

THE BANNER

OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

SPECIAL THEME: Reformation Worship

The Jealousy That Cannot Bear a Partner

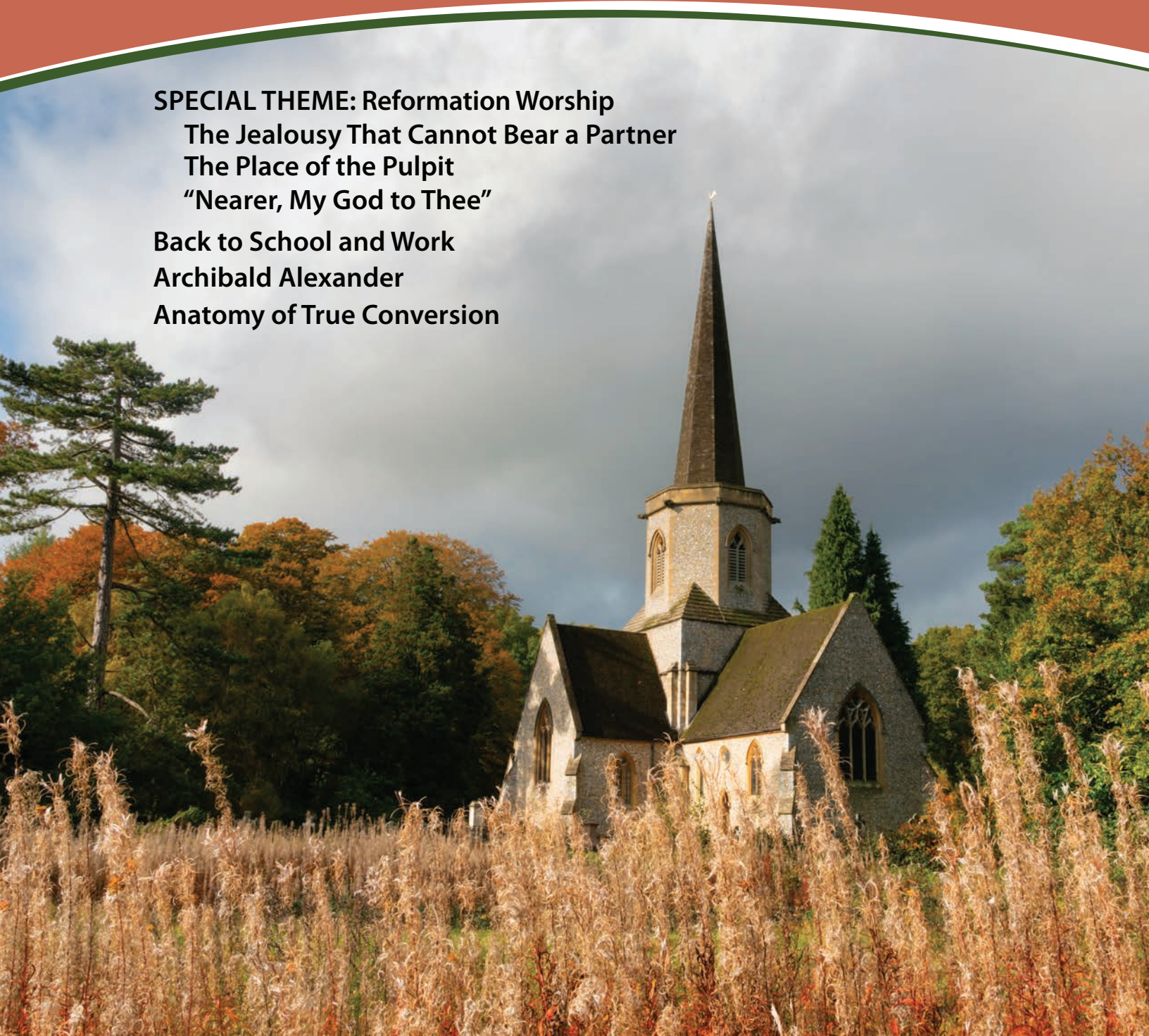
The Place of the Pulpit

"Nearer, My God to Thee"

Back to School and Work

Archibald Alexander

Anatomy of True Conversion



THE BANNER OF
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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SPECIAL THEME AND THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

This issue focuses on one of the Reformation's most major themes: purity of worship, which has often been called from the Puritan times forward, the RPW (the regulative principle of worship). That is to say, all worship today must adhere to New Testament worship that aims at the glory of God and is faithful to the Word of God. Also, we pray for God's benediction to rest on professors, teachers, students, and staff alike, from the pre-K level all the way up to the PhD level in our Christian schools and seminary as another school year begins.



Back to Work and School?

After a vacation, we're called back to work and school, to attend church, and serve God in church ministries. It's like Israel, having celebrated Passover and set free from slavery in Egypt, sent forth on its way to the promised land, through the wilderness of this world. Let's consider three commands from Exodus 14.

STAND STILL TO SEE HIS SALVATION

Before them the Red Sea, behind them the Egyptians, and to their left and right high mountains. Yet, Moses told them, "Fear ye not, stand still" (v. 13). Stand still, while they already were standing still? But he continues: "And see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day." To see God's salvation, we, like Israel, first must stand still and see it—or Him. What does that mean? Before we do anything, we must take time to turn to God's Word and prayerfully trust His Word.

What they see with their eyes, humanly speaking, is impossible. They are scared and cry out to the Lord (v. 10). Then, in verses 11–12, they reveal their anger by saying, "If we had stayed in Egypt, we would have been much better off!" They blame their trouble on Moses, but it's really directed to the Lord (like we often do). That's why we must stand still, pause, and confess our sin, before we move on, no matter what trouble we face.

That's when Moses told them, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today." The word "salvation" in Hebrew is *Jah-shuah*, which means "*Jahweh* who saves." He will save you! You will see it—first with spiritual eyes, with the "eye of faith," then with physical eyes. "Joshua" in Hebrew is the same as "Jesus" in Greek. Remember the angel telling Joseph that Mary was pregnant, and "she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21)? He is the ultimate Savior, not Moses. But we first must stand still, confess our sin, and trust God's Word.

TRUST HIM TO FIGHT YOUR ENEMIES

As Isaiah tells us, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (45:22). We so easily rely on our own wit and strength, or if we can't fix it, we try to "grin and bear it." Either way, it is wrong. Look away from self to Jesus. How did He fight for our salvation? He lived a perfect life and then offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice in our place. That's what we must see, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever" (Ex. 14:13–14). We do not have the same enemies as Israel, but ultimately this is a battle with self. Note the *today* emphasis. Trust God day by day. "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Trust God to feed you and care for you, both physically and spiritually. God will do what He promises. For Israel, this meant to destroy the Egyptians, forever. This does not mean He will always destroy all our enemies and solve all our problems. It does mean He will save us by either removing our problems or carrying us through them. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (v. 15).

GO FORWARD AT HIS COMMAND

Why are you still praying? Get up, and go! "But Lord, I don't see the way." Indeed, you won't see the entire way, yet go forward, not just one day at a time but one step at a time. Start going even if you can't yet see the way ahead of you. A minister told me that one Monday morning, he was on his knees, praying to God to tell him what to preach on next. Then this passage came to his mind. In other words, "If you want to know what to preach on, get up and open your Bible." Not just read but search God's Word, praying for the Holy Spirit to guide you in the way of our heavenly Father, seeing and following Jesus.

Notice how God commands Moses to do this: "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (v. 16). Again, it's not Moses or the rod that does it but God, by us using the means. We find this beautifully confirmed in these words: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12)—not *work* but *work out* your own salvation. How? "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (v. 13).

In other words, God not only provides what He commands but it is His pleasure. He delights to do it for us, in us, and by us: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4). This does not mean it will be easy—God never promised that—but it will be safe. The Israelites walked across the Red Sea on dry ground, into the wilderness. What a picture of us traveling through the wilderness of this life, the promised land in view.

Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag is an emeritus HRC minister.

Archibald Alexander

(1772–1851)

In the spring of 1791, nineteen-year-old Archibald Alexander and his mentor, Dr. William Graham, were riding their horses to a presbytery meeting in Augusta County, near Lexington, Virginia. Alexander was on his way to be examined in order to be licensed to preach. As his instructor and mentor, Graham had sensed Alexander's call to the ministry and encouraged him to pursue licensure.

Alexander, however, had a different goal in mind. He hoped to persuade the presbytery not to license him too soon. As their horses crossed a creek swollen with melted snow water, Alexander said to Graham, "Maybe the presbytery will decide that it is best to wait a while before licensing me."

"Perhaps," Graham said. "Or they might decide you are ready and license you now."

Alexander's stomach sank at the thought of himself—short and boyish in appearance as he was—being licensed to preach. *If they just waited a few more years*, Alexander thought, *at least I might be taller or healthier or better prepared.*

Dr. Graham, however, saw in the young man what many in Alexander's family, church, and community had already seen. Under Graham's guidance, Alexander excelled in the study of theology, the humanities, psychology, and the sciences. More importantly, Alexander had been brought to assurance of his salvation in Jesus Christ out of a lengthy time of spiritual searching and struggle. Graham had witnessed all of this as Alexander's instructor and mentor since his childhood.

"Don't be anxious, Alexander," Graham said, reading his pupil's inner turmoil. "Do your best and leave the outcome to the Lord." Having Alexander even apply for licensure was an accomplishment. Dr. Graham persuaded him that being licensed would enable him to join Graham on an itinerant preaching tour of the area and that the travel could benefit his health.

Alexander arrived at the presbytery and began his exams. Each part worried him—Latin, Scripture exegesis, and lecture writing—but his training under Dr. Graham paid off, and he passed most of the tests in his first round of exams. The lecture he delivered was on the difference between a living and a dead faith. In his second round of exams, focusing on theology and sermon delivery, he greatly disliked the text that the presbytery gave him to preach because it brought him face-to-face with his own insecurities and excuses to postpone God's call: "But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jer. 1:7). The presbytery chose this text on purpose to teach Alexander how to put his own insecurities aside when preaching the Word. And that is

just what Alexander did. After he delivered the sermon, the presbytery was impressed with his maturity and his focus on the passage's teaching without the slightest personal reference.

"Congratulations, Alexander," Graham said after hearing the presbytery's feedback on the sermon. "The presbytery spoke highly of your sermon. It was a carefully prepared message on a pivotal topic—the call to the ministry!" Graham could not help smiling. Having passed his exams, Alexander was licensed. No one at that time knew that Alexander's licensure would change the history of the Presbyterian church in important ways.

Early Years, Education, and Conversion

Archibald Alexander was born in 1772, the third of nine children. His family descended from Scotch-Irish immigrants converted during the eighteenth-century revival called the First Great Awakening, inspired by the ministries of William Tennant, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield, among many others. Living in a log house in mountainous Virginia, seven miles east of Lexington, Alexander grew up surrounded by stunning views of valleys and mountain peaks, streams, and waterfalls. The rugged beauty of God's creation influenced Alexander's understanding of the majesty of God and His powerful ordering of all things to His own glory.

Noticing his son's academic giftedness, Alexander's father sent him to a nearby school, in the Timber Ridge meeting house, where William Graham instructed Alexander in classical studies, science, mathematics, theology, and preaching. When Alexander was seventeen, he became a tutor for a few months in the home of Revolutionary War veteran General Thomas Posey. In General Posey's home there lived an elderly Mrs. Tyler who had an early influence on Alexander's spiritual awakening. A religious revival called the Second Great Awakening was occurring around this time. Mrs. Tyler told Alexander of her conversion experience and often asked him to read Puritan works aloud to her because of her weak eyesight. "On one of these Sabbath evenings," Alexander wrote, "I was requested to read out of [John] Flavel...on Revelation 3:20, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.'... The truth took effect on my feelings, and every word I read seemed applicable to my own case."¹ During these months, Alexander's heart would often fluctuate from the joys of understanding more of the gospel through greater views of Christ to the depression of sensing the greatness of his own sin and the wickedness of his heart. Although his spiritual struggles continued for some time, he made a public profession of faith in Christ at the end of 1789. He later wrote, "I am of opinion, that my

regeneration took place while I resided at General Posey's in the year 1788."

Beginnings of Gospel Ministry and a College President

Alexander's plans to continue his studies at the College of New Jersey² were halted through a providential illness that lasted several months. Instead, God opened the way for him to study with Dr. Graham at Liberty Academy (now Washington and Lee University), where his hunger for God's Word and interest in gospel ministry deepened. Graham helped Alexander develop an independent style of reasoning that depended on Scripture rather than established works of theology or confessions, which prepared him to be a more able defender of the Reformed orthodoxy of the Presbyterian tradition, embodied in the Westminster Standards.³

On an itinerant preaching tour of the area around Lexington, Virginia, Alexander recounted an early preaching experience: "Although I did not know a single word which I was to utter," he wrote, "I began with a rapidity and fluency equal to any I have enjoyed to this day. I was astonished at myself, and as I was young and small, the old people were not less astonished." Alexander developed great skill as an extemporaneous preacher, not relying on the use of notes or manuscripts. This style of preaching was especially useful as an itinerant preacher, since he could adapt sermons more directly to the needs of different hearers as he went from place to place.

In 1793, he began to serve churches in Prince Edward County, preaching, visiting homes, and maintaining his personal study of theology, science, and radical Enlightenment⁴ thought. Alexander heard one of the speeches of Patrick Henry (1736–1799), an American founding father and former governor of Virginia, who lived nearby. Alexander was greatly influenced by Henry's oratory skills, for which he was renowned (the revolutionary battle cry, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" was Henry's). In 1798, Alexander reluctantly accepted the position of president of Hampden-Sydney College, a once-thriving but then-failing institution. With the help of other pastors-professors, he combined his pastoral experience and academic skill to resuscitate the institution, beginning with strictly drilling the students in common college subjects of the day. Alexander promoted literature and the sciences as important vehicles for the advancement of God's kingdom. With his health suffering under the pressure of multiple roles, Alexander resigned his position as president in 1801. The college kept the position of president open for him, hoping that he would soon return.



Archibald Alexander

General Assembly in Philadelphia and New England Journey

In 1801, Alexander went to Philadelphia to serve as a commissioner to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. On the way, Alexander lodged in the home of Dr. James Waddel, an aged minister once known for his eloquent preaching in that part of Virginia. His eyesight now failing, Dr. Waddel was assisted by his daughter, Janetta; she would help her father around the house and read books to him, some in Latin. Janetta's godliness and selfless care for her father deeply impressed Alexander. Before continuing his journey, Alexander proposed to her and was granted permission for Janetta's hand in marriage. He would marry her upon his return from Philadelphia.

The General Assembly in Philadelphia was establishing links with the Congregational churches of New England in hopes of combining forces in a "Plan of Union" for the westward expansion of their denominations. Alexander was sent as a delegate of the Assembly to visit the New England

churches. Journeying throughout the region and preaching in various churches and institutions, he came face-to-face with the Unitarianism, Socinianism, and Arianism then spreading in New England (Harvard University would be chaired by a Unitarian by 1805).⁵ Passing through the mountains of New Hampshire exposed him to Quakers, Quietists, the Green Mountain Boys, and whole communities isolated from the influence of religion and preaching.⁶ This trip enlarged Alexander's awareness both of the expanding horizons of God's kingdom and the breadth of religious opinion in the country.

Stepping into married life with Janetta Waddel in April 1802, Alexander decided to resume his former position as president of Hampden-Sydney College. Janetta's strong character and experience as a pastor's daughter was a good match for her husband's personality and work. Two of their sons would follow in their father's footsteps, one as a renowned Old Testament scholar and commentator, Joseph Addison Alexander (1809–1860), and the other as a highly regarded preacher and pastor, James Waddel Alexander (1804–1859).

At Hampden-Sydney College, Alexander witnessed what was becoming an increasing problem at many American colleges at that time. Student conduct was marked by defiance, disregard for authority, and lack of discipline in studies. Exhausted with the students at Hampden-Sydney College, Alexander wrote, "I grew weary of governing them."⁷ In 1806, he accepted a call to pastor the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia.⁸

A Pastor-Scholar in Philadelphia

The Alexander family settled in Philadelphia while Alexander engaged himself in many creative ministry endeavors in the city. He began a sermon series on the basic doctrines of Christianity at Third Presbyterian Church. He started an evening evangelistic outreach effort called "The Evangelical Society" that enlisted pastors from nearby churches to preach the gospel to the children, the poor, and the marginalized communities of the city. Seeing a link between a decline in doctrinal knowledge and the people's taste for low-quality reading material, Alexander got involved in producing and distributing Christian literature, tracts, and newspapers. The many libraries and bookstores in Philadelphia also helped him to upgrade the quality of his personal study of biblical studies; the canon of Scripture; systematic, polemic,⁹ and historical theology; and the works of many American, British, and Continental theologians. Alexander's strongest areas of interest were church history and the Latin and Greek Church Fathers.¹⁰ In his six years as pastor at Third Presbyterian, its membership increased by 50 percent, his extemporaneous, evangelically solid, and experiential preaching was well received, and his scholarly pursuits were recognized when the College of New Jersey conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1810.

A Scholar-Pastor in Princeton

A sermon Alexander preached to the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1808 led to the planning and establishment of

Princeton Theological Seminary three years later. In a time when well-known institutions Yale and Harvard were sliding into rationalism and deism, Alexander and the Assembly envisioned a school where both academic excellence and the pursuit of godliness were promoted. "Filling the Church with a learned and able ministry, without a corresponding portion of real piety," the seminary's plan read, "would be a curse to the world, and an offence to God and his people"—so the seminary must be "a nursery of vital piety, as well as of sound theological learning: and to train up persons for the ministry, who shall be lovers, as well as defenders, of the truth as it is in Jesus; friends of revivals of religion; and a blessing to the Church of God."¹¹ In 1812, Alexander was unanimously appointed the first professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at Princeton, an office he would hold until 1840. This was an important milestone in the history of American Presbyterianism, whose confessional standards were defended for generations by able men trained at Princeton in the face of the advance of modernism's secular sway on other denominations.

Alexander immersed himself in his new responsibilities at Princeton, designing a curriculum and preparing lectures for the incoming class while waiting for additional faculty to assist him. Student enrollment doubled between the years 1817–1829, increasing from under fifty to over a hundred. In 1820, Charles Hodge, a graduate of the seminary and of the College of New Jersey, was hired as Professor of Biblical Languages. Samuel Miller, also an important founder of the seminary, served alongside Alexander as Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government from 1813 until his retirement in 1849.

Preaching and Piety

Even while serving as a seminary professor and administrator, Alexander kept up his usual practice of preaching to nearby congregations, and his experiential sermons became a source of religious renewal in the Princeton community. In his preaching, he demonstrated a gift for "dissecting the heart, unravelling long trains of experience, discovering hidden refuges, holding the mirror up to self-deceiving souls, and flashing rays of gracious hope on the lingering and self-righteous; he was equaled by few."¹² Charles Hodge describes what it was like to sit under Alexander's preaching:

Those who heard were convinced. Their conscience... bore testimony to the truth of what he said. They were judged, or examined. Their feelings... were analyzed, examined, and their true character discerned and estimated.... All classes of persons felt the power of this searching process. The procrastinating, the skeptical, the hardened, were astonished to find with what accuracy they were depicted, and thoughts and feeling, misgivings and purposes, which they thought hidden from all eyes, were brought to light.... Personal experience, observation, and Scripture, not fancy, were sources whence he drew.¹³

For Alexander, his role as a Christian, father, and husband did not exist in a separate world from his role as a pastor, professor, and seminary administrator. He lived an integrated life, where his piety and professional life were in harmony. By the Spirit's work in his life as he lived before God's Word, he possessed an enriched intellect combined with the simplicity of a child so that he "possessed the finest skill in interpreting and in treating with acute precision, the states and frames of all who sought his counsel or listened to his instructions."¹⁴ Alexander loved Christ, His church, and lost sinners. He put his detailed knowledge of the human heart to use in counseling others. His students often pointed out that even his lectures were devotional in character and effect.¹⁵

Alexander daily made time for his family and would often engage in conversation with them on any topic that interested him from "his newspaper, his book, his class, from visits, church or journey."¹⁶ Unless he was in private devotions, he kept his study open to his children, whose noise, toys, and activities did not distract him from the work at hand. He enjoyed playing with his children, telling them stories, and leading family Bible reading, singing, and prayer.

Alexander was a reluctant writer, but three of his books were highly influential in the training of ministers worldwide.¹⁷ The first, *Outlines of the Evidences of Christianity*, responded to rationalistic skepticism by providing "evidences" for the reliability of the Scriptures and the gospel message. The other was *The Canon of the Old and New Testament*. And third was *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, which is a masterpiece of experiential and pastoral divinity of soul-exercises.¹⁸ Alexander is also remembered as the chronicler of the history of eighteenth-century revival preacher William Tennent and the "school of the prophets" he founded, called "the Log College," to which both Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary trace their beginnings.¹⁹

Divisions and Controversy

In the 1820s and 1830s, the Presbyterian Church found itself embroiled in theological controversy. The "Plan of Union" of 1801 had introduced the modified Calvinism of New England into the church, and those who favored it came to be known as "New School Presbyterians." Those who opposed the New England theology were "Old School Presbyterians." At stake were a host of issues, including the nature and extent of Christ's atonement; original sin and the degree of fallen man's natural light, ability, and freedom of will; the proper conduct of revivals of religion; subscription to the Westminster Standards; and the divine or biblical warrant for Presbyterian church government. In 1837, the Old School Presbyterians acted to "excise" or cut off "New School" presbyteries and synods from the denomination, and the conflict of many years ended in outright division of the church into two opposing, often competing denominations.

Widespread theological change was impacting the seminary, denomination, and country.²⁰ In 1837, Alexander wrote

a letter expressing dismay at the disunity that marked gatherings of the General Assembly. He had firm opinions on the issues that were being debated but did not make a platform for himself in their defense. His teaching and writing were outlets for promoting awareness of key biblical doctrines that he hoped would bring clarity and promote unity.

In the decades before the Civil War, slavery was also a major source of concern and contention among Presbyterians and, when hostilities broke out in 1861, would further divide both the Old and the New School bodies. The General Assembly's 1818 "Declaration of Slavery" condemned the practice as inconsistent with the law of God and the "principles of the Gospel of Christ," but this action only added fuel to the fires of conflict in the church. Alexander tended to agree with the General Assembly, thereby supporting the view of Ashbel Green (1762–1848), an American Presbyterian minister and academic; they were contemporaries and collaborators.

In the late 1830s, Alexander's junior colleague, Charles Hodge, tried to find a more moderate and middle way by arguing that slavery was neither forbidden nor condemned by Scripture but was to be regulated by the principles of Christian charity. Hodge did oppose slavery, however, but argued for its abolition by process of gradual attrition, as these principles of Christian charity worked their way into the hearts and lives of Christians everywhere. The men of Old Princeton found themselves fighting a war on two fronts, resisting both the false logic of those who defended the South's "peculiar institution," and the intense zeal of some who demanded its immediate and total abolition.²¹

In addition to all this, America's religious landscape was changing. Charles Finney's man-centered "revivalism" was promoting a Pelagian gospel of moral self-improvement and perfectionism that denied core Christian doctrines such as man's total depravity and salvation by grace alone through faith. Finney's methods in procuring and conducting his "revival" meetings were the practical implementation of New England theologian Nathaniel Taylor's denial of the doctrines of original sin, regeneration, and the bondage of the will. Facing a changing religious scene in America, Princeton Seminary was an environment of lively debate, for the students came from different denominations—Baptist, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian. But the strong campus culture of piety helped to maintain a climate of unity that prevented major divisions among the students. In this debate, however, like every other, Alexander himself stood strong as a faithful Calvinist who defended the truth both objectively and subjectively against the errors and heresies of his day. Consequently, Alexander took the traditional, Calvinistic side of Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844), a highly influential theologian during the Second Great Awakening, on the question of revivals and how they should be sought and conducted.

Finally, and not surprisingly, engagement in the intellectual and spiritual battlefields of the day moved Alexander to take a strong and bold stand against the radical skepticism and rationalism of philosopher David Hume. Alexander warmly

advocated for “Common Sense Philosophy” as propagated by Thomas Reid as a major antidote to Hume’s thinking. After expounding basic characteristics of judgment, Reid asserts that certain common-sense principles about how the external and internal worlds function should be taken for granted as true.

Finishing the Race

In 1850, a year before his death, Archibald Alexander attended the annual meeting of the Synod of New Jersey. Alexander was surprised when he was asked to deliver one of the evening sermons. He replied, “I am too old; you must select some other person.” But the minister who asked him replied, “You see, sir, that a large proportion of the ministers of the Synod have been your pupils, and this may be the last time that they will ever have the privilege of listening to your voice.” These words struck Alexander. He consented to preach, and as he spoke, it seemed to many who heard “that he stood on the very verge of heaven, and was fully ready to say, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day” (cf. 2 Tim. 4:7–8).²² For most who were present, this was the last time they saw him. Alexander’s public ministry would conclude in September 1851. He died a month later.

Alexander’s Significance

Archibald Alexander’s life holds forth valuable lessons for us. First, when Christians and ministers become lifelong learners of a wide variety of subject areas, as Alexander was, they can often be of great service to the work of God’s kingdom.

Second, Alexander lived the belief that academic skill is useless without a sincere, deep love for Christ expressed in a lifelong pursuit of godliness that bears fruit in the home and in the church. He knew that if biblical orthodoxy and piety were not maintained as equal priorities, then rationalism would eventually render any seminary useless to the needs of the church. Very few schools maintained this double focus on academic expertise and personal piety. Princeton taught that theology must lead to love for Christ, love for His people, and childlike humility. Alexander teaches us that what we say and teach must be rooted in the power of the character of our lives, not just in great scholarship.

Third, as worldly ideologies constantly assert themselves against the doctrines of the gospel (like the rationalism of Alexander’s day or the identity politics and postmodernism of our day, or the next new idea to come along in the future), Alexander teaches us that there is always a need for Christians in each generation to resist the subtle or direct assaults against Reformed orthodoxy, defend biblical doctrine, and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Alexander was a transitional figure, standing between an old world and a new world. He promoted a more academically focused Presbyterianism that could stand up to modern rationalism and, through Princeton Seminary, ensured for

generations the availability of ministers who maintained the right balance between academic rigor and personal godliness. Princeton’s graduates were committed not just to Princeton but to sound biblical doctrine and genuine biblical godliness. In response to the rise of theological liberalism at Princeton in the 1920s, J. Gresham Machen and other theologians left the school to establish Westminster Theological Seminary, where the spirit of the Princeton tradition of academic skill and piety was carried on.

1. J. W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854; repr., Sprinkle, 1991), 44–45. *LAA* hereafter.

2. The foundation of today’s Princeton University.

3. Westminster Standards: The doctrinal confessions and catechisms that were produced by a large group of theologians at Westminster Abbey from 1643 to 1649 and that guide the Presbyterian church to this day.

4. Enlightenment: a movement among the thinkers of Europe in the 1700s that eventually spread to common people and many parts of the world, that emphasized a kind of logical thinking that dismissed the importance of God, the Bible, and the supernatural. Enlightenment thinkers argued that “reason” made monarchies and church power unnecessary and called for political revolutions and revisions of biblical doctrine.

5. Unitarianism, Socinianism, and Arianism are three related belief systems that became popular as Enlightenment rationalism took over churches and higher education institutions in Europe and America in the 18th century.

6. Quakers and Quietists. Quakers are members of a Christian group known as the Society of Friends who teach that Christians should rely on an “inner light” to guide them through life, rather than ministers or traditional reliance on the means of grace. “Quietist” was often another name for groups related to Quakers in belief or practice. Green Mountain Boys. Led by Ethan Allen, with his brother Ira, the Green Mountain Boys were a patriot military force of several hundred men who controlled and defended the area west of the Green Mountains in Vermont. The group put up armed resistance to officials who tried to enforce New York land grants in their area.

7. *LAA*, 275–76.

8. Also known as Pine Street Presbyterian Church, “Church of the Patriots,” founded in 1768.

9. Polemic theology is the area of Christian doctrine dealing with the defense of the faith against errors, unbiblical ideologies, heresy, and world religions.

10. *LAA*, 355.

11. See Miller, *A Brief History*, 8.

12. *LAA*, 686.

13. Charles Hodge, “Memoir of Dr. Alexander,” *BRPR* Vol. 27 no. 1 (January 1855): 155–56.

14. See Hodge, *Conference Papers: Or Analyses of Discourses, Doctrinal and Practical, Delivered on Sabbath Afternoon to the Students of the Seminary*, viii–ix.

15. Charles Hodge, “Memoir of Dr. Alexander,” *BRPR* Vol. 27 no. 1 (January 1855): 158–59.

16. *LAA*, 405.

17. Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1826).

18. Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844).

19. Archibald Alexander, *The Log College: Biographical Sketches of William Tennent and His Students, together with an Account of the Revivals under Their Ministries* (1851; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1968).

20. For an overview of the changes see Paul K. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

21. See Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Faith & Learning 1812–1868*, 1:325–26. Calhoun’s entire chapter, “The Church and the Country,” from which much of this material is drawn, is an informative picture of Princeton Theological Seminary’s engagement with the cultural issues of ante-bellum America during the 1830s–1840s.

22. *LAA*, 587–90.

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



PSALM 67—A WORLDWIDE VISION FOR GOD'S GLORY

From its inception, Puritan Reformed has always had a worldwide mission and vision. Our seminary's aim has long been to reach the ends of the earth with biblical, confessionally Reformed, experiential, and robust education. Recent developments in the online MA program have seen an explosion in international interest and growth; for this we are immensely thankful. Our prayer is that God would bless this work so that people from every nation around the globe would together praise our God, and as Psalm 67 anticipates, that the earth would yield its increase.

Psalm 67 encapsulates well this worldwide vision. This Old Testament missionary psalm has been described by one commentator as “the joyful outpouring of a heart which longs to see the God and King of Israel acknowledged and worshiped as the God and King of the world” (Richard Phillips, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, 258). You might say that Psalm 67 is a prayerful declaration of joyful and expectant hope that our God would pour out His blessings upon *all* nations and so, undoubtedly, gather a rich and bountiful harvest of worshipers.

What cannot be missed, however, is that this worldwide harvest of worshipers has one singular purpose: the praise and glory of God (and not the glory of any one individual or institution). This is emphasized by the poetic structure of Psalm 67. You will notice that a refrain is repeated in verses 3 and 5. But what you may not notice immediately is that Psalm 67 is a chiasm—that is, the psalm employs a Hebrew literary device in which ideas are presented and then repeated or paralleled in the reverse order, often with an emphasis on the center. Notice how in this psalm the prayerful request for God's blessing is made in verse 1, and the answer is paralleled in verse 7: “God *shall* bless us.” In verse 2, the psalmist prays that God's way and power would be known throughout the earth; this is answered in verse 6: “then shall the earth yield her increase.” As noted, the refrain of verse 3 is repeated in verse 5. Put simply, verse 1 matches verse 7; verse 2 matches verse 6; and verse 3 matches verse 5. It is verse 4, then, that sits at the center of Psalm 67. This verse, which is *not* repeated or paralleled, forms the heart of the psalm.

This central verse reads, “O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth.” How can the psalmist pray with such boldness? How is it possible that we pray confidently for God's blessing to have universal scope and significance? Does it rest on our gifts or the number of Christians involved? While God uses human instruments for the spread of the gospel, our confidence does not rest on our numbers or abilities. No, the psalmist's prayer is centered on

God's just and equitable rule over all nations. The answer to our prayer rests on the one to whom we are praying. He is Lord over all; He is the one who can make His own fame cover the earth! He can use us, weak as we are, to bring glory to Himself. Not only does the psalmist recognize the sovereign power of God to rule all nations but He does so with equity—our sovereign God rules with perfect justice and leads all nations. Interestingly, the same verb often used to describe God *leading* Israel out of Egypt to the promised land is used here. It is the covenant Lord who guides the nations, leading them to Himself. It is only then that the nations will be glad and rejoice. In today's context, where the nations (including our own) rage against the one true God, let us join together in confident, expectant prayer that God *will* gather to Himself a multitude of worshipers from all nations, all for His glory.

—Jonathon Beeke

Academic Dean / Associate Professor of Historical Theology



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ALUMNI INTERVIEW: KUSHAL RAI



After graduating from Puritan Reformed, where have you been serving Christ and His church, and in what capacity?

Having returned home in the year 2010 (fourteen years have gone by), I resumed my responsibility as a faculty at Darjeeling Hills Bible School (DHBS). In 2013, I was ordained as the minister of the Word in a Presbyterian denomination. Since 2017, the

Board of DHBS, after the demise of my father, appointed me as the principal of the Bible school, and I was also elected as the Clerk of the Session, the post which I continue to hold till this date.

What does a typical day/week of ministry look like for you?

As someone engaged in teaching ministry, my day at the school begins at 9 in the morning to 4:30 in the evening. On Tuesdays, after class hours, I, along with a co-pastor, usually do home visitation (either one or two). On Wednesday evenings, we have a prayer meeting in the church. On Thursday evenings, I do Bible study with the students, and on Fridays we have cottage meetings.

Saturdays are an off day for the school, but at least twice a week, I'm traveling either to attend church meetings or programs or for Sunday ministry. On Sundays, I usually preach three times a month.

Looking back on your seminary training, do you think it helped you for the ministry? Why or why not?

My training at Puritan Reformed has been of greatest help to me in my ministry. I must say, my time there gave me a strong sense and call to pastoral ministry; molded my heart as a pastor; and developed within me a deep sense of personal piety, a greater hunger for the Word, love for the church as well as the lost, and a perpetual need for His grace and mercy both in my life and in my ministry.

Have you found experiential theology, as taught at Puritan Reformed, robust or missing in your ministry context? What are you doing to foster a deeper appreciation of it among those you serve and co-labor with?

I have found experiential theology taught at Puritan Reformed robust as well as essential in my ministry context. Experiential theology is manifested not only in the context of preaching but equally in the context of personal engagements with various believers. It has taught me to be more patient, compassionate, gracious, kind, and loving as I engage with believers in their spiritual warfare.

Experiential theology in my context was a strange idea; most, if not all (when I first spoke) had never heard the term. I began by teaching (to students) and preaching (to congregants) experientially. Another method to foster experiential theology was to introduce the writings and sermons of the

Puritans and the like to my co-pastors. I talked about PRTS, about the faculty, their manner of teaching and fellowshiping as one large family. Many today appreciate and practice Reformed experiential theology in their respective ministries.

What part does family worship play in fostering a personal faith and piety among the people you serve?

Family worship plays an integral as well as essential role in the lives of the majority of our families. In many families, there is the practice of morning (often around 6:00 a.m.) as well as evening devotions. Nearly all families do have evening devotions. Sadly, there aren't many good Reformed materials to use in my native language that can be used for family devotions.

What are some challenges you face in the ministry and why?

In my context, a minister of the gospel is expected to be a multitasked man; as a result, there is constant pressure, which at times is overwhelming. Due to lack of learning opportunities, resources, and like-minded ministers, ministry can become mundane, and there can be a lack of freshness. Another area of challenge is the lack of growth and fruits within the church.

What advice would you give to students currently studying at Puritan Reformed?

I strongly believe that Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary is the best center of learning anywhere with a perfect blend of academics, pastoral emphases, and personal piety. My advice to students studying is to take advantage of the opportunity of learning and developing, whether it is in the classroom, personal study, interacting with faculty and fellow students, or attending conferences. For many, it is the only opportunity we may receive. Your lifetime of ministry depends heavily on your time of development at the seminary.

How could the Puritan Reformed community pray for you?

Pray for me that the Lord would continue to grant me sound health spiritually as well as physically so that I may serve the Lord faithfully and with joy and gladness.

Pray for my family—my wife, Tina Esther, as administrator of a Christian school (Mount Zion School), which is a part of our ministry; my two boys, Calvin (six years) and Joel (four years), that they would be saved to love and serve the Lord.

Pray for my ministry at the Bible school, our local church, as well as the Christian school that the Lord, who is able to do far exceedingly and above of that we have asked and thought, would continue to provide for our personal and ministerial needs.

Pray that, as we pray and plan to further the construction and expansion of both of our schools, that the Lord would provide for our expenses.

Pray that the church in general and the Reformed/Presbyterian church in India would continue to grow, both in quality and quantity, to be a beacon of light to those in darkness.

DR. MICHAEL BARRETT | *Itinerary*

September 1: Pompton Plains, New Jersey: Free Reformed Church
September 15: Burgessville, Ontario: Heritage Reformed Church
September 29: Deckerville, Michigan: East Marion Baptist Church

Publications

“Theocentric and Trinitarian Worship” in *Puritan Reformed Journal*, Vol. 16, number 2; July 2024
“Called to Holiness,” *Tabletalk*, July 2024
“3 Things to Know about Zechariah” at Ligonier.org

DR. JOEL R. BEEKE | *Itinerary*

September 1–2: Zambia, Africa (preaching)
September 11: Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo Reformed Church (topic)
September 14–16: Sacramento, California: Doxa Church (preaching)
September 21–23: Franklin, Tennessee: Stonebridge Bible Church (preaching and topics)
October 8–9: Williamstown, Kentucky: Creation Museum Conference for pastors (address)
October 10–12: Wuppertal, Germany: Voice of Hope Conference: A Family with God at the Center (several addresses)
October 13: Munich, Germany: preach for Matthias Lohman
October 17–19: Kaiserslautern, Germany: Puritan Conference (several addresses)
October 20: Kaiserslautern, Germany: preach for Pastor Peter Krell (a.m.)
October 20: Giessen, Germany: preach for Confessing Evangelical Reformed Congregation for Jochen Klautke (p.m.)
October 21: Giessen, Germany: lecture in seminary
October 30—November 2: Birmingham, England: Creation Mega Conference with Ken Ham (3 addresses)
November 3–4: Wolverhampton, England: preach for Andrew Whithead (a.m.) and Conrad Pomeroy (eve.)

Publications

Edit with Paul Smalley, *The Lord of Endurance and Encouragement: Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books)
Puritan Reformed Journal, 16, 2 (July 2024); edit with Paul Smalley
“Practical Application in Preaching,” *Expositor*, no. 47 (Summer 2024).
Vivendo para a Glória de Deus: Uma introdução a fé Reformada, 2nd edition (São José dos Campos, Brazil: Editora Fiel).
Ten Puritans Who Changed the World (Focus on the Family).
Series editor with Michael Haykin, *An Infinite Treasury: Grace in the Piety of William Bridge*, intro. and ed. Brian Hedges (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books).
4 books published by Eden Publications in Portuguese: *How Should I Live as a Single?: One Man and One Woman*; *How Do We Plant Convictions in Our Children?*; *How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?*

DR. GERALD M. BILKES | *Itinerary*

September 22: Pompton Plains, New Jersey: Pompton Plains Free Reformed Church
September 23–24: Ancaster, Ontario: PRTS Consultation
October 18–19: Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo Reformed Church Young Adults Retreat
October 20: Kalamazoo, Michigan: Kalamazoo Reformed Church
October 21–22: Dundas, Ontario: FRC Theological Education Committee Meetings
December 15: Fenwick, Ontario: Fenwick Free Reformed Church
December 29: Hamilton, Ontario: Hamilton Free Reformed Church

DR. MARK KELDERMAN | *Itinerary*

September 25–26: Chilliwack, British Columbia: Biblical Counseling Conference
September 27–28: Lynden, Washington: Biblical Counseling Conference

DR. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN | *Itinerary*

September 1: Oxford FRC and Burgessville HRC, Ontario: preach
September 8: Grand Rapids: Redeemer FRC and Kalamazoo Reformed Church: preach
September 15: Grand Rapids: Redeemer FRC: preach
September 23–30: Alexandria School of Theology, Cairo, Egypt (lecturing)
October 6: Grand Rapids: Redeemer FRC: preach
October 13: Grand Rapids: Redeemer FRC: preach
October 27: Burgessville HRC, Ontario: preach

Publications

“In Christo Homine Restituitur: William Ames’ Exegesis of Psalm 8 and 40,” in *The Old Testament, Calvin, and the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Yudha Thianto. Leiden: Brill, 2024, 133–51.
Various articles for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*

DR. DANIEL TIMMER | *Itinerary*

September–December: Montreal, Quebec: Teach Herméneutique Biblique at the FTÉ

Publications

“Reconsidering Textual Coherence: Complexity, Unity, and the Historical-Critical Task,” *Vetus Testamentum* 74 (2024): 1–22.
“3 Things to Know about Nahum,” May 2024, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/topics/biblical-studies>
“3 Things to Know about Habakkuk,” May 2024, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/topics/biblical-studies>

PRTS-RHB RHINE RIVER REFORMATION CRUISE

I am excited to let you know that (together with my fellow tour guides Jerry Bilkes and David Woollin) the final brochure together with the registration sheet for our forthcoming trip, May 12 – May 24, 2025, D.V., along the beautiful Rhine River, where many important events of God’s Reformation in Europe took place, is now ready. Some of these sites include Geneva, Strasbourg, Worms, Heidelberg, Dordrecht, and much more. This year Puritan Reformed and Reformation Heritage Books are combining efforts to make this a refreshing and invigorating trip for all who join.

Besides seeing Reformation sites up close, we will tour some of the areas where the Reformation had its strongest foothold, countries like Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands, D.V. We will hear some insightful lectures that will deepen our appreciation for the Reformation in our hearts. In addition, we will have a wonderful time of fellowship and relaxation as we enjoy one of the most beautiful areas of God’s world.

This year we have room for 100 people on the beautiful and premium MS Symphonie cruise ship. We expect that our Rhine River Reformation Cruise will fill up quite soon, so please be sure to send in your registration form as soon as possible.

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For technical questions, feel free to contact Kristina at Witte Travel: Kristinac@wittetravel.com 616-954-7492.

If you have questions we, as tour leaders, can answer, please contact Jerry Bilkes: jerry.bilkes@prts.edu 616-202-8067.

—Joel Beeke, Jerry Bilkes, David Woollin

NEW STAFF MEMBERS



Alejandro Riaño joined PRTS in April 2024 as coordinator of the Translation Center. He leads and oversees the translation process of the MA program into five different languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic). He is also directly involved in Spanish translation projects and serves as an English-Spanish interpreter for meetings and events related to our seminary's partnerships in Spanish-speaking countries.

Recently, he has been exploring ways to enrich the work of the Translation Center with AI tools, especially for dubbing and subtitling video lectures.

Alejandro is originally from Bogotá, Colombia. He holds a BA in language education, a BA in political science, and a master's degree in applied linguistics. He has previously worked in diplomacy, translation, podcasting, and language teaching. He has been accepted into the MA program at PRTS and will begin this fall.

Alejandro and his wife, Susan, are members of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). They both enjoy learning foreign languages, traveling, hiking, rollerblading, and going to the beach. Outside of work, Alejandro also enjoys reading, writing, and growing bonsai trees.

Alejandro is grateful to serve the Lord and His church at PRTS and prays that God will use him as an instrument to advance His kingdom through the translation

of Reformed education and resources into many languages around the world.



Sarah Paga joined PRTS in April 2024 as the business administrative coordinator. She is the first point of contact for both internal and external communication. Sarah welcomes

visitors and manages campus access while assisting the chancellor and chief financial officer with administration and organization. She holds a bachelor's degree in business with minors in global communication and theology.

Sarah is a member of Christ Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family and being outdoors, appreciating the creation that God has made.

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QUESTIONS GOD ASKS

QUESTIONS ANSWERED FOR TEENS by DR. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

God's Faithfulness

Suggested Reading: Isaiah 49

***Can a woman forget her sucking child,
that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?***

How can God best get the message of His faithfulness across to those who doubt His presence with them? This question from Isaiah 49:15 is a powerful rhetorical question that expects a forceful “Of course a mother won’t forget her sucking child!” God takes one of the tenderest, most intimate, and most powerful connections in human relationships to reinforce the reality of His everlasting faithfulness and never-failing presence with His people. He asks this question in response to the Israelites doubting His presence with them in exile. They looked around themselves and concluded that God had forgotten them. God responds with this powerful and beautiful question to underscore His relationship with His people—not just Israel, but His people throughout the ages. God goes further by answering the question, “Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee” (v. 15). There may be instances where a mother’s love grows cold toward her sucking child, but there will never be an instance where God forsakes those He loves.

Have you ever questioned God’s faithfulness and His presence with you? There could be times where it seems God has forsaken those whom He loves. It may seem God is at a distance and removed from what is happening in this world. This question and God’s own answer to this question demonstrate to you the impossibility of God forgetting those who are His own. If you are trusting in Christ, it is an utter impossibility that God will forsake you, because Christ has hung in your place on the cross of forsakenness (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46). This is lasting security for your soul, despite all that seems contrary to it. Only in Christ is God’s presence secure.

Are you resting in the impossibility of being forsaken by God by trusting in Christ?

Healing Refused

Suggested Reading: Jeremiah 8

***Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?
why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?***

These words are wrenched from the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah as he witnesses the stubborn rebellion and sin of God’s people. Jeremiah is broken and appalled at the spiritual condition of the people. He observes the wickedness of Israel and the fact that it ignored the spiritual medicine right in front of it. The fact that he asks the first question implies that the Lord has provided a physician and a healing balm in Gilead. But Israel refused to use these means of addressing its spiritual wounds and the devastating effects of sin. This question points out the healing grace available to rebellious sinners. The second question is built off the first assumption that there is healing for God’s people. If there is a physician and healing balm, why is there no healing? There is no healing because the people did not want healing. This question points out the grim reality that rebellious sinners will not, by nature, seek out God’s remedy.

Where are you in this equation as you read these words? These questions ought to bring you to the healing gospel balm in Christ. There is overwhelming grace in these questions in that they point out where healing is to be found—in Christ alone. But they equally point out the grim reality of our own hearts and the stubbornness that lives within them. Will you be stubborn and refuse the treatment for your sins that God offers? Or will you turn and be healed? And when you are healed, will you show the same grief and concern over lost souls as Jeremiah does here?

Where are you turning for healing for the wounds of your sins?

WALKING TALL

Leviticus 26:13

It has been said it took God a single night to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of Israel. In Exodus, Israel is redeemed from the land of bondage, and in Leviticus, it is led into the sanctuary of God. The focus of Leviticus is on sacrifice and sanctification—the way to God and the walk with God. It is not without significance that this book that deals so intensely with the theme of holiness so frequently falls back on the Exodus event as the foundation for every claim the Lord made on His redeemed people. Remembering deliverance was a motive for holiness in gratitude for grace.

As Moses brings the argument of Leviticus to a close, he sets down in unmistakable language the requirements, conditions, and results of obedience to the Lord. Leviticus 26:13 succinctly sums up the logic: “I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.” The word “upright” occurs only here in the Old Testament and has the idea of walking erect with the head held high. Those who have been redeemed by God’s grace can walk tall, not because of what they are by nature but because of what God has done.

What was true for ancient Israel remains true for all believers. The more the believer can rest in and remember what God has done in saving him, the more he can hold up his head in confidence and spiritual boasting in the gospel. If the historic exodus was important for Israel, it is timelessly relevant since it is a vivid picture prophecy of the gospel of Jesus, who spoke of His death as the exodus (Luke 9:31). Resting in that exodus should produce a spiritual confidence that enables the believer to hold his head high, not in pride but with the certain conviction that the Lord is the only hope. Reflecting on the exodus gives four reasons to hold the head high, to walk tall.

First, the believer can walk tall because he is *saved from sin’s bondage*. Israel was in a terrible estate of misery from which it could not free itself. By birth, the Israelites were slaves. They were stooped down under a hard yoke with no freedom, controlled by an alien domination. The spiritual parallels are clear. Every individual is born into bondage, enslaved by sin’s dominion from which there is no escape and over which there is no control. Not only was Israel subject to external bondage, but it also actively participated in the wickedness of its taskmasters.

Joshua 24:14 and Ezekiel 23:8, 19, 21 make clear that the Israelites were guilty of the same paganism as the Egyptians. What they were by nature determined their behavior. So overwhelmingly powerful were the taskmasters not only to subdue and control but to mold their subjects into their own image.

Again, the spiritual parallels are clear. The devil holds sinners in bondage to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26), and as Jesus said, those sinners imitate the devil himself (John 8:44). Sinners are held in bondage to their own wills; they are completely given over to the practice of sin as evidence of innate corruption and pollution (Eph. 2:1–3). The bottom line is that all are born spiritually dead, morally corrupt, and justly condemned. The more conscious we are of the depths of our sin and its horrific consequences, the more we will be grateful for the greatness of salvation—the more we will walk with our heads held high.

Second, the believer can walk tall because he is *saved by sovereign grace*. The night of the historic exodus demonstrates this grace. The sentence of death was decreed on all the firstborn, yet some would die, and some would live. That begs the question as to why. The firstborn of the Israelites were not spared because of their affliction; that they deserved. They were not spared because of their righteousness, size, or potential worth; they had none of these. The division between the Egyptians and Israelites was a matter of grace. In his last sermon to the nation, Moses reminded them that the only reason God loved them was because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7).

The apostle Paul refers to this historic event of the exodus in his irrefutable exposition of God’s electing grace (Rom. 9:15–18). If God were to leave people alone to receive the wages of sin, He would be perfectly just. But the beauty of the gospel is that God has not left people alone. Spiritual life is the only answer to spiritual death; spiritual freedom is the only answer to spiritual bondage. God, by His grace, gives undeserving sinners life and frees them from sin’s dominion. Remembering that wondrous grace that is greater than our sin motivates love and praise for God. There certainly is no room for pride or self-exaltation; indeed, the very thought of sovereign grace should generate humility because it is undeserved. But believers can hold their heads up in boldness and confidence because their hope is certain in God’s unchanging grace (Mal. 3:6).

Third, the believer can walk tall because he is *saved by irresistible means*. The beauty of the gospel is that God does for man what man cannot do for himself. Forty years before the exodus, Moses tried to deliver his people by his own strength, and it became clear that redemption requires more than the arm of flesh. The exodus highlights two crucial points about how God delivered the nation from bondage: He delivered by means of overwhelming power and through the bloody sacrifice. Both of these means bear directly on the gospel.

God's power is evident both by His word and His acts. He declared that He would deliver by His strong hand and mighty arm (Ex. 6:1, 6; 13:9; 15:6–11). The hand and arm are vehicles of action and symbols of strength. Sin is strong, but God and His grace are stronger. Significantly, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Similarly, Isaiah, in reflecting on the God of his salvation, identified the Lord as his strength (Isa. 12:2). God's power was not just talk; He displayed His power in mighty acts. Using signs (Ex. 4:8, 17, 28, 30) and wonders (7:3, 8:23), He did extraordinary things beyond human ability to persuade men of His power and superiority. The hardening of Pharaoh and the ten plagues were unmistakable displays of God's power, but even these paled in light of the ultimate display of power achieved by Christ when He spoiled "principalities and powers," making an open show as He triumphed over them (Col. 2:15). Believers in Christ can hold their heads high in the light of Christ's irresistible power: if God be for us, none can be against us (Rom. 8:31).

God's deliverance was inseparably linked to the bloody sacrifice (Exodus 12). God's grace, notwithstanding its sovereignty, and His power, notwithstanding its magnitude, could not be exercised apart from atonement. Central to the exodus event was the Passover, and central to the Passover was the shedding and application of the blood of the lamb. The link to the gospel is undeniable since Paul identifies Christ as our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), and Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ as the lamb without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:18–19). The Passover teaches that salvation must come from outside of self by a perfect substitute and the application of the blood of sacrifice guarantees deliverance. At the first Passover, the blood diverted death wherever the blood was applied. It was the blood that made the difference. So it is, wherever the blood of Christ's sacrifice is applied by faith, there is life. There is every reason for the believer to walk tall, and that is because his boast and confidence are in Christ crucified.

Fourth, the believer can walk tall because he is *saved unto great privilege*. To live in the reality of what the gospel has done is to walk with heads held high. Exodus highlights four marks of walking tall that testify to the privileges of grace.

First, believers should walk tall in light of their *sonship* (Ex. 4:22–23). Israel enjoyed a special relationship with God. He brought them into existence, provided for them, loved them, chastised them when necessary, and acted always on their behalf as the Near Kinsman (Ex. 6:6). As the firstborn, they enjoyed special rights and high rank. Significantly, the New Testament identifies Christ as the firstborn among His brothers (Col. 1:15; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). By virtue of union with Christ, believers share in that high rank (Heb. 12:23). Believers are special to God because of Christ and therefore can hold up their heads.

Second, believers should walk tall in the light of the *fellowship* with the Lord. God referred to Israel as His people (Ex. 5:1; 7:14; 8:1) and His special treasure—that is, His choice and prized possession set aside as the object of His special care and attention (19:5). The same language applies to the church (1 Peter 2:9–10). The world may despise and regard the believer as foolish, but the fact that God holds the believer in high regard is a reason to walk tall.

Third, believers should walk tall in view of *holiness*. God has defined His people as a royal and holy priesthood (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). To be holy is to be set apart to be like God. The believer is to be holy because He is holy (Lev. 19:2). That is both a duty and a privilege.

Fourth, believers are to walk tall in *service and worship* to the Lord. The same word that describes Israel's servitude to the Egyptians is used of their service to the Lord (Ex. 3:12; 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; etc.)—the same word but different masters. The former was harsh and cruel, causing the servants to stoop under the subjection. God, the new Master, makes the burden light (Matt. 11:30), enabling the servants to hold up their heads.

In every way, God's grace has made the believer special. Christians occupy a position before God that ought to be an attractant to sinners shackled and stooped low in the bondage of their sin. For saints to live in and to enjoy the reality of being delivered is to walk erect with heads held high.

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ANATOMY OF TRUE CONVERSION

READ: LUKE 5:27–32

Most of us like change once in a while—perhaps the change of seasons, a change of scenery, and certainly a change of clothes! Even if we are the kind of people who don't care for change, when things are bad enough in our life, we long and even cry for change. There is one kind of change we all need: the change from darkness to light, from idols to God, from the disfavor of God into favor with Him by Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. We call this change conversion, and Scripture tells us much about this necessary change. We wish to trace the anatomy of true conversion from the remarkable conversion of Matthew, or Levi, one of the twelve disciples of Christ and author of the first Gospel. In Scripture we have three accounts of Matthew's conversion (Matt. 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32).

A NEEDY SOUL

The Lord Jesus had been laboring in and around Capernaum. He had done a number of very telling miracles, such as the healing of the leper and forgiving and healing the man let down through the roof. After these life-changing miracles, He would both heal and forgive a man who was inwardly sick, dead even: Levi (or Matthew).

From all indications, Levi was born in a good Jewish family. His father's name was Alphaeus, and he named his son Levi, perhaps in the hope that like the original Levi, who had been set apart in the Old Testament, this child would be dedicated to the service of the Lord. Many have noted that from the number of Scripture quotations Matthew gave later on in his Gospel and how much closer he sticks to the Hebrew than the other evangelists, he likely had been immersed from childhood in the Hebrew Scriptures.

At any rate, when he grew up, he made a decisive choice to live the life of a publican, a tax-collector, a hated and despised profession among faithful Jews. Likely, he was an important tax official, one who would have been educated to do his work. He would have been schooled in the Greek language and trained to become a careful renderer of accounts. Christ would later use some of these abilities when Levi would become an apostle and Gospel writer. Yet being a publican involved a life of moral compromise, dissoluteness, and dishonesty that any Jewish father would have instructed his sons that a faithful Jew could not be a publican. Publicans were excommunicated from the synagogue and viewed as traitors of their own people to the Romans who enriched themselves off the backs of their compatriots.

But being a publican was not just viewed negatively by people; Levi had chosen against God. None of us can serve two masters, and neither could Levi. Like all of us in Adam, Levi had turned his back on God and turned toward sin and self, which he served every day from morning till night. Apart from God and grace, we all live out our days in sin. We may not suffer the disapproving looks of others, but heaven sees our sin. Levi sought to fill the void in his heart with money and friends. We may use the same things or other things, like pleasure, power, work, or even religion. We try to get the most out of life, and yet all the while, we are not sovereigns but slaves—slaves of sin and self.

What Levi needed, you and I need by nature: true conversion. And that means in the first place, as our Heidelberg Catechism says so well, the mortification of the old nature (Heidelberg Catechism; Lord's Day 33). In other words, our own sinful self must die. Conversion isn't just that we change some views about this or that. It isn't that we become more serious about life. It isn't that we try harder to do the right things. It isn't that we begin to reign in and curb our sinful tendencies. That's what many—even in church—mistake for true conversion. The Bible speaks in no uncertain terms about the need that our old nature dies. This is necessary not just once but again and again, more and more, every day that we live in the body of this death. You know this if God has begun this work in your heart. There are so many pulls from the world, and your heart is alive to them. "Mortify," says the apostle, "therefore, your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5).

And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. —LUKE 5:31–32

Are you a stranger to this dying to self? Perhaps you pity people who have begun to mourn over, hate, and flee from sin. They are people without any joy, you think. But you are really the one to be pitied, because then you are still firmly under the dominion of sin, and you must know: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

AN EFFECTUAL CALL

What a mercy it is when we read concerning Levi, “And after these things he [Jesus] went forth” (Luke 5:27). Christ had come to seek and save the lost—and one of them sat there right in front of Him. The Scripture says: “And [Jesus] saw a publican, named Levi, sitting” (v. 27). Literally, it says that He “beheld, or observed him, looked at him carefully.” What did the Lord see when He saw Levi? Christ didn’t look on the outward appearance. He saw a slave to his own lusts; a man on his way to hell; a man with a bottomless pit in his heart that he was trying to fill with money, pleasure, and sin. He saw something like what the Lord says in Ezekiel 16:6, when He passed by Israel in its blood, ready to die, incapable, lost, perishing. That’s what Christ saw.

It is painful to begin to see yourself as God sees you, but that’s what grace teaches us. When God looks at us this way, we look down in shame. We can’t look into His eyes that are pure and holy and good. We begin to grieve and mourn. How can it ever become different in my life?

It didn’t just stay with a look for Levi. Christ began to speak: “Follow me” (Luke 5:27). First of all, they are such *simple* words. They are words children use when they want to play follow the leader. All Christ needs is two simple words straight into the heart of Levi. You don’t need a lot of words when it is love that is speaking.

They are, secondly, *personally challenging* words. These words draw Levi away from his security, from his toll-booth life, from his sin. Many hear these words and won’t obey. So too countless people in church hear Christ’s commands and invitations, but they can’t part with these sins. They remain unconverted.

Thirdly, these are such *gracious* words. For this spotless Christ to have such a soiled follower is a great wonder. Perhaps you ask, *Will He take a sinner like me?* Notice this word “Me.” “Follow Me.” In the word “Me” lies everything we sinners need: grace, strength, life, patience, love, pardon, peace, comfort, righteousness.

Finally, these are such *conquering* words. We see this when we look at Levi’s response: “And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (v. 28). It’s like he awoke from sleep. Better yet, he rose from the dead in an instant. Like the prodigal in the far country, he arose that very instant. Here Psalm 110:3 is fulfilled: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” When that is true, there will be also gracious fruits.

GRACIOUS FRUITS

The life following the Lord Jesus was a life of carrying the cross behind the Lord, a life of learning more about self. It is a life of dangers, toil, and snares, a life of sacrifice and dying to self. Tradition has it that Levi died a martyr in Ethiopia. Yet, the way behind Christ is also a way to glory where Christ is seated.

To follow Christ was joy for Levi. We read, “And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them” (Luke 5:29). Levi had been healed by this Great Physician, who has come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance, to conversion (vv. 31–32). He wanted other sinners to know the joy that he had come to know in following Him.

Dear friends, are you converted? Isn’t this God worthy of your conversion? Are you living the life of true conversion? You are not a Christian if you are not following Christ. Conversion is not simply crying tears. It’s not making pledges. It is following Christ unconditionally, dying and rising in Him. Don’t you see in the conversion of Levi a door of hope for sinners? Plead for His grace and heed His call.

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Luther and *The Bondage of the Will*

PART 1

The theological discussion about the will has been raised many times throughout church history. The roots of the debate go back to the early church, to Augustine and Pelagius. During the Reformation and post-Reformation, especially in the seventeenth century, it was part of the Arminian and Calvinist controversy. The debate between Luther and Erasmus, a century earlier, on the same issue, is considered one of the most famous debates about the freedom of the will in church history.

The German Reformer, born in 1483, wrote *The Bondage of the Will* in 1525 in response to Erasmus of Rotterdam's book, *Diatribes Concerning Free Will*, written the year before. While Erasmus argued that this issue had long exercised the minds of philosophers and theologians with more labor than fruit, Luther had a different opinion. For Luther, this discussion about the bondage of the will and sovereignty of God was not a small matter. On the contrary, this discussion is at the heart of the gospel. Therefore, he considered *Bondage of the Will* and his children's catechism his most valuable works.¹ According to Luther, the matter of free will is something of great importance as it relates to salvation, the Word of God, the glory of Christ, and God Himself. As we mentioned earlier, since Augustine's time, this debate has continued, and in our days, it is still a contemporary and important theological discussion.

In my context, in Egypt, this issue is still being debated, as it has been for the last sixteen hundred years. Many Protestants today challenge the doctrine of original sin. They claim that we are born innocent, but due to the evil and corruption of the society that we live in, we become sinful. Moreover, they add that sinful men are slightly sick and just need a bit of enlightenment, a bit of help or therapy, a bit of coaching, and a bit of right information. The problem is not only that they are teaching such things but that they are calling themselves Protestants. In fact, today's Protestantism seems to have departed from the Lutheran view of anthropology and the doctrine of grace. Nowadays, much of so-called Protestantism may reflect a more Erasmian theology than a Lutheran theology. The problem is that this doctrinal difference is not of a minor importance such that we can simply overlook it and tolerate it within

Protestantism. As J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston note: "Although Luther may have differed with other reformers (such as Calvin, Zwingli, and others) on some points, yet all of them stood on the same ground in asserting the bondage of man in sin and the sovereignty of God in grace."² The question for us today is, *Do we have the right to call ourselves children of the Reformation?*

What Is the "Free Will" Luther Denies?

For clarification, we must understand what Luther meant by "bondage of the will." Luther did not deny that human beings are capable of making decisions. According to Luther, we are not puppets. However, he denied that by nature, we can perform any righteous deeds, obey God's law from the heart, or even exercise faith in response to the preached gospel. Therefore, when the German reformer denied the doctrine of a free will, he denied self-determination in the acts of faith and obedience. For Luther, only through God's free omnipotent grace can we be rescued from this helplessness by creating in our hearts the willingness to believe the gospel and obey God's commandments from the heart.

Accordingly, Luther's concerns were not just anthropological. Rather, the sovereignty of God and the sovereignty of His grace are at stake. As we will see, according to Luther, denying the bondage of the will is a denial of the freedom of God's sovereign grace and power. It is an attack on the gospel itself. The power of God is at stake, the immutability of God is at stake, the sufficiency of Christ is at stake, and consequently, worshiping God and glorifying Him is at stake. For Luther, the bondage of the will and man's inability to be holy is the root issue of the Reformation.

Importance of Preaching This Doctrine Today

Although Luther did not catalog what we know today as the five *solas*, they are embedded in his book and central to his arguments against Erasmus. In fact, the problem is not about the five distinctive words of the five *solas* (Scripture, faith, grace, Christ, and God's glory); the problem resides in this little word "only." The following points will show that the term *sola*, translated as "alone," is crucial in Luther's teaching

about the bondage of the will and should be crucial in our preaching today because it pertains directly to our salvation.

The Centrality of the Word of God

Luther's work is biblically rich. He had a very high view of Scripture as the true word of God. This belief is evident in his use of many biblical references from both testaments. For him, the Bible is the standard by which things are examined (Sections 23, 35). He agrees with Erasmus that the evidence derived from tradition is on Erasmus's side in his view of the freedom of the will with few exceptions (Section 28). However, Luther believes that we must not blindly accept what has been written by the fathers (Section 33), but we must examine what they wrote in the light of Scripture (Section 34). Luther believed Scripture was the most reliable tool for examining doctrine and ideas.

An objection from Erasmus would be that the Scripture is not clear enough about the bondage of the will. He argued that since the different saints and teachers of the church differ at this point, the doctrine is not clear enough, and we should not teach it (Section 34). In response, Luther emphasized the clarity of the Scripture, and by using many scriptural references from both testaments, he proved that the Word of God is clear enough to show us the way (Sections 34–36). Some cannot see the doctrines of grace because of their natural blindness. Therefore, only through the miraculous work of the Spirit can the human heart see and hear the clear things of Scripture (Section 38).

For this reason, many gifted people throughout history have been blind. Luther recognized that this doctrine was not well received by natural people or even by many teachers in the church. We face the same challenge today in an age where man-centered theology is dominant. Luther understood that the reason people resist this doctrine is the very same doctrine they are resisting.

By Grace Alone through Faith Alone

Luther believed that since Scripture teaches the doctrine of the bondage of the will, we have sufficient grounds to teach it. However, he contended that another cause requires us to teach such a doctrine, which is the humbling of our pride and the knowledge of the grace of God. The heart of the debate between Luther and Erasmus is the role of grace and how it relates to our will in our salvation. Up to their time in history, there had been different views about the role of the will in our salvation: Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, and Augustinianism. Pelagianism teaches that we are naturally capable of obeying God's law. Grace may facilitate our obedience, but we can achieve obedience without it by our free will. Augustine taught that we cannot obey God and His law unless He intervenes. We are dead in our trespasses and sins and do not have the power or the will to obey. According to Augustine, apart from God's grace, we have no hope.

A middle way is semi-Pelagianism, in which man is not dead, as in Augustine's view, but is merely wounded or sick. Semi-Pelagianism teaches that man cannot help himself; he can desire God's help and cooperate with it for salvation. In other words, cooperation must exist between God's grace and human will so that salvation may occur.

Luther argued that Erasmus was not clear enough in defining how our free will and the grace of God work together in relation to our salvation. Luther wrote that, on the one hand, Erasmus claims that "it is irreligious, curious and superfluous to which to know, whether our own will does anything in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, or whether it is wholly passive under the work of grace"³ (Section 6). On the other hand, "Erasmus emphasized that to strive with all powers is Christian piety. Erasmus contended that without the grace of God, we cannot be saved" (*Will*, 20). However, Erasmus argued that the decisive factor in our salvation is our free will. According to Erasmus, free will is "a power in the human will, by which, a man may apply himself to those things which lead unto eternal salvation or turn away from the same" (*Will*, 108). Noticeably, Erasmus did not deny the necessity of grace for our salvation. But he would deny putting the word "alone" beside the word "grace."

Luther described Erasmus's view as self-defeating. He said, "To say that the will is free and that it has indeed power, but that it is ineffective, is what the sophists call 'a direct contrariety'" (*Will*, 63). In contrast to Erasmus, Luther refused any reference to our will as a factor in gaining eternal life. He held to the Augustinian view that apart from God's empowering work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot will to obey or to believe. Luther defended his position in two ways: he refuted Erasmus's arguments about free will and defended his own arguments against free will. Through these two techniques, Luther defended the position of salvation by grace alone without any contribution of ours.

Luther wrote, "No man upon earth, unless imbued with the Holy Spirit, ever secretly knows, or believes in or wished for, eternal salvation, how much soever he may boast of it by his voice and by his pen" (*Will*, 113). He contended that salvation is an eternal matter incomprehensible to human capacity.

1. R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 87.

2. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, "Historical and Theological Introduction," in Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957), 58.

3. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. by Henry Cole (London: T. Bensley, 1823), 20, hereafter cited in text as *Will*.

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The Jealousy That Cannot Bear a Partner

John Calvin on Reforming the Worship of God

The sixteenth-century Reformation, which we celebrate each year particularly on October 31, is every bit as much about biblical worship as it is about the five solas and the five points of Calvinism. The special theme of this issue explores the Reformation's recovery of biblical worship. Rev. David Campbell begins by looking at Calvin and the importance of reforming worship. Second, Rev. Logan Shelton helpfully underscores the biblical principle of worship that the Reformation recovered, commonly referred to as the regulative principle of worship (RPS). Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag then speaks about how the Reformation put the Bible—especially the preaching of the Bible—back to its rightful place at the center of worship. Dr. Nathan Eshelman provides four reasons why we should sing Psalms in worship. Dr. Ian Macleod concludes by speaking on the glory of Reformation worship as a fruit of what this worship offers to us. May the Lord be pleased to use these articles to make us increasingly worship our great God in spirit and in truth.

The Reformed branch of the Protestant church has historically drawn heavily from the extensive writings of John Calvin. His monumental Bible commentaries and his famous *Institutes* undergird much of the foundational statements of doctrine in its creeds and confessional statements. Less familiar to modern Reformed readers is the Calvinist emphasis on the doctrine of worship and its implications for the churches adhering to the doctrines of Calvinism. Surprising to many will be the attention given to the reform of worship by both Calvin and others in the sixteenth century “magisterial” Reformation in Europe.

Indeed, it is true to say that greater prominence is given to the reforming of worship in the church than to any other single subject, including the doctrine of justification. Far from dismissing worship as of secondary importance and a matter to be compromised on “for the sake of the gospel” or for some external unity, Calvin’s doctrine of worship was at the front and center of the clean break with Romanism that the Reformed insisted on.

This priority of worship in the Reformed religion is perhaps most plainly expressed in Calvin’s tract, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church,” addressed in 1544 to the Imperial Diet of Spires, “in the name of all who wish Christ to reign.” This exhortation sets out to accomplish three things: (1) to enumerate the evils that compelled the Reformers to seek for remedies; (2) to show that the particular remedies that the Reformers employed were apt and salutary; and (3) to make it plain that the Reformers were not at liberty any longer to delay putting forth their hand to the work of reform, “in as much as the matter demanded instant amendment.”

In connection with the first of these objectives, Calvin’s distinctive position on the regulation of divine worship comes into sharp focus. In what would today be most likely considered a reversal of priority, Calvin homes in on the evils that required immediate remedy by identifying the doctrine of worship as the first and primary concern. Using language reminiscent of the commonly quoted position of Luther on justification—the mark of a standing or falling church—Calvin boldly affirms:

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole



substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, of the source from which salvation is obtained. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain.¹

Why this emphasis on the mode of worship?

The answer lies partly in the high view of God that characterizes the writings of Calvin. It is this that informs everything in his approach to religion and the practice of Christians. The jealousy of God identified in the second commandment brings out what Professor John Murray calls the crux of the Reformation—the question of authority.² Identifying the term “jealousy” with the marriage relation between Jehovah and the church of the Old Testament and the consequent charge of adultery made by the prophets against Israel, Calvin presses the figure to its far-reaching consequences for worship in the church. In his exposition of the second commandment in the *Institutes*, he explains the import of God’s jealousy: “The meaning here is the same as if he had said, that our duty is to cleave to him alone. To induce us to this, he proclaims his authority which he will not permit to be impaired or despised with impunity.... He calls himself jealous, because he cannot bear a partner.”³

Extending the figure in the threatening annexed to the second commandment, Calvin expounds the doctrine regulating worship in stark terms:

Therefore, as the purer and chaster the husband is, the more grievously is he offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival; so the Lord...declares that he burns with the hottest jealousy whenever, neglecting the purity of his holy marriage, we defile ourselves with abominable lusts, and especially when the worship of his deity, which ought to have been most carefully kept unimpaired, is transferred to another, or adulterated with some superstition.⁴

Returning to Calvin’s exhortation to Charles V, what we rightly define as the regulative principle of worship is expressed in the plainest of terms: “The rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application, in order that we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves but look to the injunctions of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe.”⁵

The plea to the emperor to restore the church was made from a deep sense of “how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word.” He is unequivocal: “Every addition to His word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere will-worship is vanity. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time for debate.”⁶

This conviction that Christ was the only law-giver concerning every aspect of His worship informed the creeds and worship order of the Reformed churches in the first

decades of the European Reformation. It is to the teaching and practice in worship of John Knox and his Scottish contemporaries and successors that the Reformed have turned ever since for a consistent approach to the regulation of worship. Taking their ground on Calvin’s broad and liberating foundation that what is not expressly commanded is forbidden, our reforming forefathers were willing to die for purity of worship as much as for any other doctrine of divine truth.

The high-water mark in the exposition of this doctrine was reached amid much persecution in Scotland. The writings of George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford, and others cut through the intruded ceremonies of English episcopacy that had also infiltrated other Reformed churches over the previous century. The Reformed today should turn to these for the true Calvinist doctrine of Reformed worship.

1. John Calvin, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church,” *Tracts and Letters* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 2009), 1:126.

2. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 1:298–304.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Second, Chapter 8, section 18.

4. *Institutes*, Ibid.

5. Calvin, *Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 1:128.

6. *Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 129.

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The Regulative Principle of Worship

Sola Scriptura is the doctrine that the Bible alone is the authoritative and sufficient rule for faith and practice. Upon this ground, the Reformers rejected Rome's man-made requirements for salvation. They preached the good news of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

Sola Scriptura applies to more than just salvation. The Bible alone is the authoritative and sufficient rule to direct the church in all things, including its worship. Upon this ground, the Calvinistic wing of the Reformation rejected all man-made ordinances of worship and appointed only what God required. This is often called the regulative principle of worship. It is the simple rule that worship commanded by God is required, and worship not commanded by God is forbidden.

The Second Commandment Opened

The phrase "regulative principle of worship" is not used in Scripture, but it summarizes the moral requirements of the second commandment accurately: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Ex. 20:4–5). It is important to consider two principles when interpreting the commandments.

First, under one sin, all lesser sins are forbidden also. By forbidding a flagrant act of idolatry, the second commandment forbids all the lesser sins of "devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself" (Westminster Larger Catechism [WLC] 109).

Second, when one sin is forbidden, the opposite duty is required. By forbidding all worship not appointed by God, the second commandment requires "the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his worship" (WLC 108).

Question 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism succinctly summarized the requirements as follows: "That we in nowise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word." The Reformed symbols present a clear understanding of the moral requirements of the second commandment. Worship commanded by God is required, and worship not commanded by God is forbidden.

The Second Commandment Applied

The reason annexed to the second commandment is "for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5–6). Since God is jealous of His own worship, He rewards those who keep this commandment and punishes those who do not. The Bible illustrates the principle with several examples.

The first example of God's application of the second commandment occurred when Cain and Abel offered their sacrifices. Both worshiped, but God only delighted in Abel. "The LORD had respect unto Abel and his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Gen. 4:4–5).

How Abel knew the acceptable way of sacrifice is a matter of some dispute. It is likely that God revealed it when he clothed Adam and Eve with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21). As the New Testament reveals, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which



he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). The only way to worship in faith is to worship according to God's revealed will.

The Bible does not reveal everything that was unacceptable about Cain's worship, though it gives several hints. He came in the process of time rather than giving God the best of his time. He offered fruit from the ground rather than a blood sacrifice. God's refusal to accept his worship is enough to conclude that it was contrary to His revealed will. In his commentary, Matthew Henry described the greatest difference between each brother's worship as follows:

The great difference was this, that Abel offered in faith, and Cain did not. There was a difference in the principle upon which they went. Abel offered with an eye to God's will as his rule, and God's glory as his end, and in dependence upon the promise of a Redeemer; but Cain did what he did only for company's sake, or to save his credit, not in faith, and so it turned into sin to him.¹

A second example of God's application of the second commandment occurred in the days of Moses. The ordinances of the tabernacle were strictly limited by God's revealed will. God instructed Moses on several occasions to "make them after the pattern which was shewed thee in the mount" (Ex. 25:40). When the tabernacle was pitched according to God's command, He demonstrated His delight by descending in glory (Ex. 40:34).

Shortly thereafter, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire "which God commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1). When the tabernacle was profaned according to man's corrupt inventions, God demonstrated His detestation by descending in judgment: "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:2).

God delights in worship according to His revealed will and detests worship according to man's corrupt inventions. The shocking judgment upon Nadab and Abihu should awaken the church to the reality of God's jealousy over His own worship. As Calvin said in his commentary on this passage, "Let us learn, therefore, so to attend to God's command as not to corrupt His worship by any strange inventions. But if He so severely avenged this error, how horrible a punishment awaits the Papists, who are not ashamed obstinately to defend so many gross corruptions!"²

The clearest New Testament example of the same principle is Christ's opposition to the religious handwashing of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had a tradition of washing their hands and other instruments after returning from the market (Mark 7:4). Their concern was not hygienic but ceremonial ritualism. The Pharisees took offense when Christ's disciples refused to observe this ordinance, but Christ defended them based on the second commandment. God had not appointed the ritual in question; therefore, it was forbidden. To submit would entail participating in false worship. Christ said of

the Pharisees, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (v. 7).

Liberty of Conscience

Liberty of conscience is freedom from the oppression of man. This principle applies to salvation. False teachers bewitched the Galatian church that circumcision and other ceremonial observances were required for salvation. Paul solemnly urged the church to reject legalism and "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Submitting to additional requirements for salvation is bondage to man.

The same principle applies to worship. False teachers sought to spoil the Colossian church with superstitious worship after the traditions of men. Paul solemnly enjoined the church to reject the doctrines and commandments of men, which only amounted to will worship (Col. 2:18–22). Submitting to additional requirements for worship is bondage to man.

If the above principle was better understood, the importance of the regulative principle would be more appreciated. On the one hand, rejecting it necessarily leads to a yoke of bondage and hypocrisy. On the other hand, embracing it allows for liberty and sincerity. The Christian can then serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, knowing that He is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28–29).

Conclusion

After being delivered from death by God's grace, the psalmist cried out, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" (Ps. 116:12). Matthew Henry commented that this question was posed by one "solicitous and studious how to express his gratitude."³ As the church reflects upon the Reformation, it has abundant reason for thanksgiving. Its fathers sought the biblical rule for worship from God's Word alone, and He revealed it to them. Worship commanded by God is required, and worship not commanded by God is forbidden. To abandon that simple rule is to betray *sola Scriptura*, violate the second commandment, and forfeit liberty of conscience.

A simple way for the church to express its thanksgiving to God for all His benefits is to hold fast the biblical rule for worship. Refusing all man-made inventions testifies to its contentment and delight in God's provision. As it reflects upon the worship of the Reformation, it may say with integrity, "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3). It may also look with hope upon the rising generations, remembering that God promised to show mercy to thousands of generations of those that love Him and keep His commandments (Ex. 20:6).

1. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 14.

2. John Calvin, *The Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. by Charles William Bingham, Calvin's Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 3:432.

3. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 723.

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The Primacy of Preaching or the Place of the Pulpit

As happened many times throughout the history of the church, God's people not only fell back into breaking the first commandment—worshiping other gods—but also the second, worshiping the Lord in other ways than commanded. They repeatedly departed from God's Word to what they thought would please Him, served a god of their own imagination, and trusted in their rituals instead of the God of their rituals. Thankfully, our faithful covenant-keeping Lord God repeatedly led His church back from bare rituals to the preached Word, from the altar to the pulpit.

The Authority

The Lord worked the Reformation through a return to His authoritative Word, a proclamation of “Thus saith the Lord!” What would have been left of the church if He had not sovereignly and graciously done so over and over? The pivotal moment came when God spoke to Martin Luther in Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith.” The verse actually begins with these words: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written.” Or, as the Lord already told him and us in the Old Testament, in Habakkuk 2:4.

“It is written!” The Lord Jesus repeated these words three times, being tempted by Satan, “But [Jesus] answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). As Satan tempted Adam's wife, “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1), Satan does not give up trying to make us doubt, ignore, or even completely forget God's Word. Thankfully, God does not give up on His church, drawing us back to Himself and His authoritative Word, using storms, disasters, wars, and such, but above all, His prophets, apostles, and many others He called to preach His Word.

This is how the Lord Jesus exposed the Pharisees to the fallacy of their teaching and worship. Luke 4:36 says that the people “were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.” Note that it says not only *authority* (or sovereign *right*) but also with *power* (sovereign *might*)! This is how we also must hear Him and obey Him—not only in our worship service but in all His service. James 1:22 says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” In other words, “Thus saith the Lord!” As one put it, “God says it! That settles it!”

The Priority

This means not only that we go back to God's Word because God says so but also to make His Word our priority in life and worship, because as Paul writes, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:5). It is why we are not just called to “preach the Word,” to include it in our worship, but also make it the very center and heart of the worship service. We're called to make it the priority, the focus of our worship. That's why Paul exhorts and warns Timothy and us: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:2–3).

Paul not only exhorted Timothy but also led by example, as he vowed, “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the

gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:15–17). We are not saved by our works, not even by our religious works, or by faith *plus* works, but by faith *that* works. It is God’s work in us by His word, His Holy Spirit, and His fatherly providence. He calls us to take our eyes off anything else and fix our gaze on Jesus—not with our physical eye, but with the eye of faith: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

This was the priority of Jesus’s ministry when people pleaded with Him to stay to heal more people from their diseases: “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Luke 4:43–44). Though He compassionately healed many physically, His primary purpose was to heal them spiritually—moving them from the visible to the invisible, from building their hope on seeing and feeling to hearing and believing the preached word. Maybe you have heard that a picture is worth a thousand words. Of course, that is true, but it also is true that a picture is open to a thousand interpretations. So it has been with all who made the ceremonies the focus of attention. That is why the Reformers made the pulpit, not the altar, the center of both building and worship.

The Clarity

We not only must “preach the Word” and make it the center of worship, but we also have to be clear about what “Thus saith the Lord!” is all about: God’s sovereign and free salvation proclaimed to sinners: the gospel, to all who hear, good news for bad people! Though it is all God’s sovereign work, this proclamation or preaching is joined with God’s command to sinners, as we all are by nature, to repent and believe. Martin Luther realized that it was all of grace yet by faith: “It is written, the just shall live by faith!” Actually, we read in Habakkuk 2:4, “The just shall live by *his* faith” (italics added). Paul quoted this in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, both times leaving out the pronoun “his.” Is there then something added to faith? Is it “my” faith or “your” faith that saves?

Faith is God’s sovereign and free gift: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). So God gives and activates faith in us; we do not produce it, but we should never forget that God is more willing to give it to us than we are to receive it. The root of our inability to believe and repent is our unwillingness. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said that He would have gathered her as a hen her chickens, and added, “And ye would not” (Luke 13:34). “I cannot” might excuse us, but not “I will not.” This is where God wants to bring us, and this is what must be made plain in preaching. Come to an end of ourselves and trust exclusively in His written and living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His perfect obedience and sacrifice.

So, God commands us to do the impossible. Yet He also provides what He commands. As we see in how Jesus deals with Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). We did not cause our physical birth, so we also cannot cause our spiritual birth. After Jesus explained what it is to be born again, “Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?” (John 3:9). Jesus explains it in verses 14 and 15: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” The *very* moment the people who were bitten by the poisonous snakes looked to the serpent on the pole, they were healed. Was it their looking or their faith? No, it was God who did and still does heal all who look to Christ. So, when I say I am saved by faith in Him, it is not my faith that saves but Jesus who saves. I simply believe He will do what He says He will do.

The Simplicity

We know that the disciples rebuked those who brought their children to Jesus. “But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer [permit] the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). Why did He not want to exclude children? Why did Jesus welcome them also? And, also, what did He mean by saying, “For of such is the kingdom of God”? It is plain from what follows: “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein” (v. 15). In other words, we *all* must come to Him as little children.

Imagine if Jesus had told these children, “Unless you become like those grown-up people around you, you cannot be saved.” No, it was the opposite: “You, adults, unless you become as one of these little children, you cannot be saved.” As one said, “The way up is the way down.” What makes *being* a little child and for us all to be *like* a little child so critical? It is trust. A little child trusts. That’s why we warn them not to listen to strangers. When we promise children a treat if they clean up their toys, they expect it. Sadly, as parents, we destroyed that trust by too often not keeping our promises, so the older they get, the more they, and we, learn to distrust. Therefore, the sooner we flee to Christ to trust Him to forgive our sins, the better; the longer we wait, the harder.

This means that we not only address adults in our preaching but also children. After all, don’t we, as Reformed churches, believe our children should be in church during the worship service instead of in a separate class? When I speak to children in my sermons, I often notice that I get their attention as well as that of their parents and many other adults. This does not mean we “dumb down” our preaching. That would go against all the teachings of Scripture and even against reason. We are commanded, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

“Nearer, My God, to Thee”

Why I Sing Only Psalms in Worship

J. Gresham Machen, a hymn-singing Presbyterian, is best known for his battle for orthodoxy in the early twentieth-century Presbyterian church. Machen wrote concerning “Nearer, My God, to Thee” and noted that the hymn centered more on the human experience of suffering than on the redemption provided in Christ. He said, “It means that our trials may be a discipline to bring us nearer to God.... But many persons have the impression, because the word ‘cross’ is found in the hymn, that there is something specifically Christian about it, and that it has something to do with the gospel. This impression is entirely false.”

Although hymn singing has its place in the Christian experience, it is an unsuitable substitute for God’s own book of praise in the middle of your Bible. There are several reasons for maintaining the biblical tradition of singing Psalms exclusively that are worth meditating on. Exclusive psalmody ought to be held not merely as a tradition of our churches but as a biblical imperative designed for your growth as a Christian.

Professor R. J. George, a nineteenth-century practical theologian from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (RPTS), wrote, “In 1838, the Presbyterian General Assembly appointed a committee to revise their hymn book. In their report they say, ‘On a critical examination are found many hymns deficient in literary merit, some incorrect in doctrine, and many altogether unsuitable for the sanctuary.’ What an indictment to bring against the book which their own church had substituted for God’s book of praise!”

If hymns brought such difficulty within their own assemblies, what rationale can the Psalm-singing Christian give for maintaining this practice of exclusive Psalm singing? I will provide you with four reasons worth meditating on.

Exegetical

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 instruct Christians to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” The Christian church is not commanded anywhere in the Bible to create its own songs for public worship—God has given us His songs.

The Heidelberg Catechism reminds its readers that “we are not to make an image of God in any way, nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word” (Q&A 96). God has instructed the church to sing Psalms—this is worship as He has commanded.

The threefold division of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are divisions found in the supercriptions of the Psalms themselves as well as expressing a *hendiatis*, a figure of speech used for emphasis, in which three words are used to express one idea.

Exclusive psalm singing is exegetically defensible and, therefore, biblical.

Historical

The American evangelical and Reformed communities seem to be obsessed with innovation. Christianity is not an innovative religion but a historical one. Historically, the church has sung Psalms exclusively in public worship. Hymn singing is a late innovation and reached its crescendo during the revivals of the nineteenth century. Exclusive psalmody is the majority practice of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, even through the revivals of the Second Great Awakening.

In 1640, the first book published in the New World was a Psalter called the *Bay Book of Psalms*. The English, Scots, and Dutch all brought psalmody with them to the New World, which continued in many of our churches despite the rise of hymn singing.

This primacy of psalmody is not only true within our own tradition, but the history of Christianity is immersed in Psalm singing—from the apostolic age through the late medieval period through the time of the Reformation; exclusive psalmody was the norm within Christianity.

Christological

In Luke 24:44, the Lord Jesus tells us, “It is written in the psalms concerning me.” The Psalms speak of Christ and need to be interpreted Christologically and be seen as Christ-centered praise.

Jesus is everywhere in the Psalter. His kingly office is in Psalms 2; 45:6; 72; and 110. His agony is in Psalm 22, and His betrayal is in Psalm 41:9. The singer finds the trial of Jesus in Psalm 35 and His rejection in Psalms 22 and 118. Our Lord is crucified in Psalm 69, and Psalm 22 recounts His emotional experiences and words on the cross. Psalm 16 assures the Lord of His burial and resurrection, and Psalm 47 speaks of His ascension. Psalm 50 speaks of His second coming. The Psalms are a compendium of teaching on the life, ministry, and atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Experiential

Psalm singing is not only biblical and theologically sound; it also is experientially superior. The Psalms, as the Word of God, speak to the heart of man. God is in the midst of them. The Spirit of God fills the praises of His people through the singing of Psalms. Luther said the Psalms contain everything the Bible has “beautifully and briefly.”

The Psalms allow the worshiper to wrestle with God and commune with Him. The Psalms revive the heart and soul as the church loudly sings God’s praise. Jonathan Edwards bears witness to this: “One of the most observable features of the work [of revival] was the singular delight which all the awakened appears to take in singing psalms. In houses, in the field, in the woods, alone and together, they spake forth the praises of their King; and even little children and aged persons that have never before learned to sing, came to sing praises with solemnity and sweetness.”

Conclusion

As Christians bring praise to our triune God from week to week, the grace-filled heart must come to terms with the overwhelming fact that we sing praise to a great God who has redeemed us through Christ. He gives us an identity—son or daughter, redeemed, loved, made holy, Spirit-filled—all with hearts that ought to overflow with grace.

Singing Psalms exclusively in public worship may seem foreign to many worshipers today in our climate of

professional contemporary Christian music. Others sing the old hymns that are often rich in theological truth. But the simplicity of singing God’s praise using God’s Word alone has been a feature of Christian worship as long as the church has existed.

All the Psalms are spiritual, meaning they were composed by the Holy Spirit and given to the church for our praises unto God. The Psalms are also called “the words of Christ” (Col. 3:16), which bring us into the experience of the Lord Jesus as we sing—we think His thoughts after Him, and we have the fullness of the life and ministry of Jesus in this God-authored songbook. What a glorious privilege to sing back the songs God has given us for our praise.

This question of singing Psalms was not controversial in the life of the church for many centuries. If the church’s principle of worship has been to stay close to the Bible, that good is surely met by singing the words of the Bible in our public worship. “Nearer, My God, to Thee” can be the cry of the Psalm singer as they lift up praise in the assembly great.

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The Glory of Protestant Worship

If you speak about the *glory* of someone or something, you are asking what that person or thing possesses. What does it have? For example, the Queen of Sheba saw the glory of Solomon when she saw his magnificent house, servants, the meat at his table, his wisdom, and so on (1 Kings 10:1–13). So, if you ask, “What is the *glory* of Protestant worship?” you are really asking the question, “What does Protestant worship have?” or “What does it have to offer?”

As the previous articles have made clear, the Protestant Reformation was fundamentally a reformation of worship. Specifically, it was a restoration to the worship prescribed by God in the Scriptures. All elements of worship that did not have the sanction of God were removed—away went the candles, the altars, and the images. Now, here is the question—What do you have left? What glory does this worship have? Many people claimed that the Reformation was in fact a removal of the glory. They would say, “We had a glory here, but you’ve taken it all away.”

This is a most relevant question for our day. What glory does worship that is strictly limited to God’s revealed will have? I remember a lady from the Greek Orthodox Church visiting one of our churches in Scotland years ago. You could hardly imagine two more different settings. This lady was used to great buildings, religious paintings, ornaments, great chandelier lights—everything that appeals to sense perception. The churches in Scotland were very different. The buildings tended to be old and plain. All you have is a Bible at the center—that is read, sung, preached, listened to—and some bread, wine, and water for the sacraments. At a meal after one of these services, this lady suddenly shouted, “You have no life in your worship.” An older minister asked her, “What is life?” She could not answer the question.

Perhaps this is the most pressing question when we consider the glory of Protestant worship. It is certainly a question we should all ask—Is there life in our worship? Is there real, true, spiritual life? Of all the things we claim to *have*, surely, we need life. The prophet Isaiah writes so poignantly, “The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day” (Isa. 38:18–19). Let’s honestly face up to this question—Is there actually life in our worship? And if not, why not? Is there spiritual life in our own souls? Are we merely going through the motions as we come to God’s house, or are we earnestly seeking and crying out to God, the living God?

We could spend a very long time saying what Protestant worship does not have—indeed, what it ought not to have. Our Reformed principle of worship removes anything that God has not commanded (Heidelberg Catechism, Q 96). Furthermore, we are now in the new covenant. The God-appointed ceremonial worship has been abrogated in the coming of Jesus Christ. So much of that old way of worship was concerned with the things you could see, touch, taste, hear, and smell. The whole drama of sacrifices and offerings—culminating in the great Day of Atonement—must have been spectacular to behold! But we don’t have a temple anymore. We don’t have the Levitical high priest with the turban on his head, the stones on his chest and shoulders, and his linen ephod. We don’t have the animal sacrifices or the orchestras that accompanied them.

The whole ceremonial system has gone. Hebrews 8:13 says, concerning this former way of worshiping God, “That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” There is just no way of getting away from it—New Testament worship is simple. But let’s ask the questions



again—What do we have? What are we left with? What is our glory now? The answer is that we have the Bible that we read, sing, and preach from and listen to, we have prayer to God for things agreeable to the Word, and we have the sacraments instituted by Christ.

At one level, we can understand why the world would look at this and say, “Where’s the glory?” Or, as they would put it, “Where’s the life?” It is true that there have always been people who mock the simple worship of the Bible. The pagans accused the Jews of being atheists because they had no image or statue of their God. The Roman general Pompey entered the temple of Jerusalem and came out laughing. He said to his soldiers, “There’s nothing there! I went into their Holy of Holies and saw nothing. There’s no statue. No God!” However, while we understand the pagans’ taunts, it is sad to hear professing Christians complaining of simple or old-fashioned worship. At the time of the Reformation in Scotland, Archbishop Laud complained the poor people had “no religion that I could see—which grieved me much.”

From all of this, a vital distinction is to be made—namely, the distinction between *simple* worship and *living* worship. The critical mistake made in so much of the professing church today is the idea that for there to be life, there must be entertainment. There must be noise and activity. This is very dangerous indeed. There was plenty noise and activity in Laodicea, but they were unaware that Christ was outside their assembly, knocking on their door (Rev. 3:20). The danger of associating activity and noise with life is that people can be left with the impression that they have life, when in fact they are spiritually dead. John Kennedy warned of this in the nineteenth century at a time when people were introducing novelties in Christian worship as a means of evangelism. He writes, “They may be successful in galvanizing, by a succession of sensational shocks, a multitude of dead, till they seem to be alive, and they may raise them from their [graves], to take a place amidst the living in the house of the Lord; but far better would it be to leave the dead in the place of the dead, and to prophesy to them there, till the living God Himself shall quicken them!”

The fact is, there is good reason—and divine wisdom—behind the simplicity of New Testament worship. The reality that we have the Word and nothing else forces us to look up to God for His blessing. Without the Word and the Holy Spirit blessing that Word, we have nothing to offer. We have no entertainment for you. If you find the Bible boring, we have nothing that will help you through your boredom. We have nothing here that will make you feel alive. We have nothing that appeals to the “natural man” (1 Cor. 2:14). We have no message for you apart from the old gospel. The late Edward Donnelly spoke to this point: “I think we must increasingly urge our fellow Christians to throw away all the crutches and to dare to meet God face to face with no props, with no back-up system, to come to God in simple

spiritual worship.... The truth is this, if God doesn’t meet with us, we have nothing.”

That’s it in a nutshell. If God doesn’t meet with us, we have absolutely nothing to offer. Yet the contrary is also true, and surely this is the glory of Protestant worship. If we approach God in the way He has commanded, and if we do so looking to Him for His blessing that makes rich (Prov. 10:22), we can expect abundance of life. If we have the Word of God and the God of the Word, then we have all the glory and life we need! God’s people know this in the depth of their own souls—in the quietness and simplicity of sitting silently under the Word of God—and the Word comes to them with power. What do you have? Where’s your life? They have all the life they need. They are not seeing the external ornaments and images, but by faith they are seeing the King in His majestic beauty (Isa. 33:17). They do not hear the orchestras and choirs, but they hear the voice of their Good Shepherd who loved them and gave His life for them (John 10:11–18). They may be sitting in an uncomfortable pew, but in reality, they are sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3).

The writer to the Hebrews underscores the true glory of Christian worship by emphasizing what “we have.” The Jews were telling the Christians, “You don’t have a priest! You don’t have a sacrifice! You don’t have an altar!” That is true in reference to the old covenant worship. We don’t have priests and altars and animal sacrifices anymore. However, it is not true in reference to the greatest priest and the greatest altar and the greatest sacrifice. In Christian worship, we have something far better. “We have,” says the writer to the Hebrews, “a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Heb. 4:14). And we have a sacrifice for our sins—a sacrifice so efficacious that it was offered once. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). And “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” (Heb. 13:10).

Interestingly, the altar is what gives value to the sacrifice. Jesus says that the altar is that which sanctifies—or gives value, glory, life—to the gift. What is our altar that sanctifies our worship? What sacrifice do we offer to God? Who is the High Priest who will do this for us? This is the glory of Christian worship—the worship the Protestant Reformation sought to restore. Jesus Christ is our High Priest in heaven, He has made His one offering for sins forever, and He is our altar in that He gives infinitely glorious value to all that is done in His name. The glory of Christian worship is that we have Jesus Christ set before us in simplicity and in truth and when we have Him, we have all the heaven and the glory we need here on earth (Heb. 12:22–24).

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Why Study History?

Part 5

The Jewish Background of the Early Church

Jewish-Roman Relations

To understand the Jewish roots of the early church, it is important to understand the history of Jewish-Roman relationships. The Romans had first encountered the Jews in 161 BC when Rome and Judea made a military alliance against the Seleucid Empire, one of the four smaller kingdoms into which Alexander the Great's empire had broken up. During a Judean civil war between two Jewish aristocrats, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, both men appealed to the Roman general Pompeii for military support. Hyrcanus won out with support from the Roman troops and became the leader of the Jews, though under the firm control of Rome. Eventually, through the history of the Empire and Judea, the Romans placed Herod Antipater on the throne of Jerusalem between 34 and 37 BC, and Judea became a Roman province. The relationship between Rome and Judea was comparatively friendly to this point. Because of that, the Jews had gained special privileges in the Roman Empire. They were exempt from Roman military service. They did not have to take part in any pagan rituals, not even in emperor worship. In AD 6 however, a Jewish rebellion against Rome was led by Judas the Galilean (Acts 5). The Roman military crushed this revolt, and the emperor, Augustus, placed Judea under direct Roman rule, and a Roman governor is put in charge of Palestine who is directly responsible to the emperor—Pontius Pilate (AD 26–36).

The period of the early New Testament was a period of increasingly tightening Roman control over Judea. It is fascinating to see that, in some sense, Judea came under Roman rule voluntarily and yet, in other ways, they were occupied by the Roman Empire. The governor controlled three main aspects of life—military affairs, taxation, and administration of justice. Militarily, a Roman army was stationed at Caesarea. By the time of the ministry of Jesus, Rome taxed between 30 and 40 percent of income. There was also a highly unpopular poll tax, where everyone had to pay a set amount regardless of their income. The third area that the Roman governor controlled was the administration of justice. The Roman governor had a great deal of leeway; he could sentence to death or pardon at will.

Jewish Political and Religious Life

Even though Rome exercised this direct control over Judea, the Jews still had some degree of local independence. They had their own Jewish courts of justice outside of Palestine. Inside Palestine, they had their own court referred to as the Sanhedrin. We read of this in the Gospels and Acts. It is a supreme governing council with seventy members drawn from priests, lawyers, and elders of the Jewish aristocracy. The Sanhedrin had the power to try all kinds of legal cases but not inflict the death penalty. It also had its own police force. In addition to the Sanhedrin, four major groups of Jews were influential during the time of the early church.

First were the Sadducees, a smaller group centered in Jerusalem and the temple. They were almost all priests and members of the Jewish aristocracy. They were the most influential group in the Sanhedrin. Theologically, they accepted the authority of the Pentateuch, rejected any notion of life after death, denied the existence of angels and spirits, and did not believe in the resurrection from the dead.

Second were the Pharisees, a larger group than the Sadducees. In a popular sense, they had the greatest influence in daily life over the Jewish people. They were also considered the lead opponents of the early church, just as they were lead opponents of Christ and His ministry. This continued into the early church in Palestine and beyond, in stirring up persecution and ostracizing

those who are converted (see John 9). The name “Pharisee” means separated ones or pure ones. They had a great zeal for a careful, ethical moral code that went beyond the Scriptures, adding the traditions of men. They were concerned with strict obedience to the law of God. They believed that the subjugation of Israel by the Roman Empire was a punishment from God for Jewish disobedience and that a right response was repentance and a return to obedience of God’s will. Theologically, they were deeply opposed to the Sadducees, viewing them as theological liberals. The Pharisees accepted the whole of the Old Testament and believed in the realities of the spiritual world, life after death, and the resurrection of the body.

Third were the Zealots, a party of terrorists, or freedom fighters, founded by a man named Judas the Galilean who wanted to liberate Judea from Roman rule using violence. The Zealots believed that it was sinful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor because God alone was the true king of Israel. They were responsible for many assassinations. They would kill those they regarded as national enemies—Roman officials, Roman soldiers, or Jews who were regarded as being traitors. Simon the Canaanite, one of the disciples, had been a Zealot prior to his conversion (Luke 6:15).

Fourth are the Essenes, those of a Jewish monastic movement, broken away from mainstream Jewish life and living together in small religious communities. Philo of Alexandria estimated there were about four thousand Essenes. They had a community in Qumran, northwest of the Dead Sea, best known to us as where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. They rejected ownership of private property, shared everything communally, practiced celibacy, refused to swear oaths, underwent frequent ritual washings, and devoted much time to studying the Old Testament prophets. They expected God to intervene in world history through one or more Messiah figures. Some Essenes were also Zealots.

Jewish Diaspora

Despite the relationships between Judea and Rome, the great majority of Jewish people were scattered throughout the known world and even beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire, through Persia, Arabia, the coasts of Africa, India, central Asia, and as far as the bounds of today’s China. There is a tremendous dispersion of Jews throughout history. Scholars estimate that some six million Jews lived outside of Palestine during the time of the early church. These were referred to in Greek as the Diaspora, or the Dispersion. A huge Jewish community existed in Alexandria in Egypt, likely at least in the hundreds of thousands. Other large Jewish communities were found in Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

In the Diaspora, the Jews tended to remain distinct, living together in a special Jewish area of cities. They were ethnically distinct with little social contact with the Gentiles because Gentiles were considered unclean. The dietary laws of the Jews made it impossible for Jews and Gentiles to

eat a meal together. This made the Jews very unpopular in many parts of the known world. They were seen as antisocial and proud. At the same time, they were highly regarded as merchants and businessmen, and their financial prosperity would often raise tensions in wider society.

As we speak of the Jewish communities as distinct, there were also converts from the Gentile world. This was true throughout the Dispersion, not just in Palestine. Gentiles became interested in the Old Testament, or the distinct way of Jewish life, and converted. Among the Jews, though, there generally was false, outward legalistic religion, which was largely nominal. Thus, some of the Gentile converts, proselytes, may not have been truly converted people, but others were, such as Rahab, Naaman, and Cornelius, and are often referred to as God-fearers in the New Testament (Acts 10, 13, 17).

The Jews in the Diaspora also tried to blend Judaism with Greco-Roman culture. An example of this was Philo of Alexandria, who tried to reinterpret Greek philosophy through Jewish beliefs. In fact, Philo attempted to combine the Old Testament idea of God’s Word with the Greek philosophical concept of reason using the word *logos*. Reason was divine for many Greek philosophers but distinct from God and seen as God’s agent in creating the universe. Philo fused these together. In some ways, it seems similar to a New Testament understanding of Christ as God’s eternal Son, though it is not. On this basis, some have tried to argue that Philo was perhaps a convert to the Christian faith, but this is unlikely because he nowhere speaks of Jesus Christ.

At the time of Christ, tensions between Rome and the Jews were getting progressively worse. Because the city of Babylon had a very large Jewish community connected ethnically, linguistically, and familiarly with the Jews in Judea, the Romans begin to link the Jews of Palestine with insurrection and political alliances with the Parthian (Persian) Empire. Indeed, many Jews would rather have been under the Parthians than under the Romans because of this interconnectedness. This became a real political challenge to Rome. Growing tensions finally exploded into the Great Jewish War of AD 66–73, which fit into the era of the early church, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, and Jesus’s own prediction of the temple destruction and calls to flee the city.

The Jewish context of the early church set up not only the further spread of the Jews but also Christians. As Christians were spread to the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire together with the Jews, the first-century Christians brought the gospel to the Jews first (Rom. 1:16). Christianity arose out of the Jewish context, the theology of the Old Testament, and proclaimed the Savior of both Jew and Gentile, and the early church began to grow and thrive even through turbulent times.

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Ruling Elders (5)

A NEW TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

1 TIMOTHY 2–3

In our series so far, we have seen how it was the Lord's will to institute the office of elder to govern, guide, and shepherd His people—all foreshadowing the greatest office-bearer, Jesus Christ. In our last installment, we considered some of the New Testament words used for or associated with elders in the New Testament. Having begun consideration of the qualifications the Lord has given us for this office, we continue that study now.

Sōphrona

Translated as “sober,” the meaning of *sōphrona* differs slightly from *nephalion*, the former being somewhat broader in range of meaning. An elder must have a sound or healthy mind, resulting in moderation, self-control, discretion, wisdom, and even modesty. He is a man with good judgment and a mind furnished with wisdom used for good purposes under the instruction of God's Spirit. The opposite would be one who doesn't think clearly and tends to embrace strange ideas or the latest “wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), lacking discretion and discernment. *Sōphrona* is used by Peter when speaking about this being the final age, the end being near, emphasizing a person's need to be sober and watchful unto prayer (1 Peter 4:7). If ever leaders of God's people need clear thinking, healthy judgment, and wisdom, it is now.

Kosmion

Translated as “of good behavior,” *kosmion* in the general sense means orderly, self-disciplined, respectable, balanced, and honorable. Such an elder would be a steadying influence in the congregation. To be respected, a man must be respectable. To expect persons to follow, one must exhibit a worthy example (Heb. 11:13). One commentator suggests that *sōphrona* describes an inward characteristic while *kosmion* reflects the outward manifestation of virtue. In 1 Timothy 2:9, the apostle uses the same word, translated there as “modest,” to describe clothing appropriate for Christian women. The outward deportment of an elder should be appropriate for the One he represents and the office he occupies.

Philoxenon

Literally, *philoxenon* means “a lover of strangers.” Translated as “hospitality,” this term is not to be confused with simply being

a skilled host. Rather, it means having a heart for those we *don't* know, those who are *not* like us, the truly needy, and the lost. Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord shows a particular care for such persons, as did Jesus during His earthly ministry.¹ Such an elder lives out Matthew 25:34–40 and Luke 14:12–14. Of course, his priority ought to be the sheep over whom God has placed him but not to the exclusion of the other (Gal. 6:10). The office of deacon had already been established when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy. The deacons' primary care was for the *temporal* needs of God's people and others, co-mingled with a gospel component. Yet their ministry does not alleviate the elders' responsibility to care primarily for the *spiritual* welfare of those not yet brought into the sheepfold of Christ (John 10:16). This Christlike characteristic ought to be emblematic of elders today.

Didakticon

Translated as “apt to teach,” *didakticon* speaks more of giftedness than a personal character trait or one's godliness. The elder's ability and willingness to organize and effectively communicate scriptural knowledge is vital for leadership discussions and decisions, teaching classes, family visitation, and personal counseling. It is important, however, not only to emphasize competence in acquiring scriptural knowledge but, as elders are called to lead by example (Phil. 3:17), the church should also expect an *experiential* acquaintance with God's Word and with God Himself through faith in Jesus Christ. If the latter is lacking, how could our members be expected to follow their elders' faith (Heb. 13:7)?

Mē paroinon

Mē paroinon means “not a drunkard” or “not addicted to wine.” Some suggest this expression also includes not being



quarrelsome or otherwise ill-behaved. Taken together, this qualification would not only include addictions, as with *nephalion*, but also the ill behavior that accompanies habitual sin patterns. An elder guilty of even *one* instance of public drunkenness or abusive behavior at home or abroad on account of intoxication would be censure-worthy. But for drunkenness to be *habitual*, as this term implies, strongly indicates that until such a sin pattern is repented of and broken with, occupying *any* office in the church would be unthinkable. This qualification ties in with several others that follow in this passage as well as the preceding overarching qualification of being “blameless.”

Mē plēktēn

Mē plēktēn is translated as “no striker.” This negative characteristic is a natural and clarifying extension of *paroinon*. An elder must not be violent or ready to fight, quarrel, or bully. Though it may be difficult in our day and culture to imagine an elder given to physical violence, we remind ourselves that one’s attitude of the heart can also reflect *paroinon*. This might exhibit itself in subtler forms, such as a man who persistently argues for his own way while disregarding or downplaying the thoughts and sentiments of others. An attitude like this would be the opposite of 2 Timothy 2:24, “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.”

Mē aischrokerdē

This Greek word means a desire to acquire gain so obvious that it is shameful. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’s day were forcefully and publicly denounced by Him as those who, among other things, “devour widows’ houses and for a pretence make long prayer.” Such, He warned, would “receive the greater damnation” (Matt 23:14). The *love* of money, addressed by a subsequent term in this verse, *aphilargyon*, is a craving held internally. But when *aischrokerdē* is used, it implies that one’s unseemly desire for gain breaks out into plain sight. If every prospective disciple of Jesus is warned against thinking he can serve “God and mammon” (Matt 6:24), an elder most assuredly

must not invite public scorn against Christ’s name and cause by evidencing such greed.

Epiekēs

Translated as “patient,” *epiekē* has a broad range of meanings, including gentle, forbearing, kind, considerate, reasonable, fair, good, and even capable. In Philippians 4:5, it is translated as “moderation,” and in Titus 3:2 as “gentle.” Because an elder regularly deals with those who “oppose themselves,” he needs a combination of gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and good listening skills, while carefully weighing matters before speaking or acting. This qualification, however, should not be mistaken for weakness or indecision. One writer explains, “This is not a person who winks at or celebrates sin. Rather, such a man is clear-headed about sin and righteousness but nevertheless does not appear judgmental or pharisaical.” Another adds, “This portrays a spirit diametrically opposed to the negatives. It points to a considerateness and patient forbearance that would not tolerate any violent methods.... The related noun is used of Christ in 2 Corinthians 10:1, who provides *par excellence* as example of this quality.”

Mē amachon

This term is translated as “not a brawler” in verse 3 and Titus 3:2. In Greek writings, this word originally meant “not to be withstood, invincible.” By the New Testament era, it came to describe someone peaceable, not inclined to fight or be contentious. Considering Paul’s description of church leaders having a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19), it stands to reason that an elder should be encouraging sinners to seek peace with God and those around him. As quoted earlier, “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 2:24–25). *Amachon*, then, would be the opposite of *plēktēn*.

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Biblical Counseling Corner

COUNSELING GUIDANCE | DR. MARK KELDERMAN

In the last article, I introduced three matters related to biblical counseling: (1) we all need counsel, (2) we are called to counsel one another, and (3) biblical counseling is closely related to discipleship. Rather than probe these further in this article, I want to first address a larger question of biblical counseling and its relation to “professional” counseling or therapy.

We in the biblical counseling movement would not claim that going to secular or so-called professional counseling will not yield help in a person’s life. That would not align with the experience of many people. Instead, I want to probe a couple of other questions. What does it mean to get “help”? What is the connection between counseling and our hearts? How should the answer to these questions guide us in choosing a counselor?

About 30 percent of adults in America are seeking a counselor (doubled in the past ten years). This does not include children, who have an even sharper increase. This represents nearly one-in-three adults who are in some kind of distress, enough to seek help to cope with life or to live life better. The number of people who are *giving* counsel, however, has not increased proportionately. In some rural areas, the ratio of those seeking counsel to counselors is about 450:1. It is simply not possible for a counselor to work with that many people. From these numbers, you realize it is essential in the church and in our broken world for the truth of God’s Word to minister to the needs of the whole person. But to whom shall they go?

Some comments I hear are that “people are just wanting to be heard” or “it is very normal for people to seek out counselors today.” While this may be true, it is also true that many are suffering greatly and have no one to turn to, or the ones they turn to do not give advice that leads to progressive sanctification. Pastors are the first line of contact which members of a local congregation should reach out to for counsel; the reality is that for various reasons congregants seek help elsewhere. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by the church and I may deal with it in another

issue. On the other hand, there are pastors who either feel inadequate for counseling because of their training or they feel overwhelmed with the number of people who are seeking counsel or the time needed to counsel those in need. Therefore, there is a need to have trained men and women, under the authority of the church, who are seeking to provide hurting people in need with biblical counsel.

In biblical counseling, we teach that we were created to live to the glory of God and because of sin we no longer live this way. When we are born again, the heart is renewed, and we desire to live in this way. However, the effects of sin in our lives bring about suffering and pain. The most common thing people seek counseling for is to get relief from their troubles, pain, and suffering—or at least to learn how to better cope with it. At this juncture, we find a chasm between what non-biblical counseling and biblical counseling offer. Typically, non-biblical therapy will seek to help the person feel better, and because the person is often viewed from a materialistic viewpoint, the root issues of the heart are seldom addressed. The goal of such counseling is to get the person to feel better and be happier, whether that be through change in behaviors, circumstances, or medications. But the goal of biblical counseling is not first and foremost about our feelings; rather, it is about a change of heart—a submission to the whole counsel of the Word of God, both in its promises and corrections.

To be clear, we deal with the whole person in biblical counseling—body and soul. There are interactions between these two aspects of our being that are very intricate and mysterious. However, God continues to give greater insights into these very important issues in His kindness to all. How we respond to life, how we live life, all of this proceeds ultimately from our hearts. We were created to worship the Lord and due to sin this has become corrupted. Our proneness is to worship other things and we are inclined to excuse our sinfulness by putting the responsibility of our actions on other people or other things. You will remember

this from the very beginning when Eve and Adam sought to blame others.

In contrast to this, much of therapy today, even Christian counseling, is referred to as mental health. By using this term, we naturally and unthinkingly buy into the concept of this being a medical model of care. By using the word “mental,” we have the immediate idea that it has to do with our minds and, by extension, our brains. This makes counseling and therapy about how our brains function and malfunction and how that, in turn, results in our feelings and behaviors. In other words, my responsibility is no longer assigned to me as a person created in God’s image and called to live holy but rather it is as if I am simply like any other fleshly living thing. Just like a dog has a brain and can be conditioned to salivate at certain times, so the human brain can be conditioned in the same way. We are simply the product of our physical brains and the chemical stew that resides there.

It is now easy, as Christians, to add a soul into the mix, and we sort of place it on another level than the body. We might say there is interaction between the soul and the body, but we practically live as if they were separated. Then, if we can get the brain to give off better chemicals so that I feel better, I no longer need therapy, and my problem is seen as resolved.

This is why people mistakenly give more value to “professional” counselors than to those who practice biblical counseling. They are viewed to be at the same level as a doctor who treats your strep throat or your appendicitis. However, this is not what biblical counseling teaches.

Biblical counseling centers on the heart. As we read in Proverbs 4:23, it is out of the heart that are “the issues of life.” Jesus tells us in Luke 6:45 that it is out of the treasure of the heart that we bring forth what is good and what is evil, and

out “of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” Paul Tripp unpacks this in his book, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, by pointing out that the heart is always the target in biblical counseling. He concludes that everyone is seeking some kind of treasure and that this treasure will control our hearts and therefore our actions and responses to life. Much of secular counseling or even Christian counseling does not get to the heart but rather deals with outward changes and feeling better. Biblical counseling is seeking for the child of God to be changed and transformed through their suffering and, even where there is sin involved, to repent and be made more like Christ and for the unbeliever to find Christ. No secular therapist has such a goal or end in view. They cannot because of their view of man, as soul and body, and his relationship to God. Counseling for all manner of problems needs eventually to end up at the level of our heart and our relationship with the Lord.

Of course, all of this is connected to our suffering, which I will deal with in another article. I want simply to state here that some see biblical counseling as being on a search for sin or idols in a person’s heart, and then, when you repent of those, you find hope. This is a misrepresentation of what biblical counseling is about. I encourage you, if you are interested to pursue reading some of the many books available on the subject, to make yourself more aware of what biblical counseling is, and perhaps you might be able to be an instrument of blessing in God’s hand to someone else.¹

1. A couple of books to consider when beginning your reading would be Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*; Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*; Robert Jones, et.al., *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*; Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*.

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BLEST IS THE MAN

*Blest is the man whose bowels move,
And melt with pity to the poor,
Whose soul by sympathizing love,
Feels what his fellow saints endure.*

*His heart contrives for their relief
More good than his own hands can do;
He in the time of general grief,
Shall find the Lord has bowels, too.*

*His soul shall live secure on earth,
With secret blessings on his head,
When drought, and pestilence and death
Around him multiply their dead.*

*Or if he languish on his couch,
God will pronounce his sins forgiv’n;
Will save him with a healing touch,
Or take his willing soul to Heav’n.*

—ISAAC WATTS

EBENEZERS

*An Experiential Daily Devotional
of God's Personal Dealings
with His People*



Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

—MARK 9:24

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience
the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*

—HEBREWS 12:1–2

Our Heritage Reformed denomination felt compelled to start a new seminary in the mid-1990s. In 1995, at a historic classis meeting in Ontario, I was appointed to undertake the task and be its first professor while continuing as pastor of our church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

“What shall we call it?” an elder asked.

“The Heritage Netherlands Reformed Theological Seminary,” another elder answered.

Really? The HNRTS, for short?

“Maybe that might be a little long,” I explained, “and perhaps too denominationally restrictive for what we have in mind.” We had wanted to reach the world with biblical Reformed teaching and preaching that was confessional, experiential, and practical.

“Well,” said someone, “what name do you suggest?”

“I have no idea,” I said. “We definitely want to be *Reformed*, but we also want to stress piety in our training—the kind of piety that the Puritans possessed—so I suppose, maybe something like the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.”

“So moved!” said another elder.

Immediately, it was seconded and unanimously approved. Since then, that *Puritan Reformed* name has proved so

helpful over the decades as it describes what the seminary truly represents.

Within ten years, the numbers of its students and staff were much increased, and Puritan Reformed seminary had outgrown its original location. Construction began on a twenty thousand square foot building, with a daunting price tag of \$3 million dollars. Throughout 2004, at our regular morning prayer meetings, one member of our staff kept praying that the entire building would be paid for by the time of our dedication service, which was scheduled for an evening that coming fall.

I finally felt obliged to inform him that it may not be best to pray for that as it sounded a little bit like Gideon putting out his fleece—which is not something we are generally supportive of since the entire sacred canon of Scripture is written. Moreover, realistically speaking, this wasn’t going to happen anyway, as we were far from our goal. Surprisingly, however, by God’s grace, by the evening of the dedication service, only \$120,000 was still needed to pay the remainder of the construction costs.

Five minutes before the dedication began, a friend wanted to speak to me in my study. That person put a piece of paper

in my hand, and said, "I think you might need this"—and then left. It was a check for exactly \$120,000!

I don't know if you have ever had this happen in your life, but I didn't get on my knees—I just *fell*, cried like a baby, and thanked the Lord. Then I dried my tears and walked out to the dedication service. When I told the audience that we would not be taking up an offering for the building after all because it was already entirely paid for, everyone was astonished. We could actually hear the three hundred attendees inhale and then exhale almost in unison in a spontaneous expression of surprise and awe for what God had done.

So—God had proven me wrong.

Well, another ten years passed by, and once again, we had outgrown our facilities. An extensive addition, effectively doubling the size of the original building, plus a basement addition was completed in 2014. Regretfully, I told the staff that the Lord seldom does miracles twice in a row; we should *definitely* not expect that this time the entire \$3.6 million cost would be paid for by the evening of its dedication. But to the surprise of us all, two days before the Friday dedication, \$3.54 million had been raised.

On Wednesday, my phone rang. "How much do you need to cover the building costs?" the caller asked.

"\$60,000," I replied.

"But what about your operational fund? Do you have enough to pay your faculty and staff at the end of the month?"

"No," I said, "we're near zero."

"What do you need for that?"

"\$65,000."

Well," the caller replied, "I don't have \$125,000 to give you right now; but I will call you in a few days to let you know what I *can* give." Two hours later, the phone rang again. "I was able to free up some money," said the same caller, "and a \$125,000 check is in the mail; you should have it by Friday."

Four hours before the dedication, the check arrived.

Our amazing God, in His perfectly timed providence, did it again, clearly confirming that this is His work, and His Puritan Reformed seminary—not man's! And I was wrong *again*.

The constant goodness and long-suffering patience of our gracious God displayed is a very humbling thing. Let us never confine our God into a little "expectation box" of our own limited understanding! You know, occasionally, we just don't seem to fully get what God is really teaching us, do we?

At least—not until years later.

—Joel R. Beeke

This story is taken from a book being assembled for future publication. If you have a story of God's teaching, correction, converting grace, or providential care that you would like to share, please submit it to booktestimonies@gmail.com. If selected, the editors will write the story and send it back to you for correcting and approving. You only need to supply the facts.

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"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord" Revelation 11:15

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3

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Junior (ages 4 to 8), Senior (ages 9 to 12), encourage children to seek and follow the Lord through relatable stories that share the joys and challenges of daily life.



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BOOK TALK

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

ERIN WILLIS OLSEN

NEW RHB BOOKS

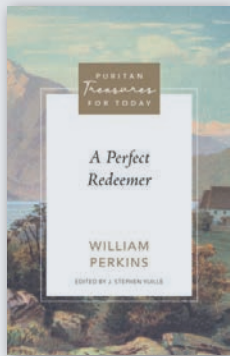


C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons: Revival Years — New Park Street Pulpit 1855–1860

Charles H. Spurgeon, introduction by Joel R. Beeke

Before preaching to crowds of thousands at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, nineteen-year-old Charles Spurgeon was used by the Holy Spirit to usher in a revival in London at New Park Street Chapel for seven years. In these years, the Holy Spirit moved through Spurgeon's riveting gospel proclamation to save thousands. Read the powerful sermons from the early years of Spurgeon's ministry in this beautiful new collection.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC 6+ volumes) ~~\$300.00~~ | \$200.00



A Perfect Redeemer

William Perkins

What is more soul satisfying than contemplating our interest in Christ?

In this brief but compelling book, William Perkins offers an insightful treatment of what it means to rest in Christ's sole sufficiency. He does this by carefully explaining what it means to know Christ crucified and the inestimable advantage we gain from His being our redeemer. This message tears down all self-righteousness and extols the riches of God's grace in Jesus, urging us to rest in "a perfect Christ, a perfect Redeemer!" As you read, may your faith be strengthened, your hope renewed, and your love enflamed.

(Reformation Heritage Books, PB, 160 pgs.) ~~\$12.00~~ | \$9.00



Our Great Redeemer: 365 Days with J. C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle, ed. Bryan Schrank

Bryan Schrank has compiled 365 devotional readings primarily from the sermons of J.C. Ryle. Each selection is one page, brief enough to fit into your busy schedule and yet insightful enough to leave you meditating on God's word throughout the day. Ryle was known as one of the great evangelical leaders of the last half of the nineteenth century, and his works continue to comfort believers in the glory of the great Redeemer. Consider spending a year with Ryle and being encouraged in your daily Christian walk.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 384 pgs.) ~~\$30.00~~ | \$23.00



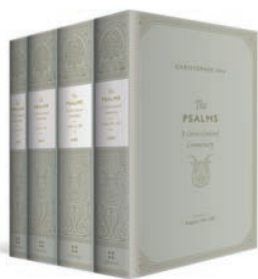
Spurgeon: A Life

Alex DiPrima

In this biography, Alex DiPrima paints a fresh portrait of Charles Haddon Spurgeon—the most well-known minister of the gospel in the nineteenth century. As DiPrima traces Spurgeon's life from the famous "boy preacher of the fens" to the mature pastor of later years, readers will marvel at his extraordinary speaking abilities, his genius for administration, and his massive global influence, which set him apart as a leader of rare brilliance. Yet by presenting Spurgeon in his social, historical, and religious contexts, DiPrima helps us comprehend the whole of Spurgeon's ministry in metropolitan London. Combining academic expertise with popular presentation, this short biography of the famed Prince of Preachers will be the go-to introduction on Spurgeon for years to come.

(Reformation Heritage Books, HC, 312 pgs.) ~~\$35.00~~ | \$26.00

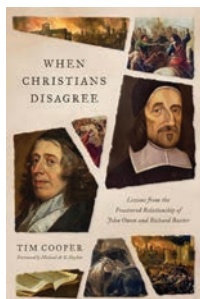
OTHER NEW TITLES



The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary *Christopher Ash*

In this comprehensive, 4-volume commentary, Christopher Ash provides a thorough treatment of all 150 Psalms, examining each psalm's significance to David and the other psalmists, to Jesus during His earthly ministry, and to the church of Christ in every age. The first volume in the set is a detailed handbook that explains how to interpret the Psalms with Christ at the center. The remaining volumes cover each psalm in depth, with introductory quotations, a deep analysis of the text's structure and vocabulary, and a closing reflection and response. Ash also includes selected quotations from older readings of the Psalms, including patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation scholars. Perfect for pastors, Bible teachers, and students, this commentary set helps readers sing and pray the Psalms with Christ in view.

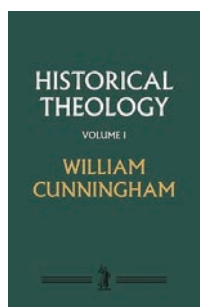
(Crossway, HC, 2480 pgs.) ~~\$160.00~~ \$105.00



When Christians Disagree *Tim Cooper*

Our current culture seems to be increasingly divided on countless issues, including those affecting the church. But for centuries, theological disagreements, political differences, and issues relating to church leadership have made it challenging for Christians to foster unity and love for one another. In this book, author Tim Cooper explores this polarization through the lives of two oppositional figures in church history: John Owen and Richard Baxter. Cooper highlights their individual stories while showing how their contrasting life experiences, personalities, and temperaments led to their inability to work together. After exploring these lessons from the past, readers will gain insights into their own relationships, ultimately learning how to love and live in harmony with their fellow believers despite their disagreements.

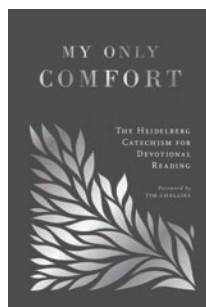
(Crossway, PB, 184 pgs.) ~~\$19.00~~ \$14.00



Historical Theology *William Cunningham*

These two volumes are derived from Dr. Cunningham's lectures to his Church History class at New College, Edinburgh between 1847–1861. Cunningham's living faith, devout submission to God, clarity of thought, and reverence for the authority of the Bible make him well-positioned to comment on the relationship between the church and its theology. Volume 1 covers the biblical view of the church, the church councils and the apostolic fathers, the development of the church's central doctrines—such as the incarnation and the Trinity—as well as the rise of scholasticism, the Reformation, and the Council of Trent. Volume 2 documents the development of the doctrines of justification and the atonement and the Arminian and the Socinian controversies. He also devotes lengthy discussions to Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and the Free Church of Scotland.

(Banner, HC, 1408 pgs.) ~~\$65.00~~ \$50.00

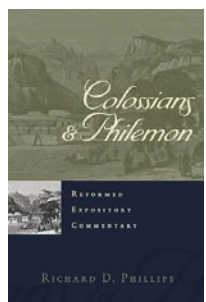


My Only Comfort *Amanda Martin, Editor*

"Rather than reading as a long series of questions and answers, [the Catechism] now reads as a kind of poetic devotional. And it works well! I trust and I pray that this will spark a new wave of interest and help a new generation to both read and benefit from it."

—Tim Challies

(Presbyterian and Reformed, HC, 120 pgs.)
~~\$18.99~~ \$14.25



Colossians and Philemon *Richard D. Phillips*

"In this clear and practical exposition of two prison letters from the pen of Paul, Richard Phillips shows the superiority and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ in his divine identity, glorious gospel, indwelling Spirit, and call to a transformed life (Colossians), as well as the resurrection power of Christ and the fruit of discipleship in a real-life scenario (Philemon). This commentary is ideal for both pastoral study and personal edification."

—Joel R. Beeke

(Baker Academic, HC, 544 pgs.) ~~\$57.00~~ \$41.00



Expository Thoughts on the Gospel *J.C. Ryle*

This seven-volume boxset brings Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel* to a new readership. Featuring a high-quality quarter-bound design that evokes artisanal bookbinding each volume will sit in a boxed case to aid use and increase longevity. The design, paired with Mary Davis's lightly modernized text, enables Ryle's

voice and tone to remain authentic while making it more accessible to a new generation.

(Evangelical Press, HC) ~~\$140.00~~ \$90.00



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The Arrow and the Truth

STORY FOR CHILDREN by ESTHER ROTH

Logan took a deep breath and silently willed his pounding heart to be still. He pressed his back up against the tree trunk and peered around the grizzled old oak. Whizzzz! An arrow whistled through the air nearly skimming the bridge of Logan's nose. Thwap! It embedded itself in a crack of a rotten old stump.

"Aieeee!" Logan shouted and dashed out of the woods to face his enemy. His right hand reached for an arrow, and his other raised the bow. He pulled and released. His arrow shot ahead of him and THUD—it connected with his mortal enemy, who clutched at his chest, dropped to his knees, and fell to the ground.

Logan put his foot on his adversary's back, raised his bow in triumph, and declared, "Speak now, mine enemy: doth the mighty Robin Hood yet rule over Sherwood Forest, forsooth?"

The victim rolled over. "Yup," he groaned.

Logan prodded his defeated foe with his foot. "Hark, what manner of speech doth reach mine ear?"

"Okay, okay. You win. But I'm not gonna talk like you with your old-fashioned nonsense." The boy rolled over and sat up, brushing long hair out of his eyes.

Logan flopped down beside him. "You almost got me with that last shot, Ben."

Ben grinned. "I'm out of arrows now. We'll have to whittle some more for next time we play."

Logan nodded. "Maybe Monday afternoon? I've only got one arrow left."

The door of Logan's house slapped shut, and Mom came out with some ice water.

"All right, boys," she said. "Have a drink and then get to work weeding the gardens."

Logan's dad was the pastor of the church next door. It was a small church in the middle of the city, but there was a wooded area around it—perfect for playing Robin Hood or climbing trees.

Logan's only complaint about living next door to the church was that it was his job to weed every Saturday. But when his cousin Ben came over, the chore was a little more fun. Once Ben had sneaked up behind Logan and dumped his weed bucket on his head. Logan had hollered and tackled Ben. As they rolled around in the grass, the air conditioner suddenly started, startling the boys momentarily, and they both burst into laughter. Now each week the boys contrived a new story about their imagined enemy, the air conditioner.

Last Saturday, the garden had been the sea, and the air conditioner a whale. Wielding sticks as spears, Ben and Logan sneaked up to harpoon the whale. The spinning blades cut splinters off the spear as the boys laughed.

Mom had called out the door, "Hey, boys, get back to work! And get away from that air conditioner!"

This Saturday, as the boys headed to do their job, Ben grabbed Logan's arm. "Stop!" he whispered dramatically, pointing. "There's a lion loose in the jungle, and we're down to one arrow." He gestured to Logan's quiver.

The boys darted around the corner of the church. They crept forward on their stomachs, keeping their eyes on the "lion" ahead. Logan carefully set his last arrow on his bow.

"Wait!" whispered Ben. "You've only got one chance, and you've got to get him good!" He pulled the suction cup off the end of the arrow. Logan realigned the arrow and fired.

There was a hiss, and then misty clouds began pouring out of the air conditioner.

"Uh-oh," said Ben.

"What do we do?" Logan whispered.

"Let's just see if it stops," Ben suggested.

The boys waited anxiously for ten minutes. The hiss eased and the mist thinned out. Finally, there was nothing to see at all.

"We better get weeding," Logan took his bucket to one side of the church, and Ben went to the other.

They worked in uncharacteristic silence. Logan was the first to speak.



"Don't say anything," he said, "Maybe it won't be hot tomorrow, and no one will even notice anything."

Ben looked doubtful. "But what will we do when someone finds out that something's broken?"

Logan shrugged. He didn't want to think about that part.

"Maybe it's just an easy fix, and they won't be able to tell what happened."

It didn't seem very likely, and both boys' consciences weighed heavily, but fear of punishment outweighed telling the truth.

By 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, the thermometer read 34 degrees Celsius, which is 93 degrees Fahrenheit.

"It's going to be a warm one!" Dad commented cheerfully as the family walked over to church. He shrugged on his black suit jacket and straightened his tie. Dad always wore a jacket and tie to preach, rain or shine. Logan wiped his own brow, which was already glistening—from the heat and the uneasy state of his heart.

"Dad..." he started, but his voice faltered. *What can Dad do now anyway? Church is about to start.*

Dad looked back at him. "Did you say something?" he asked.

"Oh, never mind...it's nothing," Logan mumbled. They nodded hello to Ben's family. Uncle Rick looked hot already in his navy-blue suit.

The sanctuary was cool as they entered, but soon it was uncomfortably warm. Before the sermon started, several men had removed their jackets. One woman fanned herself with the bulletin, and a little girl was asleep on the pew, her hair damp with perspiration.

Logan shifted uncomfortably as he looked up at Dad preparing to start preaching. The pastor took a long drink of water and started speaking.

Fifteen minutes later, Dad's face was red, and his forehead shone with moisture. Logan sneaked a look across the church at Ben. He looked as miserable as Logan felt. A trickle of sweat ran down Logan's back, and he silently wished for the service to end.

Everyone was pulling out their bulletins to fan themselves as they walked out of church. Mr. John, the custodian, was outside looking at the air conditioner with a group of men.

"Hey, what's that?" Mr. John reached his hand into the air conditioner.

Ben nudged Logan, and Logan swallowed hard. Mr. John's hand emerged, revealing a small wooden arrow.

"Huh," humphed Mr. John. "Somebody's been fooling around over here."

Logan and Ben were sitting in Dad's study. Uncle Rick stood by the door.

"Well, boys," Dad said. "How'd this happen?"

The boys feebly explained about Robin Hood, harpooning whales, and the lion. Uncle Rick turned to look out the window, and Dad's eyes smiled slightly, though his voice was stern.

"We've told you before not to touch that air conditioner. I am not happy about you breaking it. When the repairman comes, you boys will be looking at the bill, do you understand?"

The boys nodded. That was fair.

"The problem here," began Uncle Rick, "is that you failed to own up to your actions and tell the truth."

"We wanted to..." Ben said. "But we were afraid of getting in trouble."

"How did you feel hiding this secret?" Uncle Rick asked.

"It felt heavy, I guess," Ben replied.

"I couldn't think of anything else," added Logan. "I actually feel better that you know, even though we're in trouble now."

"Sin is like that," Dad said. "It weighs you down and keeps you captive. The Bible says that the truth will set you free. You've seen that today—owning up to the truth lifts a weight off of you. Confessing the truth of our sins to the Lord frees us from our burden of guilt."

"Withholding the truth is also lying," Uncle Rick added. "God is the God of truth, and Satan is the father of lies. Who do you serve?"

The boys were solemn. The right thing to do had been obvious all along, and they should have confessed right away.

"I'm sorry, Dad," Logan said.

"Me, too," Ben added.

"Ever wonder where these boys come up with such crazy ideas?" Uncle Rick said with a smile at Dad.

"Hmm, not really," Dad laughed. "We came up with some wild games as kids too, didn't we?"

"What about the time we camped out in the woods all alone," Uncle Rick began.

Logan and Ben grinned at each other. "Tell us the rest!" they shouted in unison.

Esther Roth is married to Dan Roth; they are members of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Tillsonburg, and have five children.



Where Is Your Home?

MEDITATION FOR CHILDREN by ELINA VANDERZWAAG

Let's take a look at a bird you can find pretty much in every city on earth—the pigeon.

In history books from a few thousand years ago, pigeons (or doves) are already mentioned. Some believe that pigeons were the first domesticated birds. ("Domesticated" means to make useful by humans.) Why was that? First, they were used for food. They were easily caught and tasted pretty good. Perhaps much like chicken? But early on, people realized a very amazing thing about these gentle birds. No matter how far away you took them, they always knew how to find their way back home to their roost. (A roost is where birds go to sleep and rest and make their nest.) And they did so very fast.

Imagine a time when the fastest way to get a message from one place to another was by a horse and its rider. A journey could take days. This was before the telephone was invented and airplanes were only dreamed of. A pigeon could fly that distance in hours. Soon, pigeons were used to send urgent messages, such as during war. Thousands of pigeons were brought along to the battlefields to send messages. In the First World War, 194 American soldiers were left helpless in enemy territory. They sent out pigeons with messages stored in little tubes bound to their legs. The enemy shot at the pigeons. Many died, but one of them, *Cher Ami* (Dear Friend), survived, even though he got hit in the chest, lost sight in one eye, and one of his legs was dangling by a muscle. But he made it. He delivered the message, and the 194 soldiers were rescued!

Messenger pigeons have saved many lives, and that is because they always go home!

Pigeons love to fly, but they are never safe from birds of prey who are good at catching their food from the sky. Only at home can they rest, be fed, and feel safe.

That's what home is for us, too, isn't it? I hope you all have a good home, a home where you are loved and don't

have to worry about what other kids think of you. A home where you are safe from bullies and can rest. A home where good meals are cooked.

But there is a home that is even safer and better than the best home here on earth. And that is the home that the Lord Jesus is preparing for all who trust in Him. We could call that our *last* or *heavenly* home. You know that old people will surely die. But you have also heard of children who have died. I hope you seek the Lord by praying and reading and *believing* what you read. He is so willing to forgive you all your sins! Then you, too, can be sure of this last home.

And now we come to a wonderful mystery. When you want to love the Lord and read His Word, and you ask the Lord to bless these words to your heart, the Lord Jesus says something amazing. You can read that in John 14:23: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Let that sink in. If you love the Lord Jesus and love His Word and His commandments, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit will make *your heart* Their home. That means that even when you are far from your parents' home, you can be home in the Lord. With the Lord *with* us and *in* us, we are even safer than if we were living in a concrete bunker. And it means that you can find rest and safety no matter where you are.

So, unlike pigeons who sometimes fly hundreds of miles to get home, you can rest and be safe anytime and anywhere. And when the Lord is your home, and your heart is His home, you have something special to share. Who knows, like the pigeons, you might save someone's life by showing them the only place of forgiveness, safety, and rest—the Lord Jesus!

What Will You Do?

BIBLE QUIZ FOR CHILDREN by CHERYL DEWAAL

What do you want to be when you grow up? This is a common question adults like to ask children. While you might have years before you need to decide, you can start thinking about your future now. What are you interested in? Do you have gifts and abilities in a certain area? Work on growing those talents and ask God to bless them, but also be willing to try something new. Who knows what exciting career God will open up to you in the coming years! In the meantime, work hard at the job you are doing right now. Even if it's something you don't enjoy, remember this—when you do your work well, you are honoring and praising God. You are also setting a good example for others who may be watching you. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5:16 to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Look up the following Bible texts to find some jobs mentioned in the Bible. Then find the words in the puzzle.

The words can be found across, down, backwards, and diagonally.

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

1. 2 Samuel 5:11 (starts with c)

2. John 20:15

3. Matthew 13:45

4. Jeremiah 18:3

5. John 10:11

6. 1 Samuel 9:23

7. Isaiah 41:7 (starts with g)

8. Exodus 1:16

9. Romans 10:14

10. 2 Timothy 2:3

11. Luke 5:2

12. Exodus 18:13

13. Revelation 18:22 (starts with m)

14. Revelation 18:17 (starts with s)

15. Acts 18:3

ANSWERS FOR LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE:

- | | | |
|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1. Abel | 6. Isaac | 11. Gideon, |
| 2. Enoch | 7. Joseph | Barak |
| 3. Noah | 8. Moses | 12. prophets |
| 4. Abraham | 9. Egypt | 13. faith |
| 5. Sarah | 10. Rahab | 14. Jesus |



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.

ORDINATION AND INAUGURAL OF REUEL XAVIER ORDINATION SERVICE

Heritage Reformed Congregation of Kinnelon, New Jersey
August 2 and 4, 2024

With joy and gladness, we have experienced God's blessing of receiving our third pastor as a congregation, Reuel Xavier, a PRTS graduate, on Friday evening, August 2. The service began with everyone soaking wet after rushing into our church building in the middle of a heavy downpour right at 6:30 p.m. Dr. Joel Beeke led the service, which commenced with singing Psalter 134, the reading of 2 Timothy 4:1-8, congregational prayer, and then the singing of Psalter 368. In his introduction, Dr. Beeke explained how he often met our new pastor as a young boy at various conferences in Brazil and encouraged him to prayerfully consider if the Lord might call him to the ministry, and that he hoped one day he could teach Reuel at PRTS. Marvelous are the majestic and sovereign ways of God's providence.

Dr. Beeke preached on 2 Timothy 4:1-2:

God's Beautiful and Solemn Ordination Charge

1. Remember before whom you stand
2. Remember your primary work
3. Remember to be faithful

He reviewed the words spoken by the Apostle Paul, who was being held in prison, awaiting his fate; Paul tells Timothy that he has finished his course, and has kept the faith. He is passing on the ministerial gospel baton to Timothy. He says, "I charge you before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead." Remember you are the mouthpiece of God! This is a solemn responsibility; you must speak with authority! He gives a command from God: "Preach the Word of God"—and nothing else! Dr. Beeke urged Reuel to remember that his primary work is to be ready at all times to preach the gospel, in season and out of season, remembering that one day he and our congregation will have to give an account of each other at the right hand of God as

to whether or not we have been faithful in preaching the Word and in responding to the Word preached.

Further, Paul charges Timothy to reprove sin, to call for repentance, and to exhort! Timothy is to call his hearers to respond to the gospel. Then Paul urges Timothy to be patient, to watch, to be forbearing, to endure afflictions, being long-suffering under trials. He charges Timothy to be faithful, to be an evangelist, to fulfill his ministry, and to seek to win sinners to Christ, all the while preaching the whole counsel of God!

After the sermon and the singing of Psalter 372, Dr. Beeke read the Ordination Form, which was followed by singing Psalter 246:3. Reuel kneeled before the congregation with the laying on of hands by three elders of the congregation, Rev. Johnny Serafini (our last pastor) of the Landis Valley OPC, Rev. Justin Nobel of the PPRBC, Rev. Jerrold Lewis of the Free Reformed Church, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, and Reuel's father, Elder Almir Xavier of Brazil. While the open Bible was held over his head and God's blessing was pronounced on our new pastor, each participant recited a verse from Scripture which was followed by the singing of Psalter 421.

The service concluded with personal words of greeting and well-wishes from Revs. Lewis, Noble, and Serafini, and Elder Xavier, who was translated by Rev. Serafini. The conclusion of the form was read, followed by prayer, and then Rev. Xavier pronounced the benediction on the congregation for the first time as pastor. Following the service, a time of love and fellowship transpired with refreshments.

On the following Sunday, Rev. Xavier delivered his inaugural sermon to our congregation from Isaiah 55:1-13:

Come to Christ!

1. The good news of the gospel (vv. 1-5)
2. The meaning of the gospel (vv. 6-11)
3. The result of the gospel (vv. 12-13)

Rev. Xavier began by stressing that the preached gospel doesn't return to God "empty-handed." There is a special, effectual call of the gospel that can't be resisted, for it is an eye-opening, ear-unlocking, life-giving gospel. He said, "As a pastor, I can preach the Word, I can urge you, I can plead with you, I can cry for you, visit you, pray for you. But I cannot give life. I cannot make you believe. It is by God's free grace. This prevents two things: First, it prevents high expectations, because regardless of how good a preacher might be, it is only the Holy Spirit who can give life. Second, it prevents low expectations, because regardless of how bad a preacher might be, it is the Holy Spirit who can give life."

Rev. Xavier then said, "That is a call of a minister, not to speak his words, but a far superior Word, God's words. As J. Gresham Machen said, 'If you accept the Bible as the Word of God you will have one qualification of a preacher. Whatever be the limitations of your gifts, you will at least have a message.' As long as God's minister is faithful, the Word is not his, but it is the Word of the Lord. And we have no right to hate it, to suppress it, to choose something else, or to hide from it."

The new pastor then applied this truth personally to himself: "My life centers around preaching. My ministry is to bring the Word of God



Rev. Reuel and Carol Xavier, front and center with their children, his parents on the left, as well as speakers, elders, and spouses

to all men. I'm either preaching, thinking about preaching, or praying about preaching. The summary and center of my ministry is preaching. So, you might ask me, is preaching everything to you? No! Jesus is! And because He is everything to me, I want to preach about Him until He calls me home. Always remember, it's not about the preacher, but about the God before whom we stand. We can't be here for any other reason, not even the preacher, but to glorify our Savior Jesus Christ."

Rev. Xavier then concluded: "In this chapter, we saw the good news of the gospel, which is worth pursuing, as well as the simplicity and assurance of the gospel that calls us to come to Christ. The good news of the gospel is that you *can* come to Christ. The meaning of the gospel is that you *must* come to Christ. The result of the gospel is that you *are renewed* by coming to Christ. So, come to Him, don't wait to come until tomorrow, come to Him while He may be found."

Afterwards, Elder Paul Greendyk spoke some edifying and personal words to our new pastor and his family. Please pray for our new pastor and our flock that we would be granted Godspeed and the benediction of the Holy Spirit.

—Tom Rose

OBITUARIES

FELLOWS, Catherine Kleen, age 77, of Grand Rapids, formerly of Augusta, Georgia, passed away on June 26, 2024. Catherine modeled a personal relationship with her Lord, and a beloved text was Nahum 1:7: "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." She was preceded in death by her husband, Timothy Fellows Sr., and her brother, Forest Miley. Catherine is survived by her children (and grandchildren) Timothy & Andrea Fellows Jr. (Jemimah, Timothy III, Keziah, Keren, Tirzah); John & Robyn Fellows (Rebekah & Michael Pascoe, Enoch & Blythe Fellows, Josiah, Gabriel); Anna & Steve Renkema (Mercedes, Titus, Moriah, Mordecai); great-granddaughter, Paris Pascoe; and sister, Carolyn Miley. (Rev. John Byl, Psalm 46; Isaiah 40:1-8; 2 Thessalonians 4:13:18).

DYKEMA, Ann Corinne (Doorn), age 79, of Grand Rapids, passed away July 3, 2024. She was preceded in death by her husband, David; brother, Len Doorn; brother-in-law, Phillip Dykema. Ann is survived by her children, Kim Dykema, Brian & Gayle Dykema, Greg & Sara Dykema; grandchildren, Olivia, Ireland, Genevieve, Christian, and Tennyson; sisters-in-law, Tina Doorn and Sue Dykema; brother-in-law, Larry Dykema. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Isaiah 38:14-15; Rev. John Byl, Job 19:25-27).

VAN DYKE, Henrietta "Hattie", age 92, of Grand Rapids, passed away July 11, 2024. She was preceded in death by her husband, John Van Dyke, Jr.; granddaughter Elissa Kamp; infant brother Herman Zomer; brother Herman "Chet" Zomer; sisters, Jennie "Jean" Blom, and Hermina VanRoekel. Henrietta is survived by her children, Geraldine & David Kamp, Jennie & Evert Van Maanen, Evelyn & William Rogell, Helen & Thomas Kamp, Ruth & Richard Kamp, John III & Lynn Van Dyke, David & Cornelia Van Dyke, Daniel & Cindy Van Dyke, Timothy & Sharon Van Dyke, and Rachel & John Bruinsma; 67 grandchildren and 134 great-grandchildren; brothers and sisters, Nina Koedam, John Zomer, Rolena Walma, Alvin (Lois) Zomer, Frances Overweg; sisters-in-law, Sylvia Zomer and Lillian Van Dyke, as well as numerous nieces and nephews. (Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Hebrews 9:27-28; Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag, John 11:21-27).

CALLS DECLINED

Dr. Ian Macleod has declined the call extended to him by the Riverside Associate Reformed Presbyterian church in Cambridge, Ontario.

Rev. Mark Wagenaar has declined the call extended to him by the Burgessville, Ontario HRC.

ELEMENTARY & HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Teaching applications for the 2024-2025 school year are welcome!



We are looking for enthusiastic, qualified **elementary and high school 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 both encouraged to apply.

ABOUT US:

- An expanding student body of 350+ students from Kindergarten to Grade 12
- A dedicated parent-run school community
- Strong relationship with local Reformed churches (ARP, FRC, HRC, URC)
- Newer facilities in the rural setting of Mount Elgin, in southwestern Ontario
- A unified, professional staff committed to a Christ-centered education

HOW TO APPLY: Applications must include a resume, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references.



principal@orcschool.ca (Mr. William Van Brugge)



www.orcschool.ca



519-485-1142



333182 Plank Line, Mount Elgin, Ontario. Come visit us!

TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES

PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is now accepting applications for two fulltime teaching positions.

Providence Christian School is situated in Monarch, Alberta—a beautiful, southern, rural community, minutes from Lethbridge and a short drive to the beautiful Rocky Mountains. It contains grades K-12 with currently about 190 students and 12 FTE staff members.

We are looking to fill the following vacancies:

- A high-school Bible and Social Studies teacher,
- A grade 2 teacher to fill a maternity leave starting in November

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 as it is most clearly and consistently interpreted in the Reformed confessions, and who are committed to educating children and youth for the formation of a distinct Christian worldview.

PCS offers:

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

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit:

- a cover letter of application,
- a résumé containing at least three references,
- a statement of faith,
- a statement of philosophy of Christian Leadership and Teaching.

These positions commence on August 1, 2024. For further information check out the school website www.pcsmonarch.com.

Personal inquiries and/or applications can be forwarded to next year's principal, Miss Angela Feyter (assistantprincipal@pcsmonarch.com) or our current principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek (principal@pcsmonarch.com).



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18 to
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2024



A 19-29 YOUNG ADULT CONFERENCE

Additional details and registration:
KalamazooReformed.org/young-adult-retreat

- ✓ Meaningful Topics
- ✓ Planned Activities
- ✓ Strengthening Fellowship
- ✓ One-Night Lodging at Gull Lake
- ✓ Four Delicious Meals

**CELEBRATING 25 YEARS
OF SUMBA MISSION**



CANADA & US TOUR
SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 12
DETAILS TO FOLLOW



ANY CHURCHES INTERESTED IN ORGANIZING AN **SUMBA MISSIONS** EVENT
PLEASE CONTACT BILL KLYN | KLYNB2816@GMAIL.COM OR 519-617-2816



From Our Mailbox

PREACHING AND TEACHING MINISTRY

I wanted to share with you that in December it will be 7 years since Jesus saved me from my sin and God's wrath. It was under your preaching that I saw my state before God and who Jesus was and would be to me. I've had the best years of my life since Jesus saved me and I love the Lord more than ever before. I want to encourage you that God has done so much good to my life and the life of so many young people in West Michigan, and that the gospel is so strong and powerful. Tonight I found the sermon that brought me to fall before God for the first time. I praise God for the day I was saved. Thank you for bringing Christ before my eyes that day. God is the greatest! Be encouraged to do His work.

* * *

I was came across your teachings in 2006-2007 and was radically transformed. I've listened to a bunch of your sermons, read a few of your books as I could afford them, and even got

the Reformation Heritage Study Bible. I so appreciate your thorough teaching of God's Word which touches my head, my heart, and my hands. Thanks for what you do. You also introduced me to the Puritans. I plan to get some books on Puritan theology as funds allow. Thanks again.

* * *

We listened to your sermon on the 6th Commandment and cancel culture. Such a challenging, insightful and helpful sermon in so many ways.

Every day I need to be on guard for what I think and say about others at every level, as well as standing against the lies of what is eroding truth, life and holiness in our society.

Although I take these things very seriously, it's still not enough, and I need to intensify my growth in this. Fearing God above all is a good prayer to sustain us daily. This is supplementing my daily meditation on à Brakel's writings too.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT FOR CHRISTIANS

As those of us in the U.S. approach the upcoming November election, I want to use this opportunity to share a simple (but certainly not exhaustive) guide for Christians to increase their political engagement both now and beyond the election.

1. Download and view your sample ballot *well before* election day. This can typically be obtained via your state's secretary of state website or from your local clerk. Be certain to read it thoroughly, taking note of all names and any proposals. Set aside time to research your ballot, perhaps with a few trusted Christian friends if you feel overwhelmed. You might find it helpful to first make a list of key issues and values that are important to you and are part of a biblical worldview.

Some tips and pitfalls in ballot research:

a. For candidates, party affiliation and endorsements can be helpful but should not be solely relied upon. Many organizations, even those who claim to share our values, prioritize political relationships over those values. Reaching out to the endorsing organization to learn how they make their decisions may be useful. Studying voting records, talking to others in your community, and reaching out directly to the candidate with questions can also help you paint a clearer picture of the candidate's character.

b. For non-partisan sections, researching and learning the candidate's positions on key issues becomes even more important. Even if it is a smaller race, it can still have an important impact on your community. Endorsements and communication with the campaign itself become even more important without party affiliation.

c. Communicate with campaigns, endorsing organizations and others in your community early, at least weeks before election day, as it is unlikely you'll be able to get all the answers you seek the day before or the day of the election. If you have enough time, attend candidate meet-and-greet events as well, and come prepared with questions.

d. Ballot proposals are often only summarized on a ballot and sometimes worded specifically to deceive. Researching these proposals online ahead of time is very useful, as you can obtain the full text and read any accompanying news articles written by trusted sources.

e. Familiarize yourself with researching campaign finance records. This may present a bit of a learning curve, but it is a helpful tool

for Christians practicing self-government, seeking to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Our nation's citizenry has not only moved further away from fearing God but has fallen into a state of dangerous ignorance: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). This has allowed mega-donors to step into that gap, heavily influencing the outcome of even local races, on both sides of the partisan aisle. Your state will have a search tool for campaign contributions, and your county may have records for local races as well. Political mail will have fine print "paid for by" disclaimers, and some pieces may be paid for by non-profit organizations or political action committees, known colloquially as "PACs." Remember, political mail will almost always be tailored to you and your values on its face, and the candidate or proposal in question may or may not be aligned with the messaging in reality. Researching the names of the organizations in both a search engine and a campaign finance search tool can help you uncover the candidate's or proposal's true nature.

2. Continue to engage with issues, candidates, and the community beyond the election and to the extent you are able. By attending local government meetings, committee hearings, and legislative sessions, you can learn the process and what is happening in your community. You may find it helpful to do this with a group of like-minded friends. Attending coffee hours and town hall events allows you to observe and ask questions of elected officials. You can find all these event schedules on government body websites or elected official social media pages.

3. Another useful skill Christians can add to their arsenal is learning how to research upcoming and potential legislation in their state. Again, there is a learning curve, but this is an important way we as Christians can be "watchmen" in our communities. Your state legislature will have a website with introduced legislation and may even have a tool that allows you to search keywords or receive email updates about certain bills or topics. Some Christian organizations also monitor legislation on specific issues. Salt and Light Global (saltlightglobal.org) offers a useful legislative and judicial update for Christians via their newsletter. But by learning this research skill yourself, you will be better equipped to vet candidates, alert others of dangerous legislation, and promote important legislation.

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

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PERIODICAL
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

HOW TO LOSE YOUR FEARS

As one whom his mother comforts,
So will I comfort you.
Act but the infant's part,
Give up to love your willing heart;
No fondest parent's melting breast
Yearns, like your God's, to make blest:
Taught its dear mother soon to know,
The tenderest babe its love can show;
Bid your base servile fear retire,
This task no labor will require.

The sovereign Father, good and kind,
Wants to behold His child resigned;
Wants but your yielded heart—no more—
With His large gifts of grace to store:

He to your soul no anguish brings,
From your own stubborn will it springs.
But crucify that cruel foe,
Nor pain, nor care, your heart shall know.

Shake from your soul, overwhelmed, oppressed,
The encumbering load that galls your rest,
That wastes your strength in vain;
With courage break the enthralling chain.
Let prayer exert its conquering power,
Cry in the tempted, trembling hour—
My God, my Father, save your son!
It is heard, and all your fears are gone.

—MARTIN LUTHER
in Octavius Winslow's *God, Comforting as a Mother*

the **Banner** of Sovereign Grace Truth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

A PERIODICAL FOR FAMILIES