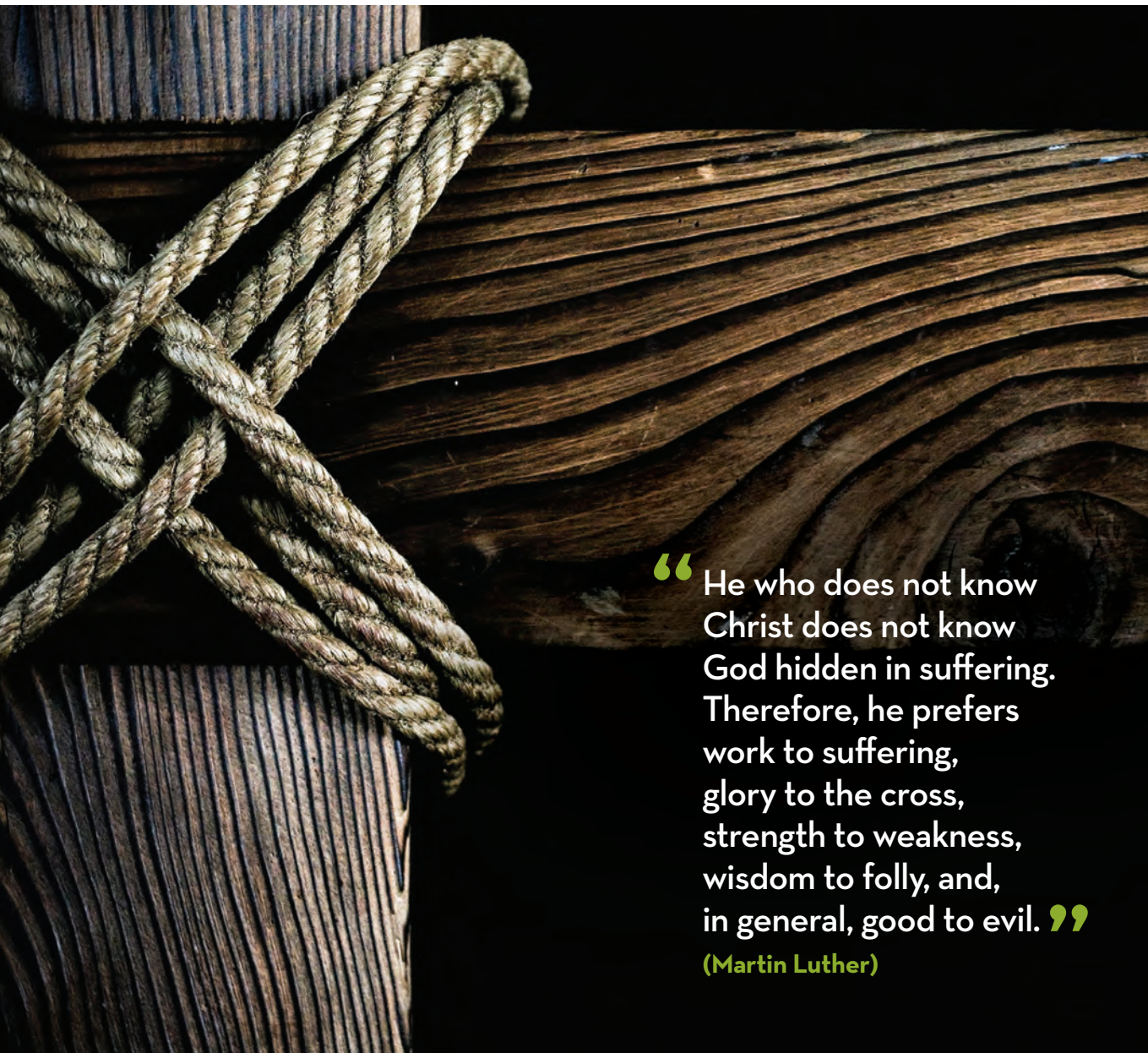




VINE JOURNAL

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ISSUE 2



“ He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers work to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. ”

(Martin Luther)

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Cross or glory

TONY PAYNE

IN THIS SECOND ISSUE of *Vine Journal*, a number of our essays cluster around the foot of the cross. This is only as it should be. The cross is our sign and our song; it is the banner we carry into battle, and the linen with which we bind up our wounds.

However, while we are used to marvelling and rejoicing at all that Christ did for us on the cross, we don't always pause to consider what it means to be a 'theologian of the cross'.

That phrase—'theologian of the cross'—goes back to an insight of Martin Luther's (see Mark Thompson's opening essay in this issue). According to Luther, the cross does more than reconcile us to God. It is also the way God chooses to reveal himself to us. God shows himself to us in his crucified Son—not at all in the way we would expect, in blazing glory and power, or according to all that we would think is wisest, best and good. Instead, God reveals himself amidst the suffering and weakness and folly of the cross.

For Luther, the deadly enemy of a theology of the cross was a theology of glory—by which he meant an attempt to know God by building on things we consider to be good or wise or powerful or excellent in some way (as medieval Roman Catholic theology did). Theologians of glory assume that how God is to be known and experienced today is in some way connected with how we might expect him to be, according to our conceptions or standards of glory, wisdom or goodness. The theologian of glory seeks to build a bridge from what humanity thinks is good and beautiful and true to a saving knowledge of God.

Mark explains all this very clearly, and in some ways the two observations that I now want to make might best be appreciated after reading his essay.

Firstly, it occurs to me that the temptation of every age is to put

The message we speak into the public square must be grounded in the foolish, weak message of the cross.

forward a version of Christianity that seems reasonable, rational and attractive to the worldly culture we swim in. Classically, this has been the approach of liberal Christianity, but let us not think that liberals are the only ones to feel this impulse. I certainly do. When I'm talking to someone about the gospel, I instinctively want Christianity to be as inviting as possible to them. I want to accentuate the positive, to find some common ground, and to agree where possible. Perhaps by building this kind of bridge, I could persuade them to walk across.

But Luther's theology of the cross sounds a warning, and it is one we need to hear personally, and that all churches and ministries involved in apologetics or pre-evangelistic witness need to consider. If we end up crafting a message that is built on the prevailing assumptions or desires of our culture (as to what is attractive or good), and then try to show how God's version of these things is so much better and more desirable, we end up sidelining the cross as God's revelation of himself. We are following the theologians of glory in seeking to find an entry point other than the cross for arriving at a saving knowledge of God.

Phil Colgan emphasizes this point in his essay in this issue, as he reflects on Paul's powerful teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:

If you want to be wise in the world's way of understanding, then you cannot grasp the power of the cross. But then the opposite is true: if you grasp the power of the cross, you cannot appear wise in the eyes of the world. (pp. 22-23)

In his wisdom, God does not use wise, clever or sophisticated things to convince the wise. He uses the confounding word of the cross, which requires us to accept that all our most cherished ideas and narratives about what life is about are folly, and that only here, at the cross, can real wisdom be found.

I'm in favour of engagement and apologetics, and for speaking into the public square in an intelligent, gracious and compelling fashion. But the message we speak into the public square must be grounded in the foolish, weak message of the cross, just as it must be in the private square, the family square and the church square. We must not recoil from the indignity of appearing foolish, weak, or contemptible in the eyes of the world, because that is the only path for salvation for the world.

The *second* observation I wish to make is more personal. It is worth remembering that Luther talked not about a theology of the cross but *theologians* of the cross.

In other words, a theology of the cross is not a topic that you study, or a doctrinal statement that you assent to, nor even a shibboleth that allows you entry into the club of true-blue evangelicals.

Being a theologian of the cross is a position you occupy. The essence of it is personal and spiritual. Theology and ministry and the Christian life don't just happen in light of the cross, or even at the foot of the cross, but *on the cross*.

One becomes a theologian of the cross by turning in faith from our pride and presumption and all other hopes, and being crucified with Christ. It is there that we receive the revelation of what God is like. It is there that we receive the free justification that declares us right with God. And it is there that we receive our commission to die for others—to go around prayerfully telling people about this foolish, counter-intuitive, seemingly weak and appalling message, and being persecuted for it.

As theologians of the cross, we share in the Christ's noble status as sacrificial servants and humiliated nobodies; as those with nowhere to lay our heads; as the scum of the earth; as those who are constantly being given over to death so that others may live.

It would be a great shame for us to read this edition of *Vine Journal* and perhaps feel good about ourselves, or to thank God that we are not like those other people, who have fallen for a theology of glory. Let us instead go again to the cross, and find in its folly and weakness the wisdom and power and glory of God. ▣

Tony Payne

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The articles by Mark Thompson and Phil Colgan in this issue have been adapted from papers delivered at the Nexus Conference on 'Crucified Ministry' in May 2015. To hear the talks these articles were based on, and other related material, visit the Nexus website.

A date for the diary: the 2016 Nexus Conference will be on Monday 23 May, on the topic of 'Ministry in Exile'.

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Agreeing to never disagree

MIKE ALLEN

WAS INTRIGUED WHEN one of my university lecturers said, “I’m not going to present that argument, because I don’t believe it”. In practice, it meant that he would only ever present his own take on a topic, while ignoring other views. Could this be right? Can we only authentically teach that which we believe to be true?

One of my other lecturers took a completely different approach. He taught one topic each week, split across two lectures. The first lecture had him arguing for one position, before he would argue against it the next. He shot for balance, but was it good teaching? Or was it ultimately subverting the learning process by suggesting that the truly wise will see both sides of an argument, without ever making a final commitment?

These aren’t the only options. It must be possible to present different sides of an argument fairly, but still to wholeheartedly believe and teach your own position. However, experience tells us that the best teachers are those who sincerely believe what they’re teaching. Being personally invested in a topic means they are the most passionate, and so the most likely to inspire others to follow them in their thinking. Just as many a scientist today can trace their interest back to a certain physics teacher, so too many Christians can trace their conversion back to the influence of a committed believer who taught them the gospel. Put simply, good teachers believe what they are teaching, and good teaching can change us.

This brings up a question that has arisen recently in the debate over teaching religion in schools in Australia. Can a Christian, teaching the Bible to non-Christians, do so without any possibility

As we elevate the right not to be offended, we simultaneously impinge our freedom of speech, a high price to pay.

of converting them? We could answer that by asking whether there could be anyone more passionate about teaching the Bible than a follower of Jesus.

So, with regard to the teaching of religion in Australian government schools, should parents be worried that their child might be taught the Bible and become a Christian? If a parent has explicitly requested their child take that class, they have little reason to complain—in much the same way that it would be unreasonable to complain if, after consenting for their child to take photography classes, their child comes home wanting to be a photographer.

Of course, there are some legitimate concerns. Parents should be told what their child will be taught, and teachers should be well-trained and stick to the curriculum. But to suggest that we should ban religious teaching in schools simply because some might find that teaching compelling and life-changing is a somewhat curious line of reasoning.

So why this aversion to conversion? Is it a symptom of a society that seeks peace at all costs, avoiding conflict by simply shutting down debate? In that view, the perfect world is one where we are all free to hold whatever beliefs we desire, with an accompanying right not to be challenged about them. But while this is not new—just recall the phrase “never talk about religion or politics”—has it been knocked up a notch with the rise of multiculturalism? Does our society really believe that the only way forward for coexistence is to exclude conversion? Is that why proselytizing is now such a dirty word?

Of course this ‘coexist without conversion’ philosophy has a certain appeal. No one desires conflict, and one simply needs to look at the earliest preaching in the book of Acts to see how gospel preaching brings with it joyful acceptance from some but angry rejection from others. So if our main aim is to avoid the possibility of conflict, we will avoid talking about Jesus.

But is that what we want for our society? For as we elevate the right not to be offended, we simultaneously impinge our freedom of speech, a high price to pay. The logical end point is a world in which no-one can tell anyone what they believe, lest they offend the other. Is that really what we want, what anyone wants?

How then should we speak to our world? It doesn’t seem adequate only to affirm the world by saying “Yes” when we agree with the world’s viewpoint. While I encourage voicing our support for the plight of refugees (for example), we have no basis to affirm what our world affirms but refuse to speak up when our views run contrary to popular opinion. This asymmetry doesn’t benefit the world, just seeks to make ourselves feel better. It shows a craving for the world’s approval. But if salt has lost its saltiness, is it still salt?

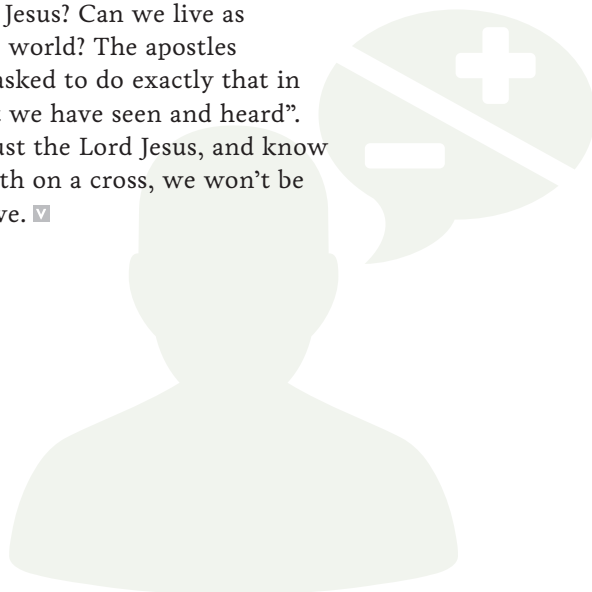
Instead we should push back against our world, but in a genuinely countercultural way. For we can disagree with others without hating

them—we mustn't ever believe the lie that to love others requires us to support their every decision. Plus we can push beyond mere slogans and engage on a deeper level, even when the world itself refuses to do so.

This will not necessarily win us more respect, because we will continue to make absolute claims, and we worship a crucified God, so we will always look foolish to some. But it will show that Christians can handle, and even desire, robust debate.

Ultimately, at the individual level, do we actually have a choice? Can we refrain from telling others about Jesus? Can we live as Christians in a coexist-but-don't-convert world? The apostles Peter and John replied, when they were asked to do exactly that in Acts 4:20: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard". So too us today. If we wholeheartedly trust the Lord Jesus, and know that salvation comes only through his death on a cross, we won't be able to stop telling others about God's love. ▣

Mike Allen



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The theology of the cross for today

MARK THOMPSON

“A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” With these typically startling and paradoxical words, Martin Luther summarized the difference between two diametrically opposed approaches to knowing and serving God. His insight is as relevant today as it was at the time of the Reformation.

IN THE CLOSING pages of his now somewhat dated study of the death of Jesus in the Pauline letters, Charles Cousar concluded “the preaching of the crucified Christ persistently addresses the church’s pretensions, its self-satisfaction, its easy accommodation with culture”.¹ I am happy to assume that most readers would agree with that. After all, we have seen accommodation to contemporary culture on a breath-taking scale over the past 50 years. In some places it really is hard to distinguish the message of the churches and the message of the culture, and not because the culture has become more Christian. But would we be a little more uncomfortable with the suggestion that the preaching of the crucified Christ persistently addresses *our* pretensions, *our* self-satisfaction, *our* easy accommodation with culture?

We might want to protest that

evangelical Christianity has the cross of Christ at its heart. If any people are the people of the cross, we are. We take the cross of Christ very seriously. We write books about the cross. We preach the cross. We call on our people to live in the light of the cross. I hear people talking about a cruciform lifestyle. But might it just be possible to do all these things and still not be shaped at a profound level by the *theology* of the cross?

Perhaps you might consider for just a moment the period of European history known as the Middle Ages. Whatever other issues there may have been, theological and otherwise, it would be hard to sustain any suggestion that the cross was neglected in the churches of those days. Anselm, Abelard and Aquinas all wrote on the cross and how our salvation was effected there. The cross was at least formally presented to every believer each week in the liturgy of the Mass—the *Agnus Dei*, an invocation of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, was added to the Roman

¹ CB Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 183.

Mass around AD 700.² The sermons of men like Bernard of Clairvaux and Alain de Lille included many eloquent and moving appeals to the cross of Christ. In popular piety, the imitation of Christ's suffering, seeking somehow to sense the pain suffered by the crucified one on our behalf, became somewhat of an ideal and crucifixes of the period began to show Christ as suffering not just as triumphant.³ The cross was just about everywhere in medieval Catholicism,

Indeed, no-one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle.

but did the *theology* of the cross really check its pretensions, self-satisfaction and easy accommodation with culture? If it had, perhaps there would have been less of a need for a Reformation.

So it is possible to talk a lot about the cross and still to miss the challenge the theology of the cross presents to the habits we so naturally fall into, even when we are conscientiously trying to live as faithful servants of God and his word. And that is why it is a very worthwhile exercise to return to undoubtedly the best-known exponent of the theology of the cross, Martin Luther, and make sure we have understood what he has to teach us.

With the 500th anniversary of the Reformation just around the corner, the attention being paid to Luther and his theology has intensified over the past few years. There have been quite a few studies and conferences that have taken up this theme of the theology of the cross—with various degrees of success in explaining what Luther actually meant by the expression. But we'll come back to that.

1. Luther's discovery

Luther's famous reference to the theology of the cross and its antithesis, the theology of glory, comes in his Heidelberg Disputation of April 1518, the theses he prepared for the triennial meeting of the Chapter of Observant Augustinians in Saxony.

Luther's appearance in Heidelberg was an opportunity, provided by his confessor and mentor, Johann von Staupitz, for his ideas to be heard more widely and tested by the members of the order of monks to which Luther belonged. Luther would conduct a disputation. One of the other Wittenberg monks, Leonhard Beier, would defend them. In the process, Luther's theology would be heard and weighed.

By this time two previous sets of theses had created a stir in Europe. The previous September Luther had published his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, a headlong confrontation with the established framework of Christian theology as taught in all the schools throughout Europe. Luther was in effect saying the whole way we teach theology is flawed, fatally flawed, not least because it relies so extensively upon the distinctions and axioms of the pagan philosopher Aristotle. You might remember one of the more sweeping statements from that disputation, its sentence 41:

Virtually the entire Ethics of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace. This in opposition to the scholastics.

He added salt to the wound two sentences later:

It is an error to maintain that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle. This in opposition to common opinion.

And then, just to be crystal clear, the next sentence: "Indeed, no-one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without

2 H Sasse, 'Luther's Theology of the Cross', trans. AJ Koelpin, *Briefe an lutherische Pastoren*, vol. 18, 1951.

Online at www.wlsessays.net/files/SasseCross.pdf.

3 *ibid.*

Aristotle”.⁴ You might also remember that Luther’s first great act of reform at Wittenberg was to radically revise the theology curriculum in the university. Rather than studying the opinions of others about the text of the Bible, rather than endless distinctions based on Aristotle’s metaphysical categories, he insisted that his students study the Bible directly for themselves. And this *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* very much gave the rationale for the changes he had made.

The second set of theses, his *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, is better known as *The Ninety-five Theses*. It was the spark that really ignited the Reformation and traditionally the Sunday closest to 31 October, the date in 1517 when these theses were posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, is commemorated as Reformation Sunday. I hope you take the opportunity that anniversary provides each year to celebrate the Reformation and in particular the recovery of the biblical gospel that God affected through men like Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and Cranmer. As you will most likely know, in this set of theses, Luther challenged the misunderstanding of repentance, which lay at the heart of the use of indulgences in the Catholic Church, as well as the abuse of indulgences, which allowed time off purgatory for you or your relatives upon the purchase of an indulgence certificate. Luther hadn’t, at this point, got as far as opposing indulgences altogether. But that would not be long coming. Yet by writing in the way he did, he was seen to be mounting a direct challenge to the authority of the Pope, and indeed, the first response to these theses was not a defence

of indulgences so much as a defence of papal authority.⁵

So Luther had created quite a stir by the time he came to debate at Heidelberg. He’d questioned the way theology was being taught all over Europe and he had questioned one of the Pope’s favourite moneymaking schemes. He’d attacked both the universities and the papal treasury. No wonder things were beginning to hot up for him during the first months of 1518. But what he wanted to do in Heidelberg was to explore the bigger theological issues, and you don’t get much bigger than the issue of how we know what God is like and what he is really doing in the world. As one Lutheran scholar has put it: in Heidelberg Luther went beyond criticizing the theology of the schools; he provided a positive alternative to the entire scholastic framework for practicing theology.⁶

The four theses at the very heart of the Heidelberg Disputation dealt with just this issue, but in a way that had massive implications. They are theses 19-22:

19. *That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.*

20. *He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.*

21. *A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.*

4 M Luther, ‘Disputation against Scholastic Theology’, *Luther’s Works*, 31:12, 1517.

5 S Prierias, *De potestate papae dialogus*, 1518. See HA Oberman, ‘Wittenberg’s war on two fronts’, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. AC Gow, T&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 122-129.

6 R Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 55.

*22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded and hardened.*⁷

*Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.*⁸

Before we spend a few minutes asking what on earth Luther was getting at with this distinction between a theology (or theologian) of the cross and a theology (or theologian) of glory, it might be worth clearing up what Luther meant by the invisible things of God and the visible things of God. Fortunately, we don't need to guess because in his own explanation of these four theses he spelt it out.

"The invisible things of God are virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness and so forth". So, thesis 19 could be paraphrased "the person who claims they can look at the world and explain God's virtue, his godliness, his wisdom, his justice, or his goodness doesn't deserve to be called a theologian". Luther himself insisted "the recognition of all these things does not make one worthy or wise". Drawing our own straight lines between what we see in the world and what God is really like is at best insufficient and at worst dangerously mistaken.

When it comes to the visible things, Luther is just as explicit. "The manifest [back] and visible things of God", he wrote, "are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness". Again we might paraphrase: "the person who looks to the cross and in the suffering there sees the human nature of God, his weakness and foolishness really deserves to be called a theologian".

Luther himself put the two together this way:

2. What was he getting at?

The baseline issue as far as Luther is concerned is that we must stop constructing God as we want or expect him to be and allow him to tell us who he is, what he is like and what he is doing in the world. We must give up the natural theology that draws conclusions from what we see around us and instead let our thinking be shaped by God's revelation of himself. Instead of demanding a show of power and greatness and glory, we must let God show us what he wants us to know about himself. We must stop trying to "master or complete his revelation of himself".⁹

For we are naturally all idolaters at heart. We manufacture a picture of what God must be like if he is really God and if we are to worship him, and then we demand that he conform to that picture. In the generation after Luther, John Calvin would describe the human heart as "a perpetual factory of idols".¹⁰ And Luther's point is that we will naturally get God wrong, we'll value the wrong things, put the emphasis in the wrong places if we start with our own imaginings or with our observations of the world. In short, we will look in the wrong places for evidence of God's blessing and approval.

If we want to see God in all his glory, if we are looking for displays of the power of the omnipotent God, we are all too often tempted to see this in the impressive and large-scale successes in the world. We

7 M Luther, 'Heidelberg Disputation', *Luther's Works*, 31:52-53, 1518.

8 *ibid.*

9 Kolb, p. 56.

10 J Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.8, 1536.

deduce so very quickly that here God is at work and here we can see God's hand of blessing. Where there is weakness and stumbling we conclude exactly the opposite. And Luther's entirely on the money here, isn't he? Isn't this how we are tempted to think? Don't we adopt the world's measure of success all too often and then baptize it with talk of God's work and blessing? When was it that we started to measure success and blessing and faithfulness in terms of numbers? But Luther insists the cross makes it clear that to think like this is to misunderstand the way God works in the world.

Consider what things really looked like on the first Good Friday. The disciples had deserted him and fled. His Jewish opponents had triumphed and he was now treated as just another criminal—an insurrectionist of sorts who had foolishly defied the power of the Roman authorities. In a countryside littered with crosses his would just be one more. All there was to see was weakness and suffering and pain—culminating finally in death—nothing impressive there. Sure there were strange things happening that day as well: the darkness, the earthquake, the tearing of the temple curtain, the strange utterance of the centurion. But whatever would be made of these things later, at the time they did not overtake the pathetic weakness that seemed to be stamped all over the central event. A man had been taken in the middle of the night, he had been mocked and humiliated, he'd been rejected by the crowds, and then he was subjected to torture and death. Nothing impressive there.

If you were looking for the hand of God at work in the world that day, you might have concluded his blessing rested upon the Jewish leaders, who had gained their victory and silenced the one who had troubled them for the past three years. They were the wise ones, the powerful

ones, the successful ones, the ones standing under the approval of God. After all, the great and powerful Creator of the universe always wins. He is always in control, always in command. He is never humiliated. His purpose is never thwarted. He is never defeated. And he never dies.

But on the other side of the resurrection you and I know that the exact opposite was the case. In the midst of the humiliation and suffering, the glory of God's love and faithfulness was being worked out in a way that changed things forever. The seeming victory of the Jewish leaders and the Roman overlords was short-lived and simply further evidence that they stood under judgement. In the light of the resurrection a reassessment of what was going on at the top of that little hill outside of Jerusalem is called for. What looked like humiliation was actually a demonstration of glory. What looked like weakness was strength. What looked like defeat was the only real, lasting victory. What looked like death was really the source of new and everlasting life.

This is what Luther said when he was explaining thesis 21:

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers work to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil.

The cross provides us with a radically different approach to looking at the world, at each other and at God. It demands that you stop looking elsewhere and that you see here the way God makes himself known in a world like ours. In the light of the cross you need to look at greatness differently. You need to look at success differently. You need to look at power differently. You need to look at

wisdom and knowledge differently. You need to look at God differently.

3. Is this biblical?

Luther never thought the theology of the cross was a new and novel insight of his. He was not into novelty or innovation or making a name for himself. That too was the province of the theologians of glory. The theology of the cross took such a hold of him because he saw it as the teaching of the Scriptures. It was not Luther's doctrine, it was Paul's, and therefore God's.

In his notes on the Heidelberg theses, Luther made repeated references to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1. You really do not have to read very far into 1 Corinthians 1 before you realize how close Luther's thought is to that of the apostle:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart". Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:18–25)

It is a total reversal of the world's assessment, a total reversal of the conclusions and expectations of a natural theology which starts with what God must be like if we are to believe in him, or even what we assume God must do because he is the God we believe him to be. The simple truth is that you will not end up here, understanding God as he is or his work for what it is, without letting the cross shape your thinking. As Karl Barth would point out centuries later, God has shown us that humility is as godlike as majesty, gentleness as godlike as almighty power, obedience as godlike as command, suffering as godlike as triumph. The cross shatters our illusions of what God can and cannot do, what God must and must not be like. He is as he has made himself known to be most clearly at this point. And the cross cannot be avoided if we are to know the truth about him and the truth about his purposes.

It is interesting that in his notes Luther also draws attention to John 14 and the some of the most famous and controversial words of the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed. Luther identified Philip as one who "spoke according to the theology of glory". Philip, you'll remember, had just heard the exchange between Thomas and Jesus. Jesus had spoken about going to prepare a place and that the disciples knew the way to where he was going. And in response to Thomas' forthright "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. (John 14:6-7)

There is no other way to know God but through Jesus—the very one who was

about to be betrayed and crucified. You can't bypass Jesus. You can't go directly to the Father. You can't leave this man behind, with all he has done and is about to do and deal only with the Father.

That's the point at which Philip chimes in. "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Luther sees in that little interjection the theology of glory. Here is one who wants to see the glory and majesty of God. He wants to see something impressive that will drive him to his knees, much like the vision of Isaiah drove the prophet to his knees. He doesn't want to get rid of Jesus, but he sees Jesus as a stepping-stone to seeing God as he really is, seeing the Father. And, says Luther, the critically important words of Jesus which follow show the emptiness of that approach.

Christ forthwith set aside his flighty thought about seeking God elsewhere and led him to himself, saying "Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father". For this reason true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ...¹¹

Luther is not, of course, denying that God is at work throughout the world and not just at the cross. He knows that God's goodness and faithfulness find expression in all his dealings with us from the creation until the end. Yet to understand these properly, to see the world as it is and not just as we might idolatrously want it to be, we must let the way God has revealed himself at the cross shape what we look for to see him and his work in the world. Otherwise, like those in Romans 1 who claimed to be wise, we will become fools, exchange the truth about God for a lie and ultimately end up worshipping and serving the creature

rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Luther explicitly cited Romans 1 in his explanation of thesis 19.

He also hints at Exodus 33 as another biblical anchor for the theology of the cross. You might not

have noticed, but in the explanation of thesis 20 that I quoted earlier Luther spoke of "the back and visible things of God" being placed

in opposition to the invisible. We know, because he makes much of this elsewhere, that Luther was referring to the incident in which Moses, not unlike Philip, had asked to see God's glory. You'll remember that God's response to Moses was "I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'the Lord'". But it would not be as Moses had hoped:

I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. (Exod 33:22–23)

God chooses only to reveal his back. For Luther this means that God so very often reveals himself under the form of the contrary—in the opposite place and in the opposite way to what we might expect—as he did at the cross. His love and compassion is shown in the midst of suffering, not so much in the avoidance of it. His strength is shown in the midst of real and palpable weakness. His glory is shown in the unimpressive and unnoticed and despised. His righteousness is shown in the midst of a recognition of sin and the propriety of judgement. We have no right to see God in any other way than the way he has chosen to make himself known at the cross.

God's love and compassion is shown in the midst of suffering, not in the avoidance of it.

¹¹ Luther, 'Heidelberg Disputation', 53.

4. Theological considerations for today

Just as Luther did not consider the theology of the cross his own invention, he did not consider it just one discrete part of Christian theology either. It is not as if you deal with the cross over there, but over here you need to deal with a theology of creation or a theology of the church or a theology of humanity. Just as he could claim “the cross of Christ occurs everywhere in the Scriptures”,¹² he was convinced the cross makes its mark everywhere in theology. That is why he could say “the cross alone is our theology”.¹³ The principle of God determining how he is known and making himself known under the form of the contrary, in the unexpected place, can be found again and again.

However weak preaching as an activity may seem, it is the powerful way in which God addresses his people.

Let me highlight a couple which have, I think, particular relevance for us at the moment.

In the weak and human words of the Bible, we hear the voice of the living God. We must not say that human words inevitably distort the revelation of God, or that they are inherently inappropriate or inadequate for speaking about God. If you simply worked from an understanding of the finitude and fragility of human language and contrasted that with the majesty and inexhaustibility of God, then you might indeed come to that conclusion. But if God chooses these words, if he chooses to call them God-breathed and if the incarnate Son can take them seriously as words which bear the authority of God,

then we are in no position to suggest otherwise. Just as the glory and victory of God is seen in the weakness and humility of the cross, so too the truth and power of God’s word is seen in the ordinariness and fragility of human language with all the vagaries of literary history, textual transmission and translation.

The search for a more direct communication from God, something which exhibits the power of God and allows no room for doubt, something that does not require attention and the hard work of seeking to understand the text and biblical theology and how it intersects with life now, is challenged by the theology of the cross. To seek God’s voice elsewhere, to seek to discern his will apart from and even in contradiction to the words of Scripture, to pursue a moment of confrontation by God elsewhere or by some other means, is to engage in a theology of glory. We must allow God to address us the way God has chosen to do so. He must determine the means by which he makes himself known.

Similarly, of course, with preaching. After all, this is the most direct application of 1 Corinthians 1. Preaching may well be despised by those who consider it weak and ineffective as a means of building and growing the churches. Yet God has chosen to use this means to shake the world. However weak preaching as an activity may seem, it is the powerful way in which God addresses his people. The cross looked weak as well, and yet it is the powerful overthrow of all which condemned us, held us captive and opposed the purposes of God. The push to abandon preaching in favour of other more effective modes of communication needs to be challenged in the light of the theology of the cross.

But perhaps we can push a little harder. Can the way we approach the

¹² M Luther, ‘First Series of Psalm Lectures [Dictata super Psalterium]’, *Weimar Ausgabe*, 3:63, 1513.

¹³ M Luther, ‘Second Series of Psalm Lectures [Operationes in Psalmos]’, *Weimar Ausgabe*, 5:176, 1519.

task of preaching itself be just another reflection of the theology of glory? When our attention is shifted from the word that is preached to the skill of the preacher, when we echo the world in its lauding of celebrities—in our case, celebrity preachers—have we sought the transforming power of God in the wrong place? I'm not suggesting for a moment that we shouldn't work hard at our preaching or seek to improve as preachers and teachers of the word of God, but it is the preached word and not the skill of the preacher that is the agent of change. There were many much more powerful orators than Paul in the first century—arresting speakers, those who could tell a good story and hold an audience in the palm of their hand, but his weakness and in his stumbling personal presence Paul drew attention to the word rather than to himself and the word is the instrument God has promised to use to “pierce to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Our measures of success in ministry so easily betray a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross. I've touched upon this earlier. It is the world that measures success quantitatively. It is the world which applauds those things which look impressive, make the loudest noise, look the most professional, sound the most reasonable, engage the most politely. But you can have the slickest presentation, the largest audience, an international reach, the attention of the opinion makers, a strong triumphalist tone... and not be successful on God's terms. And you can be involved in the weakest, smallest, most fragile ministry, unnoticed by anybody, faithfully struggling in a place nobody has heard of, and be in reality approved by God. That's not a justification of mediocrity or an excuse to sit back and

make no effort in seeking to reach the world with the gospel of Christ, or even of pessimism or the reverse snobbery of saying small is best, but it is to say that Christian ministry and the life of the churches properly follows the pattern of the cross. The day of Christ's glory on display for all to see is not yet. Don't despise the big and seemingly successful. Of course we want to see more people hear and respond to Jesus. But don't be duped by what looks big and successful either. The way we measure success in ministry needs to be shaped by the theology of the cross.

Alister McGrath put it this way:

*The theology of the cross passes judgement upon the church where she has become proud and triumphant, or secure and smug, and recalls her to the foot of the cross, there to remind her of the mysterious and hidden way in which God is at work in his world. The scene of total dereliction, of apparent weakness and folly, at Calvary is the theologian's paradigm for understanding the hidden presence and activity of God in his world and in his church. Where the church recognizes her hopelessness and helplessness, she finds the key to her continued existence as the church **of God** in the world. In her very weakness lies her greatest strength. The 'crucified and hidden God' is the God whose strength lies hidden behind apparent weakness, and whose wisdom lies hidden behind apparent folly.¹⁴*

You see, the theology of glory is always with us. It just keeps changing its dress. And we evangelicals can be practitioners of it as much as anyone else. It is, after

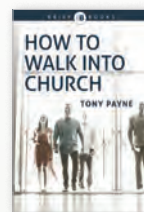
¹⁴ AE McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, p. 181.

all, the default of natural religious humanity, and we can so easily slip back there. Striving for impact, significance, the approval or at least the begrudging respect of the world, a local, national or international reputation—the language of triumphalism, the despising of suffering, the pursuit of professionalism—all of these look hollow when you take seriously how God has most clearly and most powerfully

made himself known and acted to rescue sinful men and women.

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1:27-29) ▣

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The cross and Christian ministry in the New Testament

PHILLIP COLGAN

The cross challenges many of our most cherished ideas and idols. But, as Phil Colgan argues, perhaps the most profound challenge of the cross to our ministries is its call to live an uncomfortable, insecure, cross-shaped life.

WHEN I WENT to Moore College, the application form asked you to write down the five books that had most influenced you. I don't remember all five that I wrote—but one of them was *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott. I still remember buying it from the bookstore at the Sydney University Evangelical Union's annual conference in 1993. I hadn't been a Christian very long, and I think I actually bought it because I didn't have many friends there—I was doing that thing where you wander around the bookstall pretending that you're interested but really you just couldn't find anyone you knew after dinner!

But anyway I picked up this book and bought it. And reading that book was life-changing for me—so praise God I had no friends—because it convinced me of something that I am still convinced of: that the cross is the centre of everything and is the lens through which we understand everything.

There's a segment at the end of the book where Stott talks about “living under the cross”, and I remember being struck by how the cross is not just how we are saved—if you can ever say “just” how we are saved. It's not just the message we preach. The cross drives how we understand and do everything.

If you want to understand the church—it's the cross that shapes our understanding.

If we want to understand ourselves—human nature—it's the cross that shapes our understanding.

If we want to understand Christian ethics—it's the cross that shapes our understanding.

If we want to understand suffering or Christian ministry or especially Christian leadership—the cross is the key.

Don Carson, in *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, a book I've leaned on quite heavily and unashamedly in this article, puts it beautifully:

*The cross stands as the test and the standard of all vital Christian ministry. The cross not only establishes what we are to preach, but how we are to preach.*¹

And I don't think you see that anywhere more clearly in the New Testament than in 1 Corinthians.

The issues dealt with in 1 Corinthians are infamous: the factionalism, the pride,

the triumphalism, the misunderstanding of what it is to be spiritual. They were worried about who baptized who, who was the better preacher, and so on. Paul's answer is—to put it very simply—your problem

is you don't understand the cross—or at least the centrality of the cross.

And, in answering them, he gives us this wonderful insight into the way the cross must shape ministry.

If you want to be wise in the world's way of understanding, you cannot grasp the power of the cross.

The content of our ministry

Paul encapsulates it here:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Cor 1:17)

Now if we just followed our paragraph divisions in our Bibles and took that as the conclusion of his discussion of baptism—if all we heard was that preaching or evangelism are more important than sacraments—then we've missed what's going on, because

everything he goes on to say in verse 18 and following is expanding on verse 17, in particular the second part of it.

So what is the point of this verse?

1. That evangelism—declaring the Gospel—is his priority.
2. That the content of his gospel is the cross of Christ.
3. That it is possible to empty the cross of Christ of its power by the manner in which it is communicated, especially by being too clever.

And it's that second and third point that he unpacks in the rest of the book, starting at verse 18.

In verses 18-25, his point is firstly that it is only by the message of the cross that people can be saved, so the message of the cross is the most powerful thing there is. But secondly, that powerful message looks to the world to be foolish and weak.

So verse 18 captures it:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

It's important to see what he's not saying in these verses. He's not saying that they just think it's foolish because they are foolish. And he's not saying that the truly wise will come to understand God's wisdom because it's a higher wisdom.

No; he's saying that there are two totally different ways of understanding reality and the world. You will think the cross is foolish if you are perishing, or, to put it another way, if you are of this world. If you want to be wise in the world's way of understanding, then you cannot grasp the power of the cross.

But then the opposite is true: if you grasp the power of the cross, you cannot appear wise in the eyes of the world. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

¹ DA Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1993, p. 9.

You can't be a follower of the cross and appear wise in the eyes of the world.

And that's the point he's ramming home:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... (1 Cor 1:26-27)

When he says that, he's not having a specific go at the Corinthians. He's not saying, "For some reason you guys in Corinth were a particular bunch of dullards, unlike in Philippi where God converted a heap of impressive people, and unlike in Rome where they're all university lecturers and successful sportspeople."

No. By definition the foolishness of the cross demands that being wise and successful in the eyes of the world has nothing to do with grasping the gospel. If anything, it works against a person. This is part of what Jesus meant when talking about how hard it is for a rich man to be saved. It's not that rich people or successful people can't be saved—but it is harder for that sort of person to become poor and despised and foolish in the eyes of the world, which is what we do when we say "I follow the crucified Lord".

Which makes me ask—why are we so obsessed with getting impressive sports people and successful businessmen to give their testimony? If it's just to open the door for people—a marketing gimmick so we can start the conversation—well, okay. But do we undercut the power of the cross when we do that? Have we started the journey for them on the wrong foot?

When my non-Christian friends or family members come to church,

why do I introduce them to the successful executive or to the surgeon in the congregation? Why do I hunt out those sorts of people, rather than the unemployed man who helps set up the chairs? I have a good motive: I want them to see that the gospel is not just for people who need a crutch. I want them to see that successful people and smart people can believe in Jesus.

But is it also because I don't really believe that the cross is the shape of Christian ministry? Am I undercutting the very message my family and friends need to hear to be saved?

Carson says:

Modern Western evangelicalism is deeply infected with the virus of triumphalism, and the resulting illness destroys humility, minimizes grace, and offers far too much homage to the money and influence and 'wisdom' of our day.²

We need to remember that God does not use the wise things of the world to convince the wise. He does not use the successful things of the world. He uses the weak of our world to shame the strong.

It's worth thinking about isn't it?

The other side of that coin is what he says in 2:6-16. I'm not going to look at those verses in detail, but his point is that you don't move from seeing the cross as foolishness because you become more wise. You only see the cross as the power of God for salvation when you become spiritual, when God's Holy Spirit regenerates you so that you see with the spiritual eyes: the eyes of God rather than the eyes of this world.

That doesn't happen through clever arguments or impressive oratory. It happens as you come to understand the

² *ibid.*, p. 29.

clear and simple but foolish message of the cross.

Which drives us into what I think is key for us today, because here in these verses we get this incredible insight into Paul's ministry—the practical example of cross-shaped ministry:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

I don't think there is a more important passage for understanding the cross-shaped nature of ministry than that one.

The first thing we see is that the content of Paul's ministry is the cross. Paul saw himself as announcing the testimony of God, and that testimony is all about the cross of Christ.

The NIV gets the force of verse 2, and it's what I know off by heart: "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified".

Everything he did and taught pointed people back to the message of Christ crucified.

I don't think Paul is saying that at other times and other places he resolved to know other things, but that here in Corinth he had to focus on the cross. No, what he means is that everything he did and everything he taught flowed out of the message of Christ crucified, and everything he did and taught pointed people back to the message of Christ crucified.

When he talked about the church, he understood it in the light of the cross, and it lead to him pointing people back to the cross. When he talked about the Christian life, he understood it in the light of the cross and it lead him to pointing people back to the cross. When Paul talked about sin, he understood it in the light of the cross and it lead him to pointing people back to the cross.

The cross was the centre of Paul's theology and his teaching. That's what he saw as his ministry—to take people constantly and continually to the cross, and to give people a cross-shaped view of everything. That was Paul's content.

It's interesting that there seems to be a movement in Christian ethics towards seeing the resurrection as the driving motif (see Oliver O'Donovan's *Resurrection and Moral Order* for instance). There might be a useful corrective in that. The crucifixion and the resurrection cannot be separated, our crucified Lord has been raised, and we look forward to the new creation where we will be raised with him.

But I see a danger in that—and I see it in lots of conversations I have with people about issues like work and culture and the environment.

I keep being told that the resurrection means that secular work is validated, and its value extends into the new creation. I hear similar things about the environment and culture and architecture: the resurrection says "Yes" to the created order.

There's truth in that. We have to make sure that we don't create a false divide between the physical and the spiritual. But that is all only true when you first understand that the cross has said a massive "No" to this fallen world. The cross:

- » tells us that judgement awaits
- » demands the priority of evangelism
- » gives an urgency and a priority to mission
- » says that there will be a re-creation, not just a continuation
- » says to store up your treasures in heaven, not here on earth
- » says not to make your career or accumulating artworks or international trips the focus of your life while people stand under judgement.

Ultimately, the cross will challenge people even while it comforts them. The cross creates a grating dissatisfaction with this world and a longing for what is to come.

We sometimes need the corrective to understand that work and culture and nature have value, so receive them with thanksgiving, and to understand that the cross does not make secular work or cultural pursuits irrelevant or useless: they have an intrinsic value. But I fear that there is a current movement in evangelical thinking to move those correctives into the centre—where the cross should be.

But my point is that 1 Corinthians 2:2 is meant to show us that whatever aspect of theology or ethics we are teaching on, if it isn't shaped fundamentally by the message of the cross and all that the cross says about humanity and God and redemption, then it isn't Christian teaching that we are doing.

If our ministry doesn't lead people ultimately back to the cross in repentance and faith, then we have failed. If we teach on work or joy or hope or marriage or homosexuality, and it does not lead people ultimately back to the cross in repentance and faith, then we may as well pack up our bags and go home.

And by back to the cross, I mean back to a recognition of our sin and that we come to God only on the basis of Christ's sin-bearing death.

The method of our ministry

So that's the content side of what Paul is saying, but perhaps Paul's greater focus in these chapters is on his method. Paul didn't just resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified in his content. He resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified in his style of delivery, in his form and in his manner. He resolved that he would not use brilliance of speech, to come in weakness and in much trembling, to not use persuasive words of wisdom. In other places he talks about not using deceptive methods or flattering speech.

What you see from this is that if we preach a message of foolishness and weakness in the eyes of the world then there is a sense in which that must be reflected in the manner of how we communicate that message.

Now, just a few caveats before we think more about what that means:

1) This isn't Paul justifying his own lack of giftedness in teaching. In Acts 14—in Lystra—the crowds mistook Paul for Hermes, the God of communication. Paul is resolving to restrict himself, not justifying his own restrictions.

2) This isn't Paul saying "work hard at being boring", or justifying a laziness in preparation. The New Testament is full of descriptions of how Paul and others sought to work hard to persuade and convict people of the truth of the gospel.

3) This is not specific to the Corinthian situation. Certainly they were enamored with sophistry and rhetoric, so some suggest that Paul specifically restricted himself when speaking to them. But the fact that we also have passages like 1 Thessalonians 2 show us that Paul

If our ministry doesn't lead people back to the cross in repentance and faith, then we have failed.

saw this as his general rule and method.

4) This does not mean no contextualizing your delivery to suit the audience. In chapter 9 there is that wonderful discussion of how Paul is a Jew for the Jew and a Gentile for the Gentiles. But what you see there is that contextualization is about bringing the unchanging message of the cross to bear in a culturally appropriate way. So then, what *does* it mean?

The weak vessel

Firstly, it means that the cross-shaped ministry owns the weakness of the vessel sharing it: it doesn't hide it.

What is Paul talking about when he says in verse 3 "I was with you in weakness"? Some commentators say Paul must have been sick when he was there; that the weakness was an observable physical condition. But I think they miss the point. I think it's intentionally more general than that.

He might have had some physical impediment, it might have been his unimpressive stature, it might be that he was unpaid and had to support himself. But the point is he didn't try to impress them with his manner or his style or his stature or his oratory. He owned his weakness and actually gloried in it!

Another commentator gets it right when he says: "It is in the nature of the cross that it cannot be preached elegantly and brilliantly, only in weakness".³

Isn't that true? When your message is weakness and foolishness, then your

method either supports that or undercuts it. This means that we must avoid manipulation at all costs. Tools to help with clarity and attention span can very quickly become showmen's tricks, can't they?

Ultimately, Paul's point is there in verses 4 and 5: it is the Holy Spirit working through God's power—the message of the cross—that truly converts people and produces lasting change. It's the truth of the gospel that brings lasting change, not our skills, not the mood music, not the low lights, not our powerful stories.

If a person's faith and repentance are based on men's wisdom—as he puts it in verse 5—then it will not last.

When we manipulate people by dimming the lights, playing special music, and denying them sleep on a weekend conference, when we convince people through the power of our technique or our personality—they've been converted by and to the world's wisdom. If we do that, what we will see is that quick-growing but ultimately empty growth that burns away, the growth that Jesus talks about in the parable of the soils.

I think there are some clear questions that this demands we ask of ourselves.

If our presentation leads people to say "What a great preacher!" while not being moved to repentance and faith in the cross, then there's a problem. (I wonder if the most dangerous thing that a preacher can hear is that people love their preaching?)

Are many of the people we think of as the great preachers actually not the ones we should be flocking to hear and copy? We may be shocked by which lesser-light preachers are counting more crowns in heaven.

We don't want people to love our preaching—that's not one of our KPIs. If

It is in the nature of the cross that it cannot be preached elegantly, only in weakness.

³ HR Weber, *The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 73.

someone walks away impressed by me and my communication but unmoved by the gospel, then I've failed.

Be persuasive, yes—Paul talks about persuading people. Be passionate—Paul's passion just flows out of him. But let it be a persuasiveness and a passion that comes from a clear understanding and presentation of the wonderful message of the cross, not a persuasiveness and a passion that flows out of the cleverness and power of the preacher.

It is the cross that is persuasive and powerful. Our job is to present it clearly and in our weakness, but in all its powerful foolishness.

A cross-shaped life

Paul doesn't make the second point explicitly in these chapters, but it is implicit right through them: there is nothing so jarring as cross-shaped preaching coming from a person who does not lead a cross-shaped life.

We started off talking about how the cross shapes everything in the New Testament. Nowhere is that more true than with regard to the Christian life—and therefore to Christian leadership and ministry. The Christian life is about following our Lord to glory through the path of sacrifice and suffering, and Christian ministry and leadership is leading people on that path:

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil 2:5-7)

The list of verses could go on and on. All Christians are called not just to believe in our Lord but to walk in his footsteps. Those who presume to be shepherds of the flock are called upon to lead the way in that—to take more than their share.

I think the place you see this most powerfully is in Paul's description of his own life and leadership in 1 Corinthians 4, responding to the Corinthians over-realized eschatology. They seem to have imbibed a triumphant Christianity that believes that we can appropriate the blessings of the new creation and the resurrection for the here and now—not unlike much of modern Christianity.

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! (1 Cor 4:8)

Here's his response:

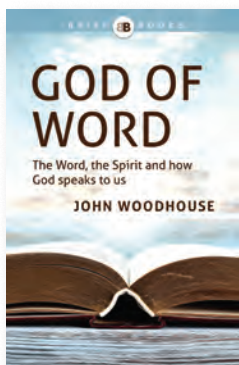
For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things... I urge you, then, be imitators of me. (1 Cor 4:9-13, 16)



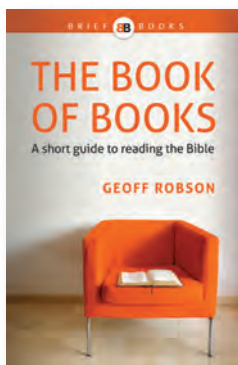
B R I E F  B O O K S

**...because a book doesn't
have to be long to have an
eternal impact.**

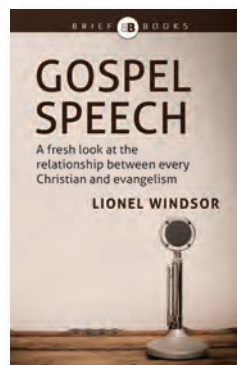




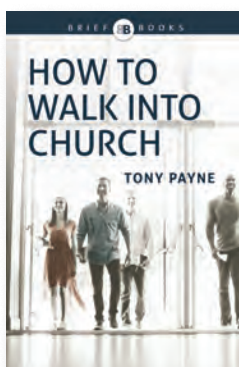
How does God reveal himself today? Does he speak in ways other than the Bible? What is the link between his Word and Spirit? Where do emotions fit in? Am I missing out on a vital dimension of the Christian experience by focusing on the Word? John Woodhouse helps us think through these important concerns.



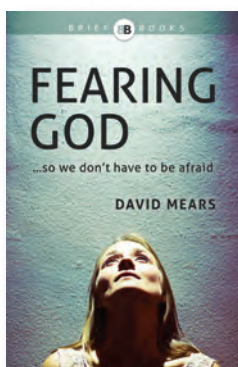
This new Brief Book is aimed at the non-Christian—or perhaps new Christian. Geoff Robson presents a strong case for why the Bible is worth reading and he provides a really useful overview of what the Bible is about, tips for how to start (including a helpful reading plan), and answers to a host of common questions.



In this refreshingly different look at what the Bible has to say about evangelism and our day-to-day speech patterns as followers of the Lord Jesus, Lionel Windsor shows the strong connection between faith and speech. He gives us warm encouragement to confess the Lordship of Jesus with our lips.



How you walk into church reveals a great deal about what you think church is, what it's for, and what you think you're doing there. In this Brief Book, Tony Payne helps you think biblically about church and your role in it. Full of profound principles and very practical suggestions this book is, in the words of Kent Hughes, "a brief must-read for all Christians".



In Western society the idea of ever acting out of 'fear' is generally considered unhealthy and to be avoided at all cost. But... sometimes fearlessness just seems foolish. In this Brief Book, David Mears takes us back to the Bible to look again at the fear of God—learning to take delight in it and discover why the fear of the Lord really is "the beginning of wisdom".



In just under 50 pages, former Principal of Moore College, Broughton Knox provides an extraordinarily clear and helpful explanation of the Bible's teaching on predestination. He shows the comfort, assurance and blessing that flow from understanding the nature of God, the nature of man, and the means of our salvation in Christ.

Brothers and sisters in ministry, there is your calling! We're not all asked to suffer to the extent of Paul—he himself pointed out that he saw it as his job to take on an inordinate share of the sufferings of Christ—but this is the general shape and form of the life we're called to live... if we are followers of the crucified Messiah.

So why does it feel so foreign to me? It seems so out of place in our comfortable, middle-class professional ministry experience. I find reading this chapter far more challenging than the review of my preaching ministry in chapter 2.

Perhaps we need less internationally holidaying pastors, and more who work with their hands?

I have a theory: that we will not see the growth, spiritual and numerical, that we long for in our churches until the leaders of our churches—us—don't

just preach the cross but live it and model it a little more.

I sometimes look at the Facebook feeds of Christians in ministry, with our chatter about coffee and wine and private schools and home ownership and, if I can be so bold, perhaps we need a few less home-owning clergy and a few more who sail close to the wind of homelessness? I remember hearing two wonderful old saints when I was at a youth leadership conferences in the early 90s saying that they'd never owned a home but God, through the generosity of his people, had never left them homeless. Perhaps we

need a few less internationally holidaying pastors and a few more who work with their hands?

Have I offended everyone yet? I feel uncomfortable in my own hypocrisy raising the questions. But they're the things that 1 Corinthians has led me to ask of myself and my heart.

I found Carson's comments on these verses a great challenge:

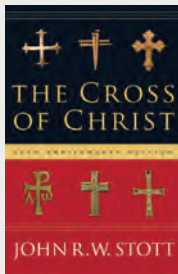
But part of the reason why Paul's stance seems alien to many of us is that we have unwittingly become more like Corinthian Christians than like Pauline (that is, biblical!) Christians. Many of us are well-to-do and comfortable, with little incentive to live in vibrant anticipation of Christ's return. Our desire for the approval of the world often outstrips our desire for Jesus' "Well done!" on the last day. The proper place to begin to change this deep betrayal of the gospel is at the cross—in repentance, contrition, and renewed passion not only to make the gospel of the crucified Messiah central in all our preaching and teaching, but in our lives and the lives of our leaders as well.⁴

We've seen there is nothing so incongruent as cross-shaped preaching coming out of the mouth of a person who does not lead a cross-shaped life. The flipside to that is that there is nothing so wonderful as cross-shaped preaching that flows out of a person living a genuinely cross-shaped life. ▣

4 Carson, p. 108.

One for many

MIKE ALLEN



John Stott,
The Cross of Christ,
IVP, Leicester, 1986, 2006.



David Gibson and
Jonathan Gibson (eds),
*From Heaven He Came
and Sought Her: Definite
Atonement in Historical,
Biblical, Theological, and
Pastoral Perspective*,
Crossway, Wheaton, 2013.

WHY DID JESUS have to die? Most of us would say he died to pay for our sins. But *how* does Jesus' death pay for our sins?

After reading John Stott's influential *The Cross of Christ*, we might say that Jesus died in our place as our substitute. Indeed *The Cross of Christ* was written specifically to show that "the biblical doctrine of the atonement is substitutionary from beginning to end",¹ and (like a great many readers) I have found this argument powerful and persuasive.

However, there is one aspect of substitution that Stott does not adequately cover in *The Cross of Christ*. It's the problem raised by texts like this:

Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deut 24:16)

How is it that Christ could do what this text explicitly rules out—that one should die because of another's sin? I will suggest below that Stott's classic work misses out an essential aspect of the cross, the retrieval of which helps us to understand why substitution does ultimately work.

But let us begin by refreshing our minds as to Stott's argument. Stott initially presents a fourfold construction that highlights the substitutional nature of Jesus' death.² He argues from the Scriptures that Jesus died for our good. Second, the 'good' his death secured was our salvation. However, third, in order for Jesus to secure our salvation, he must deal with our sins, so that finally, when Jesus died on the cross, he died our death, as our substitute.

Whilst some might argue that Stott's construction is merely that—a human construction that has been imposed from the outside—that is an anticipated objection, as Stott shows that his theory is not just

¹ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 2nd ed., IVP, Leicester, 1986, p. 10.

² *ibid.*, pp. 63–66.

supported but that the scenes leading up to Jesus' death are unintelligible without this understanding of the cross.³

This willingness to explain the cross by engaging with the actual text of Scripture, along with his desire to integrate his exegesis into a broader theological framework, is a real strength of the book,

Stott outlines five obstacles to God's forgiveness: satisfying the devil, the law, God's honour, God's justice, and the moral order.

ensuring that certain exegetical points are not overly stretched to the distortion of others.

This is seen most clearly in part 2, as he turns to consider the heart of the cross, which begins with the problem of forgiveness.

As Stott sees it, the problem is not so much why God cannot simply forgive without requiring the death of his Son—a question that continues to be asked today. The problem is how a holy God could ever forgive sinners. This leads into a theological discussion of the true nature of sin as rebellion against God, the differences between human and divine anger, alongside the relationship between human responsibility and divine sovereignty, culminating in the claim that “Before the holy God can forgive us, some kind of ‘satisfaction’ is necessary.”⁴

Likewise, Stott's knowledge of historical theology and his willingness to engage with the critics of his day serve not just to remind us that some things never change, such as those who present a caricatured “Christian understanding of the cross in order the more readily to condemn it.”⁵ But it is surely through knowledge of these perversions that Stott's own presentation of Christ's work

on the cross is made all the more clear.

He then turns to discuss the nature of satisfaction. Stott observes that: “the way in which different theologians have developed the concept of satisfaction depends on their understanding of the obstacles to forgiveness which first need to be removed.”⁶

Stott outlines five obstacles to God's forgiveness that have been expressed—satisfying the devil, the law, God's honour, God's justice, and the moral order—all of which he says are true to varying degrees. However, they are correct only in so far as they don't constrain God, such that he becomes subordinate to something other than himself.⁷ Rather, it is only ever God who must be satisfied, and that brings us back to the question of how he can forgive sinners and yet remain fully consistent with his own character.⁸

The answer is explored in chapter 6, entitled ‘The self-substitution of God’, which examines exactly who this substitute is, and why he can legitimately substitute for us. It's a chapter that first seeks to understand Jesus' death through the lens of the Old Testament sacrificial system, with a focus on Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life”.

From this verse three points are made: blood is the symbol of life, it makes atonement because the animal's life is in the blood, and blood was spilt with the intention of making atonement.

Stott then highlights two key New Testament passages that build upon this Old Testament backdrop to begin to show why only Jesus could be our sacrificial substitute.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 66-83.

4 *ibid.*, p. 110.

5 *ibid.*, p. 112.

6 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*, p. 123.

8 *ibid.*, p. 132.

Hebrews 9:22 states that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, from which Stott argues that there can be no forgiveness without substitution, since life must be given for life. Secondly, from Hebrews 10:4 and its declaration that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”, he argues that an effective sacrifice must be an equivalent sacrifice, such that only the precious blood of Jesus could atone for another human (Stott references 1 Peter 1:19). So it’s argued that Jesus is a suitable substitute and fulfils the Old Testament shadows.⁹

But why could Jesus, and only Jesus, be our substitute? Stott rightly notes that this question forces us to focus on Jesus’ identity, with three possibilities presented. Was Jesus Christ simply a human like any other? If that were true, we would be faced with the problem of the independent third party: Christ would either be intervening to pacify an angry God, or God would have chosen to punish an innocent rather than himself. Either way, the Father’s character is impugned.¹⁰

Alternatively, was Jesus God alone, such that he only appeared to be human? Interestingly, Stott doesn’t refer to the necessity of Jesus’ role as the representative head of God’s people that required him to be human (more on this below), and likewise barely mentions his role as mediator, but instead argues that Scripture never speaks of God as dying on the cross. For Stott, the fact that God is in essence immortal required Jesus to become human in order to die.¹¹

This leaves the third alternative as the only viable solution. To be our sacrificial substitute, Jesus needed to be both fully man and fully God. With this declaration,

part 2 of the book draws to a close. Part 3 then explores what the cross achieved, including a discussion of four principal New Testament images of salvation: propitiation, redemption, justification, and reconciliation. In this section Stott argues that substitution is not an image in itself, but rather essential to every image of the cross.¹² Part 4 then examines what it now means for us to live under the cross.

To conclude, Stott’s explanation of substitution is excellent in many ways, and the reasons for its enduring appeal are obvious. Yet he hasn’t explained how in God’s eyes one could legitimately die in the place of another, a somewhat glaring omission for a book explicitly focused on defending substitution. To answer this particular question, we must explore the Bible’s frequent references to Jesus’ role as representative head.¹³

On this topic, a recent publication excels: Henri Blocher’s article ‘Jesus Christ *the man*: Toward a theology of definite atonement’, found in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*.¹⁴ It’s a book aiming to be the first comprehensive resource on ‘limited atonement’, or to use the book’s preferred language, ‘definite atonement’.

Of course for some, this topic will be an instant turn off. Although interesting, asking “For whom did Christ die?” has perhaps in the past generated more heat than light. It’s an issue that many believe has little practical relevance—except perhaps for casting doubt on whether we can declare to a mixed audience that Christ died for their sins.

9 *ibid.*, p. 138.

10 *ibid.*, p. 149-50.

11 *ibid.*, pp. 152-155.

12 *ibid.*, p. 203.

13 Which is not to say that Stott doesn’t mention representation or related ideas; see for example pp. 276-277. But he does not deploy it to defend the legitimacy of Christ’s substitutionary death.

14 H Blocher, ‘Jesus Christ *the man*: Toward a systematic theology of definite atonement’, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, eds. D Gibson & J Gibson, Crossway, Wheaton, 2013.

However, the positive value of this question is that it pushes us to explore the depths of the cross, which is never an unprofitable exercise. To know more of what God in Jesus has done for us on the cross will lead to ever more appreciation and adoration of the triune God. In this sense, the cross is not simply the revelation of our salvation, but the revelation of God's most beautiful character.

So how does Jesus' role as representative head help explain *why* Jesus' death is effective for some, but not for others? And how does it enable us to see how Jesus can legitimately die in the place of others?

We can consider the significance of Jesus' role as our representative head as Blocher expounds by firstly pausing to examine another influential work on the extent of the atonement.

DB Knox argues that Christ's death was sufficient to pay for the sins of the world, not just the elect.¹⁵ This is because when Jesus died, he died for all humanity, not just the elect. That is to say that the benefits Jesus won on the cross, he won

Knowing what God in Jesus has done on the cross will lead to more appreciation and adoration.

as a human. Thus, it must at least be possible for those benefits to flow to all humans, since they were won by a human, even though in God's plans and purposes they

only ever pass to the elect. In this way the atonement was limited in its application, but not its accomplishment.

Knox argued the 'sufficient for all but effective for the elect' position along four lines. First, when God became man, Jesus took on the nature all of humanity shares, not just the elect. Second, Jesus lived in total obedience to God's law, and in so

doing fulfilled the obligation that rests on all people, not just the elect. Third, Christ's resurrection illustrated his victory over the devil, who is the common enemy of all mankind, not just the elect. Finally, Jesus bore God's curse on all humanity for their rejection of him, not just the elect.¹⁶

Now, as I'm told many discovered during his life, it is a difficult thing to argue against Broughton Knox! But what if in the atonement, Jesus was not representing all humanity, but a more limited group? Is there any biblical evidence to support the claim that, in his atoning work, Jesus was not acting as head of the entire human race, but rather the head of the elect, and the elect only?

This is precisely where the profound significance of Blocher's article is seen, but first it is worth sketching in the initial stages of his contribution and how it relates to the broader definite atonement debate.

He begins with a preliminary discussion on what systematic theology is, before defining the issue in this way: "Is the purpose of the atonement identical for all, elect and reprobate?"¹⁷ That is, "in the transaction that took place on the cross, which is described by such phrases as 'bearing sins', 'satisfying divine justice', 'paying the ransom-price', are the reprobate included as well as the elect?"¹⁸

This leads into a review of the positions of some of the leading figures in the debate. Then, turning to scripture, Blocher notes that the answer is not simple. There are passages such as Hebrews 2:9 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, that at first glance appear to teach that Christ died not just for believers, but for all people. Yet Blocher suggests that a closer look reveals that these

15 DB Knox, 'Some aspects of the atonement', *Selected Works Volume 1*, ed. T Payne, Matthias Media, Kingsford, 2000.

16 *ibid.*, p. 260.

17 Blocher, p. 548.

18 *ibid.*, pp. 548-549.

texts are not as definitive as they might have first appeared. Nor are texts that seem to teach that Christ died explicitly for the non-elect straightforward either, such as 2 Peter 2:1 and Hebrews 10:29.¹⁹

However, texts often raised by proponents of definite atonement are not totally convincing either, as those that limit the atonement to particular beneficiaries cannot be used to rule out the possibility that Christ also died for others—though Blocher does think that John 10 suggests that Jesus did not die for those who are not his sheep. Ultimately, however, Blocher concludes that “piecemeal exegesis does not yield a clear-cut answer to the choice” and that “the evidence must be ‘digested’ by *theological* reflection.”²⁰

Blocher then explores some select theological issues that have been used to argue both for and against definite atonement, before turning to consider the issue of how the Bible’s universal offer of salvation could be compatible with a definite atonement. This question turns on the exact nature of Jesus’ substitutionary death.

He begins with the critical observation that even though Jesus died voluntarily, this fact alone doesn’t enable his death to be taken as a legitimate substitute for others. Indeed, as we have already noted, passages such as Deuteronomy 24:16 explicitly reject this possibility.

Rather, the reason why Jesus’ death can legitimately be treated as a substitute for others is because “Jesus *did not* die as any individual instead of other individuals.”²¹ Instead, Jesus died as the representative head of a larger community. That is to say that there is a community dimension to human existence, such that individuals are members of a larger body.

But while one mere member of that group cannot act on its behalf, that is not the case for the community head. The head takes responsibility for its members, and it is because Jesus died as the community head when he died on the cross that he could die for the sins of the many.

So to come back to our earlier question: Is there any biblical evidence to support the claim that, in his atoning work, Jesus was not acting as head of the entire human race, but rather the head of the elect, and the elect only?

Blocher writes:

*The witness fills the Bible. Christ offered himself as the Shepherd for **his** sheep, the King for **his** people, the Master for **his** friends, the Head for **his** body, the Bridegroom for **his** bride, the New and the Last Adam for **his** new creation and new humanity.*²²

Simply put, the Bible repeatedly presents Jesus as a representative head, to such a degree that to argue that because Jesus died as a human he died for all humanity is too simplistic. The Bible is clear: Jesus died as the representative head of the elect, and it is as head of the elect that he can represent them, and thus legitimately die for them.

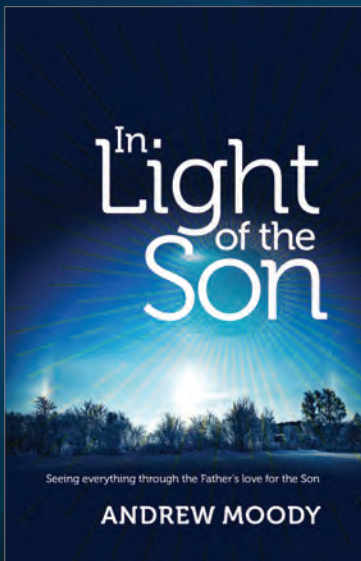
So *why* did Jesus have to die? John Stott was exactly right—the Bible presents Jesus’ death as substitutionary from beginning to end. But a key reason why he can be our substitute is because he is our representative head, a fact the Bible frequently expounds through many lenses. So let’s not neglect the full range of categories that the Bible uses to explain this great mystery—that the holy, just God declares sinners righteous and welcomes them to himself! ▣

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 561-563.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 563.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 577.

²² *ibid.*



“On the surface nothing had changed, but the ocean bed below had just dropped away to measureless depths.”

At a university Bible study on John 15 in the 1980s, Andrew Moody dared to wonder out loud why the Son, since he is God, had to obey the Father.

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From King's College to Kingsford: Charles Simeon's enduring influence on Australian university ministry

ED LOANE

Most of us are aware of Charles Simeon of Cambridge as a name in the pantheon of evangelical heroes. But as Ed Loane explains in this fascinating essay, Simeon's influence on university ministries around the world was more profound than many people realize.

THERE IS NO doubt that Charles Simeon had a tremendous impact on Christianity in Australia.

Particularly in the first hundred years of European occupation, leaders who were personally mentored by Simeon held highly significant leadership roles within the churches of the colony.¹ In this article I propose to step back from his personal influence and examine, rather more broadly, the influence of Simeon on evangelical university ministry in Australia. In his recent biography of Simeon, Derek Prime says, "Perhaps the

most exciting and fascinating illustration of Simeon's influence is evangelical witness in the world's universities".² This article will examine the ministry to university students in Cambridge all those years ago and demonstrate its enduring influence in Australian universities with particular reference to Phillip Jensen's ministry at the University of New South Wales.

Simeon's continued significance to university ministry in Australia may, at first, appear to be somewhat tenuous. After all, when Simeon was converted as a student in 1779, the American War of Independence raged on, and it was

1 Examples include the first chaplains Richard Johnson and Samuel Marsden, as well as the first bishop of Melbourne, Charles Perry, and the second bishop of Sydney, Frederic Barker.

2 D Prime, *Charles Simeon: An Ordinary Pastor of Extraordinary Influence*, Day One, Leominster, 2011, p. 239.

not until 1783 that Australia was even suggested as an alternative penal colony.³ As an undergraduate, Simeon claimed that he never met a likeminded evangelical.⁴ It was not until he was made vicar of Holy Trinity in 1782, still five years before the First Fleet departed, that he began a ministry to students. Certainly by the time he died in 1836, the settlement in Sydney was established, but the church in Australia had only enthroned its first bishop three months earlier and there were definitely no universities—and there would not be any universities in Australia for another fifteen years.⁵ This chronological disparity between Simeon and Australian university ministries begs the question of how tenable the claim is that he significantly influenced evangelical

Evangelical university ministry in Australia now includes over fifty campuses across the country.

university ministry in Australia—a ministry which now includes over fifty university campuses across the country.

The dissimilarities between Cambridge in Simeon's day and

contemporary Australian universities, however, extend much further than just time and place. Cambridge in the early nineteenth century was virtually a Church of England seminary, with more than half

of graduates becoming clergymen.⁶ The university was a confessional institution where “Non-Anglicans were de facto excluded” because students had to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles in order to graduate.⁷ While that university underwent “a complete transformation” into a modern secular institution in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Australian universities, such as The University of Sydney and The University of New South Wales, were strictly founded upon secular ideology.⁸

Another major dissimilarity was the size and cultural diversity of the universities. In Simeon's day Cambridge was quite small and Simeon's College, King's, was the smallest and most exclusive of them all. In 1795 there were only 736 undergraduates in the university and just twelve in King's.⁹ Simeon

3 This was first suggested by Admiral Sir George Young, whose descendants would in due course make significant contributions to Christianity in Sydney, notably in the establishment of the Katoomba Christian Convention and the CMS Summer School. S Braga & P Braga, *All His Benefits: Young and Deck Families*, self published, 2013, p. 6-9. Cf. S Braga, *A Century Preaching Christ: Katoomba Christian Convention, 1903-2003*, KCC, Sydney, 2003.

4 HE Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, 1977, p. 29.

5 Simeon died 13 November 1836. Bishop Broughton was enthroned on 5 June 1836 and Sydney University was founded in 1851.

6 Peter Searby states, “During the 120 years considered in this volume Cambridge was an Anglican seminary”. This was a declining percentage over this period, however, as between 1752 and 1769 more than three quarters (76%) of Cambridge graduates became clergymen, but by 1870-1886 that percentage had reduced to 38%. Nevertheless, it was still the most popular graduate profession. P Searby, *A History of the University of Cambridge: Volume 3, 1750-1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 76.

7 MJ Hofstetter, *The Romantic Idea of a University: England and Germany, 1770-1850*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001, p. 3. This changed over the course of the century, and religious tests were abolished so students were no longer forced to sign the 39 Articles to receive their degree, and by 1877 fellowships and college headships were no longer bound to holy orders. T Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2005, p. xiii.

8 V Green, *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge*, SCM, London, 1964, p. 297. When Sydney University was founded, William Charles Wentworth was adamant that it be an institution “merely for secular education” claiming “This principle was absolutely indispensable; if they once introduce the principle of sectarian interference, all government of such an institution was at an end, because if any one sect asserted its supremacy, all other sects would retire from it, and thus be virtually excluded from participation in its benefits”. Cited in C Turney, U Bygott & P Chippendale, *Australia's First: A History of the University of Sydney Volume 1, 1850-1939*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, p. 43.

9 Searby, p. 11.

himself matriculated with only two other freshmen, and the college, ever since its foundation, had only accepted students from Eton.¹⁰ It was a college of prestige and privilege. For example, students at King's had the unique privilege of being allowed to take their degrees without any examinations and could take a fellowship automatically after three years residence.¹¹ Furthermore, all university students were required to reside in college accommodation. Contrast that university experience with the more than 50,000 students currently at The University of New South Wales, of which more than one quarter are international students and only two per cent reside at the university.¹² A basic comparison of the two spheres would suggest that such great differences mitigate the case for Simeon's enduring influence. Yet we will see that despite such a great gulf in the culture, demography and ideology, Simeon's example remains an encouragement for contemporary university ministry.

Simeon's university ministry

In the months before taking up the incumbency of Holy Trinity, Simeon made six trips to visit Rev Henry Venn at Yelling, a village twenty kilometres west of Cambridge. Venn was an elder statesman of the evangelical movement and was very pleased with the potential good Simeon could do in the university town. On 9 October 1782 he wrote that his guest was "calculated for great

usefulness", was "full of faith and love" and flamed with zeal.¹³ The Bishop of Ely, a friend of Simeon's father, provided him with the platform in which to conduct his ministry, despite much opposition from the wardens and parishioners of Holy Trinity.¹⁴ Simeon had often walked past the church and thought to himself "How I should rejoice if God were to give me that church, that I might preach the Gospel there, and be a herald for him in the midst of the University".¹⁵ It was not long, however, until he began making an impression on the university. In 1786 Venn wrote in a letter to Rev Rowland Hill:

*Mr Simeon's light shines brighter and brighter. He is highly esteemed, and exceedingly despised; almost adored by some; by others abhorred. O what numbers, if the Lord will, shall come out of Cambridge in a few years, to proclaim glad tidings!*¹⁶

It had not taken long for Simeon to be counted a significant presence in the university, as both the support and opposition testified. But what did the shape of his ministry to students look like?

First, we must highlight Simeon's emphasis on expository preaching. This became the foundation of his ministry and was a legacy that he left for evangelicals in the years to come. Simeon, like other clergymen of his day, would not have received any training in preaching prior to

¹⁰ Hopkins, p. 10 f/n.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹² Figures found at <http://myuniversity.gov.au/University-of-New-South-Wales/3013#uni-stats/tables> and <http://www.rc.unsw.edu.au/colleges/unsw-colleges>, accessed on 11 May 2015.

¹³ J Venn & H Venn, '9 October 1782', *The Life and a Selection from the Letters of the Late Rev. Henry Venn*, 6th edn, London, 1855, p. 263.

¹⁴ J Pollock, *A Cambridge Movement*, John Murray, London, 1953, p. 3.

¹⁵ W Carus, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon*, 3rd edn, Hatchard and Son, London, 1847, p. 37.

¹⁶ E Sidney, *The Life of the Rev. Rowland Hill*, Baldwin & Cradock, London, 1834, p. 158.

ordination.¹⁷ Yet, in his ministry he came to the firm conclusion that it was the systematic preaching of Scripture that was the heart of Christian ministry. He said:

*Be not afraid of speaking all that God has spoken in his word, or of giving to every word of his the measure of weight and emphasis and preponderance, that it has in the inspired writings. The instant that you are afraid or averse to do this, you stand self-condemned, as sitting in judgment upon him, from whom every word has been inspired for the good of the Church.*¹⁸

With this conviction in mind, Simeon set about addressing the problem of preaching by starting sermon classes for students. These classes, beginning in 1792 and continuing for forty years, were held on Sundays after church for about fifteen to twenty

These parties provided a theological education that was probably unparalleled in the country.

undergraduates.¹⁹ They generally involved Simeon selecting a text for students to prepare a sermon in skeleton form, and then as they explained it to him he would comment on how he thought it could be

improved.²⁰ These classes were so influential that at the turn of the next century George Balleine would claim that they were the place where “most

of the Evangelical preachers of the next generation were trained”.²¹

In a similar way, Simeon attempted to fill the void of theological education within the university. For an example of how seriously the authorities took the teaching of doctrine, in 1802 neither the Regus Professor of Divinity nor the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity gave a single lecture.²² Simeon sought to address this dereliction by conducting his own ‘conversation parties’. Although initially reluctant due to the Conventicles Act, in 1813 he began to invite groups of students to his rooms at King’s on Friday evenings to discuss theology.²³ The students would crowd in, and then, with the windows shut tight for fear of fresh air, questions would be asked and Simeon would teach them.²⁴ These parties provided a theological education that was probably unparalleled in the country.²⁵ Indeed, Max Warren argued that they were a unique initiative that “anticipated the later development of Theological Colleges”.²⁶

As Venn noted early on in Simeon’s ministry, the uncompromising evangelical witness in the university entailed severe opposition. It was not uncommon for rowdy groups of undergraduates to try and break up his services.²⁷ But Simeon, with a tenaciousness that is rarely seen, remained focused on his calling for fifty-four years and ultimately saw much fruit from his labour. His own assessment of the task he had undertaken was absolutely

17 Prime, p. 67. C.f. George Peacock’s comment, “At least one-half the students in the university are designed for the church, and no provision (the lectures of the Norrisian professor alone excepted) is made for their professional education; this is a deficiency in our academical system”. G Peacock, *Observations on the Statutes of the University of Cambridge*, London, 1841, p. 168.

18 Carus, pp. 511-12.

19 K Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734-1984*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988, p. 74.

20 Prime, p. 68.

21 G Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, Church Book Room, London, 1951, p. 102.

22 Hopkins, p. 20.

23 M Warren, *Charles Simeon*, Church Book Room, London, 1959, p. 7; Hylson-Smith, p. 74.

24 Pollock, p. 5.

25 Hylson-Smith, p. 74.

26 Warren, p. 22.

27 R Steer, *Church on Fire: The Story of Anglican Evangelicals*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1998, p. 166.

foundational for his ability to persist throughout such great difficulties. Indeed, Ford Brown argued that very few people succeed in achieving such a “rigorous conception of what they ought to do” as Simeon did.²⁸ Simeon once claimed, “I look on my position here as the highest and most important in the kingdom, nor would I exchange it for any other.”²⁹ When discussing the option of marriage and the entailing necessity of surrendering his fellowship, Simeon was completely frank. He said, “the singular way in which I have been called to my present post, and its almost incalculable importance, forbid the thought of my now leaving it: therefore I think I shall never marry.”³⁰ There was no doubt in Simeon’s mind of the strategic importance of his university ministry and his calling to it. Armed with this assurance, all opposition was patiently endured and the cumulative impact of his work was multiplied over the long term.

One of the great joys of over half a century’s labour for Simeon was to reflect on the change that had taken place in that time. In 1824 he said, “The sun and the moon are scarcely more different from each other than Cambridge is from what it was when I was first Minister of Trinity Church; and the same change has taken place through almost the whole land.”³¹ In 1829 he reminisced to one of his conversation parties that thirty years earlier “five hundred pounds could not have collected such a party” as surrounded him there. He said “it was a university crime to speak to me.”³² In the last third of his life, attendance at his Sunday evening services averaged about

two hundred and fifty undergraduates.³³

In other words, a large percentage of the total student population were sitting directly under his teaching.³⁴ His influence on undergraduates in general, and upon ordination candidates in particular, was phenomenal.³⁵ Lord Macaulay was at Cambridge towards the end of Simeon’s life and he wrote to his sister, “If you knew what his authority and influence were, and how they extended from Cambridge to the most remote corners of England, you would allow that his real sway in the Church was far greater than that of any Primate.”³⁶ It would be difficult to underestimate the significance of Simeon’s ministry to university students over such a prolonged period, and it is surprising that in Wolfe’s recent history of evangelicalism in this period Simeon does not feature more prominently.³⁷ On any historical assessment it must be concluded that Simeon’s was a remarkable ministry. But was its impact only felt in Simeon’s day and in the lives he personally ministered to, or has he continued to exercise influence down to today?

What has sprung from Simeon’s ministry

To suggest that Simeon was the founder of evangelical university ministry is by no means novel. Many histories of

28 F Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce*, Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 292.

29 Hopkins, p. 86.

30 Cited in Hopkins, p. 68.

31 Carus, p. 415.

32 Hopkins, p. 84.

33 Brown, p. 295.

34 Even if we take into account the fact that the number of students at the university had doubled from 1811 to 1827, this is still a considerable percentage. Pollock, p. 9.

35 Hylson-Smith, p. 74.

36 G Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, Longmans Green, London, 1881, p. 50 f/n.

37 There are only eight passing references to Simeon in Wolfe’s account of the expansion of evangelicalism, and he doesn’t deal specifically with Simeon’s work at all. J Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney*, IVP, Nottingham, 2006.

student Christian Unions begin with some account of Simeon's ministry and the development of student ministry over subsequent decades.³⁸ The story is told of how, in response to a sermon Simeon preached in 1827, a group of Cambridge students began a Sunday school to poor children in Jesus Lane. A generation

The fledgling Union celebrated the Cambridge tradition as an encouragement to evangelize.

later, in 1862, a group of students who were actively involved in the Jesus Lane Sunday School began the Daily Prayer Meeting, which by 1875 had ten per cent of students supporting

it. The DPM had an evangelistic meeting once a term, and it was from this group that the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union was formed. The CICCUC then became a model for other student Christian groups throughout Britain and the world. As Prime surmized, "Little could Simeon or his congregation have anticipated how significant that one sermon would prove to be".³⁹

After a series of challenges to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of the atonement in the early years of the twentieth century, the CICCUC split from the more liberal inter-university Student Christian Movement.⁴⁰ At the end of the First World War, after an attempt at reconciliation demonstrated that the move away from evangelical fundamentals had

become entrenched in the SCM, the Inter-Varsity Fellowship was established as an alternative national body for evangelical students. Geraint Fielder highlighted that this did not necessarily mean things went from strength to strength for the new movement. Indeed, he said, "The centenary of Charles Simeon's death in 1936 could hardly have marked a lower tide in the ebb and flow of fidelity to the Scriptures".⁴¹ And yet, although embattled on numerous fronts, the IVF and the CICCUC in particular still looked back to Simeon for inspiration. John Stott, an undergraduate at Cambridge in the early 1940s, remembered being introduced to the story of Simeon through his involvement in the CICCUC.⁴² After the Second World War, in 1947, the IVF affiliated with other evangelical student bodies under the banner of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. This body now encompasses Christian unions in more than 130 countries.

In terms of the IVF's reach into Australia, it was the charismatic doctor turned preacher, Howard Guinness, who came to the country in 1930 to help establish Evangelical Unions among students of Sydney and Melbourne Universities.⁴³ Evangelical Unions soon began at several other Australian universities, and by 1936 they joined together in the Australian Inter-Varsity

38 Pollock, p. 1-12; D Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in Universities and Colleges*, IVP, Leicester, 1979, pp. 32-37; *Christ and the Colleges: A History of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions*, ed. FD Coggan, IVF, London, 1934, p. 12; Prime, p. 239-40; P Lowman, *The Day of His Power: A History of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students*, IVP, Leicester, 1983, p. 19; M Lake, *Proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord: A History of the Sydney University Evangelical Union*, EU Graduates Fund, Sydney, 2005, p. 2.

39 Prime, p. 240.

40 Pollock, pp. 159-189, 193-218.

41 G Fielder, *Lord of the Years: Sixty Years of Student Witness*, IVP, Leicester, 1988, p. 67.

42 T Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader*, IVP, Leicester, 1999, p. 188; Steer, p. 168.

43 H Guinness, 'Australia', *Christ and the Colleges: A History of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions*, IVF, London, 1934, pp. 169-88; J Prince & M Prince, *Out of the Tower*, ANZEA Publishers, Sydney, 1987, pp. 8-15; Lake, pp. 15-16; Fielder, pp. 42-44; Lowman, pp. 54-68. For more detail about Guinness at Melbourne University see *Decisive Years: Experiences of Christian University Students*, ed. by David Angus, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 2-6.

Fellowship.⁴⁴ Meredith Lake has shown how the Sydney University Evangelical Union identified with Simeon and the Cambridge tradition from its earliest days. She claims that the fledgling Union celebrated the Cambridge tradition as an encouragement to evangelize and as a mechanism of coping with atheism and liberalism.⁴⁵ Furthermore, she demonstrates that subsequent SUEU students also valued the Simeon tradition, as, for example, members handbooks throughout the 1960s recounted his story as the beginning of modern student Christian work and thus also of the SUEU.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Lake also highlights that in the periods of the SUEU's history when engagement with social issues gained priority over faithfulness to scripture and evangelism, there was a corresponding distancing from Simeon and the Cambridge tradition.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is fairly easy to trace a legacy of ministry amongst students in Australia back to Simeon's ministry in Cambridge—but has he been influential in a more direct way on the shape of contemporary university ministry?

Phillip Jensen's ministry at UNSW⁴⁸

I would like to answer this question by examining the remarkable twenty-eight year ministry at the University of New South Wales led by Rev Phillip Jensen.

By the time Jensen moved from his role as chaplain to UNSW and rector of St Matthias to become Dean of Sydney in 2003, thousands of students had sat under his teaching at Campus Bible Study, and St Matthias Church had grown from a few dozen people to sixteen congregations numbering over a thousand people.⁴⁹ Although the work of Simeon did not factor in Jensen's approach as he began his university ministry, there were numerous parallels between their experiences. Nevertheless, after the ministry of CBS had been established, Jensen 'discovered' Simeon's work and it influenced him in a couple of significant ways.

A simple comparison of the early stages of Simeon's ministry at Cambridge and Jensen's ministry at UNSW reveals some uncanny similarities. Both men were placed in their ministry at the direction of their bishop. In both cases this was against the will of the existing congregation. In both cases the congregations mounted opposition to the ministry. In both cases the wider university was also hostile to an evangelical witness. Both men sought to make expository preaching the foundation of their ministry. Both men's deep desire was to see students converted. Both men sought to train students in theology through smaller groups where questions were answered. (It is remarkable how similar the format of Jensen's early MTS

Both men were focused on sending convicted evangelicals into full-time ministry and training up preachers of the gospel.

44 Lake, p. 16.

45 *ibid.*, p. 28.

46 *ibid.*, p. 28.

47 She gives the example of the SUEU Members Handbook, Feb 1971. *ibid.*, pp. 28, 37.

48 Unless otherwise footnoted, all quotes in this section derive from an interview with Phillip Jensen on 6 May 2015. For a fuller account of the particular events surrounding Jensen's arrival and early ministry at UNSW, see *Let the Word do the Work*, ed. PG Bolt, *Australian Church Record*, Sydney, 2015.

49 'St Matthias, Draft Parish Profile', S Hodgkinson, 31 January 2003, states that "By mid-2002, some fifteen different congregations had been planted across the Eastern Suburbs, Inner West, and Inner South, with over 1400 members and regulars attending". The Campus Bible Study was serving 600 students per week.

training sessions resembled Simeon's conversation parties.) Both men were focused on sending convicted evangelicals into full-time ministry and training up preachers of the gospel. Even the terms of derision used against students that

The longevity of Jensen's university ministry shaped the AFES movement as a whole.

were part of their ministry were similar: 'Simeonite' and 'Jensenite'. And yet, in none of these parallels had Jensen consciously used Simeon as a model. Reflecting on this,

Jensen believes that it was their shared evangelical theology that led them to similar practices and experiences. The argument in this paper, however, is not that Simeon's ministry was *similar* to Australian university ministry, but rather, that he has been an enduring influence.

In one sense, I had hoped that when I went to interview Philip Jensen he would have said that he read about Simeon as a Moore College student and through this reading he felt God calling him to a university ministry based on evangelism and expository preaching which radically changed the direction of his life. Well, unfortunately for this paper that wasn't the case! Jensen's ministry at UNSW took shape quite independently of Simeon. Yet, after Jensen's work was underway, he bought a copy of Hopkins' biography of Simeon. His reflection on reading it was:

It blew me away... When I read what he did, it was what I was doing. He met on Friday nights, he expounded passages of Scripture, he didn't mind what others were saying, he wrote up outlines of sermons... He was recruiting young men to go the mission field... his idea of filling all the pulpits he could with evangelical preachers, having trained them in teaching the Bible was what I was doing...

This was a wonderful realization for Jensen. He says, "It was part gratitude, part joy, part excitement to find that all my 'creativity' had a precedent two hundred years earlier". Jensen described reading the book like finding a friend who understood him. But there was one important aspect of Simeon that Jensen apprehended in reading Hopkins' biography that significantly influenced the shape of his university ministry.

When Jensen began at UNSW in 1975, chaplains to the university were given four year contracts. Jensen himself had agreed to these terms, but at the end of 1977 Jensen went to see the Archbishop of Sydney to suggest that he should finish his contract a year early. His thinking behind this was that Billy Graham was coming in 1979 and it was important for the next chaplain to be well established before the Crusade. The Archbishop encouraged Jensen to stay on, even beyond the end of his contract, in order to maximise the evangelistic opportunity of Graham's visit. At this point it is worth pondering for a moment how ministry at UNSW might have been different if Jensen had finished up after just three years.

It must have been about this time that Jensen read the biography of Simeon. It revolutionized his thinking on the longevity of ministry. In his words:

From the day I read that book, I just kept on seeing how Simeon did what he did, and how big the impact was because of his continuity in the doing of it. How stupid it was to have chaplains for four years!... [I saw that] the longer I could hang on into this situation, the more people I could keep impacting by doing what Simeon did, that is, the same thing all the time.

For the work at UNSW for the next several decades under Jensen's leadership,

this was a hugely significant realization. In his words, “[Simeon] did encourage me to stay longer and to be single-minded in the task”. The longevity of Jensen’s university ministry did not only shape the way things were done at UNSW, but the AFES movement as a whole. Many university campuses across Australia continue to have an evangelical ministry that is influenced by Jensen’s work at UNSW.

A second influence Simeon had on Jensen was in helping him to see the massive advantage of ministry to residential students. In turn, Jensen began to prioritize the residential ministry because of the great influence he could have there. He said, “Knowing that [Simeon’s] impact came from being in a residential university helped me see the impact that could be had with residential students”. Indeed, the total number of residential students at UNSW in Jensen’s time was similar to the total number of students at Cambridge in Simeon’s time. Residence provided numerous teaching opportunities that commuting students missed. It was seeing the way Simeon used this experience that clarified Jensen’s priority on these students.

After Jensen’s ‘discovery’ of Simeon, the Cambridge precedent entered into the CBS narrative. Jensen read all that he could about him. Particularly with the MTS trainees and staff workers, Jensen would point to Simeon as an example to follow. He emphasized Simeon’s faithfulness to scriptural exposition. He pointed to Simeon’s patient endurance of opposition. And all importantly, Jensen highlighted the profound impact of a long-term strategic ministry.⁵⁰ Although working on the other side of the world,

in a vastly different context, Simeon’s university ministry was continuing to have an influence.

Conclusion

Charles Simeon was an evangelical stalwart of profound and lasting significance. He saw his ministry in Cambridge as of particularly strategic importance. He believed that through faithful and systematic exposition of the Bible the Lord would bring people into his kingdom and grow them in faith. He was particularly interested in training future leaders of the church in preaching and theology. He has rightly been seen as the founder of evangelical ministry amongst university students—even university students on the other side of the world. But we have seen that his influence is far greater than merely a founder. The example of Phillip Jensen demonstrates the personal impact that Simeon’s ministry has had. From Simeon, Jensen saw the gospel impact of long-term university ministry and residential student ministry. These insights shaped Jensen’s own ministry at UNSW, a ministry that has itself become programmatic for other university ministries around Australia. Charles Simeon’s ministry at Cambridge was 200 years and about 17,000 kilometres away from Phillip Jensen’s ministry at UNSW, but their shared theology and practice, their common goal of training the next generation of gospel workers and the profound impact their ministries were to have lead us to conclude that the distance from King’s College to Kingsford is not so far at all. ▣

With the MTS trainees and staff workers, Jensen would point to Simeon as an example to follow.

⁵⁰ These three lessons were recollected by Tony Payne, one of Jensen’s MTS trainees in the mid-1980s, in conversation, 20 February 2015.



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—Phillip Jensen, Bible
teacher and evangelist
at Two Ways Ministries,
Sydney

Defining and defending marriage

SANDY GRANT

In a climate of controversy, slogans and emotive appeals, where clear thinking about the nature of marriage is hard to find, this essay by Sandy Grant is a breath of fresh air. In it he not only explores the most frequently unasked question in the same-sex marriage debate (“what is marriage?”), but offers helpful advice for how Christians can put their point of view intelligently and graciously.

MARRIAGE IS UNDER threat, and particularly so during the last 50 years. The introduction of reliable contraception in the 1960s and the casual sex revolution that resulted greatly undermined marriage. Despite some good points, the ‘no fault’ divorce law reform of the 1970s further weakened marriage. Additionally, modern reproductive technologies mean that we can now obtain children without sex, let alone a marriage. In light of all this, marriage no longer seems as important an institution.

Statistically, marriage is on the decline. The 2006 Australian Census reported that the number of officially married Australians fell below 50% of the adult population for the first time in decades. During that same decade, the number of divorced Australians increased by 45%, while the number in *de facto* relationships sky-rocketed by over 60%. Although the more recent 2011 Census showed that the rates of increase in divorce and *de facto* relationships had slowed, it’s

because these situations had become so much more common. So now less people bother to get married, and less people stay married.

Marriage as a man-woman *institution* with a clear connection to children—as we knew it across almost all cultures down through the ages—is also under pressure. For decades now, gay and lesbian lobby groups, along with others, have pushed to redefine marriage and family life. For example, in 2006 the Australian Capital Territory Parliament passed the Civil Unions Act, allowing two people regardless of sex, to enter a legally recognized union, with ceremonies, and for this union to be treated the same as marriage. A month later, the federal Cabinet disallowed this legislation, because it contravened the Marriage Act, which in 2004 had made explicit what was long understood, that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. More recently, in 2012, after vigorous debate, the Australian Federal Parliament rejected

a private member's bill to legalize same-sex marriage.

In 2013, the UK Parliament passed a bill for same-sex marriage, promoted by the Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron. Currently around 20 nations around the world have legislated for some form of same-sex marriage. In Australia,

there are again private member bills for same-sex marriage before the Federal Parliament, including one sponsored by the Leader of the Opposition. Whether you approve or not, it's

clear marriage as traditionally understood is under pressure to be redefined.

In an opinion piece on the ABC Religion blog,¹ Roger Scruton and Phillip Blond responded to the UK debate. While I don't agree with all of what they said, it is exceptionally well written for the general public. They introduced it in this way:

This debate has created many divides across and between religious, civil and advocacy groups—the most unpleasant of which is the demonising of those who question the merits of same sex union as if it were self-evidently homophobic to have reservations about the current proposals. But throughout all of the debate, recognition of the value and worth of marriage has been assumed rather than discussed. Those who advocate the extension of marriage to same sex couples have been very strong on the value of equality but almost silent on the nature of marriage they want equal access to. Whereas those who defend marriage as it is currently defined

seem unable to say exactly what its value and worth is and why the institution would suffer from extension to same sex couples. A meaningful discussion about the value and purpose of the institution of marriage itself has not taken place. So, beyond the specifics of the Government's proposals, we here want to ask: What is marriage, and why does it matter?

People sometimes state that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality. However, that's not correct.

Defining marriage

So how does the Bible define marriage, and does its view coincide or otherwise with other views in the public arena?

Exclusive, lifelong, gendered union

According to the Bible, marriage is an exclusive, lifelong, gendered union. One excellent place to see this comes in Matthew 19, where Jesus answers a question about divorce. In context he is opposing easy divorce. But at the heart of his answer, in verses 4-6, is his view about marriage as lifelong in intention:

Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

People sometimes state that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality. However, that's not correct. When he addresses the topic of marriage here he quotes from the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1. That is, he goes back to the way the world is wired up; his comment "from the beginning" is talking about the original pattern. And the pattern says

¹ R Scruton & P Blond, 'Marriage equality or the destruction of difference?', *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 4 February 2013 (viewed 21 September 2015): www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/02/04/3682721.htm

God made humankind “male and female”. He emphasizes the fact of two genders. Then Jesus immediately quotes the second chapter of Genesis to say that it’s *for this reason*—of maleness and femaleness—that a man will leave his parents and marry a woman. These words make it clear that marriage is to be gendered. The one alternative he gives is singleness and celibacy, which Jesus exemplified!

So all people (especially those that follow Jesus) need to realize that marriage is to be gendered. They must respect the fact that the husband must be a man and the wife a woman. Men and women are equal but different. Equally in God’s image. Equally valuable. But to some extent made differently, and to some extent for different roles. In Genesis, man is made from the dust, woman from his rib. Man is the first worker. Woman is his helper. A full discussion of this awaits another time. But in modern terms, the most obvious difference is reproductive and relative physical strength, though modern brain science also generalizes about other differences. Two sexes, not one.

These words also make it clear that marriage is not something casual, but an intimate union. Matthew 19:5 says the man will hold fast to his wife; the two become one flesh. It’s the language of union, and in verse 6 Jesus comments, “God has joined [them] together”. God is the ultimate marriage celebrant. The union is not just a secular legal status. We’re talking about absolute reality. God makes them one.

Furthermore, this union is to be lifelong and exclusive, because in verse 6 Jesus says no-one is to separate them. No-one is to come between them. Not their parents. Not their friends. Nor their careers. Certainly no other sexual partner. That’s what we mean by exclusive. Marriage excludes the option of other

sexual partners for life. Ordinarily, you can only marry another person should your first spouse die.

Oriented towards Children

There is a second essential part to the Bible’s view of marriage. Marriage is inherently oriented towards children. Sex certainly bonds a couple together. But it’s also procreative. It’s for making you close as a couple and for making you parents. Again, we can see this from the passages we referred to earlier. Jesus talks of the two becoming one flesh in marriage. Clearly the sexual relationship lies at the heart of the oneness in flesh. But when he refers to God creating us male and female from Genesis 1, the immediate context in verse 28 tells us God blessed man and woman together to be fruitful and increase in number. We see the importance of this in a later passage, Malachi 2:15-16:

Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

It’s clear what God is seeking from those who are joined in marriage. That is, godly offspring. Sadly, a hateful divorce not only breaks your marriage promises but also threatens the spiritual wellbeing of the next generation. Positively, the oneness that sex brings to spouses in marriage has a direct connection to God’s desire for the next generation to love him. The basic New Testament assumption is that parents

must provide for their children: material needs, and spiritual.

Children are not just an afterthought. For this reason, it always worries me when friends are asked to pray at a Christian wedding, and among all the good things they request, they forget to ask God to grant the couple the blessing of kids. We must never accept the way some people speak of children as an optional lifestyle choice, whose costs are weighed against career and travel ambitions, etc.

A covenant

There's one more aspect to a biblical definition of marriage: covenant. The question can arise whether a *de facto* marriage could be a marriage in God's eyes. A big part of the answer comes from seeing marriage as a covenant. That's clear from the reference in Malachi 2:14, just prior to the passage above:

But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Your wife is your wife by covenant. This explains God's distress with an easy attitude to divorce. It's covenant unfaithfulness, promise-breaking.

But what is a 'covenant' in the Bible? It's a binding contract entered by promises from two parties. Or you could take the more scholarly definition brought to my attention by my friend and colleague Lionel Windsor, namely: "an elected... relationship of obligation under oath".²

By 'elected', we mean you've *chosen*

the relationship. Contrast a parent-child or brother-sister relationship. They exist regardless of the preferences of those involved. By 'obligation', we mean you've agreed to some particular conditions for the relationship; both parties make promises. By 'under oath', we mean that some sort of solemn sign or ritual is used to formalize the covenant. This marks public clarity about the relationship.

It's this last element that helps clarify why Christians are not comfortable with *de facto* relationships. Two people could make private promises on a beach, even of exclusive, lifelong commitment. They could swap rings. So I might concede that some *de facto* relationships are *irregularly contracted* marriages. But an official, public ceremony—whether civil or religious—removes any uncertainty in what's said, and hopefully what's meant. The wider community supports the covenant.

Most *de facto* relationships are nothing like that. There are no promises. No clear-cut choices. No covenant sign. So no real marriage. Just often highly conditional love and uncertainty. Sometimes one partner—often the woman—thinks the relationship is forever, but the other thinks it is for a time. The degree of commitment always differs. Not as long as we both shall live, just as long as love shall last, and statistics bear this out.

The bipartisan Australian federal parliamentary report, *To have and to hold*, reviewing the wide body of research in this area, indicated that *de facto* relationships are marked by lower rates of happiness, and also break up more often than marriage.³ There is also strong

2 L Windsor, 'What's the precise meaning of the word 'covenant' in the Old Testament?', Forget the Channel, 26 January 2010 (viewed 29 September 2015): <http://www.lionelwindsor.net/2010/01/26/whats-the-precise-meaning-of-the-word-covenant-in-the-old-testament/>

3 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *To have and to hold: Strategies to strengthen marriage and relationships*, Parliament House, Canberra, 1998.

statistical evidence to show that those who live together before marriage have a higher chance of divorce than those who don't. Although it's unpopular to say so, the statistics on permanence and exclusivity are worse for gay relationships. This is acknowledged and even celebrated by some Australian gay activists like Dennis Altman and Simon Copland.

Christians then are saying it is not only right and biblical, but also honest and practical to acknowledge that God has designed marriage as a covenant relationship, between a man and a woman, naturally oriented towards child-rearing, and marked by mutual promises of exclusive, lifelong commitment.

Hostile to sexual immorality

This is why the Bible is hostile to all sexual immorality. Now I've deliberately chosen a strong word: hostile. Hebrews 13:4 says God will judge the adulterous and the sexually immoral. That's the two words that cover sex *outside* marriage and sex *before* you're married. Jesus also listed these two words—adultery and fornication, as older translations put it—as sin alongside greed, gossip, idolatry, theft and pride, etc. You may not agree with Jesus, but honest liberal scholars admit the Bible outlaws sex before and outside marriage, including homosexual activity. They might say it's wrong. But they admit that's what it says.

But why is sex before or outside of marriage so problematic? Presumably as Hebrews 13 says, because it dishonours marriage and ruins the marital bed. Why? Because it undermines the oneness of marriage, present or future. As 1 Corinthians 6:16 reminds us, you are becoming one with whomever you have sex with, even if it's a prostitute. Let me speak frankly to our youth with some advice

from Carl Thomas.⁴ Sex that's just 'in the moment' is often sex where consequences are not considered. It leads to mistakes. Which leads to regret, which can never be undone, though it can be healed. Further, it's hard going *à la carte* when you marry, happy with one choice, if you've been used to a smorgasbord. The impact of sexual history means there will always be unfortunate comparisons.

I know this may sound counter-intuitive in a day and age where consumption rules, but if your only frame of reference for sex is with your spouse (sex that's special and intimate), then it's generally going to be pretty good, and you are not going to be worrying about what else you may be missing out on.

By contrast, one of Australia's most respected social commentators, Hugh Mackay, expresses his moral philosophy in *Right and Wrong: how to decide for yourself* as: "The right answer for me may be different from the right answer for you".⁵ When he applies it to relationships, this means:

*When it comes to sex, what do we regard as an acceptable interpretation of the ideal of fidelity? Do we mean being faithful to a sexual partner—i.e. having that person as an exclusive partner for as long as the relationship lasts? Or do we mean being faithful to ourselves—to our sense of what we believe in, what's right for us, what values we want to uphold?*⁶

It's hard going *à la carte* when you marry if you've been used to a smorgasbord.

4 C Thomas, '5 reasons to keep it buttoned up until you are married', XXXchurch, 30 October 2014 (viewed 29 September 2015): www.xxxchurch.com/thehaps/5-reasons-to-keep-it-buttoned-up-until-you-are-married.html

5 H Mackay, *Right and Wrong: How to decide for yourself*, Hodder Headline, Sydney, 2004, p. 237.

6 *ibid.*, p. 122.

So:

...married people will occasionally fall helplessly (and 'authentically') in love with someone else and feel that to ignore such powerful attraction would actually be wrong for them, even though they may feel that leaving the marriage would, in most respects, also be wrong.⁷

Hugh Mackay revels in his high status as a social commentator. But at this point I believe he is dangerous. His recipe for sex—whatever's right for me—will just produce more broken relationships, more hurt people, more damaged children.

Rather, if one has been swindled by temptation like this, they should stop before the damage is compounded. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 makes it clear that sexual sin cuts us off from the kingdom of God like any other sin. But verse 11 holds out great hope for forgiveness:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The Bible is clear: Jesus can heal you of sexual sin. Jesus can clean your life up. That's why he died for you. That's why he sent his Holy Spirit. Jesus loves to forgive, if only you'll turn from sin and put your trust in him.

Indeed, this is one other reason Christians believe marriage is so special. It's because in the Bible a husband's love for his wife is an analogy of God's love for his people. The prophet Hosea says that God loves his people even though they've been unfaithful to him, adulterous in their idolatries. God's love is not conditioned by the recipient's failure to perform. I know this is a belief particular to Christians,

but marriage is sacred since it reflects the gospel truth that, as a loving groom, Jesus sacrificed his life for his dear bride, the church.

The 'conjugal' view vs the 'partnership' view

Now having made that critical gospel aside, let me say how well the biblical view of marriage fits with what is often called the 'conjugal' view of marriage in public policy discussions, as opposed to a 'partnership' view. For example, just about the best secular 'natural law' case for the traditional view going around is "What is Marriage?"⁸ The authors define marriage as the comprehensive union of spouses: bodily and sexual union; with special links to children, inherently oriented by its opposite gendered union, towards conception and child rearing; committed to the norms of permanence, monogamy and exclusivity.

This conjugal view is contrasted to a mere partnership view, based on a romantic connection leading to a more or less contractual approach to mutual care that may or may not be oriented to child-rearing, permanence, monogamy, or exclusivity.

Or here is what Scruton and Blond say:

Put simply, there are two competing ideas of marriage at play in the current debate. The first is traditional and conjugal and extends beyond the individuals who marry to the children they hope to create and the society they wish to shape. The second is more [private] and is to do with a relationship abstracted from the wider concern that marriage originally was

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸ S. Girgis, R. George & R. T. Anderson, 'What is Marriage?', *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2010, pp. 245-287.

designed to speak to. Some call this pure partnership or mere cohabitation.

The latter view is what marriage is becoming: a dissolvable contract between two individuals who partner purely for the sake of the partnership itself. It has little or nothing to do with children, general education or social stability... The partnership model is one shared by many heterosexuals and wider society, and it is this that has done much harm to the institution of marriage...

Marriage in this conjugal view is a sexual union of husband and wife who promised each other sexual fidelity, mutual caretaking and the joint parenting of any children they may have. Conjugal marriage is fundamentally child-centred and female advancing. Lone motherhood, which is bad for both the woman and the child, is the evident manifestation of the contemporary separation of marriage and parenthood.⁹

They suggest the ‘partnership’ view fails to acknowledge fundamental facets of human life: the fact of sexual difference; the enormous tide of sexual desire; the unique ‘social ecology’ of parenting which offers children vital and fundamental bonds with their biological parents; and the rich genealogical nature of family ties and the web of intergenerational supports for family members it provides. To quote again:

Conjugal marriage has several strengths which partnership marriage does not. It is inherently normative, which is fundamentally good, for it stabilises and secures people in their most profound relationships. Conjugal marriage cannot celebrate an infinite array of sexual or intimate choices as equally desirable or

valid. Instead, its very purpose lies in channelling the erotic and interpersonal impulses between men and women in a particular direction: one in which men and women commit to each other and to the children that their sexual unions commonly (and even at times unexpectedly) produce. A political indifference to this normativity reflects a culture that chooses to ‘do nothing’ about sexual attraction between men and women. The outcome of which is a passive, unregulated heterosexual reality and multiple failed relationships and millions of fatherless children.

Not every married couple has or wants children. But at its core marriage has always had something to do with societies’ recognition of the fundamental importance of the sexual ecology of human life: humanity is male and female, men and women often have sex, babies often result, and those babies, on average, do better when their mother and father cooperate in their care.¹⁰

2. Defending marriage

So how can we defend marriage, conjugal marriage? I believe we need to defend it in society as well as in the church. We’ve already given some lines by which a secular argument can be advanced, alongside our biblical convictions for defending true marriage.

In society

But why should we defend marriage in society, in the public arena? Isn’t it said that we can’t or shouldn’t legislate morality for unbelievers? Others suggest

⁹ Scruton & Blond.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

tactically, missionally, it's a bad idea to fight a losing battle.

But marriage is a creation ordinance rather than a redemption ordinance. It belongs to all human society, not just the church. As those with dual citizenship, fundamentally in heaven but also in our own nations and societies, like the exiles in Babylon, we are to seek the welfare of the cities we find ourselves in. The conjugal view of marriage is good for everyone, especially for children.

In God's providence, he has placed us in a democracy that invites us to participate in the political process, as citizens, who are free to be Christians! So what do we do? I think we plainly state our biblical reasons for our beliefs as clearly as we can. But alongside that, we also try to give an account that supplies plausible reasons independent of religion for upholding the conjugal view of marriage.

We also want parliamentarians to work to defend marriage by strengthening it.

As the Bible says, we pray for all those in authority, including those we disagree with. We write to them, and in doing so we write cogent, clear, polite letters, in the main of no more than one page.

We try and write early in the debate, if we can. And we persist over time. I recall a series of letters with the local MP in my last parish. He was initially uninformed and wavering on the stem cell issue. It took three letters from me (and no doubt many others) interacting with him, until he was able to come to a position, against destructive embryonic stem cell research.

We try to engage with the research and alternative arguments, refusing to only fight weak 'straw men', yet being sceptical of the 'assured results' of research. These have often proceeded from strong pre-existing ideological commitments. We also remember that this can be true of us

as believers. We check sources carefully for ourselves, and are cautious about just parroting party lines.

We also learn how to ask good questions of the alternative visions. For example, the revisionists have been good at saying what marriage is not. For example, they say it is not inherently opposite gendered, and it is not discriminatory in whom it admits. But the revisionists have been poor at defining what marriage is, which they mostly only bother to do rarely and vaguely. So ask them to explain what marriage is. Push for a proper definition. Then on the basis of their definition, ask them to explain why the state has any business in legislating to honour romantic and sexual partnerships. You may ask them why, on their definition, marriage should be restricted to just two partners, and so on.

But as well as urging parliamentarians not to redefine marriage, we also want to see them work to defend marriage by strengthening it. We must encourage governments to put more money into marriage enrichment and mediation services. We support efforts to reform family law, in ways that might strengthen marriage, protect children, and if it's appropriate where there are difficulties, to increase the chances for reconciliation.

In the church

However, we also need to defend marriage within the churches. We need to keep expounding the good of a biblical, theological account of marriage within the faith. I understand that our youth have never known a time when society thought anything else of homosexuality other than that it's perfectly acceptable. We need to compassionately encourage those with gay relatives, or promiscuous children, or their own failed relationships, as to the

truth and goodness of the biblical vision.

We need to teach that singleness is not a disease, and that celibacy will be the normal way of life for all Christians post-puberty for many periods of life. We need to teach that neither sexual expression, nor even our orientation, is the essence of our humanity or identity. We are human; we are male and female. We are married or single. Most importantly of all, if we are believers, we are children of God.

We need to teach an absolute “No” to any bullying of those we deem immoral. Remember that the same Lord Jesus who challenged the woman caught in adultery about her life of sin also protected her from the stone-throwing bullying of the self-righteous (John 8:3-11). Disapproval of the lifestyle does not need to mean harshness or personal rejection. On the other hand, deep compassion and true kindness does not require us to approve a morality that we know the Bible identifies as sin.

But pastors and leaders, as you teach on marriage in public ministry you also need to consider how to strengthen individual marriages. What is available for marriage preparation, for marriage enrichment, for marriage counselling? What are the practical threats to marriage in our contemporary congregations from busyness and careerism, through financial pressures and materialism, or by pornography and naivety or foolhardiness about emotional intimacy with people

of the opposite sex to whom we are not married? What training or mentoring do you need in this?

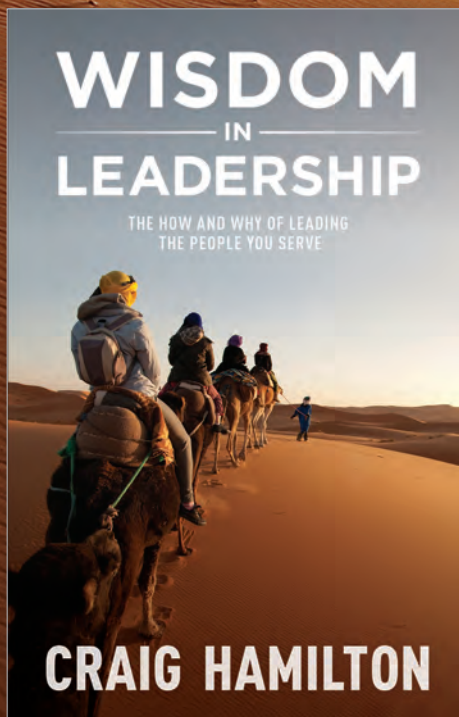
We do not expect Christian morality from those who are not Christian. But you do need to think about those who wish to follow Christ and experience unwanted same-sex attraction. Such people exist. Sometimes some change of desires takes place. Thankfully, some such Christians like Wesley Hill, Rosario Champagne Butterfield, and Sam Alberry have spoken and written about their experiences. Pastors and church members alike need to consider how to understand, to listen, to care, and to offer support, including positive warm same- and opposite-sex friendships. Almost all of us are strugglers with our sexuality one way or another.

So how can we Christians defend the institution of marriage? Andrew Cameron and Tracy Gordon make an insightful comment:

If such redefinitions continue, then marriage will become another area where Christian communities will hold out hope to a lost world by living out something different, just as many of us currently do when we try to keep sex for marriage, or bring pregnancies to term, or express the supremacy of Christ in public.¹¹

The best advertisements for marriage are people who honour it personally in their lives. ▣

¹¹ A Cameron & T Gordon, ‘What Makes a Marriage?’, *Social Issues Committee of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*, 2 June 2004, (viewed 21 September 2015): http://socialissues.org.au/issues/what_makes_a_marriage/



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Clear and good

DANNY RURLANDER

1 Corinthians 11 is a perfect storm of problems for modern Bible readers. It seems hard to understand, and its message (as best as we can read it) grates with our cultural sensibilities. However, as Danny Rurlander argues in this careful and insightful reading of the passage, God's word in 1 Corinthians is like the rest of Scripture: clear in its message, and thoroughly good in its effects.

THERE ARE CERTAIN passages of Scripture from which even Bible-loving Christians tend to steer clear. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. There are two obvious reasons for our shyness about this part of God's word.

The first is the sheer number of difficulties in the text itself, either real or perceived. For example: the meaning of 'head'; the question of whether Paul meant 'man' and 'woman' or 'husband' and 'wife'; the meaning and nature of prophesy; how this passage relates to other passages in which Paul forbids women from speaking in church; the exact custom of head coverings; how or if those customs connect to hair. And just as we thought the passage could not get any more difficult, Paul cheerfully throws in "because of the angels" in verse 10, without any explanation! For anyone wishing to teach or simply to understand this passage, it presents an above-average challenge. Or, to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, "This is a three pipe passage, Watson: definitely a three pipe passage!"

The second reason for our reluctance, however, does not lie within the text itself, but within ourselves as readers. We acutely sense the clash between these texts and our culture. This is probably a more serious problem. We live in a world in which gender is perceived to be a matter of personal choice, not a given, irreversible result of creation. Since distinctions between men and women are seen to be the products of a discredited patriarchal society whose aim was the domination of men over women, we are now able to unlearn those distinctions and throw off the 'gender stereotypes' of a previous age that have imprisoned us for so long. Indeed, because our post-enlightenment society values self-determination as the highest good, we must decide our own gender as a matter of personal preference, like choosing a set of clothes. As Emma Watson, the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, explained to the United Nations, "It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as

two opposing sets of ideals”.¹

In such a context as this it is no surprise that we want to avoid a text that instructs men and women about their personal grooming in church in order for the headship of men over women to be seen!

Even when we do teach and preach on these passages, many of us will do so with a rather embarrassed apology, like a parent giving a child a dose of cod-liver oil. We know it’s good for them but we wish we didn’t have to do it.

In the light of those attitudes to this part of Scripture consider some words of King David:

*Oh, how I love your law...
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
(Ps 119:97, 103)*

My goal in this article is to move us from reluctant acceptance to joyful delight. We need to see that this passage is both *clear* and *good*. Only if we believe that will we be able to teach and enjoy this—and similar passages—in a way that is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

1. Praise

Paul’s unqualified praise for what we know is a dysfunctional church is a surprise: “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor 11:2). How is Paul

able to ‘commend’ (ESV) or ‘praise’ (NIV) the Corinthian church, despite everything they have got so badly wrong? The answer is because of what he believes, fundamentally, about this church.

In his opening greeting it is no accident that he calls them “the church of God” in Corinth (1 Cor 1:2). Despite their immaturity and worldliness, Paul sees them as a true church, *of God*: gathered by God and owned by God. Indeed Paul is rather in awe at this little miracle of God’s grace. Consider these well-known verses for example:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. (1 Cor 1:27–28)

They were nothing in the eyes of the world. But God has chosen to reverse their status completely. Now, through the preaching of the powerful gospel in pagan Corinth, they are a gathering of God’s believing people around Christ, fragile but real. God had a stunning purpose in mind in creating this church out of nothing: by choosing the ‘foolish’, ‘weak’, ‘low’ and ‘despised’ (Paul was clearly not out to flatter the Corinthians!) God shames and brings to nothing the godless human order that considers itself ‘wise’ and ‘strong’. The church in Corinth had been created by God to be a place where the world’s values are turned on their head. They are to display the ‘foolishness’ of God, in contrast to the world’s ‘wisdom’, the ‘weakness’ of God in contrast to the world’s ‘strength’.

In other words, this ordinary local church is to be a little window into the future, a display of God’s glory and wisdom, as they crack on with God’s mission to proclaim Christ in a shameful

¹ ‘Emma Watson: Gender equality is your issue too’, *UN Women*, 20 September 2014 (viewed 28 September 2015): www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too#sthash.EYUdCVb9.dpuf

and foolish world. And that is the case for every true church of God. This awesome fact is true for the church I serve, and it is the case for your church too. However many faults there may be, it is a live expression of the hidden realities of the universe, that is capable of both ‘shaming’ the world for its subversion of God’s order, and of anticipating a new world whose values belong to God.

But how are they to live in such a way that will turn the world’s wisdom on its head and reveal the wisdom and glory and power of God? By doing what Paul praises the Corinthians for, to “remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you” (1 Cor 11:2). This praise is not about softening them up with a bit of flattery before he gets the knife in. It sets the scene for the rest of the passage (indeed, the next four chapters) very clearly. Paul’s great interest in these chapters is what happens when the church meets together.² If their meetings and their congregational life hold to the apostolic gospel, then they will shame the world and reveal the wisdom of God. This is the context in which Paul now turns to the matter of relationships between men and women.

2. Order

Before turning to the heart of Paul’s argument we need to address a translation issue. In the Greek the words translated ‘man’ and ‘woman’ can also refer to a ‘husband’ or ‘wife’, depending on the context. By using the latter translation the ESV tends to narrow the focus to relationships within marriage (although it does not do this consistently throughout

the whole passage). As will hopefully become clear, I believe Paul’s focus is broader than this, and this broader focus is consistently maintained by the NIV. I have quoted the NIV for verse 3 below, but this point should also be kept in mind later when we come to discuss verses 4-6 and 13-16.

The first thing Paul wants the Corinthians to understand is what I am going to refer to simply as ‘order’. The fundamental parameters of this order are established in verse 3:

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (NIV)

The fundamental point Paul is making here is that the world in which we live and breathe is a world of order in relationships. This order reflects the nature of God, is built into creation, and is revealed in the gospel. (This means, by the way, that those who wish to relegate the subject of the passage to a first-century cultural issue, with limited contemporary relevance, must first empty this sentence of virtually all theological meaning, which would be no easy feat!)

This sentence, then, is the theological engine room of the entire passage. We need to pay careful attention to it, beginning with two observations.

The first thing to notice is simply that there is an order. Paul wants the Corinthians to see that everyone—except God—has a ‘head’: a leader, someone with authority over them.³ The woman has a head (man), the man has a head (Christ)

² See also 1 Corinthians 11:17, 18, 20, 33-34; 14:23, 26.

³ The meaning of the word ‘head’ has, of course, been much debated. But to change the meaning of the word ‘head’ to ‘source’ defies the internal logic of the verse; it is hard to see why he would even write it. Paul is clearly thinking about leadership, not origins.

and even Christ has a head (God).

Men and women find themselves within an order of authority and responsibility established by God. The Triune God himself exists eternally in an ordered relationship, and he chose to mirror that ordered relationship onto the human race, his image, at creation. This order is expressed in the order between men and women.

The second observation is the structure of the verse. This powerfully shows how the order is grounded in the person of God, mirrored in creation, and expressed in the gospel:

*the head of every man is Christ
and the head of the woman is man
and the head of Christ is God.*

If all Paul had wanted to do were to establish a basic hierarchy, like a scale, he could have put God and Christ, then Christ and man, then man and woman. Or he could equally have reversed that order. Instead, the relationship between man and woman is sandwiched between the other two pairs. It is this relationship that he wants to explain in the light of the other

two. He wants to show how the relationship between men and women fits into the wider order—of man's submission to Christ on the one hand, and Christ's submission to

God the Father on the other.

The first line makes a statement about Christ's headship over man: "The head of every man is Christ". The risen, exalted Christ under whose rule God has put all things (15:27) is the head of every man. And the 'every' is emphasized.

It is explicitly *in this context* that Paul then makes a statement about man's

headship over the woman. Paul wants to tie male headship over women to Christ's headship over man. This means that male headship is always exercised under the rule of Christ, who will hold all men to account for, among other things, the way they exercise that headship. But he wants to tie male headship to Christ's in another way too: it is to be modelled upon Christ's own headship. Far from being autonomous and self-serving, male headship is to copy the headship that Christ exercised for the church in his death on the cross. Male headship under Christ's headship is to be servant-like and sacrificial, forgoing one's own rights for the sake of another.

The third line makes a statement about God's headship over Christ: "and the head of Christ is God". Just as male headship over women was paralleled with Christ's headship over men, now female submission to male headship is paralleled to Christ's submission to God. This means that, just as Christ's submission to the Father (also supremely displayed at the cross!) did not involve Christ in a loss of dignity and value, neither does a woman's submission to man. And just as Christ's submission to the Father was joyful and willing, exercising trust in God, so is female submission to male headship.

In other words, whichever place in God's order we find ourselves (and there are only two places, as a man or as a woman), Jesus has been there before us, and "got the T-shirt". And it is the gospel itself that supremely shows us that. Christ models both headship and submission. In each case he does so without any change in his divine status or compromise in his infinite worth. In each case he does so in humility, as he sacrifices himself for the sake of others.

That means that, whatever gender we find ourselves born into, we have

Men and women find themselves within an order of authority and responsibility established by God.

the privilege of wearing the T-shirt too. As men we get to exercise headship in a sacrificial, humble way. As women we get to exercise submission in an equally sacrificial, humble way. As Mark Thompson says, commenting on the structure of the verse: “whether we are lovingly exercising headship or wholeheartedly acknowledging it, our model is Christ”.⁴

Before we turn to the rest of the passage, four implications from what we have seen so far will help us to listen carefully to Paul’s argument that follows.

Implications

Firstly, whatever *expression* of this order the rest of the passage goes on to describe, what should be clear at this point is that the order itself is permanent and irreversible, built into the very fabric of reality. It is certainly not a reflection of first-century culture, or any other culture.

Secondly, if that is the case then we must also see that this asymmetrical ordering of relationships in God’s world is *good*. It is possible, indeed in God it is true, that asymmetry is good and right and beautiful. If this is a surprise to our ears it might be because we have been deafened by the insistence of feminism that all asymmetry in relationships can only be described in terms of power and exploitation. This ‘tyranny of symmetry’ reduces the equality of persons to the equality of roles they occupy and thus, in the end, diminishes both men and women, and even God. It is a profoundly depersonalizing ideology.

Thirdly, it is because the gospel (which expresses both Christ’s rule and

his submission) is counter-cultural that asymmetrical gender relationships are also counter-cultural, *and always will be* in a fallen world. God’s order for men and women involves an other-person-centeredness that goes against sinful human nature, and can only be restored by the gospel.

The revolutionary nature of such other-person-centeredness for sinful human beings was brought home to me by a recent story that made

the news in the UK. A commuter in London bought a homeless person a coffee every morning while on his way to work. Somehow

this unusual habit of generosity became well enough known to feature as an item of news. The commuter was asked why he bought the homeless man a cup of coffee every day. One might reasonably have expected him to explain that the reason was simply “because he is cold and thirsty”, or “because I feel sorry for him” or some other altruistic motive. But this was his reply: “Because everyday it’s a little thing I do to make myself feel good”.

Sadly this is the reality of human charity without the gospel. Even in our best moments we are innately selfish, turned in upon ourselves, treating other people as servants of our needs even as we serve them. Only the cross (not, notice, some sort of return to the 1950s) can make us truly live and die in such a way that we *honour another*, which is what male and female relationships are about. Therefore what Paul is teaching the Corinthians here will be counter-cultural in any and every age.

But fourthly that also means it will make sense in any age, if we teach it in a gospel context. When we do that, the gospel trumps our cultural baggage in

We must see that this asymmetrical ordering of relationships in God’s world is good.

4 M Thompson, ‘The theological ground of evangelical complementarianism’, *Women, Sermons and the Bible*, eds. P Bolt & T Payne, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2014.

wonderful and liberating ways. At our most recent church student conference we covered the topic of relationships, with the conscious addition of the whole topic of gender as well as the usual themes of sex, marriage and dating. After teaching our way through the ‘controversial’ gender role passages, it was striking to see this mind-change at work. Here are two emails we received by way of feedback, both from young women:

“Before now I always thought a submissive wife was a weak and oppressed woman. But when I saw how Christ submits to the Father in the gospel, I saw what a beautiful relationship a godly marriage could be when it reflects that relationship. I’m so glad I got to hear biblical teaching on a topic about which I had such distorted views.”

“I’d always assumed that submission meant willingly succumbing myself to a form of slavery. I was determined to be independent, the leader of my own life, not allowing myself to be oppressed by any man. But in learning about how Christ in all his power and glory submits to the Father I was greatly challenged. The power given to man isn’t one to control and enslave but to lead, in Christ-like love. The submission of a woman is not a sign of weakness as society had lead me to believe but is trusting God who created us to be different. I understand now that God needs me just as I am, a woman, so that the spreading of his gospel prevails through us to coming generations.”

The word of God is more powerful than culture, so we should preach and teach these passages without fear or embarrassment.

3. Order subverted

However, in every age and culture sinful humanity will subvert the order in some way. It is to this subversion of order in the church in Corinth that Paul now turns his attention.

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head... Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11: 4-6, 13-16)

We will need to leave the ‘minor detail’ of what prophesy may or may not mean for another occasion. For now we will make the fairly safe assumption that if prayer is directed to God, and prophesy is directed to other people, we have in that pair a picture of the normal ‘every-member’ Word ministry at the heart of the local church that is both vertically and horizontally directed.⁵

Despite some genuine difficulties in these verses, we should not miss the obvious but thrilling fact that Paul is able to move so effortlessly from the central, eternal, Trinitarian principle in verse 3 to

⁵ For a brief description of New Testament prophesy in the context of 1 Corinthians 11, see C Smith, *God’s Good Design*, Matthias Media, Kingsford, 2012, pp. 66–69.

an application of what men and women do and do not do with their heads in church. This reminds us that the great truths of theology are deeply practical. It also reassures us that God's commands for us are not arbitrary, but connected to his nature. And it tells us that God cares about the little things, and so should we.

But we cannot leave it at that! We need to work out why Paul is so exercised about head coverings, and the implications of that for us.

Signalled visually

The most obvious question—and probably the most difficult—is what *exactly* is the nature of the head coverings that Paul is talking about? Is he speaking about a material covering the head, such as a toga, or a veil, scarf or hat? Or can everything Paul says be explained in terms of a hairstyle? Or both, in which case what is the connection between the two types of covering?

Not surprisingly, a great deal of ink has been spilt on these questions. In particular, some fine historical research has been done to try and work out what might have been going on in the background.⁶ Although much of this research is interesting, it is worth sounding a note of caution at this point. Such research, while revealing a certain amount about first-century culture, does not necessarily unlock the difficulties in the biblical texts. The texts may be dealing with the same things revealed by the research, but then again they may not be. After all, fashions and other social customs can change remarkably quickly, and can differ dramatically from one location

to another. We should be careful not to allow historical background information from outside the Bible to determine our exegesis. When expounding the Scriptures to others, we should do so in a way that increases, rather than undermines confidence in the clarity of Scripture. And the more we lean on historical reconstructions, the harder that is to do.

Paying close attention to the words of Paul themselves, it is striking that Paul manages to say everything he wants to say about head coverings

in verses 4-6 without using a single noun. Although some have been translated as nouns into English, and despite the availability of nouns for material coverings that Paul could have used to make the custom clear, all the words relating to head coverings in these verses are verbs and adjectives in the original: 'covered' in verse 4; 'uncovered' and 'shaved' in verse 5; 'covered', 'hair cut off', 'hair cut' and 'hair shaved off' in verse 6.

The effect this has is to emphasize the *action* of covering the head—whether with hair or material.

Secondly, whatever is going on in verses 4-6 and 13, Paul is certainly speaking about hair in verses 14-15. And he does this using, at last, some straightforward nouns: 'hair' and 'covering':

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:14-15)

Paul seems to be linking a cultural custom of some kind in verses 4-6 (the exact nature of which we cannot be certain) to a physical attribute of the sexes in verses 14-15. It seems to me that a very clear

What exactly is the nature of the head coverings that Paul is talking about?

6 See, for example, B Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, p. 77-96; D Gill, 'The importance of Roman portraiture for head-coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16', *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1990, pp 245-260.

principle emerges, albeit one that sounds alarmingly unsophisticated given the apparent complexity of the passage: Paul is against cross-dressing!

But if we look back over what we have seen so far and follow the logic of Paul's argument step by step it is hard to reach a different conclusion:

- » Step 1: Men and women, by nature, are different.
- » Step 2: Men and women, by nature, look different.
- » Step 3: Men and women *should* look like men and women when praying and prophesying in church.
- » Step 4: How that difference is indicated in practice is determined, to some degree, by culture.
- » Step 5: Those cultural practices, however, are not completely arbitrary, but will normally be in the same grain as nature. Men naturally tend to have short hair—so they should behave in line with what nature has given them. They should follow the grain of both nature and culture and leave the head uncovered, so that they look like men. Women naturally tend to have long hair—so they should behave in line with what nature has given them. They should follow the grain of both nature and culture and cover the head, so that they look like women.

What does all this mean for us, in our churches today? First, another note of caution. What we often want, when we approach a passage like this, is a clear red line drawn between two possible actions, and a definitive and timeless rule written in black and white across the page which says something like “all men must have short hair and all women must wear hats to church”. The recent growth of the ‘head-covering movement’ in America is almost certainly an answer to such a

desire. It is attractively simple because it tells us what to do.

But that is to misunderstand Paul's concern in the passage. Paul is not setting out a ‘dress code’ for church, as one might put at the bottom of an invitation to a social function. Rather he is correcting a confusion of normal visual boundaries, which in turn signals a subversion of ordered relationships.

So, while there is no clear red line we can lift out and transcribe into our culture, what we can take from this passage is the fact that there *is a line to be drawn* in our culture, which we must not cross, and in every culture everyone will instinctively know what that line is.

As we draw such a line we also have to be careful not to fall into yet another trap. In our efforts to maintain the biblical distinctions between the genders, we can easily slip into cultural stereotyping which equates the essence of masculinity or femininity with a particular expression of it. Upholding biblical complementarianism should not be confused with upholding cultural stereotypes about, for example, men being insensitive and loving sport and women being bad drivers and being addicted to shopping. Biblical truth should subvert both the cultural stereotypes, against which feminists rightly object, but also the ‘tyranny of symmetry’ that is their only answer. And it should do so in a way that is truly beautiful and timeless, whether in Dubbo or Dubai, London or Lebanon, 1950s suburbia or an ultra trendy inner-city neighbourhood in 2015.

The main point here, however, is that Paul wants the universal principle of ordered relationships that begins in the Trinity and is built into humanity to be expressed visually in a culturally recognizable way. Men and women are to be true to their created selves in doing ministry, and to be easily identified as such,

not blurring the distinctions or crossing the boundaries between male and female.

Resulting in shame

The reason such blurring of boundaries matters is because it results in ‘shame’. This concept is behind the terms ‘dishonour’ (vv. 4-5), ‘disgraceful’ (v. 6), and ‘disgrace’ (v. 14).⁷ This forceful emphasis on such a morally loaded word, in the context of head coverings, is intriguing to us. But in working out what Paul has in mind by this language of shame, we again need to be careful to look *at* the text, rather than *through* it in order to perceive the historical situation in the background. Shame—in the context of this passage—is not to do with dressing in an inappropriately sexually provocative way for church. Rather, it is about going against God’s created order. The masculine appearance of women signalled a posture and attitude of independence, which Paul emphasizes rhetorically with the comment about being shaved in verses 5-6: “If she wants to look like a man she may as well go the whole way and get rid of her feminine appearance altogether”. Likewise, the feminine appearance of the men signalled a posture and attitude that refused to take responsibility for headship.

So the shame of verses 4-5 and the disgrace of verses 6 and 14 is not a kind of social shame at all. It is not like the red-faced embarrassment of forgetting your tie on the first day of work, or of not realizing your buttons have come undone, or some other *faux pas* which makes an individual feel ashamed because they have broken the prevailing social norms of the group to which they belong. This is the shame of disordered relationships.

⁷ These words are: *kataischunoōe*, *aischros*, *atimia*.

This shame is what results from the domino-toppling effect of the visual blurring of gender distinctions, which in turn signals the blurring of gender roles, which in turn subverts God’s creation order, which in turn blurs the human grasp of the nature of God.

To put that another way, the shame that Paul is concerned with is not a shame that is registered in the eyes of the world at all. But in the eyes of God, the church was in danger of failing to be what God had called it be—a little window of order which shames the world.

4. Order explained

The following verses explain why it matters that the created order be restored in the church, and the visual expression of it put right. This part of the passage is very finely argued, and the argument rests on Paul’s use of the creation account in Genesis 1-2. The easiest way to get a handle on this tricky section is to consider four related concepts: image, glory, interdependence and angels.

Image

In Genesis 1:27 the creation of humanity, as male and female, is an expression of the image of God. Whatever else the image of God may mean, it must at least mean that in that context. The poetic parallelism of Genesis 1:27 makes this especially clear:

*So God created man in his own **image**,
in the **image** of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)*

The image of God in humanity has two sides. Humanity as male and female, together, reflect the personal and relational nature of God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul says man is the image of God, reflecting Genesis 1. In verses 8-9, however, Paul is clearly thinking about Genesis 2. He is referring to the origin of the first woman from the man's side, and her role as his helper in the garden.

*For man was not made from woman,
but woman from man. Neither was man
created for woman, but woman for man.*

In both her origins and her role the woman corresponds to and differs from man. Together in those complementary roles they reflect the image of God.

It is into this context that Paul introduces the second concept, 'glory'.

Glory

There are three aspects of the way 'glory' is used in the Bible that we need to bring together to see the force of what Paul is saying here.

The first is that, at its most general, glory has the sense of 'weighty' and 'important'. Secondly, the Bible often connects the word glory to the revelation of a person's true nature. When Jesus turns water into wine in John 2, he "manifested his glory" to his disciples, pulling back the veil that hid his divinity from human observation and showing his true nature. Thirdly, in the Bible one person can bring glory to another. Again in John's gospel, for example, Jesus' glory is connected to that of the Father (cf John 1:14), which means he reveals the true nature of the Father. The reverse is also true: we do not know the Father but by the Son, and we do not know the Son unless the Father reveals him.

That reciprocal relationship, in which one person glorifies another, or reveals the true nature of another, is exactly Paul's point here in verse 7: "For a man

ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man". Here Paul brings the two creation narratives of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 together. He brings the asymmetrical partnership seen in Genesis 2 to bear on the concept of the image of God seen in Genesis 1. God's purpose of creating sexual order within humanity is to bring glory to God—to reveal God's true nature.

However, that glory is not seen by men and women acting independently of each other, but is seen in the contrast and complementarity between men and women. We only understand what man is (we see 'the glory' of man) when we see man in contrast to woman, and see woman acting in complementary relationship to man. And we understand what God is like (we see the image and glory of God) by looking at humanity together in complementary relationship: that is, men acting as men in relation to women, and women acting as women in relation to men.

Interdependence

The principle of interdependence is not difficult. Men and women need each other.

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. (1 Cor 11:11-12)

"In the Lord" here probably means "in God's design". So God has set things up in a way that makes the *independence* of men and women work against his purposes in creation, but the *interdependence* serves his purposes. The description of "woman made from man, so man is now born from

woman” of verse 12⁸ appears to be based on Adam’s poem of joyful recognition in Genesis 2:23, in which the man suddenly comes to know not only the woman, taken out of him, but also *himself* as man in contrast to the woman.⁹ At last he can look another creature in the eye who is his equal but neither an animal nor a man.

*Then the man said,
“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”
(Gen 2:23)*

Adam can see at a glance that Eve is equal (“bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”) but different (“she shall be called woman”). But what is seldom recognized is the ‘my’ part of the equation. Having named all the animals previously (Gen 2:19-20), it is only when Adam names the woman that he also finds a name for himself. She is his ‘glory’: he recognizes himself in the face of the other.

Angels

The fourth concept to consider in verses 7-12 is our route back to the context in the church in Corinth: “That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Cor 11:10).

What does Paul mean by “because of the angels”? There are lots of angels and angelic appearances in both Old and New Testaments, and we do not have space to survey the various possible meanings that have been put forward for this verse in the light of all that data. Instead, we just need

to notice the way the role of angels *changes* between the old and new covenants.

Under the old covenant, angels were messengers of God, sent from heaven to earth. This continues into the New Testament for a while and we see a flurry of angelic activity around the infancy narratives, where their announcements of the birth of Jesus signal the moment of transition from the old age to the new. But after the resurrection of Jesus their role changes from messengers to witnesses.¹⁰

Angels now stand watch as the heavenly witnesses of the spiritual realities on earth that now exist because of the resurrection of Jesus. In particular, they are the invisible spectators who watch over the preaching of the gospel in the world and the gathering of God’s people into the church.

The great concern of angels is that the heavenly realities bring glory to God on earth in the time before Jesus returns to unite heaven and earth together. Hence their great joy over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), and their joyful participation in the gathering of the great heavenly assembly of which the local church is a visible expression (Heb 12:22). In other words, “because of the angels” means: “Be very careful how you do church, because the invisible universe is watching on!”

These four related concepts—image, glory, interdependence and angels—are at the heart of Paul’s explanation, in verses 7-12, of why it matters that the Corinthians dress in such a way that visually signals their acceptance of ordered relationships, rather than their subversion of them.

Firstly, humanity, as men and women together, are created to ‘image’ God to the world. This means, secondly, that men and women make visible God’s true nature,

8 Note that ‘born’ is not in the original; it has been added by the translator.

9 Along with Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:23 is, formally, a piece of poetry. This has the effect of highlighting these two verses as defining moments that contain the theological explanation of the surrounding narratives.

10 There are hints of this spectating role in various parts of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians, see 4:9, 6:3 and 13:1.

his ‘glory’. But thirdly, that revelation of the glory of God through his image in humanity comes through a complementary partnership of interdependence. And finally, such a partnership is on display to the invisible universe when men and women take part in the vertical and horizontal ministry of the Word as members of God’s gathered people. This complementary partnership is to be signalled visually in head coverings that are culturally recognizable and in the grain of creation.

What the angels long to see in Corinth, then, and in every local church, is not an uncritical reflection of the world in its sexual symmetry, but a little picture of the future when Christ himself will come like a husband to establish a perfect relationship with his bride the church, in the perfectly restored new creation, which glorifies God.

5. Delighting in order

If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11:16)

It has been suggested that this is a peevish conclusion in which Paul, aware of the weakness of his argument, finally throws his hands in the air and insists that they jolly well do what he tells them. Of course that is not right, but why does he end like this?

The answer is because Paul knows that

for the Corinthians, and for us, the order he has been describing will always be made to seem abnormal by the powerful currents of a contentious (that is godless) culture. Since Genesis 3 the world has been covered in disorder and shame, as Genesis 2:25 ruefully reminds us. Subversion and competition, the brutality of oppression, the tyranny of symmetry, the blurring of distinctions—that is normal.

But the churches of God are to be different. Each local church is a little model of a new world that is just over the horizon. These gatherings of God’s people must of all places on earth be where men and women delight in God’s order in the midst of a world of disorder and shame. And this is part of their gospel witness, for what looks like ‘strength’ and ‘wisdom’ in the world’s eyes—the blurring of distinctions, asserting individual rights over others, freedom to determine your own gender—is actually shameful and foolish in the eyes of God. What looks like weakness and folly—forgoing self for the sake of others, leading and submitting with Christ-like love—is actually strength and wisdom.

And no matter how much our world may confuse the differences and blur the boundaries we must not be ashamed—because in the churches of God a glimpse of the new creation will be seen, as God’s people delight in being fully, truly, gloriously men and women, restored in Christ, for the glory of God. ▣

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