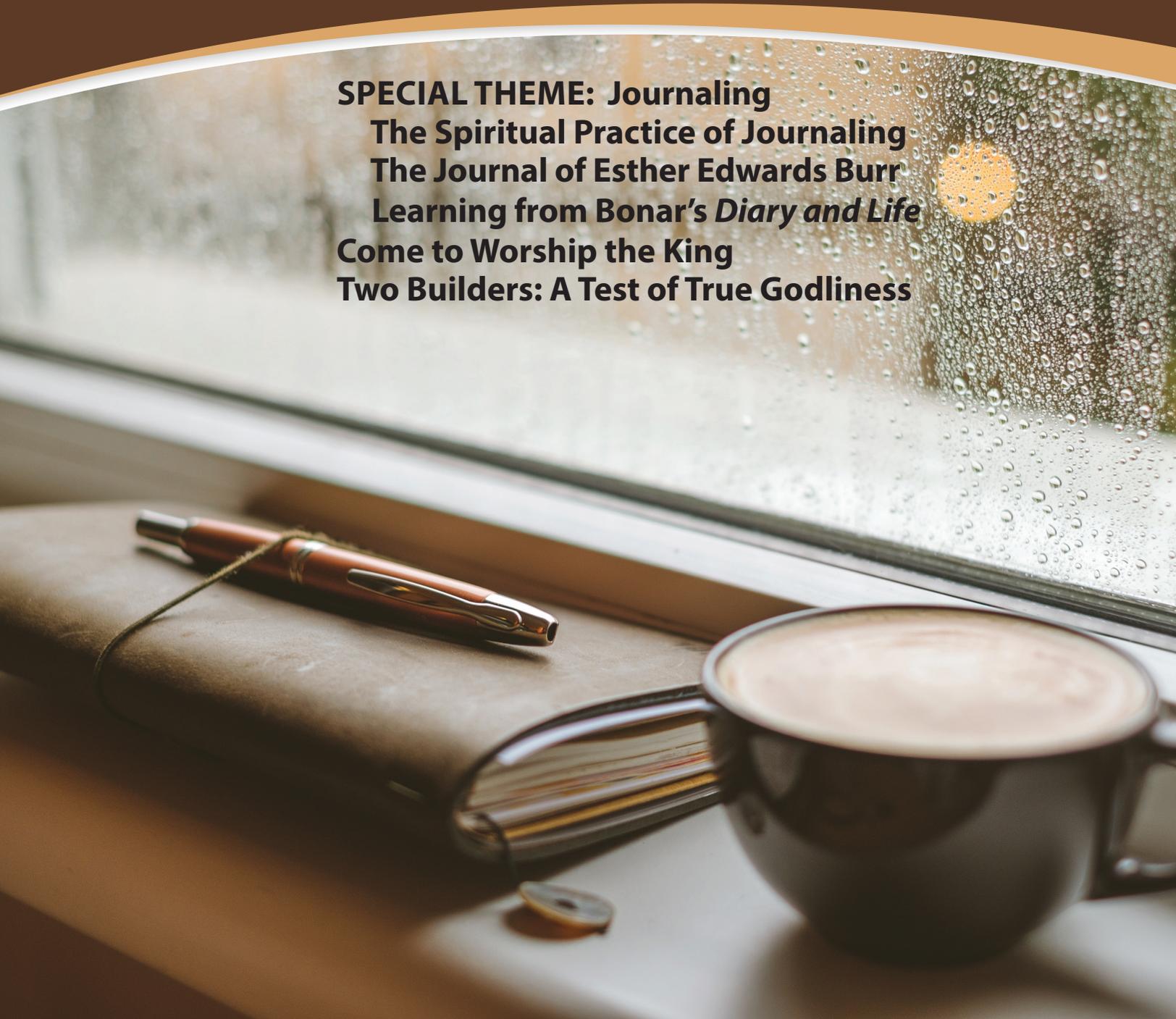


# THE BANNER

OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

A photograph of a window with raindrops, a pen, a notebook, and a cup of coffee. The window is covered in water droplets, and a bright sun is visible through the glass. In the foreground, a brown leather notebook is open, with a pen resting on it. A black mug filled with coffee is also visible.

**SPECIAL THEME: Journaling**  
**The Spiritual Practice of Journaling**  
**The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr**  
**Learning from Bonar's *Diary and Life***  
**Come to Worship the King**  
**Two Builders: A Test of True Godliness**

# CONTENTS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019 • Vol. 27, No. 6

## THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

Publication Number (ISSN 10726357)

*The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is published bimonthly by the Heritage Reformed denomination, 540 Crescent Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. Typeset at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Gardner Graphics); printed at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grandville Printing).

Subscription price for six issues per year: \$25.00 in the United States. \$30.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$35.00 (surface mail) or \$65.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. Rates listed are for one year subscriptions.

**Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Editor**  
2965 Leonard Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525  
(616) 977-0599; fax (616) 285-3246  
e-mail: joel.beeke@prts.edu

**Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven, Assistant Editor**

**Office of Publication**  
540 Crescent Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503-3402  
(616) 977-4304; fax (616) 285-3246  
e-mail: bsgt@hncr.org; website: bsgtonline.com

Copy for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is due the 5th of the month prior to publication. All copy (including announcements, obituaries, anniversary notices, and ads) should be sent to the editor. All announcements submitted for publication should be typed, and are subject to editorial policy. Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to the subscription manager. Change of address should be forwarded to the subscription manager one month in advance of moving date. Please provide both new and old address.

PERIODICAL Postage is Paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth," 540 Crescent Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

### ADDITIONAL SOURCES

For a list of printed Reformed literature, write: Reformation Heritage Books, 2965 Leonard Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525, or visit our on-line bookstore at [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org); 616-977-0889.

For free sermons write: Inheritance Publishers, P.O. Box 1334, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501.  
<http://inheritancepublishers.com/>

For free sermons and radio messages of HRC ministers write: The Gospel Trumpet, 540 Crescent Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

For tract distribution write: Banner of Truth Tract Mission, 540 Crescent Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503. For distribution of tapes (sermons, lectures, classes, etc.) write: "The Tape Room," 540 Crescent Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

For material related to theological training write: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2965 Leonard Street NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525; 616-977-0599; [www.puritanseminary.org](http://www.puritanseminary.org); [henk.kleyn@prts.edu](mailto:henk.kleyn@prts.edu).

For HRC mission and evangelistic work, contact Glad Tidings, Jane Korevaar at [janekorevaar@gmail.com](mailto:janekorevaar@gmail.com).

In all publications, the Heritage Reformed denomination aims to remain true to inerrant Scripture and its Reformed heritage as expounded in the Reformed doctrinal standards: the Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), and the Westminster Standards of the 1640s (the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

For additional information on HRC ministries, please visit our website at [www.heritagereformed.com](http://www.heritagereformed.com).

### MEDITATIONS

- Thanksgiving: A Reminder of Feasting in Booths | *Rev. Mark Kelderman* . . . . . 227  
Come to Worship the King | *Rev. Terreth Klaver* . . . . . 228  
Born! The Savior! | *Rev. Pieter VanderHoek* . . . . . 229  
Two Builders: A Test of True Godliness | *Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag* . . . . . 230

### QUESTIONS ANSWERED FOR TEENS | *James W. Beeke*

- Nominal Christians | Government Criticism and Disobedience . . . . . 231

### EDITORIAL | *Drs. Matthew Barrett and Joel R. Beeke*

- Puritans, Theology, and Practice . . . . . 232

### OLD TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY | *Dr. Michael Barrett*

- Zechariah's Revelation of Christ (3) . . . . . 234

### NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY | *Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes*

- When a City Rejoices (2) . . . . . 236

### SPECIAL THEME: JOURNALING

- The Spiritual Practice of Journaling | *Dr. Donald S. Whitney* . . . . . 238  
Journibles: "The 17:18 Series" | *Rob Wynalda* . . . . . 240  
Why Should You Read Your Denominational Periodical? | *Dr. Joel R. Beeke* . . . . . 242  
Why You Should Read an Academic Journal | *Dr. Greg Salazar* . . . . . 244  
Jonathan Edwards's "Diary" | *Dr. Adriaan C. Neele* . . . . . 246  
The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr | *Esther Engelsma* . . . . . 248  
Learning from Bonar's *Diary and Life* | *Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven* . . . . . 250  
Journals on Providence | *John Flavel* . . . . . 253

### BOOK TALK | *Erin Willis* . . . . . 254

### STORY FOR CHILDREN | *Andrea Scholten*

- A Lesson Learned . . . . . 256

### MEDITATION FOR CHILDREN | *Kara Dedert*

- Gospel Glasses . . . . . 258

### BIBLE QUIZ FOR CHILDREN | *Cheryl DeWaal* . . . . . 259

### NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS . . . . . 260

### CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW | *Anna Timmer* . . . . . 262

### CORNER FOR TEENS | *Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven*

- Signposts to Jesus (7): A Light in the Darkness . . . . . 263

### POEM | *Godfrey Thring*

- Savior, Blessed Savior . . . . . 264

## THANKSGIVING AND INCARNATION

As editors, we wish you and your loved ones a blessed Thanksgiving and a blessed commemoration of our Savior's birth, so that you may experience the truth of what J. C. Ryle wrote: "Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility," as well as grasp the truth of that which Benjamin B. Warfield said: "The glory of the Incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal."

# Thanksgiving: A Reminder of Feasting in Booths

The tradition of our Thanksgiving Day is rooted in our country's history. The Pilgrims were faced with many challenges once they arrived in the "New World." They saw themselves in many ways like the children of Israel whom God had led out of Egypt. Being very familiar with the Scriptures, some of the Pilgrims' traditions began to reflect certain practices of Old Testament Israel.

One of these practices, little known to us, was the feast of booths. God had brought Israel out of bondage and He spelled out to them various ceremonies and sacrifices which they were to perform as a reminder of their union with Him. There were four spring feasts: the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, the firstfruits, and Pentecost. There were three fall feasts: the feast of trumpets, the day of atonement, and the feast of tabernacles. This last feast had other names as well: the feast of sukkot, feast of ingathering, feast of the Lord, or simply the feast.

This feast was a week-long celebration of what the Lord had done for them and it was held at the end of the harvest season. Remember that God had told them about this feast while they were still dwelling in tents, but they also had the promise that God would give them houses they had not built and fruit from trees they had not planted. In this feast the children of Israel were to build a small booth where they would live for one week. This was a reminder as well that their fathers dwelt in booths in the wilderness; they were strangers and pilgrims. While this was a week of rejoicing, it was also an uncomfortable week. Once they were in the land, dwelling in wonderful houses, they had to build these temporary booths and dwell in them for a week as a reminder of God's faithfulness.

But it was much more a sweet week for the children of Israel. They would gather as families in these booths and share their meals. They would recount together how the Lord had blessed them, how He had led their fathers out of the land of bondage into this glorious and plentiful land. Fathers were to recount to their children the wonderful works of the Lord, how He had provided for them in the wilderness and that He had continued to provide for them until that moment. The time they would spend in the booth was a reminder that all the blessings they had were not because they had been so faithful, or because of the diligent labor of their hands, but it was because the Lord had continued to bless them.

This feast was not only to be remembered by the children of Israel, but we read in Deuteronomy 16:11 that all the family, their servants and the Levites, and the stranger, fatherless, and widow were all to come together for this occasion. In other words, it was to be a feast of gratitude and evangelism at the same time. It even became a tradition later in Israel's history that they would take seventy bulls and sacrifice them during

this feast. Each bull represented a nation and in so doing they were confessing that the Lord was Lord of all nations.

It is noteworthy as well that these days of rejoicing and feasting followed after two other feasts: the feast of trumpets, which was a call to repentance, and the day of atonement, which was a picture of salvation. This was a season of joy and rejoicing that followed the days of grief, humiliation, and sorrow. Yes, it was a feast of joy, but that did not mean absence of difficulty. It was a season of thanksgiving and gratitude for reflecting on how God had provided for them and an anticipation of His faithful promise for the future as well.

As we remember our Thanksgiving Day, we can learn from this history, and I leave it to you to flesh this out in greater detail with your families as you gather around your Thanksgiving meals. First, so often our thanksgiving is about us, but here we realize it ought really to be all about our God—His provision, His care, and His lovingkindness. These were feasting and rejoicing days for Israel; they should also be so for us.

Second, there was a reminder in these days of the past bondage: they were to dwell in booths. Those in the Netherlands who only had turnips to eat in World War II, could now eat a bowl of turnips at a thanksgiving meal as a reminder of this. Experiencing freedom from that tyranny, they could now give greater thanks to God for His blessings.

Third, it was a time that fathers spoke to their families about the Lord's deliverance and salvation. It was after humiliation and sorrow that they could rejoice. We should do the same.

Fourth, the booths were a temporary structure for a week. This is a reminder that our lives are but a short "week" and then we enter eternity.

Fifth, it is a call to reach out to others around us evangelically. Inviting others to our family meal at this time and sharing with them our devotion to the Lord may very well bring them to acknowledge the Savior.

Lastly, let this feast be a reminder of our great need of the Spirit of Christ to lead us. In the gospels, this feast is mentioned specifically in John 7:37. Jesus, on the last day of this feast, stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scriptures hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." On our Thanksgiving Day we must not lose sight of this great truth, that Christ is our provision and it is a complete provision—to Him we owe our all. Let's drink deeply of this well of salvation and rejoice on this Thanksgiving Day.

---

**Rev. Mark Kelderman** is the Dean of Students and Spiritual Formation at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and an ordained minister in the Heritage Reformed denomination.

# Come to Worship the King

In Matthew 2:2 the wise men tell Herod why they have come to Jerusalem: “to worship” the King of the Jews, our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to worship the King, the Lord made them willing to act on revelation and to sacrifice their time, comfort, and money (Ps. 110:3).

The Word of God makes clear that the wise men were dependent on His revelation to find the King of the Jews. They came to worship because “we have *seen* his star in the east (Matt. 2:2).” The Lord, the Maker of the stars (Gen. 1:16, Job 9:7), revealed to them by the leading of His Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11) where the King was to be born.

What a blessed work of the Spirit this was! These men from the East, who likely did not have the full revelation of the Old Testament (Matt. 2:4–5), were willing to trust the Lord and seek the King. The knowledge of the star, its significance, and its movements, do not seem to have been known by many (Matt. 2:2, 7) and perhaps were revealed only to the wise men (Matt. 2:10). Though it may have been difficult to objectively verify the star and its significance, these men were truly “wise” in trusting the Lord’s revelation.

Whenever God’s people come to worship Jesus the King it is only by revelation and through the Spirit (John 4:24). The Spirit leads into all truth and testifies of Christ (John 16:3; 15:26). Before the full revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ and the significance of His Person and work, the Spirit spoke through various extraordinary means, like mysterious stars; but now He speaks by the living power of God’s Word, the Scriptures (Heb. 1:1–3; 4:12).

Are you conscious of your need for revelation and the Spirit in your worship of Jesus Christ? Is there a sense of blessed dependence on His Word and Spirit? Do you have, by faith, the assurance of acceptance with the Lord as you seek to worship Him? Our lack of faith, our self-righteousness, and our desire to worship as we want rather than how the Spirit has commanded us through His Word, all rob us of the blessings of true worship (John 4:24; Heb. 4:16; 11:6). Further, if we worship in a way contrary to what the Spirit reveals, we rob ourselves of what the wise men found: “they rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matt. 2:10). When we come to worship the Lord by His Word and Spirit, we find the greatest and deepest joy (Pss. 28:7; 43:4; 84:1–2; 100:1–2; 122:1; 1 Chron. 29:21–22; Ezra 6:15–16).

The wise men experienced joy in going to worship the King of the Jews because the Spirit made them willing to act upon His revelation and because they were willing to sacrifice. What great sacrifices they must have made to

worship the King! What would they have had to sacrifice? They would have had to sacrifice at least three things.

First, they sacrificed their time. Some scholars estimate it would have taken the wise men a few months at the very least to arrive in Jerusalem. How much time do we sacrifice to worship the King? Time is precious and we never seem to have enough of it. But are we sacrificing months or minutes? How much time does it really take for our personal worship in our inner closets, with our families, and with the people of God when they gather for worship? The sacrifice of our time is a sacrifice we should be willing to make.

Second, the wise men sacrificed their comfort. They left their homes, families, and possessions behind to worship the Lord Jesus. They did not travel at 100 kilometers per hour down paved roads in large camper vans or mobile homes. They walked, or rode animals like camels or donkeys, and carried their necessary gear for travel. By comparison to the wise men, we worship in comfort. We may personally worship the Lord in any place and we often have comfortable homes and church buildings. We have convenient and comfortable vehicles in which to travel to worship. Sometimes we even count it a burden if our place of worship is just a bit too cold or a bit too warm. Is not a bit of relative discomfort worth the blessed joy of worshipping Him? If we find ourselves complaining, or feel our sense of joy evaporating in worship, perhaps it is because we are not willing to sacrifice our own personal comfort in worship.

Third, the wise men sacrificed their money. Traveling is expensive. The wise men likely could not continue their wage-earning occupations as they traveled. Further, the gifts they brought were very, very expensive. Are we willing to sacrifice our money for the joy of worship? Is parting with our funds difficult? Do we rejoice in worship as cheerful givers (2 Cor. 9:7)? Do we give freely, trusting that the Lord will provide (Mal. 3:10)? It would be much easier to give the money the Lord has given to us back to Him if we consciously focused on the blessedness in worshipping Him as we do it.

Let us, like the wise men, seek to worship our King Jesus according to the revelation given us by His Spirit in His Word and with a willingness to sacrifice. When, by the grace of God, we do so, we will rejoice with exceeding great joy!

---

Rev. Terreth Klaver is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Chilliwack, British Columbia.

# Born! The Savior!

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!* (Luke 2:11).

## A PRE-BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

It's not that common, but sometimes it happens that parents publish their baby's name and ultrasound picture even before the baby is born—a birth announcement before the birth! Now, when earthly parents do this there is so much that still can go differently from what they expected. But not so for our Lord's birth announcement. Everything was perfectly known and planned from eternity. The LORD did not need ultrasounds to publish the name of His glorious Son. And when He is in control, nothing can go wrong. That's why, years before, the LORD inspired Isaiah to write with excitement: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). What glorious names and titles our Savior received even before He was born in the flesh! That's because Christmas is glorious, and the born Savior is glorious since He who existed from eternity entered time as truly God and truly human!

## A POST-BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

No wonder that when the time came, the Lord sent His glorious angels to announce the birth of the long-awaited Messiah! How amazing it must have been for the angels to bring this announcement! The apostle Peter says that the angels were trying to peer into the mysterious prophecies about the Lord's salvation, being eager to know what this salvation for sinners meant. They were looking into this mystery from the outside, to see and know what would happen (1 Peter 1:12). What a day it must have been when they were in the fields of Ephrata to bring the actual announcement of the fact. What excitement must have filled their glorious voices when they said, "For unto you is born this day...a Savior!" These are indeed good tidings of great joy! This is the gospel—God with us, Emmanuel!

## AN ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENT

Now this was not only news which the angels curiously desired to look into. This was good news for poor shepherds

who were watching over their flocks in the fields because the text says: "For unto you is born this day." These blessed messengers never fell into sin, unlike the devils and mankind. They did not need a Savior. Today, there is a Savior *born in the city of David*, just as all the prophecies have been pointing out. Today there is a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord. Yes, this is the Messiah! This is the Lord of the universe, clothed in human flesh and blood, and even more amazingly, clothed in strips of linen cloth, and lying in a manger. This is how deeply the Lord of the universe was willing to condescend to save wretched sinners, to save simple shepherds.

## AN AWE-INSPIRING ANNOUNCEMENT

*Born! A Savior! Today!* Each of these words, spoken by the angel, are filled with wonder, awe, and adoration. But how much more should these words fill poor sinners with wonder, awe, and adoration. A Savior who was willing to be born, willing to stoop to such a low place. A Savior who can therefore take upon Himself the original guilt of my tragic fall in Adam in which I was born and conceived (HC 36). How tragic it is if you and I can't be stirred by this greatest of birth announcements.

## A PERSONAL ANNOUNCEMENT

And that is why it is so important to know the truth of these words personally by faith. He was born, so that I, a wretched sinner, can be born again. So these words, used by the Spirit, become very personal. They become the gospel to me. *To you* is born a Savior, yes, my Savior. *To you*, who, like the shepherds, hurry to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit to worship and embrace Him. Come to Him, to know Him, to adore Him, and then also to go out and proclaim this wondrous message to as many who will hear it. This is the result when we see by faith: we realize this Savior is born *for me!* Let us be faith-filled and join the angels' eagerness, awe, and joy, as well as the shepherds' zeal to proclaim and share this glorious announcement. How beautiful are the good tidings of great joy announced to all people!

---

Rev. Pieter van der Hoek is a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Burgesville, Ontario.



# Two Builders: A Test of True Godliness

At year's end it is good to ask ourselves, "Am I at peace with God and ready to meet Him?" In Luke 6:46 Jesus asks, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Are you building on the rock or on sand?

## OUR SINCERITY QUESTIONED

Jesus is not just asking a question. He questions their sincerity: "If I truly am your Lord, your Master, why don't you obey Me? Your deeds don't agree with My Word, nor with your own words." Many people came to Jesus to hear Him. They were impressed, but many of them were only hearers and not doers of His Word.

How do we come to Jesus and hear Him? First of all in prayer, but secondly, in hearing God's Word. Each time we pray and turn to His Word, we come to Jesus and hear His voice. That includes every time you came to church in 2019. That includes all the sermons you heard and all your prayers. Young people, it includes your Bible classes at school. Older ones, it includes all your personal and family devotions. Even right now He speaks to you, just as He spoke to the people in this passage. As they were saying, "Lord, Lord," so are you!

Jesus is solemnly warning us that calling Him "Lord" is not enough to be truly godly and to be able to enter into heaven. But who is the right hearer and doer? Well, Jesus says, "I will shew you to whom he is like" and tells them this parable about the two builders, one building a house on the rock and the other on the earth or sand—the one standing firm and unshakable, the other one falling into great ruin.

## OUR LIKENESS DISPLAYED

First, note what the builders have in common. The problem was not that they were not building. They worked hard, sawing, hammering, painting, and perhaps using the same blueprint, bricks, lumber, tools, windows, carpet, etc. The houses may have looked identical! Likewise, the people who came to Jesus all had the same profession of religion. They all believed in God and attended the synagogue on the Sabbath. But Jesus puts them and us to the test.

What is all included in building the house of our lives, especially our religious house? You go to a Christian school or you are home-schooled. You work hard in the office or at home or in the factory. And of course, you were baptized and faithfully attend church, daily read your Bibles, pray to God, give to charities, attend the Lord's Supper, etc. Your house is coming along nicely. It looks very good, very impressive. Yes, your building site is messy. Some have a big mess in the front yard; everyone can see it. With others it is in the backyard or inside, but we are working hard to clean it up. Our neighbors think we all are real Christians, all building on the rock.

There is another important likeness. Not only do the houses look quite similar; they also endured the same storms. We can't distinguish the true believer from the hypocrite by the trials he

faces. Both houses were severely beaten by a great flood. Tests not only come to believers but also to unbelievers.

In Matthew 7, the other account of this parable, we read in verse 22, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Jesus responds, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Workers of iniquity? Didn't we do what was commanded?

## OUR DIFFERENCE EXPOSED

First, remember the test of true godliness does not only come at the end of our lives. That will be the final test. By then it is too late to do anything about it. Jesus did not tell this parable to condemn us but to save us. We know our houses can be damaged in a storm or by a flood several times during our lives. What do we do then? We try to fix it and continue to repair and build.

So the Lord comes with His Word and with His trials, such as illness, business failure, the death of a beloved relative or friend, etc., into our lives to shake our spiritual houses. How did you respond in 2019? We all are building, but what is your foundation and how are you building on it?

The Jews refused to acknowledge that all their labor was useless and an offense to God if it was not first built on the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ, and His righteousness. That, by nature, also is our greatest sin and our greatest folly. Would you not think it foolish if a builder of an earthly house would begin to think about the foundation when he is building the second floor? How much more foolish to ignore this when building our spiritual and eternal house.

However, though it is not the usual way, it is possible to move a house and place it on another foundation. So it can be done with our spiritual house before it is forever too late. That is why Jesus tells us that if we are still building our house on sand, we can have it yet be placed on the Rock, no matter what stage it's at. How? By simply confessing even our best efforts to build our life's house without Him as sin.

That does not discredit all the doing to which we are called. For that also is the purpose of this parable. Jesus says that the wise builder is the one "that cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them." So, we cannot build the house of our lives without building it on the Rock. But we also cannot imagine that we are on the Rock without actually building a house on it. That is just as foolish. For what is a foundation without a house? So then do not boast in your works without faith, nor in your faith without works. Rather, sing, "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever" (Ps. 44:8). So we not only come to Jesus and trust in Him alone for justification but also for sanctification, not pleading what we have done, but rather what God has said and done through Him.

---

Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag is pastor of Grace Reformed Christian Church (HRC) of Harrison, Arkansas.

## NOMINAL CHRISTIANS

*When people speak of “nominal Christians,” what do they mean?*

Suggested Reading: Matthew 13:24–30

“Nominal” means “existing in name only.” When someone refers to “nominal Christians” they mean people who are Christian in name but not in reality. Many may view or speak of themselves as “Christians,” but may not be true Christians as God defines them in His Word.

Jesus taught, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:13) and that the summary of His commandments (the moral law) is to “love God above all and your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–40). If a person calls himself a Christian, but he does not strive to live according to God’s commandments to honor God, this person is a nominal Christian.

Consider the example of a young man who thinks and tells others that he really loves a young woman. But he is not interested in saying or doing things that would please her, but only that which pleases himself. He is not concerned when he says or does things that upset or grieve her, but he only cares about matters that she does not like. Do you think that this young man’s love is real or only nominal? Yes, nominal. Why? Because his love only focuses on himself and his desires and not on hers.

So it is with Jesus Christ. Only those who love Jesus above all and pray and strive to live lives pleasing to Christ are true Christians. Those who still love living for themselves, and do not love living for Jesus, are not. If they call themselves Christian, they are only nominal.

When we view the Christian church, we can see “Christians” gathering for a Sunday morning service in a church building to worship God. We call this the “visible church”—the church that you and I can see. But God sees the hearts of people. He knows those who truly love Him above all and others as themselves. We refer to these true Christians as the “invisible church.” Invisible to us but known to God. Nominal Christians are those who are members in the church visible but not in the church invisible.

In the suggested reading, Matthew 13:24–30, the true Christians are the wheat, and the tares (weeds) are the nominal Christians. They both grew up in the same field (the visible church), but some are real wheat and others are not.

*Are you a Christian? If so, are you a nominal Christian or a true Christian? How can you determine this? Read Matthew 13:24–30 and 21:33–41. Why is it important for us, and all Christians, to know if we are nominal or true? How does the book of James teach us to distinguish the true Christian from the nominal?*

## GOVERNMENT CRITICISM AND DISOBEDIENCE

*Is it permissible to criticize or disobey government?*

*To be disrespectful to government leaders?*

Suggested Reading: Romans 13:1–7

God is the ultimate authority. He is the creator of all things, also of you and me. We must all obey and give an answer to the sovereign King of the universe (2 Chron. 20:6; Ps. 103:19). God has revealed His will and commandments in His Word, the Bible (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18–19). God and His Word must always be obeyed, without exception. God and His Word are perfect, true, inerrant, and infallible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The Bible is the absolute authority.

To enable human life to function in a fallen, sinful world, God has delegated authority to persons in positions to govern others. The Lord has delegated authority to:

- Parents to rule in their home
- Elders to govern in the church
- Officials to preside in civil governments
- Managers to direct in their businesses and institutions

We are to respect those God has placed in authority over us (Rom. 13:1–2; 1 Peter 2:17), even when we do not agree with them

(1 Peter 2:18–20). Even when they do not live uprightly (Matt. 23:1–3), we must still respect them for their God-given position of authority. Even when we communicate our disagreement, it must be done in a respectful manner (Acts 23:5). We may communicate disagreement, but only with respectful words and actions.

We are called to obey those God has placed in authority over us (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1–6). Those in positions of delegated authority, however, may not simply use their authority to lead people and regulate matters according to their own ideas, feelings, or preferences. Rather, they are responsible to God. They are to direct all things according to God’s will, not their own (2 Sam. 23:3; Mic. 3:1–4). How are they and we to know what God’s infallible will is? From His infallible Word, the Bible.

If, therefore, a person in delegated authority commands us to do something that contradicts the ultimate authority, then we must obey God and not man (Acts 5:29). When the two conflict, we must obey the Word of God, as taught in the Bible, and not the word of man, as commanded in civil laws and rulings.

*May we disagree with a person placed in authority over us? If so, how must we communicate this disagreement? May we disobey our local, state, provincial, or national governments? When and only when? Why? How must we act toward persons in authority with whom we disagree on biblical grounds? How must we speak about and act toward them?*

# Puritans, Theology, and Practice

The editor of *Credo Magazine* Matthew Barrett, recently interviewed our editor as follows:

*Dr. Beeke, you've dedicated your life to the contemporary renaissance of Puritan theology. You could have picked the patristics or the Reformers. So why the Puritans and why now?*

In part, my focus on the Puritans arises from personal experience. As a teenager I took books by Thomas Goodwin and others off my father's shelves and read them. Since then, I have never read anything outside of the Holy Scriptures that so strengthens my soul. The more I read the Puritans, the more I am convinced that God the Holy Spirit worked through them with unprecedented clarity and power to bring biblical reformation and revival.

*As you look at the church today, in what ways do the Puritans "live on"?*

In a general sense, the Puritans live on wherever biblical Christianity flourishes, for they were simply an example of Christians seeking to live by God's Word. More specifically, the heirs of the Puritans may be found among Christians who embrace both fidelity to the great doctrines of the Reformed confessions and the experiential spirituality they entail.

*You've said that the Puritans have specifically spurred you on to holiness more than any other writers. Many Christians echo your experience. What is it about the Puritans that sparks this drive for sanctification?*

This question deserves a whole book for an answer, but I'll highlight two factors. First, the Puritans understand that true holiness arises from vital union with Christ by the Spirit. Hence, they constantly pointed their hearers (and readers) to the Mediator, which kept their approach to sanctification within the grace of the triune God.

Second, the Puritans were eminently practical and realistic. Their view of sanctification did not entail removing yourself from ordinary human life (though it did require separation from worldliness and sin), but instead showed how to bring holiness into the heart and home.

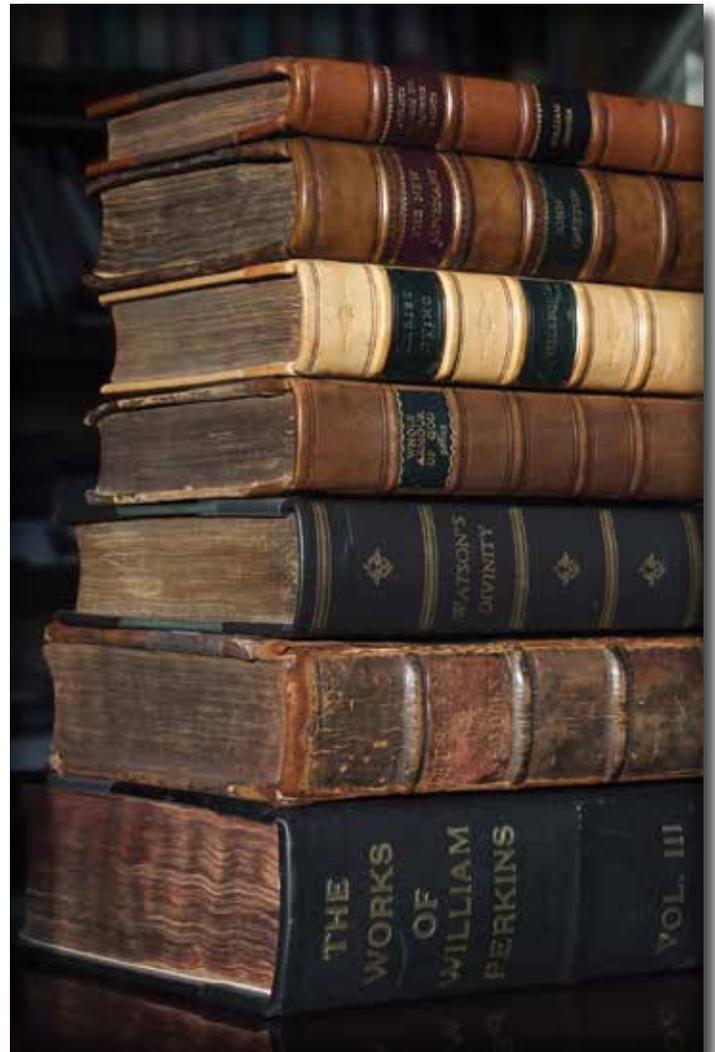
*I've heard that you are always reading at least one Puritan. Which Puritan author or books are you currently working through now?*

Presently, I am reading through the complete works of William Perkins in conjunction with Reformation Heritage Books' 10-volume reprint of his corpus.

Next, will be a 12-volume edition of Samuel Rutherford's works in the next decade, and perhaps the works of John Cotton as well. I am also reading the writings of Anthony Burgess as enabled, and would love to publish his completed works as well. In my opinion, he is the most important Puritan that has been neglected for no good reason.

*Charles Spurgeon is often referred to as the last of the Puritans or the heir of the Puritans. Do you believe that this is an accurate description?*

Yes and no. From a historical perspective, I would have to say Spurgeon is not a Puritan because the Puritan movement in Britain ran from roughly 1560 to 1720, ending long before Spurgeon was born in 1834. However, the great English preacher could be counted an heir of the Puritans in that he proclaimed the same Reformed doctrines as the



Puritans (except, of course, his Baptist ecclesiology), read and quoted the Puritans frequently, and called people to the same God-centered piety that the Puritans promoted.

*This issue of Credo Magazine celebrates the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort. As you revisit the Canons of Dort, is there one in particular that brings you great comfort and assurance?*

Head V, which deals with the relationship between the doctrines of perseverance and assurance in a masterful and comforting way, is my favorite part of the Canons of Dort. I have recently written a few articles about its comfort.

*You have pastored a number of churches and have even referred to the pastorate as your first calling. But you are also a seminary president. How does your experience pastoring the local church benefit you in the academy and vice versa?*

As a professor of systematic theology and homiletics, it helps me immensely to have significant experience in pastoral ministry, for it constantly reminds me that theology and sermons exist to serve real people in real life. We do not do academics for the sake of academics, but to serve the church. Vice versa, my doctoral studies and subsequent involvement in teaching theology have greatly enriched my pastoral ministry, both by increasing my understanding of divine truth and by expanding my exposure to the broader Reformed tradition outside of my particular denomination.

*You helped establish Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in 1994 and have served as the institution's only president. What was the chief motivation in starting this school?*

Our mission at PRTS is to prepare students to serve Christ and His church through biblical, experiential, and practical ministry. We train our students according to the Scriptures and the historic Reformed confessions. Back in 1994, we were motivated to begin the seminary to meet the needs of our fledgling denomination, but from its commencement, we had a worldwide, international vision for the work. We just never dreamed that it would grow and expand as rapidly as it did.

Last year we had the privilege of serving 224 students in our accredited MA, MDiv, ThM, and PhD programs. The students hailed from twenty countries and thirty-two denominations. By God's grace, I have been greatly blessed by God surrounding me with excellent faculty and staff, and sending us excellent students from every inhabited continent on the globe.

*You have written, "There is no true theology without Bible study, and no faithful Bible study without theological reflection." How should lay Christians think about the relationship between theology and their regular devotional reading of Scripture?*

Theology need not be a highly intellectual activity; we do theology whenever we think or speak about God and His

ways. Therefore, the most important relationship between theology and devotions is that Christians should read their Bibles to know God in a vital and powerful way through Jesus Christ.

Devotional reading can degenerate in several directions, including a legalistic approach that makes one's "quiet time" into a kind of righteousness before God and a mystical approach that seeks little more than an emotional uplift. We must read the Bible remembering that God Himself is speaking to us, and the greatest reason why He speaks is so that we can know Him.

Another theological aspect of devotional reading is the need to think about how the meaning of one Scripture passage connects with others that address the same topic. God's Word aims to form in us a comprehensive wisdom for life—not just isolated texts that we can quote for our personal comfort. This systematic approach to the Bible is crucial to grow in the fear of the Lord.

*Are you encouraged by the resurgence of Reformed theology today among young pastors? What are some potential pitfalls to avoid as pastors teach their congregations Reformed doctrine?*

I am encouraged, for the most part, by the Reformed "resurgence." The doctrines of grace are not naturally appealing to us, so I am grateful to God for the Holy Spirit's work to advance the truth in the church. As to pastoral pitfalls, let me mention three.

First, beware of advocating Reformed doctrine without living Reformed piety. Augustine said that the three essentials (not five points!) of Christianity are humility, humility, and humility. Christlike love and humility will manifest themselves in gentleness and patience toward those who oppose the truth.

Second, never try to convince people of Reformed doctrine by mere logic and many quotations of great theologians. That would be a denial of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone is the divine rule of faith). Instead, teach the Bible to people and pray without ceasing for their illumination. Logic and historical theology are servants to God's Word, not the other way around.

Third, it is a mistake to isolate some aspects of Reformed doctrine from the whole perspective of the Reformed heritage that subsumes all of life under the divine authority of Scripture alone for the glory of God alone. For example, the biblical doctrine of election will not prosper in the long term without the practice of the biblical doctrines of worship and evangelism.

---

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

## Zechariah's Revelation of Christ (3)

In many ways, Zechariah ranks as one of the most specific and explicit of Messianic prophecies in all the Old Testament. It would not at all be a stretch to designate this prophecy as “The Gospel according to Zechariah.” As he directs attention to the coming Christ, most remarkable is his focus on the mediatorial functions of Christ as the ideal Prophet, Priest, and King. Focusing on God’s redemptive purpose to reverse the curse in and through Christ was key to fostering and rekindling hope in a people who in so many ways had given up hope in the face of the discouragements of the day. To see Christ was/is to see the heart of God’s promise and to be assured of every other word, for all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) succinctly defines how Christ carries out the prophetic office: “Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by His word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (23). Speaking of the Lord Jesus in prophetic terms, Hebrews declares that God spoke in various ways through the prophets but has now revealed His final word to man by His Son, “whom he hath appointed heir of all things” (Heb. 1:1). That sums up the message of hope, for without that ultimate word, salvation would be impossible. The New Testament makes this truth explicitly clear, and so does Zechariah. At this point I want to look at a text that among other truths explicitly declares the deity of the Messiah, the essential requirement of His ideal, mediatorial prophethood.

Zechariah 13:7 marks a transition from the deception of false prophets to the person and work of the true Prophet. It is an important text both because of its identification of the Messiah and because of its statement of His sacrificial death: “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” In particular, this verse makes two great statements that highlight the deity of Messiah.

However, before I address those statements I should comment on why the transition from false to true occurs at verse 7 and not at verse 6. It is a hermeneutical error to miss seeing Christ where He is in the Old Testament text; it is also an error to see Him where He is not. Unquestionably, the reference about the wounds in the hands that were inflicted in the house of friends is redolent of Christ’s

being nailed to the cross at the relentless urging of His own people. But surface similarity is not the primary factor in the interpretive process and certainly cannot override the context. In context, the question “What are these wounds in thine hands” is directed to a false prophet who, along with his counterparts, had fallen into disfavor and was under the threat of the death sentence if and when caught (13:2–3). Even though they tried to disguise themselves (13:4–5), one of them had something exposed, the wounds in the hands, that raised suspicion, potentially giving him away as a false prophet. The Hebrew text refers literally to wounds “between the hands,” not in the hands. This is an idiom referring to the back or chest area, that body surface often the target of self-mutilation as a pagan means of invoking deity (see 1 Kings 18:28 where the prophets of Baal mutilated themselves). So, it is not likely that the words of a false prophet, bearing the marks of his trade, are prophetic of the nail prints in the hands of Jesus.

Although not in verse 6, Christ is wonderfully and unmistakably the focus of verse 7. What makes verse 7 such a remarkable statement is the fact that the speaker is the Lord of hosts. The Lord first addresses the Messiah as “my shepherd.” The messianic significance of this title occurs as early as Genesis 49:24. The “shepherd, the stone of Israel” would come from the mighty God of Jacob. The use of the title “shepherd” was common in the ancient world. Based on the obvious pastoral imagery, the appellation was frequently employed even by pagan kings to designate their authoritative rule. The title refers to sovereign kingship and thus points to Christ’s being the mediatorial King. But there is an aspect of the shepherd theology that affirms the deity of the ideal shepherd, which is why I’m suggesting it communicates something about His being the ideal Prophet as well.

Zechariah expresses the deity of the Messiah when he records the Lord of hosts’ identification of His shepherd as “the man that is my fellow” (13:7). The word “man” often designates man in his strength, referring to a hero figure. The word comes from the same root that Isaiah uses in 9:6, the classic Messianic text that lists a series of titles that describe the character of Immanuel. Isaiah identified the Son to be born as the Mighty God. This literally says “God, the defender/guardian.” The term “God” (*El*) applies only to deity and designates God in His power and

transcendent majesty. The term “defender/guardian” (the root occurring in Zechariah 13:7) is not uniquely a divine word, but the Scripture does apply it to the Lord, identifying Him as the security of His people. Isaiah uses the same expression in referring directly to Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel (10:20–21). Years later, but still antecedent to Zechariah, Jeremiah used the expression as he addressed the Lord in prayer: “the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name” (Jer. 32:18). Many years earlier Moses declared, “For the Lord your God is God of gods, and the Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty...” (Deut. 10:17). That this title became part of messianic vocabulary and theology is clear from Psalm 45, an unmistakably messianic psalm. Verse 3 entreats the Messiah, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty.” So, by the time Zechariah uses this term “man” (the mighty one) to refer to the Lord’s shepherd, it was well charged with messianic import pointing to the Messiah’s deity.

Also of consequence is the word “fellow.” This word occurs only here and in Leviticus. Usually translated “neighbor” in Leviticus, it refers to those who have things in common, such as laws and privileges. It would be inappropriate for God in the context of Zechariah to apply this term to mere mortal man. This one, God’s associate or nearest one, stands not only in proximity to God but is equal with God. He participates and shares in the divine nature; He is God. So the Lord’s referring to His shepherd as His fellow conforms to Trinitarian theology that Christ and the Father are distinct in person yet one in essence.

Zechariah hints elsewhere that he understood this unique relationship. In 11:4–14 the rejected shepherd (against whom the sword is summoned in 13:7) is Jehovah. In 12:10 Jehovah says, “They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*.” The shift in pronouns from the first to the third person testifies to the distinctive association.

That God would send His perfect representative, His Son, was the great message of hope. I would not be at all surprised if Zechariah 13:7 was in Christ’s mind when in the New Testament chapter on the Good Shepherd He declared, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). Christ Jesus is the ideal Prophet because He is God. I can’t say that too often, and there’s no limit to how strongly we must believe it.

The Lord Jesus qualifies as the ideal Prophet not only by virtue of who He is but also by what He does. The function of the prophet is to “reveal, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation” (WSC 23). Christ’s

execution of this function is unique and distinct from every lesser prophet since He Himself is the way of salvation that He reveals and declares (John 14:6). Consequently, it is not unexpected to see united into a single context facets of each of Christ’s mediatorial works.

This certainly is the case in Zechariah 13:7. I have focused particularly on the prophetic component in terms of what is revealed concerning Christ’s divine nature. But the fact that He is designated as shepherd speaks directly to His kingship since this is a common title for sovereigns. The text is also important because of its statement of the

**CHRIST JESUS IS THE IDEAL  
PROPHET BECAUSE HE  
IS GOD. I CAN’T SAY THAT  
TOO OFTEN, AND THERE’S  
NO LIMIT TO HOW STRONGLY  
WE MUST BELIEVE IT.**

Messiah’s sacrificial death—a fact pointing directly to His mediatorial priesthood. Interestingly, Jesus not only links this passage directly to the events of His crucifixion (Matt. 26:31), He also marks another parallel to Zechariah’s prophecy when He said, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

God’s way of salvation required the sacrifice of the shepherd, “the fellow” of God. Zechariah 13:7 squelches any notion that the Messiah’s death was anything other than the eternal purpose of God. The verse begins with Jehovah of hosts commanding the sword to awake and smite His shepherd. That God demanded the death of His equal (fellow) speaks volumes concerning the seriousness of sin and the immutability of divine justice. In Pauline language, it is only by and because of the death of Christ that God is both just and justifier (Rom. 3:26). In Zechariah’s terms, it is only because God bade the sword awake against His shepherd that a cleansing fountain could be opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

---

**Dr. Michael P. V. Barrett** is Academic Dean and professor of Old Testament at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and an ordained minister in the Heritage Reformed denomination.

## When a City Rejoices (2)

*And there was great joy in that city*  
—Acts 8:8

In our previous installment, we saw that the cities of our world need the very thing that Samaria experienced when the evangelist Philip brought the gospel there and witnessed God convert many people. We took from this passage the lessons that 1) gospel joy can come straight through persecution and difficulty; 2) gospel joy comes through the preaching of God's Word when heeded by faith, and 3) gospel joy is the fruit of true conversion. We now want to see some additional lessons about how gospel joy operates wherever it comes, whether in cities or anywhere else.

### 4. Gospel joy comes through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned until verses 15–17 of Acts 8, but His work was clearly behind the joy experienced in the city. The Spirit of Christ had been poured upon the apostles and the early church (Acts 2:1–4). He was active in the ministry of the apostles, their preaching, and the signs confirming their preaching. When Philip was preaching to the Samaritans, the Spirit was speaking to these people. He was convincing them of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (see John 16:8–11). He was exposing all false joys and breaking the idolatry of clinging to supposed sources of happiness. We all want joy, but by nature, we look for it in places that will never produce joy. The Holy Spirit makes room in human hearts for that which truly brings joy.

He does this as powerfully and irresistibly as the healing of the lame and the sick, and the removing of the unclean spirits from the people they possessed (see Acts 8:7). These unclean spirits and sicknesses had brought much misery and despair, but through the powerful operation of the Spirit they were gone, and joy came in their place. He is truly the Comforter, and His comforts bring joy. He has anointed Me, Jesus had said, to set at liberty those who were bound (see Luke 4:18–19). Imagine the spiritual joy at so much gospel life and liberty both spiritually and physically. This joy was better than that at the end of a war, a visit of a King, or the discovery of silver and gold. The Spirit was making the wilderness to rejoice; sorrow and sighing were fleeing away. Everlasting joy was upon their heads, all because the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering,” etc. (Gal. 5:22).

Do we not see our need of the Holy Spirit for joy? Outside of Christ, there is no true joy. The shallow joys of this life are neither satisfying nor lasting. No human works, rituals, or traditions can produce this joy. Without turning to the Lord, our lives will end in everlasting misery in the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12). But in and through the gospel, the Spirit makes it so that “with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isa. 12:3).

### 5. Gospel joy is bound up with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't read merely that Philip preached the Word, but he preached “Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). People used to speak of certain ministers as “Christ-preachers.” By that, they meant that the preaching was not simply bringing biblical truth, as necessary as that is. It isn't even simply talking about Christ, but speaking out of Him, speaking Christ, so that He comes riding on His Word, present in His Godhead, majesty, grace, and Holy Spirit. Needy souls need Christ and can't live with less than Him. They need to have Him and hold Him, to embrace Him, feed on Him, and drink Him. Christ said, “Let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37). Christ is the “river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God” (Ps. 46:4). Samaria essentially was experiencing what Jerusalem experienced when the Lord Jesus came into the city, riding on the donkey, and the children rejoiced. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zech. 9:9).

The joy of God's people is rooted and grounded in Christ crucified. There would be no joy or rejoicing if He had not been made a curse, that we might experience the blessing of God in Him. He took to Himself the cause of our sorrow that He might fill His people with joy and gladness. He went lower than any could ever go that He might bring His people to great heights of joy and praise. His delight in His Father and His people was so deep and high that all God's attributes would harmonize in His death on the cross. That is why He could say: “And now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). He had joy, which even the agony of the cross could not eradicate. “For the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2).

There are times when God's people are sad. They miss their Savior. Their view of Him is clouded. Like Mary, they feel like someone has taken Him away (see John 20:13) or like the travelers to Emmaus, who lost their hope and joy. Their hearts hurt with an aching emptiness that only Christ could fill. These nights are nights of weeping, but mornings of joy follow such nights (Ps. 30:5). Such mornings come when He Himself, whose name might as well be Joy, appears for our help. He was the rejoicing of His Father in eternity past (Prov. 8:30). He teaches His people to sing, and He is their strength and song (Ex. 15:2). He is exalted when His people joy in Him and declare His praise among the nations. All must hear the joyful tidings of salvation, that countless more might find their boundless joy in God.

### **6. Gospel Joy makes God's church a radiant people.**

Remember that Acts 8:8 tells us that there was "great joy in that city." The joy was not isolated in a few houses, but was spilling over everywhere in this large community. What must this rejoicing of Samaria have looked like? No doubt, people would have been gathering on the corners of streets, in the marketplaces, and in their homes, sharing their joy and sharing in each other's joy. They would tell each other of people being converted, neighbors healed, demon-possessed ones freed. God's work occupied many tongues and its joy must have been palpable. People woke up in the morning and instead of thinking of the drab darkness of Simon the Magician's witchcraft and all the other misery that sin brings, people would have woken up and remembered the past days. They would have looked forward to hearing the word of Philip, meeting with their new brothers and sisters in the Lord, and seeing more people saved. It was like a taste of heaven on earth.

When true joy fills your heart, you can't contain it. It must flow to others. "My cup runneth over," David says (Ps. 23:5). We rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). How cheering it is for one person's joy to flow over to others as they fellowship and serve one another! Paul wanted to see the Philippians again "that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again" (Phil. 1:26). Such spiritual, gospel joy is addicting. Then we are happy when others are truly happy in the Lord. It's as if the earth rejoices with you, all because of Christ, the Firstborn of all creation. The church then is the radiant, joyous Bride, over whom the Bridegroom rejoices and sings (Isa. 62:5).

### **7. Finally, gospel joy protects against enemies and sin.**

Right on the heels of reading about the joy in the city of Samaria comes an incident involving Simon the magician, a man who confessed faith in Christ but turned out to be an imposter (Acts 8:9–24). This could have been a devastating experience for this infant church. It's one thing to have an obvious enemy, like Saul of Tarsus, who makes alarm bells ring wherever he goes. It's another thing to have a wolf in sheep's clothing, who claims to be a believer but is actually a danger to God's cause.

What does all of this have to do with joy? Well, Scripture makes clear that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). All Christians need strength, for Satan will not leave them alone. He will not give up the fight. He will attack in a thousand ways. We need strength and a strong defense against the enemy. Though sorrow is part of the Christian life, sorrow is not our strength. The Lord has declared that the joy of the Lord is that needed strength.

God gives His people joy in order to ward off the onslaughts of Satan, whatever they may be. They may come from within or without. They may disturb our hearts, minds, families, and churches. How important the joy of the Lord is! How jealously then should we guard the joy that the Lord gives. How eager we should be to stir up the joy of the Lord among us. When we share it we don't lose, but gain instead. When we lose that joy, let us seek it in the same way we had at the first—by faith in the Word, drawing from Christ's deep well of joy, through the Spirit. Let us do so until the day when the Lord says to all His people: Enter into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:23).

In conclusion, the gospel is the real source of joy for the cities of our planet, as well as the countryside and islands everywhere. The gospel has not changed. Samaria was one of the first cities to rejoice as a result of the Christian mission, but it wouldn't be the last: Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Constantinople, Geneva, London, Budapest, New York, Hamilton, Capetown, Seoul, St. John, Bogota, Manila, Shanghai, and hundreds more. Shouldn't we expect that other cities should follow suit?

Yet, as we think about the joy Samaria experienced through the gospel, we can't help but think of what a joyful city that heavenly city will be! Don't be missing from the multitude there. May we all be inhabitants of that city, where sorrow and sighing can never enter, but gladness and joy are on the heads of all.

---

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

## THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF *Journaling*

More than almost any other discipline, journaling has a fascinating appeal with nearly all who hear about it. One reason is the way journaling blends biblical doctrine and daily living, like the confluence of two great rivers, into one. And since each believer's journey down life's river involves bends and hazards previously unexplored by them on the way to the Celestial City, something about journaling this journey appeals to the adventuresome spirit of Christian growth.

Although the practice of journaling is not commanded in Scripture, it is modeled. And God has blessed the use of journals since Bible times. A *journal* (a word usually synonymous with *diary*) is a book in which a person writes down various things. As a Christian, your journal is a place to record the works and ways of God in your life. Your journal also can include an account of daily events, a diary of personal relationships, a notebook of insights into Scripture, and a list of prayer requests. It is where spontaneous devotional thoughts or lengthy theological musings can be preserved. A journal is one of the best places for charting your progress in the other spiritual disciplines and for holding yourself accountable to your goals.

### VALUE OF JOURNALING

#### *Help in Self-Understanding and Evaluation*

In Romans 12:3 we're encouraged to have a balanced self-image: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Journaling is certainly no guarantee against either conceit or self-abasement. But the simple discipline of recording the events of the day and noting my reactions to them causes me to examine myself much more thoroughly than I would otherwise.

This is no minor point or small need in our lives. A more God-centered theologian than John Calvin never lived, yet even he wrote on the first page of his monumental *Institutes*: "Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God."<sup>1</sup> Through the knowledge of ourselves and our condition, he explained, we are aroused to seek God. A journal can be the means by which the Holy Spirit shows us areas of sin or weakness, the emptiness of a path we have chosen, insight into our motives, or other things that can transform the journal page into an altar of seeking God.

#### *Help in Meditation*

It seems as though more Christians are interested in biblical meditation (cf. Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1–3) than ever before. However, meaningful meditation requires a concentration not often developed in our fast-paced, media-distracted society. The discipline of writing down my meditations in my journal helps me concentrate.

Sitting with pen and paper also heightens my expectation of hearing from God as I think on Him and His words in the passage before me. I always listened better in school when I was taking notes. I'm the same way with hearing a sermon; I listen more attentively when I'm writing down the more significant thoughts of the message. The same principle transfers to journaling. When I record in a journal my meditations on a passage of Scripture, I can follow more closely the still, small voice of God as He speaks through the text.

#### *Help in Expressing Thoughts and Feelings to the Lord*

A journal is a place where we can give expression to the fountain of our heart, where we can unreservedly pour out our passion before the Lord. Since human thoughts and emotions range between the extremes of exhilaration and despondency, we can expect to find both within the pages of our journal. Maurice Roberts explains,

A spiritual diary will tend to deepen and sanctify the emotional life of a child of God. There is great value to us of becoming more deeply emotional over the great issues of our faith. Our age is not deep enough in feelings. Biblical men are depicted as weeping copious tears, as sighing and groaning, as on occasion rejoicing with ecstasy. They were ravished by the very idea of God. They had a passion for Jesus Christ—His person, offices, names, titles, words and works. It is our shame to be so cold, unfeeling and unemotional in spite of all that God has done to us and for us in Christ.... The keeping of a diary might help to put us right in this respect also.<sup>2</sup>

By slowing us down and prompting us to think more deeply about God, journaling helps us feel more deeply (and biblically) about God. It provides an opportunity for the intangible grays of mind-work and heart-work to distill clearly into black and white. Then we're better able to talk to God with both mind and spirit.

### *Help in Remembering the Lord's Works*

We tend to forget just how many times God has answered specific prayers, made timely provision, and done marvelous things in our lives. But having a place to collect all these memories prevents their being forgotten. A journal helps us to be like Asaph in Psalm 77:11–12, who said, “I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.” Even the kings of Israel were required by the Lord to write for themselves a copy of the Law of Moses to help them remember what God had said and done in the lives of the patriarchs (Deut. 17:18).

One of the greatest benefits of keeping a record of the works of the Lord is the encouragement it can be to faith and prayer. C. H. Spurgeon, the lionhearted British Baptist preacher in the last half of the 1800s, said, “I have sometimes said, when I have become the prey of doubting thoughts, ‘Well, now, I dare not doubt whether there be a God, for I can look back in my Diary, and say, On such a day, in the depths of trouble, I bent my knee to God, and or ever I had risen from my knees, the answer was given me.’”<sup>3</sup>

### *Help in Creating and Preserving a Spiritual Heritage*

Journaling is an effective way of teaching the things of God to my children and transmitting our faith into the future (cf. Deut. 6:4–7; 2 Tim. 1:5). We may never know the future spiritual impact of something we write today. Never underestimate the power of a written record of faith acting as a spiritual time capsule. The writer of Psalm 102 recognized it when he said of his experience with God: “This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord” (v. 18).

### *Help in Clarifying and Articulating Insights and Impressions*

An old adage says that thoughts disentangle themselves when passed through the lips and across the fingertips. While reading makes a full man, and dialogue a ready man, according to Francis Bacon, *writing* makes an *exact* man. I’ve discovered that if I write down the meditations of my quiet time with the Lord, those impressions stay with me much longer. Without journaling, by day’s end I usually can remember little from my devotional time. When insights from my quiet time are clearly fixed in my mind through journaling, I’ve also found them ready to use later in conversation, counseling, encouraging, and witnessing (see 1 Peter 3:15).

### *Help in Monitoring Goals and Priorities*

The resolutions made by young Jonathan Edwards are still well known to many Christians today. They included the resolve of his soul concerning the use of time, temperance in eating, growth in grace, duty, self-denial, and other matters dealt with in seventy resolutions. These were much

more than today’s halfhearted New Year’s resolutions. They became Edwards’s lifelong spiritual goals and priorities. What isn’t so well known is how he evaluated his conduct daily by these resolutions and recorded the results in his journal. On Christmas Eve, 1722, he wrote, “Higher thoughts than usual of the excellency of Christ and his kingdom. Concluded to observe, at the end of every month, the number of breaches of resolutions, to see whether they increase or diminish, to begin from this day, and to compute from that the weekly account my monthly increase, and out of the whole, my yearly increase, beginning from new-year days.”<sup>4</sup> An example of this use of his journal is found in the entry of the following January 5: “A little redeemed from a long, dreadful dullness, about reading the Scriptures. This week, have been unhappily low in the weekly account—and what are the reasons of it?—abundance of listlessness and sloth; and, if this should continue much longer, I perceive that other sins will begin to discover themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

How did men like Edwards become so unusually conformed to the image of Christ? Part of his secret was his use of the spiritual discipline of journaling to maintain self-accountability for his spiritual goals and priorities. Before we give all the reasons why we cannot be the kind of disciple he was, let us try doing what he did.

### *Help in Maintaining the Other Spiritual Disciplines*

My journal is the place where I record my progress with all the spiritual disciplines. For instance, I also use some of these small squares to keep myself accountable with disciplines like Scripture memory. It’s very easy for me to become lazy and slip away from memorizing God’s Word, which the Bible says is so essential to holiness (Ps. 119:11). Once I return to the habit of not memorizing Scripture, momentum keeps me there. However, when I have a daily prompter such as my journal, where I find a reminder to “discipline myself for the purpose of godliness,” I can more easily reverse the momentum.

The flesh, our natural inclination toward sin, does not contribute to our spiritual growth. Unless we labor to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Rom. 8:13), our progress in godliness will be very slow. Unless we find practical ways to cooperate with the Holy Spirit against our congenital tendency toward spiritual sloth, we will not build ourselves up in the faith (Jude 20); we will drift toward spiritual entropy instead.

The Christian life is, by definition, a living thing. If we can think of the discipline of Bible intake as its food and prayer as its breath, many Christians have made journaling its heart. For them it pumps life-maintaining blood into every spiritual discipline connected with it.

*(concluded on page 249)*

## JOURNIBLES: “*The 17:18 Series*”

### WHAT IS A JOURNIBLE?

A Journible is exactly what it sounds like—a journal of the Bible. Each Journible in the 17:18 Series is created with spacing to hand-write one or more books of the Bible. If you are wondering how to use one, why you would want to, or where the idea came from, read on!

### HOW TO USE A JOURNIBLE

The Journibles are organized so that you, as a scribe, will hand-write your very own copy of a book of the Bible (or the entire Bible if you fall in love with the concept!). You write the text of the Bible only on the right hand page of the book, which has appropriate line spacing for the text and has the chapter and verse numbers printed on each page. This makes for easier writing and also allows ample space on the left page of your open text to write your own notes and comments. Questions drafted by Joel Beeke and me are lightly printed on the left page; these questions are to aid in further study but should not interfere with your own notes and comments as you can easily write over the lightly printed material. This means that you are encouraged to not only write your own “copy” of the Bible, but to also write your own notes concerning the text. With Journibles, we are setting aside our mass-produced Gutenberg Bibles and attempting to get back to the simple hand-written copy of the text.



### THE PURPOSE OF THE JOURNIBLE

The purpose of a Journible is two-fold: engagement and legacy. Journibles assist individuals in engaging with the

Word of God. Further, Journibles provide people with an opportunity to leave a legacy to future generations.

First, the Journible is a profoundly simple attempt to aid a person’s ability to engage the Word of God. Physically writing the text slows a person down in the process of reading the text. The books are organized so a “scribe” can slowly and thoughtfully engage the text on one side of the margin while writing comments and questions about the text on the other side (Deut. 17:18; Psalm 119; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). This makes the books ideal for a variety of settings, including individual, small group, or church-wide studies of the Word of God.

On an individual level, they are especially suited for those of us (which is likely many of us, if we are honest) who struggle with focusing on the text as we read or who just skim the text in order to check the box for today’s Bible reading. Just as it is more difficult to ignore a person who is talking to you face to face than a person who is texting you, it is much more difficult to ignore the heart of God’s Word when you physically write it out than when you merely read it. Having a handwritten copy of the text also allows you more easily to engage the Word using methods like highlighting or circling key words, drawing lines to connect concepts in the text, or writing comments on the opposite page, all of which can be more difficult in most people’s printed copies of the Bible.

On a small group level, physically writing out the text and then meeting to discuss it with others helps people to engage more deeply with the text before coming together. This should hopefully sharpen the conversation’s focus on the Word of God instead of each individual’s personal ideas about life, helping people to focus on what the Word actually says and sharpen one another as iron. Having written out and reflected on the text already, people will more likely come prepared with edifying thoughts and questions.

On a church-wide level, if a church is studying through a particular book of the Bible in its services, Journibles provide the congregation a useful tool to study the text on Sundays and throughout the week. Individuals can write out the text preceding the sermon each week and take notes on the opposite margin during the sermon. This may increase engagement during the sermon as people listen attentively for their questions about the text to be answered and it could help people, like the Bereans, to study the Word and ensure it is being preached properly. Further, if an individual

has notes about a sermon series in a personally handwritten book that they will retain for years to come, this will allow them to more easily find and review previous study material when they need a refresher or when they next read through that same book of the Bible. It is unlikely that the same benefit would be gleaned from notes taken on the back of a bulletin or even in a notebook, which can be hard to precisely locate in the future.

Second, Journibles provide a legacy to pass on from one generation to the next. The Journible creates an opportunity for one generation to communicate in writing to the next generation their insights and personal applications of the text. This assists us all in the instruction in Deuteronomy 6 to impress God's commands on our children. Imagine a son receiving a copy of Proverbs hand-written by his own dad with notes in the margins—what a gift it would be to have this instruction from his dad written down for when he faces trials and temptations! Or think of the incredible blessing it would be for grandchildren to have a book from grandparents in their so recognizable handwriting with their own reflections on God's Word.

### WHY "THE 17:18 SERIES"?

In Deuteronomy 17, Moses leaves final instructions concerning the future of Israel. As a prophet of God, Moses foretells when Israel will place a king over the nation (v. 14).

In verses 16 and 17, he lists actions that were forbidden to the king. In verse 18, Moses transitions to instructing the king on what he should do. The first command for the king is not merely to acquire a copy of the law, but to handwrite his very own copy of it. Why would God command the king to spend time handwriting the law when he would be occupied with so many other concerns as king? Why couldn't the king just have a scribe provide him with a new copy? The purpose of having a copy written by the king's own hand was so that he would read it, learn to fear the Lord, obey the commands of God, keep his heart from becoming proud, not turn to the right or left from following the law, and have sons who would serve over the kingdom after him (v. 19–20).

Thirty-four hundred years after Moses wrote Deuteronomy, educators "discovered" that students who physically write out their notes by hand have a much greater retention rate than those who simply hear or visually read the information. Apparently, God knew this to be true of the kings of Israel also. From such understanding came the conception of these Journibles entitled "The 17:18 Series." We hope that as the kings of Israel were meant to do, the Journibles will help you enjoy writing, learning, and loving the Word of God.

---

**Rob Wynalda** is president of Wynalda Litho, Inc. and co-author (with Joel Beeke) of the Journibles published by Reformation Heritage Books. Go to [heritagebooks.org](http://heritagebooks.org) to purchase.



## Why Should You Read Your DENOMINATIONAL PERIODICAL?

“Give attention to reading,” says the apostle Paul, as he directs Timothy in the work of shepherding the flock entrusted to his care (1 Tim. 4:13). Most commentators say that this directive refers to the public reading of Holy Scripture. But Paul and Timothy lived in those days when the New Testament was still “in production.” What we today have printed in our Bibles was once a matter of handwritten “epistles” or letters carried from place to place by whatever couriers could be trusted to deliver them.

Christians in the apostolic age kept in close touch by means of never-ceasing circulation of epistles or letters, passed along from person to person, family to family, and/or church to church. No doubt Timothy received many epistles in the course of a year. He was expected to share them with his congregation and pass them along to other churches in the vicinity. The skills of writing and reading were highly prized in those days because few people were trained in them. When a new epistle landed in the pastor’s hands, the whole church was eager to hear it read aloud.

Christians through the ages have continued to “give attention to reading.” But like many other acquired skills, the ability to read well (understanding what you read, remembering it, knowing what to think or do in response) depends on using it on a regular basis. The saying “Use it or lose it!” is a great adage also for profitable reading. It helps if you have something worthwhile to read, in a form that is manageable as a part of your daily life. For church members, the “denominational periodical” is made to order for this purpose.

As an aside, I would note that “church periodicals” as we used to call them, like the daily newspaper, are on the list of “endangered species” today. With so many relying on their cell phones to connect with the world around them, print media (newspapers, magazines, etc.) are fast disappearing. If your denomination still publishes a substantial “periodical,” you should be thankful. What are the odds of anything about the church you belong to turning up on your Yahoo news feed?

But there are more weighty reasons to read your denominational periodical. Here are just a few:

### 1. CONNECTION

Reformed and Presbyterian churches are often described as “connectional churches,” because our system of church government is designed to connect each local church with all the others in the denomination, to give visible, practical

expression to our spiritual unity as part of the body of Christ. The life and work of each congregation should be a matter of interest to all the others; and the collective work and witness of the denomination, to every local church and every member of it.

Why belong to a church if you have no interest in its life and work? Why belong to a denomination if you have no interest in its collective work and witness? At the very least, don’t you care what happens to the dollars you drop in the collection plate or bag? How can you care about such things if you have no idea of what’s going on in your church and denomination?

Information feeds interest, and interest encourages investment and participation. Read your denominational periodical as a way of connecting with what Christ is doing in your denominational congregations, and how He is using your collective witness in the world today! Connection in this way leads to something deeper, namely “the communion of saints,” as informed interest ripens into active, loving concern to see God’s kingdom prosper, locally, nationally, and worldwide.

### 2. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

I have had the privilege of editing this particular denominational periodical, as well as my last denomination’s periodical, for the last thirty-three years as a labor of love. If you asked me the question, why did you spend thousands of hours of precious time on this labor of love over the decades in putting together about 10,000 pages of material for church families to read, my answer would be quite simple: to bind the family together by God’s biblical, Reformed, confessional, doctrinal, experiential, and practical truth. We believe firmly in God’s covenantal faithfulness—but that faithfulness needs to be manifestly promoted by the use of the spiritual means of grace. One of those primary means is reading edifying spiritual and practical material grounded in God’s Word. Hence a denominational periodical ought to have at least one article in each issue for all age groups and for various interests, so that everyone in the church-covenanted family can find something of interest and applicability to him or her.

### 3. EDIFICATION

Your pastor never ceases to recommend authors and books you should read. But you find yourself in a bind: so many books, so many authors, but so little time! But help is at

hand in your denominational periodical. The steep costs of publishing insure that the editors make the best use of resources, searching for high-value content that fits the confines of what they can afford to print.

This means that your periodical is a resource tailored to your needs! The material has been sifted and selected for the value of its content. It has been carefully pruned to fit available space. So you have good content in small portions, on a wide range of topics. You can read it as you have time, over a two-month period, before the next issue arrives. Make reading the denominational periodical a baseline in your program of personal edification and continuing education.

#### **4. ENRICHMENT**

One of the chronic problems in the Christian life is the emptiness of what passes for “fellowship” in our churches. Too many gather around the church parking lot or the coffee pots after church and discuss the weather, the big news story of the week, etc. We need something more substantial to share with our fellow believers. We need enrichment! Why not form a discussion group around the regular issues of the denominational periodical?

#### **5. ENLARGEMENT**

We meet for prayer, and too often we bring to the throne of grace largely cases of illness or injury, and pending treatments or surgeries in the local membership. While these “needs of the body” should not be forgotten, God is doing much more in our churches, and in the world we live in. We need enlargement, a wider field of vision. How can we engage with that greater work of God and the mission of His church, and assist in it through the labor of

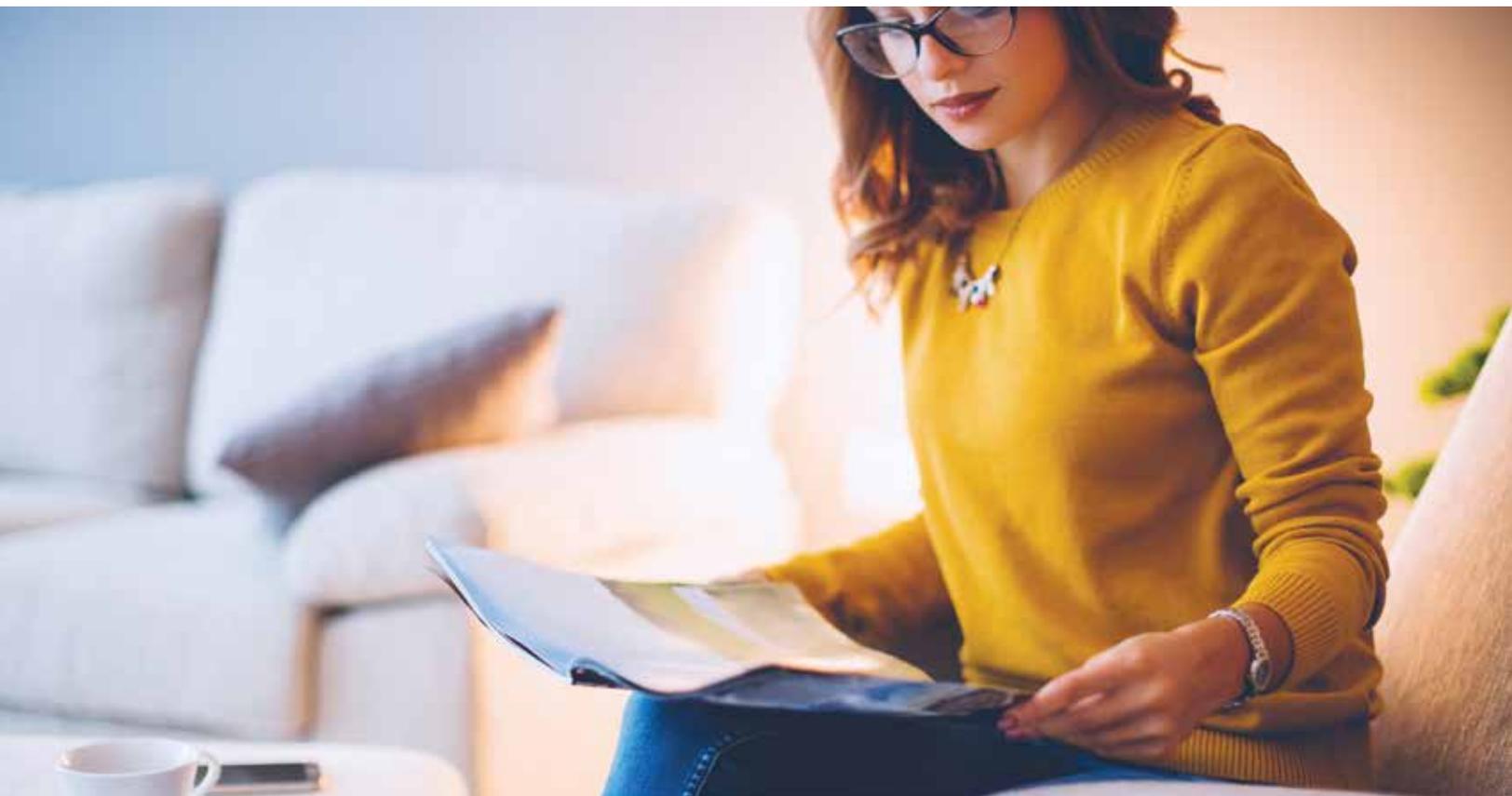
prayer? Generalities are a poor substitute for specific, particular petitions. But for that we need information. Read the denominational periodical with the prayer meeting in mind and use it as a guide.

#### **6. EQUIPMENT**

As we grow to maturity as followers of Christ, we want to become active in His service. To sit in the bleachers merely to watch is soul-numbing and body-confining. Here again, knowledge is the key to action. We need to know and understand the contents of the gospel in order to communicate it to others. We need help in fulfilling the demands of Christian discipleship. We need to know what to pray for, and how to pray. In other words we need to be equipped for ministry, or else the Christian life can be more frustrating or futile than fruitful and rewarding.

As editors of our denominational periodicals, we try to see to it that there are items in each issue of the magazine that focus on translating doctrine into life, truth into experience, theory into action, knowledge into service. Francis Schaeffer’s famous book title comes to mind: *How Should We Then Live?* Comb through the latest issues of this denominational periodical with this question in mind. In this way, you can equip yourself for service and become fit for your Master’s use.

After thirty-three years, I still hope and pray that you are reading and profiting from your denominational periodical. May God bless each issue to your mind and soul and affections, and grant that also this periodical may serve to the conversion of sinners, the maturation of true believers, and the glory of His worthy name.



## Why You Should Read an ACADEMIC JOURNAL

An academic journal is a collection of articles within a specific academic field that have been subjected to a peer-review process—that is, evaluated by a group of expert scholars in that particular field. The peer-review process exists to ensure that the published material is of a high standard and makes a meaningful contribution to further understanding the proposed subject. In this article, rather than giving an apologetic for why *anyone* (Christian or non-Christian) should read *any* academic journal, I intend to give five reasons to make a case for why Reformed Christians should read academic journals related to biblical, theological, and historical studies to the glory of God.

First, reading academic journals is *an excellent and efficient way for Christians to enrich their understanding of important topics related to biblical, theological, and historical studies*. Reading academic journals can help us to think accurately, holistically, and contextually about the various issues related to biblical, theological, and historical studies. At first glance, it may seem like a topic that is only relevant for those immersed in the academic world of biblical and theological study, but the reasons themselves for reading these academic journals are part of a larger apologetic for why non-academics should read more critical sources in general. Often Christians relegate the more scholarly resources to the academic specialists and the more general introductory literature to everyone else. However, academic journals often contain deeply contextualized studies that will enrich one's understanding of the biblical text, theological topics, or historical events. The educated layman—and indeed even the learned pastor—simply does not have the time or expertise to delve into all the specialized research of a particular topic. However, while they may not have time to do the research themselves, they can benefit from the labors of biblical, theological, and historical scholars and deepen their understanding of these topics.

For example, in seeking to understand our Christian history or the development of doctrine it is crucial to understand the contexts that shaped Christian history and historical theology. Neither history nor theology existed in a vacuum. This was part of God's design. Throughout redemptive history God has always used secondary means (e.g. economics, politics) to accomplish His purposes. And it gives God great glory when we understand not just *that* He preserved and maintained His truth and church, but

more particularly, *how* He preserved the truth and His church. For example, those seeking to understand the Protestant Reformation rightly would want to understand that God preserved Martin Luther from Roman Catholic attempts on his life through the protection of Frederick III of Saxony (also known as Frederick the Wise).

Since we pursue knowledge to the glory of God, we want to have an accurate understanding of the subjects we study, and academic journals are an excellent resource for this. To this end, we must have an accurate understanding of the contexts that shape our studies, and many of the best studies of the contexts are contained within academic journals. For example, in order to rightly understand church history and historical theology, we must acknowledge that while Christians certainly faced challenges and experienced joys common to all believers, they lived in a context that often was quite different from our own. To understand their context, we will need to study the world that they existed within—a world that they were both shaped by and sought to minister to.

In the study of church history, for instance, there were various contexts that shape our understanding of a figure or event, and these often shifted throughout time. There were ecclesiastical and political contexts that shifted with the rising and falling of influential church and political figures and movements. When these transitions took place (from one king to another, for example), the contexts shifted, and this had a profound impact on Christian ministers and laypeople during the Reformation. This means, for instance, that the first Puritans in the early years of the English post-Reformation under Elizabeth I (c. 1560–1600) lived in a very different context from the last generation of Puritans who ministered following the Great Ejection until the Glorious Revolution (c. 1662–1689). Additionally, just as there are various intellectual movements (postmodernism, feminism, gender-nonconformity, etc.) that are prevalent in our day, we too must understand the intellectual currents that shaped the worlds in which previous Christians sought to live and minister. During the Reformation, intellectual movements like humanism, Erastianism, Arminianism, and Socinianism were sweeping across Europe. As Christians seeking to faithfully understand the figures we study, we simply cannot homogenize the contexts. Rather, we must understand these shifts and understand the figures we study and sources we read in light of these shifts.

Second, reading academic journals can *help Christians grow in academic integrity*. As Christians, we should seek to avoid making the same mistakes as secular scholars, namely, pridefully projecting our own assumptions onto the matters we study. Instead, we must seek to understand these subjects on their own terms. The general approach adopted in secular academia is postmodern deconstructionism. When applied to the study of the Bible, theology, and church history, this approach is characterized by the basic assumption that the Scripture, doctrine, and events of church history can be explained away (i.e. “deconstructed”) by the projection of the beliefs of secular biblical scholars. The consequences of this kind of approach are all too familiar, with claims like Jesus’s resurrection was merely His swooning and resuscitation; that Christianity (like all religions) is a psychological crutch created to help mankind cope with the mysteries of life; or that the biblical canon triumphed in the early church as the result of Constantinian intervention. Such scholars usually advance such claims under cloaked declarations that since their worldview is non-religious, it is inherently more “objective” than that of confessional Christians.

However, as Christians living in a culture in which these claims are readily accepted as fact, we need to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). This will not mean pretending to know more than we do, but (where appropriate) being honest about our lack of knowledge and then carefully understanding the topic we study on its own terms. The best journals intentionally reject teleological<sup>1</sup> studies where authors either intentionally or unintentionally have tailored their evidence to conform to their foregone conclusions. Moreover, articles in these journals are written to make a meaningful contribution, rather than to merely repackage the arguments of another. To that end, they have often engaged with a wide range of the best and most relevant primary and secondary sources related to that subject when pursuing research. In this way, they have pursued their study not only for their own sake, but in order to benefit others.

Reading academic journals will take humility since sometimes, the unchurched person seems to be better acquainted with the various contexts and arguments related to biblical, theological, and historical study than even educated Christians. However, as those seeking to be faithful to the Lord in our study of the Scriptures, theology, and church history, we must grow in our knowledge. This will mean carefully engaging secular approaches and demonstrating that, far from being objective explanations of these subjects, they are actually predictably a reconstruction of Christian beliefs according to their own secular worldviews. Reading academic journals may expose us to the realities of weakness in our own tradition, challenge us to not overlook the errors of our figures, and remind us

that the history of redemption is a story of sinners used by God. It will mean being honest about the evidence, acknowledging the mistakes Christians have made in the past, and pointing to the greatness of the Savior.

Third, reading academic journals will *open up new applications for Christians to the contemporary church*. Although most secular scholarship and study is academically rigorous, it often makes little meaningful application to the church. This is unfortunate since real history, rather than hagiography,<sup>2</sup> is actually the most experientially edifying. Indeed, when we are reminded that God uses sinners to advance His kingdom, we receive encouragement that God can use and sanctify us, despite our sin, weakness, and failures.

Fourth, as Christians read academic journals and gain exposure to the various ideological assumptions and pressures of secular academia, they *gain appreciation for the challenges endured by Christian scholars and insight into how they, even as non-specialists, might also courageously navigate the various challenges of being a confessional Christian in a world that has rejected a biblical worldview*.

Finally, reading academic journals can *force Christians to study and learn for the sake of God’s glory alone, rather than the praise of man*. With increased knowledge can come the increased temptation to seek the praise either of the academy or of those in positions of influence within the church. Rather than giving way to this, we must throw ourselves back on the mercy of God and pursue learning and study *solī Deo gloria*.

1. Teleological: trying to achieve an end; agenda-laden, biased studies advancing pre-made conclusions.

2. Hagiography: writing that excessively praises, admires, or idealizes a historical figure.

**Greg Salazar** is assistant professor of historical theology for the PhD program at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan and an elder at Harvest Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

## PURITAN REFORMED JOURNAL

Please consider subscribing to the Puritan Reformed Journal (the journal of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary) for only \$20 per year. You will enjoy the mix of articles. Each issue is divided into various sections of articles covering biblical studies, systematic and historical theology, experiential theology, pastoral theology and missions, contemporary and cultural issues, and book reviews. Please send your request to: Mrs. Ann Dykema, PRJ Administrative Assistant, 2965 Leonard St. NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525.

## Jonathan Edwards's "Diary"

### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS

The "Diary" of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is, together with his "Resolutions," "On Sarah Pierpont," and "Personal Narrative," the few autobiographical writings of New England's foremost preacher of the eighteenth century.

The "Resolutions," a customary practice for educated people in the eighteenth century, were written from 1722 into 1723—before receiving his Master's degree at Yale College, September 17, 1723. These "firm determinations" originated mostly from when Edwards was interim pastor of a small Presbyterian church in New York City, and during his subsequent stay in East Windsor—his birthplace. These "Resolutions" were neither pious promises nor legalistic rules; they were guidelines for self-examination, instructions for life—but in dependence on the Lord, and practiced in light of His Word.

While writing these seventy resolves, Edwards began his "Diary" halfway through December 1722. These years mark Edwards as a restless young man with spiritual struggles and in search for self-discipline, as well as looking for a spouse who shared his spiritual concerns. As he writes in "On Sarah Pierpont," "They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is beloved of that almighty Being, who made and rules the world, and that there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight." Taken by Sarah's godly way of life, he longed to have the same intimacy with God that she enjoyed.

Contrary to the early and formative years of Edwards is the mature and retrospective summary of his religious awakening experiences in the "Personal Narrative." Here, Edwards's comprehensive account of his spiritual journey may have been written in response to a request from Aaron Burr, the husband of Edwards's daughter, Esther. The personal account conveys a degree of happiness that is absent from the "Diary" recording his struggles, doubts, and temptations. For example, he was aware and struggled that his conversion did not always resonate with the New England Puritan conversion narrative (preparationism), writing, "I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which divines speak; I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought." For him, it was different, when writing a couple of days later, "This day revived by God's Spirit. Affected with the sense of the excellency of holiness. Felt more exercise of love to Christ than usual. Have also felt sensible repentance of sin, because it was committed against so merciful and good a

God." Later in life, he had similar experiences. While walking in the woods, he had such a "view" of God's glory that for an hour he was "in a flood of tears and weeping aloud." Such times of solitude and meditation were for Edwards occasions of personal spiritual revival, refreshment, and renewal.

These personal writings of Edwards, then, offer a rare glimpse into the private thoughts and experiences of one of America's most important preachers, as they also attest to his talents as a writer and recorder of one's own spiritual life.

### THE "DIARY"

Diaries were common throughout early colonial New England and kept by many pastors and parishioners alike. Sometimes one finds records of the weather or noteworthy events; other times they contain sermons or sermon notes; but most prominent are those dairies that record the author's spiritual life—its progress and regress. In the case of Edwards, his recording aimed not only toward being a "complete Christian," but also to be useful for the glory of God.

Several recurring themes run through the entries, such as (1) the danger of temptation, (2) the body's need for substance and rest, (3) time management, (4) emotions, and how they related to the spiritual life, and (5) his sometimes strained relationship with his father, Timothy Edwards (1669–1758).

On the danger of *temptation*, his entry for January 10, 1723 states, "I think it would be advantageous every morning to consider my business and temptations; and what sins I shall be exposed to that day: and to make a resolution how



to improve the day, and to avoid those sins." It drove him to the Lord, writing on a Friday afternoon, July 26 of that year, "[to] declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him: all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and everything, and every circumstance."

Another concern was a (potential) waste of *time*. He rose early in the morning, worked late, and filled every moment of the day with God's work in writing and sermon preparation—although, he had the custom of giving a half-hour a day to chopping wood. And so one reads, "Wednesday night, Aug. 28 [1722]. When I want books to read; yea, when I have not very good books, not to spend time in reading them, but in reading the Scriptures, in writing on types of the Scripture, and other things, in studying the languages, and in spending more time in private duties. To do this, when there is a prospect of wanting time for the purpose."

Contrary to popular views of Edwards the stoic, the "Diary" shows a man of startling impulsiveness and a wide



range of *emotions*. He often found himself in the Slough of Despond (Bunyan). At the close of 1722, he writes, "This day, and yesterday, I was exceedingly dull, dry and dead," while a couple weeks later one reads, "Thursday. About three o'clock overwhelmed with melancholy" or "journeys, change of place, change of business, change of studies, and change of other circumstances; or something that makes me melancholy" and "the occasion of my decaying, is a little melancholy. My spirits are down, and I am concerned because I fear I lost some friendship the last night. And my spirits being low, my resolutions have lost their strength." While coming to Yale as a tutor, the first week of class was marked by "despondencies, fears, perplexities, multitudes of cares and distraction of mind." To ease these emotions, Edwards tried to regulate his meals in an effort of self-denial, hoping to think more clearly but above all grow spiritually. Edwards "was a man subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17).

Yet at other times, his sense of the majesty and holiness of God filled him with awe, wonder, and thankfulness. And so we read mid-1723, "I do certainly know that I love holiness, such as the gospel requires" or "[N]ear sunset. Felt the doctrines of election, free grace, and of our not being able to do anything without the grace of God; and that holiness

is entirely, throughout, the work of God's Spirit, with more pleasure than before." Edwards, however, did not only record these experiences, but he also reflected and looked back in his diary on what he previously logged. For example, a short reflective note one finds in July, "I seek to mortify sin, and increase in holiness; these are the best opportunities, according to January 14." Lengthy and insightful, Edwards writes, however, "Sabbath-day [morning], May 12. I have lost that relish of the Scriptures and other good books, which I had five or six months ago," but adds, "Resolved, when I find in myself the least disposition to exercise good nature, that I will then strive most to feel good-naturedly. At noon. Observe to remember the meditations which I had at Westchester, as I was coming from New York; and those which I had in the orchard; and those under the oak tree. This day, and the last night, I read over and reviewed those reflections and remarks, which I find to be a very beneficial thing to me. After the afternoon meeting [church service]. I think I find in my heart to be glad from the hopes I have that my eternity is to be spent in spiritual and holy joys, arising from the manifestation of God's love, and the exercise of holiness and a burning love to him." Furthermore, "prayer and thanksgiving" go together for the nineteen-year-old Edwards, as one finds, "[both June 1 and 21] O my dear Redeemer, I commit myself, together with my prayer and thanksgiving into thine hand."

A possible cause for the sometimes-strained relationship with his father, Timothy, lies in the fact that the latter advocated preparationism and was apprehensive of sudden conversions. Jonathan wanted to please his father and desired to love and honor his parents, and so one reads in the summer of 1723 after he had written about his own and sudden conversion, "in not being careful enough to please my parents."

Despite the issues of Edwards's spiritual struggles and parental pleasing as a young adult, these experiences seem to have turned the corner, leaving the tutorship of Yale College for the pastorate at Northampton. One of the last entries of the diary reads, "but I have remarked it hitherto, that at those times when I have read the Scripture most, I have evermore been most lively, and in the best frames."

Edwards as a journal-keeper from the age of nineteen to twenty-two shows a careful observation and reflection of his life, and his soul in particular. His diary was a mirror, a place of self-examination and reflection of himself before God. Lament, mostly in these turbulent years, and joy, later in life, marked his emotions, desires, and longings—particularly after God in Christ. The diary was for personal use, and sharing these spiritual experiences with others was not its purpose. Many godly men and women throughout the ages, furthermore, have not kept a "dairy," or a journal. For others, journaling may be one spiritual discipline the Lord could use for one's growth in grace, as seen in Edwards's life.

---

**Dr. Adriaan C. Neele** teaches at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and is a minister of the Heritage Reformed congregations.

## The Journal of ESTHER EDWARDS BURR

In 1754, Esther Burr, the daughter of Jonathan Edwards, began writing daily journal entries “which she gathered up every few weeks and sent off in packets to Boston to Sarah Prince, her closest friend.”<sup>1</sup> The entries document her life for nearly three years, sharing not only everyday details about homemaking, child-rearing, and hospitality, but also spiritual struggles and sanctifying trials. *The Journal* is a beautiful record of spiritual growth, and there are several lessons we can learn from it.

### SISTERHOOD OF THE HEART

One of the main lessons we learn from Esther’s journal is that close spiritual friendships help strengthen our faith and encourage our growth in sanctification. She wrote to Sarah, “I should highly value (as you my dear do) such *charming friends* as you have about you—*friends* that one might unbosom their whole soul too.... I esteem *relegious Conversation* one of the best helps to keep up religion in the soul, excepting *secret devotion*.”<sup>2</sup> Several months before, she had written, “I esteem it a peculiar blessing of heaven on me as well as on you that you are not so subject to melancholly as you used to be, and if I have been any ways an instrument of bringing about this happy alteration, I desire to be thankful I had the blessed opportunity. Your welfare in the least shape rejoices my heart.”<sup>3</sup>

Esther struggled to find this type of spiritual friendship in her own town, in part because her busy life as a homemaker, mother, and pastor’s wife didn’t leave her with much time to spend with friends. But her friendship with Sarah remained close because the two were willing to be vulnerable with each other. She wrote, “I think it is one of the great essentials of friendship [that] the parties tell one another their faults, and when they will [say] it and take it kindly it is one of the best evidences of true friendship, [I] think. Pray what are your thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> They also shared opinions on what they were reading and how to handle difficult situations. Esther wrote, “Your judgment my dear has a very great influence on mine.”<sup>5</sup>

Because they were so invested in each other’s lives, their friendship was full of encouragement and celebration. Esther wrote to Sarah, “I rejoice with you my dear that you have found the Lord to be with you of a truth, and that you have experienced so much of his loving kindness to your soul, and have had his enlivening and quickning

presence,”<sup>6</sup> and, “I have not one Sister I can write so freely to as to you the Sister of my heart.”<sup>7</sup>

In today’s world in which it’s possible to have hundreds of “friends,” it takes time, effort, and vulnerability to find and maintain “sisterhood of the heart” like Esther and Sarah did. But it is worth it. We need friendships in which there is a mutual pointing back to Christ when trials are shared; a high level of both vulnerability and confidentiality; a willingness to receive and offer constructive criticism; and an open celebration of each other’s spiritual growth. This is the friendship Esther and Sarah had, and it is the type of friendship God can place in our lives too, if it is what we are willing to offer to others by His grace and for His glory.

### SUBMISSION TO GOD’S WILL

Another main lesson we can learn from Esther’s journal is that although submission to God’s will for our lives does not always come easily, it is an area in which we can grow over time, through trials, and by grace. Submission was a struggle Esther was honest about: “I feel something gloomy—God knows what his desighns are altho’ they look dark to me,”<sup>8</sup> and, “I am ready to say some times, why is it? Why does God suffer his own most dear children to be hunted about in this manner! But this is a very wrong temper of mind. I hope I may be enabled to crush it by divine assistance.”<sup>9</sup>

Each time she confessed her struggle, like the psalmist, Esther turned her thoughts back to God. Feelings of confusion and anxiety about our circumstances are a painfully real result of living in a fallen world, but they do not have to be the ending point for the Christian. Instead, we can use the feelings as a reminder to turn back to God again and again. If we feel overwhelmed with stress, busyness, or worry, we can turn our thoughts to Him by praying to Him with petition *and* thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6–7); reminding ourselves of specific ways He has been faithful in the past (Psalm 77); reading and listening to His Word more in order to spend more time thinking about Him (Phil. 4:8; Ps. 19:7–11); praising Him whether we feel like it or not (Heb. 13:15); and serving and thinking of others more than we serve and think about ourselves (Phil. 2:5–7).

Esther’s journal is a record of her circumstances and feelings, yes, but also of her consistent turning to God in

the middle of those circumstances and feelings: “But perhaps greater trials await me—O to be fitted for God’s holy will and pleasure in every thing!”<sup>10</sup> “I desire to be resigned to the will of God. He knows what is best.”<sup>11</sup> In a letter to her mother after the death of her husband, we see the beautiful and encouraging result God gives to those who habitually turn back to Him. “It will be some comfort to you to hear, that God has not utterly forsaken, although he has cast down. I would speak it to the glory of God’s name, that I think he has in an uncommon degree, discovered himself to be an all-sufficient God, a full fountain of all good. Although all streams were cut off, yet the fountain is left full. I think I have been enabled to cast my care upon him, and have found great peace and calmness in my mind, such as this world cannot give nor take.”<sup>12</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The spiritual growth we see in Esther’s life throughout her journal is a testimony to our all-sufficient God. Through

the gift He gave in her friendship with Sarah, and through the grace He offered to help her submit to His will, God drew her closer to Himself, for her good and His glory. He can do the same for you.

1. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Cumpacker, editors, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.
2. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 112.
3. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 49.
4. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 59.
5. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 98.
6. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 66.
7. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 53.
8. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 203.
9. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 61.
10. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 99.
11. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 50.
12. Karlsen and Cumpacker, *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, 293.

**Esther Engelsma** lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her husband and two children. She is the author of *How Can I Feel Productive as a Mom?* and serves her church as an administrative assistant.

(continued from page 239)

## APPLICATION

*Journaling can be fruitful at any level of involvement with it.* Journaling is profitable regardless of how well you think you write, compose, or spell. Whether or not you write every day, whether you write much or little, whether your soul soars like a psalmist’s or plods from thought to thought, journaling will help you grow in grace.

*Journaling requires persistence through the dry times.* The novelty of journaling soon wears off. There will be days when you will have a spiritual version of “writer’s block.” At other times you just won’t have any insights from the Scriptures or your experience with God which seem noteworthy. While it’s okay to write little or nothing on a given day or during a longer stretch of time, remember that you must eventually push through this barrier in order to enjoy the long-term benefits of journaling. In other words, don’t quit the discipline entirely just because the excitement of the first day eventually erodes. That will happen. Plan on it. But also plan for persistence.

*You must start journaling before you can experience its value.* As millions want to begin walking, jogging, hiking, or some other form of exercise but never do, so there are many who have wanted to begin the spiritual exercise of

journaling but have never done it. It sounds interesting, and you are convinced of its value, but the words never find their way to the paper. There just never seems to be the time, a “fit opportunity” as Irishman Thomas Houston, pastor of a Presbyterian church, called it. But in our heart of hearts we know that the “greater cause” is probably the same “spiritual sloth” that clung drowsily to the will of this Irish pastor. Consider journaling, not only “for the purpose of godliness,” but also as a way to raise up a “monument of God’s faithfulness” in your life.<sup>6</sup>

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1960), 2:35.
2. Maurice Roberts, “Are We Becoming Reformed Men?” *The Banner of Truth*, issue 330 (March 1991), 6.
3. C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1834–1859*, rev. ed., comp. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 122.
4. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. Edward Hickman (1834; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:xxiv.
5. Edwards, *Works*, 1:xxiv.
6. Edward Donnelly, ed., “The Diary of Thomas Houston of Knockbracken,” *The Banner of Truth* (August–September 1989), 11–12.

**Dr. Donald S. Whitney** served local churches in pastoral ministry for 24 years and is now Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Content taken from Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1997), 195–211. Used by permission of NavPress ([www.navpress.com](http://www.navpress.com)).

## LEARNING FROM BONAR'S *Diary and Life*

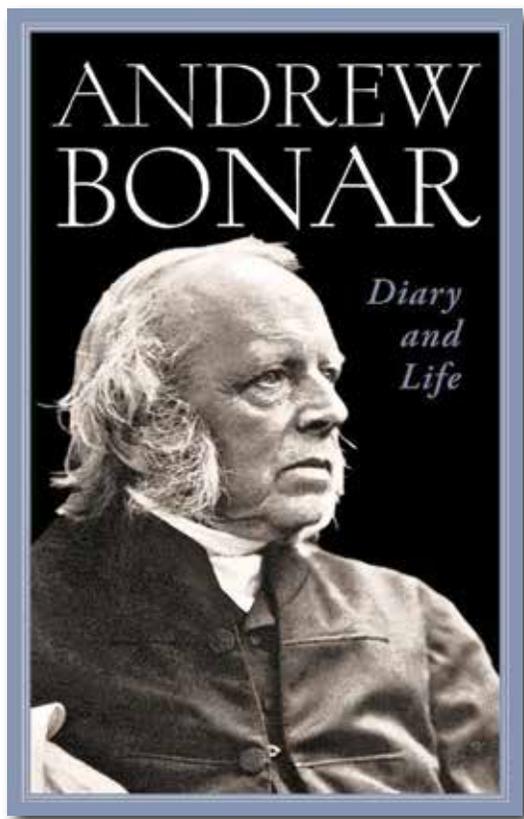
The Apostle Paul speaks of the power of godly examples to encourage believers in their pilgrimage towards heaven. These principles are found in 1 Corinthians 11:1 where Paul says, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” It appears again in Philippians 3:17 where Paul writes, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” What Paul highlights here is that we can learn from others in community. This is true of those who are currently alive, but it is also true of learning from saints in the past. One invaluable way of doing this is not only reading biographies, but reading personal journals and diaries. These personal diaries and journals are often overlooked and undervalued in the church today, but reading them can be of tremendous encouragement and help in the Christian life. This is true of Andrew Bonar’s *Diary & Life*. This book gives an intriguing glimpse into the life of a nineteenth-century pastor. Andrew Bonar was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on May 29, 1810 and died December 30, 1892. He was the younger brother of Horatius Bonar, whom he names Horace in his *Diary*. He was also a good friend of Robert

Murray M’Cheyne, which is apparent from his *Diary* as well. Andrew faithfully served the Lord in pastorates in Collace and Glasgow. He is well known for his *Commentary on Leviticus*, a gospel-centered and Christ-saturated commentary as it expounds the Old Testament sacrifices in light of their fulfillment in Christ. What can we learn from Bonar’s *Diary and Life*? Let’s consider five lessons his *Diary and Life* can teach us, followed by some tips on how to read it.

### IT HELPS US UNDERSTAND OUR OWN SPIRITUAL CONVERSION AND GROWTH

The *Diary* details Bonar’s early impressions, or lack thereof, of Christ and His gospel. It details the self-professed coldness towards Christ, but also a troubled spirit because of a lack of peace in Christ. In its opening pages, the journal is brutally honest about Bonar’s state and condition of heart before God. And yet, Bonar cannot get away from his need of the Savior and he slowly begins to have apprehensions of the love of Christ. He weighs all these experiences and tests those experiences against Scripture and seeks to find settled ground in Christ. He details his struggle with works righteousness and relating to God based on what he has done. One of the most powerful statements that can help a troubled soul is this: “Impressed with the truth that I am seeking, *before* coming to Christ, what I cannot get till I *do* come.”<sup>1</sup> But he also shares in his journal how Christ becomes sweet, when he writes, “In reading Guthrie’s *Saving Interest* I have been led to hope that I may be in Christ though I have never yet known it. All the marks of faith in a man which he gives are to be found in me, I think, although very feeble. This is the first beam of joy, perhaps, that I have yet found in regard to my state.”<sup>2</sup>

This catalog does not end with conversion and initial assurance, but it continues to demonstrate the grace of God in Bonar’s life in a deepening sense of guilt and grace, issuing forth in a life of gratitude. Bonar carefully traces this work of grace and the cultivation of humility. He writes, “The soul of a ‘weaned child’ is what I seek: meek and lowly in heart, with the eye upon the Lord alone. In this there is rest to the soul.”<sup>3</sup> This spiritual growth does not happen by osmosis, but by careful use of the means of grace. One recorded instance of this is Bonar’s attendance at communion, where he writes, “At the table of Communion felt I could acknowledge Christ as truly the source



of all my blessing, and felt Him near, so that I could give myself up to Him altogether and for ever.”<sup>4</sup>

These entries, and many others like them, help in understanding spiritual conversion and growth. This catalog of conversion and spiritual growth shows us that the saints of ages past can provide means of encouragement. These entries show us that spiritual life is not static, but dynamic and ever changing. There are good times, discouragements, setbacks, backslidings, and growth in the lives of even the most eminent saints of God. These entries should be used to encourage spiritual growth, to trace the hand of the Spirit in producing spiritual fruit. It should set the reader to prayer and a right self-examination about things spiritual. What it should not do, however, is provide such an example that if our life does not reach the same level of spirituality or piety we discount any of the work of the Spirit in our lives. When we set ourselves against the backdrop of other diaries and journals of eminent saints, we will be struck by the similarities, but also the varieties, in the experiences of the children of God. This should lead us to seek our own experience of Christ and growth in Him, using these entries as encouragements rather than being locked into one particular individual from the past. Hence we should read carefully, cautiously, and discerningly.

### **IT SPURS US ON TO PRAYER**

One of the things that strikes the reader is Bonar’s bemoaning his prayerlessness, but also his desire for and enjoyment of prayer, both private and public. Prayer was paramount for Bonar, not only as a pastor, but also as an individual before the Lord. He records at one point that in order not to be idle on a Monday and to prevent carelessness in private prayer, he observed that Christ rose early to pray after his work on the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> By describing the challenges and encouragements to prayer, Bonar provides the reader a realistic view of the prayer life of a Christian. He demonstrates the power of prayer when he analyzes the work of a fellow minister. His conclusion is that the Lord has used this pastor “because he is much in prayer, beyond all of us.”<sup>6</sup> It is encouraging to note the struggles, but also the triumphs in prayer. As Bonar labored, he recognized that the only success to his work comes through prayer.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is helpful to note how Bonar also records the answers to prayer in his diary. This brings prayer full circle. Toward the beginning of the year 1841, Bonar takes the time to reflect on the year gone by and shows how the Lord answered his prayer for a pouring out of the Spirit, but that answered prayer only spurred him on to more prayer, encouraged by the answers already received.<sup>8</sup>

### **IT CREATES A HEART FOR THE LOST**

Another prominent theme in Bonar’s journal is how he records his passion for the lost. The passion is almost

palpable and contagious. In particular is his desire for individual and specific souls under his care. This comes through when he writes about his concern for a girl who had backslidden from the truth. He brings Christ to her and leads her from her backslidden state to joy in Christ again.<sup>9</sup> Upon his transfer to ministry from Collace to Glasgow, Bonar recounts the sleepless night he endured because he “had not heard of any soul impressed by my preaching since I came, though some of God’s people give their testimony to being fed.”<sup>10</sup> This passion for souls is particularly expressed in Bonar’s desire to see the Jewish people won to Christ. He writes early in his diary how he had visited a Jewish synagogue, attended public prayer meetings specifically for the conversion of the Jews, and then his famous trip to the Holy Land with Robert Murray M’Cheyne and several others for mission to the Jews. The pages of his diary pulsate with this love for souls, especially the lost, but not only the lost, for he states at one point that “one great part of the ministry is among believers. We are blessed if we make their life flow on in a full stream. This glorifies God, it brings Him into His own world, it subdues some of the parts of His dominion to Him again.”<sup>11</sup>

### **IT COMFORTS IN SUFFERING AND DEATH**

Life in the nineteenth century was difficult and challenging and in many ways shaped by suffering. The records of deaths of family and friends are prominent in Bonar’s diary. These records give invaluable perspectives on dying, death, and suffering. The horrible death of the wicked is contrasted with the blessedness of the death of believers. In one instance, Bonar is called to the prison to minister to a notorious criminal who had personally asked for him to come. There was no observable repentance in this man and Bonar observes that one of the reasons he was to see this man was “that it may be the Lord wishes me at a future day to be a witness against that man at the Judgment-seat; my domestic life and his being so complete a contrast.”<sup>12</sup> This is contrasted with the deaths of his best friend, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, his son, Andrew, and his wife. Bonar grieved all these deaths deeply, confessing the deep void that these deaths left on a human level. Yet these deaths were marked by deep comfort as well. He remarks upon the death of his infant son, “Lord, is he not with Thee, following the Shepherd above.... O to see him come with Christ, to recognize that sweet, sweet voice amid the company of the redeemed! It was beautiful sunrise as he departed, and he has gone to better sunshine, both rest and refreshment.”<sup>13</sup> Bonar was able to release his child into the arms of the Shepherd. So too, he was able to release his beloved wife to the Lord a few short hours after she gave birth to their last child with the knowledge that she was in heaven with Christ.<sup>14</sup> These accounts help us to put our lives in order, and to be sure of the comfort necessary for dying

in Christ. But they also show the difficulty of grieving the loss of loved ones, decrying the sin that has brought on death, but also finding comfort in the prospect of the resurrection and heaven for those who have died in Christ.

### **IT TEACHES PASTORS INVALUABLE LESSONS**

There are many lessons for people from all walks of life in Bonar's diary. However, since he was a pastor there are many lessons for pastors as well. Some of the lessons above are transferable to ministers, but one of the most convicting entries addresses the besetting sin of pastors to look over the fence at those who, by all accounts, have more successful ministries. Bonar wrestled with this honestly and confessed, "Have found out more of my corruptions in the form of jealousy and envy when others are used and myself forgotten.... I see that when I discover this my soul becomes chagrined at God and is ready to say, 'Well, then, let me do as little as possible, since it is needless; He gives the blessing to others with less labor.' Such has been the unholy feeling of my heart. Lord, undo this corruption. Lord, if it be Thy will, use me yet far more." While he wrestled with this, he confessed it and used it to pray for greater usefulness. This is a beautiful example of ministerial sin, confession, and repentance.

### **TIPS FOR READING BONAR'S DIARY AND LIFE**

There are many other helpful lessons and examples that can be shared from Bonar's diary, but these should whet the appetite to pick up his journal and read it. But that raises the question, "How do I read it?" Here are some practical tips on reading this journal.

#### **READ IT SLOWLY**

This journal cannot and should not be read in one sitting, so read several pages at a time. This is not narrative reading, but short, pungent excerpts that contain much wisdom.

#### **READ MEDITATIVELY**

Instead of writing your own journal as part of your devotional exercises, you could read someone else's personal diary as part of your devotions. This aids in meditation and growth in grace.

### **READ CAREFULLY AND DISCERNINGLY**

Remember the principles with which this article began: follow Bonar as he follows Christ. Don't lock yourself in as if Bonar's life must become the exact pattern for your own. Glean the lessons from this diary and seek to apply them to your own life and circumstances without recreating an exact carbon copy of Bonar's life. Most certainly, don't use this as the standard for your own experiences, but always bring your experiences to the Word of God. Anchor them in the Word and in Christ and you will be safeguarded from some of the excesses that some have fallen prey to in reading journals and diaries.

### **READ WITH AN OPEN MIND AND HEART**

Be ready to be challenged and changed through Bonar's example, and be encouraged in your walk with the Lord using the saints of ages past as trail markers on the journey to see Christ who is the perfect pattern for us to follow.

### **QUOTES TO PONDER**

On reading personal journals and diaries from the past: "It keeps the threads of the past disentangled, and has been useful to me on some memorable occasions when I was called on to speak about times past and brethren gone."<sup>15</sup>

1. Andrew Bonar, *Diary and Life* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 7.

2. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 11.

3. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 188.

4. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 189.

5. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 34.

6. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 81.

7. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 92.

8. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 87.

9. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 59.

10. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 183.

11. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 108.

12. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 242.

13. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 204.

14. Bonar, *Diary and Life*, 236.

15. This comment is published in the front matter of a 1984 Banner reprint of Bonar's *Diary and Life*. It has no author, but a statement is included after it that states, "Written on a fly-leaf of the Diary."

**Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**cm**  
Christian **MINISTRY** to Israel  
www.cmisrael.org

**A MISSIONS ORGANIZATION  
THAT IS SEEKING TO SPEAK TO  
THE JEWS ABOUT THE MESSIAH  
JESUS CHRIST**

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to  
God for Israel is, that they might be saved"  
*Romans 10:1*

## Journals OF PROVIDENCE

In consideration of the great and manifold advantages resulting from a humble and careful observation of Providence, I cannot but judge it the concern of Christians that have time and ability for such a work, to keep written memorials or journals of Providence by them; for their own and others' use and benefit. For want of collecting and communicating such observations, not only ourselves, but the Church of God is damnified<sup>1</sup> and impoverished.

Some say the art of medicine was thus acquired and perfected. When anyone had met with some rare physical (medicinal) herb, and accidentally discovered the virtues of it, he would post it up in some public place; and so the physician attained his skill by a collection of those posted experiments and receipts (recipes).

I am not for posting up all that a Christian knows or meets with in his experience, for (as I have said before), *Non est religio, ubi omnia parent.*<sup>2</sup> Religion does not lay all open; yet there is a prudent, humble and seasonable communication of our experiences and observations of Providence which is exceeding beneficial both to ourselves and our brethren.

If Christians in reading the Scriptures would judiciously collect and record the providences they shall meet with there, and (if destitute of other helps) but add those that have fallen out in their own time and experience, O what a precious treasure would these make? How would it antidote their souls against the spreading atheism<sup>3</sup> of these days, and satisfy them beyond what many other arguments can do, that "The Lord he is the God; the Lord he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39).

Whilst this work was under my hand, I was both delighted and assisted by a pious and useful essay of an unknown author, who has to very good purpose improved many Scriptural passages of Providence which seem to lie out of the road of common observation. Some passages I have noted out of it which have been sweet to me. O that Christians everywhere set themselves to such work! Providence carries our lives, liberties and concerns in its hand every moment. Your bread is in its cupboard, your money in its purse, your safety in its enfolding arms; and surely it is the least part of what you owe to record the favors you receive at its hands.

More particularly, (1) Trust not in your slippery memories with such a multitude of remarkable passages of Providence

as you have, and shall meet with in your way to heaven. It is true, things that greatly affect us are not easily forgotten by us; and yet, how ordinary is it for new impressions to raze out the former ones? It was a saying of that worthy man, Dr. Harris, "My memory (said he) never failed me all my life; for indeed, I durst never trust it." Written memorials secure us against that hazard, and besides, make them useful to others when we are gone. So that you carry not away all your treasure to heaven with you, but leave these choice legacies to your surviving friends. Certainly it were not so great a loss to lose your silver, your goods and chattels, as it is to lose your experiences which God hath this way given you in this world.

(2) Take heed of clasping up those rich treasures in a book, and thinking it enough to have noted them there; but have frequent recourse to them, as oft as new needs, fears or difficulties arise and assault you. Now it is seasonable to consider and reflect, "Was I never so distressed before? Is this the first plunge that ever befell me? Let me consider the days of old, the years of ancient times," as Asaph did (Ps. 77:5).

(3) Lastly, beware of slighting former straits and dangers in comparison with present ones. That which is next to us always appears greatest to us, and as time removes us farther and farther from our former mercies or dangers, so they lessen in our eyes, just as the land from which they fail, doth to seamen. Know that your dangers have been as great, and your fears no less formerly than now. Make it as much your business to preserve the sense and value, as the memory of former providences, and the fruit will be sweet to you.

1. Damnified: damaged

2. Latin: It's not religion where all is revealed.

3. Atheism in Flavel's day is not the intellectual atheism as we know it today through figures such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Rather, it was a practical atheism, where it was observed that people turned away from God in their practical, everyday lives; or, a functional atheism, of living without thought of God.

This article is taken from *Divine Conduct, or The Mystery of Providence* by John Flavel, first published in 1678.

## NEW RHB BOOKS

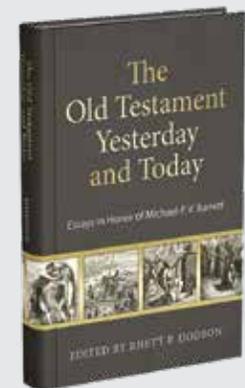
### BE RECONCILED WITH GOD Sermons of Andrew Gray

*Edited by Joel R. Beeke*

*Be Reconciled with God* presents twelve rare sermons preached by Andrew Gray. Each sermon is succinct and compelling, alluring and humbling. They are packed with both simple and profound thought communicated with almost tangible passion. When Gray preached from a text that invites sinners to come to Jesus unconditionally, his whole sermon consisted of compelling invitations. When he preached on experiential themes, such as union and intimate communion with Christ, his whole sermon unpacked these riches. When he preached on texts that

focus on our responsibility to sanctify ourselves before God, his whole sermon presses us on the particular aspect of sanctification that his text stresses. When the text selected contained a strong emphasis on warning against one kind of sin or another, his whole sermon conveyed a solemn, urgent warning note to abandon that sin and flee to Christ. Gray was a preacher who was on fire, as it were, to bring his church family the whole counsel of God as contained in the variety of texts that he selected to preach. But each particular sermon focused like a laser beam on the text at hand. This helped make his sermons so compelling and powerful.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 216 pages) \$30.00 | \$23.00



### THE OLD TESTAMENT YESTERDAY AND TODAY Essays in Honor of Michael P. V. Barrett

*Edited by Rhett P. Dodson*

This book celebrates Michael P. V. Barrett's many contributions to the church and the academy. It covers a variety of topics and is divided into three major sections of essays: historical, exegetical/expositional, and theological. The historical section covers issues from the ancient Near East to Puritan preaching and the importance of the Reformation.

Though these may seem disparate subjects, they reflect Barrett's love for the world of the Old Testament as well as his allegiance to Protestant and Reformed Christianity. The exegetical and expositional essays range from Genesis to the poetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, from historical and expositional theology to the details of textual criticism. Finally, the theological essays focus on three topics dear to Barrett's heart: Christ in the Old Testament, a biblical and balanced view of God, and the wisdom of Qoheleth. This variety reflects the breadth and depth of Barrett's own interest in the issues of reading, interpreting, and proclaiming the Scriptures.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 304 pages) \$40.00 | \$30.00



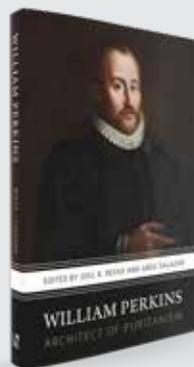
### ADVANCING CHRISTIAN UNITY

*Anthony Burgess; edited by Matthew Vogan*

In John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church. Yet today, we tend to accept disunity as inevitable. In this book, Anthony Burgess calls us to pursue the spiritual and visible unity that Jesus desires for His people. Burgess speaks of how union and communion with Christ and His people are "the life and comfort of believers." Giving careful consideration to what Christian unity should look like, Burgess excels at uncovering common causes of division and promoting

means to advance unity among God's people.

(Reformation Heritage Books, PB, 136 pages) \$10.00 | \$7.50



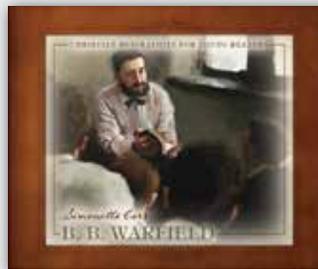
### WILLIAM PERKINS, Architect of Puritanism

*Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar*

Once a highly influential preacher in the Elizabethan church and the international Reformed world, William Perkins (1558–1602) has become a rather surprisingly neglected figure in church history. In this book, Joel Beeke, Sinclair Ferguson, Greg Salazar, Geoff Thomas, and Stephen Yuille seek to recover the importance of Perkins by situating his life, priorities, ministry challenges, and influence within their original seventeenth-century context. They help

readers "peer behind the veil" to see the real Perkins as he contended for the faith and attempted to shepherd God's people in the midst of profound challenges. This volume will be a reservoir of both theological and practical truth and will foster a greater experiential knowledge of and love for the great God whom William Perkins proclaimed and served.

(Reformation Heritage Books, PB, 192 pages) \$18.00 | \$14.00



### B. B. WARFIELD

*Simonetta Carr*

B. B. Warfield lived at a time when many people—even those who considered themselves Christians—were questioning the authority of God's Word. For centuries most people in Europe and North America had taken for granted that the Bible was the word of God, but

in Warfield's lifetime they were wondering whether it could still be trusted. Warfield was confident that the Bible could be trusted, and as a professor of theology at Princeton Seminary, he devoted his life to teaching and writing about its authority and other important issues of theology. In this biography, Simonetta Carr introduces children to one of America's greatest Reformed theologians whose timeless writings address challenges to the truths of God's Word today.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 64 pages) \$18.00 | \$14.00

## OTHER BOOKS

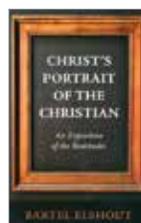


### **The Whole Armor of God: How Christ's Victory Strengthens Us for Spiritual Warfare** — *Ian Duguid*

The Christian life is a battle. We are in a daily struggle against the world, sin, and Satan. But God didn't leave us to fend for ourselves. He gave us His own armor—armor that Jesus has already worn on our behalf all the way to the cross. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is now at work inside of

us. This book unpacks each of the pieces of spiritual armor Paul describes in Ephesians 6, inviting us to take up the armor each day, all while resting in the finished victory of Christ and the assurance that our strength for the battle comes from Him.

(Crossway, PB, 127 pages) \$15.00|9.00



### **Christ's Portrait of the Christian: An Exposition of the Beatitudes** — *Bartel Elshout*

This book engages in an in-depth examination and analysis of Christ's perfect portrait of the Christian. None of us will ever reflect that portrait perfectly. However, as deficient and feeble as our spiritual life may at times be, if you are a Christian, the seven traits of Christ's portrait will manifest themselves.

To put it simply, the Beatitudes are a complete package—it is all or nothing. When the Spirit of God works in us, He will produce all seven of these marks: poverty in spirit, mournfulness, meekness, a hunger and thirst after righteousness, mercy, purity in heart (and life!), and peacemaking. If you want an edifying book that provides a scriptural paradigm of genuine experiential Christianity flowing from the teachings of our Lord, you will want to read this little gem. Read it slowly, meditatively, and prayerfully.

(Biblical Spirituality Press, PB, 140 pages) \$10.00|7.00



### **Caring for One Another: 8 Ways to Cultivate Meaningful Relationships** — *Edward Welch*

Imagine an interconnected group of people who entrust themselves to each other. You can speak of your pain, and someone responds with compassion and prayer. You can speak of your joys, and someone rejoices with you. You can ask for help with sinful struggles, and someone prays with you. The goal

of this book is that these meaningful relationships will become a natural part of daily life in your church. With short chapters and discussion questions meant to be read in a group setting, Ed Welch guides small groups through eight lessons that show what it looks like when ordinary, needy people care for other ordinary, needy people in everyday life.

(Crossway, PB, 78 pages) \$9.00|6.00



### **5 Minutes in Church History** — *Stephen Nichols*

The history of the church is filled with stories. Stories of triumph, stories of defeat, stories of joy, and stories of sorrow. In this book, Dr. Stephen J. Nichols provides snapshots of the church through the centuries. You'll meet fascinating saints, travel to curious places, examine precious artifacts, and watch as surprising turns of events unfold. This lively and

informative journey not only captures the richness of Christian history, but also reveals a record of God's providence and faithfulness to His people. It's a story to encourage and challenge us. This is our story—our family history.

(Reformation Trust, PB, 154 pages) \$10.00|8.00



### **J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir**

*Ned B Stonehouse*

John Gresham Machen (1881–1937) was one of the most significant figures in the evangelical church throughout the twentieth century. He is best known through his vision for a truly evangelical presbyterian church in the USA, and as the founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania. Gifted with an incisive mind which was finely tuned to the highest level of scholarship, he placed above all else his concern for Christ's gospel and the reliability of the Scriptures. For these he was prepared to suffer opposition, abuse, and even rejection.

In the Philadelphia seminary, Machen gathered around him a team of men, including Cornelius Van Til, Paul Woolley, John Murray, and Ned Stonehouse, whose work took on international significance, and brought guidance to Christian scholarship and wisdom to the entire Christian church.

Machen laid everything he possessed in tribute at the feet of Christ. He was, so to speak, a rich, young ruler in the church of God who sold all to follow his Master. He was deeply concerned to bring his warmhearted and accurate exposition of the gospel to the entire church. Such works of his as *God Transcendent*, *The Christian View of Man*, and *An Introduction to the New Testament*, have put many readers in his debt.

(Banner of Truth, HC, 606 pages) \$35.00|25.00

Send orders for the above titles to:



#### REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

2965 Leonard St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889 / Fax: 616-285-3246

www.heritagebooks.org; e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org

Qty.	Author/Title	Price	Total
Mich. residents add 6% sales tax.		Sub-total	
Postage (US 12%, min. \$3.99;		Sales Tax	
Canada: 20%, min. \$7.50;		Postage	
Overseas: 28%, min. \$10.00)		Total	

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

VISA/MC # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

All orders must be accompanied with payment in U.S. funds. Canadian Customers: Write *U.S. Funds* behind total amount of your check or pay by VISA or MasterCard.

In Canada these books are available at comparable prices from:

#### ReformedBookServices

230 Lynden Road, Unit 5A (behind Galaxy Car Wash)  
Brantford, Ontario CANADA N3R 8A3

Phone: 519.304.4709; Email: sales@reformedbookservices.ca  
www.reformedbookservices.ca

# A LESSON LEARNED

*He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.*

—Proverbs 10:4

Jeremy bit off a tough piece of venison jerky. It was salty, chewy, and absolutely delicious! Since it was the last piece left in the pantry, he savored each bite, chewing slowly. Thankfully his family wouldn't have to go too long without more venison jerky. In two weeks on October 1, bow season started, which gave hunters legal permission to hunt deer with bows and arrows. This year, however, it would not only be his dad that supplied the deer for his family. Jeremy licked his fingers as he remembered his birthday back in June.

"Jeremy," his dad had said, handing him a present, "this October I'm hoping that you can shoot us a deer." With a rush, he had torn off the wrapping paper to reveal a brand new bow.

"Thanks, Dad!" Jeremy had shouted. "I can't wait to use it!" Jumping off the couch, in no time he had gone outside, set up a target, and let loose an arrow. In his mind, he had already begun to plan everything from setting up his blind, to the hunt itself, to his first picture with the deer that he would shoot. In fact, Jeremy had asked his dad if he could be in charge of everything himself, and his dad had agreed.

That was three months ago. In the meantime, Jeremy's daily practice had quickly dwindled to a weekly practice and then a once-in-a-while practice. There were so many other things for a twelve-year-old boy to do during the summer. Fishing, swimming, playing with his cousins, reading, and chores seemed to fill his summer months. School had once again started, and Jeremy was busier than ever with homework.

Now here he was, two weeks away from bow season, suddenly feeling guilty. He remembered his dad's words of advice. "You have to practice shooting a lot and have good aim. You want to hit the deer right behind its front shoulder, so that you puncture its lungs, and it dies quickly. If you have poor aim, you might only injure the deer and give it a long, slow, painful death. Make sure you practice!"

"Anyway," Jeremy stubbornly thought as he stood up, "it's not like I can't hit the target, at least some of the time."

His dad had also advised him about setting up a blind. They were going to hunt on his cousin's property, which was a twenty-minute bike ride away. "Get out there three or four weeks before deer season, and scope out the place to see where the deer walk in the evening, and where you can get a clear shot at them. By the edge of a cornfield or meadow

along a wooded area is often a good place to build a blind. But you've helped me before, so I'm sure you'll do fine."

Although Jeremy hadn't quite checked out the property or built a blind yet, he had every intention of getting it done the coming weekend, which was still a week and a half away from the hunt. What he hadn't counted on was the rain. That Saturday it poured all day, and Jeremy knew that he'd have to delay his plans.

"Jeremy, want to build a fort in the basement with me?" his younger sister, Rachael, asked.

"Nope, I'm busy," Jeremy curtly replied. He was angry—angry at the rain, angry that his cousin's property was so far away, angry that his dad wasn't helping him, angry when his mom made a cheerful comment about deer season coming up, angry that everyone expected him to shoot a deer. Everything seemed to be going wrong, and everyone else was to blame.

It wasn't until Wednesday evening, a week away from the hunt, that Jeremy finally made it to his cousin's property. They had over sixty acres of fields, wooded areas, and a creek that ran along the side.

"Hey!" his younger cousin Tim yelled. "Can I come with you?"

"Sure," Jeremy agreed. "But you gotta stay quiet." The sun was beginning to sink as the two boys tramped along, looking for any movement ahead and for any droppings below.

"Are you even sure that there are deer here this year?" Jeremy whispered as the minutes marched on with not one sighting.

"There are plenty of them," Tim said indignantly. "We see them leave the cornfield all the time!"

"Well, let's head that way then." Sure enough, at the edge of the cornfield the two boys spotted piles of little brown balls. "There's our proof! Deer poop!" Jeremy excitedly said. On their right was the corn field and on their left a cluster of trees. "I'm going to build a blind right by those trees." Glancing at the descending sun, Jeremy knew he would have to hurry, but then he suddenly paused. So far he had been doing a lot of things wrong in preparation for his hunt, and in his hurry, he was about to do more damage. If deer truly walked here in the evening, he could easily spook them while preparing his blind and ruin his chances for next week. "Actually, I'm going to come back tomorrow to build the blind," Jeremy decided.

The next day, Jeremy returned and built a primitive blind out of branches and leaves. The following days found him outside with his bow and arrows, once more practicing faithfully. The excitement was beginning to build in him as each day slipped by. And then, before he knew it, opening day had

arrived and it was 3:30 in the afternoon. Jeremy and his dad were heading in a wide loop towards his blind. By going to it from the opposite direction, they hoped that they wouldn't leave their scent on the trail that the deer took. His dad glanced around without a comment after they arrived at the blind, and then he hunkered down behind the wall of leaves.

"And now comes the boring part," he said quietly. "We wait." In the past, when Jeremy had tagged along with his dad while he hunted, the waiting part was the worst. For hours they would sit, sometimes in a tree stand, sometimes on the ground, but all without talking or movement once the sun began to set.

This time was different, however. Jeremy peered above a branch in his blind and pulled his bow into position, aiming carefully at his imaginary deer. His dad sat beside him, his back resting against a tree trunk and his eyes closed. "We might not see anything, Jeremy. You know that. And it doesn't mean that you're a bad hunter. We'll have plenty of more chances." Jeremy nodded at his dad's words, trying to quiet his conscience that seemed intent on reminding him of his failure to prepare.

It was peaceful as the hours slipped by. Birds sang their evening songs and a rabbit hopped by the blind, not seeming to notice the two hunters within. It was getting darker, and not one deer had been spotted. "Let's give it fifteen more minutes," Dad suggested. Just then, they heard a snap a short distance in front of them. Jeremy quietly lifted his bow and set his arrow on it. Among the corn rows, a deer gingerly

stepped forward, ears pricked and nose trying to catch all the smells around it. It sensed that all was not right, and so it stamped its front hoof, trying to trigger some movement.

Jeremy's hands and arms shook as he slowly aimed in the deer's direction. With loud snort and a flash of a big white tail, the deer spun around and bounded back into the corn. Jeremy let down his bow and turned to his dad with a lump filling his throat. "It's my fault the deer got away. I didn't practice enough. I didn't build the blind in time. I did everything wrong and didn't take your advice. I'm sorry, Dad."

His dad looked with surprise at Jeremy and then reached out, squeezing his shoulder. "Jeremy, thanks for being honest. I saw that you weren't prepared, but I didn't say anything. You made some poor choices and now you see the poor results. I'm not saying that you would have shot a deer tonight or tomorrow, but your chances would have been higher. But we all make poor choices. We do what's wrong, what's sinful. We're lazy, think we know better, and make all kinds of excuses. God sees us and even though He knows our sins better than we do ourselves, He is willing to forgive them if we repent. Thankfully, with hunting you can have a second chance when you're better prepared. But you're not ready for bow season this year. Next year you can try again, and for now, you can come along with me during gun season, okay?"

Jeremy nodded and stood up beside his dad. "Lesson learned," he said.

---

**Andrea Scholten** is a school teacher, a writer for children, and a member of the HRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Adapted from *Open Windows*.



# GOSPEL GLASSES

## Seeing 3D

The line was long, but we decided the “Underwater 3D Experience” was worth the wait. We were at an aquarium and didn’t want to miss seeing sharks and whales and large animals lurking beneath the water. As the show started, we put on our 3D glasses and watched the screen come to life; it was incredible. Whales and dolphins surrounded us and looked just inches away. The glasses made it seem like we were in the middle of the ocean on our own private tour.

If you’ve ever used 3D glasses, I’m sure you tried taking off your glasses. What did you see? Probably what I saw—a flat screen with blurry images. It’s boring and only shows you a small piece of what’s really there; as soon you put the glasses on again, the screen comes alive with color and depth and life. Without the glasses you can only see shadows and outlines of the ocean, but with the glasses you see so much more. There is more than meets the eye!

## Gospel Glasses

The gospel changes everything for the Christian and even transforms what we see in the world around us. Much like 3D glasses, the gospel allows us to see what’s *really* happening. Using gospel glasses will change the way you see yourself, your friends, your home, your school—your whole life!

## What Is the Gospel?

It is the most important story that gives meaning to our life. It’s the story God reveals to us in the Bible. The story includes four main parts: *creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration*. Adam and Eve were created to worship and enjoy God and to reign on the earth. Instead of trusting and obeying God, they chose to disobey God and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. Their disobedience is called “the fall” and it created very sad things for us and our world: death, suffering, and pain. Sin separated us from God. But God

promised that one day Jesus, God’s Son, would come and through Him we could be made right with God again. And Jesus did come, He gave His perfect life as a sacrifice for sinners, so that we could be saved from our sin. One day, God will make a new heaven and a new earth, and those who believed in Him will live with Him forever, but those that did not believe will suffer His judgement forever.

## Using Gospel Glasses

When we see the world with gospel glasses, everything changes. Just like the 3D glasses allow us to see depth, color, detail, and action, the gospel story makes us see parts of the real story (creation, fall, redemption, and restoration) everywhere we look, even when we look at ourselves!

Let’s use gospel glasses to look at something in your life. Let’s look at you and your brother or sister playing Legos—you’re working at building a big city but soon there’s a fight. You want to build it your way, but your sibling wants to do it their way! You feel angry and frustrated and finally just leave the Legos to go do something on your own. If we put on our gospel glasses, we see more than just an argument over Legos. What we see is God’s creation of two people meant to live in perfect happiness with each other and God. We see God’s design as we desire to create and work together. Oh, but look! We can see the fall too, can’t we? The fighting and the anger is the result of sin that’s in our hearts. Now the gospel glasses show us how we need Jesus to make us right with God and each other and how to live in happy obedience.

Do you see how using gospel glasses changes everything? Ask the Holy Spirit to help your eyes to really see with gospel glasses. Read your Bible so that you will grow in your understanding of the gospel story and pray to the Lord, asking Him to help you see your story in His.

---

**Kara Dedert** is a homemaker, mother of five children, and a member of the Grand Rapids HRC.



## THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

Every December we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It's a wonderful story about God's great love for sinners! It's also a story of enormous opposites. Think about a holy God and a sinful people, a glorious heaven and a dirty stable, a bright Light and a dark world, dazzling angels and humble shepherds. All of these elements are part of the Christmas story. As you read more about Christ's birth, I hope you will be filled with wonder at God the Father's love in giving His only Son, and Jesus's love in coming to this dark world to save sinners!

Search the Bible texts listed below to find important words about Jesus's birth. Unscramble the words and fill in the blanks. Then put the numbered boxes in order and you'll discover one more amazing fact about Jesus at the bottom of the page. You can read more about this fact in the gospel of John, chapter 1.

1. MAUMENLI (Isaiah 7:14)

	14		1			17	
--	----	--	---	--	--	----	--

2. MEEHLBEHT (Micah 5:2)

			5		20			
--	--	--	---	--	----	--	--	--

3. JOHPES (Matthew 1:16)

		13			
--	--	----	--	--	--

4. LYOH GOTSH (Matthew 1:20)

		19				21	
--	--	----	--	--	--	----	--

5. NRVIIG (Matthew 1:23)

					2
--	--	--	--	--	---

6. CINKNRAFEESN (Matthew 2:11)

18			12									
----	--	--	----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

7. REIGALB (Luke 1:26)

	15		9			
--	----	--	---	--	--	--

8. RAZTAHNE (Luke 2:4)

						4	22
--	--	--	--	--	--	---	----

9. NSDGAWDIL (Luke 2:7)

	7		10	16				
--	---	--	----	----	--	--	--	--

10. HDRSHSEEP (Luke 2:8)

							3	
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---	--

11. VANHEYLE HOTS (Luke 2:13)

				6							
--	--	--	--	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

12. RENDOEWD (Luke 2:18)

11	8					
----	---	--	--	--	--	--

1	2	3
---	---	---

4	5	6
---	---	---

7	8	9	10
---	---	---	----

11	12	13
----	----	----

14	15	16	17
----	----	----	----

18	19	20	21	22
----	----	----	----	----

### ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

**Down:**

- |               |              |           |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1. decree     | 3. excellent | 4. beast  |
| 6. Belshazzar | 7. ten       | 9. Darius |
| 11. iron      | 13. Angel    |           |

**Across:**

- |                |            |            |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| 2. Beltshazzar | 5. image   | 8. kingdom |
| 10. living     | 12. dreams | 14. four   |
| 15. Babylon    |            |            |



# and announcements

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

## OBITUARIES

**POPOVICH, Dr. Frances (Blok)**, age 90, Grand Rapids, Michigan, went to be with her Lord on Monday, August 19, 2019. She was preceded in death by her husband of 57 years, A. Harold Popovich, and her sister, Barbara Visser. Fran is lovingly remembered by her children, David Popovich, Jim and Brenda Popovich, Annette and Todd Blakeslee, Philip and Danae Popovich; her siblings, Arie Blok, Bill and Irma Blok, Art and Karen Blok, Pauline GeBuys, Tony and Diane Blok; ten grandchildren; several nieces and nephews, extended family and friends. Fran devoted her life to translating the Bible among the Maxakali tribe in Brazil, training the next generation of Bible translators, and was the author of several books. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Isaiah 43:1-3; Revelation 7:15-17; Dr. Frank Guter, Ephesians 2:8).

**STOUTJESDYK, Martin, Jr.**, age 90, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, passed away on Monday, September 2, 2019. Mart was predeceased by his brothers, John (Louise) Stoutjesdyk and Clayton "Bud" Stoutjesdyk. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Shirley; his children, Jim and Debbie Stoutjesdyk, Judy and William Bolhuis; sisters-in-law and brother-in-law, Marilyn Stoutjesdyk, Marilyn Wessell, Nancy Bernard, and Gerald Williams; grandchildren—Scott (Sara) Stoutjesdyk, Jason (Edlyn) Stoutjesdyk, Jim (Lora) Stoutjesdyk, Amanda (Tom) Tsiouklas, Zach Amanda) Baker, Jared (Becky) Baker, Katie (Brandon) Bosch, Brooke (Eric) Greenley, Brandon (Megan) Bolhuis, Brenna (Jeff) Miller, Brianne (Brian) Whalen; 24 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild; many nieces and nephews. (Rev. Mark Kelderman, Psalm 46; Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Philipians 1:21).

## TEACHERS NEEDED

### OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Invites applications for the 2020-2021 school year:

- Full-time elementary teachers
- High-School Math & Science teachers
- High-School Arts & Humanities teachers
- Secondary Curriculum Coordinator

About us:

- An expanding student body of 350+ students from K to 12
- A dedicated, Reformed, parent-run school community
- New facilities in a rural setting in south-western Ontario (Mount Elgin)
- A unified, professional staff committed to a Christ-centered education

We are looking for enthusiastic, qualified teachers who have a passion for Christian education, and submit to the Holy Scriptures as summarized in the Reformed confessions. Seasoned veterans looking for a positive change, or young beginners looking to gain experience are encouraged to apply.

Applications must include a resumé, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Email applications to Mr. William Van Brugge ([principal@orcschool.ca](mailto:principal@orcschool.ca)). Visit our website ([orcschool.ca](http://orcschool.ca)), or come and visit our school: 333182 Plank Line, Mount Elgin, Ontario.

### JORDAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

There is a growing need for Christian education and for Christian educators. As Jordan Christian School is also growing, we are accepting applications from highly motivated, dynamic, and committed Christian school teachers. Located in the heart of Niagara wine country near St. Catharines, JCS provides a JK-12 program that is actively taught from a solidly Reformed perspective, with a vision of educating students for Christian service. Please include with your application your philosophy of education and statement of faith and send it to the attention of Mr. Paul Wagenaar at [principal@ourjcs.ca](mailto:principal@ourjcs.ca).

### INTRODUCING CHURCH SOCIAL

Church management software that helps reformed congregations manage membership data, share resources and communicate more easily online.



Used by churches in the Canadian Reformed, United Reformed and Free Reformed federations.

[churchsocial.com](http://churchsocial.com)

## FROM OUR MAILBOX

### REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

I finished the booklet yesterday on "How Can We Build a Godly Marriage?" and I have to say I have been very blessed by it. It is truly a gift from God to my life, and also rebukes me to better our marriage.

Thank you for giving out these booklets. I am very thankful that I had the desire to pick one up and actually read it.

I am truly edified and convicted of much that I am doing wrong in our marriage, but I know I can only fix these issues with the strength of Christ (Phil. 4:13).

Please pray for me and our marriage, that God will strengthen us to have a better companionship and that we will truly love one another, and that we will use these 10 keys to build a godly marriage. As is stated in this booklet, "You must do more than think about these things; you must roll up your sleeves and do them." May God help me to do all these things.



## LOVE ABOUNDING

*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.*

—Philippians 1:10

The relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi provides a beautiful model of the relationship between a pastor and his people. What is very obvious is that this relationship was one of an ever-deepening love. How true it must have been concerning them, as Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Indeed, you can’t read far into Paul’s epistle without catching something of its atmosphere of love. In Philippians 1:4, he tells the Philippians they are in his thoughts: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” In verse 7, he tells them they are in his heart: “I have you in my heart.” In verses 4 and 9 he tells them that they are in his prayers: “Always in every prayer of mine for you all.... And this I pray.”

When Paul continues to relate the content of his prayer, he does not pray for the creation of love, but for

the abounding of the love that is clearly already there (1:9). He is praying for their spiritual growth. Paul was never content with a status-quo piety for himself or for those he loved (cf. 3:12–17).

More specifically, however, Paul prays that their love would abound “more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (1:10). Christian love is eminently informed. It is intelligent. Just as the apostle says, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12), so we can also say, “I know whom I have loved.” If you ask the Philippians, “What do you love about Paul?” or, “What do you love about Christ?” they would not be short of things to say (cf. Song 5:9–16). Love knows its object, and the more it knows its object, the more it desires to know. Further, the more we love that which is truly lovely, the more discernment we will have for what is either not lovely or less lovely (cf. 4:8–9).

So Paul provides us with a great model of pastoral love and prayer: “This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment” (1:10). May our love so abound.

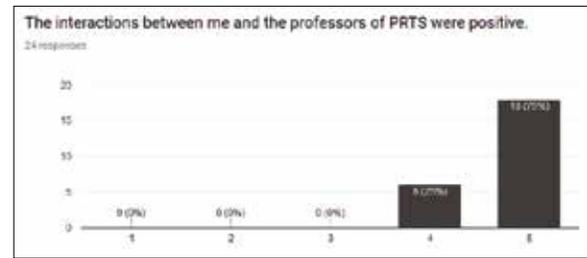
—Ian Macleod

# REFLECTIONS ON TWO YEARS *of* GRADUATE SURVEYS

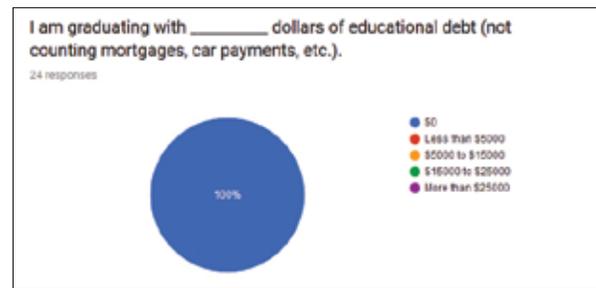
One area in which PRTS has been challenged recently is assessment. Resulting from our accreditation with ATS (Association of Theological Schools in the USA and Canada) attained in 2014, and spurred on again by our recent ATS visit in 2019, we have been forced to ask tough questions: How are we doing as a seminary? In what ways are we assessing or measuring our students? Are our graduates meeting the desired objectives? What are these objectives? Has seminary education been helpful to our graduates, and if so, how can it be improved? As is so often the case, asking the right questions is key to a proper and productive institutional assessment.

To this end, PRTS has implemented a series of questionnaires that it administers to its students. One questionnaire, the Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ), is given to new students after one semester of study. Questions in this survey focus on the admissions process, most influential reasons why the student came to PRTS, process of adjusting to seminary life, current devotional practices, and evaluation of seminary services (IT support, library, registrar, student housing assistance, writing assistance, etc.). A second survey, the Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) is given each spring semester to the graduating class of that year. Finally, a third survey, the Alumni Questionnaire (AQ), is given to all alumni every five years.

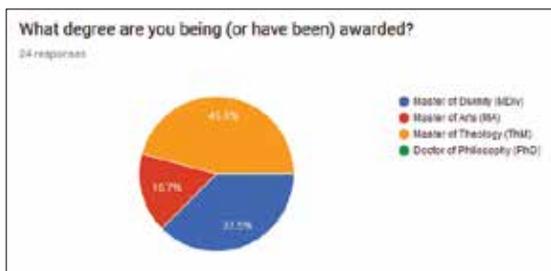
The intent of this brief article is to highlight and reflect on findings from the second of these surveys, the GSQ.



classes indicated that a positive relationship exists between professors and students. When asked to rate the statement “the interactions between me and the professors of PRTS were positive” on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree,” eighteen graduates rated this statement a 5 (“strongly agree”), and the remaining six marked it with a 4 (“agree”). When asked to explain their rating, the comments left by the graduates clearly indicated their thankfulness for all the work, time, and energy poured into their lives by the professors.

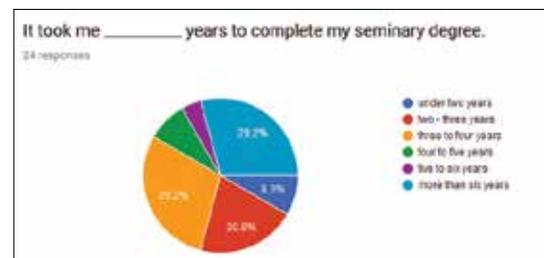


Second, another encouraging (and surprising) statistic was revealed: graduates were asked to provide a dollar range for their educational debt (\$0, less than \$5,000, \$5,000 to \$15,000, \$15,000 to \$25,000, or more than \$25,000). Every one of the 24 graduates from 2018 and 2019 indicated that they were graduating with \$0 of educational debt! How



To date, we have administered this questionnaire to our last two graduating classes of 2018 and 2019, and received a total of twenty-four anonymous responses (eleven ThM graduates, nine MDiv graduates, and four MA graduates). In this ten-minute survey, we ask our graduates to assess their interactions with professors, to comment on the effectiveness of their education, and to reassess services received (such as the resources in the William Perkins Library). Another section of the survey asks what sources of income were most used to fund the student’s education, and if the student is graduating with any educational debt. Several interesting insights were gleaned (some positive, and others not as positive) from this survey.

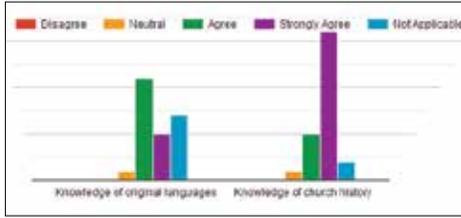
First, the overwhelming response of the two graduating



encouraging this is to hear that graduates are valuing their seminary education at PRTS, and yet they have managed (largely through receiving generous scholarships, low tuition rates, a helpful food bank, and their own endeavors and watchfulness) to be free of any educational debt.

When asked to comment on the duration of their program, results were mixed for these two graduating classes. Exactly 50% (or twelve graduates) indicated that

they completed their degrees in two to four years, whereas another 8% said they needed less than two years to finish



(presumably these would be ThM graduates as this degree is quite a bit shorter). And yet, despite these fairly standard timeframes, the survey revealed that nearly 30% of the graduates (seven of the twenty-four) needed more than six years to complete their programs. While understanding that some students have had to work on their degrees part time, this fairly large percentage of students in a program for more than six years may be an indicator of other issues/questions that need addressing (i.e., time

management questions, help with degree planning, length of programs, etc.).

A final item the survey initially revealed was areas in which the seminary could improve. For example, comparing our graduates' rating of educational effectiveness in the knowledge of original languages with knowledge of church history, most would *strongly agree* that PRTS was effective in teaching the latter, whereas effectiveness in teaching original languages (Greek and Hebrew) received somewhat lower ratings.

Assessment is a critical part of maintaining a healthy seminary. We are immensely thankful for the qualified and committed faculty at PRTS, and grateful for the many graduates serving Christ through the world that are called to minister God's Word in a variety of ways and contexts. Please pray with us that we might be a seminary that takes seriously the high calling of training servants of King Jesus!

—Dr. Jonathon Beeke  
 Director of Admissions / Registrar  
 Director of Assessment

## POST-DOCTORAL STUDIES *at* PRTS

The Puritan Research Center at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) offers post-doctoral students a study space, library privileges, and research support after the completion of their doctoral studies. In 2019 PRTS welcomed Dr. Heber de Campos Jr., professor of Historical Theology at the Andrew Jumper Graduate School of Mackenzie University in São Paulo, Brazil, as the first recipient of the PRTS post-doctoral position.

When interviewed about the reasons that brought him to PRTS for post-doctoral study, Dr. de Campos commented,

My research focus was on Post-Reformation Reformed theology, an area of study that PRTS has been known to focus its resources on. Post-Reformation debates surrounding the doctrine of justification is an example of how doctrinal development occurred among the Reformed. It helps the church see that a doctrine so dear to the Protestant identity, such as justification by faith, is not formulated all at once, but required significant refinement for the next century or so after the Reformation. It helps the academy see how the Post-Reformation undergoes development without breaking with the tradition (i.e., qualifying debates on continuity and discontinuity), thus giving us a sense in which one can talk about differences without deviation. Having the humble understanding that Reformation theology is not final, even on matters in which it contributed so significantly (i.e. soteriology), being so foundational for later theology, is a sound picture to portray both to the church and the academy. The resources of the

William Perkins Library at PRTS, both primary and secondary, digital and printed, as well as the assistance of the librarians, were always very helpful. Seldom did I need to look for something elsewhere. Furthermore, the conversations with some faculty about my project were very enriching, since I had the privilege of having dialog partners who understand the Reformed tradition. That was a very particular contribution that only PRTS, and Grand Rapids in general, could provide.



When asked whether he and his family made use of the new student housing, and how he felt about the facilities and their proximity to the seminary, Dr. de Campos responded,

Yes, we did stay at the new student housing. The proximity to the seminary was the best quality overall, specially during such a severe winter as we had. The apartment was great, it had everything we needed, and whenever some detail went wrong it didn't take long to get fixed. My special thanks to Henk Kleyn for making all the arrangements for such a nice stay. On a side note, our time in Grand Rapids was also very edifying for me and my family. With the contribution of PRTS, the church, and several friends, our compassionate God made the spring semester of 2019 a time not only for research, but also (maybe "mainly") a time for the soul to be refreshed, a time of rest and devotion.

# CARING FOR SOULS *through* COUNSELING

At PRTS, all our professors are involved with work in the local church. They are ordained pastors who have a burden for people. This is important since it keeps them in close contact with people and ministry in the church. Their teaching at the seminary does not become distant or aloof but meets students at a very practical level. This ties in closely with the idea of soul care or counseling. Every pastor provides counsel to his flock, either from the pulpit or in a more personal one-on-one setting. It seems that in many churches there are growing needs for counseling, but often members do not come to their pastor for help, or it is impossible for him to care for them all. What can happen is that those who are hurting in the church turn to secular counseling looking for hope. I do not think anyone would disagree that pastors need help in ministering to the soul cares of the flock.

The apostle Paul has highlighted that this calling to counsel within the church is a calling of the entire body. In Romans 15:14, Paul says he is persuaded that those at Rome (we might say this includes all believers today) were “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” The idea here is that all believers are equipped by God to admonish or counsel one another.

Members must also encourage one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24–25). This does not mean that everyone is gifted to the same degree when it comes to counseling one another. Paul has also told us that certain members are given gifts to be used for the profit of the other members (1 Cor. 12:11–31; Eph. 4:7–16).

Putting these two things together, we at PRTS realize that churches today need help in meeting the soul care of the flock. Our pastors receive some training in counseling, but they need help. There are men and women in the church who feel the burden to help others, coming alongside of them to give counsel and biblical guidance. Our vision is to train men and women in the practice of biblical counseling so that they might be of assistance to the pastor and the church. We also envision that church leaders will realize the need to employ those who have been equipped through specialized training to counsel members of the congregation. Please pray for PRTS as we seek to plan and formulate a Master of Arts degree in Biblical Counseling. We need your prayers for the details of this program and in providing men and women who have a heart for this kind of ministry.

—Mark Kelderman

## A 21st CENTURY SEMINARY:

### *Academic Rigor Combined with Biblical Piety*

Seminary education is one of the most privileged contexts of study—for the student being taught and trained for gospel ministry, and for the instructor being in service of Christ and His church—globally and locally. It carries also a great responsibility for the student and instructor being entrusted with a heritage of biblical, Reformed, experiential, and practical ministry resources. Comprehensive training in gospel ministry with academic rigor and integrity, combined with biblical piety (*De Pietate cum Scientia conjugenda*)—studies of pastoral, preaching, and teaching ministry, represented in the MDiv, MA, ThM, and PhD programs offered by PRTS. These are programs designed for the academic and spiritual formation of students called to ministry, programs designed for the head, heart, and hands—biblical in character, Reformed-confessional in conviction, and experientially and personally taught by Word and Spirit.

These distinctives—biblical, Reformed, experiential, practical—set PRTS apart in the world of seminary education. This position of PRTS, therefore, is rather unique: a seminary education that is biblical and historically informed and contemporarily relevant: biblical studies, systematic theology, historical theology, practical theology, biblical counseling, and homiletics are taught by a world-class faculty with a heart for the gospel, church, and

academy. This position of PRTS is sought after by students from around the world. Technologically advanced blended-learning, live-stream courses, and online education bring students and instructors together in the classroom on campus and beyond. This position of PRTS, moreover, is well represented by our international student body, by our experienced faculty, and by our graduates serving in over thirty countries in vocations of the pastorate, preaching, and teaching. This position of PRTS is shared and supported by a generous donor base for which the seminary community, students, faculty, and staff are grateful.

As our president Dr. Beeke says, “The need for faithful ministry in the academy and church is great, as are the opportunities. Moreover, no vocation on this side of heaven is as privileged or rewarding as Christian ministry. God has granted PRTS many blessings, including God-fearing instructors and students who have much love for God and each other. We are grateful for a student body of diverse backgrounds and denominations, seeking to glorify God by promoting His kingdom. The biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and relevant Reformed faith we strive to promote in every classroom builds a solid foundation for ministry today and tomorrow.”

—Adriaan Neele



## 7 SMART AND SAVVY TIPS FOR YEAR-END GIVING

### *Tax-Wise Ways to Maximize Your Impact*

Thank you for your support of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS)! As you consider plans for year-end giving, here are a few tips to ensure your gifts are made properly and in the most tax-effective manner.

#### 1 Give Stock or Property to Reduce Your Taxes

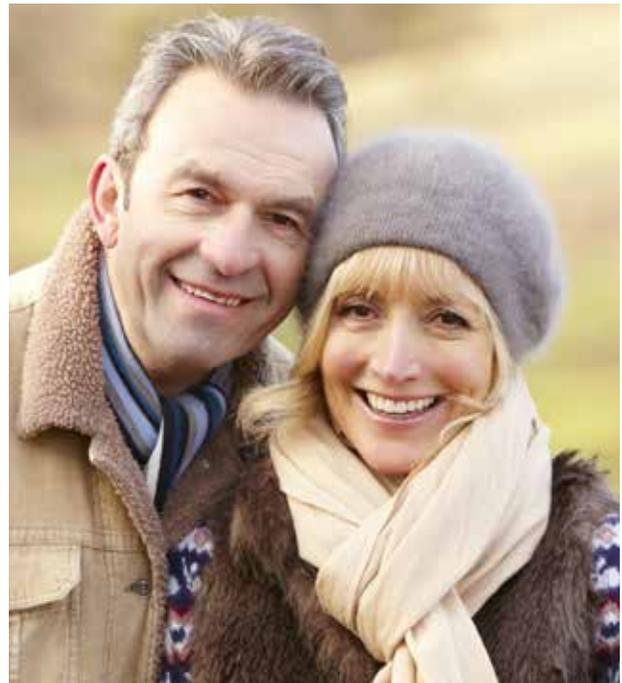
By giving **appreciated assets** (such as stock, real estate, business interests or commodities) directly to PRTS, you'll receive a tax deduction for the fair market value of the gift AND bypass the capital gains – whether or not you choose to itemize!

#### 2 Give Tax-Free Distributions From Your IRA

If you are age 70 ½ or older, **gifts from your IRA** are one of the smartest, tax-wise ways you can support the mission of PRTS! Not only do these gifts satisfy your required minimum distribution, but they also reduce your taxable income.

#### 3 Research Your Employer's Matching Gift Programs

Many employers offer **matching gift programs** as part of their philanthropic efforts. For every dollar given, the corporation will make a matching contribution, in some cases on a 2-for-1 basis.



#### 4 Streamline Your Giving

If you support several ministries, you may be able to simplify and streamline your giving by setting up a **Stewards Fund** (donor-advised fund) account through Barnabas Foundation. Like a "charitable giving account," you can give cash and appreciated assets into a single fund and then choose when and how to recommend grants to PRTS.

## 5 Timing Is Everything

To receive a deduction on this year's taxes...

- **Gifts of cash** must be delivered in-person or mailed in an envelope postmarked no later than December 31.
- **Gifts of non-cash assets** (such as appreciated stock, real estate, business interests and commodities) must be transferred by December 31.
- **Any check you write from your IRA account** must be received AND PROCESSED by December 31 in order to count toward your required minimum distribution. Unlike other checks (including those sent directly from your IRA administrator) it is NOT enough that personal IRA checks are postmarked or even hand-delivered by December 31.
- **Gifts made into a donor-advised fund** (such as the Stewards Fund) must be transferred into the account by December 31. You can decide later how to recommend these funds to be distributed.



## 6 Beat the Year-End Rush

December is incredibly busy – not only for you, but also for the post-office, your financial advisors and for us. Whenever possible, build in extra margin for your gifts to be given, received and processed by December 31. Also, err on the side of over-communication. Call ahead for the smooth transfer of stock or other appreciated assets. Alert us when writing a check from your IRA account (timing on these are critical!) so we can ensure your gift is processed immediately.

## 7 Collaborate With the Trusted Experts

Not sure what giving options are best for you? Through PRTS's partnership with Barnabas Foundation, you have complimentary access to trusted planning support, all from a Christian perspective. A planner will answer your questions with clear, easy-to-understand information so you can identify the best giving solutions to achieve your personal and charitable goals.



*This information is not intended as tax, legal or financial advice. Consult your financial advisor and legal counsel for information and advice specific to your situation.*

### THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). As Matthew Henry said, "Whatever we part with for God's sake shall be made up to us in kind or in kindness."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about smart and powerful ways to give, or to be connected with a Barnabas Foundation planner, call Chris Hanna today at 616.432.3407 or email [chris.hanna@prts.edu](mailto:chris.hanna@prts.edu).

# FACULTY ITINERARIES & PUBLICATIONS

## MICHAEL BARRETT | Itinerary

November 1: Ontario: Reformation Service at Dundas FRC

## JOEL BEEKE | Itinerary

November 1–2: Laurel, Mississippi: Reformation conference for Jerry Marcellino, Audubon Bible Church

November 3: Jackson, Mississippi: Preaching, First Presbyterian Church (for David Strain)

November 7–11: Governador Valadares, Brazil: Conference

November 14–17: Danilo Santa, Terra, Brazil: Conference

December 8: Vineland, Ontario: Preaching for FRC

January 7–9: Crieff, Scotland: Ministerial conference for Crieff Fellowship

January 16–18: Atlanta, Georgia: G3 Conference

January 31–February 6: Nakuru, Kenya: Pastors' Conference

February 7–18: Alexandria, Egypt: Preaching, conference, and seminary teaching

## Recent Publications

*Judges and Ruth Journible*, with Rob Wynalda (RHB).

Host of documentary, "Puritan: All of Life to the Glory of God," with RHB and Media Gratiae (MG).

*Following God Fully: An Introduction to the Puritans*, with Michael Reeves (RHB and MG).

*Puritan, All of Life to the Glory of God: Workbook*, with Nicholas Thompson (RHB and MG).

*How Are We to View Our Children in the Church?* (RHB).

## JERRY BILKES

December 1: St. Thomas, Ontario: St. Thomas FRC

## MARK KELDERMAN

December 1: Dorr, Michigan: New Hope Reformed and Cornerstone URC

December 8: Rockford, Illinois: Grace Baptist Service and PRTS presentation

December 29: Kalamazoo, Michigan: Covenant URC

January 5: Bradenton, Florida: Bradenton Reformed Fellowship

Continue working on DMin dissertation and setting up Biblical Counseling MA program

## DAVID MURRAY | Itinerary

November 8–11: Raleigh, North Carolina: Conference

## ADRIAAN NEELE | Itinerary

February: Taiwan: China Reformed Theological Seminary

February: Japan: Kobe Reformed Theological Seminary

February: South Korea: Hapdong Reformed Seminary

## Recent Publications

"The Class of 1652 of the *Academia Voetiana*," *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal*, Fall issue 2019.

*Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706): Text, Context, and Interpretation*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019.

"The Reception of Jonathan Edwards in the Middle East and Africa," in *Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards*. Oxford University Press, 2019/20.

"Hyleke Gockinga (1723–1793): Catechist, Translator, and Commentator," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 2019/20.

"Early Modern Dutch Biblical Exegesis: Renaissance and Reception," in Jan Stievermann, Michael Haykin (eds.), *The Bible in Transatlantic Pietism and Evangelicalism: Eighteenth-Century Trends and Exchanges*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019/20.

## GREG SALAZAR | Itinerary

November 13–15: San Diego, California: Paper at Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society

November 24: San Diego, California: Providence Presbyterian Church

January 17: OPC Presbytery Meeting

## Recent Publications

"Defending Calvinism in England Before and After Dort," in Martin Klauber and Joel Beeke, eds., *The published proceedings from Reformation Studies Section at ETS Annual Conference (2018)*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

Co-Editor with Joel R. Beeke, *William Perkins, The Architect of Elizabethan Puritanism* (RHB).

"William Perkins and the Puritan Tradition: The Primacy of Scripture, Preaching, and Piety," in Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar, eds., *William Perkins, The Architect of Elizabethan Puritanism* (RHB).

"The Beauty and Glory of the Puritan Millennium," in Joel R. Beeke, ed., *The Beauty and Glory of the Last Things* (RHB).

## DANIEL TIMMER | Itinerary

November 20: San Diego, California: Evangelical Society, lecturing on "Christ and/in the Old Testament: Reflections on the Interpreter, the Author, History, and the Canon."

November 23–26: San Diego, California: Society of Biblical Literature, lecture on "Retribution, Rule, Repas: YHWH's Luxuriant Feast in Isaiah 25:6–8 and Its Im/material Significance."

January: Taiwan: China Reformed Theological Seminary

January–April: Montreal: Esaië at the Faculté de théologie évangélique

## LONG-AWAITED PURITAN DOCUMENTARY SHOWING



Joyless. Severe. Fanatical. "Haunted by the fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." That's the Puritan reputation. But to what extent is that reputation deserved? Drawing on the latest research, and featuring interviews with some of the most celebrated scholars and pastors in the field from around the world, this beautiful and atmospheric new feature length documentary takes us from the birth of Puritanism all the way through to its influence in the present day.

Join us for a showing of this amazing documentary, Friday, December 6, 2019, at the Heritage Reformed Church, 540 Crescent Street, NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. The showing will start at 7:00 p.m. Cake and refreshments will be served beforehand. Dr. Joel Beeke, President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, will speak briefly following the presentation.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

For period 8/1/2019–9/30/2019

Income	Year to Date Actual	Annual Budget	Variance	Percent of Annual Budget
Donations	\$ 332,777	\$ 2,518,900	(\$2,186,123)	13%
Tuition Income	215,271	540,000	(324,729)	40%
Scholarship Donations	146,900	385,000	(238,100)	38%
Other Income	<u>35,852</u>	<u>356,100</u>	<u>(320,248)</u>	<u>10%</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$730,800</b>	<b>\$ 3,800,000</b>	<b>(\$3,069,200)</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Instruction	\$ 543,963	\$ 2,251,375	(\$1,707,412)	24%
Scholarships	202,421	428,000	(225,579)	47%
Administrative	<u>54,066</u>	<u>1,120,625</u>	<u>(1,066,559)</u>	<u>5%</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 800,450</b>	<b>\$ 3,800,000</b>	<b>(\$2,999,550)</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>(\$69,650)</b>			

Thank you for partnering with PRTS. We need to raise \$1.5 million before Dec. 31. A gift of any size would be a great help at this time.

—CHRIS HANNA

## YES, I WOULD LIKE TO DONATE!

- I would like to financially support PRTS by giving \$ \_\_\_\_\_, designated for:
- Operational Needs     Scholarship Fund     PhD Scholarship Fund
- PRTS Foundation     Puritan Resource Center     Building Fund
- I would like to enroll in the monthly giving program and give \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month.
- I am enclosing \$20 for a 2020 subscription to *Puritan Reformed Journal*.
- Send a free copy of *Beginning at Moses* by Dr. Michael Barrett

## PAYMENT METHOD

- Check/cash enclosed                       Charge my credit/debit card:
- Card type (circle one):    Visa    Mastercard    Discover    American Express
- Card # \_\_\_\_\_
- Exp. Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_
- Please send me a free copy of *The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible* — Genuine Leather (for donations over \$150).
- Send me a copy of the PRTS 2017–2019 catalog
- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Address \_\_\_\_\_
- City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Please include this form with your check.

Canadian and US donors please send your check to:  
 Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary  
 2965 Leonard Street, NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525  
 For online gifts, please visit [www.prts.edu/donate/overview](http://www.prts.edu/donate/overview).

## International Bank transfer information:

- Beneficiary Bank: Mercantile Bank of Michigan
- Beneficiary's Bank Swift: MEMIUS33
- Beneficiary's Bank Fedwire ABA: 072413829
- Mercantile Bank: 100061175
- Beneficiary Customer: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

- Dr. Joel R. Beeke, *President & Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics*  
[joel.beeke@prts.edu](mailto:joel.beeke@prts.edu)
- Dr. Michael Barrett, *Vice President of Academic Affairs, Academic Dean, and Professor of Old Testament*  
[michael.barrett@prts.edu](mailto:michael.barrett@prts.edu)
- Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes, *Professor of Old and New Testament*  
[jerry.bilkes@prts.edu](mailto:jerry.bilkes@prts.edu)
- Dr. Adriaan Neele, *Director of the Doctoral Program & Professor of Historical Theology*  
[adriaan.neele@prts.edu](mailto:adriaan.neele@prts.edu)
- Dr. Stephen Myers, *Associate Professor of Historical Theology*  
[stephen.myers@prts.edu](mailto:stephen.myers@prts.edu)
- Dr. David P. Murray, *Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology*  
[david.murray@prts.edu](mailto:david.murray@prts.edu)
- Dr. Greg Salazar, *Associate Professor of Historical Theology*  
[greg.salazar@prts.edu](mailto:greg.salazar@prts.edu)
- Dr. Daniel Timmer, *Professor of Biblical Studies*  
[daniel.timmer@prts.edu](mailto:daniel.timmer@prts.edu)
- Dr. William VanDoodewaard, *Professor of Church History*  
[william.vandoodewaard@prts.edu](mailto:william.vandoodewaard@prts.edu)
- Rev. Mark Kelderman, *Dean of Students and Spiritual Formation*  
[mark.kelderman@prts.edu](mailto:mark.kelderman@prts.edu)
- Henk Kleyn, *Vice President for Operations*  
[henk.kleyn@prts.edu](mailto:henk.kleyn@prts.edu)
- Jonathon Beeke, *Admissions Director and Registrar* – [jonathon.beeke@prts.edu](mailto:jonathon.beeke@prts.edu)
- Chris Engelsma, *Distance Learning Director*  
[chris.engelsma@prts.edu](mailto:chris.engelsma@prts.edu)
- Chris Hanna, *Development & Marketing*  
[chris.hanna@prts.edu](mailto:chris.hanna@prts.edu)
- Corney Les, *Development Coordinator (CAN)*  
[cles@shaw.ca](mailto:cles@shaw.ca)
- Laura Ladwig, *Librarian*  
[laura.ladwig@prts.edu](mailto:laura.ladwig@prts.edu)
- Kim Dykema, *Library Assistant*  
[kim.dykema@prts.edu](mailto:kim.dykema@prts.edu)
- Ann Dykema, *Faculty Administrative Assistant*  
[ann.dykema@prts.edu](mailto:ann.dykema@prts.edu)
- Seth Huckstead, *Director of Technology*  
[Seth.huckstead@prts.edu](mailto:Seth.huckstead@prts.edu)
- Darryl Bradford, *Video Producer/Editor*  
[darryl.bradford@prts.edu](mailto:darryl.bradford@prts.edu)
- Kim Postma, *ESL Tutor*  
[kim.postma@prts.edu](mailto:kim.postma@prts.edu)

## PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

2965 Leonard Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525  
 Tel: 616-977-0599 • Fax: 616-855-5740  
 Email: [info@prts.edu](mailto:info@prts.edu) • Web: [www.prts.edu](http://www.prts.edu)  
 Seminary EIN: 20-2394341  
 Foundation EIN: 20-2394946



## RENEWAL AND GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Most subscriptions to *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* expire with the November/December 2019 issue. Please forward your renewal in the envelope provided prior to January 15 to avoid missing future issues (unless your church provides payment).

Subscription rates for 2020 have remained unchanged. As the rates fall below costs incurred, donations remain indispensable. As in former years, we are trusting that many of you will be able to assist with smaller or larger gifts to enable us to continue keeping our subscription rates low.

Our appreciation is also extended to those of you who have donated generously for free subscriptions to seminaries, pastors, and prisoners. Please consider doing so again this year. If we had more donations for this purpose, we would be able to reach many more church leaders and prisoners with Reformed, experiential truth.

Please also prayerfully consider providing your friends with a gift subscription to the *BSGT*. That would be an excellent way to spread the Reformed faith and at the same time assist us in keeping our subscription prices as low as they are.

Finally, heartfelt gratitude to all who have assisted in providing material for *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*: our ministerial brothers, assistant editor, and others for their timely contributions; our subscription manager; our typesetters, secretaries, and printer; and our *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* Committee. Without you, this task would not be completed each issue. Above all, may God command His blessing upon this work to many hearts—saving the lost, edifying His people, and glorifying His worthy name. For this, we are totally dependent on His free and sovereign grace.

—JRB

*“Oh, precious thought that we have a Friend above who can sympathize as no other can—that we have an Intercessor who can plead more powerfully than we are even able to conceive—and whose eye of love is on each one of His followers—to support, sustain, and comfort, amid daily trials, vicissitudes, and conflicts.”*

—JOHN MACDUFF

# RENEW NOW!

## RENEW NOW SO AS NOT TO MISS 2020 ISSUES

- Please renew my subscription to *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* for 2020. Payment is enclosed.
- Enclosed please find payment for \_\_\_\_\_ gift subscriptions. Names and addresses of the gift subscriptions are enclosed.
- Enclosed please find a donation for a gift subscription for \_\_\_\_\_ prisoners.
- Please charge my VISA/MC: # \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Subscription price: \$25.00 in the United States; \$30.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$35.00 (surface mail) or \$65.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. (\$36.00 for *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* on CD.) As rates for North America do not cover expenses incurred, donations are most welcome. (Back issues are \$4.25 each.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State/Province/Country \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: **THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH**  
540 Crescent St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 U.S.A.

## 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 31, 2020.

- Enclosed please find \$30.00 for the binding of the 2019 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. My six issues are enclosed.
- Enclosed please find \$50.00 (\$30.00 for binding and \$20.00 for a set of six issues) for a bound copy of the six 2019 issues of the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*.
- I would like to pre-order a bound set of 2020 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 2021, D.V.
- Please charge my VISA/MC: # \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State/Province/Country \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: **THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH**  
540 Crescent St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 U.S.A.

## RELIGION AND CULTURE

## THE RISE OF PROGRESSIVISM IN NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

Progressivism and the commonly named “social gospel” are not new ideas in politics and the North American church, indeed both movements were born and flourished in both the U.S. and Canada in the 19th and early 20th centuries in concurrence with the second Industrial Revolution. Social gospellers, like Christian Socialists, share a belief in the “natural goodness of man,” and the idea that society can be perfected through the use of social programs and government intervention into the economy and family life. While the official end to the Social Gospel movement ended in the U.S. decades ago (and secularized into the New Democratic party in Canada), it has experienced a recent resurgence in modern society with the rise of the religious left. (*World News*) This new movement promotes critical theory and marries the original concepts of the social gospel movement with Marxism, identity politics, and the concepts of economic, social, and racial justice.

“Modern critical theory views reality through the lens of power. Each individual is seen either as oppressed or as an oppressor, depending on their race, class, gender, sexuality, and a number of other categories.... Critical theory understands all relationships in terms of power dynamics; it can’t be confined to a single issue such as class, or race, or gender.... Christians who embrace the paradigm of critical theory as a solution to racism or sexism often question a biblical understanding of gender roles, gender identity, sexual orientation, marriage, parental authority, and even the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

“Finally, critical theory claims that members of oppressed groups have special access to truth because of their ‘lived experience’ of oppression. Such insight is unavailable to members of oppressor groups, who are blinded by their privilege.” (*The Gospel Coalition*)

While in years past the influence of the social justice movement tended to be confined along denominational lines (United Methodist, Episcopal Church in the United States, United and Anglican Church in Canada), in the last decade the advent of the internet and social media has given rise to this ideology, quietly granting it access to members of nearly every denomination, through the outwardly benign means of family and motherhood blogs, social media, podcasts, etc.

## U.S. NEWS AND POLITICS

## PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE COMES OUT IN FAVOR OF POPULATION CONTROL THROUGH ABORTION

During a seven-hour televised townhall on the theory of man-made climate change, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders acknowledged he “very, very strongly” supports population control through means of funding global abortion programs “especially in poor countries.”

“Pushing birth control and abortion as a means of lowering population growth, and specifically of eliminating ‘undesirable’ populations, is not a new tactic on the part of progressives. Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger, for instance, was a pioneer in the eugenics movement’s effort to provide contraception to minority communities, largely to limit the continued growth of what she deemed unwanted populations. Sanger put a fine point on this in her writings: ‘The feebleminded are notoriously prolific in reproduction’.... The worldwide fear about (catastrophic population growth) predictions was acted on most aggressively in India, where the government conducted 8 million sterilizations over a period of two years in the 1970s.” (*National Review*)

## PERSECUTION FOCUS

## CHRISTIANS IN INDIA FACING INCREASED PERSECUTION AS THREAT OF NATIONAL ANTI-CONVERSION LAW LOOMS

Christians in India are facing increasing incidents of violence at the hands of radical Hindus as some in the government are proposing a law to prohibit so-called “forced conversion” to Christianity. The ICC has documented a rise of targeted violence toward Christians in recent months, specifically pastors.

“The news that the BJP-led government intends to propose a national anti-conversion law and the violence that has followed has many Christians across India concerned. Radical Hindu nationalists frequently use the specter of mass religious conversions to pass laws and regulations that limit religious freedom. According to these nationalists, Indian Christians are accused of converting poor Hindus to Christianity en masse by fraudulent means.” While many Christians have been accused of engaging in forced conversions, no one has been convicted of forced conversions in India. This is in spite of the fact that some of the anti-conversion laws have been on the books since 1967. (*International Christian Concern*)

Anna Timmer is married to Jonathan Timmer; they are members of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, and have two children.



## REFORMATION HERITAGE RARE AND USED BOOKS

2965 Leonard St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525 • (616) 855-5744 • (616) 977-0889

Our used book store is open Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
For online shopping, click the “Used Books” tab on [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

We are always seeking books in the Reformed, Presbyterian, and Puritan traditions. Contact Gary Vander Schaaf at (616) 977-0889; email: [gary.vanderschaaf@heritagebooks.org](mailto:gary.vanderschaaf@heritagebooks.org) when you have books to donate, sell, or trade.



# A Light in the Darkness

In our study of the signs that point us to Jesus in the Gospel of John, let's consider the vital sign from John 9. It is a sign that points us to one of the most comfortable things that human beings can enjoy—light. During a recent power outage in our neighborhood, this became very noticeable. Without power, we had no light. But as we found our flashlights and lanterns, life took on a semblance of normalcy and comfort. We could find our way around the house and the neighborhood, surveying the damage of a powerful storm. The spiritual picture is no less real and no less comforting.

Scripture often speaks of spiritual light as a powerful means to drive away spiritual darkness. Think of the prophecy from Isaiah 9:2, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” This prophecy anticipates the sign that we are going to look at from John 9, where Jesus reveals Himself as the Light of the world (John 9:5).

Jesus revealed Himself as the Light of the world in response to a question from His disciples as they observed a blind man alongside the road, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). It was, and is, a common idea that physical deformity or suffering comes as a result of some sort of personal sin. Of course, in a general way, we can say that suffering entered the world through the Fall, where suffering was pronounced as a consequence of sin. However, we need to be careful not to blame suffering on a particular, individual sin, since this does not always hold true. But Jesus takes this question from His disciples and uses it as a teaching moment. The disciples see the physical deformity and look backward, but Jesus sees it and looks forward to reveal Himself as the Light of the world and to show His Father's glory.

Jesus tells them that no one in particular is at fault for this man's blindness and He puts the man's blindness in the context of God's providence. This is God's blindness for God's glory. And it is against the backdrop of this man's blindness that Jesus's revelation comes: “I am the Light of the world.” Jesus shows the urgency of coming to Him as the Light since the night is coming where no man can work (John 9:4). If you are unsaved, Jesus shines as the Light beckoning you to His safety and eternal comfort. Don't look for light in the glittering pleasures of the world, but turn to Jesus, the magnificent, bright light of God's grace and mercy! He has come to take away spiritual darkness and blindness from hearts as dark as yours. That is what Jesus demonstrates in the healing of this blind man.

And so Jesus takes clay in His hands, spits on it, and rubs the man's sightless eyes. There were no special medicinal properties

in that clay or in Jesus's spit. It's really a test of faith. Jesus applies the clay and then commands the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man obeys and washes his eyes in the pool of Siloam, “He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing.” He saw the world with new eyes. Light penetrated the darkness that had defined his world from birth. From monochrome black, to vivid color and light—his entire life had been transformed! What a glorious transformation that points to Jesus as the Light. No matter the spiritual darkness and night that has defined your life to this point, the Light of the world has come to bid you go and wash in the blood of Jesus. Only in Him is there power to push back the darkness of sin! Here is hope for those who walk in thick darkness of unbelief and doubts. Here is hope for those who have backslidden, turning from the Light to the darkness of a perishing world!

What is the reaction to this Light? There are several reactions. First, this man's neighbors weigh in with disbelief, “Is this not he that sat and begged?” (John 9:8). They want to know how he was healed and who healed him. The blind man then witnesses to the power of Jesus. Second, there is the displeasure of the Pharisees. In their self-righteousness, the Pharisees are blinded to the Light. Their darkness only causes them to see the fact that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. They turn on the blind man and demonstrate their unbelief and their blindness by excommunicating him (John 9:34). Third, there is the reaction of his parents. As they are quizzed by the Pharisees, they punt the questions off to their son. They feared the Jews and they feared excommunication from the Jewish religious community.

But in the midst of this all, there is another reaction—that of the man who is healed. He begins to testify boldly of the power of the Light! One of the most beautiful statements in all of Scripture that encourages new disciples of Christ when challenged in their newfound Light and Savior is found in verse 25: “Whether he be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind now I see.” What mattered was the fundamental change that had taken place through Jesus! This man teaches the Pharisees and condemns their unbelief. This man is further taught by Jesus so that the physical transformation points to the spiritual transformation that has taken place at the same time (John 9:36–38). He simply states his faith in Jesus. What will your reaction be to the Light of the world when you see it here, in your life, or in someone else's life? Mere inquisitiveness? Rank unbelief and hostility? Raw fear? Simple faith? Jesus comes with compassion to draw out the faith that was in the man's heart. He does the same today. He passes by as the Light. He shines brightly for all to see. He alone is the Light of the world.

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*  
Publication Number (USPS 010584)  
540 Crescent St. NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

PERIODICAL  
POSTAGE PAID AT  
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

## SAVIOR, BLESSED SAVIOR

Savior, blessed Savior, listen while we sing;  
Hearts and voices ringing, praises to our King;  
All we have to offer, all we hope to be,  
Body, soul, and spirit, all we yield to Thee.

Near, ever nearer, Christ, we draw to Thee,  
Deep in adoration bending low the knee;  
Thou for our redemption cam'st on earth to die;  
Thou, that we might follow, hast gone up on high.

Great and ever greater, are Thy mercies here;  
True and everlasting are the glories there,  
Where no pain nor sorrow, toil nor care is known,  
Where the angel legions circle round Thy throne.

Dark and ever darker, was the wintry past,  
Now a ray of gladness o'er our path is cast;  
Every day that passeth, every hour that flies,  
Tells of love unfeigned, love that never dies.

Clearer still and clearer dawns the light from Heav'n,  
In our sadness bringing news of sin forgiven;  
Life has lost its shadows, pure the light within;  
Thou hast shed Thy radiance on a world of sin.

Brighter still and brighter glows the western sun,  
Shedding all its gladness o'er our work that's done;  
Time will soon be over, toil and sorrow past,  
May we, blessed Savior, find a rest at last.

Onward, ever onward, journeying o'er the road  
Worn by saints before us, journeying on to God;  
Leaving all behind us, may we hasten on,  
Backward never looking till the prize is won.

Higher, then, and higher bear the ransomed soul,  
Earthly toils forgetting, Savior, to its goal;  
Where in joys unthought of saints with angels sing,  
Never weary, raising praises to their King.

—GODFREY THRING

# the **Banner** of Sovereign Grace Truth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

**A PERIODICAL FOR FAMILIES**