

REFORMATION TODAY

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- ▶ What is Faith?
Learning from Hebrews 10:19 – 12:13
- ▶ The Christian and Obedience
- ▶ Is there Physical Healing in the Atonement?
- ▶ New RT Website!

What is Faith?





Inside this Issue

- 05 What is Faith?
Learning from Hebrews 10:19 - 12:13
John Palmer
- 18 New Books
- 20 The Christian and Obedience:
Nico van der Walt
- 26 New RT Website
- 28 African Pastors' Conferences News
- 29 How to do Family Worship?
Joel Beeke
- 34 Is there Physical Healing in the Atonement?
David Cooke
- 38 Betrayed!
Mike Burkett
- 42 News

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Editorial



What is Faith?

Faith is both knowledge and trust.

The question in the title refers to saving faith in Jesus Christ. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks the question, 'What is faith in Jesus Christ?' (Q86). The answer is: 'Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel' (A86). The answer given by *The Heidelberg Catechism* to the question 'What is true faith?' is also worth quoting: 'True faith is not only a knowledge and

conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made for ever right with God, and have been granted salvation.'

This means that faith not only comprises knowledge and conviction, but also



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means a personal trust and assurance regarding the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Most of the articles in this issue of *RT* are related to the question of what true faith is (and is not), and aim to shed more light on this question from a variety of perspectives.

Faith leads to obedience

John Palmer aims to answer the question from an exposition of Hebrews 10:19 – 12:13. This includes the well-known definition of faith in 11:1: 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' This truth is illustrated from the lives of Old Testament believers. They showed in their time how they exercised true faith by believing God's Word, his promises, and by obeying him accordingly.

Hebrews 11 demonstrates that true faith manifests itself in obedience to God. This brings us to an issue which often still causes confusion: what is the relationship between faith and works? Nico van der Walt offers the biblical answer to this issue in his article 'The Christian and Obedience'.

Faith and family worship

Faith leads to obedience and one area where we need obedience is in passing on the faith to the next generation (see for example Deut 6:7; 11:19; Ps 78:1-8). This also implies that we have to maintain family worship. The article by Dr Joel Beeke on this important topic is therefore a fitting addition to this issue offering great practical advice to parents.

Faith is not obsessed with blessings in this life

The Old Testament believers held on to God's promises in the middle of a life of suffering and other contrary circumstances. As John Palmer shows, this is radically different from the erratic and false prosperity gospel so popular in our day. More resources dealing with this false gospel are given in the section on new books recommended for your attention.

A particular challenge in this regard is presented by people who teach that Christians should always expect physical healing. Some say that a lack of healing betrays a lack of faith. This is not only an erroneous view, but also one that is cruel from the perspective of pastoral care. David Cooke helps to unmask such error and gives a biblical view.

Faith in Jesus Christ

Faith is not only faith in the content of God's Word and God's promises in the gospel, but especially faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the primary focus of the gospel and its promises. It is only in him and on account of his work for us that we are saved. The climax of God's revelation is found in him, the Messiah promised and foreshadowed in what we call the Old Testament. It is wonderful to read how Jews still discover this truth, as we see in the article by Mike Burkett who draws attention to the testimony of Stan Telchin and the book he has written. ■

500th Anniversary of the Reformation

As already mentioned in *RT271*, next year will be the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We are planning to play our part in remembering God's powerful and gracious intervention in the history of the church. This led to the rediscovery of the Bible as the Word of God becoming available to ordinary people, and a recovery of the biblical gospel of justification by faith alone.

Remembering the Reformation reminds us also of the continuous need to keep reforming. The church can never rest on its laurels, so to speak. The widespread preaching of the prosperity gospel in many parts of the world is a clear illustration of this point. We can ask ourselves the question why the Reformers under God's sovereign rule had such a major influence. Part of the answer is

that they were dealing effectively with the issues in their time. This means that when we consider these matters again, we should examine ourselves and our current situation to see if and how we need reformation in our own lives and in our churches. As James reminds us, we need to look into the mirror, and then not forget what we learned, but take appropriate action (James 1:22-25).

The plan is to publish articles along these lines. The planning for 2017 also includes two series of articles on important topics: one on the theme of forgiveness, and one on racism. The latter topic may be a little surprising, but this is an extremely relevant topic nowadays in most parts of the world where our readers are located. We need to listen to the Word of God to receive guidance on these highly relevant topics. ■

New Website

As you will see on page 26 a completely new website for the various ministries of the *Reformation Today Trust* has been launched. New features include the publication of old archive issue of *RT* (issues 1 – 100 spanning the period of 1970 – 1987). The website also offers the recordings of all addresses of the 2010-2015 Careys Conferences. ■



What is FAITH?

Introduction

The Christian is someone (1) who lives by faith (John 3:16; Rom 1:17; Gal 2:20) and (2) is a believer in Christ. What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition: 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (ESV – all quotations are from this, unless otherwise stated; where the article seems to reflect a different text, it is the author's own translation).

The writer goes on in Hebrews 11 to teach us of those sometimes called 'the heroes of the faith'. This chapter does not occur in a vacuum. The human writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not come to the end of chapters 1-10 and then say, 'What should I write about now?' and decide 'faith' as if it were a new subject. This chapter flows from all that has gone before, and leads into what comes after it.

This is the first of two expositional articles on Hebrews 10:19-12:13. It is not intended as an exhaustive exposition. Rather, the design is to show, as this passage does, what faith is, and is not! For sadly, many claim to have, and teach others to have, a 'faith' which is entirely different from the reality spoken of in the Word of God.

The theme of the Letter to the Hebrews

To put these verses into context, we must first consider the overall theme of

the letter to the Hebrews. This could be summed up as 'the person and work of our great High Priest'. Or one could say it is about the new covenant, and how it is better than the old: a better covenant (8:6), with a better hope (7:19), because it is based on better promises (8:6), with a better sacrifice (9:23), giving us a better abiding possession (10:34), country (11:16), and resurrection (11:35), in general 'better things' (11:40). Or one could say because of this that the theme is 'Such a great salvation' (2:3).

'FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN'

These are all valid descriptions of the book. However, another way of looking at Hebrews is this: it is about faith and unbelief. The Jewish Christians to whom it was first written were being tempted to avoid persecution for their faith, by giving up their profession of Christ to return to the legal protection in the Roman empire of being known as Jews. The

writer is exhorting them not to do so. His argument is: these are the facts about the person and saving work of Christ; believe these, and thus endure in your profession.

Background in chapters 1-10

We must see this first by briefly considering Hebrews 1:1-10:18. These chapters teach the greatness of our salvation because of the greatness of Christ. Throughout the letter the response called for is faith, as the following examples confirm:

Hebrews 4:2-3: *'The message did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in*

the hearers. For we who have believed enter that rest' (ESV, incl. margin).

Hebrews 4:14: 'Let us hold fast our confession' [ie of faith].

Hebrews 6:1: 'Not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God'.

Hebrews 6:12: 'So that you may be ... imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises'.

What is this faith? It is belief in what God has said (1:1-2 'God spoke ... he has spoken'), revealed in Christ (1:3 'He is ... the exact imprint of his nature'), announced, confirmed, testified (2:3-4 'It [the gospel] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witnesses', and 'It has been testified somewhere' (2:6).

So we 'see' Jesus (2:9) but who are 'we'? The answer is: those who have faith, who believe the Word of the gospel and so come to know the Jesus who is revealed there.

There is much more about this. God has sworn an oath concerning his promise and purpose in Jesus, that he is 'priest for ever', and so is the 'guarantor of a better covenant' (see 6:13, 16-17; 7:20-22). This oath concerns what God has promised (see 6:12-17; 7:6) so that 'those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance' (9:15). So faith is in what God has revealed, promised.

The opposite of this faith is unbelief (3:12, 19) which is disobedience to the Word of the gospel 'Those who were disobedient

... were unable to enter because of unbelief,' and 'Those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience' (4:6, see also 4:11). Disobedience to what? To the 'good news,' (4:2) the gospel call.

So before we reach 11:1, we already have a working definition of faith. We can say, in the context of Hebrews chapters 1-10: **Faith is trust in what God has revealed in words concerning the gospel and trust in God.**

Faith: keywords given in 10:19-39

In 10:19-39, we are told that having this faith means that we are to have confidence, to draw near to God through the blood of Jesus (10:19,35), in **full assurance of faith** (10:22), with unwavering hope (10:23). For the one who has promised, to save us on the Day of Christ (10:25) is **faithful** (10:23). And, again: we are to have this **confidence** to receive what God has **promised** (10:35,36).

This confidence is to endure (a theme we will see again in 12:1-3) until that Day, so that we endure in our Christian profession and walk. This confidence comes when we receive these promises by faith (10:38,39); we are those who 'live by faith'. This means that we have eternal life because we have faith; we are of those who 'have faith and preserve their souls'. The words that have been printed in bold are key themes, as we shall see.

Definition of faith (11:1)

So what is faith? Chapter 11:1 gives the following definition: 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'

God now, in this context of life and salvation, defines faith for us; it is:

The substance of things hoped for; future realities. The word translated 'substance' is in Greek 'hypostasis'. This is the word which was used in Greek theology of the 'persons' of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It means a real entity, something concrete. Faith is not a feeling!

The evidence of things not seen; present realities. Evidence here means that which is clearly evident, what proves a fact beyond doubt. It is not the sort of evidence, in a case of murder, which consists of a doubtful remnant of a fingerprint. It is rather the kind of evidence where 500 people saw the murderer pull the trigger and the defendant's lawyer tells his client, 'Just plead guilty'.

So we can flesh out our previous definition of faith, and now say that: **Faith is trust in what God has revealed in words concerning himself, and his gospel; a belief based on a certain and undeniable revelation by God of what we couldn't possibly know otherwise about the real future state of believers, and about the present high priesthood and rule of Christ, and therefore, God's promised love to believers, now and forever.**

In other words, it is faith in God and his gospel which leads us to salvation.

So we must be clear about what faith is not, lest we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are 'walking by faith'

when really it is something else. This is especially necessary because of the mystical tendencies which came into churches through the influence of the 'Higher Life' movement. Part of this teaching is the idea that some Christians are walking by sight, and others, on a higher plane, by faith. To counter this, we must understand what faith is not. (We shall see much more what it is, as we look at the verses that follow.)

FAITH IS NOT A 'LEAP INTO THE DARK'

1. Faith is not a 'leap into the dark' in order to be saved. Saving faith is trust that a propositional revelation of a promise, the gospel, is trustworthy, because the one who has promised it has a proven track record. God has revealed himself in the Bible as the Creator, and the evidence that this claim is true is that he

rules the universe reliably. He has also revealed himself as the Redeemer, and the evidence is that he raised Christ from the dead as he had promised. Saving faith is self-commitment to this God – the one true and living God – so that he will deliver you from your sins.

2. Faith is not a vague expectation that things will turn out all right as we make decisions, including important life-choices, drifting into these throughout our life without careful consideration, because we assume God loves us. This is at best the folly of wishful thinking, and at worst the sin of presumption. Living by faith does not remove the need to use common sense!

3. Faith is not a somewhat-hesitant-to-start-with belief that maybe God wants

us to do something significant – change job, enter the ministry, get married, move house – which seems to have some attraction; but we want to ‘do his will’. So, we designate signposts of our own invention – ‘put out fleeces’ – saying to ourselves, ‘If God does this, I will take it as a sign that he wants me to do that.’ Remember, Gideon’s putting out the fleece was an act of unbelief, not faith. He said to God, ‘If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said’ (Jdg 6:30). He should simply have believed! The fact that God used it in his grace is despite Gideon’s unbelief. This looking for signs is self-delusion, not faith, because it is ungrounded in anything God has promised or indicated. If the signs are not his signs, his fulfilling or not fulfilling them can tell us nothing about his will.

4. Faith is not a strong feeling, or indeed a conviction, that some course of action is God’s will in a particular situation where we have the choice between two morally acceptable options, and so we make a decision based on this. This applies when neither to act, nor to refrain from acting, is sinful. If the choice is between a right and a wrong act, according to God’s Word, of course we should be convicted that one way is the right way for us. It is the right way for us, because it would be the right way for anyone! This is not personal life-guidance; this is God’s moral guidance for all. This is where ‘inner peace’ comes in. We act rightly, and have God-given peace in our souls; we act wrongly, and that peace is denied to us. We will act rightly the more our conscience is informed by, and captive to, the Word of God.

So we obey it as taught in Isaiah 30:21, the voice calls us back from sins of commission (straying to the right) or of omission (straying to the left). If no moral element is involved in the choice, we are free in Christ to choose either option, and we must not let anyone take this freedom away (Gal 5:1) by a spurious definition of faith as feelings. This is emotionalism, mysticism which is not Christian, because such teaching is found in other religions also. Moreover, Christians are not immune from ‘feeling peace’ while sinning just as all sinners often do.

We will act rightly the more our conscience is informed by, and captive to, the Word of God.

How tragic it is that many Christians have been taught that they are ‘living by faith’ only when in fact they allow themselves to be brought back into bondage! Their Christian liberty of free choice between non-sinful options is being denied them; they are being taught that only one choice is right, but they have to find out which it is by subtle clues which they might easily miss, or misread. What sort of a God would treat his children thus? ‘For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery’ (Gal 5:1).

5. Faith is not a strong feeling that God will do something, which he has not promised in his Word. For example, we become convinced that God will heal or save a particular person, in answer to our prayers. This feeling can be so strong that we (and our so-called ‘faith’) are shaken when it doesn’t happen. This is because we have not exercised faith at all. Indeed, we have to say that this is self-deluded emotional wishful thinking! Again, the problem is

that this emotion is grounded in our own psyche, and not in the revealed will of God.

If, as sadly often happens, in these last four cases the outcome is not what we desired or expected, there are only two possibilities:

- » God has deceived you, but this is unthinkable!
- » You have deceived yourself because you have relied on feelings, which you have mistaken for faith. If it doesn’t happen, it wasn’t promised, and your belief it would happen wasn’t faith!

There is another important false teaching about faith, concerning the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’ – which we will consider throughout our study of the examples given in the chapter.

Examples of faith: the ‘people of old’

We read in 11:2: ‘For by it the people of old received their commendation.’ The word translated here and throughout chapter 11 as ‘commended’ means ‘testified of’, but clearly carries the idea of God witnessing with approval. This faith of verse 1 is what God commended people in the Old Testament for, when he commended them, and the actions which flowed from it and demonstrated that they had true faith. Some of them, we shall see, believed what God directly revealed to them personally. Others believed what God had already revealed to others. All of God’s Word has been revealed to us. We are to believe it all and act accordingly, as they did – and accept no other ‘revelation’. This is faith!

However, our previous definition of faith, which was drawn from the context of

the gospel as declared in Hebrews, will prove to be slightly too narrow. There was certainly gospel faith, in this sense, being exercised by some, indeed, most of these Old Testament believers, as we shall repeatedly see. Yet it would be better to widen our definition slightly, and say: **Faith is trust in what God has revealed in words concerning himself, and his gospel; a belief based on a certain and undeniable revelation by God of what we couldn’t possibly know otherwise about the real future state of believers, and about the present high priesthood and rule of Christ, and therefore, God’s promised love to believers, now and forever; a trust which results in actions which please God, because they consist of obeying his revealed will.** (addition underlined).

Verses 3-6 give us some foundational examples of faith, which show us different aspects of it.

Faith and creation

11:3 states ‘By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which were visible.’

By faith, when we read Genesis 1 and 2, we believe God’s revelation concerning how he created the world. He created it by a command, out of nothing – ‘ex nihilo’. What we see now is not made out of what we could have seen already, had we been there at that moment. The Greeks who lived when the New Testament was written believed that matter is eternal (the ‘four elements’ of earth, air, fire and water), and that it existed before, or at least as long as, their ‘gods’. God tells us here that they were wrong.

Wrong, too, are those who believe in the current 'Big Bang' theory. For it presupposes that something was already there: the 'Space/time continuum'. It does not even try to explain how space and time came into being. It has been ridiculed as 'First, there was nothing, which exploded' but its proponents would say, 'First there was something,' and so it's not even a theory of origins.

But 'Out of nothing, nothing comes,' is the first axiom of material science. All science which assumes the 'Big Bang' as truth is based on a theory which undermines its first principle.

John-Paul Sartre, the existentialist philosopher, has said, 'The basic philosophic problem is that existence exists.' There is now something! Where did it come from? Only the Bible gives an answer to how there is now something. There was nothing except God, the LORD, that is, 'YHWH' – the 'I AM' – the eternal God who has always been. He created and brought into being everything else.

Revelation is essential for us to know this, but we must have faith in that revelation. It is faith that the God who made everything has told us the truth as he told us about things of which we could know nothing otherwise. The little girl went to Sunday school and was told about creation in six days. Full of excitement, she came home and recounted the lesson to her mother. The mother began to explain it all away to mean long ages and evolution. When she had finished, the little girl said, 'But Mummy, if God didn't mean what he said, why didn't he say what he meant?' There is no answer to this question!

As Christians we know that this God is trustworthy, so we believe Genesis 1 and 2. If we go wrong here, we go wrong all along the line of God's revelation. We can't answer the basic questions of philosophy, theology, or ethics: 'What is this creation for?'; 'What's going to happen to it?'; 'How should we live in it?'

Revelation is essential for us to know this, but we must have faith in that revelation.

Someone who doesn't know God can't be expected to believe that Genesis 1 and 2 are true. So, we don't try to persuade such of the truth of this first, in order to bring them to faith in Christ. We can, however, point them to the fact that this creation account fits perfectly into the coherent explanation of 'life, the universe, and everything,' which the Bible gives. To dismiss this revelation is to dismiss any hope of a coherent answer, as the failure of philosophy in our day has shown.

More examples of faith

Abel

We read further in 11:4: 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.'

Faith led Abel to worship aright. His faith too was in God's revelation. We don't know how much God had revealed to him. But surely he knew the facts of Genesis 1-3, from his parents. So he knew at least that God had killed animals to clothe Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) indicating that God has mercy on sinners. He also knew that God was going to provide a substitute

for sinners (Gen. 3:15) so there is a way by which he can be approached. On this basis he killed animals, which were his wealth, and offered them to God, thereby symbolically 'paying the debt' and thus confessing his guilt. He did this because he believed God's revelation and acted upon it.

This is gospel faith, and 'whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (Rom 14:23). This is an example to us. It tells us that we should believe that the earth is cursed because of sin; and that God can only be approached through the blood of his appointed sacrifice, Christ, for he is holy (see 10:19). Cain didn't believe these things, so God rejected him and his offering (Gen 4:5).

Enoch

Verses 5-6 tell us: 'By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.'

Faith led Enoch to walk with God (Gen 5:22) as one who pleased God. God gave testimony to this. Moreover, by translating Enoch to heaven without him passing through death, God shows us that he is greater than death, and that he can deliver from death. But only if we have faith in God's Word will we believe this! The fact that Enoch pleased God (v5)

proves that he was a man of faith, for how can a man of unbelief please God? There is no 'intermediate position' – there are no people who are not 'men of faith' but not unbelievers either.

Faith is seeking God, not his rewards. It is extremely important that we understand

THERE IS NO 'INTERMEDIATE POSITION' – THERE ARE NO PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT 'MEN OF FAITH' BUT NOT UNBELIEVERS EITHER.

the difference. Those who die as martyrs for Islam die seeking a place where they can indulge themselves with alcohol and unbridled sex. They are not seeking to see the face of a holy God, who tells them to show their holiness by loving their enemies. Those who seek by 'faith' to gain health or wealth are not exercising the faith which pleases God; even if it worked, which it doesn't. They are seeking to gain a fleshly reward. It is not faith in God.

Moreover, such people seek to gain these things by working up inside themselves a strong feeling, a conviction that they will get what they desire. This feeling is not faith. If faith were a feeling, unbelief would not be its opposite. Unbelief is refusing to believe God's revealed truth; faith is believing it, and acting accordingly.

So, we find that true faith includes believing that God exists because he has revealed it, and believing that he will reward those who seek him because, again, he has revealed this as Enoch knew because of what had happened to Abel, and to Cain. So, faith is turning from sin and coming to God on that basis. Enoch believed God's Word and acted accordingly.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, we shall see that faith is seen in acting on God's revelation; acting because one believes the promises and the commands which God gives.

Noah

The next example is Noah (11:7): *'By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.'*

Faith led to Noah being saved because he entered the ark. He built it on dry land, when he had no evidence except God's word that, 120 years later, it would rain for forty days, and great waters from below the earth would come above them and destroy all life (Gen 6:17). Think of the ridicule he must have endured as he built it! 2 Peter 3:3-7 tells us that this is a picture of faith in Christ, and of his return. The only evidence we have for this momentous event, when Christ comes back and all are judged, is the bare revelation of God's Word, and so we suffer ridicule for believing it. Faith is saying, applying the second half of the definition on verse 1, 'The evidence of God's Word is enough; I unquestioningly believe in the return of Christ as my blessed hope' (Titus 2:13).

In building and entering the ark, we are told that Noah was an example of justification by faith: it didn't begin with Abraham. He exercised this faith because he was warned by God: he was

commanded to build the ark. Also, there was a promise involved (Gen 7:17-18). Just as sinners are commanded to trust in Christ and promised salvation if they do, Noah believed God's Word and acted accordingly.

Abraham

We now come on to the first extended example of faith: Abraham (11:8-19). This begins as follows (11:8): *'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.'*

Just as sinners are commanded to trust in Christ and promised salvation if they do, Noah believed God's Word and acted accordingly.

Abraham's faith led him to become a pilgrim, one who leaves his home to go somewhere else, as an act of obedience to God. In this he is an example for us: Christians should have this pilgrim mentality too. We must have the same attitude, though it will not lead to the same actions! For what he did physically, we must do spiritually: leave behind this world, in our hearts, and seek what is above (Col 3:1). This pilgrim obedience of faith can be exercised just as much by one who never leaves his home village as by one who finds his calling takes him all over the world. It is the world we must leave, spiritually, not one place in it physically, as Abraham did.

Why did he do this? He was 'called' by God; he had a verbal command. So faith meant also that he obeyed this command and went. He did not know where he was going; he obeyed the bare command of God (Gen 12:1-4). So we have never been to heaven, but when we obey the gospel,

we spiritually leave earth and seek it, confident that we shall inherit it, for God has promised it.

The text continues: (11:9): *'By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.'*

Abraham 'sojourned' in the promised land, as one passing through, as one 'living without (or 'outside') houses'. Nouns which correspond to this verb are used in 1 Peter 1:17 and 2:11 (ESV 'time of your exile' and 'sojourners'). So he lived as a 'nomad', as one who owned no land.

Ur and Haran have been excavated. They were large, prosperous, and sophisticated cities. Nomads were regarded by such city-dwellers as ignorant and uncouth, as 'Romanies' or 'travellers' are by many today. So there was a large social cost involved in Abraham's obedience. Often there is this for Christians too. The response of, and confession of, faith can lead to rejection, persecution, even death. Only true faith in God will enable us to endure, as like Abraham we look for our promised inheritance. Those who teach that faith will make you rich and comfortable are teaching the opposite of what Abraham believed!

Isaac and Jacob also lived like this, though they were heirs of the same promise. Abraham's faith was in God's promises: the promise of inheriting the land of Canaan,

but not yet; his descendants would, not he (11:8-9). And also the promise of inheriting the eternal city built by God (v10): *'For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.'*

Abraham obeyed and lived as an earthly pilgrim, by faith in God's ultimate promise of gaining his eternal inheritance in a city which has unshakeable foundations (unlike the tents in which he lived by faith), which God had designed and built, the New Jerusalem (12:22). He believed God's Word and acted accordingly. The challenge is: do we do the same?

The writer also mentions Sarah, Abraham's wife: (11:11-12) *'By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.'*

The Greek text can be interpreted to mean that it was Sarah who had faith, or that it was Abraham; it could be 'she considered' or 'he considered'. However, a moment's thought about how a child is conceived suggests that both must have believed that Sarah would become pregnant. The account in Genesis records that both laughed when the LORD told them that Sarah would conceive (Gen 17:17; 18:12). Yet they came to believe

THE PROPER OBJECT OF OUR FAITH IS NOT GOD'S PROMISES, BUT GOD, WHOM WE BELIEVE BY FAITH TO BE FAITHFUL.

the revelation. So they had the promised child because they believed God's Word and acted accordingly. So God's promise of innumerable descendants from a 'dead' man was fulfilled.

The writer points out that 'he/she' 'considered him faithful who promised'. This is a crucial point. The proper object of our faith is not God's promises, but God, whom we believe by faith to be faithful. Therefore, by deduction, we believe that he will perform his promises, and indeed will do this because he is faithful to himself. He will also perform his declared judgment on those who disobey his commands.

In the next verses we have a summary of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (11:13-16):

'These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.'

They confessed that they were: 'foreigners'; they did not belong to the people of the country in which they lived, and 'aliens'; those who had no civil rights in the country. This word is used of Christians in 1 Peter 1:1, and 2:11 (2nd word; ESV 'exiles'). They were exiles,

refugees – in Canaan on sufferance. They died without receiving what God had promised them, on earth. The 'health and wealth gospel' promises that, if a person exerts enough faith, they will receive what a man promises them. Yet those held up to us by God as examples of faith were not looking for earthly blessings at all! Nor did they receive them. Yet God declares to us that they were still living by faith, when they died; faith in God and his promises. There are clearly two completely different ideas of faith here. If we believe that we will receive our good things in this life, materially, we are not exercising what God calls faith.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob willingly did this, because they believed in a Fatherland to come (11:14). We do this too, if we are Christians. We believe in our future inheritance, in God's presence, on the basis of God's bare Word; we have no other evidence! In this faith we must live and die.

If, on the one hand, they had remembered with longing the country which they had left (11:15-16), they might have had opportunity to return (Abraham's servant did, and Jacob, both for good reason and temporarily; Gen 24, 28-33). On the other hand, they aspired to a better, heavenly country. So God is not ashamed to be called the God of these men of faith. He has no reason to be ashamed, for he has not deceived them as he has prepared a city for them, and for us, who also have faith in what we hope for (v1).

The evidence of true faith is to believe

God's Word, and so to obey it, and so to live in the world as those just passing through on the way to our heavenly inheritance. How different this is from the idea of those who claim to 'live by faith' when what they are seeking from God is earthly comforts only. How different from those who teach that 'if you have enough faith, you'll have good health and wealth, and you show this faith by giving me money!' Such people claim that they are such favourites with God that he will be pleased with those who give to them, and so will give to them in return. This is not faith in God. It is not even Christianity; it is a completely false gospel; it is, in fact, rank paganism.

Finally, the text states (11:17-19): *'By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named". He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.'*

Abraham's faith was seen in obedience to God's revealed will, even at the ultimate cost: not just having to kill Isaac, but that by doing so, he would seem to frustrate the very promises themselves (Gen 21:12)! He was willing to do this, because he believed that God would vindicate him, and act to fulfil his own promise; and if this meant God raising Isaac from the dead, well, this was what God would do. In a way which is a figure to us, God did just that: Isaac is a picture of the death of Christ, the lamb of God's provision, and his resurrection. In this, Abraham showed his faith by his works

(James 2:20-24); works which were not invented by him, but consisted in obedience to God's command.

We then read about Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (11:20-22): *'By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.'*

Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are here brought before us as they faced imminent death. Their faith was seen in speaking to others, with confident certainty about that which God had revealed and promised to them. Isaac spoke of Jacob's blessing and Esau's (Gen 27), and the different blessings of two nations. Jacob spoke of the blessings of Joseph's sons (Gen 49), and the different blessings of the twelve tribes. Joseph spoke of the fact that Israel would leave Egypt to enter the promised land (Gen 50:24-26). None of them spoke of what they had made up in their own minds. They were prophets, who spoke by revelation. Yet they needed faith to speak, rather than to keep silent. These men's faith was seen to be active, in the face of their own death, as we saw in verse 13. ■

[\(To be continued in the next issue of RT.\)](#)

John Palmer will from November this year be the pastor of Bethany Evangelical Church, Leigh, Greater Manchester, UK.

New Books

The following books have been published recently and are recommended for your attention:

Material dealing with the danger of the prosperity gospel

The prosperity gospel is causing great confusion in many parts of the world and not least in Africa. A new book has been published by several authors who unmask the myth of this false gospel and offer a solid account of the true biblical gospel. One of these is Dr Conrad Mbewe, well known to our readers. In order to capture your interest, the table of contents is as follows:

Preface

Introduction: A False Gospel – Ken Mbugua

Chapter 1: Misunderstanding the Bible – Ken Mbugua

Chapter 2: True and False Prosperity – Michael Otieno Maura

Chapter 3: The Gospel Life – Ken Mbugua

Chapter 4: Suffering – Ken Mbugua

Chapter 5: The True Gospel – Conrad Mbewe

Chapter 6: The Blessings of the True Gospel – Michael Otieno Maura

Appendix I: Twelve Appeals to Prosperity Preachers – John Piper

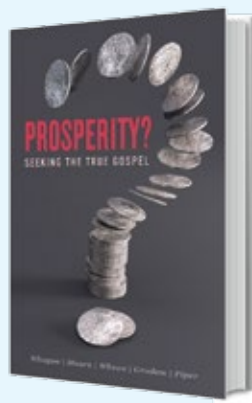
Appendix II: Money – Wayne Grudem

Appendix III: Prosperity Preachers

Appendix IV: Further Reading:

Other Books on Prosperity Teaching

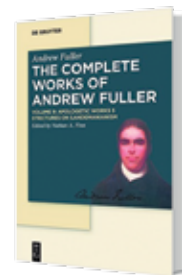
This has been announced on the website of *The Gospel Coalition* from which this book can be downloaded for free as an e-book, or as a pdf version. See: www.thegospelcoalition.org/pages/prosperity



It is also highly recommended to read the moving testimony of Pastor Elly Achok Olare: *'I am a pastor in a small village about 500 kilometres west of Nairobi — in Kenya's sugar belt region. I learned to deal with Satan for causing anything negative in my life. Spiritual warfare was ingrained in me. As part of the "God class", as Word of Faith teachers say, I had absolute authority to create my own world through positive thinking and faith-based confessions. As my world collapsed, chaotic feelings assailed me. At one point I screamed at God in disappointment that he'd failed me again. I had exercised tremendous faith; how could he let this happen?'*

Read more of Elly Achok Olare's remarkable testimony on the website of *The Gospel Coalition* : www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-god-saved-me-from-the-prosperity-gospel

Andrew Fuller: *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*



Our associate editor, Dr Michael Haykin, is also the Director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. In 2004 he started

with a plan to publish a newly prepared, critical edition of the works of Baptist theologian Andrew Fuller. He writes the following on the website:

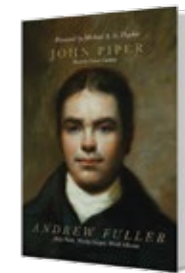
'It is with deep gratitude to God that The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies announces that the publishing house of Walter de Gruyter, with head offices in Berlin and Boston, has committed itself to the publication of a modern critical edition of the entire corpus of Andrew Fuller's published and unpublished works. Walter de Gruyter has been synonymous with high-quality, landmark publications in both the humanities and sciences for more than 260 years. The preparation of a critical edition of Fuller's works, part of the work of the Andrew Fuller Center, was first envisioned in 2004. It is expected that this edition will comprise twelve to fourteen volumes and take seven or so years to publish.'

Please see more details on the website of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies: www.andrewfullercenter.org/books-papers/the-works-of-andrew-fuller-project/ The first volume in the series *The complete works of Andrew Fuller*, ed. by Michael Haykin, has now been published by De Gruyter: *Volume 9, Apologetic Works 5, Strictures on Sandemanianism*, ed. by Nathan A Finn.

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) was the leading Baptist theologian of his era, though his works are just now being made available in a critical edition.

Strictures on Sandemanianism is the fourth volume in *The Works of Andrew Fuller*. In this treatise, Fuller critiqued Sandemanianism, a form of Restorationism that first emerged in Scotland in the eighteenth century and was influencing the Scottish Baptists of Fuller's day. Fuller's biggest concern was the Sandemanian belief that saving faith is merely intellectual assent to the gospel. Fuller believed this 'intellectualist' view of faith undermined evangelical spirituality. *Strictures on Sandemanianism* became a leading evangelical critique of Sandemanian views. This critical edition will introduce scholars to this important work and shed light on evangelical debates about faith, justification, and sanctification during the latter half of the 'long' eighteenth century (ca. 1750 to 1815).

Related to this news above, it is also great to announce a book about Andrew Fuller recently published by John Piper with a foreword by Michael Haykin. The details are:



John Piper, Andrew Fuller: *Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Mission* (Crossway), ISBN 978-1-4335-5189-5

Please, notice that we are not able to supply these books; please consult your own bookshop.

THE CHRISTIAN & OBEDIENCE

Two Deadly Enemies

A Contradiction?

'For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law' (Rom 3:28).

'(We) ... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ' (Gal 2:16).

'You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone' (Jas 2:24).

Are Paul and James at loggerheads in the above verses? Was there dogmatic dispute in the early church? Does the Bible contradict itself?

The answer is definitely no. While this would appear to be the case, an understanding of

the real issues leaves one with a sense of wonder at the balances and riches of scriptural revelation.

Not adversaries, but allies

Paul and James are not in opposition to each other, but are fighting back to back against two deadly enemies of the church from its earliest days. As active and relentless today as ever, both these heresies preach erroneous views on the question of good works in the life of a Christian.

The one would add good works to the merit of Christ as the basis for salvation; the other holds that with Christ as the perfect sacrifice of atonement, the presence or absence of good works is in principle irrelevant in our salvation. It is, however, quite clear from God's Word that both these viewpoints are totally wrong and detestable in his eyes.

Paul's battle is against legalism, while James has it against lawlessness. Both are deadly lies and every Christian should be on the alert against them.

Legalism

In the early church this heresy was championed by the Judaists. They were Jewish Christians who maintained that both faith in Christ and good works (the ceremonial laws, especially circumcision), were requirements for salvation.

Paul opposed them most vehemently, especially in his letter to the Galatians, emphasising again and again that salvation is by faith alone! Christ's mediatory work alone is the basis for justification. To insist on any works whatsoever in addition thereto constitutes a flagrant disregard for

the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

Legalism is a far more serious heresy than most would think. This is how Paul sees the matter: *'Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace' (Gal 5:2-4; cf also Rom 4:4-5; 11:6; Gal 4:21-5:12).*

Terrifying words indeed! The point at issue here is more than just the fact that my works are superfluous to the perfect work of Christ. What the apostle teaches here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that genuine legalism is actually disqualifying and damning.

Why should this be such an important matter in the eyes of the Lord? The answer is simply that we serve a jealous God. He, and he alone must receive all the honour for the salvation of each and every sinner. For this reason Christ is either the all-sufficient and only Saviour, or he does not save at all. No man shall ever play any part in his own salvation. None whatsoever! God shares his praise with nobody!

This principle lay at the very heart of the Reformation. Rome teaches faith plus sacraments, which is nothing else than faith plus works. But the Reformers preached the Word of God unashamedly: Justification comes through faith alone! Sola fide (by faith alone) was one of the clarion calls of the Reformation. (In a sense the entire Reformation hinged on the word sola [alone].)



In spite of it all, legalism is rife in the contemporary church. The fundamental error of wishing to add something to the merit of Christ has persisted through the ages. And to this day it manifests in typical ways:

Firstly, the legalist externalises God's moral law. The divine will for man is expounded in the Bible and condensed in the Ten Commandments. Not having a regenerated heart, the legalist does not understand experientially what it means to serve God 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:21-24). The biblical emphasis on the fact that obedience is only acceptable to God if it comes from the heart, is largely neglected (cf Matt 5:21 ff). Important to him is, therefore, outward conformity to the letter of God's law. This, after all, is the ladder by which he hopes to reach heaven.

The legalist therefore glories in the form of true religion, but knows nothing of its inward power. Outwardly he can be impressively devoted, but inwardly completely devoid of grace and spiritually barren.

Secondly, the legalist adds to God's moral law. Not having a heart enlightened by the Spirit, he finds it impossible to relate to God's law in its true meaning. He is however eager to establish the necessary religious merit to gain salvation. Therefore, slowly but surely, he begins to create his own expressions of obedience.

These expressions have taken on a thousand faces through the ages. Every

generation and each culture has its own thing. Sometimes it is negative: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' (Col 2:21). Sometimes it is positive: Do this, and do that!

These things are not necessarily unimportant in themselves – on the contrary, very often they are biblical imperatives. But this they all have in common: instead of being expressions of

gratitude for God's free grace in Christ, they are additions to his merits, the rungs of the ladder which supposedly reaches up to heaven. What is more, they replace Christ as the focal point of zeal, and effectively become conditions, shibboleths (Judg 12:6), for acceptance within a specific circle.

What the apostle teaches here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that genuine legalism is actually disqualifying and damning.

Lawlessness

This heresy, also called antinomianism, was prevalent among various groups in the early church. Their argument is quite simple and on the face of it watertight: if sinners are justified by the grace of God on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice, without any merit on the part of man, then surely good works, obedience and a holy life are of no consequence in the process of salvation. Faith only is required. Apparently some went even further, arguing that since God's grace is emphasised every time he forgives sin, it follows that the more we sin, the more he has to forgive and therefore the greater his glory. Paul destroys this diabolical argument in Romans 6.

Inevitably antinomianism leads to ethical carelessness in the lives of Christians

(even to the extent that they may well become worldly and sinful to a shocking degree). This is what James warns us about. He agrees that faith alone is required, but points out that there are many types of faith. Faith without works is a dead faith. It is false and cannot lead to salvation. Devils too have such faith. True saving faith, on the other hand, always goes hand in hand with good works.

In these days legalism fells thousands, but lawlessness claims tens of thousands. Neglect of, and even contempt towards, the necessity of persevering in holy obedience to the end is not just an innocent blunder, it is lethal heresy! On this point the Bible is very clear: without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

As in the case of legalism, lawlessness comes to the fore in several ways:

In the first place, it manifests itself in the view that the Ten Commandments are irrelevant in our day and age, because 'Christians are under grace, not under the law'. This leads to 'situation ethics' which regards love as the only ethical principle. Therefore, anything you do out of love is right, even if it militates against the Ten Commandments. In terms of this view it is up to the individual to decide on what constitutes love and how it should be expressed in a given situation. The Word of God delivers us from this quicksand of whimsical subjectivism by teaching

that love, even for the New Testament Christian, flows in 'ten channels' (Matt 5:17 ff.; Mark 12:28 ff.; 1 John 5:2-3).

In the second place, it finds expression in the 'cheap gospel' which assures people of their salvation on the grounds of a once-off acceptance of Christ – irrespective of whether this action is followed by authentic spiritual fruit. This 'other gospel' teaches that your salvation depends only on your

acceptance of Christ as your Saviour. If this is not confirmed by your subsequent lifestyle, you are a 'carnal Christian', but saved nonetheless. It differs in essence from the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which teaches that holy perseverance to the end is the hallmark of true salvation.

The root problem of both errors

What exactly is the root problem of legalism and lawlessness? Are not the supporters of both able to quote scripture upon scripture to brace their views? Is there not, after all, an inescapable contradiction running through the Bible?

The problem with both these views is that the relationship between justification and sanctification is not clearly understood. Legalism confuses the two, while distinguishing between them is of the utmost importance. Lawlessness, on the other hand, does not understand the perfect integration of God's work of salvation in a person and accordingly separates the two, while they are, in fact, inseparably connected.

FOR THIS REASON CHRIST IS EITHER THE ALL-SUFFICIENT AND ONLY SAVIOUR, OR HE DOES NOT SAVE AT ALL.

It is therefore essential that every Christian should have a clear understanding both of the exact nature of justification and sanctification, and of their relationship to each other.

Justification

Justification is a legal pronouncement made by God in respect of every person who truly believes in Christ. It is an action by God alone. It is his prerogative, and his alone. Man has no part in it.

At the heart of justification (and therefore also of the gospel and redemption in Christ) lie the concepts 'substitution' and 'imputation'. (The verb 'to impute' (*logizomai*) which is an accounting term, and which can mean either to debit or to credit, appears no less than eleven times in Romans 4.)

Jesus Christ came as true man in order to stand as Head of God's new humanity. (1 Cor 15:45-47 calls him 'the last Adam', 'the second man') before God. He does so on behalf of those sinners who are savingly united to him through faith, who have been taken out of fallen humanity in Adam and made part of the new creation in Christ (Rom 5:12-21; 2 Cor 5:17). He is our Substitute, our Mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Nobody has expressed this truth better than the Puritan, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680): 'There are but two men standing before God, Adam and Christ, and these two men have all other men hanging on their girdles.'

As Mediator of the Covenant of Grace, Christ lived his life on earth in perfect

obedience to his heavenly Father. This perfect obedience, or righteousness is then imputed (credited) to believing sinners. But there is more to it. Their debt is imputed (debited) to him – and when he pays it, he dies under the punishing hand of God.

Justification is therefore a double cure! It has two components, one positive and the other negative.

Both are vitally important. It is not possible to have the one without the other. On the one hand, God acquits sinners because their debt has been paid by Christ; on the other his perfect righteousness is imputed to them, thus qualifying them to live forever in God's holy presence.

Sanctification

Sanctification is a work of God's grace in the life of everyone whom he has declared righteous. It is aimed at forming the image of Christ in them and is a progressive, lifelong process.

Unlike justification, man plays a full and active role in sanctification. It is a conscious, strenuous and lifelong effort on his part. This dual involvement of man and God is beautifully brought to the fore in Phil 2:12-13: '... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.'

The relationship between justification and sanctification

A lack of clarity on the relationship between justification and sanctification can lead to all sorts of distortions in the theologies and lives of men.

In these days legalism fells thousands, but lawlessness claims tens of thousands.

Wherein lies the difference between the two, and what is it that legalism fails to understand?

- » Justification has to do with objective imputation (my debt to Jesus, his righteousness to me). Sanctification has to do with subjective impartation (the forming of his image in me).
- » The righteousness which I acquire through justification is not my own but that of Christ (and is therefore perfect). The righteousness which I acquire through sanctification, although worked by the Holy Spirit, is indeed my own (and therefore imperfect).
- » With justification there is no place for my own works (not even faith can contribute anything, being only the channel through which it flows to me). With sanctification my works are central and indispensable – which is why the Bible urges us to run, to fight, to be alert, to labour, to flee, to persevere, etc.
- » Justification is complete and perfect (in all eternity I shall never be more justified than at the first moment of faith). Sanctification is always relative and imperfect, although increasing progressively, and only becomes perfect at the moment of glorification.
- » Justification has to do with my objective legal status before God; sanctification with my subjective, moral condition.
- » Justification gives me the right to eternal glory. Sanctification prepares me for it and is, as such, the 'watermark of authentic salvation'.

What do justification and sanctification have in common, why are they so inextricably connected? What is it that lawlessness should understand?

- » Both flow from God's grace in Christ (1 Cor 1:30).
- » Both are indispensably part of God's integrated work of salvation in my life.
- » Both must therefore be present simultaneously in the same person: 'If you have it at all, you have it all!'.

On the cutting edge of a knife

The solution of the 'problem of the two apostles' has at least underlined one fact: the true Christian moves on the cutting edge of a knife, with legalism and lawlessness as yawning abysses on either side!

It is against these dangers that the apostles warn us in all earnest: Paul against legalism, which teaches that salvation is obtained through grace plus good works, and James against lawlessness, which teaches that salvation can be obtained through a faith which is not accompanied by good works.

In conclusion, let us put it positively. Paul answers the question, 'How am I saved?' James answers the question, 'How does salvation find expression in a person's life, how can we recognise it?' ■

Nico van der Walt lives in South Africa and has been a pastor.

New rt Website

I am profoundly grateful and excited to announce the launch of the new website of the *Reformation Today Trust*.
www.reformation-today.org

The website has the following features:

Mission of the Trust

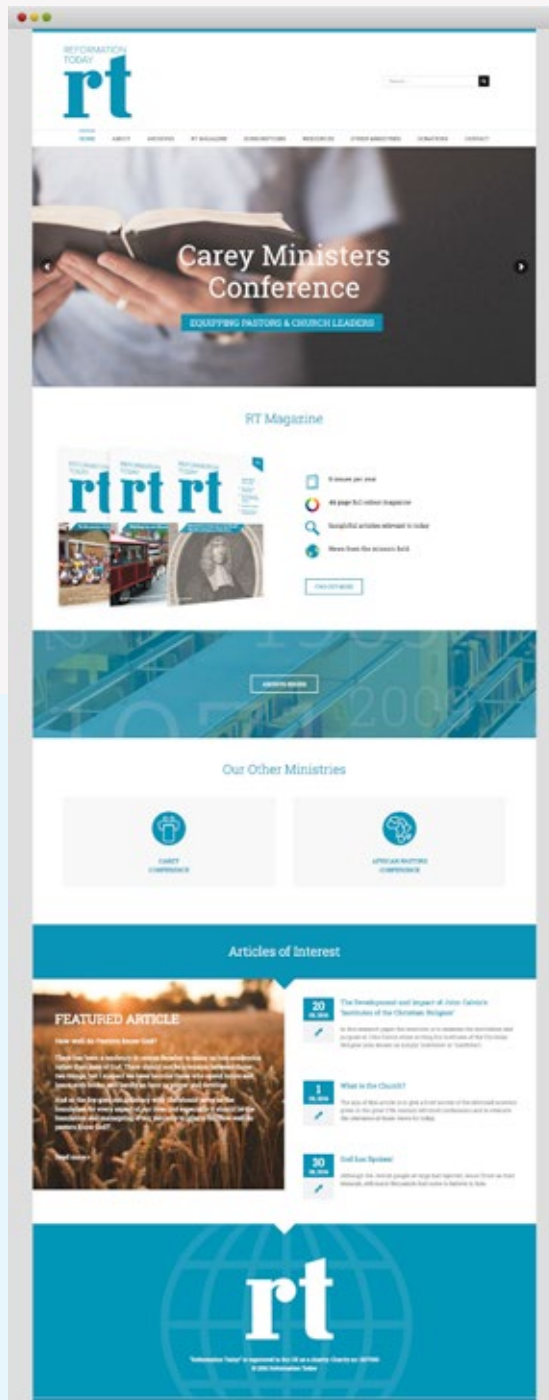
The 'About' page gives the mission of the *Reformation Today Trust* and the various ministries of the Trust.

RT Magazine

All information about the magazine, how to subscribe, or renew your subscription.

Archive Issues of RT

An exciting novel feature is that you can now read and search all RT issues from the very first one from 1970 to issue 100 published in 1987. The old issues have been scanned and are now presented on the website. This makes the index published previously under the title 'The Finder' much more useful: you can now consult the index and find the old articles in issues 1-100 on the website. Issues 101 and later will hopefully be added in due course.



PLEASE DO VISIT
AND ENJOY OUR
NEW WEBSITE.

We are deeply grateful to Pepper Collective for their excellent work in designing and developing our new website.

Resources

Two pages with articles of interest and a list of recommended reading focusing on our identity as Reformed Baptists.

Other Ministries:

Carey Conference:

The annual Carey Conference is another ministry of the Trust: this page gives you information and a link to the Carey Conference website (which is expected to be integrated with the RT website in due course).

Support to African Pastors' Conferences:

The Trust supports the work of the African Pastors' Conferences. This page tells you why we wholeheartedly support this exciting and important ministry among African pastors.

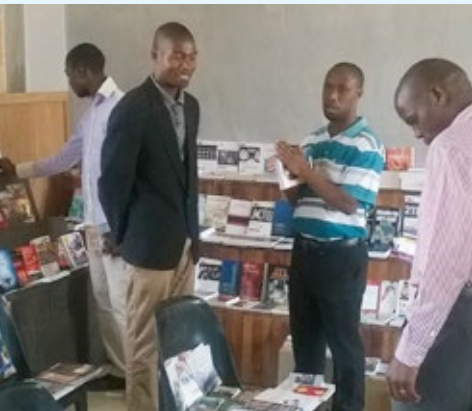


Update on Recent Conferences

The table below gives an overview of conferences held in Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi. The total number of books distributed since 2006 now stands at 86,081.

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	BOOKS Sold & Free
Kenya	Nairobi	94	762
	Eldoret	57	356
Uganda	Kampala	55	274
Malawi	Blantyre	37	242
	Monkey Bay	25	103
	Lilongwe	51	420
	Mzimba	32	173

Another 10 to 11 conferences have been scheduled for this year, most of them in South Africa. For next year a total of 55+ conferences are being planned throughout Africa. These conferences apparently fulfil a growing demand. Please pray as they are being fixed for next year and that we will continue to get the necessary sponsorship. Some churches in the US have been very generous indeed. Also a few churches in the UK have made commitments. There is still plenty of scope and need for more sponsorships of these conferences.



JOEL BEEKE

How to do Family WORSHIP

Family worship has fallen on hard times. Parents often say they are too busy to do it. Or else they don't know how to do it because their parents never did it.

When my parents commemorated their fiftieth anniversary, all five of us children decided to express thanks to our father and mother for one thing without consulting each other. Remarkably, all five of us thanked our mother for her prayers and all five of us thanked our father for his leadership of our special Sunday evening family worship. My brother said, 'Dad, the oldest memory I have is of tears streaming down your face as you taught us from *Pilgrim's Progress* on Sunday evenings how the Holy Spirit leads believers. At the age of three God used you in family worship to convict me that Christianity was real. No matter how far I went astray in later years, I could never seriously question the reality of Christianity, and I want to thank you for that.'

Christians have long recognised that God often uses family worship to bring reformation and revival to the church.

For example, the 1677 church covenant of the Puritan congregation in Dorchester, Massachusetts, included the commitment 'to reform our families, engaging ourselves to a conscientious care to set before us and to maintain the worship of God in them; and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties, educating, instructing, and charging our children and households to keep the ways of the Lord.'

Given the importance of family worship as a potent force in winning untold millions to gospel truth throughout the ages, we ought not to be surprised that God requires heads of households to do all they can to lead their families in worshipping the living God. As Joshua declared, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD' (Josh 24:15). This word serve is translated as worship many times in Scripture.

Family worship will require some preparation. You should pray for God's blessing upon that worship. Have your Bibles ready and a Scripture passage selected. Catechisms and books of questions

and answers for children are very helpful. Sometimes you might read through a book like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or *The Holy War* and discuss it together. Choose some psalms and hymns that are easy to sing. Pick a place to gather, such as the supper table or living room. Set the times for family worship, ordinarily at breakfast and supper but as it fits your family's needs. Whatever times you set, carefully guard those times like a precious jewel.

During family worship aim for brevity. Don't provoke your children. If you worship twice a day, try ten minutes in the morning and twenty-five in the evening. Be consistent. It is better to have twenty minutes of family worship every day than to try for extended periods on fewer days – say forty-five minutes on Monday, then skipping Tuesday.

Don't indulge excuses to avoid family worship. If you are tired, deny yourself out of love for God and your family. Even if you lost your temper a half-hour before family worship time, don't neglect it out of false humility. Instead, begin family worship by confessing your sins to your family and seeking their forgiveness in the presence of God. As A W Pink said, 'It is not the sins of a Christian, but his unconfessed sins, which choke the channel of blessing and cause so many to miss God's best.'

Lead family worship with a firm, fatherly hand and a soft, penitent heart. Speak with hopeful solemnity. Talk naturally yet reverently during this time, using the tone you would use when speaking to a deeply

respected friend about a serious matter. Expect great things from a great covenant-keeping God.

According to Scripture, God should be served in special acts of worship in families today in the following three ways:

CHRISTIANS
HAVE LONG
RECOGNISED
THAT GOD
OFTEN USES
FAMILY
WORSHIP
TO BRING
REFORMATION
AND REVIVAL
TO THE
CHURCH.

Daily instruction in the Word of God

God should be worshipped by daily reading and instruction from his Word. Through questions, answers, and instructions, parents and children are to daily interact with each other about sacred truth. As Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, 'And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'

When those words were first written, most believers did not have access to a precious scroll of Holy Scripture. They had to teach their children from passages of Scripture which they heard and memorised! In this age most believers have the tremendous privilege of having the Bible in their own native language. Let's take full advantage of this privilege by reading the Bible together. When reading and teaching the Bible as a family, consider these suggestions.

1. Have a reading plan. Read ten or twenty verses from the Old Testament in the morning and ten to twenty from the New Testament in the evening. Or read a series of parables, miracles, or historical portions.

Just be sure to read the entire Bible over a period of time. As J C Ryle said, 'Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.'

2. Involve the family. Every family member who can read should have a Bible to follow along. Set the tone by reading Scripture with expression, as the living, 'breathing' book it is. Assign various portions to be read by your wife and your children. Teach your children how to read articulately and with expression. Don't let them mumble or speed ahead. Teach them to read with reverence. Provide a brief word of explanation throughout the reading, according to the needs of the younger children.

3. Be plain in meaning. Ask your children if they understand what you are reading. Be plain in applying scriptural texts. *The 1647 Church of Scotland Directory for Family Worship* wisely teaches us that if a sin is rebuked in the Word, then call the family to keep watch against it; if a judgment is threatened, warn them of it; if a duty is commanded, press it upon them; if a promise is offered, then urge them to trust it and receive its comfort.

4. Encourage family dialogue around God's Word in line with the Hebraic procedure of household question and answer (cf Ex 12:26–27; 13:14–15). That's where this Family Worship Bible Guide can help you. Read aloud with your family the thoughts for each Bible chapter each day. Dialogue about the thoughts expressed. Answer the questions asked. Especially encourage teenagers to ask questions; draw them out. If you don't know the answers, tell them so,

and encourage them to search for answers. Have one or more good commentaries on hand, such as those by John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and Matthew Henry. Remember, if you don't provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere – and often those will be wrong answers.

5. Be pure in doctrine. Titus 2:7 says, 'In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.' Don't abandon doctrinal precision when teaching young children; aim for simplicity and soundness.

Remember, if you don't provide answers for your children, they will get them elsewhere – and often those will be wrong answers.

6. Be relevant in application. Don't be afraid to share your experiences when appropriate, but do that simply and concisely. Use concrete illustrations. Ideally, tie together biblical instruction with what you recently heard in sermons.

7. Be affectionate in manner. Proverbs continually uses the phrase 'my son', showing the warmth, love, and urgency in the teachings of a God-fearing father.

When you must administer the wounds of a friendly father to your children, do that with heartfelt love. Tell them you must convey the whole counsel of God because you can't bear the thought of spending eternity apart from them. My father often said to us, with tears: 'Children, I cannot miss any of you in heaven.' Tell your children: 'We will allow you every privilege an open Bible will allow us to give you – but if we say no to you, you must know that flows out of our love.' As Ryle said, 'Love is one grand secret of successful training. Soul love is the soul of all love.'

8. Require attention. Proverbs 4:1 says, 'Hear, ye children, the instruction of a

father, and attend to know understanding.' Fathers and mothers have important truths to convey. You must demand a hearing for God's truths in your home. That may involve repeated statements at the beginning like these: 'Sit up, son, and look at me when I'm talking. We're talking about God's Word, and God deserves to be heard.' Don't allow children to leave their seats during family worship.

Daily prayer before the throne of God

Does not the command to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess 5:17) include when we are with our families? Families eat and drink the daily provision of a gracious God at their tables. To do that in Christian way, a family must follow 1 Timothy 4:4-5, 'For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.'

Again, let me offer some specific guidelines for leading the family in prayer.

1. Be short. With few exceptions, don't pray for more than five minutes. Tedious prayers do more harm than good. Don't teach in your prayer; God doesn't need the instruction. Teach with your eyes open; pray with your eyes shut.

2. Be simple without being shallow. Pray for things that your children know something about, but don't allow your prayers to become trivial. Don't reduce your prayers to self-centered, shallow petitions.

3. Be direct. Spread your needs before God, plead your case, and ask for mercy. Name your teenagers and children and their needs one by one on a daily basis. That holds tremendous weight with them.

4. Be natural yet solemn. Speak clearly and reverently. Don't use an unnatural, high-pitched voice or a monotone. Don't pray too loudly or softly, too fast to be understood or too slowly to hold attention.

5. Be varied. Don't pray the same thing every day; that becomes tedious. Develop more variety in prayer by remembering and stressing the various ingredients of true prayer, such as calling upon God to hear your prayers, adoring God for his titles and attributes, declaring your humble dependence and need, confessing family sins, asking for family mercies (both material and spiritual), interceding for friends, churches, and the nations, giving thanks for God's blessings, and blessing God for his kingdom, glory and power. Use a prayer list to remember different persons and organisations on different days. Mix these ingredients with different proportion to get variety in your prayers.

Daily singing the praise of God

Psalm 118:15 says, 'The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles [or tents] of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.' That is a clear reference to singing. Every Christian family should own a few copies of a good psalter (psalms set to meter and music) and hymnal from which to sing. If one of you can play the piano, all the better. But even recorded music is helpful. Use whatever means you can to assist your family to sing God's praises together.

1. Sing doctrinally pure songs. There is no excuse for singing doctrinal error, no matter how attractive the tune might be.

2. Sing Psalms first and foremost without neglecting sound hymns. Remember that the Psalms, called by Calvin 'an anatomy of all parts of the soul', are the richest gold

mine of deep, living, experiential scriptural piety available to us still today.

3. Sing heartily and with feeling. As Colossians 3:23 says, 'And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Meditate on the words you are singing. On occasion discuss a phrase that is sung.

Conclusion

Believers in Christ follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith, and we must also follow in the footsteps of Abraham's obedient leadership of his family. 'For I know him', God said, 'that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him' (Gen 18:19).

John Paton served as a missionary over a century ago to a cannibalistic people in the islands of the South Pacific Ocean. Those people killed and ate the missionaries who had preceded Paton within minutes of their arrival. Paton faced enormous difficulties and sorrows. But he persevered in the name of Christ. One earthly means by which God prepared him for his labours was his father in Scotland. In later years John Paton looked back upon his father with great gratitude.

Paton's father worked out of a shop in their house. Their family had a small room in their home which was their prayer closet. John was deeply affected by his father's regular devotion to prayer in that room. He remembered, 'Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and "shut the door"; and we children got to understand ... that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the

Most High Place.' The Paton children could sometimes hear their father's voice full of emotion, pleading for them before the throne of grace.

Paton also remembered of his father how, 'When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in family worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Saviour, and learned to know and love him as our divine Friend.'

When John Paton left his home to go to Glasgow to study theology and do urban evangelism, he had to walk forty miles before coming to a train station. His father walked the first six miles out with him. They spoke about the Lord, and his father gave him counsel. Then for the last half-mile they walked in silence. His father's lips still moved, but now in silent prayer for his son while tears streamed down his face. When they came to the place of their parting, father grasped son by the hand, and said, 'God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil.' Overcome by emotion, he could say no more, but his lips continued to move in silent prayer. John Paton later wrote, while reflecting back on this experience, 'I vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonour such a father and mother as he had given me.' ■

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DAVID COOKE



IS THERE Physical Healing IN THE ATONEMENT?

Recently I have come across individuals and websites holding to the view that physical healing is included in the atonement. (Indeed, 'holding to the view' is putting it mildly; I have been accused of being a false teacher and liar for not preaching it!)

Those advocating this often point to scriptures like: 'Bless the Lord ... who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases' (Ps 103:2-3); 'Surely he has borne our griefs [lit. sicknesses] and carried our sorrows [lit. pains] ... and

by his stripes we are healed' (Is 53:4-5); 'He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: He himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses' (Matt 8:16-17).

These verses, they claim, show it is God's plan for all Christians to enjoy perfect health at all times; and, if we don't, it's down to our own lack of faith in laying hold of the blessings provided by Christ's death.

How should we respond to this teaching? After all, it has been around for a while. Does the Bible support it? A superficial reading of the above verses may seem to suggest so. And what are the pastoral and practical implications of adopting it? It is worth stressing that, of course, God can and sometimes does miraculously heal, often in answer to the believing prayers of his people. But this does not preclude their later illness and death. And that it is occasionally the Lord's will to miraculously heal or grant longer life — as with Hezekiah, for example (2 Kings 20:6) — by no means implies it is always his will to do so.

Unjustified

There are serious problems with this teaching. First, it is biblically and theologically unjustified.

It fails to understand the purpose of Jesus' healing miracles.

There is no doubt Jesus' healing miracles were real, physical healings. However, in the verses cited above, the healings are always linked with forgiveness of sins or deliverance from spiritual oppression. There is far more emphasis in Isaiah 53 on the Lord being 'wounded for our transgressions' and 'bruised for our iniquities', and the 'chastisement for our peace [being] upon him', than on physical healing. This is because the physical healings in Christ's ministry were, above all, intended as a powerful picture of the greater healing of sin.

Jesus himself made this clear when he dealt with the paralysed man (following Matthew 8:16-17). Responding to those who accused him of blasphemy for telling the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, Jesus said, 'Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Arise and walk"?'

But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins — then he said to the paralytic — "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house" (Matt 9:5-6).

Moreover, while the physical healings of Jesus were real and lasting (unlike many miracles claimed today), all those cured by him subsequently grew old and died.

It fails to distinguish between the 'now' and the 'not yet'.

Of course, there is a sense in which physical healing is included in the atonement. Just as death came by sin, so eternal life is secured by the atoning work of Christ. It is plain enough that, in the new heaven and new earth, sickness will be banished for ever. 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes: there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' (Rev 21:4). There, in the New Jerusalem, the leaves of the tree of life will be for the healing of the nations and there shall be no more curse (Rev 22:2-3).

But we are not there yet! Unless the Lord returns first, we must all face the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor 15:26), and for

THE PHYSICAL HEALINGS IN CHRIST'S MINISTRY WERE, ABOVE ALL, INTENDED AS A POWERFUL PICTURE OF THE GREATER HEALING OF SIN

most of us that will entail disease in one form or another.

It is not warranted by biblical history.

Examples can be multiplied of Bible characters who suffered illness without the slightest hint that it was through unbelief on their part. Consider the following examples:

Job was struck by painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:7) as part of troubles inflicted on him by the devil. This was with the Lord's permission to try his faith. When urged by his wife, 'Curse God and die!', he replied: 'Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?' The Bible adds: 'In all this, Job did not sin with his lips' (Job 2:10). There is no hint that he would have suffered less if he had had greater faith. On the contrary, it was because of his faith that he endured this trial.

Paul was given 'a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet' him (2 Cor 12:7). We are not told what this was (there has been much varied speculation), but it was probably a physical ailment of some sort.

Though he prayed repeatedly, and doubtless in faith, for its removal, the Lord's response — 'My grace is sufficient for you' — made plain that the 'thorn' would remain with him. So, by God's grace, Paul was enabled to affirm that he took pleasure in his infirmities (v10).

Paul advised Timothy, his son in the faith, that because of his 'frequent infirmities' he should use a little wine for his stomach's

sake (1 Tim 5:23). Why did he not simply tell him to claim the healing that was in the atonement? In a similar way, was Paul just being cruel by leaving Trophimus in Miletus 'sick' (2 Tim 4:20)?

It presents a feeble God.

Given how much sickness and disease there is in the world, including among Christians, it seems remarkable that it should be God's will for all to be physically healthy. It would seem that God's will for us is constantly being thwarted by our own lack of faith!

Is God's power really so limited that he cannot deal with disease unless we empower him by our believing? How does that square with the Bible's claim, 'Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases' (Ps 115:3)?

Or might it not be that God in his sovereignty intends sickness for us, as part of living by grace in this fallen world, while we wait for the 'redemption of our body' (Rom 8:23)?

Disastrous

Secondly, it is pastorally disastrous.

It renders people poorly equipped to experience illness.

If a person has bought into the teaching that 'God never wants you to be ill', what are they to suppose if diagnosed with serious illness?

While it is salutary to consider why the Lord brings adverse providences into our lives, it is surely cruel to tell a person that their illness is a clear demonstration of their inadequate faith, especially when the

sufferer expresses faith in God's goodness amidst the illness!

It is far more helpful to encourage the sufferer with the reminder of God's promises to be with his people even as they pass through sickness and suffering.

It encourages deception.

In extreme cases, sufferers are encouraged to deny that they have an illness, despite the evident symptoms. This is not far removed from the teaching of 'Christian Science', that sickness is an illusion to be corrected by prayer alone. At best it is self-delusion, at worst a blatant lie.

It is cruel to the bereaved.

To say, or even imply, to a bereaved person, 'If only your loved one had had more faith, he or she would have been healed,' is a most hurtful thing. And it runs completely counter to Scripture, which declares: 'Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints' (Ps 116:15) and 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord' (Rev 14:13). The suggestion that God is not best pleased with the believer for turning up in heaven early, through lack of faith, is both unkind and untrue.

Folly

Thirdly, it is manifestly foolish. Teaching that God never intends believers to suffer sickness or disease leads to all sorts of absurd conclusions.

Are we really to conclude that every single Christian of former generations (perhaps excluding martyrs) was somehow deficient in their faith? To take one example, instead of dying of multiple illnesses, including

malaria, gout, lung disease and kidney stones, would John Calvin still be alive today if only he had had more faith?

And what do we make of those who have taught all this but have since died? What about Charismatic writer Jamie Buckingham (d.1992), or Vineyard leader John Wimber (d.1997), or well known 'Word of Faith' advocate Kenneth Hagin (d.2003)? By their own deaths they prove themselves unsure guides in this matter.

But that is not all. The notion that Christians exercising faith are never ill brings the very gospel into disrepute. It is little wonder that believers are derided as gullible fools when such teaching is lapped up as

true even while its proponents die of diseases at the same rate as the general population! While we affirm God grants physical healing as and when he so chooses, especially through medicines and surgery, it is plain that this false notion undermines the gospel itself.

In conclusion, should we not be far more excited knowing that, through Christ, the disease of sin can be dealt with, rather than by physical healing?

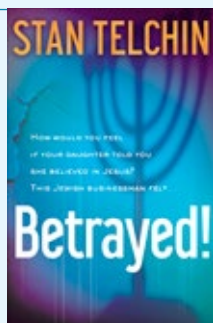
Because Jesus atoned for sin, the believer looks forward to a glorious resurrection body (Phil 3:21), and meanwhile says with suffering Job, 'And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God' (Job 19:26). Now that really is something worth celebrating! ■

David Cooke is pastor of Banbury Evangelical Free Church.

The notion that Christians exercising faith are never ill brings the very gospel into disrepute.

Betrayed!

Based on the book by Stan Telchin,
Betrayed!



MIKE BURKETT

Stan Telchin was a successful American Jewish businessman who was very happily married to Ethel. They had one daughter, Judy, who had recently started her undergraduate studies at Boston University. Judy was very close to both parents and she telephoned them regularly.

One evening as Stan picked up the telephone he quickly sensed that Judy was tense and uneasy, having the greatest difficulty finding the words she wanted to say. Eventually, after much hesitation, she managed to tell her Dad that she had become a Christian! He was speechless. His daughter had been the apple of his eye and now she had deliberately abandoned the Jewish faith, in fact everything that her parents treasured most. She had betrayed them!

Judy's Conversion

Stan's drive, in his BMW, to the Boston campus, was completed in silence. Both he and Ethel were apprehensive as they saw her with her bags waiting to be picked up and taken home for the holidays.

They soon arrived home and Stan was ready for some frank discussion. 'Well, Judy', said Dad, 'what do you want to tell us?' She briefly explained how her move from the security of home made her think what her life was all about. She felt that she wanted to do something useful to help other people so that she might find out a little more of what life was all about. She volunteered to assist at a Crisis Intervention Centre by answering the telephone and listening to people with severe problems. One of her fellow volunteers, a man called Dick, happened to be a Christian. He befriended her and took a great interest in her Jewish faith. He also gave her a Bible to read, he loved reading it himself and he often discussed passages with her and encouraged her to read it for herself. Eventually she realised that she needed God in her life. Her regular Bible reading had awakened a profound interest in her heart for something more than the faith that she was brought up with. She often cried and called out to God for help. Her main difficulty was that 'Jews just don't believe in Jesus'.

Later, another man who worked with her pointed out that Jesus came to fulfil the Old

Covenant and not to destroy it. These words challenged her so much that she gave her life to Christ.

After Stan heard all this, he was horrified. Their discussion quickly came to an end but Judy urged her father, 'Dad, please find out more about this and read the Bible for yourself ... Is Jesus the Messiah or isn't he?' With that, Stan resolved that he would read the entire Bible and prove once and for all that Judy had made the wrong choice.

A Jewish Family

Like many Jewish people, Stan came from a family of orthodox belief and he was well aware of the way in which his people had endured persecution during their long history. He underwent Bar Mitzvah and he was familiar with such traditions as the wearing of phylacteries, prayer shawls, and mezuzah on the doorposts. He regularly attended the annual feasts such as Passover, Chanukah, and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

His marriage to Ethel was a happy one. He had a fine home and ran a good business. He was even awarded the 'Man of the Year' honour. The birth of their daughter Judy, seemed to complete their happiness, but now the great challenge faced him. He must scour and devour the entire Bible so that his superior knowledge would prove to Judy that her 'experience' was spurious, 'a temporary fad' that could not last.

The Bible Student

After Judy returned to university Stan got to work. His choice of books was

comprehensive, it included The Torah, a New Testament highlighted by the fulfilled Messianic prophecies, the Authorised and Standard American versions of the Bible. When he looked at the Shemah (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), he made a note to challenge Judy about the Trinity. After months of careful study and extensive note-taking, he recognised a clear harmony between the Old and New Testaments. He was surprised to find this because he had

After months of careful study and extensive note-taking, he recognised a clear harmony between the Old and New Testaments.

expected the New Testament writers to castigate the Jewish Scriptures as being outdated. His mental turmoil led him to call on George, a Christian acquaintance. George listened as Stan tried to express his reservations about accepting Jesus as Messiah. George wisely explained that many of his Jewish friends had trusted in the Messiah but this belief had not negated their Jewish heritage.

He then said that when a Gentile accepted the Messiah, he also remained a Gentile. At last, the issue became somewhat clearer but how would it affect his life if he embraced the Messiah?

What Next?

As his studies progressed, Stan's original Jewish beliefs and principles were strengthened. His belief in the existence of God, his utter rejection of atheistic materialism and of the teachings of the liberal rabbis were all confirmed. His view of the inspiration of Scripture was also becoming clearer. He was fascinated by the discovery that Jesus loved the Old Testament writings and that he quoted from Isaiah more frequently than he quoted from any other Old Testament book.

One of his Christian friends advised him to study three particular chapters: Jeremiah 31, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. As usual, he sat down and voraciously digested the content of all three. He began to appreciate that his studies were so challenging that he found it increasingly hard to sleep at night.

The Covenant Relationship

Throughout his long and painstaking research, there were regular weekly telephone calls from Judy but Stan did not reveal his inner turmoil. He was still far from ready for serious discussion. He was determined to complete his studies but the more he read, the more he recognised his ignorance. So once again he started at the book of Genesis. When he reached the story of Abram, his attention was drawn to the word 'covenant'. He checked his reference books and quickly discovered its primary connection with relationship. Furthermore, he noticed that circumcision was the physical mark or token, of that inward spiritual relationship. The logic dawned on him that he, Stan Telchin, was a descendant of Abram and, therefore, a member of God's covenant people.

A Vital Contradiction?

Stan's clear conviction about the Jewish covenantal relationship with God became a stumbling block to his acceptance of Jesus as Messiah when his Bible-reading sessions led him to Acts 10. It seemed that Peter was totally undermining the terms of the special covenant when he informed Cornelius (a Gentile!) that God does not show favouritism but 'accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right' (Acts 10:35). If Christ saves all who call on him, whatever was the purpose of the exclusive Abrahamic covenant?

Some historical considerations

Stan's confusion prompted him to turn his attention to early church history. He was already aware that his people were no strangers to persecution. His reading about the destruction of the Temple in AD70 impressed upon him the fact that Judaism itself had reached crisis point. The priestly/Temple/sacrificial system had to be replaced by synagogue/rabbinic control. These fundamental changes led to division among Orthodox Jews. Roman oppression continued and rifts appeared between Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

As his studies moved on to more recent history, Stan was reminded again that there was a great divide between 'Gentile' Christians and 'Jewish' Christians. The main fact that staggered him was that the Jews were blamed for the death of Christ and that Nazi Germany, a so-called 'Christian' country, had planned genocide of the Jews.

Perseverance

Despite much negative information, Stan refused to abandon his research. His feeling was that if Judy had been deceived, then he must 'prove' it conclusively.

Some weeks later, Stan heard about a National Convocation of Messianic Jews to be held in Pennsylvania. He decided to go. After an uneventful drive in his BMW he entered Grantham College and was greeted by a banner 'Welcome to Messiah '75'. Some 700 delegates had arrived.

During the conference he had a conversation with a disabled Jewish woman who asked him how long he had been a 'believer'. His immediate terse reply was that he was certainly not a believer but

only an enquirer. Her response was to ask him to sit down next to her wheelchair. She asked him to remove her Bible from her briefcase and asked him to read Exodus 20:1-2. He read out, 'I am the LORD thy God, which have brought Thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me'. The woman then asked him, 'Tell me Stan, who is your god?' This simple question somehow stunned him into silence and he wondered why he was unable to verbalise what he had always believed about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Sleep eluded him. The following day he was still deeply troubled. That night, around midnight, he called out to Arthur (a man who shared his dormitory) and asked him to pray for him – something he had never done before in his life. Arthur willingly obliged and asked God to give him peace of mind.

At breakfast Stan was asked to say Grace. He willingly stood up and said, 'Praise be Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe. I thank you for the fellowship and friendship at this table. I thank you for what we have learned at this meeting and I ask you now to bless this food and I do so in the name of Jesus the Messiah.'

Stan was immediately overwhelmed by his own words! The turmoil was over, Jesus, the Messiah reigned in his heart. Stan never cries, but that day he did.

A united family

Later, when he telephoned Ethel she was not surprised and she informed him that she had been waiting for his call. She also had

received the Messiah. As for Judy, when she met up with her parents again, all she could say was that God himself had revealed his grace to all three of them and he was about to lead them in green pastures.

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A new way of life

Stan became pastor of the Living Word Fellowship from 1980 until 1994. Based near Washington DC the church attracted a multi-racial congregation, many of whom had backgrounds in a range of denominations.

After Stan retired from the ministry, he joined 'Jews for Jesus' as part of their 5-year project to visit 65 cities outside of Israel that had large Jewish populations. His great desire was to present the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles.

His ministry to the Jews was firmly based on the words of Victor Buksbazen, who wrote: 'Judaism and Christianity are as inseparable as seed and flower, or tree and fruit. Nowhere can the organic relationship between the two be observed more clearly than in the Passover of the Jews and the Last Supper as ordained by our Lord, when he and his twelve disciples sat around the Passover table.'

References:

Most of the material for this article was taken from Stan Telchin's book *Betrayed!* (re)published by Chosen Books in 2007. The Quotation above was taken from *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel* published by The Friends of Israel Missionary and Relief Society Inc. ■

Mike Burkett is from York, UK, and is a retired teacher and lecturer in Special Education.

London Seminary

*Dr Robert Strivens has sent the following report
(dated Sept 2016)*

London Theological Seminary has a new name: as from Monday 5 September, we are known as London Seminary. We have a new visual identity and an updated prospectus and website: www.londonseminary.org.

Why have we made these changes? It is certainly not because we have decided to downgrade theology! On the contrary, the objectives, theological position, methods and approach to pastoral training remain entirely unchanged. Why then have we dropped an important word like 'theological' from our name?

The name change is part of our strategy to reach evangelical churches and people

who do not know us or are unfamiliar with our work. One of our challenges is that we are not known among a wide enough spectrum of churches. Although our full name was London Theological Seminary, we were invariably known as LTS. This was fine for those who know about us, but initials are meaningless to those who do not know us. We were also finding that our initials were more and more being confused with those of LST – even to the point where we had someone in our library recently who thought she was in the LST library!

By shortening the name, then, we hope to move away from the use of initials and maintain a name which is memorable and represents what we do – train men for pastoral ministry, at a site in London. Who are these people that we are hoping to reach? We have in recent years had a few men each year from a pentecostal or charismatic background. We also have one or two men coming from a broader evangelical background, without a great deal of specifically reformed theological grounding. We are careful to make clear to these men that we teach from a reformed theological position and that our aim is to understand more clearly what the Scriptures teach. They are happy with this



and we find that they greatly appreciate the teaching that they receive at the Seminary – often, they say that it has opened their eyes to a whole new way of reading the Bible. We want to encourage this and we hope that our new name will play some role in helping us to do so.

Please continue to pray for the work at London Seminary. We greatly appreciate the support and prayers of all the Lord's people. ■

*Robert Strivens,
Principal, London Seminary*

Conference John Owen Centre

On 12 and 13 September the annual conference of the John Owen Centre was held at London Seminary (see also news above). The theme was 'Putting Theology Back into Practice: Through the Lens of Melchizedek'. The conference was a most stimulating event, highlighting the biblical and theological significance of the relatively unknown figure of Melchizedek. Dr Flavien Pardigon (newly appointed Tutor in Biblical Studies; see RT271) expounded Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7, followed by an address on what we learn about how to read and interpret Scripture, using these texts as an example. Dr Garry Williams used these texts to explain the doctrine of original sin.

The next day Benedict Bird presented a paper showing how the doctrine of the Priesthood of Christ occupied such a central place in the ministry and writings of John Owen. Andrew Kerr explained the kingly office of Christ. Jeremy Walker drew the conference to a fitting close by exhorting all ministers of the gospel to be encouraged by considering Christ as the King of Righteousness.

These addresses helped us all to experience afresh the rich contents of the Word of God and will in due course become available on the website: www.johnowencentre.org, and are strongly recommended. ■



J Alec Motyer

(1924-2016)

The news has reached us that the well-known Old Testament pastor-scholar J Alec Motyer passed away in August at the age of 91. Alec Motyer was born in Dublin, Ireland. He graduated with a BD (1949) and MA (1951) from Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, Ireland, and did further studies at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He has served the Church of England in various pastoral and teaching positions. He held firm reformed evangelical convictions which is why his ministry has been appreciated by many people from a much wider church background. He has also become known for his writings including his masterly commentary on Isaiah, and several other commentaries and/or expository books on Amos, James, Philippians, Zephaniah and Haggai, Psalms, Exodus.

It is worth reading the very informative blog by Justin Taylor on the website of *The Gospel Coalition*. This includes a testimony by Tim Keller which includes the following quote:

‘I will always remember his answer to a question about the relationship of Old Testament Israel to the church ... After saying something about the discontinuities, he insisted that we were all one people of God. Then he asked us to imagine how the Israelites under Moses would have given their “testimony” to someone who asked for it. They would have said something like this:

“We were in a foreign land, in bondage,

under the sentence of death. But our mediator – the one who stands between us and God – came to us with the promise of deliverance. We trusted in the promises of God, took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and he led us out. Now we are on the way to the Promised Land. We are not there yet, of course, but we have the law to guide us, and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst. So he will stay with us until we get to our true country, our everlasting home.”

Then Dr. Motyer concluded: ‘Now think about it. A Christian today could say the same thing, almost word for word.’

‘My young self was thunderstruck. I had held the vague, unexamined impression that in the Old Testament people were saved through obeying a host of detailed laws but that today we were freely forgiven and accepted by faith. This little thought experiment showed me, at a stroke, not only that the Israelites had been saved by grace and that God’s salvation had been by costly atonement and grace all along, but also that the pursuit of holiness, pilgrimage, obedience, and deep community should characterise Christians as well.’

The blog also contains the text of an interview with Motyer about his formative years and his approach to the Word of God by Robert Mills for The Presbyterian Layman, and conducted on 9 May 2000. This includes the following questions and Motyer’s answers:

‘What are Christians missing by not reading the Old Testament?’

‘The death of the Lord Jesus as understood in Old Testament categories. We don’t understand the cross unless we understand the Old Testament category of sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Likewise, the New Testament doesn’t have as strong a stated doctrine of creation. It leans on the Old Testament to reveal the nature of man and the nature of God as creator.

‘We have a two-way traffic. I’m very drawn to the model I first read in John Bright of the two-act play. If you have a two-act play and only have act one you ask, “Where is it going?” If you only have act two, you ask, “Where has it come from?” That is a very penetrating view of the Scriptures.’

‘How are the Psalms useful to our Christian faith and life?’

‘In many ways. First, in a formal way they

are our window into the Old Testament, therefore they are a corrective. I think many Christians assume that the Pharisees are typical Old Testament men. They forget that Jesus said the Pharisees were a plant his heavenly Father never planted. The real window for us, what was it like to live as a believer in Old Testament times, is the Psalms.

‘Second, they are a great challenge. Here are people who knew far less about God than we do and yet loved him a great deal more. Third, they are instructive. They are lovely poems in their own right. If you sat down and analysed them as poetry you would come out with a rich theology.’

(See: <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2016/08/26/j-alec-motyer-1924-2016/> accessed 22 Sept 2016.) (With thanks to Dr Ian Shaw who alerted us to this news.) ■

Westminster Conference

The annual Westminster Conference will again be held at Regent Hall in London on 6 and 7 December. The theme this year is ‘Contending for the Truth’.

The programme includes the following addresses:

Ken Brownell – *Luther and the 95 theses*

Peter Beale – *From Wittenberg to Worms: Luther after the 95 theses*

James Mildred – *The Puritan Doctrine of Repentance*

Ian Hamilton – *The Impassibility of God and the Princeton Men*

Geoff Thomas – *Evangelicalism in England and Wales since 1945*

Iain H Murray – *J C Ryle’s Abiding Relevance*

For further information please contact the Secretary at +44-(0)1924 497184, or email jfharris@ntlworld.com. See also the website westminsterconference.co.uk. ■

Madagascar

We have mentioned the work of the missionary hospital in Mandritsara before on the pages of *RT*. A recent newsletter includes this report:

Ken Brownell, pastor of East London Tabernacle, was in Mandritsara with *Pastor Training International* during the summer. Here is what he wrote:

'Jason and Lampango are friends and subsistence farmers. They regularly walk several hours to meet each other halfway in order to encourage one another in gospel ministry. Jason is also profoundly impaired in his hearing. They are just two of the 32 men I had the privilege of teaching in Mandritsara in July. Twice a year, when they can get away from their farms, they meet in Mandritsara. For six years they have been doing a comprehensive theological and ministry course. The course leader is Mat Linley, a UK missionary who is also team leader of the mission staff at the Good News Hospital. Established 25 years ago, this is a remarkable work that has had a great impact both on the region's health and its knowledge of the gospel. The small Baptist church has since then grown from 15 people to over 500 – and 80 churches have been planted.

'I spent the week training the pastors of some of those churches how to preach from Deuteronomy, which proved very



exciting. It was not my original plan but, for various reasons, we had to switch at the last moment. The men were very engaged and many of the passages we covered have been very pastorally relevant. As well as developing expository skills we also discussed a wide range of relevant local issues. These included tithing, the occult, taboos, grace and legalism, leadership, church discipline, the prosperity gospel and much more.

'Please pray for these men as they continue their ministries and put into practice what they learned. It has been exciting to see how they have grown in their ability to preach the word faithfully. Pray too for the continuing work of the hospital, which is facing some big personnel changes this year.'

Please see the website:
www.mandritsara.org.uk. ■



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Could UK donors please let Phil Roberts know if they intend to use gift aid.



Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

AFTER DARKNESS, LIGHT:

CAREY MINISTERS CONFERENCE 2017

3-5 JANUARY 2017
THE HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE
Swanwick, UK



Speakers:

- ▶ Leonardo di Chirico
- ▶ John Benton
- ▶ Ian Fry
- ▶ Linda Allcock
- ▶ Paul Gibson
- ▶ Rupert Bentley-Taylor

FURTHER INFORMATION: WWW.CAREYCONFERENCE.ORG

Next Issue

- ▶ What is faith? Learning from Hebrews 10:19 – 12:13 (Part 2)
- ▶ Against the Tide in the Power of Weakness
- ▶ Forgiveness