



# the Banner

*of Sovereign Grace Truth*

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Christ's Loving Counsel

Church Bible Study:  
Are We Wasting Our Time?

Answering Pro-Abortionists'  
Arguments

A Periodical for Young and Old

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## Pain

This issue of BSGT presents a "Practical Christianity" section on pain. No one enjoys pain, yet God can use it to make us partakers of Christ's righteousness and holiness (Heb. 12:10-11). As believers, pain stops us in our tracks, and compels us to ask questions. Charles Hodge wrote, "The experience of God's people shows that bodily pain has a special office to perform in the work of sanctification."

This work of sanctification through pain is a progressive process throughout our lives. While in pain we often see how spiritually immature we still are. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "I am trying, if I can, to find a joy in rheumatism, but I cannot get up to it yet. I have found a joy when it is over—I can reach that length—and I can and do bless God for any good result that may come of it; but when the pain is on me, it is difficult to be joyous about it, and so I conclude that my sanctification is very incomplete."

May God graciously sanctify every pain He, in His inscrutable sovereignty, will be pleased to send our way in 2012—be it physical, emotional, or spiritual—to our spiritual growth and His glory. Every blessing to you and yours in 2012.

# Christ's Loving Counsel

*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?  
Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? – Matthew 16:26*

Christ presents us with a question of grave reality. This question begs a review of the context. In the preceding verses, He shed light on the real purpose of His coming in the flesh. He informs His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and then rise again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

Peter responded negatively to Jesus' announcement—indeed, how strange and incomprehensible this message must have seemed to the disciples. How could they grasp the truth that Christ was to be a suffering, sacrificing, and saving Christ? Their conception of His mission was an earthly kingdom. Their thoughts centered on an earthly crown, not a cross of suffering and death. They dreamed of worldly honors and temporal rewards in their Master's service.

However, Christ sets the record straight by rebuking Peter's ignorance. Peter is informed of the fact that he is acting like Satan who is the great adversary seeking to thwart Christ's suffering and death for the redemption of sinners. Peter did not savor the things of God. Christ had come to do the will of His Father in giving Himself as a ransom for many; He came to suffer, bleed, and die, and then rise the third day. He was to be delivered up for our offenses and raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25). Through cross-bearing, He would obtain a crown that He could then freely give to all those who repent and believe on Him. Christ's work was the redemption of man's soul, and the re-establishment of a relationship with God for man.

Now we understand why Christ said, "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Christ is teaching the disciples, as well as you and me, that if He had entered this world to achieve everything of an earthly nature, if He had come to gain this temporal world and its possessions, He would not be doing His Father's

will—and furthermore, what blessings could ever be realized and possessed by us regarding the redemption of our souls?

You and I have sinned and come short of God's glory. Being in possession of one precious, eternal soul, the business of greatest importance for 2012 is the redemption of our souls. Scripture teaches, "The soul that sinneth it shall die."

Jesus' loving counsel teaches us that to pursue everything that is worldly may bring short-lived temporary pleasure and gain, but what about the eternal reality to be faced by all after death? We must learn now that no worldly substance or worthless earthly possessions can redeem our souls from sin, the curse, or the hell we deserve.

So Jesus is presenting to us His love for our souls and His great goal in securing redemption for us. He is teaching us to regard His crucifixion as the central truth that our souls must be in possession of by saving faith.

Dear friend, the matter of Christ's atoning death as the way of reconciliation and peace with God is the crucial issue for 2012. Will 2012 be a year in which you continue to seek to gain more of this world, but in the end lose all, including your soul? You can't exchange your earthly possessions or temporal gains for your soul which faces eternity. Christ knows this and therefore meets you with this loving counsel. Whenever you're tempted to neglect your eternal interest in 2012, let this verse rise up before your eyes and penetrate your soul: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

Christ sets value on your soul! Will you live 2012 as if you believe it? Will you heed His loving counsel and put your soul's need first? "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

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*Cruciform Press has just printed Getting Back in the Race: The Cure for Backsliding, which is a rewrite of Dr. Beeke's first book, Backsliding: Disease and Cure, written more than thirty years ago. This article provides a quick summary of the new book, which is available for \$7.00. (See page 22 for ordering information.)*

# Getting Back

» The Christian life is a race; faith is a living, athletic grace. Through the gospel, God summons us to sustained and persevering effort, empowering His children by free and undeserved blessing through Christ. But He does not carry them to heaven on flowery beds of ease. God's mercy motivates them and energizes them to press on and to overcome great obstacles.

Christ blazed the trail before us, and He now calls us to follow Him to the end. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

But realistically speaking, Christians are not always pressing forward with their eyes fixed on Jesus and their heads thrown back in joy. Sometimes they wander off the narrow path and become disoriented. Sometimes they fall down and injure themselves. They may be tempted to give up on following Christ wholeheartedly and to give in to the world around them.

To the confused and injured runner, this book says, "God can help you. You can finish this race—and finish it well." Drawing from the wisdom of the Scriptures, aided by the insights of godly Bible teachers through the centuries, it addresses the age-old problem of backsliding.

What is backsliding? Backsliding occurs in a season during the life of a professing Christian when his sin grows stronger and his obedience declines. It is a spiritual winter. Not all sin is backsliding; the Christian life is a constant cycle of sin and repentance, all under the atoning blood of Jesus. But at times the cycle of repentance is broken for awhile. This is backsliding. It could lead to outright apostasy

or falling away from Christ, evidence that the person is not saved. But by God's grace not all backsliding is deadly to the soul. Our Physician can heal fallen runners.

Healing begins with diagnosis. The most dangerous injury is the one you don't realize is serious. Many Christians are like people who know something is wrong with their bodies but refuse to go to the doctor until a friend forces them to go—or until symptoms get so bad they have no other choice. Sadly, avoiding a diagnosis can be deadly. The cancer metastasizes and spreads, and so can the cancer of sin. Early diagnosis can save your life.

Signs of sliding into a spiritual rut are uncovered in the initial chapter. Backsliding need not involve any big, scandalous sin; it often begins with coldness in prayer and a sense of indifference towards the Word of God. Inner corruption begins to grow and poisons our attitude. We make excuses for our sins instead of repenting of them. We would not admit it, but hypocrisy and pride rise up in our hearts.

We become impatient, discontent, and quick to anger. Our love for God's people cools. We develop critical spirits. Complaints, disputes, and arguments multiply—but it is someone else's fault. We begin to demand more and more of people while we give them less and less mercy. Our hopes cling to human institutions, abilities, and methods. God's glory, which once fascinated and filled us, seems distant and unreal. Our souls no longer feed on Him and His Word like they once did. Into this spiritual vacuum rushes the love of the world; without thinking about it, we become strangely like the unbelieving world. Other people notice the inconsistency of our lives before we ourselves acknowledge it.

What bitter fruit comes from such backsliding! Even while we invoke the name of the Lord, we bring shame and disgrace upon Him. If you are God's child, the Father places His hand of discipline upon you until you repent, and your sorrows multiply. If you are not God's child, then your feet

# into the Race

Editorial » Dr. Joel R. Beeke

rush down the pathway to hell. Backsliding is indeed a trajectory towards condemnation, for repentance is a defining characteristic of the true Christian life.

But there is hope for the backslider. The remainder of the book calls us to the great Physician of the soul for healing. It describes what the Bible means when it commands us to turn back to God, and how God heals backsliders and gets them back into the race. God especially describes His grace to backsliders in chapter 14 of the prophecy of Hosea.

God is so amazing! Even though our backsliding insults Him, dishonors Him, grieves Him, and pushes away His love, still He calls us to return to Him. This means repentance—coming to grips with the badness of our sins against God and turning away from them to the Lord with a firm resolution to follow His commands. We can only repent with an eye on God's mercy in Christ. At the heart of our repentance is turning from our reliance on ourselves (and other mere men) and renewing our trust in Christ alone. Such trust does not use Christ as a means to get something we want, but rests in Christ Himself as the One we want above all else.

To help us renew our faith and repent of our sins, God gave us the means of grace. He gave us His Word to meditate on, prayer to claim His promises, and public worship to meet with Him and His people. God also uses afflictions and human accountability to help us to grow, calling us to respond with submission. If you are serious about getting back into the Christian race, you must use these means. When you grasp hold of them by faith, you discover that Christ has grasped hold of you.

Our spiritual Physician has potent medicines to heal our souls. These are none other than the graces He purchased on the cross and took up in the resurrection. Christ really is all that we need for spiritual life today and eternal life in glory. He is our sanctification, creating and nurturing the

graces of holiness in our hearts by His Spirit. He gives us our adoption, taking us as His bride and so bringing us into the abundant love of the Father to His family.

Most fundamentally, Christ is our justification, turning away God's just wrath and granting to us the legal status of *righteous* on the basis of Christ's perfect obedience. While these medicines are applied to us at conversion, when the Lord heals our backsliding He gives us a renewed experience of them. Thus the power of His kingdom comes to us afresh in the righteousness, joy, and peace of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's grace has power to revive His people. He gives Himself to them like water to dry and withered plants, and it is amazing how they flourish and bear fruit again. So do not despair, backslidden believer! God's grace can make more of you than you can imagine. Pray for abundant mercies. Seek more of the Holy Spirit from the Father's hand. Trust in His grace, for His grace is sovereign, powerful, and effective. Though you may have become like a barren tree with no fruit, He will graft you into One who is the tree of life, Christ Himself. In Him your fruit is found.

O runner, run to the Lord Jesus! Perhaps you are a stranger to the life of grace. No matter how religious you may be, you have in fact been running from Christ all your life. Turn around and run to the Lord! Or are you one who knows that God saved you, but still you have backslidden? Return to the Physician of souls, and He will heal you. Are you a Christian who is pressing on in the Lord? Then jealously guard yourself from backsliding and fix your eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him scorned the shame of the cross and ran forward into glory!

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THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST (2):

# The Great Catch of Fish

DR. GERALD BILKES

READ: LUKE 5:1-11

By the time of this narrative, Christ had already performed the miracle at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11) as well as healed the nobleman's son (John 4:43-54). Along with these two miracles, the one recorded in our passage was programmatic for the whole of Christ's ministry: it would shed light on why Christ had come, what the disciples were called to do, and preeminently who this Christ was.

At the conclusion of Christ's earthly ministry, He would perform a similar miracle (John 21:1-14), one that again involved a dramatic catch of fish. Clearly, Christ wanted to remind His disciples of the early miracle and the calling the disciples had after Christ's resurrection to draw many into the net of the gospel in fulfillment of His promise.

## Christ's Word

Simon had already met Christ before in Beth-abara by Jordan, where John the Baptist had been baptizing (John 1:40-42). His brother Andrew had introduced him to Jesus. Some time must have passed; according to our passage, Jesus now finds Simon and Andrew fishing, and asks to use their boat to speak to the people (v. 3). This boat was now being used for the fishing of men through Christ's teaching to the multitudes.

After He had finished speaking, He directed Simon to launch forth into the deep for a catch ("draught") (v. 4). No doubt, Simon was an experienced fisherman. It was his livelihood to catch those fish with which God had filled the seas. This had been Simon's trade, probably from early on. It's noteworthy that Christ met him as he went about his daily vocation in order to make it training for greater usefulness.

In his transparent way, Simon responded by telling the Lord Jesus that it was basically useless: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing" (v. 5). But something in Simon made him add these words: "Nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net."

This "nevertheless" is the work of the Spirit in the life of Simon. In this one sentence, we find the reality of the life of faith, namely, the struggle between our own wisdom (which is foolishness), and Christ, whom Scripture calls "the

wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:30). Sadly, how often believers call into question the Lord's words, subtly at times, perhaps, or more brazenly. On the one hand, a disciple can be characterized as someone who obeys the word of Jesus—despite everything that he can see. Paul explains it like this: "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:18). Nevertheless, believers do not always do this immediately. Often we take longer to do it than Simon does here.

How we need the Spirit to influence us to heed the word of Christ. This is especially true when it concerns going through situations that we could compare to "the deep" Simon is directed towards (v. 5). As we go through life, there are those deep places where we lose sight of the bottom, and we do not have quick recourse to safe ground when we feel we need it. The "deep" is a place where we cannot sit comfortably in our own strength, but where we need to be cast upon the Lord.

Thankfully, God uses His Word to bend our hearts to obey His will and drive away our unbelief. When that happens, we do not regret it. After all, God's Word is best, as Simon would soon find out.

## Christ's Glory

Compelled by the power of Christ's word, Simon had gone out into the deep and there his net, which the night before had come up empty, was now filled with fish to the point that it broke. How did all those fish make it into the net? Clearly, the powerful voice of the Lord had gathered together the fish. When Jesus had given direction, He had included an implicit promise: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (v. 5). There was nothing uncertain about this "catch" Christ is speaking about.

When this truth sank into Simon, he sank down before Jesus (v. 8). The text explains: "He was astonished...at the draught of fishes which they had taken" (v. 9). The glory of Christ overwhelmed Simon both spiritually and physically. Just as the boat began to sink under the load of fish, you might say that "the boat" of Simon's life began to sink

under the manifestation of Christ's glory. He was overcome by something he perhaps had known somewhere in his soul: This was God in his nature, veiled in flesh, dwelling with him, a sinner. Perhaps he thought of his unbelief just moments ago, and realized that Christ could have cast him away forever.

The text draws attention also to James and John, who were with Simon (v. 10). They experienced the same thing. And the list of names has been growing throughout history, with names of people like George Whitefield, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and countless others. Can you add your name to this list? Have you become astonished at the glory of Christ? When the Spirit of God comes, He convinces of sin, specifically of unbelief (John 16:8–9). It makes us ask: "How could I have even uttered a word against the glorious majesty of such a one that charges angels with folly?" (Job 4:18). It's no wonder that Simon fell before Christ in humility and adoration. All too often we do not see the glory of Christ as we should. What a mercy it is when God takes us into His school and teaches us the knowledge of ourselves by showing us Himself and His glory.

### Christ's Grace

Prostrate before Christ, Simon could not help himself. He said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man" (v. 8). He felt the infinite distance between himself and Christ. He could not see how this majestic One could coexist in the same boat with him, sinful as he was.

Simon's statement was a prayer, and an understandable prayer; nevertheless, it was not the right prayer. Christ mercifully did not answer this prayer. Instead, He bestowed upon him grace in a number of ways.

First, He showed Simon *grace by continuing with him*. Instead of departing from him as Simon had suggested, Jesus stayed with Simon. He could do so because He had come to take Simon's place in the judgment of God, and endured God's word to Him instead of Simon: "Depart from me." Already here Christ brought forth His grace from Calvary and applied it to Simon in his need.

Second, He showed him *grace by comforting him*. He said, "Fear not" (v. 8). Simon first had trusted his own wisdom excessively. Then he had despaired of mercy excessively. But Christ comforted Simon by settling him and steadying him in His grace.

Third, Jesus showed Simon *grace by commissioning him*. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (v. 10). Christ had prepared him through this experience to look away from his own wisdom and his own righteousness, and to lean on the word, glory, and grace of Christ instead. No doubt, there would be other occasions when Simon would again be overwhelmed by fear when fishing for men. After

all, that is what the prophet Isaiah prophesied: "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted to thee, and the Gentiles shall come unto thee" (Isa. 60:5).

Finally, Jesus showed him *grace by captivating him*. With the others, Simon "forsook all, and followed him" (v. 11). Christ had become so attractive to Simon through this experience that he forsook all and followed Christ in a way he hadn't thus far.

### Conclusion

Through this miracle, Christ revealed the power of His word, the glory of His Person, and the grace in His work. He is doing something special in the life of Simon to prepare him for the task of being an apostle. And this is essentially what He does when He draws any sinner to follow Him. He shows us our own unworthiness by the light of the worthiness of Christ. Calvin comments fittingly on this passage: "Thus Christ sinks his own people in the grave, that he may afterwards raise them to life." Indeed, the life of a believer is one in which he dies more and more to his own wisdom and ability, and rises again through grace bestowed by this glorious Christ.

### Questions

1. Give some instances in the Christian life that are like the deep into which Peter was called to launch out. How should Christ's word help us in such places?
2. Discuss the importance of the implied promise in verse 4 for how Peter should have reacted to Christ's word. How should we use the many promises in Scripture?
3. Discuss this statement and how it pertains to our passage: "Christ either hears the prayers His people pray, or the ones they should pray."
4. There can be many ups and downs in the life of Christ's disciples. Trace them out in our passage, and discuss what purpose Christ has in leading His people in this way.
5. The disciples here literally forsook all. What sorts of things should Christ's disciples forsake even when they do not literally forsake all?

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# Church Bible Study: Are We Wasting Our Time?

It's six o'clock Wednesday evening. Your church's mid-week Bible study starts in one hour but you don't feel like going. The trouble is, you can't think of a fresh excuse and you don't dare to say what you (and several others) would like to say: "Is this really what a Bible study is supposed to be like?"

This scenario probably gets played out week after week, year after year, in the minds of countless believers. They trust that group Bible studies are important but stumble over how unedifying they often are. Can anything be done to help?

Effective Bible studies don't just happen. They are the Spirit-blessed product of persistent application of basic principles. The following are seven principles for fruitful group study.

## Keep the Bible First

Scripture studies are almost always aided by a well-written guide. Some of the best guides are commentaries, especially those that began as a sermon series. Homiletical commentaries combine the best careful exegesis and pastoral application.<sup>1</sup>

One of the dangers, though, of using a study guide is that the Bible can become eclipsed by a lesser book. It is easy to subconsciously begin to treat the Bible as the "raw materials" and the study guide as the "finished product," favoring the latter.

To avoid misusing supplemental materials, make them the last part of your preparation for the group study. First work through the Scripture passage in focus. Ask questions about the text. Note observations and applications. Use the study questions to stimulate thought before turning to the "answers" in the commentary. That way, the commentary becomes a sounding board for your ideas and conclusions rather than a source book. The Bereans took such an approach. They "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

A related principle is that group discussions should be guided by Scripture, not by personal opinion. This does not mean that a question or comment is inappropriate just because it is an opinion; it does mean that conclusions that are reached and counsel that is given should be biblically based.

## Respect the Creeds

A study is not necessarily Christian simply because the Bible is used. Even many cults zealously study the Bible. Christianity is a faith, that is, a body of teaching that can be summarized with concrete propositions. So, for example, a Christian study will hold as basic beliefs the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed.<sup>2</sup>

In the interest of "free thinking," some groups might have the goal of being open at all points. As noble as this approach sounds, it is neither biblical<sup>3</sup> nor helpful. Those who claim to have "no creed but Christ" overlook the fact that as soon as you say what you believe about Christ, you are articulating an unofficial, informal creed.

Groups which have not clarified their basic biblical assumptions may find themselves debating core, settled, biblical issues and derailing the study for others.

## Stick to the Plan

Bible study, whether personal or group, should not be haphazard, using texts and topics chosen at random. Consistent and logical progression aids our learning because concepts build upon each other just as a course of bricks is laid upon the last. Without being too rigid, sticking to a nightly schedule and a weekly timeline helps the progression of group learning.

## Be Prepared

Too often, group "studies" are an exchange of disconnected comments about a text or topic that participants barely con-



sidered ahead of time. That's a problem since, for most of us, profitable speech flows from premeditated thought. "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Prov. 15:28).

To aid in preparation, leaders should consider using study questions which members can carefully and prayerfully complete. This will give the shy person courage and the verbose person self-control. Participants who put work into the lesson and develop thoughts to share with others will be more equipped to use valuable group time wisely when sharing.

### Write it Down

When was the last time you lost a really profound thought because you failed to write it down? Such a frustrating experience illustrates the importance of note-taking. In fact, the written Word, itself, is a strong apologetic for written reproduction. It has been well said that "thoughts disentangle themselves as they pass from the mind, through the lips, and over the fingertips."

Writing down your thoughts and drawing them together is one of the key differences between Bible reading and Bible study. For this reason, study questions should be answered in writing, not just by making mental notes. If we trust that God gives insights to others, too, we should take notes during the study as well.

### Study as a Group

The *benefits* of group study are different from those gained by individual study. We need to know what we are trying to achieve by meeting together.

*Growing in love.* Our chief aim should be to love God and our neighbor. Paul teaches that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Our goal should be to understand not only the Bible, but also each other, so that we will know better how to love each other.

*Sharing experience.* In most cases, Bible study leaders should view themselves more as discussion facilitators than information providers. In other words, there should be a difference between preaching a sermon and leading a Bible study. Small group studies give occasion for everyone to ask questions and offer insights.

*Entering into a holy communion.* Group Scripture studies can do more to fit us for heaven than most other things we do in the week. Reaping this valuable benefit requires members to commit to attend and actively and holistically participate in the group.

If there are advantages to group study, there are also *dangers*; to be aware of them is the first step toward prevention.

*Inconsistency.* There is a danger of becoming for Bible study someone different from who you are the rest of the week. Beware of hypocrisy and aim for continuity both during the study and afterwards.

*Vulnerability.* Ideally, small group involvement assumes a level of transparency that creates the possibility of broken trust. When sensitive topics are discussed, confidentiality must be strictly maintained.

*Superficiality.* Because there is the possibility of getting hurt, group members will be tempted to hold back. But the more real we are with each other and with God, the more we benefit from community. Superficiality should be avoided. Sin should be discussed with sobriety.

*Animosity.* Often, the topics studied in small groups are attended with strongly held opinions. In this context, hurt feelings are only a short step away from disagreements. We need to be respectful of each other, recognizing that we are all at different points in spiritual growth and that none of us has fully attained perfection.

*Prolivity.* Unduly prolonged or drawn-out talk has unfortunately become a trademark of many small group studies. Avoiding prolivity means resisting the urge to create a verbal monopoly or chase down "rabbit trails." Use your comments judiciously. Group leaders should also know when to stop talking (Eccl. 3:7).

### Apply the Word

Too many faithful Bible study attendees silently wonder, as they pack up their materials and prepare to leave another study, "What am I supposed to do with this information?"

As with preaching, Bible study calls for a response. When Peter's Pentecost audience heard his exposition of Scripture, "they were pricked in their heart, and said...what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). This same sort of question should be asked by the facilitators of group Bible studies. The answer will have something to do with our heads, hearts, and hands.

Studying the Bible is inherently "dangerous" because the Bible is God's sword (Heb. 4:12). It changes our minds as it chops up our flawed human logic and selfish patterns of thought. It pricks our hearts and emotions by slicing through the veil that covers our deep idols. It energizes our slack hands by cutting away the weights and sins that ensnare us (Heb. 12:1).

Swords are dangerous. But if used rightly, and blessed by God, the end result is greater conformity to the image of Christ. That goal should breathe life into any group Bible study!

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1. Homiletical commentaries by R. C. Sproul, for example, make great study guides because he presents the teaching of the text clearly, simply, and practically.

2. Many churches more specifically summarize their understanding of Scripture through historic confessions such as the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), or the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

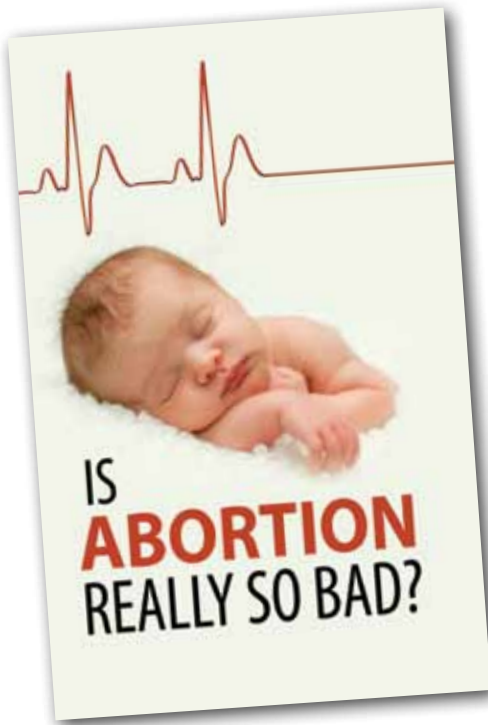
3. The Bible itself contains several short, non-negotiable summaries of the Christian faith (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:16).

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# Answering Pro-Abortionists' Arguments (1)

*January 22, 2012 has been designated as Sanctify of Life Sunday. On that day, we remember with sorrow the infamous Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that opened the door to "legalized abortion" 39 years ago. This article is the first of two that addresses this subject. This first article aims to answer pro-abortionists' arguments on their own turf; next month's article expounds scriptural arguments against abortion. Both articles have just been printed by Chapel Library in a 24-page booklet titled, "Is Abortion Really So Bad?," available free of charge from Reformation Heritage Books or Chapel Library, 2603 W. Wright St., Pensacola, Florida 32505, chapel@mountzion.org, 850-438-6666. Please consider ordering a number of copies to give to your friends.*



It is a sobering thing to visit the WWII memorial in Washington, D. C. and see 4,000 stars on the wall, each symbolizing a hundred human beings killed. The United States lost 400,000 lives during World War II. Canada lost 40,000. But if we made a similar memorial for unborn children killed by abortion, it would require three such walls for just one year of abortions. *Three times as many unborn children lose their lives in one year than the number of our soldiers who died in the entire Second World War.*

In the year 2005, hospitals and various clinics performed 1.2 million abortions across the United States and more than 96,000 in Canada. Two out of every ten pregnancies were aborted. In legal abortions committed in the United States (since 1973) and Canada (since 1969), over 53 million unborn children have been killed. To put this in perspective, the entire population of both nations is about 350 million. Legal abortion has killed the equivalent of one seventh of our population.

Historians estimate that the Nazi Holocaust killed 10 to 11 million people, including 6 million Jews. Many of them were children. Legal abortion in the U.S. and Canada has terminated five times as many lives as the Holocaust did.

We should certainly have a strong rational and ethical basis to legally sanction the ending of 53 million lives in our nations, plus over a million more each year. What would these millions of people be like today, from infants to adults over forty, if they had lived? Their termination off the face of the earth requires some compelling justification.

What is the justification for legal abortion? Let us examine the arguments used by those who promote abortion to determine on how strong of a foundation this practice is based.

## Arguments for Abortion

**Argument 1: The fetus is not a human life, therefore it may be killed.**

While the fetus will eventually become a human child, this argument says it is not yet so. But science indicates otherwise. First, the words "embryo" and "fetus" are Greek and Latin words which simply mean "young one." When scientists speak of a human embryo or fetus, they are not putting it in the category of another species, but are simply using technical terminology for a stage of development, like the words infant, child, adolescent, and adult. A human fetus is a young human person in the womb. It is natural and correct for mothers to speak of the fetus as "my baby" or for pregnancy books to say "your child."

Second, from conception the child has its own genetic code which clearly identifies it as *homo sapiens*—part of the human race. The child's DNA also has a distinct code from the mother, showing that he or she is not a part of her body, but a distinct individual living temporarily within her.

Third, ultrasound imaging shows that very early in the process of development the embryo grows into a recognizable human form. The child is not a blob of tissue, but a highly complex, though tiny, baby. At three weeks after conception a baby's heart begins beating and pumping blood through the body. At six weeks a baby's brain waves are traceable. Virtually all surgical abortions silence a beating heart and a functioning brain. At eight weeks the arms, hands, legs, and feet are well developed and the child's fingerprints are starting to form. At eleven weeks after conception all of the baby's internal organs are present and functioning. By the end of the first trimester, the baby kicks, spins, somersaults, opens and closes hands, and makes facial expressions.

By any reasonable standard, a human fetus is a young human being. To kill an innocent baby is murder. That's why the products of abortion are so ugly: severed hands, feet, and heads wrapped up in bags and discarded. On an intuitive level, we know this. People can shrug off the image of a side of beef or a chicken drumstick, but images of abortion horrify and grieve us because they are images of a dismembered human body. Unborn children are precious human beings and must be protected.

*Argument 2: The fetus is not fully human because it is dependent on another.*

Is a baby kangaroo not a kangaroo because it lives in its mother's pouch? Of course not. The location and situation of a human being does not make him or her any less human. Arguments for abortion based on dependence tread on dangerous ground. If dependency makes a person less human, then on that ground we would have the right to kill infants outside the womb, people on dialysis, handicapped people, and the elderly. May we kill all dependent people?

Consider two mothers several months into their pregnancies. One child is born prematurely, and the other remains in the womb. The first is utterly dependent on medical intervention to survive, and the other on her mother's body. Is it right to kill the prematurely born baby? How would the hospital staff react if the mother entered the neonatal ward with a knife to attack her child? If it is not right to kill the premature child, then why is it right to kill the child in the womb? Both are dependent. Both are children. Both must have legal protection.

*Argument 3: A woman has a right to do with her body as she desires.*

We affirm a woman's authority over her body. But there are limits to what we can rightfully do with our bodies, including causing harm to another human being. Abortion involves the death of her child. To argue that the living fetus is part of the mother's body defies reason: which organ of her body is it? When the unborn child's heart beats, whose heart is it? When the fetus's brain waves can be traced, whose brain is it? Every pregnancy involves two people, a mother and a child; the rights of both must be considered.

Whenever we speak of the rights of two human beings, we must guard against the more powerful person taking advantage of the weaker person. It is the responsibility of the powerful to protect the weak. It is especially the responsibility of a mother to protect her child. Does any mother have the right to do whatever she pleases with her children? On the contrary, she has the responsibility of caring for them or seeing that someone else cares for them. Certainly motherhood calls for sacrifice. We should expect adults to make sacrifices of their resources and freedoms when necessary to preserve the lives of children.

*Argument 4: Sex and reproduction are private matters into which we must not intrude.*

We believe that human sexuality is a very private matter; it expresses the deep intimacy that a husband and wife share. But sex has very public consequences. How we exercise our sexuality contributes to the restraint or spread of disease, the treatment of women with honor or rape, the nurture or sexual abuse of children, and the strengthening or dissolution of families which are the foundation of society. Society therefore has a compelling interest to guard the dignity of marriage, women, and children with respect to sex and reproduction.

People sometimes argue that the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to privacy in sexual and reproductive matters. Read the Constitution, and you will not find any such right there. In reality, the Fourth Amendment acknowledges the right of security against "unreasonable searches and seizures" without a "warrant," but says nothing about sexuality, children, or abortion.

Someone might sarcastically say, "I thought what I did in my bedroom was my own business." But if there is reasonable cause to believe that you are murdering a child in your bedroom, then it becomes a matter of public intervention by the authorities. Privacy is not an absolute moral right. But killing a child is an absolute moral wrong.

*Argument 5: Making abortion illegal would force women into dangerous, back-alley abortions.*

The idea of the crudely done abortion resulting in a bleeding, dying mother (and a dead child) has been widely used by abortion advocates. But in reality, 90 percent of abortions performed before they became legal were done by physicians in their offices. The idea of thousands of women dying yearly until abortion was legalized is a myth. In 1972 only thirty-nine mothers died in the United States from abortions. The *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (March 26, 2010) admits that the legalization of abortion has had "no major impact on the number of women dying from abortion in the U.S....legal abortion is now the leading cause of abortion-related maternal deaths in the U.S."

Every woman who dies from a botched abortion is a tragic loss. But so is every child who dies from a successful abortion. We should not make it legal to kill babies in order to make the killing safer for the adults involved. Furthermore, abortion has medical and psychological risks; making it illegal would actually protect the lives and health of millions of women.

*Argument 6: Better to die before birth than to live as an unwanted child.*

First, to give a human being the power to determine the future life of another individual based on whether he is "wanted" or "unwanted" is most dangerous. Do we have

the right to kill people based on whether or not we want them? Such a viewpoint leads highly cultured societies to commit genocide against the mentally challenged and “inferior” races.

Second, is the child never wanted by anyone? Many mothers did not want the pregnancy but cherish the child, especially after birth. There are also many parents who want to adopt a child. To say that the child is not wanted now by its mother does not mean it will never be loved.

Third, this argument has horrifying implications for “unwanted” children already born. If it is better to kill the baby than to let it be unwanted, then what does that imply about homeless children? Children with abusive parents? Would it be loving to kill these children? Of course not; love calls us to teach their parents to care for them or to find parents for them. In the same way, if unborn children are truly “unwanted,” we should try to help their mothers to see them differently, or help the children to find adoptive parents. Did you know that Steve Jobs was unwanted by his birth mother and the adopting parents the government initially chose?

Fourth, what gives us the right to decide whether it is better for a person to live or to die? Are we the owner of that person’s life? Do we know the child’s future for certain? Do not many “unwanted” children overcome severe physical or emotional handicaps in their youth and function as useful adult citizens? Do not many people in painful situations nevertheless wisely choose to live rather than to kill themselves?

In the end, the seemingly compassionate argument for the “wanted” child makes no sense at all. At best it is an emotional, illogical appeal; at worst it is a mask for deadly selfishness.

*Argument 7: Pro-life advocates are trying to force their beliefs on other people.*

In reality, all who participate in an abortion force their views on another, namely on the unborn child—so strongly in fact, that it results in his or her death. If the unborn child is a human being, then how can one be accused of trying to force his own belief on another when trying to protect the life of the child from his or her killer? If the unborn child

is a human being, then abortion is *murder*. If abortion is murder we must do all in our power to stop it.

The Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Currently the rights of some people are more “equal” than others, because their “liberty and the pursuit of happiness” apparently justifies taking the “life” of others. This seriously undermines the political foundation of our nation. But if people exercise their popular power of voting to direct the government to protect all people’s right to life, they simply do what the Declaration of Independence says they should.

After critically examining seven basic arguments for abortion upon demand, can we honestly conclude on a rational and ethical basis that abortion should be legal? These arguments are flimsy reasons for murdering more than a million babies each year. This is especially evident when we consider

that less than 5% of all abortions are for reasons of rape, incest, or a danger to the mother’s life. More than 95% of abortions take place for the sake of finances, career, personal convenience, or other selfish reasons. Are these compelling reasons for killing human beings?

So far we have concentrated on defeating the pro-

abortionists’ arguments on their own ground. But there are many other aspects of abortion: the screams of the unborn as they suffer pain and death; the cutting, slicing, burning, poisoning, and bleeding accompanying abortion; the tragic burial of the unborn in trash cans and ashen incinerators; the post-abortion anxiety, depression, sense of loss, anger, remorse, nightmares, infertility, and flashbacks of murdering mothers.

*Does any mother* have the right to do whatever she pleases with her children? On the contrary, she has the responsibility of caring for them or seeing that someone else cares for them. Certainly motherhood calls for sacrifice. We should expect adults to make sacrifices of their resources and freedoms when necessary to preserve the lives of children. . . . .

(To be concluded next month)

# For College Students:

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES  
RICK POSTMA



## A Primer to Understanding Worldviews

Driving to Toronto some time ago, I was encouraged to hear a number of people call in to a local talk show to argue that same-sex marriage is unbiblical. Unfortunately, the talk show host kept irritably swatting their arguments aside as if they were flies buzzing around his head on a warm summer night. “Why are you bringing the Bible into this?” he asked. “This isn’t a theocracy, we are a secular country. Haven’t you ever heard of the separation of church and state? We are under the rule of law,” he went on, “and all we’re talking about here is basic freedom of rights.” We have all heard these arguments before and perhaps we have even tried to counter them in some fashion: “But, but...”

What was happening? Assuming we defend a biblical worldview, why do we so often have a sense of futility in these situations? The answer to this question requires us to take a step back. We need to understand that we are involved in a war of cosmic proportions. The battle for the preservation of the biblical definition of marriage is but one skirmish; this war first came to earth when Satan convinced Adam and Eve to join him in rebellion against God. Mercifully, rather than leave man in the hands of the enemy, God declared all-out war on Satan. That war continues to this day between, as Augustine put it, the City of God and the City of Man.

### What is a Worldview?

The term *worldview* popped up in the previous paragraph; what does it mean? A worldview is a system of thought, a way of looking at reality. It is the sum total of a person’s

beliefs about the world and is comparable to an invisible pair of glasses that profoundly affects everything one believes and does. Everyone has a worldview. In fact, the term worldview is very similar to the term religion. Everyone has a religion since man is incurably religious. Some examples of worldviews include Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, naturalism, pantheism (everything is divine), atheism (literally, “no God”), secular humanism, agnosticism (man can’t know for sure), pragmatism (if it works, do it), utilitarianism (what can I get out of it?), and Christian. There are more and they often overlap. For example, an atheist usually holds to the tenets of secular humanism as well as naturalism for which the late Carl Sagan, in 1980, offered a famous definition: “The cosmos is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be” (Sagan, *Cosmos*). Since he was a scientist, many assume this statement to be a provable fact. It isn’t. Instead, Mr. Sagan was sharing his faith or his religion with us. Put another way, he was saying, “In the beginning matter.” We counter, “In the beginning God.” The well-known spokesman for evolutionists, philosopher of science Michael Ruse, admitted as much: “Evolution is a religion. This was true of evolution in the beginning and it is still true of evolution today” (Michael Ruse, “Saving Darwinianism from Darwinists,” *National Post*, May 13, 2000). The war then, is between those holding a Christian worldview and those holding alternate worldviews. It is between God and His army with everyone else arrayed in opposition. In the talk show above, the host held

to a secular humanist worldview; he shot down any statements that didn't conform to this worldview.

## Knowing the Enemy

Wars involve tactics and strategy. They also involve knowing the enemy. Many have said that if western leaders had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, they would not have been taken in by one ruse after another until a war involving millions of deaths became the only way to stop him. The same could be said for Christians over the centuries. Satan's strategy since Adam and Eve fell has been to keep mankind chained to sin and to tempt God's people into sinning as much as possible. In order to achieve this objective, one very clever tactic he has come up with is to transform the public square, which in the past was in many ways characterized by biblical principles (Christian judges, teachers, and schools, for example), into something that is quickly becoming anything but Christian. Today we have a secular public square that is thought by many to be neutral.

## A Neutral Public Square

Proponents and defenders of the secular public square declare it to be neutral and tolerant, pretending that it is above the fray of competing religions and worldviews. Religion is permitted as long as it is kept private and woe to those who try to impose their religion on anyone else. Indeed, while the secular state declares tolerance as the highest good, "inside its velvet glove of tolerance is an iron hand of tyranny" (J. I. Packer). Under a disguise of neutrality and tolerance we find that secularism is really the religion of atheism and its sibling, naturalism (the belief that natural causes alone are sufficient to explain everything that exists). Abraham Kuyper recognized this over a century ago when he attacked the public school system in the Netherlands as one of the institutions of a secular or atheist state complete with secular "priests" who ran the public school system and would not allow any Christian schools. By using this method of attack, he was able to win funding for a separate Christian school system. He saw the threat that the public school system represented to Christian families. Covenant children could not be sent to the "temples" of a religion that denied the very existence of God. Surely, in light of promises made at baptism and many other reasons, parents need to seriously rethink these kinds of decisions.

Now looking back on what the talk show host said in the opening paragraph above, we can see that while he might have thought he was insisting that religions need to be kept out of the public square, he was in fact saying that only the religion of secular humanism counts and that Christianity is, in effect, blasphemous. Does that sound tolerant?

## Clashing Worldviews

The reason we often find it difficult to defend the biblical definition of marriage is because we clash with unbelievers at a much more fundamental level. Most in our society operate on a non-Christian worldview, which Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, compared to a house built on sand. If man has evolved by chance from a random set of molecules ("In the beginning matter"), there isn't really a good reason to be against anything. In this worldview, what is wrong with polygamy, pedophilia, incest, rape, or...? Ask the atheist or agnostic this question. This may help him see that his house is sitting on sand and is in very grave danger of collapsing on his head. By taking God out of his worldview, the atheist (or anyone who refuses to recognize God as his Master) has removed the moral Law Giver with the result that he has eliminated all moral laws. This is not to say that the atheist doesn't have morals, but rather that his having morals is consistent with a Christian worldview and not an atheist worldview.

How can moral law exist without a moral Law Giver (God)? Evolution provides no moral laws. Cornell University biology professor Will Provine says that the Darwinian revolution is incomplete because man hasn't adopted all its moral and religious implications, some of which include that "there is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life..." (in a debate with Phil Johnson, April 30, 1994). Here is a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bath water! If evolution is true, then the strongest man (or group of men) wins. Hitler was an atheist and understood Darwin's proposed natural law, known as "the survival of the fittest," very well indeed.

You cannot reasonably expect to convince an atheist that his worldview is in shambles in one conversation. But at least you might get him thinking. Once you have spent time examining the house representing his worldview, it is time to take him to the house representing a Christian worldview (the one built on rock in the Sermon on the Mount). In the Christian worldview, the existence of morals can be defended since there is a moral Law Giver—God. The alternative is chaos, which is where our society is headed if God and His Word continue to be ignored.

## Sin and God's Word

Most atheists will offer lots of challenges to the idea of a moral God. What about pain and suffering? What about war? One key response to these questions is to again underline the fact that he is not in a position to ask a question that involves right and wrong. If evolution is true, how can he ask this question since, in his view, the moral Law Giver doesn't exist? The answer to the question in the Christian worldview is one word: sin. It is man's sinful heart that has turned Paradise into the world we have today. God could have left man in his misery, but instead, He chose to send

His Son to die in the place of sinners who believe in Him. You see how these conversations can and should lead to sharing the gospel.

The Christian worldview, resting on God's infallible Word, explains that God instituted marriage as a holy bond between one man and one woman. Sadly, in addition to homosexual behavior becoming acceptable in society at large, the institution of marriage has been perilously weakened by easy access to divorce and the rise of so-called common-law marriages. Western society has ignored the injunction, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). Trivializing the sanctity of marriage leaves it wide open to the attack of homosexual marriage advocates. Numerous Bible passages, such as Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and Jude indicate God's strongest displeasure. In the Christian worldview, the only true worldview, homosexual behavior is sin. This is the right point in the conversation to introduce Christ and how He was sent by God to deliver sinners.

## Homosexual Marriage

An advocate of homosexual marriage may ask, "If God created mankind, why did He give some people homosexual inclinations?" The answer brings us back to man's fall into sin. Even if some people are born with homosexual inclinations—an unproven assertion—this does not

make homosexual thoughts or behavior morally defensible. Man's sinful nature is evident very early on in the propensity of young children to lie, for example, but this does not make lying morally acceptable. To bring this argument to its logical extreme, rapists could argue that they are born with this inclination and so should not be held culpable for their actions.

Having a discussion like the one above would clearly take some time. Talk shows do not always lend themselves to serious discussion. But even making a few points can help people understand the Christian worldview better and start them asking more questions. Don't be afraid of opportunities to have more extensive discussions. As I worked on this article while sitting in Chicago's O'Hare airport, I had a chance to speak with someone for ten minutes or so on why morals have no foundation in a secular humanist worldview.

Biblical views on marriage, sexuality, family, and work (to name a few) are increasingly under attack in the Western world. We are all called to speak up in a firm and winsome way. How long will God be patient with us?

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# True Gain Through Suffering

Practical Christianity • A Chinese Christian

Olives that have known no pressure  
Never can oil bestow;  
If the grapes escape the winepress,  
Cheering wine can never flow;  
Spikenard only thro' the crushing,  
Its fragrance can diffuse.  
Shall I then, shrink from the suff'ring  
That Thy love would so induce?

*Refrain:*

*Each blow I suffer,  
Is true gain to me.  
If in place of what Thou takest,  
Thou dost give Thyself to me.*

Do my heart strings need Thy stretching,  
Music divine to prove?  
Must the sweetest music come from  
The harsh treatment of Thy love?  
Lord, I feel no deprivation  
If I be drawn to Thee;  
I would yield in full surrender  
All Thy heart of love to see.

I'm ashamed, my Lord, for seeking  
Myself to guard alway;  
Though Thy love had done its stripping,  
Yet I felt compelled Thy way.  
Lord, according to Thy pleasure  
Complete Thy work in me;  
Heeding not my human feelings,  
Only do what pleases Thee.

If Thy mind and mine should differ,  
Pursue, O Lord, Thy way;  
If thy pleasure means my sorrow,  
Still my heart shall answer, "Yea!"  
'Tis my deep desire to please Thee,  
Though I might suffer loss;  
E'en though Thy delight and glory  
Mean that I endure the cross.

Oh, I'll praise Thee, e'en if weeping  
Be mingled with my song.  
Thine increasing sweetness calls forth  
Grateful praises all day long.  
Thou hast made Thyself more precious  
Than everything to me:  
Thou increase and I decrease, Lord—  
This is now my only plea.

—AN ANONYMOUS BELIEVER IN CHINA



## Reflections on Pain

The neck and back pain and weakness started a little over four years ago. According to my most recent diagnosis, these will never completely go away in this life, absent from some special providence from our Lord. I am thirty-two years old.

Despite the chronic nature of my condition, with the right care I have been able to both manage my symptoms and experience improvement. I remain able to work and to participate in most normal activities. Still, this experience has prompted me to reflect upon the place of physical suffering in the life of the Christian. I hope the following brief reflections will be a source of encouragement to any who are experiencing pain themselves or have a loved one who is.

1. *This pain was brought into my life by God.* While I have experienced a couple of neck and back injuries, according to my physician the primary cause of my pain is a slight congenital deformity of the spine. There is therefore no single injury or event to which I can look back and say “If I had done this differently, I would not be in pain now.” Even if there were such an event, if God “[declares] the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10) and “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11), then I am suffering ultimately because God has willed it.
2. *This pain is intended by God for His glory and my good.* Even those professing Christians who reject Scripture’s teaching regarding God’s sovereignty and comprehensive decree claim the promise of Romans 8:28 that God works all things for the good of His people. This glorious promise is comforting to the suffering believer in particular, and yet only an omnipotent and sovereign God who is fully able to bring about His decree can keep such a promise. Because my pain is according to God’s decree and under His control, I am confident that He can and will use it to bring about my good as He has promised, and that He will be glorified in so doing.
3. *This pain does not excuse me from the responsibilities of work and service.* My wife and I recently read *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson during our devotions. From time to time in that volume we encountered statements such as the following about Richard Baxter (1615–1691): “Baxter worked hard, despite chronic pain from the age of twenty-one until the end of his life” (p. 64). We marveled at the productivity of such men despite significant physical challenges. Likewise, we read in 2 Corinthians 12 of

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” God refused to remove this unnamed affliction, but also did not allow Paul to use it as an excuse for despair or slothfulness in service. Rather, Paul’s affliction was for the purpose of magnifying Christ. Following Paul’s example, I am to persevere in spite of my affliction, working to provide for myself and my family and serving Christ’s church, and leaning upon Christ for strength while glorifying Him for whatever I am able to accomplish in that strength.

4. *This pain does not eliminate God’s promise to supply all of my needs.* Happily, my pain is usually only a nuisance. But even if this or some future ailment one day causes me to lose the ability to provide for myself and my family through ordinary means, Christ bids me in Luke 12 to not worry, but to seek Him first and trust in His provision. The God who provides food for the ravens and clothing for the lilies will provide for His own people!
5. *This pain is a result of the Fall.* In Hebrews 12, we read of the fatherly discipline with which the Lord corrects His people. The afflictions that befall believers in this life are not punishments, but correctives that God uses to sanctify us. Nevertheless, we are reminded by the experience of pain and affliction that such evils were not part of the original, “very good” creation. Rather, pain, suffering, and death came into the world because man sinned (Rom. 5:12).
6. *This pain is not permanent.* The physician I visited was correct: in this life I will continue to experience pain. But even as the creation groans in anticipation of the coming redemption (Rom. 8:22), so my pain reminds me to not focus upon earthly things, and instead to fix my eyes upon Christ (Heb. 12:1–3), remembering that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

Fellow suffering Christian, your suffering is but a temporary affliction that God intends for your good and His glory. One day, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...” (Rev. 21:4). Until then, let us rest upon Christ and, with our eyes fixed upon Him, continue to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

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# Why do believers have to die?

Recently, I stood at the graveside of a dear Christian friend. Before addressing the gathered family and friends, I once again pondered the question, “Why do believers have to die?” The wages of sin is death, and believers have sinned. However Christ has paid the full penalty for our sins. So why do believers have to die?

The simple answer is, “They don’t.” Believers do not have to die, because Christ has died in their place. There is not an atom of penalty left to pay. Therefore, God could translate believers to heaven without them having to pass through death, just as He did with Enoch and Elijah, and as He will do with the believers who are living upon Christ’s return. So, believers do not have to die, as Christ has purchased deliverance from physical death and the redemption of our bodies. But, in most cases, the Lord has chosen to delay or postpone the application of these benefits until the general resurrection of all. The question remains, though: “Why?” If believers do not *have* to die, why do they?

The answer is that God wisely allows the vast majority of believers to pass through death because of the immense spiritual benefits of the experience.

## 1. Dying brings us into communion with Christ’s sufferings.

Christ’s death is different from the believer’s penalty-free death because Christ’s death was a penalty for sin (our sin). However, dying reminds us of what Christ did for us. It brings us into a new communion with Him and increases our love for Him (Phil. 3:10).

## 2. Dying gives us a unique experience of Christ’s all-sufficient grace.

Bodily death is still a painful evil to the believer. He will fear it and feel it. As the last moments approach, there is often great physical pain and sometimes spiritual fear. There is also the emotional distress of seeing loved ones weeping.

At such times the dying believer can experience tremendous help from Christ. His grace is found to be more than sufficient at this time of greatest need.

## 3. Dying transforms us into Christ’s image.

One of the blessings of dying is the rapid ripening of the believer’s character and the acceleration of his sanctification. The outer person is growing weaker, but the inner is growing stronger and stronger. Though death can take an ugly toll on the body of a believer, yet his soul is being swiftly beautified. I’m sure many pastors have seen how even the approach of death can result in a believer “shining” in a way they never have before.

## 4. Dying is our last and perhaps greatest opportunity to witness for Christ’s glory.

In many ways, death is the supreme test of faith. What an opportunity to speak of how faith in Christ helps us to die and gives victory over the greatest enemy. How many unbelievers have been converted by the dying words of godly fathers or mothers!

## 5. Dying brings us into Christ’s presence.

Death hastens us into the presence of Christ and our coronation as His precious people. Death temporarily separates us from our bodies, but it unites our souls to Christ in a new and wonderful way.

In summary, believers do not have to die, but they do die: to have communion with Christ’s sufferings, to experience Christ’s grace, to be made like Christ’s image, to witness for Christ’s glory, and to bring them into Christ’s presence.

DR. BEEKE INTERVIEWED ON >>

## Parenting by God's Promises

Recently Dr. Beeke's new book, *Parenting by God's Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, was printed by Dr. R. C. Sproul's publishing house, Reformation Trust, who also interviewed him about his book. (The book is now available from Reformation Heritage Books; see page 22 of this BSGT issue.) Here are his answers to the publisher's questions.



FAMILY GUIDANCE

*How long have you studied and taught the subject of parenting?*

I've been counseling parents for thirty-three years in the ministry, reading and preaching on the subject of parenting for more than twenty years, and teaching a family class on parenting in our church for four years.

*What issues does this book address that are not found in most other parenting books?*

Theologically, few parenting books provide a solid Reformed foundation for parenting, emphasizing God's gracious promises to believing parents and their children in the covenant of grace. Practically, few parenting books address how Christian parents share in the anointing and threefold office of Christ as Mediator, and should function as teaching prophets, interceding priests, and guiding kings in the home. Also, few Christian parenting books deal with the common challenges of parenting, such as teaching children to listen, taming their tongues, and handling sibling relationships. Finally, few parenting books have chapters devoted to helping teenagers discern God's will, resist negative peer pressure, and manage their anger.

*Why do most books on parenting tend to leave parents feeling guilty instead of helping them?*

They focus too much on mandates or imperatives, on what parents must do, without relating that to God's fatherly love, His forgiveness in Christ, His promise of the Holy Spirit's power and guidance—all aspects of His covenant of grace with us, the bedrock of parenting, which truly provides help.

*How does the covenant of grace encourage parents?*

God promises in the covenant of grace that to those who fear Him, He will be God to them and to their children "to a thousand generations" (Ps. 105:8). He binds His people to Himself forever (Gen. 17:18) and seals that

covenant bond with an oath (Deut. 7:8–9). What can be more encouraging than knowing that God's normal way of working salvation is by converting the covenant children of God-fearing parents who seek to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4)?

*What do you mean by saying parents are to act as prophets, priests, and kings in the upbringing of their children?*

As the Heidelberg Catechism tells us (Q. 31), believers are called Christians because they are members of Christ by faith, and partakers of His anointing as our mediatorial Prophet, Priest, and King. As prophets, we are to teach and train our children spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically. We are to be ministers of the Word in our homes, teaching our children the whole counsel of God with prophet-like diligence, example, and zeal.

As priests, we are to intercede for our children as Christ intercedes for us, and strive to imitate His sympathy. We are also to model Christ's self-denial and self-sacrifice. By our priestly actions, we show the love of Christ to our children.

As kings, we are to help our children discern God's will, defend our children from those who would do them ill, discipline our children to root out evil and promote what is good, and offering them wise counsel to guide them in their spiritual and temporal lives.

*What are some practical areas in which you offer help for parents of teenagers?*

I try to offer parents help in areas that surface in day-to-day parenting. That includes answering questions such as, how can we as parents train our children to treat their siblings with Christ-like love? How can we help our children learn to discern God's will in life's major areas, such as choosing a career or a marriage partner? How can we help our children fend off negative peer pressure and become strong models of positive peer pressure for their friends?

How can we help our teens cope with anger? What steps can we take to prepare our children for leaving home and for marriage?

*How can grandparents minister to their children and grandchildren?*

In a chapter on grandparenting, I show that in addition to praying for their children and grandchildren, grandparents should be willing to offer advice to their children if called upon to do so; use family gatherings for teaching spiritual lessons; offer to take care of their grandchildren when needed; model a heavenly hope; and be examples of denying self, bearing crosses, and following Christ.

*You say that parenting can be seen as a triangle, with home, church, and school forming the three sides. In what ways do these institutions interact and support the raising of children?*

As parents, we bear primary responsibility for raising our children. Since the church we go to and the schools we send our children to (if we don't homeschool) should assist us in rearing our children, they should closely represent our scriptural beliefs as parents. When children hear the same biblical truths taught diligently at home, at church, and at school, the cumulative impact of these truths will register indelibly in their minds so that, in most cases, God's general promise in Proverbs 22:6 will be fulfilled: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

*You identify three types of problem parents: consensus administrators, horns of plenty, and wishing wells. What are the results of such parenting? How should parents see themselves?*

Consensus administrators run their household by majority vote. Children do not learn submission to authority in such households. Parents who are horns of plenty shower their children with money and gifts. Rather than showing true love, this type of indulgence usually produces self-indulgent, demanding, and ungrateful children. Parents who are wishing wells are ruled by their moods and feelings. These moods are so unpredictable that children never know how their parents will respond to their requests. This tends to destroy their children's trust and offers opportunities for them to manipulate their parents to further their own agendas.

Instead of following these worldly and unwise models, parents should see themselves as representatives of Christ, seeking to train their children in a scriptural manner consistent with how they believe Christ wants them to raise them.

*How does knowing the gospel apply to being a parent?*

In a thousand ways, but here are just three: First, we must show unconditional love for our children as the fruit of Christ's unconditional gospel love for us. Second,

we should not be shocked when our children sin, for the gospel teaches us that we are all sinners. We must not disown our children for sinning, either, for Christ does not disown us as sinners. Finally, the gospel teaches us that we must continually be exercised in the gospel if we are to progress in our growth in grace to God's glory. One of the greatest means of such growth is to strive to rear our children in the ways of the Lord. Repeatedly in the gospels, Christ uses children to bring parents to Himself. Think, for example, of the father of the demoniac in Mark 9 and the daughter of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15.

*How has your knowledge of the gospel helped you raise your three children?*

When I am tempted to become angry with my children for their disobedience, I try to remember that my children have never failed me even a small fraction as badly as I have failed Christ. So if Christ continues to love me without fail, why shouldn't I continue to love my children without fail?

Also, as the gospel encourages me as a child of God through all kinds of promises, invitations, and encouragements, I must speak to my children words that comfort and encourage them as they strive to walk in God's ways. For example, as my Father tells me through His Word every day, "I love you," so I must tell my children every day, "I love you."

And just as I trust that Christ continues to work in my life to bring me into closer conformity to His will for my life, so I must persevere in all the tasks of parenting, instructing, praying, confronting, disciplining, helping, and encouraging my children, living before them as a sinner saved by grace, walking by faith.

*How would you encourage parents of a child who has gone astray, rejecting their godly teaching?*

I would encourage them to continue to trust in God's promises (see Prov. 22:6), to believe in God's covenant faithfulness, and to press on in prayer for their children.

I would also tell them not to panic. Children—especially early- to mid-teens—can go through various stages of rebellion. Some seem to go off the rails for a while, only to return a year or two later with even deeper convictions about walking in God's ways. Keep pleading for wisdom and grace to persevere and for the conversion of your child, remembering that what is impossible with man is possible with God.

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**Dr. Joel R. Beeke** is president and professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

# Book Talk

## New RHB Books



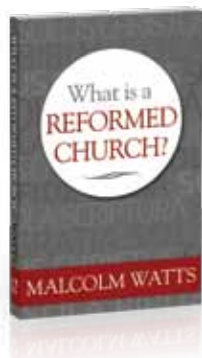
### **Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven**

*Adam Embry*

Puritan pastors of the seventeenth century were true physicians of the soul, and this is made readily apparent in Adam Embry's study of John Flavel. In *Keeper of the Great Seal of Heaven*, Embry shows the prominent themes of heavenly mindedness and the work of the Holy Spirit in Flavel's life and pastoral ministry. He goes on to evaluate Flavel's teachings about the Spirit, explains Flavel's view on the sealing of the Spirit, and compares Flavel with other Puritans. Embry further traces the significance of Flavel's theology of the Spirit in the American Great Awakenings, gives an evaluation of Flavel's exegesis relating to the sealing of the Spirit, and concludes with an insightful pastoral reflection on the material. While this study reveals a diversity of thought within Puritanism, it also underscores the profound commitment this spiritual brotherhood shared for treating the matter of the heart with biblical truth in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

"I am thrilled to recommend this study devoted to exploring this theological distinctive in the life and thought of a major Puritan author, John Flavel. Any who are interested in the history of Puritan spirituality are very much in Adam Embry's debt for this fine study."

—MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*  
(140 pages, PB) \$18.00 | \$14.00



### **What Is a Reformed Church?**

*Malcolm H. Watts*

"A true church, Reformed according to God's Word, is the dwelling place of God, maintaining and declaring the truth which He has been pleased to reveal," writes author Malcolm Watts in *What Is a Reformed Church?* Watts then looks specifically at the basics of the Reformed faith and explains, both biblically and historically, the distinctives of a Reformed

church, its doctrines, and its practices in worship, church government, church discipline, and evangelism. For both believers who are just discovering the Reformed faith and those who need to be reminded of its distinctives, this handbook offers readers solid answers to the question of what it means to be Reformed.

"These days the term *Reformed* is applied to many beliefs and practices that are not Reformed. Malcom Watts offers a wonderful guide so that the uninitiated can know what the historic Reformed faith looks like in doctrine and practice. This book, however, is also a terrific aid for the well informed as a reminder and index of classic Reformed theology—biblical, confessional, and practical."

—J. V. FESKO, *Westminster Seminary California*  
(176 pages, PB) \$12.00 | \$9.00



### **1 & 2 Corinthians — The 17:18 Series**

This book is organized so that you can write out your very own copy of Scripture. You will be writing the Bible text only on the right hand page of the book. This should make for easier writing and also allows ample space on the left page to write your own notes and comments. From time to time a question or word will be lightly printed on the left page; these questions are to aid in further study, but should not interfere with your own notes and comments.

"There is an old proverb that says, 'Thoughts disentangle themselves when passing over the lips and through the finger tips.' The 17:18 Series which encourages us to actually write out the words of Scripture will be a tremendous tool in putting that proverb into action in our daily lives. I am happy to commend this project."

—JERRY BRIDGES  
(256 pages, HB) \$13.00 | \$10.00

## Other New Books



### **Getting Back in the Race: The Cure for Backsliding**—*Joel R. Beeke*

Every Christian faces numerous discouragements in striving to follow Christ. Our knees go weak and our hands hang down when we face personal failure, when others let us down, or when providence denies our desires. Disappointment can lead to discouragement, and discouragement may end in doubt, fear, and even despair. We feel weak and tire, emotionally and spiritually, and we are tempted to throw in the towel. But we must press on, firm in the confidence that we run alongside other believers, that we run a well-trodden course, and that we run with God's inexhaustible assistance and support. May God use this book to strengthen you and keep you running in the race until you reach the goal, obtain the prize, and receive your crown from the hand of Christ in glory!

(Cruciform Press, PB, 109 pages) \$10.00 | \$7.00



### **Parenting by God's Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace**

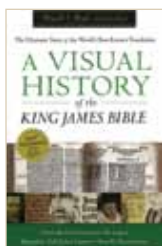
*Joel R. Beeke*

In *Parenting by God's Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, Dr. Joel R. Beeke explores what biblical nurture and admonition looks like and offers gems of practical wisdom for parents on topics such as instituting and leading family worship, teaching children, modeling faithful Christian living, and exercising discipline. However, he carefully puts parental responsibilities in their proper perspective and guides mothers and fathers to lean not on their own abilities but to trust more fully in the God who knits children together in the first place. Above all, he affirms, parents must look to the one true God, who promises to provide everything His people need and to bless them and their families.

(Reformation Trust, HB, 345 pages) \$19.00 | \$14.00

# Jay T. Collier & Joel R. Beeke

## Other New Books



### A Visual History of the King James Bible

Donald L. Brake

For 400 years the King James Version of the Holy Bible has been the most influential book published in English. With beautiful, full-color photos, illustrations, charts, and sidebars, Bible collector and expert Donald L. Brake brings to life the fascinating story of the KJV's creation and proliferation.

(Baker, HB, 284 pgs) \$25.00 | \$17.00

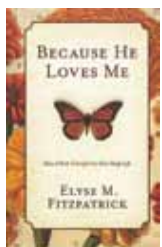


### Visit the Sick

Brian Croft

Visitation and care of the sick in congregations can be a neglected responsibility. The author seeks to instruct and motivate pastors, church leaders, and other caregivers with counsel from Scripture and heroes of church history to recapture the practice of visiting the sick.

(Day One, PB, 92 pgs) \$10.00 | \$7.50



### Because He Loves Me

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick

Christ's love transforms. This book celebrates this truth as the heart of a Christian's identity and life and as the basis for faithful perseverance in struggles against all opposition. Each chapter concludes with study questions that invite deeper reflection on the adopting, empowering love of God.

(Crossway, PB, 217 pgs) \$16.00 | \$12.00



### Rediscovering the Church Fathers

Michael A. G. Haykin

This introduction to reading the church fathers surveys seven of them, including Ignatius, Cyprian, Basil of Caesarea, and Ambrose. Haykin explores their lives and teachings, their insights on suffering and martyrdom, and their approaches to issues such as baptism and the relationship between church and state.

(Crossway, PB, 172 pgs) \$17.00 | \$12.00



### Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-in-One

Philip Ryken and Michael LeFebvre

To know God is to know Him as triune. This book explains the roles and relationships within the Godhead while tackling difficult questions. The authors offer a helpful guide into the paradoxical mystery of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the God of three-in-one.

(Crossway, PB, 121) \$12.99 | \$9.00



### God's Names

Sally Michael

Parents and children can read this book together to build a strong foundation in the character and ways of God, particularly as God has revealed Himself through His many names. The book covers nearly 25 names and includes full-color illustrations.

(P&R, PB, 119 pgs) \$17.00 | \$12.50



### Counsel One Another: A Theology of Personal Discipleship

—Paul Tautges

The ministry of counseling has been relegated to the professional counselor. Paul Tautges brings the biblical command for discipleship back to the local church and to all believers. Tautges teaches that counseling is a crucial way for believers in Christ to demonstrate biblical love toward one another within a gospel-centered, truth-driven, and grace-dispensing church environment. Believers must be taught and trained to help one another make progress in the ongoing work of sanctification. This is authentic biblical counseling.

(Day One, PB, 191 pages) \$15.00 | \$11.00



### Big Truths for Young Hearts

Bruce A. Ware

This book equips parents to teach their children (ages 6 to 14) major doctrines of faith in an understandable, chapter-a-day format. Written by a theology professor in an accessible, non-intimidating format, this book covers the whole of systematic theology to help parents shape their children's faith and worldview early on.

(Crossway, PB, 234 pgs) \$16.00 | \$12.00

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# Gratitude for Grace



Do you have a critical, jaded spirit towards the church? In his *Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards warns that, because of remaining sin, our spiritual sight is easily dulled “to all spiritual objects.” So, when a critical spirit rises, we should ask ourselves, “Is my spiritual sight clear? Am I seeing God’s supernatural, gracious work in His church? Am I rejoicing in God’s work of new creation, bringing life instead of death, beauty instead of ugliness, holiness instead of sin, love instead of selfishness, and faith instead of unbelief? Do those around me hear gratefulness to God for His work? Or have I lost sight of Him and what He is doing?”

How can we tackle a critical spirit? There are many ways, including the steady need to be personally refreshed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and to renew and keep sweet communion with Him—living in the Word and prayer by His Spirit. These are essential. But there is another vital exercise: actively pursuing awareness of, and gratitude for, marks of grace in others.

## Aware

Begin by refreshing yourself on what marks of grace are—the fruit of the Spirit’s regenerating, sanctifying work. Marks of grace are evidence of God changing people by His Word to be more like Christ. God’s glory is the motive and goal. Scripture is full of examples; study the heroes of faith, meditating on how their marks of grace point to and are rooted in Christ. Study Christ Himself.

When you see Christians pursuing a life conformed to the Ten Commandments in love to God, you are seeing evidences of grace. When you see a believer leaving a job or relationship because he wants to avoid Psalm One’s pattern of decline, this is a mark of grace. When you see women pursuing the model of Proverbs 31, this is a mark of grace. When you see someone exemplifying the Beatitudes, grieving for their sin and eager to pursue holiness, this is evidence of grace. You are seeing the work of the triune God.

Scripture not only gives us warrant to look for evidence of grace in the church, it commands it. Psalm 48 calls the reader to “walk about Zion” (v. 12). God called His people to admire Jerusalem, the center of Old Testament worship and place of God’s presence—to admire the city that God established and the God who established it.

## Grateful

So, the psalmist calls us to meditate on and give thanks for the spiritual reality that the city displays. God is building a spiritual city, a people saved by Him and set apart for Him.

Psalm 48 does not call us today to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but we are to consider our believing brothers and sisters in Christ. Open your church directory and look for God’s gracious works! The psalmist says, “Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces” (v. 13). Take note of specific evidences of God’s grace. The goal is to trace the graces back to the giver and source of all grace; “for this God is our God for ever and ever” (v. 14). The psalm is passionate in calling us to communicate our gratitude to God: “Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments” (v. 11).

The New Testament is full of similar examples. Paul’s ministry exemplifies this repeatedly in the opening words of his epistles. He notes evidences of grace with specificity and communicates gratitude both to God and to the people of God. Revelation repeats the pattern. Jesus commends the churches for evidences of grace, only made possible through Him! Yes, there are rebukes and warnings as well. In some cases, like His words to Laodicea, there is little to no commendation due to unaddressed sin. At times rebuke, prayer, and sorrow are the only legitimate responses. Yet, recognizing all this does not negate the simultaneous call to look, listen, and take note of grace, trace it all back to the Giver, and communicate gratitude to Him.

## Transformed

What would we and our churches be like if we were transformed to see these evidences? Take a few minutes to walk mentally around the parts of Zion that you know. As you consider God’s powerful, supernatural works in the hearts and lives of the saints, give thanks to Him (and tell them). Encourage each other and join together to worship our great God and Savior, the God of all grace.

“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9–10).

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# THE REFORMED FAITH (21): THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

CORNER FOR TEENS | REV. MARK KELDERMAN & REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

Perhaps one of the greatest tensions in the Christian life is that we are at peace but also at war. We are at peace with God through the reconciliation made at the cross, and yet we are called to war against indwelling sin. There is not only an individual part to this warfare, but there is a corporate aspect to it as well. The church is called to war against sin and Satan as long as history continues. The church at war is called the church militant.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:3–4, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” How does the church fight? What are her weapons? There are four primary weapons that we are called to use in our warfare: preaching, the sacraments, fellowship and unity, and evangelism and missions.

When the Word is preached, the sword of the Spirit is used to repel the attacks of Satan against the church. Preaching is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 10:14–17). Every time Christ is lifted up in the preaching and every time the cross is preached, a blow is struck by the militant church against the kingdom of darkness. Every time a sinner is saved through the means of preaching and added to the church, Satan’s ranks are depleted and the armies of Christ are increased.

The sacraments are also used in the church’s warfare and witness. They strengthen faith and strengthen the members of the church against the onslaughts of Satan. Satan loves weak and vulnerable Christians, but the sacraments serve to remind God’s people of victory in Jesus.

Another visible witness to a hostile world is the fellowship and unity of the church. The church is not based on individuals alone; it is to be a close-knit family. Does your church reflect that? Does the worldwide church reflect that? The church is not about individuals only, or local churches only, or denominations only; it is about all those who have been called from every tribe, tongue, and nation to serve Christ. Jesus in John 17 says that the unity of the church is a witness to the world, not just of the fellowship and com-

munion among themselves, but of the communion and unity that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The pioneers often circled their wagons against attacks of the marauding enemies; that is how the church is able to repel the attacks of Satan—when we stand shoulder to shoulder.

The final weapon in the militant church’s arsenal is evangelism or missions. Do you engage in personal evangelism? You can do this in a variety of ways. You can witness to your friends or neighbors. You can witness by living a holy life and making Christianity attractive and contagious to others around you. You can go from door to door, witness at school, at the bus stop, on the train, to your family members. Not everyone is called to be a missionary, but the militant church is engaged in spreading the gospel to all the corners of the world. This may mean volunteering some of your time, or it may mean devoting some of your other resources to further the kingdom of God.

At times, the church seems to be fighting a losing battle, but Christ said in Matthew 18 that the gates of hell would not prevail against her. She will not be defeated because Christ has won the victory on the cross. The militant church also keeps in view that there is an end to this fight, when the militant church will become the church triumphant. If you are on the Lord’s side, you will be welcomed into the presence of the Lamb. The focus will not be on your exploits and your courage and what you have done, but the focus will

be on the triumphant Lamb, and our victory song will be, “Hallelujah to the triumphant Lamb!”

The question is, what side are you on? What is your prospect at the end of the battle? Are you Christ’s or Satan’s? Do you face final and utter defeat or final and complete victory?



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For Our Children  
Diana Kleyn

The year 2011 passed so quickly, and suddenly a new year has begun! In a way, December 31 is another Thanksgiving Day because we look back over the past year and thank God for all His many blessings. We do not deserve any of the blessings He gives us, and yet He “daily loadeth us with benefits” (Psalm 68:19). Most of you have been born into Christian families, where the Bible is treasured and respected; most likely, you have been baptized and attend a church every Sunday where the truth is preached; perhaps you are even able to go to a Christian school. Maybe your family and teachers talk with you about what the Lord means to them. Millions of children all over the world do not have these blessings. They have not been baptized; they never hear the Bible read; they do not have happy homes where God’s commandments are upheld; they do not receive the love and discipline they need; they are never told that they must repent from their sins and turn to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness.

You are greatly blessed, but you must never think that you are more deserving than these millions of other children! We all have hearts that are “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). You are no better in God’s sight than anyone else. In fact, if you do not flee to Him for forgiveness, you will be judged more severely than those who never heard the gospel. Jesus said, “But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you” (Matthew 11:22). “But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48a). God wants us to look into our own hearts. Have we obeyed the gospel command to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from our sins, and live to His glory? Do we dare to turn our backs on the glorious tidings of salvation, knowing what awaits us if we reject the only way of salvation?

On January 1, we ask the Lord to bless and keep us in the year that lies ahead of us. Most importantly, we must care for the needs of our soul. We must not delay seeking salvation; we must never take for granted that we will have lots of time to prepare for eternity. “For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). One day, our lives will end, either when we die or when the Lord returns. Jesus said, “Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). Are you ready?

How can you prepare to meet God? You need to have your sins washed away so that you can be pure in His sight. You cannot do it yourself; only the blood of Jesus can cleanse you. You must “set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2), which means you must pay attention to the things of God. Read your Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you read. Spend time praying. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), which means that your soul should be talking with God throughout each day. In all you do, in all your attitudes, you must be seeking God’s glory and honor. Look for friends and activities that draw you closer to God, not further away from Him. Remember also that your heart is inclined to all evil, and you need the Holy Spirit in order to turn to God. You need a new heart, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit to be able to fight against sin.

Seek the Lord with your whole heart. “With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early” (Isaiah 26:9a). God promises to answer you: “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

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Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.



Story For  
Children

# The Neglected Treasure



A traveler stopped at a house one day to ask for a drink of water. A child answered the door and invited him in while she went to get the water. The man quickly took in the scene before him: the parents were cursing and quarreling while the children crouched in a corner, trembling. Wherever he looked, he saw signs of neglect and poverty. The parents looked over at the visitor. “What do you want?” demanded the father loudly.

“I’ve only stopped to ask for a drink of water,” the stranger answered. He paused and then added, “Dear friends, why do you make your home so miserable?”

After a shocked silence, the father replied, “You have no idea about the troubles we are facing. Everything has been going wrong!”

The man set the empty glass on the kitchen table and said softly, “I know what would help you, if you could find it. You have a treasure right here in your house. Search for it.” Then he said goodbye, and left.

At first the mother and father thought the visitor was mocking them. They cursed and fumed against this stranger who thought he knew the answer to their problems. How could he? He didn’t even know what their problems were! After some time, however, they could not help but wonder if the man knew something they did not. When the woman went out to feed the chickens and gather the eggs, the man searched the house; and when the man went to do the evening chores, the woman did the same. Did they own something they hadn’t known was valuable? Was there something hidden in their house, left by previous owners? They found nothing. Their poverty only increased, bringing more quarrels, tension, and misery.

One day, the woman was left alone in the house. As she thought again about the stranger’s words, her gaze fell upon an old Bible on the shelf. The Bible had been a gift from her mother who had died many years ago. It had been

years since she had read it. Could this be what the stranger meant? She took the Bible from the shelf and opened it. On the first page she found a verse inscribed in her mother’s handwriting: “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver” (Psalm 119:72). It cut her to the heart. “This must be the treasure he spoke about!” Her tears flowed as she read. She had no idea the Bible contained such wonderful things!

From that day on and every day after that, the woman read the Bible and prayed and taught her children—all without her husband’s knowledge. She did not dare to tell him. What if he forbade it? What if he threw out the precious treasure? One day he came home in a rage. Instead of responding as she usually did with angry words, she spoke to him gently and kindly. Then she boldly said, “My dear husband, we have sinned in turning away from God. We are guilty in God’s sight, and have only ourselves to blame for all our misery. If we want to be happy, we must turn back to the Lord.”

“What did you say?” exclaimed the husband. He stared at his wife.

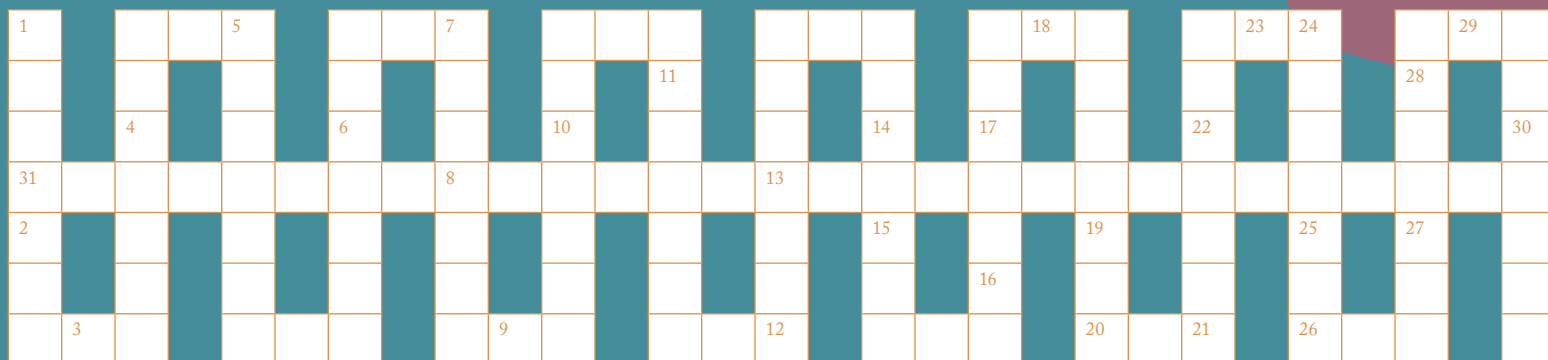
The woman took the Bible from the shelf and handed it to her husband. Weeping, she said, “Here is the treasure the stranger was talking about. I have found the treasure that will make us happy!”

The man’s heart was moved. He was stunned. *This* was the treasure? When he said nothing, the woman began to read aloud from the Bible. She read about the Lord Jesus and of His great love and compassion for sinners. The children gathered around to listen as their mother prayed aloud for all of them. From then on, the family read “the treasure book” and prayed together every day. Many discussions took place around the kitchen table, and many prayers ascended from the heart and lips of every person living in that house.

*(continued on page 27)*

# Puzzle

Look up the Scripture passages in your KJV Bible and place the missing word in the puzzle. The last letter of each word is the first letter of the next one. Numbers 1–30 weave up and down. When you are finished, try to figure out what #31 across says. If you need help, look up the Scripture passage. As you work the puzzle, think seriously about what the texts are telling you, and ask the Lord to bless them to your soul.



1. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the life" (John 14:6).
2. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: \_\_\_\_\_, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3).
3. "Come now, and let us \_\_\_\_\_ together, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18).
4. "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall \_\_\_\_\_ die" (John 11:26).
5. "Through \_\_\_\_\_ unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21).
6. "As a shepherd divideth his \_\_\_\_\_ from the goats" (Matthew 25:32).
7. "Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no \_\_\_\_\_ with me" (John 13:8).
8. "But the day of the Lord will come as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the night" (2 Peter 3:10).
9. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man,...but the \_\_\_\_\_" (Mark 13:32).
10. "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye \_\_\_\_\_, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).
11. "And no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four \_\_\_\_\_" (Revelation 14:3).
12. "And I saw the \_\_\_\_\_, small and great, stand before God" (Revelation 20:12).
13. "[The Lord] will bring to light the hidden things of \_\_\_\_\_" (1 Corinthians 4:5).
14. "And then shall they see the \_\_\_\_\_ of man coming in a cloud" (Luke 21:27).
15. "Because...\_\_\_\_\_ is the way, which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14).
16. "\_\_\_\_\_ the Son of man shall come in his glory" (Matthew 25:31).
17. "Know that it is \_\_\_\_\_, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33).
18. "It is sown in corruption; it is \_\_\_\_\_ in incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:42).
19. "And as it is appointed unto men once to \_\_\_\_\_, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).
20. "LORD, make me to know mine \_\_\_\_\_, and the measure of my days" (Psalm 39:4).
21. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and \_\_\_\_\_" (John 7:37).
22. "Watch therefore, for ye \_\_\_\_\_ neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13).
23. "For \_\_\_\_\_ must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10).
24. "O God, thou art my God; \_\_\_\_\_ will I seek thee" (Psalm 63:1).
25. "Verily, verily, I say unto \_\_\_\_\_, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).
26. "Keep this commandment...\_\_\_\_\_ the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:14).
27. "Behold, I set before you the way of \_\_\_\_\_, and the way of death" (Jeremiah 21:8).
28. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every \_\_\_\_\_ shall see him" (Revelation 1:7).
29. "And so shall we \_\_\_\_\_ be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
30. "Therefore be ye also \_\_\_\_\_: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).
31. "\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_" (John 6:68).

Please send your puzzle answers to:  
 Banner Puzzles and Questions  
 Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn  
 540 Crescent St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
 e-mail: cdkleyn@charter.net

## Answers to last month's puzzle:

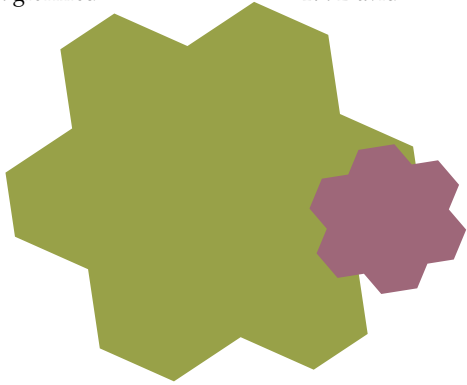
### Across:

2. acceptance  
8. about  
9. even  
11. peace  
12. generations  
15. done  
16. me  
17. lighten  
21. haste  
22. beauty  
24. age  
25. lay  
28. glorified

### Down:

1. horn  
3. coming  
4. pain  
5. there  
6. needy  
7. angels  
8. angel  
10. called  
13. eyes  
14. seed  
16. Mary  
18. highest  
19. David

20. stripes  
22. brought  
23. also  
26. manger  
27. husband  
29. depart  
32. laid  
35. host  
36. mouth  
37. sins  
38. name  
40. His  
43. us



## Thanks again to all who answered last month's puzzle!

James Beeke	Randy Cano	Jenna Nieuwenhuis
Sarah Beeke	Mickey Davis	Jonathan Scherer
Lauren Bilkes (2)	Alexander DeHaan	Hanna Sweetman (2)
Seth Bilkes (2)	Lucas DeHaan	Janine Sweetman (2)
Robert Boatwright	Calvin denHertog	Kara Sweetman (2)
Leah Boerkoel	Janae denHertog	Lauren TenElshof
Phillip Boerkoel	Matthew denHertog	Meghan VanDalen
Silvia Boerkoel	Lucas DeVisser	Melanie VanDalen
Andrew Boesterd	Natasha Eckhardt	Aaron VanderPloeg
Justin Boesterd	Jimmy Horton	Christopher VanDoodewaard
Matthew Boesterd	William Marston	Sarah VanDoodewaard
Becky Boot (2)	Elijah Meschke	Charles Villines (2)
Shelly Boot (2)	Lukas Meschke	Grace Vroegindewey
Alyson Byl	Nick Meschke	Elizabeth Wolfe
Mark Byl	Dennis I. Morrow	

(continued from page 25)

About a year later, the traveler passed that way again. Remembering the family he had visited the year before, he decided to stop by again and see how they were doing. When he approached the house, he hardly recognized it. It was clean and cheery. He wondered if the family had moved away. When he was welcomed at the door, he wondered if they were really the same people he had met a year ago. Instead of angry voices and unhappy faces, there was love and peace. The family was overjoyed to see the stranger again. The children rushed toward him, and the parents could hardly speak for crying.

"Thank you, thank you!" they cried. "We have found the treasure! Now our home and our hearts are filled with the blessing of the Lord."

They insisted that their new friend stay to hear the whole story. Together they rejoiced and praised God for His salvation. The Word of God had been blessed by the Holy Spirit, and their home had been transformed. They had found the greatest treasure of all—the Lord Jesus Christ. They had humbly confessed their sins, and asked the Lord to forgive them for Christ's

sake. They learned that God "hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). They had been pulled from the darkness and brought into the glorious light of Christ.



What about you, dear children? Are your sins washed away? Are you living in darkness or walking in the light? Is the Bible your treasure? Are you rich in Christ Jesus? If not, you must come to Jesus as the guilty sinner that you are and plead for forgiveness. He died so that sinners might live. "He that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18), but blessed be God, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Only in the Lord Jesus Christ is found true happiness. Seek Him daily, as the family in this story

did, and you will find Him. "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

Adapted from *Echoes of Grace*, Volume 2. St. Louis, Mo: Bible Truth Depot, pp. 113–17.

## OBITUARY

DOLE, Norman R., age 83, of Walker, Michigan, passed away Saturday, November 12, 2011. He was preceded in death by his wife, Margaret. Surviving are his children, Kathy Lynn Dole, James Dole, John Dole; Sisters/brother—Pauline and Don Deater, Teria Eppink, Larry Dole; Sisters/brothers-in-law—Alice Dole, Joan and John Harding, Marv and Betty Van Ess; several nieces and nephews, and many friends. (Rev. F. VanderZwaag, Psalm 27:10; John 11:25).

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Lord willing, the Synod Prayer Service, Theological Seminary Committee, and Synod meeting will be held respectively on March 27–30 in Burgessville, Ontario. The Synod Prayer Service will be held on March 27, at 7:30 p.m.

### March 28, 8:00 a.m. Theological Seminary Committee Meeting

This committee will meet in the Burgessville church to assess progress of the seminary, discuss future plans, and interview applicants.

Men who believe they are being called to the ministry of the gospel and desire to be admitted into the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary should contact either the president, Mr. Kevin Ash (kevina@gentex.com), or secretary, Rev. Bartel Elshout (belshout@gmail.com) of the Theological Seminary Committee, or the president of your own consistory for further information on the procedures and requirements in order to obtain a consistory attest.

### March 29, 8:00 a.m. Synod Meeting

The Synod meeting will be held in the Burgessville church. Consistories and Synod-appointed committees are reminded that all material for Synod should be forwarded to Rev. Don Overbeek (don.overbeek@aura-com.com) by February 15 for distribution to the consistories.

### March 30, 9:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Office-bearers' Conference

All FRC and HRC pastors, elders, and deacons (current and previous) are invited to a FRC/HRC Combined Office-bearers' Conference to be held in Burgessville, Ontario on Friday, March 30, 2012, the Lord willing.

The Lord willing, our guest speaker will be Rev. Maurice Roberts. He will address us at 9:00 a.m. on "Justification: the Only Gateway to True Piety" and at 11:00 a.m. on "Sanctification: the Daily Practice of Piety." The presentations will be approximately one hour in length with a thirty-minute Q/A discussion session after each presentation. The morning coffee break and noon meal will also provide opportunities for fellowship and dialogue.

The topics and lunch will be held in the Burgessville HRC church building located at 685 Main Street, Burgessville, Ontario.

We warmly encourage all office-bearers who can to reserve March 30, 2012 and to attend this combined FRC/HRC Office-bearers' Conference with Rev. Maurice Roberts.

If you have any questions or plan to attend the sessions and the noon meal, please reserve by emailing jimbeeke@shaw.ca prior

to March 15. We need to know the number for lunch in advance.

We trust that our gracious Lord will grant us a blessed time together.

## HRC YOUTH CAMP 2012 Mark Your Calendars for July 10–13!

What daily choices do you make? Did you know that those choices reveal whether you follow Wisdom or Folly? There are two ways to live: pursue Wisdom or pursue Folly. The Holy Spirit through Solomon beseeches us to seek the Lord Jesus Christ, who is true Wisdom. He is both our source of wisdom for our relationship with Him and our pattern of wisdom for making wise choices. If we find and follow Him as Wisdom, we will find real purpose and joy in life. When we follow Christ, He promises spiritual and eternal life, as well as practical wisdom leading to genuine riches and honor, ways of pleasantness, paths of peace, lifetime guidance, and happiness in contrast to the fading and temporary pleasures of folly.

Our theme for Youth Camp 2012 is "Wisdom: a fountain of life." We will explore the wisdom that Solomon has written about in Proverbs and learn how it applies to all spheres of our life. Camp will be held July 10–13 (Tuesday–Friday) at Camp Michawana in Hastings, Michigan. Registration forms will be available in April 2012. If you have any questions, please call Gary & Cindy Kwekel at (616) 281-2065 or Tim & Brenda Pols at (616) 536-2171. We look forward to seeing you there.

## NEW PSALMODY CDS • "WORTHY TO BE PRAISED" WEBSITE

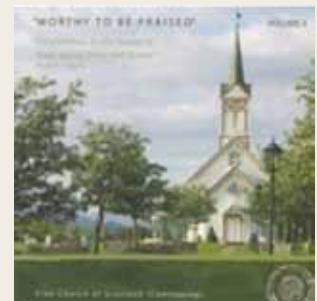
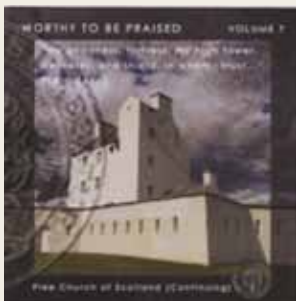
<http://sing-the-psalms.webs.com/>

This new website has been set up to encourage the singing of Psalms and to make the beautiful Scottish series of *Worthy to be Praised* Psalmody CDs more widely available.

While many Psalmody CDs exist, these are unique, having one disc of Psalm singing and one disc to teach the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass parts for the tunes on Disc 1.

As well as twelve Psalm portions sung in four part harmony, Volumes 4 to 7 include some Scottish Gaelic Psalm Singing and one track of children's voices. Samples of both English and Gaelic singing are available on the website.

The discs are attractively produced and make ideal gifts. They can be purchased online by PayPal or Credit Card.



## HERITAGE SPRING RETREAT

Mark your calendar. The 4th annual Heritage Spring Retreat will be held Monday, May 21, through Thursday, May 24, 2012, the Lord willing. The location will again be the Circle-Square Ranch near Brantford, Ontario. Please watch for details and check [heritagere-treat.ca](http://heritagere-treat.ca) for updates. Topics will center on the theme of wisdom. We look forward to seeing you in May at the retreat for, what we trust and pray, will be a spiritually profitable time.

—Heritage Spring Retreat  
Organizing Committee

## TEACHERS NEEDED

### Oxford Reformed Christian School

The Board of Oxford Reformed Christian School invites applications for elementary and secondary teaching positions for the 2012/2013 school year.

We are a parent-run school serving the needs of several local Reformed communities and have been operating for seven years. We have been blessed with a new facility located in Mt. Elgin, a rural village in South-western Ontario. Our present enrolment is 215 students and we offer Kindergarten to grade 12. We have a need for qualified, energetic elementary and secondary teachers to join our staff team. All applicants committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education are encouraged to apply.

Applications should include a resumé, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Promptly send to: Oxford Reformed Christian School, c/o Mr. W. Van Brugge (principal), 308 Church St., P.O. Box 68, Springford, ON N0J 1X0. E-mail: [orcswwb@execulink.com](mailto:orcswwb@execulink.com).

### Rehoboth Christian School

Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown, Ontario, is soliciting applicants for elementary and secondary teaching positions beginning in September, 2012. For more information about Rehoboth, check out our website at [www.rehoboth.on.ca](http://www.rehoboth.on.ca). Please send a cover letter and resumé to the attention of: Mr. Paul Vandenberg, Ed. Committee Chairman, c/o RCS Board Secretary, 198 Inksetter Road, P.O. Box 70, Copetown, Ontario L0R 1J0; t. 905-627-5977; f. 905-628-4422; e. [BoardSecretary@rehoboth.on.ca](mailto:BoardSecretary@rehoboth.on.ca)

## WORK PLACEMENTS FOR DUTCH STUDENTS

The Jacobus Fruytier SG (a Reformed High-school) in the Netherlands is looking for work placements for students 15–17 years of age. In particular, we are looking for work placements

## BOUND COPIES OF "BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH"

Once again, we make available to our *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* readership the possibility of purchasing bound copies of this periodical. Please place a check in the box corresponding to the option(s) in which you are interested and forward to the subscription manager by January 30, 2012.

- Enclosed please find \$30.00 for the binding of the 2011 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. My ten issues are enclosed.
- Enclosed please find \$50.00 (\$30.00 for binding and \$20.00 for a set of ten issues) for a bound copy of the ten 2011 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*.
- I would like to pre-order a bound set of 2012 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. Please put my name on reserve, and I will forward you \$50.00 upon receiving the bound volume in early 2013, D.V.
- Please charge my VISA/MC: # \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

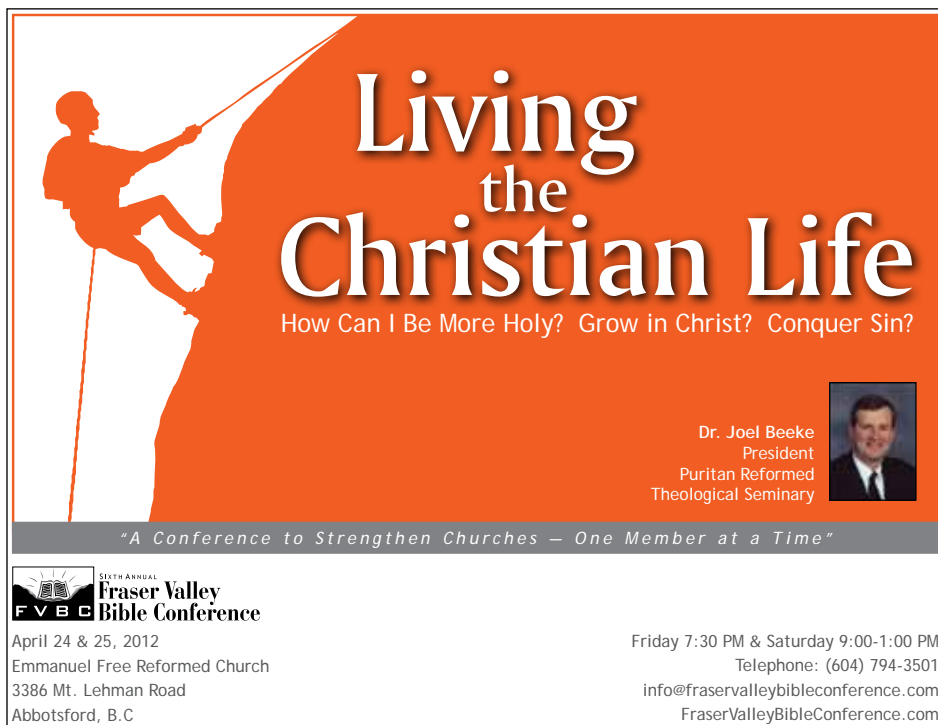
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How Can I Be More Holy? Grow in Christ? Conquer Sin?

Dr. Joel Beeke  
President  
Puritan Reformed  
Theological Seminary

"A Conference to Strengthen Churches — One Member at a Time"

**SEVENTH ANNUAL  
Fraser Valley  
FVBC Bible Conference**

April 24 & 25, 2012  
Emmanuel Free Reformed Church  
3386 Mt. Lehman Road  
Abbotsford, B.C.

Friday 7:30 PM & Saturday 9:00-1:00 PM  
Telephone: (604) 794-3501  
[info@fraservalleybibleconference.com](mailto:info@fraservalleybibleconference.com)  
[FraserValleyBibleConference.com](http://FraserValleyBibleConference.com)

in landscaping, child care, green houses, house cleaning, or other suitable jobs. We would like the student to be part of a family setting in order to further develop their English language skills. Meanwhile you can expect highly motivated students who like to work in Canada or USA for some weeks. We would ask you to send us work details including a job description, number of placements available, and the student's costs and pay. Thank you.

Please contact Mr. M. ten Hove, teamleader

lyceum ([Ho@jfsg.nl](mailto:Ho@jfsg.nl)) or Mr. H. Westerink, Vice Principal havo, lyceum and tto Jacobus Fruytier, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands ([We@jfsg.nl](mailto:We@jfsg.nl)). Reactions preferably by mail. You can also phone the school: 01131555262300.

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.

## NATIONAL NEWS

### “In God We Trust” affirmed as National Motto

Citing a crisis of national identity and mass confusion among Americans about their nation’s motto, the House of Representatives voted on a resolution reaffirming “In God We Trust” as the official motto of the United States. The resolution, smaller than a law but bigger than a wish, is designed to clear up any confusion over the motto’s official status and to encourage schools and other public institutions to display it, said Representative J. Randy Forbes, of Virginia, the measure’s sponsor. The resolution passed 396 to 9. The Senate had passed a similar measure in 2006. The motto officially became that of the Nation in 1956. (Reported in *NY Times*)



### Canada in court battle over euthanasia

The *Euthanasia Prevention Coalition of Canada (EPC)* is conducting a petition drive to encourage the government to fight against the use of the courts to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide. Canada’s Parliament voted down an attempt to legalize it 228 to 59, so proponents have gone to the courts to try to force legalization. “Right now,” says EPC founder Alex Schadenberg, “the B.C. Civil Liberties Association is running a case featuring two plaintiffs, and their goal is to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada through the courts. They are contending that the laws that protect people from euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada are unconstitutional and the courts need to strike them down.” He explains that attorneys want to amend the country’s homicide law to protect people who help others kill themselves. Canadians are being asked to sign a petition directed at the government. (*OneNewsNow*)

### VOA Keeping Message of Democracy Alive

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is planning to eliminate the Voice of America (VOA) radio programs in China, but human rights groups want them to continue because they are more difficult for the communist government to monitor and block.

VOA provides a vital service to closed countries because the international public broadcaster grants people in countries like China, where the government monitors everything, access to information that they cannot obtain anywhere else. Dr. Barrett Duke of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention agrees with other human rights groups who view VOA as a tool for “young fighters for democracy.” “In this day and age now, where closed countries are working even harder to prevent their citizens from getting news from democracies, it’s even more important that we engage in vigorous democracy promotion,” Duke contends. “VOA is one way that we can do that.” China employs many people to ensure that citizens do not get information from the outside through means like blocking certain Internet material and radio signals. But the ERLC spokesman points out that the entire country cannot be blocked, and the only way to completely silence VOA is if the U.S. government decides to end the broadcasts. (*OneNewsNow*)

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Suspected Drug Traffickers Kidnap Pastor

Some five hundred worshippers were gathered for worship service at the Christian Center El Shaddai in the Mexican city of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacan, when four masked men burst in, firing machine guns into

the air. Before the frightened believers realized what was happening, their pastor, Josué Ramírez Santiago, had been whisked away. The following day, the pastor’s family received news that the criminals wanted a ransom of 20 million pesos (US \$1.7 million). Even if the family could raise such an immense sum—considered doubtful—payment would not guarantee that the victim would be returned alive. Arturo Farela, director of the National Fraternity of Evangelical Churches, has asserted that organized crime syndicates and drug cartels have targeted Christians because they view churches as revenue centers and because churches support programs for the rehabilitation of drug addicts and alcoholics. Farela has stated that a hundred Mexican clergymen have been kidnapped in recent years, with fifteen of them losing their lives to organized crime.

Michoacan, the state where this recent abduction took place, has been a center of much criminal activity and also of severe reprisals by elements of the Mexican army. The state where President Felipe Calderon was born, Michoacan was the first to implement an anti-drug military operation that expanded to northern and eastern states. In spite of the operation, more than 34,600 people nationwide have reportedly been assassinated since it was implemented in December 2006, with most of those crimes tied to drug traffickers “settling accounts.” (*CompassDirect*)

### EU Court Limits Stem Cell Patents

The European Union’s top court ruled that scientists cannot patent stem cell techniques that use human embryos for research. The ruling sets Europe apart from much of the rest of the world, where there are little or no such restrictions. The Court justices concluded that the law protects human embryos from any use that could undermine their dignity. (Reported in the *Grand Rapids Press*)

## WORLD RELIGIONS:

### ANGLICANISM AND EPISCOPALIANISM

The *Anglican Communion* is an organization of autonomous national churches connected with the Church of England, which has its roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation. *Anglicanism* or *Episcopalianism* is the general form of doctrine, worship, and structure based on the tradition of the Church of England, which extends beyond membership in the Anglican Communion. Anglicanism is characterized by a *via media* (middle way) between Catholicism and Protestantism. Anglicans are not subject to the Pope and are Protestant in most areas of doctrine, but also retain many Catholic forms of worship, including a hierarchy based on *bishops* (which is the meaning of the word “Episcopalian”). Anglicanism in general allows for significant freedom and diversity within the bounds of Scripture, reason, and tradition. This has led to considerable variation in doctrine and practice between Anglican churches in different provinces. For example, some Anglican churches ordain women to the priesthood while others do not, and some emphasize Protestant doctrines while others hold more to Catholic teachings. Anglican rituals are expressed primarily in the *Book of Common Prayer*, a collection of liturgy developed by Thomas Cranmer in the sixteenth century and periodically modified since then; however, the *Book of Common Prayer* is not held to be normative. Much diversity has recently developed in Anglican worship around the world, and many different prayer books have been issued. In general, Anglican worship tends to be Catholic or “High Church” in flavor, with prescribed rituals and readings, bishops and priests, vestments, saints’ days, and elaborately decorated churches.

## HNRC PRISON MINISTRY

*From a friend in prison:*

I am blessed by your continued support; each week I receive a sermon and I thank God for them. This week I read *Sanctification or Holiness* and it was just what I needed to read.

In prison we have unique struggles that make it difficult to fellowship and share the Word. Violence, wickedness, hate, and many other worldly traits are prevalent among men in prison. This makes it truly a matter of faith to walk as a man in Christ should, but all is not bad. There are many Christians here, even though most are “Arminians” or “professing Christians.” I pray for them all; we fellowship as we can. There are about twelve Reformed brothers here that attend a service on Friday mornings that believe in the truth as Calvin and others taught. We teach T.U.L.I.P. and other Reformed doctrines, but it is tough. Last week one of our brothers on a different yard was attacked three versus one and is in the medical unit recovering. He was warned by other inmates to stop teaching Reformed doctrines but he decided to speak the truth anyway. There really are wolves in sheep’s clothing in here and they do bite. He will recover and, God willing, he will be moved to a new prison where he can teach again. We are against violence and truly walk in truth as Christians, but occasionally a person outside the church or someone posing as a Christian will resort to evil in order to try and keep the truth that Jesus taught quiet. Please help me as I pray for those men that persecute us; they are still in the world and only God’s mercy can save them.

God bless you all and your families. I really feel the sermons you send are of the highest quality, speak the truth, and bring glory to God. Thank you!

— Your brother in Christ (Rom. 16:20)

*From a friend in prison:*

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! The reason I am writing you directly is to inform you of how grateful I am to your service in the Lord. Thank you.

I wrote several times to HRC for sermons and books on Reformed literature. Each time I was met with helpful and useful tools that have taught, and continue to teach me, such as *The Three Forms of Unity*, *Walking as He Walked*, and many wonderful sermons by our Puritan fathers. I can’t thank you enough as words fail to accurately capture how I feel. My praise is to God for calling us out of the world and into His light, using vessels like us to share in His goodness and heavenly work. My thanks to you is to reassure you of your ministry being with fruit as you remain in Him.

## PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*From a friend in New Hampshire:*

Thank you so much for your recent gift of the books *Christians Get Depressed Too* and *Developing a Healthy Prayer Life*.

I can’t begin to tell you how much each of these books has affected my life!

I have, within the past six months, moved from a three-story Victorian home to a lovely, spacious, one-room addition to my son’s home in the same state. Though it was what I wanted and knew I needed, and I have been so welcome in the family, yet the actual reality of the move has been a difficult adjustment. Reading Dr. Murray’s compassionate book enabled me to recognize my condition and its causes and to deal with them according to his wise instructions. My attitudes have changed, and I am adjusting so much better to my situation. I praise God for the book and the timing of my receiving it. Please convey my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Murray!

As to the book on prayer, never have I read one so helpful. Most have left me feeling guilty and frustrated, so I have avoided reading more on the subject.

What a surprise and encouragement this small volume has been to me! It has encouraged me to see that my inward dependence on and communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can rightfully be characterized as prayer.

My struggles have been with concentrated intercessory prayer, and the meditations “Wrestling in Prayer” and “Pray Dependently” have been such an encouragement. Thank you so very much! 2 Corinthians 13:14.

## REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

*From a friend in prison:*

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Cor. 1:18).

Gracious greetings in the name of our sovereign LORD and Savior Jesus Christ. I have been humbly thanking the LORD for His awesome and powerful work in and through your congregation, staff, and the church’s missions—Christ’s missions. Thank you so much for your sure and swift response to my plea for assistance in battling the evil forces in this prison that try to quench the move of God in proclaiming sovereign grace in this place.

Thank you for shipping to me two wonderful books, *Calvin for Today* and *Living for God’s Glory*. Please give my deepest regards for having included the second book listed above. I did not expect such a charitable blessing and such a gracious gift. These books answered our need here perfectly.

A brother has been built back up in our most holy faith and I too have been greatly edified. He is nearly finished with *Calvin for Today* and I am being richly blessed by *Living for God’s Glory*, for this is exactly what I want to do with all my heart and all my mind and all my soul. The men I study with want to do the same. God has sovereignly saved us by His free grace and granted us repentance. We love the LORD and are joyfully and eternally indebted to Him! These books are being shared in our small assembly. We are going to go through *Living for God’s Glory* eventually as a group. Thanks again! Keep us in your prayers.

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*  
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## EBENEZER

The Lord, our salvation and light,  
The guide of our strength and our days,  
Has brought us together to-night,  
A new Ebenezer to raise:  
The year we have now passed through,  
His goodness with blessings has crown'd,  
Each morning his mercies were new;  
Then let our thanksgivings abound.

Encompass'd with dangers and snares,  
Temptations, and fears, and complaints,  
His ear he inclin'd to our pray'rs,  
His hand open'd wide to our wants.  
We never besought him in vain;  
When burden'd with sorrow or sin,  
He help'd us again and again,  
Or where before now had we been?

His Gospel, throughout the long year,  
From Sabbath to Sabbath he gave;  
How oft has he met with us here,  
And shown himself mighty to save?  
His candlestick has been remov'd  
From churches once privileg'd thus;  
But though we unworthy have prov'd,  
It still is continu'd to us.

For so many mercies receiv'd,  
Alas! what returns have we made?  
His Spirit we often have griev'd,  
And evil for good have repaid,  
How well it becomes us to cry,  
"Oh! who is a God like to thee?  
Who passest iniquities by,  
And plungest them deep in the sea!"

To Jesus, who sits on the throne,  
Our best hallelujahs we bring;  
To thee it is owing alone  
That we are permitted to sing:  
Assist us, we pray, to lament  
The sins of the year that is past  
And grant that the next may be spent  
Far more to thy praise than the last.

—JOHN NEWTON

# *the* Banner *of Sovereign Grace Truth*

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A Periodical for Young and Old