

# Grace Reformed Baptist Church

[www.grbc.org.nz](http://www.grbc.org.nz)

## School of Theology

9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> July 2012

In an age where individualism is the default setting of our spirituality, we were glad to receive a strong antidote in the form of the sixth annual School of Theology, where Dr. James Renihan taught on Ecclesiology—the doctrine of the Church. This year we had twelve men attend the lectures at Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Palmerston North representing churches in Palmerston North, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Timaru, Dunedin, New Plymouth and Hazelbrook Australia. The week was an enriching time enjoyed by all.

The course of nine units was kicked off with an introduction that dealt with the primary question: 'Does the NT have an ecclesiology?' We looked at the answers, 'yes,' 'yes-but,' and 'doesn't matter', as well as the five major approaches to the church: Hierarchical, Presbyterian, Independent, Erastian and the modern pragmatic Evangelical approach. The rest of the introduction was taken up with examining Ecclesiology's integral relationship to the other departments in Theology.

Unit 1 dealt with *The Identity of the Church*. In this section we examined the biblical foundation for establishing the identity of the Church looking at the ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) and the non-ἐκκλησία passages; the Church in its eschatological identity as it straddles the Two Ages; and an informative overview of Church History on the issue of 'The Marks of The Church.' Units 2 and 3 dealt with *The Universal Church* and the *Local Church* respectively. Unit 4 looked at the *Church Government* of the Universal and Local Church. Here we analyzed the role of Apostle and Prophet as officers in the Universal Church, and watched a debate on the role of prophets in the NT Church between Wayne Grudem and Ian Hamilton. Added to this we delved into the officers of the Local Church beginning with the office of the Elder. We established that the terms Elder; Overseer/Bishop and Pastor/Shepherd are all describing the single office of Elder in the local church grounding the Congregational and Baptist view of the office. We surveyed the terms; pictures; responsibilities; attitudes; qualifications; ordination; and the limits on authority of an Elder and likewise covered the office of Deacon. This important section was ended by investigating the combined efforts of the officers and congregation in attending to various aspects of Church life.

In our present age where 'Me, my Bible and Jesus' is the atmosphere imbibed by all, Unit 5 brought in the necessary

emphasis to give us a biblical perspective. *Church Members and Membership* was the theme where Dr. Renihan convincingly presented to us the biblical data that supports membership and the various duties of church members. In unit 6, *The Duties of the Church*, we looked primarily at the whole church's responsibility to preach the Gospel investigating how every member contributes according to their gifting and calling. Secondly, we inspected the much neglected teaching of Church discipline; here I confess I derived the most personal benefit from the course as Dr Renihan outlined the three grades of disciplinary action: firstly, reproof; secondly, suspension / censure; and thirdly, excommunication. We passed over unit 7, *The Relation of Churches to One Another*, to get to unit 8, *Sacraments/Mean of Grace* where Dr Renihan emphasized the neglected '6<sup>th</sup>' point of Calvinism, a Reformed view of God's grace to His people through Preaching, Prayer, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Where many of late who are embracing the Doctrines of Grace are becoming five-point Calvinists, few have grasped the vital place of the Lord blessing His people through the appointed means of grace. Dr Renihan gave a survey of various 17<sup>th</sup> Century authors who believed this view of God blessing His people through these means. Unit 9, *Practical Considerations*, was a 'nuts and bolts' dose of reality regarding the real life situations we will face when ministering in the Lord's vineyard.

What cannot be conveyed in a report such as this one is the classroom interaction where Dr Renihan indulged our many questions, and showed his hand on many issues. I can honestly say that I got as much out of Dr Renihan answering our many questions from a consistent Reformed approach to the local church as I did from the lecture materials. The School of Theology offers something you cannot get in a book, or through watching a DVD of the same lectures.

A report of the SOT would not be complete without some mention of the massive efforts from the ladies at GRBC, Palmerston North. We were sustained with amazing food! Thanks also for the ongoing sacrifice and service of Dafydd, Ian and the others in GRBC who make these lectures possible every year. Let me end by saying 'Thank You' to GRBC, ARBCA, CRBC Vista CA USA, and many more prayerful and supportive churches and individuals.

**A report by Nick Clevely**

Pastor of Marchwiell Reformed Baptist Church, Timaru

The members of Grace Reformed Baptist Church wish to acknowledge and thank Jim Renihan, Christ Reformed Baptist Church in Vista, California, the trustees of IRBS, and others in the ARBCA association for the various ways – by practical assistance and prayer – they helped to make our hosting of these studies possible.

