

www.faithinfocus.org.nz

faith
in FOCUS

Volume 50/3, April 2023

Reformed by Culture *or* *Conviction?*

Contents

'Reformed by Culture or Conviction?'	3
Reformed: more than a label	6
Gripped by the love of Christ?	9
Living in Light of Christ's Resurrection	13
Focus on the Christian life	16
Focus on faith	18
World Watch Monitor	19
World in focus	20
Update on the Hosanna Care Trust	22

Published monthly for the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
6 Valintine Place, Strandon,
New Plymouth, 4312.
Email: walterwalraven@icloud.com
website: www.faithinfocus.org.nz

Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Joanna Voschezang

Production:

Distribution: M. and D. van der Zwaag
Design and Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Distribution for Australia: S Bolhuis
Email: SebastianB@HarleyDykstra.com.au
Ph: 0419 043 116

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication. Church and family notices are free, subject to sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
Email: nicwhare@gmail.com

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$40.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40.00

Editorial

Dear brother and sister in the Lord. Are you Reformed by culture or by conviction? You might think this a strange question.

Last month one of our churches celebrated 70 years as a Reformed Church, and it is good to celebrate this milestone and remember the goodness and grace of the Lord in establishing His presence in our midst.

Three generations ago, our forebears in the faith saw the necessity to establish a Reformed Church in New Zealand and to maintain a faithful, consistent witness to the truth of God's Holy word in this country. Seventy years later, we have 21 churches and two church plants, one of which is soon to be instituted, Lord willing, to make a total of 22. The Lord has blessed the work.

However, if we were to allow ourselves a time of introspection, what fruits would we find as a result of 70 years of labour? I would expect that the first thing should be that we as churches are always reforming.

Have you grown up in a Reformed Church without really understanding why you are Reformed? Do you in some sense rest on your 'reformed-ness' or even unconsciously depend on the faith of your fathers just as the Pharisees said to Jesus, "We have Abraham as our father". (Matt 3:9) How do you think of yourself – is Reformed just a label to you?

Or are you Reformed because the love of Christ grips you, and the church where you are proclaims the message of salvation which is in Christ Alone, by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone and Alone to God's glory? Has your heart been taken captive by the Lord and is your life a life of service and worship to your King?

Over the years of the RCNZs existence the Lord has blessed our churches with many children, who we expect grow up in godly homes and receive godly instruction. Parents lead their little ones to Christ. Many children attend a Christian School or are homeschooled by parents who have a biblical worldview. Then the church catechises them with a view to them growing ever closer to their Saviour through the process of learning and discipling with the aid of the Scriptures and Confessions. Finally, the young person will profess their faith in Christ, hopefully not just learning everything by rote, but understanding why they are committing their life to Christ. That they are prepared to take their place in the church and use their gifts for God's glory alone, not to be a "cultural" Christian, but one who is firmly convinced and convicted of the truth of the Scriptures.

Through the wonderful process of teaching, whether in the family or in the church, let us devote our time - appealing to the heart with the truth of the gospel, pointing church members, including our children, to Christ and discipling our members, so they are convicted by the truth and walk according to their confession all the days of their lives.

Many thanks to our contributors for developing this theme with solid biblical teaching. *S.D.G.*

Featured in this issue:

Mr Nathaniel Rademaker presents the big question.

Mr Ben McDonald considers the importance of a label.

Mr Aaron Warner – gripped by the love of Christ?

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.

'Reformed by Culture or Conviction?'

NATHANIEL RADEMAKER

Introduction

'The Church Reformed, always being Reformed' (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*) has often been used by various Churches and Christians over the centuries as a motto or slogan. This phrase was first used in 1674 in the Reformed Church of the United Provinces, fondly known as the Netherlands. Many ministers preached the Gospel of the Reformation, justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, and were martyred for their faith! Their message was a call for the Church to *reform* according to the Bible and through their preaching, they bore Churches full of committed believers.¹

Is this the case in the Reformed Church today? Are we in the *Reformed* Church committed to the *Reformed* faith? As the title of this article asks, are you 'Reformed by Culture or Conviction?'

What does it mean to be Reformed?

The first question really is, what does it mean to be Reformed? To make the question more personal, "Are you Reformed?" This is a question many Christians ask themselves, and while some believe the answer is clear, for others it couldn't be more unclear.

Maybe you are thinking, "I think I am Reformed, but what does that really mean?" That is a fair question as the word 'Reformed' has become quite fashionable among Christians, whether committed or nominal, whether denominational or independent, from all Church backgrounds, to claim that they are *Reformed*. This has led to some confusion as to what being 'Reformed' actually means.

Being 'Reformed' is not as precise or as meaningful as we might like it to be. This is because, ever since the Reformation in the 16th century, Churches have called themselves 'Reformed' because they recognize the ongoing need to be continually 'Reforming' their beliefs and practice according to the Bible. 'Always being *reformed*' (*semper reformanda*) is their catch-cry!

The continual need to be "*Reformed*" is evident in that no individual always maintains the same beliefs throughout their whole life. Churches made up of many such individuals do the same thing. Churches either get stronger or weaker in their theology and practice over time, thus, the need for our Churches to continually be 'Reformed' according to God's Word (*semper reformandasecundum verbi Dei*)!

A Church is 'Reformed,' when their attitude toward God and Scripture is one of humble submission to His teaching as the only infallible rule for our faith and practice. The Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) has supreme authority as the primary norm of faith. The Bible is the firm foundation that governs and shapes *everything* Reformed Churches believe and do.

But a lot of Churches, not just *Reformed* Churches, can claim to be *Reformed* according to this definition. So, what actually makes a Church, a *Reformed* Church?

What makes a Church Reformed?

The word 'Reformed' has been used more broadly and more narrowly throughout history. "The purpose of what has come to be known as the Reformation was to *reform* the existing Church."² 'Reformed'

Reformed theology, structured on the foundation of God's covenant of grace, teaches us that it is God, not man, who is sovereign in His salvation of sinners. Reformed theologians produced several confessions, giving us a systematic way of understanding and explaining the essential truths of the faith as taught in God's Word.

Be convinced that what you believe about God and salvation, and how you worship God, is of the utmost importance! It was for the Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin in the Reformation, so much so, that they were willing to die for what they believed!

was initially used broadly to describe all Churches and Christians who were theologically in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. In the narrower sense, 'Reformed' was used synonymously with the term 'Protestant.' Eventually even amongst the Protestants, *Reformed* Churches then differed in doctrine with Lutheran Churches.

As these differences in doctrine were developed and honed over time, the term 'Reformed' became more definitive. *Reformed* theology, structured on the foundation of God's covenant of grace, teaches us that it is God, not man, who is sovereign in His salvation of sinners. *Reformed* theologians produced several confessions, giving us a systematic way of understanding and explaining the essential truths of the faith as taught in God's Word.

Thus, over time, to be truly a *Reformed* Church was to subscribe to the *Reformed* Confessions of faith: the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Canons of Dordt (1619), or the Westminster Standards (1647-1648). Our Churches subscribe to the first three confessions along with the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647).

To hold to these 'Reformed' confessions which expound the truths taught in God's Word makes a Church *Reformed*. But what does it mean to be a *Reformed* Christian?

What does it mean to be a Reformed Christian?

To be a 'Reformed' Christian means that you are a member of a *Reformed* Church, having, as part of your profession or reaf-

firmation of faith, vowed that you "believe the Bible is the Word of God, the supreme authority for doctrine and life, and that its teaching is faithfully summarized in the creeds and confessions of this Church."³

There are three types of 'Reformed' Christians in the *Reformed* Churches of NZ. Firstly, those raised in a *Reformed* Church who are culturally *Reformed*. There are two branches of culturally *Reformed* Christians: 1) those have grown up with the *Reformed* traditions, style of worship, and social customs and contacts, who would only be comfortable in a traditionally *Reformed* Church; 2) and those who, while raised in a *Reformed* Church, would be at home in any Church, whether *Reformed* or not. The second type of *Reformed* Christians are those who have become convicted regarding the truth of the *Reformed* faith later in life and cling to these truths as God's truth. A third type of *Reformed* Christians are those who have been raised in the *Reformed* faith who are *Reformed* by culture and then by conviction.

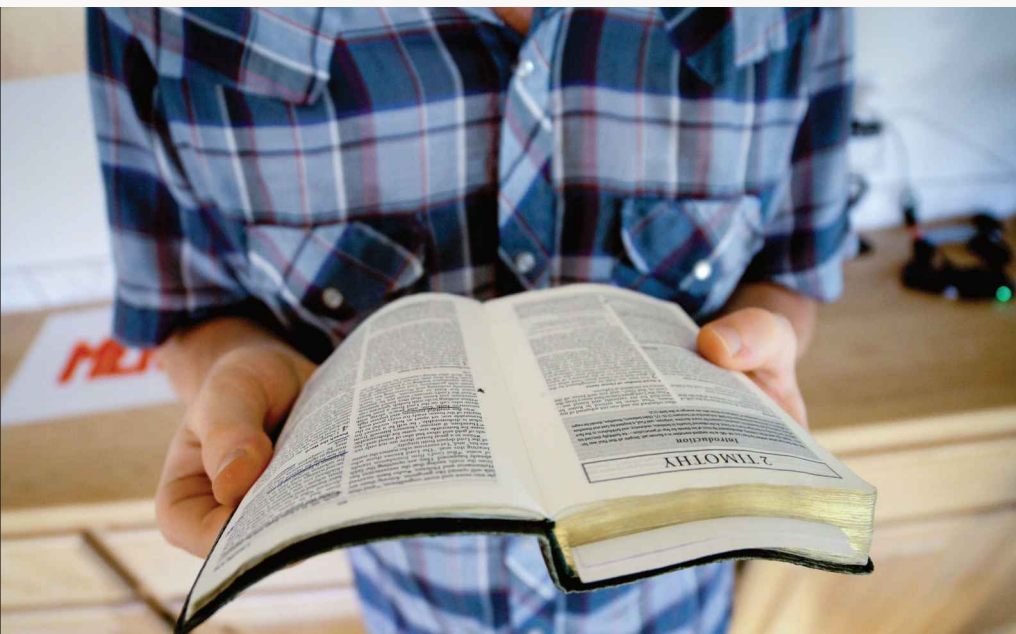
So, three groups of *Reformed* Christians. Those who are *Reformed* by **culture**, or by **conviction**, or by **culture** and **conviction**.

What does it mean to be Reformed by Culture or Conviction?

To be *Reformed* by culture means that you might be born into the *Reformed* Church. As you are raised you are taught God's Word and the *Reformed* confessions. But you either do not understand the *Reformed* confessions or do not care to understand them and accept them as true. You simply learn the *Reformed* faith and attend a *Reformed* Church because that is what you have always done. The *Reformed* faith has not become a matter of the heart.

Being *Reformed* by conviction means that you believe the Bible, and you believe the Bible as taught and summarized in the *Reformed* Confessions. This conviction as to the truth of the Bible contained in the *Reformed* confessions is then lived out!

One example of this might be in relation to what I believe is the main *Reformed* distinctive, the sovereignty of God over everything, in particular, God's sovereignty over every aspect of salvation. This includes the fact that you are one of His elect. You profess faith in Jesus Christ, and yet, this is not something to boast about, as if you have chosen to save yourself. Instead, you humbly acknowledge God's sovereign grace whereby He saved you from sin and its consequences, leading you to live a life of



gratitude for Him! This belief concerning God's sovereignty over your salvation is a *Reformed* conviction.

Please note that when we say we are a *Reformed* Church or Christian, we are not claiming exclusive rights to God's truth! We are simply saying that we believe God's truth as spelled out in the *Reformed* confessions which are a faithful summary of the truths found in God's Word.

Reformed Churches, and parents as well, need to teach the *Reformed* faith by principle and personal example, modeling it so that their children become *Reformed* by conviction. We cannot be content to let our children grow up learning these truths by rote, because then they will profess their faith in the *Reformed* Church without understanding just how beautiful *Reformed* theology is as it is lived out! We must aim for their hearts so the *Reformed* faith becomes real to them that they would hold it dear! These *Reformed* confessions will keep our children from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine that they come across! This is why it is so important to be *Reformed* by conviction.

Are the Creeds and Confessions so important to the *Reformed* faith?

Some might say, "Are the *Reformed* creeds and confessions so vital? Is the Bible not enough?" The simple answer is that the Bible is enough to teach us about salvation and to equip us to live the Christian life. But we also acknowledge that the *Reformed* confessions are faithful summaries of the truths contained in Scripture.

The confessions give us a systematic presentation of the teachings of Scripture enabling us to study and learn these biblical truths in a comprehensive way. Having written creeds and confessions is important because they "offer succinct and thorough summaries that cover the basic essentials of the faith."⁴

Carl Trueman highlights the fact that "Creeds and confessions are not simply consistent with biblical teaching, but their existence and use are implied by the same...the history of the Church demonstrates that they have frequently been of great help in the maintenance and propagation of the Christian faith."⁵

To illustrate this truth, imagine studying the Bible by yourself as similar to dissecting a frog for the first time and discovering parts of the frog for yourself. Then imagine reading the confessions being like reading a textbook on frogs, where someone else has dissected the frog and written down

everything they have discovered in it. Similarly, we benefit from those who have gone on before us who have read and considered the Bible and who have written statements of faith concerning the truths taught in Scripture.

Having clearly stated creeds and confessions benefit us in other ways as well. For example, they enable office bearers and congregants to have a common standard by which they can keep each other accountable in order to maintain unity within the Church.

Maybe you are thinking, "But what about Churches that don't hold to creeds and confessions? Are they then not true Churches?" That is not what I am saying, but as Carl Trueman points out, "all Churches have Creeds and Confessions regardless of whether or not they are written down."⁶

Let us also keep in mind, as *Reformed* Churches and Christians, as we cling to our tried-and-true confessions, let us be wary of turning '*Semper Reformanda*' (Always being *Reformed*) into '*Numquam Reformanda*' (Never being *Reformed*). For we must always be conformed to and confirmed by God's Word in relation to what we believe and how we live!

The heart is the target

What needs *Reforming* is your heart! Faith in God and a proper understanding of His Word must be constantly cultivated. If you are merely formal about Christianity, or indifferent – culturally *Reformed* – then that is something to be repented of. You must be convicted regarding the authority and truth of God's Word! Be convinced that what you believe about God and salvation, and how you worship God, is of the utmost importance! It was for the Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin in the Reformation, so much so, that they were willing to die for what they believed!

We have a *Reformed* Church in which we hold dear God's Word and its truth summarized in the *Reformed* confessions enabling us to be biblical in doctrine, worship and government! But we have not yet arrived in our personal faith and life (we have not been made perfect). This is why we need to sit under faithful preaching that challenges us to keep learning and growing in Christ-likeness! A Christian who is *Reformed* by conviction recognises and wants this.

So, are you *Reformed* by Culture or Conviction?

So, are you that kind of *Reformed* Christian, convinced that the *Reformed* confes-

sions are God's truth? If yes, then you are *Reformed* by **conviction**. Or are you *Reformed* simply because you are part of a *Reformed* Church? If so, then you are *Reformed* by **culture**.

If you are unsure, ask yourself: Is what I believe about God worth dying for? Is what I believe concerning God's Word worth dying for? Is what I believe about Jesus Christ and my salvation worth dying for? Is what I believe about how I worship God worth dying for?

The answer to all those questions will help you determine whether you are *Reformed* by **Culture** or **Conviction**. As Elisabeth Elliot once said, "There is nothing worth living for, unless it is worth dying for."

The biblical truths those questions are concerned about are laid out for us in the *Reformed* Confessions. And so, if your answer is yes to all those questions, then praise the Lord! You are *Reformed* by conviction! You will hold to the *Reformed* teachings as God's truth even if it means prison or death!

You can say with Guido de Brès (author of the Belgic Confession), you are ready to "offer your back to stripes, your tongue to knives, your mouth to gags, and your whole body to fire,"⁷ rather than deny the truths of God's Word expressed in the *Reformed* confessions.

Guido De Brès did die for these *Reformed* truths. Are we as *Reformed* Christians willing to do the same as our forefather in the faith? Are we willing to die for what we believe?

May God give us the courage of our conviction, that we would hold fast to what we believe, come what may!

References

1. *What Does Semper Reformanda Mean?* (March 24, 2017). Ligonier Ministries. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-does-sempere-reformanda-mean>
2. Mathison, K. A. (2018). What Does It Mean to Be *Reformed*? *Tabletalk*, 2, 13. <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2018/11/what-does-it-mean-to-be-reformed/>
3. Sing to the Lord, p. 946.
4. Trueman, Carl R. *The Creedal Imperative*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway. 2012. p. 159.
5. Trueman, Carl R. *The Creedal Imperative*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway. 2012. p. 159.
6. Trueman, Carl R. *The Creedal Imperative*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway. 2012. p. 167.
7. Sing to the Lord, p. 851.

Mr Nathaniel Rademaker is the minister in the Reformed Church in Whanganui.

BEN McDONALD

Reformed: more than a LABEL



Labels can be very helpful.

Some household substances look quite similar, have similar textures and come in similar packaging, like the multitude of creams and what-not that somehow accumulates in the bathroom. A label on the toothpaste makes it so much less likely that I'll have the unpleasant experience of blindly brushing my teeth with the sunscreen.

Same with medications. Having a label on bottles of potions and packets of pills makes it so much easier to take the required prescription and avoid the ones that might do us some serious harm.

But while labels can be helpful, they can also be misleading. Sticking a label on something doesn't necessarily guarantee that the item labelled is authentically what the label says it is. Just ask anyone who has bought a Rolex in Bali.

'Reformed' is a label. It is an identifier. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been called upon to answer the question from an enquirer who asked: "What does 'Reformed' mean?"

That question will be answered in greater detail elsewhere in this issue. But what 'Reformed' means and what it identifies has implications for how we as 'Reformed' Christians think of God's word, think of ourselves, and think of God's church, which is what I want to give some consideration to here.

How we think of God's word

The 16th century Protestant Reformation wasn't a movement designed to set up a new identity to rival Roman Catholicism. Nor was it merely a desire for a new way of doing church, as some today may think of 'always reforming.'¹ Both approaches merely apply a new label to an old problem. And surface level reform is never adequate.

The Reformers, rather, sought to address corruptions, abuses and errors in the church. And they appealed to God's word as the basis for doing so.

It was Scripture that enabled Martin Luther to challenge Rome's teaching on justification. It was by Scripture and its authority that corrupt practises were critiqued and called out. It was the authority of Scripture that called into question Papal authority and the place of tradition. It was Scripture that needed to be translated into the vernacular for people to read and study. It was the preaching and teaching of God's word in the common tongue that God's people needed to hear.

When asked directly at the Diet of Worms in 1521 whether he would recant his views, Martin Luther responded that his conscience was subject to God's word and

he could not do otherwise.

Luther wasn't taking a stand for showmanship. The word of God was central to his life because it is central to the life of faith. Jesus himself refuted Satan's temptations, saying: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."²

Now if Jesus took God at his word, then you and I, and the church at large, should as well – simply because it is God's word.

What happens if we don't take God at his word? Well, you end up taking someone else at their word, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, falling for the serpent's tantalising ruse: "Did God really say...?" Their rejection of God's good and trustworthy word plunged the world into darkness, lostness and death, taking all of humanity with them. We walk in their footsteps when we continue to do the same.

Yet God still spoke his good and trustworthy word after it was rejected: The offspring of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's offspring.³ By the goodness and grace of God, the serpent's word wouldn't get the final word. That privilege belongs to Jesus, the Word made flesh, crucified, risen and ascended.

Scripture testifies in many places to the goodness, usefulness, trustworthiness and authority of God's word. 2 Tim 3:16-17 may well be the most frequently cited verse that tells us this: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

It was this conviction, that God speaks through his word and that we ought to listen to, obey and feed from it, which spawned the Reformed movement.

It's one thing for Scripture to testify about God's word and for Reformed believers to uphold it as such. It's quite another, however, for it to take root in our lives, which brings us to how we think about ourselves.

How we think about ourselves

When I first came to Wellington, I was invited to a conference organised by the pastor of another church which is committed to Reformed theology. His invitation came with a somewhat tongue-in-cheek encouragement that, "It would be good to have some representation from the *truly* Reformed!"

I found that quite amusing. So I replied, equally tongue-in-cheek, saying that I wasn't quite sure where my 'Truly Reformed' t-shirt

was – probably packed away in a box somewhere – but I might be able to dig it out for the occasion.

Labels can be helpful. But we're always tempted to wear a label with pride and arrogance. And some, in response, will then regard the label with contempt, believing that's what the label represents.

I can recall growing up in the Reformed churches and sensing this tension. Those who loved the Reformed identity gave the impression (in my mind at least) that if you didn't have the label, or if other things didn't have the label on it, they were categorically not Reformed and were called out as such. This or that was not Reformed, and we are. Hear me roar!

And those who resented it, somewhat embarrassed by theological chest-beating (perceived or otherwise), either hid in shame, put up their dukes or went off in search of seemingly greener, non-Reformed pastures.

It's a sad and unfortunate dynamic, and not at all what 'Reformed' is intended to convey or produce. (And, I suspect, not limited to Reformed people either.) The problem is not so much in the label but how one wears it.

If God's word is the basis for our faith and teaching, and therefore the Reformed label, we must also take to heart what God's word says about us. Though I was dead in my sins and transgressions, a child of wrath like the rest of humanity, God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love, made me alive together with Jesus Christ.⁴ I am a new creation in Jesus Christ, not by my own doing, but by his, having been born again, and this not by the Reformed label, but through the living and abiding word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. I am saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

Glorifying God, however, is not our area of expertise. And my heart is at times still inclined to glorify other things, including myself – even using the Reformed label and identity to do so. I have much to learn but also much to unlearn. There is a race for me to run and complete. There is a fight to be fought on the battleground of my heart. I have trials, testing and even suffering to endure. I have much growing to do and much pruning to undergo that I may bear righteous fruit together with the rest of God's people.

But I do none of these things relying on the Reformed label, nor despising it for that matter. Rather, I rely on the all-sufficient grace of God in Jesus Christ which the

God has ordained to have a people for himself, who will love him with their whole being, and love one another as Christ has loved us. In this way, having called and drawn us to himself in Jesus, he keeps, sustains and renews us in his image by his word and Spirit, ministered to us in the church. In this way, he is glorified in us. In this way, together we bear light in a dark world. Isn't it marvellous to belong to Jesus and his body?

Reformed label testifies to.

And with God's people, under God's word, is where we'll do a great deal of our learning and growing. It's one of the reasons why we're called to come together as God's church on the Lord's Day.

How we think of God's church

So a third implication of being Reformed is how we think of God's church.

Jesus has given to his church various gifts, among them word-communicating servants, including shepherds (or pastors) and teachers. They will speak the truth of God's word in love, so that God's people will be equipped for the work of ministry, and the church, the body of Christ, built up in faith as a Christ-like body. Maturity in Christ, attaining to the fullness of Christ and his character, is the aim. Nothing glorifies God more than Christ and Christ-likeness.⁵

And because our salvation is the work of God from the beginning of the journey until its end,⁶ and because God is worthy in himself as the holy God, he is to be praised, thanked, exalted and called on as a fitting response to his glorious grace and amazing love.

The church, then, is more than a place to meet your friends or catch up with the people you enjoy hanging out with. You can certainly do that, of course!

The church is also more than an occasion where like-minded people get together and sing uplifting songs, though we certainly do that as well.

God has ordained to have a people for himself, who will love him with their whole being, and love one another as Christ has loved us. In this way, having called and drawn us to himself in Jesus, he keeps, sustains and renews us in his image by his word and Spirit, ministered to us in the

church. In this way, he is glorified in us. In this way, together we bear light in a dark world. Isn't it marvellous to belong to Jesus and his body?

Yet it doesn't always seem that way. Sometimes sorrow and trouble dilute our joy in the Lord to the point where both seem permanent and irreconcilable. Our problems and fears seem bigger and closer to us than God does. Our love has grown cold after a period of lukewarmness, and we suspect that God's has as well. Or perhaps we haven't yet discovered the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and insist on seeking glory in and glorifying other things.

The Reformed label can serve us well here – not because of the label itself, but because of what it testifies to and the implications it has for us.

God's word is true, trustworthy and good. He has the final word in Jesus. It humbles us to see and know our need, and that in Jesus God's people are held, loved, and renewed with fatherly care and affection. And each Lord's Day we get to come together with God's people to glorify God, to enjoy him, to hear him, to be fed and equipped by his word and encourage each other.

With John Calvin we might say that doctrine, even Reformed doctrine, is not a matter of the tongue but of the life. For, if I have the Reformed label, but have not love, I am nothing.⁷ The label, then, is not a testimony to itself. Indeed, Reformed is more than label.

References

- 1 Usually referred to by the Latin expression *semper reformanda*. This isn't a bad expression, but it is easily misused in order to call for and justify all manner of changes in doctrine and practise. It would take another article, however, to explore this in more detail.
- 2 Matt 4:4 (ESV)
- 3 Gen 3:15
- 4 See Eph 2:1-10
- 5 See Eph 4:1-16
- 6 See Rom 8:30
- 7 See 1 Cor 13:1-8

Mr Ben McDonald is the minister of the Reformed Church in Wellington.

Reynardo Etenia Wongso on Unsplash



AARON WARNER

Gripped by the LOVE of CHRIST?

After completing my first year of seminary, I was required to be evaluated by my home session before being allowed to lead the congregation in worship. I sat nervously as twelve men examined me on my abilities in writing and delivering sermons. They questioned me about the process of creating sermons, the role of original languages, and leading worship services. I had prepared answers for most of their questions, but towards the end, one elder asked something that caught me off guard. He asked, "What do you think is the biggest problem in the church today?"

I could have easily pointed to the larger Christian community and said that they needed more faithful preaching, which would have made sense in the context of the examination. However, instinctively, I responded with just one word, "apathy." My thoughts were not directed towards the broader Christian community, but rather towards the members of the faithful Reformed Churches that I had always been a part of.

Though I have moved countries and denominations, if I were to be asked that question again today concerning the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, I would give the same answer. We are very well taught, but not very convicted or zealous. We learn our Catechisms. We memorise our Bibles. We go to Church. It appears that just as the revised Profession of Faith form has removed the word "heartily" from the Profession of Faith vows, there has also been a loss of our conviction and affection for the Reformed doctrines and confessions.¹ Further than that, we also seem to be the most critical of "the Reformed." "We all have our gripes," as one person told me. It is often the ones who have grown up in the Church who love the Reformed faith the least. There is

often a yearning for something new, more relevant, much like the other churches in our area. They do it, why can't we?

How many people would "offer their backs to the stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, their whole bodies to the fire"² rather than deny the truth expressed in our confession? Sometimes it feels like we are asking people to do more than offer their bodies to the fire when we exhort them to come to two services on Sunday. You often get excuses like, "It is



my only day off,” “It’s a family day,” or “I just need a good sleep before work tomorrow.” Despite the Scriptural teaching portrayed in our Confession that says:

*This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, **but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God’s worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy.***³

All of us wrestle with apathy in some form or another. There are those “fringe

members” who are on the edges, who appear to be the most apathetic. Others attend both services simply because that is the Reformed way. Some have been raised in the Reformed faith but when challenged by others quickly fall away. Still others stick around simply because this is where their friends and family are and never truly are convicted of the faith. So what is the solution? How do we help people rediscover their love for the Reformed faith? Do you want to help people rediscover their love for worship, God, and faith? Let us start by grounding our solutions in scripture instead of relying on the wisdom of man.

I have witnessed first-hand what using the world’s wisdom to try to get people zealous for the Lord accomplishes. When I lived in Michigan, one of the churches felt

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”



Photo by Peter Conrad on Unsplash

that their youth were drifting away. They hired a youth pastor to draw them back. In the end there were a lot of events that drew in lots of youth. There were loud music, fun, games; everyone of course suffered through the short ten-minute message. It became what some thought was a thriving youth group, because there were a lot of youth and lots of events. Yet it always felt empty. It was a lot of fun, but most did not really gain any deep love for Christ and his word. They were there for the time with their friends. They wanted to hang out with the cool youth pastor, but this never resulted in anyone having a loving relationship with Christ and his Church. In fact, the actual church dwindled, and when the youth pastor left it was worse off than when they called him. It was a busy youth

group but it was not a spiritually thriving youth group.

Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. He calls ministers to “be careful how you build.” You can build with sub-par materials like wood, straw, and hay, but your building must pass the fire test. The idea that Paul is getting at here is that you can gather people into the church through worldly ways, like entertainment, charismatic speakers, you can get them with good stories, and scratch their itching ears and even slip in some shallow gospel truth, but your work will be tested and how you built will become evident. You may be saved but your building will not be. We cannot bring about a heart conviction through manipulation, through jazzing things up, or through drawing

One of the distinctives of the Reformed faith is that God has done it all. It is God’s love in Christ Jesus toward us that has saved us. It is all a work of God.



people in by worldly means.

So how does one become more excited about knowing and living out the Reformed faith? One person that no one could accuse of having little zeal for the faith is Paul. I have been preaching through 2 Corinthians and at the forefront of this letter is Paul defending his zeal and his actions for his ministry and the Corinthian church. Certain men have come into the congregation and have undermined Paul's ministry, calling into question his motives (1:17) and His preaching (10:10). These men (or super-apostles, as they have been called) had exalted themselves as having superior speech over Paul. The Corinthian church had to be rebuked because they were, at least in part, listening to these super apostles. Paul could have easily become apathetic and lost conviction since the Corinthians who had become Christians because of his message, are now bearing beautifully with the 'super-apostles' message (11:4). Paul has suffered greatly for the spread of the gospel (11:23-28) and the Corinthian Church. Why not let someone else take a turn, why continue to pour himself out for those who do not appreciate him?

Paul lays out his motivation for ministry. What is the reason he is so zealous and does not stop holding onto the truth of the gospel, sharing it, and living it out? Firstly, the fear of the Lord drives him (5:11). We do not like to think of the fear of the Lord as a motivation. Yet, for Paul one of the reasons that he is so zealous in his work of ministry is because he knows he will stand before God's throne of judgement, and though he might not be condemned all his actions will be laid out before his God. How does Paul live in light of God's grace? What does he do with the gifts God has given him? He does not fear condemnation but disappointing his Lord and Saviour.

Paul also says that his ministry and his life is compelled by the love of Christ. This is not his love for Christ but Christ's love for him. One of the distinctives of the Reformed faith is that God has done it all. It is God's love in Christ Jesus toward us that has saved us. It is all a work of God. This is what awoke zeal in Paul. It is why he held so strongly to the Gospel truth and would not let it be twisted or distorted by the many false teachers that followed him, and why he held strongly to the faith even when it meant that he would receive abuse. It is what drove him to preach the message of Christ who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God (5:21). It was the source of his unrelenting

drive to no longer live for himself but for Christ who died and rose again on his behalf.

Why are men so often apathetic towards the church and her members? It is because we are not gripped by the love of Christ seen in his death and resurrection. So often we are content with the temporary goods of this world, rather than knowing what Christ has made us as inheritors of glory. Our attention is consumed with what we can see rather than what we cannot see which is eternal. CS Lewis once said,

*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."*⁴

The issue of apathy among the faithful in Reformed churches is a pressing one. We cannot bring about heart conviction through worldly means such as entertainment, manipulation, or changing the message of Christianity. Instead, we need to grow in the faith through the word. We need to come to know more deeply the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ.

References

- 1 I was not around for the discussions concerning our Profession of Faith form and the changes that were made. But I noticed a word from the old Psalter Hymnal form was removed. Instead of the Professing member saying, "Do you **heartily** believe in the doctrine...." The new form simply contains, "Do you believe in the doctrine...."
- 2 See introduction to the Belgic Confession in "The Creeds Confessions and Liturgical Forms"
- 3 WCF 21:8 (emphasis mine)
- 4 "The Weight of Glory and other addresses"

Mr Aaron Warner is the minister of the Reformed Church in Palmerston North.



The Free Reformed School Association (Tas) Inc. invites applications for the following positions:

TEACHERS

Urgently require Secondary and Primary teachers for 2023

**Full-Time, Part-Time,
12-month or 6-month
appointments accepted**

At JCS, our vision is to be a *strongly connected* community of learners, *deeply committed* to our faith and to continual growth, nurturing individuals to be their best in the service of God and to His glory.

We are looking to add enthusiastic, committed teachers to our team for the 2023 school year. Due to growing class sizes we need additional, suitably qualified, teachers. Applications for full-time and part-time employment welcome, with 6-month or 12-month appointments considered.

John Calvin School currently has over 120 students from Kinder to Grade 10 with an average combined class size of 19. We are a well-resourced school, located in Launceston, a beautiful city in the north of Tasmania, a breathtaking part of God's creation. (<https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/>)

Applicants must be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches, be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and be registered to work with vulnerable people.

Conditions and salary are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

Expressions of interest for future positions, full-time or part-time, are welcome.

For application forms, see the school website (www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment).

Forward completed applications to the Business Manager:

- E-mail: wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au
- Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

For more information, contact the Principal, Mr Daniel Coote

- E-mail: cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au

ROBERT S. ARENDALE

Living in Light of CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

The Christian life is filled with trials of various kinds (James 1:2). It is filled with suffering and hardship. It is filled with uncertainty and anxiety. Job rightly says, "Man who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble" (14:1). We do not know what tomorrow may bring. We do not know what that next phone call or doctor's appointment may bring. What will the diagnosis be? What will tomorrow's meeting or conversation hold? Joy or sadness, despair or delight? We don't even know how many tomorrows we will have; our physical life in this world is fleeting. We are like grass that withers and fades – here today and gone tomorrow. Although the inner self is being renewed day by day, the outer self is wasting away (2 Cor. 4:16). Creation itself groans and longs to be set free from its bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:21).

Given this reality, where does one find certainty and hope? Where does one look for peace and joy in the midst of life in this "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4)? Where can we plant our feet? Paul's first letter to the Corinthians guides us.

Paul's Hope and the Empty Tomb

The Apostle Paul knew well such trials

and hardships of life. He knew slander and injustice. He knew uncertainty and fear. He knew both physical and spiritual trials. Yet he also knew peace, joy, and hope. And Paul's hope is to be our hope. Paul's hope is the hope of the believer. The hope of the risen and reigning Lord of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ. As did Paul, so also we set our feet on the firm foundation of gospel truth – the truth of the empty tomb and the risen Savior.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians reveal the heart of a man burdened by life in this fallen world, yet rejoicing in the sure hope and life of Jesus Christ. He summarizes this mentality when he writes, "We are ... sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:10). According to the world, we may be poor and have nothing; yet in Christ we possess every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). By faith, we possess Christ himself who reigns from the right hand of the Father (Col. 3:1–4). Simply put, these epistles reveal a man who walked "by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7); who knew that "this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17); and who pressed on in

In light of Christ's resurrection, we are not to be moved from our hope in the gospel. We are to be "steadfast" and "immovable."

service of the Lord looking “not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). Paul did not find his identity and purpose in the passing things of this world, but in his union with the resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). For Paul, the resurrected Christ changed everything!

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul revels in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this chapter, he expounds both the reality and the theology of the resurrection. As Paul states, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (vv. 14, 17). But Paul also declares the reality that Christ “was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (v. 4). As the angel said to the women on that first Easter Sunday, “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (Matt. 28:6).

Moreover, Paul unpacks the rich theology of the resurrection. Christ was raised, so Paul states, as the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection! His resurrection is the first

installment of the great resurrection harvest at the last day (1 Cor. 15:23). As believers, we have been raised with Christ spiritually (Rom. 6:5–11), and we look forward to the day when we will be raised bodily and will see our Savior face to face (1 Cor. 15:35–49; 1 John 3:1–3).

Persevering in the Power of the Spirit

Furthermore, by means of Christ’s resurrection, the new creation has exploded into this present evil age (2 Cor. 5:17). The age of the Spirit has come in Christ (Acts 2:33)! The age of righteousness, peace, and joy has come in Christ (Rom. 14:17). Brothers and sisters, it is this truth of the resurrection that rejoices our heart and strengthens us to press on in faith – that strengthens us to persevere in the power of the Spirit (see Col 1:29). Paul closes the majestic chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 with the following words:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (v. 58)

There are three items to note in this verse.

First, note the transition term, “therefore.” We must read this conclusion in light of what Paul has just declared in chapter 15; in light of Christ’s victory over sin and death – “O death where is your victory, O death where is your sting” (v. 55) – we are called to do something. Christ has conquered sin and death and has given us his Spirit (Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:14–15; Acts 1:4–5; 2:33). Brothers and sisters, this truth must, and in fact most certainly will, impact our lives and our ministries.

Second, in light of Christ’s resurrection, we are not to be moved from our hope in the gospel. We are to be “steadfast” and “immovable.” In other words, we are to let nothing move us from Christ (see Col. 1:23). While some in the Corinthian church were denying the resurrection, Paul calls the Corinthians – and us – to take our stand on the resurrection. We stand on the gospel of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection – and we must stand firm as good soldiers for Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). Just as the world was seeking to move the Corinthians from the sure truth of the gospel, so the world today

Photo by Jonny Gios on Unsplash



seeks to move us from the sure foundation of the gospel with its lies and deceptions. It is all too easy to give up, give in, and simply go with the flow of the world's thinking (Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:8). But dear Christian, do not be moved. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. Christ is our strength, rock, and fortress. He is our shield and stronghold.

Third, we are to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord." We are to be overflowing in our service to Christ. Serving the Lord is not a part-time responsibility; it is a full-time job. As my grandfather would often tell me, "there is no day off in the Lord's army." We are to serve him and to live for his glory all the days of our lives. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Or as Peter puts it, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:10–11).

Thus, not only are we to be steadfast, not only are we not to be moved from the foundational truth of the gospel of Christ, but we are to press forward on the old paths of the gospel. We are to be "always abounding" in the work of the Lord!

Now what exactly is "the work of the Lord" in which we are to be always abounding? What or whose works of the Lord does Paul have in view? He doesn't explicitly tell us. I would suggest, however, that the "brothers" of 1 Corinthians 15:58 is the same "brothers" of verses 1 and 50. It is those who heard Paul's preaching (vv. 1–2). In these verses, Paul is addressing the whole congregation. Thus, the "work of the Lord" is the believer's work in service of the Lord. It is the work of each child of God – God's adopted sons and daughters – in service of Christ, whether seen or unseen, whether acknowledged or hidden.

Not in Vain

Serving the Lord each moment of our lives? This sounds exhausting. Often we struggle simply to make it through another day. But Paul closes 1 Corinthians 15:58 with a wonderful word of assurance: "knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." What a truth! Regardless of the outcome or the results, our labor for Christ is not in vain. For those united to Christ and empowered by the Spirit, our service for the gospel is never empty. The Lord is always at work, in and through the

humble labors of his children. It is a wonder of wonders that the Lord would use our feeble efforts. Even the smallest work for the Lord is not empty, but is pleasing in his eyes and used for his glory.

The faithful prayer of a grandmother, the simple faith of a five-year-old boy or girl, the Bible reading of a tired, single mom, the leading in family worship of a busy father pulled in a hundred directions, or the humble, faithful testimony of the young professional – all are pleasing to our Lord. Our believing is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:2) and our labor for the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Brothers and sisters, may we

always abound in the work of the Lord knowing that we belong to the risen and conquering King! And may our eyes be always fixed on our resurrected King – the founder and perfecter of our faith, the one who rose in victory and power, the one who loved us and gave himself for us, the one in whom there is forgiveness and life, the one who does all things well – the Lord Jesus Christ!

The author is pastor of Redeemer OPC in Dayton, Ohio.

New Horizons, April 2022

57 Q. How does "the resurrection of the body" comfort you?

A. Not only my soul
will be taken immediately after this life
to Christ its head,
but even my very flesh, raised by the
power of Christ,
will be reunited with my soul
and made like Christ's glorious body.

58 Q. How does the article concerning "life everlasting" comfort you?

A. Even as I already now
experience in my heart
the beginning of eternal joy,
so after this life I will have
perfect blessedness such as
no eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no man has ever imagined:
a blessedness in which to praise God eternally.

The King of God's Kingdom

SCOTT REDD

In the ancient world, the king oversaw public building campaigns, led the nation's armies in battle, administered a system of justice, and propagated wisdom in all these efforts. The king was the embodiment of the kingdom's identity, he was the perfect expression of his people, and he was often described as the father of the nation, suggesting a deeper relationship between the king and his people than one that merely involved politics or government. The relationship between the king and his people was, at its best, a glorious possibility for human flourishing and, at its worst, a terrifying opportunity for human suffering.

The King in God's plan of redemption

Humanity was always meant to have a king, because humans were created as part of God's kingdom. This is what God intended when He made us according to the *imago Dei*, "the image of God," forming man from the land to occupy and ultimately fill His earthly domain with His image. In Genesis 1, the earth is depicted as a physical palace that will one day be filled and subdued by human regents who are made after the image of their divine Creator-king (vv. 27–28). This kingly identity informs our human identity at its most foundational level. Even in light of the utter failure and destruction of the fall, humanity is still called to set its sights on this vision of an earth filled with God's glory, and redeemed images of God are called to pray that God's kingly rule will be applied to earth just "as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10; see Isa. 6:3). Jesus told us to pray that way because He looks forward to that day too.

After the fall, God appointed a family from among all the families of the earth from whom a line of kings would come, now as a part of His work of redemption.

Abraham was promised not only that God would make him into a great nation dwelling in a great land but that "kings shall come from you" (Gen. 17:6), an indication that the hope for redemption outlined in the patriarchal era of the Old Testament included the hope for a human king to come from the line of Abraham.

This picture is filled out further in the Mosaic covenant, where we find rules and constraints for a future king intended to encourage him to remain faithful to the Lord (Deut. 17:14–20). We ought not to be surprised that such a passage comes before the coronation of an actual king. Much of the Mosaic teaching assumes the blessing that had yet to be provided for the people of Israel. There on the outskirts of the promised land, perched on the steppes of Moab, the grand extent of the Israelite hope was laid out in detail in the book of Deuteronomy, including God's provision of a sanctuary, the terms for living in the land, the structure of the theocratic state, and the profile of the kind of king Israel should have to rule over her.

The historical books of Joshua through 2 Samuel depict the story of how Israel laid hold of this hope, and so we should not be surprised to see the kingship come up again in another covenant, this time establishing the throne eternally in the line of King David (2 Sam. 7). Like Abraham and Moses before him, David received the promise whose fulfilment would come many years in the future.

The unified message of the Old Testament is clear: from the beginning, the divine King always intended humanity to be unified under the rule of His appointed human king, one who will subdue the earth under His righteous and bountiful reign. Tragically, as the curtain closes on the Old Testament, an appropriate candidate has not been identified from the line of David, but when the curtain opens on the New Testament, Jesus emerges as the true King and rightful heir of all God's redemptive promises. Indeed, all the promises of God are "Yes" in Christ and "Amen" for those who are united to Him in His kingship (2 Cor. 1:20).

Christ's promised kingdom

Christ shows Himself to be the King

humanity has been waiting for, because He is the only covenant partner who fulfils the requirements that God demands. As such, He is the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45; see Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22), the true Israel (Matt. 2:15; John 15:1–17), and the messianic Son of David (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 20:30), fulfilling the roles and receiving the inheritance anticipated by each of the aforementioned covenants.

Unlike the covenant heads who came before Him, Christ administers His covenant for His people from a position of unique identification with God. The Apostolic writers were hard-pressed to describe Christ's position of authority in the cosmos in only one soaring, superlative expression. He is "the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (Heb. 1:3), the One in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9), and the One who is placed "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion" (Eph. 1:21). In this way, Christ's covenant not only surpasses all covenants that came before; it is the reality of which all previous covenants were merely a foreshadow (Rom. 5:14; Col. 2:7; Heb. 8:5; 9:23, 24; 10:1). Whatever and whoever prefigured Christ's kingship in the Old Testament has now been relegated to the status of anticipation, shadow, and type. They pointed to Christ and now find their meaning in Him.

The kingdom provides a thematic frame for Jesus' earthly ministry. He begins by bearing witness to His kingdom (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15), and He commissions the Apostles to continue that kingdom mission after He is gone (Matt. 28:16–20). According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Christ executes the office of King by "subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies" (Q&A 26). Those who are counted as the people of God will honour and obey with proper reverence the King whom God has established over them. A person cannot claim to be saved by some other means such as bloodline or moral achievement. He must accept the kingship of Christ. While many of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day no doubt resisted His teaching because they held to a form of legalism, it is also probable that many were simply not open to the idea of faith in someone like Jesus. Like the various

rebellions in the Old Testament, their rejection of God's appointed authority was rebellion against God Himself (Num. 16; John 8:19). It is not enough to embrace the law of Moses or the promises to David if one denies the kingship of Christ. As Jesus warns, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also" (John 14:7).

To this day, Christ rules from the right hand of God the Father Almighty (Acts 5:31; Col. 3:1). As a result, the church of Christ does not look to a past saint as our covenant head; nor do we look to earthly relics of a previous generation, but rather we look to a living King as our primary and highest authority.

Christ's indwelling kingdom

The members of the universal church are deeply united with one another in Christ just as they are partakers of the fellowship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This spiritual fellowship enables believers, as individuals and as a corporate body, to be free of the corruption of sin that once governed them, while it also binds them one to another as the corporate body of Christ, the living sanctuary of God on earth, and the primary agent of the kingdom of Christ (Matt. 16:19). Christ initiated this aspect of His kingship in His prayer immediately before His betrayal:

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." (John 17:20–23)

Christ surely leads His church, and the church is united in Him through the Holy Spirit, whom the Apostles tellingly refer to as "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11). The Spirit is not only effective in the regeneration of the believer, but He is also the regular sustenance by which the Christian lives as a citizen of Christ's kingdom. Christ's kingship has a two-way application. It establishes an appropriate relationship between God and His people because Christ is truly human, but it also establishes an appropriate relationship between His people and God because Christ is truly

divine. Because of Christ, we can be united to God and enjoy all the blessings inherent in that union.

The character and work of the church are founded in Christ, enlivened in His Spirit, and directed toward His kingdom ends. He is in us as we are in Him. Christ is more than a saint in our tradition or a prophet of God; He is the fulfilment of the expectations of the Hebrew Scriptures. Our hearts are conformed to His kingly heart through the work of the Spirit in sanctification, and because of our spiritual union with Him we long for His kingdom to come in its fullness.

Dr. Scott Redd is president and associate professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He is author of The Wholeness Imperative.

First published in Tabletalk Magazine, an outreach of Ligonier, November 2021 | Vol.45 | No.11

The thanksgiving of the redeemed

WILLIAM C. GODFREY

Psalm 107 celebrates how much we have to be thankful for as God's redeemed people. We are a people who have been saved out of deep disaster by our faithful God. The depths of disaster are plumbed in this psalm in ways we can only sketch out briefly here. But the psalm gives us four vivid pictures, functioning almost like parables, which describe the depths into which God's people have plunged themselves.

The first picture is of a wandering people who are lost and homeless (vv. 4–9). It is never a good thing to be lost, but the image here is of people who are so lost that even if they knew where they were, they would have nowhere to go. They cannot stay where they are and live (v. 5), but neither do they have anywhere they belong. The second picture of disaster is of people who are imprisoned at hard labour and awaiting execution (vv. 10–16). This is not the result of some false conviction; these inmates are all guilty. All that awaits them is execution and death.

The third picture is of those who have made themselves sick (vv. 17–22). This sickness is not the kind that comes to us all through no fault of our own. This sickness is like that experienced by the drug addict who has ruined his health through substance abuse or the alcoholic who has ruined his liver through hard drinking. The sickness pictured here is fatal and will certainly lead to death.

The final picture is of those who are lost at sea during a hurricane or typhoon (vv. 23–32). They are totally at the mercy of the raging wind and waves. The situation is beyond their skill as sailors; their resources and their strength are completely exhausted (vv. 26–27).

All these vivid pictures portray those who are hopelessly lost and powerless to save themselves from the deep disasters into which they have plunged themselves. But about all these lost souls comes one repeated refrain: "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble" (v. 28). Those who are hopeless and powerless in themselves come to realize that their covenant God is their only hope of deliverance. They all put their trust in Him and called on His name and found the same glorious result: "And he delivered them from their distress" (v. 28).

I don't know what kinds of troubles you might be experiencing now as a Christian. But I know that we all dig our own graves with our sins. Thanks be to God that we have a covenant Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom we can call from the depths of our self-made distress, knowing that He will lift us out and save us. There is no disaster so deep, no situation so hopeless that the Lord will not hear you if you call and will not come and deliver you from all your distress. He can save the lost, the condemned, the sick, and the sinking. We can depend on this because He is good and His steadfast love endures forever. Let us give thanks that this God is our God (v. 1) and meditate on His amazing love always (v. 43).

Rev. William C. Godfrey is pastor of Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, Calif.

First published in Tabletalk Magazine, an outreach of Ligonier, November 2021 | Vol.45 | No.11

LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON

Our wisest plans and best endeavors!

We are disciples – Jesus is our Master. The *world* we live in is *His school*, and every *person* and *event* is under His management, designed to forward us in the *great lessons* which He would have us to learn – such as ...

- self-denial,
- a distrust of creatures, and
- an absolute dependence upon Himself.

In this view,

- *afflictions* – are mercies,
- *losses* – are gains,
- *hindrances* – are helps, and
- *all things*, even those which seem most contrary – are working together for our good.



Creatures smile upon us – or frown upon us; *caress* us – or disappoint us; *friends* grow cool – and enemies become kind, just as His wisdom sees most expedient to promote our spiritual progress.

Where we look for most blessing – it

often comes to little; where we look for nothing – we often obtain most benefit.

Our wisest plans and best endeavours at one time produce great troubles!

At another time, what we do at *random*, and what we account the most *trifling* incidents – are productive of happy, lasting, and extensive consequences.

It is well for us if, by a long train of such changing, checkered experiences – we at length attain to some proficiency, and can say with David, “My soul, wait only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.”

The heart possession of *two maxims* of Matthew Henry, is well worth all that the acquisition can cost us:

1. Every creature is to us – only what God makes it.
2. We cannot expect too little from man – nor too much from God.

In this *school* I am placed, and these *lessons* I am aiming to learn. But I am a *poor scholar* and indeed any master but He who condescends to be my teacher – would turn me out as an incorrigible dunce!

Yet I sincerely wish to be willing to be *what*, and *where*, and *how* the Lord would have me be; to cast all my cares simply upon Him, and to be always satisfied in my mind that He assuredly cares for me!

The Bummer Lamb

I recently read that every once in a while, a ewe will give birth to a lamb and reject it.

There are many reasons she may do this. If the lamb is returned to the ewe, the mother will often kick the poor animal away. Once a ewe rejects one of her lambs, she will never change her mind. These little lambs hang their heads so low that it looks like something is wrong with their neck. Their spirit is broken.

These lambs are called “bummer lambs” and unless the shepherd intervenes, that lamb will die, rejected and alone. Do you know what there shepherd does? He takes that little lamb into his home, hand feeds it and keeps it warm. He will wrap it up with blankets and hold it to his chest so the bummer can hear his heartbeat.

Once the lamb is strong enough, the shepherd will place it back in the field with the rest of the flock. But that sheep never forgets how the shepherd cared for him when he was rejected. When the shepherd calls for the flock, guess who runs to him first?

It is not that the bummer lamb is loved more, is just knows intimately the one who loves it.

Many of the inmates we mento are bummer lambs, rejected and broken. But we, as mentors, show them the heartbeat of the Shepherd, the one who cares for all their needs and holds them close to His heart so they can hear His heartbeat. We show them that they may be broken but they are deeply loved by the Shepherd.

Tony Dedda. Voluntary chair, Crossroads Prison Ministries, Australia.

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

There are 50 countries which are monitored by *World Watch Monitor* for being places where Christians around the world are under pressure for their faith.

Freedom of belief, guaranteed by the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*, plays a critical part in the unfolding, complex story of the 21st Century. We exist to tell this part of the story with accuracy and authority. We respect and uphold everyone's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Our focus is on the global Christian Church.

We will bring you summaries from different countries each issue so that you may be focussed on praying for the needs of Christians' everywhere.

Cameroon

A former agrarian colony of the United Kingdom, France and Germany, Cameroon was transformed by the discovery of oil in the 1970s. President Paul Biya, in power since 1982, has yet to deliver a state where rule of law is respected, pluralism flourishes, and freedom of expression and assembly are observed. The far north of the country is one of the remaining strongholds of the militant Islamist forces of Boko Haram, and radicalisation is spreading in that region. Elsewhere, the government has cracked down in response to protests over government policies, and the country is dealing with spillover effects of the sectarian civil war in neighbouring Central African Republic.

Central African Republic

The Central African Republic has yet to fully emerge from a civil war fought partly along religious lines. Although the Islamist rebel group, Séléka, has been driven out of many parts of the country, attacks against Christians continue in the capital, Bangui, and in the mainly Muslim north-east. Christians have been forced to flee from their villages and are denied access to farming fields. Large groups of Christians live in extremely poor conditions in refugee camps.

Chad

There has been political instability in Chad for many years, and the US State Department for Human Rights has highlighted the "use of torture; arbitrary arrest and detention, incommunicado detention, and lengthy pre-trial detention; denial of fair public trial; and executive influence on the judiciary" by the government. Under its constitution, Chad is a secular state. While Muslims (about half the population) and Christians (about a third) generally coexist peacefully, churches must register in Chad, and failure to do so can lead to a prison sentence. The landlocked country also faces problems from the Islamist militant group Boko Haram in the areas bordering Nigeria.

China

With nearly 100 million Christians, the Church is the largest social force in China not controlled by the Communist Party. As a result, there are increasing efforts to restrict the way Christians operate. A considerable number of Christians are still imprisoned. Church meetings continue to be disrupted in several provinces. Churches have also been closed and landlords pressured to stop renting to Christians. In 2017 some of China's underground churches were pushed to join the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement, while a new law on religion is being rolled out in 2018.

Colombia

Although Colombia is a democracy where religious freedom is enshrined in law, large areas of the country are still controlled by criminal organisations, drug cartels and paramilitary groups, even after the peace deal with the FARC. Christians are seen as a threat to these groups, as they represent an alternative way to behave in society. Church services are monitored and Christians who speak out against these groups are targeted. In indigenous communities, conversion from traditional beliefs is not tolerated and Christians are excluded from basic social services or even expelled from their communities.

Comoros

Comoros's Constitution grounds all public policy in Islamic beliefs. Propagating any religion except Islam is illegal; converts to Christianity can be prosecuted and face intense social backlash, leaving them little option but to practise their faith underground. Despite a trend towards democracy, the influence of radical Islam is growing. Radical scholars, many of whom are trained in other Muslim nations, are pushing for stricter Islamic laws.

Cuba

Cuba may be starting to open itself up to the outside world, but the government "continues to repress dissent and discourage public criticism", according to Human Rights Watch. "Repressive tactics employed by the government include beatings, public acts of shaming, and the termination of employment." Still, as in China, the Church in Cuba is growing. Religious organisations are the only authorised assemblies, and their activities are being increasingly tolerated, opening a window of opportunity for social change through the activities of the Church.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Born as Zaire (renamed in 1997), possessing vast mineral riches and nearly unanimously Christian, the DRC has followed a familiar African pattern: Western colonisation followed by independence, civil war, fragmentation and dictatorship. The current situation, as summed up by Freedom House: "political corruption, weak rule of law, and violence". For the past two decades, a Uganda-born rebel movement has taken root in eastern DRC, obtaining the support of jihadist organisations. A 2017 United Nations report concluded that the increasingly Islamist rebel movement has been responsible for "widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law".

Anglican bishop in Kenya rejects Church of England's decision to bless same-sex unions

Mon Feb 13, 2023– 10:03 am EST

NAIROBI, Kenya (LifeSiteNews) – The Anglican Church of Kenya has strongly condemned the Church of England for its decision to bless same-sex unions.

In a letter published February 10, Anglican Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit of Nairobi condemned the decision of the Anglican Church of England to approve the liturgical blessing of same-sex unions. The English choice, the result of a vote, was praised by Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell in a joint statement. "For the first time, the Church of England will publicly, unreservedly, and joyfully welcome same-sex couples in church," they wrote

Slamming the decision as a contradictory attempt to appease both sides on the Anglican same-sex "marriage" debate, Ole Sapit said, "It is ridiculous that the Church of England affirms to remain faithful to the traditional teachings of marriage, yet have sanctioned the so-called prayers of love to be used in their churches to bless unions between persons of same-sex. This is hypocritical and a blatant lie for there is only one truth and not many versions or opinions of it."

Ole Sapit continued, "The unfortunate rise of the liberal churchmanship within the Western Provinces of our beloved Anglican Communion is devious and must be countered with the true gospel. Having lost all theological and doctrinal legitimacy, the liberal churches have used their political dominance to secularize the church by normalizing all manner of sins."

Firmly positioning the Anglican Church of Kenya as faithful to the Gospel, Ole Sapit called upon Anglicanism's western branches to repent:

We in the Anglican Church of Kenya call upon these western liberal Provinces

to repent and return to the one and only faith in Jesus Christ as revealed and taught in the canonical scriptures of the church. The rhetoric of political and secular correctness will only serve to undermine the one and only pure gospel, and unless these churches preach the gospel as we inherited it, they will soon be irrelevant, lose their identity as a church, and they will only be as good as that salt which has lost its saltiness to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by the world (Matthew 5:13). We make a humble call to these churches: "Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. Your actions do not meet the requirements of God"

The Anglican archbishop declared, "From the Holy Scriptures it is taught that marriage is between one man and one woman, monogamous and heterosexual. Any deviation from this God-designed covenant relationship is sinful and unacceptable. If there are people who are not called to marriage and are faithful followers of Christ, let them embrace celibacy, and live a life obedient to the teachings of the bible as they so profess to believe in."

Ole Sapit made it clear that blessings of same-sex sexual relationship will not occur in Anglican churches in Kenya, saying:

We write to our Christians to note that:

1. The General Synod of the Church of England makes legislation for the Church of England, and their resolutions apply only to the Church of England. Whereas we in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) are saddened by the departure of our mother Church from the true Gospel, their resolutions do not apply to us and we do not recognize any teaching that is extra-biblical or contrary to the teachings of the Bible.
2. We affirm that marriage, as taught in the Holy Scriptures is between one man and one woman, monogamous and heterosexual. Any deviation from this God designed covenant relationship, is sinful and unacceptable. If there are people who are not called to marriage and are faithful followers of Christ, let them embrace celibacy, and live a life obedient to the teachings of the bible as they so profess to believe in.

3. We encourage and stand in solidarity with those marginalized Christians in the Church of England who is resolved to remain faithful to the Gospel of Christ and seek obedience to the teachings of the scripture in all its entirety. We pray for them that they will not surrender their light of Christ to the powerful secular voices that have captured the Church

Turning again to Scripture, the Anglican archbishop concluded, "We affirm that the Holy Scripture is authoritative in all matters of faith and any departure from the historic formularies and the plain teachings of the scripture is an error and must be corrected."

The archbishop's strong condemnation of the Church of England's blessing of same-sex unions comes amid an increasingly strong push for African countries to accept the liberal LGBT agenda that has taken hold of Western countries and churches. It also mirrors the Anglican Church of Uganda's rejection of the Church of England's decision.

Anglican Church of Uganda blasts Church of England for decision to 'bless' same-sex unions

Fri Feb 10, 2023– 8:35 pm EST

UGANDA (LifeSiteNews) – The Anglican Church of Uganda has strongly condemned the Church of England for its acceptance and blessing of same-sex unions.

In a letter published February 10, Archbishop Stephen Samuel Kaziimba of the Church of Uganda responded to the recent vote of the Anglican Church of England approving the liturgical blessing of same-sex unions, a decision lauded by Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, who said in a joint statement, "For the first time, the Church of England will publicly, unreservedly, and joyfully welcome

same-sex couples in church.”

Criticizing the decision as an attempt to appease both sides on the same-sex “marriage” debate by proposing a contradiction, Archbishop Kaziimba said of the Church of England, “They have decided to allow clergy to preside at Blessings of Same-sex Unions and have approved supplemental prayers and liturgies for such occasions. The Church of England is very good at making contradictory statements and expecting everyone to believe both can be true at the same time. That’s what they have done with this decision.”

Kaziimba continued, “The only significant difference between a wedding and a service of ‘blessing’ is the terminology used. The Church of England insists it is not changing its doctrine of marriage. But, in practice, they are doing precisely that.”

Distancing the Church of Uganda from the effective change in doctrine, Kaziimba insisted, “But, what I want you to know is that if it *looks* like a wedding, and *sounds* like a wedding ... it *IS* a wedding.”

Reiterating that the condemnation of sodomy is contained in Scripture, the archbishop expounded the traditional Christian understanding of marriage, family, and sexual morality.

You can read the rest of the article on: [Anglican Church of Uganda blasts Church of England for decision to ‘bless’ same-sex unions – LifeSite \(lifesitenews.com\)](https://www.lifesitenews.com/anglican-church-of-uganda-blasts-church-of-england-for-decision-to-bless-same-sex-unions)

Murderer identifies as “infant” in British prison

It is difficult to know who is nuttier in this case, the “infant” or the British government. The following is excerpted from “Killer now identifies as an infant,” Daily Mirror, Jan. 28, 2023: “A killer who transitioned from male to female while in prison has demanded that guards hold her hand while outside her cell because she identifies as an infant. Sophie Eastwood, 36, was named Daniel when she was jailed for life in 2004 after using shoelaces as a garrote to strangle her cellmate. Eastwood, who has lived as a woman in Her Majesty’s prisons for the past four years, has been described as ‘attention-seeking’ and ‘manipulative’ by sources inside the jail. The murderer has now told chiefs at Polmont prison in Brightons, Scotland, that she identifies as a tot, and should be

allowed to wear diapers and have her meals pureed like baby food. Prison bosses are taking Eastwood’s requests seriously and have already supplied her with a dummy [a pacifier], sources tell the *Daily Record*.

Way of Life Literature, Vol 24, issue 6, February 10, 2023

Bacteria’s eyes and ears

The following is from CreationMoments.com: “Modern researchers are learning that bacteria are not a simple form of life. Rather, a bacterium is a tremendously complex creature that thinks. Scientists have discovered that bacteria actually have molecule-sized sensors. Some of these sensors act as eyes, while others act as ears. A dozen other proteins have been discovered that receive the information gathered by the bacteria’s ‘eyes’ and ‘ears.’ The collected information is then processed the same way your brain gathers and makes sense of information. Bacteria have specialized senses and a brain. In fact, bacteria are better at sensing some things than you and I are. A bacterium can, for example, sense the difference between two parts and one part in 10,000. This is the same as if you could tell the difference between one jar with 9,999 pennies and another jar with 10,000 pennies! The idea that bacteria are just ‘simple’ forms of life comes from evolution. Growing research is showing that even one-celled creatures are not simple at all. Think of it. Every single-celled bacterium must accomplish, within that one cell, all the tasks we accomplish using the trillions of cells in our bodies. Eating, digestion, metabolism, waste removal, reproduction--and even thinking--all take place within a single cell! There is no such thing as a simple form of life. Author: Paul A. Bartz. Ref: Pietsch, Paul. 1983. ‘The mind of a microbe,’ *Science Digest*, Oct. p. 69. *Way of Life Literature, Vol 24, issue 6, February 10, 2023*

NASA learning from the Albatross

The following excerpted from David Coppedge, “Capabilities of Migrating Birds,” *Evolution News & Science Today*, Dec. 15, 2022: “Moving up to the heavy-

weight class, the wandering albatross is a fascinating bird that can travel thousands of miles without flapping its wings. With its 11-foot wingspan (the longest of any living bird), this iconic soaring champion of the southern oceans attracted the attention of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Researchers show maps of its wanderings, and describe how it tilts and swoops in clever ways to take advantage of the wind’s energy. Wandering albatrosses lack sufficient musculature to sustain continuous flapping flight for long periods of time; however *they have a shoulder lock that mechanically holds their wings outstretched so that little energy is expended while soaring, according to the paper. The wandering albatross is so good at efficient use of wind energy, NASA has taken notice.* The BBC News reported that an albatross inspired glider has been designed for future flights on Mars. Unlike rovers or the highly successful Mars demonstration helicopter, a flyer designed like an albatross could fly for free on the Martian wind, swoop up the slopes of volcanoes, and stay aloft for long periods of time. A demonstration Mars sailplane has been designed at the University of Arizona. With looks similar in proportions to the albatross, it can pack a small camera, and temperature and gas sensors to reconnoiter much farther than its battery-powered explorers can. While these other forms of transport have been partly limited by power needs, the glider would use energy available in the atmosphere itself, explained Adrien Bouskela, an aerospace engineering doctoral student at the University of Arizona. ‘It’s kind of a leap forward in those methods of extending missions,’ he said.”

Way of Life Literature, Vol 24, issue 1, January 6, 2023

Update on the Hosanna Care Trust



It has been some time since we featured in Faith and Focus so we thought we'd update the readers with what we're doing and have been doing in 2022.

As trustees we met five times in 2022 via zoom. Technology has been a great blessing to us as we all live in different places, zoom easily connects us with each other and has been a great help.

We had two Family days this year: 15 May and 30 October. These days are held

at the Reformed Church in Masterton and have been for many years. We have three families from Hastings, one from Wainuiomata and two from Silverstream who turn up faithfully to these Family days. For many years the Masterton congregation helped in providing food for lunch and morning/afternoon tea. This year we've decided to ask other congregations to bake for us. We started with Silverstream and they did an amazing job.

At our May Family day, we had Pastor Peter Kloosterman lead the session in the morning. He focussed on how we need to trust our Heavenly Father when we look for future living options for our young people. When we had Esther Wong speak to us twice, the previous year, she role modelled to us how her faith in the Lord had helped her to make difficult decision for her son. More than anything she put her trust in Him to eventually let her son go; to live in a Spectrum Care group home. Pastor Kloosterman continued with that theme of "trusting our Lord". He has all in His hands.

In the afternoon session we reflected on what we had learned that morning. We also had an open discussion about the support parents get from their other adult children. This showed very different supports for families and created a very honest discussion.

Our Family Day in October was focussed on how siblings experienced growing up in a family with a young person with a disability. For this Angelina (Johan Landkroon's sister) and Ben de Vries (Anna de Vries's brother) shared their experiences. Both gave very reflective but also very moving accounts of their lives in their families, their experiences, their thoughts but also their admiration for their parents in all they had done for their young person. It was a very "rich" day for all.

When we reflected on this in the afternoon as a group of parents and trustees, we learned that several families are taking initiatives to explore future living options for their young person. For some this is already quite set in concrete but for others this is about taking a careful first step in finding out and getting

to know agencies and people.

As trustees we've also discussed, where possible, how we can assist families. E.g. In one family, one of the trustees took part in an assessment of the young person, with another family some trustees are planning a visit to discuss future living options and how the Hosanna Trust can help with that.

We are in an ever evolving environment where new challenges are presented. As our families and trustees have grown together over the past 11 years we also continually experience the Lord's grace in all this. It is a true blessing that our faith also binds us together this way and we have this wonderful resource and strength to always come back to.

On behalf of our families and the trustees (Michelle Kloosterman, Ed Leenders, Lammie de Vries, Amy Stolte, Miriam Posthuma, Marian Jongepier and Gary Veenstra) we can't thank you enough for your support in prayer.