

G R A C E & T R U T H



PREACH THE WORD

BE READY IN SEASON AND
OUT OF SEASON

2 Timothy 4:2



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH
N A I R O B I

Editor's Desk

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

Keith Underhill

G R A C E & T R U T H
Magazine



Cover: 2 Timothy 4:2 is a strong exhortation to Timothy to preach the Word at every available opportunity. If you want to how powerful a lion is then open the cage door and let it out! The Gospel is powerful so let us open our mouths and make it known everywhere (Romans 1:16).

- 4 **What Is Kenya's Greatest Need?**
- 5 **Our Election Of God Is A Blessing!**
- 8 **A Great Opponent Is Saved**
- 11 **Annual Reformed Pastors' Conference 2012**
- 14 **Learning Christian Contentment**
- 18 **Divinely Knit and Wisely Woven**
- 21 **The God Who Writes His Own Agreement**

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

What Is Kenya's Greatest Need? *Keith Underhill*

T rue Biblical preaching is in great danger of being lost in the churches of today. But preaching is the only way we can expect the blessing of God upon us.

Preaching is in danger of being supplanted by various kinds of entertainment – choirs, films, drama, testimonies, and even preaching that is full of stories and

We wish to clearly and unhesitatingly declare that there is no greater need in the world today than true preaching.

jokes – with the aim of attracting people and making them ‘to enjoy’ the service. This is to forget that God has commanded preaching, the delivering of an authoritative message from God, like the watchman on a city wall (Ezekiel 3:16-21, 33:7-9, Acts 20:26-27). Our message is one of life and death. Can you imagine a doctor, after having diagnosed the serious condition of the patient, introducing his words with a joke or a song? No, he will speak clearly, yet with compassion, about what needs to be done to save the life.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in *Preaching and Preachers*, gives the following reasons why serious, relevant, powerful preaching must be the at centre of every local church:

1. It is what our Lord did during His earthly ministry. His ministry is described as being one of “preaching” and “teaching” (Matthew 4:17,23, 9:35, 11:1) and He expected the same gospel to be preached throughout the world (Matthew 24:14, 26:13).
2. It is what the apostles of Christ did in fulfilling the commission they were given (Matthew 28:18-20). Their primary task was to be witnesses of Christ by preaching Him, that He is the One God promised long ago to be the Saviour of the world. They were forbidden to preach by the religious authorities, but they would not disobey their Lord (Acts 4:18-20). They were being overwhelmed by other duties, so they appointed others to do these things so they could concentrate on their preaching (Acts 6:2,4).
3. It is only the proclamation of the gospel message that can deal with our deepest needs of blindness and ignorance (2 Corinthians 4.....). The problem with all men as sinners is that they are blind and ignorant (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Ephesians 4:17-18). Truth is the medicine needed, for only the truth as it is in Christ can set sinners free (John 8:32, 1 Timothy 2:4). Only by believing the truth can anyone be saved. And God wants this truth to be made known by preaching (see Romans 10:14-15, 1 Corinthians 1:17-24). Such preaching may seem very weak, especially in today’s world where there are so many more ‘attractive’ means of communication. But God has inseparably tied His promise to the preaching of the truth in Christ from the Bible. May God be pleased to raise up many more faithful preachers in our day!

Our Election Of God Is A Blessing! *Keith Underhill*

EPHESIANS 1:4

It might be a surprise to you that the very first blessing of God that Paul refers to is, “He chose us”. Ephesians 1:3 is a general statement stating that we have been blessed “with every spiritual blessing”. Verses 4-14 explain many of the great blessings we have in Christ. If you start to think about the blessings God has given you as a Christian, where would you begin?

With the time when the Lord saved you and brought you from darkness to light? Or

When you think about the blessings God has given you, from where do you begin?

perhaps you would go back 2,000 years to the cross of Christ? This is not where the Bible begins! It begins way back in eternity past with God’s choice of us to be saved. This is when God began to bless His people, and all other blessings are dependent upon this one. Or to put it in another way, ‘Why are you a Christian today, and not others?’ The real answer is that it is because God has an eternal plan for you. And when you come to understand this more it will cause you to bless God.

With the time when the Lord saved you and brought you from darkness to light? Or perhaps you would go back 2,000 years to the cross of Christ? This is not where the Bible begins! It begins way back in eternity past with God’s choice of us to be saved. This is when God began to bless His people, and all other blessings are dependent upon this one. Or to put it in another way, ‘Why are you a Christian today, and not others?’ The real answer is that it is because God has an eternal plan for you. And when you come to understand this more it will cause you to bless God.

1. THE BLESSING OF ELECTION

“Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”

When we choose one amongst the many candidates who wish to be our Member of Parliament we call it an ‘Election’. Throughout life we are making choices, or electing. When you buy bananas you do not just take what is given to you but you pick those you want from all the ones before you. God is represented as having the whole human race before Him and He chooses some (“us”) to receive the blessings, the choosing itself being the very first blessing. “Us” are the Christians to whom Paul is writing (verse 1), with Paul and his companions. We are not chosen as a group, but as individuals because becoming “holy and blameless” is for each one.

When did God choose us? “Before the foundation of the world” (see John 17:24, 1 Peter 1:20). This is before Adam was made, before anything was made, when only the triune God existed. Therefore God’s choosing us cannot be dependent upon anything in us, anything we are or do. This is the implication that is drawn from the fact that God had elected Jacob but not his twin brother Esau “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad” (Romans 9:11) – it was “not because of works but because of His call.”

If He is truly God then He must have an eternal plan which is guaranteed to be fulfilled. And this teaching that God has made an eternal choice of a great number of sinners to be saved, that He has elected them, is common in the Bible.

- Jesus refers to “the elect, whom He chose” (Mark 13:20,22,27).
- No one can successfully prosecute “God’s elect” for “It is God who justifies (Romans 8:33).
- There are some Israelites who have believed, “a remnant, chosen by grace” and not “on the basis of works” (Romans 11:5-6). These elect alone obtained the blessing (11:7).
- The Colossian Christians are “God’s chosen ones” (3:12); Christians generally are called “God’s elect” (Titus 1:1), “chosen” (Revelation 17:14).
- Paul knows God “has chosen” the Thessalonian believers because of the way they received the gospel (I 1:4-5), and he thanks God for them “because God chose you” (2 2:13).
- Peter exhorts Christians “to make their calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

It sounds strange but we may call one another ‘the elect of God’!

IMPLICATIONS

1. God is sovereign in our salvation. Let us humbly confess that God does what **He** chooses. Jesus reminded His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you...” (John 15:16). God saves who He wills (Romans 9:16); it was “as many as were appointed to eternal

life” in Antioch who *Although it is contrary to what many say, He* believed (Acts 13:48). *did choose us first, before we turned to Him.*

Ask yourself the question, ‘Why am I saved?’ You know there is only one answer, because of God and Him alone.
2. We are helpless to save ourselves. We are sinners. God chose us in order to make us holy. We have no spiritual ability as we are dead in sin by nature (Ephesians 2:1-3). Even our wills are unable to choose Christ that we might be saved (see John 6:37,44,65). It is like bananas in a wheelbarrow that depend on the will of the buyer.

3. Salvation is all of God's grace. The only reason you are a Christian today is because of God's eternal choice of you to be saved. You are no better, wiser or more powerful than any other. Rather, you deserve eternal punishment.
4. The remnant of Israel did not deserve to be chosen; it was grace and grace alone (Romans 11:5-6, see 2 Timothy 1:9). Election and grace stand together. Because it is of God's grace it must also be of God's choice, otherwise it is something in us. Also read Deuteronomy 7:6-8.
5. Election is an encouragement to godliness. Many have insisted that the doctrine of election necessarily leads to carelessness of Christian living. But no, consider how election leads to:

- » Humility – You confess, 'I have done nothing to save myself, all glory is due to God alone' (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
- » Assurance – If God has made choice unto salvation, then full and final salvation is guaranteed (Romans 8:29-30).
- » Praise – Ephesians begins with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1:3).

2. HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE THE BLESSING OF ELECTION?

"that we should be holy and blameless before Him"

As you read these words you may be saying to yourself, 'This is a wonderfully encouraging doctrine, but how can I know if my name is written in the book of life in heaven?' Now all choices have consequences and we can work backwards from consequences to choices. If there are bananas on a plate at home then you reason they must have been chosen and bought from bananas in the wheelbarrow down the road. In the same way, God's choice of His people is the first step in a great chain of blessings. If you are receiving the later blessings, then you must also have received the first one. There are 2 things in Ephesians 1:4 you can examine:

God's choice of His people is the first step in a great chain of blessings.

1. Are you "in Christ"? God's plan was to save sinners through the work of His Son by making Christ to represent the chosen ones (the elect). He gave us to Christ (John 6:37,39, 17:2,6,9,24). He saw us as united to Christ, so that all Christ came to do He did on behalf of us for our salvation. In our own experience we are united to Christ by faith, so that He lives in me, and I in Him, as the branch is in the vine (John 15:1-11). Is this your experience? If you are united to Christ then you have the spiritual life the Lord gives to every 'branch'. You have no difficulty determining whether or not a branch is truly joined to the tree. If it is not joined then there is no fruit as there is no life. If you are in Christ you are "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), a totally transformed person, brought out of death into life, rescued from sin to be Christ-like.

You confess Christ as your Lord and Saviour and you follow Him daily. If you are so in Christ today, then it is because God put you in Christ before the foundation of the world and chose you to be saved.

2. Are you seeking to “**be holy and blameless before Him (in love)**”? This is the specific purpose why God chose to save us sinners. Because it is God’s plan it will certainly be fulfilled. A gardener may graft a chosen cutting into a tree but it may fail to unite and so bear fruit. But God is not man that He should fail in anything He does. Those whom God has chosen can be identified because they are striving to be “holy and blameless”. They are on the straight and narrow path that leads to life. They want to be like God, not just outwardly before men, but even before God who sees the heart. If the words “in love” are added then the very common Biblical truth is being emphasized that love is the great mark of the Christian life. Love is not characteristic of the world where hatred, gossip, tearing down, rivalry, bitterness, selfishness, anger, revenge, impatience, coldness, pride all abound. If you are a Christian you are seeking to love God with all your heart, to love your neighbour as yourself, and even to love your enemy. You are not doing it to try to earn God’s favour. Rather, you want to do it out of love for God who has loved you in Christ. You will be recognizing your lack of love, that you are not loving as Christ loved you (Ephesians 5:2). Above all things you are seeking to grow in love. How can this be done? By looking more and more at the love of God in Jesus Christ (1 John 4:7-12). And you are longing for that time when you will be made “blameless” (Ephesians 5:27)?

So, does this doctrine of Election really matter? Is it important to believe and understand? Yes:

It puts God in His rightful place as the Sovereign God on whom we totally depend, and who is to be worshipped.

It puts man in his rightful place as totally dependent upon God as one who must walk humbly before Him.

It is thus the foundation of true religion.

If you are not a believer and becoming a Christian depended upon you, then there would be no hope. But thank God it depends upon Him. You know that God has graciously chosen to save a great multitude of sinners on the basis of His grace in Christ alone. He does not mock you by asking you first to find out if He has chosen you (you cannot read the book of life). But He speaks to you as a sinner and invited you to come to Him and says He will not cast you out. When you have come to Him you will find out that it was because the Father first gave you to Christ (John 6:37). Coming to Christ to be saved by Him is the very evidence of election. Blessed be God!

A Great Opponent Is Saved *Keith Underhill*

Our second example of salvation in the book of Acts is Saul of Tarsus. This account in chapter 9, verses 1-19, is a high point for it concerns one who was the great opponent of Christ, His gospel and His people. Please read it for yourself in the Bible. It was so unexpected; yet how decisive and total was the change wrought. Obviously some things in his experience were unique, such as the appearance of the resurrected Lord, and the 3 days of blindness. Yet through his experience we are taught again how a person can become a Christian, and what a Christian is. Paul himself later refers to God's patience in dealing with him:

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:16)

What patience the Lord has had with many of you who have been brought up in Christian families, who have heard the gospel at school, and who have even been inwardly convicted of the truth, yet you have never really bowed the knee to Him.

1. SAUL'S NEED FOR SALVATION

We know much about Saul from Acts and his 13 letters in the New Testament.

- He was a highly **educated** man. He was from Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 21:39), which boasted in a famous university, so that he was well versed in Greek learning. So he was well able to engage the Athenian debaters who prided themselves in their intellectual ability (see Acts 17:16-34). He was equally distinguished in Jewish learning, having sat at the feet of the famous Gamaliel (Acts 22:3, and see 5:34). He claims to have advanced to the top (Galatians 1:14) and his letters certainly give evidence of his abilities.
- He was a man of great **religious** zeal. He belonged to the strictest party of the Jews, the Pharisees (Acts 26:5). We would say today that he was a 'fundamentalist'. Outwardly he was a very moral man (Philippians 3:5-6), a sincere and devout practitioner of what he believed to be the truth from God. Thus he became a very violent persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ, believing Jesus to be a blasphemer, and the Way a very dangerous heresy (Acts 8:3, 9:1, 26:9-11, Galatians 1:13).

Do you say to yourself, 'I have never been like Saul, a violent persecutor. If I was I would not be reading this.' Yet some of the great opponents of those who profess salvation in Christ are religious people. Saved people are dismissed as being hypocrites, wives and children are discouraged by being accused of being fanatical. Perhaps you joyfully gossip about the failures of saved people and so feel secretly relieved. You are trying to hold off that conviction of the truth that you are sinful, as you want to think you are good enough as you are for God to accept you.

2. THE WAY SAUL WAS SAVED

It took place as he was fully engaged in persecuting the disciples of the Lord. He had travelled about 150 miles north of Jerusalem, and was nearing Damascus. The Lord powerfully, effectually, and graciously stopped him in his tracks. He saw a divine light and heard a divine voice. These things were just to arrest his attention like the outward manifestations on the Day of Pentecost. But it was the truth itself that was the immediate means of his salvation.

- a. The **appearance** of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:3-5,17,27, 22:14, 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8). What a sight this must have been to Saul. He thought Jesus had justly perished on the cross and that was the end of Him. He believed he served God as he persecuted Jesus' followers, but he is now confronted with the fact that the God he worshipped has raised Jesus, and exalted Him, the very One who he rejected. Jesus is the Christ (9:22), the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, and this makes all the difference. All these thoughts must have flooded through his mind. No wonder he fell to the ground. What do you really think of Jesus of Nazareth? If He is from God, are you listening to Him with the ear of submission? God's grace first subdues the rebel.
- b. The **voice** of the Lord Jesus (9:5, 22:14). Unknown to Saul, by persecuting Christians he had been persecuting Christ (Galatians 1:13). How closely Christ identifies with His people; what is done to the one is done to the other. On the day of judgment the Lord considers that what was done to "one of the least of these my brothers" was done to Him (Matthew 25:40, see 45). Such a direct and simple statement to Saul convinced him of his sin, that he was actually fighting against God. Jesus spoke to him as Lord, and gave him instructions to obey (9:6). The one who came to Damascus to triumph over the Way must now submit to the Captain of that faith. Jesus continues to speak with a voice of authority, not just to fulfil your deepest needs, but that you might humbly submit to Him or perish, and begin a life of committed discipleship.
- c. The **servant** of the Lord Jesus (9:10-18). For 3 days Saul was struck with blindness, struggling with himself, praying, unable to eat or drink due to conviction and heart searching.

Believing in Jesus the Christ totally changed Saul.

The physical blindness was a symbol of his spiritual ignorance. His encounter with the risen Lord was only the beginning of his experience of salvation. He must be brought to repentance and only then receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38). For this purpose Ananias was sent to instruct and confirm him in the faith, to bring salvation to completion. It was at this time that Saul called upon the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16), and was baptized. Conviction leads to salvation only when the person calls on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13, see 2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Note that the Lord used Ananias, an ‘ordinary’ Christian (see Acts 22:12), not an apostle.

3. IMPORTANT TRUTHS ABOUT SALVATION

- a. Salvation is a process. In Saul’s case it probably began with his witnessing Stephen’s martyrdom. After meeting with the Lord, there remained 3 days of internal struggle before he openly claimed himself to be a Christian. This consideration is important today as many people think salvation must be an instantaneous event, a simple decision to be made. There may well be a decisive moment, as when “something like scales fell from his eyes”. But salvation is a much bigger thing. So do not be discouraged if you cannot give the precise time of your salvation. What matters most of all is that you have been convicted of your sin, however that conviction came. And as a result you have repented and believed the gospel.
- b. Salvation is a work of God’s grace. It is not what you do. You do not save yourself. Everything in Saul was going in the opposite direction, but he was no match for God’s powerful grace. It was grace and grace alone because Saul had been such a rebel against God and deserved nothing at all from God (1 Corinthians 15:10, Galatians 1:15, 1 Timothy 1:14). The disciples thought it was impossible that Saul, of all people, had become a Christian (9:13-14,26). It was grace because it was due to God’s choice alone, revealed in effectual calling on the Damascus Road (9:15). If you are saved, do you not confess, ‘Why me, why am I saved when thousands of others are passed over and remain in their sin?’ This is a great encouragement to you who are still unsaved that you might cry to God to be gracious to you.
- *Many people wrongly think salvation must be an instantaneous event, a simple decision to be made.*

- c. Salvation is centred in Jesus Christ. It was the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself that made all the difference. Jesus did not deserve to die, but did so on my behalf. He went to the cross only out of love for me. So I must be a very great sinner, condemned under the holy law of God (1 Timothy 1:15). Salvation cannot be my own doing, but only by what Christ has done through His grace. As a result I want to serve Him fully with my life. Has your faith in Christ done this for you, so that your life has been totally changed? For Saul, even before eating “he rose and was baptized”. Practical submission to Jesus Christ begins with baptism.

Annual Reformed Pastors' Conference 2012

Murungi Igweta

Trinity Baptist Church had the opportunity of hosting this year's pastors conference under the theme of 'The Covenants'. Ronald Kalifungwa the pastor of Lusaka Baptist Church was the guest Speaker. He preached with fervency and gusto through the nine covenants in the Bible a subject he knows well.

The conference began on a high note on 16th April night with an opening sermon by the host pastor Keith Underhill in which he preached from Ephesians 3:10. He pointed out the central purpose of God is realized in the church, in which God unites all people to one community – the Body of Christ.

The well prepared strong meat of the Word was served by the skilled pastor from Zambia. He gave a wonderful Bible overview through the lens of the covenants. Through the study of the covenants we see the message of the Bible as one message all pointing to the work of Christ, so that there is an organic relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. In this way, there is only single way of salvation for all people in both testaments throughout all ages, whether Jews or Gentiles – through faith in Christ (Acts 20:21).

Firstly, there is the *Eternal Covenant of Redemption* that was made in heaven in the eternity past between Persons of the Triune God – the Father and the Son. In this arrangement of salvation, we see the depth, height and the breadth of the love of God displayed in a decisive electing some for salvation, and sending His Son to come to save them. The Son's great love is showcased in His willingness to leave all the glory, being born in the likeness of men, submitting even to the death on the cross in order to save sinners.

Secondly, there is the *Covenant of Grace* drawn from Genesis 3:15, a well known passage called the proto-evangel. God promises to perpetuate the spiritual warfare between the woman and her posterity and the devil and his posterity culminating to the total defeat of the former. The ultimate Seed of Eve (Jesus Christ) crushed the head of the serpent to obtain salvation for them.

In the Adamic Covenant, from Genesis 2:16-17, God gave the instruction that formed the basic conditional relationship that He expected where Adam was expected to imitate God in four ways: procreation, vocation, government and rest. God's generosity is manifested where He gave him the freedom to eat of any tree (including the tree of life) except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But Adam fell miserably.

The *Noahic covenant* that simply the graciousness of God in His willingness to deliver Noah and His family on the condition that Noah built the ark. His graciousness extends to His creation because He extended the creation mandate and increased food for His people (permission to eat meat).

The Abrahamic Covenant is the specific one that unifies the redemptions of the people of God by portraying Christ and His work as the ultimate goal. The basis on which God's people appropriate the blessings of God is on the basis of their faith in Christ alone because, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to Him as righteousness." Therefore, it serves to incite praise and adoration to God among His people.

The *Mosaic Covenant* made with the redeemed nation of Israel through the mediation of Moses and the angels. God stipulated how He was going to relate with a people of His possession. Its practical functions are that it set apart the nation of Israel by providing a theocracy, with both civil, moral and ceremonial code. In this manner, a corporate worship was established since they had the privilege of special revelation, through which God could be worshipped.

The last day was even more interesting with more people joining us to the deep truths of the Word of God. *The Davidic Covenant* in which God promised David the heir who would perpetuate God's mediatorial theocracy so that there would be peace, security and stability among God's people. This covenant, just like covenant of grace serves to set the stage for the coming of the Messiah through the lineage of David as fulfilled in Luke 1:32-33.

New Covenant promised through two prophets – Jeremiah and Ezekiel is in a sense the climax because it administers the Messianic inheritance. God expressed it in the most graphic language of a covenant that was unlike then one He made with their forefathers when He delivered them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant that they broke. But this new covenant, the LORD will put His law within them, and He would write it on their hearts so that He would be their God, and they shall be His people (Jer. 31:32-33).

We waited with a baited breath of what He was going to say about the last of the covenants – the *Messianic Covenant*. Since plan of salvation was commenced in heaven in the eternity past, it has to be consummated in heaven! It is drawn from Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7:17 in which the LORD swore very solemnly that, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." In this covenant Christ and the people He had ransomed with His blood are the partakers. In this Christ's superior priesthood is established forever. Thus it guarantees both

God's reign in the New Israel and believer's complete salvation and assurance, since it is Christ Himself who is on the throne as the Great High Priest forever!

Through this deep and concise survey of the covenants in 9 sessions of exposition of Scriptures and workshops, Pastor Ronald was able to show the discrepancies of Dispensationalism: firstly of putting the church on the parenthesis when it is actually God's grand idea through which He brought to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages. *So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* (Eph 3:9-10)

Secondly the dispensational hermeneutics was proved to be faulty in the insistence on literalism even when the Scriptures does not allow. Particularly in the apocalyptic language and matters to do with eschatology, there are glaring errors in blind literalism. Scripture is to interpret Scripture – this is the historical basic hermeneutic principle of the historical-grammatical approach. He gave specific illustrations to show that we should learn our hermeneutics from the manner in which the New Testament interprets the Old.

The pastors were also treated to a DVD documentary presentation called “*The Late Great Planet Church, the Rise of Dispensationalism, Vol. 1*” by Jerry Johnson, the president of the Nicene Council, in which he features prominent theologians, pastors and historians who were at some point committed dispensationalists but have now renounced it having come to light of the Covenant theology.

Lastly, Kalifungwa also unveiled the mask of the New Covenant Theology that promotes antinomianism, the tendency to be opposed to the law of God, and shrinks the Bible of a Christian to only contain the Epistles only (since all other books were for the Jews only)!

The time was spent well at the conference and we are very grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to gather around His Word which is able to make us wise for salvation. The three devotions led by Pastors Murungi of TBC, Joshua Karani of Faith Reformed Baptist and Ken Mbugua of Emmanuel Baptist divulged the work of the pastor. We were encouraged by the rebukes and correction and the training in righteousness so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work in order to equip others for the work of ministry and so that we would be able to rightly divide the word of truth.

Some of the books that were recommended for reading on this subject are

1. Covenant Theology by Greg Nichols,
2. Christ of the Covenants by O Palmer Robertson,
3. The Last Things Made Easier by Samuel Waldron.

Learning Christian Contentment *Sakwa Buliba*

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” -1 Timothy 6:6-10

A story is told of an elderly Christian fisherman. One day the fisherman was lying on a beautiful beach, with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the prospect of catching a fish.

About that time, a businessman came walking down the beach, trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why this fisherman was fishing instead of working harder to make more money for himself and his family.

“You aren’t going to catch many fish that way,” said the businessman to the fisherman, “you should be working and toiling harder rather than lying on the beach!” The fisherman looked up at the businessman, smiled and replied, “And what will my reward be?” “Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!” was the businessman’s answer. “And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman, still smiling.

The businessman replied, “You will make money and you’ll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish!” “And then what will my reward be?” asked the fisherman again. The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman’s questions. “You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you!” he said. “And then what will my reward be?” repeated the fisherman.

The businessman was getting angry. “Don’t you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let all your employees catch fish for you!” Once again the fisherman asked, “And then what will my reward be?” The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, “Don’t you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for the rest of your life again! You can spend all your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won’t have a care in the world!” The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, “And what do you think I’m doing right now?”

1. GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that (vv. 6-8)”

Contentment basically means to be sufficient, to seek nothing more, to be satisfied with what you have. The primary meaning of the word ‘contentment’ is to be independent of one’s circumstances. A contented person had something in himself which left him able to cope, and be at peace, in and of himself. He is a man at peace with the world, and at peace with God, irrespective of his own personal situation.

The apostle is speaking of the Christian’s emotional condition. Contentment is a feeling of trust, joy, fulfilment and integration. When the apostle writes about this to the Philippians he tells them, “I have learned in whatever state I am to be content” (Phils. 4:11). There are no circumstances, and no set of conditions in which he could fail to be contented. There is nothing in that great objective external world all around him that could possibly take his peace of mind from him. Jesus cautioned, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

You may have realized that the more money you have the more complex life gets. And the less you can enjoy it because you sit around worrying all the time about what you’re going to do with all this money. Or you spend all your time racing around from one place to another buying stuff you don’t need, stacking it on shelves and hang it in closets, putting it in the garage. It’s absolutely unbelievable how much we have that is useless. It doesn’t do anything. It doesn’t take us anywhere. It doesn’t provide anything. It’s just something to have and it really is a measure of the condition of our heart.

2. MORE IS NEVER ENOUGH

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction (v. 9)”

It is no secret that we live in a society that is greatly concerned about money. How much money we make, how much money we save, how much money we spend is very important to most people. This is reflected in how much we talk about money. Those who have much are ever scheming on how to amass more wealth; those who have little or nothing are ever scheming on how to acquire wealth and become rich.

It is worth noting that wealthy people are not the only ones who are susceptible to greed. Paul talks both about “those who want to become rich” and “those who are rich in this present world.” Greed can get into us whether we have a lot of stuff or not. Whether we’re rich or poor, the selfish desire for more can get into us and ruin us. We are commanded to pursue godliness and contentment. Godliness in this context implies a life of discipleship, a life of following Christ day by day, a life surrendered to the rule of Christ .

We need to be satisfied with the simplicity of life.

“For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (I Timothy 4:8).

The love for money has been a source of conflict in many societies. Enough is simply another shilling in the pocket. The more you have, the more you crave for more. When you make your first million you badly want another million. There is virtually no institution in our country where workers agree that they are paid well. There is hardly a businessman who feels the profits he gets everyday are enough for his subsistence and commercial needs. Seldom do you come across a farmer who is contented with his farm yields. It is all so utterly irrational, for it is an attachment to material, temporal things that are here today and tomorrow are no more.

Psalm 107: 9 says, “For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness.” What else could anyone ask? No wonder Isaiah in chapter 55 says, “Why are you pursuing bread that does not satisfy? Why are you spending money for what isn’t even bread? And your labor for that which does not satisfy. Hearken diligently unto Me and eat what is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Isaiah is wondering why people are pursuing those things which are not the true gain and forfeiting what is the true gain! . As Luke 9:25 says, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? .?” Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? In other words, it wouldn’t matter if you gained every single thing there was in this world if you weren’t prepared for eternity; it would all be a horrible, horrible deceptive loss.

3. LOVE FOR MONEY DAMPENS SPIRITUALITY

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (v. 10).”

Experts tell us that the average person thinks about money 50 percent of the time he is awake during his lifetime. Amazing, isn’t it? How to get money, how to keep it, how to save it, how to multiply it, how to spend it, how to find it, whatever it might be, we’re tremendously occupied with cares about money.

We see this quite clearly in the parable Jesus gives about the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). This parable is about a man who acted prudently and responsibly by every worldly standard. Jesus begins by telling us that this man “was very productive “--that is, his profit margins were extremely high. And like any good businessman, this man was always on the look out for ways to improve his productivity. He set short-term goals and long-term goals. He was wise enough to have retirement in view--he anticipated gaining enough goods that he could one day sit back, “take ease, eat, drink, and be merry “(v. 19). Yet, Jesus calls this man a “fool “.

At first glance, this man was anything but foolish. He was productive, he was proactive, and he was prudent.

Why would Jesus call this man a “fool “? Jesus answers this question in verse 21, “So it is with the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God “. We learn a number of things from this statement. First of all, we learn that one can be rich in a worldly sense without being “rich toward God “. Secondly--part of what makes this man foolish is that he is laying up treasure “for himself “. Notice how many times the word “I “ occurs in this passage--6 times. Notice also, how often the word “my “ appears in this passage. It appears 4 times: “my crops “, “my barns “, “my grain “, “my goods “.

People who love money think about self. They will get money through bribes. They will distort the truth. They will abuse and manipulate systems. They will take advantage of others. They will extort and exploit. They will deceive and steal. They will commit every imaginable sin...slunder, adultery, treachery, forgery if they think it will bring them money, more money. They will do bodily harm. They will cause spiritual destruction. They will teach false doctrine and lead people to hell so long as they make money.

Fellow Christians, it is important that we consciously realize that the Lord is the owner of everything you have. So when you go to buy something ask yourself this, does the Lord need this? Is more wealth going to serve Him better? Is this going to bring Him glory? Is this going to enable His Kingdom to advance? He is the conscious owner of everything I possess. So whatever is my desire... is this going to fit with His purposes for my life? Is this going to make my ministry to His people more effective? Is this going to enable me to accomplish what I need to accomplish as an ambassador of Christ? Is this going to be able to be used as a way to show love to other people? He is consciously the owner of everything I possess. That helps me in the decision process of whether I need more money or possessions or not.

Consider the following on Contentment.

... I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5-6)

Get hold of the great book by the Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, published by Banner of Truth. There is a simplified and shortened version, *Learning to be Happy*, published by Grace Publications.

Divinely Knit and Wisely Woven *Nelson Munyiri*

Carefully read through and consider the following verses in light of the matter at hand. The church's mandate and itself.

Be devoted to *one another* in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour...(Rom 12:10)

Be of the same mind toward *one another*; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation (Rom 12:16)

Owe nothing to anyone except to love *one another*...(Rom 13:8)

...let us not judge *one another* anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. (Rom 14:13)

...pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of *one another*. (Rom 14:19)

...accept *one another*; just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. (Rom 15:7)

...you have lawsuits with *one another*: Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? (1Cor 6:7)

...through love serve *one another*. (Gal 5:13)

Bear *one another's* burdens (Gal 6:2)

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for *one another* in love, (Eph 4:2)

Be kind to *one another*; tender-hearted, forgiving each other... (Eph 4:32)

...be subject to *one another*... (Eph 5:21)

...regard *one another* as more important than yourselves; (Phil 2:3)

Do not lie to *one another*, (Col 3:9)

bearing with *one another*, and forgiving each other... (Col 3:13)

Therefore comfort *one another*... (1Thess 4:18)

Therefore encourage *one another* and build up one another, (1Thess 5:11)

...Live in peace with *one another*. (1Thess 5:13)

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for *one another* and for all people. (1Thess 5:15)

...stimulate *one another* to love and good deeds... (Heb 10:24)

Do not speak against *one another*... (Jas 4:11)

Do not complain, brethren, against *one another*... (Jas 5:9)

confess your sins to one another, and pray for *one another*... (Jas 5:16)

...fervently love *one another* from the heart, (1Pet 1:22)

Be hospitable to *one another* without complaint. (1 Pet 1:9)

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving *one another* (1 Pet 1:10)

...clothe yourselves with humility toward *one another*, (1 Pet 5:5)

... have fellowship with *one another* (1 John 1:7)

What was your attitude at the beginning and at the end? If we consider a few reactions that we might have, such as denial, doubt, surprise etc. it is undeniable that these verses still stand unmoved and unaffected by them.

For those brave enough to lay down their façade and be honest with themselves, it is clear that this is just an impossible task. Where do you even begin? How far can you go? How long can you sustain this? Does this apply to everyone? Is there no place for 'my personality/disposition'? Where's the olive branch of hope? It is necessary that we see the impossibility of the above verses, because it is then that you can come to terms with the truth that it is not in man to either will or do. It has to be divine; it has to be of God. The church's mandate to itself is a working of God. God establishes the church and He sustains it.

As we consider this working of God, let us look at the first church right after Pentecost. This is what we read of them:

Acts 2.42-47 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.'

It seems as if they had everything well figured out from the beginning right? Wrong. Let us broaden the view a little.

These very men a few verses earlier were 'proud and religious' despising and mocking the apostles (Acts 2:7, 13) yet now against all odds they were devoted to the very same apostles' teaching and fellowship.

These very men a few years back were being rebuked by Jesus Christ because of their affinity for possessions and storing up treasures for themselves (Luke 12.13-21) yet now they cared the least of how much they had, but were generous, selling their possessions and distributing as any had need. As if that is not shocking enough, these very men about 7 weeks back, did the unthinkable; they killed the very SON OF GOD and now are praising God and having favour with all people.

It all seems very inconsistent with reason, logic or common sense don't you think? What brought about the radical change of heart? Their worldview towards God, each other and possessions suddenly changed. What happened? Well to begin with we can be sure of what they did not do. I.e. they did not go through a 2 month course in fellowship cohesiveness, or a 6 weeks course in having a Kingdom business mindedness program. Far from it, all that happened was the faithful proclamation of the clear unadulterated gospel.

In Peter's summary, he makes it clear what his whole sermon is about.

Acts 2.36 "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

This was shocking news. Given the truths laid out by Peter, i.e. the fulfilment of the prophecies by Joel and David, the inescapable fact that Jesus has truly resurrected, and now all these signs accompanying this proclamation, the people could only ask one question.

Acts 2.37 "Brothers, what shall we do?"

When Peter and the rest of the apostles, were faced with the question, their answer was unequivocal.

Acts 2.38 "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And this, my dear reader is the power of God unto salvation. As illogical and preposterous as it may seem at times, this is still the mandate of the church and itself, to preach the gospel. We need to continue trusting Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, and to live by the Holy Spirit, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual worship (Rom 12.1). We (in the church and outside of it) all need the same medicine since we all are infected by the same disease, sin.

We live in days when there have been great advances in technology and with it quick fix solutions to problems that have vexed humanity for very long. This has sadly resulted in an adapting of the same 'quick fix' mentality to the churches of our day. Given that there is some benefit in having certain programmes; it should never be at the cost of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If the verses we began with are to be true of each one of us, we do not begin by looking at the verses themselves. That would be like trying to get mango fruits from a piece of land and you do not have the mango seeds. The seed of all this Christ exalting, God glorifying brotherly living expressed in the verses we began with, is the Gospel. It is not these deeds toward one another that make us a church rather they show us to be a church. They bear testimony of the work of God in our lives. Let us labour at becoming a gospel saturated, gospel fluent body of Christ preaching the gospel to the world and to ourselves.

The God Who Writes His Own Agreement

Chris Kiagri

*The following is a summary of part 3 of a 14-part seminar by Don Carson entitled “**The God Who is There**” aimed at simultaneously evangelizing non-Christians and edifying Christians by explaining the Bible’s storyline in a non-reductionistic way. The original content is available in its entirety in both audio and video form at <http://thegospelcoalition.org/thegodwhoisthere>*

Recap

In the first two parts of this series, based on Genesis 1-3, we’ve seen the God who created everything and the God who does not wipe out rebels. He made human beings in his image, and they set themselves over and against him by putting themselves in the place of God. However, God did not wipe them out even though he had every right to do. He provides an animal skin covering for them that required a sacrifice of life.

Then things get worse. A brother kills his brother and the thoughts and desires of man are evil all of the time. God wipes out humanity with a flood and only saves a few. The people once again try to attain a position that is next to God at the tower of Babel. They are trying to set themselves in the place of God again, but God doesn’t wipe them out. Instead, he confuses their language and disperses them. He later chooses a man named Abram, whose name is later changed to Abraham, which means “father of many.” To make sense of the storyline of the Bible, we must make sense of Abraham.

Relationship with God

Is our mental image of God that of a super-soft grandfather who is generous, benevolent and obliged to forgive his errant grandchildren? Or perhaps it is the image of a spectacularly great, transcendently-glorious God who cannot be expected to care about insignificant man? Or that of a barter trade partner to whom you give something in return for something else?

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24-25

The above text of Scripture reveals that none of these three depictions of God are correct. He made everything and is therefore not obligated to his creation.

How then are we to have a relationship with a God like this - one who is neither a soft grandfather, nor an impersonal deity, nor one who has needs that you can meet and thus earn favour? As rebels with nothing to bargain with, the only way you and I can have a relationship with a God like this is for him to display his sovereign grace. God's decision to be gracious to some people works itself out in a number of different ways.

Sometimes he makes promises to assure people that he will do what he says he will do, while sometimes he enters into formal agreements with people. We call those covenants. However, unlike an agreement between two people, which they both write, God writes his own agreements.

It is a spectacular display of his sovereign grace that God gives promises to mankind - promises to which he willingly obligates himself. The Bible speaks of several covenants that God draws up. The first one we will take a look at is one with Abraham.

Genesis 12

Abraham was from the land of Ur. In Genesis 12, God chooses Abraham and says this to him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1)." God promises Abraham:

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

He is promised that he will be a great nation. And he is promised that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through and because of him. This is incredible because Abraham is already 75 years old at this point, his wife is not much younger and they do not have any children. Abraham goes through periods of doubt. He even tries to take things into his own hands and things get messy when he sleeps with someone else in an attempt to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise. However, God ultimately keeps his promise and he and Sarah have son named Isaac.

Isaac marries Rebekah, and they have twins. While the twins are in the womb, God speaks to Rebekah and says that the older will serve the younger. This was not the norm in their culture. God chose the younger before anyone had done anything good or evil. God then preserved a certain line down through the years and eventually, the descendants possessed the land.

Amidst these promises, one promise stands out above all - "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:3). God not only chooses Abraham and his descendants but he insists that through them all the peoples on earth will be blessed.

Genesis 17

Not only does God make a covenant with Abraham. He makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-10 (please take time to read this). The covenant is imposed by God but both sides have obligations. God will be the God of Abraham and his descendants. God will also secure the land for them and guarantee that nations will rise from him. Abraham and his descendants' part is to maintain allegiance to God and seal the acceptance of the covenant through the sign of circumcision, which Abraham does in Genesis 17:23.

Genesis 15

In between chapters 12 and 17 is a strange story in Genesis 15. This chapter speaks of the actual covenant ceremony that takes place. God promises to be his shield and his reward (15:1). Then later in the chapter, Abraham falls asleep and has a strange vision in 15:8-18:

But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,

You are probably thinking how strange this passage is. Perhaps you have read it and looked over the significance of what is going on here. When we make covenants and agreements with people today, this is not usually what happens at the signing.

In the ancient world, sometimes a sign of a covenant was to take an animal, cut it in half, and separate the two halves leaving a bloody alley between them. Then the two parties would walk through the animal together signifying that if either party would break the covenant then let it be to them as it was to these animals. It was if they were to say, "If I break this covenant let me be torn apart or cut in half."

God is not a human being to walk through the animal parts with Abraham. When Abraham falls asleep, a strange thing happens. A smoking firepot passes through the two halves. The smoking pot is a symbol for God, and he goes down the bloody alleyway all by himself. His going alone says,

“If either one of us breaks this covenant then may it be to me as it is to these animals.” God takes the responsibility for the fulfillment of the covenant on his own shoulders. This is grace.

Abraham will sin. Isaac will be weak. Jacob will be known as a deceiver and trickster. Reuben will sleep with his father’s concubine. Judah will sleep with his daughter-in-law. Ten of Jacob’s sons will fight over killing Joseph their brother or selling him into slavery. Yet, God does not wipe them out. He swore to them in this symbolic act that he would bear the responsibility for fulfilling the covenant that he made with Abraham and his descendants. They will become many people, they will receive the land, and they will be a blessing to all the peoples of the world.

Genesis 22

This chapter takes place sometime after Isaac, the son of promise, has been born. We’re told:

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Genesis 22:1-2

They arrive at the place and then Isaac turns to his father and says:

“My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

Genesis 22:7-8

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Genesis 22:11-18

You may ask, “What kind of God requires a sacrifice of a child?” But the whole point of this story is that this is not what God wants.

How could you possibly please the God of the Bible by killing your children?

God says in effect, “I provide the sacrifice. How could you possibly ever please me by sacrificing your son?” As we saw in Genesis 15 when God walked alone through the animals, signifying that he takes all the covenant responsibility upon himself, so here we see that he also provides the sacrifice. Child sacrifice would later become illegal according to the law in Israel. It was a reminder that the “God who is there” does not require the sacrifice of children. He alone will provide the sacrifice. What he wants in return is for us to say to him, “You are God. You are Lord. You are sovereign. I am dependent on you. I need you. I trust you. I will obey you.”

This is a God with whom we can have a relationship. For all the failures in Abraham’s life - and in our lives - God provides the sacrificial lamb. There was implication of sacrifice in Genesis 3 when God provided animal skin coverings for Adam and Eve. Here we learn a little bit more about the sacrifice as a substitutionary sacrifice. Furthermore, the stories and the accounts begin to multiply through the pages of the Old Testament in anticipation of the time when God will provide a sacrifice that far exceeds the value of animal skin coverings or some ram caught in a thicket.

The theme that binds together the various chapters of Genesis surveyed in this article (12, 15, 17, 22) is the goodness and initiative of God in dealing with his rebellious image-bearers. He calls Abraham, initiates a relationship with him, provides him with spectacular promises that propel the story forward, and then, in two dramatic steps (in Genesis 15 and 22), shows that he himself will somehow take responsibility for maintaining this covenant, for providing the needed sacrifice. The character of God, unveiled in his covenant - his promises, and his provision of sacrifice - draw us into himself. He remains our Creator (Genesis 1) and our Judge (Genesis 3), but now he provides for his self-absorbed image-bearers a hope that is grounded in his own goodness.

In the next issue of Grace & Truth we will examine part 4 of this series: The God Who Legislates.

Rest of the series:

1. The God Who Made Everything
2. The God Who Does Not Wipe Out Rebels
3. The God Who Writes His Own Agreements
4. The God Who Legislates
5. The God Who Reigns
6. The God Who Is Unfathomably Wise
7. The God Who Becomes a Human Being
8. The God Who Grants New Birth
9. The God Who Loves
10. The God Who Dies—and Lives Again
11. The God Who Declares the Guilty Just
12. The God Who Gathers and Transforms His People
13. The God Who Is Very Angry
14. The God Who Triumphs

FACING THE FUTURE-(Acts 20:22-24) *Keith Underhill*

We have deep concerns for our future in Kenya in view of the threat of terrorist bombings and forthcoming elections. We wonder if the culture of corruption will ever end. There are always more personal concerns – Will there be a job for me when I leave school? Where will I find a good marriage partner? What will Kenya be like when I retire? Will I even reach retirement age? So what if it were to be revealed to you what will happen in the future? What if you will never secure a job? What if sickness will bring you to an early death? What if you never find a suitable spouse? What if you are denied justice simply because you are a Christian? What if you have to flee your country and become a refugee? If so, you will be in company with Abraham (Genesis 12:10), with Joseph (Genesis 37:25-28), with David (1 Samuel 21-30), with Jeremiah (chapters 37-38), and with the apostle Paul, (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). The record in Acts 20 is about Paul on his way to Jerusalem at the close of his third missionary journey. What was his future, and how did he face it?

(a) *Paul's Future* (vv. 22-23). It was Paul's definite plan to go to Jerusalem (19:21, 20:16, see Romans 15:31), to take Gentile gifts to their Jewish brethren. Paul felt "bound in the Spirit", probably meaning that he had to go or he would be rebelling against God, even if danger awaited him. He did not know exactly what awaited him, but generally he knew that he would face "imprisonment and afflictions" in the future (see 9:16). It is amazing that this great apostle did not know in details the things that concerned him personally. He had to walk by faith, a step at a time, just as we must do. We also know that persecutions of one sort or another await us (2 Timothy 3:12), as well as the problems that anyone must face in this fallen world. We must therefore have the same attitude as Paul had.

(b) *Paul's attitude to the future* (v. 24).

- Negatively – "My outward condition in this world is not important to me." How long he lived in this world was not of value to him. He was not counting on reaching old age and retirement. His priority was not to keep out of danger at all costs, so that he experienced few problems. Are we really like this apostle of Christ? Are we putting our hope in uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:17)? Are we laying up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19)? Are we in love with this world (1 John 2:15-17)? Although it is true that we are not to be careless with our lives by throwing them away, think of the excuses that many people make not to do what the Scriptures command – "I am too tired, it is too far to go, there might be thugs, the weather is bad," etc. Paul would never have set his foot outside Antioch on his missionary journeys with such an attitude!

- Positively – “My priority is to fulfil the work that the Lord has given me to do.” Paul had been entrusted with the “gospel of the grace of God” (see also 15:11). What a wonderful message. It was not like Jonah’s message of deserved destruction (3:4). It was not a message that we should try to do our best and maybe God will accept us. Rather it is a message that God is ready to forgive all sin if you will confess your sin to Him and put your trust in Christ and His work of salvation on behalf of sinners. God will deal with your sins at no cost to you – He has born the cost in His Son. This is God’s free offer to all rebel sinners who seek His mercy in Christ. It was this message that Paul was determined to preach at every available opportunity, knowing that this is the only hope anyone has before God. He did not fear testifying to the Jews because they would probably oppose the message and persecute him; nor did he fear testifying to the Gentiles because they would probably mock him and reject the message as foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23). It was enough that the Lord had called him to preach, and he would be obedient unto death if necessary. Paul saw himself as a man running a race (= “course” in v. 24, see 2 Timothy 4:7). Athletes are willing to endure almost anything both before and during the race if only they win the crown. Athletes do not complain, “I have to train too much, I can’t enjoy life, I shall be too exhausted if I run to win”. Yet this is exactly what many Christians do. Although none of us have the same apostolic ministry as Paul had, we all have a ‘ministry’ from the Lord. A minister is a servant, and we are all servants. Pastors are called upon to equip the saints for their work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). Giving of gifts to needy Christians is called a ministry (2 Corinthians 8:4 “relief”, 9:13 “service”). So, what is your aim and purpose in your life? Do you only have goals for things in this life – education, job, possessions, family? How are you serving the Lord in your home, in your job, in your school, and specifically in your local church? What particular gifts do you have which you use in order to minister? Let us begin where we are, with people who are around us all the time. Is it not our great aim to minister through our life and words so that God would be glorified through the salvation of sinners? Do you not pray, “Lord, save my children, save my spouse, save my work-mates and my school-mates, save the Sunday School children, make me useful in the extension of your kingdom”? Is this not why our Lord taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come”?

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