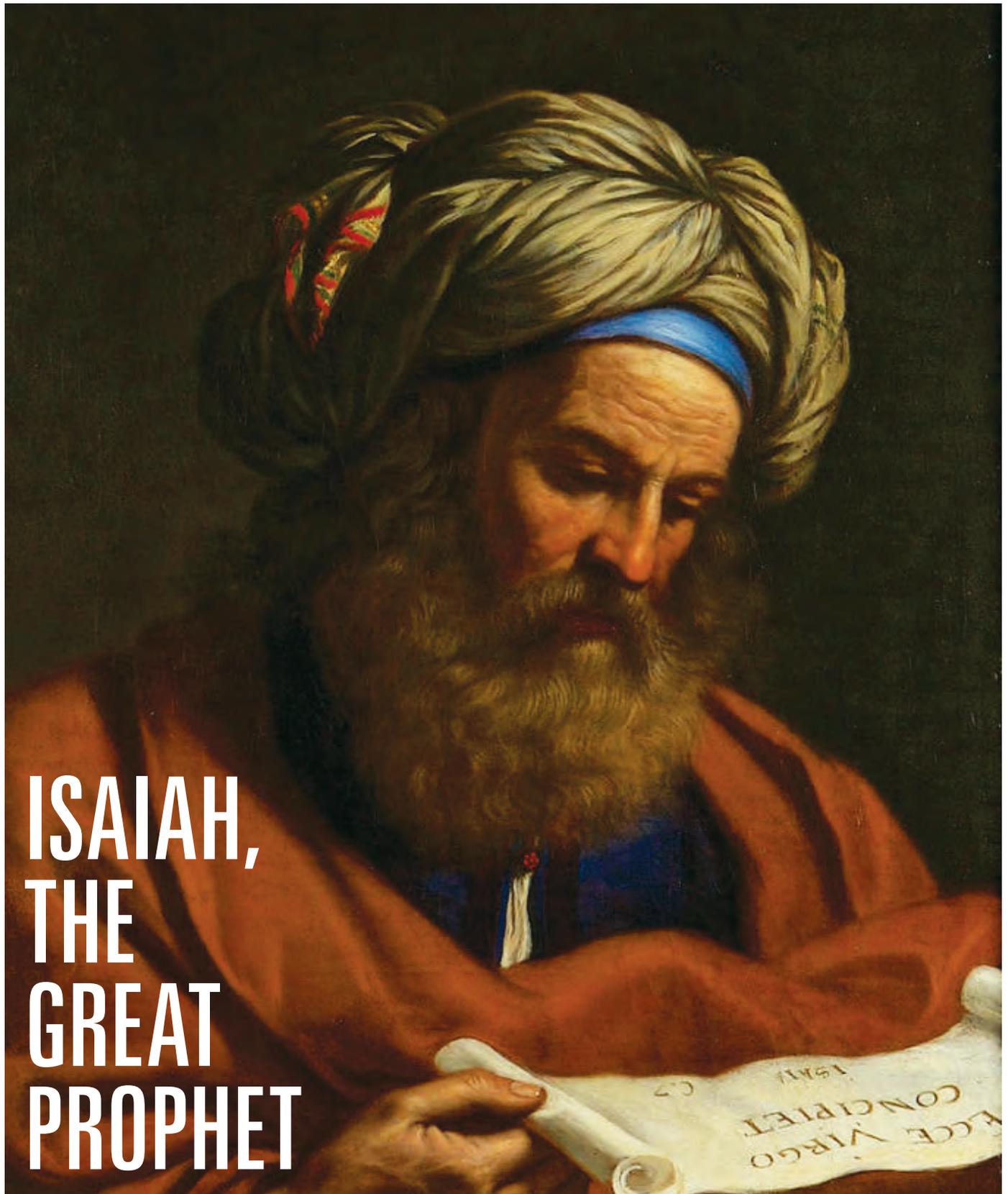


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ISAIAH, THE GREAT PROPHET

The Prophet Isaiah, Benedetto Gennari il Giovane

Contents

The Great Prophet	3
A Master Penman	6
Outward focus We and our phones	9
Letters from New Zealand	11
National Diaconate report Nepal earthquake response – World Renew	13
Letter to the Editor	16
The value of a good old print Bible	17
Focus on home Gleanings Auckland Presbytery report Wellington Presbytery report	19
Report on the Fourth GKSA General Synod 2018	20
“Male and female created He them”	22

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Editorial

Many years ago I used to view the book of Isaiah with foreboding. That feeling also extended to the writings of the other great prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. They are big books with some things which are difficult to understand, and some things that seemed quite dark to one who was a novice.

Over the years as I persevered reading through this book, I came to appreciate its contents.

Isaiah had mastery of his language, using a rich vocabulary and imagery. It is said that some of his words and expressions are used nowhere else in the Old Testament. He knew the tragedies of war, the injustices of high society, and the disappointments of agriculture. He was also a gifted preacher. Through his poetic imagination and rhetorical style he exposed the folly of relying on man's structures rather than the wisdom of trusting in God's kingdom.

There are parts of Isaiah that resonate with this reader, especially those parts that shine gloriously with the gospel.

What I find outstanding are those perspicuous prophecies concerning the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of us can identify very well with Isaiah 53, as it describes the affliction of the Suffering Servant, Who is none other than our LORD Jesus Christ. And then there is that beautiful comfort chapter – “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isa 40:1). Chapter 42 about the Servant of the LORD, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights... “A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. And chapter 12 is a beautiful passage of thanksgiving.

King Hezekiah's story is also found in this book. Finally, one chapter that always makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up is chapter 6, where Isaiah has a vision of the three-times holy LORD and declares himself undone, a man with unclean lips, for his eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts (6:5b).

In summary: I love the book of Isaiah and grow to love it more each time I read it. If you haven't yet acquired a taste for this wonderful book, let me recommend it to you as a must-read, for it is the word of the LORD.

Our contributors introduce us to Isaiah the man, to the majesty and beauty of his prophecy, and to the literary features of his book.

Mr John Goris introduces us to the life and times of Isaiah.

Mr Joshua Flinn gives us a glimpse of a master penman.

Mrs Sally Davey considers the ways our phones are changing us.

In *Letters from New Zealand*, D G Vanderpyl provides a series of interesting snippets.

The National Diaconate provides a final report from World Renew and their activities in Nepal.

Letter to the editor.

Mr Murray Capill considers the value of a Bible in print.

Focus on home with Gleanings and presbytery reports.

Report on the Fourth General Synod of the GKSA.

Protestant Reformed minister Joshua Engelsma muses on the biblical and biological differences between male and female.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

ISAIAH, The Great Prophet

John Goris

Who is this man *Isaiah*?

He was a prophet. He was God's spokesman at a critical time in human history! What should I know about his prophecy that I don't know already? Does that have any relevance for today?

Let us begin by saying that it is just as relevant for today as it was in Isaiah's own day. That is not to deny that in a sense each age has its own people and circumstances. Yet we shall *also* discover how much the situation as we find it in Isaiah's days indeed has its parallels today, in the political scene, as well as in the social and the religious scenes. Mankind is still the same at heart today.

A typical picture

Isaiah 5 gives us a good introduction. It is not only local and contemporary for the prophet's time, but also for ours, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has pointed out quite effectively.

So what is this **Six-fold Woe** message in Isaiah 5:8-23 all about? It pinpoints the six fundamental sins of the human race which underscore human corruption and failure.

You will say, **Wow!** that's exactly what we see today in the 21st century! Indeed! Have a good look at the six points to which the prophet is calling our attention.

1. Materialism (Isa 5:6-10). What do we notice? Material life is all that matters to most people today. The spiritual aspect of human life is virtually dismissed, in fact, almost submerged. Mankind is driven by covetousness (note Romans 7:7-25).

2. Pleasure mania (Isa 5:11-17). People are driven to drink and drugs to get a kick out of life, while they don't

realize that they are actually destroying themselves. Only God can give true fulfillment. Notice also that this type of thing became the downfall of world empires, e.g. Assyria, Babylon (Daniel 5), Rome, etc.

3. The drawing power of sin (Isa 5:18-19): the cart rope. What pulls the cart of humanity all along? It's sin's attraction and power that puts them on a downward slope, e.g. the "broad way" (cf Matt 7:13,14).



There is a blatant denial of God and his law. However, we should never overlook that God's power is stronger than that of evil, God can take us out of the clutches of sin and Satan (John 6:4).

4 Moral perversion (Isa 5:20). The new 'morality' is the cult of self-expression. Jeremiah stresses that the human heart is corrupt (Jer 17:9), and people usually let their **hearts** decide, instead of their **minds**.

Self-expression becomes self-gratifi-

Prophet Isaiah, Antonio Balestra,

De Agostini Picture Library / A. Dagli Orti, Wikimedia Commons

“As The Holy One of Israel,
He is on the throne, He
governs and He judges.
He plans the coming
salvation of His people,
and even the creation of
a new heaven and a new
earth.”

cation (e.g. “be natural, and do what you feel like”). The whole moral climate today shows this. Look at the so-called *liberation* movements: “loving” is giving in to the weirdest (“unnatural”) ideas.

5. Humanism, i.e. belief in humanity (Isa 5:21). Wisdom, these days, is doing what you feel like, not what Scripture commends as “the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 111:10; Prov 1:7). Standards of conduct are usually purely subjective, rather than objective. That boils down to “pride”, i.e. what I think is best! Romans 1:22-25f reminds us of that: “... claiming to be wise, they became fools”.

6. Sin in high places (Isa 5:22-23). The leadership of the nation is failing the ultimate law or standard, and indulging in intoxicating themselves. The more educated, the more refined in evil doing: they cannot live without stimulants of various sorts. Sadly people do not see that we become “slaves of sin”.

And it is only the Son of God who can make us truly free (John 8:36).

This message of Isaiah provides a good description of the times in which he lived it wakes us up to take note of how *relevant* the Word of God is!

The living Word, Jesus, is presented by the apostle John as the great Physician, who knows us individually and knows our human nature (John 2:24,25). Another physician and preacher, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, sums up the predicament of our world as follows: “The trouble is that the world diagnoses the “problem”, and then medicates the *symptoms*, while *not* treating the disease!”

When our final analysis is wrong, our solution will be wrong too!

What do we know about Isaiah?

We know comparatively little about the prophet as a person. We know far more about Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

We are told about his wife, who is referred to as the “prophetess” (8:3); and his two sons whose names were bearing a prophetic message for the nation: one is called **Shear-jashub** which means “a remnant shall return”, and his second son **Maher-shalal-hashbuz**, i.e. “*hasten booty, speed spoil*”.

Isaiah is introduced as the son of Amoz (not to be confused with the prophet Amos). Some have claimed that he was of royal descent, but we have no proof of that, although his language is certainly “majestic”. He lived during the downgrading period of the Kingdom of Judah, during the reigns of

Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Although during the time of Hezekiah, and later also under Josiah, there were spiritual reforms. These two kings were godly men, but the population of Judah and Jerusalem were far from godly. The kingdom’s population soon became ripe for judgment and deportation into exile (586BC). Isaiah lived within one hundred years of that event, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem.

The prophet was given revealed insights about future political developments beyond his time (e.g. Isa. 13-21), as well as an understanding of the fact that **God over-rules** the nations of the world, and throughout history works out His plan of salvation.

The political scene of his time ...

Isaiah was well aware of the times in which he lived. Powerful nations ruled the then-known world. We notice Assyria in the North, and Egypt-Ethiopia in the South. They were the prevailing empires, while the nations in between these empires, such as Syria, Israel and Judah, felt the constant tensions when the political “machine” was moving to show its supremacy. Eventually Assyria gave way to the rising Babylonian Empire. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC. As we know from the book of Daniel, one empire gave way to the rise of another, e.g. Babylonia, Persia (with the Medes), Greece, and Rome.

Yet, He who is Lord of lords and King of kings, remained in charge, and he could exalt one nation above another (Psalm 75). Ultimately, as Daniel explained from the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the “little rock” cut out without any human doing, ultimately demolished and outlasted human empires.

In this political climate Judah sought then the support of Assyria, and then that of Egypt, ultimately to be carried away into exile by Babylon in 586 BC.

However, Judah did not have to fear while God was on their side (note especially Nineveh’s embarrassing withdrawal from Jerusalem: 2 Kings 19:35-37). But the question must also be asked: Was Judah on God’s side, all along? That can apply to the church too, even today:

“Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus,
Constant will remain!”

The religious scene.....

What was the “church” like in the days of Isaiah? The prophecy of Isaiah opens with a blunt statement about God’s people:

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, for the LORD has spoken:

Children have I reared and brought up,

but they have rebelled against Me.

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib,

but Israel does not know, my people do not understand!”

They have forsaken the LORD.
(Isa 1:2-4)

Right through the judgments pronounced on Israel and the surrounding nations, God is weaving a golden thread of **hope**. In fact, this amazing prophecy of Isaiah, could well be called a summary of the Old and New Testaments, the Law and the gospel. (66 chapters in Isaiah, and 66 books of the Bible: 39 in the first part, 27 in the next).

That message of hope is anchored in the Messiah! The prophet introduces this already in the chapters immediately following his call to service (Isa 7, 9, 11), and then progressively in the latter half of the prophecy, when presenting **the Servant of the Lord** (Isa 40, 42, 52-53 etc). God uses Israel as His “tool”, and even other political leaders, e.g. Cyrus, but ultimately He points to the coming Messiah.

The authorship question

Precisely because this book of the prophecy of Isaiah covers such a wide area of history and such different themes, some interpreters believe that there are actually three Isaiah authors, viz Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah. This is usually based on the long time span between the themes of the prophecy, e.g. the edict of the Return of the exiles by King Cyrus. In chapters 13-21 already we read of judgments beyond Isaiah’s own time.

However, prophecy is not a matter of clever human insights, but rather “revealed truth”. God not only *controls* history, but also knows what lies ahead, in fact, He *guides* history towards His pre-determined end. What a comfort, even for today!

As The Holy One of Israel, He is on the throne, He governs and He judges. He plans the coming salvation of His people, and even the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

The underlying theme that is uppermost!

What is it that stands out in this book of the Bible, this prophecy of Isaiah? We can go a step further, and say, what is the ultimate message of the Bible as a whole?

The late Dr George Campbell Morgan has in his typical style drawn our attention to the various Bible themes, and the comments he makes on Isaiah are worth our attention. I shall touch on a point or two.

They are found in the key chapters of the book, viz. Isaiah 6 and 53.

The call of the prophet is typically placed in the context of a Throne!

“God is still on the Throne, and He remembers His own!”

He governs the events of **this world** and leads them towards the goal He has in mind. As to the **individual** who has come to know Him, He is in charge of their lives, so that *“all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

*“Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane;*

but the Church of Jesus.

ever will remain!”

The closing book of the Bible still portrays that dominant picture (in Revelation 5:13):

“To Him Who is seated on the Throne (Isa 6)

... and to the Lamb, (Isa 53)

*be praise and honour and glory
and power,*

for ever and ever. AMEN!”

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*“However, prophecy is not a matter of clever human insights, but rather ‘revealed truth’. God not only *controls* history, but also knows what lies ahead, in fact, He *guides* history towards His pre-determined end. What a comfort, even for today!”*

A Master Penman



Photo by MJS on Unsplash

Joshua Flinn

One of the great delights of the Bible is that the Holy Spirit has chosen to inspire human authors who each have different backgrounds and passions, different skills and literary ability. Luke wrote as a doctor, to give a factual account of Christ's work: 'to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished' and 'to write an orderly account' (Luke 1:1, 3). Paul wrote as a highly trained Pharisee, academically astute, and yet regularly used a scribe because his handwriting was atrocious: 'See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand' (Gal 6:11). And whoever wrote Song of Solomon had an exper-

tise all of his own: 'Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love' (Song 2:5). And yet, out of all the biblical authors, the prophet Isaiah takes the crown for the beauty, majesty and grandeur of his penmanship.

Whether it was his training as the nephew of a king, the interesting life he led (for example, God made him live naked and barefoot for three years to make a point in chapter 20), or something else entirely, Isaiah learnt somewhere how to write powerfully poetic prose. There is a particular irony here of course, given that God said that this prophet was to 'make the heart of this people dull, and their eyes heavy, and blind their eyes' (6:10). Arguably this

calling would have been more appropriately fulfilled with a boring and less literarily appetising manuscript!

Nevertheless, Isaiah displays a mastery of the written word; Although his vocabulary is the most extensive in the Bible, it is his figures of speech that immediately draw the reader's attention. In the first eight verses alone, Israel is spoken of as children who are rebellious to their father (vs 2, 4, 5) and estranged (vs 4), a daughter of Zion (vs 8), less attentive than an ox or donkey to their master (vs 3), and those who carry a heavy burden (vs 4). They have a sick head and faint heart (vs 5) and a diseased body covered in wounds (vs 6). They are a land being devoured (eaten up) by foreigners (vs 7), a booth in a vineyard, a lodge in a cucumber field, a besieged city (vs 8), and comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah (vs 9).

Throughout his 66 chapters, Isaiah continues to make use of powerful symbolism: some of his favourite images are trees ('the trees will clap their hands' 55:12), highways ('and a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness.' 35:8), deserts ('the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus' 35:1), gardens ('you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail' 58:11), and vineyards ('the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel' 5:7), just to name a few.

With the proliferation of these kinds of themes, it can be difficult to determine what draws his work together. Arguably though, the book is perhaps most helpfully seen through the lens of Isaiah 12:2 'Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.' Most of the major themes which weave throughout the book can be tied in some way to this verse and the nature of salvation.

And yet, Isaiah does not deal with salvation as an abstract doctrinal concept; rather, his treatment of this theme is done as a master weaver. Just as from a distance, a tapestry looks like a single seamless picture, yet on closer inspection one can appreciate the quality of each perfect stitch. Likewise, the prophet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, puts on display the wonderful picture of salvation by stitching together a myriad of other powerful threads.

As a result, we are able to enjoy some of most potent and poignant passages

about salvation in all of scripture: For example, salvation is described as the washing away of our sin: 'Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool' (1:18). But it is also described as food for the starving: 'Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' (55:1-2).

In exploring the significance and beauty of this theme Isaiah also weaves in other threads: judgement, hope, total depravity, servanthood, kingship, trust, rebellion, pride, humility, suffering, exploitation, peace, prosperity, compassion, life, knowledge, and wisdom. He also draws out further practical implications such as the call to righteousness, and the spread of the message of salvation to other nations and the ways this theology effects our earthly work.

Although I would love to give you a much broader tasting of the banquet laid out for us in this book, I'm going to restrict myself to just two pervasive thematic threads (which I purposely left till now to mention!). I hope that they will give you something to chew on and will make you want to come back for more.

The Uniqueness of Yahweh

If a tapestry is made up of individual threads, this theme is the fabric (or canvas) on which the threads are woven. Seldom a chapter passes without reference to the special nature of God and his work. Throughout the book, Isaiah's favourite phrase to describe God is "the Holy One of Israel"; a fitting name given his first vision of God in chapter 6:4 where the seraphim called to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' In fact, throughout his work, Isaiah deals poetically with no less than seventeen attributes of God.

Almost like clockwork, with a chime set for every new chapter, the emphasis on God's majesty and supreme authority is contrasted with the senselessness and impotency of other gods. God's people are raised to the highest of mountains, but the followers of idols hide in caves and holes. God alone provides food for the righteous, but the idol worshipper starves. God alone controls the earth and all that is in it; only he is an everlasting rock, trustworthy in all he does (26:4); only he could redeem

"Out of all the books in the Old Testament, Isaiah's prophecy points most clearly and regularly to Christ as the instrument of true salvation for the faithful remnant; a salvation which transcends the temporary distress of external enemies and painful persecutions."

his people, turning them from a blind and deaf nation into 'the Holy People' and the 'the City no Longer Deserted' (62:12). Where the idols of the nations have never had success, God has proved himself time and time again (43:8-11). He alone is to be exalted. 'I am God, and there is no other' (45:22), and only his word will achieve its desired end: 'it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (55:11).

The unescapable conclusion is, of course, that it is pure foolishness to be seduced by what the rest of the world has to offer. True glory and true happiness are only to be found in submission to God.

The Coming of the Messiah

Leaving the most well-known theme of Isaiah till last in an article such as this could be interpreted as the author un-

derrating its value. I prefer to think of it as the step backwards as the final thread is sewn; as the viewer sees the tapestry in all its glory and finally recognizes who the protagonist is in the magnificent picture of salvation.

Out of all the books in the Old Testament, Isaiah's prophecy points most clearly and regularly to Christ as the instrument of true salvation for the faithful remnant; a salvation which transcends the temporary distress of external enemies and painful persecutions. All other sub-themes point in some way towards the significance of this coming Redeemer not only for God's people but for *all* the nations. It is no surprise, then, that New Testament writers refer to the book of Isaiah more than any other biblical author.

Not only did he prophecy about the coming of the herald of the Lord, John the Baptist (40:3); but also, Christ's virgin birth (7:14), the hardness of hearts

towards his message of salvation (6:9-10), his miracles (53:4), and his ministry to the Gentiles (9:1-2). He also powerfully presented the kind of savior Christ would be: 'his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (9:6); a servant who would suffer and be rejected by the very ones he came to serve: 'He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not' (53:3). It would be through his wounds that we would receive peace: 'upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed' (53:5). 'Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities' (53:11).

And yet as glorious as these passages are, the major figure in Isaiah's tapestry would not simply provide earth-bound redemption. God revealed to his people through this prophet what Jesus would achieve for them eternally. In words which give a striking preview to Revelation 21:4, we are told in 25:8 that 'He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.' And in 65:17: 'See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.'

Dear reader, one of the many delightful things about Isaiah is that you and I are able to read this magnificent work on the other side of Christ's coming. We are able to see the significance of these promises through the eyes of faith and with the curtains of heaven pulled back that much further. How much more reason do we have, therefore, to celebrate the blessings of the Lord and spread the message of our redeemer? 'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you' (60:1).

Mr Joshua Flinn is the minister of the Reformed Church of New Plymouth, which is a church plant of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

With Thanks and Praise to God, we celebrate the

50th Wedding Anniversary

of our parents and grandparents

Len and Elisabeth Vandenberg

Married 11th of May 1968

in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Elaine & Herman Borger

Coral & Dean Warwick
Nathan & Annelise Borger

Joshua Vandenberg (deceased)

Jonathan & Lisa Vandenberg

Jake
TJ
Kiara

Matthew & Julie Vandenberg

Marcus
Andrew

Angela & David Holtslag

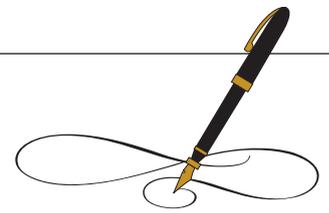
Lucy

Daniel Vandenberg



Outward focus

Sally Davey



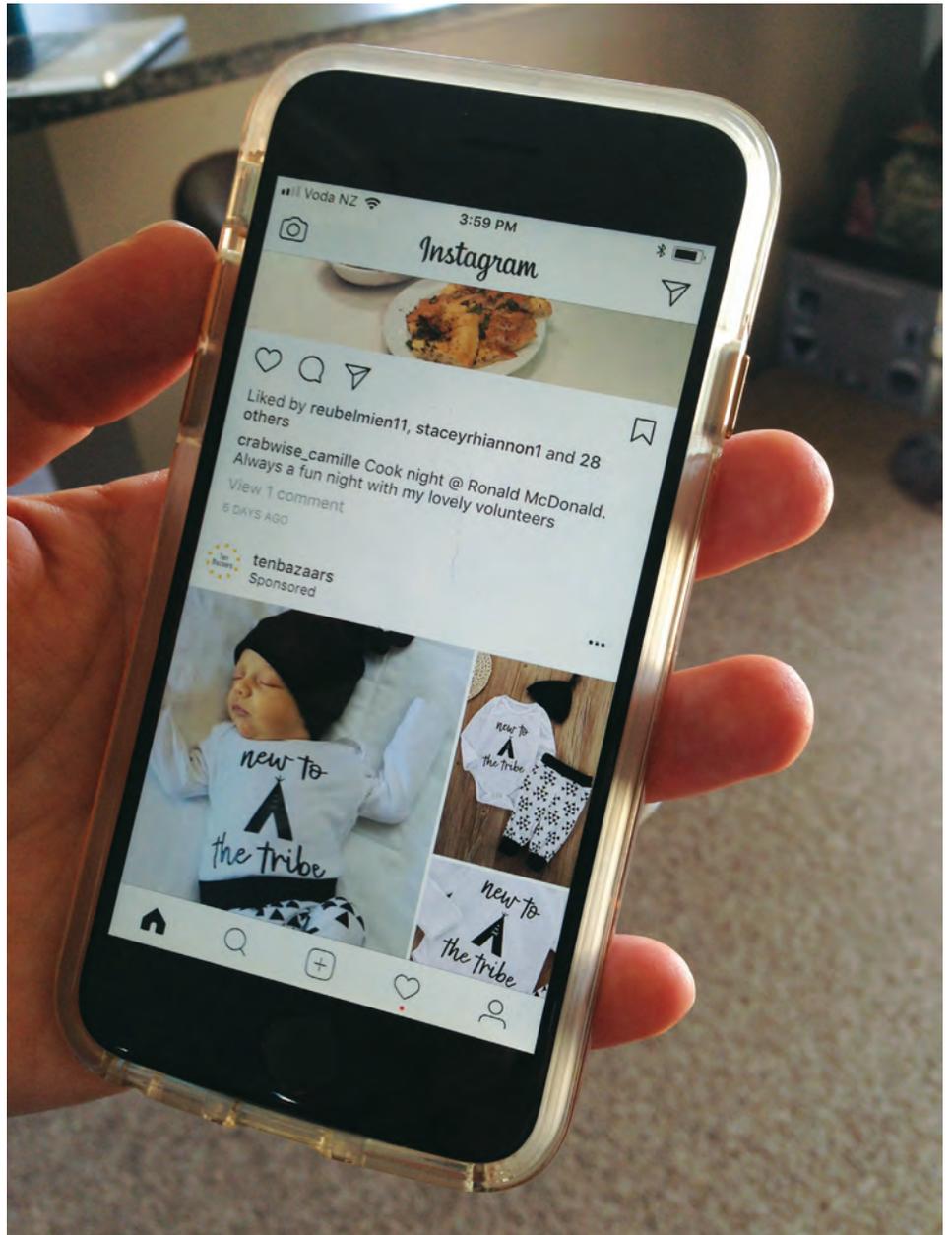
We and our phones

(Some reflections on Tony Reinke's *Twelve Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, Crossway, 2017)

Telephones have had a huge impact on our way of life. Back in the 1920s, the coming of the telephone to rural New Zealand's backblocks made a huge difference to isolated farmers' wives, allowing them to communicate daily with friends. Party lines meant calls were not necessarily private – but if you needed to chat, then you could. By the time I was a child the family telephone was a fixture on the wall, either in the hallway or in the kitchen. It was therefore in a public place where anyone could answer it and know who was calling you – or at least hear your end of the conversation.

When I was in my early adulthood cordless phones arrived. You could now take the phone into the privacy of your bedroom, and carry on a conversation unheard by anyone else. This began to worry parents, who knew the phone was somewhere in the house – but where? And what was being said on it? Then came cell phones, when suddenly, calls could be made and received way outside the house, and when instant communication was, for the first time, privately accessible to all. You could speak to anyone – seemingly anywhere. I remember my astonishment at a call from Paul while he was on the top of a mountain in South Canterbury helping on an autumn muster. It was revolutionary to think of the possibilities of limitless accessibility.

Now, since 2007, we have smartphones. More than simply telephones, they are portable, computer-like devices that enable us to be online, all the time,



We are so overloaded with online input (resulting in what Solomon called a “weariness of the flesh”) that we are inclined to retreat to bubbles of like-minded communications, dismissing all the rest as biased, wrong, or simply doubtful or unverifiable “noise”.

and wherever we go. We can browse, we can post, we can keep up with the news – in short, do most things possible previously only at home. What’s not to like?

Well, lots, actually. Our phones are changing us faster than we realise, according to a recent book by Christian writer for *desiringGod.org*, Tony Reinke. I’ve just finished reading *Twelve Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* and found it just as full of insights as its reviews had promised. Probably every one of us who own a smartphone would benefit from a long, slow consideration of Reinke’s conclusions. He has thought hard about the implications of many of our common phone habits.

In general, he finds that phones are causing us to disengage from the kinds of person to person interaction that love requires of us. We are becoming more detached, more isolated in our own little worlds, less caring, more frivolous. Despite the fact that technology is a gift from God, the product of our inventiveness as creatures made in God’s image, our use of this particular piece of technology is making us less like Christ. It’s time that we took a good look at ourselves and reclaimed the use of our phones for good purposes.

One of the most obvious problems with smartphones is their capacity to distract us. Beeps, buzzes, and tunes of all sorts destroy our concentration when we ought to be attending to work – or to someone in our proximity who deserves our attention. I’m sure you’ve noticed the way vast numbers of people walk down the street with their heads down, thumbs tapping at their phones. (You’ve probably almost collided with more than a few). Not so long ago I was in a café and noticed a sign on the counter: “Sorry, the wireless is down today. You’ll just have to talk to each other.” Shock, horror! The girl serving the coffee thought it was exciting – and I don’t blame her.

Our phones are also distancing us from our flesh and blood – the people right in front of us, our families, our friends, and the people who need our help. Every time we flop on the couch for 15 minutes of mindless scrolling and skim-reading, we could be ignoring an opportunity to edify, encourage, correct, love – and even learn from – a human being for whom God has given us responsibility. Those 15 minutes will never be given back, either.

While some still think that our smart-

phones can end loneliness by connecting us to others, Reinke believes (and I agree) that face to face interaction cannot be replaced by screen to screen communication. We were created to respond to facial expression, tone of voice, and physical touch. Neither texts nor Facebook messaging can match what can be expressed face to face. Of course we can communicate with many more people at far greater speed than is possible if we’re limited to where our bodies can be at any given time. But perhaps God has intended us for fewer, more meaningful friendships than Facebook could ever cater for.

I have never been a consumer or user of social media, mainly because I feared the effects of distraction and time-wasting, but there are other reasons Reinke suggests these media are harming us. He explains that we are becoming something like peacocks, preening and arranging our personas for the admiration of an online audience. Learning how others carefully shape their profiles to appear interesting, successful, witty, and up-to-date, we inevitably desire to be seen the same way. So Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat etc become platforms from which we can project the same attributes. I had not realised the full extent of this, but Reinke suggests that many a person wakes in the morning to check how many comments or “likes” their posts from the night before have generated. It’s obvious that young people sensitive to peer pressure can fall for this, but many a lonely adult person who lacks security in Christ can be equally susceptible. It’s time to get off social media, on our bikes and start visiting lonely people face to face!

Another effect of the distance our smartphones can put between us and others is the impunity with which we criticise and demean others, via our screens. Apparently people feel less sense of remorse for what they say to others online than for what they might say in person. Clicking “refresh” or “send” has nowhere near the consequences (they think) that saying something in personal conversation does. We’ve all seen the horribly offensive things people say, apparently without compunction, on Twitter or in the comments section beneath news articles. It seems that if the recipient of your spite is not visible through your screen, then guilt about how we make them feel is lessened. I can’t quite understand that, since each of us is capable of imagining how it would feel to be on

the receiving end of vindictive words on a screen. But certainly, increased use of screens for communication seems to be hardening us. We are getting accustomed to this unkind and demeaning discourse-at-a-distance, and it appears to be imitated by others. For instance, last week I read about our Minister of Foreign Affairs referring to our Leader of the Opposition as “simple Simon”. Does that kind of epithet sound vaguely familiar – on Twitter, perhaps?

Much has been written about the danger of what Reinke calls “secret online vices” like pornography (see Tim Challies’s blog for a sample of wise commentary). The scary thing is that this kind of vile material is available, on phones, any time and any place. Many people think they are able to view it without anyone else knowing; and therefore without consequence. Surely, all Christians need to do is remember that God sees everything we do: nothing is hidden from him. God has made our eyes and

our ears, but he expects them to be used with discretion. How can we use them to pollute ourselves? Reinke would not be the first to suggest that in the end, if your eye is causing you a problem, pluck it out. Smartphones are indeed disposable, and certainly able to have their contents blocked and curbed. The consequences of addicting yourself to such vices are too awful to contemplate.

There is one final way that our smartphones are changing us, and it concerns me more than the others because it affects our ability to distinguish truth from error. We are so overloaded with online input (resulting in what Solomon called a “weariness of the flesh”) that we are inclined to retreat to bubbles of like-minded communications, dismissing all the rest as biased, wrong, or simply doubtful or unverifiable “noise”. The result is that the world is becoming an increasingly partisan place consisting of groups of people who, day by day, shout at each other, distrust each other,

even hate each other – intractably. Being constantly online and fed a continuous diet of news we agree with is light years away from an older world. Once upon a time (maybe 20 years ago) people read a range of news sources, mindful of the biases of each, in order to arrive at some semblance of the truth. In those days discerning readers knew that if one news source got things wrong, the others would pounce and correct it. The truth prevails in the end, as historians generally know. Nowadays there is little cross-checking, and a cynicism about anything other than the source I read. All else is fake news, we hear. This is really scary, since unless we are willing to expose even our most deeply-held views to scrutiny, we will lose the power of discernment. And that is what tyranny thrives on.

So I’d suggest, along with Tony Reinke, that it’s high time to take a close look at our uses of our smartphones. Are they changing us? Yes, and in ways that we might not realise.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

August 1979

My biorhythm is all up the shoot. The physical cycle, controlling my strength, stamina and co-ordination is on the descend; the emotional cycle, governing my moods and creativity is at a critical low, while my intellectual cycle seems to influence my concentration rather negatively at the moment. But... the deadline looms on the horizon. Copy must be in “before the 15th of the month before the month before”. The snippets are all over my desk, but my biorhythm does not play ball. I picked up James Herriot’s, *Vet in Harness* and laughed all the way to the end. His tales as a young vet before the war are quite hilarious and heart-warming. But back to my desk again to shuffle and re-shuffle my notes like a pack of cards in the hands of a born loser.

The first slip I picked up is a thought for today: “Speak when you are angry, and you will make the best speech you’ll ever regret.” Mmmmmmm, I must remember to remind somebody else of that little pearl of wisdom next time

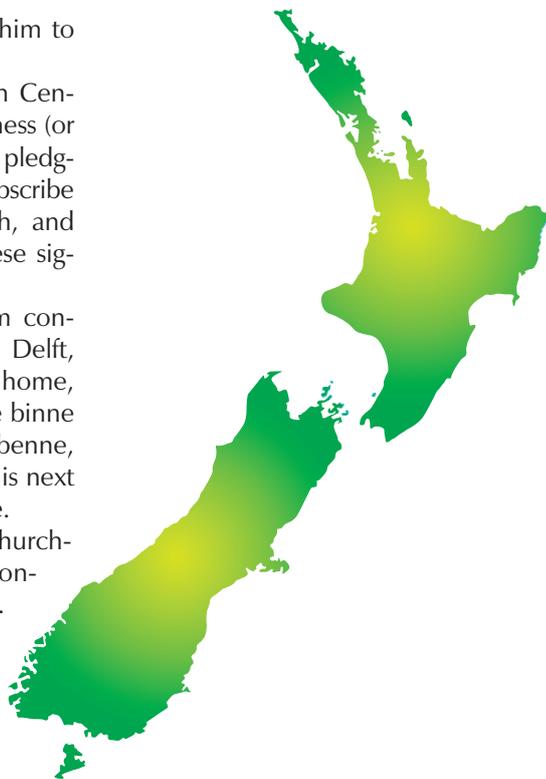
he blows his top. That will help him to calm down a bit.

Prof. Dr K. Runia complains in *Centraal Weekblad* about the seriousness (or rather lack of it) of the signing and pledging by office bearers when they subscribe to the Confessions of the church, and he wonders how much value these signatures still have.

In my youth there was a tram conductor between The Hague and Delft, who was always in a hurry to get home, clanging the bell and yelling, “Die binne benne, benne bing en die buite benne, blijfe buite.” And off he went to his next stop to repeat the same message.

One of the sessions of our churches discussed the problem of non-attendance at catechism classes. Session then endorsed a prepared statement for publication in the church bulletin. As this symptom is not just a local problem, it may be worthwhile for other churches and concerned parents to do read what this session had to say.

“Session is concerned about a number



of baptised members who, upon approaching a mature age, avoid catechism classes. Catechism teaching provides instruction in the doctrines of the church to assist parents with the fulfilment of the pledges made at the baptism of their children. Baptised members, as recipients of the sacrament of baptism, are therefore under an obligation to avail themselves of this instruction. We would like to point out that a knowledge of the doctrine of salvation becomes even more, not less necessary, when one approaches maturity and becomes subject to all kinds of worldly pressures and influences. The members concerned are therefore urged to reconsider their attitude while their parents are requested to support session in this appeal."

In one of our overseas sister churches an extra question is put to those who make their public profession of faith. They are asked if they are willing to help build the church of Jesus Christ. Nobody has ever said "no" to that question. However, they always forgot to implement it. Now the church has established a special committee within their session, which supplies the avenues of activities, and even if there is no position available, they are appointed as observers. I think it is a jolly good idea. For one thing, i.e., they should automatically become active members of the local evangelism group.

A Scot had not been to church for four consecutive Sundays and then one day he found the minister waiting for him when he got home. Uncommunicative as the Scots can be, both men sat in front of the open fireplace, smoking their pipes, for quite a long time without saying a word. At last, the pastor took a pair of tongs which hung next to the fireplace and picked up a red-hot piece of coal and placed it away from the fire. Both eyed it for some time and watched it lose its light, fire and warmth until finally that piece of coal became cold, dead and dark. Then the church member smiled and said, "Got the message, pastor. I'll be in church again next Sunday."

October

I am what they call an enjoymentologist. I like parties and socials. I like the fellowship of others. I also like munching potato chips all evening (if I get a chance) with all the beautiful trimmings which are not part and parcel of one's

daily bread, and what about that well prepared supper?

But there is one thing I don't like and that is the timing of these events. Why do people always have to pick the Saturday night for that, instead of a Friday evening or even a Saturday afternoon. That Saturday evening pig really messes up our Christian gardens. You know what an ecological disaster a pig can be to any garden. Valuable plants are destroyed and hope for flowers ruined. Such a pig roaming around in our lives always leaves victims in its wake. Those who gave the party are not in church as they are still cleaning up the mess. The guests sleep it off in church and the pastor is annoyed because his sermon falls on deaf ears and shut eyes.

I still remember the opposition to Saturday nights from my old grandmother. She lived with us for about 15 years when we were kids and she filled in the gaps in our education where my mother missed out on some of the things we ought to "know." "On Saturday night you prepare for the Lord's Day," she would say. A real battle-axe for the Lord, she was. Her husband was "Hervormd" and she "Gereformerd." Fourteen children she brought into the world and my mother was the eldest. As she brought them into the world, my mother had to "mother" them through to their early teens. They lived 20km from the nearest Gereformeerde Kerk. The story has been told that my grandfather opposed early baptism of the children in that far away little church in Tiel. Just visualise the picture of my "Hervormde" grandfather standing in front of the horse-and-buggy trying to stop my grandmother who was holding the baby and the reins in one hand and a horsewhip in the other, from going to church. "Out of my way, man, the child shall be baptised in my church," and off she went. That big fellow could not stop this little woman. And now you know why I am still a victim (quite happy though) of my grandmother's education in my early youth.

The TV series "Holocaust" has come and gone. The critics have called the film a "fraudulent history" with idiotic dialogues, simplistic characterisations and implausible situations. The film is too soft on the Nazis and does not present the essence of the Hitlerian racist totalitarianism, which planned the destruction of all "inferior" people, not only the Jews. Rev. Manfred Schwarz of the Hamilton church mentions this latest assault on our thinking, brought

into the family living room during prime viewing time. As he says, "We are too willing to fill our minds with terror and horror stories." He urges his congregation to learn to take Philippians 4:4-13 more seriously. There can be no peace in our hearts if we will it away by watching horror-shows or reading this kind of stuff or pornography. He suggests that we write out the text: "Let your mind dwell on whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute; if there is any excellence and if anything is worthy of praise,..... and the God of peace shall then be with you". "Stick that," he says, "on top of your TV and let that be your TV Guide," is his advice. It is good advice.

The Schaeffer Film series "How Should We Then Live" is doing the rounds in our churches at the moment. Ten-week showings have been run in the Hamilton, Wellington, Silverstream and Wainuiomata churches, with much success with outside attendance. At present the Palmerston North congregation gives two showings every week both there and in Foxton. Also Avondale, Mangere and the North Shore have commenced showing this series. If you want to know what Reformed or Biblical Christianity is all about, see those films.

Two decades ago, if you wanted to emigrate, you just packed your bag, burned your bridges and departed to fairer meadows. All that has changed now. Today's would-be immigrants first come to spy out the land before returning to settle down here. We came here with just a suitcase and twenty pounds sterling in our pocket. Now they come with enough in their accounts to buy a house, car and establish a business. And you wonder why they still come here.

Abridged

Nepal earthquake response —

World Renew — Final Report

A massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck 77km northwest of Nepal's capital Kathmandu on 25 Apr 2015, toppling office blocks and towers and killing thousands of people. It was followed by a major aftershock.

In response to our denomination's generous giving, the National Diaconate searched for a suitable Reformed partner that it could work with in Nepal. After some searching World Renew was selected. Looking at their work and planned response in Nepal, NDC believed this work was well aligned with the tenets of its mandate. This diaconal organization is from the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

The project

World Renew commenced a project aimed to provide physical protection from the current elements and from future earthquakes for up to 300 vulnerable families directly affected by the earthquake. The Nepal government and the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) provided World Renew with the name list of 285 beneficiaries. These were people out of three districts who could not afford to rebuild but were also ineligible for government assistance. Men, women and children would have access to safe and secure shelter with the construction of permanent earthquake resistant houses. Work started in November 2015 and was completed in October 2017.

The project ran over the scheduled time; but stayed within budget. World Renew and the beneficiaries would like to thank all who generously gave to this project. The NDC received multiple comprehensive reports from World Renew



during the course of the project. The reports outlined their proposed plans, budget and challenges along the way. Some of the obstacles included monsoon weather, proof of ownership of land by occupants (as many had received verbal handover only), complicated legal requirements for new buildings and initial distrust of World Renew.

Some of the highlights gained included getting the communities working together which helped with conflict resolution, ability to show the example of God's generosity to man, building relationships



Above: Before and After!

within these communities, training and upskilling of local masons and carpenters and working with the Nepalese government.

Beneficiary responsibility / participation

As per the Nepal Reconstruction Association (NRA), home owners are required to be involved in the reconstruction of their houses. As such, a “self-build model” and “Build back Better” was introduced by the NRA. World Renew also prioritises ownership from beneficiaries by being involved in self-build models. Initially 109 masons were trained in a two-week workshop on earthquake construction techniques. This enhanced their capacity with earthquake resistant construction techniques and carpentry.

Beneficiaries were responsible for the construction of their homes (either building themselves if they are skilled or hiring masons themselves).

Batches

World Renew proposed a Batch Model to start construction. This fostered social cohesion with community members working together in groups to build their houses. Their responsibilities were to assist each other in the building of each other’s houses and in their communities. Participation in groups helped to turn traditional conflicts into resolutions. WR proposed simultaneous construction of 6-8

houses up to the plinth, lintel and roof levels working together on each other’s houses. 32 batches or groups were established, while distributing construction tools and materials. This model was not initially well accepted by some beneficiaries.

However after working and understanding the challenges of less manpower, and fewer masons, the beneficiaries started working on batches by default. Now we can see many beneficiaries working on batches helping one another build houses.

This mutual help extended as the time went by; some of the households were headed by women, often elderly poor or sickly, were behind schedule, but other families helped them with construction of their new homes too. These most vulnerable or say poorest of the poor were eight in number and had difficulty with providing labour and materials. WR was able to assist seven of these eight with a top-up of materials for roofing. Additionally, WR arranged for volunteers to come at their own cost from North America to assist with the labour, WR encouraged the most vulnerable beneficiaries to build a smaller foot print two room house using concrete blocks. Thus, with these three saving steps, they were able to afford to contract the community head mason to construct the concrete block house within the budget.

Beneficiary Stories

Garbi Maya

Garbi Maya is 85 years old, a single women whose husband is deceased. She lost her parents earlier when she was about 10 years old. She has four sons, one deceased and the other three are living separately and she has four daughters, three of them already married. The older one is not married and is living with her now. Ten years ago she lost her husband.

During the massive earthquake Garbi Maya was feeding her buffalo and she was supposed to get inside the house. She felt like something was pushing her

and she was unable to control herself and fell down; even some stones from her house fell on her, but by the grace of God she got only minor injuries. Her house totally collapsed. She was unconscious, some of her relatives took her into the safe area. There was lots of fear and sadness with everybody, they lived five months in that safe area; during that time World Renew arrived, and they got emergency relief like food, blankets, roofing sheets etc that helped them a lot.

In those difficult conditions, her neighbor Sattara Bahadur help her to construct the house, with the coordination of WR/NJS. Sattar Bahadur did a contract to build her house within Rs.350,000 (roughly 7000 NZD). According to the contract he reconstructed her house by taking earthquake grants from World Renew. Now both of them are living inside the newly constructed house. She is not worried about the wind, rain and earthquake because of the new house which is provided by World Renew. Therefore, she thanked World Renew for making it possible to rebuild her house and thanks to Sattara Bahadur also for taking such an initiative to rebuild her house. Gari Maya said, "Now both my daughter and myself are living in a new earthquake resistant house and if WR/NJS was not with us it would not be possible in my life. I'm really happy that I got a new earthquake resistant house, and now I don't have any fear and worries of any season, peacefully I'm staying here.

Finally she really expressed her heartfelt thanks to the WR/NJS team as well as all the donors who extended their loving hearts and hands to provide her with shelter.

Buddhi Maya Tamang

My name is Buddhi Maya Tamang. I am 73 years old. My father's name is Kesang Tamang and my mother's name is Laxmi Tamang. They have already passed away. I am not educated. My husbands name is Gadu Tamang we married more than 58 year ago. We have two sons and two daughters – they are all married. Me and my husband live with my grandson

and his wife. My grandson is abroad working. I have one small and beautiful house we are living happily in my house. I am continuously taking medicine for asthma.

We faced a major earthquake and we all stayed on a farm using a tent. By God's grace nothing happened to us as per the human loss, but we lost our cattle, grains, clothes and everything. Life was very difficult after that massive earthquake; however some charity foundation came to us and provided some daily needs and food items. After some time world Renew came to us and distributed some rice, blanket, roofing sheets, water filter and daily needs items.

Later my neighbour made a temporary shelter and lived there. My son-in-law came and made the temporary shelter and stayed with a lot of problems. Then WR/NJS came to us and proposed to make earthquake resistant homes. The whole community agreed with them. Some neighbour started to construct a house but me and my husband could not start a shelter construction.

Somehow I called my son-in-law and requested him to help in constructing my house. We gave all the responsibility and grant money to him. As well, we hired labourers and masons, booked transportation from World Renew to transport construction materials. WR/NJS helped us with 10 trips of transportation and fifty thousand extra money as vulnerable top up. Finally I could construct my house with block, cement and trusses which has two rooms. Now we are living in this house. I want to say thank you to WR/NJs for making possible our dreams of a new house.

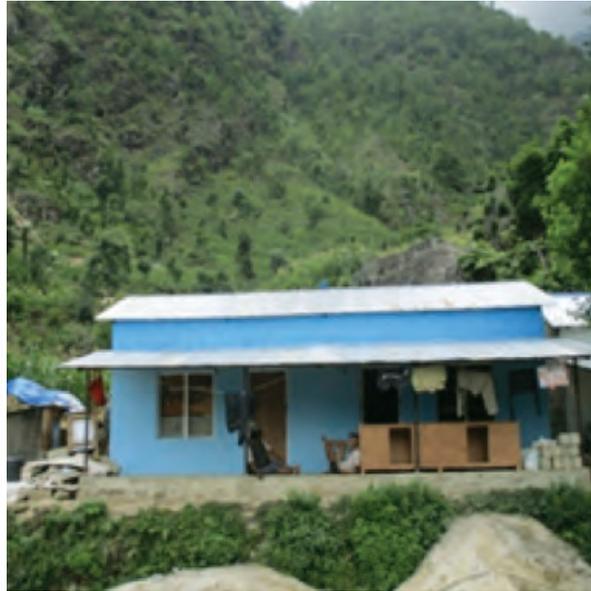
Summary

World Renew, NDC and the beneficiaries thank all who gave to this project. This project specifically focused on the poor and vulnerable; worked with the community to help each other as well as interact well with local and national government requirements and law. A wonderful Christian response and witness to the majority Hindu peoples of Nepal.

"It has been a long journey, and



Top: Garbi Maya in her temporary shelter. Centre: destroyed house. Bottom: New home to earthquake resistance standard mid construction



Above: Buddhi Tamang and her new home.

we are incredibly thankful for the support of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Your support has made it possible to help some of the most vulnerable members of the local communities, ensuring that they have privacy, security, and protection from the elements. Projects like this are amazing because of the many partnerships that make it possible; it's an incredible picture of the body of Christ working together to help others. In the midst of all that's going on in the world, it's stories like these that are worth sharing."
– *World Renew*

Letter to the Editor

Re: Friendship with the World?

It is so sad to read an article in our reformed magazine of a minister in one of our churches suggesting, even urging to us to seek friendship with worldly people.

He takes several examples of our Lord Jesus three year ministry to prove his point, of having unbelievers as our close friends! Has he not read how God warned His people of old not to do so, and where David in Psalm 101 speaking by the Spirit of God, does not want to have such people serving him in his courts?

God Himself through Jesus Christ, set His people apart from those who are ungodly and not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness, or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever, or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?

For we are the temple of the Living

God, just as God said "I will dwell in them and walk among them. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate says the Lord." And do not touch what is unclean, and I will welcome you (2 Cor 6:14-17). So God Himself set His people apart to be separate from those who are not His.

Surely our Lord Jesus is a Friend of sinners, that is why He is my best Friend. Did Jesus the God-man not know who Zaccheus was, who climbed into a sycamore tree in an undignified manner, to get a glimpse of the One he had heard so much about? Did Christ not know the inner man of Zaccheus? Did Jesus not know what sort of person Nathanael was, sitting under the fig tree when Philip told him that they had found Him of Whom Moses and the Prophets spoke in Scripture? Christ knew the 12 disciples and knew that Judas was a thief and of what was written of him in Psalm 109.

All these events our brother mentions, he fails to bring out the sovereignty and the all-seeing and all-knowing attributes of our Father in heaven and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, who claimed to be with and in the Father (John 17). In all

that our Lord Jesus did; raising Lazarus, the widow's son in Nain, the daughter of the synagogue official, healing the blind, lame and leprous, was all pre-determined – nothing happened by chance or accident.

If we are invited for dinner or a barbeque by unbelievers, we, according to God's word may accept the invitation and eat anything set before us, and also return the favour to invite them back. We may also help them if in need and be a good and godly neighbour to them (1 Cor 10:23-27).

But friendship is definitely enmity with God. Darkness has nothing in common with light. The only thing we have in common with the people of the world is that we are all descendants of Adam. And the world is still in Adam, and they will die in Adam.

But we are in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour, and forever alive in Him through His death and resurrection. Praise be to Him for this separation.

Yours faithfully
Gary Heersping
Silverstream

The value of a good old print Bible

Murray Capill

Over the last few years I have increasingly digitalised my life. I've moved to a digital diary, a digital "to do" list, digital notes and reminders, and digital filing for most items. I've also increasingly used digital Bibles on my computer, phone and tablet. But digital Bibles are a mixed blessing.

There's no doubt that the Bible on screen has some huge benefits. The greatest is convenience. It is now possible to have a Bible in your pocket wherever you go. They are small (if you use your phone), generally free, come in a multitude of versions, and contain a range of useful tools, including being able to take notes, highlight verses and so on.

Access to exegetical and original language tools in the major Bible software packages has changed exegesis dramatically, increasing the resources that can be consulted while reducing the time it takes to use them.

But with these benefits there are downsides, and one that is particularly disturbing. I came to the convicting realisation that I knew my Bible less, not more, than a couple of years ago. Although I was still using a print Bible quite frequently, my significant use of digital Bibles was actually reducing my familiarity with the text of Scripture.

In the past I've usually had one main Bible that I use 90% of the time. Alongside it I'd have several other Bibles of different sizes for varying occasions, dif-

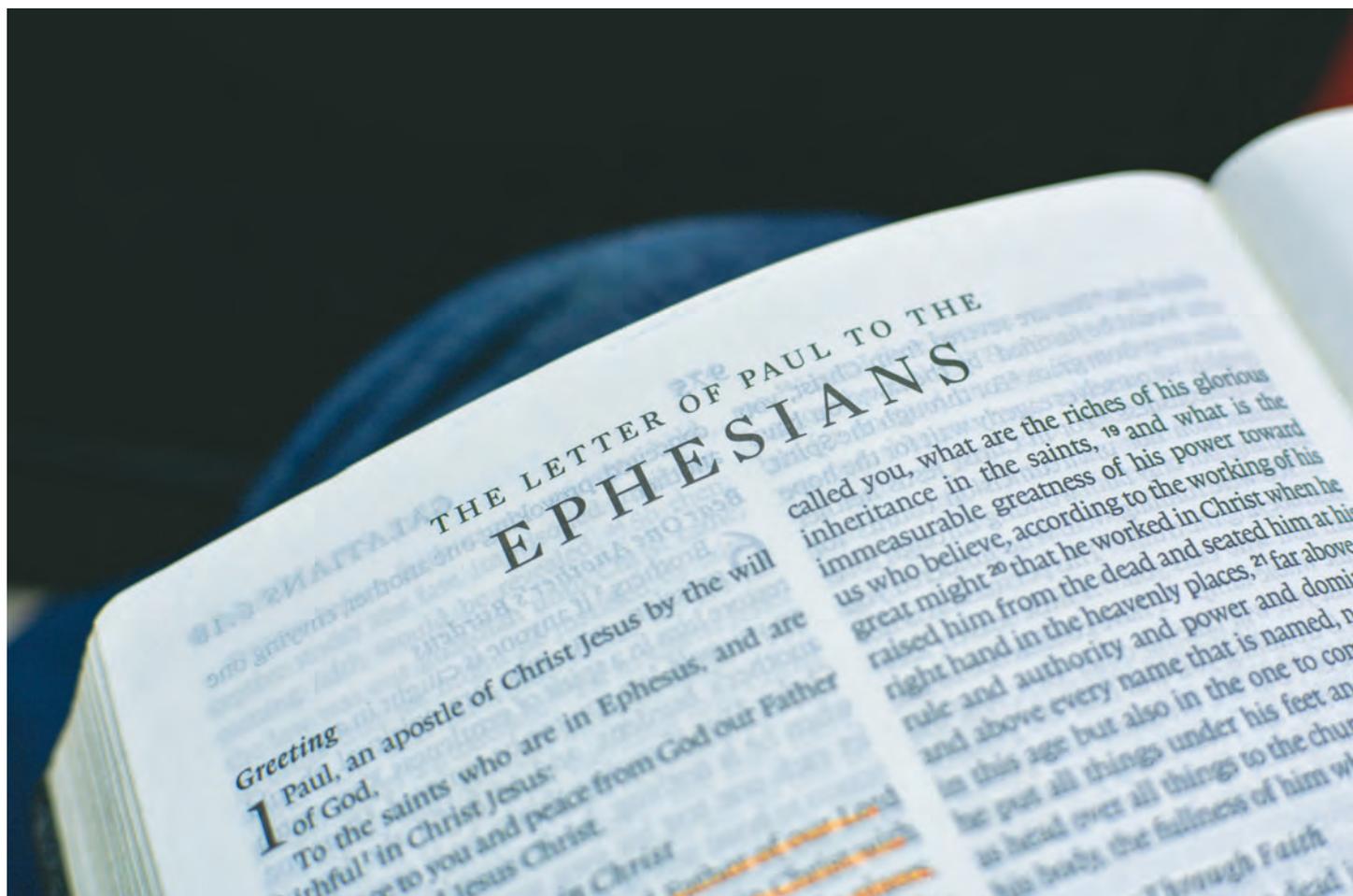


Photo by MD Duran on Unsplash

“It would be unwise to be dogmatic about one being right and one being wrong. There are benefits to both ways of reading and we are astoundingly blessed to have such ready access to God’s Word. But it’s worth stopping to think about what will help you get to know God’s Word best and what helps you read it in the deepest, most memorable, focused, personal and undistracted way. For me, that’s undoubtedly a hard copy print Bible in my favourite version.”

ferent translations for cross checking, and study Bibles for further information. But I used my main Bible for my personal devotions, for sermon preparation and for Bible studies. Typically, each one lasted about ten years until it was completely worn out. When Genesis fell out of one of them I knew I had to change; another one lost Hebrews first. A new Bible, however, even if it was the same translation, was just not the same. It took time to mark it up and get to know it. A new translation was even worse. Not only was the layout unfamiliar but so too, many of the words, messing with Bible memorisation and the endearment of the familiar.

My old Bibles now sit on my shelf like old friends. They are thoroughly leafed and I can still visualise where on the page a given verse is. They are highlighted and underlined. I could flick in them quickly from one section to the next, from one book to another. Over time I came to know my way around them well and didn’t have to stop to think where to find Zechariah or Ruth.

In a print Bible, you have a greater sense of where you are in the biblical text with a more visual perception of whether you are reading early in the Bible’s story or late. In that regard it’s similar to the difference between using a GPS and a physical map. The GPS gets me there easily, but when I arrive I don’t really know what route I’ve taken and I can’t repeat the journey without using the GPS again. When I swat up a route on a map, work out the turns I need to take, give it a go, make a few mistakes and eventually arrive at my destination, I have generally learned a bit more about how to get around the city. In the same way, my print Bible helps me to get to know my way around God’s Word better.

I can also see on the printed page the surrounding context – the verses or chapter before and after. On my phone I can see about 70 words per screen, but in my old Bibles I can see about 740 words on each double page. That’s ten times as much. And with a turn of the page in either direction, I can see more easily the flow of the book. For smaller books you can see the whole with a page turn or two, increasing one’s sense of how it fits together. Again, this greatly aids one’s understanding of and familiarity with God’s Word. And each verse is always in the same place on the same page, making visual recall of a text easier.

When I read print Bibles I am also

largely distraction free. There are no pop-up notifications, no additional resources that might take me away from the text of the Bible itself (I generally resist Study Bibles because they rob you the joy of self-discovery and tempt you to read other information first), and no other apps a click away screaming for my attention. I am less inclined to multi-task when I am reading a print Bible. With an app, it’s just too easy to check social media, or email or the news while spending time with God. That doesn’t make for quality time with God.

That connects to a theme-tune in the literature on the value of print books. A quick skim of the internet reveals a host of scholarly arguments for and against onscreen and print reading, the research indicating pros and cons to each. But there seems to be a strong case for saying that, while on-screen is typically excellent for skimming large amounts of material, print is best for more reflective reading and thinking. It tends to be easier with a print Bible to stop and think, to re-read, to ponder, to revisit and to reflect.

That’s been confirmed for me recently in an interesting way. I’ve been using an app for reading the Bible in a year, and generally after consulting the app I read from a print Bible, marking it up in the good old-fashioned way. But when I get behind and have rather a lot of chapters to catch up on, I usually use my iPad. The iPad is my easiest way to catch up; but the print Bible is my best way to read reflectively each morning.

It would be unwise to be dogmatic about one being right and one being wrong. There are benefits to both ways of reading and we are astoundingly blessed to have such ready access to God’s Word. But it’s worth stopping to think about what will help you get to know God’s Word best and what helps you read it in the deepest, most memorable, focused, personal and undistracted way. For me, that’s undoubtedly a hard copy print Bible in my favourite version.

Mr Murray Capill is the Principal and Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry at Reformed Theological College, Melbourne, Australia.

Auckland Presbytery report

The Auckland Presbytery met on Saturday 24th February 2018 at the Pukekohe Reformed Church for the final examination of Mr Graeme Zuidema and for its regular meeting. The Rev. Ryan Sparks opened the meeting by reading from Acts 16:14b, which describes the response of Lydia to the message of the apostle Paul in Philippi, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." He then read a few extracts from a book by Timothy Keller on preaching, explaining that these were appropriate to this occasion of the examination of a candidate for the preaching and pastoral ministry.

The examination of credentials followed the new regulation approved by the last Synod allowing for electronic copies. This was not all smooth sailing as two of the electronic copies had not been received by the chairman, Mr Sparks. Two delegates offered their tablets and after consulting both the chairman declared the credentials had been received and were in order. (This reporter reflected, in his own mind, that maybe the paper system was more reliable!)

A number of members of the Pukekohe congregation were present for this exam. Mr Graeme Zuidema preached a sermon on Psalm 130, one of the Psalms of Ascent. After this the visitors went out for morning tea. The delegates to presbytery had brief discussion on the sermon and it was sustained without dissent and this was announced to all who were present. The examination continued with Mr Sparks asking questions on ethics and the creeds and confessions, the Rev. Daniel Wilson asking questions about Bible knowledge, and the Rev. Michael Willemse asking questions on church history and church polity. Further questions were put by other delegates and by the synodical examiners, the Rev. Paul Archbald from Wellington and the Rev. Erik Stolte from the South Island. After this the visitors were asked to leave and the presbytery had another brief discussion and again

sustained this part of the exam without dissent, a decision confirmed by the synodical examiners. This was announced to all who were present and the chairman led us in a prayer of thanksgiving for Mr Graeme Zuidema and his wife Amanda. The Pukekohe delegates informed the meeting that his ordination would take place on Sunday 11th of March in the morning service where he would be ordained as a second pastor in Pukekohe working alongside the Rev. John Haverland. Delegates and visitors then enjoyed lunch together.

The regular meeting of the presbytery continued in the afternoon. In response to the questions of Article 47 of the Church Order the Bucklands Beach delegates reported that their members are actively involved in home groups and Language assisted Bible studies. They experience the blessing and opportunities provided by having many immigrants come to the church, especially Asians.

The Hamilton delegates were glad to report that their Christian kindergarten is viable once again after an increase in its roll. Every fourth Sunday the church hosts a fellowship meal following the afternoon service. Four times a year they have a fellowship meal and prayer meeting for the congregation. The church continues to support Janice Reid and is also providing support for Josh Meinsma and his family during his studies at the Reformed Theological College.

The Hukanui congregation is supporting Marlene van Tonder in her work in South Sudan and Johnny and Glenys Watson in their work with MAF in PNG. They were very blessed with Graeme Zuidema as a vicar for 2017 and were sorry to see him go. They are enjoying unity in the church and new members coming in.

Mr Michael Willemse presented his regular summary of the reports of all the classis meetings of the Reformed Churches of Australia. We were encouraged to see many congregations involved in community and outreach work.

The Mangere Church property has been rented out to other Christian groups since the closure of the congregation in 2008. Neither of these groups is in a position to purchase the property and its buildings so the Mangere trustees have

decided to put it up for auction. The Church Extension Committee recommended that the Auckland Presbytery use the money from this sale to secure land in specific areas deemed fruitful for future church planting work. The presbytery agreed with this recommendation and asked the Pukekohe session to make recommendations regarding the appointment of a committee charged to investigate the investment of the funds from the sale of the Mangere property so these can be used in the most beneficial way for church extension in the Auckland Presbytery.

There was some discussion on possible church plants north of the North Shore congregation (in Orewa) and in Tauranga. There is a small group of Reformed folk meeting in Tauranga for a regular Bible study; representatives from the Hamilton and Pukekohe sessions will meet with them to discuss how this work might develop.

The meeting was closed at 3.15pm with prayer and the next meeting was scheduled for the evening of Friday 6th of July 2018 in Pukekohe.

Reporter: John Haverland

Wellington Presbytery, Short Report

The March 3rd meeting of Wellington Presbytery was held in The Reformed Church of Silverstream, convened by the Wellington Church and chaired by the Rev. Pieter van Huyssteen.

The "Article 47 Questions" were answered by the Reformed Churches of Silverstream, Wainuiomata and Hastings, respectively. In all cases, the report given was encouraging to hear. The same was true of the church visitation reports for Wanganui, and then Silverstream; and for the reports by the counsellors for the two vacant churches in Wellington Presbytery – Foxton and Masterton. Some discussion was held on the process involved

when churches have a visiting preacher from another federation helping out for three months or longer.

The Wellington church reported on their scrutiny of the minutes of the Auckland Presbytery and of CRCA Classes. Some points were noted regarding the coming CRCA synod.

Elder Carl van der Meulen gave a verbal report as liaison to the Presbytery's Regional Youth Committee. The churches were asked to encourage their youth to consider volunteering to work on the committee, as it is sometimes difficult to find willing members.

The Rev. Peter Kloosterman's OMB Liaison Report was also given verbally. A good account of the ongoing work in PNG was delivered, along with the new work in Vanuatu with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia – our newest "sister-church." An up-date was given on the Douma's return to PNG, as they wind up their work there, and their plans upon their return.

The Stated Clerk for the Presbytery, Br. John Holtslag, was re-appointed for another 2 years, as was the Treasurer, Br. Leen Vandenberg.

A rather lengthy discussion was held

on a request from Palmerston North for Presbytery financial-support of the work in New Plymouth. This matter had already been agreed to in principle, but some details needed to be ironed out.

Presbytery agreed to Silverstream's request for Vicar David Stares to undergo his preliminary examination at the July meeting.

Presbytery spent some time in closed session, chiefly in order to deal with some discipline matters.

Reporter: Paul Archbald

Report on the Fourth GKSA General Synod 2018

Paul Archbald

Our sister-church, the Reformed Churches of South Africa, held its fourth general synod in the university town of Potchefstroom, between January 9 and 18, 2018. The delegates worked hard, commencing at 8.00 am and sometimes going through to 9.00 pm. Ten days of synod-meetings may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I must say I enjoyed listening to the debates, learning more about the GKSA, and the fellowship of the saints in that place.

The following matters might be of interest to our members.

Official Language for Assemblies

Considerable time was taken up again in debating whether to retain Afrikaans in the assemblies, or to move to English. At present, both are spoken. A professional translation service is provided via headsets that are, unfortunately, rather painful on the ears when worn for a day. The main problem is that not all delegates understand Afrikaans. On the other hand, while most of the Afrikaans-speakers understand English, not all can express themselves effectively in it. Moreover, there is history behind this – history that affects how one regards the English or Afrikaans language, re-

spectively. Because of that, the debate was at times a little tense. In the end, the synod decided to encourage either English or Afrikaans, though direct translation would henceforth be provided from the various "mother tongues" into English alone.

Women in the Offices of Elder and Minister

There were several appeals against the previous synodical decisions that affirmed that only men may serve as elders or ministers. Arguments included the following: that the matter is non-essential; that there are two different lines of exegesis, which cannot be absolutely settled; that office is a local decision; that they have sister-relations with churches that allow women in all offices; and that the law of the land requires equality. All of these appeals were defeated by a significant majority. A number of churches have gone ahead and ordained women as elders despite the earlier decisions against the practice. It remains to be seen how this will all work out at the local level.

Relationship with the RCNZ

Over the last few years, our churches have been expressing concern about the GKSA's decision to allow women to serve in the office of deacon. Because

this issue has not been resolved, our last synod decided that we should begin discussions with the GKSA about the possibility of altering the ecclesiastical relationship between us. The thought is that we could relate by means of the “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” category – the relationship we now have with the CRCA.

This is not to be taken as an indication that we are losing interest in the GKSA, or that this would be the first step towards further distancing. In fact, the Ecumenical Fellowship category *requires* close contact and co-operation in all those areas where we can currently work together. The chief practical difference between this and a sister-relationship, is that calling ministers involves an extra step. As our relationship with the CRCA shows, having an Ecclesiastical Fellowship enables ongoing close and friendly contact, delegation to each other’s synods, co-operation in education and missions, without any suggestion that further distancing is expected.

Other Ecumenical Relations

The GKSA has a large number of ecumenical relations, ranging from “Memoranda of Understanding” with the NGK and NHK in South Africa, to “ecumenical unity” (sister-relations). They put a lot of emphasis on “being a witness” to others, even where they cannot have full ecclesiastical unity. This is also reflected in their involvement in other bodies, such as the SA Council of Churches.

The GKSA has a sister-relationship with the “Liberated” Churches in the Netherlands, as we do. Our last synod suspended the relationship due to the RCN (Lib.) decision to open all offices to women. The GKSA has not made any decision of that kind, though the matter is still under consideration.

Elders Preaching

The GKSA has a similar policy to us on who may preach. In our churches, and theirs, elders normally *read* sermons, rather than preaching. This was decided at our 2011 synod in Bucklands Beach: “the norm is that only ministers, students and emeritus ministers be permitted to preach in our churches.” Ruling elders may preach in our churches in exceptional circumstances. The GKSA has much the same view. However, many elders in the black churches are engaged in preaching, owing to the urgent need there. Synod decided to regulate this practice, rather than to forbid it. However, the decisions care-

fully avoided implying that the practice was ideal.

Ecology and Human Rights

The synod appointed deputies for the environment to help encourage the GKSA to keep their carbon-footprint small. They also agreed to a statement on fundamental human rights. Human rights is a very big issue in South Africa. The church’s statement was not designed to fit in with the usual cultural idea of human rights, but rather to give a clear, Reformed view of this issue, over against the humanistic concept of rights.

Finances

The GKSA is struggling financially, owing to the economy in SA, and perhaps other factors. Synod decided to work on reducing the length and cost of meetings. Next synod is to take place over 1 week, rather than 2.

The synod was conducted with quite an eye for technicalities – more so than our synods. At times this made it harder to follow, for those who did not know the background. This underscores the importance of sending delegates to the synods of sister-churches. When looking on from afar, it is easy to jump to wrong conclusions about another federation’s decisions. May it be that we have many more such opportunities to learn about one another, and from one another!



(top) Mr John Rogers (bottom) Mr Murray Capill addressing the GKSA Synod.

Una Sancta

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“Male and female created He them”

“God made them both [man and woman] to resemble Him spiritually. He made them to be His son and His daughter, and caused them both to enjoy covenant friendship with Him.”

Joshua Engelsma

To understand what it means to be a mature man, we must ask this question: “What saith the Scriptures?” Or, to put it differently, “What does God say? What does He demand of me as a man?” Our view of manhood may not be formed on the basis of culture, the expectations of society, or tradition. We need a foundation that is more solid than any of those. Our understanding of masculinity must be grounded in the bedrock of God’s Word.

The fact that we need to turn to God’s Word for this instruction ought not to surprise us, but this approach is not popular. Many will scoff at this idea, claiming that to understand what it really means to be a man we need the latest findings of science, psychology, and sociology. To base our understanding on some outdated, old-fashioned Bible, they say, is laughably ignorant. It is the proverbial head-in-the-sand mindset.

But their mockery does not move us. We take our stand unashamedly on the inspired Scriptures, which is the Word of the thrice-holy God Himself.

Back to the beginning

To begin in our description of biblical masculinity, we have to start at creation. For a right understanding of anything, it is helpful to go back to its origin. To understand what it means to be a man, we have to go back to the beginning and God’s creation of all things to learn what was God’s original design and intention.

The account of God’s creation of man is found in Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1 gives a briefer description of God’s creation of mankind, and Genesis 2 gives a more detailed, in-depth description of God’s creation of man and woman.

It is important to remember that these two chapters are not giving two separate accounts of creation. Many who hold to theistic evolution will claim that these chapters are two different and even contradictory accounts of creation. They make this claim in the interests of under-

mining the literal interpretation of these chapters and promoting the idea that this history cannot be trusted as factual.

But these are not two separate accounts. Genesis 2 is not even a mere retelling of the creation account in Genesis 1, nor is it an appendix to that chapter which gives a few extra details. In Genesis 1 God describes broadly His work of creating all things. Then in Genesis 2 God begins to describe in detail the history of man. Genesis 2 describes God’s creation of man, the garden that God made for man, the two important trees of the garden, and the creation of the woman and her relationship to the man. God is setting the stage for the history of mankind that is to come.

What we learn from this history is that God made man and woman with many similarities, but also with many differences. They are similar, but not identical.

The same...

Let’s start with the similarities. There are especially three things we can identify.

First, men and women are similar in their creation.

They were both made in a special way by the hand of God. When God made all the other creatures, He simply spoke and those things came to exist. But when God made human beings, He, so to speak, “got His hands dirty.” When He made the man, God scooped up the dust of the ground, formed a man, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). When He made the woman, God caused Adam to fall asleep, removed one of his ribs, and from that rib formed the woman (Gen. 2:21-22). Both were made in a special way with God’s own hand.

Both male and female were also necessary parts of God’s creation. This was true of Adam as the king of God’s creation. But this was also true of Eve. On the sixth day, after God had already created Adam, He looked down at His creation and for the first time said, “It is not good” (Gen. 2:18). What was not good was that man was alone and there was

no woman yet. Only after God created the woman did He look down and say, "Behold, it [is] very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Both male and female are created to be similar creatures. They have similar bodies made up of brains, eyes, ears, mouths, hands, fingers, hearts, lungs, livers, kidneys, legs, toes, blood, bones, skin, and so on. They both have a soul, a conscience, a will, an intellect, and emotions.

Second, men and women share in the Fall into sin.

Although both were created by God perfect and without sin, they were also created in such a way that they were capable of falling. Some have suggested that the reason why the devil came to tempt Eve and not Adam was that she could more easily fall into sin. But that is not true. It was not the case that the woman was somehow morally weaker. She was no more inclined to sin than the man was.

Although they had different roles in the Fall, the reality is that man and woman both fell into sin. Both disobeyed God's command, both ate of the forbidden fruit, both covered themselves in fig leaves, and both ran and hid from the presence of the Lord.

Although there were different consequences of the Fall for man and woman (Gen. 3:16-19), they both shared in the primary consequence: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Today man and woman alike are conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. Today man and woman alike are by nature the children of wrath.

Third, (elect) men and women share in salvation.

In the beginning, God made both man and woman in His image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). This meant that God made them both to resemble Him spiritually. He made them to be His son and His daughter, and caused them both to enjoy covenant friendship with Him.

The same thing is true after the Fall for redeemed men and women. The apostle Peter exhorts husbands to honor their wives "as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). As we will come to see, there are many differences between man and woman, but in this area there is no difference. They are equally recipients of God's grace and of the life and salvation of Christ. "[T]here is neither male nor female: for

ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

For all these reasons, we men may not look down upon or think less of our sisters in Christ. They must be treated with honor and respect.

...But different

While there are many similarities between men and women, there are also many differences. God did not make them identical. The male/female distinction is the most basic distinction in the human race.

The most obvious difference between men and women is in their physical anatomy, particularly their different sexual organs. This is so obvious a point that you might wonder why I bring it up. But, sadly, it has to be said today because this most basic point is denied today. Many today claim that gender is not based on one's anatomy but rather on how they feel and the way that they have always identified themselves. So, a young man born with male genitalia feels more feminine and wants to identify as a woman; therefore, he must be viewed as a she. Or, a young woman born with female genitalia feels more masculine and wants to identify as a man; therefore, she must be viewed as a he. Both then are encouraged to mutilate their bodies in order to bring their anatomy into line with their feelings. The result is that Joe becomes Jane, and Jane becomes Joe.

But this is not only a wicked mutilation of the body, it is an attack on the Creator. In the beginning God created them male and female, and blessed them with the ability to be fruitful, to multiply, and to replenish the earth (Gen. 1:28). He made them with distinct physical traits, traits that complemented one another in such a way that they were able to conceive and bear children. What distinguishes men and women is, first of all, their anatomy. Any feelings that a person might have to the contrary are to be brought in line with their anatomy, and not the other way around.

There are further differences in the makeup of men and women. Generally speaking, men have greater physical strength than women. 1 Peter 3:7 calls the husband to give honor to his wife "as unto the weaker vessel," which implies that the man is stronger. There are also many passages of God's Word that connect manhood with strength (Prov. 20:29; Is. 40:28-31; 1 John. 2:13-14). Even the world grudgingly recognizes this; there is a reason why women use a smaller basketball than men and why

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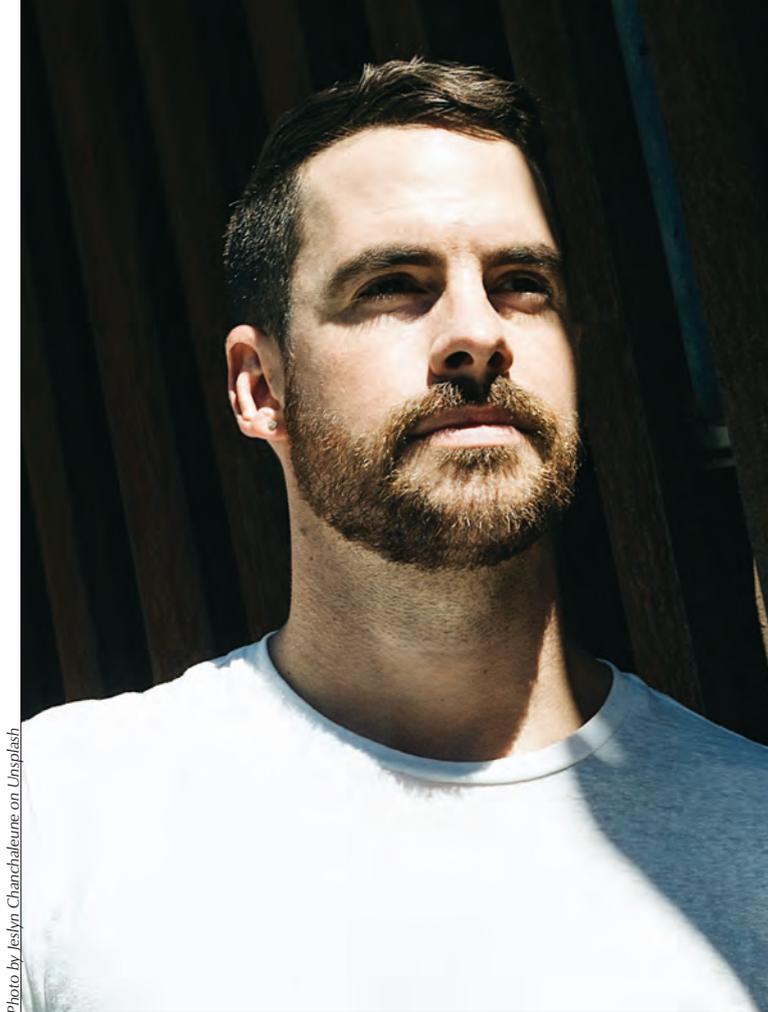


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“What distinguishes men and women is, first of all, their anatomy. Any feelings that a person might have to the contrary are to be brought in line with their anatomy, and not the other way around.”

the ladies’ tees are moved forward on the golf course. As a whole women, do not possess the raw strength that men do.

Another difference in men and women is in regard to reasoning and emotions. Generally, men are guided more by reason and logical thinking and less by their emotions. Generally, women are guided less by reason and logic and more by their emotions. I have heard numerous women say, “There’s a reason why God didn’t call us women to serve in church office! We couldn’t handle these situations emotionally! We would let our emotions get in the way!” This is not a criticism of women; it merely acknowledges the differences in the way God has formed us.

Another of the key differences between men and women is the roles that He calls them to fill. I would argue that the chief role of a mature man can be captured by the word leadership. And the chief role of a mature women can be captured by the word support. God has given men and women different responsibilities, and then He has also created them in such a way that they are uniquely qualified to carry out these responsibilities.

This idea is biblical. In the beginning,

God made the man first. He created Adam to be the head of the human race and the king of the creation. The woman was created after the man, out of the man, and for the man (1 Cor. 11:8-9). She was uniquely designed to be a complement and helper to the man (Gen. 2:18, 20). This also is the emphasis of passages that address the calling of the husband as the head and leader of his wife (Eph. 5:23). This is the emphasis of passages that address the place of men as leaders in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14).

But what does it mean that men are to be leaders? For that we wait until next time.

Mr Joshua Engelsma is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa, USA.

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*The author has made a generalisation in an attempt to get across the idea that there are not just anatomical, but also emotional differences between men and women. He, by no means meant it to apply to every single woman, nor as a criticism of our sisters in Christ generally. **Ed.**