

GRACE & TRUTH
MAGAZINE ISSUE 133

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

"...but the righteous shall live by his faith"

Habakkuk 2:4

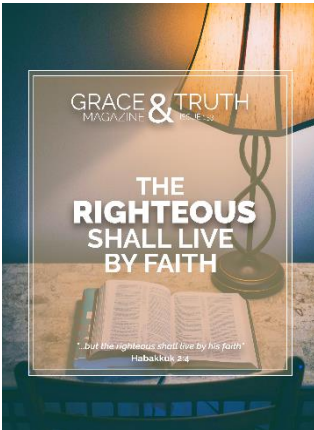


TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH N A I R O B I

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



The cover verse is so significant that it is quoted in **Romans 1:17**; **Galatians 3:11** and **Hebrews 10:38** to prove the great doctrine of justification by faith alone and the influence which the grace of faith has upon Christian living.

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

FAITH'S INTOLERANCE TOWARDS WORRY

Eric Abwao

Worry is sadly considered by many Christians today to be an honourable sin. On the other hand, it is rare to find a sin against which our Lord Jesus more largely and earnestly gives warnings to His disciples like anxiety. Against this sin of disquieting, distracting and distrustful caring, the Lord warns us and also arms us with numerous logical reasons. We are reminded:

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:30)

By worrying you in effect could be saying; ‘God, I know you said that but I don’t think I can trust you to pull-it-off.’ Worry is not a small sin. It is a serious, grievously dreadful thing. It can easily be a sin in which you call God a liar. This sin of anxiety strikes a blow at the person and word of God. Worry basically says, ‘God can’t take care of me and I have to do this thing for myself.’ Worry means that I am mastered by my circumstances and not the truth of God.

The use of, “O you of little faith” (verse 30) instead of ‘no faith’ tells me that the Lord is speaking to believers. For non-believers He would have said ‘no faith’. Herein lies a serious scandal in this sin of worry. It is scandalous that we can trust in God to give us eternal life but not daily livelihood. It is a contradiction that we trust in the Lord to deliver us from Satan and then turn around and not trust Him for the problems of the weakening economy.

O you of little faith is used in four other places in the Bible:

And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, **O you of little faith?**” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm (Matthew 8:26).

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “**O you of little faith**, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31).

But Jesus, aware of this, said, “**O you of little faith**, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? (Matthew 16:8).

But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, **O you of little faith!** (Luke 12:28).

Note that all the five times ‘O you of little faith’ has been used it is addressing disciples. Secondly, it deals with matters of clothing, length of life and food.

Materialism, financial worry and fear are sins which must be repented of and aggressively resisted. “For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:32-33).

During this period when the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown and its consequences continue to batter you, Jesus reminds you that your primary pre-occupation should be His Kingdom. He is aware of your earthly needs. He has the ability to meet those needs according to glorious riches. And He possesses omnipotent compassion. He has you covered as concerns earthly requirements. Set your affections on things above and not things below. We trust that this issue of Grace and Truth will be used by the Lord to enable and encourage you to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad (Proverbs 12:25).

Therefore I tell you, do not be **anxious** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?... Therefore do not be **anxious**, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all (Matthew 6:25,31-32).

Be **anxious** for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your **anxieties** on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength (C. H. Spurgeon).

EPHESIANS 2:14-16

PEACE WITH GOD AND MAN

Keith Underhill

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

Peace is one thing the world is desperately looking for. It is what various international organizations are seeking to establish. For example, there is the United Nations, there are Truth and Justice Commissions, there is an emphasis on education for all and on economic development. But have these things been able to bring genuine peace? The answer is in the daily news headlines that reports anything but peace. In this quest the Church is not seen as a key player. Why should it when its own strife and divisions show up its hypocrisy? Yet true and lasting peace is only found in Christianity, in Christ Himself.

Paul's readers of this letter are mostly Gentiles who have become Christians, and so he begins to address them (2:11). Before, they were far from God (2:12), but now they have been brought near just like the Christians from a Jewish background (2:13). In the following verses (2:14-18) Paul explains exactly *how* Christ has done this, using the words 'peace' and 'reconciliation'. Being "brought near" is to be at peace with God, reconciled to Him. That Christians from both a Jewish and Gentile background now have the same blessings in Christ means that such are reconciled to each other.

1. CHRIST IS OUR PEACE (2:14)

The opening words of verse 14 are like a title – "For He Himself is our peace, ..." Peace is identified with Him. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). To bring peace is why He came (Luke 2:14). His kingdom is one of peace (Romans 14:17). When you think about Christ one thing that must come to mind is 'peace'. Parents might say of their child, 'you are our joy'. We know they mean that the child brings them so much joy.

The emphasis here is on peace between hostile people. The Jews despised the rest of mankind as uncircumcised, as unclean like the dogs that scavenge through the rubbish heaps. They were so proud thinking that they alone were God's favourites. In return Jews have been hated as 'enemies of the human race' (see Acts 16:20). You only have to consider the Holocaust. Such hostility remains as a mark of humanity. You must belong to the 'right' group of people. We were shocked and ashamed to see it so blatant in the post-election clashes of 2008 in Kenya, and at best it remains hidden in very many hearts only needing

a spark for it to be fanned into flame. Christ has come to replace such hostility with genuine peace, where there is mutual respect and love for persons as they are. Although in this life it will never be perfect, it is true peace! In the church we have known a measure of it. I remember when first coming to Kenya as a young man being met by six Christians who were total strangers to me. But when we had each testified to our faith in Christ, despite all our differences of colour, age, education, possessions, language, we had wonderful peace in our relationship. Imagine the former bigoted Pharisee Paul, having uncircumcised Titus as his travelling companion!

2. HOW IS CHRIST OUR PEACE? (2:14-15a)

Paul continues with three things Christ has done to establish such peace.

(1) “*He has made us both one*”. This is the result of what Christ has done and it is put first (the way it was done following). “Both” in the context refers to Gentile and Jewish believers. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). They are not Jews or Gentiles any more as to what describes them, but they are those “in Christ Jesus”. Earthly distinctions no longer describe us. We are Christians first of all.

(2) He “*has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility*”. There was a ‘wall’ which divided the Jew from the Gentile. In the Jewish temple there was a literal wall beyond which Gentiles could not go upon pain of death. There was a wall in Europe named the ‘Iron Curtain’ that divided the East from the West. But Paul is here referring to an invisible wall that consists of “commandments and ordinances”. The purpose of the law given at Sinai, in what we know as the Old or Mosaic Covenant, was to keep the Jews separate from all others. They were a people who were holy to the Lord, belonging to Him, to serve Him, and not do what the rest of the nations did (see Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2,21, 26:19-20). In this way Israel was to be kept separate until the coming of Christ. Look at how Paul teaches about the law in his letter to the Galatians. The law was like a prison (3:23). The law was a guardian (3:24), so that the Jews were like slaves (4:1-2). Christ has broken down this wall “in His flesh”. His flesh is a reference to His body in His death (see Colossians 1:22). He fulfilled this law, that we have broken, on our behalf by bearing its curse in His body on the tree (Galatians 3:13),

(3) “*by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances*”. In this way Christ has ‘abolished’ the law. We must ask, in what sense is the law abolished? Certainly Jerusalem as the city of God on earth, the temple as God’s earthly

dwelling place, the priests of the order of Levi, the animal sacrifices, the festival days, the food distinctions, are all done away with and are no more. Yet this very letter reinforces the 5th. Commandment (6:2). Our Lord Himself reinterprets the moral laws with greater strictness, declaring that He has not come to abolish but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17-48). It is as a covenant it is abolished, summarized in the Ten Commandments written on stone. In the new covenant that law is now written upon the heart, for both Jew and Gentile believer.

3. WHAT CHRIST ACCOMPLISHES AS OUR PEACE (2:15b-16)

With the word “that” indicating purpose, Paul now explains the two things Christ has accomplished.

(1) *“that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ...”*. Paul goes further than saying that Jew and Gentile are united in Christ. Now there is just “one new man”, no longer a Jew or a Gentile, but a Christian. Gentiles do not become Jews, nor Jews Gentiles, but both become Christians. The distinction between Jew and Gentile is therefore finished. Christians, the people of God, the church, are not a mixture of the two, half Jew and half Gentile, but wholly different from both. How does Christ bring this peace? By making any person a new creation, with a new heart, united “in Himself” by faith. It is His sovereign work that guarantees success.

(2) *“and (that) He might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility”*.

- Reconciliation to God. This is the second reason why Christ broke down the wall of hostility. Four questions may be asked:
 - i) Do we need reconciliation with God? Yes, because the Bible clearly teaches it in Romans 5:10-11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, here, and Colossians 1:21. There is a great problem between God and man that needs to be solved.
 - ii) Who needs to be reconciled, man or God, or both? Both are needed. Man has a problem with God. He does not want to submit to Him, but wants to go his own way. God has a problem with man, for he has broken His commandments, and is under His wrath (2:3). Don’t hide behind what many say that ‘God loves you’ as if God is OK with you. God’s anger needs to be turned away – this is what is meant by the word propitiate as in Romans 3:25 and 5:10. Even if you can change your

own attitude towards God, how will you change God's attitude towards you? This is the greatest problem.

- iii) Which reconciliation comes first, with man or with God? We must first be reconciled to God, then we can be reconciled to each other. This is because you must first be made a new man. When God changes you then your attitude towards others is changed. For example, the most powerful motive to forgive others is that God has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).
- iv) How can we be reconciled to God? Paul goes on to explain.

- Reconciliation to God through the cross. This is the most wonderful thing about reconciliation. We are the problem, but God provides the solution in His Son. And it is "through the cross" which is why the cross is the centrepiece of Christianity. A cross was a most cruel instrument of punishment, and in the Old Testament one whose body was hung up on a tree was considered cursed of God. Before an animal was sacrificed the hands of the sinner were placed on its head symbolizing the transfer of guilt so that the animal was to die in the place of the sinner (for example, Leviticus 1:4). Jesus died on the cross in our place. Our sins were laid upon Him. He experienced the wrath of God that we deserved in those three hours of darkness, when He cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). With sin removed, nothing separated us from God, so there is reconciliation. Go back to the temple. In the ark, in the Holy of Holies that represents God's presence amongst His people, there is the Law, the Ten Commandments. Those commandments have been broken times without number and they cry out for vengeance from God. The High Priest, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), enters the Holy of Holies with the blood of sacrifice and sprinkles it on the mercy seat, which is the lid of the ark. We may say that as God looks down at His broken law He now sees the blood that covers that sin so that His wrath is now turned away. So the "hostility", here between God and man, is "killed".

There is no other way you can come to God and be reconciled to Him. Imagine the Day of Judgement has come, and you are before God. Of course you want to enter heaven, but you are told you cannot because it is pointed out that you are not holy as God is holy. You know it is true, that you fall far short of the glory of God. What argument will you bring? 'Lord, I have tried hard, although I know I am not perfect'? 'At least I have not done many of the wicked things that others have done'? 'Every Sunday I am at worship, every day I pray, and I am very careful in my tithing'? No! No! You must point to Christ at the right hand of God, and say, 'He shed His precious blood for me, to pay the debt I owe you because of my sin, and in His name and by His merits have mercy on me'.

Don't wait until that Day when it will be too late. Now is the day of salvation. Call upon Christ now.

- Reconciliation of “us both”. Here it is Jew and Gentile who have become Christians. But it also implies whatever worldly divisions there may be based on race, sex, age, and so on. We are “one body”, a “new man”. In other words, the way of reconciliation is the same for all, for Paul the strict Pharisee who had laboured so hard to keep God's law, for the Prodigal Son who had abandoned himself to evil, for the dying criminal, and for Cornelius the devout Roman soldier. Why? Because we are all sinners (Romans 3:22b-23). There is only one type of Christian, those who were once sinners, and who have now been saved by grace in Christ. That is why we are united.

Do you see how important the local church is? Christians are more than individuals who have been saved. We are “one new man”, we are “one body”. We are God's alternative, visible society, of which **peace** is a great characteristic. Read Mark 9:50, Romans 12:18, 14:19, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:13, 2 Timothy 2:22, Hebrews 12:14, James 3:18. This is the power of the gospel, bringing peace and reconciliation between God and man, and between man and man, doing what nothing else can do.

What someone was like before they became a Christian is irrelevant. Cease to think of other Christians in terms of natural birth, level of education, ability, or whatever differences there may be, as this only brings division. Once there were parents who wanted to know their daughter to tell from where the man she wanted to marry came. She answered, ‘I do not know where he came from, but I know where he is going!’ We must train ourselves to think in this new way. We have all come from various backgrounds, every one sinful, in rebellion against God. Now we are a different, a new society, all travelling to the same glorious destination (consider Mark 10:42-45)!

The early church had its own struggles with division.

- There was a division between widows who were Hellenists and those who were Jews in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).
- In opposition to the Apostle Paul, Barnabas favoured John Mark as a companion in the mission, perhaps because they were relatives (Acts 15:37).
- Peter withdrew from eating with certain Christians because they were Gentiles, fearing “the circumcision party” (Galatians 2:12).
- James decries the partiality shown to the rich in the assemblies of God's people by where they were invited to sit (Jas. 2:2-4).

May God grant that our churches forsake such divisions and be assemblies of peace, for the glory of God.

What does this have to say to the massive demonstrations that have been taking place all over the world against racial discrimination in the name of **Black Lives Matter**? We must sadly admit that in the world there is so much discrimination, not just on the basis of colour, but in whatever respect people are different from others. It is doubly sad when it rears its ugly head in the church. It becomes very hard to say Christ is the answer to discrimination when God's people fail.

The root cause of discrimination is not an external factor such as history, education or economics, but sin in the heart, from where all evil comes (Matthew 15:18-20). The solution to discrimination is not changing external circumstances, and making more laws prohibiting it, but changing the heart through the gospel of Christ. It is God making "one new man" out of Jewish and Gentile sinners that brought an end of the mutual discrimination between them.

- So let there be more education, but it must be based on the word of God. For example, God made all people, male and female, equally in His image. He hates those who take advantage of the weak, and specifically the widow, the orphan and the stranger (refugee). The 'Critical Theory' that does not see people as individuals before God, but as groups, and especially as oppressed groups versus oppressor groups, will never get rid of discrimination.
- And let there be laws that prohibit discrimination, and which are enforced. God has given authority to those who govern to be a terror to bad conduct (Romans 13:3). Out of fear of punishment most people will keep those laws. But laws, no matter how good, cannot change the evil heart. People will continue to have thoughts and attitudes that are discriminatory. Politics has its very important place, but let us never put our hope in politicians and governments as if they can change the world into a perfect place.
- But let us as Christians above all proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as that which alone can cure the evil of all forms of discrimination. This is the message of Ephesians 2:14-16. If by God's mercy the world, or parts of the world, will come to know less discrimination, it will be through God changing the lives of individual sinners. They then become the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). Changed lives, "good works", show the good 'taste' (like salt) of Christianity, and reveal the glory of the Father. But it is only in the 'new heavens and new earth' where righteousness will fully dwell (2 Peter 3:13). "Amen. Come, Lords Jesus!"

THE CHURCH IS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE PROVIDER

Murungi Igweta

The year 2020 has experienced the unprecedented and global outbreak of the coronavirus. As a result many governments have encouraged or imposed health measures to contain the spread of this highly infectious respiratory disease. Handwashing/sanitizing, wearing facemasks, maintaining a distance of at least a metre from each other, the so called social-distancing, are some of the protocols. The immediate implication of the social distancing is the closure of institutions of learning and worship centres. As I write in early July 2020 Trinity Baptist Church Nairobi met lastly on the 15th March!

However, institutions and businesses classified as ‘Essential Service Providers’ (ESP) have been permitted to operate. These institutions include hospitals, police-stations, embassies, parliament, retail shops and food production companies. Doctors, medics, police and other security officers, retail shop attendants, etc., are classified as ESP personnel.

The question that has been raised over and over again is whether the church is an ESP. In this article, I am seeking to demonstrate the unique and essential nature of the church in the provision of exclusive and essential services to the public, which cannot be provided by any other.

The purpose is for believers to be persuaded from the Scriptures that we have divine work to do and to be more confident in doing it as unto the Lord. It is not meant to either undermine the government or secure any preferential treatment by the government. However, we pray and hope that the government would always acknowledge the separation of civil and ecclesiastical authority by God and uphold the freedom of worship.

Caveat

When I talk about church, I mean true churches where Christ Jesus is the Head. I do not mean each and every property or premise bearing the name ‘church’ or denomination, but those that truly represent Christ in truth, purity and godliness. Many, if not most, of the so called churches are really synagogues of Satan, dens of heresy, and assemblies of error. When I talk about Christians, I mean the regenerate (or born again) believers, that is, all those redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. These have repented of their sins and believed in Christ. Church attenders, hypocrites, carnal/nominal Christians and false professors of the faith are out of this church.

Is the church, an essential service provider?

The answer is a resounding, YES! The church of the living God, the body of Christ, is the very first essential service provider on earth. Why is it that God, the infinitely holy God, does not destroy the world which is so sin-infested? Is it that the Lord does not see or hear the wickedness of men? Does He lack the power to act? No, the Lord knows every unholy thought, every evil intent, every act of corruption, every deceit, every lie, every hint of pride, every unrighteousness on earth. And if He was to mark our iniquities no one could be able to stand. The reason why God does not destroy this world, even with all the sins committed daily and continually, is because of His elect, His saints.

When God saw the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, He decided to destroy it. But before He did, He told Abraham, His servant. And Abraham responded,

Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place? And not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be it that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."¹

The reason why God has not poured fire and brimstone upon the earth is because of the righteous people in the world. The church has this preserving effect upon the earth. Why is it that He does not remove those that He saves from this wicked world as soon as He saves them? The following are some of the reasons that show that the church is an essential service provider, in the eyes of God, and so it should be seen as such by all and sundry.

1. The Church is the Embassy of God

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). There is no government or kingdom that has withdrawn their ambassadors and consular officials because of the pandemic. The Kenyan ambassador is still in China even though the virus began there. Even with the hundreds of thousands of infections and deaths in the USA, the Kenyan ambassador is still in his office in Washington DC.

¹ Genesis 18:23-26.

Please read the rest of the verses Genesis 18: 27-33 and see that God said that it is within the realm of his holy justice not to destroy the righteous with the wicked and so for the sake of even 10 He would have relented from destroying Sodom and Gomorrah.

Every human authority has been appointed by God (Romans 13:1). He who appointed emperors and kings, presidents and prime ministers, requires them to submit to Him. But they tend to be drunk with power and to abuse their authority. The church is the conscience of society to remind them that they are accountable to God who appointed them. The church represents the interests of the owner of the universe. God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore the church prays for kings and all those in positions of authority so that there is peace and dignity on earth (1 Timothy 2:2-3). The church also instructs all to obey the authorities.

It should also be remembered that this world has been held hostage by the devil. And the only deliverer is Christ. The way by which salvation and deliverance is possible for the world is through faith in Christ. It is the church that upholds the manifesto of heaven by which there is the hope for the world as the embassy of God. The message of the gospel we bear is the will of the King of kings. In this message of the gospel, God is making his appeal to the world through us. This is the only way by which the wicked world and sinful men can be reconciled to the infinitely holy God.

When Felix Carey, one of the sons of William Carey, was appointed ambassador in Calcutta, his father sought to dissuade him and he wrote, “Felix is shrivelled from a missionary into an ambassador”. It is this understanding of the church’s exalted place before God that informed Carey’s position.

2. The Church is the Hospital for the Undying Souls and Hearts of Men

While people are now in panic because they fear contracting Covid-19, they forget that there is a greater and worse fatal sickness called sin. All are sick of sin (Romans 3:23) and this leads to death (Romans 6:23). And all need the Physician (Matthew 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31). Christ is the Great Physician who heals the sick. It is Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). It is Christ who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The church exists to proclaim this good news to the world.

One of the great problems with this sin-sick world is the general unwillingness to admit the sickness of sin, or even to have it diagnosed. While the church diagnoses and treats this disease through the gospel, the world prefers anything else but what the church offers. It is this disdain for medication that makes the world consider the church so disdainfully. It is this same reason that causes the civil leaders to usurp authority and lord it over the church by pronouncing the closure of churches even when they do not have the authority to do so. The

church is not under the civil authority. It is an ecclesiastical authority under the rule of Christ and any leader purporting to legislate how the church is to conduct herself is simply mistaken.

The church treats the invisible part of the human being – the soul. There are surgeons who can operate human hearts and brains. But no human doctor can heal a broken heart, or a hopeless soul, or a twisted or seared conscience. There is no medical doctor, even the most learned or experienced, who can offer any medication to deal with these human problems. Yet, pastors are physicians of the souls of men. There was a celebrated doctor in the last century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served as the assistant to the Queen of England's physician. Though at the top of his profession, he decided to become a physician of souls and for 30 years served as the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London.

Christ has sent the Great Surgeon of the hearts of men – the Holy Spirit. The human problem is in the heart. We need the wonderful operation of the Spirit who removes the heart of stone and replaces it with the heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). This service is only to be found in the church.

The church is concerned with the welfare of human beings both now and in the life to come. We bear the message of resurrection – life after death. We show people that though they may die, yet they shall live again, whether they are well or not.

3. The Church is the Only Custodian of the Truth

The media houses and journalists are at large. Journalists are allowed to go to different locations even during curfew hours, even to the areas that have been locked down. And why? Because they should be reporting to us what is going on, in real time. The right to information and freedom of expression is one of the fundamental human rights. And whatever became of the right of worship which is also in the Bill of Human Rights?

How sure are we that these media houses are not simply shaping the public opinion and telling people what they want to hear? After all that is what the fourth estate is all about – to inform the public and shape public opinion. Yet the house that does not simply bear the news but the good news, the house of God, has been deemed as non-essential service provider. We read from the Scriptures, from 1 Timothy 3:15, that the church is the church of the Living God which is *the pillar and buttress of truth*. The church proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ who is the Way, the TRUTH and the Life – NO one come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). The Bible bears the message of God that sets the **standard of morality** and **foundation for ethics**. The church not

only preaches the truth, but remains as the only custodian of morality. We live at a time when the moral fabric of the society is breaking. This is because both the church and her message have been rejected.

We preach love for the neighbour as for oneself. We teach the golden rule – *whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 7:12). We bear the message of peace because we are peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). After all our King is the Prince of Peace and the King of righteousness. We do this work of peace-making better than the police and all prisons combined.

4. The Church is the Minister of Love and Mercy to the World

While there are many philanthropic and charitable organizations, most of which were began by Christians, the church is the one that offers the love of God in Christ to the world in word and deed. The church itself is the great evidence of God's love to hell-deserving sinners, whereby His rich grace and mercy has rescued us from the punishment we deserve. When the Lord Jesus did His ministry on earth, He healed the sick and fed the hungry. He sought the lost and the destitute and gave them hope and a destiny.

The Christian church has faithfully served, and through the various world crises has helped. In the pandemics of the first centuries, the church came through to offer relief and mercy to the suffering. History is replete with such men and women of the Christian faith like Dorcas (Tabitha of Acts 9:36-42), Martin Luther (during the Bubonic Plague), William Carey in India, and Florence Nightingale, among others.

There is no doubt that Christianity is a religion of love. Charitable work is given without any strings attached. True believers would simply give, without letting the left hand know what the right is giving. We see politicians giving help and they have the audacity to print their pictures on facemasks, sanitizers, etc., because for them it is to score political mileage. We give to show God's love to a suffering world. Any self-respecting church has their mercy ministry busy at a time like this. When we distribute food, we do not placard it before the world. We simply serve the needy.

5. The Church is the Only Beacon of Hope

This sin-sick and sin-ridden world is steeped in misery and hopelessness. People are not just dealing with the one sickness of coronavirus but also many

other illnesses, some even terminal like cancer. All the misery as a result of sin is still with us today. Family conflicts have been heightened by this pandemic. Financial pressure has been greatly exacerbated by the lockdown. The labelling of some jobs as non-essential services results in businesses being shut down. As I write, the Kenyan government estimates that more than half a million people have lost jobs. The Central Bank of Kenya claims that most small scale businesses will shut down. In simple terms people are suffering spiritually, emotionally, economically and physically. They need help. They need not just a few thousand shillings, or food packs, but solid joy and lasting hope, which is only found in Jesus Christ.

Distress and depression cannot be dealt by the superficial methods towards which the state tends to gravitate. Psychological counselling or psychiatric therapy, are not able to bring healing to the human heart. The heart is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). And for it to flow with this life, it has to be connected to Christ who is the Fountain of life (John 4:14). Is there another institution that can successfully offer this wellspring of life to human beings?

Men have undying souls. There is no hospital that treats these souls except the true church of Christ that administers the true gospel. There is healing only by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Only the church gives an indefinite expiry date to the souls of men. Hope beyond the grave cannot be done by the doctors who only treat the body.

Conclusion

Now show me a single institution on earth that discharges all these duties? Neither the President nor the police can effectively take the responsibilities that God has assigned to the church. Neither the magistrates nor the judges of the Supreme Court can fulfil the righteousness that God demands of us. Neither parastatal corporate entities nor private companies are able to faithfully represent God on earth. It is the church, which is the body of Christ.

To fix our confidence or our hope on this world is the height of human folly. It is like bird that builds its nest upon a tree that is being cut down, or decorating a cabin of a sinking ship. This virus demonstrates that the axe is at the root of all our earthly comforts. We all are banking on the hope that the virus is going away perhaps next week, maybe next month, maybe next year... but who knows? Rather anchor your soul upon Christ, who is the Rock of Ages. Belong to a biblical church, where Christ is enthroned, and the truth of his gospel is espoused and lived.

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH: A MIGHTY DEFENCE AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE (3)

Oliver Allmand-Smith

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FIFTHLY, the challenge that we face is *chronological arrogance and historical ignorance*. All you have to do today is mention the word 'science', and everything pre-1950 is ancient history and irrelevant. We truly think that we have all knowledge and that every generation of humanity up to now has been almost completely ignorant. As a society, we have cut ourselves loose from all our moorings. This chronological arrogance and historical ignorance is hugely misguided and, as scripture makes abundantly clear, such pride will inevitably lead to a terrible fall.

It is most disturbing, however, when this deadly mixture of arrogance and ignorance comes into the Church because our faith is rooted in historical events. Our faith is a historical faith. It has been handed down to us generation upon generation and, as we have already seen, it is our task to preserve the purity of the faith. Which is why we use the word 'Reformation', because we are not striving for something which is new *per se*, but we are striving for that which has been revealed and made known to us in history through the Holy Spirit, in the scriptures. Thus, any chronological arrogance and historical ignorance in the believer is shocking, disturbing and dangerous, all in equal measure.

One of the great comforts for believers today is that Christianity has been around so long that every conceivable objection raised against it has already been answered, *so all you've got to do is to know your history and you are covered*.

What we have in our Confession is a wonderful defence against this terrible spirit of our age which says that everything from the past is out of date, flawed, and needs updating. Often folks say that the Second London Confession needs updating – it was written all those hundreds of years ago and it is now out of date. Of course, human documents sometimes do need to be updated and we must accept the possibility that parts of the Confession may need to be improved. But let us first of all check carefully that our desire to update is not the result of chronological arrogance and historical ignorance. Before we talk

about updating, we must first understand what it is saying. We must go to the trouble of discerning how our Confession has come out of hundreds and hundreds of years of different traditions and writings, of many godly men thinking carefully through all the challenges to the faith that had been raised over more than 1600 years. When we do this, perhaps we might conclude that the Confession does not need so much updating – rather we might need to align our thinking with its teaching if we want to be thoroughly Biblical. And even if we determined that a revision might be helpful, who would be qualified to make such a revision today? Who could claim the kind of authority and spiritual wisdom of our fathers in the faith?

Jim Renihan, in his Symbolics classes, paints a wonderful picture of our fathers in the faith sitting down to put the Confession together with all their books spread out on the table before them. They are not putting the Confession together in a vacuum by direct guidance of the Spirit; they are writing it in the light of the whole history of theology, drawing information and knowledge from books and other Confessions, working especially in the tradition of Westminster and Savoy. It is in such a manner that they wisely summarised the faith. (See James M. Renihan, *A Toolkit for Confessions*, published by RBAP for more helpful background to the Confession and an invaluable outline for its study.)

For example, many today are clamouring for our doctrine of creation to be bought ‘up to date’ with the scientific discoveries and advances of recent centuries. The opening statement of Chapter 4 is considered inadequate and antiquated:

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, all very good.

It’s important to add the answer to Question 12 of the Baptist Catechism: ‘What is the work of creation?’

The work of creation is God’s making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

These two great statements give God all the glory for creation and make it clear that the Genesis account is a full and sufficient record of all that God has decided we need to know about the way he created the world, laying a solid foundation for all the doctrines that will unfold in the rest of scripture. Any discoveries of ‘science’ so-called must surely be brought under the authority of scripture and not the other way around. Indeed, we may wish to clarify further what is meant by our confessional statement over and against the false claims of modern

science. This is something we can do by means of positional papers or doctrinal statements, so as not to undermine or alter the solid biblical statement in our Confession, but to ensure that it is rightly understood and re-enforced in the minds of our people. What a bulwark this is against the spirit of our age, and how greatly is God glorified therein.

Also consider Chapter 2 Paragraph 3 containing this tremendous statement on the doctrine of the Trinity:

In this divine and infinite being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word (or Son), and the Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him.

This carefully-worded paragraph describes the very being of God. Each word and phrase is carefully weighed and considered to ensure the finest balance of understanding. As a worship-leader, I feel less daunted as I rise up to the pulpit to direct the congregation into the worship of this awe-inspiring God, because I know I am standing on the shoulders of such giants. Similarly, when a church stands on the shoulders of those godly and gifted saints who have upheld the apostolic testimony right back to Paul and his Lord, then we can have true confidence. If then we are united under this Confession, we stand with brothers and sisters across the ages and across the world today – the Confession not only gives us unity with our brothers and sisters in this age, but also with our brothers and sisters down through the generations. What an encouragement to know that with me stand not only my brothers of this generation, but also my brothers in all generations. Let us then cast off this chronological arrogance and historical ignorance which imagines that we are now in the age of enlightenment and all previous knowledge is null and void.

SIXTHLY, a manifestation of the spirit of our age that threatens our churches is *woolly sentimentalism and the denial of absolutes*. If you follow the news you will know that ‘safe spaces’ are the fashion. ‘Safe spaces’ are areas, most commonly set up in university campuses, where certain views are not allowed to be spoken. They are set up to give those whose feelings may be offended by the speaking of certain views a place to go in order that they can avoid being offended. We are cultivating a generation of university students who are

intellectually overweight, even before they have started – if prodded they say, ‘you can’t say that because it upsets me’. What happened to iron sharpening iron? What happened to our beliefs being challenged in the heat of debate so that our position can be thoroughly refined?

We live in an age of woolly sentimentalism, the denial of absolutes and the idea that ‘faith’ is something very personal which cannot be specified (by definition). The generally accepted conception of faith held today is logically inconsistent: to define something as non-definable or completely relative is, clearly, not to define it at all. Faith is seen as a movable and changeable feast, while certainty, confidence and belief in absolutes are considered dangerous vices. If we adopt this in our churches, we will not be able to follow the critically important example of Jude that we have already quoted:

I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (verse 3).

How are we going to contend for ‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ if we embrace this woolly sentimentalism and deny absolutes? Error can only be identified with confidence if we have a really firm grasp of the truth. Who do you call in to identify the counterfeits? Not an expert in making fake notes, but an expert in the real thing, because excellent knowledge of the real imparts an ability to identify any kind of fake. This is what our Confession helps us with. It helps us to expose error with confidence because it gives us a solid understanding of the truth. It tunes our antenna to pick up where error is coming in. This is, of course, one of our tasks: to identify the wolves who are coming in. Spotting wolves is not easy because they don’t come with flashing neon lights saying, ‘I am a wolf’, but they come disguised in sheep’s clothing. So how are we meant to spot these false teachers and identify this error without a confession of the faith? It is incredibly difficult to do.

But when we have a confession that is biblical, sound, tried and tested, comprehensive and accessible to all then we are in a position to spot error and to deal with it when it threatens our faith.

Chapter 31 Paragraph 1, ‘Of the state of man after death’ illustrates the comprehensive nature of our Confession:

The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and

utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the scripture acknowledgeth none.

For many years in my own Christian life I was utterly confused about this subject, and when I read this statement it was as if the clouds parted and the glorious light of biblical truth shone in my mind. Since then I have referred many people to this paragraph to deal with all kinds of confusion regarding soul-sleep and the relationship between the condition of the dead-in-Christ before and after his final return in glory.

When truth shines, error departs and peace settles upon the heart of the believer. Woolly sentimentalism and the denial of absolutes does not help anyone to find the truth which alone can set a man free and cause harmony to reign in his mind and heart. It is ironic that this aspect of the spirit of our age, designed to make people feel good about themselves and to prevent them from offending others, accomplishes the very opposite of its objective! Uncertainty and insecurity are the cause of so many psychological problems in our society – we might even call it an epidemic. In confessing the faith there is biblical certainty and a security that is grounded in the being and revelation of God himself.

FINALLY, a threat that our culture presents is *navel-gazing selfishness and compassion burnout*. This is a massive problem even in our own churches when folk are seen to struggle to cope with the ordinary challenges of daily life. Of course, throughout all the generations of our churches there have been those with serious health difficulties and personal afflictions, and from time to time these can be utterly debilitating. However, it is remarkable to note how robust our forebears were! Consider Samuel Sewall, the puritan diarist, who buried 11 out of his 14 children, and when his offspring were not dying they were battling with smallpox, measles, the flue, ague, colds and numerous other infections, all without the benefits of modern medical science and remedies. Yes he was a cheerful, devoted, committed man of God who lived his life to the full and served God with zeal and joy. It is especially noteworthy to see how intimate and affectionate were his relations with his wife and children. Where are such godly, consistent, reliable, selfless and compassionate men and women in our churches today?

Yes we thank God that our churches are blessed with some in this category, but many seem to struggle week-by-week, often absent from the meetings, unable to take up any responsibilities in the life of the church because they seem overwhelmed with what me might call the ‘stuff of life’. We have fewer and fewer people who are robust, faithful and devoted, ready to serve the Lord.

As a society we have adopted an intellectual and emotional flabbiness where nobody is ever challenged, nobody is ever caused to think again, and where there is no iron sharpening iron. It seems that very often the lack of compassion in our age, the lack of love for other believers and the lack of concern for the lost is the result of self-absorption. The more you care about yourself, the less you care for others. So if you are preoccupied with your own problems, foibles, challenges, difficulties and needs, then you are effectively rendering yourself relatively useless in the cause of Christ.

The Confession tackles this head-on. If we embrace a confessional Christianity, then we are embracing a Christianity which is rooted in scripture and is all about God. Consider Chapter 2 paragraph 1:

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

It is so important that we have the vision set out by this passage in the Confession. Have we grasped the sheer magnitude of our God? Have we comprehended His glory, His greatness, His immensity, His power, His transcendence, His worthiness? The best way to blast away the navel-gazing selfishness and compassion burnout that is rife in our age is to teach and to grasp the enormity and magnificence of our God. Self-obsession becomes a lot harder when we truly know a God as great and as glorious as this.

Also essential is the worship of this God as outlined in Chapter 22 Paragraph 1 – our worship must be regulated exactly as our God wills it! Our worship is to be entirely God-centred.

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

The Confession clearly shows that our worship is to be all about God. He is to be worshipped exactly as he prescribes in the Scriptures, and there is to be no room for personal innovation and show. Thus, when we worship, it is him alone who is praised and the pride of men is not gratified.

We must also worship respecting the historical context, so that we don't sweep away everything our forebears have done thinking that we know better. We build on everything that our fathers in the faith have handed down to us regarding the doctrine of God and biblical worship. We are back to the danger of chronological arrogance again – just think of the way that so many evangelical churches are doing away with hymnals and hymnody in favour of all things new. Isn't it the case that much of the new contemporary worship songs are pre-occupied with our personal experience of Jesus over against objective declarations of the glory of God? Yes we need both, but where is the focus – upon the individual or upon the Lord?

And if we focus upon the Lord Christ, shall not his compassion for sinners move our hearts to love and serve him and his people selflessly? Speaking of the person and work of the Lord Jesus in Chapter 8 Paragraph 4 we read:

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have born and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us, enduring most grievous sorrows in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body, was crucified, and died, and remained in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption: on the third day he arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which he also ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

Do we not need believers in our churches who are empty of self and full of the Lord? Do we not need believers who are rooted in the truth, energized by the glory of God, overwhelmed with the privilege of worship, confident and assured of the things they believe, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Christian brothers and sisters in our own generation as well as down through centuries past and on into the ages to come?

Nothing is more critical than the building of biblical churches in our generation. If we do not do this, we are in danger of losing everything. How greatly we shall be helped if we unite together under a common biblical confession of faith, standing upon the giant-like shoulders of our fathers in the faith.

THE LIFE OF DAVID (9)

Keith Underhill

GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID (2 Samuel 7)

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.

We now reach the high-point of David's amazing life, the great purpose for which God had raised David up to be king over His people. David is entering a period of rest from the enemy nations around him (verse 1). It is the opportunity to think of building projects. Jerusalem is considered safe enough for the erection of the temple. That is David's purpose. But it is at this time that the Lord reveals **His** purpose for David.

1. THE COVENANT WITH DAVID

God refuses David's desire to build a house for Him. David is not going to build a magnificent temple. Three reasons are given (verses 5-7).

- ★ God has always identified Himself with His wandering people.
- ★ God has never commanded that such a house be built, although the desire might be good (1 Kings 8:18). This yet another clear illustration that God is to be worshipped **ONLY** as He has commanded.
- ★ David has been a man of war, and it is not fitting for him to build a house that symbolizes peace between God and men. First peace is to be attained and the kingdom established, as it came to be under Solomon. See 1 Chronicles 22:7-9, 23:2-3.

God makes it clear through the prophet Nathan that this refusal to build the house for Him is not a rejection of David himself. David is reminded of God's past blessings towards him (verses 8-9), and he is told that there will be rest for Israel (verses 10-11). Then God gives these promises:

- ★ God will make David "a house" (verse 11). Clearly there is a play on words here. What David is not allowed to do for God, God will do for David. "House" here means 'descendants', one particular son whose descendants will rule David's kingdom. David already had children (see 2 Samuel 3:2-5) so this was going to be a son of promise.
- ★ David's son will build a house for God's name (verses 12-13).
- ★ David's throne will be established forever (verse 13-16). This is opposed to Saul whose sons were never established on his throne. Sin would bring

God's chastisement upon the individual king, but the covenant itself would not be terminated. There will always be a king of David's line upon the Lord's throne, as it is called in 1 Chronicles 29:23. This is the heart of God's wonderful and gracious promise in this covenant with David.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE COVENANT WITH DAVID TO EARLIER COVENANTS

This promise of God is not called a covenant in 2 Samuel 7. Why then do we describe it as a covenant? Because David calls it a covenant in his last words (2 Samuel 23:5). And in Psalm 89 Ethan reflects on the promise to David as a covenant (verses 3,28,34,39), and questions why God seems to have broken it.

Earlier God had made a covenant with Abraham, and reiterated it with his son Isaac, and then his son Jacob (Genesis 17). God established a covenant with Israel through Moses as mediator (Exodus 24). A covenant between God and man is a special relationship with God that He sovereignly establishes, 'I am your God, you are my people'. So it is not an agreement. God did not call David for a discussion to negotiate terms. David had ideas of what he wanted but God said 'No' and gave him something far better. In these successive covenants God is not casting the first aside and replacing it with the next one. The earlier covenants continue in force. Rather, God is adding details to His administration of the promised salvation. In David's kingdom the law of Moses continued to be the standard of obedience (1 Kings 2:3). And as the descendants of Abraham they continued to live in the land that had been promised to him (1 Chronicles 16:15-18). In two ways this covenant with David advances God's redeeming promises. (1) It defines the ancestors of Christ more closely, not just a descendant of Abraham, but of the tribe of Judah to which David belongs. (2) It reveals that the Christ will sit on the throne of David as God's King.

3. THE FULFILMENT OF THE COVENANT PROMISES TO DAVID

(1) **Solomon.** David's son Solomon was the first part of the fulfilment of God's covenant promise. Solomon himself makes this very clear at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:15-20).

(2) **Kings of Judah.** They were all descendants of David. Some of them were wicked but God did not visit the deserved judgement upon them because of his covenant with David. Solomon's idolatry aroused God's anger, yet He left his successor one tribe to rule over (Judah) for David's sake (1 Kings 11:12-13). For example, Jehoram was just like the wicked kings of Israel to the north, yet

God would not destroy Judah for David's sake (2 Kings 8:18-19). The Assyrians under Sennacherib destroyed Israel, but they would not be able to take Jerusalem because of David (2 Kings 19:34).

When God did finally destroy Jerusalem and remove the kings this brought a great problem to the faithful. It looked as if God had at last abandoned the covenant. As the Psalmist thinks about the covenant, this is his conclusion, that God "has renounced the covenant" for the king and his city Jerusalem are no more (Psalm 89:38-45). We should remember that the kings of Judah were only a type or shadow of God's throne, so that their failure does not mean the failure of God's promise, for God is still on the throne. So the prophets looked beyond David and the kings of Judah to a still greater King to come to sit on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Jeremiah specifically says that it is impossible that the covenant with David can be broken (33:19-22). He will cause to spring up a "righteous Branch" for David (verses 14-15).

(3) **Jesus.** Jesus has come as this righteous Branch to sit on David's throne. The angel Gabriel specifically tells Mary, "And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). On the Day of Pentecost Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11, and declares that the reference is not to his but to Jesus' resurrection. He knew "that God had sworn with an oath that He would set one of his descendants on his throne" (Acts 2:30-31). Jesus is not only a future King. He is King *now*, sitting on David's throne, which in reality is God's throne. And he reigns for ever and ever.

Application

Why is this covenant of God with David so important? It shows at least three things.

★ God's sovereign grace. It is God who takes the initiative in the covenant. David himself asks, Why me? (2 Samuel 7:18). There was no specific reason in David why the covenant was made with him and not someone else. It is God who chose him in the first place, to the surprise of everyone, as the youngest and therefore most insignificant of the sons of Jesse (1 Samuel 16). Noah was rescued from the flood because he "found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). God loved Israel because He loved them, and not because they were a mighty people (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). This is always the pattern of God's dealings. God takes the initiative because He wants to, and we are the ones who respond to His overtures of grace. If you are in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ the mediator, then it is because He chose to do so and not because of anything in you. This is a cause for adoring wonder and constant and copious thanksgiving.

★ God’s faithfulness. There is much stress on the certainty of the fulfilment of the covenant with David. Yet the persistent sins of the kings, and then the exile from the land, made it seem impossible to fulfil. Remember the godly man’s perplexity in Psalm 89. We learn that despite human sin, and despite centuries elapsing, God will not deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). He will fulfil all that He has promised. Christ has come and is reigning at the right hand of God in fulfilment of the covenant. In the new covenant God promises, “I will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). How can we be sure? First, it is because God has promised. Second, it is because God has provided the mediator, Jesus Christ, who establishes the covenant by the sacrifice of Himself.

★ The present position of Christ. He will not begin to reign when He returns, and certainly not in some supposed future earthly Messianic Kingdom. He is right NOW the Davidic King sitting on the throne! Do you now see Him with the eye of faith as dying Stephen did? “Standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56). Do you shout your ‘Hallelujah’ as you bow the knee before Him knowing that His reign is the certainty that there is an eternal salvation in Him?

4. DAVID’S RESPONSE TO THE COVENANT

As he responds in prayer David is overwhelmed (verses 18-29). It is because God has made the promise about his house that he has the courage to pray to God that it might be so. We are recipients of this promise because it concerns Christ our glorious Lord. How ought we to respond to what God has done in Christ?

(1) Confess your unworthiness (verses 18-20). David asks, “Who am I?” In the eyes of people he is surely great. He defeated Goliath. He unified Israel. He asks, “What is my house?” He is of the great tribe of Judah. However, he knows that before God he is totally unworthy. If he has become something, it is only God who has done it (see verses 8-9). Consider from where you have come, and then all that God has given you in Christ. When you do this your prayers will be gripped by a sense of your total unworthiness. This is Jacob’s thinking as he returned home (Genesis 32:10-12). This is Moses’ objection when appointed by God (Exodus 3:10-11). God gives ear to the prayer of the one who has “a contrite and lowly spirit” (Isaiah 57:15, 66:2).

(2) Continue to depend on God’s grace (verse 21). If you are unworthy, then whatever you have from God is only through His grace. At this point David is lost for words. It is enough that his thankful heart is open to God’s omniscient gaze. David emphasizes that it is God’s doing and not his own – “*your* promise” and “according to *your* own heart”. The covenant is according to what God has willed, according to His own good pleasure. Have you begun to be amazed that

you are a Christian? Do you ask, ‘Why **me**?’ Does this amazement ever express itself in prayer as you begin to think of God’s grace to you in Christ?

(3) Thank God for past mercies (verses 22-24). These are not mercies just for David, because he recognizes himself as just one of God’s people. God has not dealt with any other nation in this way, entering into a covenant relationship with them as “His people”. So Jesus teaches us to pray “our” Father in heaven. In Christ we are brought into the large fellowship of all the people of God and share in the same blessings through the same Saviour and by the same Spirit. Do you only thank God for what He has done for you, or do you all the more thank Him for saving a people, “a great multitude that no one could number”?

(4) Petition God on the basis of His word (verses 25-29). Note that it is not until verse 25 that David begins to petition God. This is the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer. Humble adoration of the Lord must always precede our own requests. It is the recognition of the centrality of God’s person. There are two reasons for any petition to be Biblical:

- It must be according to God’s revealed word. David says he has gathered courage to ask only because God has first spoken. Have you ever thought how wrong it is to insist for something from God when it is not His revealed will? Faith in prayer is not trying to persuade God to do what *you* want, but to want God to do what *He* has promised to do. May God do what He has promised to do! This is the strength of a child’s pleading with his father – ‘But Daddy, you promised!’ The Psalmist asks God to do “according to His word” or “promise” (Psalm 119:25,28,41,49,58). This is how our Lord prayed in Gethsemane, “not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42, see also I John 5:14). So we can confidently pray for such things as forgiveness (1 John 1:9), wisdom (James 1:5), against temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). We are humbly petitioning the Lord, ‘Please do as you have said’.
- It must be for God’s glory. David is convinced that when God does what He has promised, His name “will be magnified for ever”. This is surely the strongest plea before God in prayer. ‘Lord reveal yourself as you really are so that people may praise you!’ Again, this is the example that Jesus left us to follow (read John 12:27, 17:1). Learn to put the honour of your Lord before your own personal desires. This is what it means to be a Christian, to love Christ above all others (Matthew 10:37. Luke 14:26).

How you pray is one of the most clear indications of your spiritual health. The Christian is one who comes before God as totally unworthy, as dependent alone on the grace of God, as thankful for the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, and wanting God’s will to be done for His glory.

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

*My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path.
So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her
smooth words.*

*So you will walk in the way of good and keep to the paths of the righteous.
For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it.*
(Proverbs 2)

It is easy to think that the Bible does not have anything to say about courtship. But the whole counsel of God is not lacking in any area of our lives. Therefore, God's Word does not lack wisdom on how Christian courtship is to be done. It appears to me that young men and women need to be guided by their parents in the way they conduct themselves until they actually get married! Perhaps your parents should be more involved in obtaining your spouse – who loves you more? Who knows you better than your parents? Who cares for your future more than your Dad and Mum? Who wants the very best of you, if not them? Who is more experienced in the matter – you or your parents? It is the high time Christians stopped taking counsel from the world and listened to their parents more. But probably some of our parents are not Christians and this complicates things considerably.

Preparation for Courtship

The preparation for courtship is as important as the courtship itself, because the success of the courtship so much depends on preparation, just as a pupa depends on the caterpillar to eventually be a beautiful butterfly. Preparation takes place from the home and moves on to other social institutions like churches and schools. We shall pursue preparation by parents, church and in person.

1. By the Parents

- 1) **Example from the parents' own marriage:** Ideally the parents' marriage ought to be the best model for the children in the understanding of marriage. This is why the children should not be under the current social pressure to leave their parents. Leaving the parents involves leaving their roof and their daily counsel and oversight. However, we know that Genesis-3-effect may

be such that our parents' marriage was not a model at all! It is possible that you have come from a marriage that was dysfunctional, where husband and wife did not live in love, peace and harmony. Or it was non-functional, where it was a polygamous marriage. Or it was non-existent, either because of separation or divorce or death! Yet even then the Lord uses such failures to show us how our marriages must not be! And so we yearn for the godly, biblical marriages, having been dissatisfied with what we saw with our own parents. But the example of our parents has great influence on our own perspectives on marriage, either negatively or positively. This influence cannot be wished away.

- 2) **Encouragement from the parents:** Most of the time this is taken as pressure from the parents to get married. However, parents have a duty to encourage their children to embrace biblical and godly courtship, leading to a godly marriage. This is only possible where there is a good relationship between the parents and the children. Where this relationship is healthy, the children will not have problem if the parents help in beginning a relationship. The parents have a God-given responsibility to be involved in the lives of their children, especially when they are making such a life-changing decision like marriage. The normal should be that the parents help their children in choosing life partners. The children have a duty to seek counsel from their parents in choosing their future spouses.
- 3) **Parents' have a duty to equip their children for courtship:** Parents have a role to train their children. Schools do not train people for marriage, do they? It is interesting that schools teach everything else but marriage. They teach how to cook, how to behave, and train vocationally but say nothing about marriage! Therefore, parents have a role to lead their children in a manner that will make them develop spiritual appetites that will produce godly men and women who will begin strong godly families. They will also teach them such disciplines that will make them be better spouses.

2. By the Church

In addition to your biological home, you have a spiritual home, the church. We trust that you have the discretion to know a biblical church where there are biblical, loving and caring shepherds who can help you in identifying a potential spouse, and in maintaining a healthy courtship, leading to a wonderful Christian marriage. This is especially helpful when you your parents are not able to offer the necessary counsel. We know the following about the church:

- 1) The church sets the purpose for which God created you from God's Word and the example set by the saints in Christ's church. May be it is not the

will of God for you to marry. This will be made clear based upon precept upon precept of God's Word as they are applied to your consciences. It could be that the Lord's will for you is greater than marriage (as normal as it is). For each person should live as he was called (1 Corinthians 7:17,40).

- 2) The church provides models of marriage and fora of learning through brotherly fellowship.
- 3) The church provides avenues of accountability so that you are kept focused on Christ and His kingdom setting your hearts on things above rather than on earthly things.
- 4) While personal prayer is necessary, the church also prays for you.
- 5) The church's right emphasis on true holiness and purity sets the biblical parameters and standards for living before and after marriage. This effectively moulds the best spouse for you.
- 6) The church displays the wonderful picture of the ultimate marriage between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32).

Therefore the best place to be is in Christ's church and the best place to find a wife is in the church! Yet we know that God works out all things for the good of His people. Our Lord is a good Shepherd who leads his people in green pastures. By his rod and staff, he will make sure that his children are providentially in the right places for his glory and their good, where they can possibly marry and be married in the Lord.

3. Personal Preparation

In as much as other people can help you, your own personal readiness and willingness is paramount. The choice is finally yours and so in the matter your own affections have to be positively stimulated before you consider anyone for a potential spouse. But are you ready? How prepared are you? Before Adam was married, God prepared him spiritually and vocationally in the Garden of Eden.

Spiritually:

God revealed Himself to Adam and gave him the law upon which was the basis of this spiritual relationship.

- 1) **Discipline in godliness** (1 Timothy 4:7). Before considering marriage, prove to yourself that you are able to discipline yourself in matters of godliness. Know God as thoroughly as possible from His Word and His people, in your experience. Is God the first priority in your life? Are you able to keep your word? Can you keep your own schedules? Are you able

to take counsel from others? Such patterns for life must be fully established in one's life first before bringing someone else into your life. If you can't read the Bible or pray by yourself, do you think it will be easier when you have someone else in your life? This discipline has to begin before you get married. You have to train yourself for godliness because this is of greater value than anything else. It holds value for this life and the life to come. This is what is called self-watch – *keep a close watch on yourself* (1 Timothy 4:16).

- 2) **Set an example for others** (1 Timothy 4:12). *Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* The Lord expects you to practise such things that show that you are proven in your life in terms of godliness so that all people may see your progress and admire you as a marriageable young man or woman. Surely, if you are known for folly, who will you attract but a fool? Therefore in courtship walk in purity of heart and mind. Do not abandon yourself to impropriety or fall into the trap of fornication. Guard yourselves during courtship out of love and fear of the Lord. Remember that the purpose of courtship is to establish whether indeed you are fit to marry each other. If it is established in courtship that you cannot live with each because of the constant bickering, then it is advisable to terminate the relationship. If you find out that your purposes in life are different, then it is better to call off the relationship. Remember that it is better to call off the relationship than to divorce.

Vocationally: (Gen. 2:15-17)

God also prepared Adam vocationally by placing him in the Garden of Eden for him to have dominion over His creation. In the Jewish culture, the parents usually made sure that their sons were capable of having families and adequately looking after them so that they did not fall into debts which could possibly lead to slavery. It was taken that a young man who had not saved up a bride price (three years' wages) was not ready to get married! Today parents educate their children and hope that they will gain lawful employment to be able to look after their families.

What every husband needs is not merely a job or some substantial money in his account, because these two can be lost so easily, but:

- 1) To be well-trained with marketable skills.
- 2) A good work ethic (diligence) so that with or without employment he can look after his family adequately.

Before marriage a young woman should be spiritually prepared according to the patterns of Sarah, Mary and the Proverbs 31 woman (see Titus 2:3-5, 1 Peter

3:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:11, 5:10). Vocationally, a young woman must develop her domestic skills to care for the home, submit to the husband and look after the children (1 Timothy 2:15, Titus 2:5). Spiritually, every woman must understand that she will be her husband's helper not only in fruitfulness but also in dominion (Genesis 1:28). This means that she is to develop her God-given talents in anticipation of the husband for whom God has fashioned her (Genesis 2:18,22).

Purpose of Courtship

Courtship is not marriage! But courtship is meant to prepare you for marriage. When you are courting you should not conduct yourselves as if you are married. Courtship has been seen by many as a vehicle of romance and sexual pleasure. You should have the commitment to pursue sexual purity and maintain chaste conduct throughout. In other words anything that would be regarded as inappropriate: physical actions that strongly arouse sexual desires, and certainly premarital sex is prohibited at this stage. You should pursue purity in thought, word and deed. Remember what Paul advised young Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12.

The aim of courtship is to begin to know, understand, befriend and love each other. This way you would build such friendship that will last your lifetime in marriage with the fear of the Lord. But how do you get to know each other? It is primarily through communication and sharing. In courtship you learn how to talk with each other. From this you learn more about each other. You learn how to make a good friend out of the other person. You share your mutual joys, woes, burdens and cares. You learn about your friend's past. So all the cupboards, and chests, accounts and drawers of your life should be opened. You learn his past failures and mourn with him and of past victories and celebrate together.

Moreover, you discover the consequences of his or her actions, whether good or evil and establish if indeed you can live with it. If for example you learn that she has aborted three times, would you be willing to live with that? If you find out that he has five children with different women out there, would you be willing to live with that? You learn what metal he/she is made of and what furnace he/she has gone through – you learn everything about your friend. How patient is she? What are his temperaments? At this point, it is expected that you will open up to each other. You will not deliberately conceal information to deceive or to mislead. This is because when she discovers more about you from others, then you will lose trust and that would be the beginning of the end of your courtship! It is also expected that you will discuss many things touching

on your future together, not so much to make decisions, but to know if you can make those decisions together later, even over matters that you may disagree about.

Please note that if you cannot sense true, sincere and solid love from a man while in courtship, it will not be there in marriage. For, example, if he would never buy or get you a present while in courtship, it may be that he can never sacrifice for you. If you do not observe submission in your fiancée in courtship, it won't appear magically in marriage. For example, if she would not trust your choice of the church now, and want you to move to her church or to some other church, why do you think she will trust other areas of leadership once married? Do not totally ignore these warning signs. If there are too many red flags, then it may as well be that you are walking into a minefield! So these discussions are necessary to know if these qualities are present early enough.

It is also the purpose of courtship to help you know whether indeed you should continue or end it. Do not hope against hope that things will change when you get married. The Certificate of Marriage cannot change one's DNA. If you are having constant issues and frictions and strife in courtship, is it not an indication that you are not moving towards being 'happily married thereafter'? Do not force any courtship to continue. I repeat, **it is better to end a courtship, even engagement, than to divorce!**

Resources on Courtship and Marriage:

1. This message was preached at Trinity Baptist Church's Parenting Seminar on June 27th, 2020, and it can be obtained on the Church's YouTube channel - bit.ly/placeofsingleness
2. *Maintaining Dating Purity*, David W. Merck, Truth For Eternity Ministries
3. *Courting Disaster*, Neil Richardson, Day One
4. *Pathway to Christian Marriage*, John Thompson, Chapel Library
5. *No Longer Two, A Christian Guide for Engagement and Marriage*, Brian & Barbara Edwards, Day One
6. *Going Out, Marriage & Sex*, Dr Chris Richards & Dr Liz Jones, Day One
7. *Disciplines of a Godly Young Man*, R. Kent Hughes & W. Carey Hughes, Crossway
8. *What did You Expect*, Paul Tripp, Presbyterian & Reformed.
9. *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, ed. John Piper & Wayne Grudem, Crossway
10. *Passion and Purity*, Elisabeth Elliot, Revell Books
11. *Her Hand in Marriage: Biblical Courtship in the Modern World*, Douglas Wilson
12. *The Porn Problem*, Vaughan Roberts, The Good Book Company
13. *The Grand Design, Male and Female He Made Them*, Owen Strachan & Gavin Peacock

COMMON QUESTION NO. 14

CAN A CHRISTIAN FINALLY BE LOST?

Keith Underhill

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

You might immediately answer, ‘Of course a Christian cannot be lost’. But it depends how you define the term “Christian”. Many students of the Bible point to people who did fall away. Others insist that ‘Once saved, always saved’. Where is the truth? In a sense both positions are true.

1. **YES**, a professing Christian may be finally lost.

- ✓ Some who made a profession were lost – We are told that Simon believed and was baptized, yet his subsequent conduct made it clear he was still in bondage to sin (Acts 8:9ff.).
- ✓ Some who continued in that profession for a while were lost – Judas put on a good show for three years so that none of his fellow apostles suspected him. Jesus said that there are those who receive the word with joy, but later fall away (Matthew 13:20-21). The false teachers against whom John was writing had left the fellowship of God’s people showing they were never really part of it (1 John 2:19).
- ✓ Some who even died professing are lost – The most awful warning Jesus gave concerned those who maintained their profession of faith all the way to the judgement day, only to be told to depart (Matthew 7:21-23). There are many warnings to professing Christians against deception, such as to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9).

Therefore, just because a person professes faith in Christ, and identifies as a Christian even throughout his life, is no guarantee of final salvation.

2. **NO**, a genuine Christian cannot be finally lost.

At the same time the Bible is so very clear that a Christian cannot be lost. Consider the following and see who it is who is guaranteed of final salvation.

John 6:39 – All those given by the Father to the Son will be raised on the last day.

John 10:28-29 – Those who hear the voice of Christ, who are known by Him, and who follow Him, are the ones who cannot be taken from His hand (see verse 27).

Romans 8:30 – Those who are glorified are ALL those, no more and no less, who have been predestined, called, and justified.

1 Corinthians 1:8 – Paul is writing to God’s church in Corinth, to people who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (verse 2). They have much spiritual gifting and have the hope of the return of Christ. It is to such that Paul says that they will be kept until the end.

Philippians 1:6 – Paul is writing to people who have been long-standing partners with him in the gospel (verse 5). He is sure that God has started a good work in them, and that he will complete that work when Jesus returns.

1 Peter 1:5 – It is to those who have been “born again” by God’s mercy who are being “guarded ... for a salvation” that will come at the end. It is certain, because it is by God’s power through faith.

We conclude that true, genuine Christians are those who cannot be lost. It is God who keeps us. Consider three truths about the Christian that guarantee the final salvation of Christians.

(1) The election of the Father. How can the electing purpose of the Father fail (see Common Questions #4)? His purpose in choosing was that we should be “holy and blameless before Him” (Ephesians 1:4). When God calls us, it is according to His purpose. And that purpose stretches from foreknowledge through predestination to be like Christ (in glory), to calling, justification and glorification (Romans 8:28-30). If God’s plans fail then He is not God.

(2) The death of the Son. The Father gave a people to the Son to come and save (see Matthew 1:21). He died for them. He paid the penalty for their sins. He has exhausted the wrath of God that they deserved. So the Bible asks if anyone can condemn God’s elect? The reason why the answer is NO is because ‘Christ died, rose from the dead, is at God’s right hand, and intercedes for us’ (Romans 8:34). How is it possible that such can go to hell?

(3) The indwelling of the Spirit. God has put His own Spirit in the hearts of all true Christians (Romans 8:9). God Himself says that this is His guarantee of final glory (read Ephesians 1:13-14). His indwelling is like a seal to protect us from being stolen away from God, like the soldiers were supposed to be a seal for Jesus’ tomb (Matthew 27:66).

Praise God that we cannot be lost because of the work of the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!

3. Why are Christians warned against apostasy?

If this is so, then why are Christians warned against apostasy, falling away from the faith into destruction?

There are such passages as Hebrews 6:4-6 (and 10:26-31). Although the experiences such have had are great there is nothing in verses 4-5 that demands that these people are true Christians. In fact the writer specifically says of his readers that he feels sure of “better things – things that belong to salvation” (verse 9). Such a warning is one of God’s means to keep His people. He reminds them of how the people perished in the wilderness (3:16-19).

Then Christians are repeatedly told that they must persevere in order to be saved (Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Hebrews 3:6,14, 6:11, 10:36, 12:1). The emphasis of the Bible is on Christians persevering, not only on God preserving them. The phrase ‘Eternal Security’ can be dangerous. Yes, those who are in Christ are eternally secure, but they are the very ones who persevere in the faith. Those who do not persevere show they are not true Christians. This is so important because multitudes are told they are Christians because they have made some decision for Jesus, because they have said the so-called sinner’s prayer, or because they have been prayed for by the evangelist. They are assured they are saved and never to doubt it. One writer has even claimed that if a person who once made a decision even became and died an atheist he would still be saved. But the Bible is clear that there is no salvation on the last day without perseverance. A truly saved person cannot live as he chooses. You now belong to Christ to live for Him. If you do not live for Him then you do not belong to Him.

But we do not persevere in our own strength. It is because God has promised to keep us that we are encouraged to press on. It is because God works in us “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” that we have the strength to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12-13).

Do you have to live in doubt of your perseverance in the faith? No. Those who are relying on their performance to get into heaven have every reason to doubt. They do not know what tomorrow will bring. But Christians rely on the promise of God in Christ, that through faith in Him they can begin to rejoice in hope of the glory of God even NOW (Romans 5:2)!

THE LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1689

Keith Underhill

We continue a chapter by chapter study of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The other article in this issue on the need to have a Confession of Faith continues 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 THREE: GOD'S DECREE

The General Decree of All Events

1. From all eternity God decreed all that should happen in time, and this He did freely and unalterably, consulting only His own wise and holy will.

Yet in so doing He does not become in any sense the author of sin, nor does He share responsibility for sin with sinners. Neither, by reason of His decree, is the will of any creature whom He has made violated; nor is the free working of second causes put aside; rather it is established.

In all these matters the divine wisdom appears, as also does God's power and faithfulness in effecting that which He has purposed.

2. God's decree is not based upon His foreknowledge that, under certain conditions, certain happenings will take place, but is independent of all such foreknowledge.

(a) The **universality** of God's decree (paragraph 1).

1. Plainly stated (lines 1-2). God's decree is the plan or purpose He made in eternity concerning everything that should take place. See Catechism Q. 11 and Daniel 4:34, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:11. It includes everything:

- even the sinful acts of men (Genesis 50:20, Acts 2:23)
- what we call 'chance' (1 Kings 22:28-34, Proverbs 16:33)
- the small details of our lives (Matthew 10:29-30, James 4:15)
- all that the most powerful do (Proverbs 21:1, Daniel 2:21)
- and the final destruction of the wicked (Proverbs 16:4, Romans 9:17)

2. Carefully guarded (lines 3-6). The truth of God's decree must be received because it is taught in the Word of God. There are many things we cannot understand, either because our minds are too small, or because God has chosen not to reveal them to us. We must never put our minds above the Scripture, and we must never make a doctrine mean something that the Bible does not teach. As we receive the teaching about God's decree, there are 2 things it does NOT mean:
 - It does not deny the holiness of God – God is not the author of sin in any sense. He only permits the wicked to perform the sin and then overrules it for His own purpose. For example, He could have prevented Joseph's brothers from selling him into slavery, but He had a purpose in it.
 - It does not deny the responsibility of man – Men are free in the sense we act without being forced from outside. We act according to our own free choice, according to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. So Judas freely decided to betray his Master because of his love for money, and perhaps because he found that Jesus was not the type of Messiah he expected. However it is impossible to reconcile in our minds the Decrees of God and human freedom and responsibility. For more, read Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.
3. Practically applied (lines 7-8). The ability of God to plan everything from the beginning and perfectly to bring it all to pass shows His wisdom, power and faithfulness (see Romans 11:34-36).

(b) The **unconditionality** of God's decree (paragraph 2) – Many people try to teach that God incorporates something into His plan because He knows it is going to happen. But this is impossible. God can only know what will surely happen, and it is God Himself who makes it sure that anything will happen. God knows things will happen because He has decreed them. Note that God revealed future things to the prophets not just because of His foreknowledge, but because of His decree (see Isaiah 46:10, Acts 3:18, 4:27-28, 15:15-18). Anyway, God's decree includes all things, not only the end but also the means to that end (note Acts 27:24 and 31). God had no help, and no pressure was put upon Him, because when He made His decree nothing else existed except Himself (Isaiah 40:13-14, Romans 11:34).

The Specific Decree of Predestination

3. *By His decree, and for the manifestation of His glory, God has predestinated (or foreordained) certain men and angels to eternal life through Jesus Christ, thus revealing His grace. Others, whom He has left to perish in their sins, show the terrors of His justice.*

4. *The angels and men who are the subjects of God's predestination are clearly and irreversibly designated, and their number is unalterably fixed.*

(a) In granting salvation God is selective (paragraph 3). He selects (= elects, predestinates, foreordains) some to be saved. This is for His glory and especially to show the glory of His grace. See Matthew 11:27, John 6:36-39, 17:2,24, Acts 13:48, Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:3-6, 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 1:9. Those He does not select (= reprobates) "He has left to perish in their sins", to show "His justice". Read the following passages where both groups are referred to: John 12:37-40, Romans 9:6-24, 1 Peter 2:8-10. Note that it men as *sinner*s who are the objects of predestination, so that if any are saved it is God's "grace", but if any are not saved it is God's "justice". Angels are also included in the decree (1 Timothy 5:21).

(b) God's selection is of individual men and angels and what He has decreed will not be changed (paragraph 4). God's decree does not only cover nations (Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6-8), or the work that God has planned for individuals to do (Paul in Acts 26:16-18), but also the destiny of individual, such as Jacob and Esau (Romans 9:10-13), Pharaoh (Romans 9:14-18), and Church members at Ephesus (Ephesians 1:4-5).

The Positive Aspect of Predestination Explained: Election

5. *Before the world was made, God's eternal, immutable purpose, which originated in the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, moved Him to choose (or to elect), in Christ, certain of mankind to everlasting glory. Out of His mere free grace and love He predestinated these chosen ones to life, although there was nothing in them to cause him to choose them.*

6. *Not only has God appointed the elect to glory in accordance with the eternal and free purpose of His will, but He has also foreordained the means by which his purpose will be effected. Since His elect are children of Adam and therefore among those ruined by Adam's fall into sin, He willed that they should be redeemed by Christ, and effectually called to faith in Christ. Furthermore, by the working of His Spirit in due season, they are justified, adopted, sanctified, and 'kept by His power through faith unto salvation'. None but the elect partake of any of these great benefits.*

(a) The **gracious basis** of election (paragraph 5). The only reason why anyone is selected is the *grace* of God. It is grace alone that makes the difference between those God ordains to life and those He leaves to die in their sins. This is shown by the following:

1. This was God's purpose "before the world was made", so before we were created, before we had done anything good or bad (Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9).
2. It was "in accordance with the eternal and free purpose of His will" (Romans 9:11,18, Ephesians 1:5).
3. It is a choice "in Christ", dependent upon all He has done for sinners (Ephesians 1:4-5).
4. The cause is specifically given as positively "His mere free grace", and negatively "nothing in them" (Romans 9:11,16, 11:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:5-6, 2 Timothy 1:9).

(c) The **effectual execution** of election (paragraph 6). God has not only planned that the elect will enter "glory", but He has also planned all the "means" to enable them to arrive there. We must never think that the elect will be finally saved no matter what they do or how they live. No!

1. God has sent *Christ* to redeem the elect from their sins. Therefore, God's purpose in the death of Christ was not to save everyone, but to save the elect (see John 10:11, Ephesians 5:25).
2. God sends His *Spirit* to effectually work in the lives of all the elect. Everyone whom God has elected and for whom Christ died will also believe unto justification, be adopted into God's family, be sanctified (= made holy) and kept faithful in holiness unto the end. Read this wonderful 'golden chain' in Romans 8:29-30!

In salvation we are dependent upon the Father to elect us, the Son to redeem us, and the Spirit to work in us. Note how these 3 different aspects of salvation are brought together in John 6:37, Acts 13:48, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, 1 Peter 1:2.

The Necessity for Carefully Handling the Doctrine

7. The high mystery of predestination needs to be handled with special prudence and caution, so that men, being directed to the will of God revealed in His Word and obeying the same, may become assured of their eternal election through the certainty of their effectual calling.

By this means predestination will promote the praise of God, and reverential awe and wonder. It will encourage humility and diligence, and bring much comfort to all who sincerely obey the gospel.

(a) Why the doctrine needs to be carefully handled (lines 1-2). God's decrees are secret to us and we must not try to pry into them or base our duty upon them (Deuteronomy 29:29). The following wrong conclusions have been drawn:

1. God is capricious = there is no good reason why God does one thing and not another. But the fact that we do not know the reason does not mean that God does not have a good reason. For example, Joseph did not know at the beginning why his brothers sold him into slavery, but he came to see later there was a good reason (Genesis 50:20).
2. There can be no true human responsibility. Logically it may seem that God's decrees and human responsibility cannot exist together. But in the Bible they belong together. For example, Jesus died "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God", yet those who killed Him are called "lawless" (Acts 2:23 and see Luke 22:22).
3. The decree will stop a person from being saved even if they want to be saved. This is untrue, because no sinner wants to be saved. If anyone comes to Christ = believes, then that is the evidence that he has been chosen. In Antioch it was "as many as were appointed to eternal" who "believed", no more and no less (Acts 13:48, and John 6:37).

(b) How you can be assured you are elect (lines 3-4). It is being sure of your "effectual calling". So Paul was sure the Thessalonians were chosen because when the gospel came to them it came with power and changed their lives (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). Peter tells his readers that they can be sure of their election and calling by bearing godly fruit in their lives (2 Peter 1:5-10). Conclusion: God's secret election is revealed in two things, a true conversion and a godly Christian life.

(c) What benefits the doctrine of the decrees brings to us (lines 5-7).

1. "Praise of God", especially of His grace as the real cause of our salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6). We have received the opposite of what we deserve because of our sins.
2. "Humility" before God, because it is God who controls everything, and I have contributed nothing at all to my salvation (Romans 9:6-24).
3. "Diligence" in serving the Lord because His purposes shall surely come to pass. Paul was assured that "I have many people in this city who are my people" and so he stayed a year and 6 months (Acts 18:10-11). A true understanding of the decrees does not lead to carelessness.
4. "Comfort", because God is in control of every circumstance for my good (Romans 8:28).

LOCKDOWN CHURCH SERVICES: TO STREAM OR NOT TO STREAM?

Huston Malande

Huston is a member of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi, and he writes about a very pertinent issue that church leaders must grapple with during this period of Covid_19. This article has been published at afrocalvinist.co.ke.

For the longest time, Safaricom's well known tagline was “the better option.” It was a rather effective tagline during a nascent era of fierce competition between telecommunication companies. It meant that no matter where you went, and no matter what you needed from a telco, Safaricom was always going to be your “better option.”

Things obviously changed with time, and one might theorize that as the number of subscribers grew exponentially, and as the company started facing customer care challenges, the tagline eventually degenerated into a turn of phrase, “the *bitter* option.” Could this be the reason why the tagline was later updated to “Twaweza?” Was the company shedding the baggage of phonetic similarity between *bitter* and *better*? Maybe. However, I think it's more likely that a savvy marketing consultant pointed out the fact that even though the word “better” was putting Safaricom on top of everyone else, it was at the same time creating awareness for the competition. You can't talk about a “better option” without inadvertently highlighting the existence of other valid ones.

Likewise, when we're trying to discern what Romans 12 calls “the good and acceptable and perfect will of God,” we cannot avoid how complex reality usually is. There are often multiple valid options and many paths to consider taking. That said, whenever God's people choose *the better option*, then the Bible not only acknowledges, but actually praises and distinguishes such highness of pursuit. I'll give you 3 examples:

*“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised (Proverbs 31:29-30).*

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31).

The excellent woman in Proverbs 31 could have merely been charming and dutiful, but the works for which she is praised indicate a higher pursuit: pleasing God Himself. The Bereans could have simply believed what they were told by Paul and Silas, but instead, they reverently let the Old Testament be the judge. As for the church of Corinth, it was okay that they desired “high” miraculous gifts, but the fatherly Apostle Paul points them to the highest underlying motive they could ever aspire to: love.

Our Utmost for His Highest

How then do we stack up as local churches when faced with the reality of not being able to meet face-to-face? We obviously won't flout lockdown rules and put the health of our brethren at risk; love does no wrong to a neighbour (Romans 13:10). We won't disobey the government which in this regard has given a righteous and reasonable decree for the good of its people, will we? The reality is that during lockdown, we simply can't physically meet as we normally do.

What then are our options? Well, it goes without saying that churches are very different: from creed, to size, locality, order of worship, and a dozen other arbitrary criteria by which we may classify congregations. However, what I'd like to specifically focus on is the apparent fork in the road for those congregations where the majority of members have access to the internet. On the one hand, we have those who see the web as a means to continue to “do church,” while on the other hand are those who see Covid-19 particularly as a providence of God that should be treated purely as such, meaning that church services are to be mournfully forsaken in the meantime as the congregation focuses on informal mutual fellowship. One example of the latter is articulated below:

Members and Friends, please see the following update from @MarkDever about our public services. pic.twitter.com/PVpl3az0jQ — Capitol Hill Baptist Church (@chbcdc) March 13, 2020

So, should we live stream or not? Much like the strong and weak brothers portrayed in Romans 14, both of these camps have the noble motive of seeking to please God. It's not a matter of right and wrong (that is, sinful or not sinful). I don't think either that it's simply a matter of wisdom. I think it is most precisely a matter of conscience, and particularly that of the leadership in a local church.

So what should leaders consider as they ponder the path under their feet? Given the two main options available to churches which meet the criteria of congregational internet accessibility, which of these is the better option? Please

reflect with me on the following 7 biblical arguments **for** live streaming as opposed to setting aside church services on Sunday altogether.

1. The preaching argument

Thank God for local churches. There simply isn't anything in the universe like it: a group of people whose hearts have been united to one another through Christ under the preaching of His word as it's proclaimed by pastors, and as the group is served by deacons. It is a true family, where God is Heavenly Father and Christ is our firstborn Brother. There is no replacing this, and I understand why it's primarily for this reason that churches may choose not to live stream; good shepherds are careful not to replace true fellowship with the seemingly easier choice sometimes referred to as *Bedside Baptist*. This is commendable and noble.

However, we must not forget that the church is like a double-edged sword. As a bulwark and buttress of truth, a local church exists not only to perform surgery on the flock, but equally to pierce the hearts of those yet unconverted. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 from verse 23:

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

This shows that even after Paul has emphasized over and over again that spiritual gifts must be used for the edification of **the church** (that is, believers in a local congregation), he doesn't forget that the other side of the coin is the preaching of the gospel from the pulpit (implied by his emphasis on one-by-one speaking) to **the unconverted**.

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Romans 10:14)

Even though all disciples are to share the gospel, the activity of preaching is primarily the responsibility of pastors, and they must do all they can to keep that going not only for the flock, but also for the lost. Here's a helpful way of thinking about it: Paul "endured everything for the sake of the elect," as he says in 2 Timothy 2:10. When a pandemic strikes, isn't it strange for us to entirely turn inward towards the 99 and neglect the *elect* one who is yet unreached?

Thank God that a rural church was open during a snowstorm on a random Sunday morning in January 1850, causing a young Charles Spurgeon to stumble upon a lay preacher's sermon – and because of it, the Prince of Preachers came

to be saved. Likewise, let your solid church service be live streamed if only so that it may be found by those who are looking for hope at a time when the charisma of prosperity churches has all but been silenced by COVID.

2. The medium argument

I think the best way to put this point across is to just begin with the Scripture. The Apostle John writes:

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete (2 John 12).

Here, John “the elder” (as he thus identifies himself in the opening of the book, a word which is an exact synonym of *pastor*) is writing “to the elect lady and her children,” which is probably a small house church. Keep in mind that this was his second letter, as the first had been written generally to the churches in Asia Minor. What then am I getting at here? The unmistakable fact stated in his writing is that he’d rather minister to his hearers face to face. And yet, he is writing! If the face-to-face option were available, he would have taken it above all else. But in its absence, he didn’t close that chapter and wait till he could meet them again. Taking the immediate next best option, he used an available *medium*, a letter, while being careful to express why he would still prefer face-to-face. His words didn’t stop him from writing 2 John, again. As if that wasn’t enough, it didn’t it stop him from writing 3 John either, where he says once more in the 14th verse:

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

I dare say that if Paul or John or any other minister of the word had the internet today, they’d be milking it for what it’s worth: the benefit of the global and local church. We have little reason not to, for God’s true children can never get used to being away from each other. On the contrary, the longing only increases, more so as the best available medium is used to edify the church and equip the saints for the work of ministry, whether that’s through a letter or a live streamed sermon.

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face ... (1 Thessalonians 2:17).

3. The in-spirit argument

But does this actually work? Is there any real fellowship, any real worship, to be experienced by members of a congregation when they are far apart? Can a collective singing and reading and preaching experience actually occur, or is any such attempt just a figment of the imagination in each individual's mind? We find in Paul's words a surprisingly fitting precedent:

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

Now this is a difficult passage for some, because most churches have no real membership where such an excommunication meeting would even be imaginable. The context is that Paul, being a spiritual leader and founder of the Corinthian church, wrote to them to deal with various serious issues, including blatant sexual immorality. Here, he recognizes that members of a church must carry out discipline, and thus, being one of them, reassures them that he is amongst them *in spirit* when they come together *as a church* to perform this unenviable task. It's not the Holy Spirit he is referring to, but his own. See? Here before us is one of the highest forms of embodying the local church, a disciplinary physical gathering, and Paul shows us how we can be one in spirit even when apart. Again, this is never meant to be a replacement of meeting physically, but a very real provision that we ought to maximize on when the separation is beyond our control.

4. The historicity argument

A couple of verses cry out for our attention, demanding that together, they be considered of utmost importance under present circumstances.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ... As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-2,5).

We are to learn from faithful men of God who lived in the past. We are to consider the outcome of their entire way of life and imitate their faith. And what is the yardstick that Paul provides to Timothy? That they preach the word, in season and out of season. These men don't just feed their flock of members, they know that their ministry remains unfulfilled unless they faithfully “do the work of an evangelist.” It doesn't get clearer than that. We have for our benefit today countless pastoral letters and prayers and sermons and hymns from church history, necessitated by the toughest of times, from wars, to persecutions, to plagues. Those historic words bear such undeniable potency and gravitas because they were an overflow from the hearts of God's people in the midst of great uncertainty and distress. We therefore have to ask, how will future generations react when they look back at AD 2020? Will they find real sermons preached by real preachers on the Sundays when the lockdown was ongoing, pounding the pulpit against all odds with nothing but a camera lens and tripod where a dozen families used to formerly sit attentively? Or will they call this the COVID-19 Dark Age where entire congregations along with their pastors retreated out of sight and out of mind, abandoning that ever-besieged city set on a hill?

5. The slippery slope argument

It is with good reason that a lot of churches have shied away from live streaming Sunday services. They do not support the “online church” movement that has gained popularity over the past few years, with some churches having multiple “campuses” equipped with massive screens projecting images of the “senior” pastor preaching from the “main” campus. It is noble to denounce such an approach and reiterate that church should happen face-to-face. However, failing to acknowledge special circumstances – within the provisions and boundaries of God's word – can result in a stand that is very much Protestant but not entirely Biblical.

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another (1 Corinthians 4:6).

When we go beyond what is written, we risk unnecessarily drawing our lines deeper and further in the sand when uneasy questions are asked of us. For example: if live streaming makes people used to an unnatural way of experiencing church, why should any church consistently post an archive of recorded sermons online? Isn't it possible for someone to simply choose listening to the previous week's sermon every Sunday instead of going to church? Isn't that inherently enabling an unhealthy experience of church?

These are valid questions, and they need to either be biblically answered, or churches should take down sermon archives, which is entirely unnecessary unless they choose to die on the hill of no live streamed services.

6. The weak brother argument

Even though Covid-19 is new to everyone, data from the first half of the year indicates that its effects are more life-threatening towards senior citizens and those with pre-existing medical conditions, like diabetes. What this means for churches is that even though governments will eventually lift restrictions on gathering, the virus will likely still be in circulation for an unknown period of time. It could be months, it could be years. Is a Christian couple in their sixties expected to simply “be strong” and show up even though they may be wary of contracting the virus? And what about the teenager that suffers from anxiety attacks? Should they just “have faith” and not “neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some?” Are these people unbelieving sinners? No, not necessarily. They're simply weak, as we all are in various seasons. There are those among us who will be physically weak, while others will have inadequacies in spiritual strength. Some, will be both. What are we to do for their sake?

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up (Romans 15:1-2).

I trust it is already apparent that one significantly effective way for an urban church to do so in 2020, is to live stream Sunday services.

7. The stewardship argument

Finally, let's hear what Paul says to Timothy in the 4th chapter of his first recorded letter to the young pastor:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Tim 4:13-16).

This is one of the most beautiful and yet sobering sections of Scripture for pastors. First, Timothy is told to devote himself not just to private teaching and exhortation, but to the *public* reading of Scripture. This is what happens every Lord's Day and during mid-week Bible studies and prayer meetings where the

doors of the church are flung open and all are allowed to come in and listen. Second, the pastor is told to not neglect the gift he was given which enables him to do the things mentioned in the previous verse. The opposite of neglecting a gift is to steward it, and you steward a gift by using it faithfully. Preachers preach. Third, the pastor is instructed to do this in such a way that “all may see your progress.” Has this verse been true of your pastors this year? Has there been progress in exercising their gifts in public and private ministry, and can it be said that this progress has been visible to all?

Lastly, there's the weighty exhortation for the pastor to keep a close watch on himself and on the teaching. “Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” During Covid-19, have the hearers heard anything? Have the actions and decisions of the pastorate been based on teaching that has “no reason to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth?” It is a serious matter altogether, for the very salvation of both the one missing from the pulpit and the other absent from the pew, depends upon it.

In conclusion

2020 has been a difficult year, and the Lord knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. Many of us, whether as individuals or families or churches, have been doing our best to stay afloat in a world turned upside down. The Lord knows, and I empathize.

These 7 points shared above strongly push the conscience towards a more intentional stewardship of the internet as a resource not only for private discipleship and fellowship, but more specifically, for regular public preaching on Sundays. The aim is not to vilify or condemn, but to do my own part as one with the impetus to write, and as a saved sinner who loves the body of Christ and wishes to see our local churches abound in faith and hope and love. I welcome public biblical cross-examination, but more earnestly, I pray that the Holy Spirit will impress upon every shepherd and saint what is the highest and most praiseworthy path to take.

The way is narrow ...

The journey is smoother in single file ...

In the footsteps of the Apostles and the Prophets may we place our own, and may Christ be all and in all.

Amen.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHETHER YOU ARE GROWING IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF A PARTICULAR BIBLICAL TEACHING?

Tonny Karwa

Tonny Karwa is a Pastor with Grace Baptist Church, Kisumu.

There are some teachings that are relatively hard to understand in the Scriptures, but not all (2 Peter 3:16). Indeed, we cannot understand everything in the Scriptures, but we should always aim at growing in our understanding of what it teaches. This of course, requires that, among other things, you invest your time in both quantitatively and qualitatively studying God's word and sitting under sound teaching as you rely on the illumination by the Spirit. The question we are addressing ourselves to is: *How do you know whether you are cumulatively growing in what you have already learnt in God's word?* Let me suggest to you four ways as briefly discussed below.

1. When you are growing in your application of the teaching.

Biblical teachings are meant to be applied in varied but real-life situations. They are neither given in abstraction nor detached from reality. The challenge, however, is that it is not always so easy or obvious to know when to apply a particular teaching. Consider the teaching about God's sovereignty, for example. This is a teaching that most Christians or those who identify themselves with Christianity in any way, shape or form, would generally profess. But wait until a situation presents itself requiring its application, such as some form of disaster or dire need, or when expectations are not met. That is when you will get to understand that things are easier said than done.

Consider Job, for instance. How many would completely abandon themselves to God's hand when calamity strikes and say like Job, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"* (Job 13:15)? That Job understands and believes in God's absolute sovereignty is also earlier seen in his rebuke to his wife: *"You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* (Job 2:10). Was it so easy for Job to utter these words being a man like us? It is interesting to observe that at no point does Job mention Satan as the character behind all his misfortunes although the reader knows that right from the beginning. If we cobble together these pieces of

information, we come to the conclusion that Job believed in God's absolute sovereignty right from the beginning. It is a doctrine he understood even before the tragedy struck and actually applied it at the appropriate time. But did he stop growing in his knowledge of God being sovereign? Not at all. There was still so much for him to learn. From his discourse with the Lord towards the end of the book, he comes to a point where he can spell out God's absolute sovereignty even better. He says, *"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted"* (Job 42:2). His conviction about God's sovereignty grew tremendously because his suffering offered him an opportunity to learn more.

Our understanding of a particular Biblical teaching grows when more opportunities present themselves to us and we take them up. What therefore, you should pray for and be alert to identify are more opportunities where you can apply what you have learnt. That way, you grow in your understanding of that which you have learnt. Look for opportunities to love brethren and your understanding of brotherly love will grow. Look for opportunities to show hospitality to brethren and your understanding of hospitality will grow. This is important because there are intricacies involved in hospitality that are better learnt practically. For instance, when you have welcomed brethren to use your house for a weekly fellowship, you may have learnt what it means to be inconvenienced sometimes, and perhaps, you have grown or are growing in how to deal with it with the balance required.

2. When you are growing in your ability identify counterfeit teachings.

The result of a formidable growth in your grasp of a particular Biblical teaching is a corresponding growth in discernment. As Spurgeon defines it, *"Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right."* This, we must say from the outset, is not an easy task since there are many times when an imitation looks exactly the same as the original at the first glance. For instance, many Kenyans, despite having handled the Kenyan currency notes for a long time, still find themselves being duped with the fake ones. The bank tellers however, because of their constant handling of the original notes, have developed some ability over time to detect the fake ones reliably and quickly. They are able to recognise the features unique to the original notes.

The church has been going through a similar experience in history. For instance, it was not until the deity of Christ was subtly challenged by Arius in the 4th Century that the ecumenical church convened at the Council of Nicaea to clarify

and crystalize her position on the deity of Christ. According to the teaching of Arius, the Son was a ‘created god’, created by, and so lesser in essence than the Father. In Arius’ mind, the Son of God must be a created being that came into existence, hence Arius’ catch-phrase, ‘There was a time when he was not.’ Arius taught that the Son was the first created being, through whom all other things were created, and that, properly speaking, he was not God, but only called ‘god’ because of what he does.² It should be remembered that Arius reached his conclusion by pointing out certain texts of Scripture that he thought were supporting him. It is at this time that the Church reached a deeper understanding of the deity of Christ as enshrined in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God of God,
Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made;
of the same substance as the Father.
Through him all things were made.

The lesson we learn here is that we grow in our understanding of a particular Biblical teaching as we deal with its counterfeit. It is when the truth we assume to know is challenged that we are prompted to trust God more for illumination by His Spirit, study more, pray more, and consult with other Christians more. So, for practical purposes, take any common heresy around you today, say prosperity preaching that is so popular in Kenya, and try to refute it using the Biblical truths you have so far learnt. It could be in form of a simple paper or engaging a proponent of the prosperity preaching who is known to you. You will realise that there are so many things we usually take for granted when learning God’s word. The Church had so many things to deal with in the process of refuting the Arian heresy. In the end, her understanding of the deity of Christ grew. It is important to bear in mind that you cannot defend or contend for a truth you don’t sufficiently understand.

3. When you are increasingly coming to understand that Biblical teachings are related.

Biblical teachings are both intra-related and interrelated. They are intra-related in the sense that they are connected like a river and its tributaries. Constituent doctrines feed into one main doctrine. For instance, in the doctrine of salvation,

² <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2016/arianism/>

we have constituent doctrines such as foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification (Romans 8:29-30). Those who are foreknown are those who are predestined; those predestined are those who are called; those who are called are those who are justified; and those justified are those glorified. This is an unbreakable chain that forms a unit in the end. They are distinct teachings but not independent from each other. You cannot hold that one may be called and yet not be justified and still be consistent. That would shred the intended harmony. This is the reason the church refers to this calling as **effectual calling** since it must necessarily be efficacious to result in justification. Not only are Biblical doctrines intra-related but they are also infrangibly interrelated like a bicycle chain and its sprockets. For instance, the doctrine of Christ forms the sprockets upon which the above unbreakable chain runs. How is this true? The Bible affirms that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (verse 29); we will be glorified with Christ (verse 17); and we are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9); and so on. All these truths related to salvation converge in the Person and Work of Christ. The same can be said of all other doctrines of the Bible. They always have a point of convergence. The question we therefore, need to ask ourselves is, do we see these connections as we continually study God's word? Do we see how these doctrine overlap? Is God's justice opposed to His love? Does human responsibility negate God's sovereignty? Where is the intersection between perseverance of the saints and eternal security? These are questions that are better answered as we grow in God's word because at face value they may seem to contradict each other. But slowly and gradually the contradiction melts away as your mind is divinely illumined.

4. When you are growing in your ability to identify a particular teaching in many other passages where it is implicit.

The moment the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see a particular truth in the Scriptures, you realise that it is a teaching affirmed either limpidly or tacitly in the pages of the Bible. You may even ask yourself: 'How did I not see it in the first place?' It is like picking a mango fruit under a tree only to look up and realise that the tree is actually full of mangoes. The more you go around the tree the more you spot mangoes. Some are hidden while some are easy to spot. This is the case with certain Biblical teachings. For instance, we know from passages like Titus 3:4-6 that for you to be saved God must work supernaturally in your heart. In this passage, this work is referred to as "*the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.*" This truth is affirmed in the account of the conversion of Lydia where it is referred to as "opening of the

heart” (Acts 16:14). However, in the account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer, there is no mention of such a thing. It is hidden like the mango fruits we have mentioned above. We are simply told that he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God (Acts 16:34). Does this therefore mean that the Holy Spirit wasn’t involved in his conversion? By no means! Although the Holy Spirit’s involvement is not explicit in the passage, it is underpinning it. Whether or not a teaching is explicitly mentioned in a passage depends on what the author seeks to emphasize. With increased study of God’s word we are able to see doctrines that aren’t immediately revealed in a particular passage but are implied.

Book Review

Introduction to *Sketches From Church History*, by S. M. Houghton
Published by The Banner of Truth Trust

There are a number of reasons for the decline of interest in Christian history at the popular level during the present century. In this period the teaching of history has generally been dominated by a view which would make faith in divine providence no part of our responsibility. ‘Facts’ without any reference to the hand of God are supposed to be the limits of the historian’s province. So history, thus interpreted, becomes only the subject of the classroom or the lecture hall; it ceases to inspire; the music and the life, which throbs in the way in which the Bible itself teaches history, is gone; the world is all, the soul has disappeared.

... In this present century comparatively few Christian churches have thought it needful that every Christian should know the spiritual history which lies behind the present day. And therein it may be argued, lies no small part of the spiritual weakness and superficiality of contemporary religion. For church history ought to provide a standard of comparison, it ought to raise our vision of God, and it ought to show us, by countless examples, what faithfulness to Christ and His Word truly means. Significantly it was in her eras of declension that the Old Testament Church forgot her history. ‘Not to know what has happened in the past is always to remain a child’, and childish ignorance is no safe state for those who are called to fight against superhuman powers (from the Introduction, October 1980, by Iain H. Murray).

HERE I RAISE MY EBENEZER

Eric Abwao

Eric Abwao, one of the Pastors of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi, answers the question, 'Why study church history?' When you read this we hope you will agree that it is important and that you will begin to read.

If your pastor made an announcement at the start of the adult Sunday school Bible class informing the church that you were going to spend the next one hour learning about church history, would you get your note book and pen with an eagerness to learn? If you knew, in advance, that this would be the topic for the Sunday school hour during the next four weeks, would you show up to church in time? Would you even show up at all for those adult Sunday school Bible classes? Antipathy and at best apathy would describe the general attitude of many towards church history. For the majority of people who call themselves evangelicals, important church history seems to only reach as far back as the oldest member of their congregation.

In my own upbringing I do not remember any emphasis about the importance of church history. Chances are also high that if you were not brought up in a reformed church, then you similarly grew up in a context where church history received very little if any attention. Many people in the church today have no clue about where we presently stand in the continuum of what God has been doing in His church.

You may be asking, 'In our very busy schedules, where would we ever find time for learning about church history?' And even if we had the time, you may be wondering, 'Is it necessary to go through the trouble of trying to learn about the history of the church?' Allow me to try and answer this second question.

Does the idea of spending time to learn about church history have any theological grounding? Is church history a thing that Calvinists do simply because we like to talk about Wycliffe or Huss? Do we talk about them simply as preambles to Luther, Zwingli and Calvin? Even worse, do we look at these beloved historical figures merely as a preface to the Reformation? Is this what church history is all about? A means of transport that brings us to the Reformation doctrine? Is there a Biblical basis for studying church history?

Who are these people who delight in church history?

Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them (Psalm 111:2).

When studying church history you are observing something that reflects and enshrines the supernatural activity of Christ through His Spirit. Stories of triumph, stories of defeat, stories of joy, stories of sorrow in church history are all postcards from the past centuries to us. These snapshots of the past give us fascinating glimpses of a legacy of God's faithfulness to His people.

In Matthew 28:18-20, the Lord reminds us of the extent of His authority, gives the Great Commission and makes this most assuring promise; "and lo, I am with you always" (verse 20a). While the apostles received this beautiful promise, was it only being made to them? What was the duration of this promise? It is hopefully clear to you that the extent of the Great Commission goes beyond the time of the apostles. The very fact that disciples are to be made from 'all the nations' helps us to appreciate that the commission was not exhaustively fulfilled by the apostles. Therefore, this assuring promise that accompanies the command to go out and make disciples of all nations is not just for the apostolic period of church.

The Great Commission remains for the post-apostolic church to complete and so does the promise given with a view to its fulfilment. This promise, "and lo, I am with you always," cannot be restricted to the apostolic period. The concluding words of this promise, "I am with you always, **to the end of the age**" is even further proof that the assurance given by Christ spans the entire church age. The Lord Jesus Christ made the promise to be with His people throughout the church age. A study of church history is therefore an undertaking to observe, reflect on and learn from a period when we are assured of the fact that the Lord is present. *Who are these people who delight in church history?* They are those who love God and His presence wherever it is found and since He has always been with His church, they find it delightful to look at church history.

Further, we know from the Bible that the Lord is not just a silent observer in His church who is present but not active. The Lord also made this promise; "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). In this first mention of the word church, the Lord promises to personally build His church. We may wonder if this promise refers to the building of the church as an age-long process completed only at the end of the gospel age or as one restricted to a building work that was completed during His life on earth or that of His apostles.

Ephesians 2:20 is a helpful interpretive comment on Matthew 16:18. It confirms, with noteworthy present tenses, that the promise made by the Lord to build is for the universal church. The building work is ongoing. It is established on a foundation that is laid on the apostles and prophets. The activities that Paul regards as the building process are not restricted to the initial gospel age.

Again I ask, *who are these people who delight in church history?* They are those who are not only consumed by a love for the presence of Christ wherever it is found, but also by a love for His work in His church. They are those who with the Psalmist would say, “**Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them**” (Psalm 111:2). When we teach or study church history it should be done with sobriety and joy because we are looking at the continuing personal work of Christ. We would be looking at various sign posts erected by those who have gone before us. Signposts that say, ‘Here I raise my Ebenezer.’

May the Lord open our hearts so that we truly learn from church history. In church history you will learn about the faithfulness of Christ. You will also learn about the faithful followers of Christ. You will see the Lord at work for, at work in, and at work through men and women who are like you. In church history you will observe people who are like you (and many times of a lesser earthly advantage than you) growing in their doctrines of Scripture as can be seen in the development of creeds and confessions in the church. You will be challenged and encouraged by men and women of like passions who refused to recant their faith in Christ even when it would cost them their heads.

The most important place to start your growth journey in church history is to be a student of the word of God. For the history of God’s work among and for His people is, within the text of Scripture, recorded for us. “**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope**” (Romans 15:4).

The next time your pastor announces that the adult Sunday school hour will be spent looking at church history, I hope that you will not be among those who mentally make a dash for the fire exit. I hope you will look forward to a moment of study where you will relish postcards that testify of the fact that God has been Ebenezer to those who have gone ahead of you – with the impact that you will grow in your assurance of hope.

[Editor’s note. You could begin your study by reading S. M. Houghton, *Sketches From Church History*. See page 54.]

I was born and baptized into a Catholic family where we attended mass every Sunday. I went to a Catholic primary school and in high school I was an active member of the Catholic action (CA). It was during this period while in high school I began to watch videos on the internet that called into question my Catholic faith. Some of these questions included the history of the Catholic Church in the inquisition and persecution of Christians and the position the church gave to Mary our Lord's mother.

Gradually in school I stopped attending the Catholic Action regularly and I also began attending the Christian Union. It was at this time that I started to look at other Christian channels on the television stations. I then happened to come across the charismatics. I listened to them and heard the prosperity gospel and I was interested in it for a while. I even said the 'sinner's prayer' many times to invite Christ into my heart in order to get saved. But my lifestyle never changed. I still was a liar, I stole, I was dishonest, I committed immorality and I dishonoured my parents. These things that I did were like second nature to me and this was coupled with the influence of my sinful friends.

At the back of my mind I knew true change was impossible because even after saying the sinner's prayer many times and committing myself to a changed lifestyle I would still revert after a short period unrepentantly back to the old self. I longed for God, but I looked for him in the wrong places. I then went to university, and even when I went to our Catholic Church the sense of hopelessness and skepticism still followed me for a while. I hopped from one charismatic church to another and, as always, I would end up more and more disappointed.

For me this reality was becoming more and more overwhelming and after a while I decided to stop attending these church services all together. I remember at one point even confessing to a friend about how angry I felt at God for putting us here and leaving us clueless with a sense of no direction. To put it simply, in my pride and self-righteousness I personally felt that God had abandoned us and I was angry about that.

Shortly after that as I was going through YouTube, I came across a message by John Piper and I decided to listen to it. I quickly thought to myself how this was a different kind of preaching and to me it was like discovering some new hidden treasure. I had heard the word of God presented differently and I really enjoyed listening to it to a point where I could not get enough of this type of

preaching. It was like I was a thirsty man on a desert who had found water to drink.

I noticed back then that these people that I has started listen to have the word Baptist in their church. Later on, when I wanted to find a similar church that preached the Gospel, I did a Google search on Baptist churches in Nairobi where a list was brought forward. I was resolute to exclude any church I find that has any connection to a prosperity gospel. While looking at the Twitter page of Trinity Baptist Church I saw that they followed John Piper of Desiring God. I decided in early 2018 to go there and have a look and I found a church where the gospel was preached.

I started attending church at TBC and I would periodically come and every time I came, I felt welcomed. All this time, even in my sin and rebellion God brought me to Himself and he showed me the true condition of my wretched depraved heart.

For most of my life I thought being a good person would make you acceptable before God Almighty. I thought that you can be good by your own efforts, until I truly understood Isaiah 64:6, where God states that we are all unclean and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags to Him. After realizing that I was such a great sinner who was in a hopeless condition I put my faith in Jesus Christ because he says if we come to him, he will not cast us away. For he is a gracious Saviour who saves by his grace and not by our works. God showed me the great need I had for a Saviour like Christ. God removed from me my heart of stone and gave me a new heart of flesh that trembles at his Word. God's Spirit was at work in my heart. He gave me a new heart with new desires. I feared God. I did not desire to continue in my sinfulness. I desired to love God with all my heart and soul and strength. I desired to please God. I desired to obey God.

I offended God and Jesus Christ paid for my sin in my place by dying on the cross. Christ offers his free gift of salvation to anyone that comes to Him and repents and puts their trust in Him. For everyone who is lost, Christ is the way. For those who are darkened Christ is the Light of the world. If we can learn anything it is that God has been faithful even while I have not, for 'Great is Thy faithfulness O Lord my Father'. In Christ I discovered untold joy and peace in him and his eternal word.

Joining TBC for me was necessary because the gospel of our Lord is preached and the Bible is expositied there. The word of God is held in high esteem at the church and Jesus Christ is highly exalted and sin is exposed for what it is. TBC also teaches reformed doctrines and as a member you can learn many new things. As a church you will find great fellowship with your fellow brothers

and sisters in Christ who will help you in growing your faith and your spiritual growth and walk with Christ.

For now, we cannot meet as a church and fellowship together because the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the whole world. This pandemic has affected us as a church because of the health measures that the government has instituted. For new members this has affected them because there is a great need for baptism into the faith. We thank God for the technology which has allowed us still to hear the word of God in our homes preached virtually and helps us to grow in our knowledge and faith and to fellowship virtually. We hope and pray that the restrictions can be lifted for us to meet once again and fellowship together as a church.

As you have read Joe's testimony, let us go back to the Bible and ask, 'What does a Biblical testimony of conversion look like?' How can you know if your testimony is genuine?

A good basis is the testimony of Paul as written in 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Note the following emphases:

- My sinfulness (verse 13). Paul has nothing good to say about himself. He is the foremost sinner. Even that which he once counted as an advantage he came to view as rubbish (Philippians 3:3-8).
- God's mercy and grace (verses 13-14). The only reason he could account for his conversion was God's mercy and grace towards him.
- Salvation in Christ Jesus (verse 15). God has accomplished this salvation in the coming of Christ Jesus into the world.
- Glory to God (verse 17). Therefore, to God alone belongs all the glory!

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