No. 90 – 13 April 2016

College Life

- Have you seen the new RTC promotional video? If not, you can view it on Vimeo here. The video outlines the reasons for our move to Melbourne and to multi-modal delivery.
- We are delighted to announce the appointment of a new Business Manager for the RTC, Mr Chris Bongers. Chris comes to us with a degree in Business and Commerce, experience in running a small private company in recent years, and involvement in large organisation transformation programs with other employers over the past decade. He is married to Felicity and they have a 14-month old son, Noah, and are expecting their second child in early August. Chris and Felicity currently live in South Gippsland, Victoria, where they have been members of the Christian Reformed Church for many years and where Chris has served as both an elder and deacon. Chris starts work with the RTC this week, and the family will be moving to Geelong later in the year.
- Over the last few months our interim Business Manager, Mr Tony Deenick, has been an immense help and we are deeply thankful to him, and to his wife Robyn, for their readiness to come to Geelong at short notice. They have contributed most significantly to the RTC in multiple ways and will be missed by us when they return home to Wollongong.
- The RTC Board meets in Geelong for an all-day meeting this Friday, followed by the AGM. At the top of the agenda will be matters relating to the new RTC model. One of the key issues is arranging funding for the proposed Child Care Centre that we want to operate from our site in Geelong. A planning application for this has been submitted to the Geelong City Council.

Pastoral Ministry in Reformed Churches

We are currently preparing for a new intensive that will be offered in August. Pastoral Ministry in Reformed Churches has been designed as a key component of the training for Reformed Church ordination students, but it will also be a great in-service training option for elders and potential elders, ministry workers and even pastors in the RTC’s supporting denominations.

The course will consider the following:

- The call to ministry, gifts for ministry, and the theology of ordination
- The pastoral task, realities of pastoral ministry, the spiritual life of the pastor, and causes of burnout and stress
The history of Reformed churches “down under,” along with current trends, trajectories and challenges

Leadership patterns and paradigms in Reformed churches

Key emphases of Reformed theology, the reasons for holding to Reformed confessions, and discussion of theological hot potatoes

The classic practices of Reformed churches

This team-taught unit will begin on 25 July with four weeks of online study, followed by a one-week intensive from 22-26 August. The non-credit and non-assessment (audit) price for elders, church workers, and others interested in this unit is $300. Please contact the RTC for more information.

Preaching Conference

The RTC’s 2016 Preaching Conference will focus on the first book of the Bible. Genesis is the book of beginnings - the beginning of the world, of human life and society, of God's covenant community, and of the gospel itself. From the creation account to the devastating impact of the fall, from a universal flood to the choosing of one man to be the father of many nations, from covenant promises to the often scandalous lives of the patriarchal family, Genesis weaves together dozens of rich and compelling narratives. Here are the essential foundations every preacher needs to lay. Here's the DNA of gospel life.

This year's RTC Preaching Conference will help inspire and equip preachers to preach Genesis. RTC Faculty will be joined by Paul Harrington, Senior Network Pastor, Trinity Network of Churches, Adelaide. Put the dates in your calendar now: 22-23 September, 2016. Registration forms will be available soon.

RTC Faculty

All four members of faculty attended the recent CRCA ReCharge conference for ministers and their wives. It was an excellent event where we enjoyed the superb teaching of Dr Peter Adam, warm fellowship with ministry colleagues, and times for relaxation and refreshment.

Murray Capill and Phillip Scheepers are continuing to visit churches around Australia to meet with pastors and students from our supporting churches. Phillip will be in the northern part of Tasmania this weekend, in South Australia in May and in Canberra in June. Murray will be in Melbourne and southern Tasmania in May and in Perth in June.
Book Recommendation
(by Dr Murray Capill)

Given that I like short books and I’m always on the lookout for ways to work more efficiently, I was attracted on both counts to Tim Challies’s little book, Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity. In 120 pages, Challies passes on strategies and tips for working more productively in our often distracted and frenetic lives.

The book begins, however, in a somewhat surprising place. The first chapter provides a short “productivity catechism.” In six short questions and answers, Challies outlines a simple biblical theology of productivity, which is grounded in our calling to glorify God in our day to day life by doing good works. This leads to his definition of productivity, which is “effectively stewarding my gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God.” The catechism is a fine summary of our real purpose in life.

On this basis, he then examines some common productivity thieves before beginning to map a path to creating greater order amidst the myriad of tasks that call for our attention. His approach is thorough and logical, working from higher level consideration of our various roles and responsibilities, to the more hands-on matters of using electronic task management, scheduling, and information storage tools.

While I felt no need to completely reinvent my life by following his rigorous step-by-step process, I did find some of the suggestions very helpful. Since reading the book, I have been using a new task management tool (Todoist) which has proved very helpful. I have also re-addressed my daily battle with the email inbox. I believe his advice regarding emails could significantly improve the productivity and focus of many pastors and others who face the battle of the box.

If you are highly organised and efficient, have a keen sense of both your life purpose and your daily responsibilities, have excellent systems for keeping on top of multiple tasks and projects, have an email inbox that is fully under control, and, throughout much of the day, have your email program turned off - not on, then don’t bother buying this book. But if you could do with some help in these areas, this book might be just what you need.

Ministry Spot: Communion with the Triune God
(by Dr Martin Williams)

Last month I talked about worship and the Triune God. I said that, because the Christian faith is Trinitarian at heart, Christian worship should also be Trinitarian. The God we worship is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It therefore goes without saying (though I will say it anyway!) that our prayer, our communion is also triune in shape.

I have been very influenced in my thinking by the Puritan theologian John Owen’s Communion with the Triune God (1657). Few works have taken Christians deeper into the enjoyment of fellowship with God like Owen’s.

His approach to the Trinity is impressive as he carefully balances the oneness and the Threeness of God, emphasising that our communion is with “each person distinctly” while at the same time insisting that to commune with each person is to commune with the one God.

The gospel is the good news that in Christ we can have union and communion with God. According to Owen, this communion involves a mutual relationship between God and us, and believing that involves giving and receiving in the context of our union with Jesus Christ. Communion with the
Father, Son, and Spirit begins with God’s love for us and ends in our love for God. No more profound fellowship can be found in any human friendship or relationship.

(1) Communion with the Father: In Love

First, Owen takes us into the pleasures of communion with the Father. He was deeply concerned that many Christians failed to grasp experientially the grace of the Father’s love in Christ:

How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love! With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him! What fears, what questionings are there, of his good-will and kindness! At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus. (Works, 2:32)

So how do we experientially grasp this love? The answer is, by faith: “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us” (1 John 4:16).

What is this faith? Owen answers: “[Faith is] a comfortable persuasion and spiritual perception and sense of his love [by which the soul] reposes and rests itself [in God]” (Works, 2:23). We are to respond to the Father’s love by loving him in return as we delight and rest in his love for us. Owen goes on to analyse this love which we owe him as consisting of four elements: rest, delight, reverence, and obedience.

In light of this, we can ask ourselves some important questions:

- How real has God been to me this week?
- How clear and vivid is my assurance of God’s fatherly love for you?
- Do I really sense his presence in my life, and sense him giving me his love?
- Am I finding God’s love more glorious and more moving now than I have in the past?
- Do I tend to shy away from God as though he were dark or distant, or do I delight in the thought and reality of his fatherly love for me?

(2) Communion with the Son: In Grace

Next Owen takes us into communion with the Son. The Son’s special gift to us is grace—his free favour given to us and all the spiritual benefits that flow from it. All grace is found in Jesus Christ and is received when we receive him by faith.

In opening up the meaning of Christ’s grace, Owen makes much of the marriage union between Christ and his church. A key text for Owen is Hos. 2:19-20: “And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.” In this marriage union, Christ gives himself to believers, convincing them “of his goodwill toward them, and his all-sufficiency for a supply of their wants...he engages himself in a marriage covenant to be theirs forever” (Works, 2:57).

To commune with Christ then, is to accept him and set our affections on him as our only Husband, Lord, and Saviour:

Let believers exercise their hearts abundantly unto this thing. This is choice communion with the Son Jesus Christ. Let us receive him in all his excellencies, as he bestows himself upon us—be frequent in thoughts of faith, comparing him with other beloveds, sin, world, legal righteousness; and preferring him before them, counting them all loss and dung in
comparison of him. And let our souls be persuaded of his sincerity and willingness in giving himself, in all that he is, as mediator unto us, to be ours; and let our hearts give up themselves unto him. Let us tell him that we will be for him, and not for another: let him know it from us; he delights to hear it... (Works, 2:59)

So again, we can ask ourselves some important questions:

- Do I really love God’s Son, Jesus Christ, or just the idea of Jesus Christ?
- What does my heart feed on? Do I feed on the spiritual truth, beauty, loveliness, power and glory of all that Jesus is for me?
- Do I find that there are seasons in my life when my heart is drawn out in love, devotion, delight, and happiness by the beauty, glory, and grace of Jesus Christ?

(3) **Communion with the Holy Spirit: In Comfort**

Finally, Owen takes up our communion with the Holy Spirit, the great Comforter. Comfort, strength, and encouragement of heart is his special gift to believers. This comfort is conveyed to us through the assurance which he gives us of the love of the Father and our share in the salvation purchased by Christ. His comfort consists in

- bringing the promises of Christ to remembrance, glorifying him in our hearts, shedding abroad the love of God in us, witnessing with us, as to our spiritual state and condition, sealing us to the day of redemption; being the earnest of our inheritance, anointing us with ... consolation, confirming our adoption, and being present with us in our supplications. (Works, 2:249)

How are we to respond to the comforting work of the Spirit?

By taking care not to grieve him by negligence or sin (Eph 4:30), nor to quench him by opposing or hindering his work (1 Thess 5:19), nor to resist him by refusing the word (Acts 7:51), but to give him constant thanks, and to pray to him for a continuance of his peace and goodness. (Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 207).

So finally, we can ask ourselves:

- How has my fellowship with the Spirit been this week?
- Have I sensed the Holy Spirit coming alongside me in times of trouble and weariness, difficulty and anxiety, bringing me comfort and spiritual refreshment?
- How has my fellowship with the Spirit in his Word been lately? Am I finding certain biblical promises precious, encouraging, and comforting? Which ones? Am I finding God’s Word, under the influence of the Spirit, is opening my eyes to the glory, beauty, majesty and loveliness of Jesus Christ?

**Conclusion.** Since God is Triune, it not only makes sense that our prayer life and communion with him is Triune but it actually proves to be a wonderful way of truly enjoying God – enjoying the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus His Son, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual lives become richer when we cultivate relationship with our Triune God.