



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

44 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6NN

Charity No. 1060655

Tel: 020 7328 0869 (Manse)

Email: newlifeplondon@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.newlifebpc.org.uk

“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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What Sort of Church? A Five-fold Vision

*By Pastor Stephen Rees, Grace Baptist Church in Stockport.
Adapted from Banner of Truth website*

'What sort of church is yours?' I've been asked that question a number of times recently. Of course, the answer I've given has varied according to who I'm speaking to, and why they're asking. But if I were talking to somebody who really wanted to know, and who had the time and inclination to listen, I'd want to say five things.

Firstly, we are a Christian church. And I mean that in its fullest sense. We're a church that is built on Christ himself.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul describes Christian workers working together to build a church. Paul talks about the role he and others played in building the church in Corinth: 'I laid a foundation and someone else is building on it' (vs 10). And then he adds this: 'No-one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. A true church will always have Christ as its foundation.

What does that mean? It means that what links the members of the church together is Jesus Christ himself. A true church is made up of men, women and children who believe in Christ, who have been drawn to him personally, who have entrusted themselves to him, who love him, worship him, live by faith in him. They enjoy his friendship, share his life, long for his presence, look forward to meeting him.

That should be apparent the moment anyone comes among us. A visitor should be aware from the first that (s)he is moving among people who are absorbed with Jesus Christ. When they sing, they sing to Christ. When they pray, they pray through Christ. When they talk, they talk about Christ. It's their goal to please Christ, to serve him, to bring him honour.

Of course, their worship of Christ does not mean that they disregard God the Father or God the Spirit. Their love is given to the one Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But it's through Christ that they know the One God. Jesus Christ the Mediator is the contact point between us and God.

Apart from Jesus Christ, the Father would still be an unknown, unimaginable far-off Being. We couldn't love him, or trust him, or call him our Father. But now that Jesus Christ has come to us, we do know the Father. His character, his attributes, his...

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way of doing things are all on display to us, because we see them in his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

Apart from Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit would still be a mysterious, Almighty Force. We might see his mighty work in the world but we couldn't say, 'we know him'. But now the Holy Spirit comes to us sent by Jesus, as Jesus' representative, acting exactly as Jesus would act among us. He is 'the Spirit of Christ' (Romans 8:9). He is Jesus' other self. So he comes to us not as a stranger, but as one whom we love and trust.

So to be a Christian church is to be a Trinitarian church - a church of people who love Jesus Christ the Son of God; who love the Father who has shown himself through Jesus Christ; who love the Spirit who comes to us as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Either we're that sort of church or we're not really a church at all.

Secondly, we're a Bible church. We're a church that believes the whole Bible and seeks to make it central in our thinking, in our meetings and in our life together. Why? Because it is Christ's book. He said, 'Search the Scriptures for they testify about me' (John 5:39). He lived his life meditating on Scripture, being guided by Scripture, obeying Scripture. In every dispute, the words of Scripture were his final court of appeal. 'The Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35). When he was tempted, 'it is written' was the answer he gave to every suggestion of Satan (Matthew 4:4,7,10). He knew what his own destiny was to be because he read it in the pages of Scripture. 'The Son of Man goes as it is written of him' (Mark 14:21). On the last evening of his earthly life, he used the words of the prophets to make clear to his disciples the purpose of his death, telling them that his blood must be poured out to seal the new covenant (Luke 22:20 / Jeremiah 31:31). He sang with his disciples psalms taken from Scripture (Mark 14:26). He prayed in the Garden echoing words from Scripture (Mark 14:36 / Jeremiah 25:15). In his agony on the cross, the words that came to his lips were words taken from Scripture: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34 / Psalm 22:1). When he rose from the dead, he told his disciples that 'everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...' (Luke 24:44-45).

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Scriptures to the Lord Jesus. He was the Son of God but it was in the words of Scripture that he heard the voice of his Father. And it was in the words of Scripture that he answered his Father.

So if we are to be a Christian church, we must be a Bible church too. How can we say that we are following Christ if we do not love the book that he loved; if we do not honour the Scriptures as he honoured them? We want to get to know God's Word as well as he did. That is why we work through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter in our meetings. That is why we teach it to our children in Sunday-school. That is why we take it as our final authority in every discussion and debate.

Thirdly, we are an evangelical church, a church which loves the gospel. The...

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word evangel is a Greek word turned into English script. Translated, it means the good news, the happy proclamation. Or to translate it back into Old English, the gospel. We are a gospel church, a good news church.

Everything taught in the Bible is true. And every truth in the Bible is important. But there are some truths that are especially dear to us. We love to hear and to preach the good news: that God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners; that Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners; that he offers himself freely as a Saviour for sinners; that all who come to him are saved - forgiven, justified, reconciled with God, adopted as God's children.

These truths are precious to us because they reveal to us the most glorious of God's attributes. God's grandeur and majesty awes us; God's holiness overwhelms us; God's wisdom leaves us speechless... but God's love for sinners draws us irresistibly. Samuel Davies was right:

Great God of wonders, all thy ways
Are matchless, Godlike and divine;
But the fair glories of thy grace,
More Godlike and unrivalled shine...

Paul could never get over the gospel. He declared that he was 'set apart for the gospel' (Romans 1:1). He talked of how eager he was to preach the gospel: 'I am eager to preach the gospel to you... it is the power of God for everyone who believes...' (Romans 1:15-16). He called it the 'glorious gospel' (1 Timothy 1:11) and cried, 'Woe is me if I preach not the gospel' (1 Corinthians 9:16). Paul loved the gospel, suffered for the gospel, refused to be distracted from the gospel. For him, devotion to Christ meant devotion to Christ's gospel. The gospel is the 'gospel of the glory of Christ' and it's as the gospel is preached that God shines 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' into our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6).

It is terribly easy for Christians and churches to be diverted from the gospel. We can forget how wonderful the gospel actually is. And when that happens, very soon our delight in telling others the gospel will ebb away too.

As Christians we may feel ourselves bound to get involved in all sorts of worthy activities. We may become involved in political lobbying; we may work for social reform; we may devote ourselves to home-schooling or to caring for the homeless. The members of a church may together launch all sorts of projects. The church may run seminars on family life; it may organise relief supplies for famine situations; it may work to develop a Christian perspective on art and culture. All these things are worthy concerns. But very easily they can push the gospel from the centre of our thinking out to the margin. We have to be reminding ourselves all the time that the gospel comes first. Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the gospel.

The mark of an evangelical church is that it's constantly renewing its delight in the gospel, its determination to make the gospel known to others. And that's the sort...

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of church we're aiming to be.

Fourthly, we are a reformed church. And that's shorthand for saying that we're a church that believes one hundred per cent in the supremacy and sovereignty of God. That was the great emphasis of the Protestant Reformers. They talked constantly about the fact that God - the Triune God whom we know through Jesus Christ - is supremely important. They took to heart Paul's words, 'From him and through him and to him are all things...' (Romans 11:36). They believed that he is totally in control and that 'he works all things according to the counsel of his will'. (Ephesians 1:11). They didn't believe in accident, or fate, or destiny. They believed in a sovereign God who rules all things for his own glory.

And especially they believed that God is sovereign in the work of salvation. They stressed that God has planned the whole programme of salvation from beginning to end. Human beings left to themselves are so wicked, so stubborn, so God-hating that they would never take one step towards God. But before God had even made the world, he had already planned to save some - many - human beings. He chose the particular people whom he would save. He sent his Son to pay for the sins of those particular people by his suffering and death. He sends his Spirit to work in those people to bring them to repentance and faith. He keeps those people safe for ever so that none of them can be lost.

All evangelical churches preach that God saves those who believe in Jesus Christ. But reformed churches preach not only the fact of salvation. They preach the reason for salvation. And the reason is God himself. He saves because he chooses to. He saves the particular people he chooses to. He saves when and how he chooses to. He saves sinners for his own pleasure and glory.

The strange thing is that it's only when we put God in the centre in this way, that we begin to enjoy a sense of assurance and total security. When we think of the gospel only as the channel by which blessing comes to us, we are left fragile and insecure. But when we see that the gospel is God's means to bring glory to himself, then I have every reason to be confident in its power. If I am saved only because of my faith, my repentance, the exercise of my free will, then my assurance rests on very shaky ground. My faith may fail, my repentance may wither, my free will may swing back again. But if God chose me out of his free will; if he redeemed me for his own glory; if he drew me to himself for his pleasure, then I can rest on the fact that he never changes. What he began he will surely complete.

To any true Christian, the gospel is wonderful. But it's only as we grasp the sovereignty of God that we realise how wonderful it is. We find ourselves exclaiming with Paul, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...'. A reformed church is a church where again and again we're moved to such worship and praise.

And fifthly we're a church that takes church seriously. We believe that Jesus...

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Christ's will is that every one of his people should belong to a local church and be devoted to that church. We see that great swathes of the Bible were written to teach us how to live together within the church. We understand that the gospel doesn't just bring us back to God; it brings us into unity with each other. We know that God's sovereign plan isn't just that individuals should be saved but that God's people should together be a single body of Christ, a holy bride for Christ - and the local church is the visible outworking of that.

So we treasure the church and we want to build it according to the exact plan that God has laid down in his book. The Bible tells us that all who believe in Jesus Christ should express their faith outwardly by being baptised, and that it's those baptised believers who then are added to the local church (Acts 2:38,41). So that's what we do. The Bible tells us that all who belong to the local church must devote themselves to its life - to the teaching and the sharing and the breaking of bread and the praying (Acts 2:42). So that's what we expect of ourselves and each other. The Bible tells us that the members of the church must guard one another's souls; they must submit to one another and be answerable to each other (Hebrews 10:24; 12:15, Ephesians 5:21). So that's what we covenant together to do.

We don't attend the church. We are the church. The church isn't just a department of our lives. We live our whole life conscious that we're members of Christ's church. When we go out to our jobs in the world, we go there as members of the church. When we go home to our families we are still members of the church. The Bible says about the first Christians that 'all who believed were together and had all things in common...' (Acts 2:46). 'The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no-one said that any of the things that belonged to him were his own but they had everything in common...' (Acts 4:32). Does that sound like communism to you? No, it sounds like family life. And that's the sort of church we want to be: a family, united to one another because we're all united to Christ.

So there you have it. Our five-fold vision of the church. Yes of course the vision is far from the reality. We can't say that we match the picture at any point. But at least we know what we want to be. And as we pray for grace, this is the sort of church God is moulding us to be. 'Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish...' (Ephesians 5:25-26). That's our hope. That's what we're aiming for.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am** and **4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 31/05/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 07/06/2009</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	Who Am I?	Who Am I?	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Text:</i>	John 11:25; 14:6	Revelations 22 :13-20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling of Resident Minister: Continue to pray for the Lord's calling for Rev Timothy Ki to serve as our resident minister. Rev Ki will be here in July. Pray for his visa application. • DHW Bible Study today: Today, we will cover Lesson 6 (Genesis 7). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 7 (Genesis 8). • No Prayer Meeting: Please note that there will be no Prayer Meeting & Bible Study next Saturday, 6 June. • Examinations: Please pray for the students who are preparing for their examinations. • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Constance (left heel pain), those suffering from hay-fever • Pray for on travel: Melissa, Joshua and Zacky (returning today), Constance (Manchester) • School of Theology at Metropolitan Tabernacle – 7th to 9th July: The theme for this year programme is "Reviving the Lost Art of Evangelistic Proclamation". Copies of the programme are available at the Book Table.
<i>Organist:</i>	Grace	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Eld George Chew	
<i>Message:</i>	The Way	Letter to the Church	
<i>Text:</i>	John 14:6	Revelation 1:4-8	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Sophia	Hubert	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 31/05/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 07/06/2009</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Anthony / Joey	Daniel / Evelyn	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Nicholas	Joshua	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 05 June	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Bible Study – Survey of the Old Testament	
Sat 06 June		Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: No Prayer Meeting	
Worship Service Collections			
Offering:	£384.50	Lunch: £36.00	
<u>Mastering Misfortune</u>			
<i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i>			
<p>An English prisoner, suffering from persecution, was cheered for one hour each day by a little spot of sunshine on his dungeon-wall. Through a grating high up the sun's rays streamed down into his cell for this little time. He found on his floor an old nail and a stone, and with these rude implements he cut upon the wall while the sunlight lay there a rough image of the Christ upon his cross. Thus he mastered his misfortune, getting blessing out of it. The incident has its lesson for us all. Whatever the calamity or the disaster that builds its dungeon-walls about you, never let despair lay its chilly hand upon you. Never yield to the gloom. Never let the darkness into your soul. There is no dungeon so deep and dark but down into its chilling gloom the rays of God's love stream. In the light of these fashion some new beauty on your soul. Carve on the wall of your heart the image of the Christ. Master your misfortune, and make it yield blessing to you. Conquered calamity becomes your helper, and leaves beauty on your soul; but let your trouble master you, and it leaves an ineffaceable scar upon your life.</p>			