by the admission of their CEO, influenced the Kenyan elections in 2017. Bad things happen on social media because of its acknowledged massive power and reach.

But this is only one side of the story. Young people are growing their businesses through different social media platforms. Groups have been formed on platforms like WhatsApp which enhance fellowship between people who would otherwise find it hard to have any kind of interactions at all. The internet has enabled me by way of email to communicate instantly to a ministry partner the other side of the world. Because of the internet we can have 'FaceTime' communication across continents. For me, one of the blessings of platforms like YouTube has been the ability to be at multiple lecture halls at the same time. It has consequently made work much easier for me as a Bible teacher and maximized by reach.

SO HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN ENGAGE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA?

This is the question which should exercise our minds. We know social media, like all things in a fallen world, can be a tool for good and bad in equal measure. I will attempt to offer a few thoughts to help the Christian think through their engagement with this massive platform,

1. Recognize that it can be used by the enemy and your own flesh to unprofitable, even sinful ends.

This is a fact which applies to almost anything else which belongs to this world. The presence of sin and sinners in the world will ensure that the same thing will always have good and bad aspects. I find this acceptance to be useful for self-regulation and censorship on social media. I have often put out a post which I felt at the time was intended for a good end. Later I would realize it was just me flattering my ego, engaging in self-justification or trying to prove a point. Even when I posted pictures from a ministry event, I would sometimes look back at them and see the motivation wasn't holy. So let's beware of the two great enemies we battle everyday: Satan and self.

2. Appreciate that you are a Christian person even on social media.

Some have sought to create a dichotomy between their faith life and the social media. They seem to infer that on social media they have license to put Christian conduct on hold for a while and can let go and let loose. The pseudo-anonymity that comes with social media tends to cast off restraint which belongs to genuine Christianity. There is a term which has now been associated with social media, 'keyboard warriors'. These are people who have incredible courage to face anyone (including authorities) behind the computer or phone keyboards. They are on a warpath and would insult, ridicule and attack anyone. Sadly the keyboard warrior phenomenon is to be seen among so called Christians on social media.

But you are a Christian at all times and in all places. All the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 must be evident even in your engagements on social media. As a Christian must not be full of self, but be well regulated, having self-control, gentleness, kindness and truthfulness among other virtues, so must such character be brought to the social media platform. Recently we had a television evangelist dragged to court for speaking recklessly about a journalist, using such strong words as could be construed to constitute a death threat. He is struggling in court right now.

3. You are a witness of Christ even on social media.

We have highlighted the massive reach and Influence of social media. This platform for the Christian person is a mission field. God has created that platform for you to bear testimony of His wonderful grace. When you start to think like that, you will see how those brags and boasts about this wonderful birthday party, and the other nice cake you baked, or the great car you bought the other day, start to appear rather out of step with your calling as a representative of Jesus Christ. The fabulous life you display contributes to another's low regard for self and their condition. You start to think of Biblical principles like in 1 Corinthians 8,9 and 10. A dear sister on Facebook once told me how helped she was when I posted about famine killing people in Northern Kenya.

We should strive to break free from the restricted view of social media as merely a place to socialize and flatter one another with likes and more sharing. This happens when we find ourselves within the 'echo-chambers' of social media, posting recipes and showing off nice delicacies to each other, when many die of hunger. Just so I am not misunderstood, the Christian person may post things like that from time to time. It is part of the reason it is called 'social media'. But the Christian will be measured and restrained in such posts. They will also not make their whole lives and interactions on social media all about them. The constraints of kingdom life apply to our engagement on social media. We do not have such a time in our lives when we are not witnesses for Christ.

We are at all times to be light and salt of the earth (Matthew 5:12-16). We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). That charge does not permit for moments when we are relieved of its demands and whenever we find ourselves engaged in those activities which either undermines or does not enhance that charge. At that time we are being unfaithful in our witness of Christ.

4. Mind the image you project out there.

This was the advice I gave to a university girl in our Church who came under the influence of social media. She is no doubt a very beautiful girl and knows how to dress to emphasize that beauty. However I was concerned that this was all people got see about her. The stereotypes of our world are such that people can hardly see beyond what you advertise. People see you as trite and shallow if all or most of your posts are about shallow and trite matters. I have seen posts of Pastors on Facebook and formed an opinion that they were insecure about their ministries, seeking validation. When I met them I was sadly proven true. It is almost for a given now that the man or woman who keeps expressing lavish praises for their spouses and posting utopian pictures hardly have that kind of life in private. It is almost an unspoken yet accepted fact of social media life that this is where we cast reality far from us and indulge our fantasies.

5. The internet never forgets.

Lastly let the Christian person remember that the internet never forgets. What you post even after being taken down will exist somewhere in some form or shape. So be sure you want to have that post associated with you forever before you post it.

May the Lord bless our engagement with social media and help us to use it for profitable ends and for His glory. Amen.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Eunice Kyalo

I became a Christian in the year 2017.

Life without Christ was full of ignorance, hypocrisy and deceitfulness! I grew up knowing that salvation was all about going to church and doing good works (which really I could not do!). So, I attended church regularly and tried to do good works so as to please God, yet without faith no one can please the Lord. I thought that when you are in Christ you should not suffer and so I loved to hear that brand of ‘gospel’! I never knew that I was being deceived!

In 2014 through 2016, rather unpleasant things happened to my family which were contrary to the ‘gospel’ I believed. I did not think that a loving God would allow his children to suffer sickness or lack. And so, I began to question God: Why were all these problems happening to my family yet we believed in Him? It was at this point that I began to doubt my faith. The Lord graciously helped me to understand that it was either He was unfaithful or I was misguided and deceived. God has said in His Word, “Let God be true though everyone were a liar” (Romans 3:4), and again, even if we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13). By the grace of God, I realized that too many preachers and churches misrepresent God and so I started visiting other churches without truly belonging!

Last year, my husband visited Trinity Baptist Church Greenfields and when he came home he told me that for the first time he felt that he had found a local church that was true to the doctrines of grace! He invited me to come along the following Sunday!

For the first time I heard the true gospel being preached! I later understood that it was a sermon series on the ‘5 *solas* of Reformation’ because it was around October. I got to know true salvation is of God; that it is by means of grace through faith in our Lord Jesus and that I couldn’t do anything on my own to obtain it! But praise be to the Lord, for Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see myself as I am – a totally depraved sinner. He also opened my heart to know the preciousness of Christ for he is the only Saviour. He lived a righteous life for us. He died the sinner’s death for us. He rose from the dead for us. Therefore we should live for his glory, but apart from him we can’t!

Therefore, I examined my life and got convicted by the Holy Spirit that I was a sinner in need of a Saviour. I got to my knees, confessed my sins and believed Christ as my Lord and Saviour. What a great and gracious Saviour who so loved me and saved me!

I am forever grateful to God for saving me and bringing me to Trinity Baptist Church Greenfields. It is my desire to become a member of this local expression of the body of Christ so that I may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity (2 Peter 3:18). **AMEN!**

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