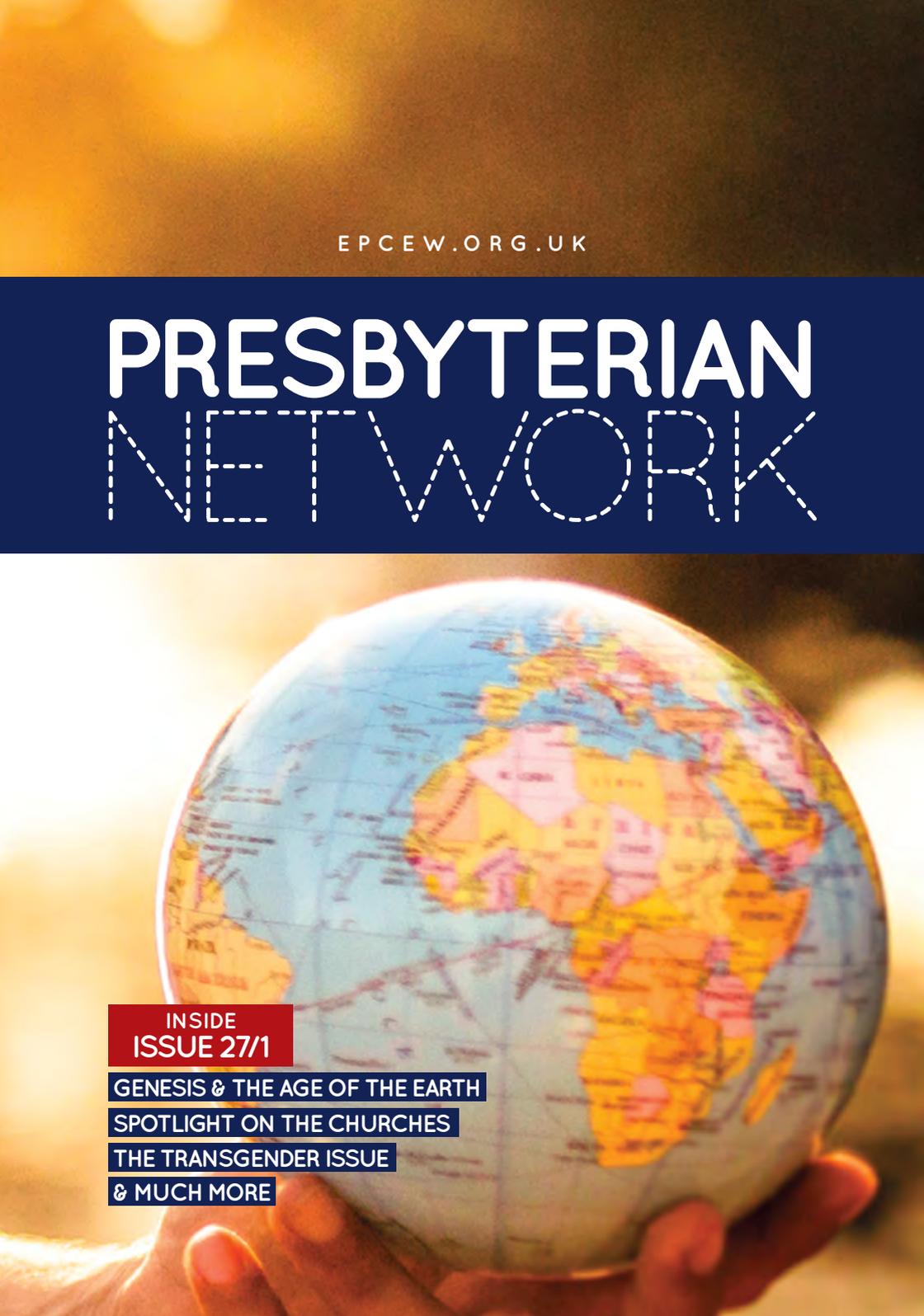


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# PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK



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ISSUE 27/1

GENESIS & THE AGE OF THE EARTH

SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHURCHES

THE TRANSGENDER ISSUE

& MUCH MORE

# PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

SUMMER 2016

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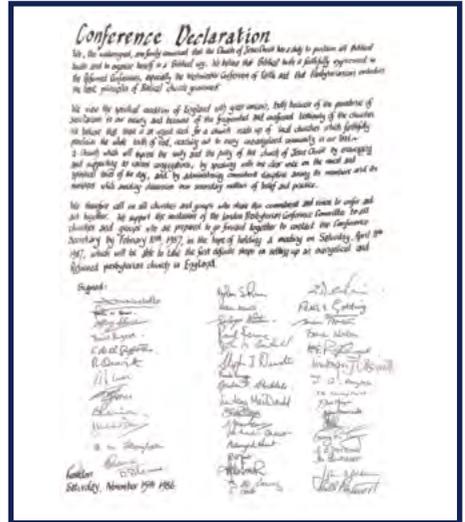
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

30 years ago a conference was held in London, the first step that led to the establishment of the EPCWE.

Concerned about the spiritual condition of England and convinced of the need to establish a Reformed Church, 65 people signed the Conference Declaration and 13 living outside England supported it (pictured right). What did they want? Local churches which faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God, reaching out to every unevangelized community in our land, speaking with one clear voice on the spiritual and moral issues of the day, and administering consistent discipline. The Westminster Confession and a Presbyterian form of government were important too.

Today we can praise our God that the EPCWE exists and has several congregations. But quite obviously, the spiritual and moral condition of our land is far worse, and there are still many communities without the gospel and without a sound Reformed church. And so we need preachers of calibre, sound in doctrine, committed unreservedly to the struggle. We have Christ's call to pray for such.



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Annual Subscription: £7. Cheques payable to the 'EPCWE' should be sent c/o the Editor to Immanuel Presbyterian Church.



# SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHURCHES

## BARRY

Wednesday mornings during school terms, we hold our 'Toddler Time' meetings, and we have been encouraged by the number of mothers, grandmothers, and fathers, who have brought their children. Opportunities have arisen to share a word in season with them. Many of them have little or no experience of Christian truths.

Sunday School is held before our morning service. Currently numbers are low, but those who attend give us great encouragement.

Our Associate Pastor, Rev. Drew Goodman, has been running a *Christianity Explored* course for small groups, and in God's goodness accommodation has been made possible to hold these sessions in an informal environment. The Goodman family are making two visits to the United States this summer, to see family and supporting churches. Drew will have opportunity to preach and share news of the work that God is doing in Barry and further afield.

The congregation rejoices that two of our young members, Matthew and Louise Selby, have recently married.

We are currently working on a new invitation leaflet, and hope to distribute it to the community soon.

In our Bible study, Rev. John Cook is currently taking us through the book of Daniel, and we have been encouraged to hear of the witness of Daniel and his three friends, and also by the steadfast faithfulness of their God and ours.

*Brendan Hope*

## BERLIN

The Church planting work in Berlin continues to be a great encouragement for those who are involved. One of the most exciting things that happened was the ordination of Johannes Müller on 18 December 2015. The local congregation was joined by many brothers and sisters from Germany and Europe. As a congregation we are very thankful that Johannes is now serving us as the ordained minister.

Germany is well known for its bureaucracy and we have experienced a lot of it in the last year. We needed to register a Verein (equivalent to a registered charity entity) in order to be able to pay Johannes as the pastor directly from the congregation and under the German tax system. We are praising the Lord that the Verein is now registered and we can move the payment of his salary from Sheffield to Berlin. Please pray for the Lord's blessing upon the finances of the church so that the day will come when we will become a financially self-sustaining work.

We thank God for sending people to our services. We welcome new faces on a regular basis, some of them are friends or family of church members. Sometimes visitors are on holiday in Berlin and others are looking for a church. Please pray that our congregation can become a home for many. Please pray for the regular visitors, that God will work faith in their hearts by his Word and Spirit.

We also thank God for the birth of a covenant child on 1 of May. We hope to baptize her soon and receive the whole family (father, mother and two daughters) into membership.

*Johannes Müller*

## BLACKBURN

You may have seen our previous request for prayer for our brother Brian Chappell. Brian went to be with the Lord earlier this year. The congregation feels this loss, and more so his family. Pray for his family that they may all be greatly comforted. We know that the Lord makes all these afflictions to our present bodily condition contribute to what is spiritual and eternal, and this in itself is a great compensation. But the sweetest of all is that these bodily weaknesses and sufferings become the occasion of our learning the tender sympathies and consideration of the love of Christ.

On a more positive note, during the last two years we have had four new-borns in the church. Please pray for these infants and their respective families. We also thank God for the encouraging response to our minister.

In conclusion, I would like to share these words as my personal testimony. In the last eight months I have been truly loaded with benefits, and with tokens of love, of which I can only feel that I am not personally worthy, but when I remember that I should not have had any of them but for the worthiness of him whose love sets all such motions in the hearts of his own, I begin to feel that the truest humility is to accept them with a deeply thankful and appreciative heart, and give him praise.

*Judith Green*

## BURY ST EDMUNDS

Our church has voted in favour of calling Benjamin Wontrop to be our associate minister, alongside Matthew Jolley. We are praying for smooth visa applications, presbytery procedures, and all the practical arrangements, as we look forward to Benjamin and his wife Anna returning from the United States.

As our week of mission approaches (July 31 to August 7), please pray for those who are joining us from elsewhere in the UK and from the United States, for unity in the work, and

for God's powerful presence throughout. Remember also our elders, Kevin and Gordon, as they face additional family and work commitments.

Tom and Jemma Fifield, Ellie May, and Mim (pictured below), are preparing to go and work with SIM at Bingham Academy, Addis Ababa (see their blog at [sufficientuntotheday.wordpress.com](http://sufficientuntotheday.wordpress.com) for more information).



We are thankful for a successful four-day trip to the Isle of Wight for nine of our youth and six adults. They had good times of worship and fun, growing together in fellowship. Most of these teenagers had never been so far from home before. Pray that the truths they have heard will bear fruit in their lives.

*Clare Pape*

## CAMBRIDGE

On Saturday 11 June we held a farewell tea for Ian and Joan Hamilton (pictured page 13), who will soon be leaving Cambridge. It was an enjoyable occasion with a buffet tea, music, and games, followed by a message by Mark Johnston and a tribute to Ian's ministry from Jonny Gibson. We are thankful for the 17 years of service that Ian and Joan have given to us, and it is with great sadness that we anticipate their departure. Pray for the Lord's blessing on them as they return to Scotland and take up new ministries, and for wisdom, guidance and unity, as our session considers

possible candidates. Pray that the Lord would soon bring us the right man to replace Ian.

In addition to the loss of Ian, two of our deacons have also recently moved from Cambridge, and we anticipate Jonny Gibson departing in October. We are therefore very much in need of more deacons and elders.

Recently we have been encouraged with the baptisms of Erik Potter and his young children, and Kotomi Egawa. Erik and Kotomi have both recently come to faith. Pray for Erik and his family as they move to Maine, USA. We were also encouraged by a large number of international friends attending our recent international BBQ at the manse.

*Annabel Haylett*

## CARDIFF - BETHEL

A great deal has happened in the last six months with a greater emphasis on outreach to our local community. We pray for ourselves that we may show love and compassion to those around us, many of whom are unloved, burdened with worries, or indifferent, or just curious about this little church. All have something in common: they are lost souls unless we can show them our Saviour.

We have had many occasions to rejoice with those who rejoice. André Kilian was installed as a deacon in January, to the delight of the congregation, helping boost the number of deacons to three. The engagement of Toni



Saad and Carie Vaughn was announced, to the great delight of all at Bethel and their families. Toni had become a member last year and Carie has since transferred her membership from Eglise Réformée Baptiste du Pays D'Aix, Aix en Provence.

But we have also wept with those who weep. Colin Wilson's father became a believer when very ill and close to death, mainly through the witness of his son. Journeys to and from Scotland took their toll on Colin and his family; but they were strengthened by God and the prayers of His people. Two months later we mourned the death of our dear sister, Atie Rompelman, of Amersfoort, Holland, with whom we have had strong links for many years.

The appointment of John Woolley as church worker/evangelist has meant that significant inroads have been made at local schools, with John taking assemblies in a number of primary schools. He has also made contact with local residents and businesses and met up with community workers to see how we may work together. John and his wife Deborah have also become members and we have welcomed them gladly to Bethel.

A popular Easter Egg hunt (pictured) was also organized in a local park with over 266 plastic eggs hidden, to be replaced with the real thing at the end of the hunt. Almost fifty children attended, very excited and competitive about filling up their paper bags with eggs. Three free coffee mornings were successful in publicizing Bethel and gave us an opportunity to speak to passers-by about the activities of the church. Another outreach opportunity was held through a 'Build with Lego' Challenge where four Lego Cities were built in a day. Four tables, hundreds of coloured pieces of Lego, and teams of creative children all contributed to letting their imagination run wild. Awesome City and Legotropolis were just two of the exciting creations of cities of the future. Helpers were on hand to scabble for the 'right' piece needed to construct a new school, hospital and futuristic houses. Factories, forts, labs and prisons all vied for a place in its own city.

We are also looking forward to an outreach evening with the *Cambrensis* choir as part of the 'Ely Festival' in July.



Throughout all this, we have been strengthened and encouraged by the Word of God, with regular ministry from the books of Luke and Proverbs by our pastor, Mark Johnston. Other preachers included Lindsay Brown of IFES and Rev. Dr Peter Lillback, President of Westminster Seminary, PA, who spoke on 2 Cor. 4, 'Do Not Lose Heart'. The relevance of this is not lost on us as we attempt to reach our neighbours.

*Patricia Stowell*

## CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

In January, we were privileged to host the Presbytery conference in our building. Members of Immanuel, Bethel, and Barry worked together to host it. We were delighted that members could share in the warm fellowship that exists among our congregations and their elders.

In May, we rejoiced at the engagement of Dr Rebecca Naylor to Doug McCallum (pictured on the next page). We pray for the Lord's blessing upon them as they prepare to marry in October, God willing. Also in May, Rob and Ashley Dykes rejoiced at the birth of their first child, Robert Kenny. Whilst the congregation is joyful at both of these events, there is also the prospect that Rebecca and Rob and Ashley will be leaving us by the end of 2016. Their absence will leave a huge gap. So it is our prayer that the Lord will meet us in this need. We are praying that he will stir up in some hearts a strong desire to serve him,

## CHELMSFORD



and also supply the spiritual gifts needed. The outreach work to children and young people is a vibrant and very demanding area of the church's life and we do need more workers.

For many years, the church has held an annual 'retreat' in Bala. This year we went to Sidmouth instead. We spent time looking at Eschatology, the Bible's teaching on the 'last things'. In August, there is a youth camp at Quinta.

At the end of September, we have planned a special retreat for young adults 18+ at Hebron Hall (advertisement opposite), with ministry from Rev. Philip Moffatt. Philip is a very gifted young minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland and we feel very heartened that he is willing and able to come to us. We are hoping that this will be of interest to some in the other EPCEW congregations and also in other neighbouring churches. We want young adults to have good opportunities to meet from across the congregations.

Ministry of late has included a series of sermons on Deuteronomy in which the uses of the law of God have been explored.

*Peter Naylor*

Church life in Chelmsford continues to be busy and there is much for which to be thankful. Recently we have had a number of visitors who have brought news of God's work abroad. We heard of evangelistic work and training taking place in Siberia, where Christians endure great hardship and opposition. Jose de Segovia Baron told us of his work in Spain and Emanuel & Jelena Relavic spoke movingly about the work their church is doing with refugees in Serbia. It has been both encouraging and challenging to hear their stories. A visit by a group from Cuba who were due to be taught by Steffen Jenkins has been postponed until early next year.

In March a group from the church went to Word Alive at Prestatyn (pictured below), where amazingly the sun shone and a good time was had by all. Vaughan Roberts led the morning study on Job, and then people attended a variety of seminars and talks during the day. It was a time of fellowship for those who went, and it was an opportunity for spiritual refreshment and encouragement with hundreds of other Christians from across the country.



Our Sunday services continue to be well attended, and we are currently studying the books of Esther and the Epistle to Timothy. In our Thursday night meetings, Darren Moore is teaching a series on eschatology, which he is also teaching to students at the EMF School of Biblical Studies. This is a subject perhaps somewhat neglected today, and it is proving very interesting and helpful.

IMMANUEL (EPCEW)

YOUNG ADULT

# Retreat

## WHAT

A Christian Retreat for young adults to spend a weekend together.

## WHEN

30 Sep - 2 Oct 2016.

## CONTACT

For more information or to book your place, please contact Rob (robbykes86@gmail.com) (07527 695 246). Guests must be over 18.

## WHY

We are expecting young men and women from several churches and so it's bound to be a good opportunity to make friends, have fun, and enjoy Christian fellowship. There will also be teaching from Rev. Philip Moffett of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

## WHERE

At South Wales' Hebron Hall (hebronhall.org), near Cardiff. Hebron Hall is a pleasant place with comfy rooms, good food, and a pool and sports area. It's near the coast and is accessible by train. Meals will be provided and the cost of accommodation with ensuite bedroom is £95.

We recently held our annual Hog Roast at the Fergusons (pictured below). It was very wet, but over a hundred people attended with many guests. It was a good opportunity to befriend people and introduce them to the church, and it was encouraging that two families from Tiny Tots came, as well as a family whose child attends Gap, the meeting for 11-13 year olds. We invited people to our next outreach event, a Jazz evening in which Bill Edgar will play the piano and also share his faith.



We held our last Impact meeting of the academic year at the end of May and were sorry to say goodbye to a number of students who have been with us for three years. We are praying that they will find work and also settle into good churches where they will grow in their faith and love of the Lord. We also said goodbye to two couples who are leaving to work elsewhere in the country. We will miss them.

We rejoice with Zoe and Fran Newby on the birth of their daughter, Lydia, and we are also looking forward to the marriage of Becky Reith and Craig Taylor in July.

*Ruth Ferguson*

## CHELTENHAM

In March, Prof. Andy Mackintosh gave three illustrated and very informative talks on Creation. Friends, as well as some from other churches, were invited and we all left with renewed wonder at the marvel and intricacy of God's handiwork.

Also in March, Rev. Courtenay & Mrs. Ali Harris celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary. Family members and many Christian friends joined together in a service of thanksgiving to mark the event. It was followed by an enjoyable time of fellowship.

As in previous years, an intrepid party of 19 from the church ventured down the River Wye in canoes on a lovely Saturday in May. We are glad that the fun did not involve anyone falling overboard. After the trip, most of the group went on to refuel in a nearby café.



Hearty congratulations to William Haggie and Claire Maze who were married on 19 March in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. We also thank God for providing Claire with suitable employment without much waiting.

The engagement of Doug McCallum to Rebecca Naylor on 7 May was met with much delight when it was announced in church. We pray that preparation for the wedding later this year will go well as there is a lot to put in place prior to that happy event.

We rejoice in the safe birth of Theo Joshua on 29 May – the second child to Andre and Latonia Soma and a little brother to Mia.

We extend a warm welcome to Andy and Jenny Flavelle who were received into membership in January.

*Tai-Tuck Yu*

## CHELTENHAM NORTH

Since the last *Network* a number of things have taken place. We officially became 'Whaddon Road Evangelical Presbyterian Church' on 1 April 2016. David Price was unanimously elected as a deacon. We have also started a children's choir for ages 7-11 (pictured below) and on 29 June had our first concert where families were invited and a short message was given. The children learn songs about our Lord Jesus and it gives us a way of sharing the gospel with their families.



We still await the arrival of Larry and Mandy Wilkes from Mission to the World (PCA) to help us in our evangelistic endeavours. We have also developed some contacts with a church in Urk, Holland, and they are keen to send some of their young people over to help us in whatever way they can. The Lord has been gracious in opening these doors for us - do pray that he will prosper them for the extension of his kingdom.

As a church we have been going through the letter to the Ephesians on Sunday mornings and most recently through Habakkuk in the evening. These are wonderful portions of God's word which have encouraged us to lift our eyes to our great and glorious Triune God.

*David Pfeiffer*

## DURHAM

It is a year now since the Baidens moved here and Phil began his ministry, a year that we can praise God for. We have known unity and continuity, and general contentment. Phil finished his Leviticus sermons,

which constantly drew attention to the seriousness of collective worship, and began Numbers, while in the morning services he has been preaching through Mark's Gospel, faithfully and often challengingly. On Thursdays for a few months we have been working through the Confession.

In May about 50 of the congregation stayed for a fellowship lunch between the services, an experiment that was very successful, and it is hoped it will be repeated.

We were delighted that Joshua Bion came into communicant membership in June. He has worshipped here with his family for several years. It is always joyful when the children of the church come to clear personal faith. We have a younger group who are now in or approaching early teens. Pray that they will all in due time come to know the Saviour.

David and Angela, Wycliffe workers, have been assigned permanently to the Asian language project they were helping. They are kept busy, not only with checking the translation others have made, but with making contacts among the language communities resident in this country and organizing distribution of the published New Testament. Fast internet connections make it efficient to be working here, in constant touch with translators overseas.

The mother of one of our members has been diagnosed with untreatable cancer; pray for this Christian family in N Ireland as this is the sixth time in four and a half years that they have had to undergo a heavy trial or grief. Other members have employment or health needs, and one is in a nursing home.

The Lord be glorified in all these things.

*Brenda Norton*

## GATESHEAD

We praise God for His continued grace to our elders and members. We have been sustained in spirit and good health; blessed with some pregnancies; and we anticipate the fruits of five people attending

membership classes. We pray that each of us would be firmly established in Christ, that our unborn children would be preserved, and for ongoing love and unity amongst us.

We give thanks particularly for the Jonathan Edwards Conference held this June, which was well attended. We were blessed with God-glorifying speakers and warm fellowship. Please pray that work on a subsequent book would be similarly helped.

The Young People's group has enjoyed a good year. 18 children regularly attend, and Nathan Hilton is currently teaching them about the names of God. We pray that our eighth summer camp would be as rich and encouraging an experience as the previous ones.

The fledgling Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary UK, renamed Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary, enjoys further developments, such as a website, [presbyterianseminary.org.uk](http://presbyterianseminary.org.uk) and an expanding library. We are especially grateful for a large book donation from Greenville. We ask the Lord for wisdom, for more students, and for ongoing support.

A final exciting enterprise is the exploratory Bible study in Sunderland. Conducted in early July in conjunction with Durham PC, this is the first of its kind. We pray that good seeds will be scattered; for the Lord's guidance; and that positive interest would be generated.

*Nathan and Anna Hilton*

## HEXHAM

In February we celebrated our first anniversary. Several new people have come to us during this year.

Rev. Joshua Rieger continues to preach through John on Sunday mornings and Genesis in the evening. As we have worked through Genesis we have looked at the lives of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and soon we shall begin to look at Joseph. In John, as we have entered chapter 13, we are in the last week of Christ's life.

In our meetings on Wednesdays we have been working through 1 Corinthians. Coming to chapter 13, we have slowed down to look at different aspects of love. This has been particularly helpful for several in the congregation.

The Riegers were back in the States during March, when we were led helpfully by Rev. Phil Baiden, Rev. Dr Bill Schweitzer, Mr Nathan Hilton (who is under care of the Gateshead Session), and by other men from the North-east. God was good to help us to continue to grow in grace during this time.

Looking ahead, we are preparing for a summer evening series on the parables of Christ. Please continue to pray for our growth, both spiritual and numerical and for the work of the gospel in Hexham.

*Joshua Rieger*

## HULL

We praise God for His ongoing preservation of our church. The main priority for prayer continues to be our need of a pastor, although we remain in lack of other church officers (elders and deacons) as well. We thought we were close to finding a man but he was recently compelled to withdraw due to ill health. At this time there does not seem to be much progress in finding a new pastor.

Rev. Barry Shucksmith will be unable to continue his preaching assistance to us in the autumn due to family commitments. However, we are very thankful to the pastors, elders, and men in training from the denomination who are helping to fill the pulpit.

The Bible clubs for the children continue. Eleven children attended our Easter Bible club and we are planning to hold one in the summer. The monthly service in a local old people's home and the monthly coffee morning in the church are still continuing.

We thank God for answered prayer regarding those ill in the church. Some are making good progress in recovering from cancer.

*Chris Lawson*

## SHEFFIELD

There are four main points for update: the ministry, a missions fortnight in April, a new ruling elder, and the development and extension of the chapel. The ministry on the Lord's Day has focused in the morning on the great themes from Titus and in the evening from Malachi. Our catechism class is summarizing the five points of Calvinism currently, before we break for the summer. Two new series will need to begin for the Lord's Day services and a new theme is being considered for our midweek meeting, because we have completed a survey of all the books of the Bible in the last two years.

Chris Statter came on church placement from LTS; he is under care of presbytery and a member of our congregation in Solihull. His church placement coincided with a missions fortnight in the church, which included various outreach events, ranging from door to door church invitations, to a city centre book table and a student event. Overall around 30 people came to hear the preaching of the gospel, many of whom were not Christians, and we pray for fruit and follow up.

Strengthening the foundations is always vital for the development of the church. We have voted for Paul Brown to be a ruling elder, subject to a commission from presbytery to examine him. Lord willing, we look forward to Paul serving in this capacity in the EPCEW in the years ahead. Our Sheffield building committee composed of six men in the congregation have been kept busy during this year. We are at the last stage of a submission of planning consent for a back extension to our chapel. This will provide increased capacity, extra toilets, a baby cry room, and it will make the chapel usable and viable for the years ahead.

*Kevin Bidwell*

## SOLIHULL

We have been in the Hobs Moat church building for about a year and have had several encouraging developments. The attendance at our morning service has

increased, roughly from 30 to 40. Before Christmas, we supplemented our regular outreach by distributing many invitations and went out carol singing. About 75 gathered for the carol service, including more than 20 visitors. For many, going to church at Christmas is merely something traditional; fewer came at Easter. We are getting to know people locally and some have come back since.

Several men with whom Chris Statter has been reading the Bible have attended services. One was shocked to hear that we contribute nothing to our salvation. There are often complications. Some have been involved with cults in the past. Some have mental health issues. Some have addictions. Many are outwardly very respectable and satisfied, but are desperately in need of Christ. We share the same gospel with everyone, urging our contacts to attend church services.

Having recently completed a series on 2 Samuel, Stephen is currently preaching through John's Gospel and 1 Thessalonians, and Titus at prayer meetings on Thursday evenings. Our Sunday worship also contains exhortations from the Shorter Catechism.

*Rosemary Statter*

## TRANÅS

We thank the Lord for the health of the church and new visitors to our services. There is a fellowship camp planned for August, which many participants are looking forward to, based on the positive outcome of last year's camp.

This autumn we plan to start bi-weekly fellowship meetings in various homes for men and women. The men will meet for Saturday breakfast, the women may choose another weekday for their meeting.

A group of Christians, originally from Romania, now living in the towns Linköping and Motala (north of Tranås) is seeking contact with us. We are glad for this contact and hope that the fellowship between us will continue to deepen.

*Sune Jäderberg*

# FAREWELL IAN HAMILTON

PETER LEVERTON

When Ian leaves Cambridge at the end of June 2016 for his native Scotland he will have served the congregation in Cambridge faithfully for 17 years. There have been some significant changes in that time in the life of the congregation. The early years of his ministry saw some turbulent times, not that most in the congregation would have noticed. However, much time and energy was spent wrestling with certain issues. With the passage of time, life in the congregation became much more settled and for some years now we have enjoyed a more productive and peaceful congregational life. This is in great measure due to a faithful ministry in which, week by week, God's Word has been opened to us in a heartfelt, God-honouring way, and it is this that has been the pastoral balm to many souls.

What is at the heart of Ian's pastoral ministry? What is it that makes it what it is? I would say one thing above all else. It is his abiding sense of God's grace toward him, an undeserving sinner. Raised in a working class area of Glasgow with little Christian influence, he has never got over (and one prays he never will) the love of God toward him in Christ Jesus. Quite simply, he knows that God is gracious to him, a sinner. It is this that shapes his life, his preaching, and his pastoral work. His work is borne out of a great sense of indebtedness to his Saviour.

What have been the marks of his ministry over these years? One undoubtedly is his preaching. He always preaches to the heart. That is not to say he bypasses the mind, not at all. His preaching at times is scholarly, but it's only scholarly to the extent that his great desire is to make the truth of God's Word accessible to his people. Clear, simple, direct, always warm-hearted, and Christ centred. A passionate

Calvinist and thoroughly reformed, but his heart is not to preach doctrine, in and of itself, but Christ. Christ is at the centre of his ministry. He will often say that he preaches first to his own heart.

A second mark of the man's ministry is his pastoral work. He is always available to his people. He is not only a regular visitor, but he is always there for people once a need is known. He's not one to take a particular day off; that's not to say that he doesn't take time off to be with his family—he does; but family life and the extended family life of the church are 'all of a piece' to him. He's never 'off duty', and is always there to be called upon. I've never known him not be there for someone for any reason. He would no sooner neglect one of his people than he would a member of his family. Nor is the demand upon him something that he complains about; he sees it as just the greatest privilege to be able to serve in this way. So often it is his dealings with his people that inform his weekly ministry.

There is however something that undergirds Ian's ministry that has not been mentioned yet. In fact, it would be to completely misunderstand the success of his ministry not to mention it. It's not a thing but a person, his wife Joan. There is no room here for any clichés about what is behind a good man. No, Joan in her quiet, cheerful way has quite simply provided Ian with the stable, loving home life that is his delight and sustenance. It is this, in God's goodness, that keeps him going through all the ups and downs of ministerial life. Many is the time we have returned from a long evening of visiting, for him to say with a tired sigh, 'it's always good to go home'.



# MEET A MEMBER

## INTRODUCING CHELMSFORD'S FRANCISCO NEWBY

### ABOUT YOU

I was born in Cardiff to an Argentinean mother and a father who is half English and half Polish. I have lived in Bristol, Cambridge and, since 2013, in Chelmsford. My wife Zoë and I moved here when I began a job teaching chemistry and maths in a local secondary school. Zoë and I have been blessed with three children, Carmen (3), Caleb (1) and Lydia (new born). While Zoë nurtures our children, she also seeks to share her life and the gospel with others, especially with international students at the two universities in the city.

### HOW DID YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53: 6). This verse is significant in the story of my conversion. It describes my way of life before coming to know Jesus Christ. Unconstrained by any idea of God, I lived for myself and my own goals – academic success, sporting glory, and people's admiration. I managed to distract myself a good deal while striving for these goals, but occasionally the emptiness was brought home to me, especially when I had just achieved a goal and was left thinking 'What's next?'

But also, such prophetic verses were important in my change of mind. I was scornful of Christians, but after some interesting conversations, I accepted a friend's invitation to attend Christianity Explored. I realized that there were reasons why Christians believed what they did, and they had thought about things a good deal more than I had. However, still unconvinced, I undertook to read a book

called *Why Believe?* by Roger Carswell over the next vacation. It was here that I was confronted with the abundance, specificity, and accuracy of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible, which struck me as powerful evidence that this book must have had supernatural origins. And then, God used the truth contained in the second part of the verse to draw me to himself. I began to realize that all my strivings were not just useless, but offensive to God. I was a lost sheep, but also a sinner needing forgiveness. Then I read how Jesus had already done all that was necessary by taking my sin on himself and dying in my place. I was overwhelmed by his love and compelled to immediately ask for him to become my Lord and Saviour. He heard my prayer that night, and I became a Christian.

### WHAT HAS LIFE BEEN LIKE AS A CHRISTIAN?

Living life with Christ is the best life. He has provided marvellously for me in every department, going beyond my expectations, just as the Bible promises. From the start I was surrounded by many faithful brothers and sisters to encourage and rebuke me, and now a wonderful wife to do the same. I have also been immersed in faithful, challenging Bible teaching, which has provided a thorough grounding in precious truths such as the sovereignty of God, the relationship between grace and works, and the certainty of both suffering and future glory. In addition, I have hugely benefited from early teaching on personal Bible meditation and prayer, leading to many sweet times of fellowship with the Lord.

Knowing God has also resulted in much pain at times as a result of battling sin and experiencing his fatherly discipline. The battle at the centre of all battles has been over lordship: recognizing

that Jesus is Lord and I am not. God is at the centre of the universe, not I. Life is therefore about glorifying God, not self.

I would like to share a couple of particular ways in which God has dealt with me that I hope will encourage you as you face the same struggle.

The first was learned during my doctoral studies. I experienced much disappointment, due to people not keeping promises, to personal intellectual failure, and a growing realization that my work was not going to have the immediate impact on the scientific community that I had hoped. God spoke to me through 2 Corinthians 12: 9 – ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ I came to see that no matter what the circumstances, God’s grace is enough, and that God delights to use our weakness and failure. Learning this did not change me instantly, but God gradually used these truths to help me persevere, grow in compassion for others experiencing disappointment, and even prepare people to cope with it. They continue, along with the injunction to Baruch in Jeremiah 45: 5, to help me to remember my position as creature and even delight in it.

The second is the way that God has opened my eyes to his cosmic plan of redemption. I mean the Scriptural truth that God the Father’s plan for his world is to prepare a bride for his Son. The salvation of individuals has to be seen as part of a larger purpose to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1: 10). I have been really helped to understand this by a series of sermons on Ephesians by Rev. Darren Moore, as well as by his consistent emphasis on the continuity between us and Christians in past centuries (for example, through learning of ancient creeds and confessions of faith). Being taken through overviews of the Bible and reading Church history has reinforced this. A right appreciation of this truth has really helped me to have a higher view of the importance of the church, to not grow weary when I share Christ with people and am met with a cold response, to respond to questions about suffering, and to have a less egocentric attitude to life.

## HOW DO YOU FIND BEING A TEACHER?

I have a strong sense of calling from the Lord that this is what he has made me to be doing, at least for now, and I rejoice at being able to do a job that he has fitted me for. Being a teacher of Science I have the daily opportunity to look into the wonders of creation and to share them with others. It is a privilege to have a hand in training the next generation of doctors, engineers, and so forth.

From the start I have been involved with the school’s Christian Union. It is a great joy to see students turning up week by week, engaging in Bible study, wrestling with its application, and inviting friends along to be exposed to the gospel. Please pray that the Holy Spirit would set ablaze the hearts of these young people. I would also value prayer for my Christian witness to staff and students alike, that I would be filled with wisdom and that in every way I would adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

The great sorrow for me, in this job, is seeing that our nation’s young people are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, and there is precious little that I as a teacher can do about it. On the one hand, morality among students is in decline, with cases of deception, theft, and violence on the rise. On the other, mental health issues abound, with numerous students suffering from depression, some quite severely. It seems to me that at the bottom of both of these issues is an identity crisis. Confusion reigns in the teenage mind due on the one hand to being told that we are just sophisticated animals, who are slaves to chemical processes in our brains, and on the other hand to being told that we must obey certain rules and principles. On what basis, they may justly ask? To this question the secular education system can give them no answer. But the gospel can. And it will. Christ will build his church among this generation of young people and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And it will be ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts’ (Zech. 4: 6). Please join me in praying that the Lord Jesus Christ will do a mighty work in this generation, to the praise of his name.

## BOOKS THAT HELPED YOU?

*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* by Thomas Brooks. I have found this an excellent resource to know my enemy and overcome the temptations that I face in daily life.

Not a book, but the most helpful sermon I have ever read is entitled *Christ's Agony* by Jonathan Edwards. In Gethsemane Christ saw the pain that lay before him and he undertook it willingly out of love for us. What a Saviour!

## LIVING IN CHELMSFORD

We moved to Chelmsford largely because of the presence of a suitable church, and we have not been disappointed by the warm

and that cliques are not formed based on age or life stage; the need for fervour in evangelism, and in the primary weapon for this endeavour, prayer; and the provision of a suitable building (the building we use at the moment has many deficiencies).

Another reason we considered a move to Chelmsford was the Anglia Ruskin University campus here. In Cambridge, Zoë had volunteered as an 'Associate Chaplain' and she was able to transfer this work to Chelmsford. She has particular responsibility and a burden for international students (she is an Associate Staff Worker with Friends International), and she has also sought to encourage the nascent Christian Union. We praise God for many encouragements: for good relations with the university, for the



welcome from the family at Chelmsford Presbyterian Church. Although Zoë and I are not Presbyterian by conviction, it has been a blessing to consider these matters from a biblical point of view, as well as seeing how they work themselves out in church life. I see that our church is facing several challenges: the need for unity as we grow

establishment of a fortnightly International Café on campus with volunteers from seven evangelical churches, and for being able to offer hospitality and open up the Bible with students in our home. As our children grow, we pray that suitable workers would be raised up to continue the work and that souls would be added to Christ through it.

# A WORD FROM MARTIN LUTHER

REV. DR PETER NAYLOR

Luther: 'In so far as we love the gospel, to that extent let us study the ancient tongues [Hebrew and Greek]... And let us notice that without the knowledge of the languages, we can scarcely preserve the gospel. Languages are the sheath which hides the sword of the Spirit, they are the chest in which their treasure is enclosed, the goblet holding the draught. So although the Faith and the gospel may be proclaimed by preachers without the knowledge of the languages, the preaching will be feeble and ineffective. But where the languages are studied, the proclamation will be fresh and powerful, the Scriptures will be searched, and the Faith will constantly be rediscovered through ever new words and deeds.'

## HELP WITH THE LANGUAGES

Busy ministers may find these two websites a help to keep alive their knowledge of the languages: [dailydoseofhebrew.com](http://dailydoseofhebrew.com) and [dailydoseofgreek.com](http://dailydoseofgreek.com)

## ONE MAN'S STORY

When he was 11, his father and mother died. The orphaned lad was adopted by a Christian family and he began to work as a shepherd. He was converted at 12 years old.

He had received very little education, but he taught himself to read, and he began to study Latin. During his lunch break he would visit a minister for Latin exercises. He borrowed a Greek New Testament and, using his Latin, he began to work out the alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar.

When he was 16, he heard that there was a Greek New Testament for sale in a bookshop



in St Andrews 24 miles away. Having walked through the night, he reached it the next day. 'What will you do wi' that book? You'll no can read it,' said the shop keeper. He was overheard! A professor from the college asked the shop owner to fetch the New Testament. He said, 'Boy, if you can read that book, you shall have it for nothing.' And so he did.

This lad went on to teach himself Hebrew, and became an instructor of others. His name, John Brown of Haddington.

His dying words included: 'Labour, labour for Christ while you have strength.'

# THE EVOLUTION CONTROVERSY

## GENESIS & THE AGE OF THE EARTH (2)

A belief that the age of the earth is many millions of years is crucial for the survival of the theory of evolution. For if the earth is only thousands of years old, as the Bible indicates, then there is not nearly enough time available for evolution to have taken place.

George Wald, a famous Harvard evolutionist, wrote in 1954, 'Time is in fact the hero of the plot. The time with which we have to deal is of the order of two billion years. What we regard as impossible on the basis of human experience is meaningless here. Given so much time the "impossible" becomes possible, the possible probable and the probable virtually certain. One has only to wait: time itself performs miracles.' But does it, and if so how?

Take away the billions of years, and evolution crumbles. Evolutionists recognize the vital importance of this and are very hostile to those who adhere to the young earth position clearly taught in the Bible. As an opposing theory to explain the universe, belief in an old earth is for evolutionists non-negotiable.

### ARCHBISHOP USSHER

In today's culture the idea of creation occurring about 6000 years ago is frequently mocked by non-Christians – and also sadly by many Christians. Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656) was arguably Ireland's greatest ever theologian, and devoted his life to defending the Christian faith. He meticulously researched the secular accounts of history and found that the Bible was in agreement with them. He devoted several years of his life to compiling a 1600 page history of the world

from creation to AD 70 (*The Annals of the World*). It has recently been translated into contemporary English and re-published. Until the promotion of the theory of evolution his finding that the earth was created in 4004 BC was universally respected and widely accepted. Many other respected scholars through the centuries have arrived at similar estimates. For example, Julius Africanus (AD 240) – 5501 BC; Eusebius (AD 330) – 5199 BC; Philip Melancthon (1550) – 3964 BC. The Mayans had a date for the flood of 3113 BC. Similar estimates of the age of the earth predominate from other nations and cultures. For example, India – 6181 years; China – 6164 years; Greece – 6145 years; and Babylon – 6165 years. The Jews believe their current year, which started on 14 September 2015, is 5776 years after creation.

Ussher recognized that there was no other reliable source of chronological information for almost all of the period he covered (creation to AD 70). Very little information was available to him from any source about Greek, Roman or Egyptian history (or about any other nation's history) prior to the Persian Empire (sixth to third centuries BC). Ussher therefore relied on data from the Bible to develop his historical framework. He based it around the reliable dates of the final deportation of the Jews from Judah in 584 BC and the death of King Nebuchadnezzar (562 BC). He used the genealogical records in Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 as well as other biblical events, and his work contains more than 100 pages of detailed calculations. They are available for examination and indicate the brilliance of his reasoning.

## BIBLICAL GENEALOGIES

It may be hard to believe but Genesis 5 and 11 are two of the more controversial chapters in the Bible, even in Christian circles. This is because many Christians have accepted the secular dates for the origin of man and the universe and must work out new ways to re-interpret the Bible's historical account. A straightforward addition of the ages given in the genealogies gives a date for creation of about 4000 BC. There are about 2000 years between Adam and Abraham, yet few scholars would question the existence of Abraham about 2000 BC and the genealogical records subsequent to him.

Many would attempt to argue that 'beget' can skip generations and does not always refer to the son of the next generation. If this argument is true, then the date for creation using the biblical timeline of history cannot be accurately worked out. Hebrew word usage rules out this argument because, although *bēn* (son) can mean son/grandson etc, the different word constantly used in the genealogies is *yālad*, which always refers to a son. Its verb form is *causative* (Hiph'il), so some modern translations translate it as 'fathered' (ESV). The form in which the genealogies are presented also preclude errors in dating due to gaps. They each state the age of the parent figure when the next person in line is born. This means that even if there were gaps the age measurement involved would not be affected.

To stretch out biblical chronology to accommodate evolutionary time scales of millions of years would require the insertion of **tens of thousands** of missing generations.

The evidence for mankind being on the earth does not stretch back more than a few thousand years and is not supportive of evolutionary claims. The size of the

world's population also supports an age of about 6000 years.

We can also check the genealogies using other means:

1. There are no missing generations between Adam and Seth since Seth was a direct replacement for Abel (Gen. 4: 25).
2. There are no missing generations between Seth and Enosh since Seth named him (Gen. 4: 25).
3. Jude says Enoch was the seventh since Adam (Jude 14) so there are no missing generations there.
4. Lamech named Noah so there are no missing generations there (Gen. 5: 29).
5. Some Hebrew scholars believe the name *Methuselah* means 'when he dies it is sent' referring to the flood. Assuming no gaps in the genealogical record then Methuselah died in exactly the same year the flood came (1656 years after creation).

Careful exegesis of the Bible does not allow for the theory of missing generations. These genealogies are given to show that the Bible is real history and that we all are descendants of the real man Adam.

The whole plan of redemption is linked inextricably with the real existence in time of the first Adam and the key representative role of Christ as the second Adam. The relevance of this is dependent on all mankind being related through a common ancestor, the biblical Adam. As Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show, the reliability of the Genesis chronology is a key part of validating the credentials of Jesus Christ as the promised Saviour.

We can trust these genealogies because they are part of the infallible, inerrant, Word of God. Our choice is clear. We must either believe God's infallible Word or the claims of unbelieving scientists who are doing their best to invent a theory to explain the universe that supplants the Scriptures.

REV. DR ROBERT BECKETT

# THE NIV (2011)

REV. DR KEVIN BIDWELL

In the middle of 2015, an unexpected book landed on my desk. It came from a respected British evangelical group. They needed someone to review the latest updated NIV (2011). I found out later that two other men had turned down their invitation, apparently because they thought that the task was too demanding or that it was a 'hot potato'. Why should that be? Previous editions of the NIV dating back to 1978 had been acceptable to many evangelical congregations. But recently, in the 2011 version, serious changes have been introduced.

The dust jacket of this newly updated NIV, now published by Hodder and Stoughton, asserts that this is 'the clearest and most accurate modern English Bible translation'.

The NIV was first published in 1978, was updated in 1984, and again in 2011. One may ask, 'Why are further significant revisions needed?'

It is assumed by the translation team that there has been a shift in the English language, which apparently required, in 2011, a gender-inclusive translation to reflect 'common' English (p ix). Where necessary, it refers to 'they/them/their' instead of 'he'.

In taking time to read this translation, comparing it with the original biblical languages, I have asked myself this question many times: 'Is the English language changing or are the theological views of the translators changing?'

Three features of the NIV (2011) call for careful consideration: the first is the accuracy of the

translation itself; the second is the extent of the wholehearted endorsements from within the English-speaking evangelical world; the third is the question of the suitability of this for congregational use. In this short review, I can only 'paint with broad brush strokes'. There is the need for further treatment of this subject on another occasion.

With reference to the gender-inclusive nature of this translation, the most prominent shift is from the word 'brothers' in the New Testament epistles to 'brothers and sisters' (sample 1 Cor. 1: 10, 11, 26; 2: 1; 3: 1). For consistency, this approach is 'rolled out' across the pages of the New Testament, including the introduction of Galatians where Paul is re-translated as saying 'all the brothers and sisters with me' (1: 2), which now implies that Paul's travelling team of ministers included men and women, which it did not. Similarly, while Paul was in prison with his male co-workers, he wrote to the Philippians. The NIV has mistakenly rendered Philippians 4: 21 'the brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings'.

There is a subtle shift in theological intent in this translation. Let me cite a stark example. In 1 Timothy 2: 12 we read: 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man'. This suggests that a woman must not 'assume' authority over a man but that it can be given to her by men. This opens the door for gender equality in ministry, the public reading of Scripture, and church governance. I contend that such changes to the Scripture open the way for a doctrinal drift, rather than reflecting an English language shift.



Further concerns arise when we turn to 1 Timothy 3 and the qualifications for elders and deacons. With a stroke of the pen, the editors undermine the office of deacon by asserting in the footnotes that the ‘word deacon refers here to Christians designated to serve with overseers/elders’ as in Romans 16: 1, Philippians 1: 1. The bold step is made to translate Romans 16: 1 ‘I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea’. The way is deliberately opened for a multiplicity of ways for women to exercise ministry and governance, while failing to uphold the biblical difference between the office of deacon and the service of all Christians.

The NIV 2011 is endorsed by high-profile evangelicals. The four primary endorsements (p ii, NIV Proclamation Bible) are from Timothy Keller of New York, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney Peter Jensen, Wheaton College pastor Joshua W. Moody, and Carrie

Sandom, associate minister for women and pastoral care at St John’s Tunbridge Wells. The breadth of these endorsements will ensure that Hodder and Stoughton’s new edition will quickly gain acceptance, and be used by preachers, as well as becoming a popular pew Bible.

There is a great need for ministers to be equipped in the biblical languages to be able to scrutinize assertions that will be made in the years ahead, because this translation signals a subtle, but seismic evangelical shift. The question is, ‘Is it a shift in a biblical direction or not?’ I am disappointed at the ‘wind of change’ towards an egalitarian model for church ministry and governance, which in my view does not have biblical, historical, or theological warrant. For churches seeking to use a new translation, I suggest that they look at an alternative rather than adopt this version of the Bible.

# WHAT SHOULD WE PREACH?

## A PURITAN PERSPECTIVE ON PREACHING

The Puritans were unanimous in affirming the importance of preaching. There is no evidence that the Solemn League and Covenant or the English Parliament required the Westminster Assembly to produce a Directory for preaching. However, as Chad Van Dixhoorn puts it, the Assembly 'in a rare display of initiative determined that preaching was important enough and bad preaching common enough that some directives were necessary' (in *Preachers, Pastors, and Ambassadors: Puritan Wisdom for Today's Church*).

### A WRONG FOCUS ON STYLE

This was a trumpet call to reinstate sound preaching and seek careful hearing of God's word.

In these days, where preaching is appreciated, it is often for its style over content. It was the same in mid-19th century Wales when preaching enjoyed a renaissance. Finney's *Lectures on Revival* were available in Welsh from the 1830s, and the effects were being felt in the Calvinistic Methodists' pulpits.

Commenting on what he thought was a retrograde development, David Charles wrote, 'We come to the house of worship to listen to the preacher, but do not expect succour from the message. We look for his excellent, ornamental, masterly treatment, and seek to derive entertainment for the mind...rather than feast upon the sincere milk of the word.... When the emphasis is laid on the externals of the ministry, such as voice and gifts rather than on substantial things, then the ministry loses its authority

and purpose, and the whole thing takes on the nature of religious play-acting' (Eifion Evans, *When He is Come*, 1959, pp. 28-9). When the earthen vessel pays attention to itself and demands the same attention from its hearers, the treasure turns to dross, and the gospel is deprived of its power.

### WHAT TO PREACH

The preacher asks 'What shall I preach?' The answer is determined by what he understands to be the purpose of preaching. The answer in essence is given by Paul in the words 'Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season' (2 Tim. 4: 2).

William Gouge, a senior member of the Westminster Assembly, said that preaching makes clear the mystery of salvation by a minister who understands it and, standing in God's place makes it known to others. John Owen agreed: 'the first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word' (*Works* 16.5, 74). This is the purpose of preaching: to feed the sheep. For Perkins the question speaks of the necessity of preaching 'the word of God alone...in its perfection and inner consistency' (*Art of Preaching*, p.9). This is the essential and unvarying answer to the question, 'What shall I preach?'

### WHAT DO THE PEOPLE NEED?

Christ's under-shepherd is required to give the sheep what Proverbs 30: 8 calls 'food that is convenient.' When choosing what to preach, he must consider not only the desirability of consistent, sequential biblical instruction, but also the needs of the people.

He might choose a topic, verse, extended passage or entire book, expounding the text, elucidating the doctrine and applying its meaning, but his choice will come from the dynamic of the pastoral relationship, his communion with God, his familiarity with the Bible, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### TEXT BASED PREACHING

The Assembly's preference was for text-preaching. 'Ordinarily, the subject of his sermon is to be some text' and 'If the text be long, (as in histories or parables it sometimes must be) let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to *the scope of the text*, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of doctrine which he is to raise from it.'

The need to pay attention to 'the scope of the text' shows that even in the case of shorter passages the wider context is important so that texts are not used as mere pegs on which to hang sermons. Also, sermons should not be tangential but about what is 'principally intended in [the passage in question]'

This advice was not universally acceptable. John Lightfoot thought it was over prescriptive and argued that the New Testament's use of the Old shows that it is possible to go beyond the 'principal intent' of the author. Baulking at pressure to preach from longer texts he said that a sermon-text could consist of a single word like 'Amen.' (*Works* 13, 278)

The Scottish commissioners desired more regulation; the English Presbyterians were more relaxed, and some others wanted no regulation at all. The result was a compromise. The Directory calls for text preaching as the norm, while allowing 'liberty to preach without a text' in the event of 'some special occasion'.

### ITINERANT PREACHERS

As an aside, it is worth noting that the difference between resident and itinerant preachers has an effect on the choice of subject and delivery. Itinerants do not have

a close knowledge of congregational needs or of 'special occasion(s)' and this will be reflected in their choice of a text and their way of applying it. Preaching a series or working through a biblical book is not feasible. They will produce one-off, stand-alone sermons that travel well and are appropriate to an occasional ministry. Yet the same disciplines apply: study, prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In every case it is the truth that sets men free. That truth can be made less interesting, sometimes without even trying, but we cannot make it *more interesting*, however hard we try. It is what it is – the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, and to reduce it to something else guarantees failure.

### AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

In Puritan thought, the preacher is Christ's ambassador: 'we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20).'

Paul served the Lord with all humility, many tears and trials and kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it, and taught publicly and from house to house declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20: 20ff). He epitomized the ambassador's role.

This is the preacher's exacting remit, requiring him to preach the full scope of God's word in a manner and mode consistent with it. He is not a free agent but one who stands 'in God's room' (William Gouge) under his authority, as Christ's servant for the church's sake and the church's servant for Christ's sake. Though vested with the highest authority, he is unimportant in himself, being committed to decrease in order that Christ might increase. Nothing in the sermon should obscure the meaning of the text and nothing in its mode of delivery draw attention to the preacher's person. He is Christ's agent, who must set his sight

firmly on feeding the sheep and calling the unconverted to faith in Christ.

The Puritans did not set out to be interesting but to identify and address spiritual need. In the words of the Directory the preacher 'is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit...a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.'

The Puritans argued for plain preaching, purged of impediments yet neither trite nor simplistic. Richard Greenham commenting on William Perkins wrote 'to preach simply is not to preach rudely, nor unlearnedly, nor confusedly, but to preach plainly and perspicuously that the simplest man may understand what is taught, as if he did hear his name.' According to Perkins, sermons should explain the meaning of the text, gather profitable points of doctrine from its natural sense and provide an application to the listeners 'in straightforward, plain speech.' Cotton Mather, in his eulogy for John Eliot says 'his way of preaching was very plain; so that the very lambs might wade into his discourses on those texts and themes, wherein elephants might swim.'

Most of the committee working on the Directory were opposed to 'clutter' made up of foreign language quotations and other kinds of citation and popularized by such as Jeremy Taylor, Lancelot Andrews, and others. Such devices Thomas Goodwin called 'vainglory' and 'withering flowers'. He had once embraced that style himself but having learned a better way, abandoned it. He

wrote, 'I left [it] all, and...never was so much as tempted to put in [sermons] any of my own withered flowers that I had gathered, and valued more than diamonds, nor have they offered themselves to my memory to the bringing them into a sermon to this day, but I have preached what I thought was truly edifying, either for conversion, or bringing them up to eternal life' (*Puritan Preaching*, p. 331).

This preaching without addition or subtraction, adjustment or embellishment, was 'designed to confront people as clearly and inescapably as possible with the closeness of God - the God who searches us, and exposes us to ourselves; who both judges and loves, both condemns and justifies through his Son, Jesus Christ; who claims and commands us, while promising protection, preservation, and final reward; and he who may not on any account be ignored' (Packer, *Portraits*, p. 27).

## EXPECT A HEARING

When the Word is fully and faithfully preached in the power of the Spirit there is every reason to expect conscionable or acceptable hearing. The preacher may come not only with earnestness but also with the eagerness and expectation of one who has himself been touched by live coals from the altar. Having first preached to himself he may preach with effect to others. Baxter wrote 'I shall never forget the relish of my soul when God first warmed my heart ... and when I was newly entered into a seriousness in religion ... I feel in myself a despising of ... wittiness as proud foolery .... As a stage-player, or Morris dancer differs from a soldier or a king, so do those [witty] preachers from the true and faithful minister of Christ: and as they deal more like players than preachers in the pulpit, so usually their hearers do rather come to play with a sermon, than to attend a message from the God of heaven about the life and death of their souls' (*Portraits*, p. 28).

**REV. RICHARD HOLST**



# A SERMON ON LEVITICUS 1:1-9

REV. PHIL BAIDEN

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of great biblical illiteracy. From TV quizzes to conversations with friends and neighbours, there is much evidence that knowledge of Scripture is not at the level it once was in this nation. For many, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David and Daniel are nothing more than entries in a book of baby names. Each year, it seems, a survey is produced that states that fewer and fewer people know the main elements of the life of Jesus.

We can, perhaps, excuse this in those who have had no contact with the Christian faith. But the fact must be faced that biblical illiteracy has entered the church. We live in an amazing age, when we can buy a cheap copy of the Bible that fits in a pocket, or download it onto smartphones and tablets free. But if today's church was to sit a Scripture exam with those from anytime in the last 350 years, would we expect it to achieve higher marks?

I want to draw your attention to some of the consequences of this illiteracy by looking at the book of Leviticus. I have asked a number of groups, 'Have you read the book of Leviticus?' Very rarely has anyone put up his hand. And this is among people who have been in church all their lives. Perhaps many readers of the *Presbyterian Network* have read it, some many times. But how many of us would choose to read it joyfully? How many of us struggle to finish this book? It is my belief, however, that a knowledge of Leviticus is vital to the health of the church at large and to each and every one of us individually.

Why do I say such a thing? Well, for one thing, we need to understand Leviticus with regard to issues of morality. In the debate about homosexuality it can be too easy to throw out the verses in Leviticus 20 about this being an abomination. But how do we react when the question is thrown back: What about shellfish, mixed fibres, etc.? Have we studied Leviticus enough within the context of the whole Bible to answer that objection with grace and truth?

In looking at chapter 1, we are looking particularly at the atonement. This has been under attack for many years, but sadly now those attacks are coming from those who would call themselves evangelical. But the whole Bible speaks in one voice on this issue: we come to God on his terms, we come to God through a substitute, through the perfect substitute, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Leviticus 1, we look at the way God prepared the way for Jesus' coming into the world, and how he established the principles that explain to us the full import of his death. We see in Leviticus the bloodline of the gospel.

## WE APPROACH GOD ON HIS TERMS

What then is the context of Leviticus? Why was it written? For the answer we need to return to Exodus. God's people have been led out of slavery and now they are at the foot of the mountain where God has called them. Moses has gone up into the presence of God. But what do we find in Exodus 32? The people can see the presence of God and yet they get tired of waiting for Moses

and create the golden calf. Here then is the reason for Leviticus: when left to their own devices, the people resort to idolatry. And so Leviticus 1 shows us that it is God who takes the initiative: 'The Lord **called** Moses and **spoke saying...**' There is no doubt that Leviticus is revelation from God, given to his people to let them know how he is to be worshipped. What comes then is God's detailed instructions for worship.

The urge to idolatry is not limited to the people of Israel. Look around at the world – the tribes and their idols, the Hindu with his elephant-headed God, the Buddhist meditating before a golden statue, the Muslim worshipping a god made in Mohammed's image, the Roman Catholic lighting candles before Mary, and the liberal Protestant holding a stone as part of his 'creative worship'. Calvin was surely right, our hearts are factories of idols. Without the guidance of the Lord we always go astray from the right worship of God. And do not think that as Presbyterians we are immune from this. Yes, we have the great blessing of the Westminster Confession's chapter 21: 'The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in Holy Scripture.' But do you believe this joyfully? Do you understand why this is the case? Or do you think that if only we were not so strict on the regulative principle, we would attract more people, our children would not be bored, and so on? Leviticus teaches us the great truth that we must only come to God on his terms.

## **WE APPROACH GOD THROUGH A SUBSTITUTE**

The situation is grave. The people fell into idolatry and we hear that God's response

was to bring death to those who had rebelled against him. First in Exodus 32: 27-28 we see 3000 fall by the sword. Later God sent a plague against the people (verse 35). Here, then, is the seriousness of what happened at the foot of the mountain. Here we have the seriousness of all sin and the penalty that it deserves: death.

But Leviticus is here to tell us that God in his grace provided a way for his people to come to him. Look at chapter 1 verse 2: the command God gives is that the people are to bring an offering of livestock. Here God is establishing for all time that we are to approach God through a substitute.

Now this is not an idea that has sprung up from nowhere. The Bible up to this point has shown us this principle already. As Adam and Eve leave the garden, their nakedness is covered by animal skins provided by the Lord. As the flood subsides, Noah sacrifices to the Lord. Abraham is commanded to kill his only son, Isaac, and as the knife is raised so God provides the substitute of the ram. And as the tenth plague comes to Egypt and the Angel of Death comes, so the blood of the Passover lamb is a substitute for the blood of the firstborn of Israel.

Let us look at this substitute in Leviticus. First it is to be a spotless male. It will be without blemish. It shall be as close to perfection as it is possible to be. There is provision for all – if not a bull, then a ram. If not a ram, then a dove. Even the poorest in Israel can come to the tabernacle with a substitute. There is also great personal cost to this offering. Not only because the loss of an animal was a cost to its owner but there must be an identification with this substitute. The prophets cried out against the abuses of the sacrificial system in later years because this element was missing. There had to be the sense that this bull, this lamb, this dove was representative of the offerer. And see what the effect is of

bringing the sacrifice. It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. The substitute is acceptable to God and it will atone for the sins of the offerer. The one bringing the offering then has to lay his hand on the bull. Then kill it himself – before the priests throw the blood against the altar and cut up the carcass and arrange it upon the altar and burn it up.

Imagine yourself in the midst of this action. There is no doubt about the seriousness of sin now is there? You have to lay your hand on the bull. You have to pick up the knife. You have to make the incision. And the smell! In Madagascar, we came across a place where there was still animal sacrifice. It is the smell that hits you.

At the end of this section at verse 9 we are told that the smell of this animal as it is being burnt up is a pleasing aroma to the Lord. What these words mean is that the sacrifice is accepted. The Lord sees the spotless substitute and the identification with that substitute and it is accepted. Just as it said in verse 4 so in verse 9 it comes to pass.

The Lord is pleased to accept all those who come to him through a substitute.

This principle still stands. God is still holy. We are still sinful. The wages of our sin is still death. The way to God remains on his terms, and his terms are that we must approach him through a substitute.

Do you recognize this? Do you realize that there is nothing you can do by your own efforts to come into the presence of the living God? He is too holy and you too sinful for this to be any other way. And however much we may cry that we believe in the free grace of God there is always part of us that says ‘if only I did more charity work, or gave more to the church, then that will make God accept me’. This is the natural position of all of us. But it is false. God’s terms are that we must approach him through a substitute.

## **WE APPROACH GOD THROUGH THE PERFECT SUBSTITUTE**

But I am not writing this to say that we must return to the state of affairs found in Leviticus. For something has changed. We now approach God through the perfect substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Leviticus is where the principles are laid down. And in these principles we see shadows and types of the perfect sacrifice – Christ. As we read our New Testaments we see this time and time again. Without the knowledge of the sacrificial system, what does it mean to us when John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, ‘Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’?

Hebrews 9 would mean nothing if we did not know the background of Leviticus that teaches us about the High Priest, the holy place and the bulls, sheep, and doves to be sacrificed. And Hebrews teaches us that those sacrifices that we read about in Leviticus have been superseded by something greater. It teaches us that rather than multiple sacrifices made over many years, now there has been one sacrifice made once for all. Now we must come to God in the same way but with a better sacrifice than bulls or sheep or doves. Now we come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

But just as the bringer of the sacrifice must place his hand upon the bull, so we must also place our hands upon Christ and claim that sacrifice as our own. We must not follow our own devices or try and climb up to God but see Christ in all his greatness and sufficiency.

And we need to be assured that as it says in Ephesians 5:2, Christ loved us and gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Christ is the only way to the Father. And only through his blood. See what he has done for you. Place your hand upon him and trust in him and him alone.

# THE TRANSGENDER ISSUE

DR CHRIS RICHARDS

A private school in Brighton is starting to offer its boys and girls the choice of wearing either trousers or a skirt. A political party leader is advocating the 'phased removal of gender markers in documentation' (Note 1). A transgender person is a successful catwalk model. Something very strange and disturbing has come upon our society. In this article we shall examine the question of gender change in the light of the Bible, consider how to respond to those with 'gender dysphoria', and begin to ask how Christians might respond.

## 1. DEFINITIONS

Promotion of 'transgender' practices has led to a shift in the meaning of terms. For this reason we need some definitions.

**Sex and Gender.** Traditionally the words 'sex' and 'gender' were used interchangeably and referred to being male or female. But lately 'gender' is being used to refer to the manifestation of masculine or feminine characteristics, desires and roles. This has made it possible to drive a wedge between a person's objective, God-given, biological sex and their subjective feelings about their identity. Particularly, with the rise of feminism, gender is increasingly regarded as a social construct. One's gender then becomes whatever one feels, or wishes to be perceived by others. In this article I will use the noun 'sex' to refer to the biological, 'true gender' for the characteristics coherent with that, and 'false gender' as perceived, aspired to, or expressed gender, depending on the context.

**Transgender** is a broad term, for individuals whose perceived or expressed gender does not conform to their God-given sex.

**Transsexuals** are people who consider their gender to be the opposite of their God-given sex and have changed, or wish to change, their expressed gender through hormonal treatment or reassignment surgery.

**Gender Dysphoria (GD)**, also called Gender Identity Disorder (GID), denotes the medical condition of a transgender individual. GD has replaced GID in the latest official classification of conditions in the *US Diagnostics and Statistical Manual*. This change in terminology has moved the emphasis away from an objective medical disorder to a subjective experience of distress. I will use GD in this article, which is the contemporary medical term.

## 2. THE MORAL CHALLENGE

Increasingly, it is being asserted that: 1. gender is not fixed but a person can choose it; 2. gender is not bimodal (male / female) but a spectrum; 3. if a person considers that his or her gender is at odds with his or her biological sex, then it can be beneficial, and morally justified, to change their perceived gender through style of dress, hormone treatment, or surgery.

## 3. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

It is striking how quickly the promotion of transgender issues has been championed and accepted within UK society. What was shocking only a few years ago is now mainstream. How could this happen? It is the result of decades of secular groundwork: 1. A rejection of God the Creator, and his laws, and a denial of accountability to him, instead asserting

absolute human autonomy. 2. A rejection of traditional marriage as the exclusive context for sexual intimacy manifest in the approval of pre-marital sex, cohabitation, homosexual practice, and the legalization of homosexual 'marriage'. 3. A rejection of certain distinctions between the sexes, especially the complementary roles of husband and wife. Vehicles for such change have included women's rights, the 'releasing' of women from child-bearing responsibilities through the use of the contraceptive pill, and the popularization of alternatives to traditional marriage. 4. The rejection of objective truth for the sake of desire fulfilment, for example, in the legalization of homosexual 'marriage'.

#### 4. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Biblical teaching on being male and female is a big subject. I must focus on those aspects that are relevant to the transgender question.

##### (a) Created Male and Female

###### *Divine origins*

'God created man in His own image...male and female He created them.' (Gen. 1: 27). Being male and female can only be rightly understood in its biblical context of the creation of mankind in God's image. What does it mean to be in God's image? Henri Blocher represents many leading Reformed theologians when he writes: Mankind is to be the created representation of his Creator, and here on earth, as it were, the image of the divine Glory' (*In the Beginning*, 1984, page 85). Bavinck reminds us that 'a human being does not bear or have the image of God but that he is the image of God' (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.554). Mankind is God's earthly representative; human abilities, characteristics, and roles arise from this status.

Genesis 1: 27 plainly states that mankind, made in the image of God, was created 'male and female'. This is essential to being human, part of our identity, and fixed. We bear the image of God as male and female beings. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived his entire earthly life *as a man* and he remains so in heaven now (Rev. 1: 4-7). Our sex was *fixed* before our birth, ordained before our conception (Jer. 1: 5). The Bible nowhere suggests that there is another category other than male or

female. There is no spectrum and there is no choice. Any attempt to obscure one's true gender is forbidden. For example, cross-dressing is forbidden in Deuteronomy 22: 5.

As an individual made in God's image, we are a body/spirit unit in which there is both duality and unity. Our God-given sex characterizes the whole being – both body and spirit. We observe this biologically in the sex-specific nature of our body, the chromosomal composition of each cell, the hormones that bathe each tissue, and the characteristic anatomy. Our sex-specific nature affects our spirit, with its distinct identity, characteristics, and desires.

When arguing for a transgender position, there is a tendency to see gender as determined by an anatomical 'overcoat' which can be changed at will. This perspective is at fault for two reasons. First, it is a skin-deep understanding of biological sex. It denies the essential nature of the biological sex of the body/spirit unit as well as its pervasiveness to every cell of the body. Second, it devalues the body. We need to treat our bodies respectfully with due regard to their wise Creator. The Sixth Commandment, 'You shall not murder', offers protection to the body. Out of respect for our bodies we are commanded not to cut or tattoo ourselves (Lev. 19: 28). God's work of redemption includes our body, which is described as 'the temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6: 19). On the last day, the Christian will be clothed with his or her transformed body for all eternity. The sanctity of our body has important implications for gender reassignment.

###### *Divine purpose*

God has granted mankind dominion over all that he has created (Gen. 1: 26). Mankind is 'crowned with glory and honour' (Ps. 8: 5, 6). The *means* by which he exercises dominion is through the working together of men and women, who are to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1: 28). Genesis 2 makes clear that the multiplication of mankind is to be achieved through sexual union in marriage, in which each has the complementary role God has assigned to them: man as head of his wife and family, their leader, provider and protector;

woman helping her husband, bearing, nurturing and caring, for the family. Deviation from the true expression of God-given sex threatens God's purpose for mankind.

### ***Divine beauty***

In a sermon on Genesis 3:11 in 1739, Jonathan Edwards says that Adam and Eve 'appeared with such a beauty and had such a lustre and glory from head to feet'. Their relationship as man and woman was beautiful, and there was unity and love. We must remember that original glorious condition, as we grapple with the ravages of sin upon individuals' God-given sex, experienced in misery, dysfunction, and ugliness. It should cause us to long for the restoration of love, health, and beauty, both in this life and in the world to come.

### **(b) Being Male and Female in the Fallen World**

The Fall was occasioned by eating the forbidden fruit, but it also involved a failure of man and woman to act in accordance with their genders. The woman took the initiative and led her husband; and Adam obeyed the voice of his wife. After the Fall, rebellion not merely against gender roles but against one's gender itself becomes a terrible possibility.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)* states that God requires our perpetual obedience to the moral law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. It is instructive to see how an individual who rejects his/her God-given sex is involved in breaking these commandments.

**The Third Commandment.** If an individual distorts the physical manifestations of his/her sex, he or she profanes one of the works by which God has made himself known.

**The Sixth Commandment.** This commandment proscribes deliberate damage to mind or body, preserving respect for one made in God's image. Hormonal or surgical intervention with the aim of 'gender reassignment' deforms a normally functioning body in order to bring it into line with erroneous desires and perceptions. In a Gnostic-like dualistic way, it exalts considerations of the (fallen) mind

over preservation of the body. It is a misuse of medicine, which should not have as its primary object the alteration of normal function.

**The Seventh Commandment.** Attempting to change one's God-given sex causes confusion or perversion of the right relationship between a man and woman both within and outside of marriage. And attempts at hormonal and surgical intervention often temporarily or permanently remove an individual's fertility, disabling him/her from the mandate to 'be fruitful and multiply'. Deliberate damage to genitalia is proscribed in Deuteronomy 23: 1.

**The Ninth Commandment.** The person who believes himself/herself to be 'in the wrong body' is deceived. In seeking to change his/her body in line with these false perceptions, he/she seeks to perpetuate a lie, deceiving self and others, since gender is a matter public knowledge.

**The Tenth Commandment.** Desiring to be the sex that God has not assigned is to covet what has not been granted and to be discontented with his will.

Even from a brief analysis, we can see the seriousness and sinfulness of seeking to change one's sex, which involves breaking several of the commandments simultaneously. It is wrong to laugh at, ignore, distort, disfigure or deliberately confuse a person's God-given sex. In contrast, God requires us to respect our own sex and that of others.

### **(c) A Sign of God's Judgment**

We live in a society that now seeks to ignore God and to 'break the bonds' of God's laws. Citizens prefer to live *autonomously*. In Romans 1: 18-19 Paul warns that when someone suppresses the truth of God's existence, God gives them over to folly and all manner of unnatural desires and practices (Rom. 1: 26-27). Isaiah 34: 11 echoes Genesis 1: 2, warning that God's punishment of sin includes the degeneration of society, so that it becomes a world *without form* ('lines of confusion'), and *void* ('stones of emptiness'). Our society's evolving moral anarchy and barren social landscape are signs that we are

facing such a judgment. In a rush to serve our selfish desires instead of honouring God, our foundational structures seem vulnerable; in this case our God-given sex.

## 5. OBSERVATIONS ON THE NATURE OF GENDER DYSPHORIA (GD)

What are the causes of Gender Dysphoria (GD)? Do medical studies help us to understand the condition? Can we integrate the medical observations with biblical principles, to reach a clear conclusion about the nature and causes of GD?

It is very important to set aside a rare group of so-called 'intersex' conditions, which are totally distinct from GD. These rare conditions are present at birth, caused by chromosomal, hormonal or developmental abnormalities that lead to an ambiguity of biological sex (Note 2). In managing these, both parents and doctors seek to identify the true – or, when uncertain, most likely – sex, and provide medical interventions to help the child to develop and function as normally as possible in that sex, though this is not always easy or successful. Though completely distinct from GD, the recognition of intersex conditions has been used wrongly by transgender protagonists to defend the 'normality' of GD.

After setting aside intersex conditions, a biblically informed analysis of the causes of GD is difficult for a number of reasons. Experts in the field often neglect moral choice as a cause of dysfunction. In addition, many researchers are biased towards promoting gender reassignment rather than affirming true gender. Finally, the epidemiology of GD may be changing rapidly (Note 3).

What then is the primary cause of GD? At least four explanations have been advanced.

1. It is normal. 2. It is caused by a physical disease of the mind. 3. It is a reactive disorder to external circumstances. 4. It is a volitional, moral disorder.

Do clinical studies shed any light on causation? Here are three observations. First, those with GD have high levels of associated psychiatric illness, including anxiety, low mood, and

suicidal thoughts, over and above that which could be explained from being a victim of rejection and misunderstanding. This continues to be the case *after* reassignment surgery at much higher rates than average (Note 4). In a study from Sweden, gender-reassigned subjects were 19 times more likely to commit suicide after reassignment than others (Note 5). Second, many of those with GD are inconsistent in their desires and practice, often vacillating between their true and 'aspired to' gender, both before and after gender reassignment (Note 6). Third, there is a strong association between GD and unnatural sexual practices (Note 7). A study published in 1979 showed that most affected individuals were either guilt-ridden homosexuals seeking a means of legitimizing their activities, or heterosexual men with an addiction to cross-dressing (Note 8). Some contributing influences on developing GD seem to arise in childhood. Most adults with GD can recall cross-gender as children (Note 9). Children with GD are more likely to come from households where they face parental, especially maternal, emotional coldness or hostility. They are also more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse in childhood, or to have a history of trauma, loss, and family disruption. A favoured theory is that the deprivation of parental love stirs up doubts about self-worth at a time when the child is developing a sense of being female or male, and so disturbs this natural process of gender identity.

1. Can it be maintained that GD is normal and healthy? In the recent past, views of homosexual behavior altered from seeing it as a sin, to sickness, and then to being normal. A similar development is occurring with GD. However, many leading clinical researchers who note the poor mental health, sexual behaviour, and dysfunctional upbringing of those with GD, conclude that claims of normality are untenable. This concurs with our assessment of GD in the light of the moral law. It is never 'normal' or right to be in persistent contravention of God's good and holy laws.

2. Could GD be a physical disease of the mind, such as a hard-wired neurochemical abnormality, of which individuals are passive victims? The literature suggests that on very

rare occasions, GD may be a manifestation of a schizophrenia-like illness, schizophrenia being characterized by fixed, false ideas (Note 10). In such a case, the individual may perhaps be excused from some moral responsibility for some actions. However, the vast majority of GD-affected individuals are considered by clinicians to be in full control of their faculties, morally responsible for their actions, and receive no benefit from anti-schizophrenic medications.

3. Could GD represent a reactive disorder to past or present circumstances? Leading US Professor of Psychiatry, Dr Paul McHugh, a keen critic of medical interventions to change gender, has described the *primary* problem as psychosocial, needing treatment with family therapy (Note 11). A biblical synthesis would agree that family and sexual pressures can damage and deceive our fallen mind and emotions, but that these in turn work to make the individual vulnerable to moral errors of the will, i.e. temptation to sin, which, if yielded to, work out in sinful thoughts, words and actions. The primary problem then is moral (option 4), not psychosocial. This conclusion affirms the assessment of GD in the light of the moral law given above. Accepting the fact that one's God-given sex and gender are fixed, we must recognize the sense of 'being in the wrong body' as a lie, seeded in the mind by the evil one, who is 'the father of lies', and the desire for gender change as sinful. We should not then be surprised that those who yield to such desires are often deeply disturbed, unstable, and drawn into unnatural sexual practices. The case that GD is primarily a volitional/moral disorder is strengthened by the testimony of those who have been healed of the disorder after coming to faith in the Lord Jesus.

How can we explain the recent rapid rise in cases of claimed GD which post-date many of the published studies? Surely more children than ever before will be suffering an identity crisis from family break-up. Other factors may also be at work. The exploration of gender identity, as well as unnatural sexual practices, has been encouraged in the media and on the internet. Such publicity has turned the prospect of gender change from something

personal and embarrassing into something morally praiseworthy and daring in the pursuit of 'finding one's true self' and in rejecting traditional boundaries. Individuals lacking self-confidence find that claiming to have GD opens the door to membership of an affirming transgender community. Thus sadly, the temptation for young people to claim GD has grown in recent years.

## 6. APPROACHES TO TREATMENT OF GENDER DYSPHORIA

Currently those troubled by GD respond in a number of ways. Some, perhaps the majority, become reconciled to their birth sex with or without counselling and support. Others limit the expression of their desires to cross-dressing, sometimes intermittently. Still others, under medical direction, choose to use hormonal treatment, and a minority will undergo reassignment surgery (often NHS funded). Genital surgery is rarer in women seeking to become men than the reverse, partly because of the technical impossibility of an effective result. Hormonal treatment is reversible. Attempts at surgical reversal have been made but obviously gonadal removal is permanent.

Only a small minority (1-6%) regret the reassignment surgery sufficiently to seek a reversal (Note 12). But high levels of suicide demonstrate that for many individuals the procedure does not bring peace. We expect it, given the biblical understanding that gender reassignment is impossible. Psychiatrist Robert Stoller describes the horror of being trapped with no way forward and seemingly no way back, when an individual's true gender is disfigured and his/her aspired-to gender fails to deliver: 'What she [a Male-to-Female] could never forget – nor can any transsexual ever forget— [is] that life began as the opposite sex. These patients...are not able to deny their past, especially the knowledge that they are forever the sex into which they were born; more than many researchers on transsexualism, these patients know they will never be truly female, [and] therefore can never be, in the depths of their identity, women.'

Since promoting deviation from an individual's sex is both wrong and impossible to achieve,

how might those with GD be helped to identify correctly with their true sex? Various means have been advocated: counselling to address emotional responses to the individual's grief, discomfort and anger concerning his/her sex; practical training on how to behave and speak according to one's biological sex; and role modelling. But because of the spiritual root of the issue, such therapies do not get to the heart of the problem. We can expect only limited success. Remember Calvin's observation, that 'man is so completely captive to sin's yoke that he cannot, of his own nature or volition, desire what is good or endeavour to do it'. Tragically we seem to observe a progressive hardening of conscience, especially in those where patterns of thinking have become long established and unnatural desires have been conceded to. In contrast, a truly effective and enduring remedy lies only in God's saving grace.

## 7. CHILDREN WITH GENDER DYSPHORIA

Puberty can be a time of uncertainty about a range of matters including gender. For this reason young people can be vulnerable to suggestions that they are expressing themselves in the manner of the opposite sex or even that they might be transsexual. How wrong it is then that schools in the UK should use material that promotes gender fluidity, and which can manipulate an adolescent mind into uncertainty (Note 13). In addition, when young people express doubt about their gender, counselling to affirm them in their God-given sex is becoming professionally censured (as is counselling against homosexual attraction). We must be concerned for the rising generation, because sexually disorientated young people are sexually vulnerable to abuse.

As we have mentioned, manifestations of GD can begin in childhood. Most adults with GD are able to recall childhood thoughts and behaviour typical of GD. But in the vast majority of affected children, such thoughts have gone by adolescence (Note 14). Nevertheless, medical referral of children with GD is being promoted. In some children puberty is delayed by hormonal treatment to make future surgical operations technically easier. Access to this service will be made easier if recent House of Commons Select Committee proposals are accepted (Note 15).

Given the natural history of GD in children and the fixedness of one's sex, this is nothing short of child abuse, perpetrated by the medical profession. The American College of Pediatrics has come out clearly against such practices (Note 16). However, professional bodies in the UK generally affirm the need for such services.

## 8. LEGAL PROTECTION

Gender reassignment is one of the protected characteristics of the 2010 Equality Act. Under the Act, people are not allowed to discriminate against, harass, or victimize another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. However, the Act would not prohibit a church from excluding from membership or the Lord's Table any person whose Christian profession was in doubt, including an unrepentant transsexual. There are also particular provisions in the Act allowing churches to refuse to solemnize the marriage of transsexuals and to discriminate on the grounds of gender reassignment in their employment practices. There are also a series of provisions in the Act permitting the provision of single-sex facilities or services, or separate facilities for men and women, if it can be objectively justified. Nevertheless, as we have seen with the ongoing Ashers Baking Company case, the protection of one characteristic (in that case, sexual orientation) is sometimes given priority over religious views in the provision of goods and services. How long will it be before Christians face civil liability for refusing to approve transgender aspirations?

## 9. HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH RESPOND?

We should be deeply concerned about recent developments. The Psalmist once wrote: 'Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep your law' (Ps. 119: 136). Yet we must believe that even these desperate developments will work to God's glory and our good. Here are general considerations as to how God's people might respond: 1. We must allow threats to biblical truth to sharpen our theology and increase our thanks to God for matters that we have previously taken for granted. 2. A church that loves truth and lives righteously will shine all the more brightly as lights 'in the midst of a

crooked and perverse generation' (Phil. 2: 15) which seeks to undermine creation order. 3. We need to defend boldly the given-ness and non-negotiability of an individual's true gender in the face of increasing moral criticism and public censure. Are we prepared to do this for the sake of Christ and in defence of the lost and vulnerable? 4. We need to pray, remembering that this issue represents a spiritual battleground, through which Satan is seeking to deceive and destroy many.

## 10. PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

Transgender practices may present particular challenges to our ministers and congregations. For example, 'Lucy' attends your church for the first time. Later 'Lucy' admits later that he was born a man, called Mark, and underwent gender reassignment whilst attending a previous church. Lucy [Mark] says that 'she' [he] is a believer and would like to attend a Ladies' Bible Study group. How do you respond? You feel disturbed and at variance with what 'Lucy' represents, with the visible distortion of nature and God's image. You feel compassion at his ('her') anguish and confusion, the internal war going on, the mind versus the body. You remember that he has probably been the victim of others' action in early, formative years. How do you speak to 'Lucy'? You do not wish to do or say anything, in private or public, to perpetuate a deception; you want to honour God in the way you speak to this person. How do you address him? Lucy or Mark? If you do not wish him to go to the Ladies' meeting, are you allowed to say no? (There are exceptions to the Equality Act which should protect a church's choice to hold single-sex meetings that exclude a transsexual. A phone call to the Christian Institute may help to clarify your legal position.) And then, there is the need to engage in pastoral conversation in which the wrongness of attempting to change sex must be explained. And your position is contrary to contemporary views. If Mark repents truly, you expect him to desire to reverse the effects of gender reassignment (where possible) and seek a restoration of the naturalness of his God-given sex. There are many encouraging accounts of God graciously working to bring about such a change (Note 17). Yet the journey of restoration can be slow and demanding. Some will have to accept that

full physical restoration will not be achieved in this life. With regard to spiritual restoration, Keith Tiller on the Parakaleo website observes: 'Overcoming transgendered behaviours is often directly related to one's willingness to enter into an ever closer relationship with God (Note 18). A personal, obedient, trusting relationship with Him is necessary in achieving a more wholesome lifestyle... To build an intimate relationship with God by wounded people takes time. The place to begin to nurture such an intimate relationship with the Lord is within the church' (Note 19).

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1. Tim Farron, 'The Tories are Trailing Behind on Transgender Rights', *Huffington Post*, 14 Dec. 2015.
  2. Examples include chromosomal conditions such as Klinefelter Syndrome (XXY), hormonal conditions such as congenital adrenal hyperplasia, and developmental conditions such as vaginal agenesis.
  3. Epidemiology: the sum of the factors controlling the presence or absence of the condition.
  4. K. J. Zucker *et al.* (2016). *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 12:217–47 p.235.
  5. C. Dhejne *et al.* (2011) Long-term follow-up of transsexual persons undergoing sex reassignment surgery: cohort study in Sweden. *PLoS ONE* 6(2):e16885.
  6. Zucker *et al.* (2016). *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 12:217–47 p.235
  7. O'Leary, Dale, Sprigg, Peter, 'Understanding and Responding to the Transgender Movement', Family Research Council Paper, June 2015 p 19, [www.frc.org/transgender](http://www.frc.org/transgender)
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# INFANT BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF GRACE

REV. PROF. ROBERT MCCOLLUM

Every subject that we think about, every topic that we discuss or every theme that we examine must be carried out with reference to God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father is the fountain of all knowledge and understanding. In Jesus Christ ‘are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2: 3) and it is God the Holy Spirit who guides ‘into all truth’ (John 16: 13) through the Scriptures which he has given. This means that we will consider the topic assigned to me, ‘Infant Baptism as a means of Grace’ with reference to God and particularly through the Word of God.

Baptism is one of the two Sacraments that Christ instituted for his Church; the other one being the Lord’s Supper. The Westminster Confession of Faith, 27:1, defines sacraments as follows: ‘Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his word.’

Sacraments are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace. That begs the question: What is the Covenant of Grace?

As it was determined in the counsels of eternity between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, it is usually designated the Covenant of Redemption. On the other hand, as it applies to the elect, those whom God has purposed to save from all eternity, it is known as the Covenant of Grace. The comment by W. G. T. Shedd in relation to this differentiation is helpful. ‘The Covenant of Grace and that of

Redemption are two modes or phases of the one evangelical covenant of mercy’ (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2.360). This eternal Covenant of Grace entered time when God addressed the serpent (Satan) after the rebellion of Adam and Eve: ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel’ (Gen. 3: 15). The blessings of the Covenant would come through a Mediator, the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ.

The remainder of Scripture is the unveiling of this Covenant, the first part of the Bible (Old Testament) being the administration of the Covenant prior to the Incarnation, prior to the coming of Christ; the second part of the Bible (New Testament) being the administration of the same Covenant after Christ’s coming.

God very specifically established the Covenant with Abraham. The details are recorded in Genesis 12: 1-9. Genesis 17: 1-14 informs us that the Covenant was established, not with Abraham alone, but also with his offspring, in descending lines of generations. ‘And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you’ (Gen. 17: 7).

With respect to this Covenant that God established with Abraham and his offspring, he decided to give to him a sign. This sign would be a visible pledge of his covenant faithfulness. That visible sign was circumcision. ‘You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised’ (Gen. 17: 11, 12a).

God gave to his people another sign of his covenant faithfulness, prior to the coming of Christ. It was the Passover. To His people, about to leave Egypt, God said through Moses: 'You shall observe this rite as a statue for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service' (Exod. 12: 24, 25).

Down through the centuries these signs of God's covenant faithfulness were observed by the Jews. Therefore, when we come to the 'Incarnation' we are simply informed about the child born to Mary and Joseph, 'at the end of eight days he was circumcised' (Luke 2: 21).

And the annual Passover feast was something that still was being observed in the first century. Jesus experienced this for himself at twelve years of age. 'Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom' (Luke 2: 41, 42).

Both of these Old Testament signs of God's covenant faithfulness involved the shedding of blood. When Christ's blood was shed, once for all, to redeem his people, to procure their salvation, the bloody signs needed to be changed into bloodless equivalents for the New Covenant era. The Passover was replaced by the Lord's Supper on the evening of the crucifixion by Jesus in the Upper Room (Luke 22: 14-23). Circumcision was replaced by baptism, prior to our Lord's Ascension, when he commissioned His disciples: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28: 19, 20).

The disciples responded to that commission. Their mission began on the day of Pentecost, with Peter preaching the gospel, concluding with the challenge: 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself' (Acts 2: 38, 39). Those

devout Jews, assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost from all over Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean, would have recognized immediately the Covenant formula that Peter used in his concluding remarks. It was essentially the same as was given by God to their ancestor Abraham, 2000 years earlier.

To Abraham God had said: 'And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you.' Through Peter God the Holy Spirit said: 'For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'

The Lord's Supper, as the New Covenant equivalent of the Passover, is beyond dispute. It is something that finds universal acceptance in the Christian church. That Baptism is the New Covenant equivalent of Circumcision is disputed by some. However, when we recognize that there is one God, and one eternal Covenant of Grace, with one way of salvation throughout history, through faith in Jesus Christ, then the evidence is compelling that Baptism is the fulfilment of Circumcision. Colossians 2: 12, 13 places the matter beyond dispute when Paul used the two terms interchangeably. 'In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.'

I have taken time to lay this foundation because I want us to see that there are parallels between baptism as a means of grace and circumcision as a means of grace.

It is also important that we understand the terms of the subject before us. The Westminster Confession of Faith defines Baptism as follows: 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by

Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.'

Hodge in his commentary on the Confession (pages 338-9) reduces this definition to three propositions.

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, instituted immediately by Christ, and by his authority to continue in the Church until the end of the world.
2. As to the action which constitutes Baptism, it is a washing of the subject with water (the manner of the washing not being essential), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a lawfully ordained minister.
3. It is done with the design and effect of signifying and sealing our ingrafting into Christ, our partaking of the benefits of his covenant, and our engagement to be his.

As we are principally considering in this lecture 'Infant Baptism as a means of Grace' what do we understand by 'means of grace'?

The eternal God we know, love and worship is the God who uses means to accomplish His eternal purpose. He is not limited to means but often for his own glory this is how he operates. For example, when an elderly person becomes partially sighted through cataracts God will use a simple operation by an eye surgeon to restore perfect vision. In the same way God often chooses to use means to communicate his grace to those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism helpfully addresses the subject of means. Question 88 asks: 'What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?' The Answer is: 'The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of Redemption, are His ordinances; especially the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.'

Roderick Lawson comments: 'In order that we may be saved, God demands of us not only faith and repentance, but the diligent use of the outward means of grace as well. These outward means are here called ordinances, or things which God has ordained. They consist mainly in

- 1. The study of the Bible; 2. The observance of the Sacraments; 3. The use of Prayer.

Baptism is one of the two sacraments. How or in what way does it become a means of grace?

First of all, we eliminate the view held by Roman Catholicism (*ex opere operato*) that the sacrament of baptism in and of itself always communicates grace at the time of being administered. Rome teaches and believes that, at the moment a child is baptized, it is then and there regenerate. The child is then and there born again. This is known as 'Sacerdotalism'.

G. I. Williamson helpfully compares the sacerdotal view of the sacraments with the Reformed view. 'The sacerdotal view is that the saving grace of God is contained in the sacraments and conveyed by their administration. The Reformed view is that God the Holy Ghost works when, where, and how he will in conferring saving grace, and that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to his sovereign operation. It is because he is pleased to use the sacraments to exhibit and to confer grace that they become efficacious' (The Confession of Faith for Study Classes, p.203). I emphasize Williamson's statement 'that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to his sovereign operation'. Everything that I say in this paper recognizes this as a foundational principle. God is sovereign in whatever means he determines to use and when he makes that means effective.

## 1. BAPTISM ITSELF AS A MEANS OF GRACE

Can we say that the sacrament of baptism is a means of grace at the moment of baptism for the child baptized? The answer to that question is 'no', if we are thinking that the baptism of a child automatically or magically communicates the blessing that it signifies – regeneration and union with Christ.

Edmund P. Clowney, writing on this subject, comments: 'The sacraments are not sacred magic, the elements themselves containing the blessing, as if the Holy Spirit could be dispensed from a font, or Christ contained in a cup. God does not surrender His work of grace to external symbols, controlled by the

manipulation of men (*The Church*, pp.274-5). I agree entirely with Clowney. But does this mean that the sacrament of baptism, at the time of being administered, is not a means of grace to the child being baptized in any sense? It would be wrong, I believe, to come to that conclusion.

Christ has appointed the sacrament of baptism for believers and their children. It would be unreasonable therefore to conclude that there was no blessing, of any description, on the child at the baptismal service. While the child will have no conscious awareness of his baptism, yet I do believe that Christ, in the exercise of his sovereignty, will communicate a blessing upon the child.

Such a conclusion is not based on sentiment. The sacraments, as the Reformed Confessions teach us, are a means of grace to all who participate in them. The infant child of Christian parents being baptized should not be considered an exception.

But is faith not essential to the receiving of such blessing? John Calvin, in a comment made on Isaiah 58, has written: 'We maintain, therefore that there is a direct relationship between faith and the sacraments; they become effective through faith' (*365 Days with Calvin*, ed. J. Beeke, 10 May). Although it is impossible for the infant being baptized to exercise faith, the parents are expressing their faith in presenting their child for Christian baptism. They are in effect saying: 'in the Covenant, God has promised to be God to us and he is, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; but he has also promised to be God to our children after us. We therefore present our child for baptism and in so doing, by faith, lay claim to that covenant promise.'

Some will maintain that a little child, a few weeks old, is incapable of receiving blessing. The answer to such an objection is found in Mark 10: 13-16. Parents were bringing their infants to Jesus so that 'he might lay his hands on them and pray.' The disciples of Jesus thought that such a thing was ridiculous and rebuked these parents. Jesus was indignant with His disciples. To the parents he gave the following words of encouragement. 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the

kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.'

Two things to note about these words of Jesus. First, he blessed these infants. So infant children are capable of receiving blessing from the God of all grace and mercy. Second, he revealed that children of such a tender age can be regenerate. He said, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'

With respect to this incident and the prayer offered for these children Calvin writes: 'what other prayer did he utter for them than that they should be received into the number of the children of God. It follows then that they were regenerated by the Spirit in the hope of salvation ... they were partakers of the spiritual gifts represented by baptism' (*Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 2, p.171).

Matthew Henry makes a similar comment: 'The strongest believer lives not so much by apprehending Christ as by being apprehended by Christ and this the least child is incapable of doing. If they cannot stretch out their hands to him; yet he can lay His hands on them and so make them his own and own them for his own' (Commentary on Matthew 19: 13-15).

Recently when preaching at a baptismal service from Mark 10: 13-16, I drew particular attention to those words at the end of verse 14, 'to such belongs the kingdom of God.' From this statement I made the point that there are no limits on the work of the Spirit in regeneration. God is sovereign. A child may be born again (regenerate) in his mother's womb as we believe Jeremiah was (Jeremiah 1: 5), as we believe John the Baptist was (Luke 1: 44), every bit as much as a boy of 16, or a woman of 70. The Holy Spirit is sovereign in his operations, as we read in John 3: 8.

In relation to the baptism of a child of believing parents, we can draw the conclusion that what is signified in baptism, regeneration and union with Christ, can take place before baptism, at baptism, or after baptism.

## **2. BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF GRACE TO COVENANT CHILDREN THROUGH THE FAITHFULNESS OF PARENTS TO THEIR VOWS**

Prior to the baptism of a child, parents in most Reformed denominations take vows. I will illustrate from the vows taken by parents in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

There is a vow that calls on the parents to be faithful to their parental obligations. It is four-fold in nature. The first obligation relates to prayer.

### **Parents commit to pray for their child**

They promise: 'To pray that your child may be renewed and brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as signified in this sacrament.'

While parents will take this promise at the baptismal service, they will already have prayed this prayer from the moment they knew a child was conceived in the womb. They will have prayed this prayer in the days leading up to the baptismal service. And they will pray it many days after the service, maybe for years, until they see evidences of grace in the life of their child.

They will pray on the basis of the Covenant of Grace. Their prayer will be worded something like this: 'Lord, you are our God. Be a God to our little boy; save him by your grace, for you have promised not only to be a God to us but to our children after us.' An essential aspect of prayer is laying claim to the promises of God.

We have an example of such persistent prayers being offered by the father of the famous missionary to the New Hebrides, John G Paton. He writes in his autobiography about a little room in his family home: 'Thither daily, and oftentimes a day... we saw our father retire, and shut the door; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place' (Missionary to the New Hebrides, p.8). Parents make a commitment to pray.

### **Parents commit to teach God's Word to their child**

They promise: 'to seek that your child may

come to know the Holy Scriptures and to know the duty of committing himself/herself to God.'

Covenant children will be taught God's Word at church services and through children and youth ministries in the church. Their most effective teachers, however, will be their parents. By taking a solemn vow at the baptism of their infant children, to teach them God's Word, they are placed under a sacred obligation to fulfil that vow. (Deut. 6: 4-9; Eph. 6: 4). 'A religious vow or covenant does not bind us to anything additional to God's Word but it additionally binds us to that which is already our duty to do' (William Symington).

Children are to be taught by their parents in both formal and informal situations. Deuteronomy 6: 6, 7 commands parents that they are to seize every opportunity, through the day, to teach their children about God and His wonderful works. 'And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.'

This command is reinforced by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6: 4. Parents will delegate some of this responsibility to the church through the teaching ministry of the congregation to which they belong. This will be of immense benefit and support. Children, however, who are taught God's Word primarily from their parents enjoy an immense privilege. With God's blessing it will bring forth much fruit.

Paul writing to the Christians in Rome states: 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10: 17).

### **Parents commit to be faithful in their Christian life and worship**

They promise: 'to rule well your household, exercising parental authority with firmness and love, setting the example of a holy and consistent life, and attending with regularity to personal, family and public worship.'

Parents who are consistent in responding faithfully to this vow will be the means of much blessing to their children. Parents promise

in this vow to set 'the example of a holy and consistent life'. As ministers must practise what they preach, if they are to have an effective ministry, so parents must conscientiously model the truth of God before their children. Parents who habitually disregard God's clear, specific commands are not keeping their covenant with God. Such parents cannot expect their children to respond in faith to the promises of God offered to them at baptism. Psalm 103 emphasizes to parents the importance of keeping the covenant: 'But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments' (Ps. 103: 17, 18).

Daily family worship will train covenant children from infancy to reach out to God in faith. In that daily context they will be brought face to face with the reality of God and the gospel of his grace. Not only that but the faith of their parents will be a challenge, and a stimulus to faith, as covenant children grow up in a world of unbelief. By being included in all aspects of family worship they will experience what it means to be part of God's covenant community in the context of the family.

Children who experience daily family worship will also integrate better and benefit more quickly from public worship than children devoid of this experience. Each day covenant children experience 'little church'. Then once a week there will be a degree of excitement in meeting with other families in 'big church'. Baptism is therefore a means of grace through the faithfulness of parents to their vows taken at the baptism of their children.

The initial promises with respect to children in the Covenant of Grace were given to Abraham. And God knew that Abraham as a conscientious parent would be faithful to his parental obligations. 'For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised' (Gen. 18: 19). The sign of God's Covenant Promise had been revealed to Abraham. God would use Abraham as the means by which that promise would be fulfilled.

It is important that parents bring up their children believing that God will use the means he has chosen to bring covenant children to himself in saving faith. Rev. William Still, a Scottish minister, in a sermon he preached to his Aberdeen congregation in 1968, challenged the parents: 'I have said this before: too many Christian parents bring up their children in fear lest they will go astray, rather than in faith that they will not. That fear, expressed in the course of their first few years in a thousand ways, soon communicates itself to their sensitive souls and they become like you, preoccupied with thoughts of going astray. It is like the horrible, drawing power of a precipice. The likeliest thing in the world is that children brought up in a home where it is feared they will go astray, will go astray. They are predisposed and preconditioned to that possibility for fear comes from Satan, and by fearing where you ought to trust and quietly implement that trust by the works of faith you are bringing Satan into your home. Whenever fear tends to grip you as it may (Satan is always up to his tricks), turn at once to God and away from Satan and say, "God, you have said and you have commanded me to say back to You what You have said to me; that these children are Yours. I will not fear, but will believe and act accordingly."'

Some Christians can be heard to say: 'It's an awful world in which to bring up children.' Such Christians need to be reminded that it has always been an awful world. It is a fallen world. But God's people have the assurance that their children are separated unto God – because they are the children of God's children. That truth is recognized in their baptism. Parents should rear their children in faith, rather than in fear; in the faith that God will early in life fulfil what was signified in their child's baptism; that God will regenerate them and unite them to Jesus Christ. In practice Christian parents should communicate that they trust their children when they are outside their direct supervision. For example, when a six year old is going to a birthday party of some of her school friends, the parent as the child leaves the home should say, 'enjoy yourself' rather than 'behave yourself'. This indicates trust rather than suspicion. This attitude should continue through childhood and adolescence.

Because baptism carries with it such

significance children need to be reminded often of their baptism. In many homes, displayed in a prominent position, will be certificates for swimming or for piano or singing. Among all these the Baptismal Certificate should be displayed.

In the Christian home birthdays are celebrated each year. As well as this celebration it would be excellent practice if parents reminded each child of their baptism on its anniversary. Family worship is a good context in which to do this. As the children reach years of understanding the meaning of their baptism should be explained in simple terms. This will keep the event of baptism alive in the child's experience and underline its significance. Children in a covenant home will then grow up aware of having been baptized, in the same way as boys in an Israelite home would have been aware of their covenant status.

In Israel the Passover was to be observed annually. God knew children would be curious about that sacrament. 'And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' You shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses' (Exod. 12: 26, 27). And no doubt inquisitive boys in Israel would have enquired as to why they had been circumcised. Likewise today children, brought up in such a way as to be aware of their baptism, will want to know from their parents its Covenant significance. Such questions will be a golden opportunity to speak of the promises offered to them in the Covenant, at their baptism, and how they must by faith lay claim to these promises.

### **3. BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF GRACE TO COVENANT CHILDREN THROUGH THE FAITHFULNESS OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THEIR VOW**

At a baptism, in many reformed churches, the members of the congregation into which the child is being baptized also take a vow. The vow in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is framed as follows: 'Do you promise to pray for this covenant child and to seek by example and precept to encourage him/her to walk in the ways of the Lord?'

People who do not believe in paedo-baptism will find it impossible to participate in the sacrament of infant baptism and therefore will not wish to take this vow. It is because of this and other reasons that I believe such believers cannot be in the membership of a Reformed Paedo-baptist church.

Covenant children have the support, encouragement, example and prayers of the members of their congregation. This is a means of grace that is an invaluable support to parents and to children growing up in such a context. There are many practical ways of expressing this.

### **4. BAPTISM AS A MEANS OF GRACE TO COVENANT CHILDREN THROUGH THEIR RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH**

The minister administering the sacrament of Baptism to a covenant child will say: 'I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' Not only does this formulae picture union with God and thereby symbolise all the blessings of the Covenant of Grace, it also indicates reception into the body of Christ, the Church. Edmund Clowney speaks of Baptism as the 'initiating sacrament that marks the candidate as belonging to the people of God' (*The Church*). Or as James Bannerman succinctly writes: 'Baptism is the door of formal admission into the church' (*The Church of Christ*, vol. 2, p. 80).

Baptized children in the congregation need to be recognized as belonging to the Covenant community. These children must grow up believing that they are a valued part of the family of God. This will give them a sense of belonging, which has, in the past, often been neglected through lack of thought. Congregations ought to rejoice in the gift of children and seek with the parents to 'bring them up in the nurture and admission of the Lord' (Eph. 6: 4)

The Westminster Assembly of Divines in its directory for public worship addressed the subject of Covenant children: 'The seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and a right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church, under the gospel,

no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament: ... That children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers’.

The Covenant status of baptized children will influence the minister in his attitude towards them and in his approach to these little ones. As he speaks to them in public worship his remarks will be governed by the fact that they have been received into the covenant community. He will on occasion speak to them about the significance of their baptism. A baptismal service is a good context in which to do this. He will inform them about what was prayerfully anticipated on that occasion, that the outward washing with water would be accompanied, early in life, with the inward washing of regeneration. He will say to these covenant children that the members of the church, their parents included, are looking forward to the time when they will make a public profession of faith before the congregation and in so doing be added to the communicant membership of the church.

Such an occasion is sometimes called ‘confirmation’. Their profession of faith is a confirmation that what was anticipated at their baptism, has become a reality in their lives; that they have by the gracious work of God come to know and love Jesus Christ as their Saviour and King.

When such young people are before the congregation, taking their vows of communicant membership, the minister should refer back to their baptism. It may have been fifteen or sixteen years previously. As a sacrament, a means of grace, its primary goal has been realized as the young people testify through their vows that they have been regenerated by the Spirit and united to Christ in all His saving work. It becomes a matter of great thanksgiving to God. Almighty God has blessed all the ‘means’ associated with their infant baptism to the salvation of their immortal souls.

## CONCLUSION

‘Infant baptism as a means of grace.’

When Christian parents truly understand the significance of this sacrament and faithfully respond to the obligations it places on them, rich and abundant blessing is enjoyed in family life.

One glorious blessing is that many of the children growing up in such homes will experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the tender years of childhood. Of course there will seldom be a conscious awareness of this experience and they will simply confess their faith in Christ by saying that they never remember a time when they did not love the Lord. Of course such professions are tested when children from covenant homes become more and more exposed to the temptations and allurements of this godless age. If their profession is in fact based on the regenerating grace of the Spirit then they will stand firm when tempted, but if not, then the true state of their heart will soon become apparent.

John Murray writes about childhood regeneration: ‘where regeneration takes place in the case of an infant there is the immediate transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God, and even though intelligent faith cannot be exercised, nevertheless there is that which we may and must call the germ of faith. The regenerate infant is not under the dominion of sin, is not a child of wrath, but a child of God and a member of his kingdom. He grows up in the nurture of the Lord in the highest sense of that term. It will take years, of course, for the infant concerned to arrive at explicit consciousness of the implications of that regeneration and of the salvation it involves’ (Collected Writings, vol. 2, pp. 199-200).

The experience of salvation does not always occur in childhood or youth. Parents are sometimes tested. They may never live to see their children coming to faith. And in the mystery of the Divine will there will be those children like Esau, who despise their birthright and become breakers of the Covenant. For them the fury of God’s righteous judgement will be reserved. Such exceptions ought never to cause parents to lose sight of what all parents should earnestly pray for, the regeneration of their offspring in the tender, formative years of life through the means of grace divinely appointed.

# EPCEW CHURCH DIRECTORY

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Barry CF62 8HE  
Sun. 11am & 6pm  
Minister: Rev. W. John Cook  
T. 01446 408086  
E. w.j.cook@hotmail.co.uk  
W. barryepc.org.uk

## 4 BURY ST EDMUNDS

Newbury 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  
W. bse-pc.org

## 7 CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

Heol Trelai, Caerau  
Cardiff CF5 5LJ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Dr Peter Naylor  
T. 029 2040 5750 / 07773 093738  
E. peter.naylor@immanuelcaerau.org.uk  
W. immanuelcaerau.org.uk

## 10 CHELTENHAM - NORTH

Whaddon Road E.P. Church  
Rear of Claremont, Whaddon Rd,  
Cheltenham GL52 5LZ  
Sun. 11am & 6.30pm  
Minister: Rev. David Pfeiffer  
T. 07846 858766  
E. drpfeiffer85@hotmail.com  
W. whaddonevangelicalchurch.org

## 13 HEXHAM

The Torch Centre  
Corbridge Rd (near hospital)  
Hexham NE46 1QS  
Sun. 10am & 5pm, Wed. 7:30pm  
Minister: Rev. Joshua Rieger  
T. 07930 016785  
E. joshuamrieger@gmail.com  
W. hexhampres.uk

## 2 BERLIN

Droysenstrasse 15 10629 Berlin  
Sun. 10am & 4.30pm  
Treseburger Ufer 44b 12347  
Berlin. Wed. 7pm  
Minister: Rev. Johannes Müller  
T. +4917631029046  
E. johannes.mueller@epkd.de  
W. ekpd.de

## 5 CAMBRIDGE

Queen Emma Primary School (am)  
Resurrection Lutheran Church,  
Westfield Rd (pm)  
Cockcroft Hall, Clarkson Rd (Thu)  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm, Thu. 7.45pm  
T. 01223 212370  
E. peterleverton1@gmail.com  
W. cambridgepres.org.uk

## 8 CHELMSFORD

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

## 11 DURHAM

The Chapel, Laburnum Avenue  
Durham  
Sun. 10.30am & 3.30pm,  
Thu. 7.45pm  
Minister: Rev. Phil Baiden  
T. 01916 700972  
E. philbaiden@yahoo.co.uk  
W. depc.org.uk

## 14 HULL

Rear of 336 Holderness Rd  
Hull HU9 3DQ  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Minister: Vacant  
Contact: Rev. Dr Kevin Bidwell (15)

## 3 BLACKBURN

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

## 6 CARDIFF - BETHEL

Michaelston Rd  
Culverhouse Cross  
Cardiff CF5 4SX  
Sun. 11am & 6pm, Wed. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Mark Johnston  
T. 029 2059 5000  
E. revmjohnston@gmail.com  
W. bethelpcr.org.uk

## 9 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  
W. cheltenhampres.org.uk

## 12 GATESHEAD

Lobley Hill Community Centre  
47 Scafell Gardens, Gateshead  
NE11 9LS  
Sun. 10.30am & 6pm  
Minister: Rev. Dr Bill Schweitzer  
T. 07939 071404  
E. contact@gatesheadpres.org.uk  
W. gatesheadpres.org.uk

## 15 SHEFFIELD

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

# FIND US

## 16 SOLIHULL

37 Faulkner Road  
Solihull, B92 8SB  
Sun. 11am & 5pm, Thu. 7.30pm  
Minister: Rev. Stephen Dancer  
T. 0121 707 1826  
E. [info@solihullpres.org.uk](mailto:info@solihullpres.org.uk)  
W. [solihullpres.org.uk](http://solihullpres.org.uk)

## 17 TRANÅS

Höggatan 8, 57333 Tranås  
Sun. 10am & 4:30pm  
Minister: Rev. David Bergmark  
T. +46 70 244 7241  
E. [d.bergmark@erkis.se](mailto:d.bergmark@erkis.se)

## CLERK OF PRESBYTERY

Rev. Chris Kavanagh  
24 Homespa House  
37 Christ Church Rd  
Cheltenham GL50 2NY  
T. 01242 576808 / 07724983959  
F. 01245 330071  
E. [cjkavanagh@btinternet.com](mailto:cjkavanagh@btinternet.com)

