

Editorial

William Carey was a pioneer missionary in India from 1793 to 1834. After more than 18 years in India, much of which had been spent in language study and translation work, a fire destroyed a huge amount of his material. Thompson, one of Carey's colleagues, wrote:

The scene was indeed affecting – the long printing office reduced to a mere shell, the yard covered with burnt paper. Carey walked with me over the smoking ruins. The tears stood in his eyes. 'In one night,' he said, 'the labours of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the divine ways! I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection I could, and contemplated the Mission with, perhaps, too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to Him'A few hours ago all was full of promise – now all is rubbish and smoke.

Carey and his friends found that the painstaking labour of many years could, in a moment, be utterly destroyed so that they must begin the work again. Carey spoke of bringing the work to the 'utmost perfection' he could, yet he could do nothing but look on as it burned to ashes. How frustrating! We sympathise with him for we have all, to some degree, experienced this sense of helplessness and frustration. All our best-laid plans brought to naught, our greatest efforts exerted in vain, and our hopes and dreams left unfulfilled.

Something that, humanly speaking, had a much greater possibility of failure than even Carey's monumental projects, and yet was indeed brought to the utmost perfection, was the atonement that Jesus Christ made for sinners on the cross – the perfect atonement.

It is perfect in its conception. God thought of everything and has not had to alter His plan in any way. He anticipated the need for atonement and He planned a way for atonement to be accomplished in such a way that His holiness and justice would be satisfied while the sinner could be forgiven.

It is perfect in its execution. The Old Testament is not a catalogue of the foiled attempts of God to redeem His people: at the perfect time God the Son accomplished the atoning work planned by the Father. Roger Ellsworth writes:

We have never begun, even in our moments of keenest insight, to understand the depths of Calvary. There the Lord Jesus Christ bore in His own person an eternity of the wrath of God. He, being infinite, suffered in a finite amount of time what we, who are finite, would suffer in an infinite amount of time. Eternity was compressed upon Him.... Because He was a man, He could take the place of men. Because He was the God-man, He could take the place of many men. (*Journey to the Cross: God's amazing plan of salvation*, Evangelical Press, 1997, pp.57, 75)

It is perfect in its application. Christ's atonement is full and complete, there is nothing for us to contribute. God the Spirit works faith in the heart of those given to the Son by the Father, and in this simple yet mysterious way the work of Christ is made effective in the life of the sinner.

Contrast this with our imperfection and impotence. Compare Carey's labour and loss with God's redemptive plan. Carey failed to perfect his work despite every effort, while God's work is perfection.

At this Easter season, let us rejoice in God and His salvation. Let us exalt His Name in all the world! Let us tell of His love and sing of His grace which planned, executed and applies such perfect atonement to sinners like us.

News

NZ Reformed Baptist Fellowship

In December 2001 an invitation was sent to all Reformed Baptist church elders and the coordinators of Reformed Baptist fellowships to a meeting to discuss the proposition, "That the Reformed Baptist Churches in New Zealand unite to form a Fellowship or Association of Reformed Baptist Churches". On Monday 4th March 2002, from 10:00am to 2:30pm, a meeting was held at the Emmanuel Church's premises, 730 Mt Eden Road, Auckland. Most groups were represented (seven out of the ten invited), though some were unable to make it due to various commitments or for other reasons. In two of these cases e-mails were received in their absence expressing their views.

The meeting, facilitated by Dafydd Hughes (of Grace Baptist church, Christchurch), opened with some hymns and prayer.

Discussions began by focusing on the reality of the unity we already have in Christ – and our responsibility to demonstrate that unity in practical concern as required by Scripture and the 1689 Confession (26:14-15). It was unanimously acknowledged that our churches have not done this satisfactorily in the past, and that this situation needed to change.

In light of this the question was asked "Is there a need for a Fellowship/Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in NZ?"

Again the unanimous consensus of those present was that there first needed to be greater expressions of mutual concern and cooperation to build relationships upon which a more formalised Fellowship could stand. To formalise immediately could actually be more harmful than helpful and lead to unnecessary divisions.

With this in mind the following were identified as areas that could immediately be

worked on to improve the links between the churches:

- a) Regular inter-church visitation – with a formal greeting to the visited church.
 - b) Elders/coordinators to meet regularly (initially once each year) with costs shared between the churches.
 - c) Annual Pastors' retreat – a meeting of Pastors & their wives (possibly with a speaker) for pastoral training, time out & mutual encouragement.
 - d) Missions coordination – e.g. sharing of speakers and a home-mission vision.
 - e) *Grace & Truth Magazine* – greater subscription support and contribution of material.
 - f) Website (<http://www.rbc.org.nz>) – commitment to continue this endeavour.
 - g) Leadership – lack of potential elders was an extreme concern and a matter for prayer. Pooling of resources to support elder/deacon training a possibility.
 - h) Sharing news & prayer needs – most effectively done by sending church bulletins/newsletters.
 - i) Youth Camp – retention of youth is a key concern. A need to build a Reformed Baptist identity was identified. Possible support for other youth activities between churches as well.
- There is much that our churches can do together more effectively and the meeting was most encouraging in this regard. Another meeting to follow up is scheduled for Saturday 27th July 2002. Items tabled for discussion include further ideas for practical cooperation:
- j) Consultation
 - k) Family Camp (Trinity RBC has offered an open invitation to its camp in November)
 - l) Conferences
- Also scheduled is the crucial question of "What should be our basis for cooperation?"

The man from Africa

Dawie and Sarah Malan, and their two children Riaan and Charne are from Zimbabwe, and are currently studying at Grace Theological College in Maurewa.

Dawie is a farmer, as was his father and grandfather before him. When Dawie was 17 years old he returned home from a day working on another farm to find his father's body lying outside the house. His hands had been tied behind his back and he had been beaten to death. Not far away his mother was lying shot in the head but still alive. Dawie carried them both inside, and began caring for his mother and for the family farm, all the time fearing for his own safety. His mother survived and is now living in South Africa close to Dawie's two sisters.

This crisis had a profound effect on this young man, but by God's grace his life was spared and his faith grew. In time the Lord gave him a ministry as an elder in his local church and a ministry of encouragement to other church leaders and church planters throughout Zimbabwe. These ministry opportunities strengthened his desire to devote himself to full-time Gospel ministry, and to formal study. After considering a number of places to study overseas the Malans settled on GTC.

Dawie is now in his second year of a three year course and he and the family worship at the Manukau Central Bible Fellowship Church, a Reformed Baptist church pastored

by Peter Reynolds, one of Dawie's instructors at GTC.

Before leaving Zimbabwe all their funds were frozen in their bank account by the Zimbabwean government so they now find themselves in New Zealand with no income. Furthermore their farm back home has been taken over by the 'war veterans' with no compensation from the government. And if that wasn't enough they have now been stripped of their Zimbabwean citizenship and cannot return to their homeland to settle.

They are in New Zealand on temporary visas which don't permit them to work here for wages. Steps are being taken with immigration authorities to rectify their visa status.

In spite of all that has happened the Malans remain committed to their training and future church planting/pastoral ministry among Reformed Baptists wherever the Lord may lead them.

What can we do to support these folk and help provide for their needs? Three things:

1. Pray for them that the Lord will continue to strengthen them in Jesus Christ, and that they will be allowed to remain in NZ for studies and future ministry.
2. Give to their support. Gifts can be sent to: Grace Theological College, Malan Student Support Fund, P.O. Box 75-534, Manurewa, Auckland.
3. Invite Dawie to preach for you.

If you wish to contact Dawie personally, his address is: 10 Portrush Lane, Takanini, South Auckland. E-mail: dasaricha@hotmail.com

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Kids'
Corner

Who will take the blame?

Dear reader,

I am sorry to say that when I was a boy it was not uncommon for me to do things that were wrong. What made it even worse was that I would often try to shift the blame to one of my brothers or to someone else.

It isn't just children who do this. The same is true of adults, and even of businesses and governments. None of us like to admit that we make mistakes and do things wrong, so we blame someone else instead.

This has been a part of human life since the very first man and woman walked on this earth. You will remember that after Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit he blamed Eve for giving it to him. When she was questioned by God, Eve blamed the serpent for tempting her. Adam's descendants have continued to do the same thing ever since.

Ezekiel lived almost 600 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was taken as a prisoner to Babylon along with many other Israelites when Jerusalem was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar. It was not a happy time for the Israelites, and many of them blamed their troubles on their parents.

Ezekiel knew that sin is the fault of each person, and he tried to teach the Israelites that each one of them needed to be right with God. They couldn't simply blame their parents for their problems.

Have you ever eaten something that is sour? If you take a bite out of a lemon it isn't very nice, is it? It is the person who bites the lemon who tastes the sourness and pulls a face! But in chapter 18 of his prophecy, Ezekiel tells us that the Israelites said they were tasting the sourness even though they hadn't eaten the fruit (v.2). They were saying that God was treating them unfairly because they hadn't done anything wrong, it was all their parents' fault (v.25).

In answer, God told a story about three people: a grandfather, a father and a son. He says that the grandfather lived a holy life and kept the law of God, and God was pleased with him. The father was very different, and lived a wicked life so that God punished him with death. But this man's son lived a life like the grandfather,

pleasing to God. Ezekiel tells us that the son was not punished for the father's sins. He says it is the soul who sins that dies (v.20). At the same time, the father was not saved because of the grandfather's goodness. Each person was treated as they deserved.

It doesn't matter how small we may think a sin is, it is still wrong and displeases God. But God says that He wants sinners to turn from their sins so that they will not be punished. We call this 'repentance'. Ezekiel says that the wicked person who turns from his sin will not be punished (v.21). But this does not mean that a person can be saved from punishment simply by living a good life. Ezekiel goes on to say that a new heart and a new spirit are needed (v.31).

The Israelites thought that God was unfair. They thought that if you did more good things than bad things then everything should be okay in the end. The trouble is, without a new heart and a new spirit to guide our actions even our 'good' works are spoiled and displeasing to God, and we therefore deserve to be punished.

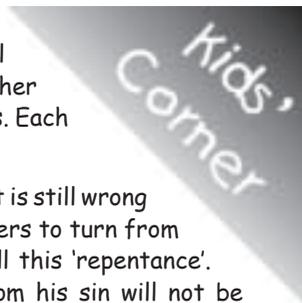
Each and every one of us deserves God's anger because we sin. We must not try to blame someone else, instead we must ask God for a new heart and a new spirit so that we can turn from our sins and live for Him (v.31).

God has made this possible through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the world to take the sins from his people and to be punished by God in their place. It is only by trusting in Jesus that you can have the new heart and new spirit that loves God and seeks to do what is pleasing to God. Without trusting Jesus, it is impossible to please God.

I hope that you will learn to take the blame for the things that you do wrong, and instead of complaining that God is unfair, ask him to forgive you and to give you a heart that loves Him and a spirit that will be pleasing to Him.

With best wishes,

Dafydd



For you to do!

Have you done something wrong recently and then tried to blame someone else?

You should tell that person you're sorry for trying to get them into trouble when it was your fault.

Who else should you say sorry to? Did you lie to your parents so they wouldn't punish you? And what about God? Do you think He is happy with what you have done?

Islam – the world's largest cult?

KENT PHILPOTT

Islam is rarely critiqued by journalists because it can be dangerous to do so. This has been less true since 11 September 2001 because people are interested in Islam and are searching for answers.

However, it is still risky to write anything that may impugn Islam and especially the founder, Mohammed. This is one reason why I call Islam a cult. Muslims often treat opponents with something less than kindness as they seek to defend the honour of 'Allah'.

What is a 'cult'?

My working definition of a cult is non-theological. Traditionally, Christians apply the term to Bible-based groups that have departed significantly from the mainstream and historical creeds.

Such cults frequently deny the full deity and humanity of Jesus; his atoning work on the cross; his bodily resurrection; and his return at the end of the age to judge the living and the dead.

However, I will employ a secular definition of a cult as 'any group that uses psychological or sociological techniques to recruit, motivate, and retain adherents'.

Cults are not necessarily religious; they may be political, commercial, psychological, or sociological in nature. They may be large or small, named or unnamed, known or unknown.

Cults may have a leader or be without a leader. The common feature is the use of control mechanisms that violate the individuality of participants.

Is Islam cultic?

Many would deny that Islam has the characteristics of a cult. But why is Islam not a cult when in many Muslim-dominated countries it is a capital offence to hand Muslims a Bible or explain Christianity (or any other religion) to them?

Saudi Arabia, the guardian of Islam's most holy shrines at Mecca and Medina, is a highly restricted society where Christians are not allowed any public expression of their faith.

Why is Islam not a cult when it is virtually impossible for a Muslim to leave the

religion, even if he merely wishes to become an atheist or agnostic?

Why is Islam not a cult when Muslim warriors force their religion on people? The history of Islam is full of that kind of proselytisation.

Yes, I know the Roman Catholic Church has in the past forced 'pagans' to adopt Catholicism. However that body has acknowledged that it was wrong-headed and anti-Christian to do so.

As a Baptist, I can say that in 500 years of our history, if we have been true to our principles, we have not engaged in such tactics and neither have any of the traditional Evangelical, Protestant denominations.

Satanic Verses

A vivid illustration of the cultic nature of Islam is the case of the novelist Salman Rushdie. Rushdie had a death contract issued against him for writing his book *The Satanic Verses*. Yet novelists, journalists, commentators, filmmakers, and television producers routinely blaspheme the God of Christianity without reprisal.

Of course, the *fatwah* against Salman Rushdie is blamed on 'fundamentalists' and 'extremists', while most Muslims who live in Western countries are peace-loving citizens. But the loyalty inculcated by Islam runs deeper than allegiance to any nation. Muslims will change 'political' affiliations if needed, but their commitment to the defence of Islam easily becomes fanatical.

A contrast

How insecure and weak must Islam be when Muslims threaten those who oppose it with violence rather than use reasoned defence. Such paranoid behaviour renders Islam resistant to self-evaluation and exposes its internal deficiencies.

Biblical Christianity thrives in a free, pluralistic, and democratic society. It neither needs nor benefits from the support of a nation state. By contrast, Islamic control in many countries is totalitarian, dictatorial, and oppressive.

In countries ruled by *Sharia* (Islamic law), minor infractions may be punished by the loss of a hand, a foot, or life itself. Muslim women have been stoned to death for inadvertently exposing an ankle or forearm in public. The much touted 'mercy' of Islam is hard to detect.

Disillusionment with the religion simmers under the surface in Islamic societies. Muslim immigrants to Western countries, if allowed to do so, either moderate or abandon Islam altogether. Others go through the religious motions, but their hearts are not in it.

The cost of defection

Recently there was a 'rallying to the cause' as many Muslims believed the 'war against terrorism' is between 'Christian America' and Islam. But many Muslims would prefer to be free of such influences if they could.

Of course, Muslim clerics in the West realise this and do not hesitate to isolate their constituents from non-Muslim influence. Isolation is a typical cultic mechanism — defections are treated most seriously.

In lands dominated by Islam, the rule is 'once a Muslim, always a Muslim'. Like the Mafia, Islam is difficult to leave, and any who defect may do so at a great price.

Most cults ostracize defecting people, cutting them off from family, friends, and even employment. Muslims sometimes assassinate people who leave their religion. How very cultic!

World rule

Cults are dangerous — they control and manipulate those under their sway. Islamic leaders may issue a declaration (*fatwah*) or call for a holy war (*jihad*). Muslims are expected to obey these calls despite their individual feelings. As with the *fatwah* against Rushdie, Moslems remained under a theoretical *obligation* to kill him even though restrained from doing so by the law of the land.

If Islam were not so fractured into sects and splinter movements, the non-Muslim world would face a more serious enemy than it does today. Islam sanctions the murder of 'infidels' and, of course, I am one and so is anyone who is not a Muslim.

It is no secret that Islam's goal is world rule. This is not some right-wing conspiracy theory; it is the stated aim of Islam. On the other hand, while Christians seek to share the Good News of Christ world-wide, they are not intent on forcing people to accept Christianity, much less eliminating those who reject the message.

Spiritual process

Conversion to Christ is a spiritual process, not the recitation of a formula like: 'There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet'. Biblical Christianity is about grace, which is God's gift of faith and forgiveness.

Christianity is grounded both in the sacrifice Jesus offered for sin on the cross, and upon his resurrection which declares those for whom he died 'justified'. No one becomes a Christian on the basis of their 'works' or actions. Rather, conversion is something God brings about. This is why the New Testament uses the term 'new birth'

to describe it (see John 3:1-15). Humans cannot control their physical birth, and the new (spiritual) birth is the same. It lies in God's power to bring about, not man's. No public or private declaration will ever make a Christian out of anyone.

Revised religion

Islam is classed with those religious groups that have 'revised' Christianity. Some of these are: The Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church (Moonies).

In all these groups, including Islam, Jesus is acknowledged and honoured as a prophet. He may even be worshipped to some degree. Yet many of Jesus' teachings are declared to be incomplete and outdated. They must therefore be replaced or superseded by the teachings of ... (insert name of group or prophet).

The Christianity Mohammed knew in the sixth and seventh centuries in the Arabian Peninsula was far different from New Testament Christianity — it had radically deteriorated. Observing the deficiencies in Judaism and this degenerate Christianity, Mohammed replaced them with his own concepts. This is understandable. The result, however, is not an improvement; it is simply another failed revisionist effort.

Downgrade

It is patronising, too, for Islam to say it respects Jesus as a prophet while denying or altering what he said about himself and what the New Testament writers said concerning him. I am thinking of such Scriptures as John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-20 among many others.

Of course, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Moonies do the same. Revisionist cults must downgrade Jesus so that the 'new, improved prophet' (or 'truth') can be presented as a replacement.

If Jesus is God in the flesh, Emmanuel, as the Christian Scripture proclaims; and if Jesus is the Messiah prophesied by the great Hebrew prophets; and if Jesus is the only Lord and Saviour who will return to judge the living and the dead; then it is impossible to replace him.

Revelation

The Qur'an declares that the Bible, Old and New Testaments, is a revelation from God. But it then proceeds to reject the clear message of the Bible! If the Bible is accurate about Jesus, there is no need for the Qur'an or Mohammed.

So, was Mohammed using flattery, or attempting to patronise Christians, when he seems to honour Jesus? Or did he simply not understand?

Christians reject the belief that Mohammed is the prophet of God. Christians reject the Qur'an as a revelation from God. At least this is an honest position, innocent of any effort to mislead, flatter, confuse, or patronise.

Misrepresentation

One sign of a cult is the way it keeps its adherents in the dark about other faiths. I doubt whether Muslims today know much about the message of Jesus and his gospel. They know only what they have been told by their religious teachers. How accurate would we expect this information to be?

To make it even worse, there is a general misunderstanding of what Christianity is. One misconception, for example, is that the 'West' is Christian and that America is a Christian nation.

But all that goes by the name of Christian is not Christian. To grasp what is the *true* essence of Jesus' teachings, we must examine the primary source, the Bible.

What about the Crusades?

Muslims often ask: 'What about the Crusades?' The intention of this question is often to deflect attention from the violence and oppression displayed by Muslims worldwide in the name of Allah.

Yes, there were the Crusades, and historians debate the complex tangle of religion and politics that gave rise to them. The power-hungry medieval Roman Catholic Church had a big part in the Crusades, to be sure.

But this same organisation persecuted Jews and Protestants also. This same medieval church persecuted to the death those who believed the truths that I, as a Christian today, hold precious.

Is it therefore accurate for Muslims to blame all that goes by the name Christian for the Crusades? Would it not be fairer and wiser to discriminate amongst Christians? After all, most people do not blame *all* Muslims for the actions of some extremists.

Women in Islam

Another cultic aspect of Islam is the oppression of women in countries under Islamic rule. It is shocking, deviant and evil.

Why is this frightful treatment tolerated? Why is there such an exaggerated fear and

mistrust of women? Islamic spokesmen say the women are merely being protected. The women themselves generally resent their treatment and lowly status, but are seemingly powerless to bring about change.

The plight of young men and women in Islamic countries is sad indeed. Their isolation from one another distorts normal social relationships between the sexes. Wealthy (and usually older) men can have four wives and as many concubines as they can afford, while younger, poorer men, are deprived. This deplorable situation stems directly from the nature and traditions of Islam itself.

Women are denied education in countries ruled by strict Islamic law. Why? Is it to keep women in their place? Why must women cover themselves so that not even an ankle can be seen in public? These are twisted gender mores.

Moderate Muslims claim that these practices are only enforced by extremists. The 'extremists' claim they are only interpreting Islam in the purest manner possible! Who is right?

Fruit of Islam

Islamic political control has prevented social progress and economic development. For example, does anyone own a car made in an Islamic country? How about a television set, a computer, an alarm clock, an aeroplane, or a boat?

Where do wealthy Muslims send their young people to be educated? To Western countries, for the most part. Why are many Islamic countries among the poorest in the world even while their oil reserves are huge?

One answer is the cultic nature of Islam. In these countries, middle-class wealth would mean an ever-increasing importation of Western ways, and this is feared and condemned by Muslim clerics.

Muslims have undoubtedly contributed to the world's storehouse of achievements. But if we look at the Islamic nations today we see they are something less than wonderful. Except for Afghanistani refugees trying to enter Pakistan, I haven't read about people queuing at their borders waiting to get in.

Islam is sometimes described as the 'beautiful religion', but where can this beauty be seen? What Islamic country practises Islam in such a way that someone might be motivated to move there?

It is one thing for Muslim leaders to disown the September 11 terrorists as extremists. It is another to demonstrate peaceful moderation and tolerance.

Please understand I am not saying that Muslim people are not as capable, intelligent and worthy as any other people. It is their religious system that is toxic, cultic and repressive.

Muslims are born into a religious heritage they did not choose and cannot walk away from. They are moulded by their environment into dedicated Muslims; there is essentially no choice available for them – they are stuck.

The major difference

Islam is a religion based on performance, whereas biblical Christianity is grounded on God's grace. The Islamic deity rewards obedience. Muslim heaven, or paradise, must be earned, either by martyrdom or by carefully keeping rules and regulations.

And since Allah is depicted as remote and detached from the individual Muslim, there is no assurance of salvation, nor any confidence that even the faithful Muslim will achieve paradise.

Works-based religion can and does inspire fear and extremism in those who take it seriously. It is not surprising that some go to extremes to curry the favour of the deity and their religious leaders, especially when a favourable eternity is at stake.

The Qur'an assures 'martyrs' that they will attain paradise, and it is this very promise that motivates suicide bombers including, one suspects, those who turned two commercial airliners into missiles on September 11.

Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, emphasises grace, which signifies 'God's giving'. Through Jesus Christ, God imparts forgiveness and salvation as a free gift, apart from any good work. Salvation is by grace, not by works (Ephesians 2:4-10). Even extreme devotion, sacrifice and obedience will never secure God's favour.

Furthermore, Christians have *assurance* of salvation by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, so they are not left in doubt and insecurity (Romans 8:15-17).

Everlasting life with God in heaven is given to the Christian through the work of God the Son. It cannot be lost, since God the Father keeps the believer by his great power (John 10:27-30).

An absurdity

Cults employ mind-bending techniques to induce their followers to be obedient – this has long been understood.

What about the mind-boggling promise of 70 virgins available for the pleasures of every martyred Islamic warrior? Talk about cultic – this is as extreme an example as can be found in even the strangest sects!

Certainly, for poor, young, love-starved men, whose future is clouded at best, the promise of unlimited fleshly pleasure in the hereafter might be an inducement to die for the sake of Allah.

But is this obscene and sexist doctrine true? Moderate Islamic interpreters say no; the sexually oriented promises are unfounded. Yet, this perverse promise is constantly embraced. Many a mind-bent warrior has killed and died to acquire his 70 virgins.

A challenge

Harassment of Muslims is unacceptable, and this article is not an attempt to bring grief to Muslim people. However, I would challenge Muslims to examine their religion, indeed, their hearts and minds, and ask themselves these questions.

‘Why am I a Muslim? Is my commitment to Islam based on a free decision, apart from family influences? What is my attitude towards those of other religions, particularly Jews and Christians? Are my attitudes cultic in any way? Do I honestly think that killing Jews and Christians serves Allah? Do I believe it is a Muslim’s duty to defend Islam by martyrdom or suicide? Should I support religious toleration for people of other faiths in Muslim-dominated countries like Saudi Arabia?’

Many Muslims are seekers after God, and this is good. The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah wrote: ‘You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart’ (Jeremiah 29:13).

Whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, nominal Christian, or nothing at all – the challenge is to seek God because he can be found. Jesus said: ‘Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well’ (Matthew 6:33).

Knowing God

Regardless of our religious background, we are created in the image of God. We have been made by and for him, and will never be satisfied until we know him personally. The Creator God sent his Son, Jesus, to break down the walls of separation between men and reconcile all kinds of people to himself (Ephesians 2:14-18).

The challenge is to make up your own mind about Jesus Christ. Learn about him yourself and do not merely accept the opinions and prejudices of others.

Find a New Testament, read the story of his life, and see if you can find anything amiss with him. Is there any sin, or anything false in the one who came from God?

Find an Old Testament, and read the prophesies of the Messiah (which is Hebrew for ‘Christ’), passages like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Are not these passages about Jesus?

If you seek him, he will be found.

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NEW

Where was God on September 11?

John Blanchard

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On 11 September 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners in the United States. Two were rammed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City and a third into the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Passengers on the fourth plane fought with hijackers, but it crashed in Pennsylvania with the loss of all on board.

In the most devastating terrorist attack in history, the world's tallest building had been reduced to rubble and some 3,000 people blasted or crushed to death. *The Times* called it 'The day that changed the modern world'. Another newspaper claimed, 'History will never be the same again.' In a CNN Time Warner poll taken three months later, 73% of those interviewed said, 'It has changed everything for ever.'

As the media teemed with speculation as to how such a thing could have happened, and what the repercussions might be, many people were asking one inescapable question: *Where was God on September 11?*

In this new evangelistic booklet, designed to be given to those who consider themselves to be atheists, agnostics or unbelievers, best-selling author John Blanchard deals with this and the difficult question of pain and suffering, before delivering a serious 'wake-up call' to the unbeliever.

Commitment to the Church - 1

Membership

DAFYDD HUGHES

There are many professing Christians who never or only occasionally go to church. Some have drifted from one church to another until in the end they stop going anywhere, never being satisfied with the teaching, or unhappy with the 'style of worship', or concerned about the lack of care (or perhaps even too much care) they have experienced. Others have been hurt by overbearing leaders or uncaring members and have become disillusioned with 'the system'. Some just don't see the point in churches.

Some of these people read their Bibles and pray every day, they live moral lives and even share the message of salvation with friends and colleagues. Why go to church? And why become a member of one? Experience has told them that commitment to a group of self-acknowledged sinners can bring more pain than gain. And, after all, the Bible says nothing about church membership, does it?

What about Acts 2:41 and 47? Is this talking about church membership or something else?

Then those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.... And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Admittedly, nowhere in the Bible is the expression 'church membership' used, however there *are* direct statements about gathering together and further allusions to membership of the church. For example, the writer to the Hebrews warns his readers about non-attendance of church meetings:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Furthermore, in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul writes about membership of the body of Christ, and in Ephesians 2 he says we are members of the household of God. Consider these passages a little further:

Ephesians 2 and the Universal Church

Some may object that the passages just cited refer to what is called the 'Universal Church', not to a Local Church such as the one in which I am a Pastor. This would certainly be true of Ephesians 2:19-22:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The whole context requires us to interpret this as a reference to the Universal Church. It would be unreasonable to restrict it to the local congregation. The passage is talking about a spiritual relationship far broader than the Local Church. In fact, *what Paul is defining in Ephesians is the one true church of Jesus Christ which knows no national, social, gender, age or even time boundaries: it is the Church and every true believer, whether alive or dead, is a member of it*, i.e. all those who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:13.

Romans & Corinthians and the Local Church

Paul's words to the Roman and Corinthian churches must be taken as having primary reference to local congregations, not the Universal Church. It is important that we understand the distinction between these two: *the Universal Church is made up of all true believers and only true believers, while the Local Church is made up of some true believers and some who profess to be believers but are not*.

The Local Church reflects the Universal Church, but it does not do so perfectly – the image is distorted by the presence of sin. This is similar to the way men and women are made in the image of God, but it is now an imperfect image marred by sin.

In both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 the context *must* be that of the Local Church rather than the Universal Church *because Paul is writing about meaningful relationships between believers in time and space* – in the material world – not simply the spiritual relationship we enjoy through Christ. Paul's illustration can only have real meaning when considered in the context of a local congregation where the people interact and use their gifts in working together as a unified whole, even though that local congregation may include those who are professing Christians but who are not true believers. Paul cannot be referring to scattered believers in other parts of the

world, nor Christians who have lived at other times in history. He is describing a group of believers working together in a particular place: this is the Local Church.

Added to the Church v. Attending the Church

So we can see that the Universal Church is made up of all true believers from around the world, in every age and for all time, while the Local Church is made up of a mixture of true believers and false professors in a particular geographic location for as long as they are a part of it.

But what does *membership* of a local church mean?

Hebrews 10:25 tells us that we should not forsake assembling together, and Acts 2:41 & 47 says that God added to the church daily those who were being saved. So, is being a member of a church the same as attending the church? Are these two passages talking about different things?

In Acts 2:42, before Luke lists four aspects of church life, he tells us that the new converts 'continued steadfastly in' them. This means that they 'were committed to' them. *This is what membership is: it is a commitment.* It is not something casual or accidental, but a conscious and deliberate act.

I believe the biblical data demands some form of recognised membership roll, and though some people do not believe that each Local Church should have a record of its members, even such churches tend to have an unwritten understanding of who are and who are not 'members': for practical purposes it is absolutely necessary. More often than not the real difference between churches is not whether formal membership is seen as biblical or unbiblical, but where the lines of acceptance are drawn. In the church of which I am a member, we understand that to effectively apply the teaching of the Bible to the Local Church there must be a recognised formal membership, and that such membership brings with it both privileges and responsibilities.

Conclusion

Membership of a Local Church is important for a number of reasons, primarily because the Local Church is a gift from God for the good of His people:

- they are nourished through the preaching/teaching of gifted, spiritually mature men
- they are cared for by those who are mutually committed to growing in Christlikeness
- they are able to develop and use their God-given gifts in a context of accountability

This is the environment in which God expects His children to grow, mature and become productive workers in His Kingdom.

Outside the church Christians

- tend to grow weak and unproductive
- often enter into errors of doctrine
- are unable to participate fully in the privileges and responsibilities of the Christian life

Often people do not join a church because they cannot find one that is just exactly what they want. But God calls us to be committed to His people, like a husband is to be committed to his wife, and children to their parents. It may not always be easy, or what we would always prefer... but it is right!

In forthcoming issues of the magazine I plan to look at Acts 2:42 to explore what I believe is the minimum commitment required of church members. It is commitment, not in part, but the whole: all four of the areas of commitment described by Luke form an indivisible group. They are what I refer to as *the priority commitments of church membership*. It is a two-way commitment between the local church and the member, between the fellowship of believers as a unit and the individual believer. And it is one designed by God to benefit the believer and build the body of Christ our Saviour.

BOOK REVIEW

Baptism: Sign & seal of the covenant of grace

Brian Russell

Grace Publications

Paperback 128 pages ISBN 0-94646-262-3

G&T price: \$14.95

This book, written by a Reformed Baptist pastor, covers all the usual issues, including the meaning of baptism, the appropriate candidates for baptism, a basic refutation of infant baptism, the correct mode of baptism, historical practice and church membership following baptism.

It also touches on other issues such as whether those baptised as believers, who backslide, should be rebaptised, the role for sincere paedobaptists who want to join the church, and what to do with baptised non-church members, etc.

He acknowledges Jewish proselyte baptism as a valid and pre-Christian form of Baptism, however this is highly disputable.

Furthermore, technically, in the Reformed/Covenantal Baptist view, Baptism isn't a seal of the covenant of grace itself (which is sealed by Christ's sacrifice and the Spirit - to which the sacraments point), Rather it seals/ confirms/declares subjectively the faith of the one who partakes worthily. In this sense the title is open to misinterpretation (though possibly aimed at attracting paedobaptists). The author advocates Baptism very soon or immediately after a profession of faith, with which not all may agree.

The book is a good overall introduction to Baptism. However, for those interested in specific issues (such as mode or subjects, etc.) there are other books that deal with them more particularly. Also, the book is fairly substantial for a baptismal manual and other titles cover similar material in a much briefer format (such as *Baptism and Church Membership* by Erroll Hulse).

Chris Good

Encouraging Young Men for Ministry

STEVE MARTIN

Probably each of our churches has at least one young man who has shown some interest in the gospel ministry. How can we encourage them? How can pastors help them determine their call and if they are called, to get from Point A to Point Z? May I suggest three ways in which this may be done.

We encourage young men to the ministry by who we are

Who we are as pastors and men of God determines much of the vision that drives or deters young men for the gospel ministry. Jesus said as much in Luke 6:40: "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Pastors impact people who become, to some degree, like them. A pastor leaves a stamp upon his congregation, even as parents leave an indelible stamp upon their children.

Pastors with joy in the ministry are attractive and an adornment to the gospel. Young men see the quality of our lives and we are either attractive or repellent. Pastors who unthinkingly fall into 'sour pity' ("Prrrray for me, brethren, the ministry is S0000 hard.") should not be surprised that no one comes forward to preach the gospel out of that congregation.

Pastors with confidence in the gospel and the Holy Spirit motivate everyone, especially young men. Pastors who have unthinkingly fallen into 'whining unbelief' ("We should not expect too much because Jesus said that in the last days things would get worse!") should not be surprised that no young men ever think of giving up their small ambitions to preach the everlasting gospel. A 'bunker mentality' attracts no one but paranoid, defeated people - mere survivalists. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was right when he said that for a minister to fail to have confidence in Christ and His gospel was sin.

Pastors who hold forth the greatness of Jesus Christ find young men attracted because Christ preached in the power of the Holy Spirit is so very attractive. He is eminently worthy to be proclaimed by our best efforts, even if no one believes or responds! Do our people sense that Christ is great and almost beyond words in our hearts and preaching?

We encourage young men to the ministry by what we say

People need feedback. Pastors and elders are called by God to oversee the flock and make assessments about people's development. Can we speak up to a young man who

is making progress in his faith? Can we speak a word to a young man who is walking with Christ and has enough of an overflow to give to others? Can we speak to a young man who we notice is witnessing for Christ faithfully?

We encourage our young men when we tell them, "I know something of how you are doing spiritually and note how you give to others. You do this well." Who else to give them positive feedback, if not their shepherds? Men need our encouragement.

We correct our young men when we tell them, "You could do this better." If he reacts with rash pride, we have exposed something that needs work. If he responds with a teachable spirit and hunger and thirst for righteousness, we see something else valuable. Men need our correcting feedback.

We teach our young men when we tell them, "I noticed that you are doing such and such. That is good and I believe I can help you do it better. See this." Apollos was gifted as a preacher but needed Aquila and Priscilla to come alongside and teach him the way more thoroughly. So does a wise pastor today.

We rebuke our young men strategically. Our perfect Master had 12 very fallible men. But He was not always rebuking them. He did rebuke them but it was usually for unbelief and pride. Be careful and thoughtful when you rebuke your men. Even when rebuked by His men, Jesus did not hotly respond and blister them with "Don't you know who I am and who you are?!" Even as parents teach children by example in how they take rebuke and correction, so pastors teach their people. Peter never forgot some of his valuable object lessons (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-5).

We amaze them when we tell them that we are praying for them. (And you had better pray for them if you tell them that.) Young men are often scattered and immature in their thoughts and dissemination of their energies. To know that an older man, their pastor, is praying for them personally is so encouraging. Pray regularly from the pulpit for God to raise up preachers and missionary church planters.

We encourage young men to the ministry by what we have them do

Jesus taught that a disciple is both a follower and a learner. that means two things: one, the disciple is to be following Christ and learning from him. But it also means that human agents, God's appointed undershepherds, are used by God to train disciples. Pastors with a heart to develop their men disciple them.

Jesus took his men with him. Alert pastors today will take young men with them almost everywhere. Never go anywhere by yourself. Take someone. The give and take as you both ride in the car, praying with you, seeing how you respond to what happens when you reach your destination, become imprinted upon our men's hearts and minds. Notice how often the disciples were with Jesus in prickly situations. Tell your

young man to be quiet and pray and act like a fly on the wall while you minister and then debrief like crazy on the way home.

Jesus gave His men basic and sometimes menial things to do. "Go get some food in Sychar while I rest by this well." "Go and get a donkey for me to ride on." Such things do not take great theological sophistication but they do require faithfulness. And that is a prerequisite for a disciple and a preacher of the gospel. If a man cannot do basic, menial things well and with a good attitude, then why enlarge his sphere of mediocrity? Jesus said in Luke 16 that those who are faithful in little things will be faithful also in much and those who are unrighteous in little things will be unrighteous also in much. Don't give a man more to do if he is not doing the basics well and humbly.

Jesus also gave His men low-visibility things to do. He sent them out two by two away from Him and the crowds and had them preach. Today, preaching in nursing homes, speaking to the youth group, speaking to the college and young singles group, speaking to local service clubs like the Rotary or Kiwanis, in the local jail or similar places is not as demanding in some ways as preaching in the local church. Let them speak at your prayer meeting or give their testimony at a youth retreat.

Give your men assignments of things you want them to do while away from you. Give them good books to read. Biographies, church history, revival accounts, books of applied doctrine, books on marriage and family and singleness are good places to start. Have them read the first volume of the biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Have them read biographies of preachers and missionaries like Paton, Judson, Spurgeon, Edwards, Brainerd, "Five Pioneer Missionaries," and other worthies. Have them read applied doctrine by Jerry Bridges, Sinclair Ferguson, Peter Jeffery, J.I. Packer, etc. If men do not show themselves faithful or if they respond negatively to what they read, then you had better find out early.

Identifying and helping young men in our congregations to lift their eyes beyond the mundane, to see the glories of preaching the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ, is a noble task. May our Lord give us personally attractive lives and discerning minds and loving hearts and encouraging lips to attract and then motivate men in our churches to give up their small ambitions.

Rather than dream about how they might put their company or their career on the map, maybe they should be challenged to dream about putting Christ on the map in fulfillment of Revelation 5:9, that people from every tribe and tongue and people group on the face of the earth will stand before His throne in their native dress and tongue and praise our great Savior.

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The Incomparable Substitute

DAFYDD HUGHES

In the first half of the 1970's a scandal shook the United States of America with ripples radiating around the world. It became known as the Watergate Scandal, in which a number of men within the Nixon Administration were convicted of illegal activities against their political opponents; President Nixon himself was implicated but was pardoned by his successor. Charles Colson was the most senior person convicted and imprisoned.

During his term in prison Colson's family went through some traumatic times and, through an unusual provision in US law, it became possible for him to be released to help his family through their difficulties. This possibility arose because the law allowed a prisoner to be released, under certain circumstances, if another person having no criminal record was willing to take their place and serve out the convicted person's term. A friend of Colson was willing to go to prison in his place, but Colson refused this substitution.

The substitution of an innocent person in the place of a convicted criminal under US law directly reflects what is recorded in the 15th chapter of Mark's gospel. In this chapter we have an account of the greatest substitution ever made; that of the perfect man Jesus Christ in the place of sinful people. It is a substitution which is illustrated in the incident with Barabbas climaxing with verse 15.

The innocence of the Substitute

The friend of Colson who offered to take his place and serve out his sentence was innocent of any crime under US law. That qualified him to act as a substitute.

Jesus Christ was also an innocent man. Not only had He committed no crime deserving the death sentence, He had done *nothing* wrong at all. He was perfect. For more than thirty-three years He had lived a completely blameless life: as a young child we are told He "grew and became strong in the spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40); as a teenager, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52). When He began His public ministry at the age of thirty, God Himself testified, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Apostle Peter, who had been with Jesus almost every day since that Divine declaration, wrote about Christ years later saying, "[He] committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

Jesus Christ was innocent. His friends certainly thought so. Moreover, His enemies knew it. For months before His betrayal by the traitor, Judas Iscariot, the Jewish leaders had tried to trick Jesus into falling foul of the law, yet He remained beyond their grasp (cf. Mark 3:6; 7:1ff; 10:2; 11:18,28; 12:12ff). With all their learning and cunning they were still unable to ensnare the Saviour. In the end they resorted to lies and deceit (Mark 14:1); but even then they had difficulty, as we see in the 14th chapter of Mark, with the account of Christ's Jewish trial:

The chief priests sent out messengers to bring in those who were able to testify against Jesus. Yet they were unable to find anyone. No true testimonies could be found, and those who brought false testimony could not agree. According to Jewish law there had to be at least two or three witnesses in full agreement. Deuteronomy 19:15 states: "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established."

At last two false witnesses were found who said they had heard Jesus claim He would destroy the temple and rebuild it. They were clearly referring to Christ's statement recorded by John, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". But their testimonies were false; they each provided a garbled version and neither were in agreement. The testimony was useless. Jesus was questioned concerning this, in hopes that His own words would incriminate Him. Yet, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, "He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth" (53:7). Jesus said nothing, knowing that the trial was simply a formality, the conclusion having already been decided. This trial was not intended to discover the truth.

In exasperation the high priest placed Jesus under oath (as Matthew tells us - 26:63) and asked Him whether He was the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus' affirmative response secures His conviction for blasphemy without any further examination of the facts. To their mind none was necessary. They were all witnesses that this Man claimed to be the Christ, a claim which they assumed to be false. Therefore the sentence was proclaimed: "He is deserving of death" (Matthew 26:66).

Jesus Christ was innocent. True, He was convicted, under Jewish law, of blasphemy. Yet He had only blasphemed if He was not really the Christ. The religious rulers assume that He was not; they did not examine the evidence - why should they? What they were looking for was a conviction; they were not interested in the truth!

But the evidence demonstrates Christ's innocence; even the desperation of His enemies adds weight to such a conclusion. The Jews wanted Christ dead, but under the rule of Rome they could not conduct executions. They had not only to find Jesus guilty under their own law but they also had to secure a conviction worthy of death from the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. So the trial before Pilate was on a completely

different charge: that of treason against the Roman Emperor (cf. Luke 23:2). After all, what Roman governor would pronounce the death sentence for blasphemy against the God of the Jews? But for treason – that was a different story!

By piling up accusations of treason in addition to the crimes against Judaism these men courted Pilate's sympathy. Again Jesus maintained His silence knowing that vindication of truth was not the purpose of this trial.

Pilate discerned that the Jewish leaders themselves had no better motive for killing Jesus than envy. He therefore attempted to acquit Jesus by presenting the Jews with a choice: they must choose between Jesus and Barabbas, who was himself condemned for treason and for murder. But the offer worked against Jesus; the Jews were in a frenzy of hatred against Him and neither logic nor common sense would convince them of the injustice of their cries for Christ to be crucified.

In the end, though finding no fault with Him, Pilate passed the sentence of death upon Jesus, while Barabbas was allowed to go free. The innocent teacher took the place of the murderous insurrectionist. Jesus Christ in actual fact became Barabbas' substitute in this farcical trial – He underwent the punishment that Barabbas deserved while the true criminal walked free.

Barabbas, you see, was guilty of the very thing that Jesus was crucified for – treason. The Jews had presented Jesus as a danger to the Roman Empire – Barabbas had already been convicted of rebellion against the Romans. As innocent as Jesus was of any crime, Barabbas was equally guilty.

We too are guilty before God of breaking His law. In our more sober moments, each one of us acknowledges our imperfection – we know that we are sinners. We may think of all sorts of reasons for excusing ourselves for those imperfections, but we must admit that they exist. We try to make light of them and think that God will not worry too much about them, but we are nevertheless uneasy. Our consciences convict us of our guilt if we allow them to speak. God has decreed that the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). Sin is defined in the Bible as lawlessness. It is rebellion against God; failing to living according to His directions. And it is a treasonable act deserving of death.

The justice of substitution

If Jesus was innocent then how could the sentence of death be allowed by a just God to proceed to actual execution? If Jesus was really completely perfect would not God have overruled so that Jesus would not die? There are two possibilities:

First, was God powerless to intervene? Death, we are told in the Bible, is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23), i.e. it is those who sin who 'earn' death – the truly innocent do not die. So if Jesus was innocent but died then God cannot be just or He is powerless to

ensure justice. If Jesus was innocent then surely a just and sovereign God could order events and provide a way of escape? Absolutely! And, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God is both just and sovereign. The Psalmist states, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways" (Psalm 145:17), yet Peter spoke of Jesus "being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God... [being] put to death" (Acts 2:23).

*Jesus died, not
because the
Jewish leaders or
Pontius Pilate
had disproved
His innocence,
but because the
God of creation
pronounced Him
guilty of the sins
of His people.*

So if God is just and all-powerful then the only alternative explanation for Jesus' death is that He must not really have been innocent. 'But,' you say, 'you've just spent all this time proving that Jesus *was* innocent!' That is true. As far as the trials before the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate go, Jesus really was innocent. However, behind all that there was something of far greater significance happening. As Peter said, God was working out His 'determined purpose'.

Both God's sovereignty and His justice were at work in the death of Jesus Christ. For Jesus died, not because He had committed any sin, but because He took upon Himself the sins of His people. Jesus Christ died because He was a substitute, and as such He stood before God as one guilty of every imaginable crime. Indeed, so intimately did Jesus relate to His sinful people that we are told, "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21); "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). This was the plan, as Isaiah prophesied, "the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). Jesus died, not because the Jewish leaders or Pontius Pilate had disproved His innocence, but because the God of creation pronounced Him guilty of the sins of His people.

Barabbas went free when Jesus was substituted in his place. So it is with Christ's people – since He is their substitute, since He has borne the penalty for their sin, they are free from condemnation. No matter how awful their sins may have been they are removed from them. And in this great transaction God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

The application of substitution

It is something of a mystery that Jesus could die as a substitute for sinners; that He could bear their punishment. Yet it happened, and even now the Holy Spirit is at work around the world bringing sinners to salvation.

Though Christ's death took place almost 2000 years ago it is made effectual only when a person turns in faith to Him. As Paul said, God is "the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Until a person places their complete hope and trust in Jesus they remain under the condemnation of sin, but the moment they trust in Him their sin is effectively removed and they are counted as righteous.

Faith is the key which unlocks the door to God's forgiveness, as it were. "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

As the Apostle Paul wrote:

"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.'" (Romans 10:9-11)

Conclusion

The incident of Jesus taking the place of Barabbas is a picture of Jesus Christ's substitution in the place of sinners. The Son of God died at the hands of rebellious sinners, as a substitute for rebellious sinners, that He might save rebellious sinners.

This isn't a case of equals exchanging places. The *perfect* Son of God experienced the condemnation of sin so that a *corrupt* people could experience the rewards of righteousness. What a substitution!

There is a vital question though: is Christ *your* substitute?

Christ died for all who would acknowledge their sin and put their faith in Him, without exception. He will not turn you away if you come to Him through prayer and entrust yourself to His care. Jesus said:

"The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me... this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life..." (John 6:37-40)

Come to Jesus! Talk to Him and, confessing your sin, ask for God's forgiveness. Come to Him now and experience the joy of sins forgiven and peace with God.

Grace & Truth Auckland Mini-conference

A REPORT BY TONY HOWARD

For a lot of people the weekend of 2nd and 3rd March 2002 will not be quickly forgotten. That weekend was the occasion of the Grace & Truth Mini-conference addressed by Martin Holdt, Pastor of the Constantia Park Baptist Church, Pretoria, South Africa. Pastor Holdt is the African representative for the International Fellowship of Reformed Baptists, a regular contributor to the *Reformation Today* magazine and he came to Auckland from Australia where he had been speaking at the Banner of Truth Conference.

The Saturday conference took the form of three sessions. There was the Lunchtime meeting for Elders and their families, at which Pastor Holdt addressed the subject of "Coping with Criticism". This was particularly beneficial as there is a very real sense in which those called to minister to, and shepherd, the flock of God are in the front line of the battle with the enemy of our souls. Satan's disruptive influence often comes in the form of destructive criticism, not only from outside the church but from within it as well, and this latter is particularly painful and hard to bear.

Martin reminded us that Paul's advice to Timothy was that if you are faithful to the Word and the preaching of the Gospel you will 'cop flack' (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). A tip for handling such flack is to ask yourself, "Is the criticism justified?" If it is, then do something about it and remember "the words of a friend are better than the kisses of the enemy". If the criticism isn't justified then we are walking in the Saviour's steps, and He committed Himself to the one who judges justly.

Approximately 150 people attended the main conference, and it was delightful to see so many young people there eager to listen to the ministry of the Word. To those of us in situations where we are somewhat starved of good biblical preaching ministry the conference was a veritable feast, and a wonderful opportunity to join with a good number of like-minded believers in singing praise to our glorious God.

At the 5:00pm session Martin spoke on "The work of the Holy Spirit in every believer", drawing attention to John 7:37-39. We were reminded that the works of the Spirit are inseparably linked with the works of Christ, and vice versa. As believers the life that we now live we live through the Spirit who lives in each of us (Romans 8:9-17). We were asked to consider how much better it is for us to be living now, with Christ

ascended into heaven, than if He were still here on earth in the flesh. Now He lives in all of us by His Spirit.

In the 7:00pm session Martin Spoke on "The biblical basis for private devotions". In pointing out that 'private devotions' are an area in which so many Christians fail, for a variety of reasons, but often for a perceived lack of time, he led us to consider the busy life of Christ, who nevertheless took time out to go to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:28-39). Some basic tips for private devotions: solitary place; close the door; read the Word of God - not the odd verse and then someone else's thoughts; read the passage three times with a notebook to record what God says through His word; pray - first about what God has said through the reading.

I was one who was privileged to attend both the Sunday services at which Pastor Holdt was preaching. In the morning, at Emmanuel Church, he spoke on prayer using James 5:16b-18 as his text. The congregation was reminded: God created prayer. Prayer works, v.16, Prayer doesn't change God, or His mind, but it changes people. Prayer is for ordinary people, v.17. We should look at Elijah not only on Carmel, but also under the juniper tree. Prayer is for impossible situations. God expects us to pray, and He answers prayer. Prayer and faith are inseparable.

In the evening, at the Tamaki Reformed Baptist Fellowship, from the text Psalm 55:1, Pastor Holdt stressed the urgency for all to come to 'the water of life' and freely drink. As water is to life, so is salvation to the soul, without it we cannot live. The call from the text is for all who are thirsty. Jesus said blessed are they who thirst... (Matthew 5:6). But, as Pastor Holdt said, the tragedy is that most people don't feel they have a thirst, and if they don't thirst now, they will thirst later, when it is too late; consider the rich man in hell, Luke 16:23-24. They who come may buy without money and without price, because the price has already been paid by the Blood of Christ. Who, other than Christ, could possibly afford the price of sins forgiven and eternity with God in heaven. As believers we must continue to daily drink of the streams of living water to nourish our souls.

No report on the conference would be complete without mention of, and thanks to, those who organised it so that we could all share in the blessing of the ministry and the fellowship, and also a word of thanks for the sumptuous meal that was provided between sessions on Saturday. Well done all involved.

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The articles in this magazine reflect the body of biblical doctrine summarised in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Contributors are allowed reasonable freedom in the exposition of those truths; the editors do not necessarily endorse every view expressed.

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Cover Picture

The Kaiapoi river, North Canterbury, NZ.
Once an important waterway for Maori and Pakeha,
including the early missionaries to the Canterbury region,
the oldest wooden church in the South Island stands nearby.