

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE

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Philippians 1 v 9-11

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Theme verses

Philippians 1:9-11



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FIRST WORD

“Are we nearly there yet?”

Over the summer months I spent many hours driving around both Ireland and Scotland as we journeyed to various holiday destinations. As all parents of young children will know, every car journey of any great distance will inevitably be interrupted with a question being asked (repeatedly) from the back seat: “Are we nearly there yet?!”

The Christian life can sometimes feel like a long, arduous journey, and we can grow restless along the way. Especially when life as a Christian is at its most difficult, when temptations assail us and suffering afflicts us, we can start to feel like that child in the back seat of the car, impatiently crying out to God, “Are we nearly there yet?” Or, as the psalmist would put it, “How long, O LORD?”

I was pondering this the other day when I was reading Romans chapter 13, and I was struck once again by Paul’s words in verse 11: “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

Of course, none of us knows when exactly our Christian journey will reach its destination; if we “shall pass the vale of death, or meet Him in the air.” However, we do know this: we are closer to the destination now than we were when we set off! And tomorrow, you will be closer still. As you sit and read this article, you have never been closer to arriving in heaven than you are right now!

Keeping this perspective in mind will transform the way in which we view the Christian life in various ways, and I want to point out two in particular it will change the way in which we view our ongoing struggles both with suffering and with persecution.

The scriptures warn us that in this world we are to expect suffering and persecution. As Paul reminded the churches in Acts 14:22, “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” However, remembering that with each passing day our final salvation draws ever closer encourages us to keep pressing on through difficult times. In comparison to the eternal weight of glory that awaits us, our suffering here is “light and



momentary” (2 Cor 4:17), and the trials that grieve us now are only “for a little while” (1 Peter 1:6). Let that encourage your heart as you “nightly pitch your moving tent a day’s march nearer home”!

Remembering that salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed also changes the way we view our sin. This is Paul’s main point in Romans 13. As Christian people, the life of the age to come is already within us, and it is our Christian calling to live lives that reflect that. The darkness of sin belongs to the old self, but now we have been made new in Christ. Though the presence of sin remains with us for now, the penalty of sin which stood against us has been exhausted and the power of sin over us has been broken through Christ’s death. Paul writes, “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy” (Romans 13:12-13). What are the sins that you need to cast aside as you fix your eyes on the destination?

Are we nearly there yet? We don’t know for sure, but our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed! So, remain steadfast under trial, and cast off every sin. We’ll soon be home.



The Popularity of Apostasy

One does not need to look too far into the dark recesses of the internet or scroll far on a social media network to realize that apostasy is prevalent in our society of today. The notion of an “Ex-vangelical” is all the rage. For instance, a son of a famous preacher in the United States has over a million followers actively listening to his words on a platform popular with teens, tweens, and twenty-somethings. On these videos he rants about “fundamentalist parents,” and the horrors of the God of the Bible. Many of these were once Christians; some even growing up in Reformed, Evangelical homes. Is this type of apostasy new or was there a time when this did not occur? The biblical answer is no. One needs only to read books such as 1 John (1 John 2:19), the vast majority of the historical books of the Old Testament (Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, etc.), or the book that I am currently preaching through on Sunday evenings, the Epistle to the Hebrews, to realize that apostasy is not something new. After all, Cain grew up in a home with parents that saw God walking in the cool of the Garden in a perfect, sinless estate and yet was the first murderer in history. For dating purposes, that means that apostasy has been around since the beginning. Hebrews has a lot to say about this topic that is just as relevant now as it was to those considering reverting to Judaism in the 1st century A.D. In particular, Hebrews 3:7-19 speaks a lot to apostasy, it gives examples of it, and how to guard against it. This text is pivotal for Christians of today to heed and listen to.

As always with an understanding of any biblical

text, one must first look at the context. The author of the epistle has been writing on the superiority of Christ over numerous figures and elements including angels, the entirety of Old Testament revelation, and, most recently, Moses himself. In the first six verses of the chapter, the author establishes the superiority of Jesus Christ over Moses. It is also important to note that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians facing pressure to revert to Judaism. Moses was the forefront figure, humanly speaking, of the Old Covenant era. After all, this was the man who would be the archetype of what a prophet was to look like. God even said that the prophet he would raise up, the Messiah, would be like Moses (Deut.18:15). Moses occupied a place of privilege more than any other, save for Abraham perhaps, in the Jewish mindset. He was the prophet, the mediator, the messenger of the Old Covenant. There were few who could compare to Moses. However, Hebrews makes it clear that a Son is greater than a servant and that the builder of the house has more honour than the house itself. Hebrews is clear on this point. Jesus Christ is greater than even the greatest figure of the Old Covenant. To break the Old Covenant carried with it a death penalty (Deut.28:15), but through Christ, there can be an escape from the just wrath of God; an atonement and reconciliation with God is possible through faith in Jesus Christ. However, for someone to reject the sole means of escape, that makes atonement and reconciliation impossible; that man is doomed. In our passage, then, one of the famed warning passages of

the book, Hebrews warns readers not to flee from the means of escape from the wrath that is to come. The author sprinkles in doctrine with application in a seamless fashion.

First, the author warns his readers with the Bible itself. He cites several verses quoted from the Septuagint (the Greek) translation of Psalm 95. He introduces this with a "therefore," indicating a shift from his previous subject. With the understanding that Christ is greater than Moses, here is an application and exhortation. Charles Hodge noted, "This verse to the 11th contains a quotation from the 95th Psalm showing the rebellion of the Jews and the consequences, and the apostle derives from it something to enforce the exhortation of the 12th verse."¹ The author is backing up what he is going to say on apostasy with the Bible; a lesson that all Christians must do when making a truth claim. The author takes his Jewish readers to their Bibles and points to Psalm 95 to show what God has to say about those who turned away from the Old Covenant and the teachings of Moses. Verses seven through eleven speak about the apostasy of the wilderness generation that came out of Egypt. In fact, in the original Hebrew, the waters of Meribah (Num. 20) are cited as where they put the Lord to the test in verses eight and nine in the Septuagint text cited in Hebrews 3. The Lord in this Psalm ends it with a "so that;" the result of this generation's continued apostasy and unbelief is that the Lord will not allow them into the land of rest. Temporally, they cannot enter into Canaan, save for Joshua and Caleb, and they also cannot enter the heavenly land of rest, denoted later in Hebrews, due to their cursed state and unbelief. That was the penalty of their apostasy. The Lord made an oath that they should not enter into the rest he had created. One of the most terrifying utterances in the Bible is that the Lord is against you or has made an oath against you. Those are chilling words for those thinking about turning away from the Christian faith.

Having based his words in the biblical text, the author then issues an imperative to his readers in verse twelve with "See, brothers." This is a command to do several things linked back to the section prior to the quotation from Psalm 95. Namely, that is to remember not to fall back from the one who is the Greater Moses. Notice too in this text that the Apostle is not bashing his readers threatening them with eternal hell-fire; rather, he is firmly warning them from going back to their former lives in Judaism. He calls them "brethren" in the opening portion

of the exhortation ranging from verse twelve through to fourteen. As a Christian, and a father in the faith to these people, the Apostle is concerned about their souls. That is a mark of a fine pastor. John Owen noted, "There is need of great care, heedfulness, watchfulness, and circumspection, for a due continuance in our profession, to the glory of God and advantage of our own souls."² The Apostle is not intending to bully his readers into heaven or to bash them with the rod of orthodoxy; he is speaking to his brothers and sisters as a pastor concerned with their current states. The Apostle certainly knows what the Bible says about the deceitful wickedness of the human heart. Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). The heart of the apostate is at odds with, and runs away from, the Living God. The Apostle warns his readers of this kind of wicked heart, and to get as far away as possible from it. Then he switches in verse thirteen with a big "but." How are these Hebrew Christians to prevent this tragic apostasy from happening? The Apostle first states that "exhortation" is key in prevention.

What is exhortation exactly? Originally, the Greek word comes from the root which means "to comfort." In fact, this is where we get the word "Paraclete" from which is a designated name for the Holy Spirit which means Comforter. This comforting or exhorting is commanded for each and every Christian. Exhortation is the particular duty of every pastor and elder. For instance, your pastor Lord's Day by Lord's Day preaches the truths of Scripture. These truths include the fact that Jesus has been tempted every way that we have and yet did not sin, that Christ has died for sinners to be reconciled with God the Father, and that he has given us the Holy Spirit to press us forward in sanctification; the list goes on and on of what comfort God gives in his Bible. However, this duty to exhort and comfort fellow believers is not just the job of the pastor and the elders; it is commanded for "each other," as our text says, or fellow Christians in the church. John Brown of Edinburgh wrote, "The duty of public exhortation forms an important part of the duty of Christian pastors; but it is plain from the passage before us that it is the duty of all Christians, as they have opportunity, privately to exhort and admonish one another, lest they be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."³ Therefore, one cannot simply watch people in the church struggling, asking questions, and possibly considering leaving the Living God, and sit by quietly expecting someone else to do the task. God has

said that you must exhort that person. One does not have to possess the gift of exhortation to act as an exhorter; it is not the same as other gifts, such as teaching, since the Bible is clear that not all are called to that office nor have those gifts (1Cor. 12:29). How does Hebrews propose that we combat apostasy within the ranks of the church? What can the church do when we see many leaving the body of Christ for a false religion? We exhort them. We comfort them. We help them. That is what the Apostle is teaching here first off. How is the hardhearted deceitfulness of sin combatted? It is by the comforting word of a faithful Christian brother or sister who comes alongside them. Now, exhortation is not the only prevention for apostasy. The primary prevention is being a "partaker of Christ." This partaking of Christ is several things including union to Christ, putting on Christ, and living in Christ; the idea is seen in the famed text of Galatians 2:20. This union to Christ is vital for Christian faith and practice; for, without Christ, we cannot do anything spiritually valuable. We would simply be living by a code, the same as the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers Paul addressed in Acts 17, if we attempt to live a Christianity apart from Christ. We will not enter into the heavenly Zion, just as Christ said to those in Matthew 7:21-23. Without Christ, we will not persevere to the end and will apostatize. Therefore, hold fast to Christ rather than trusting in yourself. For without the restraining love of Christ we will not see the heavenly Mount Zion. With these practical applications to prevent the heinous act of apostasy, the Apostle then returns to a biblical example and expounds it to his readers.

In verses fifteen through nineteen the Apostle expounds on the earlier example from Psalm 95, homing in on verses seven and eight earlier in the section. Here he enters into the role of the teacher yet again and asks questions regarding his reader's understanding of the biblical example set before him. First, he asks who heard and yet rebelled? Remember the Exodus narrative in the Pentateuch. These were the people of the wilderness generation. They saw God part the waters of the Red Sea and walked through it on dry ground. They saw Moses' face shining as if it were gold coming down from Sinai. They saw the Shekinah glory cloud, the manna falling in the desert, and water gushing forth from a solid rock. These people heard the law and the Gospel expounded clearly to them through the Ten Commandments, the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, and the finest teacher of the Old Testament who is Moses. However, though they

heard and saw, they rebelled in their unbelief. What was the result? They were not allowed to enter into Canaan save for Joshua and Caleb as the text explicitly states. All of these people heard and saw everything that went on in the Sinaitic narratives, yet they all rebelled. Secondly, due to their rebellion, they had a penalty issued by God. That is, due to their provoking God and sinfulness, they all fell in the wilderness. Recall how many people the Bible says left Egypt. Exodus 12:37 and 38 states that there were 600,000 men not counting the women and children. All of these men, save for two that we know of, fell in the wilderness due to their provoking God to wrath on account of their rebelliousness. One needs only to read the narrative from Exodus through Numbers to understand the overwhelming amount of sin, grumbling, and outright rebellion that these people were engaged in. Third, it was to that same generation that God swore an oath that they would not enter into his rest. The people were banned from entering Canaan and, ultimately, from entering into the heavenly Mount Zion. Granted, not all of the people were apostate, Moses did not enter yet was definitely regenerate, but almost all did not enter because of unbelief. Even Moses sinned at the waters of Meribah by not believing the Lord's command (Num. 20:12). Because of the people's disobedience, they were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land, though the next generation under Joshua did. Therefore, through all of these examples, the Apostle sums up his point in verse nineteen. The Wilderness Generation did not enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief or faithlessness. The wise Christian must heed the example of this generation of our spiritual forefathers lest we too incur the same penalty.

With the exposition of the passage understood, the application of the passage to daily Christian living is apparent. Though not exhaustive, three areas will be discussed here. First, Christians must consult their Bibles and heed the warnings and examples the Scripture gives. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." The Bible is replete with examples of what godliness in action looks like versus rebellion. F.F. Bruce wrote, "Despite all these privileges, the generation that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness and never saw the promised land, because of rebellion against God; so Christians should take due warning lest disobedience on their part should bring them into comparable disaster."⁴

The wise Christian must heed the warnings and examples of the Bible lest he too fall like the wilderness generation. Second, the preventative medicine for apostasy is in this text. Two of those remedies are exhortation and partaking of Christ. The first is done by brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers in the faith whether ordained or non-ordained. The duty of all in the church is to exhort their brethren. If a brother is struggling, what Christian will not come alongside of him in order to help him along the way? If we cannot show love to the household of faith, then how can we love God whom we have not seen (1 John 4:20)? Exhortation is a great aid, but partaking of Christ is even more important. For, if we rely on ourselves or others to get us to the eternal state then we will fail. How do we run the race of endurance? We do so by clinging to Christ as he clings to us. A boat tethered to a dock will not move, but if it is not tethered, it will float out to sea and be destroyed. Therefore, cling to Christ and help the brethren; this will prevent apostasy in our own Christian walks and assist others in the church. Finally, cautiously search your heart for any unbelief. Faithlessness is impossible to overcome apart from Christ Jesus and the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit. Let the church cry out as the father in Mark 9:24 did, "I believe; help my unbelief!" We truly are people of little faith and slow to believe what the Lion of Judah has said! Let us fly to the fountain which washes clean every stain of sin. Let us search our hearts thoroughly for unbelief and cling closely to the Christ of the cross who is our great high priest. Therefore, three things we learn from this passage are to watch for unbelief, how to prevent apostasy, and the necessity of consulting the Bible and learning from the examples given on the pages of Scripture.

The warning passages of Hebrews rightly send a chill up the spine of many who read them. So many Christians struggle with assurance. Some may simply gloss them over believing that it's not for them and that it could never happen for themselves, while others may run their entire race in the throes of despair and doubt. Both parties must cast themselves on Christ and cry out to him for mercy. Two examples come to mind of both types who read these passages. One of those men is John Bunyan. In his spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan notes how often he wafts back and forth between assurance and utter despair. One person reads this book thinking, "simply trust Christ," while another says, "I thought I was the only one who struggles

in such a way." The answer for both is to cling even harder to the nail-scarred hands of our Risen Lord. Another example is John Wesley before his conversion when he arrived in the American Colonies. Wesley believed himself to be a believer; a member of the holy club in college and a great pupil. One could make the guess that, were Wesley to come to this passage pre-conversion, he would have simply glossed over it without a single thought. He answered that later in life saying that he entered the ministry unconverted and was living in rebellion to God while masking his sins. Let the Christian reader, whether a mature saint or a young believer just starting, heed the warnings of Hebrews. If a car check engine light appears on the dashboard of your vehicle, it is best to check it out before the problem is too far along to fix. Let the Christian too heed the warnings, check himself or herself, and go to the one who has the preventative medicine: our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹Charles Hodge, *Exegetical Lectures and Sermons on Hebrews*, ed. William VanDoodewaard (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 24.

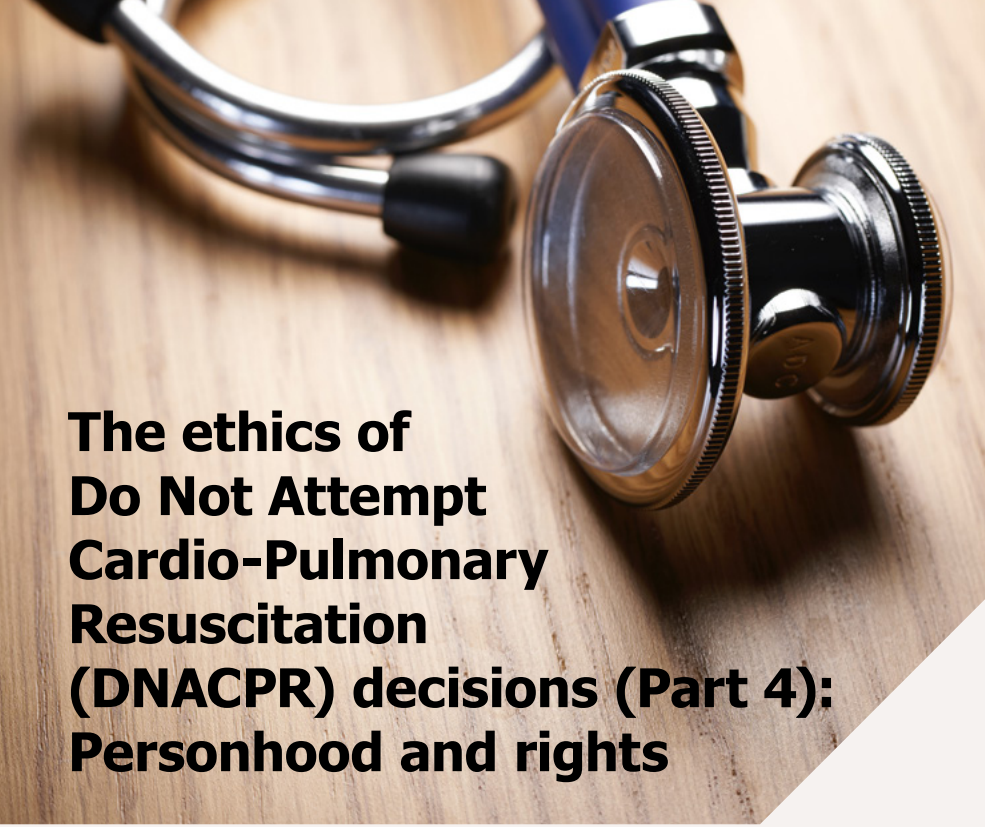
²John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews with Preliminary Exercitations*, Vol.4, ed. William H. Goold (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 101.

³John Brown, *Hebrews: The Geneva Series of Commentaries* (1862, repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 183.

⁴F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1968), 34.



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The ethics of Do Not Attempt Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) decisions (Part 4): Personhood and rights

The first article in this series considered what cardiopulmonary resuscitation involves and the clinical factors that determine whether it is an appropriate treatment in given circumstances. The second article described how clinicians make ethical decisions. The third article reflected on human life as sacrosanct, that is, sacred to God, and so inviolable and worthy of our protection. In this final piece, I wish to consider the topics of human rights and personhood and their role in contemporary ethical decision-making.

The shaky foundations of human rights

We are all familiar with talk of human rights. The authors of *The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America* begin their text with these words:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Such rights were felt to be self-evident and dependent on at least

a deistic, if not theistic, view of the world. The founding fathers had been heavily influenced by Enlightenment thinkers such as philosopher and physician John Locke (1632-1704).

“All mankind... being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.”

Men such as Locke, although attempting to base their own thinking on supposed “self-evident truths” and sound reason were in turn influenced by values from their Christian intellectual heritage.

Not everyone was so sure of the validity of the concept of natural rights. English philosopher Jeremy Bentham stated “Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense—nonsense upon stilts.” Its roots in Christian thought were to draw the ire of Friedrich Nietzsche:

“Another Christian concept, no less crazy, has passed even more deeply into the tissue of modernity: the concept of the ‘equality of souls before God.’ This concept furnishes the prototype of all theories of equal rights...”

Contemporary thinker Yuri Harari writes:

“Homo sapiens has no natural rights, just as spiders, hyenas and chimpanzees have no natural rights.”

Others go in the opposite direction: in 2014, Argentinian lawyers successfully argued that an orangutan which spent 20 years in a zoo be granted the same legal rights as humans. The ruling found her to be Argentina’s first “nonhuman person, with the right to liberty”.

Whilst the concept of human rights clearly continues to play a significant role in ethical and legal discourse, their philosophical foundations seem shaky once the Christian bedrock has been cut away. James Griffin, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford identifies the problem:

“When during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the theological content of the idea was abandoned, nothing was put in its place.”

Whether or not they understand the philosophical foundations, the vast majority of people in contemporary Western society still firmly believe in the concept of rights. Over time, rights have passed from being philosophical propositions to being codified in law. The principles of the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDR)* have become incorporated into legislation such as the UK Human Rights Act of 1998. Rights based thinking is now firmly embedded in our culture, and new rights are proposed on an ongoing basis, for example, the right to internet access.

For the purposes of our discussion, Article 3 of the UNDR states *Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.* This right to life is seen

as fundamental and absolute. To deny someone a potentially life-saving treatment, such as CPR, without good reason, or following due process, would be in breach of this right. However, in recent years, there have been challenges to its security. There are those who support assisted suicide and argue that a right to life must also include a right to die at a time and in a manner of one's choosing. We will not be engaging in that debate here. Rather we will be thinking about those who argue about to whom the right to life may apply. In brief, it is asserted that rights apply only to persons. Therefore, the question of who (or what) is a person becomes key.

Personhood

Mary Anne Warren, Professor of Philosophy at San Francisco State University, writes "I suggest the traits which are most central to the concept of personhood... are, very roughly the following:

- 1. Consciousness...**, and in particular the capacity to feel pain.
- 2. Reasoning** (the developed capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems);
- 3. Self-motivated activity...**
- 4. The capacity to communicate...**
- 5. The presence of self-concepts and self-awareness...**

It can be seen that Warren's approach mean that the rights that accompany personhood can be withheld from many individuals. This criterion-based view of personhood is frequently invoked to deny personhood, and hence the right to life, to the developing foetus. It has also been used to argue that individuals who have lost significant cognitive function due to illnesses such as dementia have somehow lost personhood. Sadly, Warren is not unique in such claims, influential ethicists such as Peter Singer and John Harris would largely agree and,

over time, such beliefs move from academia into mainstream culture and thought. Consequently, in contemporary discussion, whilst the concept of universal human rights is not contested, it may be accepted that rights are accorded only to *persons* rather than human beings, and that the definition of personhood may be based on criteria rather than essential nature. This is perhaps more clearly seen in discussion of the ethics of abortion, where the foetus may be seen as only a potential person or have no claim to personhood at all. When this criterion-based view of personhood is coupled with erosion of belief in the inviolability of human life, we can see how there will be a natural tendency to have a lower threshold for withholding life-prolonging treatments including CPR.

The Christian perspective

In the title of a paper questioning the secular view, Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke Divinity School, asks the question *Must a Patient be a Person to be a Patient? Or My Uncle Charlie is Not Much of a Person But He is Still My Uncle Charlie*. Hauerwas feels that even the language of "personhood" is unhelpful in this context, as it tends to diminish the value of the individual. Elsewhere Hauerwas has written about the importance of the individual as part of the story – and history – of the community. This is more than just a notion such as *Ubuntu*. (The word is from the Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which means, "I am, because you are". In other words, a person is a person through their relationships with other people.) Hauerwas reminds us that the story we are part of is the Christian story. Now secular ethicists may protest here that we are invoking theological ethics, but the very concept and language of personhood is derived from theological debate.

In his book *The Image of God, Personhood and the Embryo*, Calum McKellar reviews the history of the word. The term person (Greek *prosopon*) initially referred to the mask an actor wore on stage to convey the identity of the character they were playing. In classical Greco-Roman thought, there was no clear concept of the person as we know it. Plato views the soul as the key element of the human and the body as secondary. For Aristotle, the soul is the organising principle of the body. The need for clearer vocabulary arose during the debates within the early Church as the Fathers attempted to describe the nature of the Trinity and the person of Christ. There was considerable debate regarding the relationship between essential nature and observable properties – and some initial confusion as the Greek and Latin Fathers used language in different ways – before the word reached its meaning of the individual substance or essential nature of a human being. It is important though to note the direction of thought – the substance / essential nature of an entity displays its properties rather than being defined by them. As Oliver O'Donovan summarises, "The distinctive qualities of humanity are attributable to persons, not persons to the qualities of humanity." Characteristics are dependent on nature, not vice versa. A poor joke illustrating this comes to mind:

Why is an elephant big, grey and wrinkly?
Because if it was small, white and smooth it would be an aspirin.

Similarly, we might define a cat as being a domestic feline with four legs and a tail, but should the tail be lost in an accident, we would not think that it was no longer a cat. Personhood is inherent in being human. As Christians, we acknowledge the added dimension that man is created in the image of God; the divine

stamp of personhood is indelible. This then relates to our thoughts in the previous article regarding the inviolability of human life.

Entering the debate

Philosopher Charles Taylor reminds us that we live in 'a secular age'. We must note that the meaning of the word secular has evolved. No longer simply referring to activities that would not be considered sacred, secularism now holds that religion no longer has a legitimate voice in public debate.

So, what are we to do? Social commentator Rod Dreher suggests the idea of the "Benedict option," named for the 5th century monk Benedict of Nursia. By this, Dreher means the founding of communities in which virtuous life can flourish. This is important, we must maintain the faith and educate our people if we are to avoid being taken "captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ". (Colossians 2:8 NIV) However, whilst such communities may have a role in building up believers and keeping the faith, there is a risk that we withdraw from the world and pull up the drawbridge. We are to be salt and light. We are to be "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have". (1 Peter 3:15 NIV) It is worth recalling the impact made by the early church as a minority group in the vastness of the Roman Empire, living out their faith among people who did not know God and who thought their morals were madness. While there are many reasonable and logical approaches that we can and should take in making our point, as Christians we should not cede ground and hold back from putting forward specifically Christian arguments.

Concluding postscript

In the first part of this series, I made it clear that a decision to withhold CPR did not equate to euthanasia or assisted-dying.

That is still the case. However, as I write, the British Medical Association has just withdrawn its opposition to physician-assisted suicide. The Royal College of Physicians adopted a similar position in 2019. There are currently attempts being made in the House of Lords and Scottish Parliament to introduce legislation that would permit assisted-dying. There are concerns that this could precipitate a culture change with an expectation that more people would choose to die. This may in turn affect the tone of conversations regarding the relative benefits of CPR and other life sustaining interventions. In Northern Ireland, policies for advance care planning are also being developed. Whilst these will let people be involved in decisions about their long-term care and may help avoid unwanted treatment or hospitalisation when the benefits are less clear, it will be important to avoid the slide away from a presumption of life.



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Conversations with the King

Ben-Israel conducts the last of 4 interviews with Solomon, king of Israel.

King Solomon

Thanks for coming to see me Ben. I wasn't sure if you'd be willing to do another interview after the way I've behaved and brought disrepute upon our beloved land. I'm genuinely glad to see you, faithful friend. If only I had heeded your shot across my bow in our last interview; if only I had heeded the warning that the LORD had given. I'm sorry for the pain I've caused and sorry for the many ways I've offended the LORD our God.

Ben-Israel

What can I say, your Majesty? We're all sorry right now. Last time we talked together you told me about that warning from the LORD. If we forsake Him and run after other gods, then we would be exiled, and the temple destroyed, and our nation would be a by-word for calamity. We're just frightened of what is now to come. The only thing that sparks hope is your attitude of heart. Your father once said in one of his psalms, "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope." So I haven't given up hope yet.

King Solomon

O Ben, my iniquities are great. If you would have told me last time that I would have 700 wives, princesses and 300 concubines, I would not have believed you. If you had said that I would sacrifice to the false gods of Ashtoreth and Milcom, and build high places for Chemosh and Molech, I probably would have thrown you out of the palace! I was so sure of my heart, but therein was my grave mistake – I trusted my own heart rather than trusting the words of the LORD. In all of my wisdom, I lost sight of its beginning – the fear of the LORD.

Ben-Israel

I can hardly believe the reports myself O king, and I still can't get my head around how your heart was so turned

from the LORD our God. I mean, He appeared to you twice! He gave you immense wisdom. He gave you everything a man could ever want! And you loved the LORD!

Your words which we published in our previous articles were such an encouragement and a challenge to our readers. I feel I need to ask the question that many of us have been burdened with: how did it happen? How did you come to fall so badly?

King Solomon

I've considered this much in the last few months Ben. The heart is deceitful and sin is deceitful. Sometimes sin crouches at the door and pounces, but sin can also be like leaven and only slowly does it pervade the heart, slowly it takes over. You called me out on it when I took the daughter of Pharaoh as a new wife, but I remember justifying it as a sound political move, I even said that I had made that decision with godly wisdom. I was wrong. It was the beginning of many more marriages, many more "wise" alliances. But all the while, my heart was being misled. I loved my new wives, I wanted to please them – a little compromise here or there in terms of the gods they served didn't actually seem so bad at the time. But over the last 20 years my heart was turning away from the LORD. It was imperceptible to me, I guess. But I cannot deny it, the LORD was right, my continual disobedience to His word took me further and further away from Him. My sins separated me from the LORD. Having said that I never forsook the LORD totally, I still followed in His ways, but now I see that although I never asked for a divorce from the LORD, I was unfaithful to Him countless times. And every time I was unfaithful, I was further and further away from Him.

Ben-Israel

Thank you for your candour, your Majesty. There is wise counsel here for every one of God's people. The things that have happened to you serve as an example to all of us, and I pray that each and every reader would meditate upon the deceitfulness of sin and indeed the deceitfulness of the human heart; and let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

King Solomon

When we sin, Ben, it always affects those around us. We kid ourselves if we imagine that “it’s not doing anyone else any harm.” As I said Ben, sin is like leaven, it spreads. And it corrodes and causes untold harm, and the consequences of my sin have already brought disaster upon Israel. And by disaster, I mean judgement. God was angry with my sin and He has already poured out His judgement. Hadad the Edomite should never have been a viable threat to us, my father King David crushed him – but the LORD has raised him up against me, and now he is allied to Egypt! So much for me marrying Pharaoh’s daughter! And not only are we faced with war from the south, we face Rezon in the north. God has raised him up against me. What is more, we now face threat from within the kingdom itself, God’s hand is upon Jeroboam. Already God has shown him through the prophet Ahijah that he will reign over 10 out of 12 of our tribes! In vain I have tried to reverse the situation, but Jeroboam has fled; and I’m sure you can guess where... he’s found refuge in Egypt!

Ben-Israel

Alas, your Majesty, I had heard these reports but always hoped for better. There is still hope, is there not? In our previous sessions we considered the promises of the LORD our God, He always keeps His promises. I remember the promise of God to your father David: “I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” The LORD has spoken, your Majesty, surely we find hope in His words?

King Solomon

How faithful you are Ben, may the LORD bless you and keep you. You’ve always been one to remember God’s promises, how right you are. The LORD, in great mercy, has made yet more promises to me regarding the kingdom. He has said that He will not tear away the whole kingdom from my descendants – the kingdom will be established forever, just not as we know it today. One tribe will remain the treasured possession of the LORD. God has promised that there will always be a lamp in Jerusalem, for God has put His name there forever. So whatever happens Ben, keep your eyes on Jerusalem – God is going to put a light there, a light that will bear His holy name, a light that will establish God’s everlasting Kingdom. It reminds me of what we spoke about in our

first interview; about how the LORD has promised a final and ultimate King. A truly great king, greater than me and my father, a king begotten of the LORD, a king described as God’s own Son, a king who will inherit all the nations and the very ends of the earth! So while things are very dark in Israel today – there are brighter days to come under that King! So, I pray that your readers will not give way to despair, even though things are going to change greatly when I’m gone.

Ben-Israel

It sounds like you haven’t given up on hope either, your Majesty, you haven’t given up on the LORD. Would I be right to think that your heart is turned again to our LORD and God? Have you given up on your recent pursuits and committed yourself to our God? Tell me this is true, tell all Israel that there is hope when one repents and returns to the LORD.

King Solomon

The LORD has pursued me Ben. Just like He promised my father before me, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life...” He has brought me to my senses. He caused me to stop and think, to consider what life really was like when I lived it without Him. I was king of Israel, I could have it all, so I had it all. I enjoyed every pleasure under the sun, but in the end it was like a vapour – fleeting and unreal. I sought to leave a lasting legacy in what I built, and I built some great things like the temple and the palace! I planted vineyards and made gardens and parks and pools! I amassed a great number of servants and singers and wives, and I gained great possessions and I gathered riches like no man had ever dreamt of! I did it all Ben, and I did it my way. I had the very best of this world’s wealth and power and pleasure! If I wanted it, I got it, but in the end it was all was like a vapour and a chasing after the wind, and in reality, there was nothing to be gained under the sun. It was all empty without the LORD. Then I came to see that I was trying to fill an unfillable void. The LORD has placed eternity in our hearts, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in the LORD Himself. We are made for more than what this world can give us Ben. We are made for fellowship with God Himself. Only He can satisfy the longing of our hearts.

Ben, I know your readers may struggle to take any counsel or wisdom from me after all the mess I’ve made, and after I have been so blind to these ultimate truths. But it is my earnest prayer that these words would persuade them to keep returning to the LORD. It’s only the LORD who satisfies. I pray these final words of their king would be like goads, like pointed rods that would not only get their attention, but direct them to God’s word and God’s ways.



It has been my task as God's appointed king to shepherd God's people, and I have failed spectacularly. But as my father said, we have a perfect Shepherd, even the LORD Himself, One who provides us with green pastures and One who restores our very soul. Even though I have failed Him so grievously, He has restored my soul.

Ben-Israel

What a great and gracious God we serve, as you said last time – those words from Moses hold true forever: "The LORD God is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth..." This is a truth that all of Israel will need to cling on to in these coming years where we will know the chastening of the LORD. We've seen His mercy and grace in some wonderful ways in your early years as king, and you have known His patience and goodness in how He has drawn you back to Himself in humble repentance and faith. I pray that He would be our Keeper over these succeeding years, whatever they bring. As this chapter in our history comes to a close, what wisdom would you have us return to?

King Solomon

I'm humbled that you should even ask me Ben. My head would say that Israel must live in the fear of God and keep His commandments. His law and His ways have been graciously revealed to us, and such is a blessing unique to Israel. Don't make my mistake of thinking that there is satisfaction and joy in pursuing all this fallen world has to offer. Believe me, it is all a vapour and a chasing after the wind. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. Such words should not only cause us to tremble before our God, but also run to Him for refuge and forgiveness. And there is forgiveness with the LORD; when we return to Him He forgives all our iniquities and redeems our life from destruction. I pray that all your readers would find hope in Him. Our ultimate hope is in His final and everlasting King. And so my final wisdom to Israel would be from the heart – look forward with eager expectation to the coming King. The LORD will send Him in the fullness of His time. He is the One who will make all things new. Set your hope on Him, give your heart to Him, for He is altogether lovely. My prayer to God is simple, "Make haste my Beloved."

Ben-Israel

Thank you for your wisdom O king, and thank you for stirring our hope for the future. Let me close our time together with prayer: "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your Name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. Consider and hear us O LORD our God. You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed. Help us to trust You now. To You, O LORD, we lift up our soul, show us Your ways O LORD, teach us Your paths and lead us in Your truth, for You are the God of our salvation. On You we wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of our youth, nor our many transgressions; according to Your mercy remember us, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD. We acknowledge that we are poor and needy; make haste to us, O God! You are our help and our deliverer; O Lord, do not delay. Send forth your anointed One, raise Him up upon Zion. For the glory of Your name and for the salvation of Your people, hear our cry. Amen."

King Solomon

Amen. Come quickly LORD.



Robert Johnston is minister of Knock congregation in East Belfast. He is married to Julie and together they are blessed (and kept busy!) with three children; Ben (15), Luke (13) and Sophie (11).

SOME REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Andy has asked me to write an article reflecting on my ministry within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. I was ordained and installed to the Christian ministry on 2nd December 1988 in our Lisburn Road congregation. A year later I married Sheena, who has been a God-given helper to me ever since. After serving there for just over six years, Presbytery asked me to go to Bangor to help plant a church there. I began my work on 1st January 1995 and our congregation eventually moved to Groomspoint some ten years later. My plan is to retire from "full time ministry" on 31st October of this year (DV), although I hope to preach all my days. A combination of "too many birthdays" and the mental toll of recent events, have persuaded me, as far as I know my own heart, that it is the time for change. Here are some reflections on the changes I have noticed over the past thirty three years.

Firstly, there have been dramatic changes within society itself. If you had told me at the beginning of my ministry that our nation would end up in its current state of moral collapse, I would not have believed you. In those days no-one would have recognized some of the terms we presently use to describe gender matters, because more-or-less everyone believed that both nature and scripture teach that there are only two genders: "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). Now, by comparison, G K Chesterton's prediction has come to pass with a vengeance: "When people cease to believe in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything". In my early days in Presbytery I remember Rev G Burke proposing on one occasion that we shouldn't shop in Sainsbury's because they had started to open on the Lord's Day. Would that that was the only problem we were now confronted with in society! How important it is, therefore, that we plead the promise of Psalm 119:126: "It is time for you to work O LORD, for they have made void your law."

Secondly, the Lord's Day isn't held in the same regard as it once was, especially among Christians. Nowadays, many major sporting events such as Premiership football, Wimbledon, international rugby and open golf tournaments, often take place on a Sunday. It's not unnatural to expect unbelievers to support that trend, but when believers engage in worldly activities on the Lord's Day (for that is what it is), that is very sad indeed. The Puritans believed that the Sabbath was "the market day of the soul". For them, it was to be given over to public worship, private worship and works of necessity and mercy. This is the biblical position and the fact that this is no longer the case among many believers probably accounts for the low spiritual state of the church. Someone has written: "A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content and strength for the task for the morrow. But a Sabbath profaned whate'er may be gained is a certain forerunner of sorrow". Isn't it interesting that the fourth

commandment is the only one prefaced with the word "remember"? Our God knows only too well which one we are most likely to forget!

Thirdly, worship has changed dramatically in my lifetime and I'm not just saying that the old is good and the new is bad. Some modern songs are beautiful and I have treasured memories of singing "In Christ Alone" during public worship with my mother, just before she passed away, and she was as traditional a lady as you will ever find! However, "worship", in many churches, is no longer "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). It's more about exercising "gifts" and entertaining folk, rather than worshipping the One of whom scripture says "holy and reverent is His name" (Psalm 111:9). Some years ago I attended a wedding and the "worship" was led by a rock group. The music was so loud that I couldn't understand a word that was being sung and the occasion reminded me of rock music that I had listened to in the pub in a past day, with the lyrics changed. My thoughts gravitated towards David's first attempt at bringing the ark back to Jerusalem, as described in 1 Samuel 6. Things went pear-shaped for him, because he took his instructions straight out of a Philistine worship manual. He copied them by transporting the ark on a cart, rather than carrying it, which was what God commanded. I fear that we are making that same mistake many times over today, because worship is often about us, our desires and our feelings, whereas true worship is about God alone. In my humble opinion much modern worship lacks gravitas, because we do things man's way, rather than God's way. I am also saddened by the fact that there is a tendency to ditch our great legacy of hymns and psalms, and if we continue along that path it can only be to our spiritual detriment. God demands that we "rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11) and much modern "worship" doesn't meet that standard.

I could also mention several other areas where there have been changes and not for the better, such as a lack of conversions, a dwindling of numbers attending church, a shortage of students training for the ministry (although we have been here before and we must not forget Matthew 9:38), as well as a failure on the part of God's people to promote "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". However, there have been changes for the better too. Churches have been planted and reformed witnesses established where there had previously been none. As for good books, has there ever been a time in history when so many have been so readily available? I don't think so and, speaking personally, I am profoundly thankful for the good work of such publishing houses as the Banner of Truth Trust, so why not visit our bookshop sometime and avail yourself of some good literature to read, learn and



inwardly digest, and work out in your life? "To whom much is given, much will be required." We are indeed greatly blessed in this matter. And who can imagine what the last eighteen months would have been like without the technology presently available to us? Meeting on Zoom was far from ideal, but it was a lot better than the means available a few decades ago! Isn't it also wonderful that anyone, anywhere, can find out what Christianity is all about through the internet? Pray that God will bless this medium to the hearts of many who would never even darken the door of a church. Perhaps we'll then see them begin to attend worship!

Thankfully, some things never change and that's something I also rejoice in as I look back over the past thirty three years. God continues to answer prayer and many of us have had the joy of seeing members of our family come to faith, as well as others. We can never be thankful enough for that. God's people can also testify to the fact that He has supplied all our needs. Someone once said that money is the last thing we need to worry about in God's work, because if we're in the centre of His will, He always provides. I need only look at the beautiful building we presently worship in for proof of that! I can also look back upon times of fellowship, with some of the finest people I have ever met. The apostle John could say: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" (3 John 4) and I've had the privilege of pastoring many for whom that is true.

Best of all, God doesn't change. Christ continues "to build his church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it". His keeping power doesn't change either because "He is able to keep us from falling". As believers, "nothing can separate us from God's love" and we have a glorious future which can never be taken from us. As the Psalmist said: "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). It simply doesn't get better than that, so why not join us and we will do you good? (Numbers 10:29) And if you're already on the way then "let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

“ — ”

I have known Jeff for approximately fifteen years, since my wife and I joined Groomsport E.P.C. Over these years I have come to appreciate him as a friend and have benefited much from the faithful teaching of God's Word which I have found to be challenging and encouraging. During the past four years I have spent time in hospital and experienced the pastoral side of his ministry, when I was helped by his visits and grateful for the care and concern he has shown for myself and my wife.

From time to time I have been welcomed into his home along with other members of the congregation where we enjoyed Christian fellowship and hospitality from Sheena and Jeff, for which I say a sincere and heartfelt thanks. As they move on to the next phase of their ministry my

prayer is that they would enjoy health and happiness and God's richest blessing as they look forward to what He has in store for them.

Dougie Glover

“ — ”

I will always associate Jeff's ministry with the words "Keep on, keeping on". (Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Philippians 3 v 12).

Valerie and I joined the church at Groomsport in October 2007, having moved from Scotland with the recommendation from our then minister Rev Andrew Quigley RPCOS who said "you can't go wrong with Jeff." It's been 14 years since and I can certainly say that we have been truly blessed under his ministry. Jeff's sermons have always had the hallmark of a person who studies God's word in depth and spends time in prayer. This was evident each Sunday and in the mid-week services. Over the years we have studied many books of the bible. The only one I don't remember is the book of Revelation. This may be a sign that his ministry is not yet finished. Jeff faithfully visited those in the congregation who were in need of help or assistance, not to mention those in hospital. I recall him transporting a lady whose husband was very ill in hospital and spending hours at his bedside. This lasted for a period of 6 months before the gentleman went home to be with the Lord. If anyone needed help or assistance Jeff was the first one at your door. Jeff had these qualities in abundance and only the half has been revealed. The rest will be made known on that great day when all will be revealed.

Jeff will not only be known for his expository preaching and care but also with the building itself as he was the driving force behind its construction and growth. Even over time Jeff still denies his years and continues to enjoy playing football weekly despite one of his leg joints being a matter of a pinion.

Jeff is standing down from the responsibility of leading the congregation and we are sorry to see our friend and pastor go, but we are glad that he will continue to worship with us here at Groomsport. There is a saying in Scotland "Lang may yer lum reek" (long may your chimney smoke) which is the best way to wish someone a long and healthy life. He is not going out to grass just yet, and there is no doubt he will continue to be an encouragement to many as he plans to spread the word of God with the battle cry "Keep on keeping on".

Angus Macleod

JUNIOR CAMP REPORT SUMMER 2021

"A little taste of Heaven" - those were the words used by one leader at Junior Camp this summer and how true they were. What a sensational time we had at Crumlin EPC! There is so much to thank God for.

We had 60 children over the four days, attending from 10am-8pm. We jam-packed our days with all the camp favourites: tug-of-war and sand-modelling at the beach, fun at the swimming pool followed by a chippy on the lawn in the sunshine. We enjoyed the inflatable bouncy castle and assault course, especially going backwards and campers racing the leaders! We had fun and some very serious competition between our teams, including sports and water competitions and more. Henry Berry deserves special congratulations here: after decades of leading at camp and never winning a prize, Henry and Damaris's team, "The Wonky Weightlifters", raced to victory in the July camp competition. A well-deserved medal was awarded. Praise the Lord we will get a much better prize in Glory... keep waiting Henry!

If you like to see how fast you can suck up a strawberry lace without using your hands, or toss a pig, or perhaps design your own David and Jonathan outfit from toilet roll, you would love the challenge time at camp. Building junk robots, making biscuits and designing your own pencil case kept us very busy in craft. We finished our four days off with the camp favourite, the death-defying water slide. Leaders got soaked, dunked and, like the kids, ate too many sweets from our bargain tuckshop. We enjoyed fantastic food and had safe travels in the bus, and our bookstall saw many children go home with good books for future reading.

Our teaching programme was current and packed with God's word. We are very aware of the greater focus on mental health and the mindfulness mania in schools at the minute, and so we applied God's Word carefully in relation to our feelings and our needs. This was largely done through four talks from the life of King David, who, in the Psalms, talked to God about his every emotion - what a good role-model for us. We taught the boys and girls what God's word had to say to them as they face many different feelings and difficult situations in their own young lives. We considered:

"When you need a friend", the story of David and Jonathan. Our verse was Psalm 55v22, "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you," pointing the children to their better friend, their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"When you feel trapped", thinking about David and the Philistine army and teaching the children Psalm 34v4, "I sought the Lord and he found me and delivered me from my fears."

"When you have been found out", looking at David and Bathsheba and teaching the children how to deal with the guilt of sin from Psalm 130v3-4, "If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared." (Don't you love the 'buts' in scripture? God always does something amazing.)

Finally, we thought about, "When no-one cares", and considered David and Mephibosheth and saw God's lavish grace to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, teaching Psalm 56v3,



"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust You." What amazing verses for all of us as we face the challenges of our day-to-day lives! We were blessed to hear the story of Gladys Aylward and her missionary endeavours. It was wonderful to see how God uses those who have willing hearts. Ed Underwood told the children about the work of 100 Fold Mission. We were encouraged to think about what God can do with young lives as they follow Jesus in the here and now. We also pray God will raise up future church leaders, missionaries and faithful servants from our camp children.

The children were excited to learn they are "fearfully and wonderfully made", valuable but distinct, as boys and girls, sensitively preparing them, from God's word, for the assault on this truth that they will become acutely aware of in the years ahead. Listening to the talks was a blessing, as was listening to the children recite the memory verses so very well. There were some great questions and conversations with the children as they completed their worksheets beautifully.

Thank you for sending your children to camp. Many first-time children and parents arrived nervous and unsure, and the children left tired (but happy-tired) with new friendships made. Children learned about our beautiful Saviour Jesus Christ and their need to be saved. Our saved children were encouraged in their faith to see God's word as truth and the truth that they need to build their lives upon. They were encouraged and reassured to trust the Lord in all things. We pray God will work on in their young lives in the weeks and months ahead; we pray for salvation.

We want to thank the leaders and cooks for giving up so much of their time and coming to camp; they worked hard and went home exhausted. We are also thankful for all the unsung heroes who make camp possible: Crumlin EPC for allowing us to use their building, bus drivers, cleaners, artists, those who contribute to the financial running of camp and the prayer warriors - we couldn't do it without you all. Thank you, everyone.

We are planning ahead! God willing, camp reunion will take place on Saturday 5th March, 2022 and we are excited to be planning a residential camp 2-9th July 2022 DV. Get the dates in your diary.

If, like us, you get excited about camp and think you would love to get involved in 2022, please speak with your session or contact a camp leader for more details. We are always in need of leaders, drivers, cleaners, kitchen-help, printers, logistical support, financial help and, most importantly, God's people at prayer.

Robert and Julie Johnston



EPC Senior Camp Day 2021

"We know the whole creation has been groaning together..." Romans 8:22. This has certainly been evident in recent times as we have experienced the impact of a global pandemic. This has affected us all, not least the work of the EPC camps. After two cancelled summer camps, and for the first time since March 2020, Senior Camp gathered at Stranmillis EPC on Saturday 28th August 2021 for a "Camp Day". At the outset we reflected on the start of Psalm 90 where we are reminded that our God is outside of time, and in an ever-changing and uncertain world, our God is eternal and unchangeable. We had 18 young people join us for a sunny summer's day of fun and fellowship which included games at the park, Let's Go Hydro water-park, and crazy-golf. We also enjoyed the obligatory chill-out periods with a coffee or tea that are essential for Senior Camp! We were grateful to Colin Moore who brought two very challenging and encouraging messages from the Word on the theme of "relationship". Part of his second talk involved learning the definition of the Hebrew word, "Shema", which means to listen – but not just simply listen, rather to listen and act. A challenge for us all. It was great to finally have a taster of camp again! Sadly, the planned camp weekend in October cannot go ahead due to restrictions, but we look forward, God willing, to a weekend in Portadown 25-27 February 2022.

Mark & Jacqui Thompson



Autumn Conference

'Isn't it just lovely to be back out at something like this?' That was the feeling of many of the people who attended the EPC Autumn Conference on Saturday 18 September, the first event of its kind since April 2019. The venue was Stranmillis EPC and around 80 gathered for a day of Bible teaching and fellowship, under the title Man of Sorrows, Lord of Glory.

The Shorter Catechism in its answer to question 23 states that Christ, as our Redeemer, fills the offices of a prophet, of a priest and of a king, in his states both of humiliation and exaltation, and this was the theme of the three preaching sessions. In each case, Jonty Rhodes (minister of Christ Church Central, Leeds, a church plant in the International Presbyterian Church) turned our minds and hearts to the person and work of Christ as revealed throughout scripture, and sought to expand our understanding of his threefold role. It was truly food for the soul and as our understanding expanded so too did the sense of the unfathomable mysteries we were dealing with. Joining together with the wider denomination to sing praise to God felt like a privilege after months of restrictions.

Each congregation was represented and it was a joy and blessing to see whole families present. A parallel programme was provided for the children who had their own Bible teaching, craft, worksheets and games. We pray that they will remember these times fondly and with benefit. Our bodily needs were efficiently and pleasantly catered for at elevenses and lunchtime and these times also gave opportunity to peruse and purchase from the bookstall provided by the Evangelical Book Shop. Our thanks must go to all who organised the day and who helped in any way.



Finaghy EPC – 1946-2021

It is important to remember and give thanks for the Lord's help and blessing on His work over many years. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Finaghy congregation of the EPC. It's an opportunity to look back and see how gospel opportunities were taken, to see the Lord's provision in different aspects of the work, and to see the faithfulness of the Lord's people.

Back in 1946 after World War Two Finaghy was on the edge of Belfast: Finaghy Road South was a country lane, but the area was set for new housing development. Some members of the Lisburn Road congregation who lived in Finaghy saw there was an opportunity to establish a work here. One evening some met in the home of Mr. Samuel Shanks and knelt in prayer for a work to be established in Finaghy. We are thankful for the vision and desire they had to do this.

The Church Council gave permission to begin with an evening service on the Lord's Day. The British Legion Hall at Finaghy crossroads was hired, and the first service held on 15th September 1946. Eighteen people were present at the first service, and the services continued with more local people coming.

After a few years of meeting in the Legion Hall the decision was made for the church to put up a building of their own. A site was available in Locksley Gardens and a meeting was held in August 1948 to agree to start the building project. The building work was completed in a remarkably short time between March and July 1949! In the era of post-war austerity there were tight restrictions on building materials - seven of the church doors came from war-time detention cells at Aldergrove, and the roof trusses from aircraft hangars being dismantled at Long Kesh. The Lord provided for the work and over the years there have been extensions and a car park added on.

Since its beginning the congregation in Finaghy has had seven ministers: -

Rev. Frederick Leahy 1949-51 who went on to join the Reformed Presbyterians and became a professor in their college.

Rev. E. H. Titcombe 1951-52 before returning to England.

Rev. C.E. Hunter from 1952-1970.

Rev. Norman Reid 1970-78 who went on to Dublin and South Africa.

Rev. Sidney Garland 1978-87 who went on to serve with the Qua Iboe Mission, now Mission Africa in Nigeria.

Rev. Samuel Watson 1987-2012.

Rev. Marcus Hobson 2014 – present.

From an early point, when the congregation was still in the Legion Hall, a Sunday School was started. This was an important part of the work, at one point there were as many as 150 children, and some of those have gone to serve the Lord in other places. There were other children's meetings as well - a Good News Club, the Campaigners and a youth club. More recently Pathfinders started as an after-school club. Pray for the 100s of children and young people who have heard the gospel over the past 75 years.

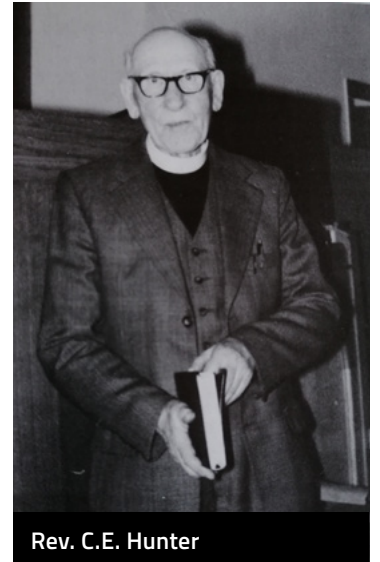
The Women's Meeting is also an important part of the church's life and witness. It has met on a Tuesday each week for over 50 years and been a means of encouragement and



evangelistic opportunity to those who have come to it.

The church in Finaghy began in response to new housing development and that desire for further outreach carried on. Some of the members lived in the Seymour Hill area and from 1965-72 held Sunday evening services, a Sunday School and a prayer meeting on that estate.

In more recent times the Lisburn Road congregation, from which Finaghy originally came, had to close. It was a rich blessing for Finaghy in 2008 to receive those members who came from Lisburn Road.



Rev. C.E. Hunter

As we look back over the 75 years of the work - it is right to mention the faithfulness of the Lord's people. Many have been members and supported the work for decades. The extent of effort amongst children, the evangelism in the local area, and the commitment for a time to Seymour Hill as well, shows a people who had 'a mind to work' (Neh. 4:6). There are too many to mention them all by name but we give thanks for many faithful elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers and other workers in the congregation.

The Finaghy area has changed a great deal over the last 75 years. Church attendance on the whole has declined; the number of different nationalities and religions in the local area has grown. There are still many to be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray for us as we seek to use that opportunity.



Left to right: Rev. Samuel Watson, Rev. Norman Reid, Rev. Marcus Hobson & Rev. Sidney Garland

Richhill: Reconnecting with the Community

The challenge of revitalising Trinity Church Richhill moved into a new phase in September with a Community Day and the launch of Explorers, our outreach to Primary School children in the local area. We had no idea what to expect with these ventures, but believed they would help us reconnect with our local community.

For the Community Day, we asked other EP churches if they might send volunteers to help run the event and were thrilled to see how many people came to help. Some looked after the afternoon tea that was laid on. Others ran a range of games and activities, including target goal kicks. Jonathan Graham, a children's worker from Co. Fermanagh, also came to organise a Lego Challenge as one of the key activities for the afternoon.

The whole event exceeded all expectations in terms of how many people came along and the enthusiasm it generated. Around 50 people turned up from the village and the kids really enjoyed the activities arranged for them. The Lego Challenge was a particular success and the two best builders were given a Lego kit each for their imaginative work.

The Community Day provided a natural link into the launch of Explorers the following week. This too was an answer to prayer. In part because the two Regional Directors for CEF in Armagh, Gareth and Lindsay Gwynne, very kindly offered to help for the first year; but also, because of how many children turned up on the first night. We had thought a dozen children might come along, but 37 turned up on the night. One of the pleasant surprises of this new work has been the number of parents who had been through the children's work in the church when they were that age themselves.

We have now moved to normal service times for our worship each Lord's Day; but this has meant a drop in the number of people attending. We range from 7-12 on a typical Sunday. Please pray that the Lord will give the growth as we seek to re-establish the work and witness of the church.

Explorers

Discovering God's Message in the Bible

For children age 4-11
Thursdays 6.30-7.30pm

Games, singing, Bible
Stories, Crafts, Quizzes
and More...



Obituary of Mr Roy Hamilton



Roy Hamilton passed into the immediate presence of his Saviour in the early hours of Sunday 8th August in a nursing home in Ballyclare that had cared wonderfully well for him in the last weeks of a prolonged illness. Originally a Belfast man, Roy had lived in Ballyclare for forty years. He was of a cheerful, happy disposition. A lorry driver for most of his working life and for much of that delivering oil, Roy's quiet affability perhaps reflected his many long days dealing with the public. His connection with the Ballyclare church came through the distribution of Harvest leaflets in 2012. It marked his return to the things of God and Roy became a faithful attender, with a strong gospel concern for others. He would bring a number of his family and friends to our evangelistic opportunities with a particular focus on the Harvest supper. He also made it his business to widely distribute audio copies of an early sermon of the late Rev. Dr. Billy Graham. Roy knew the grace of God and wanted that others know it too.

Roy bore his illness well and reflected admirably on his Saviour. He was greatly loved of his family, with grandchildren and great grandchildren, to whom we send our sympathies and particularly to his daughter Ellen, son Ian, step-son Jim and step-daughter Carol. It is of enormous consolation that Roy is with Jesus which is far better.

SR

Obituary of Miss Irene Brown



On 13th July 2021 the congregation of Stranmillis suffered a great loss when Miss Irene Brown was called into the immediate presence of the Saviour whom she loved and whom she served so well. Born on 6th May 1927, Irene grew up in the Ormeau district of South Belfast. It was in McClure Street Belfast City Mission that she came to faith in Christ in 1942 during a Sunday School lesson. Her teacher was Sadie Brown, mother of Rev Robert Beckett, and on the day in question the lesson was the Parable of the Ten Virgins. After her conversion she began to attend various meetings and services in the Botanic Avenue church which she subsequently joined in 1956. Irene was faithful in the work and service of Christ's church. She was always present at the worship services and prayer meeting. In her younger days she was very involved in the Children's Meeting and throughout her life she took an active interest in the work of Foreign Missions. The present writer can vividly remember her back in 1976 thrusting into his hand a copy of the 'From the Frontiers' quarterly magazine with the suggestion 'You should read this!' Her knowledge of the work of Free Church Missions in India, South Africa and Peru was impressive and she was well qualified to serve as Mission Box secretary, a post which she held from 1966 – 2000. Irene exercised a great ministry of encouragement to those who served in the ministry both at home and abroad. She faithfully wrote to her friend, Miss Florrie Donaldson, while the latter was serving as a missionary in Peru. Amazingly Irene wrote to Florrie every week for 35 years informing her of all that was happening in the church and sharing with her an outline of Mr Grier's sermons.

When the Botanic Avenue congregation moved to Stranmillis in 1971 Irene embraced most of the changes that took place over the next 50 years. She was just delighted to see the children of the church gathering at the front each Sunday morning. She knew them all by name and remembered their birthdays. When the Ladies' Fellowship commenced in 1982 she was always at the meetings, and the annual outing was a highlight of her year.

We have lost a faithful, caring, supportive and prayerful member who has left us an example of faithfulness in service, worship and prayer. We thank God for her life and rejoice in the knowledge that she is now 'with Christ'.

We extend our deepest sympathy to her sorrowing family circle, especially to her nieces and nephews who were so supportive of her over many years and particularly so during the closing months of her life.

PRAISE & PRAYER

Praise God for another harvest season and for his promise that while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.

Thank God for answering prayer for safekeeping and happy times at the camp days held over the summer. Pray that the word of God will bear fruit in the lives of those who heard and that camp friendships will be of spiritual benefit. Pray for camp leaders trying to organise further events amid continued restrictions and uncertainties.

Praise God for the next generation of children and young people in our churches. Pray that from them God will raise up elders, ministers, missionaries and Sunday school teachers.

Give thanks for the autumn conference, for Jonty Rhodes who spoke and for the blessed opportunity to renew friendship and fellowship with the wider church family. Praise God for his Son, Man of Sorrows, Lord of Glory.

Uphold in prayer all faithful ministers of God's word. Thank God for them and pray that they will know great help and encouragement in the preparation and preaching of the truth. Pray for the convicting and converting power of God at work each time his people meet for worship. Repent of sin in personal and church life.

Please pray for Andy Hambleton, editor of this magazine, and those who assist him. Pray that all will be done for the glory of God, that articles will stir readers on in their walk with God, will be a spur to prayer and will foster a concern for brothers and sisters in other congregations and beyond.

PRAISE & PRAYER

Join Trinity congregation, Richhill in praising God for their recent community day. Give thanks for the help of CEF workers in running their children's meeting and for the numbers attending. Pray that these events will be useful in developing relationships and in the building up of God's kingdom. Ask for God's blessing on the morning and evening services in Richhill and pray that more people will come regularly.

Pray that many students will connect with Christian Unions in their universities and colleges and will meet with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Pray that Christian students will stand up for the teaching of God's word and have a good testimony among their peers.

Thank God for many evangelical churches in university cities throughout the UK and Ireland who are reaching out to students. Remember in prayer the work of Stranmillis EPC, with their Coffee & Chat and student Bible study.

Thank God for his mercy in decreasing serious Covid cases and for the easing of restrictions. Give thanks that many church outreach activities have been able to restart and that people have been willing to attend. For those who have struggled with increased anxiety, loneliness or depression over the pandemic, pray that they will have renewed opportunities for social interaction, Christian fellowship and teaching.

Give thanks to God for 75 years of faithful ministry at Finaghy, and pray on for God's blessing in the work there in the days ahead.

BOOK REVIEWS

Title: *R. C. Sproul A Life*
Author: [Stephen J. Nichols](#)
Publisher: [Crossway Books](#) (2021)
Pages: 400
RRP £27.99
Our Price £20.99



R.C. Sproul is a name that is synonymous with Reformed Theology, particularly the recent growth in the Reformed faith in the United States (that same growth simply hasn't occurred here in the UK). I have personally been hugely influenced by Sproul in significant ways down the years. I recall clearly that one of the first books I read was *The Holiness of God*. I was in first year of university at the time and had begun to discover Reformed Theology through this book. It is accurate to say that it changed the course of my life. I devoured it in a week or so, considering at great depth the holiness of God with Sproul. I was enthralled and it helped me see Christ so clearly in all of Scripture, especially Isaiah 6, leading to much prayer and worship.

Seven years on, and I have lost count of how many of his books I have read, how many teaching series, sermons and commentaries I have enjoyed. I was delighted when I heard that this was coming out, so impatient to read it that I got it on Kindle before it hit the UK. It only took me five days to read it, I devoured it. This was my first time ever reading Stephen Nichols and I thoroughly enjoyed it - he has a simple yet clear writing style, much like Sproul himself. He takes the reader on a journey from Sproul's early years in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, USA) right through to his final sermon and passing into glory in 2017. In doing so, he covers all the biographical details in a way that we can learn from Sproul's life, but also covers all the major controversies that Sproul was involved in, standing firm on the Word of God every time. Nichols also gives us an insight into Sproul's many friendships, both in the Reformed world and at the local golf club in Florida, highlighting in the process that R.C. loved helping ordinary believers understand God's Word as much as teaching at seminary level.

The reader gets an excellent, warm, and very compelling overview of the life of R.C. Sproul in this biography. It will leave you more resolute to speak of Christ, to stand strong for the Lord and to be faithful to the end of your time on earth. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and would highly recommend it to everyone!

Ben Hegan, Crumlin EPC

Coffee & Chat

Opens Monday 20th September

We welcome our Student Community to Stranmillis and invite you to drop in for a coffee & chat. Meet fellow students, enjoy complimentary refreshments, or chat with our café team. Sign up for other activities such as student outings and discussion groups.



Opening times
Mondays – 7.30 - 9.30pm
Tuesdays – 12.00 - 2.00pm



For further details please contact John Roger: jr_johnroger@hotmail.com

EXPLORE

STUDENT BIBLE STUDY

Now meeting on Thursdays at 7.30pm
Commencing 23rd September

We welcome all students to Belfast and invite you to come & join us as we study the Bible together (refreshments included).

We meet at:
The Evangelical Bookshop
15 College Square East
Belfast BT1 6DD
(Side entrance, next to the Scout Shop, 2nd floor)



For further details please contact John Roger: jr_johnroger@hotmail.com

Best of the Blogs

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

[Three Questions for Evangelism \(Paul Levy\)](https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/three-questions-for-evangelism/)

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/three-questions-for-evangelism/>

"I sometimes fear that evangelism is made out to be something that you need to learn, that there's a magic course or a seminar out there that will unlock the hidden evangelist in you. Maybe the very term evangelism itself strikes fear into you. Jesus is so refreshingly clear, simple, and helpful when He says that "out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). That means if you love Christ and His people, you will end up talking about Him."

[No Hand But His Ever Holds the Shears \(Tim Challies\)](https://www.challies.com/articles/no-hand-but-his-ever-holds-the-shears/)

<https://www.challies.com/articles/no-hand-but-his-ever-holds-the-shears/>

"No matter how suffering comes and no matter the form it takes, it is always painful. And it is in our pain we need to remember the words of Jesus who said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ... Every branch that bears fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:1-2)."

[Hope in a World of Brokenness \(Mark Loughridge\)](https://gentlereformation.com/2021/09/04/hope-in-a-world-brokenness/)

<https://gentlereformation.com/2021/09/04/hope-in-a-world-brokenness/>

"Do you have any sense of hope?"—Kabul had just fallen, and the news was full of imagery from the captured city. Airport besieged by people looking to get out; terror etched on the faces of some, hopelessness on others. The question came from a thoughtful man, burdened by the mess of the world. For a man deeply sensitive to the pain and plight of others, he felt the weight. "Do you have any sense of hope?" Where do you find hope in a broken world: where violence, injustice and corruption abound, where assaults occur, where terrible accidents happen, where death rudely interrupts?"

[Note Taking in Worship \(Persis Lorenti\)](https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/note-taking-in-worship)

<https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/note-taking-in-worship>

"One of the joys of gathering with my local church on Sundays is sitting under the ministry of the Word. This is especially dear to me after having been un-churched for many years. I was spiritually malnourished by the time God providentially led me to the church I now call home. Hearing sound preaching was a feast for my soul after those lean years, and it still is. During the sermon, I take notes. Some may prefer to devote all their attention to listening and forego the pen and paper, but taking notes helps me learn

and to recall what I have heard. So here are a few thoughts that may encourage you in your note-taking."

[The World Is Catechizing Us Whether We Realize It or Not \(Kevin De Young\)](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-world-is-catechizing-us-whether-we-realize-it-or-not/)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-world-is-catechizing-us-whether-we-realize-it-or-not/>

"I know there are many issues confronting the church today. In some contexts, there may be a lack of love toward outsiders, or a fascination with conspiracy theories, or a temptation toward idolatrous forms of Christian nationalism. You may think that the drumbeat of the advancing sexual revolution is still far off in the distance, a problem in someone else's village but not in yours."

[A Weekly Honeymoon \(Stephen Spinnenweber\)](https://www.reformation21.org/blog/a-weekly-honeymoon)

<https://www.reformation21.org/blog/a-weekly-honeymoon>

"When I first learned of the ongoing obligation to keep the Sabbath day holy, it felt like a bucket of ice water being dumped over my head—I was shocked and gasping for answers. "How could I have missed this for so long? What do I do now? What do you mean I'm not allowed to do x, y, or z?" My experience is not unique. As a pastor, I have had countless conversations regarding the 4th commandment and been asked questions in the same vein as my own. It is that third question, "Why can't I?," that I have had to think through carefully and ask God for wisdom to respond in such a way that it will help the inquirer to call the Sabbath a delight."

