

faith in focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

Volume 42/8 September 2015



SPIRITUAL Gifts

Contents

Spiritual gifts (1) Are our churches charismatic?	3
Spiritual gifts (2) Finding your gift	5
Spiritual gifts (3) Searching for the spiritual gifts	8
Feminine focus Submission – not a dirty word but a glorious grace	10
World in focus	12
Why the church should neither cave nor panic about the decision on gay marriage	15
The Church in Exile	16
Letter to Teens unboxing their first Smartphone	18
Focus on home Auckland Presbytery report	19
Ministers and Wives Conference, 2015	20

.....
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

When we talk about spiritual gifts, there seems to be – at least in the mind of some – an element of mystery and doubt. For others, there is frustration.

The mystery and doubt seem to arise from people's lack of understanding of the spiritual gifts. So many Christians are walking around with the idea that they don't have any (spiritual) gifts. The frustration is caused when people are not able to exercise their particular gift within the church.

There doesn't need to be any mystery or doubt. According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, the Lord dispenses gifts to all His people – and in vs7 He equips them: "... to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

However, problems do arise when people have a particular gift that they think should be used in the church and believe that it is their right to do so. Rather than waiting for the right time, they are inclined to force the situation and when they don't get their own way, they become critical and withdrawn.

Does this sound familiar? It sounds a little like the Corinthian church to whom Paul the Apostle wrote concerning not only their gifts, but also how to treat the other members of the body. After writing about the necessity of all the body parts functioning together, and as being essential for the wellbeing of the whole, he goes on to point out that all should be honoured because God has so composed the body of the church (1 Cor 12:14-30).

Not all are apostles, or prophets (1 Cor 12:29) etc. We should wait patiently for the right time to arise in which we may be of service. Maybe the area of service that we desire to be involved in, is not something that is needed at that time. There may be another, more pressing task that we may be better suited to. Whatever that may be, the Apostle gives instruction on how we should conduct ourselves in (1 Cor 13).

Even though we may have the greatest gifts given to men, we must use them in love – love for God and love for fellow believers – in fact love for all men.

Our contributors give some very good insight into this subject of spiritual gifts.

Mr Michael Flinn gives an exposition of 1 Cor 12:1-11.

Mr Tim Challies (from Challies.com) looks at finding and searching for your spiritual gifts in two informative articles.

Mrs Jenny Waldron writes about the age-old subject of submission.

World in focus takes a snapshot of some events around the world.

Mr Russell Moore gives reason why the church should not cave in because of gay marriage.

Mr Carl R Trueman gives good advice about the church's identity.

Mr Tim Challies provides godly advice for first-time teen smartphone users.

Mr Erik Stolte reports on the Ministers and Wives Conference.

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.

Are our churches charismatic?

(an exposition of 1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

The term “charismatic” is frequently used to describe particular types of churches today. It is a word that has come to be applied to worship and worship styles in particular. We might even describe our own services at times as “non-charismatic”. We would be conveying by this that our services are orderly, with a reasonably set liturgy. Nothing too much out of the ordinary or spontaneous occurs in our worship services. We basically know what will happen and where we are in the service at any given point. And the music style is fairly reserved rather than upbeat and racy.

However, it is a pity that the word “charismatic” has been used in this way. I suspect that the apostle Paul would have had trouble describing *any* church of the Lord Jesus Christ as “non-charismatic”. Let me explain what I mean. Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians begins a new section in Paul’s letter, which runs through until the end of chapter 14, where the conclusion is reached that everything in the

worship services should be done “properly and in an orderly manner” (14:40). This suggests that Paul was wanting to correct some of the worship practices in the Corinthian congregation – practices that were improper and disorderly. However, that does not mean that he would have been willing to describe the congregation as “non-charismatic”. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (1Cor. 12:4-6)

The word for “gifts” here in the Greek is the word *charismata*, which comes from the word *charis* meaning grace or favour. If you look in a Greek dictionary, you will find that the word “charisma” and its plural “charismata” mean gracious favours from God – free gifts of the Lord’s grace. Paul’s point here is

that there are different kinds of gracious gifts from the triune God but it is the same Spirit who works all of them *in all persons*. Please note: Paul is not saying that there are some people who have gracious gifts from God and others who do not. He is saying that God dispenses his gifts (manifestations of the Spirit – vs. 7) to all. Again, in the next verse, he says that *to each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

This is important because it is clear from what Paul goes on to say that the Corinthians were valuing certain gifts above others – especially the gift of tongue-speaking.¹ In the midst of this discussion, he points out that love is the greatest gift of all. Love is oriented towards the other person, rather than to the self, and the Corinthians had to learn that all gifts of God are to be exercised in love. They are *gracious gifts of God* that have been given so that others can be built up. They are not signs of the spirituality, power, and sophistication of



“True spirituality acknowledges and submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ at every point. This is the kind of spirituality that is from the Holy Spirit. Every other spirituality is counterfeit..”

those who exercise them. And they are certainly not an excuse to look down upon those who do not have such gifts.

So then Paul is making two very important points here. He is saying that those who possess certain gifts must realise that they have been given those gifts by God. They are gracious gifts, not reasons to boast. And he is also saying that God dispenses gifts to all as he chooses. There is no-one who does not possess *charismata* – gracious gifts from the Lord. He goes on to mention apostles, prophets, workers of miracles, but also those who help others and those who have the gifts of administration (vs. 28). This is not an exhaustive list; others are mentioned in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. However, Paul has said enough to make his point. God has dispensed an immense variety of gracious gifts to his people. In this context, to call a church *non-charismatic* would suggest that *there are no people with any God-given gifts and talents in that church*. Conversely, to call a church “charismatic” in this sense means that the church is made up

of people with talents and abilities that have been given to them graciously by God for the building up of the church as a whole. This is true of all of our congregations!

Some words of caution here: First, not everything that goes by the name “spiritual” is from the Holy Spirit. In verse 1, Paul says: “Now, concerning spiritual (matters)...” Here he uses the word *pneumatikos*, which is translated in the NASB as “spiritual” The term “gifts” does not appear until later. Paul’s intention is to discuss the issue of spiritual matters more generally before he looks at spiritual gifts in particular. Then he goes on to say that before their conversion, the Corinthians were pagans or Gentiles and they were influenced and led astray by idols. They might have thought of themselves as very “spiritual” but in fact, their spirituality was not from God at all. For example, in 1st century Corinth the pagan temple of Asklepios held festivals to celebrate the healings that were supposed to be attributed to this god. Doubtless the Corinthians who believed in this and celebrated in connection with the festivals thought of themselves as very religious and “spiritual”. But, says Paul, no-one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus be cursed” and no-one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. In other words, true spirituality is not about miracles, or religious festivals, or prayer or chanting or mysticism. True spirituality acknowledges and submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ at every point. This is the kind of spirituality that is from the Holy Spirit. Every other spirituality is counterfeit.

Secondly, we have to realise that the gifts we possess, *are for the common good*. The apostle makes this very clear in verse. 7. The purpose that God has in mind when dispensing gifts to people in a congregation is the common good and building up of the church as a whole. Paul expands on this at some length in the second half of this chapter. There should be no division in the body of Christ. All parts are equally important and honourable, and each should be serving to build up and strengthen the body as a whole (vss 12-26). It follows that my possession of a particular gift from God does not guarantee me the right to exercise it in the worship service. Exercising my gift might bring honour to me and it might make me feel fulfilled in using my gift, but if the body of Christ is not built up through the use of my gift, I should refrain from using it. For

example, in 1Corinthians 14 Paul says that if a person is able to speak miraculously in another tongue (a 1st century manifestation of the Spirit) but there is no-one who can translate that tongue so that all may be edified and instructed by its content, then the tongue-speaker is to remain silent and not to use his or her gift in the church services (vss 27,28). Furthermore, we need to remember that *public* service is not the only way to serve in the church. I might be able to use my gift of helping (1Cor. 12:28) by privately assisting someone in the congregation to gain a new skill or by helping another perform his or her more public tasks more effectively. And, as every Session and church committee knows, the gift of administrations (12:28 – the Greek word here means steering, piloting or governing) is vital when it comes to getting the work done. Capable chairpersons, efficient clerks, and diligent treasurers are always appreciated in their respective roles. Again, the goal is to use our gifts to serve others and help build up the church.

In conclusion: are our churches *charismatic* in the biblical sense of that term? Absolutely! All our churches are made up of people who have been given gracious gifts by God. But we need to use these “manifestations of the Spirit” in love, in submission to the lordship of Christ, and in accordance with the teaching of God’s Word. They are given for the common good of the congregation and for the building up of the church to maturity in Christ.

1 The discussion of which gifts continue in the life of the church and which gifts have passed away with the apostolic era is beyond the scope of this article. For the record, the *Westminster Confession* summarises the teaching of Scripture when it says that it “pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His Church”...and that the revelation which came through these “divers means” was committed “holy unto writing” in Scripture. This makes the Scripture “to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto His people being now ceased”. (WCF. Chapter 1:1)

Mr Michael Flinn is an emeritus minister and a member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Finding your gift

Tim Challies

When I first began thinking and writing about spiritual gift assessments I was responding to a question that had been posed to me by a friend. He was interested in knowing my opinion on these assessments. I grew up attending very conservative churches and, sadly, the term “spiritual gifts” was largely foreign to me. These gifts were not emphasized in the churches in which I was raised and thus I decided to begin by researching spiritual gifts as one who was largely ignorant. I had taken such assessments a few times through churches I attended as an adult and through various men’s groups and had always found them somewhat helpful. Despite this they never really had a significant impact on my spiritual life.

As I began to research gift inventories or assessments I found one strange thing: it seems no one can agree about these gifts. It seems everyone has a different list of the gifts and even a different idea of how and when they are dispensed. One thing they all agree on is that these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to believers after they become Christians and thus they are available only to believers. Some argue the gifts are given immediately upon conversion and others believe they are given at baptism. While the Bible lists only a few gifts (see 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 and 12:1-11), some assessments list far more. The following is a typical list of gifts:

Administration: the gift that enables a believer to formulate, direct, and carry out plans necessary to fulfill a purpose. Biblical References: 1 Corinthians 12:28, Acts 14:23.

Artistry: the gift that gives the believer the skill of creating artistic expressions that produce a spiritual response of strength and inspiration. Biblical References: Exodus 31:1-11, Psalm 149:3a.

Discernment: the gift that motivates a believer to seek God’s will and purpose and apply that understanding to individ-

ual and congregational situations. Biblical References: John 16:6-15, Romans 9:1, 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

Evangelism: the gift that moves believers to reach nonbelievers in such a way that they are baptized and become active members of the Christian community. Biblical References: Matthew 28:16-20, Ephesians 4:11-16, Acts 2:36-40.

Exhortation: the gift that moves the believer to reach out with Christian love and presence to people in personal conflict or facing a spiritual void. Biblical References: John 14:1, II Timothy 1:16-18, III John 5-8.

Faith: the gift that gives a believer the eyes to see the Spirit at work and the ability to trust the Spirit’s leading without indication of where it all might lead. Biblical References: Genesis 12:1-4a, Mark 5:25-34, I Thessalonians 1:8-10.

Giving: the gift that enables a believer to recognize God’s blessings and to respond to those blessings by generously and sacrificially giving of one’s resources (time, talent, and treasure). Biblical References: II Corinthians 9:6-15,

Luke 21:1-4.

Hospitality: the gift that causes a believer to joyfully welcome and receive guests and those in need of food and lodging. Biblical References: Romans 12:13, Romans 16:23a, Luke 10:38.

Intercession: the gift that enables a believer to pray with the certainty that prayer is heard and when requests are made, answers will come. Biblical References: Matthew 6:6-15, Luke 11:1-10, Ephesians 6:18.

Knowledge: the gift that drives a person to learn, analyze and uncover new insights with regard to the Bible and faith. Biblical References: 1 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Corinthians 14:6, Romans 12:2.

Leadership: the gift that gives a believer the confidence to step forward, give direction and provide motivation to fulfill a dream or complete a task. Biblical References: Romans 12:8, John 21:15-17, II Timothy 4:1-5.

Mercy: the gift that motivates a believer to feel deeply for those in physical, spiritual, or emotional need and then act to meet that need. Biblical Ref-



erences: Luke 7:12-15, Luke 10:30-37, Matthew 25:34-36.

Music – Vocal: the gift that gives a believer the capability and opportunity to present personal witness and inspiration to others through singing. Biblical References: Psalm 96:1-9, Psalm 100:1-2, Psalm 149:1-2.

Music – Instrumental: the gift that inspires a believer to express personal faith and provide inspiration and comfort through the playing of a musical instrument. Biblical References: Psalm 33:1-5, Psalm 150, I Samuel 16:14-23.

Pastoring (Shepherding): the gift that gives a believer the confidence, capability and compassion to provide spiritual leadership and direction for individuals or groups of believers. Biblical References: I Timothy 4:12-16, I Timothy 3:1-13, II Timothy 4:1-2.

Service (Helps): the gift that enables a believer to work gladly behind the scenes in order that God's work is fulfilled. Biblical References: Luke 23:50-54, Romans 16:1-16, Philippians 2:19-23.

Skilled Craft: the gift that enables a believer to create, build, maintain or repair items used within the church. Biblical References: Exodus 30:1-6, Exodus 31:3-5, Ezekiel 27:4-11.

Teaching: the gift that enables a believer to communicate a personal understanding of the Bible and faith in such a way that it becomes clear and understood by others. Biblical References: I Corinthians 12:28, Matthew 5:1-12, Acts 18:24-48.

Wisdom: the gift that allows the believer to sort through opinions, facts and

thoughts in order to determine what solution would be best for the individual believer or the community of believers. Biblical References: I Corinthians 2:6-13, James 3:13-18, II Chronicles 1:7-11.

Writing: the gift that gives a believer the ability to express truth in a written form; a form that can edify, instruct and strengthen the community of believers. Biblical References: I John 2:1-6, 12-14, I Timothy 3:14-15, Jude 3.

I took a couple of the surveys that are available online and found them quite similar to ones I have taken in the past. The general format is between 30 to 50 multiple choice questions, most of which can be answered on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 meaning the description does not fit me at all and 4 meaning it is exactly like me). For example, I took a test at this site which tells me my primary spiritual gift is knowledge which it describes as follows:

The gift of knowledge allows people to automatically convert facts, data, and information into useful and important knowledge. People possessing this gift can learn in a variety of ways, retain what they learn, and understand how learning can be applied in meaningful and productive ways. Those gifted with knowledge have a voracious and insatiable desire to learn more, and they seek multiple avenues for deepening their understanding of God's world, God's will, and God's people.

[For an example of this gift in popular media] See the good, the

bad, and the ugly side of knowledge in Matt Damon's character in the film Good Will Hunting.

Though I digress, I noted what has to be a conflict between gifts of the Spirit (and the fruit of the Spirit) and a movie like *Good Will Hunting* which, because of much of its content, is hardly compatible with the Spirit! But getting back on topic, it occurred to me that the gift of knowledge is not so thoroughly described in the Bible as in this description. I don't think anyone could find a passage in the Bible that supports the statement that "the gift of knowledge allows people to automatically convert facts, data, and information into useful and important knowledge." This may be true, but it seems likely that these descriptions are a good bit more detailed than in the Bible.

In the end I returned to Scripture and studied the gifts outlined in the applicable passages of Scripture. Having examined the gifts of the Spirit, both those in the Bible and those in various assessments, I decided to search for references in the Scripture of people assessing themselves to discover their gifts. A question I had to ask myself is this: Is there any Biblical model for searching for spiritual gifts? Author James Sundquist researched this topic as well and discovered the following:

I can't find one single Scripture that says finding our gift was EVER a problem for the Church.

I can't find one single Scripture that instructs us how to find our gift.

I can't find any historical account that finding our gift was a problem for the Church.

I can't find any historical account that finding our gift was a problem for Church Fathers.

Anything we do in Christ is not through our strengths, but is perfected in weakness.

I can't find one single Scripture which uses a subjective balance of weighing our strengths and weaknesses to determine our Gift(s) of the Holy Spirit.

I can't find one single Scripture that uses personality or personality theory to determine our course in Christ or in the Church.

I can't find one single Scripture that instructs us to come up with a numerical value or rating system for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.



“If you want to learn what your spiritual gifts are, the best place to begin would be with reading the Bible and praying. Allow God to speak to you through His Word, showing you where He has gifted you.”

I tend to agree with most of Sundquist's observations. The Scripture tells Christians to exercise their gifts, but does not place a great deal of emphasis on searching for these gifts, especially through means of inventories or assessments.

I spent several years in the workforce and in that time was often dragged off to seminars to help me discover my personality type. One observation I made from some spiritual gift assessments (most notably the Saddleback SHAPE assessment) is that they bear an uncanny resemblance to the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator tests so common in schools and the workforce. The Myers-Briggs indicator is used for “Professionals like you [who] depend on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator when clients need to make important business, career, or personal decisions. Last year alone, two million people gained valuable insight about themselves and

the people they interact with daily by taking the MBTI instrument. The MBTI describes an individual's preferences on four dimensions; Extraverted vs. Introverted, Sensing vs. Intuitive, Thinking vs. Feeling, Judging vs. Perceiving.” Not many know this, but the Myers-Briggs assessment is drawn from the teaching and research of the humanist Carl Jung, a man who despised Christianity. Jung apparently used the services of a spirit guide, Philemon, to help him develop four profiles to describe human nature. Myers-Briggs is based upon those personality types and many of these spiritual gift assessments draw directly from this teaching. This in itself should be cause for concern. Combined with the lack of Biblical model, this should be sufficient to raise a warning flag.

But perhaps the greatest cause for concern with these assessments, and the greatest strike against them, is that they can be successfully completed by both believers and non-believers. If a spiritual gift assessment is truly assessing gifts given by the Holy Spirit, someone who is not a Christian should necessarily achieve a score of 0. This is obvious, is it not? As mentioned earlier, all of these assessments are premised on the idea that gifts are dispensed by the Holy Spirit only after a person is converted. Hence a person who is unconverted should show no evidence of the Spirit's work in his life. This is simply not the case with these tests. There may be questions related to spiritual matters that an unbeliever cannot legitimately answer, but many of the questions are generic in nature. For example “I enjoy pitching in on service projects in the church” could be as easily answered by an unbeliever as a believer. The same holds true for “People seem to respect me and follow my lead.” We might rightly ask if these tests are truly measuring the work or gifting of the Spirit, or if they are actually only measuring personality and preferences.

Let's pause for a moment. If spiritual gifts are given only to believers and these assessments can convince an unbeliever that he or she possesses spiritual gifts, then the assessments must be deeply flawed. It seems clear that these tests are, in reality, measuring personality, and even then, they may be measuring personality by a humanistic standard. Is it possible that perhaps we are only given spiritual gifts that compliment our personalities so personality and gifts are one in the same? That would be unsat-

isfying, because I believe God can work through gifts that may contradict our personalities. Think of Moses and how God used him despite his obvious shyness and lack of eloquence. Had God only used Moses' existing talents and personality He would not have had much to work with! The Bible is filled with examples of people who were used by God despite their natural talent or gifting. (Think, for example, of Solomon, crying out to God that he was only a little child and begging for God to give him the gifts he needed to rule successfully.)

A final cause for concern is that these assessments typically provide a finite list of possibilities. They list varying numbers of gifts, ranging from only those explicitly listed in the letters of Paul to a wide variety drawn from both the Old Testament and the New. Yet it seems to me that presenting a finite list of gifts and attempting to cast each person into one of those categories may be to overlook the stunning variety of gifts God gives. I find it instructive that when the Bible lists the gifts of the Spirit it lists different gifts each time. I don't think God wants us to believe there are only a certain number of gifts, one of which must be ours. I believe the lesson in these verses is that there may be as many gifts as there are Christians. Grudem agrees, saying in his *Systematic Theology*, “Paul was not attempting to construct exhaustive lists of gifts when he specified the ones he did.” There may be classifications of gifts and some may be more important than others, but there is no reason to think that the list provided in the Bible is complete or exhaustive.

Am I ready to write-off all spiritual gift assessments as a waste of time? No, I think that might be a kneejerk reaction. I see little basis, though, to believe that these truly measure the gifts of the Spirit. I am sure these tests can sometimes be valuable in assessing talents and personality traits and can cause people to look more thoroughly at where they should use their talents to honor God. But unless gifts and personality are one and the same, I do not understand how these tests can measure spiritual gifts. It seems to me that church leaders should exercise great care in if and how they present these assessments to their congregations. To have people fill out an assessment and encourage them to pursue the gift arrived at as the result of a mathematical formula based on ticking checkboxes, may lead people to pursue gifts God has not given to them while

ignoring those gifts He so wants them to exercise. I believe Grudem is wise in this regard. "Paul seems to assume that believers will know what their spiritual gifts are.... But what if many members in a church do not know what spiritual gift or gifts God has given to them? In such a case, the leaders of the church need to ask whether they are providing sufficient opportunities for varieties of gifts to be used." As for individuals,

They can begin by asking what the needs and opportunities for ministry are in their church. Specifically, they can ask what gifts are most needed for the building up of the church at that point. In addition, each individual believer who does not know what his or her gifts are should do some self-examination. What

interests and desires and abilities does he or she have? Can others give advice or encouragement pointing in the direction of specific gifts? Moreover, has there been blessing in the past in ministering in a particular kind of service? In all of this, the person seeking to discover his or her gifts should pray and ask God for wisdom, confident that it will be given according to his promise.

Beyond this, a person may simply attempt different ways of ministering, noting the ones in which God brings blessing.

If you want to learn what your spiritual gifts are, the best place to begin would be with reading the Bible and praying. Allow God to speak to you through His Word, showing you where He has gifted

you. Ask Him to give you a passion for your gift and to provide desire and opportunity for you to exercise this gift. And having done that, ask your Christian friends and family, your pastor and elders, what they think your gifting is. I believe this may be a far more valuable means of assessment, and probably a more accurate means of assessment, than a spiritual gift inventory.

www.challies.com
November, 2006

Mr Tim Challies serves as a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Ontario, and is a co-founder of Cruciform Press.

Spiritual gifts (3)

Searching for the spiritual gifts

Tim Challies

Today I want to spend just a few moments at least sharing some basic biblical teaching on the spiritual gifts. Much of this is drawn from my book *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* where I have an entire chapter dealing with gifts in general and the gift of discernment in particular.

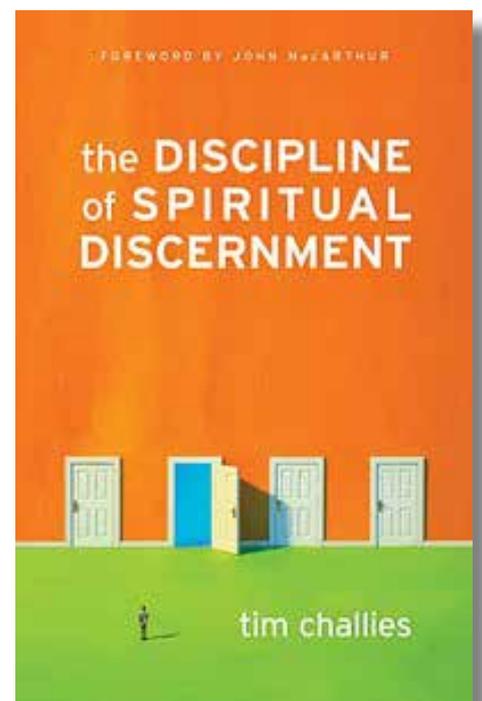
Often when I hear people speak of spiritual gifts they do so in this manner. "I have the gift of [insert gift here] and my church has no way for me to serve in that way." Or "I know what my gift is and I am looking for ways to use it." To these people I would suggest that they may have an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of the way the gifts work. The way to properly exercise spiritual gifts is not to be willing only to do what you've determined is your gifting, but to do anything that the church needs to have done, and to do it with joy and excellence. And as you do that, you may find that God gifts and equips you for

something far outside your comfort zone.

The Bible seems to indicate that Christians will typically know how they have been gifted. There is certainly nothing that would hint at the modern methods of discovering gifts through surveys or assessments. And yet, while most Christians know that the gifts of the Spirit are given to God's people, they continue to struggle with identifying the ways in which God has gifted them.

Because gifts are given for the benefit of the body, it seems likely that where there is a need, there will be someone with the gifting to fill that need. If a church has a desperate need for a person with the gift of teaching, it seems likely that someone within the church has been given such a gift and may fill the need, at least for a season. Similarly, if a person is a member of a church where there is no opportunity to exercise a certain gift, it may be that this church needs to create opportunities for that; in extreme cases, the person needs to seek a church where his gifts can be of

service to others. The leaders of churches should seek to ensure that they are providing opportunities for members to





exercise the full spectrum of gifts.

Wayne Grudem writes, "Though the lists of gifts given in the New Testament are not exhaustive, they certainly provide a good starting point for churches to ask whether at least there is opportunity for these gifts to be used."

For those who continue to struggle with identifying how they have been gifted, here are five principles that will prove helpful:

Begin with prayer

God promises to give wisdom to any who ask for it. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). Thus we should begin our search for gifting by asking God to make it plain to us how he has gifted us and how he desires that we serve him by serving others. We must ask for wisdom in seeing how God has gifted us and in opening our eyes to opportunities to serve him.

Look for passion

Where God has given a gift, we can expect that he will also give passion. A good place to begin when considering spiritual gifts is to see where God has given desire and passion. A person who is passionate about having people into her home may well have a gift of hospitality; a person who loves to organ-

ize events may be gifted with a kind of leadership; a person who is passionate about the truth of God may be gifted with discernment. Those who look for their gifting should look to what interests them and what makes them feel passionate. As they look to their passions they may just find their gifts.

Ask others

Another way of seeking gifting is to ask other believers, especially those in spiritual leadership over you. Simply ask other Christians, those who know you best and who lead and guide you, where they feel you should serve within the church. Ask them to prayerfully consider your gifting. Their wisdom and guidance may surprise you.

Try them!

Christians should try different opportunities to serve within the church. As we attempt different things and do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can expect that he will reveal passion and gifting in ways we may not expect. There is a danger in doing only those things that we are comfortable with or serving only in the ways we think we are most talented. Think of Moses, a frightened and timid man being called to lead a nation, or the apostle Paul with a thorn in his flesh being called to take the gospel to all the nations. God does not always gift

us in ways we are comfortable with or in ways we might expect. By attempting different gifts we can look to those where God brings blessing and success and perhaps see that we have a special gifting in these areas.

Keep trying!

The Bible does not tell us that all spiritual gifts are given at the time of conversion or that, once given, they are given permanently. As we grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord, we should continue to seek ways of serving him. We may be surprised to find that our gifting changes along with the needs of our local church. We may find that God wishes us to emphasize different gifts now from those we emphasized in the past. So keep serving God and keep searching for his gifting in your life. If confusion continues, take heart, wait patiently for God's wisdom and guidance, and serve him whenever and wherever possible. He will answer your prayers.

www.challies.com
January, 2009

Mr Tim Challies serves as a pastor at Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Ontario, and is a co-founder of Cruciform Press.

Submission – not a dirty word but a glorious grace

Why is it that we married women so often struggle with the concepts of a “quiet and gentle spirit” and “modesty”, let alone the big one: “being a submissive wife”?

Why is it, that we look for excuses why we are not quiet, gentle or submissive, nor even have the desire to be so? We push ahead with our own agendas, claiming we are strong personalities and that we have a “right” to wear what we want, to say what we want, do what we want, whenever we want to!

The Bible says “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”¹ Mark Twain once wrote: “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.” We understand submission all right, and even though we may have read numerous books and the Bible on this subject, when it comes to putting it into practice, well, that’s another matter! I believe one of the reasons for this is that feminists have hijacked the word “submission”, and changed its meaning to “doormat”. Although we understand the word “submission”, we misunderstand it

in this particular context because, in our culture, its meaning has been changed.

However, submission in the broad biblical sense is a beautiful grace of God. Jesus Christ was in submission to God the Father’s will when He died on the cross for those whom had been chosen from before the foundations of the world. We, as Christians, live in submission to God’s laws and commandments as an outworking of our love for him and what he has already done for us. We, as Christians, are commanded to live in submission to one another². We all, as citizens of our country, live in submission to the laws of the land. Yet, as we think about living in submission to our husbands, we often react negatively and sometimes even with hostility.

When we look back to Genesis, we see woman was created, by God, to be a helpmeet for her husband. This is the foundation for a married woman’s role and God planned this role for a married woman to be the very best for both us and for our husbands. As Christians we can totally trust God in his wisdom and trust him to give us the strength to carry it out. Because of the fall, the ability to be a helpmeet became complicated and difficult due to the curse: we want to be like our husband (in fact e often we think we can do better than him!). This is what the Bible says in Genesis 3:16b, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” The phrase “your desire shall be for your husband” suggests that the woman’s desire will be to dominate her husband. Thus our marriage relationships are so often now marred by a battle for domination and attempts to enforce submission.

But the Apostle Peter gives us wise counsel on how we are to be a biblical wife and helpmeet. He tells us how we can live with our husbands in a way that will be very precious in God’s sight.³ The

only “problem” is that the way to live with our husbands, biblically, is to live in submission to them.

So what is it with submission to our husbands that is so difficult? As Clair Smith writes: “The submission required of wives is at odds with our culture, and more importantly it is at odds with our sinful human nature.”⁴ One main reason is pride! “Its my way or the highway!” “He can’t ask THAT of me?” Or “well, he might think that, but I am doing it my way because it’ll just work out better than his way.” How many times have we thought (or said) these things or similar? I know it isn’t easy to submit. Boy, do I know that! But not only are we to submit but we are to do it lovingly and totally his way. Not half-heartedly, not grumbling, not resentfully, not by dragging the chain but whole-heartedly!

Let’s look at a couple of examples: You and your husband are out driving and he takes a “wrong” turn and you gently (of course!) point this out to him. He disagrees with you and insists he is going the “right” way. At this point, ladies, back off! Be kind. He may have a lot on his mind. Sit back and enjoy the ride. Don’t go “I told you so” when you turn up late or he has to ask you for directions. With the right attitude, support him and go with his plan. Occasionally you may end up at a surprise dinner! But, either way, if you are submissive, kind and gentle, you will end up with a closer marriage!

Another example: You and your husband have very different opinions about running the household. In my case I am more relaxed and my husband is more structured and routined and would like our home to be run that way. So, after trying to do things my way, (openly and not so openly) I am doing it his way. I am created to be his helpmeet, so how can I help my husband, a busy pastor, do what he needs to do and to do it

“Has doing it your way worked? Do you have peace and harmony in your home? God’s way works!”

well? One thing is, obviously, to have a more structured household. So I set up timetables, chore charts and diaries. Despite the efforts I was making, I was still struggling so I talked to my husband, and said "Honey, I can see your need for a more structured household routine, and I am trying, but I really struggle with being structured and keeping on track. Can you help me keep to my timetable?" Ask your husband for help. Our husbands aren't mind-readers and they are usually more than happy to help, if asked. Give them specifics, not a vague "I need your help," but particular ways you need assistance. Or you may have the opposite difficulty. Your husband thinks you are too structured and he wants you to "lighten up" and you worry that if you do, the whole family will slide into slothfulness, mess and anarchy. It may well do, for a while, as your husband adjusts to your faithful submission, but you can trust God that as you submit to your husband, you will reap the benefits of a stronger marriage.

If, as you discuss the way the house is run, you can't come to an agreement and your husband still wants it done his way, then submit and do it his way! I can almost see your hands being thrown up

in the air! Yes, submit to your husband. He has been given authority, by God, to be responsible for you and your family. He will be held accountable to the Lord for his decisions and actions and so will you! You are called to submit to your husband, as to the Lord. As you submit willingly to the Lord, so too, should you submit willingly to your husband.

Now ask yourself, "Is my way working?" "Is my home a place of rest, peace and harmony?" "Does my husband love me wholeheartedly?" "Do my children rise up and call me blessed and my husband also?"⁵ Look honestly at your home-life and at yourself. Are you a godly wife? God calls us to act in a godly way even when our husbands sin or behave badly toward us. If our husbands are selfish or yell at us, we are not to yell and scream back, or seek revenge, but we're to be quiet, gentle and kind. Martha Peace writes, "Many times a wife may fail to see clearly the importance of her submission because she is so focussed on what her husband is doing wrong. Instead she must learn to focus on her responsibility."⁶ We, as wives, are responsible for our actions, and reactions. We are to be godly in all situations. If your husband slouches

around on the couch, while you are doing the dinner dishes (again), you are to do the dishes cheerfully, or ... you could make a cup of tea for him, and yourself, and sit on the couch with him. (Maybe after having some cuddle time, he might offer to help with the dishes!)

If your husband wants you to have long hair or have a tidy house when he comes home, submit. If he asks you to stop attending a weekly meeting, submit in a gracious and godly manner. I used to belong to a community choir that met weekly. I loved it and it was my only outing, on my own, each week. Our choir had been invited to join with several other choirs to sing Messiah in a nearby (2 hours drive away) city. I was really looking forward to going, when my husband said I couldn't go. I was devastated. But... I was 8 months pregnant and he was concerned for my health and the well-being of the baby. I, rather tearfully, explained to our conductor (a godly, older woman) that my husband said I couldn't go and why. She graciously said I was to submit to my husband in this and that we can't do everything we want to do. There is a season for everything.

If you struggle with submission, (and



most of us do or have done), seek out a godly older woman. Ask for help and counsel. Get encouragement to be godly, even in the most trying and difficult of seasons. (As I look back, I can't say that missing singing the Messiah then was a huge loss, but I do so clearly remember the lesson learned and that I have a strong marriage which is built on this kind of building block!)

Let the Holy Spirit work in your life so that you are being a godly wife, living

in submission to your husband. Why? Because God designed our role as a married woman that way. Has doing it your way worked? Do you have peace and harmony in your home? God's way works! His way does bring these things into your home and marriage. God's way is beautiful in that we are reflecting the relationship the church has with Christ. It gives glory to God as we live our lives in the way that He has prescribed for us. Don't buy into the world's thinking on

this. A Christian's standard is the Bible. It is the truth and we are to stand on it, even if it is directly opposite to what the world promotes.

1 Eph 5:22

2 Eph 5:21

3 1 Peter 3:4

4 God's Good Design – Claire Smith: Matthaïs Media p127

5 Prov 31:28

6 The Excellent Wife – Martha Peace: Focus Publishing

World in focus

Roman Pontiff asks forgiveness from Waldesians for past persecution

A 22 June 2015 Reuters article by Philip Pullella titled "Pope Asks Pardon from Waldensian Protestants for Past Persecution" reports that Roman Pontiff Francis, as a part of his efforts to promote the unity of Christian churches with the Roman Catholic Church, has asked the Waldesians, a small Protestant denomination of around 30,000 members in Italy and Latin America, for their forgiveness for the persecution carried out against them by the Catholics, including a 15th century attempt to exterminate them. Additionally, in 1655, Roman Catholic forces under command of the Duke of Savoy murdered 1700 Waldesians.

The Waldesians were an early manifestation of the Protestant Reformation, and today are a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

+ Thomson Reuters

+ Chiesa Evangelica Valdese

+ The Vatican

+ World Communion of Reformed Churches

"Teaching Jesus is Son of God could become criminalised in UK"

Carrie Dedrick | Editor, *ChristianHeadlines.com* | Thursday, June 18, 2015

"A top theologian has warned that Christian teaching could become "criminalised" in the UK, under British Prime

Minister David Cameron's new anti-extremism orders. Rev. Mike Ovey, principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London, said that the policy, which is intended to defend democracy and tolerance, could be used against traditional Christian teaching."

Ovey, a former lawyer, said that teaching Jesus is the son of God and pro-life teaching could be some of the Christian ideas that are threatened under the "Extremism Disruption Orders."

"As a lawyer I think it is a disaster area and as a Christian believer and teacher I think it is a disaster area. There has got to be a better way to do it," he said.

He continued, "That is essentially a government saying trust us with your civil liberties. I would say, frankly, human experience tells us the last thing you ever want to do is trust a government with your civil liberties."

The Christian Post reports Cameron identifies as a Christian, and said this past Easter that Christianity is "the bedrock of a good society."

Evangelical Church Alliance statement on Supreme Court opinion on same-sex marriage

The Evangelical Church Alliance (ECA), one of America's oldest associations of independent Evangelical ministers, missionaries, and military and institutional chaplains, reaffirms the biblical, natural, and millennial-old nature of the definition of marriage as exclusively between one man and one woman.

The Supreme Court of the United States does not possess the authority, or the expertise, to speak to the nature of Holy Matrimony, which is exclusively within God's provenance. Jesus explicitly spoke to the divine origin and purpose of marriage when he said, "[A]t the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:4-6)

The ECA takes seriously the assurance of Associate Justice Kennedy and the four other justices when they write in today's opinion, "[I]t must be emphasised that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organisations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered."

Notwithstanding this most recent abrogation of divine and natural law, the ECA encourages its member clergy, churches, and organisations, as well as all Christians everywhere, to remain, "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." (I Corinthians 15:58)

At the same time, the ECA is committed to sharing the Gospel with all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or the configuration of their relationships or families, in keeping with the timeless declaration of Christ in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Finally, marriage will always be a loving gift from God to a man and a woman for the fulfillment of His will for humanity, whether or not it is recognised as such by the judicial branch of the United States Federal Government.

+ *Christian News Wire*

+ *Evangelical Church Alliance International*

Big win for traditional family at UN Human Rights Council

By Rebecca Oas, Ph.D | July 9, 2015

NEW YORK, July 10 (C-Fam) A monumental development for the pro-family movement came last week in Geneva when the Human Rights Council approved a resolution calling for countries to take concrete steps to protect the family, described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the "natural and fundamental group unit of society."

Nigeria rebukes UN High Commissioner for pushing LGBT as Human Rights'

by Wendy Wright

NEW YORK, July 10 (C-Fam) Nigeria publicly chastised the UN human rights office for trampling on universally-agreed rights as it seeks to impose same sex marriage and outlaw commonly-held views on homosexuality. The sharp rebuke accused the UN officials of infringing on the right to democracy, religious freedom, and cultural standards that strengthen families.

Are Nigeria's 'Middle Belt' Christians victims of ethnic cleansing?

By World Watch Monitor July 13, 2015

It has been a deadly July in Nigeria. More than 200 people have been killed since June 30 in attacks that have come almost daily in the country's northern and northeastern regions, stronghold of the militant Islamic sect Boko Haram.

Obscured by Boko Haram's headlines, violence also has raged farther south, where a lesser reported, years-long campaign has claimed thousands of Christian lives. Militants among the ethnic Fulani, a predominantly Muslim and

nomadic population of cattle herders, are suspected of killing dozens of Christians in the states of Plateau and Taraba in recent months. The two states form the eastern end of Nigeria's "Middle Belt" – the handful of states straddling the pre-colonial line dividing Nigeria's predominantly Muslim north from its Christian south.

The Middle Belt's most recent violence traces back to March, to a case of cattle rustling. According to Kunle Ajanakufsi, Plateau's director of state security services, about 500 head of cattle belonging to Fulani herders went missing, and suspicion fell upon a portion of the local Berom, an indigenous Christian population. Rev. Samuel Yakubu of the Christian Association of Nigeria said the tension escalated in April when the Fulanis took 60 Berom cows. Fifteen were returned, he said, but several unsatisfied Berom took more cattle from the Fulani herders. Shortly thereafter, Fulani raiding parties entered several Berom villages, killing at least 30 people, including a pastor of the Church of Christ in Nigeria.

Cattle rustling and disputes over land provide a pretext to the violence across the Middle Belt. Pressed from the north by the advancing Sahara, the Fulani, spread across West Africa and considered the largest nomadic ethnic group in the world, push ever-farther into lands owned by more stationary Christian farmers and ranchers, causing inevitable clashes.

Well before British colonial rule came to Nigeria, the Muslim sultans of the country's northern provinces maneuvered to spread the influence of Islam throughout the Middle Belt. But it was the rise of Boko Haram's overtly anti-Christian campaign in 2009 that rekindled religious motivations among the Fulani, this time to a deadly new ferocity, according to research published by *Open Doors International*, charity that provides aid to Christians who are pressured because of their belief.

Open Doors researcher Yonas Dembele has concluded that the pattern of Fulani violence in the region – their use of military-grade weapons to drive Christians off the land and to occupy it; the destruction of Christian homes and churches; and their call for the imposition of Islamic law, among other hallmarks – amounts to ethnic cleansing of the Middle Belt. The campaign, he argues, is animated by the same ambition that drives Boko Haram: To bring

Prolife facts

"There are many, many women sitting in churches who have had abortions, but feel it's absolutely the last place they can talk about it," says Jenny Baines, who has worked with women facing unplanned pregnancies and seeking post-abortion counselling for over 20 years in the United Kingdom. Now Baines is turning her attention to the churches, where abortion is often a 'silent issue' that goes undiscussed and 'undealt' with. In response to the need she sees in the churches, she has launched OPEN. OPEN has been set up to help support women in the churches who have had an abortion, but also to equip church leaders to deal with this sensitive issue and enable women and men to move forward in their relationship with God. Information about OPEN can be found on the UK Christian Action, Research and Education website, at: www.care.org.uk/church-leaders/open In NZ, Marina Young directs the Buttons Project and the Living in Colour post-abortion healing programme. She welcomes OPEN saying: "So many women try to suppress the grief, loss, anger and shame, which prevents them journeying towards healing and enjoying life to the fullness." For more information on pro-life issues, phone Voice for Life on (09)4430995 or visit www.voiceforlife.org.nz.

the non-Islamic world under Islamic rule.

That's a conclusion disputed by Nigeria's Catholic Bishops, who have said the religious dimension to the violence is a byproduct of underlying territorial disputes.

To support his conclusion, Dembele draws evidence from a March report by the Nigeria Conflict Security Analy-

sis Network. The report, commissioned by Open Doors, presents evidence indicating Christians have suffered the overwhelming majority of casualties – thousands dead; tens of thousands displaced; hundreds of homes and churches razed.

Drawing a line from the current conflict to Muslim dominance of the

Middle Belt during the colonial era, Dembele writes that “the nature of the conflict seems to follow the historical pattern where the Hausa-Fulani Muslim oligarchy has used colonial legacies, political policies and religious sentiments in order to conquer and dominate the Middle Belt region.”

Jewish boy's narrow escape from the Nazis

Written by Charles Gardner | Assist News
July 2015

Snatched from the jaws of the Nazis in the nick of time, Heini Fiege escaped to England to begin a new life.

It was a traumatic parting for Heini and his brother Arthur, aged seven and ten at the time, but their parents could see the writing on the wall and willingly gave up their boys for adoption to save them from the horrors of Auschwitz, where they were to perish within a few short years.

Heini and Arthur thus became beneficiaries in 1938 of the Kindertransport project of Sir Nicholas Winton, who died on Wednesday, July 1, 2015, aged 106. A young stockbroker at the time, he arranged the rescue of thousands of Jewish children from Czechoslovakia and other places under German occupation.

Despite the heartbreak, which affected him for much of his life, Heini and his brother found new hope as they grew up in Sheffield comforted by the love and devotion of a Chris-

tian couple, Les and Vera Cumpston, and their son John.

Shortly after their arrival in Sheffield, foster father Les became the butt of neighborhood jokes as he set about building an elaborate air-raid shelter in the garden of their home in the southern suburb of Handsworth.

But of course, like Noah building an ark on dry ground, he was thoroughly vindicated when the city was heavily blitzed by the Luftwaffe on the nights of 12th and 15th December 1940.

Les was under-manager of Tinsley Park Colliery at the time and later moved to Worksop following promotion to Inspector of Mines and Quarries for Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire.

Following the lead of his older brother, Heini anglicised his name to John Fieldsend, preferring the English equivalent of his second name Hans.

Not surprisingly perhaps in view of his parents' example, John also discovered a personal faith in Christ and, although he qualified as an engineer with practical experience of working on aircraft during his time in the RAF, he felt a strong call to preach the gospel full-time and became a successful Anglican vicar overseeing a thriving church in Bayston Hill, Shropshire.

Dwelling on his past was difficult to face at first, but in time he felt drawn to re-focus on his Jewish roots, referring to himself as a Messianic Jew – one who follows Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) as Messiah.

He later became involved in the leadership of the Church's Ministry among Jewish people (CMJ), a 206-year-old Anglican society dedicated to the spiritual re-birth of Israel.

The Jewish aspect of his identity had taken a leap forward when TV personality Esther Rantzen arranged an emotional 50th anniversary reunion

between Sir Nicholas Winton and some of those children he rescued as part of her very popular “That's Life!” program.

Sir Nicholas had kept forged copies of the children's identity documents (forged to speed up the process of officialdom for what he knew to be a dire emergency). And these were used to track down the likes of John, who had lost most of his relatives in the Holocaust.

In his recently published book, *A Wondering Jew* (Radec Press, £9), John recalls visits made to the Children's Memorial in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, which commemorates the one-and-a-half million children who died at the hands of the Nazis.

“As we listened to the names of the children being read out on an endlessly looping tape – which took several days to go round – I realised that had my journey from Czechoslovakia been delayed by only about five weeks, my name would have been on that tape! It was a very dramatic experience...”

John's ministry has taken him all over Britain and to many parts of the world, and on one occasion in South Africa, after sharing his story and speaking about Jewish and Gentile reconciliation through Jesus, he was approached by a man who “rather hesitantly confessed that he had spent the war years as a member of the Hitler Youth”.

“This was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that I had been challenged to practice what I had just preached!”

John and his wife Elizabeth celebrated their golden wedding in 2011.

Now 84, John is a regular speaker at the Holocaust Museum in Laxton, near Newark in Nottinghamshire.

www.mychristiandaily.com



John Fieldsend

Why the church should neither cave nor panic about the decision on gay marriage

Russell Moore

As I write this, the Supreme Court has handed down what will be the “Roe v. Wade” of marriage, redefining marriage in all 50 states. This is a sober moment, and I am a conscientious dissenter from this ruling. The Court now has disregarded thousands of years of definition of the most foundational unit of society, and the cultural changes here will be broad and deep. So how should the church respond?

First of all, the church should not panic. The Supreme Court can do many things, but the Supreme Court cannot get Jesus back in that tomb. Jesus of Nazareth is still alive. He is still calling the universe toward his kingdom.

Moreover, while this decision will, I

“We must stand with conviction and with kindness, with truth and with grace. We must hold to our views and love those who hate us for them.”



believe, ultimately hurt many people and families and civilization itself, the gospel doesn't need “family values” to flourish. In fact, the church often thrives when it is in sharp contrast to the cultures around it. That was the case in Ephesus and Philippi and Corinth and Rome, which held to marriage views out of step with the Scriptures.

The church will need in the years ahead to articulate what we believe about marriage; we cannot assume that people agree with us, or even understand us. Let's not simply talk about marriage in terms of values or culture or human flourishing. Let's talk about marriage the way Jesus and the apostles taught us to – as bound up with the gospel itself, a picture of the union of Christ and his church (Eph. 5:32).

As we do so, we must not just articulate our views of marriage, we must embody a gospel marriage culture. We have done a poor job of that in the past. Too many of our marriages have been ravaged by divorce.

Too often we've neglected church discipline in the cases of those who have unrepentantly destroyed their marriages. We must repent of our failings and picture to the world what marriage is meant to be, and keep the light lit to the old paths.

This gives the church an opportunity to do what Jesus called us to do with

our marriages in the first place: to serve as a light in a dark place. Permanent, stable marriages with families with both a mother and a father may well make us seem freakish in 21st-century culture.

We should not fear that. We believe stranger things than that. We believe a previously dead man is alive, and will show up in the Eastern skies on a horse. We believe that the gospel can forgive sinners like us and make us sons and daughters. Let's embrace the sort of freakishness that saves.

Let's also recognize that if we're right about marriage, and I believe we are, many people will be disappointed in getting what they want. Many of our neighbors believe that a redefined concept of marriage will simply expand the institution (and, let's be honest, many will want it to keep on expanding). This will not do so, because sexual complementarity is not ancillary to marriage. The church must prepare for the refugees from the sexual revolution.

We must prepare for those, like the sexually wayward Woman at the Well of Samaria, who will be thirsting for water of which they don't even know.

There are two sorts of churches that will not be able to reach the sexual revolution's refugees. A church that has given up on the truth of the Scriptures, including on marriage and sexuality, and has nothing to say to a fallen world. And a

“Let’s seek the kingdom. Let’s stand with the gospel. Let’s fear our God. But let’s not fear our mission field.”

church that screams with outrage at those who disagree will have nothing to say to those who are looking for a new birth.

We must stand with conviction and with kindness, with truth and with grace. We must hold to our views and love those who hate us for them. We must not only speak Christian truths; we must speak with a Christian accent. We must say what Jesus has revealed, and we must say those things the way Jesus does – with mercy and with an invitation to new life.

Some Christians will be tempted to anger, lashing out at the world around us with a narrative of decline. That temptation is wrong. God decided when we would be born, and when we would be born again. We have the Spirit and the gospel. To think that we deserve to live in different times is to tell God that

we deserve a better mission field than the one he has given us. Let’s joyfully march to Zion.

The witness to marriage will be, like the pro-life movement, a long-term strategy that is multi-pronged. This is no time for fear or outrage or politicizing. We see that we are strangers and exiles in American culture. We are on the wrong side of history, just like we started. We should have been all along.

Let’s seek the kingdom. Let’s stand with the gospel. Let’s fear our God. But let’s not fear our mission field.

Mr Russell Moore is president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

www.russellmoore.com

The Church in exile

Carl R. Trueman

The Christian church on earth is always, in a sense, in exile. Whatever the incidental identities of her members may be – whether of nationality, race, class, or gender – their ultimate identity is that they are in Christ and belong to him. Compared to the ephemeral categories that human cultures have created for distinguishing one from another, this foundation in Christ is absolute and final. As a result, the church never belongs to this world, but always looks to another.

Yet there are times in history when it is more dramatically obvious, and perhaps more painfully experienced, than at other times, that the church is in exile. In America, given the past cultural dominance of a form of civic Protestantism that is now vanishing rapidly, the sense of being an exile community is likely to be sharpened in the imminent future.

Same-sex marriage

At the heart of this unravelling lies the politics of sexual identity. While many Christians rightly see the advent of legalized abortion as a very significant step in the legal redefinition of what it

means to be a person, the coming of so-called same-sex marriage is set to have far more immediate impact upon the everyday lives of Christians.

On one level, we should note that abortion – the killing of innocents – is a more dramatic crime than two men marrying each other. The former involves evil inflicted on a victim. The second, wicked as it is, involves mutual consent and no necessary violation of an innocent third party. Thus, *Roe v. Wade* is without doubt a devastating blow to notions of legally protected personhood.

Yet the way in which the gay marriage debate is developing may well have a far greater impact upon the way we all live our lives than does the legalization of abortion. Most significantly, gay marriage has become the issue on which the First Amendment is now coming under incredible pressure.

First, we need to understand that the gay marriage issue is not simply about the legitimate bounds of sexual activity. Many Christians respond to accusations of singling homosexuals out for excommunication by pointing to the fact that we also object to sex between unmarried heterosexuals. That is a good argument, but it misses the full significance of the gay

issue. To object to heterosexuals having sex outside of marriage is to object to an illegitimate expression of a legitimate identity. To object to gay sex, or gay marriage, is to deny the legitimacy of an identity.

This is why parallels are so easily drawn by gay activists between their demands and those of the earlier Civil Rights movement. They see their struggle as one for a fundamental identity, not one for an incidental lifestyle choice. And this is why the church is about to feel the reality of her exile.

It is one thing to believe something that the world regards as nonsense. There are plenty of Christian doctrines that fall into that category. The doctrine of the Incarnation is an obvious one. The idea that the transcendent God, who created and sustains all things, should condescend to take human flesh and dwell in space and time as a particular man is foolishness to the world. That he should die on a cross for the crimes of others is morally offensive to the natural man. That he should be resurrected and will return again is nonsense to the unbeliever. Yet Christians can hold each of these beliefs and still be considered decent and polite members of civil society.

Attitudes to gay marriage are different. The way in which society has developed on this matter has made the traditional view not simply something that looks silly to the world, but something that looks positively evil. To many, opposition to homosexuality and gay marriage is not akin to belief in the resurrection; it is akin to belief in white supremacy – a moral stance that speaks of hatred and a basically antisocial, if not criminal, mind-set.

This is why the church is beginning to feel even now the reality of her exile status. As the public square becomes more and more intolerant of any dissent or deviation on this issue, ordinary church members are already beginning to feel the pressure. For example, a Christian nurse might well be able to object to assisting at abortions and still seem to be taking an ethically principled stand, but one who refuses to participate in a gender reassignment operation might well be stigmatized as promoting hate. That is the world in which we live. And while pastors and intellectual leaders are often those who speak out and thus seem most likely to be persecuted, the most immediate and extensive discomfort will be experienced by ordinary church members who are not protected from the secular world by pulpit or library.

At times such as this, it behooves the church to think very carefully about what discipleship should look like. Exile communities living within a wider alien, and even hostile, culture need means by which to preserve their identity and keep hope alive for an ultimate return to their homeland. If they are not self-conscious about this, then the values and patterns of the host culture will over time penetrate their community and lead to their assimilation. So how are we to maintain our identity?

Maintaining our identity

I would suggest that the answer, at least at a foundational level, is very simple: maintain the Word, the sacraments, and discipline – the three great marks of the Reformed church. If a strong sense of identity is what provides the foundation for the passionate activism of the LGBTQ lobby, then we should learn from that: we too need to instil a strong sense of identity in ourselves and in our churches in order to stand firm in the coming years. And there is no better way to do this than to focus on the three marks.

First, there is the Word. The weekly proclamation of the Word of God is

the regular declaration of the identity of God, of the identity of us as his people, and of the home to which we are destined. There is a reason why the early North American Pilgrims would hear regular sermons on providence. It was to remind them of their place in God's scheme. We too need to make sure that the preaching from our pulpits is faithful, focused on important truths, and supported by good catechetical and pedagogical practice.

We should also remember that preaching is not simply the transmission of information from one mind to another through the medium of speech. Preaching is the mediation of God's presence to his people. In the Word proclaimed, God presses his gospel upon our hearts by his Spirit. Luther put it dramatically when he declared that God, by his Word, kills us, resurrects us, and constitutes us once again as his risen people. We should not underestimate the power of the preached word to strengthen our identity and give us the power to stand firm. Society and the civil magistrate may have power over the body, but God has power over the soul.

Second, there are the sacraments. As human beings, we are more than just brains on sticks. We have bodies that also affect how we think and interact with others. And that is one reason why the Lord has provided us with more than his Word as a means of strengthening our identity. He has also given us the covenant signs of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Particularly the Lord's Supper is important in this regard. To share a meal with someone involves an intimacy that is not found in a mere conversation. To eat together, and to be invited to eat, as it were, with the Lord himself, is to enjoy a special privilege and indeed to find our identity as Christians strengthened and reinforced. Again, society and the civil magistrate may have power over the body, but God can use the simple elements of bread and wine, attached to his Word, to seal the gospel on our hearts and strengthen our hands for the spiritual fight, wherever it may be conducted.

Third, there is discipline. When one looks at the gay lobby, one might be forgiven for wondering how on earth it has come to exert such power over everyone's lives. The answer is complicated, but at its heart is this: despite being only a tiny minority, it has been highly disciplined and organized. The church has sadly not been so.

I should qualify that statement. I certainly do not mean that the church should have organized itself politically in order to use worldly avenues of power and influence to impose her will. What I do mean is that discipline is necessary to cultivate a strong sense of identity. Indeed, such a sense of identity is vital to the survival and flourishing of exile communities. Part of that comes through the Word, part through the sacraments, and a vital part also through discipline. A community is defined by the beliefs and behaviours it finds tolerable and those it finds intolerable.

This in turn demands structure. Presbyterianism is well placed in this matter, given that it has a clearly laid out system of governance. Of course, systems are one thing; practical implementation is quite another. For our exile community to survive as distinctive, those in leadership must lead, make the tough decisions, and implement unpopular policies when the Word of God demands it. Leadership in a time of obvious exile is likely far more taxing than at any other point.

To these three points one can add a fourth: the cultivation of the communal language of exile in song. Whatever ways exile populations find to survive and at times even thrive in an alien host culture, their identity as exiles will be reinforced by the common language they share. For Christians, this is above all the language that we sing. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs really do set the expectations of many believers and shape our theology in profound ways.

Singing is a powerful and universal human phenomenon. When one thinks of the blues as they developed in the American South, or of the Scottish Gaelic songs that speak of lament and sorrow for lost loved ones, we are reminded of how such things set before us a vision of loss and of longing. In a time such as the present, surely it is the moment for us all to be looking to the Psalter for more of our corporate worship. The Psalms present life as it really is, blessed by God's presence here and now, but looking forward to that time when he will call us all home.

Further, the Psalms often capture an important note: if we are set for a time of open exile even within our own worldly nation, we should remember that the exile of the people of God in Scripture was always in part a judgment upon them. As we look forward to the great future triumph that will be the marriage

feast of the Lamb, we should not forget that our current difficulties are the result of human sin and, indeed, of our own sin. We should lament not simply our exile, but also the sin that has caused it. Again, the Psalms are an ideal medium for this.

No doubt there are those reading this article who find my own position to be one of cultural surrender. Should we not be taking to the streets and the ballot boxes in order to take back what is ours? It might well be that thoughtful political

engagement by individual Christians will slow the tide of moral collapse in the civic sphere, or perhaps even reverse it. Our faith should indeed shape how we think and behave in the civic sphere. But I would suggest that whatever one's eschatology or understanding of the relationship between church and state may be, the practical reality is that we must prepare at least in the short term for the social marginalization of the church and a form of cultural exile. We may disagree on long-term public strategy,

but we should surely all agree on the basic practical foundations of Christian identity: Word, sacrament, discipline, and worship. These and these alone will allow us to face whatever the future may hold with resolute confidence.

The author is pastor of Cornerstone OPC in Ambler, Pa., and a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Reproduced from New Horizons, June 2015

Letter to Teens unboxing their first Smartphone



by **Tim Challies**

You just got your first smartphone! This is a major milestone in your life. That phone you are about to take out of the box is one of the most amazing devices ever created, and it is going to be your constant companion for the next couple of years. It is an incredible piece of technology that can be used in many different ways.

It can be used to do so many good things, but if you are not wary, it can also be used to do an awful lot of bad things. So before you power it on for

the first time, I think it would be wise to invest just a few minutes in thinking and planning.

God has a purpose for your phone

Technology is a gift from God. When we read the Bible, we find that at the beginning of time, God created two people, naked and alone in a little garden, and gave them a worldwide task: to spread out across this world and exercise dominion over it. In order to do that, they would need to invent technologies.

If they were going to plant and harvest crops to feed their family, they would

“The way you use your technology reveals your heart.”

first need to invent a plow. If they were going to spread out across the earth to settle countries and build cities, they would need to invent bridges and boats. In that way, technology is good. Technology is a means through which we can carry out the very purpose for which God created us.

Then, when Jesus was on this earth, he gave his people a new job description that is meant to go along with the first. He told us to take the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, into all the world. And again, one of the ways we do so is through inventing and using technologies. No wonder, then, that Christians are always paying attention when a new technology shakes the world. Every technology is an opportunity.

When you understand the orders God has given you, you see that God has great purposes in mind for your technologies,

“Where your heart is, there your technology will be also.”

and even your smartphone. That phone can be used to organize your life better so you can accomplish more of the things that matter most; it can be used to communicate with others so you can speak good news into their lives; it can be used to read the Bible and list your prayers; it can be used in hundreds of ways that serve the purposes God has given you. Thank God for your smartphone!

Satan has a purpose for your phone

Unfortunately, there is far more to the story. No sooner did God create man and give him this worldwide mission than man fell into sin. Adam and Eve determined they would disobey God, and when they did that, they brought sin into this world. Technology did not escape unscathed. It, too, exists in this fallen world. This reality means that every technology, including your new phone, can be used to do things that are evil. God has a purpose for your phone, but so does Satan.

Because this is a world caught up in a great cosmic battle between good and evil, every new technology enters into the fight. Every technology brings some benefits and some risks. For every good thing your phone can do, there are other evil things it can do.

You will have the choice before you every day and every moment – will you use it for good or for evil? Will you use it to carry out the tasks God has given you, or will you use it to hinder those tasks? Will you use your phone to serve God or to serve Satan? Thank God for your smartphone, but plead with him for wisdom to use it well.

Your heart has a purpose for your phone

What do you love more than you love God? In those times when you are not finding your joy and satisfaction in God, and in those times when sin seems so tempting, what is it that promises joy? What promises satisfaction? What is that thing you need so

badly that you will even sin to get it?

For some people, it is money, and they are convinced that, unless they have lots of money, they can never be truly satisfied. They will even steal to get it. For some people, it is power, and they believe that the way to happiness is to accumulate power over others. They will trample or bully people to get it.

Whatever that thing is for you, the Bible calls it an idol. An idol is anything you raise up in place of God – something that, at least for a moment, takes first place in your heart. Whatever your idol is will prove a special kind of temptation for you when you use your phone.

If you idolize sexual pleasure, you will probably be tempted to use your phone to look at pornography. Did you know that more than half of all pornography is now viewed on mobile devices like yours? This means that many people like you bought a smartphone so they could text with their friends and take pictures of their vacation, but somehow they ended up using it to look at pornography. They used this great, God-given technology to do harm instead of good.

If you idolize popularity, if it is being admired and having lots of followers that makes you feel good about yourself, then you will be tempted to use your phone to pursue that idol. You may use the camera to take inappropriate photographs of yourself in Instagram, or you may use the Facebook app to say harsh

words about other people. That phone that can be used to do so much good and to bring so much encouragement will now be used to cause harm.

There are not many people who buy a phone intending to use it to harm others or to look at pornography. But where your heart is, there your technology will be also. The way you use your technology reveals your heart. It shows whether your heart is oriented toward God and toward finding true joy and satisfaction in him, or whether you are attempting to find counterfeit joy and satisfaction in the things he forbids. At any moment, your heart has a purpose for your phone. Yes, thank God for your smartphone, plead with him for wisdom to use it well, and guard your heart.

Use it to the glory of God

And now it is time to take that phone out of the box and to turn it on for the first time. As you hold it in your hand, why don't you take a moment to pray? Ask God to help you to use that phone well. Commit before him right now that, to the best of your abilities, you will only ever use it to serve his purposes. Recruit a believing friend or two to be your accountability and check in regularly.

Then go and glorify him with and through it.

www.challies.com
June, 2015

Focus on home

Auckland Presbytery Short Report – June

The Auckland Presbytery met at its usual venue (Pukekohe) on Friday, 26th June 2015. Besides the delegates from the churches, the meeting welcomed br Ryan Sparks (vicar, Bucklands Beach), Albert Couperus (vicar, Hamilton) and Joshua Flinn (intern, North Shore). The meeting expressed thanks to the Lord for the presence of these young men and also for a number of other potential candidates for ministry in our churches.

The convening church was Hukanui. Br John Haverland was chairman, br

Peter Moelker vice-chairman and in the absence of our Stated Clerk Pieter van der Wel (illness), br Michael Willemse was acting clerk.

Plans and arrangements for the annual men's study day (July 18th) were confirmed by the Hamilton organisers. Three topics: the Christian man at home, in the church and at work will be presented.

Bucklands Beach and Hamilton were asked to respond to the questions listed in Article 47 of the Church Order. Both sessions responded positively. Bucklands Beach expressed special thanks for the arrival of their new vicar, br Ryan Sparks. The session also explained the procedures followed in arranging

this vicariate and br Sparks described how and why he came to serve them. Hamilton noted the continuing need for more elders. More elders' meetings are proving beneficial. Various outreach activities (Holiday Bible Club, a proposed joint use of 'Evangelism Explosion' with Hukanui) were mentioned. Br Michael Willemse has received and declined two calls in the last year. Br Albert Couperus and family, after completing studies at MARS (Chicago) started his 12 month

vicariate on June 22, 2015.

The Avondale session presented a number of songs for approval in worship services. Five were approved: *Oh, How Good it is* (Getty/Townend 2012), *Holy Spirit, Living Breath* (Getty/Townend, 2006). Two songs composed by Michelle Lodder: *Consider the Lilies, Your Holy Name*. Also, *You are My All in All* (Jerrigan, 1991)

Sessions were urged to make sure this year's church visitations are made

on time. Reports were also received from the National Diaconate Committee, Overseas Mission Board, Presbytery Youth Liaison (which is looking for a replacement for br John Kaijser) as well as the Synodical Examiners.

Advice was sought in closed session from three churches on pastoral matters.

The meeting was concluded at 11.17pm. Next meeting: November 13th, 2015 (DV)

Dirk van Garderen (reporter)

Ministers and Wives Conference, 2015

On May 25th the ministers and wives of the RCNZ converged on the comfortable grounds of Silverstream Retreat Centre. We were all in high expectation and hopes of being refreshed and renewed in our callings as we seek to serve the Lord and his people in our respective churches. We were not disappointed!

Each of us came from different stages in our ministries; some having served many years in multiple churches, while others were merely at the beginning of their life of ministry in the RCNZ. Despite this we all had in common our love for the Lord, his Word and church. So we arrived to be built up in our common faith and refreshed for further ministry.

So it was no surprise that, as the conference attendees started to arrive, the warm sense of comradeship and commonality was evident. This warmth and love for one another was of great encouragement to us all.

We thank many of you who prayed earnestly that this conference would be a blessing to us and that what was learnt would be passed on to the churches. God was good in answering the former and we trust the latter will pervade our ministries as we continue in our callings to serve you.

Well, what do the ministers and Wives do at these conferences? A good ques-

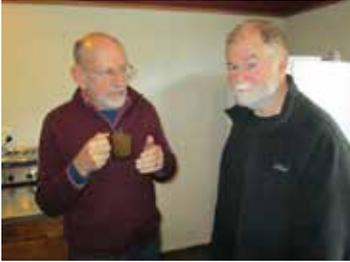
tion! Let me give you a broad run-down of our activities.

We were initially lead by the Waldrons in 'ice-breakers'. Ice-breakers are meant to break the cold formalities of meeting each other and utterly embarrass as many as possible. There were a few new faces at the conference (check out the photo) so this was a wonderful opportunity to get to know them a

little better. Just so you can enjoy some tid-bits here are a couple of interesting facts (in the interests of saving face, we will keep this totally anonymous): One of the ladies, before she was married, had a wedding proposal from a candidate for the Roman Catholic priesthood; another met David Bowie in a restaurant; and it turns out some husbands are not great at remembering wedding an-



Mr Richard Kuiken and his wife Margaret.



niversaries (surprise, surprise!). This was an important time to be updated on some useless, but hilarious, information.

From Tuesday to Friday our morning sessions were spent in hearing God's Word applied in the speaking of Rev. Rich Kuiken. Rev. Kuiken and his wife Margaret were the keynote speakers at the conference. Rev. Kuiken hails from the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church (URCNA) in New Jersey, USA. We were richly blessed by these talks as well as his pastoral heart as he ministered to us. Amongst the topics covered were: 'A strategy For Success Over Stress', 'Deliverance From Despair', 'How to Triumph Over the Tyranny of the Urgent.' Our wives had a couple of separate sessions alone with Margaret, covering topics that were helpful to their particular calling alongside their husbands. These were blessed times of refreshment in the Word and blessed conversation as discussions ensued.

The four afternoons were largely left to the participants to fill in for themselves. A lot of this time was spent in personal conversations amongst attendees (not that pastors are apt to lengthy conversations!), as well as exploring the area around Wellington. One afternoon was taken up in a visit to Wright's Hill, a WWII defence installation in Wellington. A couple of our pastors enjoyed a round of golf vying for the coveted "Pastors Masters" trophy. We are pleased to report that Andre Holtslag convincingly earned that trophy which no doubt sits in its rightful place on the mantel piece in the Holtslag's home.

Of course there are always two of our pastors who, whenever they are together, like to spend a fair proportion of it fishing hoping of a 'bite'. We were all happy to see Paul Archbald and Dirk van Garderen return with some fish which were subsequently cooked and enjoyed by all.

The evenings were spent in various ways. Bruce and Lois Hoyt presented some reflections on their fruitful ministry amongst our churches. Another evening was spent hearing Renee Joubert from Euthenasia Free NZ speak about her organization and their work to tackle euthanasia in New Zealand. One evening spent discussing relationships with churches abroad (yes, only one evening!), while our final evening, Friday, was spent enjoying fellowship with 'wine and cheese.'

All great conferences must come to an end. We thank the Lord for a blessed time together building the bonds of fellowship and love. We thank God that all of you in the churches have allowed us this time together every three years. It is was a rich blessing to have this conference to build us up, to be 'ministered to,' so that refreshed and reinvigorated we were able to go back to our churches to serve the Lord and you, his people.

May God add his blessing on this conference for many years to come.

Reporter: Erik Stolte



