

## Weekly Newsletter: 9 September 2025

### Reflection: Breathing Freely the Clean Air of Grace

By Joe Barnard

Secular materialism, the great religion of our age, is the second-hand smoke that we breathe daily, lethally, and unwittingly. Although we may not feel in danger, there is cancer in the air. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that modern Christians analyse the way in which a post-Christian culture threatens our vitality. We cannot allow ourselves to sit passively in toxic fumes. Gospel vigilance today means keeping watch lest the spirit of the age begins to suffocate our life in Christ.

In one sense, every age has the same problem. This is what Paul refers to as the “flesh” (c.f. Phil. 3:4). This is the mindset that drives human beings to think that they can achieve life, bliss, and liberty without the aid of divine wisdom, power, and grace. For the Apostle Paul, this “flesh” was fed on the paltry food of Pharisaic religion. Paul was sufficiently detached from reality to think that the CV outlined in Phil. 3:5-6 was sufficient to secure him a place in the life to come.

Of course, on the other side of his conversion, Paul realised the foolishness of such thinking. Encountering Jesus was a radical upheaval of his values. The things he once thought of as “gains” were transvalued as “losses”. The gospel reprogrammed his heart so that he came to see that the only way to be right with God was a complete renunciation of self-confidence and a complete entrusting of oneself to Jesus. Righteousness could not be purchased; it must be a gift from God, that is, *of faith*.

Now, we live in a very different spiritual setting than did Paul. This means that, for us, the “flesh” is often experienced in the form of a different kind of godlessness than afflicted Paul in his pre-converted state. Our fleshly religion is a secular religion, that is, one that revolves around the self, not God. This is evident in a lot of different ways. For many of us, peer recognition means a lot more to us than does divine approval. We don’t struggle with religious guilt as did Luther or Bunyan. Instead, we agonise over whether or not we are “winners” or “losers” in the eyes of our colleagues. Similarly, in a secular age, conspicuous consumption replaces conspicuous sanctity. Unlike the Pharisees, we don’t measure the width of our phylacteries or the length of our prayers; we do, however, spend far too much time selecting a pair of shoes or contemplating which phone is most honourable to hold in public. Are many of us devoted to legalistic righteousness? Not really. But transpose righteousness from the key of Moses to the key of self-care, and our zeal in religion is seen to match that of the most pious of ancient Jews.

All of this indicates that the problem of the “flesh” has not gone away in the modern world. We, too, are relying on the self for life, freedom, and happiness, the great difference between us and Paul the Pharisee

being that, whereas his religion was governed by a passion for God, ours is lived for nothing more noble than the self.

What should we do when caught in the thicket of a false religion? The answer is that we need to undergo the same revolution that occurred in the heart of Paul. We need to discover that all of the things counted as “gains” by the culture around us are in fact “losses” when compared to the “excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus”. We need to come to appreciate that the only righteousness that matters, when the dust settles, is being “right” with God, and the only way to garner such righteousness is by faith in Christ.

If we grasp this truth, heart-transformation will occur. We, like Paul, will find ourselves willing to suffer the loss of all things – indeed count them as rubbish – if only we can know *Jesus himself* and “the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, [we might] attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11).

What happened in the life of Paul is that he discovered that the life he so longed for, *resurrection*, could only be gained in Christ. Henceforth, everything changed for him. Life simplified; life focused; life renewed in purpose. From then on, his life reduced to a single lane in a single race with a single prize: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

But how does this transformation happen? How do we reach a point of seeing the vanity of a false religion and the impotence of the flesh? The answer is the gospel. It is by meditating on the death and resurrection of Jesus that we find a higher purpose in the world and a uniquely stable ground of righteousness before the only audience that matters, God. The gospel is the knowledge that transformed the life of Paul, and the gospel is the knowledge that can heal us from the fumes of secularism and fill our lungs with the invigorating air of free grace.

## Home Groups: 1 Thessalonians - this Wednesday

This term we will be spending time together in our home groups exploring 1 Thessalonians. Jon Gemmell writes ‘It will strengthen our faith, reassure us of God’s work in our lives, challenge us about our shared holiness, and prepare us for steadfast endurance through hope. There is a rich journey ahead, filled with discovery, insight, and encouragement, waiting for us in these pages.

Let’s join together as we hear God’s Word encouraging us to **Stand Fast.**’

**This Wednesday we’ll be meeting in the church building for the launch of our Home Groups at 7pm.** Jon will lead us through the first study on 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:12. Tea and coffee will be served beforehand from 6.45pm. There will be no livestream of the Home Group meeting.



## Church Family Lunch – Sunday 21 September

We're looking forward to having lunch together as a church family on Sunday 21 September after the morning service. All the food will be provided and please let Liz know ([Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) if you have any dietary requirements. Thank you!

## Women's Bible Studies are back!

We're meeting this Thursday from 10.30 – 11.30am in the church building and will be continuing our studies in Acts. No prereading is required, just come as you are! We'll meet every Thursday morning for the next five weeks (finishing on Thursday 9 October). Contact [Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you have any questions.

## CARE for Scotland's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



It's CARE for Scotland's 40th Anniversary this year and on **Saturday 20 September at 7pm** we're invited to join them at Freedom City Church, Cumbernauld for a special celebration.

'With worship led by Allan McKinlay and thanksgiving and updates from the CARE team, it'll be a fantastic time to recognise God's incredible goodness and celebrate all that has been achieved.'

Tickets are available [here](#).

## Gospel Partnership with UCCF – Thursday 9 October

Esther Dickson (UCCF Team Leader in Scotland) has invited us to join them as a team, as well as other friends from across the wider fellowship as they host an evening for those who partner with them in the work in Scotland. Come along at **7.30pm on Thursday 9 October to Chalmers Church, Edinburgh** where we'll be giving thanks together and praying for the next season of CU mission. If you'd like to come along, please do book a space using this link: <https://scotlandpartnerevent.eventbrite.co.uk>

## East of Scotland Gospel Partnership – Sunday 26 October

Save the date! As a church we are part of the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership and one of the aims of the partnership is to express unity by coming together for a yearly Gospel Partnership evening service. This will take place on **Sunday 26 October at 7pm at Charlotte Chapel**. There will be no evening service at Holyrood and we look forward to attending the joint service instead.

## Upright Piano

Someone in the church family has an upright piano that is looking for a new home. Contact [Liz@holyroode-vangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroode-vangelical.org) if you're interested.

## Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Wednesday: Home Group Launch in the church at 7pm. Refreshments from 6.45pm.
- Thursday: Women's Bible Studies from 10.30 – 11.30am in the church
- Sunday:
  - Morning service at 10.30am – Jon Gemmell preaching (live streamed)
  - Evening service at 6pm – Jon Gemmell preaching (live streamed)
- Baby and Toddler Group: 10am – 11.30am



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