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NOAH STARTS A DELUGE FOR HOLY-WOOD

ON 27 MARCH DARREN Aronofski's film *Noah* opened in Australia, torrential rain bucketed down along the East Coast of Australia. Perhaps it was a sign of things to come?

Russell Crowe plays a dark and troubled Noah, in a dark and troubled film, whose special effects have earned it the description 'Lord of the Rings meets Transformers'.

Although the brevity of the biblical account requires some creative adaptations to deliver a film-length portrayal, the important details of the Genesis version come through: humanity is wicked—every human being, including Noah; our rebellion against the Creator has ruined the world; God's judgment is utterly deserved and ought to lead to the total annihilation of the human race; but we survive because of mercy. Important differences stand out clearly: God doesn't speak in the film, but he constantly speaks in the Genesis account; Crowe's Noah is confused about his role, rather than directed by the Lord's clear word; and the film's small hint of mercy, portrayed as a failure on Noah's part, misses the main drift of why the ark was floating in the first place: mercy on God's part, with promise for the great mercy to come in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Noah is the first of at least ten biblical stories presently being adapted to film in Hollywood. This interest no doubt arises in large part from the success of Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* (2004), which made \$611 million on a \$30 million budget. But Mel's earnings, as well as the box-office takings of *Noah* on the first weekend all over the world (not only in the 'Christian' west, but in atheistic

Russia), show that the movie-going public want biblical stories. Hollywood films and Hollywood audiences thrive on stories of redemption. And the Bible is all about redemption.

With the Hollywood gun already loaded with our ammunition, the Bible will be shot into the air time and again across the next several years (if the box office continues to thrive). To be prophetic, no doubt there will be the usual Christian suspects rejecting (strangely, often before the film opens?), and the usual conflict-generating media stirring that pot. But art is always adaptation. And adaptation shows the continuing power of the original for new audiences. And so, adaptation provides the opportunity for discussion. As with NT prophecy (1 Thess 5:19–22), the bad can be rejected so that the good can be received. Where is the film the same as the Bible? Where is it different? Where does it speak the truth about our desperate world, and how does the truth of Christ speak even more loudly?

With *Noah* a wave has begun that Christians need to learn to ride. Christians need to become movie-goers, especially when our Bible provides the screenplay. When the latest Hollywood offering is in the news and being endlessly dissected around the water-cooler, this is a conversation ready-made for gospeling.

'Like the film? Have you read the original story? How come so many films love redemption? Do you know that it points to Jesus? Now there's a man who brings good news worthy of hundreds of Hollywood films!' 



JESUS BRINGS, SO WE DON'T HAVE TO

Steve Carlisle



THE EASTER PERIOD BRINGS WITH it many gatherings, parties, dinners and get togethers. So often when these events take place we feel obliged to take something along with us. Perhaps we take a bottle of wine, some snacks, or (as we are told on television) we take along a box of Cadbury Favourites. ("What to bring when you're told not to bring a thing") Whatever we might take, we do so as an act of good will, a contribution which we make to the gathering, even when we are told not to bring anything at all!

Easter is not just a time for gatherings, but also for celebration. Over the Easter weekend we are reminded of the great grace of the Lord Jesus. We are reminded of his sacrificial death and his powerful resurrection. We are reminded that the cross invites us to belong to Jesus and take a place in his kingdom through forgiveness and reconciliation. We are reminded of our place alongside our brothers and sisters at the heavenly feast hosted through the atoning work of Jesus.

So what do we bring along to this celebration? Having been cared for by Jesus in his death and resurrection, surely I need to take something along with me to be accepted by him? No, the Bible is clear, we are told not to bring anything, Jesus brings salvation. We bring nothing of our own merit, efforts, or works. As Galatians 3:11: Now it is evident that no one is justified before

God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

Jesus brings everything we need for our salvation. Nothing else is needed. His death and resurrection are enough. We don't even need to bring a token gift, instead we accept his work on our behalf, and we accept it not by working for it, but by simple and humble trust in his work for us.

So what do we bring when we have been asked not to bring a thing? No chocolates, no wine, nothing at all, for it has been completed for us in Jesus himself. Jesus brings us to God, we bring nothing. ☺

What do we bring when we have been asked not to bring a thing?

ELDERLY REFLECTION

Caitlin Hurley



A FEW WEEKS AGO I FOUND myself on a question and answer panel for retirees. My fellow panelists were a fellow student minister and a retired clergyman who had spent the best part of the last decade nursing his wife who suffered from Parkinson's disease and then dementia. Many of the questions that were posed to us were about heaven: how to get to heaven and seeking assurance of salvation. It became rather apparent that we were talking to a group of people who were dealing with the reality of death. For many in the audience, death was not only a reality but imminent. Into this space we got to share the gospel over and over and over again. In reply people seemed to listen and respond. God softened hearts, creating lots of follow up for those running the event.

This event was the highlight of a week in which I spent a significant amount of time with the residents of an Anglican Retirement Village. As a group we door-knocked, prayed for mission within the Village, ran evangelistic

Church services, hosted evangelistic events and carried out pastoral visits. Not only was the gospel preached and the Village evangelized several generation X'ers and Y's were equipped, trained and encouraged by older saints. It was Titus in action.

As the Australian population begins to age very rapidly, ministry to seniors will become more and more important. The week of ministry partnership that I experienced was a not so subtle reminder that just as children and youth are a mission field, so are seniors and the elderly. They are a mission field with a sense of urgency as many of them are closer to meeting their maker than most. After my week with the seniors I have recognized the need and been encouraged to speak into this mission field with words of hope and truth with a sense of urgency. ☺

The questions ... posed ... were about heaven.

EDITORIAL

THE DANGER OF MISSION DRIFT

THE DANGER OF MISSION DRIFT recently came to the fore on the international stage, with the public flip-flop of the American World Vision organisation concerning same-sex marriage. Only days after announcing the change of policy to hire Christians in homosexual marriages, World Vision reversed their position because they 'could not defer on things that are central to the faith'.¹ Of course, the Australian context is very different from that of the United States.² But despite the significant hullabulloo, one of the key lessons of the sorry saga has been the danger of public Christianity drifting with the cultural tides of the day.

This same drift emerged in the local context recently, when overseas visiting theologian, Miroslav Volf, aired his public Christianity out on national television. In a dazzling downplaying of the creational order of marriage as defined as between a husband and wife, Volf stated that, 'I don't think the State should legislate against—against gay marriage.'³ With this short and sudden sentence, he not only capitulated to the agenda of so-called 'marriage equality' lobby, but replaced the clarity of the evangelical voice with cloudiness. Do evangelicals *really* believe the Bible? Do evangelicals *truly* believe that marriage reflects Christ and his bride? Set beside the gospel clarity of Peter Jensen on the same television program previously, the danger of mission drift in these remarks is apparent.

Of course, the mission of making disciples of all nations requires cultural sensitivity. Yet it refuses to cave in to culture, for the word of the gospel will always sound more strange to society, than familiar. The great missionary Apostle, St. Paul knew that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom' (1 Cor. 1:25). For those who are in the world, but not of it, the wisdom of man is crouching at

the door, waiting to master evangelical convictions. Our sworn enemy is prowling around, roaring against biblical truths, and hungry to devour our grasp of them. The impressionable and vulnerable amongst us run the risk of being tossed back and forth by the cultural waves, leaving the shipwrecked debris of the gospel mission strewn along the shores.

And yet, like the great St. Athanasius, there will be times when we must promote the Gospel *contra mundum* (against the world). There will be times when our *credo* causes us to be thrown to

the lions that inhabit our culture. There will be times when we appear as the scum of society. However, even if the world crashes down upon us, the gospel shall never fall.

Though the siren song of society seeks to seduce with great promise, the simple word of the Lord will never return void. Cultural zeitgeists come and go over the centuries, but Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today and forever.

So let us keep the main things, the main things. The history of evangelicalism has many examples of how the positive desires of mission can lead to a drift from evangelical truth. These sobering lessons from our past ought to spur our various movements and organisations to promote the gospel first and foremost in a clear and unadulterated form. Every human pronouncement, public or otherwise, should be subordinate to the announcement of the gospel—and the evangelical truth arising from it. The urge to drift with the tide of our cultural niceties must be countered by holding fast to the confession of our faith without wavering. In the great quest of seeing souls saved, only clarity of evangelical conviction will assist them in reaching the heavenly city. ☺

The word of the gospel will always sound more strange to society, than familiar.

1 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march-web-only/world-vision-reverses-decision-gay-same-sex-marriage.html>

2 Given the structural separation of the Australian and American organisations, and the law regarding charities in either country.

3 <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3951334.htm>



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IMPUTASHUN: JESUS' RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MINE

Matt Olliffe

COLIN BUCHANAN WROTE A KID'S SONG, 'BIG Words that End in SHUN'. It's a great song to teach doctrine. Thrown in with 'AdoptSHUN' and 'JustificaSHUN' is 'ImputaSHUN': 'Jesus righteousness is mine'. It's a good one, but not everyone thinks so. Imputation means God credits you with the righteousness of Christ when you trust Jesus. At the judgment, God doesn't see your sins, but he sees Christ's obedience, his righteousness (Romans 4:6,11; 5:18-19) which is credited to your account.

Lots of people don't like this nowadays. The first accusation is that **it's a legal fiction**. But then so is forgiveness. What, is God covering up our sin (Romans 4:6-8)? What about God's selective amnesia remembering our sins no more? If imputed righteousness is a legal fiction, so is forgiveness. More to the point, God had to make the sinless Christ 'sin' for us so that he didn't have to credit our sins to us (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). So what's the problem if God says he also must credit righteousness to us because we are ungodly? (Romans 4:5, 6, 11).

Then imputed righteousness is accused to be a **textless doctrine**. 'Yeah', I say, 'But they've changed the bible on us!' Let me explain.

Up until the end of the 19th century, almost everyone used the Authorised 'King James' Version. But then Christians started revising it. One of the things that got revised was a key text for imputed righteousness.

'by the righteousness of one [Christ] *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. ... so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' (Romans 5:18-19 AV)

English Translations of Romans 5:18

KJV/AV	Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.
ASV	So then as through one trespass <i>the judgment came</i> unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness <i>the free gift came</i> unto all men to justification of life.
NRSV	Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.
NIV 11	Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.
ESV	Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.
TNIV	Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all.
HCSB	So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is life-giving justification for everyone.

Notice how the AV speaks of the 'righteousness of Christ' and his obedience which makes many righteous. Most bibles from the 15th till the end of the 19th century said something similar, even the Catholic ones. With a tweak here or there, pretty much everyone basically agreed that was the meaning of the Greek. The debate was whether 'made righteous' meant 'imputed' (Protestant) or 'imparted' (Roman Catholic). Well, the plethora of revisions came at the turn of the 20th century, and imputed righteousness has never been the same since. I'll pick on the Holman, but all modern bibles are the same:

'so also through one righteous act there is life-giving justification for everyone.' (Romans 5:18).

Again, this represents a particular understanding of the Greek text. The question you ask when you read the Holman is 'what is Jesus' one righteous act?' And it's a no-brainer. It's his death. No longer is it Christ's righteousness, the whole course of Christ's obedience, but Christ's death—that's it.

Christ's justification in resurrection then brings us justification and life also.

Now, I don't agree with the AV translation 100%, even on this verse, but I think it is closer than all our modern translations here. My preferred translation, is 'the justification of the one', or even 'one act of justification'. Augustine, John Calvin, Leon Morris, Morna Hooker, and I H Marshall agree.

Another reason imputation is under attack is, we don't talk about 'righteousness' as **something** someone earns or deserves. We talk about 'righteousness' as a 'right relationship with God'. That's OK as far as it goes. But righteousness is not just a relationship. Righteousness is declared when someone has conformed to a standard. God's standard is the law. And the law demands obedience (Galatians 3:10; 5:3; Romans 10:5). What is required is perfect obedience, even in your thoughts and inclinations (Romans 7:7-12). Otherwise you die (Romans 2:12). No one who thinks they keep the law has done so really (Galatians 6:13), for it is only the one who does everything in the law that shall live (Galatians 3:10). There's a great test to see **CONTINUED PAGE 5**

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IMPUTASHUN: JESUS' RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MINE (CONTINUED)

if you kept the law: If you die, you didn't keep the law (Romans 6:23). The exception to that rule is Jesus.

Jesus was put to death to endure the curse of the law for us (Galatians 3:13). That's one side of the law. Jesus also obeyed the precepts of the law (Romans 5:19; Galatians 4:4). That's the other side of the law.

The best righteousness anyone can have is the righteousness that is declared by the highest court. Jesus has righteousness declared by the highest court of all: God's court. God overturned all the sinful human courts. God declared that only Jesus Christ has fully kept the law, because only Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. It was impossible for death to hold the obedient one.

Wonderfully, Christ's justification in resurrection then brings us justification and life also (Romans 5:18). That's why Christ was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). Jesus shares this highest court-approved righteousness with us. It comes to us by faith as a gift (Romans 5:17).

When Jesus rose, we are considered to have risen with him, and are united with our representative (Colossian 3:1-4; Ephesians 2:5-8). But you are still in your seat aren't you? Yes. Because Paul is speaking about spiritual realities. So too with imputation. You can't see it, it doesn't seem real. But we trust God that what he declares about us is true. And when we are raised, we will be justified too—not on the basis of our goodness, but on the basis of Jesus' goodness. We will be raised because Jesus earned our justification by fully keeping the law.

God cares about righteousness, so imputation matters. You either need to have your own **righteousness** through the law, or the righteousness from God coming upon faith (Philippians 3:9). **Paul thought his righteousness by the law was poo** (Phil 3:8). As for me, I've got a lot of sins, and even my best works are filthy rags. I'm going to take the gift of Christ's righteousness, thank you very much, both his obedience of the precept, and enduring of the penalty.

If we should not talk about imputation, neither should we talk about rights. Rights simply describe a relationship from an individual's point of view. 'I have a right to payment' says the same thing as 'You have an obligation to pay me', but not from a relational point of view. A 'right' is really a relationship with one person removed from it, usually to think about the relationship from the first individual's perspective.

We should defend imputed righteousness because each of us will appear before God's judgment seat as an individual. Union with Christ is a relational perspective (we are in him, and he in us), and imputation is an individual perspective (his righteousness credited to us given to us, and in us, and upon us, and our sin is given to him, because he became sin for us) (Romans 5:17, 8:4; Philippians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). We are going to need his gift of righteousness, if we are going to be justified as individuals on judgment day.

So as you minister to the dying (which is all your fellow parishioners), tell them about Jesus' Blood AND Righteousness, that he kept the penalty and the precept of the law for us. Tell 'em about one of the big words that ends in 'SHUN': ImputaSHUN. 🇨🇦

Trust Me, Trust My God

Alison Blake

Trust—it's such a precious commodity in our world. Around the world communities are rightly appalled at breaches of trust in schools, orphanages, churches, nursing homes and families, especially among vulnerable adults and children. I can generally manage to look out for myself but even my antenna is alert for the dodgy tradesman or hairdresser who won't follow my instructions!

Having discovered that Jesus is worthy of our trust, we've been willing to turn, and rely on him and his work on the cross, and we show our trust in our obedience.

But our unsaved friends and family don't have that same trust. Based on their encounters with him, through SRE at school, connections with a church youth group, kids club or church attendance, or through family, friends, work colleagues, or the media, they'll each place Jesus somewhere on the spectrum of trust, from "worth a closer look" to "steer clear and avoid" or even "dangerous".

And we also need to be trustworthy messengers of the gospel. Though our broken world gives people every reason to be suspicious of people and offers that seem too good to be true, many are seriously searching for someone or something reliable to depend on, in all the circumstances of life, and beyond the grave. The multitude of therapies, products and spiritualities on offer is evidence of that!

So how can we grow our trustworthiness, so others will ultimately trust Jesus? Here's some thoughts:

Pray and commit to being increasingly trustworthy in your personal life.

Pray that your church will be a place worthy of people's trust.

Trust can take time to develop, but don't be overly cautious or slow to share your faith and Jesus either. Pray for opportunities, take the plunge, trust God to be at work in people's lives. Work hard at relating to people with genuine interest, a listening ear, with openness about yourself, and you may be surprised how quickly trust develops.

Be proactive in sharing how your trust in Jesus has positive relevance in your life—people are open and curious to hear others faith experience, even if they don't yet share our beliefs.

Be quick to share that you go to church. Lots of people attend or have some experience of religious events or communities, so there's a good chance you'll have common ground.

As trust develops, keep moving the "trust journey" forward. Make, take and pray for opportunities to share that you're a Christian, moving on to who God is, what he's like, then who Jesus is and what he's done.

Take your cues from their response and respond appropriately, offering more—invitations to socialise with your Christian friends, an offer to pray for them, read the Bible together, go to church with you.

And don't lose sight of who you really want them to turn to, trust and worship—God's Son Jesus Christ! 🇨🇦

CHURCH PLANTING AND THE WORD OF GOD

Scott Millar

THERE IS AN ABUNDANCE of literature available today on church planting. And for anyone involved (or thinking about getting involved) in the business, it is wise to listen to the counsel of those who have gone before, to learn from their experience and to weigh up their contexts against your own.

As helpful as this abundance of literature may be, however, it can give rise to a certain level of anxiety for the would-be church planter. Much like the first time Mum and Dad navigating their way through a sea of parenting publications, so the would be church planter can become overwhelmed, confused, maybe even disoriented by the waves of information that beat against their hull as they seek to raise this new work of God.

For the last couple of years I have been involved with leading a church plant. I entered as a naïve rookie church planter; I now consider myself to be an experienced naïve rookie church planter. I feel privileged for the experience, but it has not been without its turbulence. Many times I've felt as though I was chasing my tail, many times I have felt my mind deceiving me, my vision becoming blurred, my heart sinking. And yet through all this turbulence one thing has remained sure and true—the word of God.

There are no fancy strategies or complex programs required.

The word of God, graciously and plainly presented in the Scriptures, remains the only piece of communication that really matters,

and I am very thankful for the various things I have been reminded of concerning the word of God through this time.

I have been reminded of the comfort that God's word brings. Take Psalm 121 for example: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth". What a joy! What a comfort to know—to really know—that the creator of all things provides us with the help we need. He does not leave us alone. He does not leave us to figure it out ourselves. He helps us. And without the word of God telling me about this activity of God my times of distress would be intolerable.

I have been reminded of the foundation that the word of God lays. In its testimony and witness to Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, the word of God provides the bedrock on which the people of God are built (Ephesians 3:20).

God breathes life into things by his word. As such, the first step in any church plant venture must be to recognise this fact and any subsequent steps must be to return to this fact. The word of God must be at the heart of our proclamation strategies, and it must be at the heart of our pastoral care strategies. We need to bring the word of God to bear on the lives of those around us for their salvation and sanctification. In practice this means that our most important efforts in church planting will be those that encourage and empower people to read their Bibles more. Our most effective evangelism strategies will be ones that engage people in the word of God more and more. A healthy diet means a strong church. God's word lays the foundation for the life of God's people.

I have been reminded of the growth that the word of God brings. In Acts 2, as the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, people hear, they repent, and the church grows in number (Acts 2:41). From there, devotion to the word of God through the apostles' teaching causes growth in the godliness of those people. They begin to open their homes in response to the word of God. They begin to express selfless charity in response to the word of God. They engage in neighbourly hospitality in response to the word of God. The word of God brings growth.

Related to this last point I have been reminded of the simplicity that the word of God offers to ministry. Look again at the process of God's word in Acts 2: the gospel is proclaimed, people hear, they repent, the church grows. God's word comes to us in the form of basic human communication. It is articulated in common language; it is pitched to ordinary people; it targets the most essential of human needs. There are no fancy strategies or complex programs required. I might be tempted to find the next "silver-bullet" for church planting success, but in reality it is already right there. The word of God is the silver bullet. I have been greatly encouraged by a friend lately whose evangelism strategy consists of inviting people he knows to read the Bible with him over coffee. Simple. Effective.

Finally I have been reminded of the hope that the word of God assures. Like a string resonating at its natural frequency at the impulse of the wind, so our souls resonate at the impulse of God's word. God's word stirs up a longing for the life that only God the life giver can provide. And yet as it stirs it also satisfies. The eternal desires that God has set on the hearts of men find their satisfaction in the word of God. As the Bible's message is taught - as

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CHURCH PLANTING AND THE WORD OF GOD (CONTINUED)

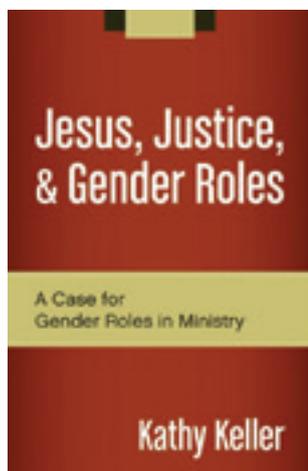
the gospel message of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed—so the hopes of life eternal are assured. Redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus we live lives now that are free from the anxieties of a perishing world (1 Pet 1:18-19); we live lives now that look forward to Jesus (1 Pet 1:13); we live lives now that look out to others (1 Pet 1:22); we live lives now knowing with great assurance that we have been born again with imperishable seed, through the living word of God. For all the turbulence we might experience in church planting, for all the pains that the Christian life might entail,

the word of God provides the assurance of enduring hope.

There is much more that could be said about the word of God and its place in the life of the church. In the midst of a world laden with information let us not let the word of God fall from its central place in building up the church. Let us not be tempted to displace the word of God as the silver bullet to building up the church. Let us instead continue to mine the riches of the Bible's message always thinking about how we can share the hope of these riches with our neighbours. 

REVIEW: JESUS, JUSTICE & GENDER ROLES

Claire Smith



Kathy Keller: *Jesus, Justice, & Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry* (Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry Series) Zondervan. 2013.

KATHY KELLER'S EBOOK has much to commend it. It is brief and easy to read, personal and pastoral, Christ-focused, has a high view of the truthfulness and authority of Scripture, and

is unapologetically 'complementarian'—in the usual sense of the word. It envisages women participating in all areas of public ministry except the 'authoritative teaching' that the New Testament restricts to men, and, as the title suggests, it seeks to answer the objections of those who approach this as a justice issue.

Keller's own journey begins the book and runs like a thread through it. Her views of Scripture have changed, so have her views of gender and ministry. At a time when former 'evangelicals' are abandoning the plain sense and historic understandings of Scripture for softer, more palatable interpretations (think, at least, of Rob Bell, Steve Chalke, and Bart Ehrman), Keller's movement in the other direction is testimony to the power of God's word to change human hearts. It is also a case study of trust and submission to God's written word, and a willingness to stand for the truth no matter the cost.

The book has two parts. The first presents two 'hermeneutical imperatives', namely, that 'Scripture does not contradict Scripture', that the clear interprets the

cloudy; and that 'every text must be understood in its historical, cultural and social context' and that we must obey God's revealed will, despite cultural change.

Keller studies 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, concluding that God assigns men and women different roles in the church. These are explained as 'a difference between public communication of information, exhortation, or explanation (all permitted to both unordained men and women) and teaching with authority, which is the province of ordained elders' (Loc 245). This involves final judgement in matters of truth, and power to discipline those who teach contrary to it. Her discussion is framed by her denominational setting and seems to tie the biblical restriction to a *role* (ordained elder), rather than *activity* (authoritative teaching). The texts themselves focus on the latter. Also, for someone unfamiliar with her polity, it is unclear how her view works out in practice.

The second part answers common objections to the Bible's teaching, and briefly but skilfully exposes the poverty and circularity of arguments against gender roles. Keller concludes that these roles are God's gifts to us to be rejoiced in and enjoyed, not endured and resented. They are for our good, not bad, injurious, unfair or oppressive. In the submission of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11) we see that different roles do not imply inferiority.

'Why did God arrange things this way?' Although her repeated response is 'I don't know', Keller herself mentions possible answers. These include truths about the inner life of the Triune God, redeemed men and women modelling Christ to a fallen world, analogies of God's relationship with us, and, most notably, that in his wisdom, love and goodness, God designed things like this for our good. In short, relationships and ministry will work best when we live the way our Creator designed men and women to live and relate. 

Claire Smith is the author of *God's Good Design*.

SHARING YOUR PRAYERS WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Peter Bolt

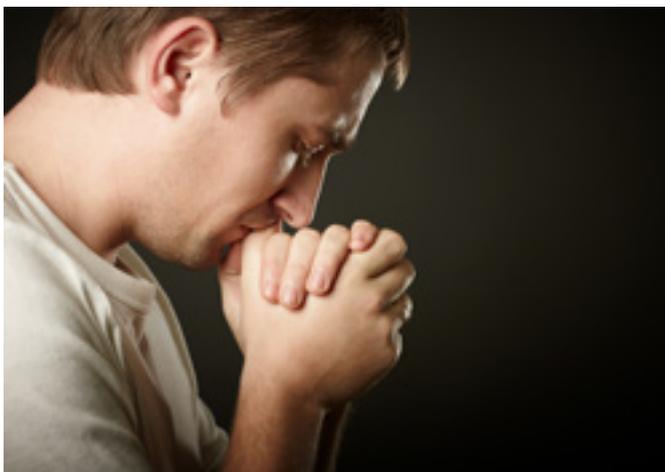
THERE IS A DIFFERENCE between praying your own prayers and leading a congregation in prayer. But the person who leads in prayer is nevertheless still praying to God, and their own heart should be heard as they pray, otherwise their prayers will ring hollow and sound like a sham. So leading congregational prayers is really sharing your prayers with other people in a public setting.

It often doesn't matter how coherent your own prayers might be. They might be the groans that are too deep for words that the Apostle Paul talks about. But when you share your prayers with others, inviting the congregation to pray, prayers need to be more coherent so that everyone can say 'Amen' at the end. There should be no 'clashing cymbals' here, and the principle of intelligibility should govern public prayer, just like it should govern all else in the public assembly of God's people.

We might forgive ourselves for rambling on in undisciplined and lengthy sentences when we are at our own prayers, but public prayers are best when they are precise and economical. That might not mean they are always short, but if the sentences are long, then perhaps they should be made up of several shortish and clear parts, so that the prayers are logical and have a recognizable flow to them.

Our own prayers at home might not be that poetic or memorable. But prayers said in public might be more arresting or memorable for people if they have some elements of language that grab the hearers' attention, or that touch the heart with an apt metaphor, or use a phrase that resonates deeply with the Scriptures.

Our private prayers are addressed to God, and so are the prayers in public. But there are a variety of ways that



God can be addressed. If we know what we are about to give thanks for, or to request, it is very helpful to think of a way of addressing God that brings a relevant aspect of his character to the forefront. If we have a big problem we are talking about, then 'Almighty God'. If we are thankful for his commitment to us, 'Gracious God', or 'Loving Father'.

The whole of the Heavenly Father's plans and purposes look towards the coming of the Kingdom of God, and they all centre around the death and resurrection of Jesus. The 'Lord's Prayer' is a model prayer because it shows us this kind of focus. It is a challenge to try to make our own prayers Kingdom focused, and Jesus centred, and Jesus death-and-resurrection centred. And it is a delightful challenge to try to do the same as we share our prayers with others. ☺

A PRAYER OF DISMISSAL

Sending out the congregation to their work in the world

We tremble Lord, before your word.

Our Maker and our Judge.

You see the sinful rebellion of each of us expressed collectively in human cultures. And you are grieved and angry at all our Babel-like towers that taunt your heaven.

We tremble Lord, to hear your word.

Our Saviour and Redeemer.

You see the damage and disaster caused by human cultures. And your heart goes out to us. In your great love you sent your Son to die for us, lifted up on that cross, that opens up your heaven.

We tremble Lord, to have your word.

Our Ruler and Father.

You see a world around us so lost and broken still. And your gospel goes out through us. And you are pleased through us to win the lost for Christ, to lift us up and welcome us into your heaven.

Go before us Lord today, and in the coming week,
And always help us tremble at your word,
at work in this world
so far from heaven.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

PGB