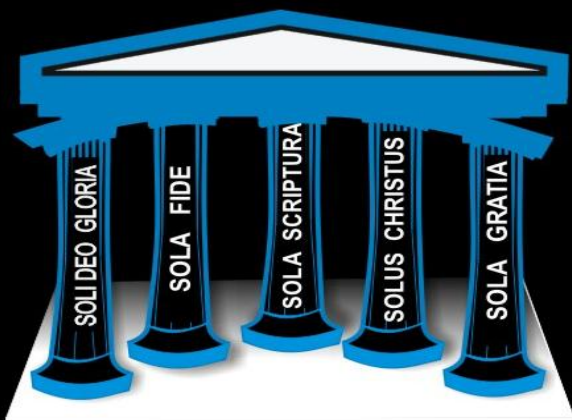


GRACE & TRUTH



THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE REFORMATION

“What must I do to be saved?”

(Acts 16:30).

“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”

(Hebrews 2:3).



TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

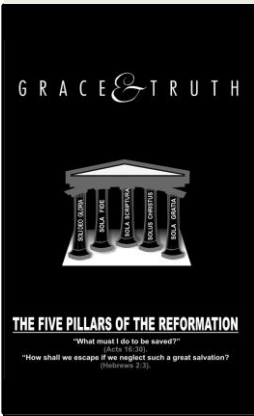
N A I R O B I

Editor's Desk

We welcome you to read and profit from 'Grace & Truth', a publication of Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. We believe there is a very great need for serious Biblical literature to be produced in our country of Kenya. We trust your soul will be fed and that you will be challenged from the Word of God. We welcome feedback from you by letter, phone or email. Please also visit us on the web at: www.trinity.or.ke

Keith Underhill

GRACE & TRUTH Magazine



Cover: The greatest question a person can ask is "**What must I do to be saved?**" (Acts 16:30). A second question that indicates the value of salvation is "**How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?**" (Hebrews 2:3). The Protestant Reformation was founded on five pillars which are the basis of this great salvation.

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Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible, unless otherwise indicated.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE REFORMATION *John Muketha*

The greatest question a person can ask is “***What must I do to be saved?***” (Acts 16:30). A second question that indicates the value of salvation is “***How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?***” (Hebrews 2:3). The Protestant Reformation was founded on five pillars which are the basis of this great salvation. These are the Five Solas which are five Latin phrases that emerged during the Reformation to summarize the Reformers’ theological convictions about the essentials of Christianity. These five truths remain relevant to our day as they were during the 16th century Reformation.

1. “***Sola Scriptura***” (Scripture Alone). The Bible alone is the truly ultimate and trustworthy authority for faith and practice. This means that everything else we learn about God and his world, and all other authorities, should be interpreted in light of Scripture. Every word of the 66 books of the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit who also helps us to understand and obey Scripture.

2. “***Solus Christus***” (Christ Alone). The Bible is about Jesus Christ and His role as God and Saviour. God has given the ultimate revelation of Himself to us by sending His Son, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15). *Solus Christus* affirms that salvation has been accomplished once for all by the mediatorial work of the historical Jesus Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification. God is holy and all humans are wicked sinners with nothing to offer to God for their salvation. It is only through God’s gracious self-revelation in Jesus Christ that we can come to a saving and life transforming knowledge of God.

3. “***Sola Gratia***” (Grace Alone). As fallen humanity we have no claim upon God and God owes us nothing except just punishment for our many and very willful sins. Therefore, if God does save any sinner, it is only because it pleases Him to do it. Apart from this grace and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that flows from it, no one would be saved, since in our lost condition, human beings are not capable of winning, seeking out, or even cooperating with God’s grace. We can only stand before God by his grace as he mercifully attributes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ and attributes to him the consequences of our sins. Jesus’ life of perfect righteousness is counted as ours, and our records of sin and failure were counted to Jesus when he died on the cross. It is grace alone expressed through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ, releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from death to spiritual life. (Ephesians 2:8,9).

4. “***Sola Fide***” (Faith Alone). Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. Justification flows from God’s grace and it comes to the individual not by anything he or she might do but by faith alone. Justification is the act of God by which He declares sinners to be righteous because of Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. We are saved solely through faith in Jesus Christ because of God’s grace and Christ’s merit alone.

5. “***Soli Deo Gloria***” (To God Alone be the Glory). God’s glory is the central motivation for salvation. God is not a means to an end but He is the means and the ends. *Soli Dei Gloria* is what Paul expressed in Romans 11:36 when he wrote, “***For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*** The goal of life is to give glory to God alone “***So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.***” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

THE BLESSING OF KNOWING GOD'S WILL

Keith Underhill

EPHESIANS 1:8-10

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with blessing God for the blessings we Christians receive in Christ. So far he has referred to election, predestination and redemption. He does not even consider the so-called blessings many emphasize today, health and prosperity. And who would even consider that knowing the will of God is such a great blessing?

When someone makes a legal document for the disposal of his property when he dies, we call that a 'will'. If we who are made in God's image can think so far ahead, what about God who made us? So we shall consider the fact that God has a will, what that will is, and why it is such a blessing to know it.

1. GOD HAS A WILL

"making known to us the mystery of his will" (v. 9)

God's will is simply what God wants to be done. It was God's will that Saul of Tarsus become an apostle (1:1), something Paul himself was totally opposed to! For an example about the will, child upbringing is basically a conflict between the will of the child and the will of the parent. You want your child to be at church, but she wants to hang out with friends. Adoption is God's will for His elect (1:5). God works all things according to His will (1:11). In Theology we call God's will the 'Decrees of God', what God has willed to do in eternity (as election in 1:4). God is not like a man on a journey who stops to make a decision at every junction, even to retrace his steps! There are 3 things these verses tell us about the will of God:

- GOD'S WILL IS HIS DELIGHT: *"according to his purpose" (v. 9)*

The word translated "purpose" is literally what 'seems good, well-pleasing' (see Philippians 2:13). God takes special delight in willing whatever needs to be done for the salvation of His elect. So if we ask why God allowed sin to enter into His perfect world, there can only be one answer – it is to highlight with intensity God's delight to be known as the God of salvation.

- GOD'S WILL IS CENTRED IN CHRIST: *"which He set forth in Christ" (v. 9)*

All our blessings are "in Christ", the choosing of us (1:4), predestining us (1:5), and redeeming us (1:7). Nothing that God does in salvation is apart from Christ. Outside Him is no blessing. So there is no greater need than to be united to Christ. For example, you may have a wonderful tank, with a capacity for thousands of litres, and the most durable pipes, but it must be joined to a source of water to be filled! So you must be joined to Christ.

- **GOD’S WILL IS FOR ALL TIME:** “*as a plan for the fullness of time*” (v. 10)
 God’s will does not concern just a part of history but **all** history from beginning to end (see Galatians 4:4). There is special emphasis on times being filled, “the end of the ages” (1 Corinthians 10:11), “these last days” (Hebrews 1:2). One writer tells us how important this is: “This verse states what is the central theme of all Scripture”, and we “find ourselves looking at God’s final purpose with respect to this world” (Lloyd-Jones). What a privilege we have to consider this!

2. GOD’S WILL IS “TO UNITE ALL THINGS” IN CHRIST

When God has done everything He wills to do, then all things will be united in Christ. This is the future of the world, not as many predict with foreboding that the present state will continue until we self-destruct (nuclear holocaust?), or the sun burns itself out. There have been many interpretations of what “all things” means, but it certainly cannot mean that ultimately *all* will be saved. If “to unite” is a spiritual unity then it can only include true Christians, and perhaps good angels. But it should probably be given a wider meaning so that “all things” is literal, because sin has affected all of created reality. The word translated “to unite” literally mean ‘to sum up by recapitulating, putting everything under one head’. It may thus be understood as a *re*-uniting all things in Christ by putting everything under His rule (see 1:22, Philippians 2:10-11, Colossians 1:20).

Even before there was sin on the earth, the devil and other angels rebelled in heaven and were cast out of God’s presence. He, with his followers, declared war on God and all His works and became the great deceiver and slanderer. God had made the heavens and the earth to be “very good” so that everything was functioning together in perfection. But sin entered in and brought division between man and God, the man and the woman, the brothers Cain and Abel, and so on. God’s will is to fully remedy this situation by restoring His creation to its original condition of peace. Consider such beautiful prophetic pictures as are found in Isaiah 11:6-9. The devil, with all his angelic and human followers will be confined to the lake of fire where they will be under total subjection. Especially the great division of Jew and Gentile will be brought to end by reconciliation in Christ (2:14-16). There will be no more thorns and thistles, no more sickness or death. In this sense there is healing in the atonement, as in the fullness of time all sin and its results will be conquered. Christ will reign as the undisputed Head (1:22). There will be “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

3. GOD HAS BLESSED US BY MAKING KNOWN HIS WILL TO US

It is impossible to bless God for His gracious will unless we know what that will is! Do not take it for granted that you know God’s will, but bless God if it is revealed to you.

- GOD’S WILL IS REVEALED/MADE KNOWN: “*making known to us the **mystery** of His will*” (v. 9)

A “mystery” is not something so complicated that it is impossible to understand, but something that can only be known if it is revealed. In Ephesians the mystery is that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs” (3:6) with their Jewish brethren, and this is something that is not difficult to understand. But given the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile who could have believed it unless God had revealed it? It is God who chooses to make it known when and to whom He pleases. He has no obligation to us to make these things known.

- GOD’S WILL IS REVEALED BY THE SPIRIT: “*in all wisdom and insight*” (v. 8)

This is not a reference to God as we cannot say of God that He has *all* wisdom, nor does He have *insight*. Rather, it is we Christians who have been given this wisdom by God, wisdom which means spiritual understanding, so that we are able to understand the gospel. “Insight” is the gift of love for the truth, so it is a lively application of the truth in our daily life (read Colossians 1:9-10). For this wisdom and insight we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit (see 1:17 and compare 4:18), and He gives “all”. “All” means that we lack nothing. It is amazing how different kinds of believers have the very same understanding, with different backgrounds and educational levels. It is because the same Spirit has revealed it to them. There was a time when we heard the gospel but we could not understand and so had no joyful appreciation of the truth. Perhaps as you read this you feel this is true of you, and it needs the Spirit of God to open your heart, like Lydia of old.

- IT IS ALL BECAUSE OF GOD’S GRACE: “*according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us*” (vv. 7-8)

If you have wisdom and insight it is not because you deserve it because you are good or cleverer than others. Why was the heart of Lydia opened, but not the other women who were with her at the riverside? Why did the Lord appear to Paul the Pharisee and not to other Pharisees? Why to you, and why to me? It is another of the blessings of God revealing the riches of His grace, for which we must ever bless Him. Jesus says: “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45). This grace is ‘rich’ for it is not given in small measure. The Spirit of God reveals all we need for life and godliness through the Scriptures. We are as dependent upon God for this grace as we are for election, predestination and redemption. As the hymn states: ‘Lord! I was blind, I could not see in Thy marred visage any grace; but now the beauty of Thy face in radiant vision dawns on me’.

THE CONVERSION OF TIMOTHY

Keith Underhill

No two testimonies of conversion to Christ are exactly the same. Our past lives differ, and the circumstances of our conversion differ. Yet the basic ingredients remain the same. There is always a period of preparation, longer or shorter, leading to conviction of sin; then through the truth of the gospel there is an exercise of faith and repentance; finally there is the open profession of faith in baptism.

Timothy was Paul's son in the faith, and his faithful companion, yet there is no specific account of his conversion in the Scripture record! Does it really matter? Should we therefore doubt his conversion?

1. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT TIMOTHY

- He was born of mixed parentage, a Jewish mother and a Greek (Gentile) father (Acts 16:1).
- His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5) were the greatest influences in his life, teaching him the Old Testament from his childhood (2 Timothy 3:15). Thus he knew the word of God and "salvation through faith in Jesus Christ".
- He was probably converted at Lystra during Paul's first missionary journey, as Paul calls him "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:17).
- A year or two later, when Paul revisited Lystra, Timothy was sufficiently well spoken of as a believer for Paul to want him as a fellow labourer in the gospel (Acts 16:2-3).
- He accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16:4ff., 19:22, 20:4).
- Paul sent him to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2), planned to send him to Philippi (Philippians 2:19), and made him his special representative to the church in Ephesus and wrote 1 Timothy to him there (1 Timothy 1:3).

Obviously Timothy was of great spiritual usefulness to the apostle Paul. These facts tell us enough about Timothy for us to be able to draw at least two very important and practical conclusions.

2. WHAT WE LEARN FROM TIMOTHY'S LIFE

(1) *The blessing of a home where the Scriptures are learned* (2 Timothy 3:15).

This is the one great means the Lord used to prepare Timothy for conversion. What a wonderful task you mothers have in a world that almost considers such a role unworthy! And Eunice had no help at all from Timothy's father, only from Lois his grandmother. What did they do? From them, from childhood he was "acquainted with the sacred writings" and so "learned and firmly believed" in Christ Jesus. He believed because he had been taught the Scriptures (for him only the Old Testament). Do you parents and Sunday School teachers realize that in the Bible (now complete) that there is all the truth necessary unto salvation? As an instrument in the hands of God it is perfectly fitted to bring sinners to faith in Christ and so to salvation.

Then what a privilege, and awful responsibility, for you parents to gather your whole family together; if this is impossible, then you can do it on an individual basis. You take

the opportunity to read and explain the word of God day by day. If you fail to do this will not the blood of your children be upon your own head (Acts 20:26-27)? You will not be able to blame the church or the school. You will combine such instruction with a “sincere faith” (2 Timothy 1:5). The faith you teach will be seen in your everyday life in the home; you will practice what you teach.

Some of you have had the blessing of at least one godly parent with a sincere faith. What have you done with what you have heard from your childhood, remembering that countless millions have not had this privilege? Even as you read this, the reminder of your youth may well prick your conscience. In many ways those teachings have preserved you from being amongst the most wicked of men. Yet perhaps you have not yet fully and willingly embraced the truth of your need for a thorough conversion through faith in Christ.

(2) Living the life of a converted person is far more important than having a specific experience about which to testify.

It is strange that although we know so much about Timothy we do not have his ‘testimony’ recorded. In fact, having a specific experience to relate may even be dangerous, if it is trusted in! Remember the hearer who is likened to seed sown on rocky ground, “who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:20-21). The real evidence of conversion to Christ is not the specific experience, no matter how elated the joy or deep the sorrow. Rather, it is the changed life that results from that experience. “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). So it is far more important to know the kind of life Timothy lived as a professing Christian, than to know the time and circumstances of his conversion. The most wonderful testimony which only leads to a life devoid of godliness is like an empty noise.

We learn much about Timothy’s character as a Christian from Philippians 2:20-22. Paul considered him to be a pre-eminent Christian, one who had proved his “worth”, one totally devoted to the Lord. This was to be seen in his practical concern for the welfare of the Philippian Christians, and in the way he “served with” Paul in the gospel as a son. The implication is crystal clear: anyone who is a true Christian has ceased to serve sin, to serve himself, so that Christ is now the centre of his life.

Does this in any way describe you? Is your life now devoted to Jesus Christ just because He gave Himself for you on the cross? And are you showing it in your concern for your brethren? You may or may not have had some specific experience to show the precise time of your conversion. It is possible that you may never remember a time when you did not believe in Christ. One thing is clear, that if you are *now* devoted to Christ and His people then the Lord has savingly worked in you; only the Lord can do that, as we would never do it by nature. Whereas if you can only speak of a particular experience you have had in the past it is no guarantee that you are converted. This a warning to some of you who have had some sort of experience, but little or no fruit following. It is an encouragement to others of you who have been troubled as you do not know the precise time of conversion as many others claim to know.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP *Murungi Igweta*

Do you belong to a church? I mean, as a Christian, do you have a church that you have formally identified, either by baptism, or official application? Identify a biblical church, seek its membership and be involved in its life and call it your own eternal family. There are many Christians who just stay at home and are content to watch television or simply worship with their families at home. Is this biblically acceptable? Isn't it sinful not to belong to a church?

Just like vegetables are grown in the garden, so are Christians born and brought up in a church. No true believer will be without a church. Everyone who has been saved by trusting in Christ, and repenting of his sins, is baptized into a local church. One of the greatest reasons why Christianity in Kenya is only a skin deep and lasts only a few years is because of the little regard for church membership. Many churches do not have formal members, but simply assume those who attend their church to be their members. However, the Bible teaches that every Christian has to be a recognized member of a certain local church and be accountable to it in his/her life as a believer.

What is church membership? It is the outward demonstration of one's inner commitment to identify with Christ and His followers, worship God with them, be taught the Scriptures, submit to God's ordained authority structure, selflessly serve other believers, and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ together. In this way a believer is accountable to the church so that there is an observable and guaranteed spiritual growth. When there is no such growth, then he will admonished, gently by the church and the leadership.

1. What is the Biblical evidence for Church Membership?

a) *Numbers of who belonged to the church were known:*

Acts 1:15 – 120; Acts 2:41 – added 3,000; Acts 4:4 – 5,000

b) *Rolls were kept*

Timothy 5:9 “Widows indeed” were recognized members of the congregation whose needs were known and whose names were put on a special care list.

c) *Church officers or servants were chosen by the congregation*

Acts 6:2-5 the apostles instructed the believers in Jerusalem to “select from among you” seven men to serve the people. “From among you” indicates that some kind of “who is in” and “who is out” lists were maintained. At the very minimum, there was an understanding that believers identified themselves with other believers in some formal way.

d) *Discipline was practiced*

Obviously church discipline requires it:

- Matthew 18:15-17 – the entire church is brought into the process in step 3
- 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 – the entire church must voice its displeasure with the disobedient brother. (Note: II Corinthians 2:6 says, “For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough.” This is a clear indication of corporate decision by a vote to determine the ‘majority’)

- 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 *“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you have to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”* Clearly the phrase “from among” indicates that the local congregation at Corinth knew who was a part of the church and who wasn’t. Afterwards, Paul wrote to them and instructed them with the Lord’s authority, 2Corinthians 2:6.

e) *Worship was corporate*

1 Corinthians 14:23 *“If therefore the whole church comes together...”* You notice that it does not say when you sit to watch the service of other believers (say in a television or on the internet). It says that the church assembles or meets together. The actual meaning of the word church is an assembly, convocation or gathering. Even for those who are not in the most ideal church must seek out other believers for corporate worship and fellowship for mutual edification. This is because in glory we will be a corporate body, and it better begin now and here!

f) *Pastors/shepherds must give an account for their flock*

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.*

How can pastors keep watch over their flock and stand before God to give an account for the flock that God entrusted to their care if they do not have a means by which to know who is in the flock and who is outside the flock?

2. What are the qualifications for church membership?

Considering Acts 2:41-47, we discover these qualifications:

- a) Salvation
- b) Believer’s baptism
- c) Desire to participate in basic functions of the church:
 - Agreement with fundamental doctrines and willingness to be taught
 - Care for other members of the church family (fellowship)
 - Faithful remembrance of the Lord’s Supper
 - Praying for one another

3. Responsibilities of members to their church

- a) Regular attendance – Hebrews 10:24-25
- b) Financial support – 1 Corinthians 16:2
- c) Devotion – Romans 12:10
- d) Confession and Prayer – James 5:16
- e) Service – Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10
- f) Willingness to confront sinning brethren – Galatians 6:1
- g) Openness to being confronted by caring brethren – Matthew 18:15-17

4. Why you must belong to a church today!

A. *To prove that you’re not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people*

Mark 8:38 [Jesus said] *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels”*

When you join a church you make it clear whose side you're on. You're telling the family of God that you're part of the family too, and that you don't want to be considered on the outside (1 Corinthians 5:12-13) any longer.

B To stop being an independent Christian

Joining a church demonstrates that you are willing to:

❖ *Be accountable to other believers*

Matthew 18:15-17 *“And if your brother sins against you, go and tell him of his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”*

❖ *Be in submission to spiritual authority*

Hebrews 13:17 *“Obey your leaders, and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for this would be of no advantage to you.*

If you are not part of the church, it has no authority over you and so you cannot do what the Lord expects you to do (remember the deceitfulness of one's heart). Unless you join the church, your independence places you outside the way the Lord wants things to happen in His Church.

C To participate in a stronger, more unified effort of God's people

As your local church reaches across the country and around the world in direct and indirect support of evangelistic work, you can participate in ways of reaching the world for Christ that you could have never dreamed otherwise. In contrast, consider the potential negative impact on our efforts to talk about Jesus if we don't join His earthly body. How believable is our testimony of the goodness and greatness of Christ if we don't want to identify openly with Christ's family?

D To have a greater opportunity to use your spiritual gift

1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit has gifted each believer with at least one gift for the benefit of others and the building up of the body of Christ. Yes, you can use your spiritual gift for the good of God's people without joining a church. But in many churches, ministry opportunities are available for church members only. That's because the church wants to know that you stand with her doctrinally and support her ministry goals before you're asked to minister in certain positions. *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”* (1 Peter 4:10)

E To openly demonstrate the reality of the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:27 *“Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.”* When you join a church, you make it visible. You give a living demonstration of the spiritual reality of the body of Christ, which is the ONLY God-ordained instrument of manifesting His glory on earth. You show that even though you are an individual, you are a part of the body and you are joined together with others. You take the body of Christ out of the realm of the theoretical and give it a meaning that people can see.

F. To participate in a more balanced ministry

Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches that God gave spiritually-gifted men to the church for the purpose of leading and teaching His people. It also teaches that wholeness and balanced growth as a Christian is dependent on the proper working of each individual part. In other words, independent Christians are always imbalanced.

We can't get this well-rounded ministry on our own. No one develops the proper spiritual stability just by listening to Christian radio, watching Christian television, or watching the 'most solid preachers' either on video or internet or reading Christian books. You can't get this kind of maturity merely by participating in a group Bible study. Unless you're an active part of a local church, your Christian life and ministry will be imbalanced.

G. To demonstrate your commitment "to the proper working of each individual part"

Ephesians 4:15-16 *"...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him, who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

Consider someone who has settled all his major questions and has definitely decided where he wants to attend church, but now he wants all the benefits and privileges of that church's ministry without taking any responsibility for it. His attitude is all take and no give. He wants no accountability, just a free ride. This is an unchristian attitude!

Consider a church-hopper, he has no real intention of joining the church, (at least not soon!) He only wants to enjoy its advantages without any obligation on his part. He wants convenience without commitment, to be served rather than to serve. But every true Christian is to be committed to *'the proper working of each individual part'* (Ephesians 4:16) in a local church. When you join a church, you're saying you believe in taking your individual part and that you don't want to be a 'spiritual hitchhiker'.

H. To encourage new believers to be committed to the local body of Christ

Hebrews 10:24-25 *"...and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the Day drawing near."*

Notice the command to *'consider how to stir up one another'* that is associated here with church involvement. While this is an encouragement, it is sinful to *"neglect"* it. Bear in mind the message you communicate to other believers, especially new believers, if you do not join a church. Do they see your example and learn that church isn't important enough to join? Do they get the message that the kingdom of God is not worth such an investment of your life? Do they interpret your actions as saying that the work of God does not deserve a full commitment?

I. To encourage a ministry for you consider it faithful when you join it

Hebrews 10:24-25, teaches that you will be an encouragement to a church when you join. Of course the people and pastors of a church are glad whenever you attend. But if you keep coming and never join, they may begin to wonder what is keeping you from joining despite how happy you seem to be with the church and how many wonderful things you say about it. There is a sense in which your attendance and involvement can actually discourage the church and its leaders if, after reasonable time, you do not join it. The church is encouraged...and its leadership is encouraged, when you indicate by joining the church that you love it and think it is a biblically faithful ministry worthy of your commitment.

- ❖ Please note that this is not meant to discourage those who are attending a church to find answers about Jesus Christ and are still uncertain about their eternal destiny (not yet saved). If that describes you, your first priority is to come to Christ in faith rather than to come for church membership.
- ❖ Neither is this intended to deter those who are sincerely and actively seeking God's will in searching for a biblical church. Sometimes that decision cannot be made quickly. A wise person evaluates a church carefully before joining its membership.

Find more info about the subject on the author's blog: www.pastormurungi.blogspot.com

THE BIBLE SAYS:

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. -- I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. -- ***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*** (Psalm 119:18; 138:2; 2 Timothy 3:16,17) ***SOLA SCRIPTURA!***

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. --Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. -- **He** made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. -- But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. -- To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. -- Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." -- ***For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.***(1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11; Revelation 1:6; 2 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 3:21; Revelation 7:21; Romans 11:36).***SOLI DEO GLORIA!***

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. -- ***He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Colossians 1:13-18).***SOLUS CHRISTUS!***

(Continued on page 17)

GODLY PARENTING IN A GODLESS AGE – Lessons from the life of Noah

Eric Abwao

Caring leaders will generally strive to ensure that those who are closest to them love and respect them the most. It is a good thing for a leader when his constituents find it easier to love and respect him as they know him more and more. On the converse, we would be concerned for the leader who is loved and respected less and less as he is known more and more.

One of the common causes of this sad situation – where the closer you get to the leader, the harder it becomes to love and respect him – is an inconsistent life on the leader’s part. If a leader is behaviorally one thing in public and another in private, those who are close to him could easily find themselves struggling to reconcile his incongruent civic and personal life.

As leaders, Christian parents need to be keen on ensuring they conduct themselves in a manner consistent with Biblical values both in and outside the home. It is a sad thing that many parents confuse their children by being one thing in public and another at home. On a particular day they condemn an act of sin and on another they tolerate or even embrace it. Sometimes the parent obeys God’s instruction on an issue and then at other times he blatantly disobeys the same commands. A TV program becomes unacceptable when there is a Christian visitor at home and then relished when the visitor is gone. Now and then the parent gives instructions to children and then fails to follow-up to ensure an adherence to them. In an age marked by an increase in ungodly practices, the Christian parent must appreciate that a call to consistent obedience is of crucial importance.

The life of Noah presents lessons for today’s parent who desires to be a faithful leader in an age that is just as godless as the one before the floods. The inspired writer condenses Genesis 6 – 9 into one verse to summarize the life of Noah in Hebrews 11:7;

“By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

Noah’s obedience was an important ingredient of his faithful parenting in an age that was very ungodly. What were the keys to this obedience?

The Basic Foundation of Noah’s Obedience

Noah believed by faith and then went further to commune with God so that he was divinely warned concerning events yet unseen. Noah stayed in touch with God and therein had the opportunity of getting privileged guidance from God concerning the approaching great and severe judgment that in his present circumstances was otherwise unapparent to human beings.

Having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian parent must by way of the provided means of grace remain in fellowship with God. The Christian parent who desires to see things from God’s perspective and to escape the short-sighted approach to life that is acceptable in society today must appreciate this foundation for a consistently obedient life.

The Biblical Follow-through of Noah's Obedience

The guidance received from God influenced Noah's mind and practice. Upon his mind it impressed his soul with a fear of God's judgment. He responded to God's guidance '*...in reverent fear.*' Upon his practice Noah's faith influenced him to construct the ark.

As parents we need to appreciate the proper place of faith on both our affections and our practice. Faith should be seen to influence our emotions. Our children need to appreciate that for good things we are stirred-up to love and desire while for dreadful things we are moved to the appropriate emotions of fear or dislike. Demonstrating a weaving together of emotion and execution in our obedience of God's guidance is an important aspect of leadership.

Noah's obedience involved doing something earnestly for a long time, for the first time ever, in a context that would probably scorn and oppose the work, and at a considerably advanced age of approximately 500 years.

The Blessed Fruit of Noah's Obedience

Shem, Ham and Japheth were the three sons of Noah. Together with their wives they greatly benefited from God's grace and favour towards Noah.

Noah and his household was saved when a whole world of sinners were perishing around them. It was well for Noah's household that they were his sons and daughters'-in-law. And the reason for this privilege was not Noah's earthly estate but his God given privileges.

By his faithful obedience Noah condemned the world's false security, vain confidence, and futile contempt for the things of God. By his faithful obedience he commended himself to man's conscience in the sight of God so that they were judged by it.

If you are an, '*...heir of the righteousness that comes by faith...*' then your life, like that of Noah must be marked by persevering obedience that brings-forth the fruits of righteousness in your life and in your family.

Like Noah; believe God, commune with Him, obey His laws, live with integrity both in the world and at home, stand against the whole world of sin for this will be proof that you are a true heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

If you were to become a child again would you be delighted to have a parent who is just like you? If your children were given the opportunity to choose their parents and they made their selection decision based on faithful obedience to God in a godless age, do you think they would settle for you as their preferred father or mother? It's highly probable that the sons of Noah together with their wives would have gladly 're-elected' Noah for a second term to the position of daddy if the ballot decision was guided by faithful obedience to God.

EFFECTS OF THE NEW BIRTH ON THE MIND OF THE SINNER

Sakwa Buliba

“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The divine illumination which the mind receives at the new birth is not by means of dreams, visions or revelation of things that have not been made known in the Scriptures. The only means which the Holy Spirit uses to enlighten the mind of a sinner is the written Word of God. We read: “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:130 KJV). God’s word may have been read attentively for a long time, its doctrine intellectually rehearsed extensively, its precepts memorized at great length, but because there was a veil upon the mind (2 Corinthians 3:15) and so no spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14), the reader could not be inwardly affected by it.

At the new birth, the Holy Spirit removes that veil from the mind, opens the heart to receive the Word (Acts 16:14), and powerfully applies to the mind and conscience the truth of the Scripture. The result is that the one renewed is able to say, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). The sinner is now enlightened in the knowledge of his own terrible condition. Before this spectacular occurrence, he may have received deep theological instruction, subscribed to some sound doctrinal statements, and intellectually believed in the ‘total depravity of man’. But now the solemn truths of God’s Word concerning the state of the fallen man are brought home in a stunning reality to his own soul.

The renewed sinner no longer compares himself with his fellows, where he would easily judge himself to be better, but now measures himself by the standards of God’s Word. He now discovers that he is unclean, that his heart is desperately wicked and that he is altogether not worthy to stand in the presence of the holy God. He is powerfully convicted of his own sins, he feels that they are awful and numerous and that they deserve nothing but judgement. Even though he may have been a devout church attendant, he now realizes that there is ‘no soundness’ (Isaiah 1:6) in him and that all his religious observances are only as ‘filthy rags’ (Isaiah 64:6) and that he deserves nothing but eternal punishment in the lake of fire.

The equity and severity of God’s law and the fact that sin justly calls for terrible punishment is humbly acknowledged. Thus he confesses with his own mouth to be guilty before God, and rightly liable to His awful wrath, both for the rotten condition of his own heart and his multiple transgressions against God. He now realizes that his whole life had been wasted, living in deception and rejection of God’s ways. He now understands the sinfulness of sin, its awful malignity and contemplates how to escape the due reward for his rebellion. “What must I do to be saved?” is his painful cry.

He is convinced of the absolute impossibility of his past acts of charity and record of religious performances to reconcile him to God. He has been brought to the ultimate end of himself. By instrument of the illumination of God’s Word through the working of the Spirit, he perceives himself to be a poor sinner and a worthless wretch, unsuited for

Christ's pardon. As the prospect of obtaining mercy from the wrath to come through the vicarious death of Christ starts dawning on him, his soul starts sparkling with rays of hope and joy.

As the Holy Spirit presents to him the infinite merits of Christ's obedience and righteousness and His power to save sinners, earnest desires for an interest in Christ now possess his heart. Under the gentle but powerful influences of the Spirit, his soul is drawn by such solemn statements as, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest", or "Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out" and he is led to apply to Him for pardon, cleansing and righteousness.

Repentance, which is a godly sorrow for sin, an abhorring of it as unpleasant and an earnest desire to forsake and be delivered from its pollution, follows. In the light of God, the renewed mind now perceives of the utter vanity of the world, the worthlessness of the earthly achievements and the uselessness of the perishing trifles which the godless strive so hard to acquire. He has been awakened from the death slumber and things are now viewed in their true reality.

His mind now recognizes that God in His awesome majesty is an object to be feared, adored and worshipped. His law is accepted as holy, just and good. All of these perceptions, awakenings, convictions and actions are realized in constant pursuit of holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

(This article is adopted from Arthur Pink's 'The Doctrine of Salvation' and paraphrased for simplicity of language and style for wider readership).

(From page 13:)

THE BIBLE SAYS:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.*** (Ephesians 1:3-8). ***SOLA GRATIA!***

Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ***"The righteous shall live by faith."*** (Galatians 3:6-11). ***SOLA FIDE!***

REFORMATION AND CALVIN IN A COUNTRY FAMOUS FOR ATHLETICS AND OBAMA

Vincent Kajuma

I can still remember the shock I felt when I heard that Trinity Baptist has existed as a Reformed church in Kenya for over 30 years. For a long while I had believed myself, a friend in Nakuru, another brother who had just left for theological studies in the United States, and a handful of Facebook friends to be the only people in Kenya who held to Reformed theology. I remember wanting to organize us into a fellowship where we would meet regularly, pray, exchange resources, and encourage one another to persevere in the truth against the tide of the terrible doctrines of our day. That was early 2011.

I still the remember the joy, a short while before I visited TBC when I attended a Bible Study (BS) I'd been invited to by one of my Reformed friends that I'd met on Facebook. I was struck by the BS leader's attention to the details of God's word, as he tried to look at the different meanings of 'filled with the Spirit' as used in their study through Acts. I had only imagined but never actually seen such a BS, or so many ESV Bibles in one room. On my first visit to Trinity Baptist, weeks later, I was even more humbled to see old men and women sustaining a rigorous discussion on the meaning of a verse and quoting verses I thought remote, in the Adult bible study led by Pastor Keith Underhill.

I am therefore made conscious that what I might put forth in this article as the beginning days of the surge of reformed theology could only be the fruit of prayers and labour of those who the Lord had planted way before the internet introduced us to monergism.com or John MacArthur.

Definition of terms

The awareness and increased understanding of Reformed theology has also come with great misunderstanding of the same and therefore sharp disapproval and criticisms. And therefore before I proceed to try to trace the spread of Reformed theology in recent years, a brief definition of terms is most necessary, to put it mildly.

The word 'theology' always rings bells of burdensome academic engagement and tedious trifling with non-essential matters in the Bible like 'whose daughter did Cain marry'. While that may be true in some extreme cases, your 'theology' is simply your view of the Christian faith. Everyone has a theology (a way they view Christianity). Your theology therefore informs what you believe about Christianity and how you [inevitably] live it out. When I say 'Reformed theology', I (as I refer to it in this article) I simply mean 'an understanding of the Christian faith that has historically being labelled 'Reformed'.

The Reformed view is characterized by the centrality of the Bible; the sovereignty of God; the wondrous necessity of grace (as seen in what are known as the Doctrines of Grace or the 5 points of Calvinism); the quality of the Christian life, the place of the law and the gospel, the biblical view of the world and a distinctive view of preaching¹. There is also a marked emphasis of the authenticity of the gospel and importance of the local church.

The Internet

Most of the reformed Christians in Kenya have been exposed to it through the internet. In a recent article, Conrad Mbewe, a pastor of a Reformed Baptist church in Zambia, attributes the spread of reformed theology ‘almost exclusively’ to the internet. While the internet and the possibility of video streaming, uploads and downloads has led to a colossal rise in the use of pornography, God, in His sovereignty, has used the same medium for good. Sermons, e-books and articles by reformed authors and preachers abroad have been found their way into people’s hands, as God has used the internet as a great wind to blow the scattered seeds to far lands beyond the sowers’ imaginations.

Mbewe says ‘The testimony of these young men and women has been universally the same. They have listened to a few of the sermons and felt like men and women who have starved for years and stumbled into a room with food meant for a king. Hence, they have listened to everything that they can lay their hands on. They have also foraged the blogosphere for Reformed discussions and monologues.’².

Challenges

For many of these reformed people, most of them in their twenties and thirties, there is the problem of a lack of a local church. ‘Now that I believe the authority of God’s word, how do I keep going to this church where the preacher preachers primarily from a vision he got on Saturday night, instead of the Scriptures?’ ‘Now that I know that true conversion is an internal surgery of the heart by the Holy Spirit, how do I keep participating in the missions-team where all we do is use clever means to get people to repeat a prayer, raise a hand, come to the front during the highly emotionalized alter-call?’ ‘Where do I go to continue hearing the wondrous doctrines of God’s amazing grace that elects undeserving sinners, unbinds their shackled wills and draws them to Himself to keep them forever?’ Sad to say, there are few preachers who are not embarrassed or afraid to say ‘elect’, even if this is a thoroughly Biblical doctrine.

Sad to say, there are few preachers who are not embarrassed or afraid to say ‘elect’, even if this is a thoroughly Biblical doctrine.

A negative attitude to expository preaching

Most preachers have a negative attitude to expository preaching, since they find it too tedious for what they think is consumable by their idea of the ‘ordinary’ Christian.

One of the reason why many preachers see no need for a careful exegesis of God’s word is that many church goers are assumed to have little education, as slowly religion becomes the reserve for the less privileged of the society. The perhaps well-meaning preachers chose to avoid anything ‘heavy’ and therefore err in the other extreme of oversimplification. They in effect deny God’s ability to communicate to His children the Scriptures He has given. They forget that the Scriptures were written to many who were not ‘wise according to worldly standards’ (1 Cor. 1:26); instead of dismissing God’s word

as ‘difficult’, theirs is the great duty of every pastor –to understand the meaning of the text so well they can present it simply to their hearers.

However, there is more to be gleaned from this avoidance of expository preaching. The intolerance to careful expository preaching is even in the pews. This is not just limited to the less educated but also the more educated in the society. Scripturally rich and exegetical preaching comes to them as ‘theological’, ‘boring’ and unnecessarily detailed. They want practical stuff. Most preachers have conveniently not taught their congregants to search the Scriptures, or trained them to do it; not even the most educated. Many of them know that they would go out of business if the true believers in their congregations learnt a thing or two about Bible interpretation. Their ignorance, or manipulation of the Bible to ‘encourage’ people, all the while with the ulterior motive of causing them to give more, will soon be public knowledge.

The keener church-goers are only versed with the theology of the Word of Faith movement, which is readily available on the best known ‘Christian’ TV channels and radio stations. The Word of Faith propounds the health/wealth gospel and misinterprets verses to teach Christians to use their words to manipulate God’s sovereignty in Providence. Most of the ‘deep’ Christians have learned it from the false teachers of this movement.

Sadly enough, this disease has plagued our churches for so long and so deeply that many people have never heard of any different doctrine. This, to them is basic Christianity.

This is the climate within which the current reformation is taking place. Despite the fact that those with Reformed persuasions challenge these false views by appealing fully to the Scriptures and are very rigorous about what a verse means, they are the ones seen to be introducing new and strange teachings. They often find themselves drawn into arguments over doctrine. Because of their disagreement with what is commonly believed, they find themselves labelled as argumentative and controversial, and at times cut off from friends. They are ostracized and termed followers of John Calvin and John Piper instead of ‘Christ’. To many, such persecution has brought temptations towards compromise.

It is hence a lonely road for these believers. They are caught in the age-old dilemma of being patient with their local churches and praying for reformation there or travelling a long way across town to the only reformed churches available.

The way forward

Nevertheless, the grace of God has been sufficient for these men and women. For those that are not able to meet together because of distance, the internet has proved a great front for them to find warmth in each other’s fellowship. While still bemoaning false teaching, they encourage, teach and exhort each other to love and to good works through blogs and social media. Such individual-to-individual interaction is necessary, as it checks excesses and gives opportunities and encouragement towards orthopraxy, doing what you say. Indeed it is only by adorning the doctrines of grace with a holy life and love even for the non-reformed, that the truth-wars will be won. Many who don’t have such opportunities end up becoming pedantic internet polemicists who will argue about the meaning of ‘the love of God’ but show none of it.

There are a few existing reformed churches scattered in Nairobi and a few others in places like Eldoret, Kericho, Pokot, Rendile, Siaya, Funyula, Bondo, Kilifi, Tana River,

and South Nyanza. There is still a great need for church planting, especially in the cities, for the furtherance of the gospel and sound reformed teaching. For these churches, every Lord's Day is an opportunity to preach the gospel, instruct the saints, and offer a setting of mutual encouragement and enjoyment of the gift of fellowship. Such churches also need to emphasize the place of creeds and confessions, so that these young reformers don't see the faith as a recent thing but the actual doctrines handed down from the apostles, preserved, taught and defended through church history.

A monthly forum known as 'the Meaty Forum' that happens in Nairobi city provides an opportunity for healthy discussions on important Christian topics. The forum, started by a group of young people, most of whom are members of TBC and Emmanuel Baptist Church Nairobi, seeks to challenge and address common unbiblical views held by the professing Church. Attendance has grown considerably in the last one year.

The Grace and Truth Conference held in Trinity Baptist Church, Donholm (6th-7th September), and whose theme was 'The 5 *Solas*' was to me, a landmark in the path of a reformation that has slowly been burying its root into the needy soil of the Kenyan church. The conference sought to give an appreciation of, and an in-depth understanding of these key doctrines of the Protestant reformation.

Dangers

In the face of all this, caution must be taken. As with America's recent resurgence of what was known as the YRR (the Young, Reformed and Restless) the surge of reformation in Kenya proves no different in its susceptibility to the perils of such movements. There is always the danger of faddism. Since reformed theology counters a widely held view, it seems rebellious or anti-establishment. Many joy-riders may be drawn by this. Related to this is the other danger of people-worship and party spirit. Just as the Corinthian 'I follow Paul', 'I follow Apollos' phenomena, the tendency of infighting among those in the reformed camp is heightened when many 'go beyond what is written' and fail to see Spurgeon or Warfield or D.A Carson as mere servants in Christ's garden. None of them is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:7). There is also the danger of being merely polemical with doctrine and lacking an actual, genuine pursuit of holiness, in agreement with the doctrines so vigorously defended. Just as the prosperity gospel is unconvincing and laughable because only the pastors get richer while the congregants are impoverished, the reformed truth, with its Biblical roots, is literally unassailable when accompanied by a holy life of humility and love. We, the young present-day reformers of our country, must pray both for truth and grace.

1. Cover page, *What is the Reformed Faith?*, John R de Witt
2. <http://www.conradmbewe.com/2013/08/the-young-restless-and-reformedin-africa.html>

HOW TO BE HAPPY IN THIS LIFE *Sakwa Buliba*

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Psalm1:1-3).

The expression ‘blessed...the man’ suggests that this is a person subject to all the frailties and sorrows of humanity just like anyone among us. We should not cherish the delusion that a happy man must have been better than the ordinary folk. Certainly not. The most blessed man is still a man. He must suffer pain, succumb to sicknesses, endure losses and yet in it all be a happy man!

Being a man, he is also subject to human infirmities; perhaps of a bad temper, or of a proud spirit. He may be tempted to lies or a besetting sin of another kind. Do not imagine that the blessed man is yet without fault! He will confess to you that he has to wrestle hard as we do still with sins and doubts and fears. Furthermore, it appears that he has to endure the same temptations that we all go through; “the way of sinners” often crosses his path, the “seat of the scorner” is sometimes next door to his own and “the counsel of the wicked” even under the same roof as him.

The blessed man is not blind. He is obliged to see the obnoxious pictures displayed by profiteers in the streets of his town. He is not deaf either; he is forced to hear the obscene words uttered by drunkards in the thick of the night. He is subject to like passions and tempted in all points as we are, and yet he is blessed! Observe, too, he does not have to be of a lofty social status in life. This blessedness is not a preserve of those famed for riches, power or celebrity status. No, it is as attainable by the poor, and the obscure, as by those whose names feature in the history books as achievers.

Pursuing pleasure and egocentric goals in this life will not bring us happiness. Only a life built on God’s Word and His promises and obedience to His precepts will yield true happiness. That’s what this psalmist seeks to declare. The first verse begins with “blessed,” which in Hebrew is a plural form of intensity and may be rendered, “Oh, the happiness of the person!” Here, the word ‘blessed’ stems from a root verb that implies going on or all things getting well or advancing. Therefore, if you want to advance to the highest degree, fullest extent and purest form of happiness, the psalmist endeavours to tell you how.

1. Consider Your Socialization

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.....”(v.1)

From this verse, it is clear that a happy man is one who dutifully avoids the common way of ungodly persons. The ungodly are not necessarily drunkards and social perverts that you may think about. More often you find the ungodly just being likeable kind of neighbors. They may go to Church regularly and be kind to the poor. They may hold respectable positions in society and be caring husbands and wives. Their tragic folly

principally lies in the fact that they have neglected the chief end of man: to worship God, and enjoy Him forever.

The blessed man, however, avoids this folly. He does not consider first how the world regards him but how God looks at him. The first thought of the truly blessed man is how he can best glorify the name of Christ. Whenever something is labeled, "sin," in God's Word, and though men may laugh it off, dismiss it as a joke, or accept it as fun, the Christian will avoid it like plague. The seat of the scornful causes a Christian's blood to boil with horror. When he hears God's name profaned, his heart is full of indignation. He distances himself from scoffers. Sinners could not be his bosom friends; he does not dream of being unequally yoked with them. He shuns their company, ways, talks and example wherever he can, for his congenial associates are in the family of God. As he would keep from plague-infected people, so he strives to keep away from men who blaspheme and profane the name of God.

The ungodly are ever ready to counsel the believer, seeming to be very much concerned about his welfare. They will warn him against being too strict about the things of God, advising him to be rational and liberal and to "maximize his goods in both worlds." The policy of those who leave God out of their lives, who have no fear of God before their eyes, is regulated by self-will and self-aggrandizement, and is dominated by what they call "fun, intellect, logic, choice or free-will."

It is indeed sad that many professing Christians regulate their lives by the advice of ungodly friends and relatives, heeding such "counsel" in their business choices, their social occupations, the furnishing and decorating of their homes, their dress and diet, and the choice of school or careers for their children.

2. Consider Your Delights

"...his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (v.2)

The law of the Lord is the daily bread of the true believer. He is not under the law as a curse and burden, but he is in it because he delights to be in it, he cherishes meditating on it, to read it and think over it day and night. He takes a text and carries it with him all day long and in the night-watches, musing upon its instructions, corrections and reproves. Real meditation in God's Law is an act of obedience, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; *meditate* on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (Joshua 1:8).

'Meditating' means in-taking, ingestion, consumption, appropriation and assimilation. It is as God's Word is pondered by the mind, turned over and over in the thoughts, its sweetness felt in the heart and mixed with faith, applied and obeyed. The Word of God is that which most occupies the mind and most constantly engages the thoughts, and thrills the heart of a believer. "Your words were found, and I ate them; and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). It is not only reading that does us good, but the soul inwardly feeding on it, digesting it and assimilating it into our daily lives. The inward meditation is the thing that makes the soul rich towards God. This is the happy man's occupation.

"But his delight is in the Law of the Lord" (Psalm 1:2). The opening "But" points to a sharp contrast with the last clause in the previous verse, and serves to confirm that the

worldly seeks his "delight" in the entertainment furnished by those who scorn spiritual and eternal things. Not so the "blessed" man; his delight is in something infinitely superior to what this perishing world can provide: the Scriptures. This is a sure mark of those who have been born again. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God" (Romans 8:7). To "delight in the law of the Lord" is a sure proof that we have received of the Spirit of Christ, for He declared "I delight to do Your will, O My God" (Psalm 40:8).

God's Word is the daily bread of the "blessed" man. His desire and his determination is to walk by the wholesome counsel of God, and not by the corrupt counsel of the ungodly. The unregenerate delight in pleasing self, but the joy of the Christian lies in pleasing the Lord. It is not simply that he is interested in "the Law of the Lord," but he delights therein. There are thousands of people in churches today, who are keen students of Scripture, who delight in its prophecies, mysteries, and promises; yet they are far from delighting in the authority of its Author and in being subject to His revealed will. This "delight" is a peace, joy, and satisfaction of the soul; pure and stable, to be found in subjection to God's will.

"And in His Law, he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). His meditation in the Word, is not occasional and sporadic, but regular and persistent; not only in the "day" of prosperity, but also in the "night" of adversity; not only in the "day" of youth and strength, but in the "night" of old age and weakness. The gnostic thinks about satisfying his carnal mind; the scatterbrained youth is concerned only with pleasures; the man of the world directs all his efforts in acquiring wealth and honors; but the truest happy man's determination is to please God and obtain a better knowledge of His will by meditating day and night in His holy Word. Thereby his paths obtain light, his heart extracts its sweetness, and his soul is nourished!

3. Consider the Fruitfulness of Your Life

"He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (v.3).

Notice very carefully, dear reader, what precedes this. There must be a complete break from the world's policy, ungodly counsel or secular associations, a separation from their fellowship, pleasures and socializations; and there must be a genuine subjection to God's authority and a daily feeding upon His Word, before there can be any real fruitfulness unto Him. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." A blessed man is not a "reed" moved about by every wind which blows, nor a creeper, trailing along the ground. A tree signifies stability, uprightness, and even growth. It is not a dry, dead, sapless pole, but grows upward, downward, abroad, spreading its branches, leafing and fruiting steadily. Not self-sown nor the foundling of the wind but planted by God, the blessed man, believes God has put him where he should be. Poor or rich, he learns to be content for he is a tree divinely planted. He is well sustained.

This tree is "planted" - many are not - but grow wild. A "planted" tree is well rooted in the ground, under the care and cultivation of its owner. Thus, this metaphor assures us that those who delight in God's Law are owned by God, cared for and pruned by Him!

He is united to Christ; the grace of God abounds in him and has a living faith. The rivers of water imply the place of refreshment, replenishment, communion, and renewal. That refers to Christ, and tells us that just as a tree derives life and fruitfulness from the adjacent river, so the believer, by communion, draws from the fullness there is for him in Christ. The phrase "which yields its fruit in season," brings out an essential character of a gracious man, for there are no fruitless branches in the True Vine.

The expression "his leaf shall not wither, whatever he does shall prosper" aptly portrays the Christian profession as a bright and living reality. The blessed man's works evidence his faith. Where there is no fruit to God's glory, our profession of faith is a mockery. Solid joys and lasting pleasures are his portion. He has, too, the gladness of growth as he is in a favored position 'by the rivers of water'. Whatever is really good for him, God has pledged Himself to give. Not a tree in the desert, but placed where the water comes rippling to his roots.

"His leaf, also, shall not wither." Even when personal beauty decays because of illness or old age, and power of wit and learning diminish due to approaching death, still he shall not wither but shall glitter in the spiritual beauty of the glorious presence of his Master! And to crown it all, he has constant prosperity. "Whatever he does shall prosper." He may not grow rich in this world, but he still prospers towards God. His ships may be broken, but he can thank God even for that, for their breaking may be his means of grace through which the tribulations may cement his grip on God's faithfulness. A happy man is content to lose his material possessions or worldly positions or fame if his soul is made wealthy in faith and sweet submission to God's will. This metaphor of the flourishing tree paints a very beautiful picture of a man who is not walking in the counsel of the wicked, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of scoffers, but delighting in the Law of the Lord!

A CHARGE TO KEEP I HAVE!

Keep the charge of Jehovah, so that you do not die.

(LEVITICUS 8:35)

Matthew Henry's Commentary on Leviticus 8:35

They attended to *keep the charge of the Lord*: We have every one of us a charge to keep, an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, needful duty to be done, our generation to serve; and it must be our daily care to keep this charge, for it is the charge of the Lord our Master, who will shortly call us to an account about it, and it is at our utmost peril if we neglect it. Keep it *that you die not*; it is death, eternal death, to betray the trust we are charged with; by the consideration of this we must be kept in awe.

DO YOU BELONG TO A TRULY BIBLICAL CHURCH?

John Muketha

Paul writing to the Church in Thessalonica says: “*this is the will of God, your sanctification*” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This means believers are set apart and made holy for God and are ready at all times for the return of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Justification must lead to a life of sanctification since without holiness, no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14). How can we be sanctified as we await the Day of the Lord? We need to belong to a biblical church where we are edified and built up so as to be able to overcome and persevere to the end. Some Is your church an edification church? Are you being built up and established in your faith?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15, Paul gives us five principles of an edification church

1. RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Those whom the New Testament writers describe as having spiritual authority in the local church are designated elders (also referred to as bishops or pastors. These are the men who possess authority to rule. Paul describes leaders in terms of their work – what they do to make the church a place where believers are edified. Church leaders should be more concerned with what they do rather than the accompanying titles

- ***The Pastor’s Work (v.12a):*** To labour hard! Apostle Paul as a tent maker, knew what hard manual work entailed – labouring/toiling making tents out of animal skins (2:9). Pastors work hard. Paul’s goal was to bring men to maturity through “*struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*” (Colossians 1:28,29). For a pastor to study, pray, teach, preach, and exhort as he should, it will put a drain on his heart and often brings mental and as well as physical fatigue. This is a high price well and there are no short-cuts to effective ministry.
- ***Overseer’s Work (v.12b):*** The overseer/bishop is given the authority to take charge of the affairs of the local church. This work involves looking out for the needs of members and taking care of the weak and those who are needy and in danger.
- ***Elder’s Work (v. 12c):*** The Elders work involves instructing, directing and warning. Elders admonish (rebuke) and church members are expected to respond to the rebuke/admonition. (Acts 20:26-28)

Responsible Leadership is an essential mark of a truly biblical church. How effective is your teaching? What do you expect of church members? How could the members in your church assist in making your work a delight and more enjoyable?

2. RESPECTFUL MEMBERSHIP (vv.12,13)

Church members should respect and recognize the leaders formally identified and set apart for ministry. These leaders are honourable with a proven track record and character. As church members, we must accept them as our Pastor-Shepherd-Overseer and we are required to esteem them highly and humbly receive their admonition since they will give an account to Christ. (Hebrews 13:7,17). Let them do their work with joy. We should love the leaders with the love of commitment and pray for them daily. Show them kindness/warmth and don’t join anyone mouthing your pastor. Never say anything bad/negative/critical about your pastor until you have spoken to them.

The Scriptures make it clear that we have an obligation toward elders.

- We are to *remember, follow, obey, and submit* (Hebrews 13:7 and 17).
- We are to respect *esteem, love honour* them (1 Thessalonians 5:13; 1 Timothy 5:1)
- We are to recognize them (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Corinthians 16:15-18)
- We are to protect them from unfounded charges (1 Timothy. 5:9)
- We are to remember them and imitate them (Hebrews 13:7)
- We are to *support financially* (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Corinthians 9:4-14).

If your pastors are faithful in their oversight, providing Scriptural counsel and responsible leadership, then God expects you to submit to them. This requires an attitude of submission to their leadership under God as their counsel is given due weight. They must be allowed to influence your life and your decisions. As a church member, what do you expect of the elders and what are your obligations to the elders? How could you help your elders to make their labour a joy?

3. PEACEFUL FELLOWSHIP - *Be at peace among yourselves.* (v.13)

Christ is the Prince of Peace. In the church there must be fellowship within the church leadership, between members and leaders, and among members. Wars need not be conspicuous! Wars can be fought quietly through gossip and refusal to encourage one another. Ministries can dry up for lack of encouragement. As a church member you should tell the leaders how the Lord is working in you through the ministry. Ask: *How can I help? What can I pray for?* How could fellowship in your church be improved?

Fostering peace is achieved through commitment to encouraging one another. ***Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God.*** (Matthew 5:9). The first deacons were appointed to deal with divisions in the church. Deacons should work with pastors to foster peace in the church.

4. NURSING FAMILY (v.14)

The church is God's family where all are to be nurses taking care of one another. Through the new birth and baptism one is born into the church family. In the family there is love of commitment with the strong taking care of the weak.

- Admonish the disorderly and lazy (v.14; 4:11)
- Encourage the faint-hearted/despairing/lonely (v.14). Use doctrine to encourage/help the weak. Use truth the truth of God to build/bless others.
- Help the weak (v.14). The morally weak (4:3). Do everything possible to help the morally weak. Church discipline is meant to keep people in the church.
- Be patient with all. (v.14). There are cultural, personality and language differences within the body of Christ.

5. KIND COMMUNITY (v.15)

In a truly biblical church, there is no room for revenge as evil is nipped in the bud. Pay evil with good. *Be perfect as your Father is perfect.* (Matthew 5:43ff).

The church should be a community committed to doing good to one another, with Christ who suffered for us being example. This is a community where everyone is looking for opportunities to do good both inside and outside the church. What opportunities does your church have to bless others like Christ did? Are there any initiatives for doing good to others?

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**THE EDITOR,
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Chief Editor:
Keith Underhill

Editor:
John Muketha

Producer:
Ken Sakwa

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Cell Phone: 0728 431067

E-mail: info@trinitybaptistkenya.com
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