



SPRING 2014

# PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

INSIDE  
ISSUE 25/1

RUGBY & THE SABBATH: A VISIT FROM EUAN MURRAY

LONDON PRESBYTERIAN CONFERENCE 2014

PREACHING FROM HEBREWS

SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHURCHES

& MUCH MORE

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

My sincere thanks to readers for their patience and for their feedback and support. Patience, because we have not been able to maintain the regular output of *Presbyterian Network* issues. Feedback: this is always appreciated, especially now as we are trying out a new format. Support: thank you for gifts made to support our publishing work. It is a reward indeed to know that many read the Network from cover to cover.

As well as news from around the churches, this issue contains two articles drawn from material presented at the conference of elders and ministers in Cheltenham. As you read these – about ministers' discouragements, and about preaching from Hebrews – please uphold the preachers of God's Word in your prayers. We are truly 'earthen vessels' who feel the challenge of dividing the Word of God aright, and of standing firm when the conditions are difficult.

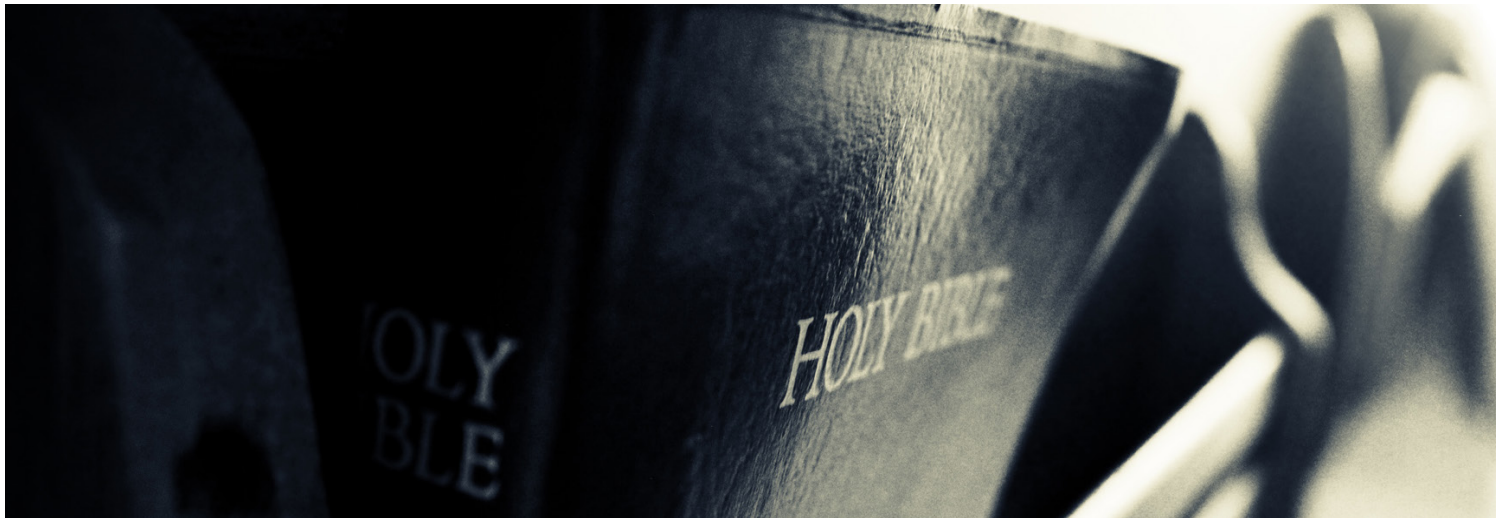
Annual Subscription is £7. The normal pattern is two issues of the *Presbyterian Network* and two *Pray for One Another* news bulletins, in a year. Cheques payable to the 'EPCEW' should be sent c/o the Editor at Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

*Presbyterian Network* is published by the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales* (Charity No. 801935) to promote the well-being of the churches by offering articles that present biblical, Reformed Christian faith, and by sharing news about its congregations; and to provide information to those outside its membership.

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# BUILDING BY GOD'S DESIGN

## THE LONDON PRESBYTERIAN CONFERENCE

In 1986 the London Presbyterian Conference became a catalyst for the Presbyterian Association in England and later the EPCEW. Over a quarter of a century later, in 2012, a second conference was held in London on the theme, 'Warm Hearted Presbyterianism,' with much thanks to God for how he has guided and grown the EPCEW in that time. The day was considered a great success, drawing people from EPCEW congregations from Durham to Cardiff to Chelmsford and everything between. Not only did it draw people from our own congregations, but a good number of people from Independent and Anglican churches and from theological colleges, all interested in seeing more similar churches being built in England and Wales.

After the success of 2012, we decided to hold a follow-up conference this year. For most organisations nowadays their shop window is their website! The EPCEW is no different and ours states in bold colourful type on our home page that we stand for, the Inerrancy of Scripture, upholding the Westminster Standards and fulfilling the Great Commission.' These form a brilliant basis for our next conference!

These three governing principles are not accidental to us or mere preferences or unrelated

to each other. Each of the three drives the others and are needed together in order for us to plant and grow healthy churches. Hence our theme: 'BUILDING BY THE BOOK.'

We are delighted that Ligon Duncan, CEO of Reformed Theological Seminary, will be with us to give the opening talk on the inerrancy of Scripture. Andrew Young, the minister of the Cheltenham EPCEW congregation, will be looking at the Westminster standards, to help us think about the biblical justification for such standards, and about their enduring usefulness. Our final talk will be by Ian Hamilton on the Great Commission.

During the day there will be a time dedicated to prayer and an interview with Bill Schweitzer about using these three principles in growing churches from scratch in the North East of England.

**WHERE?**  
**REGENT HALL**  
**275 OXFORD STREET**  
**LONDON**  
**W1C 2DJ**



**THE INERRANCY  
OF SCRIPTURE**  
**LIGON DUNCAN**



**THE WESTMINSTER  
STANDARDS**  
**ANDREW YOUNG**



**CHURCH  
PLANTING**  
**BILL SCHWEITZER**



**THE GREAT  
COMMISSION**  
**IAN HAMILTON**



**WHEN?**  
**SATURDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2014, 11.30 AM-4 PM**  
**£5 AT THE DOOR**  
**MORE INFORMATION**  
**[www.london.presbyterianconference.org](http://www.london.presbyterianconference.org)**

# PREACHING FROM HEBREWS

REV. DR PETER NAYLOR

This material was first presented to the Presbytery's annual conference on 3 January 2014. It was intended for preachers; and I allowed myself scope to be a little provocative and challenging. I hope that this material will be of wider interest and especially that it will benefit those who listen to sermons.

The Bible contains many striking and memorable verses that draw us to them. These passages can be dangerous to the preacher. They attract him like a moth to the flame. For example, Paul's words, 'For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2: 2). How often I have heard a preacher treat these words as if Paul was speaking about the content of his ministry at Corinth. The context makes it clear that Paul is thinking about the manner of his ministry, that he studiously avoided proud oratory and instead stuck to lowly plain declaration of the truth. He sought to exhibit the lowliness of Christ among them. And then, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil. 4: 13). I heard a past American President say that Billy Graham gave him this text, and he applied it to all the tasks of his political office. Paul did not mean that; he did not mean 'all things' in an absolute sense. Again, context shows us what Paul meant, that he was enabled to suffer all that the ministry had thrown at him, particularly poverty and humiliation, by the strength of Christ.

The danger of taking such verses and passages

and making of them something that they are not, is present in the case of Hebrews. Have you ever preached a series of sermons on men of faith from Hebrews 11? That chapter was not intended to be used in that way. Have you ever approached the book of Hebrews with the threefold office of Christ in mind (Prophet, Priest and King)? That paradigm, developed as it was by John Calvin in the 16th century, was almost certainly not in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews. Take Hebrews 11: 1, 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'. Have you ever treated this as a definition of faith? It is not that. What about Hebrews 13: 8, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever'. Is this a statement about Christ's divine immutability? If we want to understand it, we must ask, 'What did the writer mean? Why did he say it in this place?'

Key questions are these. 1. What is Hebrews? 2. What was the situation it addressed? 3. What is the purpose or message of the book? 4. How does the author achieve that purpose? 5. How then should we apply its teaching today? In other words, we must seek to establish clearly the context and the message of the book.

## 1. WHAT IS HEBREWS?

The writer calls it a word of exhortation (13: 22). This phrase is also found in Acts 13: 15. It refers to a sermon preached in the synagogue. Hebrews is a sermon. It has some of the characteristics of a letter, but not all. It is a sermon. As such it has one

message, it makes one single point. That focus controls every detail of the text. This book argues a case. This will guide our exegesis.

## 2. WHAT WAS THE SITUATION TO WHICH IT WAS SENT?

The book contains many indications of the situation of those addressed. They had heard the apostles and had believed in Christ. They had experienced spiritual gifts, miracles. They had done many works of love, and had endured a first wave of persecution (2: 3-4; 6: 4-5, 10; 10: 32-35). Time had passed, and instead of making spiritual progress, becoming wiser and stronger, they had actually gone backwards and become weaker (5: 12ff). It seems that they had not understood with clarity Christ's office and work, and they were not clear why the ceremonies of Moses' law were no longer needed. Now renewed pressure had come upon them. They felt the pain of alienation from the temple and synagogue, from family and friends. They felt acutely the pain of bearing the reproach of Christ. They felt the loss of the ancient ceremonies which they had known from their youth. They were tempted now to forsake the assemblies of Christ's people and their leaders and to retrace their path to the temple and synagogue with its priesthood and sacrifices (10: 25; 13: 7, 17). Perhaps they did not fully realize that to do so would be to forsake Christ utterly. They were in danger of falling away from Christ and of not completing their journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

## 3. WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE, OR THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK?

Positively, this sermon called them to hold fast their confession of Christ firm to the end (3: 6). 'You have need of endurance' (10: 36). Negatively, it warned against an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God, the danger of falling away, of drifting from Christ (2: 1; 3: 12; 6: 6; 10: 26, 29).

The writer aims to persuade them to endure in their confession of Christ, to exercise faith, and to accept and be profited by the training of

suffering. He wants them not to return to the temple.

In other words, he calls them to stay with the new covenant and not to revert to the old covenant. When we put it like this, we must be very clear that the old covenant is not the whole 'Old Testament'. It refers to the Sinai Covenant.

And the writer is not even thinking of the entire Sinai Covenant, but only the ceremonial laws of the priesthood, the tabernacle, and the sacrifices; those are the things which he regards as obsolete. But overall he presents a continuity from Old Testament to New: we have the same promises, the same faith, and the same inheritance as Abraham.

## 4. HOW DOES HE MAKE HIS CASE?

First, observe a pattern in the book. The writer presents a block of teaching, and then moves to exhortation. I will not provide a complete analysis here, but merely illustrate this.

Instruction (1: 1-14). He presents the Son of God, through whom God has spoken to us. The entire chapter shows us Christ in his exaltation. The series of Old Testament quotations are all words of the Father to, or concerning, his Son, his exaltation (resurrection, ascension and session). He is the heir and he has entered into his inheritance; he is seated at the right hand of the majesty in highest heaven. The writer draws on Psalm 110. Indeed, this Psalm, perhaps more than any other part of the Old Testament, permeates the thought of Hebrews. Christ is exalted far above angels and this is important because the Old Testament ceremonies were highly esteemed as coming to Israel through the mediation of angels.

Exhortation (2: 1-4). 'Therefore' since the new covenant mediator is far superior to the old covenant's mediating angels, we must give his message more careful attention. This is the exhortation: give more heed, and do not let it slip. Interestingly, the writer returns to this exhortation towards the close of the book (12: 25-29).

Instruction (2: 5 – 4: 10). Here the focus is on the world to come, which is also the rest that remains for the people of God to enter. Jesus who has sat down on high has been crowned with glory and honour (2: 9) and has entered his rest (4: 10). As the writer speaks about the future inheritance in this way, there is an implicit comparison with the present world, Canaan and the Jerusalem below, and with the rest which Joshua gave to Israel. The point is that we do not look to that inheritance but to one yet to be received. We do not yet possess it; the world to come is not yet put under our feet (spoken of in Psalm 8), and we have not yet reached the rest (spoken of in Psalm 95). But there is one who has reached it, Jesus. And through him the Father is bringing many sons to glory (2: 10). The message is: There remains a rest for the people of God.

Exhortation (4: 11-16). Be diligent to enter that rest and do not stop short of it.

Instruction (5: 1 – 10: 18). This long section of teaching is interrupted by some elements of exhortation, but that should not distract us now. It is a single section on the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. Psalm 110 continues to be formative. Jesus' priestly ministry is compared and contrasted with that of Aaron and the Levites. Two sanctuaries are compared, the earthly temple and tabernacle made with hands, and the heavenly one. The sacrifices are compared: Jesus' single, 'once for all', sacrifice is compared with the multitude of offerings under the law of Moses; the true is compared with the shadows that preceded; the old and the new covenants are compared, and the promises attached to each.

Exhortation (10: 19-39). Having such a superior mediator, a final and completely effective sacrifice, and a heavenly sanctuary where the forerunner has already entered, let us draw near with confidence to God by this new and living way.

Second, note that the writer works all the time with comparison. The Hebrew believers were looking at the temple and the church and

feeling that the church suffered by comparison. The temple had a 'wealth' of ceremonial worship which the church did not have. They saw the glory of the ceremonial law: there Ananias was going into the holy place; there daily blood was offered; and they could look at the wonderful stones (soon to be cast down!). It was impressive, reassuring. It was visible, tangible, spectacular and familiar.

But the writer responds with comparison. It is as if he says, 'You want to compare? Good, let us compare! Gladly! Let me show you that what the church has from Christ is superior on every count.' The new covenant wins hands down! The law came through angels; the gospel came through the Son. The angels are commanded to serve and worship him. The people of Judea have the promised land and the earthly Jerusalem, the place which Joshua gave them; the church looks to the world to come, a promised rest, and although it does not yet possess it, Jesus does. The temple has thousands of priests? That is because they keep on dying! We have only one, but he needs no successor, because he never dies. They were made priests by a law that required them to belong to the tribe of Levi. Jesus did not come from that tribe. Is his priesthood then invalid? No, he holds his office by a superior word: he was made priest with an oath. And he has a far higher office: remember that Abraham was less than Melchizedek (7: 7) and Levi was in Abraham when he honoured Melchizedek (7: 10). So Christ is shown to be higher than Aaron and all his successors. They serve on earth; he serves in heaven; they remind us of our sins every time they slaughter a lamb; through the cross, God has forgotten our sins forever. The old covenant was not faultless; they broke it and were at fault (8: 7,8); the new covenant is unbreakable and perfect and brings the conscience to peace through the effective ministry of the Lord. Psalm 110 is key here: the second oath (in Psalm 110: 4) has the effect of changing the law!

We must not think that the writer despises the old covenant. But he knows that the time has come for it to be superseded and for the sins committed during the time that the ceremonies

were in force to be removed by the blood of Christ (9: 15).

## 5. HOW DOES THIS GUIDE OUR EXEGESIS?

The message and the method of persuasion govern the entire content of the book, and therefore they guide our exegesis. Here are some examples.

### ABOUT FAITH (11: 1-40)

In chapter 11, the writer develops the point that the just shall live by faith (10: 38-39). He develops it with a series of examples. He did not expect his hearers to stop him in order to study the life of each one in turn. He was showing them that two characteristics of faith recur in all these cases. 1. Faith looks to the invisible and disregards what is visible. 2. Faith is rewarded by God with a future, as yet unseen, reward. The examples make the same points time and time again. Faith looks at things unseen (11: 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 27 etc); faith looks to the reward (11: 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 26 etc.). Faith is the substance of things hoped for (i.e., the future reward) and it convinces us of things which we do not yet see (i.e., things invisible) (11: 1).

### 'LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT AND THE SIN WHICH CLINGS SO CLOSELY' (12: 1)

Is this to be understood as a general exhortation: one Christian carries a certain kind of weight and falls prey to one particular sin; another has his own weights and is prone to another sin – your weakness is not mine etc.? No, this is not the way to understand this exhortation. Is it not clear that the readers were tempted to encumber themselves with the heavy burdens of the ceremonies of the Sinai covenant? If they returned to the temple rituals, the daily blood sacrifices, and all that went with them, would not those things weigh them down and prevent them from running and making progress in their faith? Were there many sins that now clung on to them so closely? Was it not one specific sin that they had in common? The sin of unbelief,

of turning away from Christ. Hence, the writer follows up immediately with the positive: 'Looking unto Jesus' (12: 2). Whilst it is true that any cherished sin will impede our progress, Hebrews has something very specific in mind.

### THE EXHORTATIONS OF CHAPTER 13

One commentator has written: 'A series of apparently disconnected exhortations and other incidental teaching is found in this last chapter.' Such a view of Hebrews chapter 13 fails to see how these exhortations fit in their context. Once we see that these exhortations are relevant to the particular situation of the readers, we shall also see that they are not disconnected but that they carry the theology through to its practical expression in life. If they desert Christ, they will also fail in all the duties of the Christian life, in their relationship to brothers, to husbands and wives, to elders and pastors.

'Let brotherly love remain (or continue), do not neglect to show hospitality..., remember those in prison' (13: 1-3). Although they refer to general principles of Christian conduct, these are not general exhortations. The point is that the believers were tempted to discontinue love, hospitality and associating with those imprisoned. Why might they discontinue these things? Because, by these activities they were publicly associating themselves with others who were suffering reproach for Christ's sake. Welcome a persecuted Christian into your home and you invite the same hostility. It was costly to work out brotherly love, to turn up at the prison where a fellow believer was held in chains. (Paul knew this: Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chains, and he was not deterred from visiting him and supplying his needs in prison (2 Tim. 1: 16).)

Remember your leaders (13: 7). This needed to be said because it was not easy to stick with Christ's servants. This is not a general command, but it is a call to remain faithful to the pastors of the church when it would be safer and easier to forget them and submit once again to Ananias, the scribes and Pharisees.

## JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER (13: 8)

What does this mean? Why does he say it in this precise place? It is not the attribute of divine immutability that is in the foreground here. It is the fact that Christ is a high priest forever, supported by an immutable oath, and serving by the power of an endless life. He can say this so briefly because he has already spelled it out over the course of 12 chapters. 'You are the same' (1: 12); his is an unchangeable priesthood (7: 24). This is central to the argument of the book. Maintain your confession of Christ without wavering, because he is the same: he was ordained by God as high priest, he is still that high priest today, and he will remain so for ever.

### APPLYING THE MESSAGE TODAY

John Calvin saw how relevant this message was to the Reformed people of his own time. They had recently been delivered from the errors of Rome. But what was the Protestant Church by comparison with Rome? So many of the old ceremonies were discontinued. Protestantism rested in Christ and did not require decoration with rituals, feasts, saints, and popes. They felt the contrast. They were in such a similar position to the Hebrews of the first century.

The message of Hebrews speaks to us today. It explains why the Old Testament ceremonies were not needed once Christ came. Who needs the blood of bulls and goats when they have been forgiven all their sins by the one sacrifice made at Calvary? Who would fix their desires on the land of Israel today, when we look for a city built by God? We need to understand that by faith we look to things future which we do not yet see and possess. We also need to be exhorted to constancy in our faith. We need to be strengthened to persevere in times of reproach and shame. We look to Jesus, the forerunner. We know that he has entered into heaven, that he is crowned with glory and honour; and his presence there is the anchor that keeps our souls.

# HOSTING THE ICRC

## REV. DR PETER NAYLOR

At the end of August, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales hosted the Eighth International Conference of Reformed Churches.

The opening service was memorable. Ian Hamilton's sermon encouraged us all in the knowledge of Christ's triumphal victory procession (2 Cor. 1: 12-17). The singing of God's praise lifted the roof!

Lectures and group discussions focused on preaching God's Word – its nature, necessity, and practice in non-literary cultures.

The ICRC always includes time for relaxation. Since it was taking place in Wales, group visits were arranged to two castles, a coal mine, and museum of Welsh Life. On the closing evening, we were able to listen to the music of the Welsh harp and singing a short selection of hymns tracing the earthly life of Christ from the manger to his ascension.

Fellowship was good. Two churches were welcomed as members, both from Africa: the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Churches of Sudan. A few months later, reports coming from South Sudan are very disturbing: the Nuer tribe is being systematically slaughtered. At least two Presbyterian ministers were dragged into the streets and murdered. Patrick Wic, who attended the ICRC, has had to leave his home to seek safety elsewhere.



# CAUSES & CURES OF MINISTERS' DISCOURAGEMENT

REV. MATTHEW JOLLEY

Discouragement in the ministry is a killer. Ministers of the gospel and office bearers of all kinds can be destroyed by discouragement. There are times when the burdens of ministry, setbacks and opposition encountered, can leave a man broken and despairing.

In 1 Kings 19, we see Elijah the prophet succumbing to discouragement in his ministry. Whether you have ever been brought as low as Elijah or have just waded in the shallows of discouragement, my hope is to offer you some comfort from this part of God's Word. Our passage teaches us about the causes and the cure of ministerial discouragement.

## 1. THE FIRST COMFORT: THE MAN OF GOD MAY FALL INTO DISCOURAGEMENT BECAUSE HE IS A MAN OF GOD.

Consider the context of our passage and what has brought Elijah to this point. Elijah ministered in a time of spiritual decline and apostasy. The people of Israel were turning away from the Lord. As he says 'the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets' (verse 14). The nation was in moral and spiritual ruin. There was outright rejection and hostility towards the Lord their God and his Word. Queen Jezebel swears she will have Elijah killed. Elijah seems to have accomplished nothing. Fruitless. All his courage, his faith, his bold action, has achieved seemingly nothing. He must have felt his entire life, his sacrifices and hard work, had been for nothing.

Would any of us find fault with Elijah? Did he fail in being faithful in any way? With hindsight we can esteem Elijah for his faith, obedience and courage. He did everything he was sent to do—he cannot be faulted. His despondency comes because he loves the Lord and his people so much. He is zealous for the glory of the Lord of hosts.

Brothers, no doubt you may have made mistakes. But not everything is your fault. When we are discouraged we all tend to pile on the guilt and become overly harsh with ourselves. We begin to think that ministry is fruitless because of us—and feel worse and worse and worse. Your calling is to be faithful, like Elijah. Good men can have a seemingly fruitless ministry and face many set backs. But that is no measure of how pleasing they might be to God, as Elijah was. It might be that doing the right things and caring for the right things is why you are discouraged. It is in fact a mark of true grace. Be encouraged by your discouragement. The first comfort is this: the man of God may suffer discouragement because he is a man of God.

## 2. THE SECOND COMFORT IS THIS: GOD'S COVENANT.

The covenant shapes and directs the Lord's help to Elijah and to us. Elijah travels through the desert for 40 days. Along the way he is led by the Angel of the Lord. He is fed with miraculous, spiritual food, food from heaven. He travels to Mount Sinai and there the Lord meets with him

in a theophany, a manifestation of power, in thunder, fire, and in an earthquake. Why is the Lord meeting with Elijah in this way? The Lord is leading Elijah through a re-enactment of the time he entered into covenant with the nation of Israel at the Exodus. What is the message and comfort to Elijah? The Lord is still faithful to his covenant. Israel may desert the covenant and fail to uphold its obligations but the Lord will never go back on his word. He will always be faithful to the promises he makes in covenant. He will always meet his obligations to be God to his people. He is faithful even when we are faithless. The comfort in all your travails is that we serve a God of covenant. He will be faithful to you. He does not change. Underneath rest the everlasting arms. Do you feel let down by those around you? Do you feel alone? Has everyone despised, forsaken you? There is one who never will. Be comforted by his covenant.

## 3. OUR THIRD COMFORT IS FOUND IN THE FULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST.

The first gift God shares with Elijah is the provision of miraculous food from heaven. The Angel of the Lord awakens him and somehow in the desert he provides food to sustain him. This heavenly food is able to sustain him for 40 days, journeying through the wilderness.

What does this food from heaven signify? Nothing less than the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Lord says in John 6, the miraculous food from heaven in the wilderness was a type of his own coming into the world. And he says, 'He who comes to me shall never hunger... I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all he has given me I should lose nothing.' The bread from heaven is a picture of Christ's ability to save—his fulness of grace and power. Just as bread sustained Israel and Elijah in the desert, so the Lord Jesus sustains forever those who feed on him. He is all sufficient to save. He is able, he is more than enough, he is absolutely abundantly sufficient to meet every need. The supply of manna from heaven never ran out. The bread Christ gives, never runs out. He never runs out of grace, or love, or power.

Hungry souls can feed on him again and again and again. What you must do, brothers, when discouraged, is to feed on the absolute sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Discouragement comes because we have stopped looking at Christ and have started looking at ourselves or our circumstances. Of course you are discouraged if you look at the church or at yourself! But do not look at those things—look up. Lift up your eyes; see the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ.

## 4. THE FOURTH COMFORT IS FOUND IN THIS: LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GRACE.

As you consider the parallel with the giving of the law at Sinai and Elijah's meeting there, it is what does not happen that is most significant. When the Lord spoke to Moses with thunder and fire it was so frightening the people cried out, 'Let not God speak to us, lest we die!' Confronted with the law they felt utterly convicted of their sin and were terrified of the holiness of the Lord.

When Elijah comes to the mountain, the wind picks up, the rocks shake, and the fire falls upon the mountain, and you would then expect the voice of the Lord to thunder out: to thunder out his anger and his law; to speak of judgment of a sinful people. Instead comes a still small voice, a whisper. Not a voice of law to condemn and do away with sinners. But the sweet, soft, tones of a loving God who will save them from themselves. It is the voice of the gospel, if I could put it that way, that Elijah is greeted with.

The Lord will not abandon his people: he will sanctify them. There is no voice of law thundering out against you. There is only the still, sweet and gentle, whisper of the gospel. The Saviour has hushed the law's thunder. The Lord will never speak to you in thunder to frighten you away.

He is speaking to you in and through Christ, your Saviour, and no matter what your sins, failures and weaknesses, the Lord is merciful. That the Lord whispers and doesn't thunder is the surprise of grace. Be amazed, brothers, by the grace that is yours. The Lord our God is patient, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. When you are discouraged, remember the Lord is not against you, but for you.

Listen to the gentle, comforting, refreshing, small voice of the gospel.

#### 5. THE FINAL COMFORT IS THIS: THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

The Lord promises to raise up a champion who will destroy the house of Ahab. He will also raise up a prophet to complete Elijah's work and to take on his mantle. And he will preserve a faithful remnant of believers, 7,000 strong, when Elijah thought he was alone. The Lord will redeem his people, faithful to his promise of grace.

What we should draw from this, is the comfort of the perseverance of the saints. No matter what discouragements we face, the Lord will build his church. He will secure the next generation. He will always have a people in the world. Even when we seem to fail and all is against us, still the Lord has reserved himself a people. 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' Why do the nations rage? The Lord looks from heaven and laughs at them.

Despite the apparent fruitlessness you feel, despite the smallness of numbers, despite all your discouragements, the work will be accomplished.

You are on the winning side! In all your discouragements, be refreshed by the grace of our God, in covenant, in Christ, in mercy.

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHURCHES

## SHEFFIELD

In November, Rev. Bill Schweitzer came from Gateshead to preach on the office of deacon, from Acts 6, and David Porteous was ordained as our first deacon. Paul Brown has just completed diaconal training and, subject to the congregation's vote, will be ordained in the spring. These are significant encouragements to us and it means that the workload is being spread in the congregation.

Due to our growth as a church in a number of areas, the session asked me to begin to look for a potential church building. This led us to put an offer for a building called Hill Top Chapel (pictured opposite), which is about four minutes from where we currently meet. The offer has been accepted by the Church of England and we hope to begin services there during March or April 2014, while we wait for the actual purchase to go through, which could take between 12 and 18 months.

Please pray for finances for the purchase and the development of Hill Top Chapel; for our two new series on the Lord's Day on Genesis and Hebrews; for our outreach to the students at two universities in Sheffield; and for the young people's work (11-18 years).



## BERLIN

There is nothing easy about church planting but the doors are opening for EPCEW to plant a Westminster Confession Presbyterian church in Berlin. In February there will be trial services in two locations, to enable people to experience the kind of worship services in German that will happen when a congregation is established. This is a good step forward. The monthly Bible studies continue and the work is steadily being consolidated in preparation for regular worship services on the Lord's Day. Please pray for grace and wisdom for our session in all the future decisions.

*Kevin Bidwell*

## BETHEL, CARDIFF

The work amongst children at Bethel has continued to grow with an attendance of 22 children at Sunday School one week over the Christmas period. Children from the local school have shown interest in both the Sunday School and Catechism Club, with grandchildren from members also attending. Tiny Tunes, our mums and tots group, has seen a reduction in numbers of late but we pray that newcomers from the locality will join with us. A designated prayer meeting for the children's work is held at least once a month when we call upon God's name to work amongst the hearts of these beloved children.

The highlight of this period has to be the hosting of the ICRC with visiting delegates from all over the world joining in fellowship and worship at Immanuel and Bethel churches. With ministry from the Rev. Ian D. Campbell and Rev. Tony Curto, we were blessed by God's word and enjoyed unity with members of His church. One member commented that she was thrilled to have been part of such company and proud that such a small church as Bethel could be packed with people of so many different nationalities.

Two months later, that same member had been

called to be with the Lord. Maggie Hall had been suffering with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) for many years and the struggle had proved too great. Her family wrote a very kind letter of appreciation noting how Maggie's faith had changed her life. Since her death, her husband has continued to attend Sunday morning services and seems to enjoy the company of God's people here.

Our elder, Ian Hepburn, is doing well whilst continuing treatment for prostate cancer. Janis Liddington, wife of our elder Alan, was diagnosed with breast cancer in December and underwent surgery very quickly. She is recovering well but will need further radiotherapy treatment. Kathryn Matocha is also recovering from surgery following a sinus operation but, again, we thank God that she is progressing well.

One couple, with their young twins, have joined us and will be made members shortly. Visitors continue to attend our services, some more regularly than others, and we pray that these will join with us in the building up of God's kingdom.

*Patricia Stowell*

## IMMANUEL, CARDIFF

In September, Rob Dykes commenced a two year internship with us. Rob was born in Glasgow but later moved to South Wales with his family. He trained for four years at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina. While there, he married Ashley (above top right).

Initially the UK Border Agency refused to grant Ashley a visa to stay in the UK. The appeal tribunal overturned that decision, an answer to our many prayers.



The church's youth group meets every Friday evening, and also after the Lord's Day evening service they meet regularly with the minister, when a wide range of issues is discussed. Recently two guests have spoken to the young people. Dr Bhaskar Rao spoke about his upbringing as a Hindu priest and his conversion to Christ. Mr Euan Murray, the Scottish international rugby player, also spoke of the Lord's grace to him and the reason for his decision not to play sports on Sundays (pictured below and opposite). In these days, when the 'multi-faith' agenda is pushed, and when the fourth commandment is disregarded, both of these testimonies were entirely relevant and much appreciated. The young people have an annual 'house party'. They are currently looking for a suitable venue.



Several members are experiencing the trials of advanced age. They encourage us all by their steadfastness, the outer man perishing, the inner man being renewed from day to day.

The challenge of outreach lies before us in 2014. Christ's commission is our privilege. We feel acutely the need of Christ's power to recreate us in unity and love, and to open a door for his Word.

*Peter Naylor*

## CAMBRIDGE

Last September, Doug McCallum started working with our church as a student for the ministry. He is involved in various aspects of church work and is also pursuing a ThM in systematic and historical theology through the John Owen Centre. Pray that the Lord will prepare him to serve as a pastor and that an opportunity to serve in a church would open up for him in the coming months.

The student group is now being led by Doug McCallum. Fifteen undergraduate students are regularly attending. We aim to ensure that students always have a Sunday lunch invitation in order to enjoy fellowship with other church members. This past term we have also organised a couple of student social events with more planned for this term, as well as an end-of-term 'retreat' at a family's house. Please pray that this will be a blessing and that our students will grow in their faith as they pursue their studies and, despite the demands on their time, will remain committed to the church.

We have begun a search for new premises with

more facilities for our Sunday morning worship. So far we have not found anything suitable and would appreciate prayer for this.



For the past two months, CPC, along with the Bury and Chelmsford congregations, have been overseeing and providing weekly ministry in Littleport Evangelical Church, near Ely. This help is being given in response to a 'Macedonian call' from members of CPC who live in the Littleport area and who have been long associated with LEC. Our hope is that the support of EPCEW churches will breathe new life into this small gospel cause and enable it in coming months to become a faithful, worshipping fellowship, holding out the gospel of Christ in a spiritually dark and needy town.

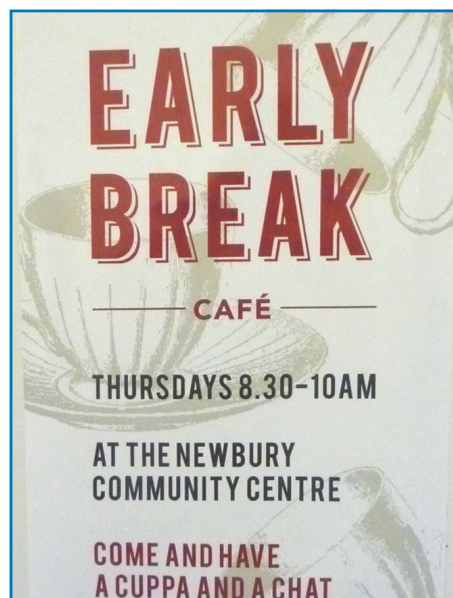
Please pray for some more children to attend 'Adventurers', our children's club, and that they will understand the message of the Bible as we complete both the Old and New Testaments this year. Two of the children have been there since the start, so have had an overview of the whole Bible.

We have much appreciated Sean and Natasha Kinsella's leadership in the youth group over the last five years. Since they moved to Uganda to serve at the African Bible University, the number of youth attending the group has been steady. Pray that the leaders will have wisdom in meeting the needs of young people from a wide age range and diverse backgrounds.

*Annabel Haylett*

## BURY ST EDMUNDS

We continue to be encouraged by good attendance at our Kids Club and Youth Club held on alternate weeks. In addition, we now have our 'Early Break Café' (pictured below) held once a week initially intended for adults bringing children to the neighbouring primary school. Free drinks and biscuits are provided along with an opportunity to chat to members of the church. From this contact, some children have been introduced to the Kids Club and other church events such as the Harvest Supper. We are especially delighted to welcome some new children to Sunday services.



We held our customary week of prayer at the beginning of the year, focusing on Psalm 34 and the fact that the Lord's ears are always open. Our urgent prayer is for conversions and for more workers to help with outreach.

*Clare Pape*

## CHELMSFORD

The past six months have been busy ones. At the start of the summer we said farewell to Rev. Chris Kavanagh and his wife, Julie, who have moved to Cheltenham. Chris had been our associate minister since January 2006 and we are hugely indebted to both him and Julie for all they contributed to the life of the church.

We have been challenged by an excellent series of sermons by Rev. Darren Moore on Abraham, and have also studied Job in our evening services. Five people were received into membership in the autumn. Our Christmas services were well attended, and it was a great encouragement that several of the families who come to our children's events came and heard the gospel.

In our midweek meeting we have been looking at how to share our faith. This has led to two sessions of outreach work in the town centre.

We have started the Men's Big Breakfast. This is an outreach event held in a local hotel once a term, to which men of the church can invite friends to a breakfast followed by an evangelistic talk. Thirty men attended the first one in October and the next one is planned for February.

We have also started a group called Impact specifically for 20s and students. This meets monthly at the Fergusons after the evening service, where food is followed by a Bible study on issues relevant to that age group. We have been encouraged by the numbers who come and pray that they will gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

Our weekly Tiny Tots group is now well established and a good number of local families attend. We have introduced a five minute Bible story slot into the session and would value prayer for this as we seek to witness to the parents who come.

*Ruth Ferguson*

## HULL

At the end of July we held our annual Holiday Bible Club—the 'Star Ship Discovery' (picture below). We followed the life of Peter from the time the Lord called him. We had thirteen children attending and all of them entered into the club with great gusto, at least half of the children we had not seen before. How good it was to watch them intently sit and listen to the story and answer the questions and how good it was to hear them all sing out the memory verses each day.



As in previous years we had young folk from the Netherlands helping us and they were an amazing help to doddering old folk.

Following the Holiday Bible Club we always have a church outing and this year we returned to Normanby Hall in Lincolnshire. What a good time that was.

Our services and midweek meeting continued as normal, though numbers were affected by illness. The past months have indeed been hard ones with many of the congregation suffering from serious illness, both physical and mental. For some, these illnesses continue to the present. One member, Dot, a lady in her 80s, and yet a driving force within the church, became very ill and was called home to glory in December.

Plans are now being made for our second Easter Holiday Bible Club and we look with expectation to the Lord for His direction and blessing.

*Bill McCully*

## TRANÅS & STOCKHOLM

Two new members were welcomed in the autumn of 2013.

Two men, Bob van Ettinger and Sune Jäderberg, were ordained and installed as deacons in January 2014.

The church plant in Stockholm is taking steps to

build a good foundation for growth ahead. Stephen Dancer and David Bergmark have both visited monthly to teach. A membership has been opened and a search committee for a pastor formed. The church is small at the moment, but looking for ways to become more known in the area.

De Verre Naasten (a missions arm of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) has graciously agreed to fund projects related to church planting in Sweden. A young couple from America are considering moving to Sweden. He is licensed to preach and hoping to be ordained when there is a suitable call. The goal is to evaluate their suitability for ministry in Sweden. Initially they would be placed in Tranås.

*Sune Jäderberg*

## CHELTHENHAM

Just before Christmas, Matt and Rachel were married at Romsey Abbey. Many of us were there to rejoice with the new Mr and Mrs Faux at the start of their married life together.

We welcomed Rev. Chris and Mrs Julie Kavanagh, when they moved from Chelmsford to Cheltenham. They have settled in quickly and have been engaged in the work of Friends International among overseas students at the university. We thank God that a handful of international students have begun worshipping with us regularly.

David Pfeiffer's assistantship will be coming to an end in June. On top of his work at the church, David has also taken a weekly Bible Study at the university CU. There are changes on the horizon for the Pfeiffer family and we invite you to join us in prayer for them.

Rev. Andrew Young has started the Shorter Catechism with the children during the Sunday morning service.

We thank God for a number of families who have recently begun to attend services.

*Tai-Tuk Yu*

## BLACKBURN

The Lord has been gracious to us through another year. We are pleased to report that the church had an election of office bearers in January and elected two deacons and an elder. Messrs Stanley Halstead and Winston Boyle were installed as deacons by the session in February. Pray that the Lord would fan into flame the gifts he has bestowed on his church, and would bless the faithful ministry of the Word to the saving of the lost and the building up of the saints.

*Kevin McGrane*

## SOLIHULL

In Sunday services, Stephen is preaching series in Romans and Micah, Chris preaches twice a month from Philippians and Falko is teaching through the Shorter Catechism. We have been encouraged by some Aston University students attending, and short-term visitors. In the New Year our midweek prayer meeting attendance has also grown, to great encouragement.

In September, Chris became a part-time ministry assistant with the church (studying at LTS in London for half of each week) so our outreach necessarily adjusted. Some home visiting and the evangelistic book table have continued. We have produced an evangelistic newsletter with contributions from church members and design help from the Cheltenham congregation. Having delivered 2,500 copies to Solihull homes in November, we are now due to deliver a new issue.



**Solihull Presbyterian Church**

**Autumn 2013**

**Sharing Our Hope**



If I had one adjective to describe Christians, it'd be 'hopeful'. It's true of the members of our church, because we have a shared hope. Let me explain.

Life is full of hopes. We hope to get a decent job. We hope to find

Mr or Mrs Right. We hope to send our kids to a good school. We hope to retire early. We hope to keep our independence. We hope, at the end to die peacefully.

The TV talent shows tell the stories of hopefuls like us. For the losers, the dream dies. For the 'winner', the hope's meant to be fulfilled. However, you can win The Voice and flop as a recording artist. You can become The Apprentice and soon be out of work. Those at the top still ask, "Is this it?" Their hope turned out to be disappointments, just like in our lives.

When I say Christians are 'hopeful' I mean that we have an unshakeable hope. Our hope is not based on wh

**What's Inside...**

p2 Valerie Tipple tells her story

p3 'Jesus: Dead or Alive?' reviewed

p3 '1 Peter - relevant to me!'

p4 'Our Minister writes...'

We were disappointed not to have any visitors to the Carol Service, despite many invitations distributed and prolonged personal contact with a number. Pray that those who welcome Chris to read the Bible with them in their homes would come to church.

Recently, we have been encouraged by increased congregational giving; a potential budget deficit for the next year has been met in the Lord's will. Give thanks with us as we look to the Lord's continued provision.

*Rosemary Statter*

## GATESHEAD

We have much to be thankful for and, at the same time, challenges ahead.

In regard to thanksgiving, God has now brought the Rieger family to take over the work in Hexham, three of our young people will come into membership in the next few weeks, and a number of university students have been worshipping with us. Each of these is an answer to our long-standing prayers, and a reminder of our God's love and care for His people.

In regard to challenge, our minister and his family have been unavoidably called away to the States from March to August this year. This period, without our minister, is bound to be challenging. However, we thank God for the provision He has given already and we pray that this time will be used to show us more clearly that God is indeed, God our provider.

*Benjamin Wontrop*

## DURHAM

In the autumn we congratulated our oldest member on reaching 90, and 2 others had eightieth birthdays. At the other end of the scale there are well over 20 children in the congregation, among more than 50 adults, so our age distribution is healthy. But are we ever all there at the same time? No doubt it's the same for all churches. In September we witnessed the baptism of 2-year-old Soon Oo Kwon. We were

looking forward to the birth of two babies in March but one has arrived early, in February, and we await two more later in the year.

We are very glad to have Chris Bowerman, our elder, and his wife back in the centre of Durham from February, after travelling 14 miles regularly since their marriage in 2012.

Since Christmas, serious problems have arisen for two or three families, while ongoing family problems continue for others, all needing our prayers. At least three members are uncertain about employment and the near future. Four members have to undergo surgery in the next few months, one of them fairly major. Brian Norton has continued to gain strength and to preach once every Sunday, and his treatment is proving extremely effective.

A couple of Wycliffe missionaries are with us who have been unable to return to their sphere of work and are engaged in assisting with the last stages of Bible translation into a language that they earlier had contact with, but they need official backing from Wycliffe authorities to do this longer term. David, the husband, has health problems that are not stabilised yet, and so this family with two young children value our prayers.

A further matter for rejoicing and prayer does not directly concern our church. In September a small Free School opened in Durham, a secondary school with a Christian ethos. (Free Schools are independent State Schools funded directly by government.) This is very exciting and has meant tremendous hard work over the last few years. Some of our members have been involved. Give thanks, and pray with us that the Lord will bless the venture and enable it to flourish. There are still big problems needing resolution.

*Brenda Norton*

## BARRY

'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18). We go forth in the confidence that our Lord Jesus Christ is building his church, and though we are few in number we do not despair for God has been abundantly merciful to us. God has been

abundantly merciful to us. God has continued to provide to us the ministry of his Word through the agency of our pastor, and visiting preachers. We give thanks to God that two of the covenant children now partake of the Lord's Supper, and trust that in partaking they will be beneficiaries of the many blessings that are bestowed by him.

Our meetings for children are held on Thursdays and we have been concentrating on the teachings regarding our Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel records. Please pray that the children will treasure the truths that are taught to them in their hearts, and especially those who do come from Christian homes.

In God's goodness we have been able to welcome two elderly ladies from a local residential home to our services. One of ladies has been coming to us since July and is also keen to attend the midweek prayer and Bible study. Pray for relationships with staff at the home, and for opportunities to share a word in season.

We are currently looking into the possibility of inviting people in the neighbourhood to our Easter services, and prayerfully considering how best to communicate the invitation. We would ask for your prayers in this matter.

*Brendan Hope*



# IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

## THE FOURTH POINT OF CALVINISM

### IS GOD'S GRACE IRRESISTIBLE?

Arminians of the 17th century said it was. While they believed that it is impossible to please God apart from his grace, they viewed grace as enabling and co-operating grace rather than as sovereign and irresistible.

This was entirely consistent with what they believed about the human condition: that human nature is not totally depraved and that man has a free will. They also believed that God chooses for salvation those whom he knows will believe.

### BIBLE QUOTED BUT MISUNDERSTOOD

They thought that there were plenty of Bible texts to support their doctrine. Genesis 4 is about Cain and Abel, two brothers reared in a believing family and instructed in the realities of sin and grace. God accepted Abel and rejected Cain. Cain resisted the grace of God.

A favourite text was Acts 7: 51. Stephen declared to the unbelieving Jews 'you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in your heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.' This, it seemed, was cast-iron proof that God's grace is resistible.

Again, in Matthew 13: 58, we are told that Jesus 'could not do any mighty works there because of their unbelief' and this was taken as further proof that even though God wanted to save them, he couldn't.

### REMONSTRANTS' ARTICLE IV

The Fourth Article of the Arminian Remonstrance states 'as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible in as much as it is written concerning many that they have resisted the Holy Ghost, - Acts 7 and elsewhere in many places.'

### THE WRONG STARTING POINT

This form of reasoning shows how important it is to have the right starting point. As we have seen, the Arminians began their thinking with a defective view of man and ended up with a defective doctrine of God. For them he could never be absolutely sovereign. Their concern was to preserve man's dignity as man but in doing so they robbed God of his glory as God. Their whole way of thinking was

essentially man-centred and goes to show that a false premise will lead to a false conclusion.

## UNDERSTANDING GRACE

The same is true about their doctrine of grace. They lumped all forms of grace together, which meant that they could not differentiate between resistible and irresistible grace. God's grace is manifested in a variety of ways. What they missed is that not all grace is saving grace. Non-saving grace is resistible.

This is what John Murray writes, 'When we speak of irresistible grace,...it is not to assert that all grace is irresistible... In fact the truth of and necessity for irresistible grace may be most cogently demonstrated in the premise of resistible grace.' In other words the very fact that we can resist some forms of grace means that we really need irresistible grace in order to be saved. If it were not irresistible we would all be under judgment without any possible hope of acquittal because 'the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.'

Murray continues, 'the enmity of the human heart is most virulent at the point of the supreme revelation of God's glory. So deep-seated and persistent is the contradiction (of the human heart) that the Saviour as the embodiment of grace is rejected.' Only in the resolute resistance to God of the human heart is 'the need for irresistible grace ... perceived.' (Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology, edited by R. C. Sproul, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976.)

## WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

Irresistible grace is an aspect of Effectual Calling. The Westminster Confession 10.2 states that the '... effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.' When sinners respond to God's call through the gospel, they do so as subjects of his 'free and special grace.'

They are 'passive' until made active towards God by the Holy Spirit. God works in us to will and to do his own pleasure.

Thus, it is possible to hear the gospel call without effect one day and effectively the next. Zachaeus came down from his tree in response to the irresistible call of Christ. The same is true of us. We emerge from our hiding place to stand in the presence of Christ in response to his irresistible call. There had been previous moments when the gospel came to us but at a precise moment, the Holy Spirit with the word of God enables us 'to answer this call, and...embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.' That's a miracle!

The Remonstrants, by denying irresistible grace, cut off their nose to spite their face. By wanting to accord man his 'proper dignity' they overlooked his depravity. By overlooking his depravity they did not recognise his inability. By not recognising his inability they did not grasp the necessity of irresistible grace.

Spurgeon said that Zachaeus came to saving faith because Christ initiated the meeting, sought him out, called him by name, drew him down from the tree and announced 'This day salvation has come to this house.' It was Spurgeon's way of illustrating irresistible grace.

Do not be afraid of it because only irresistible grace can restore to us our proper dignity. What matters is not what we are but what we are in Christ. Apart from him we remain captive to sin, stripped of dignity, robbed of righteousness and deprived of freedom. We have nothing else to lose but everything to gain by abandoning our dignity and surrendering to irresistible grace.

*O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that grace now like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee!*

REV. RICHARD HOLST

# TRANSLATING GENESIS 15:6

REV. W. JOHN COOK

There is a serious error in the *English Standard Version*, a version that claims for itself to be 'highly accurate', and to combine 'the utmost accuracy with readability'. The error in question is found in its translation of Genesis 15:6: 'He believed in the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness'. The use of 'as', in this translation is really improper and misleading. The natural translation of the Hebrew is 'He believed in the LORD and He reckoned righteousness to him', or, as in the Authorised Version, 'He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.' The *New King James Version* kept this sense: 'He accounted it to him for righteousness'. John Calvin commented on the verse, 'Abram obtained righteousness in the sight of God by imputation.'

In Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6 (which refer to Gen. 15:6), the ESV says, 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness'. The New Testament Greek text uses the preposition *eis*, as does the Septuagint of Genesis 15:6. This preposition conveys the sense of purpose. So W. T. Shedd emphasised the telic use of *eis* here, and this may be readily confirmed by considering the uses detailed in the Greek-English Lexicon (Arndt & Gingrich, Bauer, Danker, Chicago, 2000). This requires the translation 'counted for righteousness' according to the clear doctrine of Scripture that God reckons the righteousness of Christ to believers.

There is a great danger in the ESV's rendering, for it seems to teach that God accepts faith as a substitute for righteousness. This introduces a false doctrine that was rejected by Protestants, both Lutheran and Reformed. They emphasized in accord with the Scriptures that God imputes his righteousness to the person who exercises faith, and the believer is blessed because God

does not reckon his sins to his account but instead the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:6-8). The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 11, teaches concerning God's justifying of believers: 'Not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them.' This is clearly taught also in the Larger Catechism Answer 70 and more concisely in the Shorter Catechism Answer 33. 'Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.'

Because this doctrine is fundamental to the Christian Faith one must view with suspicion any translation that deliberately excludes it from these major texts and question the wisdom of 'evangelical' scholars who commend and use the ESV without criticism.

### Note

English versions fall into three groups: Tyndale's translation (1534), the Geneva Bible (1599), the Authorised Version (1611/1769), the Revised Version (1885), and the New King James Version (1982) all render it 'for righteousness'; the New International Version (1978 and 2011) and several others change the preposition to 'as'; the Revised Standard Version (1952) and the English Standard Version (2007) add words not found in the Greek 'his faith'.

So then the Greek διὰ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην which was originally translated 'wherefore also it was reckoned to him for righteousness' became 'That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness"' (ESV Rom. 4:22).



# NO CONDEMNATION

REV. DR PETER NAYLOR

The short account of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53 – 8:11; see footnote) is part of a long section of John's gospel (7:1 to 10:21). It happened at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem six months before the Crucifixion.

When we approach this passage, we must remember not to ask the wrong questions, such as, 'What happened to the man with whom she was caught in the act of adultery?' Scripture does not tell us.

## THE WOMAN

Without a shadow of doubt, this woman was

guilty of adultery: caught in the very act. Today, adultery is often tolerated and even approved, and the wrecking of lives is further accommodated by swift, no fault divorce, and remarriage. But this adulteress was wicked.

Not only did she defile herself, but she was destroying other lives. Adultery does this: it is an assault on a marriage, the ruination of a couple's happiness, and damaging to the children, and society. She had broken the seventh commandment, 'You shall not commit adultery' (Exod. 20: 14).

The penalty was death by stoning (Deut. 22:22-

24). The scribes and Pharisees were right.

The death penalty was laid down for adultery, and other offences, such as murder, blasphemy, sabbath breaking, and false prophecy. The severity of the punishment taught Israel the seriousness of sin. Do these things and your life is forfeit. The Lord will not allow us to make light of sin. The death penalty also taught judgment on sin, warning of the final judgment to come and the eternal punishment of the wicked.

This woman was lost.

## THE MERCIES OF THE LORD

So this adulteress was brought to Christ. Her accusers did not intend it to be, but what a mercy it was.

### 1. 'WHERE ARE YOUR ACCUSERS?'

The Lord Jesus delivered her from the Scribes and Pharisees.

These men were right about her sin and the penalty. But these were the people whom Christ called thieves and robbers, who came only to steal, and kill, and destroy (John 10: 10). These were elders of the people, and judges with lawful authority in Israel. But they did not care for the sheep. These were the men who would excommunicate the man born blind to whom Christ gave sight (John 9).

Their motives were evil: they sought not only the woman's death but the destruction of our Lord Jesus.

They were as guilty as she. One word from Christ and their consciences were awakened and they could not stand as her accusers. One by one they left. But even if they could not carry out the stoning, she was still guilty before God.

### 2. 'NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU'

Christ forgave her sin and let her go. This calls for close attention. How did he do this?

Was he exploiting a legal loophole? She was

technically guilty but there was no accuser left? Hardly. Our Lord would never treat God's law with such contempt.

Had he gone soft on sin? Was he really saying that her adultery was not really as bad as those Scribes and Pharisees made out? We know that he was not doing that. We need only read Matthew 5:28 to know that our Lord never minimized the seriousness of sin!

Was he setting aside the law of Moses, then? Some people believe that the law and the gospel are opposites and that Jesus cancelled the law. But it is plain that he did not cancel God's law (Matt. 5:18-21). If anything, the Lord Jesus strengthened the law's demands by his own example: love one another '*as I have loved you.*'

We cannot explain Christ's action in any of these ways. There must be another explanation.

Since the woman was guilty and the law demanded death, that penalty was required. If she were not to suffer it, then someone else had to. Do we not see that Christ himself could only pronounce her forgiven because he had come to suffer the penalty? He would undergo death, as a righteous one in the place of his own sinful people. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

In eternity, Christ had already committed himself to come and die for the sheep. He knew that the hour was approaching. At Passover the following year, he would be crucified, sacrificed as an offering for the sins of his own sheep. Jesus took the sins of his people upon himself.

In 2 Corinthians 5: 21, Paul writes: For he [God] has made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who [Christ] knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This is why Jesus could forgive that guilty woman. 'Neither do I condemn you.' Again, Paul writes: There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8: 1). Justice has been done, and God is satisfied at Calvary.

### 3. 'GO AND SIN NO MORE'

The Lord Jesus does not save sinners in order that they might go and sin more and more. He saves us from sin.

Those who belong to him, do so by faith. Faith and repentance belong together. What we believe leads us to turn from our sins with sorrow and with resolve of heart.

So our Lord sends her away with the command to forsake her sins and turn her feet into the paths of righteousness.

But she could not go away and do that by concentration of effort. She did not have the power needed. That transformation of life is impossible without the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the one who baptizes all his people with the Holy Spirit (John 1: 33; 1 Cor. 12: 13). Indeed, this is what the Good Shepherd does: he leads me in paths of righteousness (Psalm 23). Hence by the power of the Holy Spirit within the heart of the believer, he or she is enabled to walk in new ways of holiness and truth.

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the sinful fallen nature but according to the Spirit (Rom 8: 1).

#### THE GOSPEL

Here is the essence of the gospel. We are by nature sinners, as that woman was. The Bible tells us so and we find the truth of that when God opens our eyes. When I confess my sins I declare God and his Word to be true.

Christ is the Good Shepherd. By his death we are delivered from sin and hell; and by his Spirit we receive grace to turn away from sin and to live seeking the will of God in our own lives.

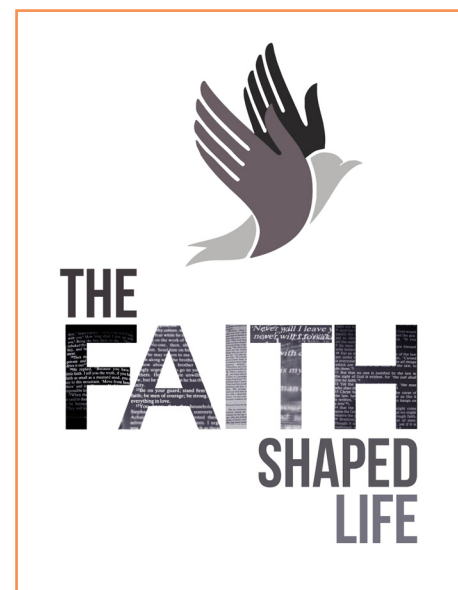
#### Footnote

Some say that John 7: 53—8:11 is not originally part of John's Gospel. This question requires us to examine the Greek manuscripts. Almost all of those support this passage but about 30 do not.

Tyndale, Calvin, the Reformers, the AV and NKJV accept it; liberals from 18th century reject it, followed by RV, RSV, NIV etc. Hence, the ESV says: THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE JOHN 7: 53—8: 11, and it puts the passage within double brackets [ [ ] ]. This area of study has been introduced in the last issue: Presbyterian Network 24/2, Editorial and pages 4-6. It merits further attention, d.v., in subsequent issues.

## NEW BOOK

Ian Hamilton, the minister of Cambridge Presbyterian Church, has written a book entitled *The Faith-Shaped Life*. This has been published in small paperback format, 160 pages, by the *Banner of Truth Trust* at the price of £5.50. ISBN 978 1 84871 249 2



## RUGBY & THE SABBATH

### REV. DR PETER NAYLOR

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, and shall honour him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isa. 58:13-14).*

A highly successful international rugby player becomes a Christian. Soon he faces a choice. Training and matches are scheduled for Sundays; but that is the Lord's Day. Recently the young people of Immanuel had the opportunity to hear Euan Murray speak about how he became a Christian and why he decided that he would no longer play rugby on Sundays. Sunday – the Sabbath day – is too valuable to waste. It is

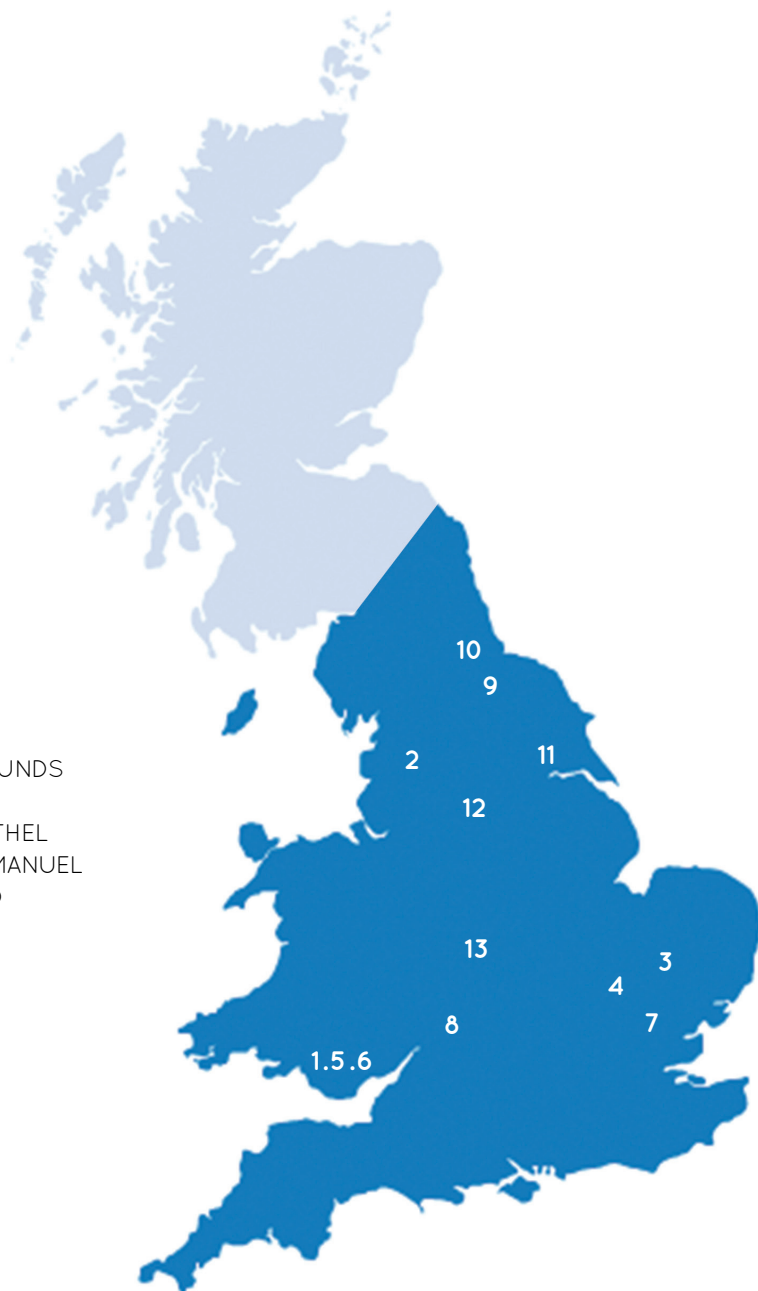
not simply a matter of keeping a rule. On that day, God calls his people to enjoy his presence together and to feed their souls on Jesus Christ. When a Christian learns to delight in the worship of God and to love God's Word, he will not give that up for a game of rugby, football or basketball. 'Rugby is not real life,' Euan told us. It is vital that we preserve the Lord's Day of rest, the Sabbath. The Lord gave it to us for our good and he promises blessing to us when we keep it.

Euan Murray recommended *The Lord's Day*, written by Dr. Joseph A. Pipa. It was a read that helped influence his decision to honour God by observing the Fourth Commandment, despite living in a society where people have neglected the Sabbath. It was clear the Scottish International didn't refrain from playing rugby on Sunday begrudgingly, but instead delighted in committing the whole day to God.



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- 10 GATESHEAD
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- 13 SOLIHULL



## EPCEW CHURCH DIRECTORY

### 1 BARRY

Wilberforce Chapel  
Barry Rd  
Barry CF62 9BL  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm  
Minister: Rev. W. John Cook  
T. 01446 408086  
E. w.j.cook@hotmail.co.uk

### 2 BLACKBURN

Fecitt Brow  
Blackburn  
Lancashire BB1 2AZ  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm  
Wed. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Norman Green  
T. 01254 260388

### 3 BURY ST EDMUNDS

Newberry Community Centre  
St. Olaves Rd  
Bury St. Edmunds IP32 6RW  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Matthew Jolley  
T. 01284 706123  
E. matthewjolley@mac.com  
www.bse-pc.org

### 4 CAMBRIDGE

All Saints Church, Jesus Lane (am)  
Resurrection Lutheran Church,  
Westfield Rd (pm)  
Cockcroft Hall, Clarkson Rd (Thu)  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Thu. 7.45pm  
Minister: Rev. Ian Hamilton  
T. 01223 246371  
E. revianhamilton@gmail.com

### 5 CARDIFF - BETHEL

Michaelston Rd  
Culverhouse Cross  
Cardiff CF5 4SX  
Sun. 11am & 6pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Todd Matocha  
T. 02920 595000  
E. tdmatocha@btinternet.com  
www.bethelpcr.org.uk

### 6 CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

Heol Trelai, Caerau  
Cardiff CF5 5LJ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Wed. 7.15pm  
Minister: Rev. Dr Peter Naylor  
T. 02920 405750 / 07773 093738  
E. peter.naylor@  
immanuelcaerau.org.uk  
www.immanuelcaerau.org.uk

### 7 CHELMSFORD

Hall Street Methodist Church  
Chelmsford CM2 0HG  
Sun. 11.30am & 6pm, Thu. 8pm  
Minister: Rev. Darren Moore  
T. 01245 690559  
darrenmoore@chelmsfordpres.co.uk  
www.chelmsfordpres.org.uk

### 8 CHELTENHAM

23 Naunton Lane, Leckhampton  
Cheltenham GL53 7BJ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Wed. 7.45pm  
Minister: Rev. Andrew Young  
T. 01242 231278 / 07963 139683  
E. revandrewyoung@yahoo.co.uk  
www.cheltenhampres.org.uk

### 9 DURHAM

The Chapel, Laburnam Avenue  
Durham  
Sun. 10.30am & 3.30pm  
Thu. 7.45pm  
Minister: Rev. Brian Norton  
T. 0191 3840504  
E. durham@epcew.org.uk  
www.depc.org.uk

### 10 GATESHEAD

Lobley Hill Community Centre  
47-49 Scafell Gardens  
Gateshead NE11 9LS  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Minister: Rev. Dr Bill Schweitzer  
T. 07939 071404  
E. bill.schweitzer@btinternet.com

### 11 HULL

Rear of 336 Holderness Rd  
Hull  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Minister: Rev. Billy McCully  
T. 01482 706413  
E. mccully@ehpc.co.uk

### 12 SHEFFIELD

Hill Top Chapel, Attercliffe Common  
Sheffield S9 2AD (as of March 30th)  
Sun. 10am (SS), 11am & 5pm  
Minister: Rev. Kevin Bidwell  
T. 0114 2431720 / 07954 546487  
E. kevinbidwell@me.com  
www.sheffieldpres.org.uk

### 13 SOLIHULL

Women's Institute Hall  
745 Warwick Rd, Solihull B91  
3DG (Sun. 10.30am & 5pm)  
160 Ulverley Green Rd, B92 8AB  
(Thu. 7.30pm)  
Minister: Rev. Stephen Dancer  
T. 0121 707 1826  
E. info@solihullpres.org.uk  
www.solihullpres.org.uk

### SWEDEN

**Tranås**  
Hoggata 8, 57333 Tranås  
Sun. 10am  
Minister: Rev. David Bergmark  
T. +46 70 244 7241  
E. d.bergmark@erkis.se

### Stockholm

For info see [www.reformert.se](http://www.reformert.se)

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