



MONTHLY

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Praise and Petition

We are very thankful for a successful start to Semester 2. Please give thanks, and pray with us, for the following matters:

- We are currently working through the five 'Solas' of the Reformation ('Scripture Alone', 'Faith Alone', 'Grace Alone', 'Christ Alone' and 'To the Glory of God Alone') in our devotions and small groups. Please pray that being reminded of these great truths will flow over into a deep desire to proclaim the Gospel.
- Please give thanks for the fact that more than 20 students from across Australia and New Zealand attended intensives at the Melbourne Campus this week.
- Much work still needs to be done to prepare for our Open Day and the Preaching Conference. Please pray for strength and wisdom for everyone involved.
- The latest edition of our journal, *Vox Reformata*, is about to be released. Please pray that those who read the articles and reviews will find them helpful and edifying.

RTC Open Day



By attending the upcoming Open Day (16 September) prospective students will have the opportunity to experience 'A Day in the Life' of the college. This will include morning devotions, sample lectures and a, free, community meal. Paul Lucas, our registrar, will also be on hand to answer any questions and to assist with course planning. Please do come along if you are considering theological study, or encourage others to do so. Full details can be found at: www.rtc.edu.au/openday.

Preaching Conference



The theme for this year's Preaching Conference is '*Preaching Romans*'. Dr Bryan Chapell is the keynote speaker and he will be assisted by members of the RTC Faculty. There are not many places left so we would strongly encourage you to get your registrations in if you are planning to come. For more information, or to register, please see rtc.edu.au/pc17.

Faculty News

- Dr Murray Capill recently had the privilege of attending a retreat for principals of theological colleges organised the by the Gospel Coalition of Australia.
- Dr Phillip Scheepers is due to attend the synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand during the second week of September.
- Dr Martin Williams will be speaking at two 'Proclaiming Creation' events. The first one will be in Melbourne (26 August) and the second in Sydney (16 September). More information

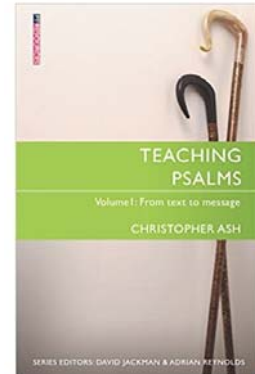
can be found at www.creation.com/conferences/proclaiming.

Book Review

by Rev John de Hoog

Christopher Ash, *Teaching Psalms. Volume One – From Text to Message*. Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2017, 272 pages.

Working from the premise that anything from Christopher Ash is worth reading, it is pleasing to welcome a new book he has written on Teaching Psalms. It fits into a series published by the Proclamation Trust which are not commentaries and not books about preaching but rather books that combine some aspects of both. They particularly focus on the purpose of the biblical books, which is very helpful for preachers.



This work is the first volume of two on Teaching the Psalms; this volume lays out some of the principles, while the second volume will work through the Psalter psalm by psalm. Many Christians will say that they love the Book of Psalms, but when pressed will admit that they love some of the old favourites but struggle with others. Ash's aim is to give us guidelines so that we can love and pray all the Psalms God has given us, not just our favourite "nuggets" (33).

Ash begins by asserting that the Psalms have been given to teach us to pray; he outlines six thoroughly biblical benefits that come from learning to pray the Psalms. So we must pray the Psalms, but then Ash explains why we can't pray the Psalms easily. He summarises what appear to be intractable problems under five headings: The experience of intense suffering expressed by many psalms, implications of global significance, claims to extraordinary innocence, praying for God's judgment on the wicked, and the strange mix of singulars and plural voices in many psalms.

The rest of the book (just over 250 pages in all) is devoted to resolving the apparent conundrum between the basic ideas that we must pray the Psalms and that we can't pray the Psalms. At the risk of not providing a spoiler alert, Ash argues that we must pray the Psalms in Christ. He considers many aspects of this simple truth in the pages that follow. For Ash, this approach does not do violence to the original context of the Psalms. To read them as centred on Christ is not to impose a framework in spite of their original meaning, but arises from the Psalms because of their original meaning.

I found one of the most helpful sections in the book to be one in which Ash identifies the different kinds of "voices" we hear in the Psalter. Most often we hear voices speaking "upwards" – particularly the Son leading the people of God in speaking to the Father. But sometimes the people of God speak to one another about the King, or about God the Father, or they speak outwards to the rest of the world. There are a few instances of God the Father speaking to the Son (e.g. the psalms quoted in Hebrews 1) and other voices can be identified. Learning the voices involved in the Psalms can help us to take the place the Psalms envisage for us; often we will be able to place ourselves as part of the congregation being led in worship by the King and so sing the Psalms adopting that role.

This is a helpful volume that is easy to read but profound in its implications.

Ministry Spot: Reformation 500 as a 'Teachable Moment'

by Dr Phillip Scheepers

The 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation is upon us and it is likely to be noticed far beyond the walls of our churches. The consequences of the events set in motion by the Augustinian friar Martin Luther on 31 October 1517 have been so wide reaching and momentous that it represents a significant turning point in the history of Western civilisation. It is, therefore, almost inevitable that we will be regaled with a wide range of assessments of the legacy of the Reformation over the coming months. In fact, I even noticed that a Roman Catholic church down the road from our Melbourne Campus is hosting a special event to discuss the Reformation!



It is probably fair to assume that much of the Reformation commentary that we will encounter in the secular media will be either hostile or superficial (or both). Be that as it may, wider discussion of the Reformation will still give Protestant Christians a valuable opportunity to talk about an event with the recovery of the Gospel at its heart. As such Reformation 500 represents what might be termed a 'teachable moment' that we can use to communicate God's mercy in Christ to a society that has, in so many ways, forgotten the foundations that it has been built on.

Here are some ways in which we, as individuals and churches, can make use of the opportunities presented by this 'teachable moment':

Prepare Well: If you want to talk intelligently and persuasively about the Reformation you will need to prepare yourself well. In practice this means that you will have to undertake the pleasant task of getting reacquainted with some key Reformation events, dates, places and their importance. A good introduction to Martin Luther's life and ministry is Thomas Kaufmann's *'A Short Life of Martin Luther'* (Eerdmans, 2016). For a very accessible discussion of the importance of the Reformation see *'Why the Reformation Still Matters'* by Michael Reeves and Tim Chester (Crossway, 2016)

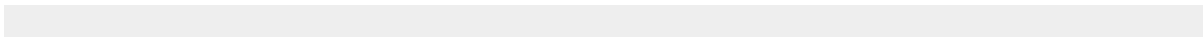
Tell the Story: We can sometimes all too easily reduce important historical events to a few digestible bullet points. While it is true that the Reformation has much of substance to teach us, these truths shine all the more brightly when presented in the context of the historical dramas in which they played pivotal roles. There was plenty such drama in the Reformation era in the form of heartfelt conversions, mortal danger and breathtaking courage. Highlighting this can serve as a great 'bridge' into spiritual conversations. It would, for example, be quite powerful and memorable if we can talk about 'Justification by Faith' in the context of Luther's personal struggles instead of merely listing the key points associated with this doctrine. A great visual entry point into the drama of the Reformation is the movie *'Luther'* (2003) with Joseph Fiennes in the lead role. It may be a good idea to watch this together in small groups or with friends who have questions about what the Reformation was all about. (Please be aware, however, that the movie contains some depictions of violence that may not be suitable for younger viewers).

Consider Hosting Reformation Events: Here at the RTC we are working our way through a sermon series on the 5 'Solos' of the Reformation ('Scripture Alone', 'Faith Alone', 'Grace Alone', 'Christ Alone' and 'To the Glory of God Alone'). I know of several churches who are planning to do the same during October. This is just one possible way to formally mark the Reformation. Other possibilities include: Reformation based small group studies, short courses, book clubs or

movie nights. Of course the point behind such events must not be to simply 'teach people a bit of history', which brings me to my final and most important point.

Keep Coming Back to the Gospel: Over the next few months we will be confronted with many analyses of the Reformation that will highlight its social, political and even linguistic legacies. Yet, the Reformation ultimately amounted to a powerful restatement of the liberating truth of the Christian Gospel to a church hierarchy and wider culture that have largely left it behind. Does that sound familiar? It may be that the Gospel is not being denied in exactly the same way as in 1517 but millions of people around us still need to hear it in all its truth, clarity and power. When talking about the Reformation we should, therefore, not simply dwell on the past. Let us, instead, mark and talk about the Reformation in ways that will point people who desperately need Him to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

One of the 95 Theses that Martin Luther nailed on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg 500 years ago reads as follows: "*The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.*" (Thesis 62) I trust that you will join me in celebrating the recovery of this great treasure through the Reformation and will point many others to God's grace in Christ as its ultimate source in the process.



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