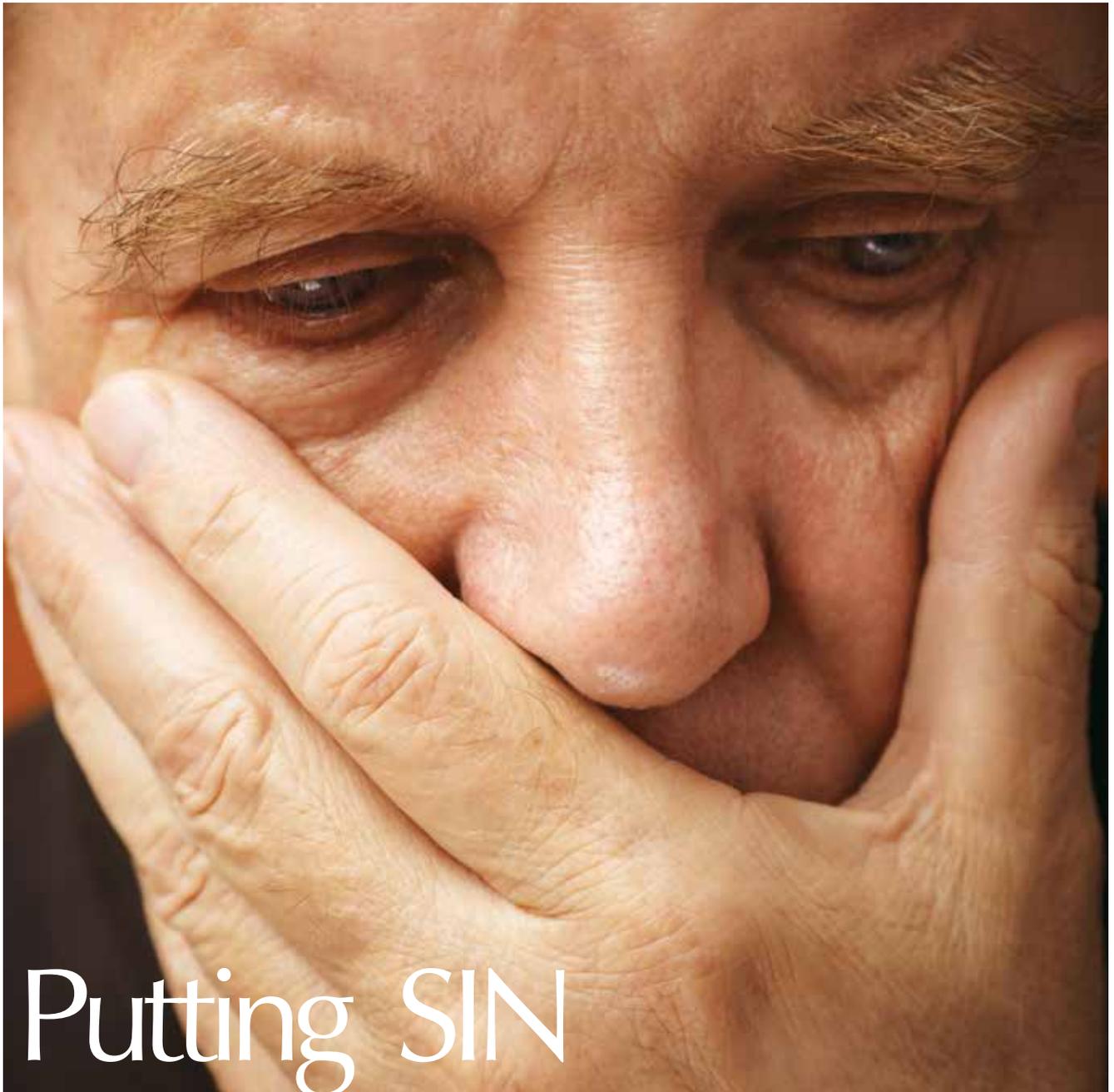


faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

Volume 42/7 August 2015



Putting SIN
to DEATH

Contents

Putting sin to death (1) Psalm 51: A song of brokenness	3
Putting sin to death (2) Overcoming sin and ...	5
Life after porn 5 things my husband did to rebuild trust	
Outward focus Rico is very helpful (again)	9
Feminine focus A friend for all seasons	11
World in focus	13
Books in focus	16
Focus on home Gleanings	19
51st Wellington Presbytery Ladies' Fellowship Day	20
Missions in focus So you volunteered ...	22

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

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

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

Editorial

Sin is a small word with a most profound meaning. It is so profound that we are affected by the mere mention of the word, let alone by living with the reality of it each moment of our lives. Its effect is deeper than our skin, it is part of our very core, it is part of who we are.

The Bible and the Reformed confessions tell us much about the meaning of that tiny word. In essence, in reality, it means we are sinners. Not sinners because we sin, but because we are conceived and born as sinners. Our first parents sinned, and as a result, every human being born since that time has had the natural disposition to hate God and his neighbour.

It is not as though it is an ethnic problem – being born the wrong nationality or colour. No, it is a problem of our corruption and pollution, our separation from the living God, our natural inclination toward evil. That is the nature of man – a sinner. Sounds dire, doesn't it?

It would be dire, if that is all there is. But, thanks be to God, He has sent His only begotten Son into this world to save sinners. To save us from His wrath, from our corruption and pollution, our evil disposition, inability to do good, our unbelief and much more.

As a result we are to respond in faith and thankfulness. How? By putting to death or crucifying sin in our lives, and be holy as God is Holy (Rom 4:4-14; 1 Peter 1:16). Because Jesus our substitute, has paid our debt, and is raised from the dead, we also are to walk in newness of life and not as slaves to sin. If we are truly united to Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection, then we must not allow sin to reign in our mortal body, nor obey its lusts, or go on presenting ourselves as instruments of unrighteousness; but present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead, as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

Our contributors write about this solemn subject by looking at it in a non-sensence refreshing manner.

Mr Leo de Vos writes about repentance and brokenness.

Mr Andre Holtslag reports on an online group reading of a Puritan classic on the subject of sin

Mrs Micah Horner candidly puts forth a good framework for those who have dealt with pornography in their lives.

Mrs Sally Davey reviews *Honest Evangelism* by Rico Tice.

Mrs Jenny Waldron investigates valuable friendships.

World in focus takes a look at what some Christians endure living in hostile situations.

Book reviews: *Real Christianity* by William Wilberforce, as revised and updated by Bob Beltz; *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*; *A Study on Biblical Eschatology*; *The Gospel & Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*.

Mrs Wendy Haverland reports on the 51st Wellington Ladies Fellowship Day.

Mr Roel Dykstra reports on his mission to Vanuatu to help with the re-building of a Presbyterian Reformed church building, after cyclone Pam.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ 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 NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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

Putting sin to death (1)

Psalm 51: A song of brokenness

Leo de Vos

Psalm 51 is David's song about his repentance and brokenness for sin. If repentance is a complete change of direction, like turning around on the expressway, then brokenness is like the off ramp¹. We talk a lot about people needing healing and restoration, but brokenness for sin must come before any healing can happen.

While this Psalm hits us hard and makes us face our sin honestly, it also offers the wonderful hope of gospel forgiveness which can be found only in Christ. Let us look at a few hard, but honest facts about sin:

Call our sin, sin

The heading of Psalm 51 is graphic and gripping. It was written by David after Nathan the prophet paid him a little visit. "To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went

to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba" (Psalm 51:1).² We don't have to imagine for long what David is writing about. He took another man's wife. We might be more comfortable with talking about some affair! Or we might talk about sleeping with someone else. But the Bible calls adultery what it is, having sex with another man's wife.

Sin is irrational

John Bunyan called adultery and sexual impurity "a very taking sin" because "it is natural above all sins to mankind". Not exclusively, but especially men are inclined to sin sexually.³ But all sin including adultery is irrational, and blind. Why would a man risk lifelong damage to his own family and reputation for a few minutes of sexual pleasure? Think of the grief David could have spared himself if he had not rested his eyes so long on beautiful Bathsheba bathing? But sin so twists our hearts, minds and wills that

we think irrationally, forgetting the consequences. Many a man has lost his reputation and office in the church because of a few moments of sin. "Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids. For by means of a harlot *A man is reduced* to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her shall not be innocent (Proverbs 6:25-29)."

Sin snowballs

When a snowball rolls down a hill, it becomes bigger and bigger, accelerating as it rolls. Our sins are soon bigger than we imagined and fast rolling out of control. "Sin always takes us further than we wanted to go, keeps us longer than we wanted to stay, and makes us



“David realises that sin sticks to us like used bubble gum or builder’s foam.”

pay far more than we ever wanted to pay – even the price of our souls.”⁴

David called Uriah back from the frontlines to sleep with Bathsheba, to explain her pregnancy. But Uriah was more duty-bound than David. He refused to celebrate and sleep with his wife while the Lord’s cause was being fought. David then had Joab place him where the battle was hottest and then suddenly retreat. The next day brave Uriah died. When David knew that Uriah was dead, he relaxed. After Bathsheba finished mourning for her husband, David married her and continued to enjoy his bathing beauty.

Sin is deceitful

For over a year, David was in honeymoon mode, until a prophet named Nathan came to pay him a visit. Some people get nervous when a minister comes to visit, but initially this visit did not even make David jittery. Nathan preached to David with a parable. The rich man with flocks of sheep stole the poor man’s only pet ewe in order to entertain a traveller. Not even Nathan’s penetrating parable awakens David’s sleeping conscience. In self-righteousness, David demands justice: So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die (2 Samuel 12:5)!”

Nathan was a preacher who did not chicken out with the application. We can see him shaking his forefinger in the king’s face: “You are the man!” Nathan applies the law: “Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord to do this evil in his sight (2 Sam 12:9)?” When we are deceived by sin in our lives it can take more than listening to sermons to wake us up. We are often the first to see the sin in others and the last to see it in ourselves. Remember that David slept in

the pleasure of his sin for over a year until God sent Nathan to awaken him. Our consciences are like smoke alarms with dead batteries until the Holy Spirit re-energises them with His Word.

When David’s conscience was awakened by the Holy Spirit, he wrote the poignant, poetic words of Psalm 51.

Sin crosses all the boundaries

In his Song of Brokenness David confesses sin as his *transgression* (verse 1b). To transgress is the same as to trespass. This means to cross a boundary established by God into forbidden territory. When I was a young fellow I had such a passion for old cars that I would jump fences with big No Trespassing signs into junk yards full of rusty treasures. I soon found out that junk yard owners are almost as mean as their dogs. David confesses that he sinned because he wanted to. He deliberately crossed God’s clear boundaries to live his own way.

David also called his sin *iniquity*. This word means our sinful nature, which is twisted and perverted. I do some hobby, fine woodworking; it is always disappointing to pull out a beautifully grained board and find that it is twisted. God’s crown of creation, man created in his own image, fell into sin and is twisted. He is unable to fulfill his original purpose to glorify God. When you look closely at your life, do you cry out in brokenness because you are so bent and perverted by nature? When David says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5)”, he is not excusing his sin. Rather, he realises that his twisted nature is rooted in original sin and conception. He understands that he sins because he is a sinner; not that he is a sinner because he sins.

Finally, David calls sin, *sin*. In archery, an archer shoots the arrow at the target, but sometimes the arrow falls short of the mark. This word for sin means that we were created to aim our lives at the target of God’s glory but we all fall short. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Paul sums up our depravity this way: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)

In Paul’s description of the way we were, he says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). We were dead because we lived in the realm of trespasses and sins. We commit sins of commission (crossing the boundaries) and sins of omission (falling short of God’s target).

Sin is against God

David realises that what makes sin so terrible and the sinner so broken is that sin is primarily against God. We memorise how he expresses this: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight – That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge (Psalm 51:4).” This confession does not mean that David ignores the damage he has done to Uriah’s family and his own family. David has sinned terribly against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against the men who were killed in battle. But he sees that the essence of his sin is that he has sinned against God. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones preached, “Now that is the essential difference between *remorse* and *repentance*. A man who suffers remorse is one who realises that he has done wrong, but he has not *repented* until he realises that he has sinned against God”.⁵

Lloyd-Jones preached that true repentance is when the sinner admits that he has absolutely no excuse or plea.

*Let me put it bluntly, by putting it to you like this. As long as you are in the position of trying to justify yourself you have not repented. As long as you are clinging on to any attempt at self-justification and self-righteousness, I say you have not repented. Surely the man who is repentant is the man who, like David, says: There is not a single excuse. I see it clearly. I have no justification. The things which I see in my life – I hate them, I had no business to do them, I did them willfully, I knew it was wrong. I admit it! I frankly confess it – “that you might be found just when you speak and blameless when you judge.”*⁶

Sin must be cleansed

David realises that sin sticks to us like used bubble gum or builder’s foam. Builder’s foam is great stuff to seal gaps in our draughty homes, but this spray foam does not wash out of clothing or off one’s hands. It is messy and sticks worse than used chewing gum. Sin is messy and sticks to us. When you read this Psalm you hear David crying to God, *Have mercy upon me ... Blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly, Purge me with hyssop, Wash me, Create in me a clean heart, O God, Deliver me from blood guiltiness* Here is David, the sinner, aware that everything he needs for cleansing his sin can come only from God. Before we are broken, we think that

everything comes from us.⁷ Just look at all of those verbs again. Read the entire Psalm for yourself. Unless God scrubs us clean, sin sticks to us. The blotting out, the washing, the purging David pleads for can only take place through the cleansing blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The memories of sin stick to us as well. David certainly remembers his transgressions! *Psalm 51:3* For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Voddie Baucham provides three reasons why the memory of sin remains with us until we get amnesia or die. If we could forget our sins, we could not testify to the goodness of God in forgiving us. If we could forget our

sins, we would repeat them. Think of what life would be like if we forgot that fire was hot! If we could forget our sins, we could not grow in victories over sin.⁸

However, when God removes the guilt of our sins through Christ's blood, and assures us of this, he also lifts the weight of sin from our burdened consciences and memories. Then we delight in worshipping him again. Apart from brokenness for our sin, we are incapable of true worship. This is why David prays that God would restore to him the joy of his salvation, that God would open his lips with praise, that God would fill his hands and contrite heart with the sacrifices of a broken spirit.

Notes

- 1 From a sermon on Psalm 51 preached by Voddie Baucham; see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVow8rSQwiA>
- 2 The historical account is described in 2 Samuel 12
- 3 *The Works of John Bunyan*, p.569
- 4 Richard D. Phillips, *Saved By Grace*, p.27
- 5 *Out of the Depths: Studies in Psalm 51*, p.19
- 6 *Out of the Depths: Studies in Psalm 51*, p.21
- 7 I gleaned this insight from Voddie Baucham's sermon.
- 8 Same sermon by Voddie Baucham.

Mr Leo de Vos is the minister in the Reformed Church of Hukanui.

Putting sin to death (2)

Overcoming sin and ...

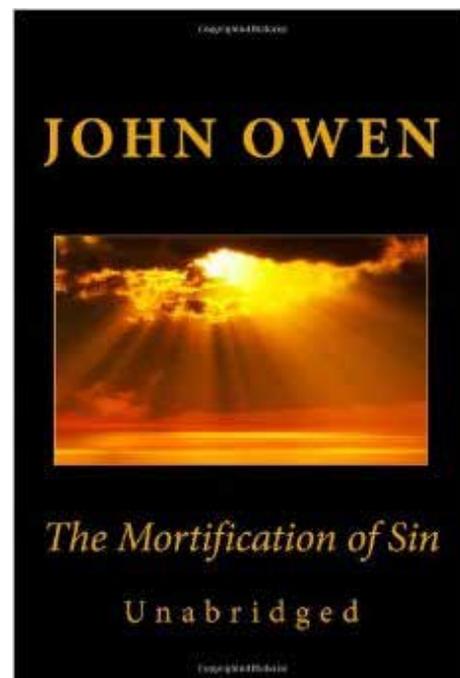
Andre Holtslag

My daughter goes to a Christian school. They frequently have special assemblies with guest speakers. At a meal recently my daughter observed, with obvious annoyance, that all the speeches for some time now have been about the dangers of social media!! Well, it's true, there are dangers with social media, just as there are with other media, and there are *particular* dangers with social media. However, there are also particular *opportunities* that social media make possible. The well-known author and pastor and blogger, Tim Challies, has recognised one of these, and so some years ago he embarked on a project called *Reading Classics Together*. He invites whoever is interested to purchase a specified book and to read it with him. Challies says, "Each week we will read one chapter. Then, on Thursdays, visit my site and I will have an article on that chapter along with a place for you to add your comments or a place for you to link to your own blog (or Facebook or any other place you have been discussing it). The idea is to read the book *together*, so we can benefit from one another's insights

and have mutual accountability as we press on in our reading." One of those who joined with the reading, Denise Ludwig, surely expressed the thoughts of many when she said, "I would never be able to plough through it myself and was thankful that God opened the way to do it with others."

Of particular interest to Tim Challies are the Christian Classics. He is no neophobe, as his online presence makes plain, but he has a deep appreciation for the writings of authors that have stood the test of time and demonstrated an edifying usefulness to generations of believers. So beginning in September last year, he invited readers to join him in reading John Owen's *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (also known as *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*). Now Challies knows that a book title like that won't grab the attention and interest of many today who, if they read at all, prefer books that speak about The Fulfilled and Victorious Life or titles with *Gospel-centred* in them. But Challies knows that every believer struggles with remaining sin. He says, "I hate sin. Sin is destructive. Sin is insane. Sin is maddening. Sin is just plain stupid. Yet sin is

also so alluring, so tempting, and always so close at hand. Even while we fight sin, sin fights us. There are many strategies to identify and destroy sin, and one of the best is to read great books on the subject. There is no better book than John Owen's *The Mortification of Sin*."



Now, given that this book was written in 1656, you won't find terms like 'whatever!', or 'tots (totally), amaze!' in it. In its original format, it reads like the King James version of the Bible. So Challies has made use of a modernized version of the work. It "maintains the unabridged text, but provides useful introductions and editorial assistance. For example, the editors footnote difficult or obscure words, update archaic language (i.e. they change "thee" to "you"), transliterate words that Owen provided in the original biblical languages, and so on. They also add helpful introductions to the sections. They maintain the full impact of Owen's words while removing some of the hindrances experienced by the modern reader."

Well, enough about the *How* and *Why* of the online book reading project. What did the reading and discussing of it yield?

- In terms of a comment on the book as a whole, one contributor said, "I read ahead a little because the first chapter was so intriguing in the way it laid out the thesis for the book. I must say, I'm rather surprised at my misconceptions of Puritan writers, having never actually read one before."
- The main thesis of the book is that the Christian must be actively engaged in putting sin to death. The first chapter is an exposition of Romans 8:13, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." The rest

of the book explores what this means and how it is done.

- The following general comment is typical of many: "I was challenged by the nine directions that were in the introduction, before even getting to the meat of the first chapter. It caused me to examine my life to see what sins in particular I'm dealing with, and was very sobering."
- Another contributor found himself in full agreement with Owen and convicted of sin. He said, "Amen! I'm given to sloth and unbelief. I fall into, actually run to would be more accurate, that sinful way of acting and thinking over and over and oh, how my comfort, joy and consolation in Christ evaporates. I hope this book will help me. Thank you for this!"
- As an example of the type of discussion engaged in, some contributors honed in on the "if" of Romans 8:13 and asked if this meant that their salvation depended on *their* efforts to put sin to death? Some wondered if this verse taught that failure to put sins to death completely would lead to eternal condemnation? Owen and Challies and other contributors pointed back to Romans 8:1 and the great bedrock truth of our salvation, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." One contributor explained that this is not a cause-effect idea, as in, if you do this, you will get eternal life,

but a means-end relationship, as in, "God has appointed this means (mortification) for the attaining of that end (life), which He has freely promised."

To give you some idea of the practicality of this book and the discussion, let me give you the titles of some of Challies' chapter-summarizing blog posts:

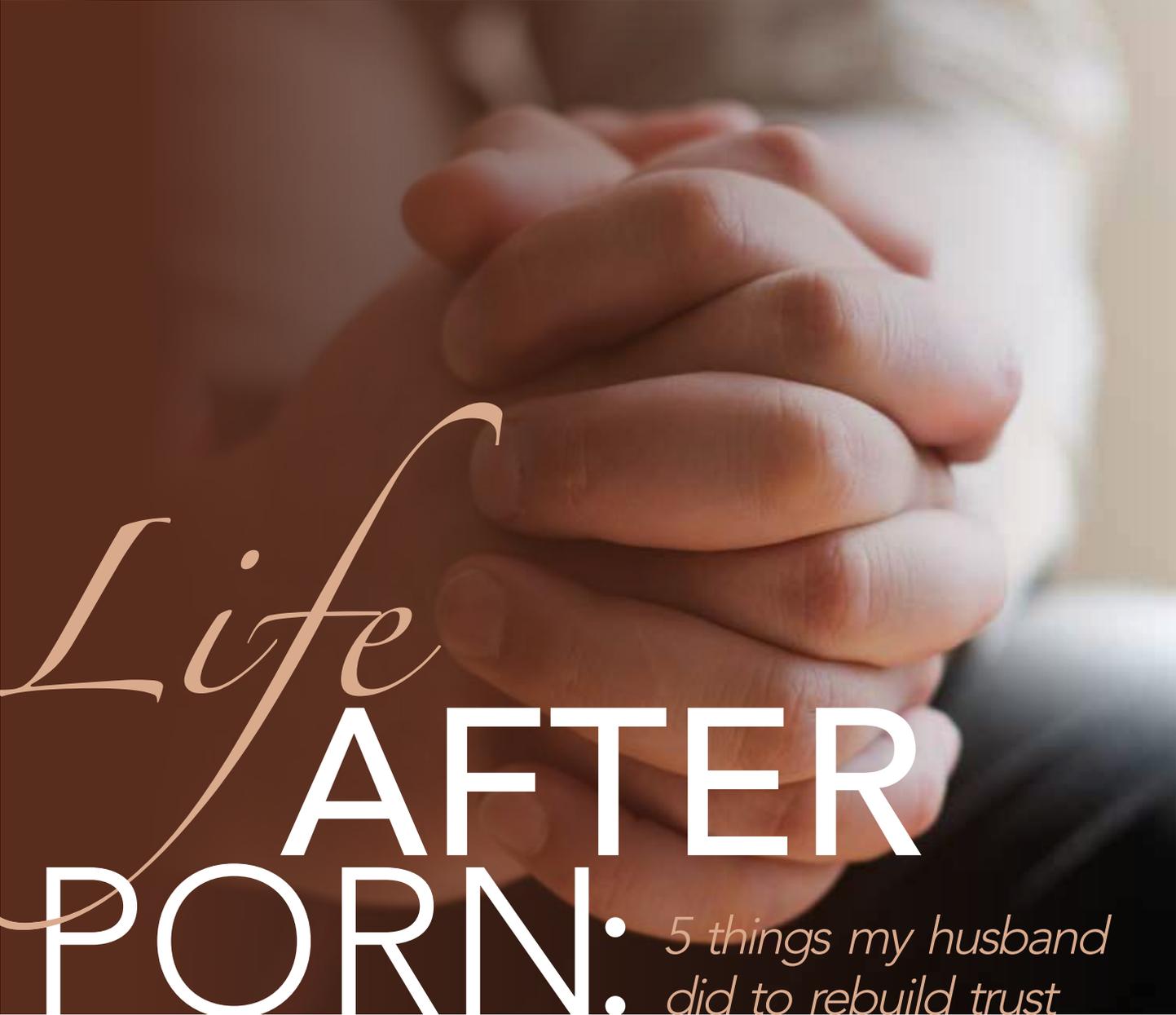
- Christian, Do You Make it Your Daily Work?
- You Need the Power of the Holy Spirit
- 6 Evil Effects of Sin
- 5 Ways to Lose the Battle Against Sin
- What to Expect When Battling Sin
- A Deeper and Wider Obedience
- 7 Marks of a Deeply Deadly Sin
- 3 Things to Consider Before That Next Big Sin
- 9 Steps to Putting Sin to Death
- True Peace With God Comes on God's Terms

And here is an example of the content of one of these chapter summaries to show you just how realistic and practical Owen is (9 Steps to Putting Sin to Death). Colossians 3:17 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Our immediate question is: How do we do this? The answer supplied is:

1. Evaluate – *Evaluate whether your sin is especially serious and deep-rooted.*
2. Fill – *Fill your mind and conscience with the guilt, the weight, and the evil of your sin.* Never succumb to the temptation to minimize it.
3. Load – *Load your conscience with the guilt of your sin.* See Christ suffering for your sin and don't turn away your gaze.
4. Long – *Long for deliverance from the sin.* Cry out for it.
5. Consider – *Consider how this sin is amplified by your nature of constitution.* There may be a family history of this sin or you may have been sinned against in the past. This is not to excuse you from your sin but to further convince you of your weakness and desperate need for God's strength.
6. Contemplate – *Contemplate the occasions that this sin breaks out and guard against them.* What happens right before you sin? What are the habits or patterns that lead to it?
7. Battle – *Battle hard against the first awakenings of that sin.* Do not toy

Continued on p9





Life AFTER PORN: *5 things my husband did to rebuild trust*

by Micah Horner

Standing in a dark Las Vegas hotel room with my ear cupped to the bathroom door, I heard a voice that I had never heard before. This was not the man I married eight years ago.

I was overhearing my husband “chatting with” and making arrangements to meet with a prostitute later that evening. Immediately fear seemed to strangle me. My body shook uncontrollably at just the glimpse of the depth of darkness my husband was entangled in.

This moment became just the beginning of the unveiling of my husband’s secret life of sexual addiction. I was finally seeing that his “little problem” with pornography wasn’t such a little problem at all. The next few days and

weeks became his horrendous unveiling of a lifestyle of infidelity, beginning with pornography and spiraling into a limitless pit of sexual sin.

Although there were specific things Michael did that helped rebuild my trust, each action would have been meaningless apart from a foundation of *true brokenness and repentance*. I had seen lots of tears over the years, but genuine repentance looked very different than anything I had ever seen in him before. No longer was he just sorry he got caught or that he had to face consequences, but he was literally sick over where this addiction had taken him.

Of course, I could have forgiven Michael without continuing a relationship with him. However, as I worked on forgiveness, he worked on doing anything

necessary for rebuilding trust into our marriage. Here are five of those things.

1. Commitment to a full disclosure of the truth

Initially there were three major dump-truck type confessions of “junk.” But beyond that, he made a commitment to being a “truth-teller” every time a memory was triggered.

I got to where I hated the words, “Micah, I need to tell you something.” It was odd. Even though I hated hearing it, those moments of truth were also somehow rebuilding trust. We both knew that if he never disclosed those things, I would’ve never known. Yet he made the continual choice to wipe the slate clean and repair the foundation that had been cracked with lies.

2. Took full responsibility

His lifestyle cost us a lot. It nearly destroyed our marriage, small business, finances, reputation, friendships, family relationships, and testimony – pretty much everything that was important to us. Previously, he was the king of excuses. After real repentance, however, he no longer tried to minimize, deny, or justify his actions or their consequences. He didn't try to shift the blame to someone else. Instead, I saw him consistently take ownership of his actions by humbling himself before others and me, admitting his wrongs, and asking for the opportunity to make the wrongs right.

3. Willingly set up boundaries

Initially, I gave him a list of practical things he could do that would help me see that he was sincerely striving for purity. I never had to enforce or nag these issues. He willingly put up boundaries in his life, and then set up others on his own. Boundaries will look a little different for everyone, but some of the boundaries looked like:

- Being accountable to other godly men
- Submitting to godly marriage counseling and cooperating with anything asked of him
- Installing Internet protection and not being on an unprotected computer
- Changing cell phone number; getting

rid of old contacts

- Having no unaccountable time
- Giving me a list of all e-mail accounts and passwords
- Going to bed at the same time I did
- Not watching anything that could trigger lustful desires

4. Pursued other forms of intimacy besides sex

After our separation, Michael initiated a 90-day abstinence period in order to work on building emotional and spiritual intimacy back into our marriage. That time was both fulfilling and draining. It was draining because issues surfaced that we couldn't gloss over with sex. We had to deal with them.

But it was fulfilling because it took the pressure of physical intimacy off the table. It allowed us to actively pursue rebuilding our relationship with physical intimacy as the overflow of our emotional and spiritual intimacy. It also helped to "reset" his brain chemically, and prove to us both that sex was no longer going to be an idol his life.

5. Passionately pursued God

Without a doubt, the most important thing he did to rebuild my trust was passionately pursue God. In his own strength, I knew that I would never be able to trust him again. He'd tried in the

past to quit viewing porn on his own. The results were always a deeper spiral of degrading sin. I determined that as long as I saw an active pursuit on his part, and I saw evidences of the Spirit's work in his life, then I was going to choose to trust. I may not be able to trust him, but I could trust the Lord in him!

This may be a good start, but it's just that...a start. I can still hear my counselor saying, "Trust is lost by the bucketfuls, and gained by the dropfuls. The only way to rebuild trust is by consistency over a period of time."

To anyone looking in, we were a hopeless case. The sin was just too extensive. It took no less than the supernatural power of God and two willing hearts to do the tough work of obedience. That was six years ago. Despite near destruction, our marriage continues to flourish as Michael continues to walk in purity and submission to the Lord.

This article is reprinted with permission from the CovenantEyes.com blog. Covenant Eyes is an Internet and Accountability filter for computers and mobile devices – this is a wonderful tool that any family would benefit from. For more see their website www.CovenantEyes.com



If your teen has a smartphone they have access to pornography

...lots of it!

Fix it with
CovenantEyes®

Continued from p6

with sin. If you do, sin will win every time. The very second you feel that sin awakening within you, slam it down with all your force and strength.

8. Meditate – *Meditate on God to see His glory and your desperate inability.*
9. Expect – *Expect to hear God speak peace to your soul* (but do not speak it to yourself until He does).

In another of his chapter summaries, *A Debate I would Watch*, Challies says that he would pay good money to watch a debate between John Owen and Joel Osteen. And here is where we see an example of how the online discussion brings a contemporary relevance to the book. Osteen teaches that we are basically good and that we should think highly of ourselves. Owen teaches that we are fundamentally sinners who need to fill our minds with self-abasement and the truth about our vileness. And in case your blood is starting to boil!!, Challies continues, “I am sure there are those who read this and quickly picture dour Puritans who enjoy thinking of how awful they are, as if beating up on themselves is a form of holiness. But this is not what Owen says at all. Instead he teaches that proper thoughts of God and of humanity are of critical importance because only through abasement of ourselves before God can we experience humility of spirit. It is like a balance. As our thoughts of God increase, our view of ourselves naturally decreases accordingly. As that view of ourselves decreases, our love for God swells.”

And that, I believe, is a fitting place to end this article. Perhaps some of you have heard this quote from John Owen before? “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Sin is a serious problem. But the end result of reading this book and meditating on this topic is a deep love for God’s glory and grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ. You will lovingly say what another John, John Newton, once said, “I am a great sinner; Christ is a great Saviour!”

I hope what you have read here is enough to whet your appetite to read this book! Each of the chapter summaries and their collated comments is still available at Challies’ website (see below). At the time of writing this article, Tim Challies had just posted a summary of chapter 2 of John Flavel’s *The Mystery of Providence*. One of the things Flavel wrote about in that chapter was the duties that parents have in raising their children. Eight con-

siderations were offered. Challies said, “The other day, the old Puritan John Flavel took me out back and slapped me around for a while (metaphorically, of course).” It is probably too late to join in with the discussion on that book, but I trust that Challies’ comment shows just

how timelessly useful it is to read Christian Classics and to read them together (<http://www.challies.com/writings/reading-classics-together>).

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister in the Reformed Church of Doverdale.

Outward focus

Sally Davey

Rico is very helpful (again)

Most of us know of Rico Tice¹ from his evangelism course, *Christianity Explored*. Perhaps you’ve used this course with friends in your efforts to explain the Christian faith for them. From the accompanying video, you will have seen Rico himself, his passion for the gospel, his self-deprecating humour, and his obvious desire that we take the gospel to those who don’t yet know Jesus Christ.

Rico is a modest man, as his behaviour at a seminar in Christchurch two years ago demonstrated. Despite being the celebrated “out of town” speaker, it was he who personally welcomed us all at the door. And at smoko time, who was passing around the muffins? Rico. His winsome humility and gentleness are equally obvious in his new book: *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even When It’s Tough*². Rico recognises his own failures in sharing the gospel, and wants to help us improve in this often-difficult calling of evangelism that we all share.

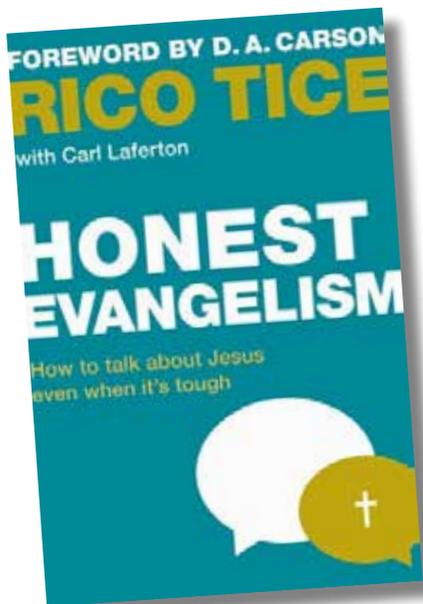
Reflecting on the thirty-odd years since he first believed and began sharing his faith, Rico realises that it’s getting harder. Don Carson makes the same point in his foreword to the book: our culture is more hostile to the gospel, but that is both a good and a bad thing. It is good because there are fewer nominal Christians. The decline in church numbers means those who are left are the genuine Christians, there



Rico Tice

for the long haul of service to Christ. But it is a bad thing because the thinking of our world is further and further removed from those whose view of life is shaped by the Bible. It gets harder all the time to bridge the gulf between ourselves and unbelievers in order to explain the message of the cross. Consequently, we face ridicule, resistance and we get “hit”, as Rico puts it.

Are we ready for this? Does it put us off? Have we given up telling people about Jesus – or have we never really started? Being hit hurts, and not everyone is prepared to keep doing what will mean more, and intensified, hittings. Do we choose the avoidance



option? As Rico puts it, there are two ways of reacting to avoid being hit – one, to stop saying anything; and two, to change what we are saying (neither being the right thing). He observes that new Christians are full of their love for Jesus, and don't mind the prospect of hittings – at first. Later, the comfortableness of being with fellow church members may seem much more attractive than a wire-brushing with the world. What particularly worries him, though, is the seasoned Christians who never get hit.

Rico's book was written to help us through the "painline" that faithful evangelists will always encounter. Why do we find facing this pain so difficult? Rico has patiently explored the reasons for the difficulty, and his analysis has brought him to several conclusions. The first is that it is idolatry that stops us speaking about Christ. We love something else more than him, and so we fail in the great commission he has given us. Opening the window into his own heart, he tells us that years ago, he failed to speak to his grandmother about the gospel in the week before her death. He now realises it was because he didn't want to lose his good reputation with his family. Talking about religion with her would not have impressed the rest of the family; and she died without knowing the Lord, as far as Rico knew. He urges us to identify our own idols – be they a comfortable, conflict-free life, a good reputation at work, or whatever – and repent of them.

His second conclusion is that there are two categories of Christians. (Now, you may have thought there are two categories as well – reformed, and non-reformed - but bear with Rico, because he has a point.) As he sees it there are

those who really are Christ's ambassadors – and who expend energy and emotion in taking his gospel to others. "Their friends and colleagues don't only know they are a Christian, but they have been told about Christ – because this person has told them." (p.47) The other category of Christians has

"been a churchgoer for many years. They are a loving friend or spouse or parent. They read their Bible and pray. They know their doctrine. But as I probe, it becomes obvious that this person has a view of Christian faith that does not include Christian witness. Somehow, their view of godliness has had evangelism removed from it. Witnessing is an optional extra in the Christian life, and they've opted out. They may have colleagues they have worked alongside for years, who don't even know they're a Christian or who think that they have a hobby they do on Sundays called "church" – a little like golf, but without the fresh air." (pp. 47-8)

We might well ask ourselves, how can you be interested in good theology without wanting to see it believed and lived out by everyone?

But let me emphasise that Rico is not the kind of pastor who beats us about the head as he exposes our sin. I've already stressed his modesty – he tells plenty of stories about his own weaknesses. But he also provides plenty of positive encouragement, laying out the reasons we would want to share the gospel, and making the doing of it seem both possible and attractive to the Christian. After all, this is what a good pastor does – chart a clear path out of wrong action, and make the goal of obedience eminently attainable. The rest of his book does just that.

Among the reasons we would logically want to tell people about the Lord Jesus are, firstly, that their believing would bring him glory. Unbelief – in essence, stubborn rebellion – should have us grieving for the dishonour done to him. A second reason Rico gives is the hope heaven brings. We ourselves have great security, and a wonderful hope beyond the griefs and troubles of this world – and surely we want to share this with others? Don't we think, each time we meet a new person, where will you be 100 years from now? And likewise, don't we want them to share in all the

benefits of the new creation? We need to get the scene of Revelation 21 into our heads so that it moves us and motivates us to share it with others. Finally, truly loving people means warning them of the danger awaiting them at the final judgement should they never repent of their sin.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, Rico gets even more positive and practical. While stressing that our overall motivation depends on our view of God's grace, his sovereignty and his power, Rico also lays some very useful how-to groundwork to help us past the inertia we experience when it comes to evangelism. He suggests "chatting" our faith – speaking naturally, and conversationally, about every aspect of the gospel of Christ and its relevance to our lives. He also includes two sets of three words (*identity, mission, call* and *understanding, agreement, impact*) as useful summaries to keep in our minds to ensure that we've both covered the central features of the gospel and to gauge just how far our friend or workmate has understood and agreed with our message.

A final, and I think very helpful, suggestion he makes is to be ourselves. This is certainly what we see in the gospels. Rico offers the examples of four quite different people who believed in Jesus, and who then went on to share their faith quite differently with others: Peter, Paul, the ex-blind man and the woman at the well in John Ch. 4. Which one are you, Rico asks, and how might God make you similarly useful in your interactions with others? Be yourself, and be faithful.

I found Chapter 7 especially full of insight. Here Rico thinks back over the changes in our culture in the past 30 years, and asks himself why it is getting more difficult and why more groundwork is needed when we share the gospel with someone. We are no longer helping people move along a path toward God that they sense they are on already. Rather, we find them moving fast in the opposite direction, and they will tell you that Jesus has no relevance to them at all. In consequence, Rico finds that invitations to attend Christian outreach "events" have little interest to people. He has come to the conclusion that you can't expect people to get enthusiastic about your suggestion to go along and hear someone else give a presentation about Christ. Why should they? They don't know them, and have no reason to trust them. Are

you hoping you can hand over the task of explaining the gospel to some speaker? No, he writes, “it takes *you*. It’s harder and harder to take people to hear the Bible taught; you need to take the Bible to them. People who would never consider stepping into a church will feel far less threatened reading and talking about the Bible with a friend.” (p. 88) Over and over he stresses that time and friendship are the two things that are the most important in sharing

the gospel today. *We need to invest ourselves.*

While we would give greater emphasis to the role of the church than Rico does in this book, I think his emphasis on the need to be busy as individual church members is spot-on. The church community only gets the opportunity to welcome enquirers if its individual members are active evangelists wherever they are in everyday life.

I found this little book personal, chal-

lenging and motivating; and recommend it for the sort of encouragement we all need to be faithful in the call of the gospel.

Notes

- 1 Rico Tice is Senior Minister (Evangelism) at All Souls’ Church in Langham Place, London. It is a large, well-known Anglican Church where John Stott was previously Rector.
- 2 Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism: How to Talk about Jesus Even When It’s Tough* (The Good Book Company, 2015)

Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron

A friend for all seasons

Have you ever been disheartened or discouraged and a friend comes along and helps you back onto your feet? Have you sat and listened as a friend tells you how she is struggling in life? Have you laughed with a friend until the tears flow? Friends can be such a blessing to us, and we to them.

God has placed us in the body of Christ, in a community of believers, a family of fellow Christians. He does this so that we may encourage, exhort, admonish, show love to, rejoice with or weep with¹ one another. It is part of His good plan for us to have people around us who, together with us in the Lord’s power and enabling will, build His kingdom on earth. Some of His people become our friends. Sometimes friendships are lifelong, or for a shorter time. Occasionally we experience a one-off close time of fellowship in the Lord with someone whom we may never see again this side of heaven.

Most friendships develop over a period of time. It takes time to get to know people and to develop a close relationship with them. We meet people with whom we sense an underlying kinship. If nurtured and cultivated these relationships can become friendships that are deep and may last a life-time. There are several building blocks on which a good friendship is founded.

Friendship is built on trust: To foster

a close relationship we need to be trustworthy with what we are told, and to trust the other person too. You may not need to share every little struggle in your life – but be open about the fact that your life is not perfect, that we all sin and we all need encouragement to become more like Christ. We are to share one another’s burdens. The New Testament has many “one anothering”² commands. Jesus said we are to obey his commands so that we would love one another.³ You certainly don’t need to take a “concrete pill and harden up” as the saying goes. Some people feel that that they are burdening others with their troubles. Or it is pride that holds you back from asking for help and prayer? A friend will be there to see you through the good times and the tough times, to pray for you and to just walk alongside you. Allow them the joy that could be theirs in Christ by opening up to them and allowing them to do likewise.

Friendship is built on love: Christ showed us unconditional love and showed us the way to show love to others. Be a friend who is kind, gentle and loving. A good friend will show us love by spurring us on to good works and will admonish us when we need it.

Friendship is built on sacrifice: Sometimes in our friendships we need to sacrifice our time so that we can be with our friend in a time of need. We

need to think about our friend’s needs before our own. Friendship isn’t about what we can get out of a relationship, but about what we can give to the other person.

Friendship is built on respect: Good friends respect one another. If one person is always at the other’s house,⁴ ringing on the phone or wanting to be togeth-

“Friends ... are a blessing from the Lord to help us in our growth in Christ, to bind His body closer together, and to build His kingdom here on earth.”

er constantl, then the friendship can become toxic and unhealthy, especially if the friend tries to come between you and your spouse or other friendships. A healthy relationship recognises the need for you both to have other friends too.

Types of friendships:

Best/very close friends:

A note to married women:

I love meeting with women friends, but my best friend, and the one I love to spend the most time with is my dear husband. We talk a lot, which is good for our marriage, and very beneficial for our relationship in general. We talk about everything from theological issues, gardening, the children, food, church, through to hiking in national parks of New Zealand. We make sure we have time for one another and do things together as often as possible. Is your husband your best friend? Is he your first “go-to” person when you need a chat,

help or advice? Our marriage should be the most important relationship we have, after our relationship with Christ, so we need to work at making our husband our best friend. Yes, there is space for coffee, fellowship and sharing with friends, but first and foremost, our husband comes first.

Women friends:

But sometimes, we just need a woman to talk to. Close friendships are a blessing and can be very encouraging, uplifting and enjoyable. Cultivate friendships with several women. A few will be closer than others, but there should always be room to meet new people. The women who are our closest friends will be sisters-in-Christ too. God uses these “sisters” to encourage us in our walk with the Lord. They lift us up when we are down, gently point us in the right direction when we stray, help us to speak wise words when we think foolish ones, share hugs and kisses and tears when we most need

them, provide a listening ear and hold our hand as we travel through the miry clay of this world. They laugh with us when we need good medicine⁵ for our hearts and souls.

It doesn't matter how old or young your friends may be. I have one “sister”, who is 24, and we share our highs, lows and struggles and she is such an encouragement to me. She spurs me on to do the good works that the Lord has laid out for me, and vice versa. Another in her 80s, has blessed me so much by her example as a loving wife.

Mentoring friendships:

Whatever your physical age, there may well be someone who is younger spiritually than you whom you can mentor/disciple and encourage in her walk with the Lord. When deliberately mentoring another woman, make sure that you have boundaries and limits. For example; agree to meet once a week for an hour for prayer and Bible study.



There are also those who are lonely or struggling in their lives or who are more difficult to be friendly with. Be friendly and thoughtful to these people. Look out for opportunities to invite them to events and to include them with others. Get to know them and help them. Show Christ's love to them. He loved you when you were lonely and a stranger to Him. Do that for others.

Being disciplined:

In turn, we can enter into a discipleship relationship with an older, more mature woman. Respect the time she is giving you and pray for her. If I need wisdom, my experience is that someone I respect as an older woman⁶ for example; a minister's or elder's wife – is a good place to start. She would be a woman who will listen to you, guide you and prayerfully seek to point you to Christ.

Being friendly:

What if you do not have any friends? (and it can so easily happen in this world where people seem to be too busy to be friends). What can you do if you are lonely and don't seem to be able to make friends easily? Firstly, trust in Jesus. He knows our inner most thoughts and needs and the wonderful thing is, is that He loves us more than any mere human can. He cares for you, in an intimate and beautiful way and is interested and involved in all the details of our lives. Secondly, be friendly yourself. Smile at people. People like to talk to people who smile. Learn how to talk to people. I am reading a book at the moment entitled *Always Know What To Say – Easy Ways to Approach and Talk to Anyone*⁷. It is proving to be very helpful in teaching a shy person like myself (yes, I am shy) to approach and talk to others. It's not easy, but worth the effort. Remember to ask Jesus for strength as you go to talk to someone. Thirdly, ask Jesus to show you opportunities to be friendly with a woman (no matter what age). Take the initiative. Invite someone over for a coffee or a picnic in the park. Get to know the other women in your Bible study and perhaps ask one of them over for lunch afterwards. When God called us to be one of His daughters, He also called us into a community of other believers, whom we are to love as brothers and sisters. So be friendly.

Treasure your friends:

Care for them and love them. Spend

time with them, keep communication up. This may be a conversation on Sunday after the service, or a weekly coffee catch-up or a personal message through social media or texts, letting them know that you are thinking of them. Or sending a card or a handwritten letter, or making a meal when they are sick or overwhelmed.

Male friends – A word of warning:

Always watch your conversations, social media interactions, etc with men. Keep them short and infrequent. Women who are on your own, beware of men⁸ who seem friendly and want to help out around the home and want to come on their own. Either they should bring their wife or you should arrange to have a female friend or a relation with you when he visits. If you are married, no man should be closer to you than your husband. Over time this type of close friendship is likely to be disastrous to your marriage. If a man seems to be trying to get close to you, tell your husband. Don't try and handle it on your own, and certainly don't keep it hidden from your husband.

Friendships with non-believers:

Can we have friends with non-believers? Certainly. Many a person has come to know our Lord Jesus Christ through friendships with believers. It may, however, be difficult to have a non-believer as a best friend because

there is a huge part of your life as a Christian you cannot share with them. But the Lord brings people into our lives to show them the love of Christ, to talk and walk the gospel before them and to pray for them.

God brings friends in all shapes, sizes and ages into our lives to encourage us when we need it, to rebuke us on occasion, to share their lives with us, to laugh with us and to love us for who we are! They are a blessing from the Lord to help us in our growth in Christ, to bind His body closer together, and to build His kingdom here on earth.

Work on making your husband your best friend. Share each other's burdens. Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Keep your listening ears open, your smile at the ready, your arms ready for hugs, keep a tissue or two in your handbag and love one another. Be a true friend and sister in Christ.

Notes

1 Rom 12:15

2 For Example: Mark 9:50, John 13:34, Rom. 12:16, 13:8, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:2,32, 1 Thess.

5:11, Heb. 3:13, 10:25, 1 Peter 1:22, 4:9-10

3 John 15:17

4 Prov. 25:17

5 Prov. 17:22

6 Titus 2:3

7 *Always Know What to Say* – Peter W. Murphy <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/105286> – A Free e-book.

8 2 Tim. 3:6

World in focus

Central Asia in the spotlight as Azerbaijan hosts European Games

Sporting event draws attention to religious and human rights abuses

World Watch Monitor

The first ever European Games is taking place in Baku, Azerbaijan. In a somewhat geographically and culturally challenging development, the first ever European Games begins today (13 June) in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is more usually identified as a Central Asian country, but the European Union considers it to be in what it calls its "European Neighbourhood" – what others in the world would call "our backyard". This might be shorthand for "an area close enough to us that what happens there affects our peace and stability" – Ukraine is another country in the "Neighbourhood".

And even as the Games start, the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe has been given one month to halt its operations in the country. Aidyn Mirzazade, a lawmaker from the Azeri



The first ever European Games took place in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Urek Meniashvili / CC

ruling party, said this was because the OSCE has fulfilled all its goals. However, OSCE has a role to oversee free and fair elections, and parliamentary elections are due in the autumn.

Just days ahead of the Games, on Tuesday the global human rights organisation Amnesty International was also ordered to leave Azerbaijan.

Amnesty launched its report, "Azerbaijan: the Repression Games", in London on Wednesday, in which it highlighted human rights abuses in the country.

But what about rights to freedom of religion or belief in Azerbaijan, and, more generally, across Central Asia? The Games and the surrounding publicity offer a reason to take a closer look at the region.

Which countries belong to Central Asia?

Central Asia is generally understood to refer to the geographical region encompassing the five 'Stans' formerly belonging to the Soviet Union – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Parts of the neighbouring Caucasus region such as Azerbaijan and some areas of Russia are often mentioned in the same breath (although not technically part of Central Asia), due to similarities

in cultural, political and religious life. Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, sits on the western shores of the Caspian Sea.

Why is there pressure on religious practice, and especially on Christians?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago, the newly established Central Asian nations used Soviet tactics to maintain control. As in Soviet Russia, religious 'zealots' were considered a particular threat and laws were created to ensure all aspects of religious life were closely monitored.

The laws vary and have evolved over time, but the general trend is for a slow, steady increase in pressure to ensure, as governments follow the mantra of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, that nothing is considered more important than the state.

How pressure is exerted

The pressures on Christians in Central Asia vary from country to country. In some places, Christians face harassment, fines and even imprisonment for very ordinary activities. This can mean anything from possessing a single religious book or DVD to holding a prayer meeting at a building not registered with the state as a place of worship – even one's own home.

Christian charity Open Doors International refers to this type of pressure as "dictatorial paranoia."

"The regimes want to stay in power at any cost. Communism as an ideology is dead. Now it is a simple question of staying in power," said Rolf Zeegers, an analyst for the charity.

The respective Presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have each been in power since the early 1990s. The re-election in March of Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, to a third term (even though the constitution limits Presidents to two terms) was followed in April by a fifth consecutive election victory for Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Both elections were foregone conclusions, with each victor recording more than 90 per cent of votes.

The World Watch List, Open Doors International's annual list, which ranks the 50 countries where life as a Christian is most difficult, cites two major persecution 'engines' in Central Asia: 'dictatorial/totalitarian paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism'. Two more 'engines', 'organized corruption' and 'tribal antagonism', are secondary 'engines' in some countries.

Christian sentenced to death for murder, aged 15, hung after 22 years on death row

On Wednesday, June 10th, Pakistan hung a 37 year old Christian, Aftab Nazir Bahadur, who'd allegedly confessed to double murder when he was 15 years old in 1992. He was convicted on the evidence of two witnesses, both of whom recently retracted their accounts, saying they had implicated Bahadur after police tortured them.

"This is a truly shameful day for Pakistan's justice system. Aftab was subjected to almost every injustice conceivable," said Maya Foa, director from international human rights group Reprieve.

"To the last, Pakistan refused even to grant his lawyers the few days needed to present evidence which would have proved his innocence. This is a travesty of justice, and tragedy for all those who knew Aftab," she added.

A recent book *Blasphemy Law and Religious Freedom* by Prof. Shahid Mobeen reports that at least 13 Christians (including Aasiya Noreen Bibi) are on death row on blasphemy convictions.

Moubin, of the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome, says the Pakistani blasphemy law criminalizes all behavior considered offensive to the Koran or the Prophet Muhammed.

The academic says that over the past 25 years, this law was applied more than 1,000 times and Christian minorities have suffered from this more than others. World Watch Monitor

Do you have a business?
Why not advertise in
Faith in Focus

Overcoming a century of pain

by Barbara G. Baker

Turkish Christians take first step toward embittered Armenians

"We came to share your pain," Turkish Christians declared in early April, standing before TV cameras at the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan.

"We have come here to apologize for what our ancestors did, to ask for your forgiveness," two spokesmen for the Turks went on to say.

Shocked viewers across Armenia watching the Azdarar TV news channel on April 11 could hardly believe their eyes and ears.

Turks, claiming to be Christian? And laying wreaths at the nation's genocide memorial? How could Turks, of all people, come to Armenia to honor the memory of more than a million Armenian Christians who had been slaughtered 100 years ago by their own forefathers, the Ottoman Turks?

Gathered around the monument's eternal flame, the more than twenty Turkish citizens spoke out simply, and repeatedly: "We plead with you, if you can, to forgive us and the crimes of our forefathers."

Significantly, the Turks were joined by a number of local Armenian Christians who formed a huge circle, holding hands together around the memorial as they prayed aloud in Turkish and Armenian for their nations and peoples.

"You wrote history here in Yerevan today," one Armenian pastor declared. It was the first time, he thought, that prayers in Turkish and Armenian had ever been voiced together before the somber memorial.

The Turkish Christians' April visit to Armenia was the latest step in an unprecedented reconciliation initiative between Turkish Protestants and Armenian evangelicals during the past year.

Organized informally by several Turkish pastors from Muslim backgrounds, the gatherings first began with diaspora Armenians in California and New Jersey, followed by an Istanbul weekend between some 90 Turkish and Armenian participants.

For the past 100 years, Turks and Armenians have remained outspoken enemies. Their historic enmity rooted in the Armenian genocide of 1915 is both political and ethnic, but also religious.

Early in the 4th Century, the Kingdom of Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as its state religion. But the rulers of the crumbling Ottoman Empire which carried out the genocide were Muslim Turks.

In today's Turkey and Armenia, strong nationalist elements in the current political climate are so prevalent that the Turkish and Armenian Christians who spoke to *World Watch Monitor* about their reconciliation gatherings requested strict anonymity for their own protection.

An uprooted people

An estimated 2 million Armenians had been living in central Anatolia and the eastern regions of what is now modern-day Turkey for two millennia. But after the Ottoman regime-ordered massacres and forced deportations began in April 1915, within two years up to 1.5 million had died. The survivors had either been forcibly converted to Islam or managed to escape into the Syrian desert.

"This page in history is really painful for every Armenian," a church leader from Yerevan who met with the Turkish Christians told *World Watch Monitor*. "You can hardly find an Armenian whose relatives were not victims of the genocide. For this very reason, Armenians live with hatred and bitterness in their hearts."

A Kurdish pastor who went to Yerevan said he discovered this reality for himself. "There is a huge pain, and it needs to be softened to find healing, to stop the hatred," he told *World Watch Monitor*.

"Armenians take their children to the memorial in Yerevan, but instead of healing, it stirs their hatred. It's in their hearts, and they cannot forget. Our fathers harmed them, and they are angry. Even in very small details, their trauma continues. If this is not stopped by healing, it will get worse."

But he stressed that the solution was a spiritual one, which had to be built around honest, personal relationships. "We went as individuals. We didn't go in the name of our churches. To meet face to face, in person, to hear from these Armenian brothers and sisters and pray with them was healing for both sides. The seeds of reconciliation have been planted, to grow and spread."

"This has all developed personally, through the Holy Spirit's orchestration in our hearts," one Turkish pastor told *World Watch Monitor*. "Politics can't resolve this," another said. "The United Nations has tried, so has the United States, to restore relations between Armenians and Turks. But they couldn't reconcile us."

"Politicians are stuck in the quagmire of pride, politics and getting votes," another Turkish church leader said. But recently, he said, "Church leaders of both peoples are seeing that we must take the steps of following Jesus, in humility and forgiveness, to see reconciliation and overcome this century of pain."

A bold step

"We have all been waiting for someone to make the first step," one Turkish pastor told *World Watch Monitor* after returning from Yerevan. "But the first step against



Turkish and Armenian Christians circle the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan, Armenia, on April 11. Faces have been blurred to protect identities. Ricardo Pessoa

hatred must come from us Turks. When we made that first step, the Armenians accepted it. They are ready.”

“It was a bold step,” one Armenian evangelical said, and particularly significant for him because it had been initiated by the Turks.

“Until now,” another confessed, “we forgave with our mouths, but not with our hearts.”

For the first time, many Armenian Christians said they now realized how painful it is for the 5,000 ethnic Turks and Kurds who have converted to Christianity in Turkey in the past few decades to face the truth about the Armenian genocide.

Like other Turkish citizens, they were angered by the revenge murders perpetrated by Armenian ASALA assassins, who killed some 40 Turkish diplomats and officials during the 1970s and 1980s, allegedly “to avenge the Armenian genocide.” But this violence only stiffened Turkey’s resolve to continue to deny the Armenian genocide, deepening the society’s resentment against Armenians as a people.

“When we Armenians saw that the Turks felt pain for what their grandfathers did, we understood that we must forgive them,” one participant said. It took meeting Turkish Christians in person, one admitted, to be convinced

“it is a fault for us to nurture hatred to our children.”

“We want to tell you we are sorry for what happened, and beg your forgiveness.” — *Turkish pastor*

Tears and acceptance

Some of their most moving experiences in Yerevan, the Turkish Christians told *World Watch Monitor*, came through casual interactions on the street with complete strangers who heard them speaking Turkish.

Several men happened one evening on a restaurant selling lahmajun, a small thin pizza common in both Armenia and Turkey. After they ordered a meal in English, they sat down speaking Turkish among themselves. A middle-aged man nearby reacted angrily, asking in Turkish, “Are you Turks? What are you doing here in Armenia? May God save us!” When they explained why they had come, he retorted skeptically with a Turkish proverb, “Bir cicek’ten bahar olmaz!” [One flower doesn’t bring the spring]. Then he quizzed them about their faith, dubious that Turks could in fact really be Christians.

“He softened a little, when we explained that we had been forgiven by God,” a pastor said. “We told him, ‘Our people have sinned. Can’t you forgive us? God has.’”

The man then said his family was originally from Gaziantep, in eastern Turkey. “I taught my children not to love or even like Turks,” he said. “I never thought until now that such a thing could ever happen, for Turks to become Christians. This has changed something in my heart.”

In another encounter, a shop salesman in a souvenir market reacted harshly when he heard his visitors were from Turkey. “We have come here on the centennial of the genocide,” one pastor explained, “to share your pain. We want to tell you we are sorry for what happened, and beg your forgiveness.” The man’s expression changed, his eyes filling with tears as he shook their hands and embraced them, one by one.

One Western observer of the Yerevan gathering confessed, “I may never see something like this ever again in my life. I was a spectator, watching the walls of division and hostility come down. It’s what the gospel of Christ should be doing all over the world, bringing true reconciliation.”

Asked what the reconciliation effort has really accomplished, one Turkish pastor said simply: “We want our fellow citizens, Turks and Armenians alike, to ask us: ‘What kind of God can bring two enemies together like this?’”

World Watch Monitor

Books in focus

Real Christianity

by William Wilberforce

Revised and updated by Bob Beltz

reviewed by Walter Walraven

As I read this book, I couldn’t help feel a kindred spirit with Wilberforce, who had penned this book more than two centuries ago. I found myself agreeing with so much of what he said. It was as though he had only written it yesterday. The theme and content are timeless. This book is a call for reformation.

When it was originally written, it was entitled *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, and it was published in 1797. Since

that time, the title has been condensed in subsequent republications, hence, the revised title, *Real Christianity* for this 2006 edition. The revision of this classic book has produced a very readable edition.

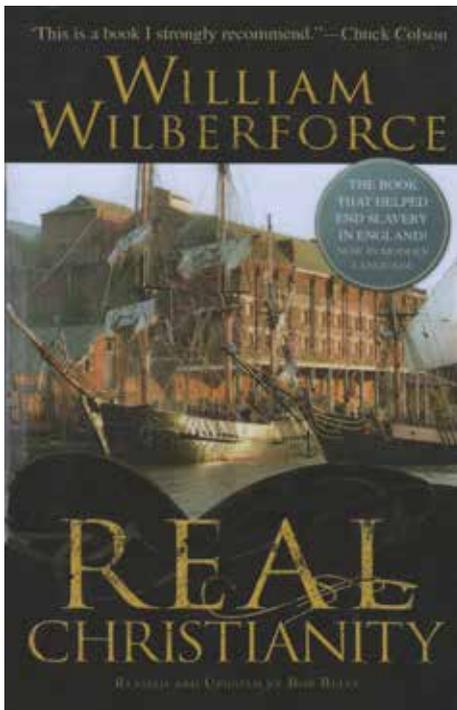
It is suggested that this book helped to end slavery in England. Wilberforce had become deeply concerned to foster moral and cultural renewal in Britain. He was always seeking to be salt and light in the culture where many people did not share his Christian worldview.¹

A Practical View of Real Christianity influenced many lives throughout Britain. To Wilberforce’s contemporaries this book was a cry from the heart – a plea to fellow countrymen to embrace what he referred to as authentic Chris-

tianity. It was a declaration of his faith commitment and set forth his vision of a good society.²

He shows what the problem with people’s view of Christianity was in that time. He investigates the state of contemporary Christianity, explaining the errors and faults which displayed themselves in the way nominal Christians of that day conducted themselves – having a form of godliness, but denying its power. The reader of this book can only come to the conclusion that Christianity in Britain at that time lacked spiritual heart. We would call it “nominal” or “carnal” Christianity.

Wilberforce leaves no stone unturned. After exposing the errors of the day, he shows what constitute true standards of



Christian behaviour, offers arguments for true Christianity and then moves on to the current state of the nation. Finally, he gives advice to authentic Christians, those with a true saving faith.

Wilberforce was a man of faith, who loved his Lord and Saviour passionately. Right throughout the book, we see his warm love for his Lord and his dependence upon Him. But he was also a man who had a deep concern for his fellow men and their spiritual state.

He entitled his original introduction to the book "Author's Apology: What I Am Attempting to Accomplish" and then went on to explain the reason for the book. The following excerpt is from Wilberforce's original introduction:

"I'm not going to attempt to either convince skeptics or answer the questions unbelievers always seem to ask, but rather point out some of the problems with the beliefs and actions of those who already claim to be Christians. I'd like to attempt to contrast what we see in the lives of many, perhaps most, who make this claim with what I understand the Bible teaches about what it means to believe in Christ. I am disturbed when I see the majority of so-called Christians having such little understanding of the real nature of the faith they profess. Faith is a subject of such importance that we should not ignore it because of the distractions or the hectic pace of our lives. Life as we know it, with all its ups and downs, will soon be over. We all will give an accounting to God of how we have lived. Because of this fact, I'm

not going to pull any punches in what I write. I hope you will seriously consider what is contained within these pages".

What more can be said? Read it for yourself. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to every authentic Christian and those who think they are.

1 Kevin Belmonte's "William Wilberforce: A Man for All Seasons" was used.

2 Kevin Belmonte's "William Wilberforce: A Man for All Seasons" was used.

A Study of Biblical Eschatology

by G. I. Williamson.

Reviewed by OP pastor Archibald A. Allison.

After more than sixty-two years in the Christian ministry, G.I. Williamson has written a book to explain biblical eschatology to ordinary Christians. Two of the "things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation" are the doctrines of creation and consummation, which "are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them" (WCF 1.7). This small book will encourage you to study the text of the Bible and see for yourself that, although no one has all the answers to questions about the future, the main things we need to know about the future are clearly revealed in Scripture.

After clearly stating five time-tested principles of sound Bible interpretation, Williamson defines eschatology as "whatever God has revealed concerning things still in the future at the time when God revealed them" (p. 9). He summarizes the eschatology of the Old Testament, focusing on God's promises to the nation of Israel and the various visions that God gave the prophet Daniel concerning the four great world kingdoms leading up to the time of Christ. He concludes, "There is no other event in the history of the world that rises to the level of importance of that momentous time when the Jewish nation, as a whole, was disenfranchised by the Lord Jesus" (p. 19). From this we learn that biblical, doctrinal, and spiritual qualities define the true church, not organizational continuity.

One of the reasons for so much confusion in eschatology is the loss or weakening of "reformational principles of biblical exegesis" (p. 26). Williamson explains the importance of "grammatico-historical exegesis," rather than looking

at the text of the Bible from the perspective of the twenty-first century and changing its meaning. The rest of the book sets forth the eschatology of the New Testament. He gives a careful exegesis of Matthew 23–26, focusing on things that are commonly misunderstood and the most difficult points. He looks at the Thessalonian letters and compares three basic types of interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. He compares the most common interpretation of the texts in the Epistles of John concerning the Antichrist with what the texts actually say.

About half the book is an exposition of the book of Revelation, carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture and showing that John restates the same things Jesus taught in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Williamson gives six concluding statements, the last of which is WCF 33.3. The final chapter gives confirmation from other evidence in Scripture and the confessions. Throughout the book are questions for further study and discussion. Buy a copy of this refreshing, accessible study of Scripture that sets forth the certainties of biblical eschatology, study it, and share it with others.

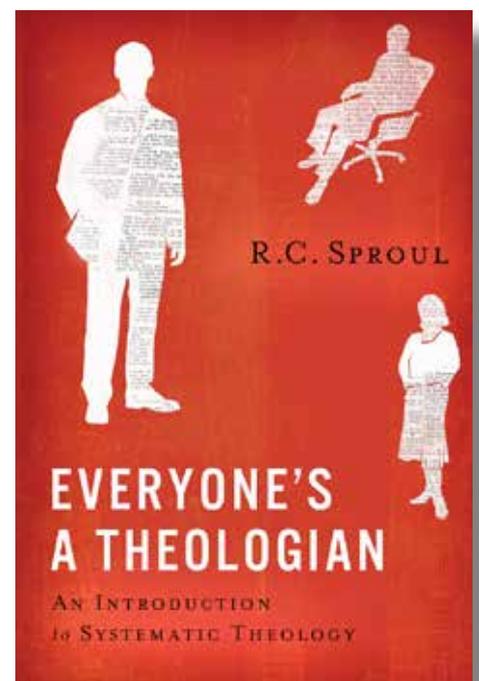
New Horizons, June 2015

Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology

by R.C. Sproul.

Prof. David VanDrunen.

Is everyone really a theologian? In a professional sense, of course not, but R.C.



Sproul argues that all Christians inevitably engage in theology as they seek to understand the truth that God has revealed to us. The only question is whether we are good theologians or bad ones. Sproul writes this overview of systematic theology in order to steer readers in the former direction, and accomplishes this task quite admirably.

The book is organized into sixty short chapters that deal with nearly all of the main issues of Christian doctrine, following the usual order of Reformed systematic theologies. Consistent with his goal of reaching ordinary Christians, Sproul's explanation of topics is usually clear, concise, and winsome. The text is free of technical scholarly debates and is only lightly footnoted (though most of the footnotes, unfortunately, function as advertisements for Sproul's other books).

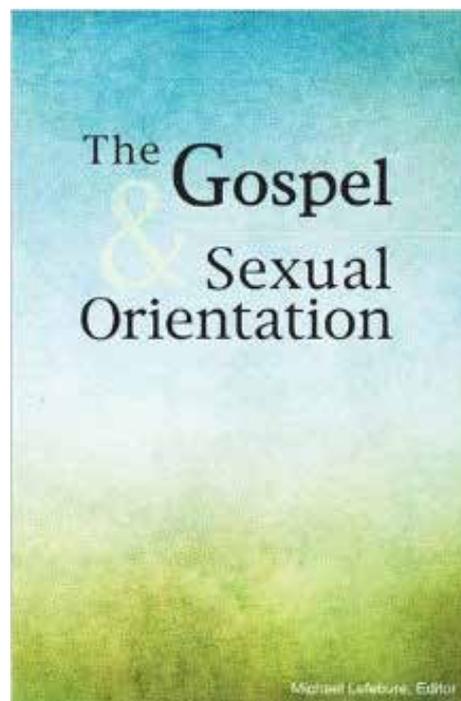
This volume should serve many Christians well as a general introduction to biblical, Reformed doctrine. Among many sections that helpfully treat important, but often puzzling, features of Christian doctrine are Sproul's discussion of the relationship between God's justice and his mercy and grace (pp. 68–69) and his practical illustration of how God's justice is displayed in the atonement (pp. 157–58). Sproul frequently seeks to answer the objections of unbelief against biblical truth. Another commendable feature of this book is that it includes a chapter on worship – an important topic that is

often absent from Reformed systematic theologies.

Less helpful is the fact that on several occasions Sproul, after describing different views on a given topic, does not explain why his own view is correct – and sometimes does not even identify which view is correct. For example, he takes no position on how sin is transmitted from Adam to subsequent generations or on the millennium (though he does specifically reject the pre-tribulation dispensationalist version of premillennialism and makes comments suggesting a bias toward postmillennialism). Historically, confessional Reformed theologians have differed on these issues, so Sproul's reticence to choose sides is understandable and perhaps properly irenic. Yet his book would have been stronger if he had provided at least some defense of infant baptism and of the "spiritual" presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Also, his treatment of the gifts of the Spirit (ch. 35) is weak; some of his claims here are less than clear, and he does not provide a lucid defense of cessationism.

Despite a few weaknesses like these, Sproul has effectively presented the main teachings of Reformed theology as an organized and coherent whole. OP pastors and elders should find this book useful as an educational tool for believers moving beyond the basics of biblical truth into a richer understanding of our system of doctrine.

New Horizons, June 2015



The Gospel & Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

edited by Michael Lefebvre. Crown & Covenant

Reviewed by OP pastor George C. Scipione.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is to be commended for their brief but important testimony. They have tackled a pivotal issue in the culture in which we live. They are to be commended, *first*, for facing this issue headon. *Second*, the testimony attempts to be comprehensive in facing the issues involved. *Third*, the testimony maintains an irenic tone throughout. *Fourth*, the testimony ends with the pastoral implications of this testimony. *Fifth*, the testimony is well written in plain English.

Chapter 1, "Introduction and Terminology," covers the historical development of the new ideas concerning sexuality. This is essential to properly grasping the issues at stake. Chapter 2, "Biology, Gender, and the Biblical Doc-

*Do you have a business?
Why not advertise in
Faith in Focus*



*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7*

Teacher Vacancy

Silverstream Christian School is seeking the services of a Reformed Primary/Intermediate School Teacher for the 2015 school year. Silverstream Christian School is a school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed Faith. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed Faith and Reformed Christian Education. This is an opportunity to be a part of a vibrant covenant community.

If you have any questions or wish to apply please email:

board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz
or phone Koen van der Werff on (04) 5297 558

trine of Man," emphasizes that a biological link to homosexual orientation does not negate an individual's moral responsibility to avoid what God forbids. Chapter 3, "Personality Traits and the Multiplication of Gender Categories," states: "The church needs to be aware of these trends in our society, multiplying gender categories through the separation of sexuality and brain gender from one's physical gender." Chapter 4, "Hermeneutical Issues of the Homosexuality Debate," deals with the arguments that some use to avoid the clear teaching of the biblical texts and the hermeneu-

tical fallacies behind them. Chapter 5, "Exegesis and Confessional Statements," interacts further with "progressive" scholars' exegesis of the key texts. Larger Catechism Q/A 139 is covered as well. Chapter 6, "Pastoral Implications," deals with many pastoral issues.

This excellent work has a few weaknesses. One, the implications of texts like Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 are not fully mined. In their light, how can genetic make-up be the cause of homosexual desires or any other particular sin? Two, a fuller biblical anthropology, dealing with the implications of genetic

research in general, needs to be developed. Three, the presuppositional framework of the social sciences is not challenged sufficiently, though there is a warning of possible bias. Four, the pastoral advice should be better organized. Five, the resource section needs to be edited more carefully and updated. For example, *Exodus International* no longer exists. *Harvest USA* should have been listed, as it is both biblically based and Reformed. When biblical and Reformed resources are available, why even go to questionable evangelical resources?

New Horizons, June 2015



www.personalisedhollandtours.com

a taste of Holland and Portugal

We offer all holiday makers from Dutch expats to those who simply want to see Holland for the first time the chance to spend time discovering the wonders of the Netherlands and the Algarve region in Portugal. Your personal tour guide Jan Veltrop will take care of everything for your entire stay.

51st Wellington Presbytery Ladies' Fellowship Day

On Saturday 21 March 2015, Wainuimata Reformed Church had the privilege of hosting the 51st Wellington Presbytery Ladies' Fellowship Day. Approximately 70 ladies made the journey to Wainui on a sunny autumn day.

We were welcomed with a wonderful morning tea and then led to the auditorium, which was beautifully decorated with the theme of the day in mind: "Bound – now free" New life in Christ.

The Reverend John Goris opened the day with a devotion on the day's theme and the text of Galatians 5:1, where the apostle Paul says... "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!" (Gal. 5:1)

After this, we were blessed by the two main speakers of the day. Christina first spoke of her involvement in the Womens Prison Ministry in Auckland. She spoke of her work involving Bible classes in the prison and how she came to be involved

in this ministry through CBI. She was a passionate speaker, as she shared the great need for this work. Women prisoners are often very lonely, with low or no self-esteem, miss their families, and are quite often left to deal with things by themselves without anyone to turn to, no listening ear or source of much-needed sound guidance. CBI is of great importance here, and although Bibles are supplied to the prisoners, study material is not, and we heard of the financial need of CBI.

Christina then invited the second speaker, Doris to come and give a first-hand account of what it's really like to be incarcerated, to be a woman prisoner, and how CBI helped her turn her life around, leading to her salvation in Christ and a life lived for God. Even though she wanted to share her story, and had asked God for an opportunity like this, Doris revealed that she was extremely nervous, very scared and opened with the words: "I ask myself; I am a Maori lady with tattoos, how will I be received by all those nice white ladies?" Her testimony moved many in the audi-

ence to tears and she received a standing ovation as she concluded her story. Doris was welcomed and assured of her place among her new sisters in Christ that morning.

Then there was the opportunity to watch the DVD of Karla Tucker, an inmate on Death Row in America, who also turned to Christ. She shared her story and her active life as a Christian in prison. She knew, that although she was a forgiven sinner, she ultimately had to pay for her crimes. She was put to death last year.

After this it was time for some light relief and lunch. There was an amazing crew in the kitchen, chopping and prepping and serving and dishwashing under the watchful eyes and guidance of Marrie Williams and Ymmie Feenstra. The food was presented in a beautiful way and tasted fantastic. We were able to enjoy it all in beautiful surroundings, as the auditorium and rear hall were transformed into a pretty springtime banquet venue by Geraldine de Vries and her helpers.

In the afternoon we were able to enjoy something most of us ladies enjoy:



shopping and fashion. Local eco fashion designer and Director of the annual Eco Fashion Show, Denise Angley, showed us how to look fantastic on a budget and how to be kind to the environment by recycling, upcycling and second hand shopping. She put together 10 outfits from clothes brought by us all and we thoroughly enjoyed the Eco Fashion Parade, as 10 of us ladies sashayed

down the runway and showed off the recycled outfits. This, of course, got us in the mood for some shopping and the organisers of the day had preempted this by setting up a Second Hand shop in the manse. All the clothing was donated, and all proceeds of the shop, together with the morning's collection and donations from Denise, were sent to the ministry of our morning speakers.

In keeping with the theme of renewal in Christ we were all able to take home a keepsake to remind us of our new life: a seedling in a container with the day's verse.

We look forward to seeing you all again next year in year Palmerston North, d.v.

Wendy Haverland



So you volunteered ...

Roel Dykstra

There are times in life when you are presented with an opportunity to volunteer for a task or fill a need. This was the case recently, when a devastating cyclone struck the 83 islands in the Vanuatu archipelago.

The forces of the cyclone had been building up for a week, and were predicted to hit Vanuatu on 13 March 2015, with winds exceeding 250km, and accompanied with torrential rain. The islands and its inhabitants were familiar with and prepared for such natural events.

Structures built by the native inhabitants are designed to counter the effects of the different air pressures, to allow equalisation through gaps and flexibility; and as a last resort relatively light to be reconstructed to provide shelters. Most materials are lashed rather than nailed together. Windows are either shuttered or non-existent.

The climate is such that growth of plants rejuvenates the land rapidly to commence next season's growth after natural events. Volcanic soils are rich in nutrients and coconuts that have fallen out of the trees send up shoots to establish new palms. Heavy rain is filtered through the soils, draining away to creeks that turn into short-lived torrents.

The Presbyterian Reformed Church in Port Vila has a Mission Post at Louananupu on Tanna Island, one of the larger southern islands of Vanuatu, with an active volcano (Mt Yasur) that continues to rumble and throw up lumps of molten rock. Louananupu is about 4km inland from the port of Lenakel on the western coast of the island and only accessible by four wheel drive or on foot. There is also an airport at White Grass further north on the coast.

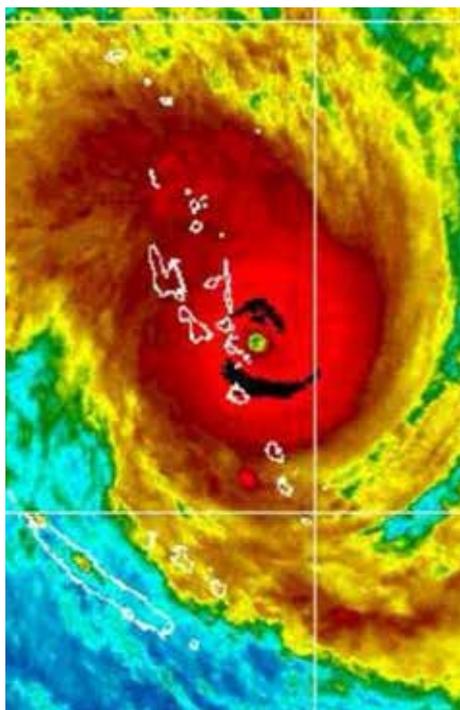
Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the gravel roads, but will happily choose the other side when there are pot-holes. Several nearby villages have

members attending services at the church in Louananupu where the local chief is also the minister.

The water supply for the village is rainwater collected from the roofs of the mission house, church and local district school. Sadly, the gutters that gather the water were torn off and damaged beyond repair. Supplies had all but been exhausted with the dry season about to start. Any remaining water in the storage tanks was considered contaminated and useful only for washing.

The only part of the church which was still standing after successive cyclones was the concrete block foundation, and its 25,000 litre concrete block storage tank. Church services were either conducted outside or in a district school classroom.

The Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC) sent out a call for a Relief Team to go to Louananupu and rebuild the church building, repair the mission house, restore the water supplies and help clear away fallen trees to improve



Cyclone Pam in a tanager graphic form.



This gives you an idea of the ferocity of the wind.

access. This help would also provide support to the church and evidence of God's provision for His people. Six members from the PRC and four from the Reformed Churches of NZ responded to the call.

Fund raising was generously supported both with finance and equipment. Through the main church at Port Vila material needs were quantified, purchased and transported to Tanna by boat. From the wharf they were brought on site by local villagers in utes. Relief Team members ironically commenced their travels on ANZAC weekend and were soon combining their skills to tackle each of the separate projects.

The majority of the work was carried out in the first week, with rain, stormy weather conditions and the transportation of building supplies causing delays in the 2nd week. Eventually a smaller team had to stay behind a further week to ensure completion of the entire project.

Volunteering often comes with personal sacrifices, exposure to medical dangers such as Malaria, Giardia, tropical diseases, food contamination, infections and being placed outside a westerner's comfort zone. These are offset by bless-

ings too numerous to mention individually. Chief among these has to be the joy experienced in sharing and applying your faith in a most practical way with those who belong to the family of God.

It was an encouragement to those who work tirelessly in keeping the flame of faith burning.

In all this I would encourage all of you, no matter how young or old, to

consider heeding the call when an opportunity is on offer.

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians.6:10)

Mr Roel Dykstra is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.



(top) Problems with a wet day.

(bottom) Church service in classroom.





(above) Team photo with the locals. (inset right) The completed church project.



Locals dressed for the Kustom Dance.