

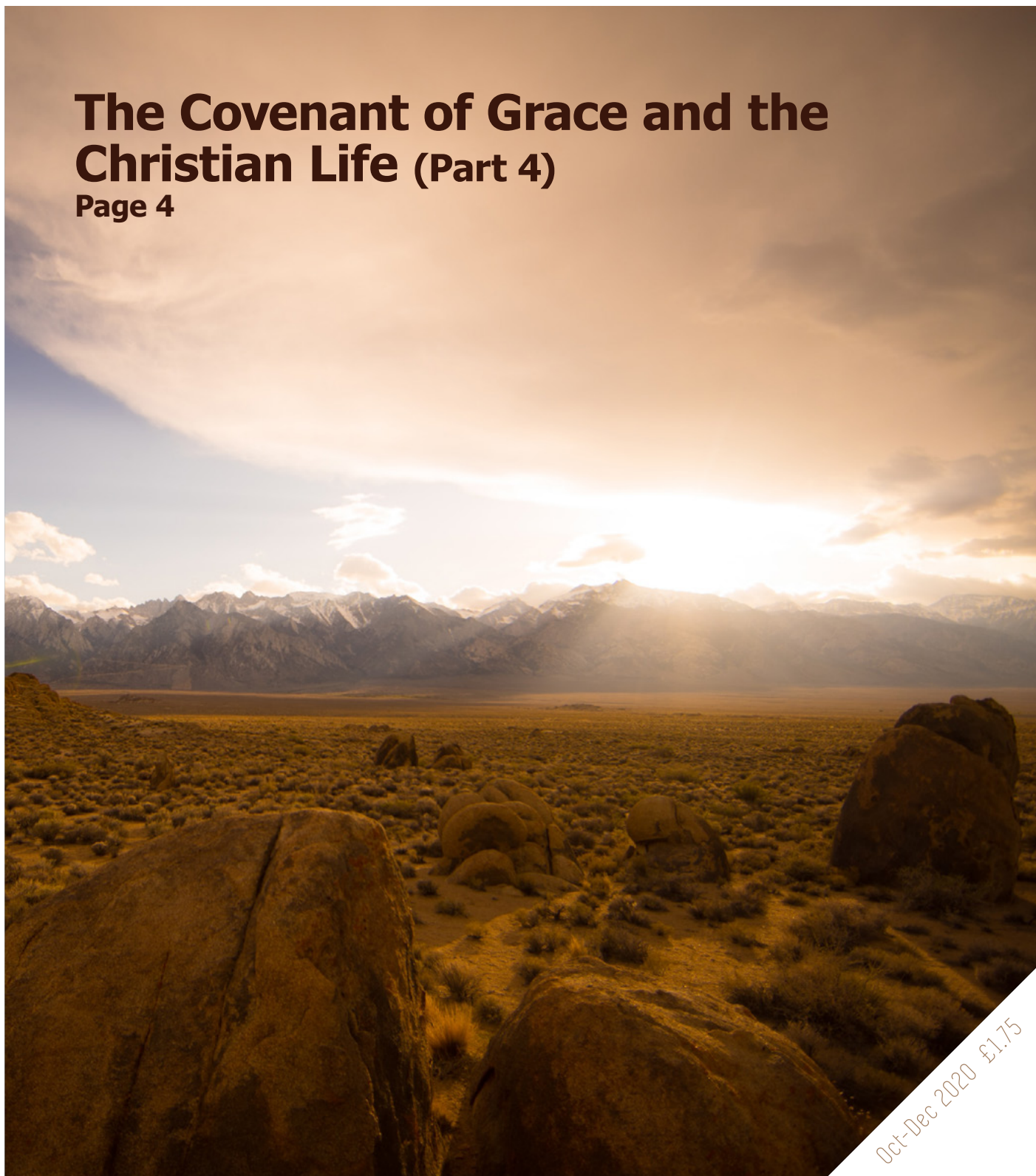
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE

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Philippians 1 v 9-11

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Philippians 1:9-11



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FIRST WORD

On the west coast of Scotland, looking across to the island of Jura, there is a beautiful, isolated beach. The beach is flanked on one side by a rocky outcrop. If you climb over these rocks and scramble down the other side until you almost reach the water, you find a small ledge where you can sit comfortably and look out to sea in peaceful solitude. I know this because when I was a child this is the part of Scotland to which we would travel each year for our summer holiday. Each time we went there I would head to that beach, scramble over the rocks, and enjoy sitting on the ledge absorbing the breathtaking scenery. That ledge is one of my favourite places in the world!

This summer, for the first time in many years, I went back to that same part of Scotland, taking my own family with me. On our last night there we went to that beach, and (after toasting marshmallows on a fire!) climbed over the rocks and sat together on that ledge, looking out to sea and to the islands beyond. As I sat there, what struck me was that even though many years had passed by, and though I have changed so much in the intervening time, this beautiful resting place was exactly the same as it had ever been.

The opening words of Psalm 90 came to mind. In this psalm, Moses contemplates how transient and fleeting our life here on earth is: "like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers." (v5b-6)

Yet, the psalm begins by showing us how different to us God is in this regard. Whilst we flourish and then fade, God is eternal and unchanging. Even before the mountains were brought forth, and before the earth was created, from everlasting to everlasting he is God (v2). It is because God is eternal and unchanging that he will forever be a dwelling place for his people, in all generations (v1).

Those in Christ know this to be true for themselves. When we come to Christ, we come to one who never changes and is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and one in whom we find a beautiful place of rest for our souls (Matthew 11:29).

**Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.**

**Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

(Psalm 90:1-2)



The Covenant of Grace and the Christian Life (Part 4)

This series has attempted to explain the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace by outlining the biblical teaching concerning God’s plan of salvation to rescue his people through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, and by indicating ways in which the covenant of grace forms the context of our life with God, namely as we participate in the church. This last part explores one more dimension of our experience of the covenant of grace, specifically the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Reformed Christians can be uncomfortable about speaking of the sacraments as having a high value, but that should not be. The fear is that we sound Roman Catholic, since the Roman communion believes that the sacraments truly work by performing the ritual. We should not let fear of Romanism steal our joy in what the Scripture teaches us about the sacraments’ usefulness in our lives though. The Christian life cannot be reduced to a mere empty observance of ritual, but Christ himself did appoint rites for his church, and we need to trust him that they are for our good.

Before linking the sacraments to the covenant of grace, we need to note that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are part

of “the ordinary means of grace.” The Westminster Shorter Catechism 88 highlights how Christ uses outward means to convey the blessings of salvation:

“The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all of which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”

In questions 29–36, the Catechism outlined that the benefits of redemption are effectual calling, justification, adoption, and sanctification. In questions 85–87, it affirmed that faith in Christ is necessary to receive these benefits, that we must repent, but also that we make “diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption” (question 85). So, the Reformed believe that a heart level response to the gospel is required, but use of outward means is also required.

Sometimes we prefer to neglect outward means because we like to prioritize the experiential dimensions of faith. This preference, however, is exactly why it is so important to recover a proper emphasis on the sacraments. Evangelicals like to describe our life of faith as “relationship not religion.”



ice cream, but we receive that substance as administered in either cone or cup. In the covenant of grace, the substance is always that God will be God to us because of Christ, but the administration changes. In the past, God administered the covenant through the types and shadows of circumcision, Passover, and Israel's ceremonies. Now, God grants the substance through the Word, sacrament, and prayer, but the sacraments contain our experience of life in the church so that we properly understand the Word and prayer.

In this regard, Hebrews 6:1–8, helps us see that sacramental structure of life in the covenant of grace.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits. 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. (New King James Version)

This passage is not about falling away from true salvation, but about how the sacraments in part facilitate life within

the church as blessings that produce good spiritual fruit in the lives of the elect.

This section first exhorts Christians to doctrinal maturity beyond the basic principles of the faith, which included teaching about "baptisms."

The context then already concerns knowledge about these rites. In verses 4–5, the author outlined blessings that people within the church receive. The first is "being

enlightened," which is not the actual renewal of our minds, but, as the ancient church understood, a reference to Christian baptism. Verse 2 has already noted baptism, and, although baptism does not in itself bring us to new life, it

The intention to affirm that our faith is more than empty practices is good, but there is another dimension to our faith: we are sinners prone to wander. Isaiah was speaking of God's people when he wrote, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way." (Is. 53:6). In our relationship with God, we like to run away. It may sound nice to emphasize the experiential aspect of our relationship with God, but we are terrible at upholding our end of the relationship. Since we are sheep, just like a shepherd uses his crook as the means to take back hold of his sheep, so too God uses the ordinary means of grace to take back hold of us. The Word and prayer are so fundamentally important, but in the end, the sacraments are actually the most tangible hooks with which he can grab us.

Part 3 argued that we must participate in the covenant of grace by participating in the church, but the Scripture also testifies that the sacraments contribute to how we do that. So, we thought before about a trip to the ice cream shop, where the substance is always

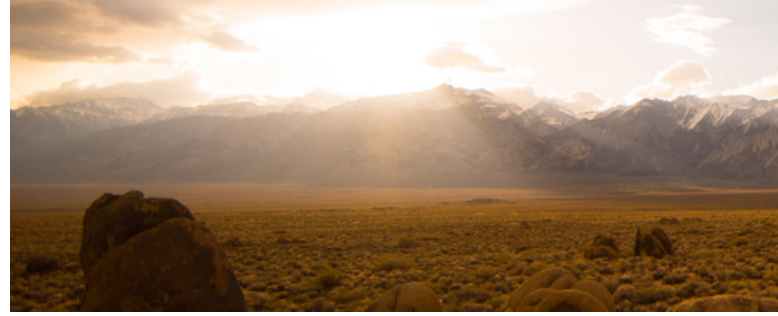
Since we are sheep, just like a shepherd uses his crook as the means to take back hold of his sheep, so too God uses the ordinary means of grace to take back hold of us

does symbolize that reality of being enlightened when God effectually calls us (2 Cor. 4:6). The blessings received in the church also include “tasting the heavenly gift,” which refers to eating the Lord’s Supper. Being a “partaker of the Holy Spirit” does not indicate a sure personal indwelling, but simply sharing blessings that come from him, which happens to everyone in the church. They encounter the Holy Spirit in the church, even if they reject him. The last blessing is receiving the Word of God, as everyone who hears preaching does. This preaching is God’s means to call unbelievers to faith, which is the power of the age to come, which is visible to even those who are not themselves called.

In verses 7–8, the author illustrates his point, which depicts life in the covenant of grace. He described the land (the church) receiving rain (all the blessings of being in the church). Now, this rain – blessings of church participation – falls on everyone, but in some people this rain brings forth useful crops and in others it grows thorns and thistles. God uses the rain – the Word, the sacraments, and fellowship in the church – as the means which actually bring some people to faithful fruition. God stands behind the effect, but nonetheless uses these outward means. Those who are not elect still receive outward blessings, but grow into worthless crops not trusting in Christ. The point for our discussion is that God uses the sacraments to fence his covenant community and to bring people to true faithfulness.

So, regarding relationship vs. religion, we must remember that we are not good at the relationship, even though God is faithful. He has given us the structures of religion whereby he works in us to develop us in our relationship with him. Relationship and religion then are not opposed, but go together. If we prioritize only the experiential life of faith, then when we do not “feel it,” we let ourselves wander. But God ordained the sacraments as means to take hold of us even when we do not feel it. We need to participate in outward means precisely because God can work in us through those things when we are unable to stoke the flames of our experience. He appointed sacraments as the way in which we live within his covenant community, so we should trust him that he knows best what we need and how we are to live with him.

Baptism is the sacrament of entry into the covenant community. It does not itself guarantee that we partake



of the blessings of renewal in Christ, but it does promise those blessings to all who trust Christ by faith. The Shorter Catechism 94 says,

Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s.

Scripture does speak about baptism being the tool that brings us “into Christ.” Romans 6:3–4 says,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Baptism does not automatically regenerate someone, as in the Roman view. Still, Hebrews depicted baptism as part of the outward structure of our life in the covenant that God uses to make us into fruitful crops, but not everyone who receives it will become so. In Romans, God uses baptism to join us to Christ through God’s community. Just as Abraham received circumcision as the sign and seal of his faith after he believed (Rom. 4:11), but circumcised both Isaac and Ishmael before they believed, so also baptism is to be given to those who come to faith from outside

the covenant community, but also to their children. God has always marked the children of his people with the sign of the covenant, which is the way that he effectively designates them as heirs of the promise that he will be a God to us and our children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39).

Paul wrote again about how we are joined to Christ’s death through our baptism. In Colossians 2:11–12, he referred to Christ’s crucifixion as his circumcision, which tied that Old Testament sacrament to the reality it symbolized of needing someone to be cut off from God in our place.

***The point for our discussion
is that God uses the
sacraments to fence his
covenant community and
to bring people to true
faithfulness***



These verses say,

In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Notice that we are circumcised in the sense of getting a new heart (Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:25–29) by “having been buried with him in baptism.” We again need not fear bare ceremonialism, since the Westminster Confession 28.6 explains,

The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time.

God genuinely uses baptism to convey blessings of new life to those who are elect, but does not have to use it at the time it is applied. This may be a mystery, but we affirm God’s sovereignty in drawing his elect to faith and the necessity of faith for salvation, and we agree with the Scripture that God uses baptism as a means to this end.

The Lord’s Supper is the sacrament that seals nourishment and continuation in the covenant, rather than birth and initiation. God uses it to convey Christ to us. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:16, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” God grants Christ to us in the Supper, but not by magically transforming the bread and wine physically into Christ’s body and blood. The Westminster Confession 29.7 explains that worthy receivers of the Supper “really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death” since Christ’s body and blood are “really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.” God does truly offer Christ to us in the Supper to be received by faith.

In these ways, God structures our covenant relationship with him through the church by the sacraments. He binds us to him and makes promises to us in baptism, but also binds us to one another. Baptism makes us accountable to the community of faith that we would come to profess faith, but also that we walk worthily of the God who calls us (Eph. 4:1). God uses the Supper to strengthen our souls as food nourishes the body, even or especially when we are weak and struggling. It is not a mere remembrance that we make of God, but is a meal that God uses to feed us. It is also the means to frame our life in the covenant of grace, since our credible profession of faith grants us access to the Supper, but our continued and unrepentant undermining of that profession will prompt church discipline, which removes our right to partake of this meal with the communion of saints.

God has always promised saving grace, but he has done so through Christ in the covenant of grace. Christ has always been the substance of the covenant, and the reason for salvation. We receive him not by works, but by faith. Still, God has not left us with an abstract experience of our salvation. He puts us in the church, so that we might meet Christ in the preached Word and in relationships with other believers. God has made that life in the church as the covenant community concrete in the sacraments as the means by which he seals our new birth and our nourishment in Christ. God has met our ultimate spiritual needs in providing us with the unsurpassable Saviour, Jesus Christ, but he has also met us as creatures who exist in bodies, promising us in baptism that he cleanses us and promising us at his table that he feeds us.



Harrison Perkins serves as assistant minister at London City Presbyterian Church, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland. He and his wife Sarah are from Alabama, but the Lord moved them to the UK in 2016. While doing further studies at Queen’s University Belfast, Harrison served at a church in Northern Ireland, which quickly became and remains ‘home’ to him and Sarah, before taking the call in London in late 2018.



Preaching the Song of Solomon (Part 4)

In my first three articles I have already outlined my overall approach taken in this wonderful portion of God's word. Also, I have given some exposition and application of the first chapters, showing a little about the many interwoven and repeating themes.

It is of course fundamentally a love song, the greatest of all songs—the Song of songs — the greatest story ever told - the Love of the Shepherd King for his rather unlikely Shulamite (6:13) bride who often still seems rather prone to wander. The story in the Song also never really seems to end — there is no real progression towards any conclusion or indeed any final consummation of an actual wedding. We continue, however, to see various advances and withdrawals, the ups and downs

of a loving relationship - but there is also never any doubt about the very high esteem that both parties hold for each other throughout. The bride can hardly find enough superlatives to describe her Lord, and the Lord, the bridegroom, is only ever full of praise and delight for his love, his bride.

But I want to deal with the rather surprising final chapter, which as I have indicated, is no finale. There is simply no conclusion and we are left rather bemused at the end of the song as to what happens. The song seems to finish in mid-air, and that is perhaps because the song is only a portion of God's word and not the whole, it only therefore describes for us a part of the story which is woven throughout the whole of scripture — about the Sovereign Lord who

has from the counsels of eternity past chosen for himself a bride, and of his purposes and plan to come to find her and to fetch her and bring her into his eternal home, commencing with the Lamb's wedding feast (Revelation 19:7-9).

So, the Song picks up on the joys and wonders of such a love - but set prior to the wedding feast, and without giving us any details of the origins and mechanisms (i.e. the cross) of that love or indeed its fulfilment. The other parts of Holy Scripture will fill in those details for us.

So, don't expect too much from Song of Solomon chapter 8 - there are no resolutions or clarifications, but there continue to be wonderful phrases and word pictures about



Christ's love for his Church as we have seen throughout the Song. However, it is important to remember that although the wedding ceremony proper has not yet happened, there would already have been a formal betrothal - which is a more exalted commitment than our rather more dilute engagement arrangement is. This, of course, was also the same situation that Joseph and the virgin Mary found themselves in before they had made their way to Bethlehem. So, apart from a very serious crisis, such as when Mary was found to be pregnant and Joseph inwardly and secretly had decided to break off the betrothal, until the Angel explained what had actually happened — then that period of betrothal, although legally binding,

was merely preparatory and temporary. Full union and close intimacy was not permitted until the one flesh experience of the consummation of the wedding night.

There is still, however, even in betrothal, a very close and developing relationship of commitment and love — but it's not yet complete - it is still "separate rooms" —they do not live together yet - but they still sought to be together as much as possible. So as one modern preacher rightly comments— this accurately represents the present age of the Church before the second coming of Christ. He has already come to redeem us and we are already his people and married to him in the sense

of betrothal, but still awaiting his glorious return and the great wedding supper of the Lamb, when all the Church, the gathered elect, will be finally and fully present and faith shall be turned to sight and there will then be a much fuller and closer and completed communion with Christ that will never ever end.

So, our position is like the Shulamite here in the Song - we are betrothed, but we long for our marriage day. In verse 1 of chapter 8 the bride shows this longing for the fuller and completed physical demonstration of love to her husband-to-be. But that could not yet happen, she still had to wait - but the longing is there - so she cries out, "I wish you were as my brother", because then I could at least be permitted to show you my affection by means of a kiss, and that would then be regarded as acceptable and not inappropriate and premature - as it still is, by the way, in many traditional cultures. But no, she can't do that, for she is not yet married to him, so she must restrain herself and control herself and be patient.

The bride then continues to ponder on that full and final marriage experience in verses 2&3 of chapter 8. It is always appropriate for us to consider the heavenly joys that await us, the church of Jesus Christ — we should surely contemplate heaven much more! A longing for heaven's communion with the Saviour.

For the final time in the Song the bride now repeats the refrain

to the daughters of Jerusalem in verse 4 not to disturb these pleasant anticipations of full and final communion with her beloved. It's as though she is dreaming, in bliss with her husband-to-be - she doesn't want the dream to be over — do not awaken it - do not let it go.

Christ must not be disturbed so as to withdraw and leave us again, even if it be temporarily—such as happens when there is a quenching of the Spirit, or a grieving of the Spirit by sin — how easy to lose that closeness and spiritual nearness to the Lord. Such disturbances may occur by the spiritually immature in a church, or by the nominal adherents in a church — these are not so much enemies, but nor are they formally one with the bride yet either. They can easily disturb the life of the church.

They then call out their question, just as they had done back in chapter 3 verse 6. Here in verse 5 of chapter 8 they see the arrival of the royal chariot on the horizon and unlike chapter 3 when the details about the chariot are given, here it is the occupants that are in view. Who is this woman? Who is this bride-to-be? She is obviously on a journey; she is coming from somewhere and heading towards somewhere—and that's the testimony for every Christian. We have come from somewhere and we are headed somewhere, and we are a bit further on that journey each week. We have all come up out of the wilderness (of this world) and we

are headed upwards - "up from the wilderness" - and notice the picture of the royal betrothal chariot where she is "leaning upon the beloved" - a lovely picture. That is the Christian's and the Church's posture as we journey through the wilderness upwards to the wedding feast in glory. So back to their question—who is this? Who is this fortunate bride, to have such a beloved to lean upon and to journey beside? In the rest of verse 5 the question is answered - I believe it is the Lord himself who answers here as he describes how his bride has been raised up and nurtured.

Then we move onto prayer requests (about Christ's love) - prayers from the bride together with her reasons in verse 6 & 7 - as well as her great concern for her so-called little sister in verse 8. These are perhaps the lost sheep who have not yet been gathered into the fold. As Jesus said, "Other sheep I have... and I must bring them in too." (John 10:16). Here is a plea for evangelism just before the finale! And then in verses 11 & 12 it's about the Church herself — Solomon's vineyard! We have had so many metaphors which keep on flashing back and forth in these chapters in a kaleidoscope of ideas.

From gardens to walls to towers to vineyards to orchards — all speaking of aspects of the Church and its Saviour.

The last 2 verses (13,14) are the farewells from each of the main characters of the song.

We have all come up out of the wilderness (of this world) and we are headed upwards - "up from the wilderness" - and notice the picture of the royal betrothal chariot where she is "leaning upon the beloved" - a lovely picture.

Verse 13 is the farewell of the bridegroom and verse 14 is the bride's farewell. The Lord in his farewell, simply charges his bride, the Church, to let him hear her voice. There appears to be some sort of parting going on as at any

farewell, but there is also an assurance of future and ongoing communications. A similar picture may be found at the Lord's ascension with the temporary separation, but assurance of ongoing non-physical presence and ultimate return - so the Lord had issued instructions not just to go out into all the world to evangelise, but especially that they would pray, asking things in his name (John 14:13). He expected to hear from us often and repeatedly. The gardens are where the church continues to be found and the Lord requires to hear us — in praise and song and in prayer. He desires to hear our responses!

The final verse is then the Bride's farewell - and again the note struck is one of expectation of

meeting again soon. Once again, this fits with the gospel age where the expectation of future and permanent union is the hope of the Church— ever since the ascension. But how long will it be? Well the bride doesn't know — no-one knows that final day of the Lord's return. But the longing and eager expectation are not in doubt here. So, it is all about asking the beloved to make haste - even so come Lord Jesus — maranatha. Where do we look for him to come from? The mountain of spices —that sweet smelling place of glory. And how shall he come? Swiftly and suddenly - like a roe or gazelle.

Conclusions:

Our evening congregation has wound its way through this glorious Song over many weeks, and we have found certain hymns of the past wonderfully captured the mood of experiential love and delight that flowed in these scriptures. So, we often found ourselves singing (repeating many times) hymns such as Nearer still nearer, Loved with everlasting love, I am his and he is mine, William Featherstone's My Jesus I love Thee, or even George Matheson's Love that will not let me go.

I would 'love' to preach through the Song again, as I don't think I really grasped the magnificence of it or the immense number of doctrinal subjects contained within it.

However, twice would, I believe, be quite taxing on any congregation,

so I am resigned to only occasional forays into the book from now on. Nevertheless, I do encourage others to preach it, all of it, and not in too large chunks or too quickly either!

As I said in part 1, there may be subsidiary and minor applications for people's romances and marriages, but by far and away the dominating and glorious theme of the Song of Solomon is what dominates the whole Bible: Christ's love for his Church. This is the Song of Songs!



Neil Beatson. After over 25 years of pastoral ministry in Africa (mainly South Africa, but also a few years in Tanzania) Neil and his wife returned to Ireland 5 years ago. After a couple of years of medical locum work in the South of Ireland, Neil became the minister of Erne West Evangelical church two and a half years ago. Last year, Erne West Evangelical Church was incorporated into the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.



Good Warfare and Bad Shipwrecks (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

(Part 3 of series)

As we turn to the next few verses in 1 Timothy chapter 1, let us remind ourselves of the context in which this pastoral letter was written. Timothy has been left in the city of Ephesus by the apostle Paul because the church there has been rocked by the emergence of some false teachers from within their own ranks. These people are teaching different doctrines, and they are seeking to drag people away from the real gospel. It is Timothy's job to stay in Ephesus and lead the church through this time of crisis. He is to refute false doctrine, and he is to teach sound doctrine. This letter was sent by Paul in order to help Timothy in this difficult task set before him – but the short section we are looking at in this article especially instructs Timothy in what he needs to do.

1) The “good warfare” of gospel ministry

Make no mistake, gospel ministry is a kind of warfare. It is spiritual warfare, but it is warfare nonetheless. It is brutal. It is messy. There are casualties along the way. There are victories to rejoice in, but there are also setbacks to absorb and recover from. The enemy we

are fighting against does not play by the rules, and the enemy is ferocious.

This is Paul's letter to the minister in Ephesus, but remember how in his letter to the congregation in Ephesus he also used this imagery of warfare. He said, “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:11-12). Make no mistake, the Christian life is warfare, and in many ways gospel ministry is the front line of that warfare.

Consider this: what kind of person would you choose to put right on the front line in this ‘good warfare’ of gospel ministry? You would probably choose someone who is naturally confident and bold. A strong, fearless personality. That's the kind of person you would choose to put on the front line, isn't it? But, remember what kind of person Timothy is. We know from what Paul says elsewhere that Timothy is still relatively young, he's very timid by nature, and he doesn't enjoy the

greatest of health. If he was to apply to serve in a military army, he wouldn't get past the first interview! He's not naturally cut out for a life of warfare. And yet, of all people he has been placed on the front line in Ephesus, and he has been told to stay there and wage the good warfare against the enemy.

You can imagine how daunted Timothy must feel about this. Couldn't they have found someone better for this job? That's why Paul gives Timothy such encouragement here in these verses:

a) Remember your call!

Paul wants Timothy to understand that it wasn't just by accident that Timothy ended up in Ephesus, leading the church there. He didn't just drift into the job of being the minister in Ephesus even though he clearly wasn't the right man for the job. No, Timothy was very clearly called to the work of gospel ministry in Ephesus. In fact, he was called in two different ways. On the one hand he was called through Paul's charge to him.

i) Paul's charge

That's what Paul says right at the start of verse 18. "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child..."

This charge came straight from the apostle Paul. Despite Timothy's relative youth and natural timidity, Paul was convinced that this is the man whom God would have there in Ephesus, leading the church as they wage the good warfare through these difficult days.

But there was more to Timothy's call than just Paul's charge. As well as that, there were certain prophecies that had been made about him.

ii) The prophecies

That's where Paul turns next: "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you."

So, Paul's charge to Timothy lined up with certain prophecies that had already been made about Timothy. So, Timothy had received two very clear calls to the ministry. Paul's charge, and the prophecies.

Now, what were these prophecies? We don't know specifically what they said, but almost certainly they were the prophecies that were given when Timothy

was commissioned, or ordained, to the ministry. You might want to take a glance at chapter 4, and verse 14 where Paul again mentions these prophecies. He says to Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."

Paul is saying to Timothy here, "remember your call! Yes, the good warfare of gospel ministry may daunt you greatly, but you're not in it by accident. You were clearly called to it – both by prophecy and by my charge to you."

As Timothy remembers that twofold call, both Paul's charge and the prophecies given to him, that will be of great encouragement and great guidance to him as he engages in the warfare of gospel ministry. Remember your call!

b) Remain faithful

That's where Paul turns at the start of verse 19. And, again, there are two parts to this encouragement. The first is holding faith.

i) Holding faith

By this Paul means, Timothy must ensure that he remains faithful in what he believes, and what he teaches as the minister there. He must adhere to sound doctrine. That's always true, but it was particularly necessary in the context of Ephesus and what was going on at that time. False teachers had arisen in the church and had started teaching different, false doctrines. Timothy must make sure that he doesn't drift into the same errors. If he is going to wage the good warfare, he must remain faithful in what he himself believes and what he teaches to the church.

As well as this, Timothy must maintain a good conscience.

ii) A good conscience

If "holding the faith" refers to what Timothy believes, a good conscience refers to how Timothy behaves. The faith which he professes must show itself in a life of godliness. It would be worse than useless if Timothy was doctrinally sound and yet lived a life of lax morals. The 19th century Scottish minister Robert Murray McCheyne once famously said, "The greatest need of

my people is my personal holiness." I'm sure that Paul would nod in agreement. A gospel minister must have a good conscience if he is to wage the good warfare. So, you see that there are these two parts to remaining faithful, Paul says. Faithfulness in what you believe, and faithfulness in how you behave. Let me encourage you to make these things a matter for prayer. Pray this for your minister, and pray it for yourself, and pray it for your church family. If we continue in these things, we will wage the 'good warfare' of gospel ministry.

2) The "shipwreck" of leaving the faith

So far, Paul has been using the picture of warfare to describe faithful gospel ministry. But what about those who desert faithful gospel ministry? The picture that Paul uses for this is a shipwreck.

About 11 miles off the coastline of County Cork lies the shipwreck of the RMS Lusitania. As you may know, the Lusitania was an ocean liner which made a total of 202 trans-Atlantic crossings. But during the First World War, on the 7th May 1915, it was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat. 1,191 people lost their lives as a result. It is this horrific picture of a devastating shipwreck that Paul chooses to describe what it is like when someone leaves the Christian faith.

The nature of a shipwreck is that, in most cases, you don't realise there is anything wrong until it is far too late. Perhaps you have subtly drifted off course, into dangerous waters. Maybe there are some rocks submerged under the water that you didn't realise were there.

Maybe there is a U-boat lurking, about to fire a torpedo at you. You are coasting along, blissfully unaware of these dangers, and then it is too late, and you have drifted into a disaster, a shipwreck, with devastating consequences.

Paul mentions two people from the church in Ephesus who have experienced this kind of shipwreck of their faith. He mentions Hymenaeus and Alexander. We don't really know who Alexander

is – it was an extremely common name in those days, and so it is hard to say for sure who he is. But we know a bit more about Hymenaeus. Paul mentions him again in

2 Timothy. He says to Timothy there, "avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened" (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

Hymenaeus was a false teacher, who at one time belonged to the church in Ephesus, but who started teaching different doctrines, false doctrines, in particular to do with the resurrection of Christian believers. Now, the bible tells us that this general resurrection will happen when Jesus returns, but for some strange reason, Hymenaeus was claiming that this resurrection had already happened. He was wrong on two counts – both in terms of the timing and the nature of the resurrection. The bible teaches that this resurrection is future and physical, but Hymenaeus was teaching that it is present and merely spiritual. We can assume that Alexander was probably teaching similar things as well.

How had they drifted into this false teaching, which resulted in the shipwreck of their faith? What had caused this drift in Hymenaeus and Alexander? Paul says, "By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith." So, the question is, what does the word "this" refer to? What had they rejected which led them towards this shipwreck? The previous sentence tells us that they have rejected a good conscience.

Our conscience is our inherent, God-given guide to what is right. Hymenaeus and Alexander had rejected

this. They ignored what their conscience said. They allowed sinful thoughts and behaviours to have room in their lives, and it resulted in them leaving the true gospel, and getting mixed up in these false doctrines. John Calvin summed it up well when he said, "A bad conscience is the mother of all heresies."

Sadly, it is a tragedy we see all too often, this kind of shipwreck. Maybe even a well-known and highly respected preacher adjusts their stance on a key moral issue.

They depart from the biblical teaching on that matter, and the drift starts. Give it a year or two and you see that they are teaching all sorts of nonsense, and have

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perhaps denied the Christian faith altogether. They have made a shipwreck of their faith.

It doesn't just happen with preachers; it happens with all kinds of Christians. They know what the bible says about this matter or that matter, but they ignore their conscience and they make a compromise in their life, in their beliefs and in their behaviours. The drift begins, and you look at that Christian two years later, and they have made a shipwreck of their faith.

It is well worth asking ourselves honestly, "do I see that kind of drift taking place in my Christian life? Am I ignoring what my conscience tells me about what is right and wrong? Am I allowing things to drift slowly off course in my Christian life? Am I getting lax with church attendance? Am I neglecting the spiritual disciplines of bible reading and prayer? Am I ignoring my need for fellowship with other Christians? Am I walking in disobedience on some matter of ethics? Am I lowering my standards in terms of sexual purity? Am I watering down difficult doctrines?"

Paul warns us here: by neglecting these matters, some have made shipwreck of their faith. If you see that kind of drift even beginning in your Christian life, cry out that by his grace God would bring you back, and save you from making a shipwreck of your faith.

Don Carson writes, "People do not drift toward holiness. We slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism. We slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."

How is this mess going to be dealt with in the church in Ephesus? That brings us to the third and final thing to notice in these verses, and that is the severe grace of church discipline.

3) The "severe grace" of church discipline

Look at what Paul says next – it is quite shocking! "By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan..." Paul is talking here about church discipline –

and particularly the sharp end of it, which is excommunication. Excommunication is what happens when a church member persists in beliefs or behaviours which are incompatible with a Christian profession. It

could be any number of sins that lead to this. It might be sexual sin, as it was in Corinth. It might be heretical beliefs and teaching, as it was in Ephesus. It might be refusal to show forgiveness to another person and be reconciled to them.

After sufficient opportunity has been given for the person to repent, and the necessary processes have taken place in the church pleading for them to repent a number of times, and the person still persists in this certain

heretical belief or sinful behaviour, then the result is that excommunication takes place. That is, they are removed from the membership of the church. That's what Paul means by being "handed over to Satan". It means they no longer are considered a part of a church, which is Christ's kingdom, but a part of the world, which is Satan's domain.

Of course, it is always heart-breaking and messy when this happens. But the fact of the matter is, warfare is heart-breaking and messy, and shipwrecks are heart-breaking and messy. The severe grace of church discipline is God's way of cleaning up the mess, and healing the broken-heartedness. I call it a "severe grace" because for all of its severity, church discipline should always have a gracious intention. That gracious intention is summed up by Paul in those final few words of the sentence: "that they may learn not to blaspheme."

That is, the goal of this church discipline is that Hymenaeus and Alexander would come to their senses. That they would learn the right lesson from it. It would make them realise that they have made a shipwreck of their faith. They would see the seriousness of their sin, and they will turn from it, and be forgiven for it by God's grace in Christ, and be welcomed back into the church once more, and reconciled to their brothers and sisters in Christ. And, thereafter, they would stand alongside the rest of the church in waging the good warfare, holding the faith, and a good conscience.

Update from Ben and Esther Smith

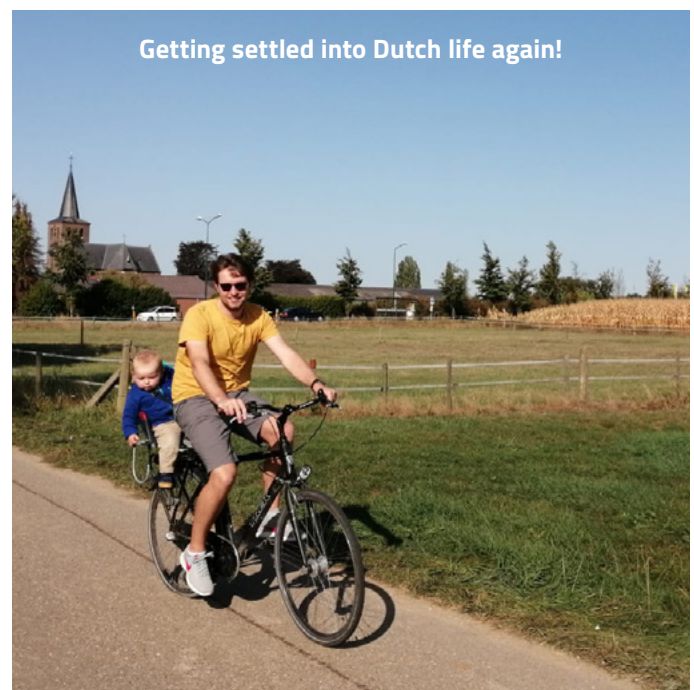
As for everyone, our last six months have been full of unforeseen changes and last-minute decisions. We sometimes look back in disbelief at all that has been happening across our world and how much has changed in a short period of time. Having returned to college at the end of August, we are now settled into our second and final year of missionary training here at Cornerstone College for Intercultural Studies in the Netherlands.

After leaving the college rather promptly when it closed suddenly in March, we spent quite some time in Northern Ireland. Although unexpected, this turned out to be a time of physical and spiritual refreshing that we didn't know we needed. The months leading up to our departure from the college had been challenging ones: we were both juggling a lot, and much of our time was taken up with planning for a Spring mission team to South East Asia, a daunting prospect for us as a family. After the inevitable cancellation of our trip, and the unexpected change of scenery from Holland to home, God graciously gave us time to process all that had taken place, and to spend precious time together as a family. We learned valuable lessons that we will take forward on our missionary journey. We knew God's provision in very practical ways as well and were blessed by the abundant generosity of our wider church family.

The new semester is well under way now. While the coronavirus affects college life in some ways, it is a blessing to be able to attend classes in person and resume most of our usual college activities. Many of our regular local ministries are unable to take place due to the ever-changing restrictions and regulations; however, it looks hopeful that Esther's Mother and Toddler Group should be able to go ahead in some form, for which we are very thankful to God. After our studies here are complete, we had hoped to make a visit to Moldova, primarily to move the possessions we have here and to make other necessary arrangements regarding accommodation etc. We had then planned to return to Northern Ireland for a longer period, to tie up loose ends and reconnect with friends, family and supporters before making a more long-term move to our new home in Moldova. Naturally, there is a lot that needs to fall into place for these plans to go ahead.



We simply have no idea how feasible any of this is at the moment. At the time of writing, entry to Moldova is impossible for us due to border regulations, and restrictions across the globe seem to be constantly in flux. We trust God that He will direct our steps. He knows what is on our hearts, He knows what the situation will be like after our graduation in July. Each day we must commit our way unto Him and trust in His goodness. We continue to seek His guidance for our future and remain ever grateful for your prayerful support as we continue to feel burdened for those marginalised by society and cut off from the gospel because of disability in the ex-Soviet bloc. We leave our future plans in the hands of Him who holds the future.

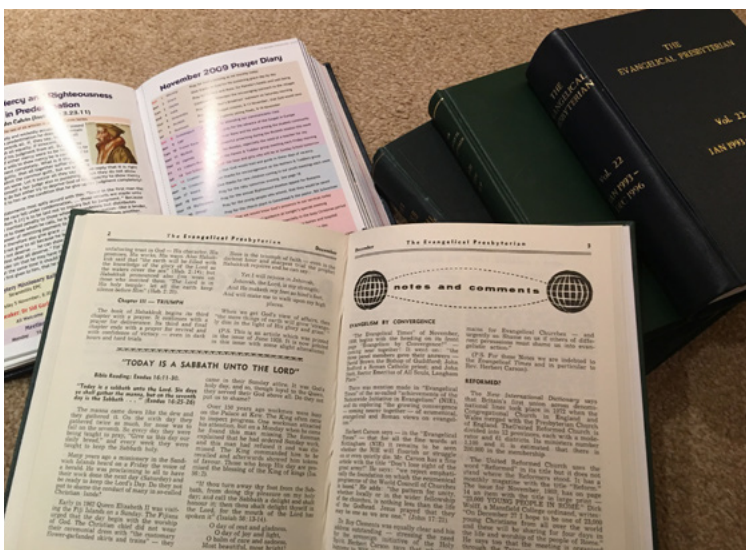


Farewell to Andrew and Joan Woolsey



On Sunday 27 September the Crumlin congregation said an emotional farewell to Andrew and Joan Woolsey after 32 years as part of the congregation, nineteen of those with Andrew as Minister of the church. For so many years Andrew and Joan have been such a central part of congregational life in Crumlin, and they will be greatly missed by all. We give great thanks to God for all that he has done through them over the years at Crumlin – for Andrew’s faithful preaching and pastoring, and for Joan’s godly service and personal evangelism. As many commented on their final Sunday with us, Andrew and Joan are irreplaceable, and only eternity will reveal the fruit of their labours in this part of the Lord’s vineyard. During the morning service a presentation of gifts was made to Andrew and Joan, and as they now move to become a part of the Groomsport congregation it is our prayer that Andrew and Joan will know God’s richest blessing in this new season of life, and that just as we have been blessed by their presence amongst us, the Groomsport congregation will know a similar blessing in the days ahead. “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)

Bound Copies of the EPC Magazine 2012-2020



Bound copies of past issues of the Church magazine have been produced from its inception. Normally four years of magazines are bound together in a hard-back cover, the last being the 2009-2012 volume. We intend to bind sets for the 2013-2016 and the 2017-2020 periods. The new-bound volumes will be hard-back and will be in A4 format. It is likely that each volume will cost around £15 and only be supplied to order.

If you would like to purchase a volume please contact David Watson (by email at davidwatson006@btinternet.com) who will supply further details. If you have old magazine copies from the 2013-2020 period we would be happy to receive them in order to help fulfil orders (again contact David Watson).

These volumes are more than a collector’s item. Apart from two missing volumes, I have bound copies from the start (in 1928). I take these down from time to time to read. They always do my soul good. Try it.

Reflections on Fifty Years of Ministry - Norman Reid

As I reflect on the past fifty years the words of Jeremiah come to mind:

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'" (Lam 3:22-24)

My time spent in ministry falls into four periods; 1970-1978 in Belfast, 1978-1998 in Dublin, 1998-2011 in South Africa, and retirement since 2011.

As I look back over the years I am amazed at the great love of the Lord. That he should save my soul and choose me to serve him in the Gospel Ministry has always been humbling to me. I have made many mistakes and have often reflected that I could have done better, yet the Lord's great love has never left me. "His compassions" have never failed.

1970-1978 Ministry in Belfast

I was ordained on 2nd October 1970 in Crosscollyer Street Church and served the two congregations of Crosscollyer Street and Finaghy until 1978. Both churches were caring and supportive to Angela and me as we began our married life serving both these congregations. Let me begin by saying that I have been greatly blessed for the past fifty years to have Angela's love and support in every situation, especially in the difficult moves to Dublin and South Africa. In both moves, she believed that God had called me, and she persevered through the hard times and always encouraged me. I thank God for her wisdom and for the sacrifices she made for the Lord's work.

My ministry in Crosscollyer Street and Finaghy was well received and I was greatly encouraged by Rev C.E. Hunter who was retired and worshipping in Finaghy. When I look back on my early attempts at preaching I can but conclude that he was indeed gracious and patient with me. The Lord was also gracious and during my time there the churches did not diminish but grew a little.

1978-1998 Ministry in Dublin

The work in Dublin was different from the pastoral ministry in Belfast. Now we were engaged in evangelism and church planting. There was the excitement and enthusiasm that accompanied a new work. As a weekly Bible study was established it was a joy to see the hunger for the Word of God



and the evidence of lives being changed through the Gospel. Over the years the Bible study developed into a mission church and then to a regular congregation of more than forty committed Christians. Of course, the work was not without its difficulties. There were many disappointments like endless door-to-door visitation with very little fruit. But in the Bible study groups it was a joy to teach people who were ready to listen and appreciated God's Word. Recently while preaching in a church in Tallaght, Angela and I met a lady in whose home we had conducted Bible studies thirty years ago. We had lost touch with her but now we discovered she was still following the Lord and meeting with his people. During our time in Dublin I was involved in teaching at the Irish Bible School. This experience proved valuable for the next period in our lives.

1998-2011 Ministry in South Africa

Our lives became very different when we were asked to take up a teaching post at Dumisani Theological Institute

in South Africa. A different climate, a different people, a different culture and a new work. It was a big challenge. It meant leaving our three older children behind and bringing Stephen our youngest (aged 15) with us. This put a strain on the family and there were difficult periods coping with the separation. The Lord was compassionate and gracious to us and gave us strength to weather the storms. It was a great privilege for Angela and me to renew fellowship with Mrs McCracken, a retired missionary who was confined to bed in an old-age home.

I found the teaching of Church History, Systematic Theology and Homiletics very rewarding, together with involvement in the local church Presbytery and local village preaching. The ministry there was strategic since our students were already in pastoral ministry. Some had large churches which meant that what we taught was being conveyed to many people. There were many problems: the race problem and the poverty problem seemed to affect everything we did. Yet the Lord blessed the Word and his kingdom was advanced. We both made many good friends there, some of whom still keep in touch. It was an important chapter in our lives, and we give thanks to God for allowing us to be involved there.

2011-2020 Ministry back in Dublin.

Reflecting on my time since 2011 I am so thankful to still have energy to serve in the Lord's work. I have been preaching frequently in Dublin and in Wexford where our son Jonathan pastors a church. I have been doing some tutoring at the Irish Bible Institute in the city centre. Since Covid 19 we have gone online with this work. For several years now I have been responsible for an afternoon Bible Study group at Grosvenor Church, for retired folk and those who cannot attend an evening study. Since Covid 19 I have been producing weekly e-mail Bible studies for these believers. We thank the Lord for the health he has given us all through our ministry.

The Lord has done all things well; "great is his faithfulness."

Obituary of Mrs Florrie Gray (Stranmillis EPC)



On the afternoon of Saturday 25th April the congregation of Stranmillis received the sad news that Mrs Florrie Gray had passed away during the night. Mrs Gray was 97 years of age but was still regularly present at worship services and was able to maintain an active interest in the life of the church right up until her death. She had become a member of Botanic Avenue (later Stranmillis) in 1949. Of a gracious disposition Mrs Gray, who normally occupied the back row, regularly welcomed those who were visitors and who had 'slipped in at the back of the church'. Her gentle and winsome manner meant that folks felt welcomed and not threatened, and many would testify to the fact that she was among the first to greet them when they began attending the church. Mrs Gray was well known across the congregation and she enjoyed interacting with the younger people, many of whom she got to know well during their student days when they were living in student houses off the Donegall Road near to her own home in Rydalmere Street.

Remarkably she lived in the same house from 1935 until her death. In May 1987 she married a widower, Mr Jimmy Gray, who took up residence with her in Rydalmere Street until his death in 2001. Before retirement she worked as an ornamenter for the linen manufacturers, William Ewart and Son, in Bedford Street. Florrie was always neat in her personal appearance and one can imagine that same neatness and precision being applied to her work as she prepared boxes of linen handkerchiefs and other items for export to the American market. It was while working for Ewart's that she established a lifelong friendship with Myrtle Christie who, along with her husband Joe, proved to be faithful and supportive friends throughout all the years.

The sense of loss at her passing was felt throughout the whole of the Stranmillis congregation, both young and old. Although saddened by her death we are comforted by the fact that her faith in Christ was clear and steadfast and that she is now in his presence in the glory of heaven.

Due to the Covid restrictions a very small number of people gathered for the graveside service in the City Cemetery. A fuller thanksgiving service was held in Stranmillis Church on 4th November. We extend our sympathy to Florrie's family, especially to her caring nephew David and his wife and family.

Update from Musa, Pamela and Gracie Gaiya

Friends, it's great to connect with you again.

We have been very conscious and encouraged by your prayers particularly during these recent months of Covid-19. The uncertainty of these times has underlined for us the constancy of our God. He has been our steady hand and the One who has kept us.

The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him. Psalm 28:7

Certainly, when school didn't resume after Spring break in March, we wondered what was ahead of us. Our fears rose when we went into lockdown; this meant no movement on certain days of the week (Sunday evening-Thursday), with the rest of the week for stocking up on essentials (Friday-Saturday). But we sit now in October and we thank God that although Covid-19 cases are still being reported in Jos, Plateau State (and some near to us), we can thank God for His protection over our lives. We are so thankful that the death rate in Nigeria has been considerably lower than in developed countries. Why this is, people can speculate, but we just thank God for all His mercies to us, as a nation, as a State, as a family and as the organisation of Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS).

Our ACTS mission statement and purpose continues to be as strong and as focused as ever: existing to strengthen the Church by providing Bible-based literature that is relevant and affordable. Celebrate and rejoice with us as we bear witness to the increase in sales in Bibles during this Covid-19 pandemic. People are looking and asking for Bibles more than any other book in this current climate! You know what to pray, right?! That God's Word would reach deep into the hearts of men and women and convict of sin and convince them of their need for a Saviour; that God's precious Word would strengthen and help Christians to grow and mature in the Lord.

We are excited when Bibles and books leave our Warehouse and branches and are a blessing to those who buy them. Musa's latest publication, *Early Christianity*, is being distributed to the Bible College libraries of the United Evangelical Church/ Qua Iboe Church and the Evangelical Church Winning All during the next few months. Pray for God's help and blessing.

Continue to pray for the Hausa Africa Bible Commentary (Hausa ABC) to be a vital and useful tool for pastors particularly in the North who speak Hausa; the English ABC continues to be a solid tool for pastors. Pray for the large consignment of recently purchased Bibles to arrive safely in Nigeria and pray for their distribution among our 15 branches.

Covid-19 has helped us realise we need to have more of our titles available electronically/digitally. The growing demand for online sales has also been highlighted. Pray for God's wisdom and help as we move forward in this direction.



Please pray that we make good connections and contacts with church leaders as we share the vision of ACTS. We are very conscious of how the Lord has blessed and sustained us through your prayers and generous gifts to ACTS at this time. Thank you so much.

As you can appreciate, many economies have been affected by Covid-19 and Nigeria's economy is no exception. Prices of most things have doubled and even tripled. Our hearts are heavy for Nigeria. We continue to ask you to pray for our leaders, that they will have the fear of God in their hearts and that they will rule with integrity and righteousness. Sadly, there are ongoing attacks by nomadic herdsmen/bandits in the southern part of Kaduna State. Closer to home we're thankful that our neighbour's daughter is recovering well after being kidnapped last year. Pray for safety particularly during the hours of darkness.

We thank God for His goodness over all our lives and particularly over Gracie, our tall soon-to-be-11-year-old! She is in Grade 5 at Hillcrest School. We appreciate the way Hillcrest has adapted and carried students online so their learning is not disrupted. Schools are planning to reopen early November so pray for the Lord's help in adjusting to another new schedule.

Meditation . . .

The God who sees is not merely a spectator. He is a God who governs what he sees.

R. C. Sproul

We have no right to expect that our lives are going to be free from trouble. But in every circumstance, if we are the Lord's people, we are assured of God's care and providence.

D. W. H. Thomas



To those who know us well and who pray and support us regularly we say a huge thank you; if we are new to you then please contact us, we'd love to hear from you.

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PRAISE & PRAYER

Give thanks with Norman and Angela Reid as they praise God for his faithfulness over their 50 years of ministry. Praise God for lives changed by the gospel during those 50 years.

Thank God for his plan for marriage and the blessing it brings to individuals, families and society at large. Pray that Christians would uphold the honour of marriage by word and example.

Take time to pray for the ministers and elders in your church, remembering that 'they watch out for your souls as those who must give account.' Pray for yourself that you would hear God's word with obedience, submission and profit. Heb 13:17

Praise God for the continuing strategic role of Dumisani Theological Institute (Eastern Cape, South Africa) in training men and women for pastoral ministry, women's ministry, Sunday school teaching and evangelism. Pray that God's grace would be with teachers and students alike and that the church of God would be strengthened in this corner of his Kingdom.

Join Ben and Esther Smith in thanking God for the physical and spiritual refreshment they enjoyed when Cornerstone College closed unexpectedly; praise him that 'all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.' Rom 8:28

Pray that Ben and Esther would know God's help in their studies, family life and the planned resumption of the Mother and Toddler group. Pray for wisdom and peace, amid much uncertainty, as they make plans for their move to Moldova.

Pray for much-needed help for congregations seeking to resume activities safely and within Government guidelines. Pray that the God of mercy will bless efforts to reach out, often virtually, and that young and old, church and unchurched, friends and strangers will yet find salvation in these strange times.

PRAISE & PRAYER

Pray for the work of Casa Mea among adults with disabilities in Moldova. Praise God for those now living in the community whose lives have been transformed by the gospel. Remember before God those who live in institutions, often in poor conditions and knowing abject neglect. Ask that they will be reached with the love of God.

Pray for Pamela, Musa and Gracie in Nigeria. Ask God graciously to continue to protect and bless them and make them a blessing to others.

Praise God for increased Bible sales from ACTS during COVID-19. Pray that God's word would reach deep into the hearts of men and women and convict of sin and convince them of their need for a Saviour; pray that God's precious word would strengthen and help Christians to grow and mature in the Lord.

Ask God to help Pamela and other ACTS staff to know wisdom and strength as they move towards increased online sales and digitally available titles.

Thank God that Nigeria and many other African countries have, to date, known fewer deaths from COVID-19 than feared. Praise God for his mercy, but remember our many brothers and sisters who face poverty, floods, threat of violence and difficulties which we don't experience on the same scale.

Pray for God's help for those who are isolated, anxious and unwell during this pandemic. Pray that God would graciously come to our aid. Even more, ask that people's hearts would be humbled before him, for his praise and glory.

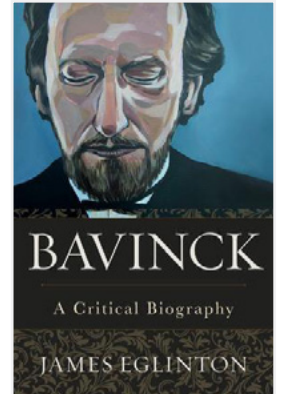
Title: [Bavinck: A Critical Biography](#)

Author: [James Eglinton](#)

480 pages

Publisher: [Baker Academic, Div of Baker Publishing Group](#)

RRP £34.99 [Our Price: £24.50](#)



Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) was arguably the most able theologian of the late-nineteenth century in the Netherlands and certainly one of the premier Reformed theologians of the modern era. Bavinck's works have recently started to be translated into English, most notably his four-volume Reformed Dogmatics, which has skyrocketed scholarly and churchly interest in his work. The flood of access to Bavinck's works has sparked greater curiosity not only in his theology, but also the context behind it.

James Eglinton is the foremost expert on Bavinck today and has produced the definitive biography of the Dutch dogmatician. This book is serious scholarship in that Eglinton has scavenged through Bavinck's own personal papers, journals, and letters to trace Bavinck's life according to the primary sources themselves (which Eglinton reads in Dutch). Still, this book is also supremely accessible in that it is well-written, non-technical, and gives enough background about the Dutch context and Bavinck's family so that no one is lost as the story develops. Eglinton has struck the perfect balance of digesting top-level academic research into a highly readable and accessible volume that is sure to satisfy anyone who is interested in Reformed theology.

This book is a must-read. Bavinck's story is gripping, inspiring, and soul-stirring, but also enriches our understanding of the man who produced some of the most popular theological works today. Eglinton's presentation of the Dutch context and Bavinck's life brings new energy to, and shines new light on, the books that Bavinck has left to us. This account of Bavinck's struggles to address the difficult issues of his own day while staying confessionally Reformed and keeping his denomination engaged with the most recent developments in theological research shows what a tremendous accomplishment the Reformed Dogmatics in particular were. These books were not a dry

presentation of the Reformed faith, but a battle to keep a conservative denomination in conversation with the most recent trends in theology and an attempt to push back against modern trends that had questioned Christian orthodoxy.

Christians will be moved by a man who gave his life to work for the best for God's people in his own day and for the future. Ministers will see someone wrestling for the good of the church in his nation. Aspiring theologians will find a kindred spirit in Bavinck as he balances love for the church with ambitions as an academic. And scholars will find a well-crafted biography to inform their reading of the theologian himself.

Title: [Christianity and the New Eugenics](#)

Author: [Calum MacKellar](#)

Publisher: [Inter-Varsity Press](#)

London 2020

212 pages

RRP £12.99 **Our Price: £9.99**

Eugenics is a term that is most often used in an historical context. The word itself was coined by an Englishman, Sir Frances Galton, in 1883 and his definition seems innocuous – the science of improving stock. Indeed, farmers often seek to do this with their breeding animals. However, the subsequent application of eugenic principles to human beings, particularly in Nazi Germany, has led to a reluctance to consider the term relevant to contemporary medical or social practice. However, whilst the word may be unfashionable, the concept is very much in vogue.

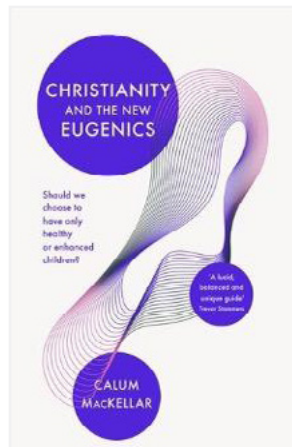
In this book, Calum MacKellar seeks to raise awareness of how new technologies and changing societal values are again applying eugenic principles to the human race. After a short introduction, he presents us with a survey of the subject in its historical context; from its roots in the civilizations of the Classical period, through the horrors of the Nazi era, and on to more recent times. Next, drawing on his earlier book, *The Image of God*,

Personhood and the Embryo (SCM Press, 2017), MacKellar considers Christian perspectives on the nature of the embryo, procreation and parenthood, and hence the reasons for concern with eugenics. In contemporary conversation, less is said about eugenics and more about the desire for healthy children, the elimination of disease, or a healthier population, and in the next chapter MacKellar reviews the means available to these ends. The discussion here ranges from simple decisions regarding the choice of a healthy partner, through to novel technologies and even infanticide. The inclusion of the latter may surprise some but, whilst considered extreme by the majority, this has been suggested by serious and influential academics such as Australian ethicist Peter Singer. The book concludes with consideration of the worth and value of all individuals created in the image of God and the risks of discrimination.

This book is thought provoking. MacKellar's theological approach sets the tone for subsequent discussion. His exposition and explanation of the term procreation is a highlight. Some philosophical topics are challenging, e.g., the non-identity dilemma. Whilst, as might be expected, novel assisted reproductive technologies (ART) are discussed, this is not in great depth and readers may need to seek elsewhere for more detailed explanations. A glossary of scientific terminology is provided.

My main difficulty with the book is that the author stretches the spectrum of eugenics so broadly, that he includes postponing attempting to conceive until a maternal illness has passed [an example might be rubella or German measles] as eugenic practice. To me this seems extreme. In casting the net so widely, I feel he risks undermining his arguments against more clearly unethical practice.

Michael Trimble



Best of the Blogs

A selection of online blogs and articles to challenge and encourage you in your walk with God and his people...

[Humble Prayer Under Humbling Providences \(James Faris\)](http://www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/12/humble-prayer-in-humbling-providences/)

[\(www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/12/humble-prayer-in-humbling-providences/\)](http://www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/12/humble-prayer-in-humbling-providences/)

"The providences connected to COVID-19 are humbling, whatever one's opinions of the problems and solutions. Perhaps the greatest blessing of the pandemic is being humbled to the point of crying out in prayer to God more persistently."

[The Psalms: A Mentor to our Spiritual Experience \(Jeffrey Stivason\)](http://www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-psalms-a-mentor-to-our-spiritual-experience)

www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-psalms-a-mentor-to-our-spiritual-experience

"Think for a minute about how amazing it is that God gives the gospel to both Old and New Testament believers and neither group will ever come to the end of the treasures found therein. The Psalms are the same. Here is a book given by the inspiration of God to the Old and New Testament saints. It is a book infinitely usable by both no matter the era."

[Who Defines Your Joy? \(James Coffield\)](http://www.tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/who-defines-your-joy/)

www.tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/who-defines-your-joy/

"It often seems as if God narrates the story of our lives with irony. Joy is often fleeting, and real joy is paradoxically birthed in the most challenging of times. As I am writing on this topic of joy, I have been dealing with significant sorrow. A few weeks ago, I was asked to speak at the funeral of a young friend. Is the buoyancy of joy possible when swimming in a sea of sorrow? Is real joy possible in a sin-stained, fallen world?"

[Are You Shaped By the World or By the Word? \(Nancy Guthrie\)](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/are-you-shaped-world-or-word/)

[\(www.ligonier.org/blog/are-you-shaped-world-or-word/\)](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/are-you-shaped-world-or-word/)

"There's a section in department stores these days called "shapewear." It's in both women's and men's clothing. These stores are banking on our concern with the shape of our bodies and our willingness to invest in garments that promise to give us the shape we're looking for. But when we read Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we discover it's not what is shaping our bodies that he is most concerned about. He's concerned about what is shaping our perspective, our priorities, our pursuits, and our opinions."

[How To Thrive As A Christian \(Warren Peel\)](http://www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/22/how-to-thrive-as-a-christian/)

[\(www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/22/how-to-thrive-as-a-christian/\)](http://www.gentlereformation.com/2020/08/22/how-to-thrive-as-a-christian/)

"How would you answer these questions?: How can we most glorify God on the earth? How can we experience most of his presence? How can we see him most clearly revealed? How can we get the maximum possible spiritual benefits from the Lord? How can we do the most good to our fellow believers? What is the best antidote to backsliding and apostasy? Where can we experience the Lord doing his greatest works on earth? What is the closest experience to heaven we can get in this world? What do you think? What would you suggest?"

[Five Ways Churches Will Have Changed One Year From Now \(Thom S. Rainer\)](http://www.churchanswers.com/blog/five-ways-churches-will-have-changed-one-year-from-now/)

[\(www.churchanswers.com/blog/five-ways-churches-will-have-changed-one-year-from-now/\)](http://www.churchanswers.com/blog/five-ways-churches-will-have-changed-one-year-from-now/)

"I am not prophetic. And if I am prescient, it's only because I have the incredible vantage point of hearing from tens of thousands of church leaders every year. While it is admittedly difficult to project trends in typical times, it is exceedingly difficult to do so in a time of pandemic headed for, hopefully, a post-quarantine era. Because we hear from so many church leaders and church members, allow me to venture where local churches will be in one year."

