

# PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

Spring 2012



**‘Marriage is the voluntary union for life of one  
man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.’**

**Lord Penzance  
1866**

**Issue 23/1**



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**Cover Picture: Wedding Rings.** The present issue contains a focus on marriage, e.g., the Editorial, and the article on homosexuality.

**Back cover:** Quotation from Lord Penzance in the case of *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866).

## A time to speak

Imagine the reaction if the government decided to change the orbit of the moon! Of course, they can't change it, so we can all relax. But what if they could? Wouldn't we expect the worst? Tides would alter—and who knows what other disastrous effects would be felt on earth? The moon's orbit is a creation law of God and man has neither the authority nor the wisdom to alter it.

So is marriage: a creation ordinance of God, given to the whole human race for our good. Alarming as it is, in March the present British government will hold a consultation about **changing the definition of marriage to include same sex relations**.

Currently, in English Law, marriage is defined as 'the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others'. This definition was provided by Lord Penzance in the case of *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866). This is in line with the Bible and on no account should it be changed.

Already, in response to the announcement of a consultation, several 'petitions' have been started. On 20 February, the newly formed *Coalition for Marriage* (C4M) launched a civil petition. This petition is based on arguments from tradition, reason etc., which are non-religious, in the hope that people of other faiths and of no faith will sign it.

Since marriage is God's institution and he has spoken about it in the Bible, we believe that it is necessary that the BIBLICAL position be represented to the government *and that it is imperative that the church should speak up*.<sup>1</sup> Hence, a **SUBMISSION** to the government will be tabled at Presbytery on 3 March. If approved, readers can expect to hear more about it very soon.

♦ Editor, 24 February 2012

### Note 1

We are aware of the *Keep Marriage Special* campaign (by the PTS and the Church Society) which seeks to target MPs.



# The Church's Duty to the Nation

Rev. Dr Peter Naylor

There are three fundamental spheres ordained by God: family, church, and state. Each sphere has its own appointed task, and its limits.<sup>1</sup> In each sphere, God has placed a point of authority: husband, elders' session, government (whether monarch or parliament). All these authorities are commanded to be subject to Christ: he is the head of every man, the head of the church, and the King of kings and Lord of lords. *Say among the nations, The LORD reigns!*

## Church members and citizens

Each Christian lives his life normally within all three spheres.

After the Reformation, the Anabaptists thought that, because they belonged to the kingdom of heaven, they owed no obedience to rulers. They 'considered earthly governments as worldly and beneath the attention of the heaven-bound Christian, and so declined to participate in governmental affairs'.<sup>2</sup> That is not what the Bible teaches.

'Honour the king.' We must submit to the authorities, since God

has appointed them, and to pray for them (1 Peter 2: 17; Romans 13: 1-7; 1 Timothy 2: 1-5).

## Church and state

One of the most intriguing and vital questions in history has been *the relationship between church and state*.<sup>3</sup>

Wrong answers include: *Rome's view*, that earthly authorities should kneel before Christ's representative; *Erastus' view*, represented in the Church of England, that the church is a department of the state; and *the Anabaptists' view* that there is no relationship at all. Reformed Churches reject these ideas.

## Two swords

The state has the power of the sword. Its rulers have the right to use force to ensure peace and justice. In this work, they are servants of God in their own sphere.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, holding the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Christ gives it gifts to interpret and preach his Word.

Without that Word, neither indi-

viduals nor kings can have sure knowledge of how to live and how to be saved.

## The church's commission

The Lord clearly commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel, teach, and be witnesses, to all people (Matthew 28: 19-20; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 48 and Acts 1: 8).

Evangelicals often think of this task in terms of one to one witnessing, and preaching in church and in the open air. That is an incomplete understanding of the church's mission.

In addition to personal witness and the preaching of its ministers, the church also has a responsibility, at times, to speak to kings, to nations and their governments. The apostle Paul was to bear Christ's name before nations and kings (Acts 9: 15). He did, standing trial before governors Felix and Festus, King Agrippa, and Caesar.

## Humble petitions and advice

The Westminster Confession of Faith says that the church is not to meddle with the business of the state but in extraordinary circumstances may make a humble petition or give advice if rulers ask for it.<sup>4</sup>

'On a few occasions, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has considered whether it should enter the

public sphere and present a humble petition.'<sup>5</sup> What do you think it should have done? Here is a test.

1. 1960: urge American citizens not to vote for a Roman Catholic presidential candidate? *Yes or no?*
2. 1965: petition the US Senate not to hold elections on a Sunday?
3. 1970-71: (in response to liberalized abortion laws) rule that voluntary abortion, except possibly to save the physical life of the mother, is in violation of the Sixth Commandment' (You shall not murder)?
4. 1993: petition the president not to lift the ban on homosexuals entering the military?<sup>6</sup>

## Our duty today

The UK government's consultation on marriage (see the editorial) is asking people to say what they think. This gives the churches an opportunity to present the truth of God's Word.

## Notes

1. James E. McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man. The Life and Work of Abraham Kuyper* (EP, Darlington, 2000).
2. Clarence Bouwman, *The Overflowing Riches of My God. Revisiting the Belgic Confession*, (Premier, Winnipeg, 2008), p.390.
3. E.g., the dramatic struggle between Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII) and Emperor Henry IV. See R. B. Kuiper, *The Church in History*, pp.96-114.
4. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 31.5.
5. D. G. Hart & J. Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight* (OPC, Philadelphia, 1995), pp.185-6.
6. For answers, see Hart & Muether, or the next issue of the *Presbyterian Network*.



# The Queen's Jubilee

**God** has been very gracious to our Queen, Elizabeth II.

Countless times, the people have sung, 'Long live our noble Queen,' and that *prayer* has been answered. Thanks be to God.

Daniel said, 'Blessed be the name of our God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his. And he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings' (Daniel 2: 20-21).

From the outset of her reign, her Majesty has regarded herself as a servant of God. That is entirely justified by Romans 13: 4: 'for he [she] is God's minister'. Her coronation vows included the following:

**Archbishop:** Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of



your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England? And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?

**Queen:** All this I promise to do.

This must be virtually unique in the world today.

Paul wrote: 'Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority...' (1 Timothy 2: 1ff).

We must do this in EPCEW churches. ■

# Going to the Cinema?

An extract from Johannes G. Vos, *Commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism*, Questions 137-9 on the Seventh Commandment, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

*What attitude should a Christian take toward the cinema?*

Of course, Christian people should adopt a serious and conscientious attitude toward the cinema as toward all other ethical questions. There can be no doubt that many, if not most, commercial films, as they exist today, are bad in their effect, especially upon young people. For this reason many earnest Christian people feel that they should totally abstain from attending cinemas at all times and under all circumstances. As this decision is made, as a matter of Christian duty and devotion to God, it should of course be respected by all Christian people, even by those who feel unable wholly to agree with it. On the other hand there are many professing Christians who do not seem to have any conscientious scruples whatever about films, but who attend practically any 'show' whenever they feel like doing so. Such an attitude is not compatible with a conscientious Christian life, and cannot be justified. The reputation of the 'movies' being what it is, it cannot be taken for granted that a 'show' will be fit for Christian people to see. No Christian should

have such a heedless, complacent attitude toward the cinema. Apart from these two attitudes there are many truly conscientious Christian people who are quite aware of the general character of modern films, and who for that reason very seldom go to see them, who yet do not feel that a Christian could never do so without committing sin. It is clear that films are not necessarily evil: there can be pictures that are clean and wholesome. The conscientious Christian should take the trouble to ascertain the character of the picture before he goes to see it... Needless to say, Christian people should always pay heed to the teachings of God's Word about questions of this kind, taking care not to become a stumbling-block to any Christian brother (Rom. 14: 4-7, 14-23; 1 Cor. 8: 9-13). We must always be willing to deny ourselves some pleasure rather than cause our brother to stumble.

*What Dr Vos says, here, about films applies with equal—if not greater—force to much of what is now offered on prime-time TV (G. I. Williamson).*

*Vos wrote this in the 1940s. Where he wrote 'motion picture theater' we have substituted 'cinema' (Editor).*



# One Night in the Wilderness

## Psalm 63

The Hebrew superscription tells us that this psalm was composed by David when he was in the wilderness of Judah. Words: *Sing Psalms*, Psalm 63, verses 1-8. Tune: Deliyannides 42 LM. (Source: Peter Wallace) An English Traditional melody (*O Waly Waly*) modified.

This is a great Psalm for evening worship and the tune fits it well.



O God, you are my God alone;  
I seek your face with eagerness.  
My soul and body thirst for you  
In this dry weary wilderness.

I've seen you in your holy place;  
Your power and glory held my gaze.  
Far better is your love than life,  
And so my lips will sing your praise.

I'll bless you, Lord, throughout my life  
And raise my hands to you in prayer.  
My joyful lips will sing your praise;  
My soul is fed with richest fare.

Upon my bed I lie awake  
And in my thoughts remember you;  
I meditate throughout the night  
And keep your constant love in view.

Because you are my help alone,  
In shadow of your wings I'll sing.  
You hold me up with your right hand;  
To you, O God, my soul will cling.

# The Biblical Languages

Rev. Dr Peter Naylor



When the EPCEW was constituted, it was decided that men who desired to become ministers would be required to learn Hebrew and Greek. Occasionally that decision has been called into question. Should we insist that men toil over grammars and lexicons? Are we too academic? What about those who find language study difficult?

## High standards

The Scriptures present a very high standard for ministers, elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).

The minister of God's Word must be a man of godliness and holiness, an example to believers 'in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity' (1 Timothy 4: 12), sound in doctrine (Titus 1: 9), a 'man of one book', the Bible. In this, he depends constantly upon the Holy Spirit.

In their work, ministers will find much help in the Westminster Confession, and in the magisterial works of John Calvin, but even those masterpieces are *secondary*. The Bible alone is *primary*. 'The Old Testament in Hebrew...and the New

Testament in Greek...[are] immediately inspired of God (Westminster Confession 1.8). Yes, 'they are to be translated' but even the best translation will contain deficiencies, and is one step removed from the inspired text, by which all controversies in religion are to be settled. When our Lord Jesus spoke of the *jot and tittle*, he was drawing attention to the smallest stroke of the pen in the Hebrew Scriptures (Matthew 5: 18; Luke 16: 17).

## Our sister-churches

In valuing the biblical languages, the EPCEW stands in line with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches, such as the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Reformed Presbyterians in Ireland.

## Eminent preachers

Some years ago, a young man told Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones that he felt called to the ministry. 'I. B. Davies had little secondary education and yet under the preaching at Sandfields he believed that God had called him to the gospel ministry. Broaching this conviction at



length to Dr Lloyd-Jones, he was told to "go home and study Greek", this being his pastor's way of testing the strength of his call. A year later as "I. B." was leaving a meeting at Sandfields, Dr Lloyd-Jones asked him what the book was which he saw sticking from his pocket. It was a Greek grammar which the young man had been assiduously studying for twelve months.' (Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, volume 1, p. 201).

Listen!

**Luther:** 'If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the word, I might have still remained a monk!' And again, 'It is certain that unless the languages remain, the Gospel must finally perish!'

**George Whitefield:** 'Though weak, I often spent two hours in my evening retirements and prayed over my Greek Testament.'

**John Newton:** 'The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them.'

**William Carey,** a pioneer missionary, in early days, said: 'We should let few days pass without reading in the Hebrew one of these poems [i.e., psalms]. The more they are studied, the more they will delight. None ever repented such labour, though many its neglect'

## We need to recover our vision of the pastoral office.'

(S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, p.58). In May 1792, Carey preached in Nottingham: 'Isaiah 54 was his scripture. He knew its song by heart, having so often read it in the original Hebrew, his one regret being that its rich Hebrew assonances were not echoed in the English rendering. With Isaiah's faith his soul was all aglow' (p.74). He was just 31 years old and had spent his youth *as a cobbler*.

**George Muller,** age 24: 'I now studied much, about 12 hours, chiefly Hebrew...'

## 'Bitzer was a banker'

John Piper has written about Heinrich Bitzer, *a banker* who prepared a book of Hebrew and Greek readings *to help pastors!* He said, 'The more a theologian detaches himself from the basic Hebrew and Greek text of Holy Scripture, the more he detaches himself from the source of real theology. And real theology is the foundation of a fruitful and blessed ministry.' Piper concludes: 'We need to recover our vision of the pastoral office.' 'Oh for the day when prayer and grammar will meet each other with great spiritual combustion' (*Brothers, We are not Professionals*, pp.81-88).

If you believe in the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures

and if you love the Word of God, then you will have no argument with Luther and Lloyd-Jones, Bitzer, Piper and the others.

## Benefits illustrated

Knowing Hebrew and Greek helps us understand the text.

Genesis 6: 18 is usually translated, 'I will establish my covenant....' The Hebrew verb means 'confirm', clearly indicating that the covenant was previously in existence, as do the words '*my* covenant'. This implies that the covenant with Noah is part of the one covenant that originated in Eden and that was continued and developed with Abraham, Israel, David, and our Lord. It links the preservation of the world with the crucifixion, and it explains why Noah built an altar after the flood. One small insight into the Hebrew language contributes to our theology.

Luther was used to the idea of penance but when he read the Greek New Testament he saw that Jesus did not say, 'Do penance!' but 'Repent' (L. Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, P&R, 1962, p.255).

## Caution

A superficial acquaintance with Greek or Hebrew can mislead.

In several places, the New Testament uses the Aramaic term 'Abba' (Mark 14: 36; Romans 8: 15;

Galatians 4: 6). Sometimes we hear it said that this is like 'Daddy'. But it is not: this is the ordinary Aramaic term for 'Father', a term of respect.

The Greek word for church is *ekklēsia*, which combines *ek* 'out of' with *klēsia* 'called' (from *kaleō*). Some have concluded that the church is to be defined as 'the called out ones'. This is a basic error in handling Greek. Compound words do not always preserve the discrete meanings of the parts. In Acts 19: 41, *ekklēsia* refers to the body of citizens in the amphitheatre in Ephesus—not 'a church' at all. We must build our ecclesiology on other grounds.

Don Carson's book, *Exegetical Fallacies*, is useful. It makes available in a simple, condensed form, the benefits of more substantial linguistic studies. It can help to protect us from the fallacies often committed in the use of the original languages.

## A minister's equipment

The knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is only one part of what a minister needs to interpret Scripture.

He needs skill in handling the principles of interpretation, such as:

- ♦ to read the text in its context
- ♦ to ask what the aim of the passage was
- ♦ to understand the relationship



between the Old and New Testaments (the continuity, discontinuity, and development)

- ♦ to see the trinitarian, covenantal, Christological shape of Scripture
- ♦ to observe distinctions between law, history, psalm, etc.

John Calvin's *Commentaries* are unsurpassed as a model of interpretation. Dale Ralph Davis's commentaries on the books from *Joshua* to *Kings* present an object lesson in seeing the purpose of a passage.

On the relationship between the testaments, a good starting point is in Calvin's *Institutes*, Book 2, Chapters 10 and 11.

### *No need to be ashamed*

The man of God must seek to develop his powers of discernment by

frequent use (Hebrews 5: 14). Taking one book at a time and reading it in the original repeatedly until the purpose, argument, structure, style, etc. becomes familiar, is a great way forward.

'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2: 15).

May the Lord help us by his Spirit and may he prosper our spiritual, warfare, so that Satan's strongholds come crashing down, as Jericho's walls did (2 Corinthians 10: 4-5).

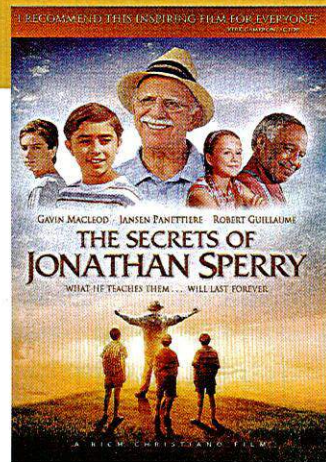


## One to watch

Don't hold your breath for *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry* to appear in your local cinema.

It probably won't win any Oscars either.

It is a story of a Christian man whose witness, love, forgiveness and prayer, has an impact on the lives of others.



## The Beauty of Zion Isaiah 4: 2-6

Rev. David Bergmark



In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. <sup>3</sup> And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy-- everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, <sup>5</sup> then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. <sup>6</sup> And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

Sometimes we Christians forget how attractive the Christian faith is. Although we are already convinced of its truth, we need to be reminded of how beautiful and beneficial our faith is. In the fourth chapter of Isaiah we receive an amazing picture of how the Lord saves a people for himself, providing beauty, purity and protection for them.

First we need to remember a few things about Isaiah. His purpose is to point the people of God back to their King. They were living in all kinds of sin. The bottom line is that they had abandoned God through abandoning his promises and his Word. They said, 'The promises of God are meaningless. Who cares?' And so they lived in line with their beliefs. They didn't care.

Isaiah uses the picture of the approaching day of the Lord to arouse them. This day is like a threat slowly approaching them. The message is clear: Repent and believe, because tomorrow it may be too late. The day of the Lord is a dangerous thing. It is an approaching enemy. Listen to what Isaiah says earlier:

'The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day' (Isaiah 2: 11).

'Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle' (3: 25).

In chapter four he returns to the day of the Lord. But what does he say this time? The day of the Lord is not a threat! It is only full of



blessings. It will bring wonderful things to the believing people of Israel. We notice three things about the people who will enjoy the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is the beauty, the purity, and the protection of the people.

### *1. The beautiful people, v. 2*

'In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honour of the survivors of Israel.'

Although this is written to ancient Israel it has direct bearing on our lives today. The promises of God are the same to those who trust and believe in the Lord.

First of all we see that the day of the Lord is the beauty of the people of God. This day means that there will be a beautiful people. And this is such a surprise. Earlier the day of the Lord was a threat, but now it is presented as a blessing.

As we look into the meaning of the text there will be treasures even for us who meditate on the truth for today. Isaiah refers to 'that day', which is the coming day of the Lord. It is a day of judgment, but not so for the 'survivors of Israel'. So what makes the difference? Why is this day good for some and evil for others? Isaiah traces the difference to what he calls 'the branch of the Lord'. The branch of the Lord

makes all the difference as to whether the day of the Lord is a threat or a blessing. This branch is also called 'the fruit of the land'. The image is taken from a garden. Someone has planted a new tree. Out of the ground we receive a new growth which produces good fruit. And who planted this? It is 'the Lord'. God has done this.

Jeremiah often refers to the branch when he prophesies. He claims that the branch is righteous and will grow in the line of David and rule as king. He will also be called 'the Lord is our righteousness'.

The Lord has provided a person to be the blessing of Israel. And this can be none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord is a terrible thing for all who are devoid of Jesus Christ. However, as Isaiah points out, this branch will be the beauty and the glory of all who believe. Since he is with them, they will share in his beauty.

The words used here, 'beautiful' and 'honour', have to do with being attractive and pleasant. It is related to personal beauty and honour. In the previous chapter Isaiah condemned the women whose beauty was merely outward and who had hearts hard as rocks:

'The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks,

glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts' (3: 16-17).

In many ways it sounds like us today. We too are tempted to adorn ourselves on the outside and call that our pride and honour. Today we do this in various ways. We put forth our new stuff, our car, the new mobile phone, our social competence, our knowledge, our intelligence, our ability to make quick decisions, or our ability to be calm and collected. You name it. We do this instead of trusting in Jesus as our beauty and our pride.

The Jews loved temporary beauty, but the coming branch of the Lord would put an end to this. He would provide true and lasting beauty. He would be their beauty so that they themselves could possess the glory of the Lord.

In today's fast moving technological world there are so many temptations. We must be aware of the danger of having our sense of worth, personal beauty, honour, or glory, in other things than the branch of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

### *2. The pure people, vv. 3,4*

The second thing said here is that the Lord's people are clean because

the Lord has cleansed them. We are not only beautiful but also pure. Verses three and four explain this by saying that God's people are to be called holy and that God will wash away their filth and clean them from bloodstains:

'And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.'

The people spoken of here are those that have been recorded for life. During this time the people were in danger of exile. However, those recorded in the books were to remain in Jerusalem. There was a register of all the people in the city, and Isaiah uses this imagery to speak about God's register. God has a book where he records all the people belonging to his city. When the people made for themselves a golden calf during the time of Moses, God said: 'Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.'

All who belong to God have their names written in God's book of life. So it is not by accident that they are saved, but part of God's almighty plan. To be clean is as wonderful as



being beautiful. To be unclean in this instance means being full of violence and other crimes against other people. However, the Lord takes to task all filth and sin. He cleans completely and therefore the people of God can be called holy. And how does this happen? It is by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning. This is most likely the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the will of God. God burns off all impurities.

Let's not forget that *Jesus* is your purity, not anything you have done (or not done). Your actions are inconsequential: Jesus' actions are everything. The grace portrayed by Isaiah is no less true for the New Testament saint. In fact, we now clearly see how it is all fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection.

It strengthens our faith to think of how God has a plan of salvation from the beginning of the Bible to the end. Isaiah clearly is preaching the Gospel to the people living in his time and this Gospel is the same which we can make our own today. God declares to the prophet that God intends to cleanse all his people from sin. This is the most important thing that can happen in a person's life. This message was clear in the Old Testament. However, it is even clearer in the New Testament as we see the Lord Jesus take the sins of the world on his

shoulders on the cross. We can be sure of these promises. God has over and over covenanted in his Word to their truthfulness and reliability.

### 3. *The protected people, vv. 5,6*

Last we see that God is intimately involved in the lives of his people. He is near to all who trust him and he protects them from all harm:

'Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. <sup>6</sup> There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.'

The picture of the cloud and the fire is taken from Exodus. And the message is clear: God lives with his people! The protection and guidance of the Lord never cease. They covers the people of God day and night.

Isaiah also says that there is a booth or a chamber in store for you. This chamber is a place of refuge. The imagery here is taken from a wedding: it is a bridal chamber. God has *married* his people and made them his own. God is the bridegroom who takes on the role of protecting his bride no matter what the circumstances.

This beautiful picture reminds us of what Paul says in Ephesians 5: Christ has wed his wife, the church, by cleansing her 'so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.' It is said that Christ's joy is to nourish and cherish his wife. This has a protective element to it, which Isaiah so beautifully brings out. God shields his people from the evil that attempts to ruin their souls.

This has many practical consequences for your life today. You have all good things in God no matter what happens. God has placed an enormous treasury of blessings before you. They are at your disposal. And what sin or problem or accident can destroy this? God will never remove them from you.

And remember that it is easy to reach this secure place. It is always open for you. You do not need a specific key because there is no door. We enter easily by faith! Think of all the riches you have!

Imagine what difference it would make if we lived with this in mind. Think of the joy you would have in the midst of sorrow, the light in the midst of darkness, the strength in the midst of weakness, the righteousness in the midst of sin. God is

here trying to convince you of these things. Embrace them. Make them your own!

The Christian faith is not dull, boring, and unattractive no matter what people say. If we concentrate on the good news about Jesus there can be no more attractive thing in the world. Herein lies the strength of our witness to the world and our own comfort as we live in this sin-infected and fallen world. Isaiah wrote in times of agony and uncertainty. We too need the sure promises of God in our weakness.

Our only comfort in this life and the next must be the life and death of the Lord Jesus. He is the beauty, purity and protection of the people of God. How very different this is from the ways of the world! It is so different that it is almost awkward at times. However, this points to the true power of the Christian faith. It is not based on any one thing or person or action in this world, but only on the person and actions of our Saviour.





# Unconditional Election

Rev. Richard Holst



William Helmsley, the Victorian Stoic, wrote his poem *Invictus* to demonstrate his resilience in the face of suffering. In it he thanks 'whatever gods may be' for his unconquerable soul and ends on a note of defiant triumph: 'I am the master of my fate...the captain of my soul.' Despite all evidence to the contrary, Helmsley was hooked on the idea of human autonomy.

Calvinistic doctrine has been criticized for *de-humanizing* us—by affirming personal accountability in the context of God's absolute sovereignty. This, it is said, robs us of our right of self-determination.

Calvin wrote, 'God freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others'. Consistent with what the Bible teaches, he held to a doctrine of **Unconditional Election**: God's choice of people either for salvation or judgment, independent of his knowledge of their personal decisions.

God is omnipotent, self-sufficient and absolutely sovereign. We, though free agents, capable of making choices, are not autonomous. We only ever make choices in consistency with our nature, as God

does with his. Thus, the doctrine of unconditional election does tell us something about ourselves but it speaks primarily about God.

However, given our propensity to act as autonomous beings, it is hardly surprising that over the centuries people have tried to give God 'a more human face', to move from the *theocentric* emphasis to the *anthropocentric* one, ascribing to man a kind of divinity that he has never had.

One expression of this is the Arminian's modified doctrine of election. Wanting to reconcile the universal call of the gospel with the fact that many people do not believe it, they were attracted to Bible texts that appeared to say that God's intention to save all people was contingent on personal faith in Christ. They focused on texts like John 3: 16, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' They appeared to start with God but actually began with man's decision to believe.

This comes out in Article 3 of the Remonstrance (*The Arminian Articles* of 1610). Against the *Belgic Con-*

*fession*, they asserted that 'God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ His Son, before the foundation of the world, *hath determined, out of a fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, shall believe on this his Son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end ...*'.

That parts of this sound Calvinistic is not surprising since Arminius, himself, studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva. Arminius accepted that 'the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened; but...useless unless...assisted by grace [and] has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace.' Therefore he could argue that salvation was by grace; the question is 'what sort of grace?' It is essential to read the small print!

Grace, according to Arminius, 'assists' and 'excites' but is not irresistible and does not, unaided, transform (more about this in our fourth study—I mention it here in order to underline that Arminius' belief that man's decision affects God's). He tried to combine two mutually opposed elements but apparent similarities of language cannot hide his departure from

Scripture and the logical fallacy of his thinking.

For people seeking a supposedly balanced and more user-friendly doctrine, Calvin's bold affirmation that 'God by his secret plan freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others' must come as something of a shock. No free choice or no self-determination here; not even the possibility of co-operating with God! According to the Bible and Calvin, God acts freely and sovereignly apart from our decisions.

The Reformed Churches understood the Arminians to be saying 'that complete and peremptory election occurred *on the basis of a foreseen perseverance to the end in faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness*.' This is to teach *conditional* election: God's choice based on 'foreseen faith'. The Reformed Churches countered by asserting that 'this same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith...the obedience of faith...holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition...but rather for the purpose of faith, of holiness and so on...election is the source of each of the benefits of salvation'. That is the Biblical and Reformed order of things.

Our own *Westminster Confession* puts it this way, 'Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed



anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.'

Now we come to practical considerations. Every minister and elder subscribes to this confession at the time of their ordination. Why is this important? It is important for the way in which we think about God.

In 1949 someone wrote a book about Martin Luther with the title 'Let God be God.' The doctrine of Unconditional Election lets God be God. Just think how important this is for worship. Most people instinctively start with themselves. 'What can I get from this service?' Worship is about honouring God as God.

Again, it teaches us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Unconditional election puts us in our place as sinners wholly dependent on sovereign grace.

Then it also reminds us that in witnessing to others, the idea of Scripture is not to make God more like us (notwithstanding the doctrine of the incarnation) but to remind us that we should be more like him.

Finally, it assures us that when we worship, preach or witness, we do so under the sovereign oversight of God and that is what gives us confidence. It is not of man who wills but of God who shows mercy!

According to the Confession, the elect are 'chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of [God's] mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance...'

Thomas Chalmers once told his congregation, 'We stand here by the decree of heaven, and it is by the same decree that you are now sitting round and listening to us. We feel the importance of the situation we occupy; and though we believe in the sovereignty of God, and the unfailing-ness of all His appointments, this, instead of restraining, impels us to bring the message of the Gospel, with all the practical urgency of its invitations, and its warnings, to bear upon you.' Yes, our service to God is supremely significant because it is done in the Name of the God who does all things according to the pleasure of his will and who has appointed men and women to be saved through the folly of preaching and witnessing.

One word of caution: Calvin regarded inquiry into predestination as 'penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom' and warned that if 'anyone breaks into this place he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit' (*Institutes*, 3.21.1).



## Spotlight on the Churches

### News from around the Presbytery

#### *Welcoming Wilberforce, Barry*

In November, Presbytery invited the congregation of Wilberforce Chapel, Barry, South Wales, to join the EPCEW. A commission was established to bring this about.

Wilberforce is a small congregation; pray that it may grow and be strengthened. The minister, Rev. John Cook, is well known to several EPCEW churches. For many years, he taught at Barry Bible College (now WEST). He is the author of a commentary on 1 Timothy, in the *Let's Study* series, published by The Banner of Truth Trust.

God willing, a service will be held at **4:00 p.m., on Saturday 24 March**, to welcome the congregation into the EPCEW.

Pray that unity and love may grow and that blessings may abound as a result of this step in the life of our churches.

♦ Editor

#### *Focus on church planting:*

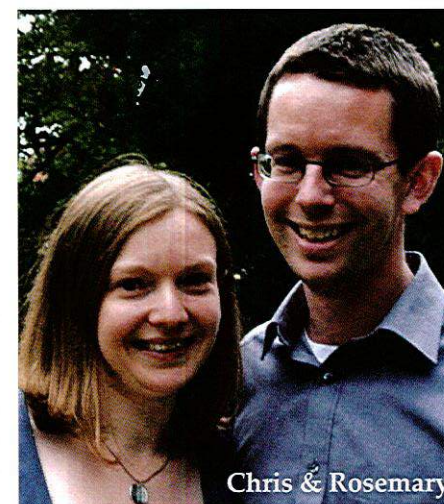
##### *Solihull (since 2005)*

The new year began with the welcoming of Chris Statter into our congregation. Chris is a community missionary with Birmingham City Mission and is

now attached to our church to work alongside Stephen. Chris has been visiting homes in the neighbourhood, offering literature, engaging in conversation and inviting people to church. We expect this to be a long arduous work over the next year, so please pray for Chris as he pursues it.

Chris is getting married to Rosemary Grier in February, and soon after both will come into membership. Please pray for them both as they launch out into married life.

In February SPC moved the morning service to the Women's Institute (where we have our Presbytery meetings). It has several advantages: a town centre, visible location, a modern facil-



Chris & Rosemary



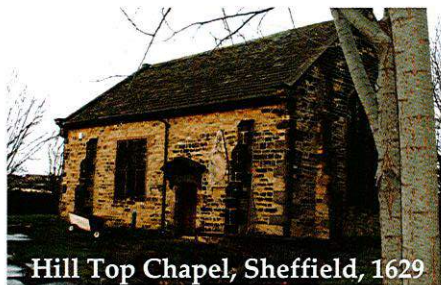
ity. However, more importantly we believe it will be better for the mission to Solihull. Pray for us in the coming year.

♦Stephen Dancer

### **Sheffield (started 2010)**

Recent months have seen new 'shoots of growth' in the church. We have just completed our latest baptism and communicants class. With the upcoming baptisms and the reception of new communicant members into the church, this inevitably means that the dynamic of the church begins to change. A constant prayer is that the Lord would hide us under the 'shadow of his wings' and that we would enjoy the unity of the faith.

The Sunday School (before the morning service) continues to be appreciated; the adults value the systematic teaching from the *Westminster Larger Catechism*.



Hill Top Chapel, Sheffield, 1629

It is still very early days for the work here in Sheffield. We continue to pray that the church would become financially self-supporting, that the Lord would raise up elders and deacons, and that we would see many other churches planted in the North of England in the years ahead.

Our Christmas Day service (picture below) took place in Hill Top Chapel, built in 1629. The founding minister, Stanley Gower, was a member of the Westminster Assembly.

♦Kevin Bidwell



25 December 2011

### **Bury St Edmunds**

We have started the year with our customary week of prayer, this time focussing on the theme 'Love one another'. It is truly a blessing to spend time together, praising God and calling on him for various needs in our congregation and beyond. We have recently seen remarkable answers to prayer on behalf of a number of people known to us with serious health issues.

On Sunday mornings Matthew has been preaching from Malachi on the problem of spiritual burnout, and leading our Wednesday meetings with a study of Pentecost. We are thankful to the Lord that Matthew's health has significantly improved and ask for continued prayer for his complete recovery.

In March, one of our members, Bryony Macintyre will be taking part in a short mission to Haiti with Covenant College. Also in March we look forward to the arrival of two new babies.

♦Clare Pape

### **Immanuel Church, Tranås**

In January, a fellowship week of prayer meetings and various other gatherings were arranged by the different churches in Tranås. David had the opportunity to preach in the Sunday worship service in Brunnsparkskyrkan, the largest evangelical church in town.

Recently, the youngest child in the Leander family was baptized, a happy occasion for us all.

The group in Stockholm has started a relationship with a small church which is using its building less and less. The church consists mostly of old people and they are most likely moving their membership to a nearby city's church. Perhaps the building could be used for the church plant.

♦Sune Jäderberg

### **Durham**

Ordinary life often provides startling events that turn our attention to its important issues. Within two weeks in January three people in the congregation experienced the sudden death of family members. And each of these occurred miles from Durham. One person had to travel to South Africa and Zimbabwe for two weeks, leaving his family here; another flew immediately to Northern Ireland for two weeks; the third was unable to travel to the United States. What was the Lord saying to us? Certainly we were ready to 'weep with those that weep,' and to pray for the Lord's comfort for them. There were other trials that some members were experiencing in their families. Such things test the reality of the things we believe and sing about from week to week.

We are also rejoicing with those that rejoice. One member has been recovering slowly from major surgery and been able now to return to Sunday worship. One other dramatic answer to many prayers over many months has



come for another member in the reversal of circumstances that have been baffling and hard to cope with. The result will have widespread effects for the Lord's work in the north-east and beyond. Soli Deo Gloria.

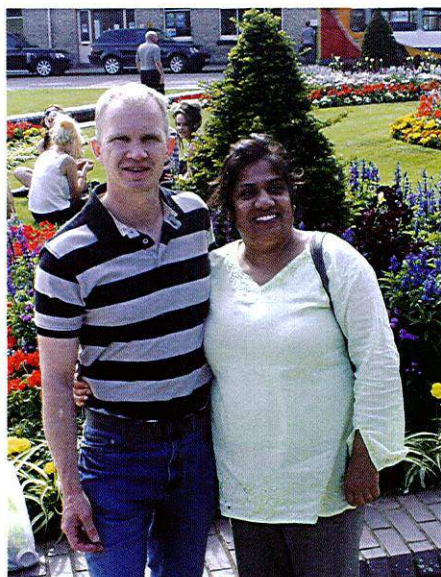
The University mission is being held as I write this. One of our students is responsible for organizing follow-up work. Pray for him. It is his final year and he and others among us are looking for jobs, not easy in the present climate.

♦ Brenda Norton

## Hull

We have been very conscious of your prayers for us and we have been greatly encouraged as we have seen God answer some of those prayers.

We have seen new faces at our Sunday worship and midweek Bible study. The health of those in the congregation who were ill has steadily improved, the numbers attending our worship services have increased (although the evening service still remains low) and sev-



Chris and Pam—soon to marry

eral people are looking to become members.

We have had the joy of praising God for the 50 years of marriage of one of our members and her husband. We are about to have the first marriage service in our new building.

At the moment we are considering the content of our leaflet for distribu-



Dot and George—married 50 years

tion in the area at Easter and beginning to plan the program for the Holiday Bible Club in August.

'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.'

♦ Bill McCully

## Chelmsford

The congregation recently voted to call Rev. Darren Moore to be the new minister in the Lord's work here. We are grateful that he has responded positively. We covet prayer for Darren and his wife Glad, and their young son Josiah. Darren is due to be examined by Presbytery in March.

It is good to report that both David Ferguson and Graham Nicolle had successful surgery back in December and are on the road to recovery. Our Christmas travellers have all returned safely, and new year activities are well under way.

In our midweek Bible studies, Hugo Heij continues his studies on Philippians and Chris Kavanagh leads a series on Deuteronomy.

We were delighted with the response to our most recent Saturday Bible Club on 4 February. The snow held off just long enough for the children and helpers to enjoy a morning session centred around the theme of 'Jesus Calming the Storm'.

A new venture starting in late February is a 'Tiny Tots' session for tots and their parents or carers. It is hoped

that this midweek ministry will be a means of contacting some families in the vicinity of the church.

It was a joy to hear of the recent engagement of Emma Platts to Rob Mowatt. Emma is the eldest daughter of our deacon, Tim Platts and his wife Ruth. Congratulations Emma and Rob.

Rafe Louis continues to amaze us with his positive outlook and willingness to have a go at most things. We are grateful for a succession of clear MRI scans. Rafe is due to undergo further eye surgery later this month. Please pray for this and for the success of Rafe's medications and therapies.

♦ Julie Kavanagh

## Blackburn

Our open air work continues to need much prayer as the hardness, apathy and ignorance seem to grow. It is an opportunity to meet a variety of different folk while scattering the good seed of the Word of God, and it has been a means whereby a number of people have come to the church.

Our contacts with Kenya still progress and have proved a blessing to those in need over there. Our minister will probably go there again later this year. He is usually involved in an evangelistic campaign as well as ministering to pastors at their conference. We also have contacts with an orphanage sending gifts for their help. Please pray that the Lord might raise up somebody to maintain a permanent contact in a mis-



sionary sense.

We strive for the unity of the brethren that by our love for one another and our visible unity we may testify to the world of the reality of our faith. (John 17: 20, 21). May our Lord and Saviour prosper all our assemblies for his own eternal glory.

♦Dean Stevenson

### *Bethel, Cardiff*

We said farewell to the Kwon family, who have returned to South Korea earlier than expected because of tightened visa rules. 'Jerry' will finish his PhD from home. Likewise, the husband of a member working in a local care home has had to return to the Philippines.

Many, young and old, have suffered from long lasting viruses, so that, even though we have enjoyed a steady flow of visitors, attendance overall has been low.

We pray on for the Lord to add to our number and giftedness through the various contacts we have. The two small boys in the adoption process, now living with James and Natalie Hepburn, have settled so well and social workers have been pleasantly surprised. Thanks be to God.

On the last Wednesday of every month, we are now holding the mid-week meeting in homes, in order to involve members who are not normally able to come to the church building.

We rejoice that the children's work

is thriving. Ben Holst is leading a weekly class for four to nine year olds in the catechism. The number of mums and tots gathering each Friday morning is putting strain on the room available. A one day Bible Club is planned just after Easter for the children of the district.

The blessing of faithful ministry of the Word continues from Todd, Bob Letham, and visiting preachers, with profitable application in line with 2 Timothy 3: 15-17. A class on teaching the Larger Catechism to adult members is planned.

♦Ian Hepburn

### *Immanuel, Cardiff*

We began 2012 with a series of prayer meetings during the first two weeks of January, focusing first on God's holiness and Christ's atonement, and then pleading the promises and praying for the church's vocation.

We are so thankful to the Lord that we continue to see new faces appearing in the congregation. In February, we started a second Christianity Explored Course.

Mrs Jean Jones' stay in hospital continues: we pray for her recovery from infection, so that she will be able to have the hip surgery she needs. Jeremy Humphries has seen improvement physically. We pray for his spiritual needs and for his future care.

Our young people continue to enjoy time together on Friday nights.

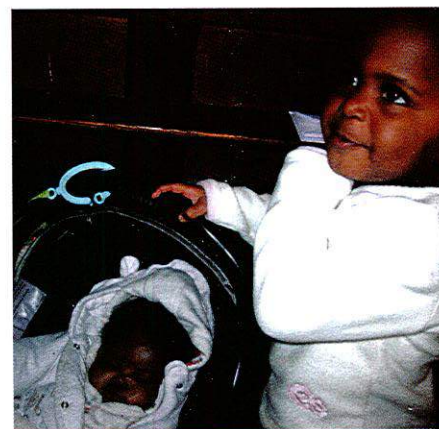
This summer we are planning further work on the building, including laying a new floor: this will present us with a challenge. The Reformed congregation of Amersfoort East is hoping to send a team to help us with the decorating work. This is good timing, as we need to be ready for the ICRC in 2013.

♦Peter Naylor

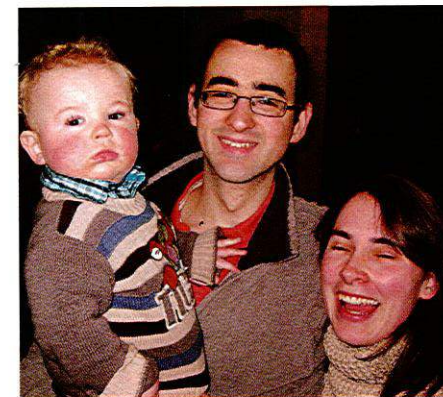
### *Cambridge*

'Behold, children are a gift from the Lord' (Psalm 127: 3). We give thanks for the safe arrival of five babies in recent weeks: Abigail Herd, Iona Batchelor, Winston Clark, Edward Hainsworth and Michelle Pouakouyou. Michelle was baptized on 5th February.

During 6-10 February, CICCUC held its annual evangelistic mission. Six evangelistic talks were held, which are now being followed by a five-week discussion course. This is an opportunity for interested students to explore the life and character of Jesus more



Michelle & Grace Pouakouyou



Joel, Jonny & Ali Umpleby

deeply. You can read more at [www.reallife2012.org.uk](http://www.reallife2012.org.uk). Please pray for speakers and students engaged in follow-up work, that the Lord will bring many to saving faith.

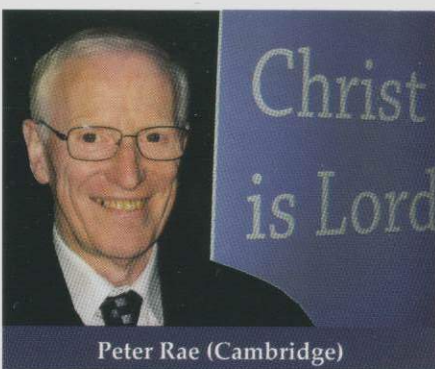
We are pleased to report the addition of two men to our leadership. On 11 December, we welcomed Peter and Margaret Rae into membership. Peter is a retired Church of Scotland minister and will serve as a pastoral assistant, visiting and helping under the direction of the elders. Peter is also leading a new home group. On 4 February, our members voted unanimously to appoint Jonny Umpleby to the office of deacon.

Thank you for your prayers for our carol service. We were pleased to welcome several non-Christian visitors.

Please pray for the city centre book table and the youth group, which now has several young people regularly attending from outside the church.

♦Annabel Haylett





Peter Rae (Cambridge)

### Cheltenham

On 21 January, Paul Johnston and Megan Hodge were married. The service, at Peace Presbyterian Church, Cary, North Carolina, was taken by our minister, Andy Young. This joyful event was shared live with some of the congregation back at home via Skype. We pray for the Lord's blessings on the young couple as they set up home in Gloucester.

Recently, the congregation invited David Pfeiffer to be an assistant to our minister, a position that will enable him to further his training and gain experience. God willing, he and Bethan, and Owen their son, will move here in July

or August.

Numbers at the JAM Club for children of primary school age have increased to a consistent 14 to 16 every Friday. This is an encouragement to all, especially to Matt Faux and his able and enthusiastic band of helpers. In a day when the Bible is out of most minds, we pray that the lessons from it will enter young minds for their good.

Finally, the church has started to plan its annual visit to the Presbyterian Church in Mangalia, Romania. This year, a small group will go there in June. The younger ones will acquire a range of useful DIY skills; all will be putting their energies into the spiritual mission work. Pray for Pastor Gilberto Coelho and the church there as they endure another harsh winter and some discouragement.

♦ Tai-Tuck

### Gateshead

Give thanks for the work at Gateshead. Pray for this work and the ministry of Rev. Bill Schweitzer.

♦ Editor



## Homosexuality viewed in the light of Scripture Part 1

Kevin McGrane

One topic that we cannot ignore in our day is that of homosexuality. Not that we ourselves especially wish to raise the matter, but the topic and its ramifications are continually presented to us in all walks of life, and through the media. Many of us are old enough to remember that the practice of homosexuality was widely regarded as immoral and was outlawed well into the 1960s. Following de-criminalization, it became socially tolerated, and is now actually promoted using public funds, and protected and undergirded by a panoply of 'equality' and 'hate crime' laws. We are now enjoined to 'celebrate diversity' – except the diversity to remain true to traditional conservative and biblical principles.

As society at large has rehabilitated and embraced this practice, various Christian denominations have accepted clergy and bishops who are practising homosexuals. The argument is advanced that since society at large has embraced and even celebrated homosexuality, then it is high time that the

church got into line. As ever, those who maintain the traditional teaching of the church and uphold the long-established *mores* of society risk being branded diehard reactionaries and intolerant bigots. With this is blended the postmodern idea that there is no objective truth, and that the meaning of the Bible is a subjective one in which the intentions of the original author are irrelevant.

This line of argument, which comes so naturally to those outside the church, is singularly unimpressive; for the church, ever since the gospel came to these shores, has regarded civil society as the one needing transformation by its unique message, and has not regarded itself as a community that should be conformed and trimmed to the philosophy of the age, or to be a mirror or echo chamber for society.

Certain sections of the church are doubtless responsible for the widespread misapprehension that the church is merely an accessory in a democratic society, able to work symbiotically with the state in pro-



moting its latest social programmes. But to the contrary, the gospel does not change or go out of date but is in every age the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, and the church owes its allegiance, and derives its message, morals, ethics and practices from Christ, and always finds itself in a society with various degrees of degenerate thought and practices. To be salt and light in every age, not least in our own, we very much owe it to the society in which we live to define what God the Lord has to say about the prevailing philosophies, worldviews and cultic practices all around us.

### **Introductory remarks**

We wish to make it clear from the start that in discussing homosexuality we are not dealing with whether one prefers the company of persons of the same sex or is more attracted to them, nor whether it is possible to have some form of genuine love and affection for those of the same sex – such things are perfectly acceptable. We are here only considering sexual relations between those of the same sex. For the purposes of this article we use the term ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ exclusively with reference to sexual relations between persons of the same sex. Though not entirely satisfactory,

this definition must suffice for the present purpose because there is no specific word in the English language for sexual relations between the same sex in general – other more technical words are specific, but too narrow, easily misunderstood, generally offensive, or pejorative.

In dealing with questions of morality, for those who accept divine revelation and share Christian presuppositions it may be quite sufficient to quote biblical law and commandments. This is certainly a shortcut, bypassing the need to lay foundations again by assuming a common foundation as a given; yet this is not the best place to start more generally. Demonstrations from law tend to become mired in arguments about ‘relevancy’ – the perpetuity of the moral law, whether certain laws are moral, ceremonial or civil, whether they were cultural and cultic practices, how ‘relevant’ they are today etc.

We will eventually have to deal with some such specifics (these are addressed in *Part 2*, to follow), but rather than attempting to discover and compile a list of sexual behaviours that the Bible deprecates, it is more fruitful to lay some groundwork and discover what, based on biblical principles, it unquestionably enjoins. Finding the principal scope of sexual relations necessar-

ily demarcates what is acceptable from what is unacceptable, without initially having to construct a litany of specific examples or laws; this is the methodology in this article, which is the first of two parts.

If we subsequently find specific examples or laws supporting this demarcation then the principle is at least validated. But if specific examples and laws do not support the demarcation validly deduced from the principles, then we must revisit the principles. If we find, for example, that the Bible sanctions sexual relations only within the context of marriage between a man and a woman, then it would logically follow that all other forms of sexual activity, such as fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality, are deprecated. In point of fact, most Christians do not single out homosexuality as in a special class of what is forbidden, but include it among all the forms of sexual activity of the type that is forbidden, i.e. extra-marital sex.

### **The ordinance of marriage**

We begin with the principles undergirding marriage. Marriage is a creation ordinance, ordained by God for the union between one man and one woman:

‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he cre-

ated them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth”’ (Genesis 1: 27-28).

‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’ (Genesis 2: 24).

The word translated ‘wife’ is not merely ‘sexual partner’, though that aspect is implied, but is the word ‘woman’, the counterpart to the man. This aspect of ‘one flesh’ between a man and a woman is a clear reference to a sexual union. Thus in the New Testament the Apostle Paul can expound the aspect of ‘one flesh’ with reference to sexual immorality:

‘Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.”...Flee from sexual immorality’ (1 Corinthians 6: 16-18).

What is translated as ‘sexual immorality’ is the Greek word *porneia*, the general term for such behaviour.

The verses from Genesis are quoted three times in the New Testament in the context of marriage:

‘But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and



female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate' (Mark 10: 6-9; Matthew 19: 4-6 is similar).

'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' (Ephesians 5: 31).

Christ's teaching, following Genesis, is that two different sexes, male and female, were created, and that God instituted the lifelong faithful union, including the sexual union, of each man with his wife. This is termed marriage, which is the context of the verses in Genesis, Matthew, Mark and Ephesians.

Accordingly, historic confessions of faith such as the Westminster Confession rightly define marriage to be 'between one man and one woman'. So-called 'same-sex marriage' comes nowhere near this definition, and is in fact a repudiation of it, and as an oxymoron can never be more than a semantic contrivance that subverts the ordinance of God.

To counter this, the argument is sometimes adduced that since the state legally regulates marriage then it must have the power legally to re-define it. That is an evident logical fallacy, and theological non-

sense to boot. Any action by any party to meddle with a creation ordinance, which comes with the specific admonition that 'what (not 'whom') God has joined together let not man separate', is *ultra vires* (i.e., beyond the limits of the authority of that party).

In the Bible, only marriage is afforded the honourable place for sexual relations. We see this in a number of places, for example:

'Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous' (Hebrews 13: 4).

This little verse packs a lot of truth. First, the state of marriage is an honourable estate, and to be held in honour; second, sexual relations within marriage are lawful and honourable (the word translated 'bed' is a common Greek euphemism for sexual relations); third, the honourable estate of marriage can be defiled through improper sexual relations; fourth, such defilement is sin, since God will judge it; fifth, marriage is defiled and dishonoured by adultery, and sexual immorality (the word translated 'sexually immoral' is the Greek word  *pornos*  which is the general term for such).

Sexual activity outside marriage not only defiles an individual marriage, but also dishonours the es-

tate of marriage itself. It can be defiled and dishonoured not only by sexual relations with married persons outside their own marriages (adultery) but also by sexual practices outside the scope of marriage itself.

The Apostle Paul's teaching also confirms marriage as the only estate for sexual relations (outside of which sexual relations are termed 'sexual immoralities'):

Nevertheless, because of sexual immoralities [plural of *porneia*], let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her proper husband (1 Corinthians 7: 2).

The words 'man' and 'woman' are implied by the gender of the Greek words for 'each' in the masculine and feminine respectively so that the English translation is accurate. Paul could easily have stated 'let everyone have their own spouse' if any same-sex unions could be in view; but instead he quite deliberately states the case both ways to avoid all ambiguity, and uses the terms 'husband' and 'wife', which are also the same words for 'man' and 'woman'. It is evident from this that strictly monogamous heterosexual marriage is in view here, outside of which are sexual immoralities of all forms.

Some protest that this is too restrictive: they have sexual natures, and those natures need expression,

and they claim that they can only find satisfying expression in sexual behaviour beyond the confines of traditional marriage. But this is not a plausible argument within a biblical framework: What is the married man to do who feels sexually attracted to another woman; or a single woman who feels sexually attracted to a married man? What if a man is sexually attracted to his sister, a schoolgirl, or his dog? Sexual attraction does not of itself confer rights to sexual gratification. There are many instances where it is absolutely right and required to avoid, repress or sublimate sexual desires.

### *Sexual rights*

Paul goes on to teach something that is startlingly and diametrically opposed to what today's society asserts. He states that authority over one's sexual nature belongs exclusively to a marriage partner:

'The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does' (1 Corinthians 7: 4).

Non-Christian teachings err in asserting that rights (or authority) over one's sexual nature belong to oneself, i.e., that a person has the sexual rights over his own body. Once admit that a person has rights



regarding his own sexual nature and it is a short step to affirming the rightness of personal choice and expression in the matter.<sup>1</sup> This defiance against God's created order is at the root of all sexual sin. It is covetousness because it is desiring and lusting for something that does not belong to us, and which can never belong to us, and which rightly belongs to someone else.

'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality (*porneia*), impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry' (Colossians 3: 5).

'For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral ( *pornos*) or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God' (Ephesians 5: 5).

Since a marriage partner alone has God-given authority over one's sexual nature then it is evident that deliberate sexual arousal or activity with anything or anyone (including oneself) who is not one's marriage partner is immoral—it is usurping authority and rights that do not belong to oneself. Indeed, if our understanding with respect to the Bible's teaching on marriage is correct, then we would logically expect the Bible to deprecate all other forms of extra-marital sexual relations including incest (within a family; Leviticus 18: 6), fornication

(with an unmarried person; 1 Thessalonians 4: 3), adultery (with a married person not one's spouse; Exodus 20: 14, Leviticus 20: 10), bestiality (with an animal; Exodus 22: 19, Leviticus 18: 23; 20: 16), and homosexual relations (i.e. with the same sex; Leviticus 18: 22, Romans 1: 26). That this is exactly what is found in the Bible lends useful confirmation to both the principle and the deduction.

### **Justifications for sexual behaviour**

Some who indulge in sexual activities forbidden by the Scriptures seek to justify their behaviour on the grounds that they are 'made that way'. Society does not (yet) accept such a defence in the mouth of what it brands 'sex offenders', however.<sup>2</sup> Nor does society accept that all manner of bad behaviour is acceptable because we all exhibit undesirable tendencies to a greater or lesser extent. From the Christian standpoint, we all have a corrupt nature, and to accept the 'made that way' justification for behaviour would be to wink at all manner of sin simply because we all have tendencies to sin.

Such a view is a form of hard determinism coupled with a lack of moral responsibility that is foreign to the spirit of biblical teaching. Indeed, with regard to propensity

to sin, we freely admit that we are all of us 'made that way', but it is the very gospel itself that delivers us from the bondage to expression of our ingrained proclivities and predispositions. The tendency to sin is undoubtedly the 'hard wired' condition of all of Adam's race, but such as does not lead to a lack of personal responsibility for sin where it is consciously and willingly indulged.

Accordingly, many people who indulge in sexual activity outside of the marital relationship try to justify their behaviour on the grounds that sexual activity does not belong to the realm of morality at all—it is a free act, as is choosing what to eat, or whether to go jogging. The Bible takes a different view. In the Old Testament, extra-marital sex was considered a very serious matter indeed. Consonant with what we have found from the teaching in the New Testament, we find that in the case of sexual relations between those who were both unmarried, but who were eligible to marry, the requirement was enforced marriage with no possibility of divorce (Deuteronomy 22: 28-29; Exodus 22: 16), the ancient equivalent of a 'shotgun marriage', as a restitution to bring sexual activity into the only relationship where it is permissible, and so regularize it. This is similar to the Apostle Paul's ad-

vice to those eligible to marry who are tempted to indulge in sexual relations outside marriage:

'But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion' (1 Corinthians 7: 9).

In all other cases, whether homosexuality, incest, adultery, bestiality (i.e. same sex, same family, already married, and with beasts respectively), there was no possibility of marriage as any form of 'remedy', restitution or regularization. The Law described these as an abomination and, being quite unable to afford any regularization of such practice within marriage, prescribed a permanent cutting off from society. Whether or not the same penalties should be imposed in societies today is entirely beside the point, and can be an unprofitable diversion if we lose sight of the point; the point being that the seriousness and immorality of extra-marital sex, and the exclusive province of marriage for sexual relations, is stated in the Old Testament and confirmed in the New.

### **The significance of marriage**

The importance of faithfulness and chastity within the marriage bond is heightened when we realize what marriage represents. Marriage is not only for the comfort of husband and wife, and the raising



of children, or a useful social custom (though it is all these), but it is representative of something vastly greater. The Apostle Paul's teaching in this regard is very illuminating because he makes plain that the marriage relationship is indicative of the relationship between Christ and his Church, for whom he gave his life:

'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church...' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church' (Ephesians 5: 25, 28-32).

Things that are representative or symbolic have meanings far beyond the mere fabric of which they are composed. For example, a national or memorial flag, or a painting of a president or king, cannot simply be said to be coloured dyes and pigments on canvas; and if we tamper with such representations and symbols, it will always be disfiguring, dishonouring, vandalizing or desecrating, however much

we might think we improve appearances judged according to our own tastes and personal preferences. It is vitally important to appreciate that marriage is a figure of the union between Christ as God and the Church as his people. As such, the figure must properly and definitely express the reality it represents. And with one of the parties represented being God, and the figure itself being ordained by God himself, this is not a figure that can be meddled with and reshaped with impunity at the behest of man.

In the Old Testament the covenant relationship 'I will be your God, you shall be my people' was expressed as a covenant marriage relationship:

'For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name' (Isaiah 54: 5).

'And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy' (Hosea 2: 19-20).

Thus covenant faithfulness in marriage is to represent the reality of God's covenant faithfulness to his church and our being in covenant with him. Indeed, though we find that human marriage continues until the return of Christ,<sup>3</sup> there then ensues the Marriage of the Lamb, the ultimate reality, where

the church, the heavenly Jerusalem, is presented to Christ as his bride.

'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready' (Revelation 19: 6-7).

'And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God"...Then came one of the seven angels...spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he...showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God' (Revelation 21: 2-3, 9-10).

Covenant faithfulness and fidelity in (and exclusively in) marriage after the biblical pattern is a figure of God's covenant faithfulness to his church, and is to be expressed according to God's appointment until the consummation of all things.

### *Extra-marital sex*

What then, if anything, do sexual relations outside marriage represent? Are they merely neutral or

unrepresentative, lacking in signification of a deeper truth—or are they also powerfully expressive of something significant? Time and again, the turning of the Israelites to serve foreign gods (idolatry), and their unfaithfulness and covenant breaking was expressed in terms of sexual immorality: harlotry, adultery, fornication and the like. And no wonder: sexual immorality is itself an expression of idolatry: casting off the order that God has ordained for an order of one's own imagination, and to serve one's own interests.

'My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore' (Hosea 4: 12).

'She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree' (Jeremiah 3: 8-9).

Nor is it any wonder that inherently idolatrous religion often involved sexual immorality. Combining sexual immorality with religious idolatry aggravates them both. Heathen temples had cult