

THE  
**BANNER**  
OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH



**SPECIAL THEME: Creation  
Science vs. Faith  
Created Male and Female  
The Divine Marriage  
Enjoying God's Present  
Creation**

**7 Ways a Wife Can Cultivate  
Her Marriage**

**Esau in Your House**

**Exemplary Pilgrims**

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## THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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In this issue you will find meditations focused on Christ's redemptive work, particularly His passion, death, and resurrection. Passion does not mean strong feeling, rather it comes from the Latin "passio" which means to suffer. Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection are central doctrines of the Christian faith, and we pray that these meditations would bring the Savior's person and work home to your soul with power. In this issue, the special themed section focuses on the foundational subject of creation. We encourage you to read these articles through and discuss them with your teen-agers and used these articles to delve deeper into the issues that have become flash points in our culture, not only in matters of science and faith, but also in ethics. Take up! Read! Be fed, nourished, and informed!



# Christ, Our Substitute

*But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities.* —ISAIAH 53:5

The only way to read the Old Testament Scriptures profitably is to read them in terms of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ affirmed this in Luke 24. After having lovingly rebuked the travelers to Emmaus for “being slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (v. 25), He then favors them with an unforgettable exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures, for we read, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (v. 27).

From verse 26 it is clear, however, that in His exposition of the (OT) Scriptures, Christ particularly highlighted those passages that pertained to His suffering as the appointed Lamb of God. His exposition undoubtedly included Isaiah 53. Of all the Old Testament passages that speak of Him as the suffering Servant of the Father, this one excels them all!

Our text, taken from this remarkable prophecy, sets before us the foundation of the gospel, namely, the substitutionary death of the Messiah. It highlights that He would be wounded and bruised for the very people who would despise and reject Him—men and women worthy of the wrath of God and of being banished from Him forever. Paul echoes this when he writes, “In due time Christ died for the *ungodly*” (Rom. 5:6).

How movingly this sets before us the unfathomable gospel of the Scriptures! How astonishing is the good pleasure of Jehovah toward the children of men! He knew that sinners could only be reconciled to Him by giving His beloved Son to be the Substitute of sinners. He, the beloved Son of the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, was therefore wounded on Calvary’s cross for our *transgressions* and bruised for our *iniquities*.

Isaiah here defines the essence of our fallenness. In Adam, we have all violated God’s covenant, and the words “transgression” and “iniquity” are directly related to this violation. We could define *transgressions* as our sins of *commission*, and *iniquities* as our sins of *omission*. In other words, by using both terms Isaiah summarizes the totality of our sinfulness. Our transgressions and iniquities confirm that as sinners we are despisers of God’s covenant, of God’s covenant love, and ultimately of God Himself!

How astonishing, therefore, that Jehovah delights in saving such vile and wretched rebels as we are, and that in order to accomplish this it pleased Him to bruise the Son of His love (Isa. 53:10)—to wound *Him* for our transgressions, and to bruise *Him* for our iniquities! And yet, this is precisely what happened on Golgotha’s hill. He who knew no sin was made sin, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Has this ever become a personal, experiential reality for you? Has the language of our text become your personal confession

of faith, so that you can say, “He was wounded for *my* transgressions, and He was bruised for *my* iniquities?” If not, a future awaits you in which you will eternally be wounded for your transgressions and be bruised for your iniquities by a God who will by no means clear the guilty (Ex. 34:7).

This is exactly what the Spirit of God will teach us in order that we might understand that we need such a divinely appointed Substitute, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, to be reconciled with God. How grievous and unsettling it is when He teaches us to see our transgressions and iniquities from God’s perspective! How precious and altogether lovely Christ then becomes when we may discover in Him God’s blessed solution for our overwhelming guilt and failure—when we may learn experientially that God is well pleased with the perfect, sinless sacrifice of this blessed Substitute!

However, the Spirit, in revealing to us the preciousness and suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ, will also draw us to Him. He will enable us to embrace Him by faith and appropriate what He has accomplished on the cross. In other words, as the Spirit of Christ, He not only reveals Christ to us as God’s acceptable solution for our transgressions and iniquities, but He will also not rest until we may rejoice experientially in the knowledge that Christ has accomplished this salvation for us personally.

What a struggle it can be to appropriate this by faith! Considering the magnitude and heinousness of our sins, it seems too good to be true that Jesus could also have been wounded for *our* transgressions and that He was bruised for *our* iniquities. And yet this is precisely the rich gospel of our text! Therefore, if, by grace, you have trusted in Christ, God’s Word here testifies that the Christ who has become so precious to your soul has also been wounded for *your* transgressions and bruised for *your* iniquities (cf. Isa. 40:1–2).

Dear reader, do you have that assured knowledge today? Without that knowledge, we are without the only comfort in life and death, and we will not be able to meet our Maker at the end of life’s journey. Do not rest until you can say, by grace, that the Christ of the Scriptures, the altogether lovely Servant of the LORD, was also wounded for *your* transgressions, and was bruised for *your* iniquities.

And dear believer, do not live below your privileges! Do not let the painful awareness of your indwelling corruption rob you of the comfort of this text. Therefore, follow the sound advice that for every look we take at ourselves, we must take ten looks at our blessed Substitute. When we may do so, we cannot but join the chorus of the saints of all the ages and jubilate, “He was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities!” Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!

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# The Living One

*Why seek ye the living among the dead?*

—LUKE 24:5b

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! Hallelujah! Every Lord's Day points to His resurrection. He is worthy to be worshiped forevermore!

The wonderful fact of resurrection lies at the very core of Christianity. If Jesus is not raised, there would be no good news. If Jesus is not raised, there would be no church. If Jesus is not raised, there would be no future to look forward to. If Jesus is not raised, Christian believers are of all people most miserable (1 Cor. 15:19).

In Luke 24, with spiritual brilliance Luke sets forth the reality of Christ's resurrection—from the sorrowful and perplexing trip to the tomb at daybreak, to the conversation-filled journey to Emmaus that afternoon, to the climactic appearance of Jesus in the evening. All of this culminated with the call to spread the message of Jesus's resurrection to the nations.

In this meditation, I would like to consider the angels' words to the women who came to the tomb expecting to perform their final preparations for the dead body of the Lord. Specifically, we will look at their opening question, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" In some ways, this is a cryptic query to be clarified unmistakably in the very next words: "He is not here, but is risen." This initial question is a penetrating picture of people trying to understand Jesus's identity, trying to express faith in Him, and trying to worship Him rightly. Yet how easily we can be misguided and governed by sinful will worship!

First, we are given the key to Jesus's identity. He is the living one, in contrast to the human race which is marked in Genesis by the refrain "and he died" (Gen. 5:5, 8, etc.). Here He is the living one because He is God. God is not dependent on man or anything outside of Him for His life, since He has life in Himself. But this declares more than the fact that He is God. He is the glorified Mediator—the following verses indicate: "He is not here, but is risen... the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:6–7). As Mediator, Jesus came to atone for the sins of His people. But He also came to lift His people up to the life that they forfeited because of their sin. This is that eternal life they could never arrive at on their own terms.

The resurrection sets forth the glorious identity of Jesus as the living one! He is your life, dear believer, in every sense

of that word. He is also the one who exposes you when you settle for so much less than He is and has provided.

A second aspect of this question is for the believer to express his or her faith in Christ rightly and in truth. This is indicated in the words "Why seek ye" and the sad confusion that gripped the women. They were at the tomb expressing their faith. They were there seeking the Lord, but it was not an expression of faith in line with the time that had been ushered in. Theirs was a faith clouded by death. Their faith was given expression under death's low overhang. But this was not right and proper for that time and place because the entire circumstance had changed—the one in whom they believed "is not here!"

The right and proper expression of the believer's faith must be seeking the Living Savior according to His Word. True saving faith is faith in *a person who is alive*. Seeking of Christ is not a ritualistic act but an ever-growing knowledge of the living Christ as He is revealed in His Word. This is why the Scriptures and the phrase "remember how he spake unto you" are so vital throughout this chapter (v. 6). Our expressions of faith must have the resurrected, living Savior as their heart and hub—where they pulsate with life and are held together.

The final consideration in this question is the call to worship Christ as the living one. The women bowed their faces to the earth before the angels, but this was out of fear and in uncertainty of what was taking place. Yet the language is strikingly similar to the language of worship. The first word that follows this action is "why"? Why are the women at the tomb? To anoint a body. The body was gone and the angels' question is to say, "It isn't right worship! There is an incongruity here!" The resurrection is one great reason for Christian worship. It is not self-guided or expressed in empty, rote actions. It is worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Beloved, this resurrection Lord's Day, may we worship Christ as alive and the one who regenerates hearts—making us alive—and sanctifies lives—making us like Him. And in doing so, let us look ahead to the final resurrection ushering in the true worship as set forth in Revelation 19:1: "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God!" Alleluia!

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# “Be Careful for Nothing”

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

—PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

These are familiar, yet challenging, words about prayer. All of us have cares and anxieties in our hearts. We wonder what the coming months will hold for our lives. We wonder if we will meet the right person to marry and establish a good life. We wonder if the weather will sustain a good crop from the fields. We linger over concern about a loved one who seems not to have embraced Jesus in faith. With society in such rebellious decline, we worry about what kind of world our children or grandchildren will inhabit. These, and others, are the cares of our hearts. And the apostle Paul tells us that we are not to cradle these cares; rather, we are to bring them to the living God in prayer. Rather than being “careful,” or anxious, about all the things of this life, we are to bring those concerns to our heavenly Father, knowing that He hears the cries of those who are His.

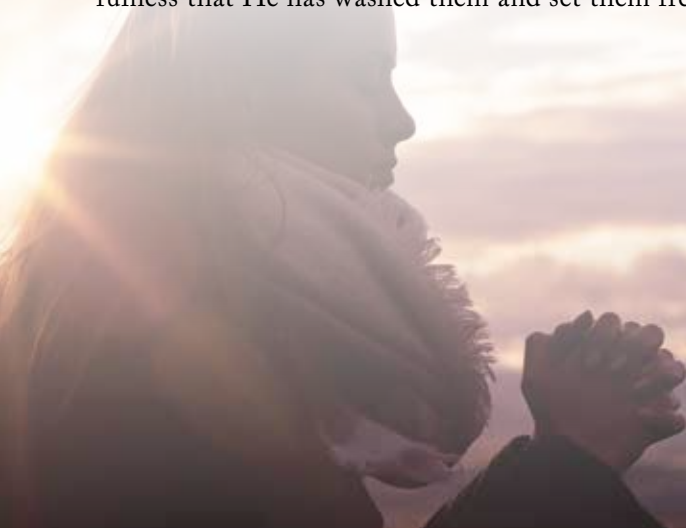
Paul gives some instructions about how we are to bring these concerns to our Lord. First, we bring all of our cares to Him. Nothing is too trivial to be of His concern—do we not know that He has numbered the sands upon the seashore and the hairs upon our heads? Nothing is so grand as to be beyond His control—do we not know that He causes the rising and the falling of the nations? God encourages us to bring all of our cares to Him. And as we do so, we are to pray “with thanksgiving.” Always, we are to remember the soul-saving grace that the triune God has lavished upon us, and the gratitude that flows from that remembrance will season all of our prayers. The Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 116) reminds us that “prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us” and those who remember their redemption will come to God with thankfulness that He has washed them and set them free.

In the course of a normal, busy Christian life, it can be hard to do these things; hard to bring everything to the Lord; challenging always to give thanks. But the most challenging thing of all comes in verse 7. There, Paul promises that when we come thus to God in prayer, we will know a peace that “passeth all understanding.” What is challenging about that? Think carefully about what Paul is saying. If we pray for our loved one to be brought to faith and he is quickly brought to repentance and faith, we know peace. If we pray for the rains to come and they come and water the fields, we know peace. But this kind of peace makes sense. It does not surpass understanding. If we get from the Lord what we ask from Him the very next day, our peace makes all of the sense in the world. It does not pass understanding. But if we pray for the soul of our loved one and no softening seems to come; or if we pray for rain and the clouds still stay away—and yet still we know peace—that peace passes all understanding. That peace is rooted not in the acquisition of our requests but in our trust in the One to whom we pray. We trust His power to do all things, we trust the eternal magnitude of His love for us, and we trust His wisdom to do all things well. We have brought our concerns before Him in prayer and so we know that whatever He does with them is right and will work only for His glory and our good. That is what prayer is. It is not our giving to God a list of what He must do to bring us peace. It is our turning over our cares and concerns to God, trusting that in His boundless power, infinite love, and unsearchable wisdom, He will do right.

Let us be a people of prayer, trusting not in the power of our prayers, but in the ineffable goodness of the God who has promised us that He hears them. Then, dear brothers and sisters, in all seasons, we will know a peace that passes all understanding.

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## EXEMPLARY PILGRIMS: William Brewster & William Bradford

*This is the first of several editorials consisting of short summary addresses given on last year's PRTS New England Tour at various historical sites about God-fearing and influential Puritan and Pilgrim leaders in New England. This first editorial presents two influential Pilgrims. The Pilgrims are often described as some of the more "radical" Puritans who cut ties completely with the Church of England.*

### William and Mary Brewster

William Brewster (1566/7–1644) was born at Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, England. He was one of the original members of the historic Separatist congregation at Scrooby that became the nucleus of the now-famous Pilgrim church. In that church, Brewster, though a layman, became an influential figure, serving alongside pastor John Smyth.

Brewster was a man of industrious zeal for Christ. The church met on Lord's Day afternoons in Brewster's historic old manor house. Bradford wrote of Brewster's hospitality: "with great love he entertained them when they came, making provision for them, to his great charge." And he says, "He did much good in the country where he lived in promoting and furthering religion, not only by his practice and example of provoking and encouraging of others, but by procuring good preachers to the places thereabout,

and drawing on of others to assist and help forward such a work, [while] he himself most commonly [remained] deepest in charge." John Brown writes of Brewster's influence in Scrooby, saying "he had a foremost part in promoting the spiritual welfare of the district. That the preachers in the churches round were the earnest men they were seems to have been largely owing to him."<sup>1</sup>

The political upheaval of the times became a scourge for Brewster as he faced persecution for his nonconformist convictions. When the group sought to emigrate to the Low Countries, Brewster was briefly jailed. After emigrating to the Low Countries and relocating to Leiden, Brewster was ordained as an elder of the Scrooby congregation, where he served alongside the pastor, John Robinson. But threats of persecution spurred Brewster to emigrate further, probably due in part to Brewster's involvement in printing forbidden Protestant literature. When the original Pilgrim band set sail for America, Robinson stayed behind and Brewster became the spiritual leader of the community. Though he never graduated from ministerial studies, he was well-respected and much loved as the functional pastor of the new Plymouth Colony.

There, Brewster led the church. He led a sincere and earnest ministry and practiced the Puritan plain style of



preaching. His biographer writes that he “preached, taught, prayed, catechized, and disciplined the congregation. His plain sermons were ‘very moving and stirring of affections’ and his prayers were capable of ‘ripping up the heart and conscience before God.’”<sup>2</sup> Governor Bradford much esteemed him and counted him a personal advisor for all weighty affairs.

William and Mary Brewster (who greatly assisted and supported her husband) had six children with some unique names: Jonathan, Patience, Fear, Love, Wrestling, and an unidentified child who died in infancy. William, who lived to the ripe old age of about eighty years (quite remarkable considering the primitive conditions of Plymouth), is remembered today as a spiritual patriarch of the new world, where he labored for about twenty-four years.

### Reflections:

1. Use your gifts for God. Though not formally ordained as a pastor, Brewster knew the Word well and did good to many souls through hospitality, publishing, and soul-stirring teaching. You don’t have to be an ordained pastor to leave an indelible mark on the world for Christ. Do you have untapped opportunities to glorify God through these or similar areas of ministry?
2. Let us never forget that America was grounded in plain preaching. How desperately we need this again!

### William Bradford

William Bradford (c. 1590–1657) was one of the Pilgrim Fathers, known for being the sagacious and courageous governor of the Plymouth Colony in America.

Bradford was born in Austerfield, Yorkshire. Orphaned through the death of both his parents by the age of seven, he was raised by relatives. He evinced uncommon sensitivity to the things of God from his youth. By the age of twelve, he attended the nonconformist congregation in Babworth, which was about a ten-mile walk from Austerfield. There, he came under the Reformed gospel through Robert Clyfton, the Puritan minister of that congregation. Through this connection, he later became involved with the separatist congregation at Scrooby (South of Yorkshire). When this congregation fled persecution in England and emigrated to the Low Countries, Bradford went with them. He wrote that their Puritan convictions compelled them to flee from England, for they merely desired to worship God “according to the simplicity of the gospel; without the mixture of men’s inventions.”<sup>3</sup> He wrote that such inventions contaminated the church with popish errors under the influence of Satan and had pervaded the state-controlled church in England and the Low Countries.

Bradford and the Scrooby congregation ended up in Leiden, under the ministry of the well-known John Robinson.

Under his able leadership the congregation grew to several hundred. But their situation was not very safe there either. Poverty and hardship plagued the English emigrants, and the threat of persecution loomed over their heads. It was there that the first band of Pilgrims formed who would embark on the transatlantic voyage in the *Mayflower*.

After arriving in America, Bradford braved the cruel hardships of pioneering the new region. Bradford’s wife fell overboard off the deck of the *Mayflower* into the cold waters and drowned. By grace, despite overwhelming sorrow, Bradford pressed on. He was elected governor in 1621 after the first governor, John Carver, died.

Bradford wrote an extensive journal between 1630 and 1651, titled *Of Plymouth Plantation*. It chronicled his experiences along with the events of the first thirty years of Plymouth Colony. It is the most important primary source that relates the history of this important period, and it emanates the fragrance of Protestant, Puritan, and Reformed theology. Historians refer to its genre as “providential history,” because it relates events in terms of God’s sovereign and overriding providence. Bradford wrote this work as a testimony to subsequent generations:

May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice, and looked on their adversity, etc. Let them therefore praise the Lord because He is good, and His mercies endure forever.<sup>4</sup>

### Reflections:

1. Notice Bradford’s positive note of praise as he reflects on God’s providential dealings. This was in spite of horrendous trials, brutal winters, plagues, wars, the death of his wife, and so many other hardships! Why do we complain so easily even about little things in life?
2. Meditate about how a biblical, Reformed view of God’s sovereignty is essential for interpreting providence also in your own life, and then seek grace to surrender your entire life afresh to God.
3. Do your trials drive you to doubt God, or to depend on and trust Him more?

1. John Brown, *The Pilgrim Fathers* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1895), 93.

2. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press), 7:532.

3. William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation* (New York: E. Maynard, 1890), 8.

4. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Boston: Secretary of the Commonwealth, 1900), 97.

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# A PICTURE WORTH A SOUL

## *Zechariah 3*

Three months after his call to be a prophet, Zechariah received a comprehensive revelation concerning the people and kingdom of God in a series of visions in the night. Zechariah preached after the Babylonian captivity and did much to comfort and reassure a people who had experienced exile. Much of his encouragement focused on predictions about the Messiah and His work—some of the most specific in all the Old Testament. His message of hope was certain and constantly authenticated by the word of the Lord. Yet, the spiritually minded, particularly, would have been conscious that their personal holiness did not merit such grandiose promises. And they would have been correct. The basis of favor was not in their merits; the basis was God’s grace. What had national implications also had personal application. Chapter 3 records the fourth in the series of visions and narrows the focus from the nation to the individual. It addresses the very personal issue of salvation from sin and moral defilement.

The principal scene of this fourth vision centers on Joshua the High Priest. Since the High Priest was the paramount representative of the people of God, we must see him here not only in terms of his own person but also in terms of his office. What is true of Joshua is true for every justified sinner. That is the ultimate point of the vision as it symbolically pictures the gospel truth of free and gracious justification. As we meditate on this vision, keep in mind the classic Reformed and biblically precise definition of justification in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone” (Q. 33). This vision is instructive to teach sinners what must be done if they are to be plucked from the burning (Zech. 3:2); it is instructive to saints to remind them that none can lay anything to the charge of God’s elect because it is God that justifies (Rom. 8:33). Four essential components of justification are pictured in the vision. They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. That may or may not be true, but here is a picture that is worth a soul.

*First, the need for justification is great.* The passage begins with a judicial scene in which Joshua, the accused, is

standing in the presence of the angel of the Lord, the judge. This is the messenger who is Yahweh, a preincarnate designation of Christ. As he stands before the Lord, Satan is at his right hand, the place of the prosecutor in the judicial proceedings. Satan literally means *the accuser* or *adversary* and is a noun form of the verb translated here as “to resist.” In other words, Satan was being Satan, or the accuser was accusing. He is the great adversary who accuses God to us (Genesis 3) and us to God (see Job 1–2). The specific accusation against Joshua is not recorded but can be inferred from how Joshua is dressed (Zech. 3:3). He stands silently, dressed in detestably filthy garments with no self-defense before the Judge. The language is graphic in describing the garments as heinously detestable and disgusting, fouled by excrement and vomit. The sight is not pretty, but it vividly pictures how man appears before God in all the filthy rags of his own righteousness. It is a true and accurate picture of the sinner’s moral pollution and how every man on his own stands before God. Because of unrighteousness, all men are guilty before the just God. That part of Satan’s accusation was true because man has no inherent right to stand before God and to be accepted on his own merit. Joshua’s vile condition cries for something to be done. It requires a free justification just as Paul argues: Because all have sinned, God must justify freely or there could be no justification (see the logic of Rom. 3:23–24).

*Second, the act of justification is gracious.* Joshua was silent; he offered no self-defense; he was guilty as charged. But the vision highlights something of the beauty of the gospel in that God does for man what man cannot do for himself. Seemingly out of the blue, God rebukes Satan and rescues Joshua as a brand plucked from the burning. The accuser is swept away with no power to condemn because God’s plucking the sinner from destruction meant that none could pluck the sinner from His hand. Joshua was fit for destruction for sure, but He was delivered by grace. Joshua was accepted before the Lord and allowed to stand in His presence. The text highlights two essential elements of that acceptance that correspond precisely to the definition of justification. (1) The Lord graciously pardoned sin. This is pictured by the removal of the filthy garments and is explained directly: “I have



caused thine iniquity to pass from thee” (Zech. 3:4). The word “iniquity” refers not to the acts of sins but the consequences. The actual sins could not be undone, but the resulting guilt and, therefore, the liability for punishment and penalty were removed. But taking away the filthy garments alone would only result in nakedness before God and the potential to foul things up again. Something positive had to be done. (2) So the Lord provided righteousness. Not only were the filthy garments removed, but they were replaced with costly and glorious clothes. The fair mitre or turban refers to the headdress of the High Priest inscribed with the engraving, “Holiness to the Lord” (Ex. 28:36). The filth was replaced by radiating holiness, without which no man can see God. This represents that robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation (Isa. 61:10), that renders the wearer presentable before the Lord. In justification, God both pardons sin and imputes righteousness, and there can be no condemnation for those to whom God has imputed the righteousness of Christ.

*Third, the ground of justification is solid.* God’s pardoning sinners is gracious, but it is not capricious. This brings us to the Branch (Zech. 3:8). It is the Lord’s sending the Branch that would be the meritorious grounds by which He justifies sinners. That the Branch is called the servant builds on all of Isaiah’s antecedent theology that identifies the servant as God’s elect One who would do all of His pleasure and bear the sins of His people (Isa. 42, 49–50, 53). The title speaks of Christ’s real humanity and His humble obedience both in life and to death. The reference to iniquity’s being removed in one day (Zech. 3:9) points to His cross, the only place where iniquity was effectively removed since forgiveness requires the shedding of blood. Christ’s perfect life (His active obedience) and His effectual death (His passive obedience) is the only meritorious ground for salvation.

*Fourth, the demand of justification is logical.* Zechariah makes it clear that a change in legal standing demands a change in moral behavior. A change in standing demands a change in walking. Justification always issues

in sanctification; position always affects experience. The beauty, wonder, and power of grace is that it never leaves a man where it finds him. Those who are justified are to persevere in godliness by walking in God’s ways (a manner of life conforming to God’s law), keeping His charge (obedience and fidelity to God’s ordinances), and maintaining justice (Zech. 3:7). Those justified are to be like Christ; they are to imitate and represent Him. Zechariah described Joshua and his fellows as “men wondered at” (v. 8). Literally, they were “men of a sign,” men who were to be types of something else; they were to signify the Branch. So it is that every justified sinner is to be like Christ, to be conformed to His image.

The vision begins with a picture of despair coming from a condemning heart that too often hears the accusations of the accuser. It ends with the assurance and hope that God will remove every obstacle to blessing for His people, even the sin that separates us from Him (Isa. 59:2). The vision illustrates John’s declaration that “if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart” (1 John 3:20). Rather than being abandoned to the fire (Zech. 3:2), God’s people are as a stone upon which are seven eyes (v. 9). Opinions differ as to what this means, but I would suggest that stone represents the Lord’s people, His kingdom, upon or toward which He directs His seven eyes, a symbol of His omniscience and consequent protecting care. They will also enjoy, because of the work of the Branch, peace and prosperity. This is the point of the symbolism in verse 10 of calling every man neighbor (peace) and residing under the vine and fig tree (prosperity). God has the answers to all our concerns, both corporate and individual. What He has promised that seems too good to be true is not. His providing the means for salvation from sin by the Branch assures us that everything else He has promised is sure. Paul put it this way: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

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**THE VISION BEGINS WITH A PICTURE OF DESPAIR COMING FROM A CONDEMNING HEART THAT TOO OFTEN HEARS THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE ACCUSER. IT ENDS WITH THE ASSURANCE AND HOPE THAT GOD WILL REMOVE EVERY OBSTACLE TO BLESSING FOR HIS PEOPLE, EVEN THE SIN THAT SEPARATES US FROM HIM (ISA. 59:2).**

# LEARNING CHRIST (2)

## *Ephesians 4:20–21*

Last time we saw that the essence of Christianity is described in the Bible as “learning” or “knowing Christ” (Eph. 4:20–21) In this second, concluding installment we will trace how Paul unpacks this truth in three further lessons relating to life in the school of Christ.

### NOT THIS WAY

As Paul is exhorting the Ephesians, he makes clear that there is a wrong way of learning Christ as well as a right way. He writes: “You have *not so* learned Christ” (Eph. 4:20). What does Paul mean? He means that you have learned Christ the wrong way, first, *if you are content to live in old patterns of living*. That is what some of the Ephesians were imagining, or perhaps some among them were practicing. They were content to settle on their lees and live like those around them. That can’t be. Because when you learn Christ, there comes a real, visible difference in your life. The Christ you are learning is transforming you and making you new.

You have learned Christ the wrong way, second, *if you are making excuses for sin*. For those who have truly learned Christ, the power of sin has been broken in their lives, and the lies that once captivated you can no longer hold you. Instead of excusing them, believers own their sins. Instead of minimizing sin, they see it for what it is—sin against God, and deserving of His just displeasure (Ps. 51:4). Philip Henry wrote, “There is no bridle like [learning Christ] to keep us from sin. When a temptation to sin comes, it says—No, I have not so learned Christ. I thank God, I am better taught.”<sup>1</sup>

You have not learned Christ, third, *if you imagine Christ will not conquer sin in your lives*. When you are learning Christ, you want to put on the new man, because He is Christ, and you want to put off the old man, because he is not Christ. Not that you do it perfectly. There is sadly much sloth and straying even by true Christ-learners, but they do very much want Christ as their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). They want to see Jesus, learn Jesus, and be changed by Jesus—nothing less!

To help us understand what Paul is saying, an example might help. If you were learning to play violin, and had taken lessons for months or maybe even years from a very accomplished violinist, and you were still doing everything wrong, holding the violin and the bow the wrong

way, and doing everything the opposite of how you had been taught, someone could say to you, “You did not *so* learn to play the violin.” In other words, “This can’t be the result of all those months or years of training; there is no way that there would be *no* difference in the way you’re able to handle a violin.” Just like that, Paul is saying: Christ did not so teach you so as to make no difference in your life. In other words, learning Christ always *does* make a difference. It has to. He is such an amazing lesson and He is such an effective teacher. If another person needed to teach you Christ, things would be hopeless. However, as He is both the priest and the sacrifice, so Christ can be both the teacher and the lesson. He, after all, is “all” (Col. 3:11). But how then does He teach?

### THIS WAY

In Ephesians 4:21 Paul unpacks how Christ as teacher teaches Himself as lesson.

1. *We need to listen to Christ*: “If so be that ye have heard him” (Eph. 4:21). The Ephesians lived in Asia Minor, far from Jerusalem and from the places where Christ had lived and ministered while He was on earth. And at the time Paul was writing this letter, it was some thirty years after Jesus had ascended into heaven. The Ephesians had not literally heard Christ speak. But wherever the gospel is preached, Christ can be heard. To hear Christ, doesn’t just mean to hear the good news of the gospel with our literal ears. As Christ said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). This hearing of Christ is the hearing of faith. It includes a spiritual understanding of what Christ is saying. It involves God’s unveiling to them what they are as He sees them. It involves following the way Christ goes and has set forth for them. Do you hear Him like this?
2. *We need to be united to Christ*. Ephesians 4:21 actually says “and have been taught by (literally, *in*) him.” What Paul is saying is that *believers are taught in union with Christ*. They are in a very intimate relationship with Him, as Paul makes clear in the next chapter (Eph. 5:23–30). Sometimes after decades of marriage, a husband and a wife know each other so well that they know each other’s thoughts. That’s how it can be between believers and their Lord. They are united



to Him. And His words are so meaningful. They do more than inform; they transform. They are more than just language; they are life. Jesus said as much. He said His words “are spirit and they are life!” (John 6:63). Believers are united to Christ by faith. He fills up their needs and teaches them day by day, till they find their “all” in Him.

3. *We need to find all truth in Christ.* Some wonder where to find truth. They search the universe, but Paul knew where to find it. It was all in Jesus (Eph. 4:21). The philosopher grows grey scaling the Everest of human learning and comes back with a few specks of truth. But you, simple believer, transfixed on Jesus, know infinitely more because all truth is in Jesus. When we first discover the truth of salvation in Christ, we are amazed that we find such love for sinners, and we bask in it. But over time, we find more in Him. We find holiness, purity, wisdom, patience, kindness, and so much more. The more we study, the more we see in Him. Like spokes on a wheel, they all hold together in Christ. He is the hub of everything.

### IS IT SO?

There is an “if” at the beginning at verse 21. “If so be that ye have heard...and been taught.” Paul is assuming that is the case for the Ephesians, but is it true for you? Have you heard in this way? Have you been taught in this way? Do you no longer find “what you hold to” (your belief) in

all the wrong places, but rather in Christ? That is where it is. Should we not all learn Christ? Believers, should we not look to Him more? Should we not hear what Christ is teaching to us? Do you walk with Him? He has so much to teach us.

Notice the name Paul uses for Him at the end of verse 21: “Jesus.” He has switched from His official name Christ to His personal name Jesus. “As the truth is in Jesus.” He would have us think of the approachable Savior, who in the flesh first made His appearance on the fields of Ephrata, then growing up in Galilee, and then in the temple, as a twelve-year-old boy who astounded the doctors (Luke 2:46). They should have learned Him! All the truth was in Him, so clear, so close, so convicting, so comforting. And where is the truth more clearly evident than when standing before Pilate, who asked Him: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). He stood there as Truth before a world that crucified Him, but as He is lifted up, He draws all sorts of people, including Greeks, who sought learning and wisdom everywhere, but now say: “We would see Jesus” (John 12:21). He will help you unlearn everything, and you will find all truth in Jesus, and when you do, everything about Him will make your old life unthinkable, and impossible.

1. Matthew Henry, *The Life of Rev. Philip Henry, A.M.* (London: William Ball, 1839), 93.

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## ACTS OF KINDNESS

Suggested Reading: John 15:1–12

*How can we be kind to others, when we all are so busy doing our own things?*

Kindness to others is important. So important, in fact, that in Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus teaches that the distinction between those entering heaven and those barred from entering is whether they showed kindness to others or not.

In Matthew 25 Jesus uses the following examples to illustrate kindness to others: giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the stranger, clothing to the naked, and visiting those who are sick or in prison. None of these activities is difficult to do, limited to special people, or newsworthy. None requires significant education, skill, or wealth to carry out. Anyone can do them. In fact, when you read the reaction from those that Christ the King credits with doing such acts of kindness to Him, they cannot remember when they did them. They ask Jesus, “When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” (Matt. 25:38–39). And how will Jesus answer them? “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, insomuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40).

Showing kindness to one of the least in Jesus’s family is doing so, as it were, to Jesus Christ Himself. What may appear as a simple act of kindness to us or others now becomes an action of eternal importance! And we know that God commands us to love and show kindness not only to His saved children, but to all people, even to our enemies (Matt. 5:38–48).

How can we show kindness to others during our busy schedules? In hundreds of ways. Speaking with an outsider at school or work is “taking in the stranger.” A kind word of comfort to one who is mourning is “giving a refreshing drink to the thirsty.” A word of encouragement to one who is depressed is “giving food to the hungry.” Protecting one who feels bullied by peers is “clothing the naked.” Simply giving a friendly greeting, asking about a fellow employee’s ill mother, offering to take an extra shift for a stressed out worker, giving a kind smile, stopping your car to allow another to merge into traffic, giving a well-deserved compliment to a fellow student, and hundreds of more examples all show acts of kindness as we go about our daily business. Speaking a grateful word to a parent, thanking a teacher, or sharing appreciation with your pastor reveals this same spirit. Visiting the elderly in a care home, the sick in a hospital, or an inmate in prison all communicate kindness and love for others.

“But,” you ask, “if I do these things, how will I know what to say? And what to do?” The Lord Jesus provides us with the answer. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Simply say and do that which you would want someone to do or say if you were in the same situation.

*Everyone can say and do kind things to others. Do you? Do you pray and look for opportunities to do so as you go about your daily business? And when you see opportunities, do you promptly speak and act? What does Jesus mean in Matthew 7:12 when He teaches that we are to do unto others as we would have others to do to us, “for this is the law and the prophets”? In one word, what does God’s law require? What is meant by “the prophets”?*

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## GUILT AND SIN

Suggested Reading: Psalm 51, Psalm 32, 1 John 2:1–2

*How do I deal with a deep guilt of a terrible sin after I've been saved?*

Sin can haunt us. The guilt of sin can plague us. What do you do with that guilt? Sometimes the guilt comes from sins committed before grace. Sometimes it comes from sins committed after grace. Sin is always present, even with believers (Rom. 7:14–25). How do you deal with that guilt, whether it's sin before being saved or after being saved?

First, confess your sin. Covering sin only brings misery. Proverbs 28:13 tells us, “Whoso covereth his sins, shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” If you have never confessed sin before, or whether you have done it for the hundredth time, confession before God and confession to others whom you have hurt and wronged is the proper way to deal with sin and its guilt.

Second, look to Christ. This is where David found forgiveness and release from the guilt that bound him. Read Psalm 51 and Psalm 32. These Psalms encourage you to

look outside of yourself for forgiveness and cleansing in Christ. It is by looking at the cross, where God dealt with sin and guilt in Jesus, that your sin and guilt can be dealt with. Often, the nature of sin and guilt is that it hangs on and clings to us, but there is encouragement in 1 John 2:1–2, “If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Christ alone can take away your guilt.

Third, redefine yourself in gospel terms. If you are a new creature in Christ, then guilt and sin do not have the final word. Even though sin and guilt cling to us, it is Christ that holds us fast. He is the One who redefines our nature and identity. If you are a new creature, press forward in Christ instead of looking backward and letting guilt and sin define who you are.

*Have you confessed your sin? Have you looked to Christ for cleansing and release from guilt? How will you define your identity?*

## BELIEVERS AND SUICIDE

Suggested Reading: Job 3, Matthew 27:1–10

*Does committing suicide condemn a believer to hell?*

Despair is the devil's tool to drive a believer to consider ending his or her own life. Satan knows the weaknesses of the vulnerable, the depressed, the naturally pessimistic, or even those who are positively natured. He knows where to tempt you with taking your own life as an “out” of the problems and trials you face. This is what we learn from the life of Job. In Job 3, Job cursed the day of his birth and longed for the day of his death. But Job never took his own life. He did not see suicide as an option even though he suffered intense trials. Job shows us, though, that true believers can wrestle with suicidal thoughts. His life offers hope in the midst of trials. Contrast these words of Job 3 with those of Matthew 27:1–10 and the life of Judas. Judas despaired. He did not see any gospel hope of returning to Jesus whom he had betrayed. He sadly and bitterly destroyed the life that God had given him. His actions revealed that he never believed. His life and death stand as a warning.

But Judas was not a believer, was he? Where does that leave those who have professed faith in Christ and lived sincerely all their days but find life unbearable? First, let's

talk about suicide itself. Suicide is sin. It is a clear transgression of the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13). Suicide is a tremendously selfish sin. It leaves behind grieving family members who are only left with more questions than answers, and probably guilt too, for not offering help sooner. Suicide is not the escape from trials, no matter how hard they are. There is help for those who are struggling with trials.

Committing suicide cuts God out of the picture of a person's life. To say that God cannot help in a particular trial says that God is not enough. That is simply untrue. Suicide will say a lot about our view of God in the middle of challenges. God is able to bring about good in our trial. Consider Job. God brought him out of his challenges into a place where Job could think clearly and consider who God was. This led him to repentance in dust and ashes (Job 42). Where does this leave someone who professed to believe and lived accordingly and yet took his own life? Suicide is a serious sin, though not the unforgivable sin. God is the Judge. That's where we need to leave this question.

*Are you struggling with depression and dark thoughts? How will your view of God determine your course of action? Will you seek help, knowing that it's available?*

## Science vs. Faith: The Great False Dichotomy

One of the recurring themes in Christian higher education is the perceived challenge of integrating the biblical Christian faith with science. We are told that there is a contradiction between much of what is found in science and a plain reading of Scripture. Because of this apparent contradiction, integrating science and the Christian faith has become one of the biggest challenges for both Christian higher education and for believers who seek to understand what God's Word has to say about reality. Although we are told that the Bible and science are at odds, few seem to critically analyze the perceived axiom itself. But what if there is no need for such integration because the perceived dilemma does not really exist? What if it is really a false dilemma? What if the axiom that science and faith cannot be reconciled is altogether wrong? That is exactly the point of this article. We will prove that the perceived dichotomy between science and faith is really a false dichotomy, and that there can logically be absolutely no tension between the Christian faith and true science.

The perceived dichotomy between science and the Christian faith is, in reality, a false dichotomy. It can be explained by looking at the different *presuppositions* which each side chooses to believe. According to Greg Bahnsen, a presupposition is an elementary assumption in one's reasoning or in the process by which opinions are formed.<sup>1</sup> Every scientific outcome will be determined *a priori* by the presuppositions that the scientist, who is engaged in the scientific endeavor, holds by faith. Nobody is presupposition-free but we all need presuppositions, by way of worldview, in order to make sense of reality. In other words, *before* a person—Christian or non-Christian—begins any scientific endeavor, he already holds basic presuppositions concerning *metaphysics*, *epistemology*, and *ethics*. He holds these presuppositions or assumptions *by faith* since he cannot gain any knowledge or understanding without having a concept about reality (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), and morality (ethics) first.

It is very important for us to understand that a person who is endeavoring on any scientific conquest holds such presuppositions by faith before any kind of science is attempted. For the purposes of this article, we define science as the process of gaining knowledge of any kind. The particular field or kind of science is irrelevant for our purposes as this problem refers to all kinds of human thinking and reasoning. The outcome of any scientific endeavor will always be determined on the basis of the specific presuppositions a person has adopted beforehand by faith. A person who, for example, has subscribed himself to the metaphysical concept of secular naturalism has made an *a priori* commitment not to accept the supernatural at all and so his research outcomes will always be interpreted according to this *a priori* faith-commitment. Does this mean that a

scientist who has adopted a secular naturalistic worldview can never discover anything true or useful? Such a scientist can of course discover or develop things that are true or useful for mankind, but there are two major limitations for him. The first one is that, while he can find and discover fragments of truth, like discovering a new and helpful fact about genetics, he will never fully know. He does not know why this fact exists or to what ultimate end it exists. He does not accept the existence of God in his thinking and therefore he will not accept Him as the source and His glory as the end of all reality.

At this point it might be noted that the secular scientist can only do any kind of science because he “steals” or makes assumptions that can only be assumed through the existence of the immutable, unchangeable, and faithful Creator of the universe. Such a scientist, for example, assumes reliable laws of nature without logical justification, and he works with them, assuming repeatability without ever being able to account for such an orderly universe apart from the God of the Bible (Rom. 1:25). Secondly, as soon as any research object is rooted in a supernatural act of God, the secular naturalist scientist will necessarily always be wrong. This is also where the Christian scientist who has sadly adopted naturalistic presuppositions for his “science” will be wrong in exactly the same way. And that's exactly from where the perceived tension comes. It is not to be found between biblical faith vs. science but between biblical faith vs. a “science” based on naturalistic, counter-biblical presuppositions. It is therefore, not a battle between an “irrational faith” vs. “rational science” but a battle between the reasonable Christian faith vs. an unreasonable competing faith.

We have to understand that there is no such thing as *neutrality* when it comes to scientific endeavors, and therefore it is of the utmost importance to make sure that a scientist is aware of his or her particular biases and presuppositions. J. Gresham Machen comments on the nature of neutrality and science that “the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity...in trying to remove from Christianity everything that could possibly be objected to in the name of science, in trying to bribe off the enemy by those concessions which the enemy most desires, the apologist has really abandoned what he started out to defend.”<sup>2</sup> Regarding those who claim neutrality, DeMar adds that “they do not approach any issue neutrally. Any claim to neutrality is a pretense, and it is philosophically impossible.”<sup>3</sup> While secular scientists constantly claim neutrality, the opposite is true. Romans 1:18–19 describes the mindset of the unbeliever and therefore also the mindset of the unbelieving scientist: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all



ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” The scientist who thinks that he is neutral or “facts-only,” as is often claimed, has already fallen into the trap of his own biases without even knowing it.

What then does this mean for the Christian scientist? Has the Bible anything to contribute to the scientific endeavor at all? Or is God’s Word only useful for salvation and personal piety as is often claimed? If the Bible is only useful for personal salvation, then there would be no difference at all between a Christian scientist and a secular scientist. And that is precisely the very sad part in all of this. Many scientists in the Christian realm, apparently in order to find acceptance with secular academia, utilize the same secular-naturalistic presuppositions as non-Christian scientists, and then they claim that their supposedly neutral research has rendered results that are in conflict with the perceived teachings of God’s Word. But that is not true, as we have already shown. Of course, some still might ask why it should even be considered a problem if there is no difference between secular science and Christian science. The problem is that those Christian scientists who see no difference between the two approaches are engaging in the fallacy of *circular reasoning*. All thinking, and therefore all scientific activity, is about starting points. Just like secular scientists, such Christian scientists start with secular counter-biblical assumptions and then they are often surprised to receive results which are clearly in conflict with the Scriptures. It is exactly this kind of fallacious, circular reasoning that has actually created the whole (perceived) tension between science and the Bible. Concerning the nature of such circular reasoning, Lisle comments that “it is fallacious if used in arguments that do not involve necessary foundational truth claims.”<sup>4</sup> Secular scientists and Christian scientists who work on the basis of the same secular materialistic presuppositions love to claim “neutrality” and keep assuring us that they’ll go “wherever the facts lead,” but in reality, as we have already seen, the outcome of their research has already been determined by their *a priori* faith-commitment to secular, naturalistic assumptions.

We are often confronted with the notion that scientists can neutrally interpret “general revelation” in an unbiased way, apart from biblical presuppositions, in order to find real truth. We are then told that because Scripture has multiple possible interpretations, we must look to general revelation to find Scripture’s intended meaning. But such a notion is preposterous. Of course, there are sometimes different interpretations of biblical texts, but to use this as an excuse to abandon biblical validity for doing science apart from (=contrary to) biblical principles means to engage in the *abusus non tollit usum* fallacy—that is, occasional abuse doesn’t render the proper use invalid! A researcher needs a worldview, consisting of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics in order to interpret general revelation. If he is not using a biblical worldview, he

must necessarily use a non-biblical worldview—which will, of course, lead him to non-biblical results. That describes the whole problem at hand. Even if we consider some differences in the interpretations of some passages of Scripture, how many different interpretations are there of general revelation apart from Scripture? How often have scientists erred about all kinds of things in the history of the world? Furthermore, it should be clear to all that propositional Word-truth is much clearer as it comes directly from the mind of God and is not affected by the fall, as general revelation is. More and more we are hearing from Christian academics that we need the natural scientist’s “unbiased” interpretation of general revelation in order to understand Scripture properly, and we are pushed to declare them a new class of priests in order to tell us how to (re)interpret God’s Word properly. Thereby the Christian scientist with his counter-biblical presuppositions lifts himself and his personal interpretation of general revelation above God’s Word. Again, we see that it is all about starting points.

The so-called “scientific method” itself is biased because it is based on naturalistic empiricism—it does not allow for the supernatural at all. The “scientific method” itself, therefore, is a *faith commitment* and was not determined through any valid, scientific process. Therefore, we can see that the “scientific method” itself is not all that scientific but based on counter-biblical philosophical assumptions which are itself held *by faith*. All this, of course, begs the question: since we know that the non-Christian is by no means neutral, what about us? Can we, as Christians, claim neutrality in our research? The answer to this question is an emphatic “no.” Neither the non-Christian nor the Christian are unbiased in their interpretation of reality, since they both need a worldview (consisting of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics) in order to be able to *even begin to interpret reality*. The non-Christian is not neutral, but neither is the Christian. Van Til rightly stated that the Bible is “authoritative on every subject about which it speaks. And moreover, it speaks of everything.”<sup>5</sup> It is the only source of special revelation about creation from God; it should be the starting point from which any scientific interpretation is developed. If science is done from the basis of the affirmation of the divine inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, it requires scientists to develop and analyze their theories and interpretations according to what has been revealed in God’s Word. The problem with many Christians today is not one of outright denying the truths of Scripture, but of trying to accommodate secular interpretation of reality over against biblical truth. Francis Schaeffer warns that “here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—*accommodation*.”<sup>6</sup>

From here, the question no longer becomes one of neutrality, but it becomes one of judging correct or incorrect presuppositions. On the issue of judging presuppositions, Van Til commented:

There are two mutually exclusive methodologies. The one of the natural man assumes the ultimacy of the human mind. On this basis man, making himself the ultimate reference point, virtually reduces all reality to one level and denies the counsel of God as determinative of the possible and the impossible. Instead of the plan of God, it assumes an abstract notion of possibility or probability, of being and rationality.<sup>7</sup>

This helps us get to the core problem at hand. To say it in the words of Cornelius Van Til, “facts and interpretation of facts cannot be separated...facts without God would be brute facts. They would have no intelligible relation to one another. As such they could not be known by man.”<sup>8</sup> All “facts” need interpretation and every interpretation is based on a person’s worldview, which is held by faith.

For example, consider the floating axe head in 2 Kings 6. There, we encounter a miraculous account of an iron axe head floating in the river Jordan. If we were to utilize the naturalistic worldview of a secular scientist, and apply the scientific method to try to reproduce this event, we would come to the conclusion that an iron axe head can never float. Therefore, the Bible would need to be reinterpreted irrationally, or called a book of lies. The main presupposition behind such an interpretation is a secular, naturalistic concept of metaphysics. Such an approach would introduce a method of biblical “interpretation” which we are now obliged to consistently apply to the whole Bible. And the new principle is this: there are no miracles. If there are no miracles, then there is no resurrection from the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen, “and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain...and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). We often hear that this whole problem is “not a salvation issue,” but we have just shown that it ultimately and consistently is. It will ultimately lead us down the road of the German liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann and his concept of the *demythologization of Scripture*<sup>9</sup> whereby everything in the Bible that cannot be explained by a naturalistic worldview must be considered a myth. That would be the end of Christianity in the minds of people.

Understanding that all scientific interpretation is birthed out of presuppositional biases, biblical or not, leads to a question: which revelation must gain priority—general or special? All beliefs are supported by other beliefs and all reasoning is initially circular (=by faith!), and it ultimately comes down to the person’s most basic presuppositions. If people cannot support their worldview beliefs, they engage in unfounded circular reasoning. So, the question arises: is there an ultimate standard by which to judge all truth claims? As Christians, we recognize that the Bible is the only source for objective truth, and we accept it as the ultimate standard for everything (2 Cor. 10:5). As Lisle points out, an ultimate standard must be assumed to be true and also affirm its own truth.<sup>10</sup> Lisle

says that “all of our chains of reasoning must be finite. Therefore, everyone must have an ultimate standard: a proposition (upon which all others depend) that cannot be proved from a more foundational proposition.”<sup>11</sup> Not only must it prove itself, but it must provide a basis for all knowledge. Knowing this, everyone must recognize the need for an ultimate standard by which to test all truth claims.

Therefore, every Christian must come to the conclusion that Scripture must be used as the final authority by which to assess every bit of reasoning in the universe. If something interpreted from general revelation seems to conflict with Scripture, we must always give the written Word priority—because we use it as the ultimate standard of reasoning. From this basis, it is the Christian system alone that provides meaning for science in the first place.<sup>12</sup> Because science must build itself upon the foundation of faith (as we have shown), it is of absolute necessity that the foundation upon which it is built is the truth of God’s Word. Because God must have dominion over every square inch of our lives, we have to make sure that we are doing science according to His will.

To summarize, we can say that the perceived dichotomy between the Bible and science is a false dichotomy. The real dichotomy or the real antithesis lies between the Bible and all scientific endeavors operating on anti-biblical presuppositions—between truth and lie. Or to say it in the words of Abraham Kuyper: “Notice, that I do not speak of a conflict between faith and science. Such a conflict does not exist. Every science in a certain degree starts *from faith*.”<sup>13</sup>

For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (2 Cor. 6:14–15).

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 2, n. 4.

2. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 7–8.

3. Gary DeMar, *Pushing the Antithesis: the Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen* (Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision, 2007), 28.

4. Jason Lisle, *Discerning Truth: Exposing Errors in Evolutionary Arguments* (Green Forest, Ark.: Master Books, 2010), 27.

5. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 36.

6. Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1984), 37.

7. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 63.

8. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 38.

9. “*Entmythologisierung der Bibel*”

10. Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation* (Green Forest, Ark.: Master Books, 2009), 141.

11. Jason Lisle, *Ultimate Proof*, 143.

12. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 90.

13. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 131.

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## Created Male and Female

What would you say if your little boy asked you, “Daddy, what does it mean to be a man?” or if your little girl asked, “Mommy, what does it mean to be a woman?” We start by affirming that both male or female are made in God’s image and are meant to show what God is like in the world. We should also affirm that Christ is Lord and that both male and female should believe the gospel and grow in communion with God. Both were made for union with Christ. Those are the two core principles for manhood and womanhood.

Beyond that, however, I would want my children to know the following five ways men and women are different according to God’s good design:

- A — Appearance
- B — Body
- C — Character
- D — Demeanor
- E — Eager Posture

Though we can label these differences A, B, C, D, and E, at the risk of being confusing, let’s consider each in the order they are revealed in Scripture and not in alphabetical order.

### EAGER POSTURE

*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Gen 2:18).*

In these early chapters of Genesis, Adam is created to lead. He was created first, he was charged with naming the animals (2:19–20), he was given the probationary command (2:16–17), and even though Eve ate the forbidden fruit first, God holds Adam responsible (Rom. 5:12–21; cf. Gen 3:9). Eve was created to be his helper (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3). In Scripture, a helper is not a demeaning role and does not imply inferiority. In fact, the Lord is often called a “helper” of His people in the Old Testament. At the same time, Genesis 2 affirms that by God’s design, according to the order of creation, the woman is to help her husband. That is her eager posture.

I use the word posture deliberately. Posture is a flexible thing. You can slouch, you can sit upright, be casual, prim and proper, or formal. I use the word posture because we’re not talking about an inflexible office but an inclination—an eager posture. The wife should be willing to be led and the husband eager to take the sacrificial initiative to lead. It would be wrong—sinful even—for a husband to tell his wife “you’re the helper; I don’t help you.” The fact that men were created to lead does not mean that men lead to the exclusion of helping or that women help and are never able to exercise leadership.

Instead, I’m simply noting that male “leading” and female “helping” is what men and women should be intentional to find and eager to accept. Even in the workplace, where a company’s organizational chart may have men and women

positioned at every level, I believe there is still a way for Christians to embrace masculinity and femininity in appropriate ways. This inclination is seen most clearly—in the Bible and in practice—in marriage, but there are reasons to think the Genesis pattern reflects realities that go beyond the marriage relationship. We see for Paul that the Genesis pattern was to be reflected in how women learn and men teach in the church (1 Tim. 2:11–14). Or consider the example of Deborah. She was undoubtedly a strong woman whose influence was important, but she (implicitly) rebuked Barak for not leading the army into battle (Judges 4:6–9). He and his men were to take the lead in Israel (Judges 5:2, 9). This point about posture often has more to do with what men ought to be doing than what women should not be doing. The exhortation is not for women to sit down but for men to stand up.

### BODY

*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination (Lev. 18:22).*

The world claims that orientation is more essential than gender. It also claims that gender is a construct and actions should correspond to our self-authenticating desires. The Bible, however, suggests that gender carries with it its own ought-ness. Our actions should correspond to divinely created identity.

Our bodies therefore signify a divine design and that design carries an ought-ness to how we use that body. A man has a body that uniquely fits, in a one-flesh union, with a woman. It is not designed to fit together in a one-flesh union with another man.

Similarly, Paul uses this language of “fittedness” or “natural relations” in Romans 1:26–27:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

Throughout Romans 1, Paul has been employing the language of Genesis 1 to describe human idolatry and rebellion. In this text, Paul recalls how God created both male and female in Genesis 1 as a biologically complementary pair—a biological complementarity that two women or two men cannot recreate.

Why is it that the sexual act is so powerful? Why is it that God determined sex as the moment of one flesh union? Why not holding hands or locking arms? Because God endowed

the unique male/female sexual union with the procreative ability—the ability to fulfill the creation mandate in Genesis 1, to replenish the earth, to multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it.

One of the most counter-cultural verses in all of Scripture is 1 Corinthians 6:19–20:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

As we teach our children at home and in the church, we must not merely skip to the right conclusions without unfolding for them all of the arguments that lead to those conclusions. Don't merely teach "sex is between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage." Explain why that is the case. And no explanation of that point is sufficient until we communicate a biblical understanding of the body. The body isn't incidental to us as human persons. God created our bodies and called them good. This same God took on human flesh in the incarnation. God is going to resurrect our bodies. Our bodies are therefore not incidental, and how we use our bodies is not a separate matter from who we are and how God made us to be. God created male bodies and female bodies, different bodies that carry moral "oughts" according to God's good design.

## APPEARANCE

*For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered (1 Cor. 11:6).*

*Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering (1 Cor 11:13–15).*

A number of scholars have suggested that head coverings and veils in late antiquity were signs of modesty. Our culture, of course, may have different signals than these, but ultimately we should see in these passages that Paul suggests men and women are different and should look different. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11 is complicated, but at its core he is asserting that confusing the appearance of our genders is contrary to nature. When Paul says that nature itself teaches long hair is a disgrace to man, he's not making a universal statement about exact hair-length but he is making two universal statements about gender. First, he's asserting it isn't right for men to look like women. Second, how this plays out will be somewhat determined by the culture. These two core principles undergird Paul's primary point: men should not seem to be women or express themselves in a feminine way, nor should women express themselves in a masculine way or seem to be men.

Of course, we cannot be overly exacting with this principle. We shouldn't become Pharisees who walk around with tape measures assessing everyone's hair length. But Paul is providing us with a principle that the way we express ourselves should correspond to our gender.

I'll admit, this principle is tricky. We shouldn't use this principle to endorse cultural stereotypes of hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity—"Real men wear Stetson hats, drive pick-up trucks, can fix anything, hunt, fish, and know everything about baseball." If that's the standard of "manliness" then many of the godliest men I know aren't "real men." At the same time, these cultural stereotypes are significant in that they show that our culture recognizes that some aspects of life can be more or less masculine or feminine.

So how might this apply in our day? Hopefully we might all agree with at least some examples. Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears a cocktail dress it is a disgrace for him? Does not nature itself teach us that if a man puts on lipstick it is a disgrace for him? In our cultural context, these actions express femininity, not masculinity.

Yes, I know, some of the examples are culturally situated. The Bible, of course, makes no explicit prohibitions against men being decked out in all pink. And yet, if masculinity and femininity are going to have any conceptual content, we cannot avoid certain cultural cues. This makes pastoring difficult—how to say something practical about masculinity and femininity without being overly rigid. But it wouldn't be the first area where we need wisdom to apply broad principles into specific areas.

Pastors, in a day when male movie pirates, figure skaters, and stand-up comedians wear eye liner, we cannot ignore this question. The Bible may not give us every detail we might want on this topic, but it does, at least, affirm an essential truth no longer obvious in our day—it is disgraceful for a man to appear to be a woman and a woman to appear to be a man. That is the theological foundation under 1 Corinthians 11.

Of course, we must apply these truths with all the appropriate graces necessary in our discipling contexts. If someone from your church struggles with gender identity issues or gender dysphoria, deal patiently with them and sympathize with struggles they're experiencing. Point them to 1 Corinthians 11, not as a way of shaming them, but for instruction. Teach them that God made men and women to be different and when we confuse those differences we're confusing what God designed to uniquely glorify Him.

## DEMEANOR

*But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us (1 Thess. 2:7–8).*

*As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye should walk worthy of*

*God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory* (1 Thess. 2:11–12).

Notice what Paul is doing in these passages. First, he describes his own ministry among the Thessalonians like that of a nursing mother: gentle, affectionate, sacrificial. Second, he describes his ministry as “fatherly”: full of exhortation, encouragement, and leadership. Paul identifies these demeanors as corresponding with one gender more than the other.

I don’t believe Paul is suggesting that one set of virtues are exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine. After all, he’s describing Himself as ministering “like a nursing mother.” At the same time, Paul clearly suggests that certain demeanors fall more naturally along gender lines. When Paul thinks of nurture, affection, and gentleness he thinks of a mother. When he thinks of exhortation, discipline, and charge, he thinks of a father.

Yes, each man and each woman is unique. But no matter our personality types, fathering is generally marked by a hortatory demeanor and mothering marked by gentleness—which is saying something, given the people that moms work with every day!

Ultimately, in Paul’s mind a mom has a certain demeanor and a father has a different type of demeanor, and these demeanors correspond with the natural inclinations of their gender.

## CHARACTER

I also believe that Scripture provides us with the crowning characteristic of a godly woman and the crowning characteristic of a godly man. We hear about both in 1 Peter 3:1–7, where Peter enjoins women to be respectful, pure, and gentle, while he enjoins men to show honor, understanding, and caring leadership. From this passage, we might suggest that the crowning characteristic of a woman is true beauty and the crowning characteristic of the man is true strength.

These two categories (feminine beauty and manly strength) are prominent throughout Scripture. For instance, in this passage, Peter focuses on instructing women to pursue the right type of adornment (not outward but inward). Paul gives similar instructions to women in 1 Timothy 2:9–10:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

Similarly for men, Paul refers to a sanctified, manly strength in 1 Corinthians 16:13–14:

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity.

Of course, this is a command to the whole church—men and women—but it is telling that Paul associates strength and courage with masculinity, a perspective embraced throughout Scripture (cf. 1 Kings 2:2).

So what do we learn from Scripture’s emphases on female beauty and masculine strength?

Though not universally true, it is broadly true that most women pay at least some measure of attention to cultivating external beauty: from time spent fixing hair to how they dress. This attention to beauty signifies something about the created order. Women are wired for beauty. The Bible appeals to that natural feminine impulse and warns women not to settle for any lesser beauty than the internal beauty of Christlikeness. Women are made for this type of beauty; it is their crowning characteristic.

Similarly, men generally are physically stronger, more interested in sports, and more inclined to activities like competitive hunting or fishing because they are wired for strength. The Bible appeals to that natural masculine impulse of strength and warns men not to settle for any lesser strength than the strength needed to follow God and lead in a way that mirrors Christ’s own tenderhearted strength. Men are made for this type of strength; it is their crowning characteristic.

What do we say then to our sons and daughters who ask, “Daddy and Mommy, what does it mean to be a man or a woman?” Tell them they are made in the image of God and for union with Christ. And then tell your daughters that they should strive to be beautiful in the way God wants them to be beautiful. And tell your sons to strive to be strong in all the ways God wants them to be strong.

## A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION

My aim is not to perpetuate stereotypes. Fabricated lists of masculine and feminine traits can often become pharisaical and run the risk of excluding godly, masculine men and godly, feminine women.

At the same time, in an effort not to perpetuate stereotypes some complementarians simply are not granting the fullness of what Scripture affirms on masculinity and femininity—a theology that goes far beyond merely “Men should be pastors and lead their homes.”

I hope from these Scriptures we see there is, in fact, an “ought-ness” to manhood and womanhood. There is a difference; a difference that should not be eradicated but celebrated; not confused but clarified. These are truths we should happily embrace, not be shamefully embarrassed about.

Yes, the cultural winds are blowing stiff and strong against the church on these issues. But the good news is that behind us lies a massive river of divine design in every human person that is flowing in this direction. God’s created order cannot be re-engineered by sinful human ingenuity. This is how God made us to be and it’s how we can flourish as men and women made in His image.

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## Maintaining the Historical Adam

Creation debates among Christians can seem insignificant to some: isn't it just a matter of interpretive differences over time and method? Proponents of a literal interpretation of Genesis posit earth's age at 6,000–10,000 years, while proponents of evolutionary models argue for millions to billions of years. Supporters of a literal interpretation argue for a divine, creative work taking place with breath-taking, supernatural suddenness, resulting in a full-orbed, dynamic creation in a matter of one week. Supporters of evolutionary models posit a mediate work primarily through natural processes over spans of time, resulting in increasing complexity and diversity. And there are some who argue for an "old earth" model punctuated by supernatural creative work. All say God created and God sustains. So why expect a greater commitment?

Quite simply because, as Hebrews 12:25 says, God speaks to us by His Word. All evangelicals agree that Scripture reveals the essential aspects of what God wants us to know about creation's origins, simply because creation is His, existing because of and for Him. As we write or teach on Genesis, we are talking about what God has said and what God has done—realities inseparably connected to who God is. To get it wrong one way or another is to take away from or add to what God reveals about Himself and how He made us. Genesis and origins are inseparably connected to our doctrine of Christ: the One by whom all things were created (Col. 1:15–17). It is intertwined with our doctrine of man, sin, and salvation (cf. Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–8; Luke 3:23–38; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15). If we understand that the gospel is God's story to us, then it is no stretch to say that the interpretation of Genesis is inherently a gospel issue. Creation and redemption are not merely connected in a human sphere: they belong to the triune God as His works. At the end of the day, Genesis is first about God, second about us. Our exegesis and hermeneutic have theological and spiritual consequences, for good or ill.

In the contemporary discussion on Genesis and human origins, some claim that the historical Adam and Eve were the first human pair that marked an evolutionary-supernatural transition to humanity; some claim that they were a figurative couple which was archetypical for an evolving early humanity. We, by contrast, stand with the mainstream of historic Christian orthodoxy that believes the literal tradition, including the creation of Adam and Eve, from dirt and a rib, on the sixth day, a day of ordinary duration. There are numerous reasons for the endurance of this view, despite varied efforts to the contrary by a minority stream of individuals from the patristic era to the present. First,

the literal understanding of creation, including human origins, is remarkably viable exegetically. It is also hermeneutically consistent with the whole Genesis text. Second, it coheres seamlessly with the rest of Scripture's teaching on creation, man, and redemption. The literal tradition on origins is cohesive with a full-orbed exegetically derived Christian theology.

This does not mean that there is a lack of intelligently argued challenges to the literal tradition—though not primarily via interpretive alternatives of Genesis 1–3. At points the literary and biblical-theological insights of proponents of other views are fully coherent with the literal tradition, but only the literal tradition avoids the errors and pitfalls inherent to alternate views. The most substantive challenge to the literal tradition is posed by mainstream dating methods, particularly in relation to fossils. Even here, an understanding of a mature creation, the fall, curse, and ensuing natural processes interspersed with episodes of catastrophism along the way, gives cogent answers to satisfy issues of geological age and subsequent biological adaptation. The literal tradition has exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological coherence with Scripture, historical endurance beyond all other interpretive models, as well as extensive ecclesial and confessional support. There is good reason to believe that it stands as an example of the Holy Spirit's fulfillment of Christ's promise to guide the church in the truth of the Word.

For millennia, the mainstream of the church has understood this: Genesis reveals an awe-inspiring mystery. All creation—from matter and time, light and darkness, stars and kinds (not equated with modern species) of creature and plant—were created distinct, mature, and productive, with order and inter-relationship, in one week prefaced by nothing but God's existence. The Trinity acted in a sudden, cosmic event revealing His wisdom, power, and delight. In this context, God formed the image-bearer, Adam, whose humanity Christ would in time take to Himself. Shaping Adam from the dust of the earth, God breathed into Him the breath of life, so that He became a living being. Eve was likewise intimately created, that same day, from Adam's rib. The divine work of the creation week culminated in this mature, sin-free couple, created to enjoy communion with God, happiness of the proto-typical marriage, be fruitful, multiply, and rejoice in a splendid creation. Here is the beginning of humanity, the beginning of our history.

This is an inseparable part of the gospel. Scripture reveals that Christ was the One by whom all things—including Adam—were created. It teaches us with consistent clarity


that while Adam, as the first man, brought all humanity under sin and judgment, God had a plan of redemption ready. The literal reading of Genesis provides every ground to recognize that the redemption of fallen men and women will be marked, illustrated, pursued, and confirmed with supernatural activity in history—activity whose nature and timing can only be attributed to God. Passages like Isaiah 35:5–6, where the eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped, are a glorious prophecy of God’s saving re-creation. There is a promised Creator-Redeemer who comes: Christ, the second Adam. He turns water to wine, feeds thousands with loaves and a few fish, heals, restores, raises from the dead, stops wind and waves, and transforms sinners from spiritual death to life. He takes God’s wrath, the curse for the sin of His people, suffering as a substitutionary sacrifice unto death. The supernatural glory of His resurrection and ascension seal and crown His work as Creator and Redeemer. The first Adam and the second Adam are inseparably connected: when we lose the first, we will lose the second.

Pretty much everyone, including many opponents of a literal reading of Genesis 1–2, agree that this is the mainstream, historic view of Christian orthodoxy. Most will agree with the claim “the church has never questioned the historicity of Adam and Eve.” Some, however, like Peter Enns, argue that this is irrelevant, “since the history of the church did not have evolution or any scientific discoveries to deal with until recently.”<sup>1</sup> While this statement misapprehends what the church from the patristic era through the Enlightenment actually did engage, it reflects those pursuing alternate Genesis interpretations on human origins today. The re-interpretive edge argues, “evolution and ancient texts that put the biblical story in its cultural context are *new* factors we have to address.” While this compels some, and evolution and ancient texts do need to be intelligently engaged, the biblical story—the Word of God—is actually what places both evolutionary hypotheses and ancient Near Eastern texts in context. Scripture illumines, and it reveals Adam and Eve, our first parents, marvelously created by God, apart from any ancestry, in less than one of our days. Rather than spurring hermeneutical ingenuity, hearing this Word should still us in reverence, awe, and wonder—for this God is our God, the One who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>2</sup>


1. Peter Enns, “11 Recurring Mistakes Evangelicals Make in the Evolution Debate,” accessed January 7, 2020, <https://peteenns.com/11-recurring-mistake-evangelicals-make-evolution-debate/>

2. An earlier version of this article was published as “The First Man and Woman” in *Books and Culture Online*, June 23, 2015, accessed 7 January 2020, <https://www.booksandculture.com/articles/webexclusives/2015/june/first-man-and-woman.html/>

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## The Divine Marriage

“And they lived happily ever after.” This is not merely the end of a fairy tale marriage. This is in fact the conclusion of the history of the world recorded in Scripture. Among other things, the Bible is a historical and dramatic love story of the marriage between the triune God and His people. All human desire and longing for an eternal and all-satisfying happy marriage points to this ultimate, divine love story that the Bible recounts from start to finish.<sup>1</sup> The Bible teaches about marriage in virtually all its genres. From the Pentateuch to Revelation and everything in between, marriage is a constant theme explored. And yet, the Scriptures present the marriage of God and His church as the overarching theme within which all other female/male biblical marriages find their place. In fact, the Bible unfolds this dramatic and divine marriage in the history of the world with four progressive and organic stages: the creation as its context or setting, the fall as its conflict, the covenant as its redemption, and the new creation as its happy and blessed ending.

### THE CONTEXT

This biblical unfolding of divine marriage is first set in the context of creation where human marriage is brought forth and serves to point to the perfect communion between human beings and God. By creating the world in binaries and complementarity of differences—heaven and earth, light and darkness, sea and dry land, and so on—God set the patterned context and created human beings male and female in His image (Gen. 1:27) as a complementary couple (Gen. 1:18) to live together in an intimate and perfect bond.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the wedding of Adam and Eve officiated by God in chapter 2 of Genesis is the climax of the creation of the universe. In the series of God’s declarations that His creation is *good*, it was only on the sixth day when God finally created man and woman that He called His creation *very good* (Gen. 1:31). This is especially emphasized in Genesis 2:18 where God breaks with the series of calling His creation good and declares that it was *not good* that man was alone. God created woman for man and united them, saying, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Only after their wedding did God finally call His creation *very good*. Thus this human marriage pointed to the perfect relationship of man with God in the context of a perfect creation. Sadly, this marital harmony would not last much longer.

### THE CONFLICT

Both the marriage of man and woman and their relationship with God would suffer severe brokenness through the evil attacks of the serpent in Genesis 3. Intriguingly, the serpent does not appear in the narrative to tempt Adam to sin against God when he was still single in Genesis 2:4–17. Chronologically, only when man and woman are married does the serpent come to disrupt their union by tempting them to break their relationship with God.

This serpent’s intention is seen in the narrative in the play on similar words of the couple being “naked” in Genesis 2:25 and the serpent being “subtil” in 3:1—in the original Hebrew text, *arôm* and *arûm*, respectively. “The man and the woman were nude, but the Serpent was shrewd, we might say. And the point is, the object of the Serpent’s cunning was the man and woman’s marital bliss.”<sup>3</sup> This devilish attack resulted, first, in the breakdown of the relationship with God, when the couple sinfully ate the forbidden fruit, and second, in the conflict between man and woman. Instead of Adam defending the woman from the foe, he was cowardly and silently present during the temptation (cf. Gen. 3:6), let the serpent deceive his wife, and ate of the fruit.

Consequently, sinful conflict and blame-shifting became the constant characteristic of earthly marriage after the fall (3:12, 16), Adam and Eve lost their perfect communion with God, and were exiled from His special presence in the temple-garden (3:23–24). Hence, the original sin of this first married couple reveals the deeper brokenness of their relationship with God. But in the continuation of this dramatic love story, God restores His relationship with them by being the bridegroom of His people and finally saving them from the serpent.

### THE COVENANT

With the purpose to save His people, God made covenant with them. Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the covenant that the Lord made with Israel is often depicted as a marriage covenant. Both the Sinai covenant and the new covenant are described by the Old Testament prophets as a divine marriage. For instance, interpreting God’s covenantal relationship with Israel in the exodus, Jeremiah reveals, “Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown” (Jer. 2:2; see also Ezekiel 16:8 and Hosea 2:14–15).



Similarly, Hosea's prophecy of the new covenant is depicted as divine marriage: "And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, thou shalt call me, Ishi.... And in that day I will make a covenant for them...I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD" (Hos. 2:15–20; see Isa. 54:5–10 and Jer. 31:31–34). Accordingly, in the old and new covenant, the Lord is not only the creator and redeemer of His people, but is especially the bridegroom.<sup>4</sup>

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when the Lord became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to save His people, He was called the bridegroom. John the Baptist explicitly refers to Jesus as the messiah-bridegroom: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29). That is why in the narrative of the wedding at Cana, the evangelist John ironically lets the reader know that Jesus is the real bridegroom of the gospel story because the steward of the feast wrongly congratulates the bridegroom for saving the best wine for last without knowing that in fact it was Jesus who had performed the miracle (John 2:9–10).<sup>5</sup>

Remarkably, after showing in other parts of his narrative that Jesus is the messiah bridegroom (e.g., Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman), John climaxes with the description of Jesus as the bridegroom when He goes to the cross. Again with irony, John carefully narrates that Jesus wore a crown of thorns and a priestly, seamless garment (John 19:1–5, 23–25). Interestingly, it was culturally common in Jewish weddings to see a Jewish bridegroom wearing a crown like a king and dressing in a seamless garment like a priest on his wedding day, just as John depicted Jesus in His passion:<sup>6</sup> "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song 3:11); "he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments" (Isa. 61:10). Thus, Jesus sacrificially gave Himself on the cross to save and forgive His people and to triumph over His enemies (Col. 2:14–15) not only as the redeemer, but as the ultimate bridegroom. For this reason, Paul correctly quotes the definition of marriage of Genesis 2:24 and fitly concludes, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

## THE CULMINATION

Finally, at the end of this dramatic love story in the history of the world, the Bible reveals, in the last three chapters of Revelation, Jesus Christ ultimately defeating the old serpent,

the devil (Rev. 20:1–3, 10), consummating His covenant marriage with the bride-church (21:1–2), and renewing the universe in a better new heavens and new earth than the original paradise (22:1–5). The everlasting marriage of the Lamb with the church is at the same time His triumph over His enemies and His recreation of the best world.

This is the perfect closure of a dramatic love story: the restorations in Revelation's final three chapters unfold in the reverse order of the events of the fall in Genesis's first three chapters:<sup>7</sup>

A – Creation (Genesis 1)

B – Marriage of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2)

C – Serpent's Attack (Genesis 3)

A C'

C' – Serpent's Ultimate Defeat (Revelation 20)

B B'

B' – Marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 21)

C A'

A' – New Creation (Revelation 22)

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the biblical romance is the history of the relationship between God and His people in the paradise of creation where the dragon attacked the bride-church, and, as a result, she fell into sin, and was separated from her divine bridegroom. Consequently, because of her sin, she became an undesirable and undeserving woman. But the incarnate, eternal Son of God, in His infinite mercy, sacrificially defeated the old serpent-dragon, by His blood purchased for His bride forgiveness, and transformed her into the most beautiful princess in the universe. He is coming again ultimately to destroy the dragon, to consummate His marriage, and to be happy ever after in the new heavens and the new earth.

This is not a fairy tale. Rather, it is the ultimate true historical romantic story between God and His church, upon which all men and women united in marriage should depend, and in which they should find their ultimate longing for eternal love finally fulfilled.

1. For an argument that all unfulfilled desires in this world point to the necessity of another world, see C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour and Company, 1952), 115.

2. Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2016), 27–28.

3. Ray Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, 33.

4. Brant Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* (New York, N.Y.: Image, 2014), 9–19.

5. Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1985), 83–84.

6. Pitre, *Bridegroom*, 101–9.

7. Miles V. Van Pelt, "Introduction," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2016), 34.

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## Anticipating the New Creation

Even children know what it is to anticipate something. For example, we anticipate our next birthday with great expectation of the visits and gifts from relatives and friends. Young couples anticipate their wedding day, waiting longingly for the time when they will be inseparably together. Also in church life we anticipate the Lord's Day's public worship services, hoping by faith to meet with Jesus under sound gospel preaching. We anticipate the celebration of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper nourishing our faith by the blessing of the Holy Spirit. There is something unique about these anticipations: a child anticipates his own birthday; a young couple anticipates their unique wedding day; and believers anticipate the Lord's Day with its blessings. So what about anticipation of the new creation? I am using the term *anticipation* in the sense of hope, eagerness, and longing for a future event.

Who anticipates the new creation? We have the beginning of our answer in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The term "new creature" is more often translated "new creation." When we speak of the new creation, our tendency is to flip straight to Revelation 21 and 22 and start with the new heavens and the new earth, but that would be getting way ahead of ourselves. Let us begin where Scripture begins—with the new creation that takes place when a sinner is born again by the Holy Spirit and the Word. At that moment that sinner comes to Christ by faith. According to Scripture, when someone believes in Christ alone for salvation, that person believes into Christ. So when Paul writes of a man being in Christ, he is referring specifically to a sinner who believes the gospel of Jesus Christ and is thus now in Christ.

In one sense, then, the new creation is already here. Every believer is a new creation. "Old things are passed away, all things are become new!" Those who are in Christ know something of this experientially. The way we used to think about sin has changed: the things we once hated, we now love, and vice versa. Our thoughts about God are changed from seeing Him as an austere judge out to condemn us, to a loving heavenly Father who loves us as He loves His own Son. Our way of thinking about Jesus has become new: whereas at one time we really did not know what to do with Him, now we love Him and desire to serve Him. At one time sin was our friend, but now sin has become our enemy. We have learned what it means to struggle with sin, when in the past we welcomed it and gladly committed it.

Our relationship with God the Father has become new in that we have become the children of God, so that we are in a father-child connection. What formerly came between us—sin—has been removed by the precious blood of God's Son. While we at one time did not serve Him at all, or served Him with slavish fear, now we desire to serve Him out of love and gratitude for His grace. Our relationship with God the Son has been changed as He has become our Elder Brother. He is not only our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord, but our brother. In Him all Christians have become our brothers and sisters. Our relationship with the Holy Spirit has become new. In the past we resisted, fought against, and at times came close to blasphemy against the beloved Spirit; now we love Him and know we desperately need Him to do His applying work in our lives.

When we by grace are in Christ through faith, we realize that our righteous deeds are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Therefore we desire to "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). By Christ's imputed righteousness we have been declared righteous by God Himself. We have tasted and seen that God is good. Every Lord's Day under the preaching of Christ's gospel we have little foretastes of the new creation. Whenever we experience or witness a baptism, we are pointed to the blood of Christ that washes away our sins. In the administration of the Lord's Supper, we by faith partake of the body and blood of our Lord. Yet we realize that what we experience now is not complete and full. This causes us to anticipate the new creation where all of this will be the ultimate reality. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). If we by faith are in Christ now, we shall see Him as He is in the new creation.

What is the new creation? Most of what we can know about the new creation is recorded in Revelation 21 and 22. John introduces this theme with the well-known words, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Rev. 21:1). Peter also describes what is coming: "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:12–13). So the present fallen order passes away (Rev. 21:1, 5). The heavenly pattern comes down from heaven to shape the

new earth. For the first time since Paradise, absolute peace prevails. All evil persons are banished (Rev. 21:27), so that the gates of the city never need to be shut. Then we shall forever and fully be in the Lord's presence (Rev. 22:3-4), in the same glorious peaceful existence Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before the fall.

In the new creation there will be no sorrow nor death. In our resurrected bodies, as adopted children of God we receive our eternal inheritance (Rev. 21:7). Our whole environment will be bathed in the very glory of God (Rev. 21:23). What we now cannot even imagine will be reality there: universal harmony and righteousness enabling us to engage in our God-given tasks the same as God originally intended for Adam and Eve. Our Lord originally created us as physical beings with bodies able to adapt to our natural environment. In the new creation we will be raised bodily from the dead. So in our eternal state we will inherit and inhabit a renewed, purified earth much like the original Eden, with one huge difference: there will be no possibility of failure. How applicable to all this are the closing words of the Lord's Prayer, "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen"!

It is true that in many ways, we are not sure exactly what the new creation will be like in all of its details. As Paul writes to the church at Corinth, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). So whatever we can understand from Scripture, and whatever we imagine of the new creation, it will be infinitely more blessed, glorious, and spectacular for them that love the Lord.

My dear friend, are you anticipating the new creation? Your answer to this question will depend on whether you are already a "new creation" yourself. If you are born again, you experience the new creation in principle already. When you, by faith, lay hold on Jesus Christ for your soul's salvation, from that moment you are a new creature. Sadly, the reality for most believers is that we do not contemplate the new creation often enough, nor do we regularly meditate on its imminence. If we did, we would look forward to it with great anticipation. For believers the new creation will be a glorious existence in the presence of our Lord, without sin forevermore.

For unbelievers there is no anticipation at all of the new creation because it comes after the judgment. The ungodly who refuse to repent of their sins and refuse to believe the gospel face eternal banishment from God, from hope, from life, and from peace. They will be tormented day and night in hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. But it does not have to end that way, my friend. You are laboring to find peace and rest without success. Even as you read this article and feel a tug at your restless heart-strings, the Lord in the gospel calls to you, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28). When you come to Christ in the way of repentance and faith, this rest for your soul is a little foretaste of the new creation, which you too can begin to anticipate.

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# Enjoying God's Present Creation

Psalm 19:1–2 states, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” Creation speaks! It talks to us, all the time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The question is, “Are you and I listening?” You might wonder, “What is it saying?” It is constantly repeating: “God is glorious!” in a gazillion different ways. Psalm 19 highlights the fact that the heavens declare the glory of God. So, when we read our Bible, and if we keep our eyes wide open in this created world, the reality cannot escape us that God has created *everything* to be richly enjoyed (1 Tim. 6:17). In fact, God has created everything for His own glory and our good. God's glory on display in creation is one of the reasons angels in heaven repeat with awe and adoration: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa. 6:3). If they are so full of adoration and awe, how can we by God's grace be more like that?

Here are six ways we can enjoy the present creation:

## 1. Wear biblical glasses to view creation.

We all know that creation is not what it once was: the fall and the flood have left creation groaning (Rom. 8:22). Yet, despite that truth we can still find much of the beauty and glory of God on display in creation. We need to be cautious, however, for our naturally sinful hearts tend to worship creation itself. Tragically, after our desperate rebellion against our Creator, we find it easier to worship God's creation and its enjoyments more than the Creator Himself (Rom. 1:25, Phil. 3:19). Adam and Eve were enthralled by the fruit of the forbidden tree. And naturally we all follow in their trail, unless God has fundamentally changed us at the heart level. Still, creation speaks to each one of us. However, its voice is largely muffled by our natural estrangement from God. Though creation cannot redeem us, still its voice says,

There is a great God of glory and power and generosity behind all this awesome universe; you belong to him; he is patient with you in upholding your rebellious life; turn and bank your hope on him and delight yourself in him, not his handiwork.<sup>1</sup>

Before anything else we need to wear biblical glasses if we want to learn to enjoy God's glorious creation. Creation should at least awaken in us a restlessness about so much beauty, power, and glory on display, and make us ask: “What is all this for?” And the answer is, “To delight yourself in the Lord.”

## 2. Know who is Lord of creation.

This world came into being for a reason. Colossians 1:16 tells us “For by him [Jesus Christ] were all things created, that

are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him, and for him.” So, creation is an expression of the overflowing love of God the Father for His Son and vice versa. He was active in it! Everything reflects Christ's glory and majesty!

But that is not all; the Lord chose the earth as a sanctuary to put His glorious plan of redemption on display. Jonathan Edwards says that creation “was doubtless created to be a stage upon which this great and wonderful work of redemption should be transacted.”<sup>2</sup> This earth, in God's mind was the place upon which His mercy and grace would be put on display, through Christ, the God-Man. Think about it: Christ, the eternal Lord of creation, through birth, became part of His *own* creation! Born of a virgin! This all, so that sinners like you and me could be born again.

This should transform our enjoyment and awe every time a baby is born into this world, as each baby is to remind us of the day that Jesus Christ, the Lord of creation, was born as a baby into His own creation! Let those times when ten tiny fingers clasp around our finger be a reminder of the fact that the Lord of creation deserves our worship for becoming a baby as well. Creation calls us to celebrate life, especially the life of the Lord Jesus.

## 3. Let creation remind you of the Creator.

Creation is there to remind us that God is our Creator and we are not (Psalm 100:3). It is there to remind us that God's greatness is unsearchable! When we consider the heavens, “the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained,” it should make us cry out, O, Lord, “what is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:3–4).

Creation and all its pleasures were made to be a help for us to praise, adore and worship our glorious Creator. C. S. Lewis explains it well when he says,

Pleasures are shafts of glory as it strikes our sensibility... But aren't there bad, unlawful pleasures? Certainly, there are. But in calling them “bad pleasures” I take it we are using a kind of shorthand. We mean “pleasures snatched by unlawful acts.” It is the stealing of the apples that is bad, not the sweetness. The sweetness is still a beam from the glory...

I have tried since...to make every pleasure into a channel of adoration. I don't mean simply by giving thanks for it. One must of course give thanks, but I mean something different... Gratitude exclaims, very properly, “How good of God to give me this.” Adoration says, “What must be the quality of that Being whose

far-off and momentary coruscations<sup>3</sup> are like this!” One’s mind runs back up the sunbeam to the sun.<sup>4</sup>

Too often we are tempted to wrongly condemn the pleasures of creation itself. When we learn to use these pleasures as reminders of God’s greatness, it frees us to see the glory of creation with new eyes. Not only does it speak to us about God’s power, might, glory, and beauty (Rom. 1:20), it also speaks about a generous and gracious God, who showers us with all kinds of blessings to remind us of Himself as a good and gracious Father (James 1:17, 1 Tim. 6:17).

So, when we are in tune with Psalm 19, or hum along with the hymn, “This is my Father’s world, He shines in all that’s fair...He speaks to me everywhere,” then creation for the believer is loaded with innumerable reminders of the glory of our Creator. Therefore, it should lead us to consider His greatness and inspire praise and adoration in our hearts for Him who made all this. That is what we see the psalms do, over and over. Think for instance of Psalms 29, 97, 104, and 148. Take time to read these psalms and to rejoice and praise God as the Creator.

#### 4. Let creation remind you of scriptural truths.

We see a very clear example of this in Psalm 19. In many ways Psalm 19 is unique. For in Psalm 19, the psalmist begins by meditating on the beauty and glory of God’s creation. But his meditation on creation leads him to spiritual truths. Here is what happens. In the opening verses he thinks about the glories of the heavens as God’s creative art. Then his eyes focus on the sun. He considers how penetrating these rays are (v. 6). And as he considers the beams of the sun, he starts to compare the sun to the purity and penetrating power of God’s Word, His law (vv. 7–11). And as he does so, the rays of God’s Word reach all the way into his heart. And he asks the Lord for purity of heart (vv. 12–14). That is how we also can enjoy creation around us as well, when it leads us to consider spiritual truths.

There are so many ways in which the Lord has given us helps in creation to turn our minds to spiritual truths and realities. The Puritans often used creation and created objects to inspire meditation. Have you ever realized how creation can also help us think about Christ and His glorious redemption? Here is how Dr. David Murray puts it:

He created sheep so He could teach sinners about how He is the Good Shepherd. He created birds to help His redeemed people live less anxious lives. He created camels to teach how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter heaven. He created lilies and roses so He could compare Himself with them. He created water to explain how He refreshes and revives the thirsty.

And think of how Jesus even created what would be used in His own crucifixion. What did He think when He made the trees, one of which would one day suspend Him between heaven and earth? What did He think when He made the metal that would eventually impale

Him on the cross? He made what would be used to cause Him pain and kill Him. He created all the accessories of redemption.<sup>5</sup>

Let us enjoy this present creation to lead our minds to spiritual truths.

#### 5. Take time to study God’s creation.

Through reading books or watching videos about the stunning facts or beauty of God’s creative handiwork, we can learn to enjoy this present creation as well. Creation praises God by simply being what it was created to be, with all its breathtaking variety. And reading about it and studying it will also inspire us to worship our glorious Creator.

When we start to study some of the facts we will be stunned by God’s wisdom, ingenuity, and endless variety. Here is one of those facts for us to ponder, in which God shows His eye for detail and design:

Antarctic ice fish can live in waters so cold they would freeze the blood of other living creatures, while desert pupfish survive in waters that are over 100 degrees.<sup>6</sup>

As we study more of the facts, Psalm 104:24 will echo in our hearts: “In wisdom thou hast made them all.” So, let us take time to study God’s creation and inspire young children especially to study it. Let creation spark delight in our hearts and we will be humbled by God’s unrivaled wisdom.

#### 6. Go outside and enjoy creation.

But there is of course nothing better than going into creation and enjoying it for what it is. Perhaps with a pair of binoculars. Perhaps taking a magnifying glass. But simply to enjoy.

Go outside and enjoy “the redness of the sun, the roundness of the moon, the whiteness of the snow, the wetness of rain, the blueness of the sky, the buzzing of bumblebees, the invisibility of the wind, the number of the grains of sand on a thousand beaches, the never-ceasing crashing of countless waves, millions of gorgeous wild flowers, some in places where no one sees but God!”<sup>7</sup>

So, if you have time, take a friend or family member, or just yourself, and go outside to enjoy this present creation. Because even this fallen earth is filled with God’s glory, all to fill our hearts with wonder and adoration for our glorious Creator.

1. John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers), 2000, 87.

2. Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, 300.

3. This word means that which glitters, or sparkles.

4. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963), 89–90.

5. David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 136.

6. Starr Meade, *God’s Mighty Acts in Creation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway), 74–75.

7. Adapted from John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 95.

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## Responding to Greta Thunberg

“I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic...and act as if the house was on fire” (*The Guardian*, 2019). These are words spoken by Greta Thunberg in Davos, Switzerland on January 25, 2019.

### Who is Greta Thunberg?

Greta Thunberg is a seventeen-year-old climate and environmental activist with Asperger’s Syndrome. She first began her movement to fight climate change at the beginning of 2018, when she took a poster board with the message “school strike for climate”<sup>1</sup> to the Swedish parliament to protest. Later, she began to skip school for protests and eventually dropped out of school to pursue the so-called “environmental crisis,” which has brought global attention to the protection of our planet.

### The Climate Crisis

How serious actually is this crisis? According to the world’s leading scientists, humans only have twelve years to avoid climate breakdown. This means global warming needs to be restrained to a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius (WWF). But there is still hope: 95% of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s climate models predicted more warming than actually occurred (ARPA, 2015). Although the earth is warming, it is not near the estimated rates of climate scientists and therefore not as big an issue as some scientists claim. This does not condemn all the research that scientists have conducted, however, because the climate is still changing and temperatures are rising, just not as rapidly as is portrayed. In fact, in the last century, temperatures have only increased by 0.8 degrees Celsius (ARPA, 2015) and there have been periods when no warming was observed. These plateaus, however, could just be part of natural fluctuations. For that to be determined, long-term patterns need to be carefully observed and analyzed by experts and no assumptions can be made in the process.

Greta Thunberg is being used by scientists and environmentalists to bring their message across the globe. With over 9 million followers on Instagram, she has a large impact on society. She uses powerful and convincing words that tug at the hearts of people and force them to think about how they are impacting the environment and how they can reduce their emissions and carbon footprint. She is doing a good job of getting people to think about how they are treating the environment. However, she has adapted to the secular research agenda and is a pawn in its hands. If she takes a closer look at the data secular researchers have collected, she might be able to see how their predictions and calculations are flawed.

### Greta’s Leadership Credibility

Isaiah 3:12 says, “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.” In this passage, Isaiah is warning future generations of the downfall of letting unreliable leaders lead others over important matters. This type of leadership is not only seen in the secular world but also among Christians. Mega-churches are embracing not only women but also young men to shepherd thousands of people. While young people play an important part in society, they should not carry the burden of leading it. Greta Thunberg was voted as *Time* magazine’s person of the year for 2019. People are listening to her rather than to scientists who have done years of research and in-depth study. The problem is, however, that society is allowing it and failing to recognize what Isaiah predicts, that destruction will come from unreliable leaders. Today’s culture is placing too much emphasis on less-experienced people, and not enough emphasis on more mature people.

### Stewardship of the Environment

All Christians are called to be stewards of the environment, regardless of the severity of the warming temperatures. God commands us to steward creation, as we are the noblest creatures that He created. In 1 Corinthians 4:1, we are commanded to be stewards of the great mysteries of God. Creation is one of God’s greatest mysteries and it is one’s Christian duty to learn more about and care for His creation. Being a steward of the environment means that even though the earth is the Lord’s, humans are responsible and accountable for it. Through the parable of the talents in Mathew 25, God promises a reward for being faithful to what He has given. God has entrusted the earth to the care of humans, but it does not mean that it is theirs. One is responsible for how it is treated and what is done with it (Whelchel, 2017).

While humans are not at the beginning of a mass extinction as Greta claims, the climate is changing, and Christians should do whatever can be done to take care of it. Whether that means conserving resources, buying commodities with fewer emissions, or simply using reusable containers, it is a Christian’s calling to keep and sustain the universe in which God has placed them.

1. Biography.com Editors, “Greta Thunberg Biography,” <https://www.biography.com/activist/greta-thunberg/>.

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# 13 Ways a Husband Can Cultivate His Marriage

Marriage is like a garden. If you are a gardener and want to have a beautiful garden, you should work hard on it. Likewise, if you are a husband and do not invest time and energy in your marriage, you can't expect to have a wonderful marriage. And as a garden needs constant care, so does marriage. Like a gardener, you as a husband should "water, fertilize, and weed" your marriage regularly in order to have a healthy marriage. Of course, there are many ways in which you can cultivate your marriage. Here are some:

*1. Pray for your wife regularly.* Pray also *with* her. Despite your busy schedule, set aside time for you and your wife to pray together.

*2. Be the spiritual leader in your home.* Find ways to point your wife and family to Christ. Ensure that your wife has time for personal devotions. Your goal is to have a gospel-centered home.

*3. Provide for your family.* Depending on your circumstance, as God enables you, give your best to meet the physical and material needs of your family.

*4. Spend quality time with your wife.* You may see each other every day but feel like you miss each other because you don't really spend time together. Show genuine interest in listening to her.

*5. Support your wife's passion.* Your wife may have different interests than you do, but learn to appreciate what is important to her.

*6. Continue to court your wife.* Take her out (without your children, if you have children). Plan a date that will make your wife feel very special.

*7. Give your wife time to hang out with her girlfriends.* Your wife also needs to spend time with her close friends.

*8. Write a love letter to her.* Send a short but loving and encouraging text or email to her during the day while you are at work.

*9. Tell her "I love you" every day.* Yes, it's wonderful to show her your love, but your wife wants to hear those "I love you" words, too.

*10. Buy her something she enjoys,* like flowers, chocolate, or whatever might bring a smile to her face. You don't have

to spend much. She will already appreciate your thoughts of love.

*11. Affirm your wife with words.* Appreciate her beauty, her gifts, and the many ways she cares for you and your family. Tell her that she is the most wonderful woman on earth. Don't forget to always thank her when she prepares a meal for your family.

*12. Offer your help with the household chores.* Help with the dishes. Vacuum the floor. If you have small children, assisting with the bedtime routine can help your wife as her patience with the children may be severely tried by this point.

*13. Treat your wife as God treats you.* God does not deal with us according to the multitude of our sins but according to His rich mercy. Your wife is not perfect; she has flaws and weaknesses, but so do you. Therefore, as God is gracious to you, so be gracious to her. When you are wrong, be humble enough to admit your mistake. When you sin, ask for forgiveness. When your wife sins, forgive her as God has forgiven you. Grow with her in God's mercy and love.

Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive. Plus, every spouse and every marriage is unique. That's why it's important that you become a student of your wife; study to know her better and learn to understand her more.

In summary, we husbands are to love our own wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). You may say, "I can't do that!" Well, I'm glad you admit it. You're right. We can't love our own wives as Christ loved His church, for He loved her with perfect love. However, our inability to love as such should not discourage us to love our own wives with the love with which Jesus loved His bride. Rather, it should cause us to humbly cry out to God for His help and grace to do what He has commanded us to do. Therefore, marriage is a sanctifying means by which a husband and wife can grow in God's grace—the grace that enables them to love each other till death parts them.

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# 7 Ways a Wife Can Cultivate Her Marriage

As a parallel piece to my husband's article "Thirteen Ways a Husband Can Cultivate His Marriage," I would like to borrow his first paragraph, changing it slightly to fit my article's context: Marriage is like a garden. If you are a gardener and want to have a beautiful garden, you should work hard on it. Likewise, if you are a wife and do not invest time and energy in your marriage, you can't expect to have a wonderful marriage. And as a garden needs constant care, so does marriage. Like a gardener, you as a wife should "water, fertilize, and weed" your marriage regularly in order to have a healthy marriage.

Here are seven ways in which a wife can cultivate her marriage:

**1. Pray daily for your husband.** As a leader and provider of the family, your husband has weighty responsibilities. What a comfort it can be for your husband, if he knows that each day his wife is praying for him—that God will strengthen, direct, and protect him! Personally, I find the prayer card *Lifting My Husband Through Prayer* by Family Life (2014) a helpful tool as I pray for my husband. It uses Bible verses as a guide for a wife as she prays for her husband.

**2. Encourage and support your husband's leadership in your home.** In today's culture, the idea of a wife's submitting to her husband seems absurd. However, when a wife obeys God's command to submit willingly to her husband as unto the Lord, it is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and His Bride (Eph. 5:21–24). And biblical submission does not mean that you become a doormat. On the contrary, God calls you as a wife to be a helper to your husband—to work alongside him for God's glory. A godly husband will value his wife's input, and will not abuse his authority and demean his wife. Just as a husband's tender love increases his wife's desire to honor him, so does a wife's willing submission to her husband increase his desire to cherish his wife more.

**3. Make an effort to show interest in your husband's work, hobby, or passion.** Continue to date your husband. Engaging in your husband's hobby or passion can build sweet friendship in a marriage. My husband enjoys basketball. When we were first married, I knew little about that sport. Now, I'm not sure who enjoys watching a basketball game more, he or I.

**4. Listen (really!) to your husband.** Women are so used to multitasking; and sometimes they continue to multitask even when their husbands are talking to them. Yes, generally they are listening, but their actions can show disinterest. Depending on your situation, putting down your grocery list, setting aside your cleaning cloth, or putting your cellphone down are some meaningful ways to show your husband that he matters

to you. Now, if you really can't listen well at the moment that he is trying to share something with you, you may want kindly to say, for example, "Dear, what you have to say is important to me. Could we talk about it tonight after supper so I can really listen to you?"

**5. Praise and compliment your husband, not only privately but also publicly (and if you have children, in front of them).** Make sure he knows that you admire him, value his care for your family, and appreciate his leadership. A wife who intentionally esteems her husband will be surprised how her admiration can motivate her husband to lead and serve more their family.

**6. Remember that before you became a mother, you were first a wife and are still a wife.** (This point is especially for moms with young children.) Our precious little ones can consume so much of our time that we neglect to cultivate intimacy with our husbands. As a mom of four small children, I know how hard this can be! I also know how much my husband appreciates it when I make an effort to show him that he is still number one. A small love note sent in his lunch or placed on his desk, cooking his favorite meal, and planning date nights away from the children are just some ways wives can communicate love to their husbands.

**7. Treat your husband as God treats you.** (I've borrowed this point from my husband's article as it excellently applies to both husbands and wives.) God does not deal with us according to the multitude of our sins but according to His rich mercy. Your husband is not perfect; he has flaws and weaknesses, but so do you. Therefore, as God is gracious to you, so be gracious to him. When you are wrong, be humble enough to admit your mistake. When you sin, ask for forgiveness. When your husband sins, forgive him as God has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32). Grow with him in God's mercy and love.

The above list is by no means exhaustive but meant to give some practical suggestions for cultivating our marriages. We need to realize, however, that apart from God's grace in Christ we ultimately cannot be the kind of wife God calls us to be. Therefore, we need His grace for us to grow more selfless in our marriages. We need His forgiveness for the many ways in which we fail to respect and submit to our own husbands (Eph. 5:33). And we need His Spirit to enable us to nurture a happy and holy marriage.

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# 10 Benefits of Corporate Worship for Our Children

Having your children with you in worship can be hard. It can be hard for the parents, for the children, and for the rest of the congregation. The squirming, the shuffling of papers, the loud whispers, and the louder cries, can all make it challenging to have our children with us in corporate worship. But the benefits far outweigh the challenges. Here are ten benefits of corporate worship for our children.

## 1. Singing

Our children are blessed as they hear the whole church singing to God joyfully and heartily, with full hearts and full voices. They learn that the truths we sing are truths worth singing about. And they learn to sing. They learn how to sing the psalms. They learn the great hymns that have been passed down to us from previous generations of believers. They learn to obey Paul's command in Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." They learn to sing to the Lord with the congregation.

## 2. Prayer

To be sure, children learn to pray by listening to their parents pray, but they also learn to pray by listening to their pastors pray. They learn to pray along with those who are leading in prayer. They add their voices to the congregation as we all pray the Lord's Prayer together, or join together in a corporate confession of sin. They learn to add their hearty "Amen" to the end of the prayers, as a way of agreeing with what has been prayed and making it their own. They learn to pray in corporate worship.

## 3. Reading

Paul told Timothy to devote himself to "reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13), which is for the benefit of the whole congregation, of which children are a part (Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20). Children should read the Bible in their home, or have it read to them, but they should also be able to benefit from the public reading of Scripture in congregational worship. It is one of the means of grace that God has appointed for His people.

## 4. Preaching

The preaching of the Word of God is not just for adults; it's for children too. The whole counsel of God is for the whole people of God and therefore the preaching of the whole counsel of God is for the whole people of God. And

the preaching of the Word is the high point of the means of grace, and we don't want our children to miss out. We don't want them to miss out on what the Westminster Larger Catechism says about the way God uses sermons to challenge us: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to His image, and subduing them to His will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation" (Q&A 155). Those are the things we want for our children.

## 5. Sacraments

The sacrament of baptism is a blessing to our children, not just their own baptism, but the baptism of other children, or of adults professing faith. They can see the sign and seal of the covenant of grace and their natural curiosity may spark conversations with their parents about the meaning of it all. And the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is also a blessing to our children, even though they don't participate in the sacred supper until they have made a public confession of their faith and been admitted to the Lord's Table by the elders. They see what's going on, they hear the words of the institution that become familiar to them, and again their questions can generate meaningful discussion about what the Lord's Supper signifies—much like the question the son would ask the father at the celebration of the Passover in the Old Testament, "What is this?" (Ex. 13:14).

## 6. Habit

The habit of worshiping God on the Lord's Day is formed in the hearts and minds of our children. The healthy, holy habit of attending corporate worship is formed, which, if kept up, will be a blessing to them all their lives. We are creatures of habit, and we want to form the habit of Lord's Day worship early in the hearts and minds of our children.

## 7. Inclusion

It is a tremendous blessing to our children to know that they are included in the covenant community, and that they have both great privileges as a member of the covenant community and great responsibilities. Their greatest responsibility is first and foremost to trust Christ personally and to make public profession of their faith. Our children can either get

the distinct impression that worship is for adults, or they can learn that worship is for them too.

## 8. Learning

Children are blessed with the opportunity to learn how to worship God by watching their parents and the rest of the church worship God. Author Jason Helopoulos writes in his book *Let the Children Worship*,

Corporate worship is corporate. The entire body gathers together. This re-emphasizes the unity God's people possess with one another. It reminds us that we are one people united in our one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5). This blesses the entire congregation. The old saint looks around and sees generations that will carry on the faith once he has passed. A teenager, who may struggle to respect his parents, observes venerable and respected men and women in the community who also believe in Christ Jesus. The young child witnesses other adults possessing the same faith and heart for worship that her parents model at home. As the congregation sings, all the voices of the church unite. When God's people read the confession of faith, they confess the same truth united. When God's people hear the public prayers, they voice a loud "Amen" united. How unfortunate it is when the entire congregation should witness and voice this unity and receive encouragement from this fellowship, but our children remain absent. It steals blessing from them and the greater congregation itself.<sup>1</sup>

## 9. Modeling

This is actually a blessing for the whole congregation because by *modeling* I mean our *children* are modeling for *us* the

child-like faith we should have as we worship God. In Luke 18:15–17 we read,

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

We are helping our children learn to worship, but they are also helping us.

## 10. The Special Presence of God

Matthew 18:20 says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." God, of course, is everywhere, but He is present with us in corporate worship in a special way. He is present to bless us and to keep us, to make His face shine upon us and be gracious to us, to lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace (Num. 6:24–26). And if God is present, we don't want our children to be absent. As a pastor once put it, "if Jesus showed up for worship on a Sunday, would we separate our children from the service?" The answer, of course, is "no." We would want our children there if He were there. But He is there, every Sunday, and so we want our children to be there too.

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1. Jason Helopoulos, *Let the Children Worship* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2016), 44.

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# Esau in Your House

## Introduction

The relation of God's sovereignty, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the salvation of sinners is hotly debated among God's professing people. The ninth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans is one of the battlegrounds on which those debates rage. And among conscientious, theologically minded readers of Paul's letter, perhaps few controversies surpass verse 13: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." That text identifies two children in Rebecca's covenant womb: Jacob and Esau. They shared the same covenant space, but not the same covenant grace. Jacob was the child of God's promise: through him God would make a covenant people, who would give birth to the Savior of the world. Jacob was chosen; Esau was rejected—both were in the same womb.

That raises a disturbing question. And every thoughtful parent must ponder it: What are you going to do if God puts Esau in your house? Is there an experience in this world that crushes a godly parent's heart more, that causes more gut-wrenching anguish, than children who turn their backs on their Christian upbringing and run into the arms of the world? I can think of none. Yet, this

is the experience of many godly parents. I do not expect everyone here to agree with all the views or conclusions that follow. But my wife and I *have* experienced Esau in our house; so I have prayed that our Savior will grant at least some encouragement and hope to brokenhearted parents. I have also prayed that I might prepare some in the event that God puts Esau in their home. So, may our loving heavenly Father through Christ our Mediator, illumine our hearts to His Word by the Holy Spirit.

*1. First, let us consider a brief exposition of this complex, controversial passage (9:1–13).*

In vv. 1–5, Paul declares his great anguish for his Jewish brethren. Why? They were unbelievers. They had rejected their Messiah, and they sought the righteousness of God by works, not by faith. So, in this passage, Paul addresses an important question: Did God's Old Testament promises to Israel fail? Paul's answer is "no." But how does he explain that? He says, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect" (9:6a). In other words, God's promises to Israel have *not* failed: they have taken effect in God's elect. To prove it, Paul makes this argument: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel. Neither, because they





are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (9:6b–8).” That means one can be a physical descendent of Abraham without being a true child of God. God chose Abraham’s son Isaac, not his son Ishmael. God saved Isaac and would create His covenant people through him. By “promise” Paul meant God’s promise in Genesis 10:14: “At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son” (9:9). That is, God kept His promise through the miraculous birth of Isaac, not through the natural birth of Ishmael.

Paul then strengthens his argument by giving another example: “Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac.” At that point, Paul stops to add an explanatory thought about the children in Rebecca’s womb: “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth” (9:11b). So, God did not choose Jacob or reject Esau on the basis of their works. He chose Jacob and rejected Esau according to His purpose of election. With that in mind, Paul completes his thought: “The elder”—Esau—“shall serve the younger”—Jacob (9:12). God chose Jacob and made Esau Jacob’s servant! Why did God do this? Paul answers from Malachi 1:3: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (9:13). God loved Jacob, saved him, and created the nation of Israel from his sons. But God hated Esau, made of him the nation of Edom, and left him to his profane, godless character. Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Esau were all Abraham’s descendants! So, what made the difference between them? “The purpose of God according to election.” Now, our sermon arises from that thought: in godly families, God saves some children and leaves others to their wicked hearts. Well then,

### *2. Can godly parents know with certainty that one of their children is Esau?*

No. Only God knows from eternity who His Jacobs and His Esaus are; we do not. But we *can* know that a child is ungodly. And all ungodly children are potential Esaus. However, ungodly children may instead be prodigals, who someday return. We must pray for an ungodly child as though he were a prodigal. He will only prove to be an Esau when he dies without Christ.

### *3. What do we mean by godly parents?*

Godly parents have been born of God’s Spirit. Because of that, they believe that the Bible is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule for all faith and practice. They bow to the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of life. So, they care for the physical *and* spiritual needs of their children, “bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Godly parents are flawed at best, often failing in

their lofty parental desires; but they repent of their sins, they believe on Christ, and they flourish in the gospel love of their Savior. If we don’t know with certainty that a child is “Esau,” then

### *4. What do we mean by “Esau in your house”?*

Hebrews 12:16 tells us that Esau was a “profane person.” Profane means “godless” or “having no respect for holy things.”<sup>1</sup> A profane person cares nothing for the promises or warnings of God’s Word. He thinks little or nothing of being brought up in a godly family. So, when I say, “Esau in your house,” I mean God has given you an ungodly child who turns his back on what is holy, casts off the privileges of his godly upbringing, and pursues worldly and ungodly things like Esau did.

### **What then should godly parents do when Esau shows his colors?**

#### *1. When Esau shows his colors, the first thing you must do is thank and praise God for sending that providence to you.*

What did Job do when, in the same day, he lost all his oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, the attending servants, and all ten of his children? He “fell down upon the ground, and worshipped.” He said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And Paul urges, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). That will be difficult. But love for, trust in, and submission to the sovereign God who loved you before the foundation of the world and gave His Son for you is the path of rest for your troubled soul. You have done what you could for your ungodly child; trust the God who gave him to you.

#### *2. You must realize that your good works cannot save your Esau.*

Godly parents can create a beautiful, Christ-filled homelife; you can be consistent with family worship; you can create a loving environment in which children flourish; you can teach them to pray, to read holy Scripture, to understand the difference between law and gospel; you can brand what is right and wrong in their consciences for as long as they live; and you must! Generally, you will see when your children are younger, they can repeat their catechisms and confessions, the Scriptures they have memorized, and portions of sermons they have heard. They can have “favorite preachers” that they like to hear. They can heartily sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs on the Lord’s Day. But your best works, O godly parents, cannot and will not save them. That belongs to God alone. Isaac and Rebecca’s godly home could not give Esau a taste for godly things. God puts Esau in some godly families and saves some in godless families. Your hope is entirely in Christ alone.

*3. You should ask the Lord to reveal if you have committed sins that have contributed to the defection of your ungodly child.*

There are no perfect parents, but there are godly parents. Yet godly parents can and do sin against their children. Impatience, unrealistic expectations, abuse of authority, unnecessary harshness, broken promises, public humiliation, name calling, derogatory remarks, inconsistency, or excessive punishment—if you are guilty of those or similar sins, you must repent before God and before your Esau. The reasons for this are (1) to remove any barrier to reconciliation and (2) to know before God that you have done what you can to bring reconciliation. Your sincere repentance will not save him; nevertheless, you do not want to contribute to his damnation. If God sentences your Esau to everlasting burnings, may your testimony be that you did all you could to point him to Christ the Savior and to deliver him from eternal misery. Let your testimony be that you did all that you could, like David, to take your lamb out of the lion's mouth (1 Sam. 17:34–35)!

*4. Repent if you discover that you have been an idolater.*

Godly parents can be guilty of making idols of their children. Unwittingly, you may begin to find all your happiness in your children instead of in the God who gave you children. Your darling sons on earth can subtly take the place of the darling Son of God in heaven. We can idolize our children in numerous ways; but, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” includes our little ones. Confess your idolatry if you discover it, for God is faithful and just to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

*5. You must be earnest, consistent, and mighty in prayer.*

Paul urges believers to pray “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). O brokenhearted parents, you wrestle not with flesh and blood, “but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). And take heart, knowing that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). While you may find some comfort in sharing your miseries with brothers and sisters who have experienced an Esau, your greatest solace is communion with Christ: “Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps. 61:1–2). Nothing will bring balm to your soul like Christ.

*6. In your sorrow and grief, you must remember that you are not alone.*

First, Jesus Christ, the lover of your soul, the Word of God made flesh, the blessed One who loved you and gave Himself for you, “will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”

(Heb. 13:5). Pour out your grieving heart to Him and hear Him: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). Furthermore, remember that Adam and Eve, the first recipients of God's promise of Christ, gave birth to Cain—a murderer of his own brother! Noah, “the preacher of righteousness” was father to wicked Ham. Godly Isaac and Rebekah had that godless Esau. And David was father to traitorous Absalom who led a rebellion against his loving father.

*7. In your sorrow and grief, do not dishonor God.*

Your anguish is natural, expected, and reasonable. But you *can* sorrow sinfully. David cried, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee” (2 Sam. 18:33). But David turned victory into mourning. He shamed all those who had risked their lives to save him, and agonized over an unrepentant, blood-thirsty traitor who defiled his father's concubines, turned the nation against him, stole his kingdom, and was trying to take his father's life! O groaning parent, Christ loves you, while Esau despises you. Christ counts your tears, while Esau causes your tears. Christ heals your heart, while Esau rips up your heart. Rather, by God's grace and Spirit, you should grieve and groan more that your Esau has rebelled against a holy God, despised a gracious God, sneered at a providing God, and rejected a saving God. Your tendency will be to grieve your loss, your hurt feelings, and your dashed hopes more than to grieve Esau's hatred for God, his dishonoring God, his defiling his own soul, and his inviting God's most severe and eternal wrath. Grieve with faith in Christ's promises.

*8. Prayerfully consider your blessings in Christ.*

Do not let your sorrow overshadow God's treasures to you. Esau loves himself and will do so to the grave unless he turns to Christ. But God's eternal love for you will never diminish. God the Father loved you before the foundation of the world. He sent His Son to become man so that He could be your prophet, priest, and king. Jesus kept the Father's law in your place; died on Calvary's cross in your place; rose again from the dead for your justification; and ascended into glory to intercede for you, which He is doing right now! And He will one day bring you into His presence so that you may forever see Him in His glory! Esau destroys your happiness and casts his self-worshipping shadow over your joy. But Jesus will wipe away all your tears, swallow up death in victory, and fill you with eternal joy! Elkanah said to grieving Hannah, “Why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?” (1 Sam. 1:8). O godly parent, do you not hear Christ say to your soul, “Am I not better to thee than your Esau? Am I not better to thee than millions of children, worlds, and

galaxies? Your sorrow for Esau will eventually pass; your treasures and joys in Christ are for all eternity. Though Esau leaves you, Christ never will!

### **What should true Christians do when they learn Esau is in a godly family's home?**

#### *1. Pray for the suffering family in and out of their presence.*

Go to their home and pray for them. Few things open the fountains of parents' eyes as Esau in their house. Pray for their sorrow, their agony, their fears as they groan out their rivers of tears. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). They feel like they are dying. They feel like they may never smile again. They see their life-investment thrown away. They fear that the child they taught of Christ will be consumed forever in the flames of hell.

#### *2. Let them know you love them in Christ.*

When a child proves ungodly, a unique and indescribable pain cuts to the very core of a father and mother. They will say things like, "My ungodly child is a greater calamity than not having children." "Having Esau in my house is worse than having a child that suffers disease or deformity." "I would rather lose a believing child to death than to lose an ungodly child to the world and hell." Show them your love and "weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

#### *3. Do not be quick to condemn such parents for faulty parenting.*

In congregations, there are always those who conclude that when a child abandons his home, the parents did not have enough faith or they did something wrong. Such are no better than Job's comforters, no better than the "name it and claim it" crowd who accuse the sick or poor of having little or no faith. Be careful: God may have put an Esau in your house.

### **What should ungodly children living in a godly home do?**

Lastly, I will address ungodly children. Children and young people—are you ungodly? You don't have to be outwardly rebellious to be so. Are you Esau? Do you have little or no care for your immortal soul? Have you no interest in the promises of Christ or the warnings of everlasting damnation? If you have not looked to Christ, *please* hear me:

#### *1. You are profane like Esau because you care not for holy things.*

Through your parents, Almighty God has provided food and clothing for your body, education for your mind, happiness for your senses, friendship and love for your heart, correction for your errors, praises for your accomplishments, and the hope of salvation by presenting Christ to your soul. Jesus said that Capernaum would be brought

down to hell because of His ministry to that place: then He said, "it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:24). You will have a lower place in hell than all depraved, idolatrous, whorish, murderous sinners that never heard the name of Christ. Oh, come to Christ!

#### *2. You are profane like Esau because you despise your godly father and mother and have brought unimaginable sorrows upon them.*

Solomon said, "The father of a fool hath no joy" and "a foolish son is bitterness to her that bare him" (Prov. 17:21, 25). In your self-worship, you have trampled a godly heritage, ignored your parents' Spirit-wrought goodness, despised their gracious provision, dashed their hopes for you, ruined their joy, displayed a devilish arrogance, and worst of all, rejected their presentations of Christ to you. In that, you have broken the Fifth Commandment, heaped sorrows upon them, and have invited your own eternal sorrow in hell. Oh, come to Christ!

#### *3. You are profane like Esau because you love the world instead Christ.*

You are a fool to swap your immortal soul for worldly pleasures. That has everlasting consequences. Oh, come to Christ!

#### *4. You are profane like Esau because you reject the person and work of Christ.*

In the history of the world, millions have never heard the precious name of Jesus. You have. But you have turned your back on the eternal purpose of God revealed to you in Christ; ignored His saving work for sinners; despised His death upon the cross; made light of His glorious resurrection; rejected everlasting joys for everlasting damnation; and refused the calls of Christ to repent and believe on Him for everlasting life. You deserve no grace, mercy, or love. You will have none in hell. Oh, come to Christ! He saves all that come to Him by faith!

### **Conclusion**

Has God put Esau in your house? I pray that your Esau will prove to be a prodigal and will come home to you and to Christ. If he proves to be an Esau, I have given you a few biblical comforts for your groaning soul. May your rest ever be in Christ. Amen.

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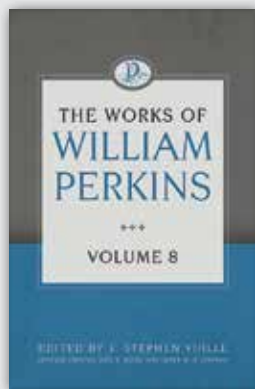
1. Douglas J. Moo, "The Letters and Revelation," in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2519.

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**Pastor Jeff Pollard** serves in Pensacola, Florida as minister of Mt. Zion Bible Church and president of Chapel Library.



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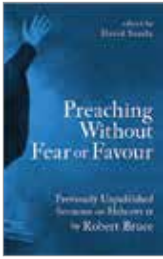
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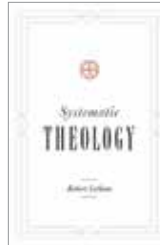
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# Creation Praises God while Groaning

*O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all:  
the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are  
things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.*

—Psalm 104:24–25

*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

—Romans 8:22

“Do you boys want to pop into this store with me or move on?” Aunt Alice asked, pausing in front of the red shop door. John clutched a bag of candy from the previous store in one hand while licking a lollipop with his other. He and his twin brother James peered into the big display window and wrinkled their noses. Hats, scarves, jewelry, and ladies’ clothing filled the aisles. It was not an interesting store for six-year-old boys.

Uncle Luke laughed as he opened the door for Aunt Alice. “You enjoy your time here—we men will move on to the store next door. You boys will love it!”

“What can be better than a candy store?” wondered James. But when they stepped into the store next door, the twins’ eyes widened. The four walls were lined with large aquariums, and in the center of the store was a huge round aquarium that one could walk around.

“These are special aquariums,” Uncle Luke explained. “They have salt water in them instead of fresh water, which means that all of the sea creatures in them belong to the ocean, and not a lake or river. Your goldfish at home, John, is not a saltwater fish.”

Walking closer to the aquariums, the boys couldn’t believe how bright and beautiful everything looked. Instead of being filled with fake weeds and plastic castles, these aquariums seemed to be bursting with real life of all shapes and sizes. The rocks were covered with colorful coral, from bright yellow to pale pink. Fish with amazing patterns and shapes swam through the bubbling water, and there were many other strange creatures swimming around that the boys didn’t even know existed! Uncle Luke listed a bunch of funny-sounding sea creatures that they might spot in the aquarium: sponges, snails, crabs, shrimp, scallops, urchins, star fish, slugs, lobsters, and sea cucumbers.

The owner of the shop walked over. She smiled at the wide eyes of the twins and the bursts of excitement coming from them as they spotted different creatures.

“Look at that squiggly pink thing with long antennas!” John pointed out.

“That’s a peppermint shrimp,” explained the owner. “Do you know what its job in the aquarium is?”

“Umm...” John scrunched up his face and thought for a moment. “I don’t know.”







“It’s kind of like a janitor, because it cleans the aquarium of bad stuff that is floating in the water. Pretty neat, huh?” the lady commented. “They’re friendly little fellows. Many other animals in these aquariums also have different jobs. They all work together.”

“What about that fish?” questioned James. He pointed to a small white fish with orange spots near the bottom of the aquarium. It had a large mouth and seemed to be eating little grains of sand and spitting them back out into little piles.

The shop owner smiled again. “One of my favorites: a goby. Although he isn’t the most attractive fish, and he’s a shy little guy, he does work very hard. He actually cleans all of the sand on the bottom of the aquarium, and makes cute little sand piles while he does it!”

Just then a customer walked through the door and the lady went over to greet him. John looked over at his Uncle Luke. “Do you think that I can have a tank like this?” Suddenly, his little goldfish named Sunny didn’t seem so exciting anymore.

“I’m afraid not for many years,” Uncle Luke answered. “Saltwater aquariums, with all of their different animals, are very expensive and take a lot of work to keep up. That’s why I love visiting this store—we get to enjoy the fish without the responsibility.”

The boys and Uncle Luke continued to walk around the room, looking at the different aquariums, when the owner once more walked up to them. “Would you like to see me feed the sea anemone?” She walked over to an aquarium in the corner and the boys followed her. Behind the glass they could see what looked like a big, dark red flower that was covered in bumps. “An anemone looks like a plant, but it’s actually like an upside-down jellyfish. All of those bumps

are its tentacles that it uses to catch its food. It will sting its food and then pull it down into its mouth, which is the hole in the center,” she explained. Using long tweezers, she pinched a small goldfish from a nearby bag of water and pushed it into the aquarium and down to the anemone’s tentacles. She let go of the goldfish, which swam straight into a tentacle. Before their very eyes, the boys watched the anemone sting the goldfish and then slowly push the goldfish into its mouth, eating it whole.

“Cool!” said James. “I can’t believe that flower blob actually ate a fish!”

“The poor goldfish!” exclaimed John. “That nasty creature is mean.” He couldn’t help but think of Sunny, swimming in his little tank at home.

Uncle Luke looked at the two boys thoughtfully. “I think you’re both right. It’s both cool and sad at the same time. It’s cool because it shows us how amazing, powerful, and creative God is. He designed that anemone just the way it is. It is perfectly created to catch fish even though it can’t swim around the aquarium. But it’s also a little bit sad because it shows us death, which reminds us of our sin.” Uncle Luke’s eyes looked sad. “The Bible says that all of creation groans under the curse of sin. Even animals that don’t sin suffer because of our sin. In the new heaven and earth, there will be no more death. That’s a little hard to understand, isn’t it? So you’re both right.”

James solemnly nodded his head and then his eyes lit up and he began waving his hands toward the door. “Aunt Alice, we’re over here! You won’t believe what we just saw! Something that is both cool and sad at the same time!”

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

# What Have You Hidden in Your Heart?

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart,  
that I might not sin against Thee.*  
—PSALM 119:11

Your heart is like a treasure chest. It holds everything you love. It holds what you have learned and experienced. Your personality and your God-given talents are part of your heart.

We're not talking about your physical heart that is beating in your chest. Instead, we are talking about the heart that we read about in the Bible. We mean your mind, soul, and spirit. Your heart holds your thoughts, feelings, and desires. Most importantly, your eternal soul is part of your heart. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your heart is right with God. If you're not a believer, your heart is not right with God.

How do things get into your heart? God created us good. But through Adam's fall in Paradise, sin entered our hearts. We inherited a sinful heart. So, we are naturally selfish and disobedient. Like when you just don't feel like sharing a toy with your brother or sister. Or when your mom tells you to put your clothes away, and inside you say, "I just don't want to," and you "forget" to do it. We call this "original sin." It lives in our hearts from the moment we started to live.

But there's more. You are young. You are putting many things in your heart every day. Once something is in your heart, it stays there a long time. Whatever you put in your heart now will shape who you are later. Here's how it works. In a very old book, *The Holy War*, John Bunyan talks about "eargate" and "eyegate." When you hear and see, you learn and understand, and you store up treasures in your heart. That is why your parents care so much about what enters your heart. So, they limit screen time. They work hard to prevent you from seeing or hearing bad and sinful things. That is why they read the Bible and other good books to you. They have you memorize godly songs, catechism questions, and verses from the Bible. Psalm 119:11 says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

How do we know what is in our heart? Really only God and you know. But it shows through your words, your actions, and the look on your face. And it shows by what you love. It's fine to enjoy your toys, good food, family and friends, but God wants us to love Him and His Word the very most of all. It's great to learn more about science, art, machines, or history, and it's good to develop your skills, as long as we give all the glory to God in the end. We must not brag about ourselves; instead, we are to be humble and thank God for everything we have and all that we do. It's natural for us to want the biggest and the best things for ourselves, but God wants us to love other people as much as we love ourselves. He wants us to serve others and not ourselves.

By now you may be saying, "If I'm honest, I love to play more than go to church. I would rather learn about the world than about the Word of God. I get upset when things don't go my way. And I want the best things for myself. I think that means that God is not the greatest treasure of my heart."

And then you might ask, "How can my heart be right with God?" God has a special place in *His* heart for children. You are a treasure to Him, and He wants you to treasure Him in return. He says, "Suffer (let) little children to come unto me." That means that you pray to God, ask Him for His Holy Spirit, and ask Him for a new heart. Repent of your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, by His grace. Go to Jesus for all your needs.

God has given us some special texts. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). And, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (Ps. 101:3). Remember eargate and eyegate. If you are tempted to listen to or watch something bad, close the gate! Walk away. Turn it off. Instead, hide God's Word in your heart! When you read the Bible and pray for God to bless it, then you are storing up the best treasures in the whole wide world in your own heart! And then you will be happy and blessed!

---

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





## Doubting Thomas

Jesus's disciple, Thomas, is known as the doubting disciple. Read the Bible texts listed below to find out more about Thomas and his journey from a doubting disciple to a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe you can relate to "Doubting Thomas." Sometimes it's hard to believe in God's power and goodness when we're filled with questions about ourselves, our loved ones, and the world we live in. God's Word offers hope for doubters through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ! Ask God to take away your doubts and give you faith in Him. Remember, even if your faith seems small like a mustard seed, God can make it grow and use it for His kingdom!

Q	D	W	H	O	F	I	K	Z	F	C	E	O	V	E
G	I	B	K	Z	W	C	R	G	C	R	N	G	C	D
V	D	M	S	E	L	P	I	C	S	I	D	N	B	E
F	Y	E	F	G	R	N	U	E	K	L	A	E	D	U
U	M	J	Y	A	J	Y	Z	J	V	T	L	A	L	N
S	U	I	H	A	S	D	X	U	S	I	V	M	G	I
Z	S	B	U	S	R	U	L	B	E	M	H	E	V	T
O	I	E	W	I	S	P	U	V	H	J	V	A	F	N
C	H	S	L	A	G	S	E	D	G	Z	E	H	E	O
G	L	R	W	H	V	A	D	R	A	T	S	U	M	C
Y	T	W	H	K	T	E	V	O	Y	S	D	N	Y	O
Q	U	G	L	U	B	I	R	I	W	O	X	P	L	R
E	B	O	X	Z	O	N	A	I	G	V	Y	X	R	Q
U	N	B	E	L	I	E	F	F	N	K	A	X	X	N
M	U	F	E	W	T	C	J	E	Q	G	W	N	C	A

## ANSWERS TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE

1. God
  2. compassion
  3. one
  4. turned
  5. Isaac
  6. worthy
  7. Abel
  8. sheep
  9. blemish
  10. voice
  11. green
  12. blood
- Good Shepherd

Use the clues below to solve the word search. The words can be found up and down, forward and backward, and diagonally.

1. Thomas was also called \_\_\_\_\_ . (John 11:16)
2. He was one of Jesus's twelve \_\_\_\_\_. (Matthew 10:1)
3. In John 14:5 Thomas asked Jesus an important question: "How can we know the \_\_\_\_\_?"
4. After Jesus arose from the grave, Thomas doubted that it was really true. "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not \_\_\_\_\_." (John 20:25)
5. When Jesus showed Himself to Thomas He scolded him for his unbelief. "Be not \_\_\_\_\_, but believing." (John 20:27)
6. Thomas responded to Jesus's words with a wonderful confession of faith: "My Lord and my \_\_\_\_\_". (John 20:28)
7. Later on we read that God helped Thomas put aside his doubt and he served his Lord faithfully. "These all \_\_\_\_\_ with one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:13-14)
8. The Bible teaches us that faith can be as small as a \_\_\_\_\_ seed, and still be true faith. (Matthew 17:20)
9. Like the father of the demon-possessed boy, God's children may cry out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine \_\_\_\_\_." (Mark 9:24)
10. James tells us that God gives freely to those who ask in faith without doubting. "But let him ask in faith, nothing \_\_\_\_\_." (James 1:5-6)
11. In the gospel of Luke we see that Jesus prays for His people so that their faith may remain strong: "But I have \_\_\_\_\_ for thee, that thy faith fail not..." (Luke 22:31-32)
12. Hebrews 11:1 explains faith in a clear and simple way. "Now faith is the \_\_\_\_\_ of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."





# 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.

## PASTORAL CALL

Pastor Marty Slingerland has received a call from the Free Reformed Church of Langley, BC to be their pastor and teacher.

## HRC 2020 SYNOD MEETINGS

The HRC 2020 Synod will be held at the Grand Rapids HRC on June 9–10, concurrently with the FRC Synod—each day commencing at 8:30 a.m. Please honor the March 9, 2020 deadline for all agenda submissions. The Pre-Synod Prayer Service is planned for the evening of June 8 in Grand Rapids, with the Office-bearers' Fraternal scheduled for June 9 at 4:00 p.m. All the Lord willing.

In anticipation of the 2020 Synod Meeting, the HRC Theological Student Committee (TSC) encourages men considering a call to the ministry to talk to their pastor and/or consistory for guidance before March 2 (if you have not already done so). If the consistory decides to forward you further, the consistory will correspond with the TSC and the TSC will prepare the application for Synod's consideration. Please pray earnestly that God would provide converted and called men for theological training in the HRC and from other denominations all across the globe. The fields are white and ready to harvest.

## DENOMINATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids will be hosting the annual denominational Women's Conference on Thursday, April 23, 2020. This year's conference will be held in the evening beginning at 6:00 p.m. Accommodations will be available for out-of-town guests. Please make plans to join us for an edifying time of learning, growing and fellowship together! Further details will be forthcoming. Please email Melissa Bleeker with any questions at [melissableeker@yahoo.com](mailto:melissableeker@yahoo.com)

## 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

Jordan Christian School is a learning community that embraces the God-glorifying calling of educating students for Christian service. 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, while preparing students with the fundamental skills for further learning. We are currently accepting applications for a part- or full-time elementary teaching position for the 2020–21 school year. 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).

## PLYMOUTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Plymouth Christian Elementary and High School are accepting teaching applications for possible openings in the Elementary School and the High School for the 2020–2021 school year. Interested K–6 applicants should send or email their resumé and/or questions to Mr. Nathan Bleeker ([nbleeker@plymouthchristian.us](mailto:nbleeker@plymouthchristian.us)). Interested 7–12 applicants should send or email their resumé and/or questions to Mr. James Bazen ([jbazen@plymouthchristian.us](mailto:jbazen@plymouthchristian.us)).

## REHOBOTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Rehoboth Christian School, Copetown, Ontario, invites applications for possible elementary, secondary, and educational support positions for the 2020/21 school year. We are looking for qualified individuals with a vision for Christian education to join our committed, vibrant community of learners. We are a K–12 parent-run school serving the families of four local Free Reformed Churches and beyond. Located on a beautiful rural setting between Hamilton and Brantford, RCS has been blessed with a strongly supportive community, and since our inception in 1978, has grown to an enrollment of 380 students. Please send a cover letter, resumé, statement of faith, and references, including a pastoral reference (teacher applicants are also asked to include a philosophy of education) to the attention of:

Adam Kloostr, Principal, 198 Inksetter Road, P.O. Box 70,  
Copetown, ON L0R 1J0, t. 905.627.5977  
[principal@rehoboth.on.ca](mailto:principal@rehoboth.on.ca), [www.rehoboth.on.ca](http://www.rehoboth.on.ca)

## PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Providence Christian School is accepting applications for a full-time position for a Jr. and Sr. High School teacher, commencing August 10, 2020. Our main subject areas of need are Science and Math. The ability to teach part of our P.E. program will be a definite asset.

Providence Christian School is also accepting applications for a full-time Elementary School teaching position.

We are looking for enthusiastic teachers who have a passion for Christian Education. We encourage applications by qualified teachers who submit to God's Holy Word, subscribe to the Reformed confessions, and are committed to educating children and youth for formation of a distinct Christian worldview.

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit:

- a letter of application
- a resumé containing three references

- a brief philosophy of Christian Education statement

Providence Christian School is a growing Christian school in Monarch, Alberta. It is situated in a beautiful, southern, rural community, minutes from Lethbridge. It has grades K-12 with over 150 students and with 11 FTE staff members. PCS offers:

- a four-day school week

- attractive working and living conditions
- a growing, committed school community
- a dedicated team of teachers

For inquiries check out our website: pcsmonarch.com or contact the principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek, principal@pcsmonarch.com, 403-381-4418.



## Trinitarian Bible Society (Canada)

The Central Ontario Auxiliary of the Trinitarian Bible Society

Invites you to attend their 2020 Annual Spring Meeting to be held, the Lord willing, on Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, at 8 PM, at the **Hamilton Free Reformed Church, 1114 Old Mohawk Rd., Ancaster**. The main speaker will be the Reverend **Pooyan Mehrshahi**, who has been the pastor of Providence Baptist Chapel, Cheltenham UK, since 2007. He is a native of Iran, and the main reviser for the current **Persian (Farsi) translation project**. We pray that this work may be used and blessed by God to Persian speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, and around the world. Pastor Mehrshahi is involved in a ministry for Persian speakers through Parsa Trust, and is also a trustee of the Bible League Trust.

### Come and hear about:

The Persian (Farsi) Translation Project  
 God's Providence in opening doors for this work to proceed  
 Accounts of those involved in this work  
 Risks  
 Arrests  
 Promises of the Lord



Rev. Pooyan Mehrshahi

For more information on this and many other works of the society please visit [www.tbsbibles.org](http://www.tbsbibles.org)

### HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS 2020 YOUTH CONFERENCE

## Looking to JESUS

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. —Hebrews 12:2

JULY 7-10, 2020  
 CAMP MICHAWANA

**HRC Youth Conference** is planned for July 7-10 at Camp Michawana in Hastings, MI. Be sure to reserve these dates for a special time of fellowship, growth and instruction in God's Word as we plan to consider inspirational topics on Looking to Jesus. Speakers include Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven, Rev. Brian Najafpour, Dr. Joel Beeke, Rev. Bill Boekestein and Rev. David VanBrugge. To receive the reduced price and reserve your place, register online now by visiting [heritagereformedgr.org/ministries/youth/youth-conference](http://heritagereformedgr.org/ministries/youth/youth-conference). Direct any questions to [youthcamp@hrcgr.org](mailto:youthcamp@hrcgr.org) or to Rich and Karen TenElshof at [rtenelshof@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rtenelshof@sbcglobal.net) or call **616-301-5692**.

## PRO-LIFE NEWS

### THE LANDSCAPE IN AMERICA FOR 2020

In January of this year, President Trump made history by becoming the first sitting President to address the annual March for Life rally in Washington D.C. “When we see the image of a baby in the womb, we glimpse the majesty of God’s creation... every human life, born and unborn, is made in the holy image of almighty God.” Both the President’s words and presence at the March served as a powerful symbol for what his presidency has meant to the pro-life movement during his administration and set the tone for a continuing fight in 2020.

In the last three years we have seen a conservative judicial revolution, federal funds being diverted from abortion clinics, and in just 2019, the furthering of fifty-nine state abortion restrictions. Yet there is much work for pro-life advocates ahead. In March of this year, the Supreme Court will hear the first abortion-related case since the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. The Court will hear the case of *June Medical Services v. Gee* to determine the fate of a new Louisiana law requiring any doctor performing abortion procedures to have admitting privileges at a hospital within thirty miles, the same standard of care other outpatient procedures in the state are held to (*The Federalist*). If the law is upheld, it is likely only one abortion clinic would remain in the state of Louisiana. If the Court indeed returns a verdict favorable to pro-life advocates, this will likely spur a great deal of cases and legislation aiming to end up before the justices. The country awaits this case and the results of the November election to determine the future fate of the ideological balance in several federal circuits and the Supreme Court itself. Meanwhile, several more state-led abortion bans are expected in 2020 from states like Tennessee, Idaho, Nebraska, Ohio and South Carolina. Elsewhere, states like New York, Maine, and Virginia have seemingly responded to this conservative resurgence by passing barbaric laws that increase access to late-term abortion, further widening the political and ideological gap on the issue of life.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### GLOBAL UPDATE

Religious freedom advocates in the United States are welcoming recent action by the Trump administration to protect prayer in school. Among the announced steps are the U.S. Dept. of Education’s plans to send memos to administrators in all fifty states with updated guidance and reminders that teachers and students may not be prevented from praying in public schools, and that federal funding may be withheld if students’ religious freedoms are violated. The administration further plans to publish draft rules issued by nine federal agencies that would “eliminate burdensome Obama-era requirements that unfairly imposed unique regulatory burdens only on religious organizations” (*The Christian Post*).

Elsewhere in the world, religious freedom for Christians continues to erode, as persecution continues to increase. In November the State Department made the first new addition since 2016 to its list of “countries of particular concern” for particularly severe

violations of religious freedom: Pakistan. It also added three countries to its “Special Watch” list, including Russia (*uscirf.gov*).

The Chinese government has also increased their oppression of Christians (and other religious peoples) as excerpted from *LifeSiteNews*: “New draconian rules for religious groups are set to go into place in China requiring that they ‘spread Communist Party principles.’ China’s totalitarian government promulgated new rules on December 30 that will place virtually all aspects of religious life under the control of the Communist Party. The ‘administrative measures’ consist of six chapters and 41 articles governing the ‘organization, functions, supervision and management of religious groups,’ which would include religious doctrine, annual and daily activities, and rallies.... In concert with the government’s policy of ‘sinicization,’ which is intended to underscore Chinese culture and socialist policy, the new rules reinforce policies announced in 2017 to reinterpret Christian teachings according to socialist doctrine.” The Chinese government will also require all religious organizations to submit all decisions for approval, and banned the celebration of Christmas. Despite this new wave of persecution, the church in China continues to grow.

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



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PARTNERING WITH CHURCHES IN EASTERN EUROPE  
TO BRING GLORY TO GOD THROUGH GOSPEL  
PROCLAMATION AND PRACTICAL MINISTRY.



# FROM OUR MAILBOX

## BANNER OF TRUTH TRACT MISSION

### FROM A FRIEND:

I am writing this letter to thank you for the Psalter books and the two CDs that you sent to me last month. It's a wonderful Psalter book and the CDs have beautiful psalters. The brothers here are very encouraged and thankful for that great blessing. May our sovereign Lord keep blessing your ministries and may He keep using you for the edification of His church in this world.

We happily and joyfully practice every Saturday night in the chapel, so that the next day on Sunday morning we are ready to worship the Lord. It's encouraging and a blessing to sing psalters to our Lord Jesus Christ. I also thank you once again for the other resources and for the sermons that you send to me. All that is very helpful and very edifying. Thank you so much.

### FROM PRISONERS:

I would like to thank you very much for your ministry. I have been receiving the catechism sermons for some time now. I look forward to them every week as they are my favorite mail. I was wondering if you have Lord's Day 36 as there was a jump from Lord's Day 35 to 37. And by the way, can you tell me what is meant by "Lord's Day" in this context? I've never had or been instructed in a catechism so I don't know what that means. I was also wondering how far the teachings go. These really are my favorite teachings and I would like to have them all. Like I said, I have never been taught from a catechism and I enjoy this systematic format and the building of one topic on the one proceeding.

Again, I thank you so very much for your ministry. You are truly a blessing to the body here as we grow together from these teachings.

\* \* \*

Thank you so very much for all you do for Christ's name. There is much error here...your ministry brings much needed truth inside these prison walls.

\* \* \*

I have been receiving your Bible sermons for over one year. I find them extremely helpful in discerning God's grace and my belief in the Reformed theology. Please continue to send them to me. I keep every one and go through them when I have a question about something they cover.

## INHERITANCE PUBLICATIONS

### FROM A FRIEND:

Thank you so much for the booklets "From the Inheritance of Our Fathers." They are such a blessing and are similar to a gem in mostly the daily ho-hum mail. I usually read each one several times before I pass them along to another needy soul. Thank you, and the Lord bless you.

## PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

### FROM A STUDENT:

The Puritan Theology class has been very meaningful to me all throughout this semester. Today on God's holiness was so special. There were moments when I couldn't even move. And I didn't want to leave. I felt like I was on hallowed ground. I praise the Lord for all He is. And I praise Him for using you as His instrument for teaching each one of us there the depth of the holiness of God. I was deeply touched today. I've heard about God's holiness since my childhood, and it had always meant a lot to me. But today was like a light bulb beaming directly into my heart and soul.

The sincerity of the Puritans striving to live for Christ in every area of their lives was also so precious to me. With the Holy Spirit's help, that is how I truly want to live.

May God be with you as you serve Him and teach so many how to live their lives completely for Him.

## REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

### FROM A FRIEND IN FLORIDA:

As I am reading *The Lord Shepherd His Sheep*, I am humbled each time a characteristic of sheep is spoken of and then thinking about how we are considered the sheep and how totally and utterly helpless we are and in need of our Shepherd to guide us, take care of and provide for us. Since becoming a Christian four years ago, I knew how we were referred to as sheep, but didn't know how the characteristics of sheep were used to reflect our helplessness until now.

Each time I learn something new about connections in the Bible I am thrilled, humbled, and thankful that God is answering my prayer to reveal the truth and give me deeper wisdom from the Bible to deepen the root of my faith so that it may never be shaken.

### FROM A FRIEND IN CANADA:

I am emailing you today to seek permission to use the book *Fighting Satan* as a course and to use the questions after each chapter as an outline. I run an addictions and recovery program and have been looking at adding more Reformed resources to a watered down program, and since we are battling bad theology in response to demonology, I would like to use this book. I work for an inner-city mission agency that affirms itself as Christ centred and therefore it is my job to build that in into an existing addictions ministry.

### FROM AN E-MAIL FRIEND:

I'm a religious studies major and philosophy minor and am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been reading through the book, *Living For God's Glory*, and have been truly blessed and enriched by the work that the contributors did in the book. Getting a very solid introduction to the Puritans has been so sweet for me, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the book.

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## JESU, THE WORLD'S REDEEMING LORD

Jesu, the world's redeeming Lord,  
The Father's co-eternal Word,  
Of light invisible true Light,  
Thine Israel's Keeper day and night.

Our great Creator and our Guide,  
Who times and seasons dost divide,  
Refresh at night with quiet rest,  
Our limbs by daily toil oppressed.

That while in this frail house of clay  
A little longer here we stay,  
Our flesh in Thee may sweetly sleep,  
Our souls with Thee their vigils keep.

We pray Thee, while we dwell below,  
Preserve us from our ghostly foe;  
Nor let his wiles victorious be  
O'er them that are redeemed by Thee.

O Lord of all, with us abide  
In this our joyful Eastertide;  
From every weapon death can wield  
Thine own redeemed forever shield.

All praise be Thine, O risen Lord,  
From death to endless life restored;  
All praise to God the Father be,  
And Holy Ghost eternally.

—Unknown author, translated from Latin  
to English by William J. Copeland

# the **Banner** of Sovereign Grace Truth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

**A PERIODICAL FOR FAMILIES**