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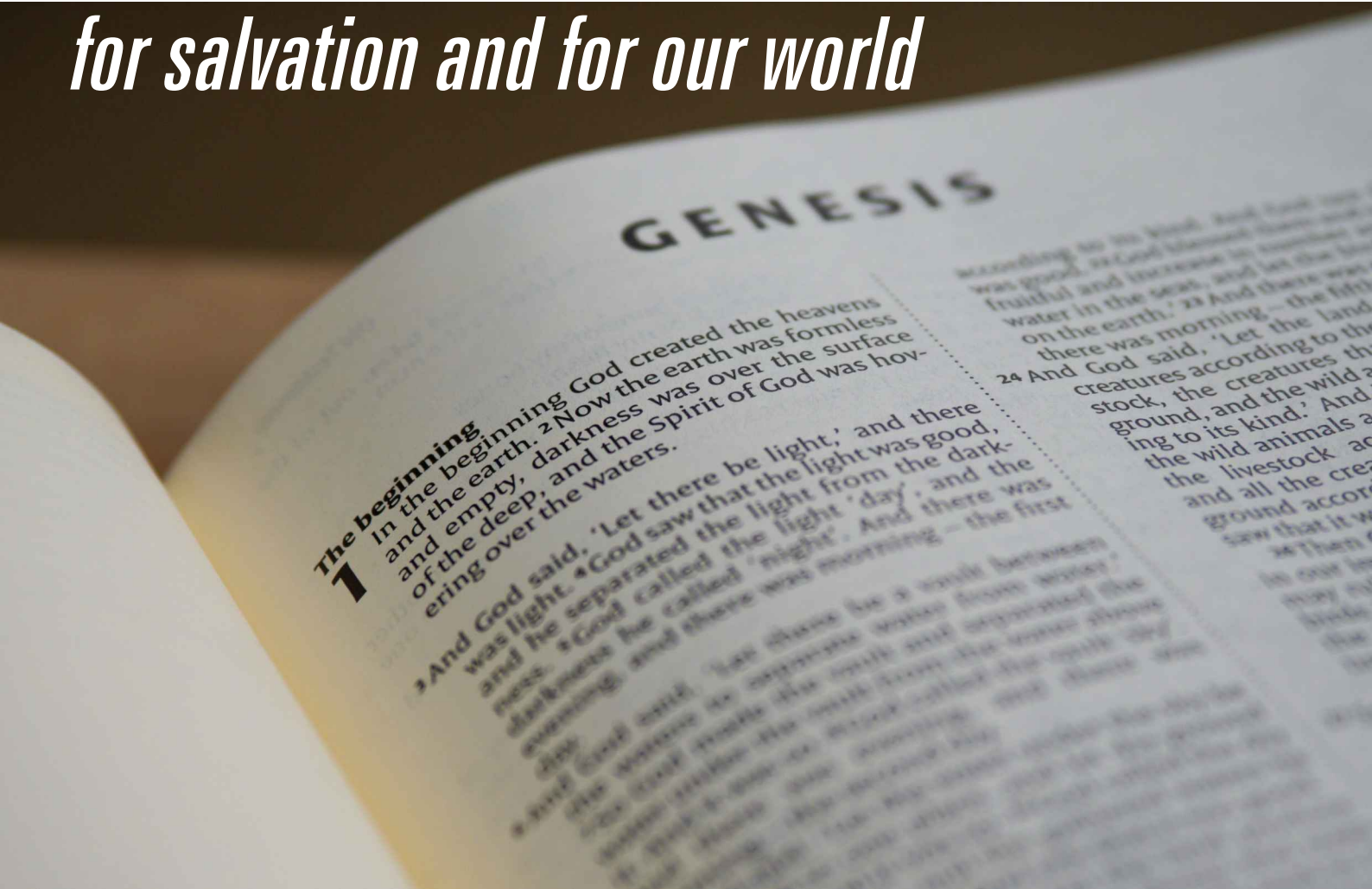
faith in FOCUS

Volume 50/2, March 2023

GENESIS —

foundational truths

for salvation and for our world



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Published monthly for the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

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

Distribution for Australia: S Bolhuis
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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:

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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

After the worship service one Lord's Day morning, an elderly saint was in tears. I stopped to enquire if this lady was okay because she really appeared to be distressed and deeply moved. She told me that her tears were in response to the song that was sung after the sermon. To my surprise, her tears were not from distress, but joy! It was her response to the good news of God's faithfulness – "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, ... great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!" (SttL 173)

I shouldn't be surprised at this beautiful and joyful response, because she was responding to a foundational truth about the Creator of the heavens and the earth, that our God is faithful as testified throughout the Scriptures. From the very opening words of the Bible, "In the beginning God ...", not only the faithfulness of God is spoken of, but the truth of His Being. That He is God and there is no other. That He is the Creator and there is no other. That He alone is "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. (Q&A 4, WSC)

This lady, as well as so many others before and after her, understands that God revealed Himself to us and His people so that we would have a foundation upon which we may relate to Him; after all, we don't really know and understand ourselves apart from Him. In the very opening chapter of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin begins with "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he "lives and moves: (Acts 17:28)"

Because we live and move and have our being in our God, a very good rule-of-thumb for the believer is firmly preserved in the book of Proverbs 3:5-6:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.*

We live in an age where those who oppose the Creator, and those who want to make the gospel palatable and seeker-friendly do their best to undermine the foundations of the Scriptures. Rather, let us not lean on man's understanding but heed God's word and find our refuge in Him, and be diligent to maintain and believe wholeheartedly the foundational truths of Genesis and all of the Scriptures and teach them in our homes, our churches and wherever we have the opportunity.

Many thanks to our contributors for their steadfastness and defence of the truth in our opening articles. *S.D.G.*

Featured in this issue:

Mr Paul Archbald defends the link between Gospel and Creation.
Mrs Margeeske Davies puts into practice the Biblical imperative.

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.

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PAUL ARCHBALD

Gospel and Creation

Throughout the ages the church has considered the question of “fundamentals of the faith.” It has been generally accepted that the Apostles’ Creed is a good place to start with that. But the Reformation also realized that the Creed was a summary of fundamentals, rather than a comprehensive list. Even before the Reformation, those wishing to join the church received instruction in what the Creed *meant*. The Reformers continued that practice, as we can see from the Heidelberg Catechism. The necessity of explication should be obvious from the fact that many heretics have been able to pay lip-service to the Creed, though they twisted the words to mean something quite different than that which was orthodox. That is also the reason why the church did not settle with the Apostles’ Creed, but added, for example, the Nicene and the Athanasian.

Now the Apostles’ Creed clearly includes the doctrine of creation as a fundamental of the faith. But here again we have this problem – that many who pay lip-service to the Creed understand it in a way that is very far from the historical interpretation. The Reformed Confessions give much help in explicating the Creed, though even then there are some who claim to adhere to the Confessions, but hold to a very different interpretation than the original authors and the majority of our members.

How serious is this? Of the various opinions on the doctrine of creation, some novelties seem to be relatively harmless. Others have a much more radical effect. I would like to look at how a certain view affects the system of Biblical doctrine. Anything that warps the system as a whole, is on the more dangerous side. Those interpretations that do not have any systematic effect may, perhaps, be tolerated.

That is not to say that the Bible directly lays out a systematic theology in the form we find it in Berkhof’s “Systematic Theology.” The discipline of systematic theology is an important way of teaching the system of

Biblical doctrine. For the Bible is systematic. Its doctrine is seamlessly woven into a tapestry of interconnected truths. Warp one of those truths, and most likely other truths will be affected. If I may use an illustration – from a trade about which I know next-to-nothing – builders have, I expect, a system they use to construct a house. There may be some details they can vary. Another building company might do things slightly different. But there are also many aspects of the work that cannot be changed without altering the whole structure. It’s probably not a good idea to put up walls and roof before the footing; or, to make a roof out of gingerbread.

For that reason, I want to consider the systematic effect of replacing the historical doctrine of creation with some form of theistic evolution – the idea that God used the biological process of evolution, over millions of years, to create life on this planet.

Hermeneutical contortionism

Before running through the effect on the system, I want to comment on the way one’s view of creation can affect the principles of interpretation we bring to the Scripture. This is called “hermeneutics” – principles of interpretation. The Bible itself teaches us how to interpret the Bible. In fact, one of the commonly accepted principles is that “the Bible is its own interpreter” {WCF 1:9}.

In recent times, in hitherto solidly orthodox circles, there has been an increase in emphasis on “genre” as part of that effort to let the Bible speak for itself. We take care to consider the kind of literature in each book and section of the Bible. We do not interpret Revelation, for example, as we would 1-2 Kings. For Revelation itself tells us that John is recording a series of visions, which also rely on a great deal of OT symbolism.

Those who believe that the Genesis account of creation is wrong do not worry much about genre. But those who want to present themselves as sound, Bible-believing

When an illegitimate use of genre is forced upon the text of Genesis 1, other doctrines are affected — since the rest of the Bible grounds other doctrines and ethics in Genesis 1-3.

Christians – but are also convinced that the historic view of creation is wrong – have to find a way to affirm that Gen. 1 is still the infallible Word of God. One of the popular ways of doing this is by appealing to genre: Gen. 1 is seen as “exalted prose,” more like poetry. Poetry tends to take a less literal approach, therefore we do not need to take Gen. 1 literally. Others will appeal to the alleged “framework” in the account of the creation days (The Framework Hypothesis) to prove that Gen. 1 is more like poetry.

Since I have written on this in a previous *Faith in Focus* article, I do not wish to answer it in detail on this occasion (see Vol 43/4, p5-8, May 2016, online <https://faithinfoocus.org.nz>). But what I do want to point out is the grave danger of

contemporary scholars that the Gospels belong to the genre of Graeco-Roman biography,” which “offered the ancient biographers great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches...and they often included legend.”

There is a legitimate use of genre criticism. Geisler draws attention to the conclusions of the *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy* regarding this matter. Genre can be used as part of the historical-grammatical method of interpreting Scripture, to clarify the meaning of a text. It should not be used to stand over the Scripture, to de-historicise a text or contradict any teaching of God’s Word. In the context of the debate about Genesis 1, features of the text that make it “exalted” prose do not justify discounting the chapter as historical narrative, describing how God created the world in 6 days, from nothing, by the power of His spoken Word. Moreover, if it is acceptable to use genre to force Genesis 1 to make room for biological evolution, then why not allow Licona to use genre to make room for invented speeches and legends in the Gospels?

When an illegitimate use of genre is forced upon the text of Genesis 1, other doctrines are affected – since the rest of the Bible grounds other doctrines and ethics in Genesis 1-3. Those who want to hold on to the re-interpretation of Genesis 1 are then forced to use further theological speculation to justify their position – if they want to continue to present themselves as Bible-believing. In the following sections I will point out some of the implications of making room for evolution in the interpretation of Genesis 1.

The Doctrine of God

Possibly the most significant problem with theistic evolution is that it necessitates death before the Fall. Evolution requires the death of whole species, opening up niches for better adapted species. So there is widespread death and decay. Blood must be spilled. Injury and pain are part of this. As has been pointed out by many, God becomes the Author of pain, death and decay. He made it that way from the beginning, then commented on it, “It is good.” Of course, God defines His own goodness – we do not tell Him how He has to demonstrate goodness. But He has made it clear throughout the rest of the Scripture that pain, death and decay are NOT good. Death is an *enemy* (1 Cor. 15:26). It is part of creation’s subjection to futility, slavery to corruption groaning and

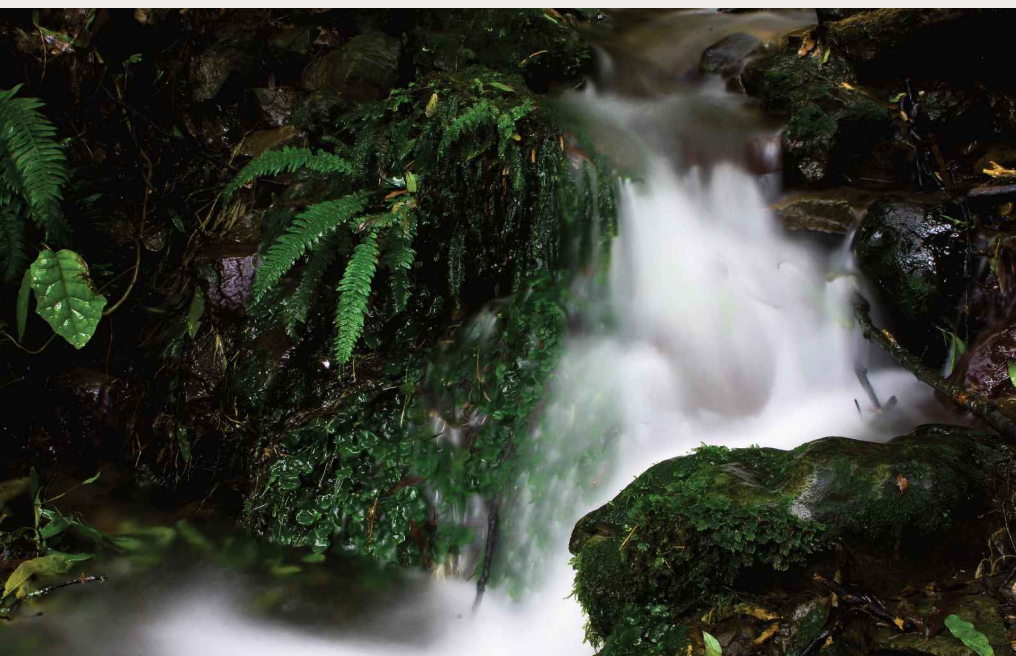


Image Carl Leenders

speculation in such matters. Whatever the genre of a particular passage, we still have to recognize the literal truth it is teaching. Every passage in the Bible is teaching something that is literally true, from Genesis to Revelation. The fact that a passage is poetic, parabolic or apocalyptic, does not mean that we can dismiss what we find difficult or inconvenient as if it were merely symbolic. Identifying the genre of a Biblical text is important, but using it to challenge historic doctrines that affect the system of truth is extremely dangerous.

Norman L. Geisler provides an example of a faulty approach to “genre criticism” in his article, “Is Genre Criticism of the Gospels Contrary to the Inerrancy of Scripture?” He cites Mike Licona’s view that “There is somewhat of a consensus among

suffering, because of Adam's sin (Rom. 8:18-23). If death were present before the Fall, God would be guilty of subjecting a perfect creation to these things apart from any connection to man's sin.

As an example of the speculation needed to get around this problem, consider Tim Keller's explanation of Romans 8. Man became a bad manager after his fall, so that creation's experience of pain and death simply became *more* severe. (*Biologos*, Feb. 23, 2012, "Creation, Evolution and Christian Laypeople").

Adding further speculation, Keller adds that there must have been death before the Fall, since Satan was active in the world. However, Satan only operates within the limits that God allows – as we see in the Book of Job. There is no evidence in the Bible that Satan's existence prior to the Fall necessitates death in the pre-Fall creation.

The Doctrine of man and his fall into sin

If we start with the assumption that death existed in creation before the Fall, what do we do with Genesis 2:17, "The day you eat from it, you will surely die"? Death entered the world through the sin of the one man, Adam, and so spread to all men (Romans 5:12). Tim Keller, however, in the article mentioned above, suggests that the punishment was only *spiritual* death. That suggestion flies in the face of the curse pronounced in Genesis 3:19, which involves "dust to dust." Physical death began in man, and in the rest of creation (Romans 8), as a result of the Fall.

For those, like Keller, who want to maintain a literal Adam and Eve and a literal Fall – while also allowing biological evolution – further speculation is required. Keller is not the first person to suggest that Adam and Eve had sub-human progenitors, the result of the evolutionary process. God, it is suggested, then elevated Adam and Eve, conferring spirituality upon them to make them the first humans. Keller even goes so far as to speculate that Adam, as head of the human race, conferred humanity outwards on his previously sub-human contemporaries, as well as on his descendants. His fall into sin then disinherited both groups.

One of the problems with this is that federal headship requires that the head be of the same nature as those whom he represents. Moreover, Romans 5:14 indicates that death reigned from "Adam to Moses," not "from the beginning to Moses." This is an issue that has enormous implications for the Gospel.

The Doctrine of Christ and His saving work

As I just mentioned, Christ is able to represent us because He took on a truly human nature. He was sent as a "Second Adam," to pay the penalty for Adam's sin and ours; to remove the curse and restore man completely; and to redeem all of creation with man.

In order to accomplish this, Christ had to be truly human, true God and truly righteous. He had to pay the "wages of sin." Paying that wage required His death – physical death, along with the agony of hell, alienation from His Father – indeed, the weight of His Father's wrath against the sin of all the elect. He did not merely suffer *spiritual* death, in order to remove the curse



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of *spiritual* death that Adam incurred. Likewise, He had to rise again bodily, to obtain a physical resurrection for the elect. Placing death before the Fall removes the necessity of Christ's physical death and resurrection. If one still insists that Christ did come to remove physical death from the elect and from the world, His mission then becomes one of dying to undo what God had first inflicted upon the world – rather than that which came as a result of Adam's sin. This seriously alters the Gospel, however unintended that effect might be. Martin Williams, from the *Reformed Theological College*, has pointed out the nature of this problem very well in his DVD, "Which Gospel?- How Long Age Stories Undermine the Gospel."

This kind of twisting of the doctrine of

Creation also breaks down the argument of Romans 5:12ff. There is a parallel there between the work of Adam and that of Christ: Adam's sin brings about death (physical, spiritual and eternal) and condemnation. Through the obedience of Christ, the Second Adam, life (physical, spiritual and eternal) is given to all who are united with Him. Remove the physical death from the first part of the equation and there is no reason to suppose that physical life is involved in what Christ accomplishes.

Doctrine of the Last Things

I have already alluded to the fact that the Bible teaches that at Christ's return there will be a new creation in which there is no more curse or death. Placing death before the Fall, as part of God's "good" creation, removes the necessity of putting an end to physical death and decay. If such death is good in the first place, why can it not be good at the end? One may still accept that God will remove physical death, but it becomes a kind of miscellaneous bonus,

rather than a necessary outcome of Christ's work.

Revelation 21:4 makes it clear that there will be a restoration involving the removal of all physical death. For there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain. The Lamb's "water of life" negates also physical death (Revelation 7:17). This is in line with a consistent contrast between life and death that permeates the whole of the Bible.

Of course, these verses in Revelation – and others like them – such as Isaiah 65:17ff

Genesis – foundational truths for salvation and for our world

BY MARGEEESKE DAVIES

Equipping our Children



By nature our children are curious about their world. Every nine months old child is compelled to crawl over to discover what is behind that door we've left ajar. And the word 'why' is the refrain of every 2-3 year old child. That curiosity is the most fruitful ground for planting the truth of God's Word in their hearts and minds. As we answer their incessant questions we have copious opportunities to show them the character of God. We get to show His wisdom in the moral laws he has established. And we get to show His love of logic, beauty and order in the created world all around us. It is so apparent that the mind of a child is like a sponge, that it will soak up as much as it can of whatever is presented to them. And it becomes ingrained in their hearts and minds in no time. It is important then that we are purposeful with the information to which their young minds are exposed. As parents it is essential we nurture with intent when and what

our children see and hear. There is however, an enormous amount of information that we would rather have them not be exposed to, but that is outside of our control. With wise actions however, these negative inputs can be dealt with. Just as we put sunscreen on the bodies of our children when they are exposed to the beneficial out-of-doors in order to combat the detrimental UV rays, so we need to apply wisdom when they are exposed to lies like the theory of evolution.

In this article, it is not my aim to debate evolution, but rather, to impress on parents, especially of young children, the importance and urgency that they be active in protecting their children from it.

Since the theory of evolution was first introduced almost 160 years ago, the world has become increasingly enamoured with it. It seems to be fulfilling what Paul referred to in 2 Thes. 2:11 "Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false..." Our

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– could easily be subjected to genre criticism, if we wanted to take that approach. Revelation is an apocalyptic vision; Isaiah 65 is poetry. Do they really teach a Paradise that is so restored that there will be no more physical death?

Conclusion

My purpose in working through these aspects of systematic theology has been two-fold. I wanted to show the serious, systematic effect of twisting the doctrine of

creation. I wanted to show that this is not a minor disagreement.

Second, I wanted to demonstrate how a speculative hermeneutic easily leads to a speculative theology. That is especially so when death is allowed a place in God's good creation before the Fall. What starts with one error, quickly leads on to a degree of twisting that would make a professional contortionist envious! As I have written before, the Gospel itself is at stake. Given that this acceptance of biological evolution

is growing in Evangelical and Reformed circles, we need to be very vigilant here in the RCNZ. For the sake of the Gospel.

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children are exposed to it numerous times throughout their formative years. Indeed, they are inundated by evolutionary teaching. And whether it is the intent of the informant or not, they are planting falsehood and lies into their hearts and minds of our children. Indeed, the Devil fervently desires the fertile ground of our children's curious minds to plant the seeds of his lies. It is imperative then, that this fertile ground is protected. It is important that more true seeds of God's Word are planted than weed seeds of the Enemy. Be aware that our children will be taught these things. Even in Christian schools that are not exclusively Reformed, children will be taught some aspect of evolution since, officially, all of the traditional mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church, support or accept the theory of evolution. Even outside of school our children will be exposed to these lies. Whether it is in a TV program, or on the news, or in a book, or in a nature documentary our children will hear it. Even in shows that appear completely unrelated to any science theme at all, like for example a romance movie, some aspect of evolutionary thinking can suddenly be mentioned in an off handed manner as fact. The Devil is subtle, sprinkling his seeds to promote confusion, and making it hard for people who are not alert, to discern between truth and lies. Even Christians themselves will sometimes talk using phrases like, "during the time of the cave men." So, attempting to keep our children unaware of the ideas of evolution, would be like trying to keep them away from UV rays by always keeping them indoors. God calls us to live in this world, to bloom where He has planted us. So rather than hide it from them, we need to equip them with

the truth. Just as sunscreen filters the sunlight for their bodies, so God's Word will filter the world of science for their minds. The Devil is tireless in his pursuit of our children's souls. But God has granted us what we need to equip them in their combat against evolutionary thinking from a young age.

The whole armour of God is not only for adults. Children too have access to it in

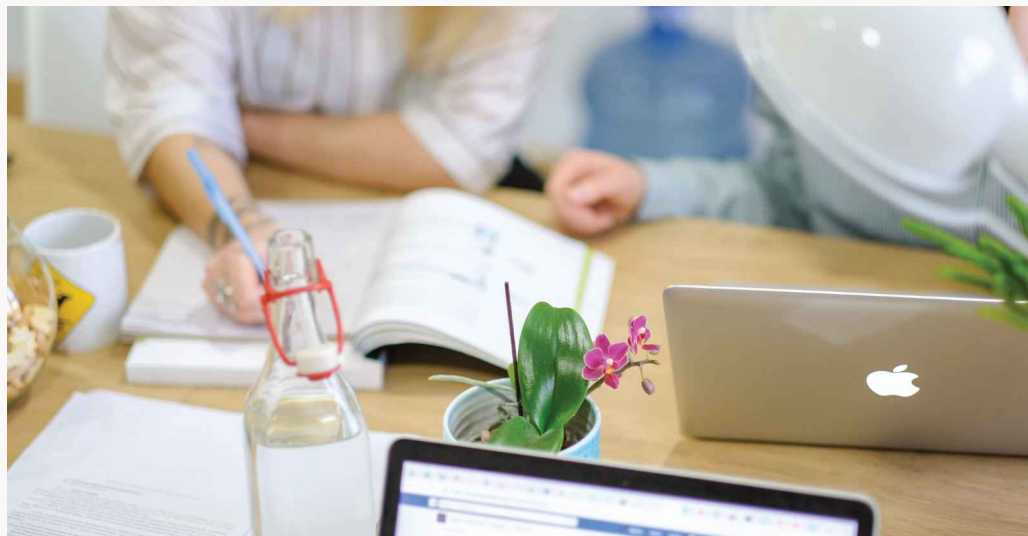


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their youth through the teaching and guidance of wise parents. The Bible teaches us that by nature we will slip away from God, wisdom and truth. In 1 Cor. 15:33 we read that "Bad company ruins good morals", and Prov 13:20 teaches that 'the companion of fools will suffer harm'. Therefore we must be active in combating the attacks on our children and equipping them with the Word of Truth and the ability to counter what the world teaches.

Interestingly, much of what evolutionists see as examples of evolution, a Creationist will see as the evidence of creation. This is because data, even of a new scientific discovery, is filtered through the worldview held by the observer. Too often the reports of discoveries in the scientific world are twisted to suit evolution's ideology. This is done either by omitting some parts of the complete picture, or by reporting unrelated information together with the new data, so they appear connected, leading the consumer to a wrong conclusion. Many of those reporting these things are not doing it with malicious intent, but are themselves, blinded from the truth. As Christian parents then, we need to do careful research. We need to invest in well presented material to counter the skewing of the information, so that our children can incorporate all the new scientific discoveries into their understanding. And we need to do so through a Biblical worldview. The Devil works hard to gain disciples for himself. But we have made an oath to God, at the baptism of each one of our children, in front of hundreds of witnesses that we would disciple them in God's name and equip them for this.

The truth is, that the theory of evolution undermines our faith completely. The very first words God speaks to us in His Word in Genesis 1:1 are: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." To believe that these very first words are untrue or misleading means we cannot confidently believe anything following them. To call these words untrue negates anything else the Bible entails. But God's infallible word repeats the truth for us gently and lovingly, over and over. In Ps. 33:6 "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts".

Heb 1:2 "... His Son ... through whom also He created the world ..."

Romans 1:20 "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever

since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made ..."

1 Corinthians 8:6 "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

John 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."

Colossians 1:16-18 "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ..."

But man in his stubbornness tries to find a middle ground that will allow him to have a bit of both. By suggesting that each side concedes some supposedly small aspect of what they believe, some people try to convince others that the two belief systems, (evolution is indeed a belief system), can live together peaceably. Two examples of such half-and-half belief systems or theories are the theory of Theistic Evolution and the theory of Intelligent Design. The first holds that evolution was controlled by God. It claims that the days which we read about in the first chapter of God's Word refer to long periods of time. It attempts to use the concept Peter refers to in 2 Peter 3:8 ... "that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." They choose to ignore however, that God distinguishes and identifies this time span clearly for our understanding when he repeats multiple times, "There was evening and there was morning" ... another day". The second belief system, the theory of Intelligent Design, holds that some intelligent being must have created this earth. The improbability of chance having produced the intricate order and purposeful design that we see in nature, requires an intelligent creator. This belief acknowledges that facts as large and wide as the size, location, make-up, and placement of the planets, and as intricate as the chemical makeup and storage of the spray used by a bombardier beetle could not have happened by chance. But neither of these theories are acceptable as Christians,

neither of them acknowledge the infallibility of God's Word and so they must be rejected.

God's Word and His people are attacked and tempted to go astray at every turn, yet there is comfort. Explaining the existence and make up of our present world without acknowledging God is not new! Heb 11:3 states, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." Only faith is what makes us able to understand and believe this truth. In Paul's time too, people did not know or did not believe that God was the Creator. Throughout history different cultures have made up their own legends to explain and make sense of what they saw all around them. Yet God's Word stands unchanged. And we have the privilege of having been gifted with that Word so that we may understand the Truth. What a humbling truth! It is only through God's grace with which we have been blessed that we can know God as the Creator of all things. But we do not need to be worried or scared of the Devil's attacks through the evil of evolution. God has even comforted us for an evil such as this in Rom. 8:38-39: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, [and that includes this theory of evolution] nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So how do we as humble parents fulfill this aspect of our baptismal vows? We have little knowledge of what is being taught, what information is being withheld, what data is being shared so unrelated information leads us to the wrong conclusion? Let's be honest, people who publish evolution promoting information are educated in it. We're just everyday, average people, most of us are not educated in combating it. Admittedly, it is a difficult task. And unless we keep abreast of the latest scientific discoveries and how they relate to information we already have, we can't do it on our own. First and foremost we need to be fully convinced of the infallibility of the Bible. Secondly, we need to read the Bible and meditate on it regularly ourselves and teach our children to do the same. We also need to be aware of the prevalence of the teachings of evolution. Then, when our children are confronted with some aspect of it we can speak with them about what they have seen or heard. If we are watching a nature documentary with the kids and the narrator speaks of how things have

evolved we can pause the show, if we have that option, and discuss with the kids that these things did not evolve, but rather were created to fit together like this by our glorious Creator God. Or we could have the discussion afterward if that works better. We can teach our children to assess what they have seen or heard, and help them identify the inconsistencies that the theory of evolution presents. As our children get older, their questions become more pointed. They are no longer happy with hearing that it did not happen via evolution, but want to know what did happen, and how it should correctly be understood.

As they mature our children look for greater detail, which we often do not have at hand of ourselves. Thankfully, there is a plethora of Bible obedient material out there for us to use. Material which has been put together by godly men and women, who do keep abreast of all the new scientific discoveries. These people have been gifted with the ability to understand new and old scientific data. Moreover, they have been blessed with strong faith and the gifts to interpret the information through a six-day creation worldview and then teach it to others.

- Our first place to search for this material should be our church libraries. Many of them have books and DVD's for all ages to learn and grow in their understanding. If you find you have exhausted what your church library provides, ask the librarians to look for more material you can use. You will find that most of them love suggestions of titles you have found in your own search for material. Or, if you have no titles to suggest, asking for material for a specific age group, or a specific topic, or as a specific media will also be a great benefit for them to know what they can research to benefit specific needs in your congregation.
- Secondly, your local public library can also potentially be a great resource. As with all material sourced from there, you will need to filter what you borrow, but I have been pleasantly surprised with the Christian materials they have available. It is not extensive, but it is a great place to start.
- Another fantastic resource is *Creation Ministries New Zealand*. They put out a gorgeous quarterly magazine. These magazines are on par with the *NZ Geographic*, with stunning photography and excellent, clear, easy to read, Bible

condoning articles. They also have a colossal amount of information on their website Creation.com. They have put out a beautiful resource of 12 DVDs exploring the biblical and scientific truths of the Bible's opening chapters. And their material can also be rented or streamed online.

- For those with younger children there is the Jonathan Park Audio Series. An excellently directed and presented 'movie for the ears', that is as entertaining and informative for the parents as it is for the kids. These can be bought as disc sets, as well as listened to online, by subscribing at jonathan-park.com, under Unlimited.
- There are also some great movies produced by RedeemTV, which offers a free subscription.

For those looking for more thorough and complete materials that cover 'all' of nature more extensively with a six-day creation worldview, there is curriculum which can be purchased through organizations such as *Answers in Genesis*. This can be found at Answersingenesis.org. They have an excellent series called, 'God's Design for ...'. They also produce another series called, 'The Wonders of the Human Body Series.' Other trustworthy resources are *Sonlight Science and Apologia*. There is also *Berean Builders* with their 'Berean Builders Science in the ... Series' geared toward the elementary years. And *Elemental Science*, who put out their 'Living Books Series' which are adventure style stories integrating facts related to a major science topic into storylines.

This is a small sampling of what is out there. These are a few items with which I myself am familiar and feel comfortable recommending. But there is so much more out there, for all budgets and skill levels, enough for each one of us to be able to equip our children well. It will require that we do research and invest both time and money but it is essential for the nurturing of our children in the completion of our vows.

Mrs Margeeske Davies is a member of the Reformed Church in Pukekohe.



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- 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

REUBEN BREDENHOF

"Talk to Me"

I love the book of Proverbs. You can read through it every year, and still learn new things about leading a wise life in the fear of God. And after years of reading Proverbs, I've come to a conclusion: If Proverbs mentions something a lot, then it must be important.

So what does Proverbs mention a lot? It gives a lot of space to the topic of money and material things. It gives much attention to adultery and marriage. And it also says a lot about our words. Proverbs warns against boasting, gossiping, and pointless arguing; it criticizes revealing secrets, speaking recklessly, and promising more

than we can deliver. At the same time, Proverbs celebrates wise counsel, gentle speech, and loving admonition. Time and again, the power of ordinary communication comes to the fore.

We all know this: talking together is vital! When I speak with young couples preparing to be married, they all mention this as something they need to work on, or as something that they really value about their relationship: good communication! And when you're first courting, it sometimes does feel like you could keep talking forever. There is so much to say.

Dangerous neglect

But what happens? Husbands and wives begin to neglect this essential activity. We know it's essential, but we try to forge ahead without it. It's like we remove all the oil from our engine, and we start heading up the road, just to see what happens and how far we can get.

Maybe that's not the best illustration. Removing the oil from your engine would be intentional, deliberate automotive destruction. When we stop communicating in marriage, it's often an accidental thing, done unawares. It's a bad habit that we fall into without realizing the destruction



that it can cause down the road.

We know it's important, yet I'm afraid it is all too common for married couples to exist without really communicating. There is this 'space of silence' between husband and wife. So many unsaid words can become like a vast body of water between two people, and you're not sure how to cross it anymore. How does this happen?

Why?

The easiest answer is that we are too busy. We are involved in pursuing our daily work and career, keeping up a household, raising children, doing endless 'life administration,' plus enjoying hobbies. We are busy with many things, and many good things: serving in church, helping at the school, being available for other people.

And when you're busy, you frequently run out of time for some activities. Maybe our personal devotions fall to one side, or we opt out of regular exercise. After all, we still need to work, and to take time for meals and sleep. Perhaps we don't have that precious half hour tonight to sit down with our wife or husband and just *talk*. After a couple weeks of living like that, or a month, you can feel like you're co-habiting. You share a bed, you share meals, you even get along pretty well, but you're not talking.

"But of course we're talking!" you protest. After all, you're coordinating your schedules each week. You're planning your next family holiday. You're discussing how it's very warm for this time of the year, but how you heard it's going to rain next week. In other words, you're great at exchanging information. But you're not really *talking*, because you have to get going to your meeting or because it's almost time for sleep.

Hard talking

So time – or a lack of time – is one big factor. But I don't think it's the heart of the issue, because we all know that if you want to make time for something, you can. Communication falters in marriage because talking can be *difficult*. Strange, right? When you were dating, it used to be so easy. But now there are some topics that are hard to speak about.

Like what? Typically the things closest to our heart – and that's not the weather! What are we worried about? What sins are we struggling with? What do we regret about how our life has gone, or how our marriage has turned out? We're scared of

the truth about ourselves, and sometimes the truth about others. So even with the person closest to us, the one who knows us best – even with them, we're afraid to be vulnerable.

It's hard to talk about our personal fears, since they seem quite silly. It's embarrassing to talk about sex, since that should just happen naturally, right? We hate to appear weak by admitting certain sins or getting emotional. Neither do we want to hurt our spouse. So we avoid having that tough conversation about the in-laws, a pattern of sinful behaviour we've noticed, or some minor irritation in household living.

These can be crucial conversations. We know they might be difficult, with the potential for strong reactions. So perhaps

Probably every consistory can tell a story about a marriage that crashed on the rocks without warning. For years, the home visit report was positive: "Marriage is good, fine, normal" — but then the crisis hits, and she's ready to leave, or he just had an affair. It's all very sudden, but it's been developing for years. And I am cautious to generalize about marriage breakdown. But is it not fair to say that a lack of true communication is so often wrapped up with these other marriage problems, whatever they are?

we wait for the right moment – when we have enough time for a decent conversation, and she's in the right mood, and the setting is good – and usually the moment never comes.

The pattern of avoidance

What happens instead of good communication is avoidance. Because I know that there are some hard conversations that we need to have, I ensure that I'm not available. Again, it might be intentional, it might not, but the outcome is the same: the important conversations don't happen.

What does avoidance look like? It can look like busyness. I say "yes" to every request for help in the church. Or I plunge

myself into work: long hours, week after week. Or to avoid those quiet evenings where we're going to need to talk, I'll go and tinker in the shed. Some people hide in the shed, others behind a book, others behind the children.

This neglect will not result in a strong marriage. Remember Proverbs, and the emphasis that God puts on good and wholesome communication for all our relationships. If I will get along with my neighbour, or my brother in the Lord, I need to talk to them. How much more is that true for our marriages? When there is a lack of openness, a 'closing off' toward each other, it will be impossible to achieve the 'one flesh' unity that God desires for marriage. As a result, we miss out on so much of the gift and blessing that marriage can be. And we also threaten the very health of our marriage.

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Everyday problems

It is probably common in many marriages that so-called minor irritations are allowed to continue for years. It's the way he doesn't put the cap back on the toothpaste tube. It's how she doesn't crush the milk jugs before putting them into the bin. These things can seem small. But if you collect dozens of these irritations, and you never talk about them to resolve them, your marriage might well come onto rough ground.

One author writes, "Every little problem you have every morning, afternoon, or evening with your spouse will be repeated for each of the 15,000 days that will make up a forty-year marriage." So do not pretend you are happy with something if you are not. Bring it out, deal with it. It will be one less straw for the camel's back.

If something happens in your marriage every day, that thing is important: the cooking, the dishes, the housecleaning, managing finances, and more. Every argument that you have about these things will be duplicated until you successfully address it. As we said before, it sometimes

seems easiest to let the small things slide. But if you pile enough rubbish in your closet, one day the door will spring open and all of what has been packed inside will bury you.

So if there is something that irritates you about your spouse, resolve to talk about it. Or just make up your mind that it's not a big deal, and that you refuse to let it bother you anymore. Instead, *you'll* flatten the milk jugs, and you won't complain about it and be grumpy!

When you give sufficient time to communication, you can address the thousands of little things that make up daily life. You exchange the necessary information that will ensure the kids get picked up from school and the car insurance gets renewed. That's all good. When you have enough time to talk, you take care of those things for the first half hour or so, and then finally you get to the real stuff – as in, the most important stuff.

Keep talking

Genesis 2 says that the man and woman were naked and were not ashamed. That condition of being 'naked' doesn't simply refer to their lack of clothing, but to their total openness toward each other. And that is still God's ideal for us in marriage: when there is nothing to hide, and everything to share.

So what should you talk about? There is key ground that a husband and wife should cover on a fairly regular basis. For instance, what is something that has brought you joy lately? Something that's been hard? How can I pray for you? Is there anything that's gone unsaid? What's been on the forefront of your mind? How are your devotions going? How about sexual intimacy? Talk about these things, making the time and space to be transparent.

In so many ways, we can bless and serve each other in marriage by speaking wisely to one another. Proverbs says a lot about this, like 12:25, "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." Or 16:24, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body."

I don't pretend that this kind of talking is always easy. Neither do I say that talking *in itself* is able to resolve our difficulties. We're still fighting against our natural selfishness. In marriage sometimes we talk, only to be heard and not to listen. In marriage we sometimes want to win an argument, just for the sake of winning. In our conversations together, we all need the continual grace of the Holy Spirit.

James 3:17-18 outlines the wisdom which comes from fearing the Lord. He says, "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." Notice some key elements of wise conversation within marriage: purity, peace, consideration, submissiveness, mercy, sincerity – attitudes and actions for you to put into practice today!

Blessings

That same text speaks of "reaping a harvest of righteousness." For when we do life God's way, according to God's design, He will bless it. So what are the blessings of talking together in marriage, really talking? You share the load together. You help each other. You keep each other humble and honest in God's service. You get the benefit of your wife's perspective, and your husband's insight. God gives a rich blessing to a husband and wife when they talk, when they open themselves to the kind of 'one flesh' unity that He desires for them.

May God bless our marriages with his Word and Spirit, that we may speak the truth, and speak it in love, and speak it often.

At the time of this article, Mr Reuben Bredenhof was the minister of the Free Reformed Church, Mount Nasura. He recently took up his new task as Professor at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Canada.

*Una Sancta, 30 July 2022.
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God's Kingdom and the Scriptures

RICHARD L. PRATT JR.

Christ and His Apostles and prophets taught that every part of Scripture consents to or agrees with every other part. The entire Bible reveals one true faith – a coherent system of beliefs, a single story, one path of life for God's faithful servants to follow. But getting our arms around how everything in the Bible is organized isn't easy. The problem is that the Scriptures don't explain their coherent system of beliefs one topic at a time. We don't get their unified story chapter by chapter. Their moral guidance doesn't come in one neatly packaged set of rules. Rather, the Bible is an anthology of sixty-six books,

written in many genres over a span of 1,500 years by some forty human authors. These authors were led by the Holy Spirit to address a multitude of topics in various ways to guide God's people through different circumstances. So, how does all this variety fit together? The Bible's coherent system of beliefs, its one story, and its unified path for faithful living reflect a set of convictions that the Spirit of God implanted in the hearts and minds of every biblical author – convictions about the kingdom of God. Make no mistake: God's kingdom isn't just one of many themes running through the Bible. It lies just beneath the surface of every biblical passage. It supports and connects everything written in the Bible.

The biblical concept of God's kingdom is complex, but let me touch briefly on three crucial facets of the kingdom that permeate the Scriptures: (1) God is the King of the kingdom; (2) creation is the place of

the kingdom; and (3) human beings are the servants of the kingdom.

The King of the Kingdom

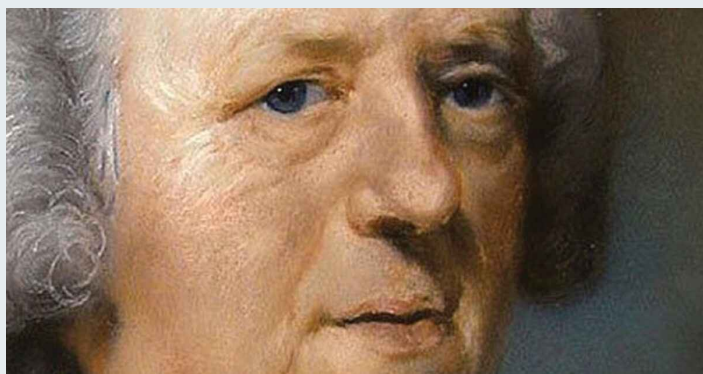
Without a doubt, the Word of God reveals many different things about God, but first and foremost it speaks of Him as the King over all creation. Biblical authors unanimously affirmed that God has ruled and always will rule over all things. As the psalmist declared, "Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting" (Ps. 93:2).

Everyone familiar with the Bible knows that both the Old and New Testaments explicitly call God "the King." They also speak hundreds of times of His "throne," His "reign" or "rule," and His "kingdom."

But the Scriptures also hail God as King in many other ways. In biblical times, human kings were often extolled as great architects and builders, leaders of powerful armies, warriors who crush their enemies,

Focus on faith

LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON



My dear friend,
I am very sorry about your accident, but I am *thankful* that you were not hurt. Such *catastrophes*, as this may properly be called, have often been attended with dislocated or broken bones, a fractured skull, or instant death – so *frail* is man!

Often, when he thinks himself *safe*, and is dreaming of his own importance, as if he were a necessary part in the complicated

movements of Divine Providence – he falls like grass before the scythe! And not by the hands of a *giant*, or the fangs of a *tiger* – but *the smallest trifle is sufficient to destroy him!*

For example – how many *loose stones* do we see in the road; it seems no great matter where they lie. Yet any one of them, by changing the direction of a wheel – is sufficient to confound all the plans of *this mighty creature!* One stone stumbles him down; he falls with his head upon another – in that very moment all his future plans perish! But the Lord gave His angels charge over you; therefore you fell unhurt, and are still alive to praise and serve Him.

I see so much of the *uncertainty* of life, and how little I can either *foresee* or *prevent* what the next moment may bring forth – that I would be a very great coward – afraid not only of riding in a coach, but of walking across a room – if I was not in some degree enabled to confide in the Lord's protection!

I wish for you to think much of *the Lord's governing providence*. It extends to the *minutest* concerns. He rules and manages all things; but in so *secret* a way, that most people think that He does *nothing*. When, in reality – *He does ALL!* "Hold me up – and I shall be safe!" Psalm 119:117

saviors of their people, supremely wise men, benevolent lawgivers, covenant enforcers, good shepherds, and fathers who love their people. Human kings were extolled as the source of light and the hope of life in their kingdoms. Do these ancient depictions of human kings sound familiar to you? Time and again, the Scriptures speak of God in these ways to exalt Him as the King over all.

If we hope to see how everything that the Bible says fits together, we must always go back to the firm conviction that undergirded everything that the biblical authors wrote: God is the Sovereign of the universe and “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

The Place of the Kingdom

A second crucial facet of God’s kingdom is that creation is the place of God’s kingdom. Jesus summed up this ubiquitous biblical teaching when He taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Notice where Jesus longed to see God’s will done – on earth as it is in heaven.

In God’s heavenly throne room, every creature obeys God’s commands (2 Chron. 18:18; Job 1:6; Isa. 6:1–3; Rev. 4:2–11). You would, too, if you were before God’s glorious throne in heaven. In one way or another, every passage of Scripture reveals how God is accomplishing His infallible, royal plan for history, how He will be glorified as obedience to His commands spreads throughout the earth as well.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, God planted a sacred garden with the goal that His kingdom would fill the whole earth with obedient servants one day. Sin led to humanity’s expulsion from Eden and corruption of the physical world. Yet, in the days of Moses, God led Israel back to what was likely the original location of Eden, to the place we call the promised land. God’s kingdom advanced in the promised land and beyond its borders, especially in the days of David and Solomon. But over time, Israel rebelled against God, and He drove them into exile. For centuries, God’s kingdom on earth languished. Still, even as they anticipated this terrible time in history, God’s prophets boldly proclaimed that one day “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa. 52:10).

The New Testament explains how Christ fulfilled this prophetic hope. He began in earnest as He ministered in the promised land and sent His disciples to spread God’s

kingdom to every nation on earth. Jesus continues to extend the kingdom throughout the world now through the proclamation of the gospel, and the kingdom of God will reach the ends of the earth when He returns in glory. On that day, every follower of Christ will see that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Nearly every page of the Bible speaks of the history of events on our planet. If we hope to understand how these countless events fit together, we must always keep in mind that all events in the past, the present, and the future unfold according to our divine King’s one great plan. They reveal how God is glorified as His kingdom comes and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Servants of the Kingdom

This brings us to a third facet of what every biblical author believed: Human beings are the servants of God’s kingdom. All kinds of people, doing all sorts of things, appear throughout the Bible. But above all, the Scriptures teach that human beings, in one way or another, will be used to bring about the spread of the kingdom throughout the earth.

God could have accomplished this goal by Himself in an instant, but He chose to use people over the course of history. To be sure, sin has so corrupted human beings that we all need forgiveness of sin and reliance on God’s power. Yet, while angels also have their roles, every portion of Scripture reveals that redeemed, faithful human beings are the primary means by which the kingdom of God will come.

The Lord first called the human race “[His] image . . . [His] likeness” (Gen. 1:26). In biblical times, many nations surrounding Israel referred to their kings as images of their nations’ gods. These kings were to represent the interests of their gods by learning what their gods wanted and by enforcing the will of their gods on earth. But from the true biblical perspective, all human beings are to represent the true God and to bring about His will on earth.

In the beginning, God called the parents of the entire human race to multiply and have dominion throughout the world in service to Him (Gen. 1:28). As other nations served the purposes of false, satanic gods, the true King of the universe called the nation of Israel, and now the Christian church, to serve Him as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). Like Israel, you and I are to “proclaim

the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). All redeemed images of God have been called to spread the light of God’s kingdom everywhere in the world.

But how can this divine plan ever succeed? Surely, sinful human beings will always fall short. Throughout the Old Testament, the faithful people of God longed and prayed for someone who would come and fulfill God’s kingdom purposes. As New Testament believers, we know this person’s name – Jesus of Nazareth. The eternal Son of the Father took on flesh and became one of us. As the perfectly righteous Son of David, He not only atoned for the sins of His kingdom servants on the cross, but He also rose from the dead and now sits on the heavenly throne of His father David. From there, He rules over all nations, pours out His Spirit on His people, and gathers more and more people into His kingdom through our proclamation of the gospel. When He returns in glory, Jesus will finish the task. He will spread the kingdom of God to every corner of the earth.

If we ever hope to understand how everything the Bible teaches fits together, we must cast off what the world says about the human race. Why is sin so destructive? Why is salvation in Christ so crucial? Why do the Scriptures focus so much on how people live their daily lives? It is because we are the image of God, called to serve His kingdom. Isn’t that amazing? The King determined to spread His kingdom to the ends of the earth through people like you and me. As the twenty-four elders in heaven praised Jesus, “You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation . . . and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9–10).

Dr. Richard L. Pratt Jr. is founder and president of Third Millennium Ministries. He is author of many books, including He Gave Us Stories.

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

Christian Concern response to Church of England plans for same- sex prayer blessings

In a landmark moment, confirming the Church of England's (CofE) departure from biblical teaching on human sexuality, Church of England bishops have today announced plans to allow 'prayers' and 'blessings' for same-sex couples in civil partnerships in its churches.

In the statement the Bishops say they will urge all congregations in their care to welcome same-sex couples "unreservedly and joyfully" as they reaffirm their commitment to a "radical new Christian inclusion founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it – based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st Century understanding of being human and of being sexual".

The bishops met on Tuesday to discuss and finalise their recommendations for a debate on the Church's position on same-sex marriage at General Synod next month.

The move follows the UK government announcing yesterday plans to ban what the LGBT lobby call 'conversion therapy'. The proposals will criminalise prayer and certain types of consensual conversations.

Responding to the news, Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern and former lay member of general synod, said: "This is capitulation by the Church of England. The bishops have lost the courage and conviction to state clearly the beauty of God's vision for marriage between one man and one woman. Such a vision is clear and uncompromising and leads to a healthy and happy society.

"The Church of England is making way for the celebration of 'same-sex marriage' in all but name.

"Whilst not formally changing the doctrine of marriage as between one man and one woman for life, the Church of England is planning to completely disregard

the bible's teaching on marriage and act as if the long-established and still current doctrine counts for nothing.

"Church doctrine matters and the Church of England is being inconsistent and contradictory when it allows practices that do not conform to God's vision for marriage as set out in the Bible between one man and one woman.

"The Church of England institutions are formalising what they have, in fact, been doing for years by formally holding to its historic teaching but practicing and promoting the complete opposite.

"Christianity teaches that sexual expression is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Any other form of sexual relationships are sexually immoral. The bible calls it sin. The Church of England is now encouraging the celebration of sexual immorality. Let's be clear this is a critical moment and will go down in history as a turning point in the decline and fall of the Church of England.

"This is a landmark moment and will go down in history as a turning point in the decline and fall of the Church of England – unless these proposals can be decisively resisted by the faithful in Synod."

christianconcern.com
18 January 2023

Appeals Court backs Florida School District's policy that separates bathrooms by biological sex

The following is excerpted from "Federal appeals court," *Fox News*, Dec. 31, 2022: "A federal appeals court has ruled in favor of a Florida school district's policy that separates school bathrooms by biological sex. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals announced its 7-4 decision on Friday, ruling that the St. Johns County School Board did not discriminate against transgender students based on sex, or viol-

ate federal civil rights law by requiring transgender students to use gender-neutral bathrooms or bathrooms matching their biological sex. The court's decision was split down party lines, with seven justices appointed by Republican presidents siding with the school district and four justices appointed by Democratic presidents siding with Drew Adams, a biological female, who sued the district in 2017 after not being allowed to use the boys' restroom. Judge Barbara Lagoa wrote in the majority opinion that the school board policy advances the important governmental objective of protecting students' privacy in school bathrooms. She said the district's policy does not violate the law because it's based on biological sex, not gender identity. Two other federal appeals courts have ruled that transgender students can use bathrooms that accord with their identities. Friday's decision increases the likelihood that the U.S. Supreme Court will take up the issue.

Way of Life Literature, Vol 24, issue 01
January 6, 2023

Canada euthanized 10,000 of its citizens last year

The following is excerpted from "America, be very afraid," *Daily Mail*, Dec. 6, 2022: "Canada, a country that prides itself on its open-mindedness and tolerance, has the most permissive rules on euthanasia in the world – and the results have been frankly terrifying. Last year, more than 10,000 people in Canada – astonishingly that's over three percent of all deaths there – ended their lives via euthanasia, an increase of a third on the previous year. Alan Nichols, for instance, was a 61-year-old British Columbian with a history of depression and other medical issues – though none of them life threatening – who was hospitalized in 2019 over fears he might be suicidal. Although he asked his brother, Gary, to 'bust him out' as soon as possible, within a month of going into

hospital he'd submitted a request to be euthanized. He listed only one health condition – hearing loss – as the reason, but that was enough to satisfy his keepers and he was killed. 'Alan was basically put to death,' said his brother Gary. Erin Smith said her 71-year-old father, Rod McNeill, went to an Ontario hospital after suffering a fall. A month later, he was euthanized for a condition – end-stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease – that an autopsy shows he didn't have, Smith said. Canada is set to allow people to die exclusively for mental health reasons. Starting March 2023, Canada's medically assisted suicide eligibility will expand to people who do not have a physical ailment. Canada is also considering extending euthanasia to 'mature' minors – children under 18 who meet the same requirements as adults. Doctors and human rights campaigners say Canada's easy-come, easy-go euthanasia laws are particularly dangerous for disabled people who are being 'devalued' as a result. Professor Tim Stainton, director of the *Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship* at the University of British Columbia, described Canada's law as probably the biggest existential threat to disabled people since the Nazis' programme in Germany in the 1930s'. Being compared to the Nazis is surely the last thing that Justin Trudeau and his achingly woke allies would expect to ever hear but as they turn their country into an assisted suicide Wild West, they are losing any claim to common humanity."

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Retired Greek footballer sentenced to prison for anti-LGBT comments

The following is excerpted from "God created Adam and Eve," *Premier Christian News*, Nov. 14, 2022: "A Greek football legend has been sentenced to time in prison after he criticised a gender identity law on social media. Retired midfielder Vasilis Tsiartas has been sentenced by an Athens court to ten months in prison and a 5,000 fine after he was charged with hate speech following comments he made

in 2017. Tsiartas wrote on his Facebook page that he hoped 'the first sex changes are carried out on the children of those who ratified this abomination,' according to news outlet *The Greek Times*. 'Legitimise paedophiles, too, to complete the crimes,' he continued. Tsiartas later added, 'God created Adam and Eve.' The law being criticised by Tsiartas removed the medical requirement from the process of changing legal gender, and dropped the minimum age to 15. Following Tsiartas' comments, prominent Greek trans activist Marina Galanos filed a lawsuit against him. The 49-year-old has become the first person to be convicted after Greece introduced an anti-racist law for public incitement of violence or hatred on the basis of gender identity. The *Transgender Support Association* (SYD) described Tsiartas' conviction as 'particularly important for the transgender community.' Reacting to the news on Twitter, Tsiartas said he will be appealing the decision.

Way of Life Literature, Vol 23, issue
47, November 25, 2022

King Hezekiah inscription

The following is excerpted from "Bible's Reliability Further Affirmed," *Israel Today*, Nov. 8, 2022: "A broken portion of an engraving on a limestone tablet the size of your palm is adding yet further confirmation to the biblical account and giving a new twist on how Israel's kings saw themselves. The partial inscription engraved in ancient Hebrew letters was originally reported in 2008, but was not deciphered until recently. The letters on the inscription are only fragments of words, with the rest of the letters having been broken off. When found, the artifact was near an ancient man-made pool together with pottery shards dating to the 8th century BC. However, at the time the *Israel Antiquities Authority* did not make a conclusive connection between the inscription, King Hezekiah and the pool. Now two mainstream Israel archaeological experts, Gershon Galil and Eli Shukron, have concluded that the full inscription was: 'Hezekiah made the pool in Jerusalem.' The parallel passage is found in 2 Kings 20:20, which reads: 'As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city...' (NKJ). Not so many years ago,

skeptical archaeological minimalists were claiming only minor evidence had been found for the reliability of the Bible. However, year by year those claims are increasingly being shown to have been premature and mistaken."

Way of Life Literature, Vo 23, issue 47,
November 25, 2022

Fabulous ancient science

The following is from *creationmoments.com*, December 3, 2020: "For centuries the Chinese were the world's greatest scientists and engineers. Many people know that the Chinese invented the compass and gunpowder, but these are only the beginning. Over 1,000 years ago, Chinese astronomer Su Song built the first planetarium. He even tilted it at a precise 23.5° to match the Earth's tilt. More than 2,000 years ago another Chinese astronomer noted the moons of Jupiter – long before Galileo 'discovered' them. Almost 1,000 years ago, the Chinese used gunpowder to make over 30 types of fire arrows, including one that was a two-stage rocket. They were great shipbuilders as well. One of the most famous examples is a nine-masted, 300-foot ship with watertight bulkheads. The Chinese-invented odometer featured reduction gears and carved figures that beat a drum every time a distance of about one-fifth of a mile was traveled. The world's first known working seismometer – a device that registers earthquakes – was built in 132 AD. A 16th-century palace roof was designed with a series of interlocking joints that were layered to provide flexibility in case of an earthquake. As our knowledge of humanity reaches into history and grows, the picture we are seeing is not that of a primitive becoming more like a modern human. Rather, we see humans – ever curious and inventive – creatures that are very different from the animal world. Truly we have come from the hand of God Himself! Author: Paul A. Bartz.

Way of Life Literature, Vol 23, issue
45, November 11, 2022

<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.

Argentina

Argentina is a federal republic with a government structure similar to many Western democracies, but with a turbulent history of episodic military rule and brutal repression of leftist movements. The population is overwhelmingly Catholic, but Evangelical communities are growing and a 2015 law gives non-Catholic groups many of the same registration privileges as the Catholic Church. Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, and anti-Christian pressure is felt not so much from the national government as it is provincially. A 2001 law adopted in the central state of Córdoba outlaws "psychological manipulation", ostensibly a measure to discourage cults but which has ensnared Evangelical Christians. The Argentinian requirement for church registration, and its sensitivity to cults, may be understood partly as a vestige of a 1978 law that put large obstacles in front of minority sects seeking official recognition. The law was imposed by the military dictatorship of the time to identify possible subversives.

Bangladesh

As the number of Christians from a Muslim background is growing, they face restrictions and difficulties with radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders, and families. There are fatwas implemented all over

the country, especially in rural areas, and demands to introduce Sharia (Islamic law) to show the country belongs to the "House of Islam". Local government officials create various obstacles for Christians, but the rise in attacks claimed by the Islamic State group has been countered by security forces.

Belarus

The constitution of Belarus guarantees religious freedom, but the reality is different. Although there is no state church, the Belarus Orthodox Church has privileged status. There is a sizeable Catholic minority, but Protestant denominations endure government pressure because of perceived links to the West. Legislation makes it difficult for "non-traditional" denominations, which the government often labels as "sects", to register or own property, forcing Christians to meet illegally in people's homes.

Bhutan

Pressure on Christians in Bhutan has increased significantly in recent years, both from the government and society. Though a secular state, constitutionally Bhutan's "spiritual heritage" is Buddhist. Christians lack any formal status and recognition – many do not have National ID Cards – and have been arrested for distributing religious literature or inviting people to church. Registering churches is very difficult; the government keeps gatherings confined to household premises.

Bolivia

Landlocked and poor, Bolivia has the largest indigenous population in Latin America. Like many other constitutionally secular countries that promise religious freedom, Bolivia's underlying laws and regulations restrict church activity. A new constitution in 2008 eliminated the Roman Catholic Church's official preferential standing in the country. The subsequent church-registration law, however,

has critics, especially among Evangelical groups, which have sued to have the law declared unconstitutional. The Bolivian government is accused of close links with drug trafficking, which puts it at odds with churches, which oppose the trade. The politicised courts prosecute government opponents, putting Christian leaders seeking to defend religious rights on the defensive.

Brunei

As Brunei's sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah, encourages Islamisation throughout society, pressure on Christians increases. The third stage of Sharia, or Islamic law, came into effect April 1, 2019. Attendance at Muslim prayers is mandatory for all, including converts to Christianity. This latest stage will affect every Muslim who converts from Islam to another faith. A fatwa bans the construction or renovation of buildings used for non-Muslim worship, while the authorities monitor and place restrictions on all churches (including registered ones). Importing Bibles and Christian evangelism are prohibited, as is celebrating Christmas.

Burkina Faso

Only a handful of countries have a lower per-capita GDP than Burkina Faso, yet it carried itself through a peaceful election following a 2014 coup. The constitution promises religious freedom, and religious organisations must register with the government. Even as the Muslim population increased rapidly, little had happened in Burkina Faso to mark it as especially hostile to Christians. That changed in January 2016, when elements associated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb attacked a hotel in the capital, Ouagadougou, killing 29 people, including seven Christians in the country on humanitarian missions. The BBC reported that the attack "would seem to be an attempt by AQIM not just to reinforce itself as the main jihadist group in the region, but also to show that it can spread its violent campaign to new frontiers".

The world's easiest theological question

MICHAEL J. KRUGER



Florian Weichelt on Unsplash

For those who love to talk about theology, a good head-scratching question can really be fun. It allows us to stay up late in deep conversations with our friends over the mysteries of God and his Word.

Indeed, Jesus was known for asking some pretty tough theological questions. Sometimes the answer seemed obvious when it was not. When Jesus asked the Pharisees, “Whose son is he [the Christ]?”

they assumed the answer was simple: “The son of David,” they said (Matt 22:42).

Turns out, however, that it was not at all simple. Jesus proceeds to stump them: “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt 22:45). The text then tells us: “No one was able to answer him a word.”

Lesson: we’re not the great theologians we often think we are. At any moment, Jesus can take us into the deep theological

waters where the currents are swift and we struggle to keep our head above water.

Even so, sometimes Jesus asks easy theological questions where the answer is obvious. Often he does this to make a point about the hardness of men’s hearts. As an example, he asks the Pharisees what may be the world’s easiest theological question:

“Is it lawful ... to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4)

People in positions of religious authority can sometimes be more concerned about protecting their power than about caring for the sheep.

No one hears this question and thinks, “Hmm. That’s a tough one. The Bible is pretty vague about good vs. evil. Not sure if God wants me to save a life today or murder someone ...”

No! Jesus is purposefully asking the Pharisees the world’s easiest theological question. One that any 3-year-old could get right. And how do they respond?

The text tells us, “And they were silent.”

So, let’s not miss how incredible this scene is. The Pharisees – Israel’s foremost scholars, teachers and theologians – won’t answer a question about whether they should perform a good act or an evil act. What in the world is happening here?

The larger context provides the answer. This remarkable exchange takes place in a series of passages about what one is allowed to do on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had a reputation for adding all sorts of man-made laws on top of God’s law, allowing them to be judge and jury over the people. As the enforcer of these rules, the Pharisees were in the position of power and control.

Indeed, the passage tells us that they had turned their sights on Jesus himself. A man with a withered hand had walked into the synagogue and we are told, “They watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him” (Mark 3:2).

But their whole plan is ruined by Jesus asking the “world’s easiest theological question.” That one question exposes their hypocrisy and abusive behaviour.

If the Pharisees answered “to do good,” then they would be giving Jesus the green light to heal the man. Not only would this prove that their man-made laws are a farce, but it would rob them of their opportunity to “accuse” Jesus.

If the Pharisees answered, “to do harm,” then they would be directly

admitting that they are advocates for bad behaviour. And that is obviously not an option.

So, trapped between these two options, they choose to say nothing.

This incredible story has tremendous lessons for the modern church. First, *people in positions of religious authority can sometimes be more concerned about protecting their power than about caring for the sheep.*

The saddest part of this story is that there was a hurting sheep right in front of these Pharisees – the man with the withered hand – and they don’t really even see him. They only pay attention to him when he becomes a possible pawn in their bid to destroy Jesus.

Jesus, on the other hand, is quite concerned about this poor man, and eventually heals him. In effect, he is rescuing him from abusive shepherds. What Ezekiel had said of the bad shepherds of Israel was still true in Jesus’ day: “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up ... with force and harshness you have ruled them” (Ezek 34:4).

Of course, these bad shepherds don’t take this lying down. Since their power as been challenged by Jesus, they will protect it at all costs. We are told that “The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him” (Mark 3:6).

Keep in mind, of course, that bad shepherds don’t think they are bad shepherds. No doubt, these Pharisees probably saw themselves as the defenders of theological orthodoxy. In their own minds, they might have thought they were defending the purity of the Sabbath against this upstart teacher from Nazareth.

And that is the second lesson for the

modern church: *sometimes bad shepherds hide behind the garb of theological truth. In their minds, they are keeping the church pure.*

So, how should we respond to the bad shepherds in our modern day? The same as Jesus. The text tells us that he was “grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:5). We should mourn for those sheep who lack good shepherds.

But, I think we can also follow Jesus’ lead in another way. We can distinguish between good and bad shepherds by again asking the world’s easiest theological question: “Is it lawful ... to do good or to do harm?”

In the end, good shepherds can readily be identified in one simple way. They, like Jesus, don’t hurt the sheep but do good to them.



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October 20, 2020

Sometimes bad shepherds hide behind the garb of theological truth. In their minds, they are keeping the church pure.

A Door stands open —

Mission opportunity in the UAE
(United Arab Emirates)

*Praying for God's
work among the
unreached*



By 2023 the world population is projected to reach 8 billion. Reaching the whole world with the gospel seems like an impossible task, but even more so when the Reformed Missions community is so small. We need to be wise with our use of resources and in assessing the Church's missionary-sending program. Let me invite you to consider how God has directed our attention to open doors in the UAE.

The Muslim world is a mission field and notoriously hard to reach. For instance there are over 200 million Muslims in Pakistan and approximately 1% are Christian.¹ The story repeats itself across the Muslim world. "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Luke 10v2).

In many middle eastern countries, it is difficult for Christians to enter and openly proclaim the Gospel. Imagine a country with multitudes, a melting pot of people and cultures from many countries- many of them Muslim. A diaspora of mainly South Asian gentile nations taken out of their communities to be transplanted into the UAE. What if many of those people came to Christ in that country and then were able to take the Gospel back to their home countries and communities? Often without the barriers facing foreign missionaries.

"The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom..." Isa 35v1. It may surprise many that God is at work and bringing numerous people to himself in the Middle East. God is pleased to do this through the ministry of multi-ethnic churches. My family and I had the privilege of visiting one of those churches, Grace Church Abu Dhabi (GCA), in November 22.

I would like to report back to any who are interested.

Abu Dhabi is the capital of the United Arab Emirates; the Middle Eastern nation borders the Gulf of Oman and lies between Oman and Saudi Arabia. Islam is the state religion, with a Sunni majority and a Shi'a minority. Of the 43 people groups in the United Arab Emirates, 25 remain unreached by the Gospel, and many of them are indigenous and illiterate. The number of people coming to Christ from other ethnic backgrounds, such as South and East Asians, is rising. However, sharing the Gospel with Emiratis is illegal, and those who do so can be arrested, imprisoned, and deported. This however only represents 11% of the population. Medical ministries have served this nation for decades and consistently provided healing for both physical and spiritual needs. What started with Medical Missions has now transformed into holistic

missionary work in the UAE, and Grace Church is no exception.

Grace Church Abu Dhabi was launched as recently as 2015 by a Missionary couple who moved to Abu Dhabi to plant a new church. The missionary pastor was sent out from the church he was serving in San Jose, CA, to a church-planting opportunity in Abu Dhabi. The Lord has blessed this work. God started calling people to join them in planting a church. The church would experience Jesus' grace. Believers would love each other and reach out to others with Jesus' grace. Now, Grace Church is focused on Christ-centred worship and preaching from God's Word.

Grace Church has people from multiple nationalities in their services each week. i.e., South and East Asians. Already there are approximately 1200 who attend worship or bible studies each week. Many of these people are very open to the good news of Christ Jesus because of the mix of cultures in that country. Many are coming to faith, and many others are keen to learn about Christ Jesus. People from multiple nationalities will return to their home countries; many of which are not open to Christian ministry. Some countries are relatively open but do not have well-trained ministers, for example, Pakistan. Those returning or those who stay permanently need to be well-fed, well-trained, well-equipped, and well-prepared to flourish as witnesses of Christ's love. This is a wonderful opportunity to reach these largely unreached peoples with Christ's love at a time when they are more likely to be open to the Gospel. I have seen this in action in my recent visit.

During our visit, we were able to observe these migrant workers – new followers of Christ continue to exhibit hope, joy, peace, and love while sharing the good news with their fellow workers. The beauty/favour of God resting on us and our brothers and sisters in Christ in Abu Dhabi. It was an incredible picture of God's Grace. The light of God shining in the face of the spiritual gloom of Islam. Thinking like this should just blow our minds.

The GCA has graciously extended a call to me to work alongside them in this exciting work. They desire that I work independently as a church planter, a distinctively Reformed work in which I will preach the Gospel, feed believers, equip new Christians, and plant new Churches in a multi-ethnic environment. My role will also involve caring for and training the staff who reach out to the community. I will also focus on preparing small group leaders to be Christ's witnesses now and wherever



Mr Kamran Nazir



Dubai, United Arab Emirates Photo by Timo Volz on Pexels.com

God will take them in the future. My wife will assist with our children's education, hosting home groups and hospitality.

Why has the GCA called me to this work?

Grace Church is part of Acts 29 churches in the United Arab Emirates that are focused on church planting, the Gospel, and ethnic diversity. As I said earlier, approximately 90 percent of the population are expatriates. The most prominent foreign nationals group are South Asian (including Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani), followed by Egyptians, the Philippines, and Westerners.² The potential for the gospel to spread from this diverse centre out to some of the most closed countries on earth is thrilling. "... a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" Revelation 7:9-10.

I feel the call of the Lord of the Harvest to do this work

As many of you may remember I was generously supported by the RCNZ and the Palmerston North Church to train at the RTC. I am fluent In Urdu (which means I can communicate in Hindi) and Panjabi.

As a Pakistani, I am familiar with the Muslim religion and culture. I have worked as a Pastor in Pakistan and also in Australia. The call to Missions has never left me.

We are currently seeking the spiritual oversight, financial and prayer support of a sending church. Please join us in this exciting ministry. You can be part of it with us. Please pray for us and ask how you can participate in God's mission to the world. Is this perhaps an opportunity to reach the unreached?

"May the favour/beauty of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands." Psalm 90:17

Using the words of Psalm 90, I invite you to pray. Lord, establish your church in Abu Dhabi. Let's pray for those labouring and striving in an environment hostile to the Gospel's spread. Psalm 90:17 is a good reminder and encouragement to pray for God's church both in New Zealand and UAE.

Psalm 90:17 Pray for UAE during the year 2023

Please join us and pray for more grace, power, and boldness to share the Gospel in a spiritually parched land. That Christ's Church indeed is established.

Lord, establish your church in the desert to thrive and be a spiritual oasis for many.

May many churches be planted to bring hope and beauty. May the Gospel hope increase.

Let's pray for the Gospel to spread

Lord God, we pray that you would establish the work of our hands, that you would cause your beauty/favour to be upon us so that the Gospel might spread throughout those men and women and their children who work in UAE. May God give us reason to praise Him for the privilege of being a part of what He is doing there, and through our prayers, may God establish the work of our hands we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

References

- 1 See: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics
- 2 See: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/united-arab-emirates-population>

Mr Kamran Nazir is currently serving as a Chaplain for a Christian not-for-profit organization in Melbourne, and an ordained minister of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Pakistan.