

Thanksgiving: Prayer of thanksgiving for the apostle Paul who has left us a powerful example of how to imitate Jesus. **“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”** (1Co 11:1 ESV)

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations Mrs. Jack and C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2019 (Please note some changes for Moncton and Saint John)

Times of worship services: Moncton – 10:30 AM every Sunday

Time of services in Saint John – November 10 and November 24 at 10:30 AM

Communion- On the 1st, and 3rd and 5th Sunday – Moncton and 2nd and 4th Sunday in Saint John.

Address: Moncton—70 King St. —Sage building, second floor;

Saint John—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

The next Discipleship groups Thursday, November 7th – 7:30 p.m. We will study Philipians

Mr. Bill Rabey, GCI regional coordinator, will be visiting both Moncton and Saint. John for worship services on November 24.

Should you have forgotten the password to enter “For members only” on the www.worshipim.ca website, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Vautour.

Prayers for our brethren living in Haiti: There quite a few GCI members living in Haiti. Please pray for them as the poverty-stricken country is presently experiencing violence and political upheaval.

(<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article236242113.html>)

THEOLOGY IN PERSPECTIVE

Sound theology is important, for unsound theology distorts our understanding of God and our relationship with him. However, it's important to note that we are not saved by theology. And so we need to keep it in perspective.

Christianity has never been theologically or doctrinally perfect. We often hear preachers urging people to “get back to the faith once delivered.” By this, they usually mean the early apostolic church, which they assume had a complete and uncorrupted understanding of the faith. However, those apostolic churches were not perfect. They too had to grow in their understanding of what was “sound doctrine.”

In fact, much of the New Testament is polemic—meaning that it was written to correct various wrong ideas. In Corinth, for example, some Christians were tolerating incest, suing one another in court, offending each other by their understanding of what they were permitted to eat and becoming drunk at the Lord's Supper. Some thought they should be celibate even if married and others thought they should divorce their non-Christian spouses. Paul had to correct these ideas, and history tells us that he had only limited success. But the people were Christian despite their lack of complete doctrinal understanding.

There are many examples of the disciples failing to understand Jesus, even when he was with them. For example, after Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people, he and the disciples got into a boat and Jesus warned them, **“Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (Mark 8:14)**. The disciples concluded that Jesus meant that, since they hadn't brought any bread they would have to buy some on the other shore; moreover, they shouldn't buy any bread from a Pharisee or Herodian because something was incorrect about the yeast they used. Why didn't they just ask Jesus what he meant? Perhaps because they were afraid of looking foolish (that happens today, too!). Jesus chided them for not understanding something that they should have been able to grasp. The disciples didn't need to worry about bread or yeast. Jesus had just shown that he could make bread miraculously. They could remember facts (**verses 19-20**), but they didn't always draw right conclusions from those facts. The miracle of the loaves was not just a way to save money—it also had a much deeper meaning that the disciples had failed to understand (**Mark 6:52**). It figuratively symbolized the fact that Jesus is our source of life.

I am encouraged to know that Jesus' own disciples frequently didn't fully comprehend what he was doing. Nevertheless, Jesus still co-ministered with them, as he does with us. It demonstrates that any “success” we have is the result of God's guidance, not our human ability to figure things out exactly. Those first disciples were thrown into confusion by Jesus' death even though he explained it to them more than once. But, like us, they could only absorb so much at a time. If you follow the flow of the conversation at the Last Supper, you can see by their questions and frequent attempts to change

the subject that the disciples did not understand what was going on. So Jesus told them, **“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth”** (John 16:12-13).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and instructed them for 40 days, after which he ascended to heaven. While with them, he said, **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 1:4-5).

Jesus' words were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. And as we read in **Acts 2:4**, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and through his guidance, what had been isolated facts and an unsound theology came together in a new and exciting way. The apostle Peter preached his first public sermon, urging his audience to repent, to believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (**verse 38**). On that day, some 3,000 people were baptized and became the people of God (**verse 41**).

The church had been born. From that day on, the Holy Spirit has continued to guide the church into “all the truth,” helping her to **“prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment”** (John 16:9). The New Testament writers, led by the Holy Spirit, showed those first Christians how to live godly lives in the turbulent environment of the first century. He is doing the same with

us today, as we struggle to “get it right” while facing the complex and controversial challenges of our time.

We need to remember then, that the ultimate object of our faith and the only object of our worship is our Triune God, not our theological statements. We want to tune our theological understandings as best we can to do nothing less and nothing more than serve our faith in and worship of the Father, Son and Spirit. By the Spirit and the Word our theological understandings can be continually sanctified. This coming week on Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the descent of the Spirit that gave birth to the church. While not yet perfect, the children of God have been given the good and perfect gift of the Spirit, who will in the end enable all of us to share in Jesus' own perfection!

Joseph Tkach

THEOLOGY: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

“Don't talk to me about theology. Just teach me the Bible.”

To the average Christian, theology might sound like something hopelessly complicated, frustratingly confusing and thoroughly irrelevant. Anybody can read the Bible. So why do we need head-in-the-clouds theologians with their long sentences and fancy terms?

Faith seeking understanding

Theology has been called “faith seeking understanding.” In other words, as Christians we trust God, but God has made us want to understand who we are trusting and why we trust him. That's where theology comes in. The word theology comes from a combination of two Greek words, *theos*, meaning God, and *logia*, meaning knowledge or study—study of God.

When properly used, theology can serve the church by combating heresies, or false teachings. That is because most heresies come from wrong understandings of who God is, understandings that don't square with the way God has revealed himself in the Bible. The church's proclamation of the gospel needs to rest on the firm foundation of God's own revelation of himself.

Revelation

Knowledge about God is not something that we humans can just come up with on our own by thinking it out. The only way we can know anything true about God is to listen to what God tells us about himself. The main way God has chosen to reveal himself to us is through the Bible, a collection of inspired writings compiled over many centuries under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. But even diligent study of the Bible, in itself, cannot convey to us right understanding of who God is.

We need more than mere study—we need the Holy Spirit to enable our minds to understand what God reveals in the Bible about himself. The bottom line is that true knowledge of God comes only from God, not merely by human study, reasoning or experience.

The church has an ongoing responsibility to critically examine its beliefs and practices in the light of God's revelation. Theology is the Christian community's continuous quest for truth as it humbly seeks God's wisdom and follows the Holy Spirit's lead into all truth. Until Christ returns in glory, the church cannot assume that it has reached its goal.

That is why theology should never become a mere restatement of the church's creeds and doctrines, but should rather be a never-ending process of critical self-examination. It is only as we stand in the divine Light of God's mystery that we find true knowledge of God.

Paul called that divine mystery **“Christ in you, the hope of glory”** (Colossians 1:27), the mystery that through Christ it pleased God **“to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross”** (verse 20).

The Christian church's proclamation and practice are always in need of examination and fine-tuning, sometimes even major reform, as it continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dynamic theology

The word dynamic is a good word to describe this constant effort of the Christian church to look at itself and the world in the light of God's self-revelation and then to let the Holy Spirit conform it accordingly to be a people who reflect and proclaim God as God truly is. We see this dynamic quality in theology throughout church history. The apostles reinterpreted the Scriptures when they proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah.

God's new act of self-revelation in Jesus Christ brought new light to the Bible, light that the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the apostles to see. In the fourth century, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, used descriptive words in the creeds that were not in the Bible in order to help Gentiles understand the meaning of the biblical revelation of God. In the 16th century, John Calvin and Martin Luther contended for the renewal of the church in light of the demand of the biblical truth that salvation comes only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

In the 1800s, John McLeod Campbell attempted to broaden the Church of Scotland's narrow view on the nature of Jesus' atonement for humanity, and was thrown out for his efforts.

In modern times, no one has been more effective in calling the church to a dynamic theology rooted in active faith than Karl Barth, who "gave the Bible back to Europe" after liberal Protestant theology had nearly swallowed up the church by embracing Enlightenment humanism and the "natural theology" of the German church, and ended up supporting Hitler.

Listening to God

Whenever the church fails to hear the voice of God and instead gives in to its own assumptions and presuppositions, it becomes weak and ineffective. It loses relevance in the eyes of those it is trying to reach with the gospel message. The same is true of any part of the Body of Christ when it wraps itself up in its own preconceived ideas and traditions. It becomes bogged down, stuck or static, the opposite of dynamic, and loses its effectiveness in spreading the gospel.

When that happens, the church begins to fragment or break up, Christians become alienated from one another, and Jesus' command that we love one another fades into the background. Then, gospel proclamation becomes merely a set of words, a proposition that people unthinkingly agree with. The power behind it to offer healing to sinful minds loses its force. Relationships become external, only surface contacts that miss the deep union and communion with Jesus and one another where genuine healing, peace and joy become real possibilities. Static religion is a barrier that can prevent believers from becoming the real people God intends them to be in Jesus Christ.

'Double predestination'

The doctrine of election or double predestination has long been a distinctive, or identifying doctrine, in the Reformed theological tradition (the tradition that stands in the shadow of John Calvin). This doctrine has frequently been misunderstood, distorted and the cause of endless controversy and distress. Calvin himself struggled with this issue, and his teaching on it has been interpreted by many as saying, "From eternity God has decreed some to salvation and others to damnation."

This latter interpretation of the doctrine of election is usually described as hyper-Calvinistic. It fosters a fatalistic view of God as an arbitrary tyrant and an enemy of human freedom. Such an approach to the doctrine makes it anything but good news as proclaimed in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The biblical witness describes the electing grace of God as astonishing, but not dreadful! God, who loves in freedom, offers his grace freely to all who will receive it.

Karl Barth

In correcting this hyper-Calvinism, the preeminent Reformed theologian of the modern church, Karl Barth, recast the Reformed doctrine of election by centering rejection and election in Jesus Christ. He carefully laid out the full biblical doctrine of election in Volume II of his Church Dogmatics in a way that is consistent with the whole of God's revelation.

Barth forcefully demonstrated that within a Trinitarian context, the doctrine of election has one central purpose: it declares that God's works in creation, reconciliation and redemption are fully realized in the free grace of God made known in Jesus Christ.

It affirms that the triune God who lives eternally in loving communion graciously wills to include others in that communion. The Creator Redeemer deeply desires a relationship with his creation. And relationships by nature are dynamic, not static. Relationships penetrate the abyss of our existence and turn it into real life.

In the Dogmatics, where Barth rethought the doctrine of election in a Trinitarian, Creator Redeemer context, he called it "the sum of the gospel." In Christ God elected all of humanity in covenant partnership to share in his life of communion by freely and graciously choosing to be God for humanity.

Jesus Christ is both the Elected and the Rejected for our sakes, and individual election and rejection can be understood as real only in him. In other words, the Son of God is the Elect on our behalf. As the universal elected man, his vicarious, or substitutionary, election is at the same time both to the condemnation of death (the cross) in our place and to eternal life (the resurrection) in our place. This atoning and reconciling work of Jesus Christ in the incarnation was complete in the redeeming of fallen humanity.

We must therefore say yes to God's yes for us in Christ Jesus and embrace and begin to live in the joy and light of what he has already secured for us—union, communion and participation with him in a new creation.

New creation

In his important contribution to the doctrine of election, Barth writes: "For in God's union with this one man, Jesus Christ, he has shown his love to all and his solidarity with all. In this One he has taken upon himself the sin and guilt of all, and therefore rescued them all by higher right from the judgment which they had rightly incurred, so that he is really the true consolation of all." Everything changed at the cross. The entire creation, whether it knows it or not, has been, is being and will be redeemed, transformed and made new in Jesus Christ. We are becoming a new creation in him.

Thomas F. Torrance, premier student and interpreter of Karl Barth, served as editor when Barth's *Church Dogmatics* was translated into English.

Torrance believed that Volume II was some of the finest theology ever written. He agreed with Barth that all of humanity has been redeemed and elected in Christ. Professor Torrance, in his book **The Mediation of Christ**, lays out the biblical revelation that Jesus is not only our atoning reconciler through his vicarious life, death and resurrection, but serves as our perfect response to God's grace.

Jesus took our fallenness and judgment on himself, assuming sin, death and evil in order to redeem the creation at all levels and transform everything that stood against us into a new creation. We have been freed from our depraved and rebellious natures for an internal relationship with the One who both justifies and sanctifies us.

Torrance goes on to explain that "the unassumed is the unhealed." What Christ has not taken upon himself has not been saved. Jesus took our alienated mind on himself, becoming what we are in order to reconcile us to God. He thereby cleansed, healed and sanctified sinful humanity in the depths of its being in his vicarious loving act of incarnation for us.

Instead of sinning like all other human beings, he condemned sin in our flesh by living a life of perfect holiness within our flesh, and through his obedient Sonship he transformed our hostile and disobedient humanity into a true, loving relationship with the Father.

In the Son, the triune God took up our human nature into his Being, and he thereby transformed our nature. He redeemed us and reconciled us. By making our sinful nature his own and healing it, Jesus Christ became the Mediator between God and a fallen humanity.

Our election in the one man Jesus Christ fulfills God's purpose for the creation and defines God as the God who loves in freedom. Torrance explains that "all of grace" does not mean "nothing of humanity," but all of grace means all of humanity. That is, we cannot hold onto even one percent of ourselves.

By grace through faith, we participate in God's love for the creation in a relational way that was not possible before. That means that we love others as God loves us because by grace Jesus Christ is in us and we are in him. This can happen only within the miracle of a new creation. God's revelation to humanity comes from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and a redeemed humanity now responds by faith in the Spirit through the Son to the Father.

We have been called to holiness in Christ. We enjoy freedom in him from the sin, death, evil, misery and judgment that stood against us. We reciprocate, or return, God's love for us through thanksgiving, worship and service in the community of faith. In all his healing and saving relations with us, Jesus Christ is engaged in personalizing and humanizing us—that is, in making us real people in him. In all our relations with him, he makes us more truly and fully human in our personal response of faith. This takes place in us through the creative power of the Holy Spirit as he unites us to the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of grace really does mean all of humanity. The grace of Jesus Christ who was crucified and resurrected for us does not depreciate the humanity he came to save. God's unconditional grace brings into the light all that we are and do. Even in our repenting and believing we cannot rely on our own response, but in faith we rely only on the response that Christ has offered to the Father in our place and on our behalf! In his humanity, Jesus, the new Adam, became our vicarious response to God in all things, including faith, conversion, worship, celebration of the sacraments and evangelism.

Ignored

Unfortunately, Karl Barth has generally been ignored or misinterpreted by American evangelicalism, and Thomas Torrance is often presented as too hard to understand. But to fail to appreciate the dynamic nature of theology displayed in Barth's reworking of the doctrine of election causes many evangelicals and Reformed Christians alike to remain caught in the behavioralism trap, struggling to understand where God draws the line between human behavior and salvation.

The great Reformation principle of ongoing reformation should free us from old worldviews and behavior-based theologies that inhibit growth, promote stagnation and prevent ecumenical cooperation within the Body of Christ. Yet today doesn't the church often find itself robbed of the joy of grace as it shadowboxes with all its various forms of legalism? For this reason the church is not uncommonly characterized as a bastion of judgmentalism and exclusivism rather than as a testament to grace.

We all have a theology—a way that we think about and understand God—whether we know it or not. And our theology affects how we think about and understand God's grace and salvation.

If our theology is dynamic and relational, we will be open to hear God's ever-present word of salvation, which he freely gives us by his grace through Jesus Christ alone. On the other hand, if our theology is static, we will shrivel into a religion of legalism, judgmentalism and spiritual stagnation.

Instead of knowing Jesus as he is in a way that seasons all our relationships with mercy, patience, kindness and peace, we will know judgment, exclusivity and condemnation of those who fail to meet our carefully defined standards of godliness.

New creation in freedom

Theology does make a difference. How we understand God affects the

way we understand salvation and how we live the Christian life. God is not the prisoner of some static, humanly reasoned idea about what he must and should be.

Humans are not capable of reasoning out who God is and what he must be like. God tells us who he is and what he is like, and he is free to be exactly how he chooses to be, and he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as being the God who loves us, is for us and who chooses to make humanity's cause—including your cause and my cause—his own.

In Jesus Christ, we are freed from our sinful minds, from our boasting and despair, and graciously renewed to experience God's shalom peace in his loving faith community.

Recommended reading

Michael Jenkins, <i>Invitation to Theology</i> • Thomas Torrance, <i>The Mediation of Christ</i> • Karl Barth, <i>Dogmatics in Outline</i> • James Torrance, <i>Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace</i> Thomas Torrance, <i>The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons</i>	• Thomas Torrance, <i>The Trinitarian Faith</i> • Ray Anderson, <i>Theology, Death and Dying</i> • C. Baxter Kruger, <i>The Great Dance</i> • Robert Farrar Capon, <i>Parables of Judgment</i> • Donald Bloesch, <i>The Christian Foundations series</i> (seven books)
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Terry Akers and J. Michael Feazell

Devotional – Love All, Serve All

(from <https://update.gci.org/2019/10/devotional-love-all-serve-all/>)



“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, NIV)

Anyone who has feasted at the griddle of one of the 185 Hard Rock Cafés across the globe, could not help noticing their slogan, “Love All – Serve All” emblazoned across the wall in huge gold letters.

Personally speaking, I prefer the soft tinkle of a baby grand to loud rock music when I'm eating out, but I admire the HRC's philanthropic aim to “do well by doing good” even though the cynic in me says it's just a slick marketing ploy.



By Peter Mill
Pastor Edinburgh,
Scotland

God, on the other hand, demonstrated true love and service for the whole of mankind when he sent his Son to die in our place. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” ([John 3:16, NIV](#)).

The mission statement on the Hard Rock Café's website ends with this message: “Thank you for helping us in our goal to make the Earth a safer, healthier and better place.” An ambitious and worthwhile mission, certainly, but Jesus had an even grander plan: “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of” ([John 10:10, MSG](#)).

Jesus' mission really rocks!

Prayer: *Father we thank you that you truly love all and serve all and that you demonstrated this*

love in the only way that could save us from ourselves; by sending your Son Jesus Christ. In his name, we pray. Amen.

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshipim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website. *Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email—evautour47@outlook.com*