

THE BANNER

OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

Who Are You?

Graduating Heartily

**Who Am I As God's
Image-Bearer?**



CONTENTS

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THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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SPECIAL THEME ISSUE ON IDENTITY

Who are you? We often identify ourselves by stating our name, or describing our parents, or discussing our job. But behind those answers, which are different for all of us, stands a common truth: we are sinners in need of God's grace. And yet, we often go through life without thoughtfully identifying with this common answer. It is our prayer that this issue focusing on "Who am I?" will help children, students, adults, and seniors alike understand what it means to be a sinner in need of, but also transformed by, the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“What’s the Difference?”

I can still hear my late mother asking this question, rhetorically, and generally with some level of exasperation. Of all the Christian days of remembrance, this question might be asked about the day we call Pentecost. It’s somewhat easy, though still astounding, to think back on that day when the Son of God, having assumed our human nature, was born. It is also not difficult to graphically visualize the solemn yet joyful sacrifice of our Savior on the cross. And it seems many, even nominal Christians, will pause for a moment to mark in some fashion the resurrection day of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Pentecost? In many ways, it is the most enigmatic of days on the church calendar. There’s good reason for that.

First, we humans grapple with the whole idea of spiritual realities. We can test the physical realm in all sorts of ways, but what MRI or Doppler radar can show us our soul? So when we hear Jesus tell us, “God is a Spirit,” we are already faced with uncertainty, and when we hear references to the Holy Spirit, we feel He is shrouded in mystery.

Second, from the testimony of Scripture, we know that the Holy Spirit does not want the attention that the Father and the Son are to receive. In John 16, for example, Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak,” and again, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” The Holy Spirit delights in revealing God and His will to us, which is why He inspired men to write the Scriptures. Yet He reveals relatively little about Himself in that very Book.

Third, our natural spiritual condition is antithetical to the Holy Spirit. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). The Scripture speaks of the Spirit “striving” with unsaved sinners (Gen. 6:3) and warns all of us not to “grieve” the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), “quench” the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), nor do “despise” to the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29).

Fourth, we tend not to interact consciously with the Holy Spirit in prayer. We pray, as we were taught by Jesus, to the Father through the Son. So our conscious interaction with God through prayer seldom brings the Holy Spirit to mind in these most intimate moments of communication with God.

Having said all this, however, it is not only fitting but also vitally important that we reflect on the immense role the

Holy Spirit plays in each and every person’s life. I alluded to the passage in Genesis 6 where God says His Spirit “shall not always strive with man.” It’s noteworthy that He said this with respect to the people of the “old world” who were about to be deluged by the flood as a judgment. This clearly teaches us that conviction of sin, regardless of our spiritual condition, is from the Holy Spirit of God. He strives with us, whether the means He uses is our conscience, God’s providence, or the Word of God. We all confess, as Scripture teaches, that by nature we are spiritually dead. We are disinclined toward conviction of sin by nature. Yet God the Holy Spirit strives with sinners, even with those He will ultimately judge and condemn. We should therefore thank Him for this ministry among men and in our own life. Where would we be without the Holy Spirit’s gift of conviction?

We ought also to recognize the immeasurable importance of the Spirit’s gift of special revelation, otherwise called the Scriptures. The Lord tells us that the only aspects of His Being with which natural revelation (nature) acquaints us is His existence and His eternal power (Rom. 1:20). Anyone should be able to see the immense impact Scripture has on mankind, not only with regard to salvation but in practically every other measurable indicator—education, ethics, economics, etc. Non-Christian nations borrow from the Christian worldview to achieve significant advancement. Where would mankind be without the Holy Spirit’s gift of Scripture?

Finally, though not exhaustively, the Holy Spirit is the One who connects spiritual realities with us, personally. He makes us alive, spiritually, so that we are capable of appreciating the things of God. He graciously enlightens our understanding so that we begin to comprehend to some extent what we find in Scripture and experience in life. He influences our “affections” so that we begin to value, more and more, the Lord and His will and less and less that which God forbids and hates. He emancipates our wills which begin to make choices that are increasingly aligned with God’s holy will and Word. Such is the great work of the Holy Spirit in man, restoring the image of God in us from step to step (2 Cor. 3:18). Where, indeed, would we be without the blessed Holy Spirit of God!

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What Is Man?

An Overview of the Bible's Answer

Answering the question “Who am I?” depends on answering the question “What is man?” since there are aspects of each individual that are consequences of being part of the human race. The Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, supplies the essential data necessary for understanding human nature. I want simply to sketch an overview of the biblical revelation about who and what man is, and by application “who I am.”

THE ORIGIN OF MAN

Man is a creature, directly and especially created by God. Significantly, there are elements of man's creation which identify him with the rest of creation. God created man on the sixth day along with all the other land creatures (Gen. 1:24–31)—providing all the same sources for food (Gen. 1:29–30; Ps. 136:28), issuing all the same instructions to reproduce (Gen. 1:22, 28), designating all as living beings with the breath of life (Gen. 1:20, 24; 2:7; 6:17; 7:15, 22) until they return to the dust from which they came (Gen. 3:10; Ps. 104:29; Job 34:14, 15; Eccl. 3:20). Man is just one small part of God's vast and multifaceted creation. That alone should generate amazement that God should set His mind on man (Ps. 8).

Yet, there are elements of man's creation that make him distinct from everything else that God made. God displayed special determination and self-interest in man's creation (“Let us make man”—Gen. 1:26) in contrast to the impersonal, although irresistible creative commands for everything else (“Let there be”). All the other creatures were living entities immediately, but man required the special breath of God before becoming a living being (Gen. 2:7). Most significant is that God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26). Consequently, man enjoyed a unique dignity with a special rank and role in the created order (Ps. 8:4–6). Cosmic dominion over the earth (Ps. 115:16; including control of earth's potentialities, Gen. 4:21, 22; 9:20) and animals (Gen. 2:19–20; Prov. 12:10) was man's mandate. Being in God's image placed unmatched value on man's life (Gen. 9:6) made it possible for man to make ethical choices (Gen. 2:16, 17), and became the basis of fellowship with God (Gen. 2:19; Amos 4:13). For sure, God's image in man was impaired after the fall, but it was not lost (Gen. 5:1, 3; 9:6). Cosmic dominion became a struggle against nature, and man no longer had the ability to do right (Jer. 10:23; 17:9; Prov. 16:9). But it remains that we must see ourselves

as being in God's image and look to the Perfect Man who restores every original intention for humanity (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24; Heb. 2:6–9).

DESIGNATIONS OF MAN

The Hebrew language uses various terms to designate mankind. Some underscore man's mortality and frailty and others his unique strength and ability. But most significant are the three most common terms designating man's nature. The word most often translated “soul” (*nephesh*) in the KJV is the most general term referring to the whole person or one's self. As a general word referring to the whole man, it occurs in contexts which stress the outer or physical part of being. Thus, the “soul” feels pain (Job 14:22), experiences bodily needs (Ps. 107:9; Prov. 25:25; 27:7), and can even refer to a corpse (Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:6; 19:13). Similarly, it may occur in contexts that stress the inner, immaterial part of being. Consequently, the “soul” is capable of desiring (Deut. 12:20; 14:16; 1 Sam. 2:16; Job 23:13), abhorring (Lev. 26:11, 15, 30, 43), sorrowing (Judg. 18:25; 2 Sam. 17:8; Job 3:20), rejoicing (Ps. 86:4; 94:29), loving (Deut. 6:5), and hating (2 Sam. 5:8; Ps. 11:5; Isa. 1:14). Simply said, the “soul” is “me.”

The word “heart” (*leb*) is the most general word for the inner man and includes the intellect, emotions, and will. Often times all three components are in view. So to love the Lord with the heart involves the engagement of the mind (what we think), the emotions (how we feel) and the volition (how we choose to behave). Sometimes the focus is on some specific component of the inner being. It may refer to mental activity (Deut. 8:5; 1 Kings 3:12; Prov. 14:10, 33; 15:14; 18:15). It may refer to emotional activity, including rejoicing (Judg. 16:25), fearing (1 Sam. 25:37), sorrowing (Ps. 55:5), being troubled (2 Kings 6:11). It may refer to volitional activity (Ex. 14:5; 35:5, 21, 22); Ps. 10:17; 78:8). The heart designates as well the moral nature. It is what God searches and tests (Ps. 17:3; Jer. 12:3). It is associated with evil and can be hard or insensitive (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Ex. 4:21; Jer. 12:9; 14:14). It should be circumcised, clean and renewed (Deut. 10:16; Ps. 51:12; Ezek. 18:31; 36:36). The heart is what I am inside.

The word “spirit” (*ruach*) refers to the animating principle of life as well as some aspects of inner man, which overlaps with functions of the heart. For instance, the spirit may refer to moral character (Ps. 32:2) or refer to

dispositions of character, such as courage (Josh. 5:1), anger (Judg. 9:23), impatience (Micah 2:7), humility (Prov. 16:19), or misery (Gen. 26:35). But principally it is the animating or vital force within man. It can refer specifically to the breath, which is essential to life (Job 15:30; 34:14; Ps. 104:29; 135:17; Ezek. 37). It represents life itself (Gen. 6:17; 7:15). As the life-force within man, it stands in contrast to flesh (Num. 16:22:27:16). It is the spirit that returns to God when the dust of flesh returns to dust (Eccl. 12:7). The outer man is destructible; the inner self (one day with a new outer man, according to Isa. 26:19) will live somewhere for ever. God has set eternity in the heart (Eccl. 3:11).

CHARACTERISTICS OF MAN

Although God created man upright, he “sought out many inventions” or schemes (Eccl. 7:29) that changed his nature irreversibly apart from the intervention of divine grace (Jer. 13:23). Two principal thoughts stand out. First, man’s nature is sinful. This sin nature is universal for “there is no man that sinneth not” (1 Kings 8:46; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 10:14). This sin nature is extensive, permeating the entire man, and is man’s malady from conception (Ps. 51:5). Man is thoroughly and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). It was true of the pre-flood generation that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5), and the flood did nothing to cure that nature since the post-flood character of man remained the same: “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). God’s assessment of mankind as He looks down from heaven is that “there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2–3).

Second, man’s existence on earth is ephemeral. His days are like a fleeting shadow (Ps. 144:4) and like withering grass (Ps. 103:15; both images in Job 14:1–2). Psalm 49:12 underscores two sobering facts about this transient existence: “Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.” On the one hand, life is so very short, nothing more than an overnight lodging (the literal sense of “abideth”). On the other hand, he is destined to die (see also Heb. 9:27). As domesticated cattle are raised with a view to slaughter, so man is headed for death. It is inevitable. Because this life is temporary, it is imperative to give attention to the next life.

THE INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMUNITY OF MAN

Every man stands before God as an individual, yet his actions are seldom private. Ezekiel especially emphasizes man’s individual responsibility before God: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...” (18:20; also 18:4). Notwithstanding the individual

responsibility, the consequences of sin extend horizontally. The sin of parents has an effect on the children (Gen. 20:7; Ex. 20:5; Jer. 31:29; Lam. 5:7), either by way of example or “collateral” punishment. Some individually committed sins have an effect on the whole of society as evidenced by Achan’s transgression (Josh. 7). Happily, individual piety may have good effects as well (Prov. 14:26). But when it comes to salvation, it is always an individual issue. Ezekiel again is instructive when he warns the nation concerning inevitable judgment that “though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God” (14:14). There are indeed corporate blessings and promises integral to God’s gracious covenant, but salvation is personal.

That God made man to be an individual is a key component in answering the question “what is man?” The implications of rephrasing the question back to “who am I?” should have a sobering and urgent effect on every one us. Every individual is distinct from another and is accountable to God for who he is and what he does (2 Cor. 5:10); only Christ can save others by His own righteousness.

Yet God has intended man to be a social being: “Two are better than one” (Eccl. 4:9–12). God’s first assessment that something was not right with the world was when He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [sufficient] for him” (Gen. 2:18). So God created woman to be man’s complement, his counterpart (Gen. 2:20, 23). Marriage is the first social institution established to satisfy this essential need. Together man and woman constitute a whole; “they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). It is a relationship of love (Song 6:3, 9; Prov. 5:18–20; Eccl. 9:9). It is the institution for procreation (Gen. 1:28; 2:18; Prov. 12:4; 19:14), which is the beginning of the whole family structure, which is God’s gift (Ps. 127:3; 128:2; 113:9; 144:12). The love that is learned in family is to extend to other relationships as well (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 15:12–18; Micah 6:8). The family is the foundation of all social structure as is illustrated by Israel’s organization of nation, tribes, clans, and household (see Josh. 7:16–18).

Answering the question “what is man?” is multifaceted, but the Bible provides an overview that will help inform all the specific issues of “who I am.” “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7). In other words, “the body of divine instruction is complete, restoring the whole man.” If we are going to discover who we really are, the Bible is the mirror into which we need to look.

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Who Am I As God's Image-Bearer?

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

—GENESIS 1:27

What is it that sets man apart from the beast? The language of Genesis chapter 1 makes it very clear that it is the image of God in man that sets him apart from all other creatures.

At the outset, we need to understand that man shares certain important characteristics with animals. Of man we read, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground...” (Gen. 2:7), and of the animals, “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field...” (Gen. 2:19). Animals are described as “living creatures” (Gen. 1:20) and man, a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The same Hebrew words are used for both. What then distinguishes man from the animals?

The image of God in humanity is critical to our understanding of what makes us human.¹ But when it comes to defining what exactly this image of God in man is, our task becomes somewhat more difficult. What precisely is it that separates you and me from the animals? Those who embrace an evolutionary view of the image of God would have us believe that it has to do with man's function in creation (stewardship and development of creation), his ability to operate in a variety of relations (with God, others, and creation), and man's unique abilities (his capacity to care for creation). This makes the image of God in man a matter of function and ability rather than a matter of being; what man *does* in relation to creation and not what man *is*.

However, it is exactly what man *is* that makes him utterly unique in God's creation. He is made in God's image and the beast is not (Gen. 1:27). It is only of man that it is written, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7a). This breath of life imparted to man is entirely different from the biological life that both man and beast possess (Gen. 1:24, 2:7b). The Hebrew word used here for “breath” is a different one than used before (Gen. 1:30); it is always used in reference to God for the life He imparts to man and not to animals. God formed man from the dust, much the same as a potter lovingly shapes and molds his wares, and then breathed into him life, a divine inbreathing that we can describe as a “kiss of life” or “mouth to mouth resuscitation.” What an exquisite picture of intimacy and care for man whom He formed as the pinnacle of His creation! This divine kiss of life sets man apart because

through it God communicated to man something of Himself, enduing him with some of His divine attributes and thus separating and making him different from the beasts.²

While God has attributes that He does not share with humanity (for example, God is self-existent, all-knowing and all powerful), we can still see His shared attributes in humanity today, even though they are distorted by sin. Here we think of language, creativity, love, holiness, immortality, intellect, practice of religion and freedom, to mention just a few. This places man far above the beasts, as David sings out in Psalm 8:4–7: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field.”

Sooner or later we have to ask the question, “Why?” Why did God raise man up above all of His creatures to be the vessels through which He displays His divine identity? The answer is simply so that man, through his God-given identity, would display God. One writer puts it this way: “A human being is a creature of God with a nature designed by God to consciously display God's greatness and His beauty and His worth.” This is our core identity as created beings. We are creatures of God with a nature designed by God to consciously display God's greatness, beauty, and worth. This was originally what we were created to be in Adam, and this is our essential nature in our second creation in Christ. What we lost is being restored, but it's the same nature with the same design to make much of God. In other words, my fundamental identity is that I am designed by God to display God's identity. My fundamental nature is that I was created and re-created to display God's nature.³

This is one of the reasons why the worship of images is forbidden (Ex. 20:4). God has already created an image of Himself in man who, in turn, should reflect that image. Why build images of God when God has seven billion image-bearers spread across the face of the earth? But we need to understand the purpose of an image to prevent mistaken notion that man is to worship man, which, in our day and age, is far more common than we would care to admit. We need only to think of movie stars, pop stars, and, yes, even some high-profile pastors who are blatantly worshipped as gods.



The wax models in Madame Tussaud's in London are strikingly similar to the actual persons they image; but they are only images that direct us back to the real people. So too, man as God's image-bearer points us back to God Himself. The mirror only reflects a small part of the whole person yet bears strong resemblance to the one whose image is being reflected. The image in the mirror has no real substance of itself, but only reflects. The moon of itself has no inherent light but only reflects the full glory of the light of the sun! You and I display our true identity only insofar as we in some measure reflect the glories of our Creator. All other creatures, yes, even the heavens themselves, declare the glories of their Creator (Ps. 19), but it is man alone who *consciously* is to display the glory of His Creator. It is in man that God becomes visible, as it were. No higher honour can be accorded man than being made in the image of the One who made him.

This was the glory that belonged to Adam before his tragic fall in Eden. Since his fall into sin, man has been caught up in relentlessly pursuing self-identity, self glory, and self-exaltation, choosing not to be the man reflected in the mirror but to be the man himself; hurling the moon away, choosing to rather be the sun itself. In short, to be God and not His image-bearer, as the serpent tricked him into believing in the garden (Gen. 3:5). What a dreadful fall from that glory to which God had originally created man! Man's true God-given identity was lost. Now man in a variety of destructive ways does his utmost to destroy that image wherewith he was created, as the demoniac in Mark 5:5 demonstrates. The image of God in man, however, was not entirely lost in the fall, praise God, but it became a sinister and malformed replica of what it once was. No longer a shining new limousine, but a wreck on the highway.

Where man failed, our gracious God stepped in and took action. Our glorious identity needed to be restored in some way. To the praise of His glorious grace, He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam, to undo what the first Adam had done and so restore us. He died to bear the penalty for our treason and rebellion against God our Creator and was raised for our justification. He poured out His Holy Spirit into our lives and began the long process of re-creating us. Now with Paul we can say, In Christ, I

am a new creature. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:18). What exactly is this new creature? He is the "new man" being renewed after the image of his creator" (Col. 3:10). Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, works through His Holy Spirit in that glorious and ongoing process of renewal that in this life will never be perfected, but the Christian can be assured that more and more he will be conformed after the image of his Master. A day will come, however—and what a day that will be—when, though we do not yet know what we will be, yet "when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). For once and for always, man will fully and forever be what God created him to be: not only a receptacle but a radiant transmitter of the effulgence of God's glory. Dear Christian, this is your true and final identity in your Lord Jesus. Is this not worth striving for, even in the difficulties and afflictions of the sanctification process?

Last, being God's image-bearers in the here and now bears responsibilities, particularly for the Christian. First is the use of our tongues. James warns us that with the tongue we "curse men, which are made after the similitude [in the image] of God" (3:9). We curse God by speaking evil of others who are made in His image! If Christians truly realized this, they would be less inclined to slander others. Then, second, taking the life of another is forbidden, as God told Noah; the blood of another may not be shed at the hands of men "for in the image of God made he man" (Gen. 9:6). Man becomes so embroiled in the "ethics" of capital punishment that he forgets what lies at the heart of murder: the destruction of one of God's image-bearers. It is an abomination in the eyes of God for man to do what alone is the right of God to do.

1. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 12.

2. John Rendle Short, *Creation 4*, no 1 (March 1981): 21–29.

3. John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/identity-and-desire>. Accessed on April 7, 2016.

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The Sinfulness of Man's Natural State

Man in his natural state is altogether corrupt: both soul and body are polluted, as the Apostle Paul explains (Rom. 3:10–18). In the soul, the natural corruption has spread itself through the faculties of the understanding, the will, the affections, the conscience, and the memory. This corruption also extends to the body.

THE CORRUPTION OF THE UNDERSTANDING

The understanding, that leading faculty, is spoiled from its original glory, and is now covered over with confusion. “There is none that understandeth” (Rom. 3:11). This can be seen in two ways: First, there is a natural weakness in the minds of men with respect to spiritual things. It is a hard task to teach people the common principles of the Christian faith and to make truths so plain that they may understand them. Second, man's understanding is naturally overwhelmed with complete darkness in spiritual things. We are spiritually blind and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. Every natural man's heart then is a mass of darkness, disorder, and confusion, no matter how refined they may appear in the sight of others. Their natural bias is towards evil and opposition to spiritual truths.

THE CORRUPTION OF THE WILL

The will, that commanding faculty, which at first was faithful and ruled by God, is now turned traitor, and rules with and for the devil. God planted it in man, “wholly a right seed,” but now it is a “degenerate plant of a strange vine.” There is, in the unrenewed will, an utter inability for what is truly good and acceptable in the sight of God. How often does the light so shine before men's eyes, that they cannot but see what is right. Yet they follow, and cannot but follow, what is wrong. Further, there is in the unrenewed will an aversion to good. One not only cannot come to Christ, but he will not come (John 5:40). Consider how the will of the natural man rebels against the light. Light sometimes enters in, because he is not able to keep it out; but he loves darkness rather than light. Sometimes by the force of truth, the outer door of the understanding is broken up, but the inner door of the will remains fast bolted.

THE CORRUPTION OF THE AFFECTIONS

The affections are also corrupted. The unrenewed person's affections are wholly disordered and distempered; they are as the unruly horse, that either will not receive, or violently runs away with, the rider. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth; his heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on (Acts 9:5). His face is towards hell, his back towards heaven; and therefore God

calls him to return. He loves what he should hate, and hates what he should love; joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor. If the unrenewed man's affections are set on lawful objects, then they are either excessive or defective.

CORRUPTION OF THE CONSCIENCE

The conscience is corrupt and defiled (Titus 1:15). It is an evil eye that fills one's life with much darkness and confusion, being naturally unable to do its office. Until the Lord, by letting in new light to the soul, awakens the conscience, it remains sleepy and inactive. The light of the natural conscience in good and evil, sin and duty, is very defective. It may check for greater sins, but it cannot stop the more subtle workings of sin because it cannot discern them. Thus conscience will fly in the face of many, if at any time they be drunk, swear, neglect prayer, or be guilty of any great sin. Yet these same people may live in peace with their unbelief and remain strangers to spiritual worship and the life of faith.

CORRUPTION OF THE MEMORY

Even the memory bears evident marks of this natural corruption. What is good and worthy to be remembered makes only such slender impressions that the impression easily wears off. The memory, as a leaking vessel, lets it slip. And yet the memory so easily retains what ought to be forgotten. Even though one may try to get a wrong thought out of his mind, yet it sticks like glue.

CORRUPTION OF THE BODY

The body itself is partaker of this corruption and defilement, so far as it is capable thereof. The body is such a furious beast, of such temper, that if it is not beat down, kept under, and brought into subjection, it will cast the soul into much sin and misery. Its eyes and ears are open doors, by which impure motions and sinful desires enter the soul. Its tongue is a world of iniquity. Its throat is an open sepulcher. Its feet run the devil's errands. Its belly is made a god. The whole man by nature is corrupted.

The natural man, while in this state, grows worse and worse; the soul is made worse by the body, and the body by the soul. Thus the poor creature stands out against God and goodness until a day of power comes, in which he is made a new creature.

Thomas Boston was a Scottish pastor in the late 17th and early 18th century. This is adapted from his *Human Nature In Its Fourfold State*, from the discussion on the natural state of unregenerate man.

Identity and Contemporary Culture

The Problem With Not Using the Mirror

The problem with much of contemporary culture is that people are no longer spending any time reflecting on who they are. Many of the issues coursing through our countries stem from a lack of proper understanding about what God's Word says about human identity.

CULTURE SAYS

Contemporary culture says, I define myself. I should decide how long my life should be. I decide which lives matter. I decide what my sexual identity is. I decide how to respond to the politics of the day. I decide what is best for my kids. I decide what I want from marriage. No one else and no objective norms should direct how I live my life.

Defining itself the way it pleases, culture allows itself to become unkempt and ugly.

CULTURE FORGETS

By saying what it does, contemporary culture forgets that we need to see ourselves as God sees us. God says all life is valuable, and all lives are created in His image. His people are from every race. He made people male and female. He has appointed leaders in the land that we would live righteous and peaceable lives. Parents are responsible to guide and teach their children. Marriages are to be supporting, sacrificial, lifelong, monogamous relationships. God says there is truth, and a way to walk in the truth. By refusing to look into the mirror of God's Word, culture is not only choosing to become disheveled, but is mocking the God who gave the mirror.

CULTURE SHOWS

However, this cannot continue; neglecting God's norms cannot bring blessing. It only results in contradiction and inconsistency. It makes no sense to weaken the value of the life of the unborn and elderly, and yet demand that no teen be bullied. It makes no sense to ask for respectful relations between races, and yet never work together. It makes no sense to desire sexual fulfillment, and yet leave a string of broken and abusive relationships in your wake. It makes no sense to pursue high quality healthcare and yet promote

destructive lifestyles. It makes no sense to try to ask for foster and adoptive parents, and yet promote family structures that lead to family disintegration.

Avoiding the mirror of God's Word only tells everybody else you don't care about God's Word. Yes, looking into the mirror will bring out sin. It will reveal the need for value changes, perspective changes, attitude changes, relational changes. But without looking into it, there will be a downward spiral. If things continue the way they are, apart from grace, there will be a total disintegration and descent into chaos.

CULTURE NEEDS

What does much of contemporary culture then need? It needs to look into the mirror of God's law and recognize the need for repentance. It needs to turn from wickedness and bow before the One who sees beyond the visible and straight into the hearts of everyone. It needs to find in Christ the forgiveness for all the past saying and forgetting. Contemporary culture also needs to find the mirror of righteous liberty and recognize the need for obedience to God's Word.

Identity is not "plastic": it is not to be shaped purely by social and cultural history and personal choice. It is to be based on the revelation God has given concerning how He made people. There will certainly be superficial social and cultural and personal differences, but our ultimate identity is not shaped by any of those differences or even by our religious upbringing; it is shaped by looking into the one good mirror and desiring to live accordingly. That one good mirror is God's Word. As individuals and as a culture, we need to look into that mirror and submit to what it shows us. Let us, as Christians, not refuse to see who we really are. Let us not be those who look in the mirror and forget. Rather, let us look into the mirror and see God's perfect law of liberty, and then gladly continue in it. May we know the full blessing of obedience to our Lord until the day when full transformation is complete.

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Personal Responsibility and the Gospel

This question “Who am I?” is closely related to “Who is God?” If I were still an unbeliever, God is my judge and will condemn me to eternal perdition unless I repent and believe the gospel. So the answer to the question of my identity is I am a sinner and a reprobate unless God intervenes and saves me. If and when, however, I come to faith in God by His gracious gospel, God then not only is my divine judge but also my heavenly Father.

God’s common way to save sinners is to bring them into His family. Or to put it differently, He will bring them into His covenant and call them His people. That’s what He did with Abraham, making a covenant with him and with his descendants. He continues to work the same way today, as Peter testified at Pentecost: “For the promise is to you and to your children,” (Acts 2:39). Then he adds, “...and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Continuing His pattern of keeping covenant with His people, He now expands it to include the Gentiles.

CONVICTION

When the people heard Peter’s preaching, “they were pricked in their heart” and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). This has always been God’s common way to save sinners. Though the entire nation of Israel was led out of Egypt, not all were saved, because “with many of them God was not well pleased” (1 Cor. 10:5). Why not?

They did not repent and believe their God when they were convicted of their sins when He spoke to them, “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). As they were set apart from the world as His people to serve and obey Him, so we are today. Since God is the Lord our God, the answer to the “Who am I?” question is: I am one of God’s people. This is an awesome privilege but also an awesome responsibility.

When God speaks to us, as He did to Israel, He does so through His Word, read or preached. This always includes both law and gospel. I love our tradition of reading God’s law every Lord’s Day morning, followed by gospel preaching. He commands perfection while at the same time providing it for us. He knows we can’t and won’t obey, by

nature. But we can, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. So when we hear the law read, it must not be our first impulse to do our best, but flee to God’s best, His Son. It is meant to convict us of sin, repent, and believe in Him.

CONFESSION

Whether we are inside or outside the covenant, Peter’s promise comes to all who hear this convicting Word of God that not only *have* we sinned, but we *are* sinners. So the question of identity is easily answered: I am a sinner. Even the very best I have ever done or said is polluted with sin. Any good is God’s doing, so I can never use it as credit but only as a deficit, putting me further into debt than I already am. As a sinner I can do nothing to save myself. I can and will be saved only by being “made acceptable in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

Only the perfect obedience of God’s beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased, can make Him pleased with us and we with Him. This obedience is obtained not by works but by faith. When God convicts a sinner “of sin, righteousness and judgment” (John 16:10), though we cannot believe the gospel without the Holy Spirit, we can by grace. The Spirit who convicts also prompts the sinner to confess his sin and his Savior. It is His delight to lead us into all truth and reveal Christ to me (vv. 13–14).

When I confess that I am a sinner and take refuge in Jesus, He will receive me—not *because* of my confession but *by means* of it. The conviction and confession of sin are God’s means to draw a sinner to Himself through Christ. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). The best evidence of being elect is to come to Christ as a hopelessly and helplessly lost sinner. Then, based on God’s own Word, the *Who am I* question can be answered: I am a saved sinner. Yes, even more boldly: I am a saint.

CONVERSION

The Apostle Paul often begins his letters to the churches addressing each and every one as saints. For example in 1 Corinthians 1:2, he writes, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” What a striking and enlightening opening line, especially considering that the church



in Corinth could be better described as sinners! However, first they are sanctified, or set apart, in Christ Jesus. Second, in the KJV the words “to be” are in italics; it seems the translators sought to safeguard two things: that they were actually *declared* saints, and that they yet had to learn to *live* as saints.

So, how do we answer the question, Who am I? I am a saint who still sins. The Lord has set me apart, convicted me of my sins, and caused me to confess them; and He has also caused me to trust Him both for the forgiveness of my sins (my justification) and for the mortification of my sins (my sanctification). I am converted, but I also continue to be converted. This truth is confirmed in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, where we are called to mortify all sin, “seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds. And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:9–10). But then in verse 12, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness....”

Thus, if indeed we are in Christ, we will bear fruit. Paul writes, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1–2). As we place our trust in Christ and seek to imitate Him, we will “above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14). In other words, it won’t just be about do’s and don’ts but about living and loving like Christ and having our image be renewed in Him (v. 10). We may give evidence of that in our words and actions. Paul writes, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Who am I? I am God’s work in progress.

CONSUMMATION

God not only works in me but also puts me to work: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12–13). So I am not only God’s work in progress but I am a co-worker, a laborer “together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9).

Even though I’m called to do the perfect will of God, I also know that it’s out of my reach in my lifetime. “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). The more I look to Christ, I realize how I fall infinitely short of His perfection, and the more I yearn for the perfection to come. Just as we know that the whole creation groans, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22–23).

But this final redemption of my body and soul will surely come at last. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Then the question, Who am I?, will be forever absorbed in, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song 6:3).

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Life in the Spirit

CLOSE TO JESUS

When we're in close proximity to another person, we learn a lot about them in a short amount of time. If you happen to be seated between two strangers on a plane, by the end of the flight you'll likely have learned what they like to read, how they interact with others and even how loudly they chew their food!

Have you ever stopped to think how deeply personal and intimate the disciples' experience of living with Jesus was? They had three years of doing life with Jesus, from mundane travel to mountain-top experiences. Jesus did not hold them at an arm's length; He cooked fish for them, broke bread with them, took their cracked and dirty feet into His hands and washed them, sat in crowded boats with them, and jostled through large crowds alongside them.

There were times of lively conversations, comfortable silences, and praying together. Jesus knew their thoughts and hearts like no one else. He spoke to their doubts, called out their unbelief, and comforted them with the Father's love. And then, in the end, He died for them. How much more intimate could a relationship be?

The loss of this face-to-face relationship with Jesus would be staggering. But before dying, Jesus had many "heart-to-heart" moments with them, giving encouragement and counsel for life after His death. He knew this separation would cause loss, pain, and confusion; yet He repeatedly assured them that He would never leave them as orphans and that He would continue to be with them. But how?

CONTINUED NEARNESS IN THE SPIRIT

Death would sever the physical connection of the disciples' life with Jesus; what could possibly comfort them and keep them going when He was gone? Maybe they worried this season of life would fade, like a sweet dream you can never relive. Would they return to their fishing boats and tax tables, left only to recall "the good old days"?

Jesus assured them that life, not spiritual death, was ahead. He would be with them in a new and different way—through another One He was sending: the Holy Spirit. "I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). Christ went so far as to say it would be to their *advantage* for Him to leave and for the Holy Spirit to come! This must have been hard to grasp. He promised that the Spirit would dwell in them, would never leave them, and would guide them into all truth. Their lessons were not over but had just begun; instead of parables on the mountainsides with Jesus, the Holy Spirit would now teach them and remind them of Jesus's words: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another

Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16–17). The death of Jesus would not lessen their relationship with Him; rather, it would become stronger and more vibrant through the power of the Spirit.

This level of spiritual life and intimacy is meant for us, too. Just as the disciples, we have every opportunity for a vibrant and intimate relationship with our triune God through the Holy Spirit—and not just on Sundays in church.

It can be easy to agree with a theological book on the Holy Spirit but still be confused about what it means to have a divine resident in our heart. How does this reality actually affect and transform our day-to-day living?

DEFINING WHO WE ARE

The way we act, think, and speak is a result of who we view ourselves to be—our identity. J. I. Packer says in *Knowing God* that the Holy Spirit's main job in our lives is to "make and keep us conscious that we are God's children by free grace through Jesus Christ." In other words, He regenerates us and then acts as the legal representative in our hearts, reminding us of our identity and legal status—adopted children.

If you're like me, you know this with your head but still try to rummage up a sense of identity by the accumulation of your failures, successes, roles, and responsibilities. Many days I go to bed with an acute sense of failure—I can never do or be enough, and I feel defeated. But as I click on my lamp and pull out my Bible, the Holy Spirit reminds me of truth: Jesus is enough and I am in Him. When spiritual amnesia has woven itself deep in my mind, He teaches me the same thing again the next day.

If we don't understand who we are in Christ, our faith will be small, our witness weak, and our love diminished. This is why the Holy Spirit works tirelessly after regenerating us to produce a real awareness of our redeemed status with God and our identity as His children. When we grasp this, our lives are transformed into expressions of faith, assurance, and joy.

EMBRACING THE FATHER

When I first met my husband, we were both reserved and hesitant as we got to know each other. Fourteen years later, it's a different story! When we feel more sure of a relationship, it brings a new freedom, intimacy, and boldness with it. So it is when we grasp our identity as adopted children of God; our hearts will naturally embrace God as our Father and approach Him as such. This is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

How can we know? “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6). These two verses speak of *freedom* and *intimacy*. Imagine if we tried to earn our status as children of God: we would fear every day because we fail every day! But our relationship with the Father has been secured in Christ and can never be revoked.

Jesus repeatedly pointed the disciples to this freedom and intimacy with the Father as a result of His work: “he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father” (John 14:21), and again, “if a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

Like the disciples, we too have freedom in Christ to approach the Father as His children. Doesn’t that bring you to new levels of joy and humility?

ACTING LIKE CHILDREN

Usually that phrase is not a compliment! But in this case, it is. It’s an inevitable result of understanding who I am in Christ and embracing the Father. We will act as His children by loving the brethren, living for God’s glory, and becoming more like Jesus.

The Spirit lives in us and guarantees He will bring this work to completion in us: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). He will oppose anything in your heart that will lead you away from Jesus, whether it be temptation, unbelief, or doubt. He will not let you go; He is a friend who is utterly for you. The reality of His ministry in our lives will be seen in simple yet transformative ways.

It will be found less in seeking feelings and experiences and more in actually seeking God Himself through concrete ways—Scripture, meditation, and prayer. It will be found less in mystical experiences of strong emotions that don’t produce fruit and more in living life with the Word open, allowing the Spirit to weave it into our hearts and bear fruit in our lives: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23). It will be found less by seeking the Spirit through special experiences and more about following His leading to see the beauty and glory of Jesus and responding in sin-conquering, life-embracing ways.

THE WORD CONNECTION

Do you struggle to understand your identity in Christ even after confessing faith? Do you lack an intimate relationship with the Father? Is it hard to find any fruit of being filled with the Spirit? Ask the Spirit to make the Word alive in your life—it’s what He does, taking objective truth and

making it alive and powerful. But you need to be in the Word for that to happen. If you read through Acts, you’ll find the disciples and apostles had the Word ruminating in their minds, spilling from their lips, and directing their lives.

A Word-filled life often means a Spirit-filled life. Maybe you’re in a season of life with little “quiet time” and have to do this creatively, but do whatever you need to saturate your life with the Word. For me, it means saturating the “dead spaces” of my days with the Word. I have podcasts, sermons, and the Bible app downloaded on my phone with a set of ear buds always on hand. If the kids are napping and I’ve got cleaning to do, I pop in my ear buds and work while my heart and mind are filled. Sitting in a long line for the car wash? Listen to the next sermon in the series. Create little lifelines wherever you can.

Get Word-filled music to saturate your ears and heart. The Spirit uses this often to draw you to God in faith and worship during doubt, coldness, struggle, and pain. We have CD’s of Scripture set to music in the car; many times the Spirit has ministered to my heart and moved me to worship as I play these songs “for the kids.”

Have a stack of books on your coffee table for kids and adults—books filled with the Word. Maybe it’s a book of nature or art with thoughtful texts from Scripture or a kid’s study Bible. Have copies of the Bible easily and always accessible for you and your kids to use during family worship or for spontaneous readings. It’s through the Word that we often discover sin that needs to be confessed, trust that needs to be restored, obedience that needs to follow, and the Savior to be treasured. It’s one thing to read and it’s another to have the Holy Spirit reveal Jesus Christ in your heart. So as you read (or listen), pray!

EVERY REASON TO REJOICE

If you read through Acts, you’ll see everything Jesus promised the disciples came true. They were not left as orphans but instead lived with a strong awareness of God *with* them. They did receive the ministry of the Spirit, making them bold in their witness, alive in the Word, and vibrant and intimate in their relationship with the Lord.

We too will never be left as spiritual orphans, and He’s given the ministry of His Spirit to guarantee it. Do you feel the security and freedom in that? You have an advocate in heaven, Jesus, standing on your behalf before the Father. You have a heavenly Father desiring for you to come to Him as His child, placing your implicit trust and love in Him. And finally, you have an advocate here on earth, the Holy Spirit, assuring you of these realities and actively completing the good work in you.

He has done everything. May our life-song sing to Him!

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Identity in Christ

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

In his letters, the apostle Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” more than seventy times. Clearly, this idea that believers are “in Christ” profoundly moved him. But what does it mean? How can believers find their identity in this?

First, if we are in Christ, it means we have been born again. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again or else we cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). To be born again is to be spiritually reborn, literally, “from above.” Being born again means sinners are brought from death to life (Eph. 2:1, 1 John 3:14).

The thought of this spiritual rebirth is so profound Paul wrote about it often so as to impress the truth of it in the reader’s mind. Paul writes to the Corinthians that anyone—boy or girl, man or woman, learned or simple, rich or poor—who is in Christ is a new creature. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). A new creation implies a creator, and that creator is God. He created the universe by the word of His power (Gen. 1–2), and He re-creates sinners living in that universe by the power of His Word. As believers, our identity in Christ begins with being born again and receiving the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Second, Paul writes that our new spiritual identity involves being in Christ. In the Old Testament, believers found safety in the ark (Gen. 6:7, cf. 2 Peter 2:5). When guilty, they found protection in a city of refuge (Numbers 35). In the New Testament, believers are in the vine (John 15:4–5). Peter writes that saved souls are living stones in the building of which Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone (1 Peter 2:4–6). All these are pictures of born-again believers being in Christ. We do not lose our personality, but we lose our primary personal identity. Before being born again, we were at the center of our world, lovers of self (2 Tim. 3:2). But as a new creation in Christ, our primary personal identity is now “found in him” (Phil. 3:9). We are Christians not so much because Jesus is in our hearts, but foundationally because we are in Jesus Christ’s heart!

Do you identify yourself as being in Christ? When we do, we will be filled with joyous praise and humble gratitude for the Lord’s undeserved mercies! Such a glorious truth

does not engender pride, but stimulates the soul to praise-filled worship for His life-giving grace.

Third, we find our identity in Christ as we seek to follow His example and walk as He walked. We find our identity in our reliance on the grace of the Holy Spirit to be Christ-like. We seek to reflect His characteristics of patience, wisdom, love, diligence, holiness, kindness, and forgiveness. We try to let our words be always seasoned with grace (Col. 4:6) so that others could see that we have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

We also find our Christian identity in Christ through our obedience to His Word. Christ delighted in every aspect of God’s law. When through faith we do delight to keep God’s law we do so out of obedience to Him “and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). We should grieve more when we feel like God’s law is a burden.

Lastly, our identity in Christ involves suffering persecution. We are promised, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). This can be the hard part of our identity with Christ. When we seek to walk the Christian life, opposition can raise its stubborn head (John 15:20). We are tempted to compare our life to the apparent ease of the world and secretly echo Asaph: “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps. 73:3). We may even tend to think in those difficult times of persecution, Where is God when I need Him most? But during persecution, He is not so far away that we cannot see Him; He is so close that we gaze beyond Him! How we should learn to joy more in Christ during such times! “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12).

Are you in Christ by faith? Are you seeking to walk in Christ’s footsteps? Are you suffering well for His sake? Do you identify with Christ Jesus the Lord? The wonder of His sovereign and merciful grace is that, for those who are united to Him, He is in us and we are in Him. One day He will come again and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:3). As we await that great day, may we glory in His name and not only find the reason for our existence in Him but also find our identity in Jesus Christ.

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Understanding the Responsibilities of Full-time Students

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

—DANIEL 1:17

For those whose chief desire is to know the Lord more fully, it can be difficult to appropriately engage in secular academics. Between the workload of our studies and the generally anti-God atmosphere of a secular school, worshipping God can become increasingly difficult.

Although there are not many examples of Christians participating in secular academics found in Scripture, the few that arise are sufficient to establish several guidelines. According to Daniel 1, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were all “skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science” (Dan. 1:4). They were clearly men who knew the extent of the secular academics of their day. Since they were favored by the king of Babylon, we can assume they were skilled communicators. And interestingly, Daniel and his friends are generally regarded to have been teenagers during the time of the captivity.

We can gather from this that God does not frown upon academics. In fact, quite the opposite is true. God created the world and all the things in it. He also created human minds to think and reason. Among many other reasons, God gave Adam the task of naming the animals in the garden so that Adam could learn about the world he was caring for; God gave us rational minds in order to learn more about the world in which He has placed us. Realizing that God has given us the ability to study and learn helps us study more diligently.

Although Daniel was well educated and favored among men, he was, more importantly, well schooled in his faith and favored by God. As a result, Daniel is recorded to have made a very clear decision prior to entering the kingdom of Babylon. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat” (Dan. 1:8). Before engaging the world around him, Daniel made a commitment to serve God above all else and not to let the ways of the world defile his mind, soul, and body. The consequences of this decision are expounded upon early as Daniel refused to eat the food of the pagans. Although the results of the decision were risky and likely embarrassing for Daniel, he stood on his religious convictions. The rest of the historical portion of the book of Daniel is centered on these four Jewish men who refused to participate in worldly activities because of their dedication to their faith.

The lesson of Daniel’s commitment to religious purity is the most important aspect of being a full-time student. Before

attending a secular college, every believer should recognize that he or she is entering a religiously hostile area. Subsequently, every Christian student should make a commitment to not allow the world to defile him. Although it is impossible to go through college and not be assaulted by some worldly teaching, having a firm conviction of faith and a solid foundation in the Scriptures is the only antidote for observed ungodliness.

There are a few more observations from Daniel’s life. First, notice that he did not argue with every person he came across in Babylon. When he refused to eat the king’s meat, Daniel simply notified the appropriate person. While college is definitely a mission field and Christ commands us to share the gospel, it is not appropriate to enter college as a “teen missionary” with thoughts of reforming the entire campus. Such an approach only succeeds in distracting you from your main reason for being there. When opportunities arise, share your faith. However, take Daniel and his friends’ examples and don’t try to debate every philosophy and anthropology professor.

Second, observe where Daniel obtained his knowledge: from God. God granted these four men gifted minds and wisdom. Therefore, prayer is the most important ingredient in being a student. Ask God for His blessing on the classes and for a guarded heart in conversation.

Finally, note that Daniel never objected to learning the ways of the Chaldeans. He accepted where God providentially placed him and took on the role of a student to the best of his ability. Daniel clearly learned what was taught him as he eventually became the ruler of the province of Babylon (Dan. 2:48).

If God has placed you in college, use this time to the best of your ability. Be careful not to spend all of your time in studying, however, as a balance between studies and time in God’s Word is vital. Never use college as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. It is easy to use studying as a reason to not read the Bible or attend weeknight church services; however, God calls us to be followers of Him first and students second. All the academics in the world cannot amount to time spent in the Word. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26a). There are many examples in recent history of godly men and women attending college whose biographies are helpful and inspirational. Reading these can help you grasp what being a godly young man or woman looks like in a college setting.

Although each student has a unique situation and calling, the guidelines from Scripture are clear: serve God above all else, and do all things He has called us to do as unto Him.

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Vocation and Honor:

Understanding My Responsibility as an Employee

Two biblical concepts are helpful when thinking about the believer's responsibility as an employee: vocation and honor.

Paul writes that believers are new creatures with a ministry of reconciliation, for whom “all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:15–20). The creational calling (which was part of what God decreed “very good”) was for Adam and Eve to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Adam was created in God’s image—distinct from every other creature (Gen. 1:26)—and the task given to him was to reflect a Creator-God who does not idly observe His creation from a distance but is actively engaged in the world through His works of creation, providence, and redemption.

The fall profoundly impacted Adam’s vocation. The ground was cursed. Thorns and thistles grew and the bread that would come from the fields required sweat and toil (Gen. 3:18–19). But it did not negate his Edenic calling, nor was it a sentence of hopeless misery. The promised Messiah would crush Satan’s head and, as the familiar words of Isaac Watts remind us in that Christmas hymn:

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

The redemption earned by Jesus Christ is a complete redemption, not only covering the guilt of sin but also its effects. True, the process of sanctification is not instantaneous. Believers are called to live in both the now and the not yet, but we live (and work) with the confidence that the groans of creation, which longs for its complete redemption, will be answered (Rom. 8:21–25). In the new earth, we will still work, but we won’t pull weeds.

These are not just theological truths worthy of reflection in devotional settings; they are life-changing truths which impact our approach to our everyday occupation. Had Adam not fallen, we still would work; it is part of our creational calling. So we approach our work with a delight because when we work well, we reflect the image of the God who made us and whom we are called to love and serve. Our everyday work is a place where we are able to read an “elegant book” which should “lead us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His eternal power and divinity...which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse” (Belgic Confession, Article 2). This might be realized in those wonderful “aha” moments when we stand amazed at the advance of a technology which the Creator God has embedded in His good creation and we are privileged to discover or

utilize. It also occurs in the faithfulness of our work routines, which are patterned after a God of order who in His own pattern modeled a rhythm between work and rest. We cannot fully worship God on the days set aside for rest when we neglect to follow His example during our six days of labor. And if we worship a God who tells us that He delights in a working scale (Prov. 11:1), should not the use of the artifacts of creation, which are the tools and objects of so much of our daily work, be an inspiration to worship? In order to understand the Christian’s calling as an employee, we need to build on the foundation of our vocation as human beings. We are image-bearers of a God who works.

But vocation is not simply a general principle regarding general human purpose. It is a personally applied principle: each of us has our own specific calling. Most will be familiar with the biblical metaphor of the body (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12) that teaches us that we are not all the same but have unique personal gifts and callings. Discovering our calling requires an assessment of our own gifts, passions, and temperament, as well as God’s providential leadings in our lives in which doors are opened and closed. And while stewardship of our gifts is a key component to discovering our calling, we should resist the individualistic temptation to think about our employment circumstances simply in terms of “what’s best for me and my family.” Surely, asking how we might be used in service of the kingdom of God and its expansion is a necessary and relevant consideration.

In a society where social status is so linked to our employment, it is helpful to remind ourselves that, biblically speaking, following our vocation rather than achieving a position is what is pleasing to God. Calvin said that “no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eyes of God” (*Institutes*, 3.10.6). Hugh Latimer reminds us of how finding dignity in our work directs us to think rightly of Christ: “This is a wonderful thing, that the Savior of the world, and the king above all kings, was not ashamed to labor; yea, and to use so simple an occupation. Here he did sanctify all manner of occupations.”¹

If vocation is one under-appreciated theme in contemporary society, the biblical concept of honor is another. Human autonomy and rights are the hallmarks of our egalitarian age. The world is viewed through the lens of “me.” A biblical lens runs very counter-culturally. “What is your only comfort in life and death?” the Heidelberger famously asks. “That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ” is the believers’



answer. I belong to another—I am a slave for Christ. And in all of life, including as an employee, I serve Him.

These teachings have been abused through history and many articles could be written exploring why this is a license neither for totalitarian employers to misuse their economic power and privilege nor for irresponsible employees to abdicate responsibility or perform work as mindless duty. Holy principles, when misused as secular tools, can have devastating consequences. We cannot escape the reality that an employer-employee relationship, as well as the inter-employee relationships in a workplace (or a supplier-customer relationship for that matter), involves power differentials. Transactions are enacted and economic exchanges take place, and there is usually not equal power on either side of the transaction. In a world where the curse of sin is real, this becomes a setting in which opportunities to take advantage of others are plentiful and easy to rationalize. The hurt and sin that occurs in workplaces can leave many feeling helpless. These are sins that need to be recognized and repented of. The Westminster Catechism describes the scope of the fifth commandment as “the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals” (QA 126). At its heart, honor can be understood as seeing others as God sees them. To honor someone requires an assessment of their worth.

While the term “employee” directs us to the specifics of the employer-employee relationship, it may be helpful to broaden the application to all of the relationships we encounter in the workplace. While the extent varies depending on our specific circumstance, work is by its nature a social activity that is rarely completed in isolation of others. The successful completion of our work requires relationships with many others. And while the command to love our neighbor and to be honest in our dealings applies here as everywhere else, there are workplace-specific dimensions of these relationships to which we also need to pay attention.

So what are the criteria that frame how we live within those relationships? It is easy to point out mistaken secular

standards which, although relatively easy to identify, are harder to avoid influencing our own behavior. “What’s in it for me?” “Who’s got power?” “How might I get ahead?” “Who do I like to work with?” Few of us can claim pure thoughts when it comes to our workplace relationships.

But there is a particular “Christian” challenge to thinking about workplace relationships that we need to be careful to avoid. While there is an appropriate assessment of all of our relationships as to whether the person we are dealing with is a believer or unbeliever, care needs to be taken that we do not frame our workplace relationships with that as a defining criterion. Showing preference to a fellow believer in the workplace (and in the process doing an injustice to a more-deserving unbeliever and devaluing his/her God-given skills and gifts) is one such example. If our calling is to honor others by respecting God’s gifts in them and utilizing our relationship with them in carrying out our vocations, we need to use appropriate and relevant criteria in our workplace relationships. Calvin warns not to neglect or despise the many gifts left in human nature lest “in despising the gifts, we insult the Giver” (*Institutes*, 1.1.15).

Vocation and honor are two underappreciated biblical themes relevant to the Christian’s calling in the workplace. Vocation directs us to understand our calling as human beings in service of God and His kingdom, and the individual and specific way we ought to carry it out. Honor directs us to interact with the many who are part of our workplace neighborhoods in a way that sees them as God sees them, acknowledging the gifts and responsibilities that they have been given. As we work in this way, we glorify our God who works, even as He provides us with the means to earn our daily bread.

1. Quoted in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as they Really Were*, 25.

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Who Am I as a Senior Citizen?

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.

—PSALM 92:14

We are living in an extraordinary period of history, particularly when we focus on our Western world. Never before in the history of mankind have men lived as well and as comfortably as we do in our Western society. We enjoy creature comforts that previous generations of kings and rulers could have only dreamed of, and we have access to health-care provisions that were unthinkable only a hundred years ago—even fifty years ago. As a result, the average life span in our Western world has increased dramatically during the past century. The National Institute of Aging addresses this as follows:

The dramatic increase in average life expectancy during the 20th century ranks as one of society's greatest achievements. Although most babies born in 1900 did not live past age 50, life expectancy at birth now exceeds 83 years in Japan—the current leader—and is at least 81 years in several other countries.... These improvements are part of a major transition in human health spreading around the globe at different rates and along different pathways.... In early nonindustrial societies, the risk of death was high at every age, and only a small proportion of people reached old age. In modern societies, most people live past middle age, and deaths are highly concentrated at older ages.¹

The NIA also informs us that “in 2010, an estimated 524 million people were aged 65 or older—8 percent of the world's population. By 2050, this number is expected to nearly triple to about 1.5 billion, representing 16 percent of the world's population.”²

This means that the number of senior citizens in our society has increased dramatically, and that is particularly true now that the so-called “baby-boomer” generation (to which I belong) is coming “of age.” As a result of the extraordinary healthcare our post-war generation has enjoyed, it is now becoming increasingly common for people to live well into their eighties or nineties. There are even a growing number of senior citizens who are passing the hundred-year mark.

Consequently, many more Christians are now reaching the age of the strong and the very strong, and that means that a growing number of us must learn incrementally what it means to live the Christian life as a senior citizen. However, to do so in a God-glorifying manner, aging Christians must have a clear grasp of their Christian identity, for only then will they be profitable during the aging process and will the words of Psalm 92:14 be an experiential reality: “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.”

The significance of understanding what our identity is as aging Christians becomes all the more clear when we briefly

focus on the challenges Christians increasingly face as they grow older. Many Christians never faced these challenges prior to the onset of the twentieth century, for they never lived to be that old.

CHALLENGE #1: RETIREMENT

Our society has arbitrarily determined that one should retire at the age of 65. An increasing number of people still enjoy excellent mental and physical health at this age, and would therefore be fit to engage in their profession well beyond this age. Therefore, for those who are still privileged to enjoy such health, mandated retirement can be, and often is, a dramatic event that affects them profoundly. For most people, their identity is very much defined by the work they do, and when suddenly that work is no longer part of their daily lives, retirement can precipitate a rather serious identity crisis. They suddenly feel that they are no longer making a meaningful contribution to their families and to society.

CHALLENGE #2: LOSS OF SPOUSE

So often when married couples arrive at the so-called “golden years” (or even before getting there), one of the spouses will pass away, and the surviving spouse must now journey life's pathway alone. By the time married couples arrive at this stage in life, spouses will have established such an intertwined identity that the decease of the one spouse will leave a gaping hole in the heart and life of the other.

CHALLENGE #3: HEALTH ISSUES

Though the number of senior citizens has increased dramatically during the past fifty years, for many of them, the so-called “golden years” are anything but golden, for as they gain in age, they often must deal with the increasing decline of their health and strength, and more often than not they have to live with debilitating illness, chronic pain, loss of mobility, etc. All of this can profoundly affect the mindset of senior citizens and make life increasingly difficult and unsettling.

CHALLENGE #4: DECLINE OF MENTAL FACULTIES

This, too, can be so unsettling, particularly when the senior citizen finds himself in the twilight zone between being of a sound mind and dementia. Often they sense what is happening and experience what to them is a frightening loss of control.

What a blessing it is, therefore, when one may enter the evening season of life as a Christian and deal with any or all of these challenges from a biblical perspective! By the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, the Christian will learn gradually that his true identity is ultimately not defined by either his status in life, his possessions, his health, or any other circumstances. Rather, his true identity is defined by

who he or she is in Christ. And if the Christian senior citizen is focused on that blessed reality, he will be able to deal with the challenges of old age. He will know that also these things must ultimately work together for his spiritual good (Rom. 8:28–29), and that none of the aforementioned challenges can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

How starkly different this is for unbelieving senior citizens. Their entire identity is wrapped up in this world and all that pertains to it. It is so disillusioning for them when, upon arriving at the golden years, their life in which they have invested all their time and energy begins to fall apart. They experience the reality of Psalm 90:10 that our years consist of “labor and sorrow”—many years of hard work, followed by the sorrow of old age and all of its challenges. In the end, nothing else will be left but feeble and frail human beings who have been betrayed by the siren song of this world, promising a happiness that eludes him in the end.

What a privilege it is therefore to live our senior years as a Christian when the challenges of old age increasingly become a thorn in the flesh. It is precisely then that believing seniors may experience that Christ will make His strength perfect in weakness, and that His grace is sufficient for our insufficiency (2 Cor. 12:9). Furthermore, if our focus may indeed be a scriptural one during our declining years, we will embrace by faith that our decline is but a reminder that our redemption is drawing nigh, which in turn should intensify our desire to be with Christ, which is far better (Phil 1:21–23). In other words, if, by grace, we enjoy the only comfort in life and death of not belonging to ourselves, but to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, we can face the sunset of our lives and deal with all the challenges that will come our way.

This is not to suggest that believing senior citizens do not know seasons of discouragement and frustration. It is true for them also that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. However, what an inexpressible privilege it is when during such seasons we have a heavenly Father we can turn to, who will prove to be our refuge and strength also in our old age, and a very present help in trouble (Psa. 46:1–2). Also then we will experience that when we are weak we are strong (2 Cor. 12:10).

However, we ought not to focus only on the negative aspects of our senior years. God’s Word has some remarkable things to say about these years. Here is a sampling:

“Thou shalt rise up before the hoary [gray] head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God” (Lev. 19:32).

“The hoary [gray] head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31).

“The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head” (Prov. 20:29).

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar [gray] hairs will I carry you” (Isa. 46:4).

In other words, God’s Word bestows a special honor upon the gray head, “if it be found in the way of righteousness.” Indeed, from a biblical perspective, life does not end at the age of 65. From the perspective of an ungodly and secular world, the life of a senior citizen is of little value, for our seniors can no longer contribute to the bottom line of our economy—and they are viewed as a burden to our government and our medical system.

The Bible, however, exhorts us to honor the gray head. And we are to do so for a good reason, for the senior citizens among us have a great deal to offer:

- Due to a lifetime of experience, they can offer wise counsel to younger people.
- Godly seniors can be great role models for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Are there not many believers among us who have unforgettable memories of interacting with godly grandparents?
- And last but not least, senior Christians can be the great prayer-warriors of the local church. Their retirement offers them ample opportunity to engage in intercessory prayer, and only eternity will reveal how many godly seniors have proven to be a great blessing to God’s church.

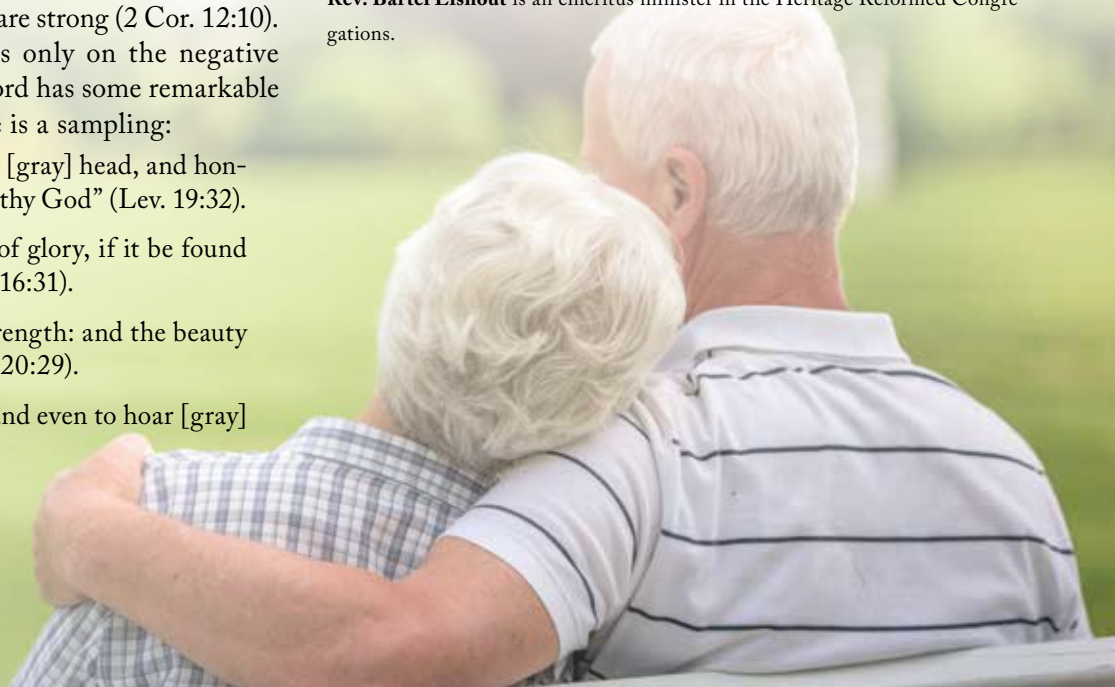
All of this affirms that our senior years, in spite of all their challenges, can be a most profitable season—a season in which, by God’s grace, we can also bear much fruit if, by faith, we may daily abide in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That unbreakable union with Christ ultimately defines who we are as Christian seniors. Therefore, also regarding the senior years, the words of Jeremiah are applicable: “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me” (Jer. 9:23–24).

1. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/publication/global-health-and-aging/living-longer>

2. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/publication/global-health-and-aging/humanitys-aging>

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John Bunyan: The Faithful Tinker

Young John Bunyan (1628–1688) hardly seemed fit for preaching. He was a coarse person with little education and a mouth full of foul language. He had lost his mother and sister to death and was exposed to the evils that come with military service before his seventeenth birthday. As a young man, he worked with his hands as a tinker (a worker in soft metals). His soul was probably much like his body after carrying his sixty-pound portable anvil: outwardly tough and calloused, though inwardly bruised and burdened. Marriage to a church-going woman brought some moral improvement and produced much self-righteousness, but it was not until Bunyan overheard a few poor women talking about the new birth and the grace of God in Christ for sinners that he realized his greatest need.

The faithful pastor of those women, John Gifford, taught Bunyan about the grace of God. Bunyan read Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians and learned how Jesus Christ made satisfaction to divine justice for our sins by His death. Bunyan was transformed, and others soon called upon him to speak in meetings for evangelism and exhortation. Feeling very unworthy, he nevertheless was able to speak from his experience of the truth of God's Word. He said, "I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel, even that under which my poor soul did groan and tremble to astonishment." He was not a fire-and-brimstone preacher who looked down on unbelievers, but one who lived with a "fire in mine own conscience."

After two years, the Lord brought Bunyan to a stronger faith in Christ when He revealed Christ's righteousness to Bunyan's soul powerfully one day when walking through a field. Bunyan later wrote of this experience: "Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my afflictions and irons, my temptations also fled away.... Now I went also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.... I lived, for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. O I thought Christ! Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes."

Bunyan's preaching changed substantially. While still attacking self-righteousness, Bunyan dwelt more upon Jesus Christ. Sin and Christ as the Savior of sinners became the major themes of his preaching. Through it all, Bunyan said, "I preached what I saw and felt." His pastor John Burton (John Gifford had died) commended Bunyan as a man "not chosen out of an earthly, but out of the heavenly university, the church of Christ," who "has not the learning or wisdom of man, yet, through grace, he has received the teaching of God." Already the church had recognized Bunyan's sound doctrine, holy life, and giftedness in preaching.

Bunyan's preaching soon provoked opposition. He was indicted around 1658 by the authorities for the offense of preaching without a license. A Cambridge scholar publicly attacked him the next year for preaching as a mere tinker and not a university-trained man. This prompted a fellow Baptist to say in Bunyan's defense, "You seem angry with the tinker because he strives to mend souls as well as kettles and pans." He pointed out that Bunyan did not preach on his own initiative but at the call of the church in Bedford. Bunyan was the target of rumors that he was a witch, a robber, and had two wives at once. However, Bunyan went on preaching, calling sinners to flee to Christ, traveling to the spiritually darkest parts of the country to proclaim the gospel.

When we read Bunyan's treatises, we can almost hear the tinker's voice as he preached in the villages of Bedfordshire. We sense his earnest desire that his hearers may be granted spiritual senses to see, hear, and taste invisible spiritual realities. He cried out, "O that they who have heard me speak this day did but see as I do what sin, death, hell, and the curse of God is; and also what the grace, and love, and mercy of God is, through Jesus Christ."

His preaching drew his listeners into the divine drama of salvation. He addressed people directly, graphically, and simply in common language. He answered their objections and pressed them to respond. For example, Bunyan depicted the following dialogue on the day of Pentecost:

Peter: Repent, every one of you; be baptized, every one of you, in his name, for the remission of sins, and you shall, every one of you, receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Objector: But I was one of them that plotted to take away his life. May I be saved by him?

Peter: Every one of you.

Objector: But I was one of them that bare false witness against him. Is there grace for me?

Peter: For every one of you....

Objector: But I was one of them that cried out, Crucify him, crucify him; and desired that Barabbas, the murderer, might live, rather than him. What will become of me, think you?

Peter: I am to preach repentance and remission of sins to every one of you.

Objector: But I railed on him, I reviled him, I hated him, I rejoiced to see him mocked at by others. Can there be hope for me?

Peter: There is, for every one of you. Repent, and be



baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Bunyan passionately urged his listeners to respond with faith in the warning of judgment to come as well as the promise of forgiveness and life, by the grace of God. He said, “Poor sinner, awake; eternity is coming. God and his Son, they are both coming to judge the world; awake, art thou yet asleep, poor sinner? Let me set the trumpet to thine ear once again! The heavens will be shortly on a burning flame; the earth, and the works thereof, shall be burned up, and then wicked men shall go into perdition; dost thou hear this, sinner?”

Bunyan pleaded with people to flee from God’s wrath. “The soul that is lost will never be found again, never be recovered again, never be redeemed again. Its banishment from God is everlasting; the fire in which it burns, and by which it must be tormented, is a fire that is everlasting fire, everlasting burning. That is fearful.” He continued, “Now tell [count] the stars, now tell the drops of water, now tell the blades of grass that are spread upon the face of all the earth, if thou canst; and yet sooner mayest thou do this than count the thousands of millions of thousands of years that a damned soul shall lie in hell.”

While Bunyan pleaded with people to see the sinfulness of sin and the torments of hell, he also proclaimed the mercies of God. He urged, “Cast but up thine eyes a little higher, and behold, there is the mercy-seat and throne of grace to which thou wouldest come, and by which thou must be saved.” He added, “Coming sinner, what promise thou findest in the word of Christ, strain it whither thou canst, so thou dost not corrupt it, and his blood and merits will answer all.”

Bunyan was particularly focused on moving his hearers to praise the Savior. He cried out,

O Son of God! Grace was in all thy tears, grace came bubbling out of thy side with thy blood, grace came forth with every word of thy sweet mouth. Grace came out where the whip smote thee, where the thorns pricked thee, where the nails and spear pierced thee. O blessed Son of God! Here is grace indeed! Unsearchable riches of grace! Grace enough to make angels wonder, grace to make sinners happy, grace to astonish devils.

Bunyan’s preaching was not only doctrinal, dealing with the weighty matters of the faith; it was doxological, calling forth from awakened hearts the praise of their Redeemer. He said, “O grace! O amazing grace! To see a prince entreat a beggar to receive an alms would be a strange sight; to see a king entreat a traitor to accept of mercy would be a stranger sight than that; but to see God entreat a sinner, to hear Christ say, ‘I stand at the door and knock,’ with a heart full and a heaven full of grace to bestow upon him that opens, this is such a sight as dazzles the eyes of angels.”

Though sometimes slandered as an antinomian, Bunyan promoted the pursuit of holiness and godly behavior. We are justified by faith in Christ alone, but we demonstrate the reality of that faith by our good works. Bunyan preached that a holy life is “the beauty of Christianity.” He called men and women to turn from sin, “and let your minds and affections be yielded up to the conduct [guidance] of the word and Spirit of God.” He exhorted them to separate themselves from sinful occasions, sinful examples, and all enticements to sin. He warned, “A man cannot love God that loves not holiness;

he loves not holiness that loves not God's word; he loves not God's word that doth not do it."

Bunyan suffered for his preaching. In 1660, the authorities arrested Bunyan for non-conformity, failing to attend the services of the parish church, holding conventicles (illegal assemblies for worship), and preaching without a license from the Church of England. Bunyan was offered release if he promised to stop, but he refused, saying, "If I was out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow, with the help of God."

The shock of her husband's arrest may have caused Elizabeth Bunyan to lose the baby she was carrying. Nevertheless, several months later, she bravely stood before the court to plead for her husband's release. The judges derided Bunyan and said that they would only release him if he promised not to preach. She replied, "He dares not leave preaching, as long as he can speak." One judge was enraged and said Bunyan preached the teachings of the devil. Elizabeth boldly declared, "My Lord, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil." One man later remarked that a queen could not have answered with more dignity than this simple, Christian, peasant woman.

Though Bunyan remained in prison for years, the jailers occasionally gave Bunyan freedom to leave for short times and preach. George Offer noted, "It is said that many of the Baptist congregations in Bedfordshire owe their origins to his midnight preaching." He also preached to those with him in prison, though at times he himself was deeply discouraged.

After twelve years, Bunyan was finally released in 1672, when King Charles II issued the Royal Declaration of Indulgence. However, government officials quickly moved to restrict that freedom. Bunyan was imprisoned again from December 1676 until June 1677, when the Puritan theologian John Owen interceded with the Bishop of London for Bunyan's release. Owen famously told King Charles II that he would gladly trade his vast learning for the tinker's ability to touch men's hearts.

Bunyan's greatest book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written in that prison, contains poignant examples of his lofty ideals for the ministry of the Word. In the house of Interpreter, the pilgrim sees a portrait on the wall. It is a picture of the kind of minister God authorizes to be a spiritual guide to others, one who "had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon its lips, the world was behind his back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head."

In the Delectable Mountains, the pilgrims meet shepherds of the flock for whom Christ died, teachers whose names are Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere. They showed the pilgrims the horrible consequences of doctrinal error, the dangers of spiritual blindness, the fearful reality of hell, and a glimpse of the glories of heaven.

In the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian's wife and children receive guidance from "Great-heart," a

valiant warrior well-equipped with sword, helmet, and shield. He teaches them of Christ, fights against a giant that assaults them in the way, and leads them safely past roaring lions—yet not of his own will or for his own glory, but as a servant of the Lord.

Bringing these images together, we see Bunyan's vision of the godly pastor. He is a heavenly minded man, scorning the pride and pleasures of this world to live for treasures that last. He is a humble man, enduring trouble and sorrow to care for the lambs of the Lord. He is a holy man, knowing experientially the truths that he declares to others and fighting with all his heart against the powers of darkness. In all things, he is a preacher of the Word of God, a living trumpet that sounds the alarm to sinners and lovingly calls them to God.

Bunyan seized his freedom in 1677 as an opportunity for more preaching in Bedford, the villages around it, and in London. He had a plain style, which made him appealing to the common people, yet a power of eloquence that would shame the finest orator. He was an experiential preacher *par excellence*, proclaiming both what Christians should experience in their spiritual pilgrimage and what they actually do experience. He did not preach as from an ivory tower, but as one delivered from the depths of the dungeon, and, as a result, by the Spirit's blessing, his preaching produced a great harvest.

Bunyan's preaching often drew large crowds. Three thousand people listened to him one Sunday, and one winter weekday, twelve hundred people gathered at 7:00 A.M. to hear him preach the Word of God. In the mid-1680s, persecution broke out again and Bunyan narrowly escaped capture by agents of the government. Out on the road in 1688, seeking to make peace between members of a broken family, Bunyan was exposed to a storm, fell ill, and died. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, London, close to Thomas Goodwin and John Owen. Thus he died in faithful pastoral service to his Lord.

Though the church in America appears to be weakening as pulpits become platforms for story-telling and entertainment, the tinker from Bedford remains a remarkable monument to the mighty power of the Spirit. God uses the weak and foolish things of this world to shame the wise. Bunyan's college was a prison cell and his library was the Bible. Nevertheless, clad in the armor of Jesus Christ, he stood fast in the gospel and walked in the power of the Spirit. Through Bunyan's ministry, thousands of common people heard the Word of God preached in all its fullness, with clarity and passion.

This same Spirit is still at work in the church of Jesus Christ today. Let us pray for God to give us more preachers like Bunyan so that Christ will be glorified in every village and city around the world.

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The Journey of Faith

“Oh God, do it again! Do it in our day! Do it for Thy glory and praise!” Such are the prayers that instinctively rise from the hearts of serious Christians when they read or hear accounts of true conversions and of Spirit-wrought seasons of awakening and revival. We find such records in our Bibles, in the annals of church history, and in contemporary reports of these gracious works of God occurring in various parts of the world.

However, it is crucial that we recognize that both conversion and seasons of awakening are never to be looked upon as the arrival at a destination—a destination that we repeatedly describe and for which we yearn, nostalgically regarding them as capturing “the good old days.” Rather, they are to be regarded as the beginning of a wonderful journey—a journey of ongoing communication with God and obedience to God that grows richer and deeper with the passing of time.

CONVERSION

Acts 26:20 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 are two texts that demonstrate the truth that conversion is the start of a journey. In the first of these texts, Paul emphasizes that conversion begins with a radical turning to God in repentance that issues in a lifetime of living out the implications of that turning by doing works “meet for repentance.”

The second text describes the conversion of the Thessalonians as consisting in a radical turning to God from idols, issuing in a life of bondservice to the living God, and an eager waiting for the completion of salvation to be bestowed at the return of Jesus.

Our initiation into spiritual life by conversion occurs in different ways. God has no detailed “conversion blueprint” to which His saving work must universally confirm. But, if any professed conversion is indeed God’s work, it always issues in the following: a life of growing communion with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; Phil. 3:8–10); a life of increasing conformity to Christ (2 Cor. 3:18); a life of continuous abiding in Christ (John 15:1–11); and a life of principled obedience to Christ (John 14:21, 1 John 2:3–4).

The life of a true child of God shaped by these realities will become a blessed and beautiful fulfillment of the promise of Psalm 92:12–14: “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.”

On my sixtieth birthday, some twenty-one years ago, I took these verses as my own special companion for whatever

years were yet marked out for me. While most other older saints and I are constantly reminded that our outward man is wasting away, according to the promises of Psalm 92, we also experience the reality that our “inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

GROWING IN GRACE

Pentecost was a singular epochal event in redemptive history. However, the flood of spiritual life and power sent down from the enthroned messianic King continues to come upon the emerging and growing church, often as a steady, gentle shower. Awakenings and revivals, when they are the work of God, are periodic intensifications of the ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in which, instead of a gentle and steady rain of heavenly life and power, Christ sends upon His church an intensified localized deluge. As the old gospel song puts it, “mercy drops ’round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.”

What was the result of that initial deluge of Pentecost? Did the 120 disciples remain in the upper room, repeatedly rehearsing to one another the thrilling experience of hearing the “sound like a mighty rushing wind,” seeing the “divided tongues of fire,” and experiencing the linguistic miracle of speaking in other languages? No. Their risen Lord had told them that when the Spirit came upon them, they would receive power to bear witness to Him and to His saving work in ever-widening circles, even to the “uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, Luke 24:45–49).

The biblical account of the Spirit’s work subsequent to that initial deluge is focused upon bringing more sinners to conviction and conversion, and then incorporating those converted sinners into an organized community of the people of God, called the church. Luke informs us that the three thousand who were converted were added to the 120 and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). The subsequent record indicates that the church formed on that day did not meet in a perpetual celebration of the events of that day, but grew in the corporate graces of brotherly love, practical benevolence, and demonstrable unity, which validated the power of the gospel that was being preached by the apostles (Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–36).

The book of Acts, the apostolic letters, and church history contain irrefutable evidence that true revivals and awakenings give birth to churches and bring renewed life to dying churches. May the Lord do so again, for His glory and praise.

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Graduating Heartily

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not as to men.

—COLOSSIAN 3:23

You are graduating. In a sense, it may seem like your whole future is before you. What will be next?

If you are graduating from high school, you may be getting ready for college, or may have chosen to go to work. If you are graduating from college, maybe you are getting ready for grad school or looking for work or are starting a career. The possibilities may seem very narrow or they may seem limitless. Your gifts and abilities and opportunities may have given you great blessings. Or you may feel that you do not even know what you are good at, or where you could be useful in society.

Honestly, in a sense, many of these questions matter far too much to us. *Whatever* is next, there is a proper way to approach the future. Paul says, “whatsoever you do, do it heartily.” The idea of heartily is that one would live with energy, with zest. It is a reflection of care and ambition. It is the opposite of working lazily. But one can also be working hard without working heartily. Someone can even overexert themselves, and still not work heartily, because they lack the proper motivation.

The proper perspective is that *whatsoever you do, do it as to the Lord*. This should be your focus as you graduate, as you transition to a new stage of life, for whatever God places on the next stage of your life path.

This means that you ought to be living for the Lord, and not for other people. When we approach school or a menial job or a high profile career in this way, it changes things. It brings different priorities, different expectations, and different rewards.

One implication of working heartily is that no legitimate work should be looked down upon. Obviously, there are some jobs that would demand an immoral lifestyle, and those need to be avoided. But, beyond those, every job is honorable. As you work towards your ideal career or start in a job that just seems like a steppingstone, you are still to work heartily with a good attitude.

Another implication of studying heartily is that you can study the same thing as an atheist or skeptic, but the results

of your study should be remarkably different. They may get the same GPA, but they will not work with the same focus or appreciation. Your approach to your study is that you are studying a part of God’s world and what humanity has done with it. You are able to see God’s hand in the world.

Another implication of living heartily is that your motivation is not accolades, a raise in pay, or visible success. The motivation really should be in serving the Lord. This can also help answer the questions surrounding job changes: am I stopping for legitimate reasons or am I stopping because of human ideals?

And so, dear graduates, be motivated to find something that allows you to work for the Lord. That does not mean high-pressure factory work is not acceptable. But are you working there as a Christian, as one working to the Lord? It is possible to work heartily, with a thankful attitude, desiring to honor God even as you work in a difficult environment.

I trust you also realize that you cannot work for the Lord if you are living apart from Him. You need to know the Lord and love Him in order to live heartily for Him. To work heartily for someone you live in opposition to is impossible. You need to learn, by grace, the desire to live as a servant of the Perfect Master. Our prayer for all those graduating is that they will know the Lord and desire to serve Him. And then being filled with His Spirit, study and work heartily—“as to the Lord, and not as to men.”

Five Lessons from the Gym

After my second episode of pulmonary embolism in the summer of 2014, I decided to finally get serious about physical exercise. I'm on the thin side (understatement of the year) so I've never really needed to watch my weight, and I've kept quite active, but I'd definitely become a bit soft and flabby. I needed to get my heart pumping and my muscles hardened to pump that blood around my system as part of my new medical regime to avoid more clotting. Apart from the obvious physical benefits, I've also learned some valuable spiritual lessons along the way.

1. We need group pressure. My previous attempts at exercise programs have always floundered after a couple of weeks, mainly because I was doing it on my own: jogging on my own, weights in the basement, etc. I just couldn't keep it up. Last summer, though, I joined a group fitness class at the YMCA and despite the initial embarrassment of most of the (largely female) class being able to lift more than I could, I found the group pressure to be highly motivating. I left the class in April to follow a more personalized weights program in the gym, but even there, people pressure helps as they watch you and you watch them.

For similar reasons, we need the church. We need people pressure. If we try to do Christianity on our own, we will soon peter out. God uses the community of believers to spur us on, to keep us going, to inspire and motivate.

2. Slow and small is better than fast and big. Like most guys, I want big and fast results. That might have been possible at 19, but not at 49. This doesn't stop me trying though. But when I do try to be Mr. Universe some days, I usually either injure myself or I'm so sore the next few days that I can't work out at all.

There's something in us that wants big and quick results in our spiritual lives, too. If only we can find a spiritual exercise that will raise us quickly to a new level of spirituality! If only I could do something that will accelerate my growth! But slow and gradual is the normal way, the best way, and God's way.

3. Growth is often invisible. Despite playing many sports, I've always been skinny. So, although I've lost weight over the year, it's not really obvious. As for the muscles, despite all the pains, sweat, and tears, they don't look too different either. But I sure do feel different. I definitely feel stronger and firmer, even though few would notice.

When I look out at my family or my students or my congregation, I sometimes wish I could see many more evidences of spiritual growth. There are some obvious encouragements here and there, of course, but spiritual growth is often invisible. However, I believe that there is an inner strengthening and developing going on that is making a difference that the eye cannot see. Just because I cannot see growth doesn't mean it's not there.

4. I'm inspired by strugglers. The people that depress me most at the gym are the six-packing, shredded guys. It's not that I'm jealous of them (okay, maybe I am). But it's more the way they seem to look down on every lesser mortal. I promise myself that when I look like that, I'll never act like that!

I actually go out of my way now not to look at them. Instead, I look at the gray- and no-haired seniors, daily pushing through their arthritis and other ailments. Or I look at the really overweight people lifting only a few ounces, or running slower than I walk, and I think, "Wow, if they keep going at this, why can't I?" It must be so difficult for them to do this.

And it's the strugglers that inspire me in the church, too. Not the super-successful widely admired pastors, and the perfect homeschooling families that adorn the covers of the latest "Here's how good we are" book. No, it's the strugglers, the seniors pressing on through life's challenges, overcoming multiple obstacles and excuses every week just to get to church. It's the depressed believers who are hanging on with their fingernails, keeping on believing despite having no subjective helps to do so. The wife in a loveless marriage daily casting herself on the love of Christ. Strugglers, I salute you all, are my daily inspiration.

5. Encourage one another. I don't go to the gym to socialize, but when you see the same people every day, you get to know them a bit. I'm usually hardly able to breathe, so significant conversations are rare, but last week, I noticed one woman looked a bit down. She's a really overweight young woman and one of my inspirational strugglers. But I'd never talked with her. I'd thought about it, just to encourage her, but I was afraid she'd take it the wrong way and slap me for suggesting anything negative. The next day, she was doing even less in the gym, and, the following day, she was just sitting in the hallway on her phone. She looked defeated. When she looked up, I took the risk. "Keep going," I said, "you're my inspiration." She looked a bit shocked and I prepared to defend my face, but then she smiled and said, "Oh, um, thanks."

A few minutes later, I was working out when she came up to me. "Uh-oh!" I thought. But she surprised me, "Thanks for what you said to me. I wasn't going to work out today but what you said has got me going."

We never know when a few words in season to a fellow-struggler might just pick them up, put some fuel in their tanks, and change their day, and even their lives.

There are many more lessons, but as my ego-puncturing wife said to me after I'd used gym illustrations in sermons two weeks in a row, "Okay, David, they all know you've started going to the gym now. Doesn't make you a world expert!"

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FATHER KNOWS BEST

Lessons in Faith from Abraham (Part 2)

Abraham is the father of the faithful, and as a good father he is an example to his spiritual offspring on how to live the life of faith. The apostle Paul points to Abraham as an example of saving faith that justifies (Romans 4); the apostle James points to Abraham as an example of living faith that is justified or vindicated by actions (James 2). Salvation is through faith without works, but that kind of saving faith always works. Faith becomes a way of life that defines behavior. What Abraham believed influenced how he lived. His whole life was a pilgrimage as he wandered through this world looking “for a city...whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Following Abraham’s example teaches lessons both about the ethics and problems of living by faith.

A LESSON ABOUT THE ETHICS OF FAITH

In Genesis 17:1 God identified Himself to Abraham as “the Almighty God.” This divine self-revelation designates the Lord as the One who is all sufficient and able to keep every promise. In response to that truth, God commanded Abraham to “walk before me, and be thou perfect.” He was *to live his faith before God*. The form of the word “walk” has the idea of walking around, back and forth in constant movement. It refers to the manner, habits, customs, and routines of life. The expression “before me” is literally “to the face of” or “in presence of God.” To be in the presence of God is to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). This was a place of fellowship and communion, but essentially a place that demanded holiness. Purity is a mark of living faith. To so live in the reality of God was the exercise of faith. Abraham’s life of faith had to be different from his life of unbelief, and so must it be for his offspring. Justification initiates sanctification which in turn evidences justification.

He was also *to live with perfection*. Being perfect conveys the thought of that which is whole, complete, and blameless. It does not refer to sinlessness but rather to whole-hearted dedication to pursue holiness. It is a key Old Testament word for sanctification designating that spiritual maturity in which the whole man is renewed after God’s image and increasingly dies to sin and lives to righteousness. There were so many instances in Abraham’s life that demonstrated that his faith was more than theory. His behavior often made no sense apart from faith. His generosity to Lot in giving him the first choice of territory was a selfless decision (Gen. 13:8–9). But in faith, he preferred another above himself, esteeming another higher than himself and submitting to

another in the fear of God. Father Abraham teaches us that how we react to others is a good gauge of how we are with God. In faith, he demonstrated his loyalty to Lot by rescuing him at his own personal risk from a powerful coalition that far outnumbered his little band (Gen. 14:12–14). In so doing, he illustrated James’s principle that true faith meets the needs of the brethren (James 2:14–17). His intercession for Sodom (Gen. 18:22–32) was an expression of faith since prayer is a key indication of faith and dependence on God. Looking at Abraham confirms James’s assessment that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). Father Abraham illustrates the hardest part about being a father: teaching by example.

A LESSON ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

The problem with faith is that it requires exercise to increase, to grow. Testing faith is a key means of strengthening faith. So the Lord often brings trials into life that are designed to increase the sense of dependence on Him, to reinforce the sensibility of faith. The whole of Abraham’s life was a school of faith with one test after another. Some tests he passed; others he failed, but his failures did not jeopardize the divine promise or alter his position before the Lord. If his life was a school of faith, he was never expelled from school because of his failures but he did have to repeat a few “questions.” All of Abraham’s children are likewise enrolled in the school of faith where there are no audits. All will take the tests sooner or later. Four particular tests of Abraham’s faith provide a study guide for us regarding the kind of tests we may face.

First, there was the test of the unknown (Gen. 12:1–4). When God called Abraham to leave Ur, He did not specify where to go, just to leave. Abraham had to exchange the known for the unknown, and that is not always easy. There is something comfortable about the known, and not knowing the future can often be fearful. But God wanted Abraham simply to trust Him. He wanted Abraham simply to take Him at His word. Although He did not provide Abraham a map, the Lord assured him that “I will shew thee,” “I will make of thee a great nation,” “I will bless thee,” “I will bless them that bless thee.” All those “I wills” were enough to cause Abraham to rest on God’s word and move accordingly. His beginning the journey to the unknown was not a blind leap, but a conscious stepping out on the divine promise. Father Abraham passed this test with flying colors;



without hesitation he left Ur to follow God wherever He would lead. This test teaches us that God does not always reveal all the details of His will upfront. Obedience to God's call is not a measured response of calculating options; it is rather the confidence of trust.

Second, there was the test of the unexpected (12:7, 10). By faith, Abraham left prosperity and comfort to come to famine and desolation. This was, without doubt, contrary to expectation. Here was the all-too-common tension between faith and experience. Faith rested on the promise, but experience seemed to be contrary to the promise. At this point, sight so easily prevailed over faith, and Abraham left the promised land, went to Egypt, and further jeopardized the promise with his lie concerning Sarah's true identity. When he left Ur, his spiritual eyes were on God. When he left the promised land, his physical eyes were on the famine. This time Abraham failed the test.

At first, it appeared that he had made the right move. In Egypt, there was plenty of food, and he prospered. There is always the danger that carnal decisions bring seeming success. But apparent success is not the criterion for judging the word of God. God was testing Abraham to teach him to trust and obey regardless of circumstances. But even in his failure, God was faithful to His promise and protected Abraham from jeopardizing the promise of the Seed, the coming Christ, by restraining Pharaoh from violating Sarah. God graciously addressed Abraham's wrong response with further lessons about the sensibility of trusting Him. But this was a hard lesson for Abraham to learn. Years later, Abraham compromised Sarah in exactly the same way to Abimelech, the king of Gerar (Genesis 20). Again God showed Himself faithful and protected Abraham from himself and his folly. The faith/experience tension is a tough test. Abraham faced it more than once, and so most likely will his offspring.

Third, there was the test of waiting (Genesis 16). At the core of God's initial promise to Abraham was a seed, an offspring. Although Abraham never staggered at the promise through unbelief (Rom. 4:20), the delay in the arrival of the first installment was a great test of faith. Years had passed, and there was no son. The ages of Abraham

and Sarah, humanly speaking, made the prospect unlikely. So they took matters into their own hands. Sarah, who received the promise along with Abraham, offered Hagar, her servant girl, to become a surrogate to give birth in her place. Although this arrangement is shocking, it was common place in Abraham's world. This in no way justifies the action; indeed, it heightens the transgression. Not only did the union between Abraham and Hagar constitute polygamy, but it also reflected his following the way of the world, his walking by sight rather than by faith. The consequences of that union led to a conflict between Ishmael and Isaac that continues to this day. Attempting to accomplish God's purpose through human effort is always deleterious. Waiting is a hard test because we always want God's timing to correspond to ours. But those that wait on the Lord will never be disappointed. Isaac was born in God's timing to show His ability to keep His word even when it seemed impossible. With God nothing is too hard. That is the lesson to learn.

Fourth, there was the test of the unthinkable (Genesis 22). God's instruction to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on Moriah was the final exam. Notwithstanding how unreasonable this demand seemed to be, Abraham had learned his lessons well. All the other tests had strengthened his faith, and he passed this hardest test of all. He was convinced that, even though this request was beyond his comprehension, God was faithful and could be trusted regardless of the cost. He believed without doubt that Isaac was the promised seed (Gen. 21:12) and that one way or another they would return together from the mountain (Gen. 22:5; even if by resurrection, see Hebrews 11:17-19).

Father Abraham knew best and his lessons about faith remain relevant and important for all his children. He teaches believers that faith is necessary both for salvation and for life. Abraham was not the man of faith he was because of personal merit or worth. He was what he was by grace, and that is true for all his children. If father Abraham could walk by faith notwithstanding his stumbles, so can his offspring. How great it would be if it could be said of every Christian, "like father like child."

The Corn of Wheat

When Mary fell to Jesus's feet and poured ointment over His feet, Judas thought it was a horrible waste. He never understood that in losing ourselves, we gain; in giving to Christ, we are blessed; when we deny ourselves, we truly win. This is the mystery of the Christian life. It is also the mystery of Christ Himself. Christ wouldn't go any further into His suffering and death without explaining this mystery in the picture of the corn of wheat. It falls into the ground and dies so that it brings forth fruit.

Mary's Giving Love

Besides reminding us of the raising of Lazarus (vv. 1, 9, 10), and the upcoming Passover (vv. 1, 12, 20), John 12 opens with a picture of the Savior between Mary, a believing and loving disciple, and Judas, a thief and betrayer. John paints the picture with brilliant strokes of contrast. Christ was eating with Lazarus, newly raised from the dead, while the religious rulers consult together to kill Lazarus (v. 10). As Christ already said, they have come clearly "to steal, kill, and to destroy," while Christ has come to give life and that abundantly (John 10:10).

Christ defended Mary against Judas, showing her action as preparation for His burial. Mary realized that He who had taken Lazarus out of the tomb would take Lazarus's place in the tomb. But she didn't wait until the Savior's death before she anointed Him. Of all those who had followed Christ, she seems to have been the only one who truly understood the significance of Christ's death before the fact. She had truly sat at the feet of Jesus and learned the "one thing needful" (Luke 10:39, 42).

"Let her alone." The Savior defended His child against the harsh treatment of Judas. This picture of Mary, Christ, and Judas is in essence a picture of how the true people of God live in this world. They are devoted to their Lord. They give Him their all, while the world and false disciples fail to understand this true love of God's people and ridicule it.

Christ's Lowly Reign

Christ explained what Mary was doing, and next, Scripture would explain what Christ was doing when He came riding into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey to the Hosanna cries of the people (vv. 12–14). After Christ was glorified, the disciples remembered that Scripture had prophesied in Zechariah 9:9: "Fear not, daughter of Sion, behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

Christ is the King, but not a king like many expected or wanted. He would not ride into Jerusalem in a chariot behind a military horse, indicating that His rule will be through sword and spear, military conquest, and bloodshed. He is a King, but His reign would be a reign of grace and righteousness, of service and sacrifice. In fact, even Christ's enemies were forced to admit this in verse 19: "The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him." This is a powerful premonition that Christ's victory is sure!

Another powerful sign lies in the fact that "Greeks," or Gentiles, are asking to see Jesus. Approaching Philip, they made a simple but beautiful request: "Sir, we would see Jesus" (v. 21). We might wonder what glory there would be in a few strangers asking to see Jesus: it is a sign of His sure victory, yet only to faith.

Christ's Giving Love

To all human appearances, Christ's reign of grace was coming to a premature and sad end. It looked like Christ was being judged and that His cause was lost. It certainly doesn't look like what He described was happening: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (vv. 31–32).

In other words, rather than Jesus being judged, the world and Satan were being judged. They were judging themselves unworthy of the eternal life He is bringing. They thought they were in the judgment seat over Christ, but they were really condemning themselves by rejecting Him. Yes, He would die, but there would be fruit from His death. They had no anointing for their burial and no fruit in their death, but the opposite was true of Christ. Like a corn of wheat, He would fall into the ground and die. Listen to how He said it: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (v. 23).

It's true, there is a deep feeling of anguish and trouble in the soul of Christ (v. 27), and yet an unrelenting willingness and gladness to do what the Father had asked Him to do. Christ revealed to us the secret of true disciples: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (v. 25). God's people may not run away from their task, even if it means sacrifices and trouble.



Upon Christ's announcement of His fruitful death, people heard what they thought was thunder (v. 29). It was instead a voice from heaven, in answer to the prayer of Christ to the Father that He would glorify His name. "Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (v. 28). Christ explained what the voice is saying. To put it in our own words: "World, watch out. Satan, your judgment bell has tolled. Christ will be lifted up and glorified in His death. People from all nations will come to Him. Death will be a portal to true life, for here is the Resurrection and the life" (compare vv. 30–33).

An Invitation to the Light

In the last section of this chapter, John joins two ideas we understand to be in conflict: God's sovereignty (vv. 37–41) and human responsibility (vv. 44–50). It is hard to understand how God blinds people's eyes so that they don't see, and thus cannot understand and be converted (v. 40). God, however, doesn't ask us to understand. He tells it to us to explain that when we do believe, it is His work. We have not made that difference ourselves; He has shined into our hearts. We need to follow God's call to walk in the light even when others refuse to, as Abraham did, and Rahab as well. God's power in their lives was great and what testimonies God made them! When others do not believe, we need to simply leave that to God, who is ruling over all.

The order of light and darkness, day and night, has a purpose in our world. When there is light, we need to make use of the light. It's as if Christ is saying: "Don't just imagine that it will always be there. Believe the light; benefit from the light, while it shines." In the life of God's children, there are periods of light and darkness. We are to drink in all the rays of the sun when we can so that when the darkness comes, our heart will still shine. God calls us to believe on the light without questioning (v. 35, 46). That's what Isaiah did way back in His day. On one occasion, He saw the Lord high and lifted up (Isa. 6:1–2). John refers to

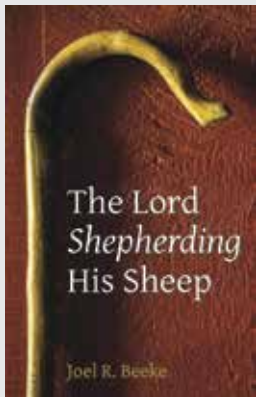
this in verse 41 of our chapter: "He saw his glory and spake of him." However, there was also a time when he said, "And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isa. 8:17). The great difference between God's children and the children of the world can be put like this: The children of the world don't look for God even in the light; God's children look for God even in the darkness.

QUESTIONS

1. How are Mary and Judas pictures of different people's relationships to the Savior? What set Mary apart, even from the disciples?
2. Why did Jesus enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey?
3. "Sir, we would see Jesus" (v. 21). What does this desire express? Can you relate to it at all? Explain what it means to see Jesus by faith now and then by sight in the future.
4. How does the picture of the corn of wheat (v. 24) describe Christ's work and purpose? How does it direct us at the same time?
5. Christ knew that His death would redeem people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. He speaks of drawing people to Himself. How are people drawn to Christ (v. 32)?
6. What are some of the seasons of light that there can be in our lives (v. 36)? What does it say about the heart of the Savior that He calls to faith in the light, and then hides Himself?

Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes is Professor of Old and New Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and an ordained minister in the Free Reformed churches of North America.

NEW RHB BOOKS

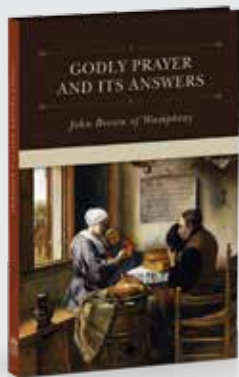


The Lord Shepherding His Sheep

Joel R. Beeke

Through the simple words of Psalm 23, David revealed a glorious and comforting knowledge of his covenantal Lord, pictured vividly as his gracious Shepherd and Host. We easily recite this psalm, but it describes an experience nothing less than a spiritual Holy of Holies. Yet God calls sinners to enter here by faith and walk with Him through all of life. This exposition of the psalm illuminates the riches of the Reformed experiential doctrines of salvation and sanctification. The book

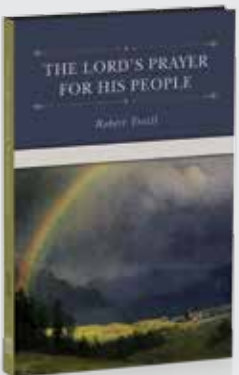
aims, by God's grace, to help readers to grow in their understanding of God's love for His elect people, their submissive embrace of His purposes, and their glad contentment through life's distressing journey until they dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This is an extensively revised and updated version of *Jehovah Shepherding His Sheep*. (PB, 304 pgs) \$14.99 | \$10.00



Godly Prayer and Its Answers

John Brown

Here is an extended meditation upon Christ's promise in John 14:13–14, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." However, in the process of touching upon everything stated and implied in the text, Brown produces a full and complete treatment of the doctrine of prayer in a manner calculated to promote the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. (HC, 368 pgs) \$28.00 | \$21.00



The Lord's Prayer for His People

Robert Traill

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Robert Traill's treatment of Christ's intercessory prayer for His people is a masterpiece of Puritan experiential doctrine. Mining the depths of John 17:24, Traill discovers the comforts of the doctrine of election, the blessing of our hope of heaven, and the believer's delight in the glory of Christ—all

founded on the immovable love of the Father for His Son. Traill's exposition is full of practical application, careful to address both believers and unbelievers alike. (HC, 424 pgs) \$30.00 | \$22.50

The titles below are recently published or reprinted. The first price is retail, and the second is our discounted price. PB = paperback, HC = hard cover.

From the *Cultivating Biblical Godliness Series*

How Can I Cultivate Private Prayer?

Joel R. Beeke



Prayer is a crucial part of the Christian life, and believers must give it careful attention and cultivation. As they pray, Christians exercise their faith in repentance, in submission to God's will, and in praise to God. Believers in Christ, then, must grow in their prayer life—in their communion with God. In this pamphlet, the author gives readers helpful, practical ways to improve their prayer lives by first disciplining themselves, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, and by then taking hold of God. Learn more about what a blessing it is to pray!

(PB, 32 pgs) \$3.00 | \$2.25

OTHER BOOKS



Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer & Life in Christ

J. Todd Billings

At the age of thirty-nine, theologian Todd Billings was diagnosed with incurable cancer. The questions were acute: Why me? Why now? Where is God in all of this? This eloquently written book shares Billings's journey and reflections on providence, lament, and life in Christ in light of his illness. He moves beyond pat answers to

show how our human stories of joy and grief can be incorporated into the larger biblical story of God's saving work in Christ.

(Brazos Press, PB, 201 pgs) \$18.99 | \$14.25



Hammer of the Huguenots

Douglas Bond

Full-scale warfare is breaking out as intense religious conflict rages throughout sixteenth-century France. Philippe, a quiet and hardworking shipwright apprentice, is entangled in the trouble whether he likes it or not. Defying the state church's vicious persecution, his closest friends have embraced the gospel proclaimed by church Reformers—whom will Philippe follow?

(P&R, PB, 226 pgs) \$12.00 | \$9.00



Churches Partnering Together

Chris Bruno and Matt Dirks

This book shows how all churches—big and small—can do more together than they can do apart. Looking to the New Testament for guidance, this practical book will help pastors, church leaders, and laypeople alike think creatively about gospel-driven church partnerships in their own communities and around the world.

(Crossway, PB, 176 pgs) \$16.00 | \$12.00



The Heart of the Gospel: God's Son Given for You — Sinclair B. Ferguson

How can we truly know that God always does what is best for us? Focusing on Romans 8:32, Ferguson reminds us what lies at the heart of the gospel. In the atonement, we behold the Father who refused to spare His own Son—and the Son who was obedient in being delivered up on our behalf. If this is the kind of God we have, and if this is what He has already shown us of Himself, then we can confidently say He is for us.

(P&R, PB, 23 pgs) \$4.99 | \$3.75



Gamechangers: Key Figures of the Christian Church — Robert Letham

Weaving together biography and theology, this book delves into the life and influence of twelve key figures who helped shape the church—Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Anselm, Martin Luther, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, and others.

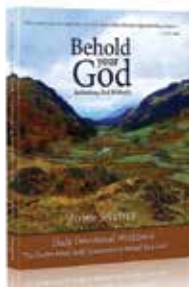
(Christian Focus, PB, 195 pgs) \$14.99 | \$11.50



Give Them Truth: Teaching Eternal Truths to Young Minds — Starr Meade

How do you prepare children for life's ups and downs? How do you push back the harmful messages of our culture? Whether you are a parent or a teacher, Meade encourages and guides you to impart a robust knowledge of God to your children from a young age, because a sound theology will prepare them for whatever life has in store.

(P&R, PB, 207 pgs) \$14.99 | \$10.75



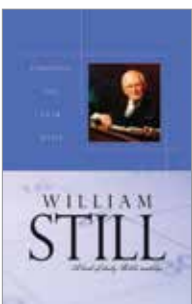
Behold Your God: Rethinking God Biblically John Snyder

Are we sure that the God we serve is the God described in Scripture? Is rethinking Him biblically really necessary? How would it affect our views of Christ, the gospel, holiness, worship, evangelism, service, and revival? *Behold Your God* is a 12-week study for churches, small groups, families, or individuals. It focuses on God's self-revelation in the Bible, helping the believer apply the descriptions of God to all of life.

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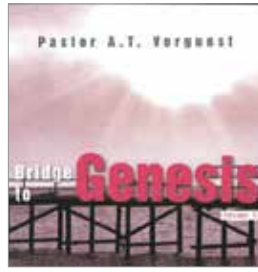
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GOOD WORKS

Is it true that only saved Christians can do good works?

Suggested Reading: Matthew 7:15–20 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–3

To answer this question properly, we must distinguish between civil good works and scriptural good works. Civil good works are good actions performed by all kinds of people; these works are good as defined by society. Under God's common grace, most people do good things for others. One person prepares a meal for a family whose mom is in the hospital, another stops to help a stranger having car trouble, and a third contributes food to feed the homeless. All of these are works that are important, meaningful, and "good." They are examples of civil good works, but might not be scriptural good works.

Scriptural good works are good actions performed by Christians. These are good works as viewed and defined by God. Scriptural good works arise from God's saving grace in the hearts of His children by His Holy Spirit. Scriptural good works contain the following three elements:

1. Their source (or root) is saving faith (Heb. 11:6)
2. Their standard (or rule) is God's law (1 John 5:3)

3. Their motive (and goal) is God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31)

So the answer to the question "Is it true that only saved Christians can do good works?" is both yes and no. No, in the sense of civil good works, as all types of people do many good works every day, but yes, in the sense of scriptural good works. Only the saved can perform scriptural good works as the unsaved do not possess saving faith, miss the Spirit in their hearts, and do not aim to promote God's glory.

We need to be careful that we do not under-value God's gifts of common grace. Many people perform acts of meaningful kindness to others in daily life that are very helpful. On the other hand, we may not over-value common grace, and view civil good works of God's common grace as if they are scriptural good works arising from God's saving grace.

How is God's instructing Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7 fitting for this meditation on distinguishing civil from scriptural good works? Are you actively looking for opportunities to perform daily good works? By God's saving grace, are you performing scriptural good works?

NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS

Is it necessary to do good works to be saved?

Suggested Reading: Romans 3:20–25 and Matthew 7:16–21

After reading the suggested passages above, also read Galatians 2:16 and James 2:20–22 and 26. Do these verses appear to contradict each other? To properly answer the question asked in the title of this meditation, we need to understand that a two-fold answer is necessary. The same answer helps us understand the two paradoxical texts just examined.

1. Good works are not necessary to earn salvation. Our best works are impure; they cannot earn our salvation or justification. Our entire salvation is solely earned by the perfect, sinless righteousness of Jesus Christ, who lived and died to save those who believe in Him (Titus 3:4–7; Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 11:5–6; 2 Tim. 1:9).

2. Good works are necessary, however, as fruits (as the result) of our salvation and sanctification. A person's salvation is not genuine if it does not produce scriptural good works—works motivated by saving faith, love to God and

others, and promotion of God's glory (Rom. 2:6–11, Matt. 3:10, Jer. 17:10).

Re-read Romans 3:20–25 and Galatians 2:16. Do you see how these verses speak of #1 above? Re-read Matthew 7:16–21 and James 2:20–22 and 26. Do you understand how these verses teach #2? The correct answer then to the question is that no, good works are not necessary for salvation, but yes, they are the result or evidence of salvation.

While some err by over-emphasizing good works and believe that one's good works are necessary to earn salvation, we must be careful to not under-emphasize good works as necessary fruits or evidences of salvation. Scripture teaches three important reasons or purposes why we must do good works: to promote God's glory (John 15:8), to edify others (Matt. 5:16), and to strengthen one's faith (1 Peter 1:10).

Is doing good works important to you? If so, why? Is your desire and aim to glorify God, to be a blessing to others, and to grow in faith?



Who Are You?

If I asked you, “Who are you?” what would you say? You would probably tell me your name and your age. Then you might explain where you live and who your parents and siblings are. If I said, “Tell me more about yourself,” you might share your interests with me, like building Legos, reading, playing games, playing with dolls, playing soccer, or painting.

You are unique. You are special because God created only one of you. Your personality is unique. Are you patient or impatient? Outgoing or shy? Careful or carefree? What are your talents? Are you good at math or reading or understanding machines? Are you creative? You are one of a kind.

You also have things in common with many other people. You are either in the group of all the boys in the world, or you are one of many girls. You are a member of a family. You belong to a church. You may be on a sports team or you may be a Scout. You are a part of your country.

So you are both one of a kind and one of many groups. But there is another group that you are either a part of or you are outside of. Every single person who has ever lived in the past, is living now, and will live in the future is either in this group or outside of it. People can move into this group, but once they are in, they can’t move out—neither do they want to. They are the only truly happy people. Being in this group is more important than anything else.

Do you know what I am talking about? I am talking about Christians. Every one of us is either a Christian or we are not. Are you a Christian? Are you saying, Yes? No? I don’t know?

How do I know if I am a Christian? Let me try to explain it in a simple way. To be a Christian means something has changed in your soul, and it shows itself in how you think, feel, act, and speak. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has taught you who God is. He is your Maker. He is perfectly holy. He knows everything and has power over everything. And the Holy Spirit has taught you who

you are. We were made pure, but we became sinners with Adam and Eve in Paradise. We need to meet our Maker when we die. When I was a child, I was very afraid of death because I knew I was a sinner. We should be afraid of death if we are not saved. But there is a safe place for us to go! Just like you go in your house during a storm, Jesus Christ is a shelter in a time of storm!

The storm is your sin. If you are a Christian, you see your sins—when you lied, were unkind or selfish, when you disobeyed your parents—and these sins really bother you. In fact, they bother you so much that the burden of them makes you cry out to God in prayer, asking Him to forgive you. You are drawn to God and His Word. You can also be drawn to God just because you love Him so much. Either way, you need God and you can’t live without Him. You pray to Him, and He shows you that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who never sinned, died on the cross to pay for your sins. You believe on Him. When God shows Himself to you, you feel the heavy burden of sin roll off your back, like Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Or it might not be so dramatic; you might just feel like God is so close to you, like He is your BFF, your Best Friend Forever—and He really is!

Then this will show in your life. If you love God, you love His law and His Word! You love good things. You want to live your whole life for God. You are obedient. You show the fruit of the Spirit. You love your parents, your siblings, and your neighbor. You want them to have God in their hearts, so you tell them what Jesus did for you. You want to spend time with God by reading His Word and by praying. Everything you do is measured by the Bible. You still sin, but you fight it, and you ask God for forgiveness. And you have a deep joy that no toy or person can match.

Who are you? Are you a Christian?

Mary Beeke is a homemaker, wife of the editor, and member of the Grand Rapids Heritage Reformed Congregation.

BIBLE QUIZ for children

.....
Elina VanderZwaag

At this time in the church calendar we remember that the Lord Jesus went back to heaven after His work was done on earth.

Do you ever think of heaven? Let's look at some texts and see what you can learn.

1. What is meant with heaven in Genesis 1:14? The _____
2. In 1 Kings 8:30 Solomon is praying in the temple. He calls heaven God's _____.
3. In Malachi 3:10, the Lord gives a special promise to the people of Israel. What do the people have to bring in the store house? Their _____. What will He open? The _____ of heaven. What will He pour out? A _____.
4. Look up Isaiah 51:6. We read here that the heavens shall vanish away like _____ and the earth shall wax old like a _____. Everything will die, but what shall be forever? God's _____.
5. Will there then be no more heaven and earth? Read Isaiah 65:17! No, there will be a _____ heaven and _____ earth!
6. Peter speaks in 2 Peter 3:13 how we as believers look for that, "according to his _____."
7. In Revelation 21:1 John has a vision of this. We read that the "first heaven and the first earth have _____."
8. Heaven is going to be a place of happiness. A place where God Himself shall _____ away all tears. (Revelation 7:17)
9. According to Psalm 16:11 heaven is a place of "fullness of _____," and "_____ for evermore."
10. In Hebrews 11:16 heaven is described as a better _____ and as a _____ prepared for them.
11. In Revelation 7:9 we read that in heaven there will be a multitude no one can count. And people from "all _____, and _____, and _____, and _____" shall worship the Lord Jesus.
12. But will *you* be there? John 3:16 tells you in a few words how you can be saved and need not perish, "but have _____ life."

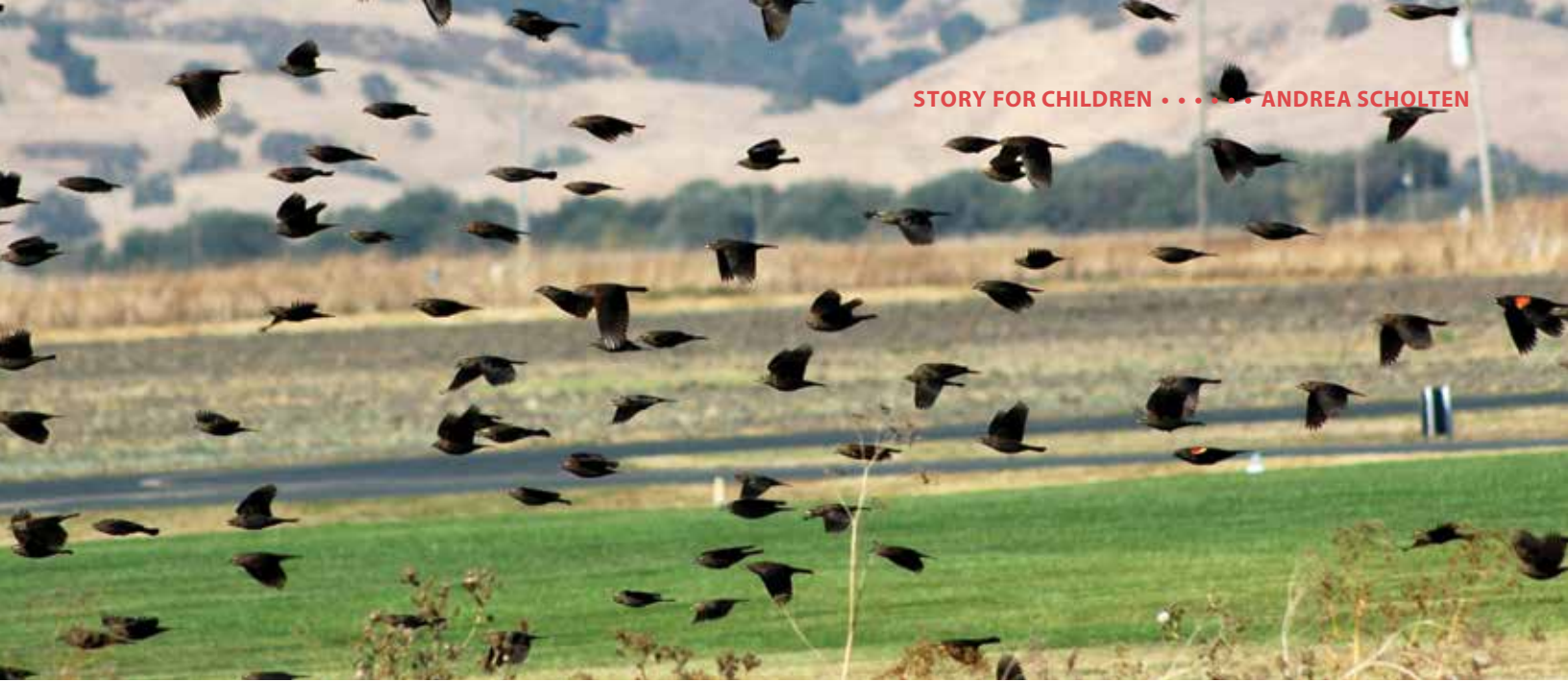
ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

Across

3. showers
5. frost
10. clouds
11. earthquake
12. hail
13. wind
14. flood

Down

1. thunder
2. tempest
4. summer
6. snow
7. lightning
8. whirlwind
9. dew
10. calm



A Sparrow with Blackbirds

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).

The blackbirds had troubled us for several days. We had seen flocks of them about our cornfield, and although we didn’t actually catch them in the act, we blamed them for the mischief that was done there.

One morning, my father had had enough and said, “Paul, I think you had better go over to that field with your gun, and try to get a shot at the blackbirds. Make an example of some of the little thieves. Perhaps that will frighten off the others from now on.”

I was not in the cruel habit of wandering around the fields and woods, shooting harmless birds just for fun. Robins and many other birds built their nests all around our house. In fact, one nest was built right outside my bedroom window! To my delight, little robins were hatched in that nest and lived there until they were strong enough to fly. There was only a pane of glass between them and me when I stood at my window. Yes, I loved birds. But I was like most boys who have been taught how to handle a gun, and when there seemed to be a reason for using it, I did not need to be told twice.

Having loaded my gun, I started for the cornfield. Just before reaching it, I saw a flock of blackbirds rise from the field and land in a clump of bushes nearby. I crept stealthily along under the shadow of a wall until I was close enough to shoot. Quietly, I raised my gun and fired! I immediately knew that I had hit my mark when I saw a number of birds fall from the bushes upon the grass.

Running to the spot, I picked up six black birds and... one little song sparrow! I had never shot a song sparrow

before and I felt a rush of sadness as I looked at the little dead bird I held in my hand. It had evidently been on the field with the blackbirds and had flown with them to the bushes when I had approached.

Sorrowfully I walked home, but as I continued to think about what I had done, I comforted myself with the thought that I had not intended to kill the song sparrow. If it had not been mixed up with such company, it would not have suffered death.

This incident in my life led me to think how important it is for children, as well as sparrows, to be very careful about the people they hang around with. The lesson learned has been a very good one to me, and I have remembered it all these years. Even though today I look at blackbirds in a somewhat different light than I did back then, the lesson still stands that we may throw ourselves into danger if we join up with bad company.

Children, if you find that your friends often use bad language, or if you are tempted by a so-called friend to go to any place or do anything which is not according to God’s Word, first try to influence them for good. If they continue down the wrong path, leave them quickly and distance yourself from such a person, for they are doing what God hates and it is sin. You may think that bad company is not such a big deal and that you are safe, but remember that the sparrow, in choosing to follow the blackbirds, chose death.

“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Proverbs 1:10).

Andrea Scholten is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article is adapted from *Uncle Paul’s Stories for Boys and Girls*, by Uncle Paul. Boston: American Tract Society.



and announcements

Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

OBITUARY

SPAANS, James, age 79, of Hudsonville, MI, passed away on Tuesday, April 26, 2016. He was preceded in death by his son, Ken Spaans; sister, Nellie Bouma; brothers, Herman Spaans, Rev. John Spaans, Henry Spaans, Albert Spaans, Marvin Spaans, and Adrian Spaans. James will be lovingly remembered by his wife of 34 years, Catherine; daughters, Sheryl and John VanRoekel, Marcia Simo; daughter-in-law, Lori Spaans; step-children, Christopher and Wanda Widner, Eric and Stacy Widner, Theresa Widner; 15 grandchildren; 9 great-grandchildren; brothers, Cornelius and Pauline Spaans, Dick and Marilyn Spaans, Leonard and Elizabeth Spaans, Andy and Doris Spaans, Ben and Betty Spaans; many sisters-in-law; and many nieces and nephews. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Psalm 62:5-6; Rev. David VanBrugge, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

TEACHERS NEEDED

HERITAGE REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is accepting teaching applications for possible openings for the 2016-2017 school year. Interested K-6 applicants should contact Mr. John Zomer at (605) 359-7206 or email (johnz@zomertrucks.com). HRCS is a multi-grade classroom setting that is located in Rock Valley, Iowa. You may also visit the school's website at heritagereformedschool.com.



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"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to
God for Israel is, that they might be saved"

Romans 10:1



CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE? 2016 HRC YOUTH CONFERENCE

And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? — Esther 4:14

Topic 1 Your World – Pastor David VanBrugge

What kind of world are we living in today and is God still in control?

Topic 2 Your Privilege – Pastor David Lipsy

What are your privileges and responsibilities in this present world?

Topic 3 Your People – Dr. Jerry Bilkes – *Esther was a Jew; with whom do you identify today?*

Topic 4 Your Dilemma – Pastor Ian Macleod – *What dilemma are you faced with in your world today?*

Topic 5 Your Plea – Student Pieter VanderHoek – *What is your response to this dilemma?*

Topic 6 Your Risk – Pastor Maarten Kuivenhoven – *Are you willing to take the risk to stand?*

HRC Youth Conference is planned for July 5-8 at Camp Michawana in Hastings, MI. We will look at how youth, by God's grace, can make a difference today in our world biblically. Register early to receive the reduced price and reserve your place by visiting the website <http://hncr.org/ministries/youth-conference>. We prefer you click on "register online" or, if necessary, you can register by downloading and printing the registration form and e-mail it to youthcamp@hncr.org or mail it to Ben and Beth Engelsma, O-1630 Leonard St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534.



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Afternoon Session: 1:30PM
Lunch at cost: \$5.00

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to the Lord for the blessings received, we hope to commemorate the 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents:

George and Catherine Petersen
on June 22, 2016, D.V.

*Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk;
for I lift up my soul unto thee (Ps. 143:8b).*

Children

Henry Petersen, Smithville, Ontario
Margaret Petersen, Beamsville, Ontario
Cathy and Heino Dehaan, St. Anns, Ontario
Gerald and Esther Petersen, Rolly View, Alberta

Grandchildren: Jessica, Nathan, David, Cassandra, Jonathan, and Hannah Dehaan, Owen and Luke Petersen

Address: 18 Garden Dr., Smithville, On. L0R 2A0 Canada



FREE REFORMED ASSOCIATION

PEACE HAVEN Free Reformed Association in Brantford, Ontario operates two homes with assisted living in a Christian environment for persons with disabilities. In the Spring of 2016, one of the persons supported plans to move away from the area. For more information about either full-time residential care or regular part-time respite care, please contact Peace Haven Director, Margaret Heemskerk, email: mheemskerk.peacehaven@gmail.com cell: 519-770-8816 or Secretary, Jorina Bouman jorinabouman@cogeco.ca



A day care center in the village of Pechanivka, Ukraine is a project that COAH supports.

Pastor Maxim's heart is filled with love for children and teenagers from this village. He has many moving stories of the children he has helped. He also tells disturbing stories of parents who have forsaken their children, who rebel against God, and are unwilling to listen to His Word. Yet not all of Maxim's labours have been in vain, for a few parents have begun to attend church, and Maxim continues on in this work.

After school, the children come to the center. If the weather allows, they have some activities outside, then they do homework, after which follows a good meal for them. Together, they clean up and wash dishes. After the meal, they are divided into two groups for Bible lessons. Maxim says, "These children are not visiting the church, they live in the church." The center is open five days every week.

Some positive changes have been noticed in families since the church came into contact with them. Most children came dirty and attired in soiled clothing, but now they are washed and wear clean clothes. Even this simple change makes the children feel like they are wanted.

Maxim and his wife Natasha share how these children like to be in their home. They desire to model a good Christian family by their example. This gives the children a new view of family relationships.

Pechanivka is a small village with little opportunity. Most of the people leave for bigger cities to search for a better life. The hope and prayer of Maxim is that the seeds he is planting now in these children will bring fruit in the future.

Please, keep this project in your prayers. May God give all the staff strength, wisdom and encouragement. May the Lord continue His work in the souls of parents and children.



Pastor Maxim and his wife Natasha



Phone: 888-844-2624 Website: coah.org Email: info@coah.org

NATIONAL NEWS

OKLAHOMANS TO VOTE ON WHETHER TO RETURN TEN
COMMANDMENTS MONUMENT TO STATE CAPITOL

Controversy over a Ten Commandments monument removed from the grounds of the state Capitol in October continues with an effort to reinstate the monument. The Oklahoma House of Representatives voted 65-7 in favor of a statewide vote to determine whether to remove an article of the state constitution which prohibits the use of state funds to support religion.

Oklahoma voters will now have the opportunity in November to vote on whether the constitutional section prohibiting the use of state funds for religion should be removed. If the voters decide to abolish the constitutional mandate, it will pave the way for the Ten Commandments monument to be reinstated on the grounds of the Capitol. The monument was initially commissioned by the Republican-controlled Legislature in 2009 and was privately funded. (*ChristianHeadlines.com*)

INDIANA BECOMES SECOND STATE TO BAN ABORTIONS
BASED ON DOWN SYNDROME

Indiana has become the second state in the nation, following North Dakota, to ban abortions on babies who are diagnosed in the womb as having Down Syndrome. Gov. Mike Pence signed the bill today to protect unborn babies from being aborted simply because of a disability, race, or sex.

“Throughout my public career, I have stood for the sanctity of life. HEA 1337 is a comprehensive pro-life measure that affirms the value of all human life, which is why I signed it into law today,” Governor Pence said in a statement. “I believe that a society can be judged by how it deals with its most vulnerable—the aged, the infirm, the disabled and the unborn. HEA 1337 will ensure the dignified final treatment of the unborn and prohibits abortions that are based only on the unborn child’s sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry, or disability, including Down syndrome.”

In 2013, North Dakota became the first state to pass a similar bill to protect unborn babies from abortions because of disabilities. A handful of states also ban abortions based solely on the baby’s sex. (Steven Ertelt, Micaiah Bilger, Indianapolis, IN)

PERSECUTION FOCUS

MUSLIM MAN INTENT ON KILLING CHRISTIAN FAMILY
IS MIRACULOUSLY CONVERTED

A Muslim man who was intent on killing Christians has miraculously encountered Christ and, by God’s grace, became a Christian himself. Charisma News reports that Al-Rashid was the commander of a radical Islamic group that sought to bring all people and nations under Islamic rule. Al-Rashid was especially angered by a report of a former Muslim who had converted to Christianity, became a pastor, and began spreading the gospel.

Al-Rashid decided to target Pastor Paul and his family, but God had other plans in mind. “We attacked them several times,” Al-Rashid recounted, “and miraculously they escaped.” Ironically, Al-Rashid had a Bible in his house for the purpose of refuting Christians. He picked this Bible up and it fell open to John 1:9–10, which says: “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.”

Al-Rashid understood that the passage was about Jesus. Soon after, the Holy Spirit enabled him to surrender his life to Christ. “Jesus is the Prince of Peace. And He will give you peace. Receive Him as the only Savior,” he now tells others.

Al-Rashid now works with Bibles for Mideast, distributing God’s Word to those who are just like he was. He also went to see Pastor Paul who embraced him as a Christian brother. (Veronica Neffinger)

FOCUS ON CHRISTIANITY

MADE IN CHINA: THE NEXT MASS MISSIONARY
MOVEMENT CHINESE CHRISTIANS PLAN TO SEND
20,000 MISSIONARIES BY 2030

Last Fall, about 850 Chinese leaders gathered for their own missions conference, and announced from Hong Kong a long-discussed goal: with God’s help, to send 20,000 missionaries from China by the year 2030.

The number is enormous for a country that has sent only a few hundred foreign missionaries so far. Of the world’s top six sending countries, four hover around the 20,000 mark, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC): France, Spain, Italy, and South Korea. Only the United States (127,000) and Brazil (34,000) send more.

But nobody’s ruling China out. The Pew Research Center estimated there were 67 million who professed Christianity in China in 2010. CSGC, which includes growth from unofficial conversions, put the figure at 106 million in 2010.

By those numbers, reaching 20,000 isn’t unrealistic. The global average for Christians sending foreign missionaries is 175 per million, said CSGC’s Todd Johnson. If China has 100 million Christians, sending 17,500 would meet the average.

However, the Chinese church isn’t aiming for averages but repayment: Chinese leaders estimate about 20,000 missionaries have served in China since the days of Robert Morrison and Hudson Taylor. “The idea of the 20,000 was based on a gospel debt or missional debt,” said 10/40 Window speaker and author Luis Bush, who addressed the Hong Kong conference. “They see themselves as an extremity of Acts 1:8.”

China’s big goal is reminiscent of South Korea’s pledge in the 1990s to raise 10,000 missionaries in 10 years. South Korean Christians met their goal in 2000 and raised it: they’re now aiming, with God’s help, to send 100,000 missionaries by 2030. (Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra)



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CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY? (2)

HOW DOES PAUL'S ARGUMENT IN COLOSSIANS RELATE TO PHILOSOPHY?

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

Every time one verse or passage becomes the center of a large discussion, it is imperative to ask about the relationship of that passage to the wider context. In other words, was Paul's primary concern with philosophy? If his primary concern was not the philosophical questions, what relevance does the warning about philosophy have in his overall purpose in writing to the Colossians?

The short answer is that Paul's overall argument in Colossians is not the philosophical one, but is the supremacy, centrality, and sufficiency of Christ especially in relation to the believer (1:18; 2:9; 3:11). E. C. Caldwell expressed this key theme as the "perfect sufficiency of Christ for every human need."¹ Earlier, Nicholas Byfield described Colossians as "an excellent epitome of the doctrine expressed in the rest of the books of the Old and New Testament."² Related to that key theme, William Hendriksen describes Paul's theme of the all-sufficient Christ as the object of believers' faith, and as the source of believers' lives.³

While not Paul's overall argument in Colossians, the centrality of Christ and the believers' union with Christ are connected to the philosophical question. If philosophy is simply another way of seeking to answer man's ultimate questions, then Christ, who is the source of all wisdom and knowledge, will answer those questions. It is only through union with Christ that believers can know and understand this, and have it impact all of their life. Therefore, Christ must become supreme over the false philosophies in a Christian's life.⁴

In relation to the content of this article, Paul is exhorting the Colossians to not be deceived by the philosophies of the day that have vain deceit as their source and subject matter.⁵ He does not want them to fall into the danger of proud, heady thinking that relies on



speculation rather than knowledge, nor the dangers of legalistic asceticism or boundless sensuality.⁶ "They cannot synchronize their own beliefs and traditions with Christ; they cannot listen to Satan's vain philosophies and maintain the purity of the gospel."⁷

Rather than any syncretism, Paul wants the Colossians to experience the treasure that is in Christ. True treasures of spiritual wisdom can only be found in Christ, and to be deceived concerning spiritual wisdom will only produce problematic Christian living.⁸ While the Colossians were struggling with looking elsewhere for their spiritual treasures, it is the universal sin to displace Christ, and therefore Paul's admonition anticipates the tendencies of all times and all people.⁹ Still today, in spite of (or because of) all scientific advance, this treasure of Christ as the treasure of wisdom and the answer to the traditional philosophical questions, is necessary for all people.¹⁰

There may be those who believe that binding philosophy to Christ is over-reaching and is something that ought not to be done. A Christo-centric philosophy? No way! But Christ and philosophy do go together. Yes, Christ is over all things, including the love of wisdom. While this may seem untraditional, the full scope of Christ's supremacy needs to be grappled with. The skeptic may wonder: "Are we to assert that all things whatsoever are to be determined by Him; all nature, all history, all revelation, all redemption, have as their ultimate purpose His honor and His exaltation? Are we to say that the universe is to be reconstructed with Him as its center, the principle of its unity, and its goal?"¹¹ We are. It is after the warning of vain and human philosophies (2:8) that Paul states, "In [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (2:9-10).

Therefore, even philosophy must be understood with Christ as its center, its unity, and its goal. While Paul did not explicitly build answers in response to the philosophical questions, it is the intent of future articles in this column to try to derive answers from Paul's writing to the Colossians.

1. Eugene C. Caldwell, "The Fulness of Christ," in *Princeton Theological Review* 16, no. 4 (1918): 558.

2. Nicholas Byfield, *An Exposition upon the Epistle to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1869), 1.

3. William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 40.

4. Caldwell, "Fulness of Christ," 567.

5. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians VI. Beware of Philosophy" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119, no. 461 (Fall 1962): 307-8.

6. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Christ Pre-Eminent: Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage, 1923), 8.

7. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 133.

8. Johnson, "Beware of Philosophy," 304.

9. W. R. Nicholson, *Popular Studies in Colossians: Oneness with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1951), 19-20.

10. Johnson, "Beware of Philosophy," 304.

11. Caldwell, "Fulness of Christ," 563.

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HAVE YOU HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS?

Have you heard the voice of Jesus
Softly pleading with your heart?
Have you felt His presence glorious,
As He calls your soul apart,
With a love so true and loyal,
Love divine that ever flows
From a Saviour, righteous, royal,
And a cross that mercy shows?

Have you heard the voice of mercy
Granting peace and pardon pure?
Have you felt the balm of Calvary
Binding all your wounds secure?
Was there ever such salvation?
Was there ever care like this?
See the Saviour's grief and passion,
Grace and mercy's gentle kiss.

Have you heard the Saviour calling
All to leave and follow Him?
Have you felt His Person drawing
With compulsion lives to win?
Hearken to His invitation,
To the music of God's grace;
Let the peace of God's salvation
Fill your soul, and love embrace.

Will you hear the voice of Jesus
Calling home to mansions fair?
Will you know the promise precious,
And the Shepherd's tender care?
Yes, if you in life responded
To God's grace and gospel sound:
For they never are confounded
Who believed and Jesus found.

—WILLIAM VERNON HIGHAM

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The Lord of the Harvest

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38).

As Jesus went by the cities and villages and saw the multitudes, Matthew 9:36 says He “was moved with compassion on them.” This small account of the condition of the people and the heart of the Lord Jesus has at least two major elements that ought to greatly humble the pastor or prospective one. First, we see the heart Jesus has for the lost and the supreme example after which the heart of every pastor should be molded. Oh, to be moved with compassion as Jesus was! He was not manifesting concern at a lack of followers as much as He was concerned for the souls of those who were not following. Jesus is calling us to weep not for empty pews but for empty hearts. Only then will our concern be Christ-like. We need a sincere and deep concern for the condition of those who are without hope and without God in the world. Their condition ought to make us hurt to the point that we do something.

The second thing that truly humbles any man in the ministry is what Jesus points us to do. He says to pray which in itself humbles us since prayer declares we need the Lord and we are helpless without Him; such is the reality of all of Christian life. The element which really humbles a man in the ministry is the request Jesus commanded His disciples to ask. He did not say to pray for the strength or salvation of those who were weary and scattered, which certainly has its place in our prayers. He says for us to pray that the “Lord of the harvest would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

My dear fellow pastor or student of the ministry, does this humble you: that you, as a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, going forth to proclaim Him in this harvest which is “truly plenteous,” are the very answer to this prayer you are commanded to pray? The “labourers” do certainly relate to every believer who shares the gospel of the Lord Jesus with unbelievers. However, a pastor, by the very nature of his vocation and work, is such a laborer every day of his life. If he is not sharing the gospel, he is studying the Word in order to share it, praying for the gospel to bear fruit, and living in holiness in order to reflect the gospel he proclaims.

May the Lord give us the grace to fulfill such a high calling and privilege. May He give us the heart He Himself has for the lost. And may He bless this love to reflect a life which truly cares for others so that they are inclined to listen when we share the good news of Jesus Christ.

If you are a minister or contemplating seminary studies, always remember that you are the very answer (or preparing to be) to this precious prayer Jesus taught us to pray. It is humbling to be called to such depths of Christ-like compassion and to be the very answer of Christ’s prayer.

—REV. JOHNNY C. SERAFINI
Heritage Reformed Congregation of New Jersey

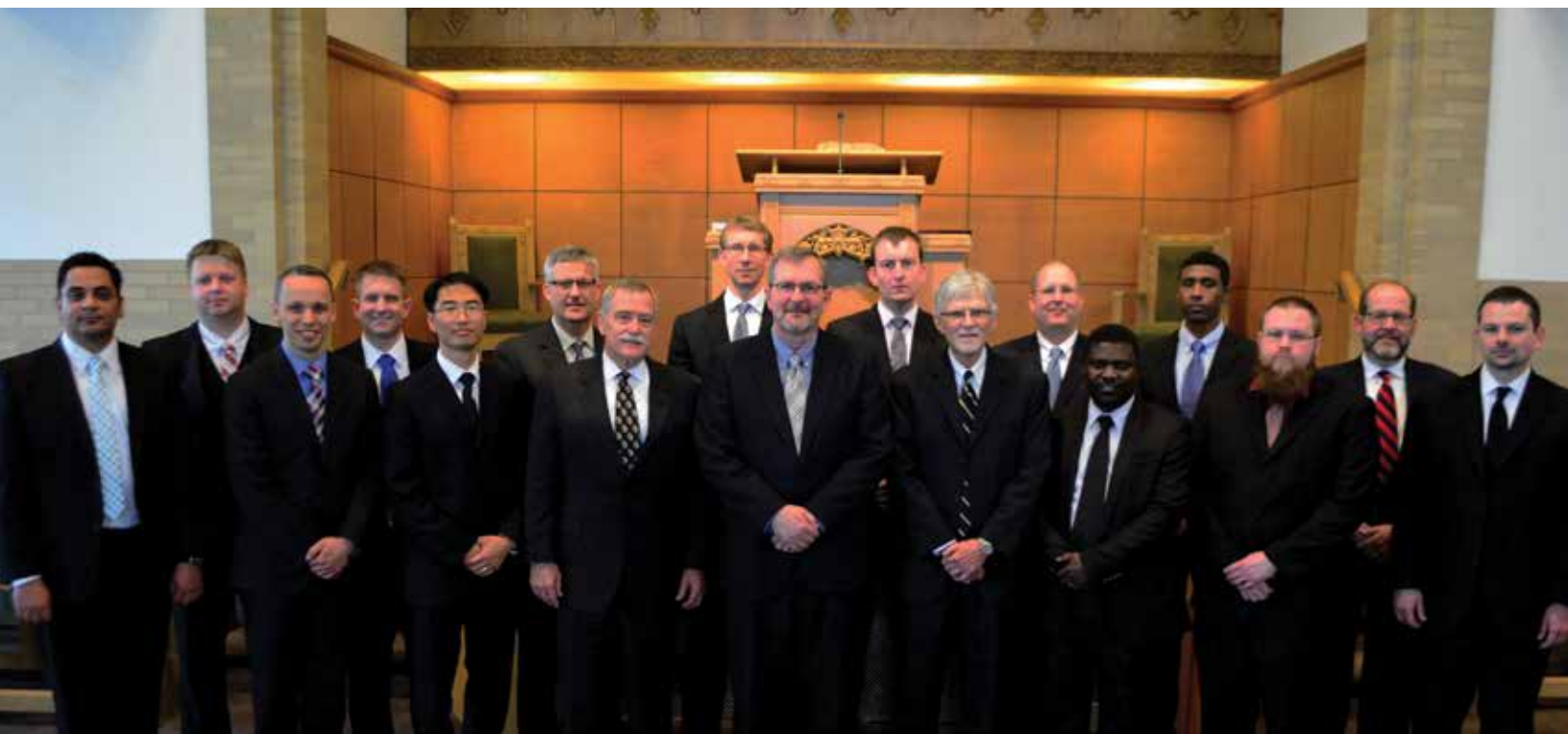


2016 PRTS Graduation

On May 6, several hundred people gathered to watch as eighteen excited yet thankful PRTS students were awarded their theological degrees. To date, this year's graduating class has been the largest since the founding of the seminary in 1995. A total of five Master of Arts, seven Master of Divinity, and six Master of Theology degrees were awarded. Remarkably, these eighteen graduates came to PRTS from thirteen various countries from around the world. Many will or have already returned home to take up calls as pastors and/or teachers; some have plans to further their education before returning home to serve Christ and His church.

This year's commencement speaker was Dr. Joseph Pipa, President of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His message, *A Prayer for Graduates*, was taken from 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. In it, he encouraged each graduate to seek comfort and strength in the Lord Jesus Christ for life and service in His kingdom.

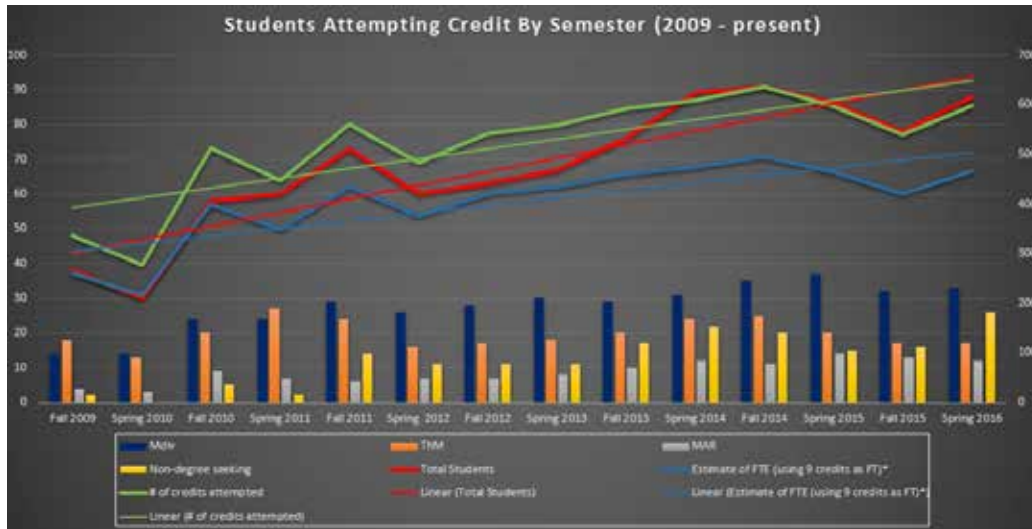
Participants in this year's ceremony included Dr. Michael Barrett, Vice President for Academic Affairs/Academic Dean, who opened the service with a Scripture reading, Psalter, and prayer; Dr. Joel Beeke, President/Professor of Systematics and Homiletics, who gave the graduating class a personal charge and a Bunyanesque name and best wishes to each graduate, describing their personal character; Dr. Jonathan Engelsma, PRTS Board Chairman, who awarded each student his degree on behalf of the seminary; and Mr. Henk Kleyn, Vice President for Operations, who closed the service with prayer.



Registrar/Admissions Report

In some aspects, a registrar is like a historian. Not only am I involved in setting the schedule for the upcoming semesters, ensuring that current students meet the requirements of the program in which they are enrolled, and helping new students adjust to the academic climate of PRTS, part of my job is also to evaluate the past trends or patterns of student enrollment in order to make strategic choices for the future.

Certainly too much emphasis can be placed upon numbers, but one way to evaluate the past is to consider the number of students who have walked through the doors of PRTS. In the following graph, I narrowed the focus to consider the number of students who have attempted at least one class since the fall of 2009. This graph highlights several factors:

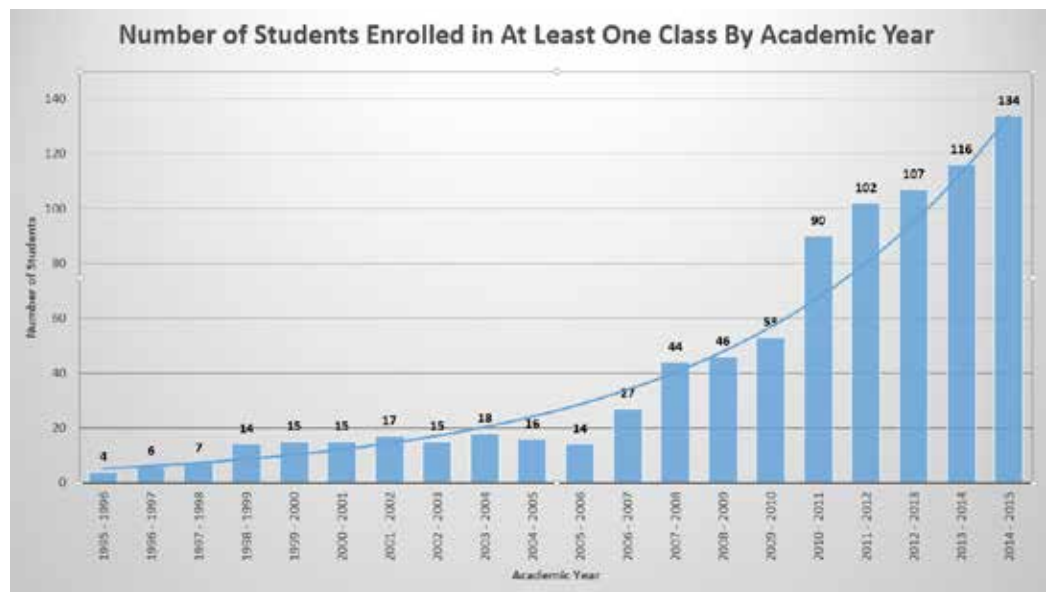


1) the total number of students enrolled each semester at PRTS (the red line on the graph, which ranges from approximately 30 students in the spring semester of 2010 to just over 90 students in the fall semester of 2014); 2) the number of enrolled students in each program (as represented by the bars near the bottom of the chart); and 3) the number of credits attempted each semester (the green line, from which the full-time equivalent number of students is drawn [blue line]).

We can broaden the historical

scope and look at the number of students enrolled in each academic year since the beginning of the seminary's existence. It is amazing to think, as the next graph illustrates, that PRTS began in 1995 with four enrolled students, and then during the last completed academic year, 134 students were enrolled in at least one class.

While we are encouraged by this growth and pray for increasing influence and spread of the gospel through the various ministries of PRTS students, we are acutely aware that growth in numbers is not necessarily an indication of God's blessing. Nevertheless, we are thankful to God for the continued witness we can have here in Grand Rapids, and desire that this be carried on through our students to the rest of the world. Our desire is that through the ministry of this seminary, and because of the covenantal and gracious character of the God we serve, the Lord



will gather a people to Himself as Deuteronomy 7:6-8 testifies: "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

—Jonathon Beeke
Registrar and Director of Admissions



STUDENT INTERVIEW with Sherif Fahim

Please tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up? Anything you want to share about your family?

My name is Sherif Atef Shawky Fahim. I grew up in Alexandria, Egypt. I am married since 2005 to Marian and we are blessed with three daughters: Sophia (9), Nelly (7), and Naomi (4). Fishing and playing soccer are my favorite hobbies.

Can you list one or two formative people/mentors in your life? What quality or characteristic in them was most appealing to you?

My mentor since 2009 is Frank Newel. Frank is a pastor in the PCA and has been in Egypt for 17 years. Frank was my teacher in a seminary back in Egypt from 2005 to 2009. Then he trained me as a teacher assistant in some of his courses for the following two years. We also attended the same church, doing a lot of ministry together.

The most important lesson I learned from Frank is how important for him the kingdom of God is. He was always more concerned about building the kingdom of God than his own kingdom. He trained and equipped me to the point that I could start to teach his courses instead of him. Moreover, he continued to support, pray, and guide me through all the following steps in my ministry and teaching role. Frank taught me with his life before his words that life is not about us but it is about Christ.

What drew you to this seminary?

One of the main challenges in today's academic world is to find a place with solid Reformed, conservative teaching and high academic standards. PRTS is one of these places. This is essential especially in the light of our context where liberal and Arminian views are the most dominant among church leaders in Egypt. These kind of challenges need to be addressed not only in a loving spirit but also in a sound, academic way.

I have served as a ruling-elder in the Presbyterian church of Egypt since November 2012. The church overall struggles to grasp the meaning and application of the gospel. Most teaching in the church is legalistic and moralistic. This results in either legalistic religious nominal Christians

or irreligious nominal Christians. I believe that PRTS can give me valuable perspectives to address these issues.

Certainly Egypt and Grand Rapids are worlds apart in terms of culture, weather, geography, customs, etc. What has been the most challenging thing since relocating to Grand Rapids? Anything that you thought would be very hard, but was surprisingly easy?

The most challenging things since relocating in Grand Rapids is that we miss our family and friends back in Egypt. However, we are starting to make new friends here in Grand Rapids. Of course, it takes some time, but things are moving forward in a good way.

I thought it would be very hard to settle in a church which would be suitable to all my family. Surprisingly, we found a church that is very near our house—the Free Reformed Church. People have been very welcoming and kind to us since we arrived. My family is very comfortable in this new church even though it is quite different from our home church in many ways. Many of my fellow students in PRTS are attending the same church which also makes it easier for us to settle in there.

After you graduate, Lord willing, with a Master of Theology in Systematic Theology, what then?

I am already teaching in an Anglican seminary back in Egypt named Alexandria School of Theology. So, I have a long-term vision to help train my fellow Egyptians to think theologically and to embrace a Reformed worldview. In order to do that, I would like to enter a PhD program in New Testament Studies in the future. The aim of the research is to show how the gospel converts people and how it conforms their lives to the likeness of Jesus Christ. This is an important topic in our context, especially with the lack of understanding of the meaning of justification and its relation to our Christian life. So a ThM at PRTS would help me to move towards that goal.

You indicated that you have already had a teaching role in a seminary in Egypt. Can you describe the types of classes and students that you taught or oversaw? Also,

what choices of seminaries does one have if planning on studying in Egypt?

I have been teaching in Alexandria School of Theology since 2009. It is the only Anglican seminary in the Middle East. AST is a conservative seminary whose mission is to train Christian lay people and ordinands to serve Christ in the Anglican Church as well as in other churches in the Middle East. Although AST only started in 2005, it is now one of the best seminaries in Egypt because

of being a conservative seminary with high academic standards.

I teach Christology, Eschatology, the book of Romans, the Pentateuch, and New Trends of Theology. We have students from many denominations in Egypt: from Anglican, Presbyterian, Coptic Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Brethren churches. So studying the Scripture and discussing theology among all these kinds of backgrounds is quite exciting and challenging.

Seminary Awareness Month

For the last two years, the Alumni Committee has promoted “Seminary Awareness Month,” a way for graduates of PRTS to raise awareness of the seminary that has meant so much to them. Having selected a relevant passage on raising up and training men for the ministry, we have encouraged the alumni to preach it in their congregations in May.

In our congregation last year (the Presbyterian Reformed Church of R.I.), I preached on our chosen text, 2 Timothy 2:2, at three of our mid-week prayer meetings. Before prayer, we shared highlights from alumni printed in the PRTS Update. Our congregation gladly sent a donation to the seminary afterwards.

A couple of years ago, we learned that Dr. Beeke was coming our way, so we asked him to preach for us and to do a presentation about the seminary. The sermon, from Hebrews 12:1–2, was a boon to our souls, and the presentation was extremely informative and encouraging to everyone. God is definitely at work in PRTS and throughout the world. “On this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

Rev. Brian Najapfour’s congregation, the Dutton United Reformed Church, holds a regular collection for PRTS and includes special PRTS events in their bulletin, such as the annual Puritan Reformed Conference. As they are geographically close, they also regularly invite teachers and students from the seminary to speak, and they hire two PRTS students to lead Bible studies every other Wednesday.

This year, our chosen text for Seminary Awareness Month is Isaiah 6:8, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.” We pray that the Lord will enable the alumni to preach this text in the power of the Spirit and deepen our commitment to the raising up and training of more men to answer that call.

—Michael J. Ives
Presbyterian Reformed
Church of R.I.
The Reformed Parish

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FROM THE PRESIDENT.....

Dear Friends,

Please remember four exciting things in prayer with me. First, our upcoming conference, “The Beauty and Glory of the Christian Worldview,” features a wonderful lineup of speakers, including Derek Thomas, senior minister at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina; Charles Barrett, assistant minister at Wayside Presbyterian Church in Signal Mountain, Tennessee; Brian Cosby, senior pastor also at Wayside Presbyterian Church; and several PRTS faculty members. Today we need to hear a clear, robust message of what a biblically Reformed, experiential worldview looks like. Please consider joining us August 25–27 as we ponder anew the beautiful, old message of God’s grace in the gospel in a variety of practical areas.

Second, next year marks the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. To celebrate, I will be leading, by God’s grace, a two-week tour through Scotland and England. We will be stopping at places such as St. Andrews, London, Cambridge, and several lesser-known destinations that have been significant to the Reformed and Puritan movements. We will visit the church where Robert Murray M’Cheyne was ordained and the cemetery where Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Halyburton are buried next to each other. You will want to secure your place soon to join us on what is sure to be a delightful and informative trip. For more information, contact Ann Dykema or me at 616-977-0599.

Third, as we celebrated the graduation of eighteen PRTS students on May 6, I was reminded that our extended

PRTS family was partially responsible for the joyful occasion. For it is with God’s help and the loving commitment of partners from around the globe who pray for the work and support it in various ways that we are able to train students for ministry in Christ’s church. What a privilege! Please continue praying for the seminary’s alumni, faculty, staff, and student body. We are humbled by how the Lord has used PRTS these past twenty-one years and excited about what He has in store for us in the years to come.

Finally, please remember in prayer all that will be taking place for us this summer. We are looking forward to new non-matriculating PhD students beginning their studies here in August. We are asking our faithful partners to consider supporting the seminary’s PhD Scholarship Fund to help offset the cost associated with these studies. We are praying for the Lord’s benediction to rest on this program and for Him to send converted and called men with exceptional gifts from North America and the nations. Pray for wisdom from the Lord for the HRC Synod that will be meeting on June 7 and voting on the candidates associated with this program. We are also looking to the Lord for our daily provisions and for wisdom to carry out all our responsibilities. We are a needy people depending on a loving, heavenly Father who takes great delight in lavishing good gifts on His children. It’s my prayer that you too may know the eternal love of the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ, who works through the tender promptings of the Holy Spirit.

—Joel R. Beeke

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THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION: Tour of Scotland and England with Dr. Joel Beeke

I am both delighted and excited to be leading a very special and exclusive tour to Scotland and England. Together with Witte Travel, we at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary have carefully assembled an incredibly attractive itinerary including treasures on and off the beaten path. During our travels we are going to experience rich Christian heritage across two countries, visit some extremely beautiful places, and stay in premium accommodations. With the optional extension of the William Perkins Conference in the historic city of Cambridge, this promises to be a memorable time together. We would love to have you join us. — Dr. Beeke



MAY 8 – 20, 2017

ESTIMATED TOUR COSTS:

Based on double occupancy from Grand Rapids:
\$4,799 per person
\$875 per person for the optional Cambridge Extension

Complete brochures will be available by early July. Please let Dr. Beeke or his administrative assistant, Ann Dykema, know of your interest in joining this enlightening and educational trip to Scotland and England!

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Ann Dykema
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FACULTY ITINERARIES & PUBLICATIONS

DR. MICHAEL BARRETT | Itinerary:

June 6–8: Dundas, Ontario: HRC Synod
June 26: Chicago, Illinois: Addison Street Community Church
July 10: Chatham, Ontario: Chatham Free Reformed Church
July 17: Burgessville, Ontario: Burgessville HRC
August 7: Kinnelon, New Jersey: Kinnelon HRC
August 25–27: Grand Rapids, Michigan: PRTS Conference
September 18: Mitchell, Ontario: Mitchell Free Reformed Church
October 9: Fenwick, Ontario: Fenwick Free Reformed Church

Project:

A Radical Comprehensive Call to Holiness in collaboration with Dr. Beeke

DR. JOEL BEEKE | Itinerary:

June 2–4: Seattle, Washington: Ligonier Conference
June 4–5: Burgessville, Ontario: HRC Youth and preaching
June 6–8: Dundas, Ontario: HRC Synod
June 10–13: Dominican Republic: Preaching and meetings to establish Spanish-speaking division of books for Reformation Heritage Books
July 5–9: Brazil: 25th annual Puritan Project Conference
July 22: Grand Rapids, Michigan: speak for American Decency Association's Summer Conference
August 1–5: Dubai: preaching and lecturing on the Puritans
August 6–7: London, England: Evangelical Reformed Church, conference and preaching
August 8–12: Aberystwyth, Wales: Aber Conference
August 13–23: South Africa: itinerary of preaching for Peter Temple
August 25–27: Grand Rapids, Michigan: PRTS Conference
August 31–September 2: The Netherlands: Conference on John Owen
September 23–24: Jacksonville, Florida: Ortega Presbyterian Church (conference)
September 30–October 2: conference in southern Mexico

Recent Publications:

Living in a Godly Marriage (with James A. La Belle). Grand Rapids: RHB.
One Man & One Woman: Marriage and Same-Sex Relations (with Paul M. Smalley). Grand Rapids: RHB.
John Bunyan and His Preaching (in Korean). Seoul: KIRP.
Portraits of Faith (in Persian-Farsi). Cheltenham, England: Parsa Trust.

How Can I Cultivate Private Prayer? Grand Rapids: RHB.

“Perseverance by the Spirit” and “Perseverance by the Word.” In *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Essays in Honour of Robert W. Oliver*, ed. Robert Strivens and Blair Waddell. West Garden City, U.K.: Evangelical Press.

“Revival and the Dutch Reformed Church in Eighteenth-Century America.” In *Pentecostal Outpourings: Revival and the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Robert Smart, Michael Haykin, and Ian Clary. Grand Rapids: RHB.

“Laurence Chaderton: His Life and Ecclesiology.” “A Life in the Word.” “Busy but Fruitful: How to Manage Time.” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, 1 (Jan. 2016).

“The Life and Vision of Abraham Kuyper.” In *By Common Confession: Essays in Honor of James M. Renihan*, ed. Ronald Baines, Richard Barcellos, and James Butler. Palmdale, California: RBAP.

“John Bunyan, The Faithful Tinker.” *Expositor* no. 9 (Jan–Feb 2016).
Edit and publisher’s preface for John Brown of Wamphray, *Godly Prayer and Its Answers*. Grand Rapids: RHB.

Edit and publisher’s preface (with Paul Smalley) for Robert Traill, *The Lord’s Prayer for His People*. Grand Rapids: RHB.

DR. DAVID MURRAY | Itinerary:

May 24–27: Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Pastors’ Conference

June 23–24: The Netherlands: PhD Seminar on The Latitudinarians
August 31–September 2: The Netherlands: Conference Paper on John Owen’s View of Happiness

September 23–24: New Jersey: Trinity Baptist Men’s Conference

Projects:

PhD on “Matthew Henry: The Reasonableness and Pleasantness of Religion” (Free University of Amsterdam)

Three books with Crossway.

DR. WILLIAM VAN DOODEWAARD | Itinerary:

June–July 2016: Visiting Research Fellow in the School of History and Anthropology, Queen’s University Belfast.

July 2016: Preaching at Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Writing Projects:

1 & 2 Peter, Evangelical Press.

A review of Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ, Themelios*.

FINANCIAL REPORT

For period 8/1/2015–4/15/2016

Training students today for service in Christ's church tomorrow is the mission that we have undertaken together. Your partnership in this endeavor, along with the Lord's blessing, is vital to its success. Please remember the seminary in your prayers and with your financial contributions in 2016.

—CHRIS HANNA

	Year to Date Actual	Annual Budget	Variance	Percent of Annual Budget
Income				
HRC/FRC				
Church Support	\$ 261,942	466,500	(204,558)	56%
Other Donations	1,452,686	1,011,500	441,186	144%
Tuition	311,367	350,000	(38,633)	89%
Scholarships	168,263	285,000	(116,737)	59%
Other Income	117,501	344,000	(226,499)	34%
Total Income	\$2,311,759	\$ 2,457,000	\$ (145,241)	94%
Expenses				
Instruction	\$ 483,061	720,254	(237,193)	67%
Scholarships	264,422	285,000	(20,578)	93%
Administrative	1,135,342	1,292,746	(157,404)	88%
Total Expenses	\$ 1,882,825	\$ 2,298,000	\$ (415,175)	82%
Net Income	\$ 428,933			

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