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**CONDITIONAL or
UNCONDITIONAL**

Forgiveness?

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Editorial

Forgiveness is a relatively big word in our English vocabulary. There are many other words which are larger, but don't carry the same weight, meaning, application or consequences.

The reason for this is because forgiveness is right at the heart of reconciliation.

Think about our relationship to our Saviour and Lord. Without His forgiveness there would be no mercy, no grace and no reconciliation. We would still be in our sins and hell-bound and what a miserable situation to be in. However, the good news is that there is forgiveness based upon the mercy and grace of Christ and his death on the cross.

At the end of what we call the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6:14-15, Jesus says *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"*.

And so, as we see Jesus' forgiveness for sinners, we also must forgive. I am only too aware that sometimes that is not an easy process, especially where there is serious sin involved. Something that gets in the way all too often are our own emotions and justifications. And sometimes, other people just don't respond how they should – there is no humility in them or in us.

I have known people who do not suffer fools lightly. Once someone has trodden on their toes or offended them, even in a small way, they write them off forever, even when the offender was really only trying to be helpful and the action was misunderstood. What ensued was a 17 year feud between neighbours who lived on opposite sides of the street. What a woeful situation! Just imagine it! 17 years of holding a grudge with your neighbour – and these were unbelievers! It affected both families in a very negative way. Thankfully, there was eventually reconciliation, but it took one of them to humble themselves and seek the other out.

But, these things also happen in the church. And when they do, reproach and dishonour is brought against the Name of our Lord, and damage is done to each other. How often have there not been running disagreements with members in the congregation, or members leave the church because they disagree with their Sessions? Not to mention, husbands and wives and children!

Clearly, there needs to be forgiveness and repentance. There needs to be humility of heart and a willingness toward reconciliation.

That is what our theme is this month. How is forgiveness given? Is it conditional upon repentance or is it unconditional? I know we have two streams of thought on this matter in our churches. Maybe our contributors will shed some light on this very important facet of the Christian life. Many thanks to them for taking the time to contribute.

Featured in this issue:

Mr Ron Norman writes about conditional forgiveness based on Chris Brauns' book *Unpacking Forgiveness*.

Mr Joshua Flinn takes the contra position and considers the problem of conditional forgiveness.

Mrs Harriet Haverland summarises both views.

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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Conditional or Unconditional forgiveness?

RON NORMAN

Forgiveness requires repentance: unconditional forgiveness risks treading underfoot the justice of God

The topic of forgiveness is of fundamental importance to all Christians because it relates to our relationship with God and with our fellow man. Theologically there are two main views. Conditional forgiveness is defined as that forgiveness which is only granted when the offending party shows remorse, repents and asks for forgiveness. Unconditional forgiveness is forgiveness which is granted to the offender without the requirement of prerequisite repentance.

Chris Brauns' definition is helpful:

"Forgiveness is a commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated".

He includes reconciliation in his definition, but my focus will be on the commitment to pardon.

The forgiveness that is in view in this definition is that which relates to serious offences and is not to be confused with our responsibility to be forbearing when dealing with minor offences. The great Reformed theologian John Murray summarised this truth as follows:

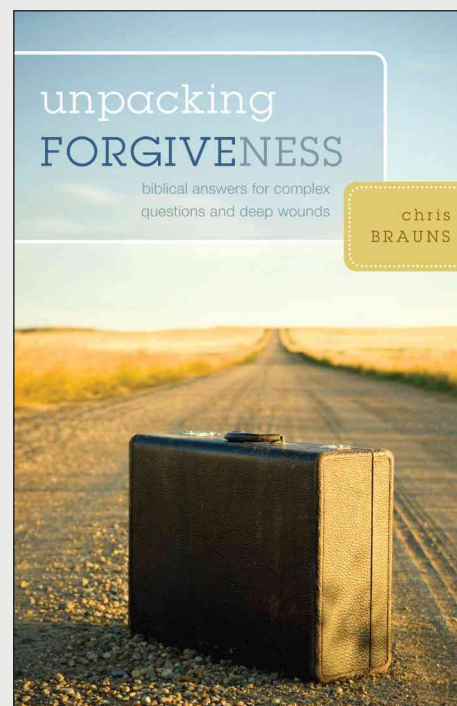
"Forgiveness is a definite act performed by us on the fulfillment of certain conditions. Forgiveness is something actively administered on the repentance of the person who is to be forgiven. We greatly

impoverish ourselves and impair the relations that we should sustain with our brethren when we fail to appreciate what is involved in forgiveness."

It is also a given that the model for our forgiveness of others, is God's forgiveness of us, and we should follow His example (Col. 3:13, Eph. 4:32). God's forgiveness is only granted when confession and repentance are forthcoming (1 John 1:9), and presumably our forgiveness of others should follow suit.

There are two levels of forgiveness. The first is forgiveness granted for minor offences. Such forgiveness – probably better called forbearance or overlooking – is granted without any repentance being required of the offender (Prov. 19:11). The second is forgiveness for a serious offence, which is only granted if repentance of the offender is forthcoming (Matt. 18:15-35, Luke 17:3, 4, 1 John 1:9). Whether an offence is serious or minor is a judgment that must be made by the one who is offended. Counsel and Biblical references can be sought to help the offended person make this judgment. Withholding forgiveness for serious offences does not automatically create bitterness in the one offended and can be an act of love, aimed at encouraging the offending person to come to repentance.

Chris Brauns states "the notion of automatic, unconditional forgiveness itself fosters bitterness". Furthermore, "we are



We are to have a forgiving spirit towards our enemies. We are to love them, pray for them, seek their good, care for them, be ready to forgive them and not be bitter towards them or hold a grudge for their actions. But we must not tread underfoot the justice of God.

created with a standard of justice written on our hearts. When we forgive someone who is not repentant, we are acting in a way that is unjust and unloving. Deep down we are saying that forgiveness must sometimes happen at the expense of justice." This is not talking about revenge but a flouting of the divine principle of justice.

So how are we to view the basis for God's forgiveness? Ultimately the basis for God's forgiveness of us is the finished work of Christ, paying the penalty for our sin and graciously granting us faith and repentance. But God has made forgiveness contingent upon repentance as a second cause, and its focus is the glory of God and our joy (Westminster Confession of Faith, 5:2).

In a sermon on Matthew 6:7-15, John Piper pointed out: "One last observation remains: forgiveness of an unrepentant person doesn't look the same as forgiveness of a repentant person. In fact I am not sure that in the Bible the term forgiveness is ever applied to an unrepentant person. Jesus said in Luke 17:3,4, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him and if he repents forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times, saying 'I repent', forgive him." So there's a sense in which full forgiveness

is only possible in response to repentance. But even when a person does not repent (cf. Matt. 18:17), we are commanded to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us and do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27). The difference is that when a person who wronged us does not repent with contrition and confession and conversion (turning from sin to righteousness), he cuts off the full work of forgiveness. We can still lay down our ill will; we can hand over our anger to God; we can seek to do him good; but we cannot carry through reconciliation or intimacy.

John MacArthur argues that for minor matters there are times when forgiveness is unilaterally and unconditionally granted. But MacArthur also states: "It is obvious from Scripture that sometimes forgiveness must be conditional. There are times when it is necessary to confront an offender. In such cases, unconditional forgiveness is not an option. These generally involve more serious sins, not petty or picayune complaints, but soul-threatening sins or transgressions that endanger the fellowship of saints."

Ken Sande agrees that there are times when minor offences should be overlooked, (unconditionally forgiven), but he also emphasises the need for repentance for serious offences before forgiveness can be granted. He helpfully describes forgiveness as a two-stage process: "When an offence is too serious to overlook and the offender has not yet repented, you may need to approach forgiveness as a two-stage process. The first stage requires having an attitude of forgiveness and the second, granting forgiveness. Having an attitude of forgiveness is unconditional and is a commitment you make to God. By His grace, you seek to maintain a loving and merciful attitude toward someone who has offended you. Granting forgiveness is conditional on the repentance of the offender and takes place between you and that person when there has been a serious offence, it would not be appropriate to make the promises of forgiveness until the offender has repented."

The promises of forgiveness to which Sande refers are:

1. I will not dwell on this incident.
2. I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
3. I will not talk to others about this incident.
4. I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

(Matt. 6:12, 1Cor.13:5, Eph.4:32.)

These promises can only be made in good conscience and according to the Biblical mandate when repentance has occurred. R.C. Sproul too writes: "God does not forgive us unilaterally; He requires repentance." So God's forgiveness is conditional upon repentance and He cannot show mercy to sinners at the expense of His holy justice.

If we apply the hermeneutic principle that we should allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and that Scripture cannot contradict itself, then with reference to Luke 17:3,4 and Mark 11:25, can we not say that when forgiveness is mentioned in Scripture, prerequisite repentance is implied? Could repentance be required by Christ for forgiveness in one text and not in another?

The teaching of unconditional forgiveness places an enormous and unbiblical burden on the backs of Christians in requiring them to be more forgiving and more gracious than God Himself. While we are commanded by Christ to love our enemies in Matthew 5:44, He does not tell us that we are to forgive them unconditionally. In fact, forgiveness is not mentioned at all. In 1 Corinthians 13, where God spells out what love does and does not do, forgiveness is also not mentioned. Cheap (unconditional), forgiveness is not love. We are to have a forgiving spirit towards our enemies. We are to love them, pray for them, seek their good, care for them, be ready to forgive them and not be bitter towards them or hold a grudge for their actions. But we must not tread underfoot the justice of God.

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JOSH FLINN

Grace, justice, and the problem with conditional forgiveness

Forgiveness is a crucial component of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So crucial in fact, that Jesus tells us that if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven (Matt 6:15). It's staggering then, how few people actually seem to have a good handle on what forgiveness means.

It doesn't surprise us, of course, that this failure is true in the secular world. Enormous effort is spent in trying to teach people how to communicate, how to de-escalate heated situations, how to express their lived experience... but when it comes to the core matter, and whether someone has actually done something *wrong*, the ground is declared to be too treacherous to proceed... for after-all, there isn't really any clear moral standard to appeal to.

And so we see post-modern counsellors expend more effort in establishing 'judgement free zones' rather than speak about the fact that their clients will have to give an account of every careless word in the day of judgment (Matt 12:36). People's personal journeys are constantly affirmed – and both the abuser and the abused are encouraged to speak their own truth – and how people *feel* rules the day.

The damage to our society, our church communities, and our families is immense. Moral relativity has created an environment where people are completely out of practice in how to reconcile when relationships break down. And so we see far too many adults (even in churches) never apologise when they do something wrong... and when they do, it's so foreign that it doesn't even convince the one who says it! There are those who spend a lot of time trying to forgive *themselves* for their own wickedness (a completely futile exercise from a

Christian perspective!) and those who have a litany of ruined friendships behind them, primarily because their expertise is in conflict avoidance rather than healthy conflict resolution.

So, in the midst of all the mess, and given the serious weight God places on this matter, what are we to do?

Conditional or Therapeutic?

Chris Brauns, in his book 'Unpacking Forgiveness' defines forgiveness as: *"a commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated."*

This is a helpful working definition (when you read it slowly). The Scriptures clearly teach that there is a relationship between forgiveness and repentance, not only that we must do both, but that reconciliation is the goal of both, and that both are necessary to enjoy that goal realised.

And yet, as Ron Norman's article reveals, the phrase 'pardon graciously the repentant' is a contentious one. His isolated quote from R.C. Sproul suggests a hard line: "God does not forgive us unilaterally; He requires repentance."¹ This hard line seems to be Norman's own position. It also appears to be the position of Chris Brauns: that forgiveness can only be given on the *condition* that the guilty repents.

Nevertheless, Norman contradicts himself by suggesting there is also a level when repentance *isn't* required – in reference to 'minor offenses'. The phrase he has quoted from MacArthur seems to point to the same, in that serious offenses *need* repentance *before* forgiveness is given.²

How does someone determine when true repentance has occurred? Repentance is, after all, not just a matter of apologising, but is a change of mind, a change of life. It is not just a sorrow for doing wrong, it is the desire and effort to do something right.

Even at a casual glance this is a problem. Why? Because the degree of offence is subjective... and most people these days would still be left with the question about how one might determine the difference. This is why we have people who equate language which offends them with domestic terrorism.

But we may also wonder: How does someone determine when true repentance has occurred? Repentance is, after all, not just a matter of apologising, but is a change of mind, a change of life. It is not just a sorrow for doing wrong, it is the desire and effort to do something right. Repenting for being impatient today, as an example, is

shown in striving to be patient tomorrow... and so we'd certainly expect positive fruit. But who determines which fruit is most important? Or how much fruit? If it's the victim (who is waiting for true repentance so they can forgive), then are they the best person to objectively make that call?

The conditional (or contractual) view of repentance is often contrasted with the unconditional ('therapeutic') view. Although it's an unhelpful label, the idea is that we are called to forgive regardless of whether or not someone repents. This view brings comfort because it means that our peace is not found in the positive response of the offending party, but the positive work of Christ. At times, this position has been criticised for simply pandering to the feelings of hurting people, but the fact is that the Scriptures provide a very clear basis for it.

Proverbs 19:11 ("[The glory of a man] is to overlook a transgression") is far from isolated. Proverbs 25:21-22 also suggests that forgiveness, shown through an act of love to one's enemy, works to bring said enemy to repentance; Jesus prays on the cross that God will forgive people even though they *haven't* yet repented (Luke 23:34); Mark 11:25 teaches that if you stand praying and haven't forgiven someone then you *must* do so. Interestingly, there is no proposed order here, where the individual researches whether repentance has occurred first, but rather, Christ's command is simply: "Forgive!" And there are many more passages which testify to the same.

Sometimes the language used by the conditional camp is decidedly unhelpful: you need to show a 'willingness to forgive'; you must 'work towards forgiveness'; or 'be ready to forgive'; forgiveness is perceived as a contract. The problem with all this language, although true in itself, is that it's not sufficient. The clear mandate is to forgive... that's the command... and that's what we're called to do.

And to put a fine point on the matter, if one professes to be a Christian and they refuse to show fruit of *repentance* before God, they may well end up in hell in their disbelief. So too, if one professes to be a Christian yet refuses to *forgive* (Matt 18:32-35). One is an abuse of God's justice... the other is an abuse of his grace.

A few critical observations

We would do well, at this stage, to briefly consider a number of other issues.

First, we are to forgive as God has forgiven us in Christ (Ephesians 4:32; Matt

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6:12-14). Now, it's certainly true that God does indeed forgive only those who truly repent. This is why unrepentant unbelievers are not forgiven their sin but will face judgement. This is also why 'Christians' who live in unrepentant sin are, if they refuse godly counsel, to be cast out of the church and counted as an unbeliever (1 Cor 5:1-13; Matt 16:17).

On the other hand, it isn't quite as simple as this. Even once converted, there are many sins that we commit that we are ignorant of. There are sins we commit because we don't think they are sins, being mistaken about the Law. Even in areas where we are conscious of the truth, we are unable to grasp the explicit depth of our depravity. It follows then, that God does not require qualitative nor quantitative repentance of every single sin we commit before he washes us clean in the blood of Christ. We certainly should repent of every individual sin, but that is not the condition of our salvation.

Second, there are those who argue that if we forgive before someone repents, then we fail to uphold (and pursue) justice. This is a legitimate concern and yet misunderstands a broader context. The basis of justice is found not in your feelings, your culture, or even your experience. When you sin against someone else, the only reason it is a sin is because it contradicts God's Law. This is why, in Psalm 51:4, after David has committed adultery and murder, he says to God: "Against you, You only, have I sinned... *I have done that which is evil in your sight.*" The harm he caused other human parties was only sin worthy of repentance because God had defined it as such.

As such, we cannot ultimately determine justice based on our own experience. Why not? Because we define neither the terms nor the penalties. When someone forgives a party who has wronged them, they are ultimately testifying that they both trust in God's judgement and submit to it. Vengeance is His rather than ours (Rom 12:19), and all men ultimately face justice on the day of judgement (even if they don't on earth!).

Moreover, far from ignoring justice on earth, God's system includes an earthly court which is to ensure the victim is restored. Broadly speaking, an entire community has a responsibility in this restoration (seen even in the work of the diaconate), but the central responsibility is given to the abuser!³ This is why there were so many laws for reparations in the Scripture for those who sinned against their neighbours... at times having to pay back

four-fold (Luke 19:8) or even sevenfold (Proverbs 6:31)!

Thirdly, it follows that personal forgiveness doesn't negate all consequence for wickedness (whether someone is repentant or not!). An individual who has abused children should face the consequence in prison. And yet, if they become converted afterwards, even having already 'done the time', they should not be able to be a Sunday School teacher. It should be clear that forgiveness does not necessitate immediate trust. To assert such, misunderstands the prevailing temptations even of repentant sinners (e.g. Paul in Romans 7:14).

And so, an abused wife may refuse to hold bitterness in her heart, and not require "moral liability" (as per Brauns' definition) from her unrepentant spouse, but she may still separate from him for a time to maintain her own safety and the safety of her children. Should the abuse be serious enough, she may even take him to court to face discipline for his crimes. Nevertheless, even as she is separated from him, this does not mean that she has not forgiven, for out of love she can desire that the consequence will be used by God to bring him to repentance and that the family might be finally reconciled to one another.

The end goal of forgiveness

The reason both forgiveness and repentance in our earthly relationships is so important is because it points towards the gospel. As God has modelled marriage to point towards the relationship of Christ and his bride, so too do our earthly relationships point us to God's desire to be reconciled with his people.

So prominent is this message, that Paul uses the phrase "ministry of reconciliation" as synonymous with the gospel itself (2 Cor 5:18-21). Wonderfully, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us", and "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom 5:8, 10). Because of the sufficiency of Christ's person and work, we who once hated our God are now reconciled and restored to him. And the indwelling Spirit, in response to the Lord's sovereign will, necessarily caused us to respond to his election through faith and repentance when we became converted.

Although it's painful to admit, the sins someone else has committed against us are nothing in comparison to the weight of our sin against God. R.C. Sproul writes: "the foundation for a forgiving spirit is the

experience of divine grace." We can forgive their wrongs against us because we have been forgiven much; Because he loved us first, now we can love... both him and others.

And yet we must also call the sinner to repent. Not just towards us, but towards God... for God is the one who rules in justice and will pursue that justice even for his beloved children they have abused. And even as we were saved by grace, we desire them to recognize that without grace, they will face a much more serious ramification for their sin than alienation from their neighbour.

And so we forgive, even if someone has not yet repented, that their conscience may be pricked by the Spirit as they behold a grace they did not deserve; that they might be driven through repentance to enjoy the blessed unity of reconciliation – both in this life and the life to come. For our desire even for our enemies, is that through being confronted by a love so foreign to them, they too will be reconciled to God and be adopted into our spiritual family, to enjoy the blessed unity of the brothers of Christ (Psa 133:1).

The ultimate goal of repentance and forgiveness is not small, nor is the task easy. As C.S. Lewis noted: "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." In fact, we could say it's an impossible thing for us to change our heart to love our enemy in such a way. But what is impossible for man is not just possible for God, but he does it all the time. Place your hope in him. And may we all, through the work of his Spirit, forgive others, even as we have been forgiven.

- 1 Incidentally, R.C. Sproul argues *against* repentance being a *necessary* contractual condition of forgiveness. His position is rather: "Though that may be indeed a wonderful thing, it is not commanded." <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/why-forgive>. Although I disagree with this position, it is important to avoid misrepresenting him.
- 2 This also appears to be a misrepresentation given that MacArthur has denied conditional repentance.
- 3 Each person, then, is held responsible for their own sin. This can also go both ways... as both parties were guilty and needed to pay recompense to each other.

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HARRIET HAVERLAND

A summary of the arguments for conditional and unconditional forgiveness

I have grown up in a Christian home with believing parents. My family was part of the Reformed Churches of Australia (now the CRCA). I have attended worship twice a Sunday for most of my life and have only ever heard preaching on unconditional forgiveness. I did not know until recently that there was another view at all.

A few years back when I was leading a Ladies Bible Study in Pukekohe, we had a discussion about forgiveness. At that discussion another godly lady in our group talked about conditional forgiveness and the need for repentance. As I had never heard of this before I decided to do some research for our next meeting, which led to a profitable discussion.

What is forgiveness? It means to let go of the hurt caused by another. It is an active decision to say and think, 'I won't get even with you, or give you what you deserve'.

Through my study of this subject my views have not changed. There are respected Reformed Theologians on both sides of the debate who argue for either conditional forgiveness, or unconditional forgiveness.

Arguments for Conditional Forgiveness

Conditional forgiveness says that we shouldn't forgive people who have sinned against us unless they repent from their wrong doing and ask us to forgive them. Once they have repented we must and should forgive them.

God's forgiveness, they argue, is conditional upon our repentance. 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Using these words the argument is that if we confess, and if we repent, God forgives us and cleanses us. We are to follow this pattern in our relationships with others.

Luke 17:3b: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" Repentance is often mistaken for feeling sorry for what you have done. That is not repentance. You can be sorry that you have been caught out, or sorry for the pain caused, without repenting. Repentance leads to a life of change in your actions and your attitudes. If the person doesn't show change in their life, you don't need to forgive them. Chris Brauns argues that "God's forgiveness is conditional. Only those who repent and believe are saved." Therefore, no repentance

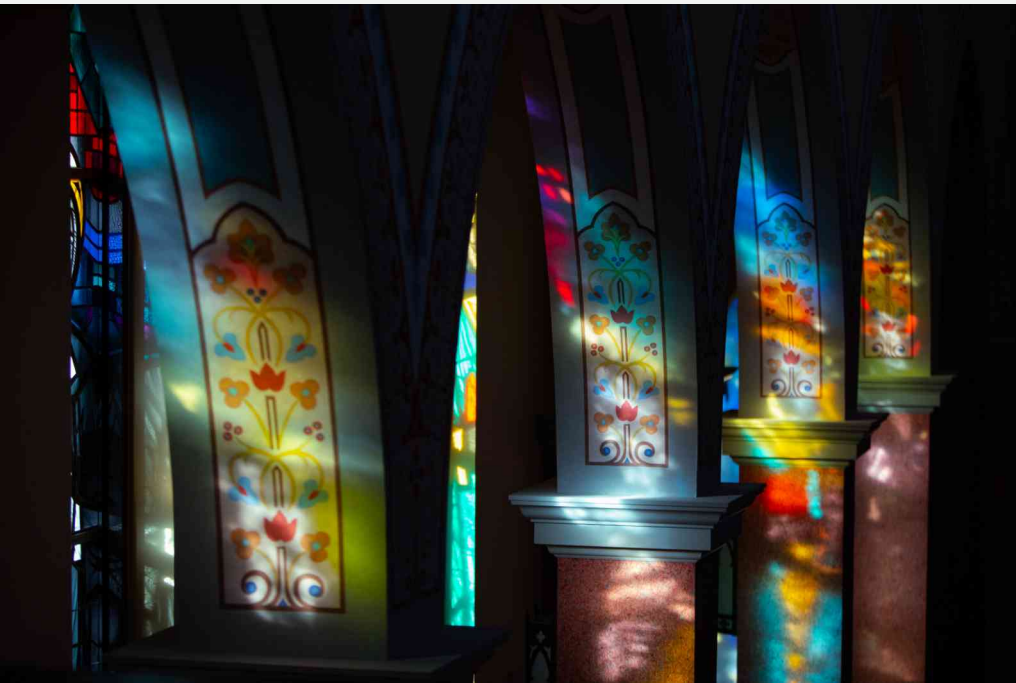


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equals no forgiveness.

So how do you respond to the unrepentant person who has sinned against you? How do you move forward with these people who may still be in your life? We are not to take vengeance as vengeance belongs to God. God will ultimately decide what to do with the unrepentant sinner. We must still show love to our enemies. We must not live with an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth mentality. As far as we are able, we are to do good to those who hate us. We are not to take out revenge on people in any shape or form.

Arguments for Unconditional Forgiveness

Other theologians such as Lewis Smedes, Mark Beach and Dick Tripp argue for unconditional forgiveness.

The Bible has a myriad of verses on forgiveness. Here are just a few of them.

Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Matthew 6:14: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Colossians 3:13: "bear with one another and, if any of you has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Luke 6:37: "Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven;"

One of the main arguments for unconditional forgiveness is what Christ has done for us. Christ didn't make us repent first, and then forgive us. We read in the Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 69 that though I have ".....grievously sinned against all God's commandments.....out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ." God forgives us unconditionally. He is the one who gives us faith. He is the one who puts the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He is the one who gives us repentance. His grace is a gift given to us even though we don't deserve it.

In the same way I choose to forgive those who haven't asked for it. God forgave me through no goodness seen in me. It was all grace. If I am to forgive others the way God forgave me then I need to forgive others whether or not they ask for it or repent from their actions. I struggle to see how I could show love to someone I haven't forgiven.

When I consider this practically I see that there are many times when I may have

felt wronged but will never get to solve the issue with the person involved. Do I forgive the driver who yelled at me while making rude hand gestures and cutting me off and to whom I will never speak? How do I move forward in my life after hurtful words and actions when that person has died or moved away? How do I heal from pain when I have to wait for the abuser to make the first move to repentance? That leaves the abuser in control of the healing process. They may never repent.

Forgiveness can be hard. It is an ongoing process, but it has the potential to reap so many rewards. It removes bitterness. It allows us to get on with the healing process. It lets us move forward in our lives and it honours God for we are following his example.

I have just finished reading the book "What is a Girl Worth?" by Rachael Denhollander. This is the biographical account of the circumstances that led to the conviction of the USA Gymnastic Doctor, Larry Nasser. He was sentenced to 40-175 years in jail for his abuse of girls and young women.

In Rachael's victim impact statement this godly woman said to him: "I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so that you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me, though I extend that to you as well." "This is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace

and hope and mercy where none should be found."

Question and Answer 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism says "....that out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God and have been granted salvation."

If I choose to love others in the sacrificial way that God did, then I will show grace to the unrepentant sinner. God's compassion for us never fails. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22,23. May we show that compassion and love to others.

Resources

Forgiving like God, Some reflections on the idea of conditional forgiveness by Mark Beach
Unpacking Forgiveness by Chris Brauns
The Art of Forgiving by Lewis B. Smedes
Forgive and Forget by Lewis Smedes
Forgiveness. What It Is and Why It Matters by Dick Tripp

Mrs Harriet Haverland is a member of the Pukekohe Reformed Church.



Image by Brett Jordan on Unsplash

Leaning on my father's shoulder

My mind has recently gone back to the days when I was a small boy, sitting next to me, dad in church.

I am tremendously blessed to have had parents who regularly took us to worship with God's people in our local church. In addition to that, I have also been blessed to have had a church where children were sitting right there next to their parents to join in the worship service.

It wasn't always easy – not for me, nor for my dad (and possibly at times, not for those who were sitting around us). My dad often had to "speak" sternly with me, using only his eyes, but for most of the time it wasn't necessary, because we were used to being in church – it was just such a normal part of our lives.

There were times when it perhaps was just a bit too much for me as a young boy who couldn't sit still at the best of times, to behave as expected in a reverent worship service; but it was then that I had my father's shoulder to lean on. Once or twice I might even have fallen asleep with my head resting on his shoulder.

The leaning on my dad's shoulder was sweet and might even have worked to calm

me down physically, but there is a Biblical principle at work in this. My spiritual life, my love for Christ, my reverence for God's Word and my enjoyment of the Gathering of Saints, all hinged on these two gifts from God in my life: a father who took me with him to church and whom I could lean on, and a church that ministered to us both!

So thinking back at it now, I realise what a precious gift God in His grace has given me in the form of my father and my church working side by side to shape me into the man I am today. To have been able to sit next to my dad in church, to participate in the worship of the living God, to see my dad follow in his Bible the same passage the pastor was reading from, seeing him pray and hearing him and my mom and sisters join the rest of the congregation in singing God's praises were hugely influential in my life. The Lord God providentially ordained it so that through our parents and the church obeying His commandments, the children will benefit from it. This was a most profitable investment into my spiritual life.

Let's encourage our fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, to enjoy

worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ together with our fellow brothers and sisters in the church.

In the Church and Family Life Declaration, article VII it is stated:

We affirm that the church and the family were designed to be complementary, compatible, and harmonious because the family is commanded to raise "godly seed," for the next generation, and is the proving ground for church leaders, while the church is responsible to give the family her instruction, discipline, protection, fellowship, and worship (Mal. 2:15; Acts 2:42; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9).

I am so grateful for a father who led by example, and a church who understood!

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Is the Larger Catechism worthwhile?

CHAD VAN DIXHOORN

A recent article in *New Horizons* asked the question, "Is the Shorter Catechism Worthwhile?" – and answered with a resounding yes! This article asks the same question about the Larger Catechism.

Unlike the Shorter Catechism, the Larger Catechism has suffered much neglect in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. At least a dozen commentaries have been written on the Shorter Catechism, and I can think of at least seven commentaries on the Confession of Faith. Yet only Thomas Ridgely has penned a commentary on the Larger Catechism, and that was in the early 1730s. Many of the commentaries on the Shorter Catechism and the Confession are still in print; Ridgely's work was never reprinted and is now very scarce.

Closer to home, another indication of the popularity of the Larger Catechism among conservative Presbyterians may be *Trinity Hymnal*: the Larger Catechism has never been printed at the back of our hymnal, unlike the Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism. Many families learn and study the Shorter Catechism, but few people tackle the Larger Catechism. So is the Larger Catechism worthwhile?

This question will be approached from three angles. First, we will ask why the Larger Catechism was written. The Westminster Assembly obviously thought there was a good purpose for it; it may still be worthwhile for the same reason. Second, we will compare the Larger Catechism with previous catechisms. This may show us what the Assembly thought was lacking in other catechisms, and help us see the unique contribution of the Larger Catechism. Third, we will ask if the Larger Catechism teaches us anything that the Shorter Catechism and the Confession of Faith do not.

The making of the Westminster Catechisms

The year was 1642, and many Englishmen had taken up arms against King Charles I. Some of their complaints were similar to those that would be raised by Americans

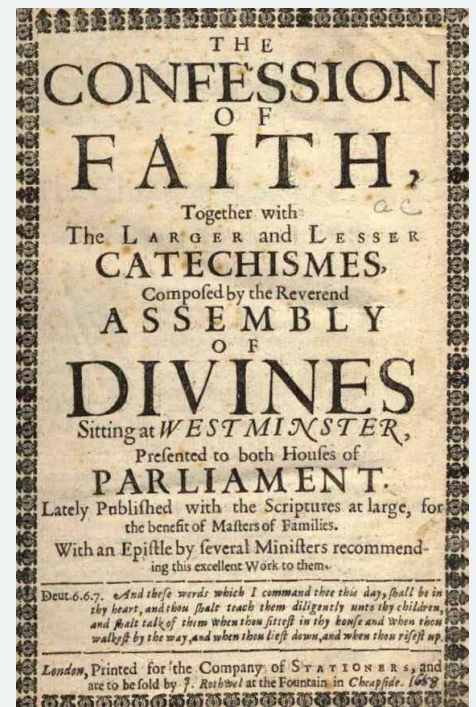
one hundred and thirty years later, but many of their grievances were specifically religious. Some of their number were reckless libertarians; many were Puritans, who wanted changes in worship and theology that King Charles and his Roman Catholic wife had opposed with all their might.

By 1643, the English Parliamentarians had lost too many battles to the royalist forces, and so they appealed to the north, asking the equally unhappy Scots to help them against the king. They agreed to help, so long as the English subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant. The first point of that covenant stated that both countries were to be Reformed in "doctrine, worship, discipline, and government." To achieve this unity, the English Parliament called an ecclesiastical Assembly in 1643 to produce a "confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship," and a directory for "catechising."

The first steps toward the Catechism

Thus, the first purpose of the Westminster Assembly's proposed catechism, like every one of its documents, was to achieve religious unity. Other catechisms existed, but in their view, a fresh one was necessary if the worship of the English and Scottish churches was to be uniform. At least five of the English ministers (often called "divines" in those days) at the Assembly were famous catechists, and so the Assembly asked one of them, Herbert Palmer, to write the first draft of a catechism.

For some reason, Robert Baillie and the other Scottish delegates to the Assembly found Palmer's work disappointing. The Assembly promptly handed the catechism over to the Scots, who were left to correct its shortcomings. Beginning in December of 1643, the catechism committee of the Assembly worked on this catechism, reporting back frequently to the Assembly for public discussion. Other debates



Dr. Godfrey has hit the proverbial nail on the head. His observation may explain why so many non-Presbyterians appreciate the Shorter Catechism and not the Larger Catechism. The Shorter Catechism, like much of North American evangelicalism, focuses on the individual; the Larger Catechism, on the other hand, is explicitly Presbyterian and churchly. In places the Larger Catechism appears more concerned with the church and the ordinary means of grace than even the Confession

sidetracked the Assembly, and other committees made faster progress: the divines completed the Confession of Faith first, and handed it over to Parliament in December of 1646.

The forming of two Catechisms

Finally, in January of 1647, the Assembly gave up on the idea of writing one catechism that would be suitable for all purposes. Richard Vines, an English divine at the Assembly, spotted the problem and made a motion "that the Committee for the Catechism prepare a draught of two Catechisms in which they have an eye to the Confession of Faith, and to the matter of the Catechism already begun."

Mr. Vines's motion, which was accepted by the Assembly, has been understood in different ways. Most popular has been the interpretation of Robert Baillie, who inferred that no doctrine would be in the Larger or Shorter Catechism that was not already in the Confession. In his mind, the catechisms would only be reductions of the Confession.

The Scottish commissioners, in a report to their church back home, supplied a further reason for writing two catechisms rather than one: it is too hard to serve milk and meat in one dish. In their view, this difficulty prompted the Assembly to make one catechism "more exact and comprehensive" and the other "more easie and short for beginners." In terms of efficiency, this was a good decision; by October 15 of that year, the Assembly completed the Larger Catechism, and a month before Christmas the divines presented the Shorter Catechism to Parliament.

We see, then, that the catechisms were designed to promote religious and political unity between England and Scotland and, more obviously, to instruct God's people in matters of faith and duty, with the Larger Catechism providing more exact and comprehensive instruction.

A Catechism for preaching?

Philip Schaff, the well-known nineteenth-century historian, and J. R. Pitman, the editor of one of the divine's works, have both stated that the Larger Catechism was to be used for preaching. Schaff says that the Assembly wrote it "for the public exposition in the pulpit, according to the custom of the Reformed churches on the continent." In a recent essay, W. Robert Godfrey has observed that the evidence for this claim is completely lacking. He also points out that the Assembly's Directory for Worship (still used by Scottish Presbyterians) explicitly states that the preacher is to preach from a biblical text. If the minister was to preach

from a text, it is not likely that he was to use the propositions in the Larger Catechism as his launching point.

The unpublished minutes of the Assembly confirm Dr. Godfrey's point. In the middle of the Assembly's debates on preaching, there is a somewhat cryptic statement: "Debate upon that text or argument because it gives liberty to preach without a text." In twentieth-century parlance, this means, "We debated whether a preacher should preach from a text of Scripture or from a doctrinal proposition (such as a catechism answer); we were concerned that a sermon based on a doctrinal statement could allow a minister to preach without expounding a text."

This statement reveals that the final declaration found in the Directory was a deliberate one: the ministers at the Westminster Assembly did not think that a preacher should preach from a proposition, or argument, but only from the Scriptures themselves. As important as the catechisms were, the Westminster divines did not want to follow the Continental Reformed practice of preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism.

Most likely, the Scottish commissioners were correct in thinking that the Larger Catechism was simply intended to be used by those who were more seasoned in the faith. Its chief beneficiaries would be the adult Christians who already understood the doctrines and duties of the Shorter Catechism and needed the meat of the Word.

In view of the original purpose for the Larger Catechism, there seem to be at least two reasons why the Larger Catechism is still worthwhile. First, it unites us with other Presbyterians who use and love it. Second, it teaches the deeper aspects of the Christian faith.

A comparison with previous Catechisms

Having outlined the historical purpose of the Larger Catechism, it still seems appropriate to ask why it had to be written at all. After all, respected teachers in Britain had composed good catechisms, Calvin's catechism was in the bookstores, and so was the Heidelberg Catechism. Why could the assemblymen not agree to use one of those catechisms for the purposes of unity and instruction? The simple answer is that they thought that the earlier catechisms could be improved upon.

This needs immediate qualification. Although the Westminster divines may have spotted deficiencies in the earlier catechisms, they were not departing from their fathers in any large way. In fact, studies have shown that the bulk of the phrases in the Westminster catechisms can be found word-for-word in

earlier theological works. Thus, the framers of the catechisms took what they thought was best expressed elsewhere, and brought it together.

The Apostles' Creed

The main difference between Westminster's catechisms and earlier catechisms has to do with the Apostles' Creed. The standard practice of catechisms written earlier had been to expound the Apostles' Creed, phrase by phrase, just as they did the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. But the Westminster Assembly decided to exclude the Apostles' Creed because it, though scriptural, was not Scripture.

Scripture Alone

Avoiding the Apostles' Creed gave both of the Westminster catechisms two strengths. First, the catechisms are based explicitly on Scripture, which is consistent with the position expressed in the first chapter of the Confession: all our doctrine comes from Scripture alone. Second, every catechism that uses the Apostles' Creed reflects one of the weaknesses of the Creed: there is no mention of the importance of Christ's life.

The life of Christ

The Apostles' Creed says that Jesus Christ "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." And what does it say next? He "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." Similarly, the Heidelberg Catechism moves right from Christ's birth to his death. The same thing is true of Craig's Catechism, a popular Scottish catechism written in 1581, and the New Catechism, written in 1644.

Calvin notes this jump in the Creed and asks in question 55 of his catechism: "Why do you go immediately from His birth to His death, passing over the whole history of His life?" While this observation is helpful, Calvin's answer is disappointing: "Because nothing is said here about what belongs properly to the substance of our redemption." A similar approach is taken in his Institutes, II.xvi.5-7.

This is rather shocking, particularly from Calvin. Christ's life has everything to do with our salvation: he spent his life fulfilling all righteousness; he kept the law that Adam broke. It is because of Jesus' active, lifelong obedience that God the Father sees us as righteous in Christ. The Larger Catechism, using a framework different from that of the Apostles' Creed, recognizes the importance of Christ's life. It speaks about his birth in question 47, his life in question 48, and his death in question 49, thus presenting a more

balanced and biblical picture. The Shorter Catechism does something similar, summarizing these three statements in question 27. The Larger Catechism also recognizes the importance of Christ's life, at least implicitly, in its statements on justification (questions 70 and 71).

Comparing the Larger and Shorter Catechism with previous catechisms is a useful exercise. It reveals that the Westminster catechisms (1) explicitly base their teaching on Scripture alone, and (2) emphasize Christ's life (and active obedience) as well as his death and resurrection. For these reasons also, then, the Larger Catechism is very worthwhile.

A comparison with the other Westminster Standards

But does the church really need the Larger Catechism when it has the brilliant summaries of the Shorter Catechism on the one hand and the depth and breadth of the Confession of Faith on the other? The answer is yes, and the reason for this answer is simple: the Larger Catechism is neither a mere summary of the Confession nor a verbose expansion of the Shorter Catechism.

At times, the Larger Catechism asks different questions than the Shorter Catechism. Sometimes these extra questions may not strike us as all that important, such as when question 16 asks about the creation of angels, or when question 19 asks about God's providence toward angels.

At other times, the contributions are more obviously significant. The Larger Catechism, for example, gives us rules to interpret and apply the law of God, and spells out the differences between justification and sanctification. The Larger Catechism also goes into more detail about our triune God than does the Shorter Catechism, and has more to say about Jesus Christ. The Larger Catechism has multiple questions on the mediatorial role of Christ, and Christ's humiliation and exaltation. These and other contributions show that the Larger Catechism was written to take us into the heavier matters of the Word of God. But perhaps the largest remaining contribution of the Larger Catechism is one noted by Dr. Godfrey.

The Church

Dr. Godfrey has pointed out that the Larger Catechism frequently speaks of the church, whereas the Shorter Catechism is concerned with the individual. The Larger Catechism frequently mentions ministers of the gospel and carries on extensive dis-

cussions of the outward and ordinary means of grace, whereas the Shorter Catechism says almost nothing on these matters. The Larger Catechism broadens its view to include the corporate, public, gathered people of God. Dr. Godfrey appropriately warns that where the church has neglected the Larger Catechism, there could be a lack of teaching about the church.

Dr. Godfrey has hit the proverbial nail on the head. His observation may explain why so many non-Presbyterians appreciate the Shorter Catechism and not the Larger Catechism. The Shorter Catechism, like much of North American evangelicalism, focuses on the individual; the Larger Catechism, on the other hand, is explicitly Presbyterian and churchly. In places the Larger Catechism appears more concerned with the church and the ordinary means of grace than even the Confession.

Of course, if Robert Baillie's earlier statement is correct, this should not be the case. Baillie thought that the catechisms would not say anything that the Confession did not. But it appears that the committee working on the catechism did not always feel bound to follow the wording of the Confession. Prof. John Murray has suggested, for example, that the Larger Catechism's teaching on the covenant of grace surpasses that of the Confession (7.3), and that question 22 has a better discussion of the imputation of Adam's sin than the Confession of Faith (6.3).

Summary

There are many reasons why the Larger Catechism is worth our study. It unifies Presbyterians who use it as one of their church standards. It gives us the meat of the Word of God. It places a greater emphasis on, and gives fuller explanations of, doctrines that maturing Christians need to hear. It emphasizes aspects of the gospel and draws directly from Scripture in a way that other catechisms do not. And the Larger Catechism emphasizes the church, the ministry, preaching, and the sacraments at a time when Presbyterians – and in fact all Christians – need to hear of them. For these reasons, the Larger Catechism is worth our while.

The author is a licentiate of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Reprinted from New Horizons, October 2000.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. VANDERPYL

November 1993

Many cards and letters arrived at my place in Hamilton after the departure of my wife Klazien to her eternal home in July. Among them was one which really stood out and spoke to my heart as I read it. I'd like to share it with you. *What a Comforter* was the heading and the Scripture reading was from Isaiah 12:1-6. The writer of this meditation had this to say from his own personal experience:

Jesus Christ is not only the answer to the fear of death – He is the answer also to the fact of bereavement. If it is hard to meet the thought of our own untimely death, it is harder still to stand by and watch our dear ones meet it. Perhaps we never need the comfort of God more than in that numb hour when we call our dearest by name for the last time, and hear only the echo of our own voice. I came to this less than a month after having laid my wife to rest following a long, hard battle with cancer.

Over the years I have often given advice to those who have been bereaved. Now I have had an opportunity to test that advice in my own life. And what is the conclusion? It works – oh, how it works! On the evening of the day my wife died I picked up an old copy of "Every day with Jesus" in which I had written a section on the subject of bereavement. I read: "Make up your mind that grief is bound to come to you, and when it comes be prepared and willing to feel it – really feel it. Don't dodge it, sidestep or repress it. Let it sweep over you. Remember, when you are prepared to face a feeling, not run away from it but really feel it, then you are in charge of it and it is not in charge of you." I responded to my own advice, went down into the feeling and found there the sweet comfort of Christ assuaging the pain and softening the hurt. It hurt – but not half as much as it would, if He had not been there.

I feel deeply sorry for those who lose a loved one and do not know the comforting presence of Jesus. It is this that helps shorten the period of re-adjustment. Now I can testify not just from a theoretical base but from an experiential one – there is no substitute for Jesus in the hour of bereavement.

Many of our families who began their married lives in the early 'fifties, starting a new life in Australia and New Zealand, will be celebrating their fortieth wedding anniversary. Not all of us were so fortunate, but for those who are or will be soon, it must be a time of great thankfulness that the Lord has spared their lives together. For a good number of our churches this year is also a time to remember that forty years ago the Lord provided true and faithful churches as a safe haven for families to bring their children up in the fear of the Lord. As Rev. J. W. Deenick prepared his *A Church En Route* so it will be my privilege to present our churches in New Zealand with a book full of memories of how it all began forty years ago and how the churches fared in these past years under the guiding hand of our God.

Synod 1992 decided to encourage the churches to set aside a day of Prayer and Fasting for evangelism, preferably in the ten-day period between Ascension Day and Pentecost. Its purpose would be for our churches to come together before God in penitence for our many shortcomings in the area of evangelism, in renewed dependence on God's Spirit to commit ourselves to this task and to seek direction and vision as to God's purpose in each congregation.

To my knowledge, only the Dunedin Church took this decision made by our last Synod really seriously. On May the 9th the central theme for both services was *The Importance of Prayer and Fasting*, based on Daniel 9:1-19 for the morning service and Matthew 6:16-18 for the evening one. On the following Sunday, both sermons for the day would stress the importance of Evangelism. Session made it clear to the congregation that participation in a day of prayer and fasting will be encouraged, but cannot be made mandatory. The members should decide for themselves when and how they would like to come before the Lord in penitence for their many shortcomings in this area. Session therefore suggested that each family set aside a day between May the 20th (Ascension Day) and May the 30th (Pentecost Sunday) for a day for prayer and fasting.



I'd like to conclude with one more item for this issue. One of our young couples will be leaving for Pakistan shortly.

Martin and Wilma Minnee, members of the Pukekohe congregation will join missionaries Frank and Emily van Dalen. Martin, who is a medical doctor, will be helping out at a severely understaffed Christian hospital. For over a year they tried in vain to obtain permanent visas to work. Now they will go for a period of three months which is the maximum period allowable for volunteer work. This will give them adequate time to evaluate whether a much longer period of service should be pursued. It is their prayer, and ours, that in the meantime a visa may be obtained for a longer period.



God's work of grace in the soul

"The soil produces grain:
first the *blade*,
then the *stalk*, and
then the *ripe grain* on the stalk."
Mark 4:28

The Lord compares the usual method of *growth in grace* – to the *growth of grain*, which is perfected by a *slow* and almost *imperceptible progress*.

The *seed* is *hidden* for a time in the soil; and, when it appears, it passes through a succession of *changes* – the *blade*, the *stalk*, and lastly the *ripe grain*.

And it is brought forward amidst a *variety of weather*: the dew, the frost, the wind, the rain, the sun – all concur to advance its maturity, though some of these agents are contrary to each other; and some of them, perhaps, seem to threaten the life of the plant! Yet, when the season of *harvest* returns – the grain is found ready for the sickle!

Just so is *God's work of grace in the soul*. Its *beginnings* are small, its *growth* for the most part slow; and, to our apprehensions, imperceptible and often precarious.

But there is this difference in the comparison: frosts and blights, drought or floods, may possibly disappoint the gardener's hopes. But the *great Gardener of the soul* will not, and cannot be

disappointed. What *He* sows *shall* flourish in defiance of all opposition! And, if at times it seems to *wither*, *He can* and *He will* revive it!

For the most part, God's people are exercised with sharp trials and temptations; for it is necessary they should learn not only what *He* can do for them – but how little *they* can do without Him! Therefore He teaches them not all at once – but by degrees, as they are able to bear it.

"The soil produces grain:
first the *blade*,
then the *stalk*, and
then the *ripe grain* on the stalk."
Mark 4:28

Shepherding in the Spirit

by Barry J. York

An overseer appointed by the Holy Spirit has a uniquely spiritual work (Acts 20:28). How do elders shepherd in the Spirit? First Peter 2:4–5 says:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

A three-part blueprint of the church as God's temple emerges that guides its shepherds.

The Costly Cornerstone. Peter calls Jesus a "living stone." What a mixed metaphor. Obviously, stones are not normally considered living. And in one very true sense, we can say that no one was ever "more dead" than Jesus. He was eternally destined to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, KJV). He came to Israel but was the "stone that the builders rejected" (1 Peter 2:7). At Calvary, with the weight of all His people's sins on Him, He died and was buried.

Yet no one was ever more alive than Christ now is. For the Spirit raised Him to life from the grave. As the psalmist says, "The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation" (Ps. 18:46). Elders must devote themselves to teaching the Spirit's Word to God's people so that their lives are built on this cornerstone.

The Beautiful Building. Peter describes those in union with Christ as living stones themselves. Charles H. Spurgeon says:

The house of God is built with the living stones of converted men and women, and the church of God, which Christ hath purchased with His own blood—this is the divine edifice, and the structure wherein God dwells even to this day.

As people from all different cultures, classes, and conditions come to Christ, they are fitted together by the Spirit of God into a beautiful temple. God's shepherds are to work diligently to help this "priesthood of all believers" achieve their service in the household of God.

The Acceptable Actions. This service is described in the New Testament with sacrificial language. God's people are to learn to worship and "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb. 13:15). Their prayers are to rise as incense to the Lord (Rev. 5:8). They are to care for one another, "for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:16). They should evangelize, seeing this work as "ministering as a priest the gospel of God" and hoping the "offering . . . may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:16). Ultimately, believers are to "present [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," by offering themselves fully each day to God (12:1).

Following this blueprint will help elders describe the church as the elder in Revelation did. He said of God's people, "They . . . serve him day and night in his temple; and . . . the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd" (7:15, 17).

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Christian generosity

by Don Bailey | CITY ON A HILL

The inventive mechanical genius of Robert Gilmour Letourneau's (1888–1969) led to the development of almost three hundred patents in the field of earthmoving. Though he dropped out of school with only a seventh-grade education, his inventions would dominate the large construction equipment used by the Allied forces during World War II. His sister challenged him at an early age to get serious about serving God, which he thought meant becoming a preacher or a missionary. But after he prayed with his pastor about his calling, the pastor told him, "God needs businessmen too." Letourneau's decision to become "God's business partner" motivated him to eventually give away 90 percent of his vast earnings to charitable projects all over the world. He said, "I shovel money out and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel."

Perhaps, like me, you have heard stories like this before. On the one hand, you might marvel at how God has used the generosity of Christian men and women to give of their time, treasure, and talent to the glory of God. On the other hand, I don't think many of us believe we have any realistic opportunity to emulate such a person and even wonder if these stories simply belong to the "good ol' days." Moreover, we may question the value of using such gifts outside the local church, since Scripture specifically highlights doing good "especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Though we should indeed make sure we are caring for the needs of our brothers and sisters first (Deut. 15:7–8; 1 John 3:16–18), Paul doesn't allow us to minimize generosity to nonbelievers. He writes: "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9–10). The clarion call remains to do good to everyone as God gives opportunity. How often do we think about

how the providence of God has been so aligned as to give us opportunity to shine the light of Christ into the world's darkness through our God-given gifts?

We must first consider the abundant supply that is God Himself. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy that God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Famously, John's gospel states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). James tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (1:17). God causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust in His beneficence (Matt. 5:45). If these considerations aren't enough to humble us in wonder, Paul asks in 1 Corinthians this piercing question: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (4:7).

In responding to God's generosity, we mustn't get stuck on giving money alone. Each of us possesses the time on earth that God has given us as a resource to steward. He has also given us specific talents, whether they be cooking a meal, singing a song, designing a landscape, caring for a grandchild, constructing a building,

diagnosing a disease, teaching a math lesson, or sweeping a floor. Consider the good we can unleash in granting our forgiveness to someone who has wounded us deeply. What about the sacrifice of our time and attention in being "quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19)? Are we a people who are prayerfully using our various talents so that others may be blessed? Do we know the reality of what our Lord Jesus taught when He assured us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)?

I think that at times we may get stuck in extremes as we think of how to give our gifts outside the church. We might embrace cultural retreat like the monastics or a "Christ against culture" mindset. Or we look to the opposite temptation of social gospel liberalism, which has been called "Christ in culture" thinking. Let's be clear: neither escape from our culture on the one hand nor developing more access to soup lines and clean water on the other hand can usher in the kingdom of God without the call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We must hold on to the tension of proclaiming the gospel in Word and living it out in deed. The world is always watching Christians, a fact that bears strongly on the giving of our time, treasure, and talents.

God doesn't need flashy or sophisticated

programs. I am moved to see members in my own church who sacrificially give of their time at a local pregnancy center, where they pray and share the love of Christ with fearful and often desperate mothers-to-be for the cause of life. Likewise, I am grateful for those in my church who give of their time and talents teaching the Bible's ethic of work in an organization dedicated to helping men and women find meaningful vocations. Jesus openly and pressingly calls on Christians to a life that rises above that of the common human instinct to give to those who can give back or to those who are close to us in kinship and creed (Matt. 5:47; Luke 14:12-14). It is when our giving makes no sense to the world's economy of giving and being repaid in kind that the world scratches its head and is beckoned to behold the economy of God's kingdom, where beggars who have received bread go running to the hungry with gifts of mercy and kindness.

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What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,
but belong —

body and soul,
in life and in death —

to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;

in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life
and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for him.

JOHAN TANGELDER

A Christian mind

In this century, there is no longer a Christian mind. In our approach to this world, the church has surrendered to secularism, and to the whims and wishes of the biggest crowd making the loudest noise.

It is said that Christians should not become fanatical about their religion. We have been told that Christianity is a private affair. Many Christians have fallen for this line.

Look at the practices of many Christians today! What have their positions become? Their minds have become enslaved to the world. They don't think Christianly, but politically, pragmatically and so on. In other words, Christians have resorted to a materialistic, secular outlook on life. How should Christians think?

1. A Christian should have his mind set upon God. He should look at the world from a different dimension. He has adopted a new way of thinking, and a new standard of values. He looks at life from the light of eternity. His standard is God's and not man's way of thinking.

2. A Christian should remember that his concept of truth is different from that of anyone else. In this age, many regard truth as a brew you can concoct from human opinions. Everybody can give his or her opinion and then you are supposed to have truth.

Truth in the Christian view, is not manmade. Truth is not manufactured. The gospel does not have its origin in man. Truth has its origin in God. The Christian believes that Christ is the fullness of truth. Thus, to think like a Christian is to think in terms of the Bible. Therefore, our whole mind should be framed by the teachings of the Word of God.

3. A Christian thinks on the basis of the authoritative Word of God. As shown, the Christian has a different concept of truth than the man of the world. His starting point and the basis of all his thought should be the Holy Writ.

Today, it is said that the church is outmoded and outdated. And, therefore,

we should adapt our language to the language of the world. This means that we are called upon to do what the Romans do. This means that every time a new fashion or new idea comes around, the church must jump on the bandwagon and embrace the new idea, whether it is Biblical or not. What must the Christian say to all this? Should the Christian jump and embrace every idea which comes on the market? No! The Christian should say, I believe that the Christian faith is true, and that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God in this time, and it is the most urgent, inescapable need of the modern world to adapt itself to the church.

The language of the church should not conform to the language of the world, but the language of the world should conform to the language of the church. The world must adapt herself to the church and not vice versa. This means that we as Christians must learn to speak the language of the Scriptures ourselves.

This does not mean that we must speak in King James English, quoting Scripture verses all the time. No. This means that all of our thought life should be moulded and shaped by the authoritative Word of God. We must learn to speak on the basis of the Bible. And when we do this, we speak then as those who have crucified their old nature to the Cross and who are now in the newness of mind. Can the church with this attitude survive? Can we still survive as Christians who hold to the Bible?

As a Christian, I would rather state it this way. Can the world survive? Can the world keep on going the way it is? The church will survive! It is too late for the world to destroy the church, 2,000 years too late.

The world had its chance at that Friday when they tried and crucified Christ. The world was defeated and Christ was victorious. Now, the world stands under the judgment of the Word of God. Thus be mindful in this year of the Lord-1972- of the words of the apostle Paul: "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

*Johan D Tangelder
January, 1972*

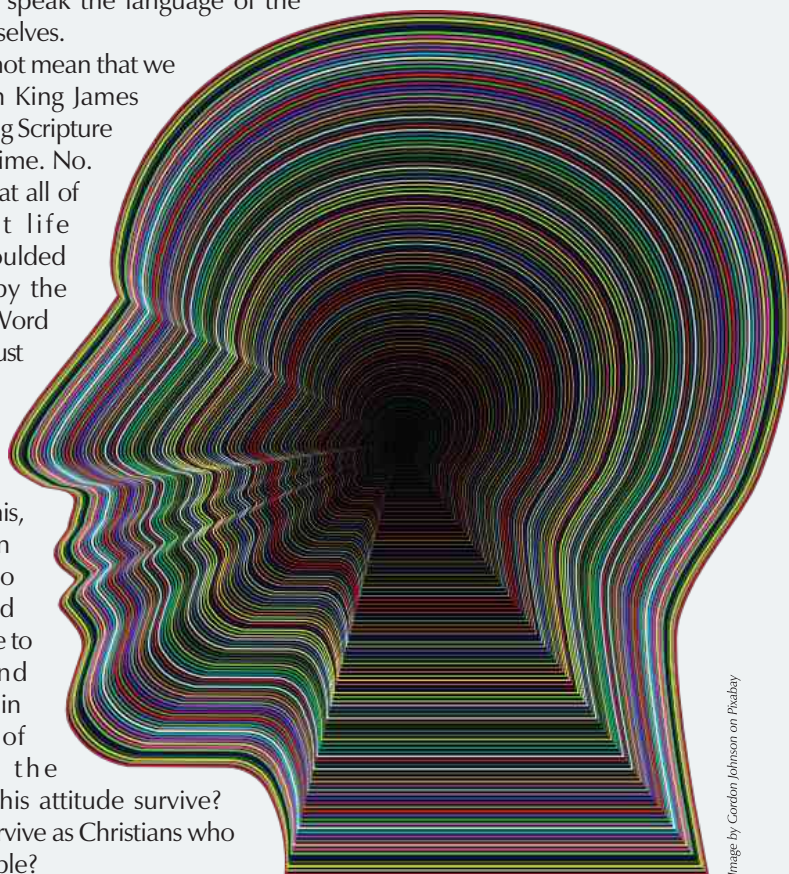


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<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

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.

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

Nigeria

The Nigerian army has had some success subduing Islamist group Boko Haram, but Christians are still being killed in Nigeria. Many of the killings are carried out by nomadic Hausa-Fulani herdsman, a largely Muslim ethnic group that frequently targets the more settled Christian farming communities of central Nigeria. Meanwhile, 12 of Nigeria's northern states employ Sharia (Islamic law), and Christians in these states face discrimination and restrictions in accessing community resources, such as clean water, health clinics, and higher education.

North Korea

The Kim dynasty, which has ruled North Korea for three generations, are worshipped like gods, and any suggestion that there is a higher authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-Un, is immediately crushed. Tens of thousands of Christians are incarcerated in labour camps. Thousands more keep their Christian faith a complete secret, even from their families. Imprisonment, torture, and death are the potential risks – not only to oneself, but to one's family – of deciding to be a Christian in North Korea.

Oman

Most Omanis practise a form of Islam called Ibadism. The Constitution provides for religious freedom, but while apostasy is not a criminal offence, neither is it respected by the legal system, which assumes all citizens are Muslims. Those who leave Islam are shunned by society, and

Muslims who convert to Christianity risk legal discrimination, ostracism from family, and loss of house and job. Foreign Christians are allowed to worship in private, but their facilities are restricted and Christian meetings are monitored for political messages and Omani nationals attending.

Pakistan

Some of the world's most widely-known cases of anti-Christian pressure and violence have arisen in Pakistan, a country whose founder promoted religious freedom. Asia Bibi's case prompted international condemnation of Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws but there are still dozens of Christians and others on death row for blasphemy. Meanwhile, several churches and Christian colonies have been attacked by Islamists in recent years, leading to the loss of many lives. Although Christians are around 2% of the population, they make up about 80% of the workforce dealing with waste management (sewerage and street-cleaning). World Watch Monitor's journalism brought changes in employment legislation in Punjab for such 'sweepers' in September 2015.

Palestinian Territories

Christians who come from a Muslim background live under high pressure. In Gaza, although Christians are largely tolerated by the militant Islamist party, Hamas, their rights are neither upheld nor protected, and it is almost impossible to build and register Protestant churches. In the West Bank, under the ruling Fatah party, Christians face more subtle forms of discrimination, but increasing Islamic radicalisation throughout society is making conversion to Christianity more dangerous.

Peru

Non-Catholic Christians make up about 13 per cent of the population, and according to the US State Department they report no restrictions or harassment on account of their faith. They do, however, complain that Peru's favouritism towards

the Catholic Church, which claims 81 per cent of the population, restricts their ability to function. For example, Catholic Church property is exempt from taxes. Other religious groups, depending on location, must pay taxes on schools and clergy residences. And they may buy land only in commercially zoned areas, while the Catholic Church can establish locations anywhere. Minority religious groups say reforms to the law in 2011 haven't adequately addressed the unequal treatment.

Philippines

Since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in June 2016, much of the world's attention towards the Philippines has been on Duterte's take-no-prisoners war on drugs, which has resulted in thousands of deaths. The campaign has overshadowed the country's long-standing struggle with the Islamist-led independence movement on the southern island of Mindanao, where the Islamic State group wants to create a "province" of its "caliphate". It was in Mindanao in May 2017 that Islamists pledging allegiance to IS besieged the city of Marawi, abducted a Catholic priest and several other Christians, set fire to buildings including a cathedral and Protestant-run college, beheaded a police chief, and erected the black flags of IS. Christians in the south fear that a proposed peace deal between the government and Mindanao's Islamists will legitimise anti-Christian harassment. Already, the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches has reported that some recent converts from Islam have been abused by their families and communities.

5 pro-life rescuers unjustly face 11 years in prison

Last Tuesday, a jury found five pro-life activists guilty of violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act. They were immediately incarcerated following the verdict and could face more than a decade in prison for their efforts to prevent women from killing their preborn babies, reports LifeSiteNews.com.

Back in October 2020, Lauren Handy, 29; Jonathan Darnel, 40; Jay Smith, 32; Paulette Harlow, 73; Jean Marshall, 72; John Hinshaw, 67, Heather Idoni, 61; William Goodman, 52; and pro-life heroine Joan Bell, 74, blocked access to the abortion mill called Washington Surgi-Clinic in downtown D.C., in a traditional rescue. Pro-life rescues involve activists physically intervening to try to stop women from getting abortions.

They've taken the counsel of Proverbs 24:11 to heart. It says, "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter."

Defendant William Goodman urged his supporters "to forgive the jury, the judge, and all those who witnessed against us, and to pray that they would see how God loves the gift of every human life."

All the defendants were led away and Goodman was handcuffed after the judge determined that the pro-life rescuers must be immediately detained pending sentencing since the nature of their FACE Act violation amounted to a "crime of violence."

Steve Crampton, senior counsel with the conservative Thomas More Society law firm, called the immediate incarceration due to the alleged "violence" of the crime "an outrage" since "the one thing the defendants had really agreed upon was to remain non-violent. The real violence is what happens during the abortion procedure."

Lila Rose, founder and president of Live Action, says the jury's decision has set "a horrific precedent for jailing Americans for exercising their 1st Amendment rights," reports CBN News.

She added, "From the beginning, this

trial has been a sham with a completely biased pro-abortion judge who has made a mockery of our justice system. This decision will be appealed, and we demand it be overturned. These activists are heroes, and the Department of Justice has acted capriciously and illegitimately. These charges stem from the FACE Act which exists to target and chill the free speech of pro-life Americans. Their acts of bravery to protect innocent human life from notorious D.C. abortionist Cesare Santangelo have been punished by the corrupt DOJ."

Theworldview.com | 5/9/23

Finland prosecuting Christians for quoting the Bible

The following is excerpted from "Newest NATO Country," *The Federalist*, Sept. 1, 2023: "In an appeals court Thursday, Helsinki's top prosecutor said publicly quoting the Bible and publishing a booklet about Christian sexual ethics violates Finland's 'hate speech' law. The appeal escalates this U.S. ally's prosecution of dissidents from leftist politics, a marker of repressive regimes. The prosecutor has charged Member of Parliament Paivi Rasanen and Bishop Juhana Pohjola for writing and publishing, respectively, a booklet supporting natural marriage. 'This [case] is a God-given wake up call for Christians and others worried about the direction our society is going,' Pohjola said in a post-court press conference Friday morning U.S. time. He noted convicting a religious leader for publishing theological documents would in effect criminalize Christianity in Finland and encourage similar oppression worldwide. Rasanen is also criminally charged with posting a Bible verse to X (formerly Twitter) and stating Christian theology in a radio interview. The prosecutor wants all recordings of the radio interview taken down and the booklet to be unavailable online, and fines levied against both Christians. ... 'the content of my writings and my speeches represents the classical Christian view of mar-

riage and sexuality, the same as the Churches have generally taught for two millennia,' Rasanen said in a statement. 'I do not condone insulting, threatening or slandering anyone, and my statements have not included content of such a nature. I consider this matter to be a theological discussion that should not be in a courtroom.' Friday morning, [prosecutor Anu] Mantila argued, 'there is material in the Bible that contradicts principles in our society. This is why the interpretation of the law against discrimination must be applied effectively.' Due to Communist influence, much of the West has enacted speech restrictions similar to Finland's. That includes dozens of U.S. states and cities. All it would take is courts to interpret hate speech laws the way these Finnish prosecutors are arguing to criminalize Christianity across the West."

+ *Way of Life Literature*, Post Office Box 610368, Port Huron, Michigan 48061, 519-652-2619, fbns@wayoflife.org

Surprise Indian court decision: Distributing Bibles allowed

Earlier this month, an Indian court ruled that distributing Bibles is not a violation of local anti-conversion laws.

India's state of Uttar Pradesh passed the anti-conversion law in 2020. It bans attempts to convert someone through "allurement" by offering gifts or money.

However, Hindu nationalists have used such laws throughout the country to target Christians.

The latest ruling also states that promoting education for children and offering good teachings is not a violation of the law either. *theworldview.com* | 20/9/23

Ministers and Wives Conference 2023

After two failed attempts to hold the Ministers and Wives Conference, we were finally able to meet the first week in May. We met at the lovely and comfortable Silverstream Retreat Centre. Absence must make the heart grow fonder as the joy in finally meeting again was palpable. Many of us expressed how the fellowship was a

particular blessing this year.

The speaker for the conference this year was Reverend Dr. Peter Barnes. Reverend Barnes is currently the pastor of Revesby Presbyterian Church in Sydney and also a lecturer on church history at Christ College in Burwood. We had two lectures each day covering a Christian view of history and

Christian historical figures such as William Wilberforce, Hudson Taylor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Amy Carmichael. We were very grateful that Reverend Barnes was willing to come and share his extensive knowledge and study of Christian history with us.

After the lectures in the morning or afternoons were usually spent in fellowship. We had a day away to Brewtown, a large complex housing several breweries and an adventure park. It was a relaxing afternoon, including a game of 10 pin bowling, a race on the go-kart track, and of course, sampling a few of the craft beers. We ended the afternoon singing hymns in the rain while we waited for our delayed bus. Our evenings were spent in additional fellowship. Upon recommendation from Reverend Archbald, who was unfortunately unable to attend this year, we walked to the Birchwood Dam at night. It was a beautiful, clear night, and we were delighted by the beauty of the dam in the moonlight and the glow worms that lined the path. We also devoted time in one of the evenings to prayer groups and another evening to singing and even learning some of the more unfamiliar songs in the Sing to the Lord Hymnal. Reverend McDonald used one of the evenings to give a short presentation on the retirement fund and answered some of the questions on how the fund works.



Despite our many delays in holding the conference due to COVID, we were unable to escape Covid. Several of those who attended became ill the following week. Despite the illness, the conference was a blessing to everyone who attended. We are fully aware of the privilege we have to devote a full week of rest and fellowship with our fellow ministers and wives in the RCNZ. We want to thank all of the congregations who sent their pastors and wives and provided much of the funds for the conference and took on extra burden for the week while many of the pastors were away. We pray that the unity and fellowship we experienced at the conference will be felt in all the churches in the RCNZ.



Trivia Leaderboard				
Auckland	5.75	5.86	4.75	8.8
Wellington	5.5	6	4.5	6
Other Islands	5.2	5.5	3.5	4

