

March Prayer Points 7

Those who do not have time to read the stories may still get the main points in less than two minutes by scanning the red print and looking at the photos.

Dear Friends:

In this report I want to feature the many opportunities for teaching that go begging here for lack of time, focusing in particular on a recent seminar conceived and carried out by Mission Ekklesia. Ekklesia is a work begun by a gifted African brother whom I believe God is raising up to influence the church in Mozambique. His work closely parallels the ministry of Grace Missions and the efforts of Editora Fiel. I give it all the help I can from behind the scenes, because I believe its indigenous nature makes it potentially more important than what we missionaries are doing toward the same end.

Teaching Ministry

My teaching work consists of preaching in the church on alternate Sundays, preparing daily devotions for the missions' employees, leading family worship each weekday, and serving as guest speaker at special seminars organized by other churches. For many years I taught a formal two hour Bible study during the week and had an ongoing weekly discipleship ministry with several church members, but this term I had to drop both of these latter ministries when administrative work became excessive.



Saturday Bible class, discontinued this term

Because of the high profile nature of our Fiel Conferences, I receive many invitations to teach at seminars, preach at other churches, and even bring regular radio messages, invitations that I cannot accept for various reasons, most related to encroaching administrative tasks. **Teaching normally consumes one very full day of my week, the most I can usually give it, although there are occasions when it dominates all my other work, as I feel it ought to do.**



Though work devotions target only the mission's staff, I esteem that time and put effort into it because it has proven a fertile seedbed for series that have been profitable for the church and seminars. At work, we have read through the entire Bible and have also covered many topics in a piecemeal fashion strung out over months, topics such as Man's Sin and God's Solution, Biblical Marriage, Biblical Work Ethic, Biblical Leadership, the Attributes of

God, and the Ten Commandments. Since work devotions are daily, and preaching is only twice monthly, the church ministry lags months behind what I do with the workers.

In the past three months I have preached series of messages at three seminars, one on Christian marriage, another on Christian leadership, and a third on salvation by faith and sanctification through faith.

Ekklesia Seminar

But the most satisfying ministry of recent months was the first Ekklesia seminar held in December. Timóteo Bila planned the program and selected three men along with himself to bring the messages. The messages consisted of 14 hours of preaching through the entire book of Romans over two days, a message on the five solas of the Reformation, another message contrasting the old vs. new (Mozambican) gospel, and a message on ten guidelines for correct Bible interpretation. Timóteo scratched the last message to make more time for Romans, but I was pleased when the 80 participants expressed their disappointment at having anything cancelled despite the intense schedule (seven hours of teaching each day) Timóteo had planned.



Timóteo did a good job preparing the program, which ran well despite being highly compressed. The message on the old vs. new gospel was inspired by J.I. Packer's monograph on the same subject where Packer vividly points out the contrast between the biblical gospel that is God-centered and Christ-exalting and the new gospel that is focused on man and the help God gives him. Packer says the old gospel is actually more helpful to men, even without trying to be, because it gives them a right view of God, themselves, and man's relationship with God. Out of that proper perspective comes heartfelt worship and an understanding of and relationship with God that is truly useful to men. In contrast, the man-centered gospel that has helpfulness to man as its main objective paradoxically falls short of its goal because it focuses on the benefits of knowing God rather than focusing on God Himself, thus failing to secure either a proper knowledge of God or the fruits of that knowledge.



Ibraimo Hâmido Ibraimo

Packer's monograph is one of the first books Timóteo distributes to the men in his reading circles. Ibraimo Hâmido, the man Timóteo selected to preach and apply this message to the Mozambican situation, leads one of the reading circles, and did a good job on the preaching assignment given to him. I was so enthused by his fervent and insightful presentation that I thought, "We need to have this preached at the next Fiel Conference!"

But then I heard André Kizito, the Mozambican pastor selected by Timóteo for the message on the Five Solas of the Reformation, and I thought, "No, this is the message we have got to hear!" The second speaker gave a message that was 25%

well-written, scholarly treatise and 75% spontaneous, earnest application to the situation in Nampula today. I was glued to every word and was delighted when other participants begged the speaker for his manuscript as soon as he ended. At their request, we have printed the message and are making both the manuscript and CD available at the bookstore.



Timóteo Bila and André Kizito visit between sessions

Timóteo assigned me the task of teaching through Romans from the middle of chapter 3 to the end of chapter 8, the sections on salvation by grace through faith and on sanctification through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. I had taught through the same material years before, benefitting much from Robert Haldane's exposition of those chapters and from Martin Lloyd-Jones on the controversial second half of chapter 7. From that prior study I already had a detailed verse-by-verse commentary in Portuguese available as a handout for the participants. In bringing my messages, I felt the same power and unction from the Holy Spirit that I perceived in the messages of my Mozambican colleagues.

So I was indeed euphoric about the seminar, but for even more reasons than I have yet mentioned, reasons that perhaps bias my perception of the ministry of the other speakers. Because the two Mozambican brothers who did such a fine job teaching alongside Timóteo and who have joined his mission to promote the five solas of the Reformation are men who were first exposed to the doctrines of grace through my post-conference seminar.

André Kizito, who preached on the five solas, studied with me in 2010 and made one of the highest scores in the seminar's eight year history. The man who preached so eloquently on the old vs. new gospel, Ibraimo Hámido Ibraimo, studied with me in 2012 and made the second highest score ever. Both of them struggled in the first days to accept concepts that differed so sharply from what they had previously heard and believed. Both debated freely and articulately, defending viewpoints that contradicted what they were hearing from the instructor. But by the end of the course both were thoroughly convinced from the Bible as well as their own experience that the Reformers understanding of salvation by grace through faith was correct and resolved many inconsistencies they had already encountered in their own theology. Both participated in Editora Fiel's pastor's library project, receiving a free book every month for 36 months, and both have continued to grow in their understanding of God's word.

None is so fervent as he who is convinced that beliefs he once tenaciously embraced were actually in error, and both Kizito and Ibraimo have enthusiastically sought to help others discover the doctrinal legacy left the church by its Reformation fathers. Both men have organized reading circles for church leaders where good books are read and discussed each month, though Kizito's group is still struggling to get underway. For two years Kizito has taken courses via Internet from the International College of Reformed Theology and has induced many of his church friends to sign up with him. Kizito and Bila both have benefitted from a college education, and Ibraimo is not far behind them.

For me, it was gratifying to see God producing fruit from seed sown in my yearly seminar. I have not had nearly as much interaction over the years as I would like with Kizito and Ibraimo, or with any of my former seminar students.

I lament my inability to follow up even with local people who have appreciated the seminar, wondering what might result from maintaining the momentum that gets started during that week of intensive study and debate. But God's word does not return void, without accomplishing all His good pleasure, and in the case of these men I was privileged to see what God has done in the years since the seminar.

Many of the 80 participants were also former students. In fact, the only people we made a specific point of contacting about the seminar were my students. Many responded, bringing their friends and fellow leaders with them. **My prayer is that through Ekklesia's quarterly seminars we can finally begin to follow up regularly with those men who have appreciated the annual conference and seminar.**

Besides handling most of the teaching, Bila also distributed the first issue of his theological journal at the meeting containing helpful articles by John Piper, Bila, and Kizito. Bila is a voracious reader, a scholarly Bible student, and a good writer, but he battled with designing the layout for his magazine, something that consumed much time and in the end still fell well below the quality of the articles. To buy more time to work out the graphic design kinks, Timóteo asked me to take over



Bonifácio Alberto

the logistics of the seminar, which was being held without charge at the Grace Missions property under our large pavilion. Out of town pastors, some traveling from six hours away, were lodged in the hospital, and my usual team of conference cooks prepared the meals. Because I was myself preaching four hours the first day, Bonifacio, one of the mission's workers and another alumnus of my seminar who has organized several conferences for his own denomination, stepped up to help. Timóteo and I ended up letting him run the entire seminar, which he did quite capably. He has agreed to run the next seminar as well, and we hope God has uncovered yet another important member of the indigenous Ekklesia team.

By His grace,
Charles Woodrow

**Gifts to this ministry can be sent to: Grace Missions, c/o Faith Community Church,
723 South D. Street, Oxnard, CA 93030**