



MONTHLY

November 2016 Issue #96



College Life

We are at the close of another academic year, lectures having concluded last week and exams looming. Last Friday night we enjoyed a lovely end of year dinner, marking not only the completion of this year's study but the conclusion of lectures in Geelong after 61 years of ministry here.

We are now busily preparing for next year in Melbourne. Our new building has to be fitted out and we are beginning to actively promote the RTC in Melbourne churches. Please pray that we would soon become known as a great study option for Melbourne students.

Melbourne Campus Open Days

Any potential students who want to see our new campus and explore study options are welcome to attend one of our Melbourne Campus Student Open Days:

- Thursday 15 December, 3pm – 7pm
- Tuesday 24 January, 3pm – 7pm
- Thursday 9 February, 3pm – 7pm



While these days are for potential students and their families only, once our building is fully ready there will be a **public open day on Saturday 18 February, 1.00pm – 4.00pm**. Anyone who would like to see our new facility is most welcome to come and visit us then at Level 3, 221 Queen St.



2017 Flexible Study Options

RTC is offering an exciting range of study options for next year. Full details can be found at <http://rtc.edu.au/study-with-us/2017-study-options>.

We are offering the following units at our new Melbourne campus:

Old Testament Foundations – Rev John de Hoog
Christian Worldview – team taught
Evangelism – Dr Phillip Scheepers
New Testament Greek – Dr Martin Williams
Theology (Grace and Eschatology) – Dr Karl Deenick
Practice of Preaching – Dr Murray Capill
The Fourth Gospel (English and Greek) – Dr Martin Williams
Principles and Practice of OT Exegesis – Rev John de Hoog

Two intensives will be held at the Melbourne campus from 15–19 May:

Christian Worship – Dr Murray Capill
Christian Ministry in Islamic Contexts – Dr Phillip Scheepers

Several on-campus units are also available live online via video link:

New Testament Greek – Dr Martin Williams
The Fourth Gospel (English and Greek) – Dr Martin Williams
Principles and Practice of OT Exegesis – Rev John de Hoog
Practice of Preaching – Dr Murray Capill

Three units are available in full online mode

Jesus and the Gospels – Dr Michael Flinn
The Church from 1550 to Modern Times – Dr Phillip Scheepers
Theology: The Knowledge of God – Dr Bill Berends

All units can be taken toward a diploma, undergraduate degree, graduate degree or graduate diploma. All awards are accredited by the Australian College of Theology.

If you are not wanting a degree or diploma, you could consider being an “audit” student (with no assessment or academic credit) for just \$300/unit.

Faculty News

Dr Phillip Scheepers is currently in the USA, along with K. J. Tromp, our Discipleship Training Coordinator. They are attending a conference in Monterey, California, on evangelism and outreach, hosted by Dr Kevin Harney, author of several excellent books on Organic Outreach.

Dr Martin Williams is coming to the end of his semester of study leave. He's been relishing the chance to read and write, focusing on how Puritan exegesis can enhance commentary writing today. The Puritans tended to be far more applicatory in their writing than many contemporary commentary writers, and Martin has been working on blending the best of their approach with contemporary scholarship as he works on a commentary on Ephesians. No doubt his exegesis classes next year will be full of new insights!

Book Recommendation

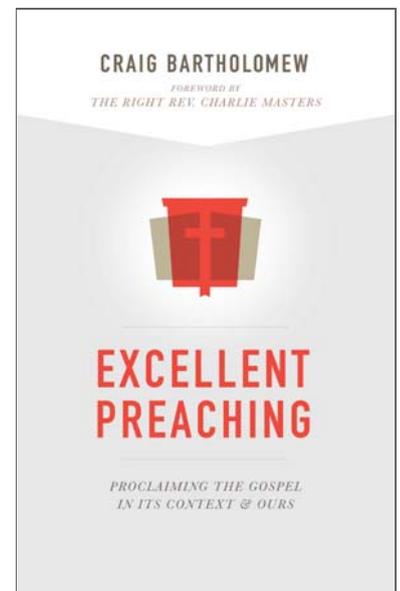
by Rev. John de Hoog

Craig G. Bartholomew, *Excellent Preaching: Proclaiming the Gospel in its Context and Ours* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

One of the things we often bemoan about modern Western society is that it is individualistic, almost narcissistic in the complex of values it promotes. In this context it is important that our preaching does not simply fit the trend but rather challenges the focus on self. Crucial to developing such preaching are two factors: understanding the “big story” of the Bible and the place that any particular passage plays in the big story; and recognising how the authoritative Word of God best addresses the particular contexts in which we find ourselves.

Craig Bartholomew's book *Excellent Preaching* can help us address both these concerns. This is a small book, just over 70 pages (including notes), so it is very far from being a comprehensive read on excellence in preaching. Rather, it focusses on two main issues. The first of these is to explore what difference it makes for our preaching if we understand the big story of the Bible. Bartholomew suggests that we must so indwell the biblical story that it becomes our “default mode” amid the challenges of the other narratives our culture offers (31). The other useful focus of the book is an analysis of the context of our preaching in modern Western societies. He suggests a series of six concentric circles which “locate” our preaching ministries, from “creation” as the outermost circle to “your congregation” as the innermost circle (39). His analysis of the cultural situation most of us live in is sharp and helpful for preaching.

In both these areas, Bartholomew urges us to engage the relevant contexts – the biblical context and our cultural context. He believes that simplistic teaching is the enemy of good Christian engagement (34). The book closes with four examples of preaching the gospel from specific passages in Genesis, Exodus, Galatians and Ephesians and with six practical ways forward. Here is a book you can read in a couple of hours that will challenge and help in positive ways.



Ministry Spot: Balance

by Rev. John de Hoog

What is this thing called “balance” and when is it necessary? There are times when you or I will be called “extreme” or “unbalanced,” simply because we want to serve our king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We say, for example, that God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day he rested from his work. Because we have this on very good authority, we reject the possibility that the universe emerged through a process of blind evolution.

Or we might say that there is only one way to be saved, that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him. Again we have this on very good authority, and so we affirm it. But in this way we can lay ourselves open to the charge of intolerance on the part of non-Christian friends.

We have to frankly admit that there are some things that we are utterly intolerant about. In these situations, we must stick to our guns but also be welcoming and winsome in our responses.

I like the way a Year 9 schoolboy I heard about recently replied to a question from a friend of his. His friend knew he was Christian, and so he asked this young man, “What do you think about same-sex marriage.” His reply? “Well, you and I are going to disagree, so let’s play basketball.” Is that just dodging the issue? No, because he’s leaving himself open to further conversations and even setting some guidelines, all in the context of cementing a true friendship.

In thinking about these matters, we need some clarity about when we should try to be “balanced” and when we should stick to what might seem extreme positions. This is true not only in our relationships with non-Christians; it is also important in how we make decisions in our Christian commitments. A very useful question can help to guide our thinking here: *How does this decision or attitude affect the way we serve our king, the Lord Jesus Christ?*

A recent book by Vern Poythress, which I heartily recommend (and which to some extent shapes this article), puts the issue up front. His book is entitled, *The Lordship of Christ: Serving our Saviour all of the Time, in all of Life, with all our Heart* (Crossway, 2016). The call to serve Jesus Christ is a radical call because he is radically the Lord of the universe. He is the Master of everyone, those who acknowledge him and those who don’t. Everyone is ultimately accountable to him. The story of the Bible, which tells this truth, also tells the true story of the world. But it is in sharp conflict with prevailing attitudes in the modern West, which say, “Keep Jesus out of business, work, education, science, technology, government, entertainment, media, sports and the arts. Jesus is OK for your private religion and your family and your church, but just keep

your opinions to yourself.”

The call to serve Jesus Christ is a radical call because he is radically the Lord of the universe.

Acknowledging that Jesus is Lord of all of life is a simple profession, but as we live that out in our current environment it implies many matters of considerable complexity. And here the question of “balance” often rears its head. There is *no room for balance* in our basic commitment to serving Jesus all the time, in all of life, with all our heart. But *as we live that out* many of our commitments and decisions require wisdom, and that often means trying to balance out competing factors. What follows are just two examples of situations in which we must think carefully, with the guiding question always in mind: *How can we best serve our king, the Lord Jesus Christ?*

Taking initiative and humility

There is no doubt about it. Pride is the fundamental human problem ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden. Pride is basically saying: “I know better than God.” Whenever we sin, we are saying that our opinion about this area of life is better than God’s opinion. But we face a problem. Pride creeps in even as we are serving God with all our energy. “Jesus is Lord of my life, and because I understand this I’m doing something about it. How slack are those Christians who don’t!” Exalting Jesus Christ means humbling ourselves and not imagining that what we do is utterly crucial for his kingdom. But that doesn’t mean becoming piously passive. Passive piety, saying that we are just letting God do the work, can be a smokescreen for a form of reverse pride – the fear of failing.

The Bible calls us again and again to take initiative for the work of the kingdom (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9:24–26; 15:58). In recent times the RTC Board has taken some daring initiatives in a new model for the work of the RTC based on a campus ministry in the Melbourne CBD. It involves promotion for growth, using business acumen and strategizing about image and direction. None of that would have happened if an attitude of “passive piety” (let go and let God) had prevailed. The Board has sought a “balance” between taking initiative and humility. Yes, there is promotion and concern about image. But not *self-promotion* for the glory of the RTC, but rather to promote Christ, to positively answer the guiding question: *How can we best serve our king, the Lord Jesus Christ?*

We can face a similar kind of problem in our personal lives. Taking initiative for the kingdom means overcoming such traps as timidity (“I’m not capable of doing anything really worthwhile for God”), defensiveness (“I always need to justify myself in the face of criticism”) and despair (“I’ve usually failed in the past, what’s the point of trying again”). Each of these traps can masquerade as humility, but each of them is a false humility. Finding the balance between taking initiative and true humility is essential if our service to Jesus is to be truly godly.

Our attitude to the institutional church

There is also a balance we need to achieve in how we relate to the church. On the one hand, we can be tempted to downgrade the institutional church, to underestimate its importance in our attempt to live Christian lives in our culture. But on the other hand, we can also be trapped into an attitude which sees the church as the only significant institution, to which we should devote all our energy.

Poythress reminds us that Jesus did not come to found a political party or a school, rather he founded the church (Matt 16:18–19). Even if everything in our culture comes crashing down, not even the gates of hell will prevail against the church. So we do well to reflect in our everyday actions the importance of the church, which is the body of Christ. At the same time, if we imagine that what happens within the walls of the church is the only thing that really matters, we will end up falling into the mindset of the world around us which urges us to keep Jesus only to the private realm. Our guiding question again helps us in keeping a healthy balance in our attitude to the institutional church: *How can we best serve our king, the Lord Jesus Christ?*



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