

# Clarion

## In Memoriam: *Professor Jakob Geertsema*

(June 24, 1935 - March 31, 2020)



# Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,  
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized  
in the Reformed confessions, Clarion  
adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed  
Loving in manner  
Attuned to current issues  
Readable and Reliable  
In Submission to Scripture  
Open to constructive criticism  
Nurturing Christian living

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## ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

**CLARION** Premier Printing Ltd. One Beghin Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: 204-663-9000 | Fax: 204-663-9202

**Subscriptions** [subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca](mailto:subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca)  
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	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$69.00	\$102.00
International	\$98.00	\$171.00

\*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra. GST/HST no. 890967359RT

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**Published biweekly** by Premier Printing Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

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## What's Inside

Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer begins our issue with his lead article, "Salvation Issues?" It may be a phrase readers are familiar with, and Rev. Holtvliuwer takes a closer look at using it.

In this issue we are pleased to print an article by Donald Macleod (of the Free Church of Scotland) regarding the coronavirus. We also have the second half of Dr. Gerhard Visscher's article, "Living in the Light of Grace: Paul, Grace, and Conflict."

Issue 9 remembers Prof. Jakob Geertsema, a beloved minister and professor of our churches who was called to glory on March 31, 2020.

In addition, there is a report from Carman East CanRC welcoming the Van Dam family, a Treasures, New & Old meditation, a canticle, and mission news.

*Laura Veenendaal*

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# Salvation Issues

Have you ever been involved in a disagreement over something the Bible teaches when suddenly someone exclaims, “But that’s not a salvation issue!” And that’s where the conversation stops short. Someone will bring up, say, theistic evolution, and after a few rounds of discussion about whether its scriptural or not one person will say, “Well, anyway, it’s not really a salvation issue, right?” In other words, you don’t need to worry about it. The same is done at times when believer’s baptism comes up or women serving as office bearers or how to discern the true church from sects. The slogan is a channel changer: *next issue please!*

**T**he motive behind speaking of salvation issues may well be laudable. The person may want to concentrate on what unites Christians and stay away from controversial topics. Or the speaker may be laser-focussed only on matters believed to be of eternal consequence, on the saving of souls. Surely it is good to desire unity (Ps 133)! And absolutely God commands the church to spread the gospel so that his elect might be gathered in (Matt 28:19-20). But there is more to what God commands of us in this life, isn’t there? Doesn’t the Lord command us to carefully discern truth from error (Rom 12:2), false teacher from true (Matt 7:15-23), to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), and stay grounded in the truth of his Word (Prov 23:23; Eph 6:10-18; Jude 3)? Aren’t we called to be united in the *truth* of God’s Word and be obedient to *all* the Lord’s commands (John 17:17-21; Matt 28:20)?

With that in mind, I’d like us to examine this catch phrase and ask: does God instruct us to divide his teachings into “salvation

issues” and “non-salvation issues”? Is it biblical to declare something taught in Scripture to be “not a salvation issue” and therefore not worthy of further discussion? As Christians we all agree that the Bible is our guide for faith and living. It’s our litmus test. So, where in Scripture is this concept put forward that we are only to push through challenging points of biblical doctrine to the point of clarity and conviction *if those issues are salvation issues*? I’ve looked high and low and can find no such instruction or example. From Moses to Jesus to the Apostles, I see no hint of any of the Lord’s servants indicating that something they taught is not worth discussing and understanding, believing and practicing because, at the end of the day, it doesn’t concern anyone’s salvation.

## What is a salvation issue?

This naturally leads to the further question: what precisely is “a salvation issue”? For starters, that phrase is not found

anywhere in Scripture. What people seem to mean by it is to distinguish between those biblical teachings which *must* be believed for a person to be saved from everlasting damnation and those teachings which do not. Certain things that God reveals in Scripture must be believed for salvation, but other things do not. Teachings that fall into the latter category, then, however beneficial they might be, become essentially *optional* for the Christian. The reasoning goes like this: whether you are convinced of six-day creation or not has no effect on your salvation. The same is true for infant baptism, women in office, the true church, and a host of other biblical teachings. So, in the end, it matters very little what you believe on these points. You'll still end up in heaven. They are simply not salvation issues.

So, does the Bible distinguish between salvation issues and non-salvation issues? Between optional and non-optional beliefs and practices? The latter question is easier to answer: I can find nowhere in Scripture that any of its teachings are optional. And that makes sense when you consider that the Bible is not a human production but a divine one. It is *almighty God* who is our Teacher all throughout Scripture: whatever he instructs us to believe and do, we are *bound to obey*. He does not allow us to opt out based on what we think is beneficial or necessary or not.

This is what so offended the LORD about Saul's actions in taking plunder from the Amalekites which he was commanded not to take. Though Saul thought the plunder would yield many more sacrifices to the LORD (and thus be pleasing to him), the LORD's response is telling: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22). The Bible is God's book, his Word to us, and so when he teaches (as he certainly does) that he created the world in six days, that children are included in his covenant and ought to be baptized, that women are not permitted to teach or exercise authority over men in the church, and that the true church needs to be and can be clearly distinguished from all manner of sects (groups) which claim to be church, then his people must accept, believe, and (where action is involved) obey all of them.

## Distinctions ≠ optional

But are all points of the Bible's teaching of the same weight? Do they all pertain to our salvation? Must everything be believed in order to be saved? Here the answer needs to be more nuanced. Scripture does teach us a distinction in terms of more or less weighty matters in God's law. From God's answer to Saul we can see that to obey is better than sacrifice—and yet that didn't mean sacrifice became optional! Distinctions in terms of levels of offense can also be seen in the different punishments commanded for different transgressions. The sin of the rape of an unmarried girl called for a financial penalty but

the sin of homosexual activity called for death (Deut 22:27-29; Lev 20:13). Also, the latter sin is called an "abomination," as is idolatry (Lev 18:22; Deut 7:25), but that description is never applied to rape or adultery. Does that mean that rape and adultery were more tolerable to God than homosexuality or idolatry? Of course not! To make distinctions in terms of the repugnance of a sin or what is more important to the LORD does not make the

The question of so-called salvation issues puts mankind in the centre

so-called lesser sins of no matter to God or the so-called lesser commandments optional for the people.

The Lord calls for obedience to *all* of his commandments and holds his people to account for *every* offense. The Lord Jesus taught this clearly when he rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, *without neglecting the others*" (Matt 23:23). He taught something similar in the Sermon on the Mount, "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19). Perhaps to the surprise of some, Christ also emphasized total obedience for Christians in the Great Commission. The Lord's concern for the salvation of souls did not come at the expense of any of God's commands: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to *obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:19-20 NIV).



## Trinity and resurrection

So, are there no “salvation issues” at all then? Don’t we confess in the Athanasian Creed that “whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally”? That creed goes on to specify a belief in the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, the two natures of Christ, as well as the suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, session, and return of Christ in judgment. And what about the fact that the apostle Paul points out that if anyone denies that Jesus was raised from the dead, his faith is in vain and he is still in his sins (1 Cor 15:12-19). Aren’t these, then, the “salvation issues” that are to be distinguished from non-salvation issues? Isn’t it true that outside of these limited number of truths the other doctrines may have good value but are not strictly required in order to be saved?

And yet that’s where the reasoning goes too far. The logic breaks down. It is true that we must believe in Christ’s resurrection to be saved. And in the Trinity. And in the other points itemized in the Athanasian Creed. Yet, neither the Bible nor the church’s confessions reason from what is necessary to believe to *what is unnecessary* to believe. There is no church creed or confession which lists the teachings that are optional for Christians because none of God’s teachings are ever optional! God is no minimalist! Nor does he waste words or commands. When he reveals his will, he expects total submission and complete obedience. He doesn’t ever say in the Bible: *Okay, you must believe these things but if salvation or unity is on the line, you can ignore the rest*. On the contrary, everything the Lord reveals is worthy of and thus demands our attention, our acceptance, and (with respect to all his commands) our obedience! And if we fail in any point, God will be our Judge and determine what happens to us. How do we even know how God will judge a believer’s neglect, ignorance, or disobedience of any of his teachings? That’s up to the Lord, isn’t it?


## God in the centre

I’m convinced that the very root premise behind claiming “that’s not a salvation issue” is unbiblical and needs to be abandoned, along with the slogan. The assumption is that our primary concern in every point of debate is: *will this lead to a person’s salvation or not?* That overriding concern forces a person to look at all teaching, belief, and lifestyle as if the main concern is whether a person is going to be saved or not. But in Scripture,

the main concern is always: *will God’s name be glorified or not?* The question of so-called salvation issues puts mankind in the centre, but the Bible only ever puts God in the centre. According to Scripture, the most important thing in the world is not whether this person or that person gets saved, but whether the Triune God is glorified in all things. “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Ps 115:1; see Rev 15:3-4)! As Jesus taught us, the very first petition we are to make of our heavenly Father is, “Hallowed be *your* name.”

Does having God’s glory as top priority suggest that the salvation of people is of little concern to God and thus of little interest to us? Of course not! God himself tells us in the Bible that he is greatly concerned for the salvation of his elect – that is why he sent his only-begotten Son to die on the cross. That is why Good Friday and Easter Sunday are such precious days to believers. That is why the church is charged to preach the gospel to all nations so that the countless elect from around the world may be brought into salvation. And yet, the goal of their salvation itself is the honour and glory of God! Saving people is not an end itself but is a means to exalt Father, Son, and Spirit who have given everything that sinners like us might have eternal life with God! Peter speaks of this highest goal, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him* who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Trying to sort out which doctrines must be believed and which ones can be safely discarded as secondary and unnecessary for man’s salvation is to take the focus off the Lord and place it on people. That’s backwards. It’s also quite risky and offensive. How do we know which doctrines are secondary? Where does God spell out for us which doctrines are secondary and thus dispensable? If we teach people not to be concerned about certain doctrines of God’s Word because we think they don’t really matter in the final analysis, don’t we risk insulting the Lord? And if we make our own divisions in this regard, are we not placing ourselves in the Judge’s shoes and taking on a task we have no business taking on?

As Christians, we should be passionate about following Christ in *all* things, passionate to believe *every* word of God and obey *every* instruction with a heart filled with love and gratitude, and to teach others to do the same. Isn’t this his clear command to us and won’t this be sure to bring honour to the Lord? 

# How the Devil Tempts You

**"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made." (Genesis 3:1)**

**H**ave you ever been deeply disappointed in someone whom you held in high regard and who did something unthinkable? You never thought that this person would do such a thing. He or she got caught in some secret sin and you find out that this person lived in that sin for a long time. How is it possible?

Once you realize how cunning the devil is, and how he deceives us, you will understand that this can happen to anybody. We are all prone to sin and to live in that sin (1 Cor 10:13). After all, it happened to Adam and Eve, the most perfect couple that ever lived.

When the devil approached Eve, she did not yet have poisoned blood running through her veins as you and I, who were born and conceived in sin, do. There was nothing in creation that troubled her. She had the perfect start in life. There was nothing lacking in her life and nothing to spoil her happiness. She didn't know what it is to be lonely, or to be full of despair, or to experience rejection or abuse or famine or disease or hunger. She had everything going for her.

Yet she was tempted. How? Well, the devil uses one of God's delightful creatures, the serpent. As he approaches Eve, he does not warn her of any danger, rattling with his tail like a rattlesnake, or hissing like a coiled snake ready to strike. No, he slides into her life like a trusted companion. He comes, as it says in 2 Corinthians 11:14, like an angel of light.

Despite the many delicious foods available in the garden, he has her thinking about the one forbidden fruit. She doesn't need it. There is no logical reason for her to desire anything else. Until the devil mentioned the forbidden fruit, she had barely given it any thought.

"Innocently" he asks her a question. All he wants to do is to have a theological discussion with her: "Did God actually say...? Why would God deny you the freedom to enjoy all the fruit in the garden? ... God has a hidden agenda and does not want you to reach your full potential. He wants to stifle you."

Isn't that how the devil still works today? He wants us to think about those things we desire the most for our own gratification, and to be ungrateful about the many good things we do have. He sows dissatisfaction. And he wants us to reinterpret God's Word to suit our personal likes and dislikes.

We regularly fall for his tricks. If we are not watchful and do not lead repentant lives, he will have us in his grip more and more. We will never be satisfied. We will become obsessed with what is forbidden. "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:15).

The devil also tried to tempt Jesus Christ to sin. He quoted God's own words and again twisted its meaning and intent. Jesus withstood the temptation. He was wise to the devil. He rebuked the devil by correctly quoting God's Word back to him. He knew exactly what the will of the Father was and acted in accordance. Thanks be to God that we have a Saviour who was obedient and defeated the devil on our behalf.

Yet, we are still prone to fall into the same sins over and over, aren't we? And so, we need Jesus to give us wisdom and to forgive us and to strengthen us in our fight against sin and the devil. Daily we need to humble ourselves and repent from our sins and give glory to God. **C**

## For further study

1. How does the devil disguise himself as he enters our lives? Is his presence immediately apparent?
2. What are the kinds of things he wants us to concentrate on as he lures us away from God?
3. How did Jesus defeat him?



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# In Memoriam:

## *Professor Jakob Geertsema*

(June 24, 1935 - March 31, 2020)



During the evening of March 31, 2020, the Lord called to himself his faithful servant Professor Jakob Geertsema at the age of 84. His health had been in a slow decline over the past number of years and, in a sense, one could see the end coming. And then the time came. The Lord indicated that his task had now ended, and he could enter into the perfect joy of his Lord and Saviour. His dear wife Anneke had already been called to glory in 2011.

### The minister of the Word

Our brother and colleague has meant much for the churches which he served with great dedication. His ministry began in The Netherlands, where he first served churches in Kantens (1963-67) and Opende-Surhuisterveen (1967-71). In the spring of 1971, he made the big move to Canada on accepting a call from the church at Carman (now Carman East). It was in the fall of that year that I was ordained into the ministry of the Word in Neerlandia, Alberta. It was with great pleasure that I worked with Rev. Geertsema in what was then Classis Alberta-Manitoba. In 1976, Chatham called him, and the family moved there in the fall. The last congregation he served was at Surrey, B.C., where he succeeded me as minister in the fall of 1981.

Our brother Geertsema had a sterling reputation as a patient, compassionate, and wise servant of the Lord who faithfully brought the gospel to the congregation. He was also one who loved to dig deeper into the Word of God to extract as much of the riches of the gospel as possible (cf. Matt 13:52). This characteristic was a factor in a series of events that led to his being inaugurated as Professor of New Testament in 1986, following in the footsteps of Prof. L. Selles.

### The professor

Professor Geertsema loved his task of teaching students in preparation for the holy ministry of the Word. It was his pleasure and joy to have the opportunity to mine the riches of the Word. Coupled with his teaching load at the seminary, he also

pursued graduate studies in New Testament at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. All of this was quite a workload, but his God-given gifts of tenacity and perseverance meant that he was able to complete the course of study. He graduated in 1991 with the degree of Master of Theology. As part of the requirements, he had done a special study on "Jesus Blessing the Little Children."

In all his work for the seminary, he never lost sight of the fact that he was there to serve the churches. And so alongside his professorial work, he continued writing articles on a wide variety of topics for *Clarion*. He had started contributing to the magazine in 1974, served as editor from 1983 to 1997, and kept up writing edifying articles regularly for it until his retirement from the seminary in 2001.


### The legacy

If one may choose a single element of the legacy he has left us, it must surely be the example he set in his unquestioning humble submission to the Word of God. How he sought to inculcate a sense of awe for the divine Word and the obedience we owe to our Maker to all those he served whether in the churches or at the seminary. His respect for the Scriptures was noticeable in the manner in which he approached and explained the text and submitted to God's will for his life, also when that was difficult and challenging.

One of his favourite books of Scripture was Hebrews and its continuing emphasis on the fulfillment of God's promises in the coming of the promised Messiah. He was in awe of the fact that Christ learned righteousness through suffering and so saves us through his hard-earned perfection (Heb 5:8-9). What a Saviour! A related highlight for him was Hebrews 12, with its encouragement not to grow weary but to remember that in tough times Father in heaven may be disciplining you as sons. And we have every reason to be of good courage. After all, we have not come to Mount Sinai with its no-trespassing sign or the temple with its forbidden Most Holy Place, but God now

welcomes us into his presence through the blood of Christ. We "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new

covenant" (Heb 12:22-24). In faith we can go to the very threshold of heaven. We have access to the Father in prayer.

Our dear brother has now crossed that threshold and is in heaven to join "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" and to be with his Saviour. May that knowledge continue to comfort and encourage the family and us all. 

Cornelis Van Dam

FROM THE  
PUBLISHER

# Remembering Rev. Geertsema

With gratitude to our Father, despite the sadness in our hearts, we remember the life and service of Rev. J. Geertsema as pastor and professor for our churches.


Our connection with Rev. Geertsema dates back to his ministry in the church at Carman, Manitoba, which he took up in April 1971. During his time there, he also helped the Winnipeg congregation, after the passing away of her minister, Rev. Stel. It was also during this time that he got to know my father, Bill Gortemaker, when he officiated at my parents' wedding. This acquaintance developed into collaboration in *Clarion* and a lifelong friendship.

As early as 1974, Rev. Geertsema was writing for *Clarion*. In our September 4, 1976 issue, we find the following note: "We are happy that we can tell you that both the Rev J. Geertsema and the Rev. Cl. Stam have declared themselves willing to become co-editors. The former has already contributed regularly for a considerable time...."

He would go on to serve for twenty-four years on our Editorial Committee, more than half of that as the Editor-in-Chief. In the July 7, 2000 issue, we read: "Professor J. Geertsema has been a long-time, active team member of *Clarion*, first as co-editor, then as chief editor, and again as co-editor. Indeed, he has spent countless hours providing articles for our magazine. In addition, he always was a willing listener and dispenser of advice. His convivial approach to

working for the benefit of the churches will be remembered for a long time to come. As he retreats from the position on the editorial team we thank him heartily for his input into the affairs of *Clarion*."

*Clarion* meetings took my father - and later, me too - to Hamilton annually. My father would often stay at the Geertsema home during these trips, which coincided with the Seminary convocation evening. It was a common occurrence for Prof. Geertsema and my father to be among the last to leave. But the evening was not over. Regardless of where we were staying, we would often first end up back at the Geertsema's. Whether over a glass of juice or beer, the conversation would carry on into the early hours of the morning, with Prof. Geertsema, in true "night owl" fashion, showing few signs of fatigue.

We remember our brother for his genuineness and humility. His lack of pretention allowed him to engage easily with people on a deep level. He loved the Lord and his church, and we praise God for our brother's love and service. Our heartfelt condolences to his grieving family. May our risen Lord, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," bring comfort and assurance of his victory over the grave. 

William Gortemaker



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# The Coronavirus: Can Any Words Help?

**T**he coronavirus had one huge advantage: the element of surprise. It gave no advance warning, no early danger-signs, not even a gradual evolution. One mutation, and suddenly it was there, invisible and unstoppable. Neither oceans, mountains, armed border-guards, or national lockdowns could stop it. It took possession of the air we breathe and got its victims to carry it.

My first thought was that this thing was too big to say anything about it. It wasn't a time for clichés, and reassuring words were hard to come by. Despite this, however, much was already being said, some of it of a pseudo-theological kind.

## Over-hyped?

Some said the crisis was being over-hyped, and nothing like as bad as politicians and the press were saying. Well, that was true. It wasn't as bad: it was worse. The world had known many epidemics in the past: plagues which affected whole cities and whole nations and, in the case of the Bubonic Plague, a whole continent; and as recently as 1918-19 a virulent form of influenza had led to the deaths of 50 million people in Europe and America. But the one now upon us was a pandemic, affecting the whole world from pole to pole and from east to west. Besides,

these epidemics had taken place in what we like to regard as pre-scientific ages. This one was defying science itself.

Then there were others who said, blandly, "God will protect us, and so there's no need for all these special precautions." Sometimes we even seemed to be coming close to the thought-world of those cults which teach that if we're true believers then we should be able to pick up venomous snakes and drink deadly poison. No need, then, for the elderly to minimise their social contacts, and even less need to consider curtailing church services or to suspend the use of the common cup in the Lord's Supper.

It is easy to mistake such sentiments as signs of great faith, but faith embraces every divine command, including the command to make "all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others" (Shorter Catechism, Answer 68). Prudence will keep to a minimum the number of miracles we expect God to perform on our behalf.

We are such odd creatures, willing to stay off church to avoid passing on a common cold but balking at proposals to stem the spread of a deadly virus.

Pseudo-courage may say that we aren't interested in measures to protect our own health, but our own health isn't the issue,

at least not directly. We have a duty before God to do all we can to preserve the life and health of others. Christians are as likely as anyone else to catch the flu, perish in a tsunami, die in an earthquake, or even drown on their way to the mission field. By the same token they are as likely as anyone else to contract Covid-19; if they contract it they will spread it; and to minimise that risk they must take the same precautions, and share the same inconveniences, as the rest of the population.

Other voices loudly proclaim that the virus is a divine judgement, and this has, of course, its grain of truth. Biblically, all death and all diseases are the wages of sin; and though God has reserved his final judgement for the Great Day, he does sometimes pass interim judgements on nations and civilisations in the ordinary course of human history, as the Apostle Paul makes plain in Romans 1.

But the only reason we know that what happened to the Roman empire was a revelation of the wrath of God (Rom 1:18) is that an apostle blessed with divine insight, and writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, tells us so. We today have no such insight. The wisest of us has nothing to offer but his own interpretation of world events (2 Pet 1:20), and when we venture to suggest that any human calamity is a divine judgement on the victims, we should remember the Lord's rebuke to those who thought that when the tower fell on the people of Siloam it was because they were more wicked than the common run of humanity (Luke 13:4).

The premise of those who see Covid-19 as a divine judgement is that ours is a singularly dark, irreligious, and apostate age. The slightest knowledge of history should be enough to remind us that the world is no more godless today than it always was. Ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, every intention of the thoughts of man's heart "was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5), and this applied to post-Reformation Britain as much as it did to the rest of human history. John Knox never suffered the illusion that the people of Scotland were a "people of the Book;" George Whitefield and John Wesley were pelted by mobs when they preached the gospel in eighteenth century England; the commercial and industrial life of Imperial Britain, and the domestic life of nineteenth century Edinburgh, tolerated evils that shame us even today.

Is the twenty-first century godless? Yes! Do our politicians ever refer to God? No! But then, neither did many Prime Ministers of an earlier age, and those who did, like Winston Churchill, did it only for rhetorical effect, not because they governed in the fear of his name. Had God marked the iniquity of sixteenth or

seventeenth or eighteenth or nineteenth century Scotland, we would have been wiped out long since. The fact that we haven't been owes nothing to the godliness of past generations, but to the fact that there is forgiveness with him (Ps 130:4).

Most of the Bible's references to the anger of God speak not of his anger against the world, but of his anger against his own people. It is his chosen nation he punishes for their iniquity (Amos 3:2), and those he loves that he reproves and chastens (Rev 3:19).

It is not, then, the evils and sins of the world that should be troubling us, but our own shortcomings as the people of God, and if we want to continue speaking of the pandemic as a judgement we should remember that it begins at God's own household (1 Pet 4:17); and if that is the case, then the voice of all true piety will be asking, "Lord, is it me?"

## Is there anything the church can do?

Is there anything the church can do? She can only ask that question in a spirit of real humility, knowing that care and compassion are not a monopoly of the church or of Christians. Covid-19 has not only unleashed the selfishness of panic-buying and mass migration to remote and fragile rural communities: it has also demonstrated the depths of active benevolence which, thanks to common grace\*, still dignify our common humanity. This being the case, believer and unbeliever, church and un-church, Christian and Muslim, will often find themselves working side by side.

At the same time, the very nature of the pandemic imposes severe limitations on what the church can do. The urgent need to restrict social contact means she cannot do her usual things, such as opening her doors to the vulnerable or using her pulpits to offer comfort to the anxious or going from house to house to minister to the lonely, the sick and the dying.

What, then, can we do?

First of all, we can give our full support to "the powers that be" and to the measures that government proposes. One marked feature of the crisis has been the dignity and gravity of the response from both Westminster and Holyrood. Shorn of their usual adversarialism, and armed with the best medical and scientific advice in the world, the Prime Minister and the First Minister have focussed firmly on limiting the spread of the virus, saving lives and making sure the NHS remains fit for purpose. The time may come again when we will need to raise our voices in protest against government policies. But now, more than ever before, is a time when those who fear God must honour those

\***Editor's Note** The use of the term "common grace" in this article is questionable and does not as such have the endorsement of the Editor.

whom he has appointed to govern, and submit to every directive of the state for the Lord's sake (1 Pet 2:13). Secondly, the church must pray. How glib that sometimes sounds! Nothing is easier than prayer, and nothing is more difficult.

All prayer is based on faith, which means that it starts from a position of assurance and certainty. But this assurance, in turn, is based on knowledge. What, then, do we know?

We know, first of all, that the world isn't praying for itself. It is taking all sorts of measures, but looking up and spreading the matter before the Lord is not one of them. But the Christian community, dispersed throughout the world, is a nation of priests (Rev 1:6), with a right to approach God's throne with confidence (Heb 4:16), and a duty to plead not only for ourselves but for all around us. That includes those in authority, that they may be as wise as Solomon and as unsure of themselves as little children. But it also includes the whole struggling society around us. There is a great precedent for this in the letter that Jeremiah sent to the Jewish exiles held captive in Babylon. In reality, it was a letter not merely from Jeremiah, but from the Lord, and it said, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7).

We know, secondly, that God, and specifically the Lord Jesus Christ, has the whole world in his hands. Everything lives, moves and has its being in him, and this means that when we pray, we are not confronting some corpus of impersonal natural laws or pleading for mercy from a biosphere trapped in an inexorable nexus of cause and effect. We are speaking to God, a living, loving, all-powerful personal intelligence in whom the universe as a whole and in each of its component parts holds together (Col 1:17). For his own reasons (so far not made known to us), he has permitted this virus to mutate and to become what we can see only as an unguided missile of biological warfare. But God can cause it to mutate yet again; he can cause our bodies to enhance their immune-systems; and he can guide and resource (and fight with) the vast hostile army which is already gathered against the virus (medics, scientists, politicians, and millions of ordinary people deploying only their common sense). Together, with divine blessing, that army will conquer.

Thirdly, we know that God cares deeply for the world and for its most distinguished inhabitant, the human race. This doesn't mean that he never permits epidemics or other natural disasters, but it does mean that even in the midst of such episodes (and they are only episodes) it still remains a world of incredible beauty, teeming with life and filled with what pleases eye and ear, touch and taste; and it remains, too, a world marked by stability and order, where even a virus has its own delicate

genetic code, and where it remains possible to work out why it is so toxic and what vaccine might hold it at bay. God knows its secrets and will guide us to them. In the meantime, nothing has happened to shake our confidence that we live in a magnificent universe under a caring Deity.

Fourthly, we know that with God there is grace to help us in every time of need (Heb 4:16). The language here is deeply suggestive. The word translated "help" was a specialised technical term used by sailors when their ship was caught in a severe storm and belts or ropes were slung round the hull to prevent her breaking up. We see an instance of this in Luke's account of Paul's shipwreck, where he tells us that when the ship was driven before the storm the sailors "used supports [helps] to undergird the ship" (Acts 27:17).

This is an apt metaphor for the danger the present crisis poses to mental health, especially in the case of those forced into complete isolation. We could easily go to pieces, but we have every right to trust God's grace to hold us together. Paul gives a similar assurance in 2 Corinthians 12:9. When we feel at our weakest and most helpless, God's grace is "sufficient" for us; and it is sufficient, he says, because it is "power." God doesn't just wish us well or send us on our way with bland words of reassurance such as, "It'll be OK" or, "Don't worry." He pours his power into our situation or, more precisely, into ourselves; and that power, that grace, is not something abstract, detached from God himself. It is the Almighty standing beside us as our paraclete: The God of all consolation, comforting, encouraging, and empowering whatever the pressure.

This is why Paul can assure the believers in Rome that, whatever happens, they will be triumphant conquerors (Rom 8:37). Isaiah put it even more memorably: "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isa 40:31).

## Does the crisis have a message?


But apart from testing our faith, has the crisis any other message for us? It clearly does. It tells us in no uncertain terms how limited and fragile is our control of our world. Pascal once remarked that, for all our dignity as "thinking reeds," such is our weakness that, "a vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill us." We had forgotten that lesson, but it's come back with real force. A tiny organism, only a fraction the size of a drop of water, is enough to kill us.

Ancient man, expelled from Paradise, found himself in a world that terrified him: a world where, his imagination told him, the forces of nature were controlled by countless angry and unpredictable deities, each one demanding endless rituals

and sacrifices, and yet never satisfied. Then with the slow and gradual rise of modern science the whole picture changed, and nature lost its terrors. With knowledge came reassurance, and power. We learned to fly, and to “sail” under the sea; we split the atom, put man on the moon, and conversed with each other across vast oceans; and we conquered, more or less, diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis, malaria, and AIDS.

These were remarkable achievements, and enormous credit is due to those who pioneered them. But then, calamity! A bloody twentieth century saw our greatest scientific insights and our greatest technological achievements put to hellish use; a prodigal use of natural resources polluted sea and sky, fields and rivers; and now, a tiny virus, undetected and unforeseen by science, suddenly threatens hundreds of thousands of lives and forces whole nations into lockdown.

We are no longer steering a steady course. Instead, we are forced into a series of evasive actions, hoping only to stave off disaster.

May God grant our leaders generous measures not only of wisdom, but of humility; and may he grant all of us the grace to go on our knees and cry, “Lord, we’re way out of our depth. Have pity on us, and save us.” 

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#### Donald Macleod

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# Living in the Light of Grace

## *Paul, Grace, and Conflict* (PART 2 OF 2)

This article was originally a message delivered at the Eastern Ministerial of CanRC and URC pastors, October 2019.

### The gospel of grace: power to transform

Every Christian realizes, I believe, that it is the grace of God that saves. There is no salvation apart from God and his grace. What we need to realize, however, is that we need the grace of God not just to get into the realm of those who are saved. We need that grace throughout our lives and we need it if we would live the Christian life effectively and powerfully. In the thinking of the apostle, this grace also has the power to *transform* lives. John Newton said it well in his classic hymn when he pointed out that for Christians, grace causes one to believe but also keeps one safe and leads one home. Blessed are we when the grace of God abounds throughout our lives – even to the end.

Tim Keller sees this very well when he writes in his book on Galatians:

It’s very common in Christian circles to assume that ‘the gospel’ is something mainly for non-Christians.... We often assume that once we’re converted, we don’t need to hear or study or understand the gospel – we need more ‘advanced’ material. But in this short letter, Paul outlines the bombshell truth that *the gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life*. It is not only the way to *enter* the kingdom; it is the way to live as part of the kingdom. It is the way Christ transforms people, churches and communities.... The gospel – the message that we



## 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.

Amazing Grace by John Newton, 1725-1807

are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope – creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth, for obedience, for love (*Galatians For You*, p. 51).

This is why it is so powerful and so essential. The gospel has the power to do what the law can never do – transform lives, transform people. When we start pushing law instead of gospel, we are probably doing that because we have more confidence in the law and in the power of our own eloquence than we ought to have. But for a Reformed church, it is grace that has the power to transform. Notice that Paul never starts telling people what to do in Romans *until* he has expounded the grace of God to them. It's on the basis of all the previous chapters that he begins to talk in Romans 12-16 about what a "living sacrifice," this new life, looks like. Obedience, love, respect for authorities, not despising the weak, and so forth, flow out of the grace of God.

As Machen puts it when he fights liberalism, change happens not through a set of philosophical or religious principles, but

The strange thing about Christianity is that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by *telling a story*; not by exhortation, but by the *narration of an event*. It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called "the foolishness of the message." It seemed foolish to the ancient world, and it seems foolish to liberal preachers today. But the strange thing is that it works. The effects of it appear even in this world. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed *by a piece of news*. (*Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 29, my emphasis added. Cf. Alfred D. Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*, p. 62.)

Alfred Poirier says that as pastors we all agree with Paul when it comes to this matter of being saved, but when we are dealing with bad behaviour in our churches or homes, we "tend to want to hit them harder with the law. We are stricken by an inveterate tendency toward promoting human effort rather than seeking heartfelt hearing and trust" (p. 62). Doesn't Paul rebuke us for this very thing: "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal 3:2-3). Poirier suggests that in the counselling room we ought to do much more of what we do from the pulpit, namely, preach the gospel. Says Poirier:

So how do we begin to restore our relationships? How do we overcome the sinful desires that are causing fights and quarrels in our marriages? If we are to restore and overcome, if we are to become people who desire God above all, it will be by hearing again and again the glorious story of God's pursuit of us! The call to love (Eph 5:1-2) and the call for husbands to love their wives (v. 25) both follow the announcement that Christ has and continues to love us (v. 2). One father in the Lord told me, "Alfred, just preach the gospel to your wife and begin by preaching the gospel to yourself. You will never have joy in God unless you stand firmly upon the foundation of his joy over you" (p. 92).

Interestingly, Poirier shows us that even in James, who seems to be so much more works-centred than Paul, the deep doctrines of grace are working overtime. The admonitions in chapter 4, for example, about fights and quarrels among God's people are: he suggests that perhaps James 4:5, 6 should be read: "Do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us longs jealously? But he gives us more grace" (cf. 1:18, 18, 21). As the commentator Alec Motyer says of this verse: "What comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side.... His resources are never at an

end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: *he gives more grace*" (p. 150).

It reminds one of Romans 5:20: "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." You can't even translate "abounded all the more" properly. He writes: "Where sin increased, grace hyper-abounded...."

Or think of the words of Richard B. Hays: "There is no meaningful distinction between theology and ethics in Paul's thought, because Paul's theology is fundamentally an account of God's work of transforming his people into the image of Christ" (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament Community: Cross, New Creation: a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, p. 46).

## Paul's message to office bearers

Paul's message to all office bearers and to the whole people of God is that there needs to be more reflection on the *transforming power of the grace of God*. We set ourselves up for burnout when we imagine that changes are going to happen because of our personality, our eloquence, our effort, or our new program. Deep, meaningful change happens only through God and his Spirit. Paul knew that. The single, solitary reason he changed from a heartless persecutor of Christians to a dogged follower of Jesus Christ was through the grace of God.

In another wonderful book, William H. Willimon says: "Christian leaders are convinced that deep transformation is what God does. So, one of the challenges of church leadership is to be the sort of leader whom God uses to change people.... Being a transformative leader means believing that God makes all things new, even us, and that conversion, change, transformation is a typical, expected gift of this faith" (*Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*).

So, this is the deep question we are left with. *Do we believe God can do this, and God alone?* If we know and preach that "God will give his grace and Spirit only to those who ask him and thank him" (LD 45), we will be found more often in prayer beseeching him to do the very things that we too often seek to accomplish ourselves.

## Community transformation

In so much of the literature on Paul, one is struck by the number of times authors refer to the corporate nature of Paul's writings. The thought is that whereas we are living in an individualistic age

and focus on individual persons in our preaching, it is striking that Paul is thinking collectively. His concern is with what's best for the brotherhood in Rome, what's best for the Galatians, for the Thessalonians. His aim is to bring the congregation to the point where it rejoices together in the grace of God. And if he singles out individuals, he singles them out because they are the ones who are jeopardizing and preventing the grace of God from being fully experienced by that congregation.

There seems to be more than that at stake here than just the social conventions of his day. Paul is thinking strategically in a manner that agrees with the way Christ gathers his church. If the grace of God is about transformation, it is first and foremost about *community transformation*.

James W. Thompson brings this out well when he says that according to Paul

*Ministry is participation in God's work of transforming the community of faith until it is "blameless" at the coming of Christ.... Those who identify with the crucified Christ are also empowered by the Christ to be "formed" in the community (Gal 4:19) as they are incorporated into Christ (3:27-28) and abandon their self-absorption to live for others (5:13-14).... The ultimate consequence of Paul's doctrine of justification is the creation of a community that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries and can "live in harmony with one another" (12:16) (Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision 149-3).*

Willimon puts it this way:

One of the greatest weaknesses in many of my moves from the biblical text to the preached sermon is that I neglect the communal, corporate intensions of scripture, turning a text that addresses the whole congregation into existential, subjective therapy. Yet scripture tends to be communally concerned before it is individually so. The Epistles are obsessed with parochial, congregational matters.... It may be enough for most Christians to tend their own spiritual gardens without much thought for the needs of their fellow Christians, but it is not enough for the pastor (*Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*).

It leads me to wonder: as we go about our work of pastoring the flock, do we still see the whole flock, or are we just focussed on the individual sheep, especially the hurting ones? Do office bearers reflect enough on the question whether *the congregation as a whole* together has an awareness, an appreciation, an applause for the power and effectiveness of the grace of God? Or does a spirit of nit-pickiness and legalism rule? It's deeply troubling to hear about the family quarrelling that goes on in the churches, or about one church lifting itself up in a judgemental fashion over another. Is this what the grace of God was given for?

## Congregational fruits of the grace of God

The truth is: corporately and individually, a healthy emphasis on the grace of God makes the congregation *less judgemental*. Here it is true, indeed, *if you don't know yourself to be the biggest sinner you know, you don't know yourself very well*. You and you alone know your own thoughts, your own dreams, the things you have done, thought up, and what not ... you never know all that about anyone else. Grace convicts us.

The truth is: corporately and individually, the grace of God makes us *more humble*. "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7) "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim 1:15).

The truth is: corporately and individually, the grace of God makes us more loving. In the words of Raymond Brown:


In the [Damascus] revelation Paul ... discovered a love that went beyond his previous imagination. He felt "taken over" by Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12). With awe Paul exclaims: "The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20)... This love became the driving factor of Paul's life when he came to understand how encompassing it was. "The love of Christ compels us once we come to the conviction that one died for all" (2 Cor 5:14) (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 449).

The truth is: corporately and individually, the grace of God makes us *more peaceful*. Should it not strike us that the word that goes along with "grace" in so many benedictions and great biblical phrases (Rom 14:19, Eph 4:3; 1 Thess 5:13; Heb 12:14) is the word "peace"? "Grace and peace to you...." "Grace, mercy, and peace to you...." Why should peace accompany grace in such a way? Obviously, because the result of the abundance of

the grace of God among the people of God will be an overflow of peace. In the face of all the enmity and hatred that was heaped upon God and his Son on the tree of the cross, we learn deep and powerful truths that reveal that all our quarrels and pettiness is nothing – nothing at all. This is the ministry of reconciliation.

Poirier is right when he says to every pastor who resists getting elbow deep into the conflicts of the people of God:

If you do not want to be a mediator, put down the Bible, for its passion is for peace and peacemaking.... If we know our Bible and our God, we know that the call to peacemaking – to mediation – has its roots not in a few scattered verses but in the rich, deep soil of the divine story that extends as far back as the garden, the fall of man, and God's promise of a mediator.... Everything we do is peacemaking because this is who we now are in Christ the mediator. Preaching is peacemaking. Praying is peacemaking. Administering the sacraments is peacemaking. Leading and discipling are all peacemaking. Pastoring is all peacemaking ... because the integrating points of the universe is the one man and mediator, Jesus Christ, and we as pastors are his servant-mediators.... The real silver and gold by which we mediators help the blind and rebuild relationships is the gospel. Mediators mediate the gospel. The first thing we announce to the warring factions must be the gospel (p. 183-4, 187, 191. Cf. Curtis Heffelfinger, *The Peace Making Church: 8 Biblical Keys to Resolve Conflict and Preserve Unity*).

So, brothers, sisters, do we want less conflict in the church? Then we must let the over-riding message Lord's Day after Lord's Day, in the church, the council room, the catechism room, the homes, be the one message of the *grace* of God. Preach the *gospel*, the pure gospel. And the peace of God *will* go with us. 



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By **Dawn Beichter**

Family photos by **Dawn and Lianne Riedstra**

# Carman East Welcomes the Van Dam Family

**T**he Carman East Canadian Reformed Church hosted a welcome evening on Friday January 10, 2020 to celebrate the installation of their new minister, Rev. S. Carl Van Dam. As congregation, we were delighted to welcome him as well as his wife Lisa and their six baptized children, Rachel, Martin, Carrie, Heather, Daniel, and Lydia.

It was a great turn-out and the pews filled quickly. The evening itself was led by Harwin Bouwman, who was one of the

members of the calling committee. He opened the evening with reading from Philippians 1, "To live is Christ and to die is gain." As congregation, we followed this reading by the singing of Psalm 122:1-3. Harwin welcomed the Van Dams and jokingly mentioned that the family will fit right in, for "at least half of the church's surnames start with a letter 'V.'" But finding their mailbox among all these "Vs" could be a little tricky!




By way of introducing the Van Dam family to the congregation, Harwin proceeded to give a presentation of the Van Dam family members to the congregation. This included a series of pictures of each child as well as telling us the children's ages and grades and a short description of their interests and history. A few passing jokes included the answer to the question, "Why did the chewing gum cross the road? Because it was stuck to the chicken's foot!" and the hilarity of finding spaces to go mountain dirt biking, for the excitement of mountains pales in comparison to the joy of biking on the flat lands of the prairies!

In addition, we were delighted to learn that our sister Lisa Van Dam enjoys painting as a hobby and that our brother Rev. Van Dam thoroughly enjoys walking in the open air. We were delighted to show them some photo shots of the beautiful scenery of Carman and the prairie skies. We know they will enjoy seeing the LORD's creation on display for many years to come! Our Reverend was also encouraged in his committee work, for, as our MC observed: "You are known as a wise man and wise men tend to gather in the East."

Soon it was time for us to introduce who we are to the family. Gerry van Dijk came forward to give a short history lesson on the Carman East church and her congregants. Starting in the early 1950s, members arrived to set up farming steads in and around the Carman area and our institution after 1951 saw Carman East begin with a total of thirty-six members. We reflected on how the LORD blessed the community richly over the course of the next sixty-nine years, bringing many members and ministers into Carman, with Rev. Van Dam and his family

being the tenth ministerial family. As gift, he then presented Rev. Van Dam with a copy of our communal history book, "Many Grains, One Bread" as written by Peter Veenendaal and Paul deRuiter.

The children from the congregation soon were invited forward and, under the capable direction of Mrs. Theresa Bergsma and Mrs. Vanessa Rook, sang two beautiful pieces including "Welcome to Carman" and "Creation Sings." Following this, the young people took the microphone and proceeded to play a guessing game with a number of young peoples entitled "Which one of these teens does not belong?" It was both challenging and amusing for the Van Dams to make a correct guess, as families with siblings and cousins came forward and these children looked quite similar.

After, Lyle Van Veen came forward on behalf of the men's societies, both Saturday morning and Thursday evening, and presented a Keurig coffee maker as a welcome gift "to wake their minds and warm their stomachs." Joanne Termeer then came forward on behalf of the women's Bible studies, both Tuesday morning and Thursday evening, and presented a photobook of church members recently put together by a handful of creative and ambitious women in the congregation. The gift was very much appreciated by the Van Dams and they themselves promised to get to know us very soon! The organized event was followed by a time of fellowship in the foyer. Indeed, the LORD has blessed Carman East with our tenth minister and may the LORD continue to bless us in the years ahead. 





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## Harvest Workers in Ethiopia

by Pastor Timothy Burden, METF Augustine Program Coordinator



Tim and Rosalind Burden with trainees

The Ethiopian METF team leaders had already been teaching for a week before my wife, Rosalind and I arrived in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa on November 23. The first half of the book of Romans and evangelism among Muslims had already been covered. This was METF's fourth 21-day Ethiopian biblical study term for pastors and evangelists held in 2019.

### From Far & Near

Over twenty Ethiopian pastors and evangelists gathered from ten different regions. Most came from Muslim dominated areas and the rest from Ethiopian Orthodox areas. Some had traveled long distances to attend. Recruited through local churches, each board-

ing trainee must commit to teach the material learnt to as many others as possible upon return. Reports of their teaching are then sent back to the Ethiopian METF team leaders.

In questions raised between themselves, it was clear some were already thinking of how they would conduct this teaching when they returned home.

In addition to the resident trainees, local pastors and other church workers attended sessions daily. This raised the number of trainees to above thirty.

On Tuesdays, pastors' wives came for a full day of Bible study with my wife, Rosalind. As a podiatrist, she began with foot care demonstrations and education,

which were greatly appreciated. Rosalind took the theme of Mary at Jesus' feet: *Sitting at His feet, Falling at His feet and Anointing His Feet*. Their time together was very precious.

### Intensive Training

Over two weeks, I covered a portion of the three month Augustine Program, the biblical training course developed for East Africa at the METF-Lokichoggio Center. This included:

- Teaching through catechism
- Stuart Olyott's book *Preaching Pure and Simple* with METF's Amharic translation.
- Pastoral theology of 1st & 2nd Timothy and Titus.
- The Doctrine of the Trinity: This was my first time teach-

ing the subject to those of Muslim background. So, I finalized some lessons there.

Translation was ongoing into the two major languages of Ethiopia, Amharic and Oromo. Daily two morning sessions were held with a longer one ending early afternoon, so day trainees could return to ministries.

### Hungry to Learn

Response to the teaching was a great encouragement. The hunger to learn God's Word was a delight. Interaction in discussion was impressive in fluency of thought and expression as well as the courtesy towards each other. Questions the men raised varied: *How can God have a Son? Can you explain Genesis 6:1-4? Who was Mechizedek?*





Is divorce permissible for Christians? What is meant by 'Your Kingdom come'? Why doesn't the Church unite today to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against the denial of Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims?

### Gripped by Truth

It was a blessing to hear some testimonies while relaxing together. One man had led a gang in persecuting Christians, until the courageous and wise witness of a Christian. This believer offered him a book. Had it been a tract, he would have crunched it up and thrown it away. But as a book lover, he accepted it. The book on Jesus' teaching of the broad and narrow ways was used by God to save him. Then he became the target of perse-

cution, but praises God for preserving him.

Another began his journey to salvation when the imam asked all attending Friday prayers to contribute to a bribe fund for a judge sentencing a Christian man the next day. It was to ensure that a 45 year prison sentence would be imposed. Disgusted, he refused to worship the god of such injustice and went home. He then resolved to take the prisoner some food that evening. The prisoner asked him to telephone a certain number to explain his plight. He did so, resulting in the man's release. This began his search for the true Christian faith. Months later he found salvation in Christ.

A Somali man first began reading the Bible with other friends to confirm that the terrible things said about Christians were true. As they read, their understanding of the Christian faith and life was transformed. Realizing that they had been told lies, they were gripped by the truth of the Bible. After persecution for Bible reading, they eventually came to faith, born again through the incorruptible Word of God.



*"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"*

— Psalm 133:1

### Gratitude & Laughter

The last day, the trainees presented books to the instructors as a thank you gift. Great appreciation was expressed for Zemen, MERF's Ethiopia team leader, for his service organizing the training. One trainee presented his long and very entertaining poem on the course. Without understanding a word, we caught on to his caricatures of most of his colleagues, skillfully mimicking their peculiarities. It was great fun to see all relaxed and in good humor.

### Glory of Christ

The final teaching session was a study on the two contrasting states of Christ, His humiliation and His exaltation. We closed contemplating heaven and Christ's glory

### METF-Canada

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at the completion of His work of redemption. This was followed by a time of praise and open prayer concluding with a chorus of amens.

It was a tremendous privilege to work alongside the METF Ethiopia team and serve the men and women who gathered. We were wonderfully upheld by the prayers of the Lord's people. Please remember these men in prayer as they return to teach and bear testimony to the Lord.

Another encouragement was learning that METF now partners with local Ethiopian churches to support fifty evangelists in remote areas of Ethiopia. METF support is matched and sometimes exceeded by local churches. May the Lord bless these faithful Ethiopians as they strengthen believers with God's Word and bring salvation to the lost.



# I Am the Resurrection and the Life

1. I am the res - ur - rec - tion and the life,  
 2. Do you be - lieve that what I say is true,  
 3. Yes, Lord, I do be - lieve that you're the Christ,

the One who frees his own from mor - tal strife.  
 that this good news is meant al - so for you?  
 the Son of God in whom I place my trust,

He who be - lieves in me will nev - er die.  
 Do you be - lieve that I have con - quered death,  
 the One who was to come in - to the world,

E'en though he die I will him glo - ri - fy  
 that I have come to give man - kind new breath?  
 for whom the god - ly have for ag - es yearned.

and sat - is - fy with life from heav'n a - bove.  
 Do you be - lieve that I will you re - new?  
 Christ will de - liv - er us from death's dark plight.

Text: Based on John 11:25-27; vers. George van Popta, 2019  
 Tune: Geneva, 1551; harmony, C. Goudimel, 1565, alt

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