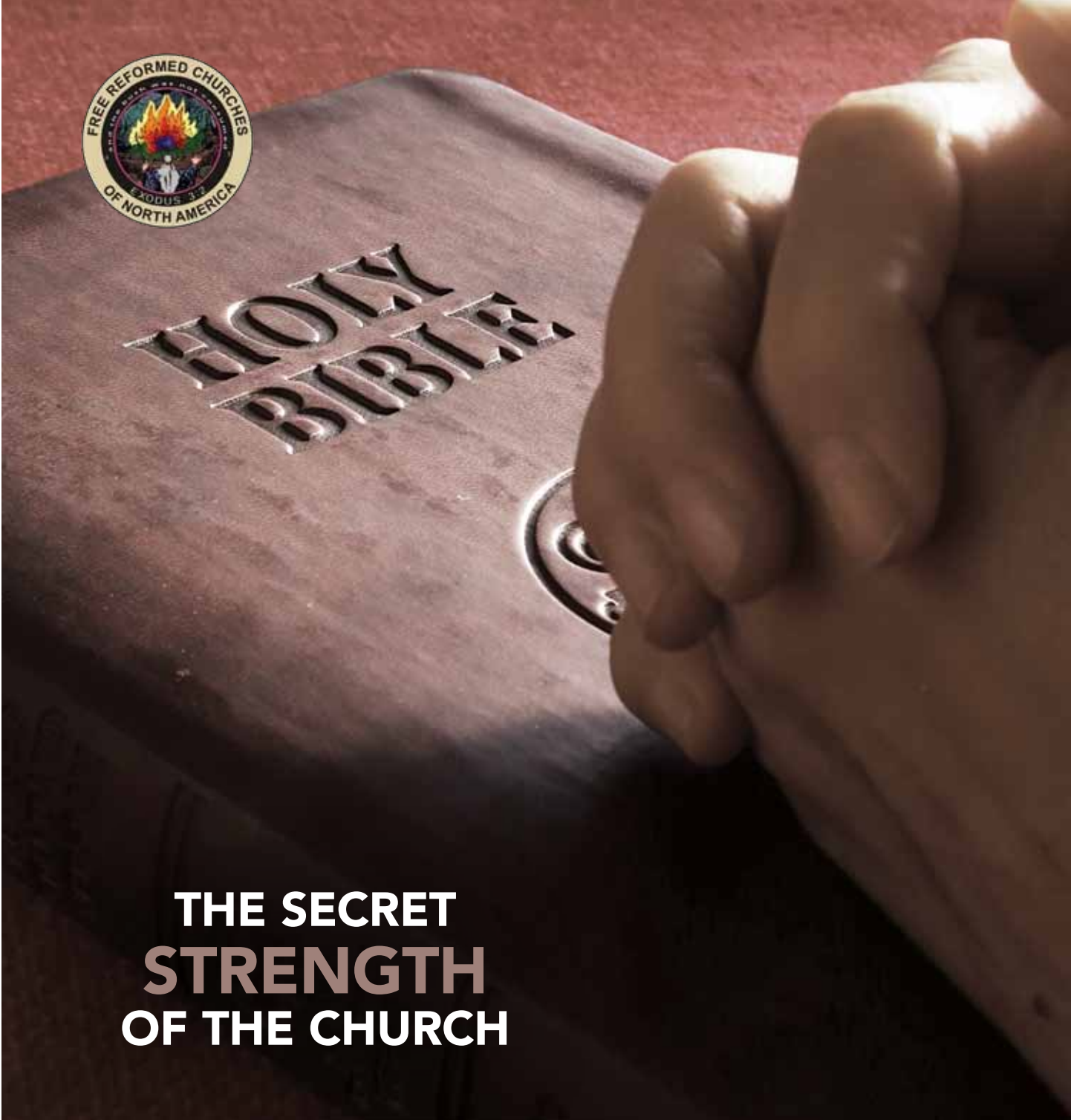


VOLUME 67 NUMBER 5 · MAY 2020 EDITION

THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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THE SECRET STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” Zechariah 4:6

Several years after the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Zechariah was called to administer consolation and encouragement to the people of God. Born in Babylon, he was among the first exiles who returned to the Promised Land. He witnessed the early endeavours of the restoration of the temple. The inception of this undertaking was characterized by great zeal. The foundation of the temple was completed within thirteen months.

Shortly after, the Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the house of God. These foes successfully sought the aid of the Persian Court and caused substantial difficulties. Gradually, a change took place in the convictions and inner feelings of the people. Their interest in the temple and the worship of God was waning. They erroneously viewed the encountered opposition as a divine indication that the work on the temple should be discontinued. Consequently, they devoted their time and energy solely to their own homes and interests. Formalism and materialism became real dangers. The attitude of the people certainly required a strong and firm correction. For this purpose, the Lord raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

The name Zechariah means “The Lord remembers.” This was also the theme of the prophet’s message. During one memorable night, Zechariah received a series of eight visions. When the prophet related these visions and their lessons, he brought renewed hope and courage to a disheartened people. The Jews ‘prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo’ (Ezra 6.14).

The vision described in Zechariah 4 is a remarkable one. The prophet saw certain things that were familiar to him, such as the golden candlestick. However, the vision contained also certain unknown elements, such as the rounded bowl with oil, the seven pipes running from this bowl to each of the seven lamps, and the two olive trees on either side of the bowl.

The vision was puzzling to Zechariah; he needed an explanation from the interpreting angel. The candlestick with its burning and shining lamps was a symbol of the theocracy, of the people of God. The candlestick is also an emblem of the New Testament church. This is evident from the last words of the first chapter of Revelation: ‘the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches’.



The symbol points to the purpose of the church, namely, that it must present the *light of God's truth and grace* to a lightless world that is estranged from God.

At no time may we neglect our responsibility regarding this glorious mission. The church must provide *light* in this dark and needy world of today. That *light* should *clearly shine*. We are called to proclaim the great truths of the Word of God boldly and faithfully without compromise. Moreover, it should be evident from our lives and testimonies that we have a true understanding of, and a sincere unwavering love for, the truth.


This symbol of the candlestick was familiar to the prophet. The interpreting angel came to the prophet's aid and gave the necessary additional explanation. The angel did not interpret the minor details. He immediately went to the heart of the matter, as he explained, "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts' (Zechariah 4.6).

The endeavours of the Hebrew governor were not dependent on human strength, but on a far more exalted power, on the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, an omnipotence symbolized by the abundant supply of oil. All that was necessary for the continuation of the church and the restoration of the temple would come from the same wondrous and powerful source, the Spirit of God. External means are often admired and trusted. However, human strength in itself is vain and inadequate.

The special grace of the Holy Spirit is the blessed secret. This Spirit is able to remove all stumbling blocks. The obstacles may be impressive and high like the mountains, yet by the power of the Holy Spirit they will become a plain before Zerubbabel. The opposing forces may be mighty, yet the church will prosper by the Holy Spirit's intervention. In the troublesome times of Zechariah, this comfort was exceedingly precious. In due time, Zerubbabel would bring forth the headstone. The headstone is the top or crowning stone. Zerubbabel had begun the work, and he would also complete it. The Lord in His powerful grace would provide even in this day of small things (verse 10).

So it has always been, and so it will ever be in the church of Christ. We must constantly acknowledge anew on the one hand, our absolute helplessness and dependence, and on the other hand, the all-sufficiency of divine grace. We must ever remember this basic and vital truth.

Today the tendency is to neglect the role of the Holy Spirit, especially in the application of the Gospel. In this regard, multitudes are satisfied with mere theory. How fatal! The Lord is a God of wonders. The greatest of these are the wonders of His grace. They are essential and much to be desired. We must learn to understand the meaning of this valuable and indispensable lesson, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts'. It is a holy secret. Only the Lord Himself can reveal it to us. For Christ's sake, He still hears and answers the prayers of those who seek Him in earnest for the Holy Spirit's guidance. How blessed are all who come to know the power of this truth in the reality of their own experience. By the Holy Spirit's grace, they taste, as humbled sinners, the riches of God's love revealed in Jesus. The greatness of this blessedness cannot be measured.

Do you already know this precious grace? 

This meditation was taken from Rev. G. Hamstra's beautiful book of meditations entitled The King in His Beauty (pp. 215-218), published by and available from Free Reformed Publications (bookorders@frcna.org).

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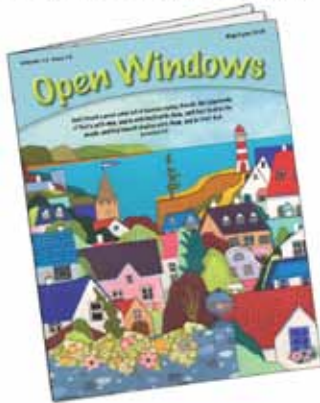
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- Pictures of people and events.
- Interviews with 'founding' members.

If you or your (grand)parents have any such materials, please contact:

Rev. D. Kranendonk (secretary)

Cell: 226-980-9607 • Email: kranendonk@frcna.org

SYNOD RESCHEDULING: Due to the Covid-19 travel and meeting restrictions, the Free Reformed Synod meetings set for June 2020 have been postponed to September 8-11, 2020, DV and will be held in the Hamilton Free Reformed Church building. Since September 7 is Labour day Monday, Synod is to begin with a prayer service Tuesday evening and proceed to Friday of that week. The Theological Education Committee is recommending that students Ben VanLiere and Benjamin Hicks undergo their candidacy examination at that time.

Annual Dutch Day



CANCELLED!

Speaker: Pastor Pronk

Location: Dundas Free Reformed Church,
253 Weir's Lane, Dundas, ON

Lunch will be provided.

All who understand the Dutch language are warmly invited to join us.

Coffee: 9:45

Morning Session: 10:30

Afternoon Session: 1:00



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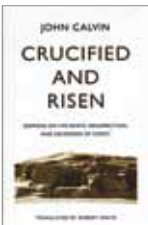
Hidden Stories of War and Peace

By Christine Farenhorst
These are stories of quiet heroes during violent times in history when Europe was overwhelmed by the turmoil and horrors of WWII. The stories are told from a viewpoint of God's sovereignty, showing that unassuming men and women acted in unexpected ways during extremely trying circumstances, bringing about unexpected results. This book will touch your heart and point your family to a hiding place from the present days of turmoil and fear. The author dedicates this book to Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, from whom she gained spiritual inspiration. Softcover, 303 pages, NSM Press
RBS Price \$14.50



Crucified and Risen: Sermons on the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ

By John Calvin
In this newly translated and memorable set of sermons which date from 1557 to 1558, Calvin offers a sensitive reading of Matthew's account of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. The focus, however, is not so much on the events concerning Jesus' passion as on their significance, on what he calls the fruit and efficacy of Christ's redemptive work. What, in practical terms, is the importance of the Resurrection message for the life of faith? Calvin's answer has vital implications not only for what we believe, but for the way we live, serve, worship and pray. Hardcover, 181 pages, Banner of Truth Trust
RBS Price \$28.00



Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith

By R. C. Sproul
Dr. Sproul, founder of Ligonier Ministries, introduces readers to the Westminster Confession of Faith. In his easy-to-understand style, Sproul provides valuable commentary that will serve churches and individual Christians as they strive to better understand the eternal truths of



Scripture, showing how the doctrines of the Bible—from creation to covenant, sin to salvation—fit together to the glory of God. This accessible volume is designed to help you deepen your knowledge of God's Word and answer the question, "What do you believe?" Hardcover, 751 pages, Reformation Trust
RBS Price \$30.00

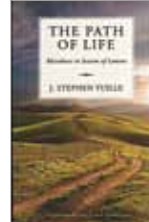
God Made Boys and Girls: Helping Children Understand the Gift of Gender

By Marty Machowski
The story begins as the girls and boys at Grace Christian School are discussing if boys will always be boys and girls will always be girls. Their teacher explains that God gives each of us the gift of being male or female before we are born, and that you continue to be a boy or a girl whether you like to climb trees or play house, play tag or colour pictures, cause a ruckus or sit quietly. Included in the back of the book is a special section just for parents and caregivers that gives biblical guidance and help as they have this important conversation with their children. Hardcover, 32 pages, New Growth Press
RBS Price \$14.40



The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament

By Stephen J. Yuille
Psalm 119 is noted for its call to delight in the word of God. But we must not fail to realize that this great psalm is also infused with great lament. The author follows the psalmist through his many ups and downs in order to seek comfort for bearing sorrow, strength for enduring difficulty, trust for facing uncertainty, and peace for overcoming anxiety. The author shows that this is how Jesus persevered through trials and endured the cross, and how we can take up this psalm and find blessedness in seasons of grief and lament. Softcover, 205 pages, Reformation Heritage Books
RBD Price \$12.50



The Great Transformation

By Maurice Roberts
The eight chapters of this book bring before the reader the sanctification and

glorification of the believer in Jesus, with fresh insights into the daily experiences and struggles of the Christian. He shows how they are a great encouragement to God's beloved people, especially when living in sad and difficult times in which sin and evil abound. While it is true that God's children must go through many trials and discouragements in this world, it is also true their 'light affliction is but for a moment.' All true believers may look forward to the blessed change - the great transformation - from grace to glory. Softcover, 144 pages, Banner of Truth Trust
RBS Price \$11.00



Grace Defined and Defended

By Kevin DeYoung
This book points modern readers back to an old document originally written during the 17th century. The Canons of Dort, a summary of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, are widely regarded as a key pillar of the Reformed tradition. The Canons of Dort stand as a faithful witness to God's grace—offering a depth of understanding that the church still needs today. In three sections—covering history, theology, and practical application—DeYoung explores what led to the canons, the five important doctrines that they explain, and Dort's place in the Reformed tradition today. Hardcover, 141 pages, Crossway
RBS Price \$23.50



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BE SOBER, WATCH UNTO PRAYER

The calls to watch and pray jump out of the Scripture at this time and make us wonder why we have not heeded them at all times. They are frequent, repeated, and urgent calls in Scripture. Besides repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus, there are certainly few other things as important to the Christian as watching and praying. Peter wrote: “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7). Each of these elements is important for the church of all times and places.

Be Sober!

To be sober is the opposite of being intoxicated, flippant, frivolous, or capricious. It is not the opposite of being joyful, because the Christian is called to rejoice at all times (Phil. 4:4). It also doesn't mean that Christians are to be ascetics or must always put on a pained look. Biblical sobriety means that our mind and hearts are directed to think biblically. Regarding ourselves, we are not to think more highly than we ought to think (1 Cor. 4:6-7). We need a biblical and humble self-estimate. It also means looking at things around us not as the world wants us to look at them, but rather having the mind of Christ, thinking about things as Christ would have us think (1 Cor. 2:16).

Sobriety also means that we love things as Christ would love them. We are not to love things inordinately, but as gifts of God to be used in thankfulness to Him. We ought to use this world while not abusing it (1 Cor. 7:29), not allowing things to become idols, to become what only God can be for us.

Sobriety also means that we gird up the loins of our mind (1 Pet. 1:13). The picture is of a man in biblical times belting up his long-flowing garments so that he could work or move quickly. That is what we are to do with our mind. We are to rein in our minds, not letting them run wild or simply go on auto-pilot. Though this doesn't mean that there are never times to relax and rest our mind, we shouldn't look at Christian duties and Christian behavior in a *laissez-faire* way, as if things will simply run their own course. No, we should be resolute, determined, and focused, neither star-gazing nor navel-gazing, but hearing and heeding what God teaches in His Word. This first of all: Be sober!

Watch!

There are many calls in the New Testament to “watch.” Many are concentrated in the last days of Christ's ministry. Consider the following: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 24:42-44).

To watch means to be awake and on military alert for dangers that may sneak up on you and disadvantage you. By nature, no one likes watching. Even soldiers don't really enjoy watching. Many would prefer to fight in the battle itself to the strain of being on the lookout in a long, dreary, and intense way.

Though watching may often seem unrewarding, it is extremely important. You might be a good fighter, but if the enemy takes you by surprise, no matter what kind of fighter you are, you are bound to lose.

Watching is not something we do in order to be saved. Watching does not lead to faith nor is it a requirement for faith. Instead, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, resting in Him and His Word of promise, will yield other graces or fruits, such as obedience to Christ's word and watching. If you are not saved, the call of God for you and for all of us is to believe Christ, to look to Him alone for salvation, and to not rest in your own works or watching.

At the same time, there is no excuse for any to be not watching. Christ said in Mark 13:37: "And what I say unto you (disciples) I say unto all, Watch." Every soul living here on the earth *must* watch, none excluded. There is grace and ability to watch through Christ. Believing in Christ, we will watch with the help of the Holy Spirit, for watching is a grace of God worked in our hearts whereby we see things as they truly are. We become awake to spiritual things, attuned to the threats and dangers, and all realities around us. We become aware of God and His commands, sin and Satan, God's grace in Christ, as well as the opportunities to serve Him and witness for Him. We become aware too of the need for Christ to come on the clouds to bring all things to a conclusion. Aware that His coming will be sudden, as a thief in the night, we look, we watch, we eagerly peer to see the signs of His coming, lest His coming finds us unprepared.

To watch means that we especially guard against spiritual sleepiness, laziness, and intoxication with moral and spiritual evils that cloud our judgment and make us sleepy. A watchful Christian is not someone who gets absorbed in the games and play and fun of the world! On the contrary, we do all we can to shake off spiritual lethargy, which easily besets us.

Mind you, watchfulness does not mean that we cannot and do not enjoy good things God has given us or that we push away earthly callings because we need to be reading the Bible all day long. No, to watch is a habit of taking stock of important things in us, around us, and on the horizon, while doing all that God calls us to and allows us to do. We bring this posture to everything and it shows itself in our attitude.

Spiritual watchfulness also does involve being morbidly introspective, timid and always alarmed, or easily thrown into a panic. No, watchful Christians are steady Christians. He is no good watchman who is constantly sounding the alarm, even when nothing is on the horizon, for that works the wrong way. False alarms make us and others drift off to sleep.

Do we watch? Do we watch in the right way?

Watch unto Prayer!

"Watch unto prayer," Peter says. Spiritual alertness is not for its own sake, but to have us directed to Christ, and to commune with Him in prayer.

When the Lord calls us to watch and pray, He especially wants to be in the center of our gaze, as the Mediator and Substitute of His people. He wants His people's attention and focus. It is as if He invites His people: "Watch Me! Focus on Me! Keep alert to see Me! Do not lose sight of Me!" When we focus on the Lord Jesus, we see how watching is an invitation to fellowship with the Lord. It is a call to express our thankfulness, for prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. It is a call to exchange our worries for peace and calm through leaving our requests with the Father of mercies (Phil. 4:6-8).

Praying is not always easy work. It is costly; it is hard. It is true, there are times when the Lord is close and prayer is as easy as a beggar's cry or a child's plea. But other times, it is "sweating work," as Spurgeon called it. For Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, it literally involved great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). How we need the Spirit of grace and supplications to help us, especially when we "know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26). No wonder we are called to be sober and watch, or prayer will not happen.

The Lord wants the attention and communion of His church and people. Our times are a reminder that we ought to be sober and watch unto prayer. We should not need the reminder our times afford us, for God's Word should be reminder enough. God's Word tells us: "The end is at hand." Very soon, time will be no more. Christ will have come. We will wish that we had been sober and watched unto prayer. 11

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SUBSCRIPTION RATE
Canada & U.S.A. - **\$33.00 ANNUALLY**
PER SUBSCRIPTION The Messenger is published 11 times per year (July & August issues are combined).

SUBSCRIPTIONS/REMITTANCES
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SUBMISSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/NOTICES: All articles, notices for family announcements, obituaries, anniversaries, and non-commercial advertisements for the **MAY 2020** issue should reach the editor no later than **TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2020** and should be sent to:
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(Messenger Administrator)
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OPEN WINDOWS
This bi-monthly publication for children is under the direction of the Free Reformed Publications Committee:
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SPIRITUAL REMEDIES AND MEDITATIONS ON PLAGUES

As mentioned in the last issue of *The Messenger*, Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) was a Puritan pastor who continued to minister to his London congregation during the Great Plague of London. In his *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon writes: “If you have never read [Brooks’] works, I almost envy you the joy of entering for the first time upon his *Unsearchable Riches*, trying his *Precious Remedies*, tasting his *Apples of Gold*, communing with his *Mute Christian*, and enjoying his other masterly writings.” If Spurgeon’s counsel makes you order some of his books online from RHB or RBS, you will only be following Brooks’ own good example as one who spent more money on books than most of his associates.

One of his classic works is *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices* available as a Puritan Paperback by Banner of Truth Trust. In his preface, he notes, “Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan’s devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here, nor happy hereafter.” He then proceeds to give thirty-eight devices or tricks of Satan and provides multiple remedies for each device.

This article only gives you a taste of his method. The first set of devices are Satan’s devices to draw us into sin. For each device, he gives various remedies. We have selected those remedies that involve meditations on the worst of plagues, so important to realize amid the obsession with the current pandemic. The last device shows Satan comes from all angles, including trying to keep believers in the grip of sadness and anxiety due to an obsession with the disease of sin within. All Brooks’ remedies for that device are summarized below. The excerpts below are a condensed and edited version of Brooks’ original work.

Satan’s Devices to Draw a Soul to Sin

Satan’s Device: Present the bait and hide the hook.

Satan’s first device to draw the soul into sin is to present the bait and hide the hook; to present the golden cup and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit from yielding to sin and to hide from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin.

A remedy: See that sin is a plague, yea, the greatest and most infectious plague in the world. Yet, ah! How few are there that tremble at it and keep at a distance from it! “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). As soon as

one sin had seized on Adam’s heart, all sin entered into his soul and overspread it. How has Adam’s one sin spread over all mankind! “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Ah, how does the father’s sin infect the child, the husband’s infect the wife, the master’s the servant! The sin in one man’s heart is able to infect a whole world, it is of such a spreading and infectious nature.

Satan’s Device: Minimize sin.

“Ah! Says Satan, it is but a little pride, a little worldliness, a little uncleanness, a little drunkenness, etc. It is but a very little sin that you stick so at. You may commit it without any danger to your soul.”

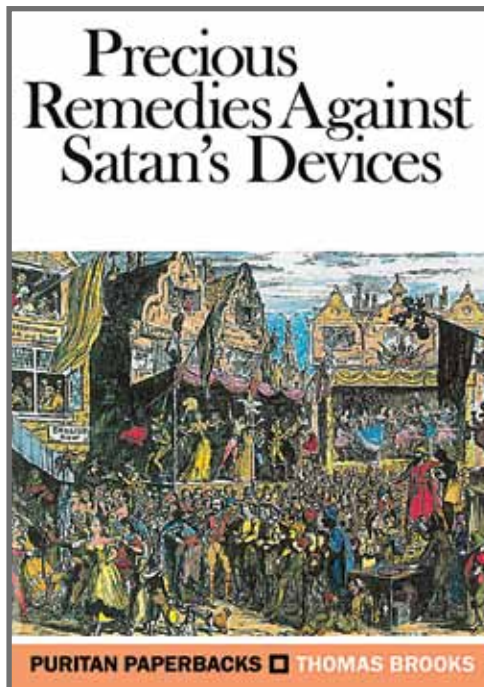
A remedy: Seriously consider that there is great danger, yea, many times most danger, in the smallest sins. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). Greater sins do sooner startle the soul, and awaken and rouse the soul to repentance, than lesser sins do. Little sins often slide into the soul, breed, and work secretly in the soul, till they become so strong, as to trample upon the soul, and cut its throat.

Oftentimes our least diseases give us greatest danger, because we are apt to make light of them and to neglect the timely use of means for removing of them, till they are grown so strong that they prove mortal to us. Similarly, there is often most danger in the least sins. We are apt to take no notice of them, and to neglect those heavenly helps whereby they should be weakened and destroyed, till they are grown to that strength that we cry out, “the medicine is too weak for the disease!” The viper is killed by the little young ones that are nourished in her belly: so are many men eternally killed by the little sins, as they call them, that are nourished in their own bosoms.

Satan’s Device: Present God as all mercy.

“Oh! says Satan, You need not make such a matter of sin! You need not be so fearful of sin or so unwilling to sin, for God is a God of mercy, a God full of mercy, a God that is ready to show mercy, a God that is never weary of showing mercy!”

A remedy: See that sin against mercy will bring the greatest judgments. Capernaum, which was lifted to heaven, was threatened to be thrown down to hell. No souls fall so low into hell, as those that are lifted by a hand of mercy nearest to heaven. You who



are prone to abuse mercy, consider that in our gospel days, the plagues that God inflicts on the despisers and abusers of mercy are usually spiritual plagues: blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and benumbedness of conscience. These are ten thousand times worse than the worst of outward plagues that can befall you. Therefore, though you may escape temporal judgments, yet you shall not escape spiritual judgments. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” says the apostle (Heb. 2:3). Oh! therefore, whenever Satan shall present God to the soul as one made up all of mercy, that he may draw you to sin, say to him, that sins against mercy will bring the greatest misery, and therefore whatever becomes of you, you will not sin against mercy.

Satan’s device: Present to the soul the outward mercies enjoyed and outward miseries avoided by vain men who walk in sinful ways.

A remedy: Solemnly consider that God often most plagues and punishes those whom others think he most spares and loves. God plagues and punishes them most with spiritual judgments — which are the greatest, the sorest, and the heaviest — whom he least punishes with temporal punishments. No men on earth are so internally plagued as those that meet with least external plagues. Oh, the blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience those souls are given up to, who are considered the most happy men in the eye of the world, because they are not outwardly plagued as other men! O souls, it were better that all the temporal plagues that ever befell the children of men since Adam’s fall should meet on you, than that you should be given up to the least spiritual plague of spiritual blindness or hardness of heart. Nothing will improve or move the one who is given up to spiritual judgments. Let God smile or frown, stroke or strike, cut or kill, he regards it not; let life or death, heaven or hell, be set before him, it stirs him not; he is mad upon his sin. This man’s preservation is but a reservation unto a greater condemnation. He has guilt in his bosom and vengeance at his back wherever he goes.

Satan’s Device to Keep Believers Fixated on the Disease of Sin

Satan’s device: Keep weak believers in a sad and doubting condition by causing them to be still poring and musing upon sin and to be minding their sins more than their Saviour; yea, so to mind their sins as to forget, yea, to neglect their Saviour. Their eyes are so fixed upon their disease, that they cannot see the remedy, though it be near.

Remedies:

Remedy 1: The first remedy is for weak believers to consider that though Jesus Christ has not freed them from the presence of sin, yet He has freed them from the damnatory power of sin. The law cannot condemn a believer, for Christ has fulfilled it for him; divine justice cannot condemn him, for that Christ has satisfied; his sins cannot condemn him, for they are pardoned in the blood of Christ; and his own conscience, upon righteous grounds, cannot condemn

him, because Christ, who is greater than his conscience, has acquitted him.

Remedy 2: Consider that, though Jesus Christ has not freed you from the molesting and vexing power of sin, yet He has freed you from the reign and dominion of sin. Lord! says the believing soul, sin plays the tyrant in me; it would have me to do what is against Thy holiness as well as against my happiness; against Thy honour and glory, as my comfort and peace. Therefore, do me justice, Thou righteous Judge of heaven and earth, and let this tyrant sin die for it!

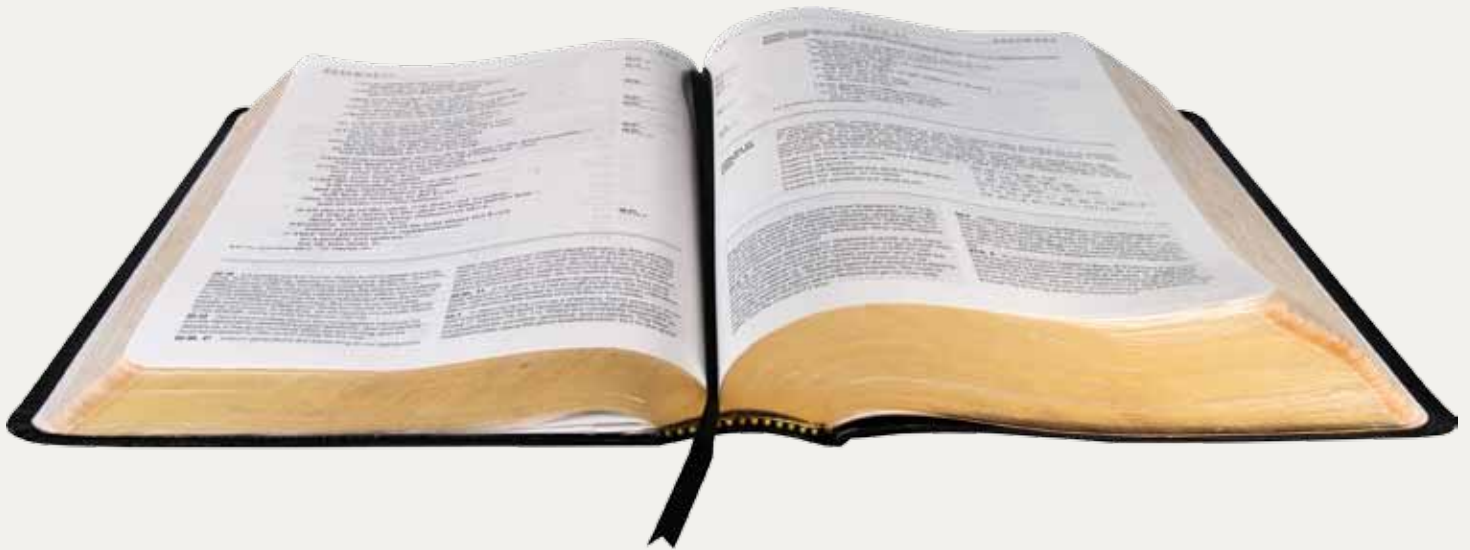
Remedy 3: Constantly keep one eye on the promises of remission of sin, as well as the other eye on the inward operations of sin. Ah! you lamenting souls, who spend your days in sighing under the sense and burden of your sins, why do you deal so unkindly with God and so injuriously with your own souls, as not to cast an eye on those precious promises of remission of sin which may lift up and refresh your spirits in the darkest night and under the heaviest burden of sin?

Remedy 4: Look on all your sins as charged upon the account of Christ, as debts which the Lord Jesus hath fully satisfied. Were there but one farthing of that debt unpaid that Christ was engaged to satisfy, the unspotted justice of God could not have let Him come into heaven and sit down at His own right hand. But with all our debts discharged by His death, we are freed, and He is exalted to sit at the right hand of His Father, which is the top of His glory and the greatest pledge of our blessedness. In law, we know that all the debts of the wife are charged upon the husband. The wife says to others, If I owe you anything, go to my husband! So may a believer say to the law and justice of God, If I owe you anything, go to my Christ, who has undertaken for me. I must not sit down discouraged under the sense of those debts, which Christ has fully satisfied to the utmost farthing.

Remedy 5: Consider the reasons why the Lord is pleased to have His people exercised, troubled, and vexed with sinful corruptions. They are these: partly to keep them humble in their own eyes; partly to make them use all divine helps, whereby sin may be subdued and mortified; partly, that they may live on Christ for the perfecting of their sanctification; partly, to wean them from things below and make them heart-sick of their absence from Christ; partly, to stir in them bowels of compassion to others who are subject to the same infirmities; and partly that they may distinguish between a state of grace and a state of glory, and that heaven may be more sweet to them in the end.

Remedy 6: Consider that believers must repent for their being discouraged by their sins. This discouragement will cost them many a prayer, many a tear, and many a groan. That is because their discouragements under sin flow from ignorance and unbelief. It springs from their ignorance of the richness, freeness, fulness, and everlastingness of God’s love; from their ignorance of the power, glory, sufficiency, and efficacy of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; from their ignorance of the worth, glory, fulness, largeness, and completeness of the righteousness of Jesus Christ; and from their ignorance of that real, close, spiritual, glorious, and inseparable union that is between Christ and their precious souls. ●

THIS IS THE FINGER OF GOD: A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



What would Jesus say to us were He living in this world during the Coronavirus pandemic?

That is the question I have been wrestling with. It sent me to my Bible because that is the way Jesus speaks to us today. I turned to Exodus chapters 7-11, where we read of another time God used plagues to create a national state of emergency. I encourage you to read these chapters and ask God to help you hear his ever-relevant, ever-powerful Word. We will focus on God's message in chapter 8.

Errors

Chapter 8 highlights two major mistakes we can make when God sends judgments on the earth. We can **underestimate** God's judgments or we can **overestimate** God's judgments.

We can **underestimate** God's judgments in two ways:

- **We minimize them:** We can do this by ignoring God's judgments, by playing them down, by attributing them to chance, or by false assurances that all will be well.
- **We equalize them.** We wrongly think that human power is equal to the challenge of God's judgments. Or we can equate God's power with the devil's power, seeing any battle as one between two equals with an uncertain outcome.

We can **overestimate** God's judgments in two ways:

- **We catastrophize.** We panic that it is all out of control and there is no way of escape. God is just lashing out at everyone.
- **We idealize.** We are sure people will be scared of God's judgments and turn to Him in repentance.

We don't want to fall into these errors and lose the spiritual profit that is available. Is there a way to approach these judgments of God that will yield the maximum worship for God and spiritual profit for us? In Exodus 8, Moses helps us to have a balanced view of God's judgments that neither underestimates nor overestimates them.

Context

Exodus chapter 8 narrates the second, third, and fourth plagues that God sent upon Egypt as a judgment upon Pharaoh for refusing to obey His command to release Israel. Up until verse 18, the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate the signs and wonders of God. But in verse 18, they are powerless to duplicate the plague of lice, and admit to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (19). But Pharaoh's heart grew hard and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.

So, how do we offer maximum worship and gain maximum profit in times of judgment?

1. GOD'S JUDGMENTS GLORIFY HIM (1-15)

They glorify His truth (1-6)

God promised plagues and plagues came (Ex. 7-11). He specified what, where, when, how, and why; and it happened exactly as He promised. Ten plagues, one after another, flawlessly executed exactly as He said. God's Word is powerful, reliable, and unstoppable.

They glorify His power (7-15)

We see God's power in His sending of the plagues and in His removal of the plagues. Yes, to some extent, the Egyptians could duplicate some of the early plagues and miracles, but their power

ran out and even where they could duplicate a plague, they couldn't remove it. Only God could do that, in response to prayer (10).

Application

1. God has promised judgments upon sin and He will keep his Word: Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (5:2). God is showing who He is. He is the God who does what He says, and therefore we should do what He says.

2. We deserve far worse: As I write this, 28,000 people have died in the USA from Covid-19. But over 2,000 babies are killed in the USA every day. That's about 750,000 a year.

3. God can arm and deploy His whole creation against His rebellious creatures: If we fight against God, God will fight against us. God can use the mighty Nile or tiny mosquitoes and everything in between, including invisible viruses, to damage our health, our economy, and our psychology.

4. This is but a shadow judgment: However much damage this pandemic may do to our health, our economy, and our psychology, it is but a tiny sample of the main judgment, the final judgment of God that is definitely on its way. The shadow warns us that the ultimate judgment, the final judgment, is just around the corner and getting closer.

5. Prayer removes judgments: Who is the Lord? He is a God who judges sin but is also ready to forgive. President Trump called for a national day of prayer. Let's heed His call to do so every day. Let's seek His face to turn away His anger (2 Cor. 7:14). Let's humble ourselves in these days when God is lifting up Himself. Let's examine ourselves, confess our sin, and seek God's face in prayer.

God's finger lifts Him high, but brings us low.

I love that God's judgments lift Him high and bring us low. But will we see evil brought low?

2. GOD'S JUDGMENTS DEFEAT EVIL (16-19)

Evil is powerful

The magicians were able to duplicate the plagues up until this point. That may have been by trickery or by accessing evil power, or perhaps a combination of both. Pharaoh also was believed to have great power. The Egyptians believed he was in control of the climate and the whole cosmos.

God's finger is more powerful

The magicians could only make things worse by adding to the existing plagues. They could not defeat God. The magicians could not remove any plague. They eventually recognized their impotence and God's omnipotence. God won; they lost. Evil was powerful; God was more powerful.

Application

1. God will defeat evil: May God use these present judgments to dethrone evil by convicting our consciences of sin, reminding us of our mortality, and pointing to the final judgment when God will wipe all sin and evil off the face of the earth with a flick of His finger.

2. God is in ultimate control: He rules over all humans and all evil. God has the devil on a chain and has set limits upon him. The same goes for evil in general. Evil can only go so far by God's permission. The coronavirus is under His control, and so is the stock market.

Your fist is no match for God's finger.

How can I be sure they will not spill over and impact me too?

3. GOD'S JUDGMENTS ARE TARGETED (20-24)

God targets the Egyptians (20-21)

Although it may have looked as if God was just unloading on everyone, He was specifically target-

TEACHING POSITIONS

REHOBOTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL (COPETOWN, ONTARIO)

Invites applications for possible
ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND
EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT POSITIONS
for the 2020/21 school year

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

Adam Klooststra, Principal
198 Inksetter Rd

P.O. Box 70, Copetown, ON L0R 1J0
t. 905.627.5977 e. principal@rehoboth.on.ca w. www.rehoboth.on.ca

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(Beginning Dec. 2020)

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And the 2020/21 school year:

- POSSIBLE, FULL TIME ELEMENTARY
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- POSSIBLE, FULL TIME EDUCATIONAL
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HCS has 660 students from K to 12, a supportive Reformed Christian community, and a cohesive, professional faculty and staff of 65+ persons, and beautiful, modern facilities.

We seek

- Qualified applicants who seek to serve Jesus Christ in the area of Christian education and who submit to Holy Scripture as confessed in the Reformed creeds
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Submit a resumé, a statement of faith, and references (including one from your current pastor). Teacher applicants, please submit your philosophy of education as well.

Please forward inquiries &/or applications to:

Mr. Brian Kemper,

Principal, Heritage Christian School
2850 Fourth Avenue, Box 400, Jordan
Station, ON, Canada L0R 1S0

T: (905) 562-7303 • E: heritage@hcsjordan.ca • W: www.hcsjordan.ca

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PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

FULL-TIME TEACHING POSITION

Providence Christian School is accepting applications for a

FULL-TIME POSITION FOR A JR. AND SR. HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER,

commencing August 10, 2020. Our main areas of need are Science and Math, with ability to teach in our P.E. program a definite asset. We are also accepting applications for a full-time Elementary School teaching position.

We encourage applications by enthusiastic, qualified teachers who submit to God's Holy Word, subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, are committed to educating children and youth for the formation of a distinct Christian worldview, and have a passion for Christian education. Providence Christian School is a growing Christian school in Monarch, Alberta, a rural community minutes from Lethbridge. It has grades K-12 with over 150 students and with 11 FTE staff members.

PCS offers: a four-day school week, attractive working and living conditions, a growing, committed school community, and a dedicated team of teachers. Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit: a letter of application, a résumé containing three references, and a brief philosophy of Christian Education statement.

Application deadline is April 3, 2020.

For inquiries check out our website:

pcsmonarch.com or contact the principal, **Mr. Hugo VanderHoek**, principal@pcsmonarch.com, 403-381-4418

COVID-19 RESPONSE *Continued...*

ing the Egyptians.

God protects His people (22-24)

God put a difference between Egypt and Israel, ensuring Israel was not affected. The difference was probably there before, but this time it was more visible and observable. God knows His people, distinguishes them, separates them, and can protect them (2 Tim. 2:19).

Application

Remind yourself of God's special care for His people. Read Ezekiel 9 and Psalm 91 to encourage and comfort you. In 1990, my pastor's son, a British soldier and a Christian, was sent to help drive Kuwait out of Iraq. One night, his anxious father woke up with the words of Psalm 91 deeply impressed on his mind and heart. He knew his son would be safe, even though he was in the first convoy to break through the Iraqi defenses and fight the Iraqi army. He knew God would take special care of him.

God's finger panics the world but comforts the church

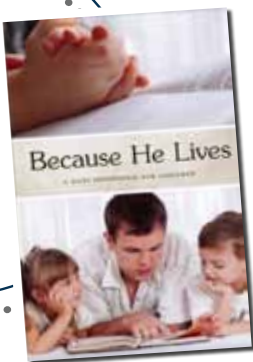
Should I pray for God's judgments then so that the wicked turn to Christ?

4. GOD'S JUDGMENTS DO NOT SAVE (25-32)

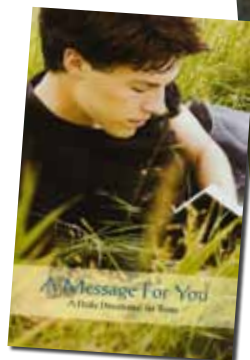
Sometimes we can have great hopes about God's judgments, that they will be more effective than the preaching of the Gospel. The evidence is not encouraging. Look at how Pharaoh reacted. He didn't get softer, he got harder and harder after each plague. He did anything and everything but repent.

• **He delayed:** It was only after the third plague that a slight chink appears in Pharaoh's armor, a slight crack in his hard heart when he appears ready to compromise. It didn't last.

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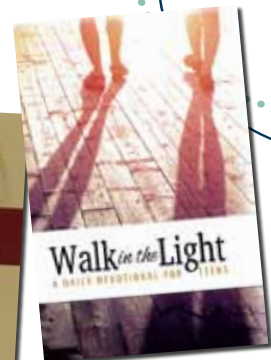
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- **He negotiated:** You can go and sacrifice, but do it in Egypt (25). You can sacrifice in the wilderness, but only nearby (28).
- **He lied:** He said he would let them go, but when the plague was stopped, he stopped them (32). That's solemn, isn't it? We often overestimate the power of God's judgments to save.

Application

1. Don't harden your heart: Revelation 16:9-11 is another passage that warns, "Those not made better by God's Word and providences are usually made worse by them" (Matthew Henry).

2. Bring the Gospel: God's judgments may open the door to the Gospel. They give us opportunity to point to Christ's cross, where God judged Christ in place of sinners. He suffered God's plagues so we can have peace.

3. Message to Teens

• **Pray:** There are many things to pray for during this time. Wisdom for the President and his team. Protection for healthcare workers, seniors, and other at-risk groups. Help for those who may suffer financially. Acceptance of this time as part of God's perfect plan even though we may have to give up sports, vacations, trips, social occasions, and other events we were looking forward to.

• **Patience:** It's going to be tough for our families. We are going to be home together a lot! We need help to love one another and cooperate together.

• **Profit:** Our families may lose out financially, at least for a time. But this can be a relationally and spiritually profitable time. Think of ways to use more time at home to build relationships and your spiritual life.

• **Protect:** Follow the advice of local and federal government and healthcare experts as part of our duty to the lawful authorities God has ordained (Romans 13:1-7).

• **Prepare:** The Apostle John described Christ's final judgment using the imagery of the plagues: water to blood (Rev. 8:8; 16:4-6); frogs (16:13); disease and afflictions (16:2); hail and fire (8:7), locusts (9:1ff); and darkness (16:10). Use this time therefore to think about and prepare for the final judgment by finding safety in Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

• **Peace:** If you are a Christian, then show your panicking friends that you have a peace the world cannot give or take away (John 14:27). Our security is not in our health or our wealth, but in God and in His salvation.

• **Praise:** Praise God that He has not dealt with us as we deserve. Praise God for His awesome judgments. Praise God that we still have time to repent and believe the Gospel. Praise God for the healing power of Christ's cross.

God's finger does not save, but Christ's body does.

CONCLUSION

Although we can underestimate or overestimate God's judgments, with many serious spiritual results, this passage helps us get the balance right by reminding us of the following:

- God's judgments glorify Him
- God's judgments defeat evil
- God's judgments are targeted
- God's judgments do not save.

Therefore, through Moses, God calls us to **be in awe of God's promised judgments and seek security in Christ.** 11

Dr. D. P. Murray is a Free Reformed professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

TEACHING POSITIONS

OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Invites applications for the 2020-2021 school year:

- FULL-TIME ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
- HIGH-SCHOOL MATH & SCIENCE TEACHERS
- HIGH-SCHOOL ARTS & HUMANITIES TEACHERS
- SECONDARY CURRICULUM COORDINATOR

About us:

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

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

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

JORDAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Jordan Christian School is a learning community that embraces the God-glorifying calling of educating students for Christian service. Located in the heart of Niagara wine country near St. Catharines, JCS provides a JK-12 program that is actively taught from a solidly Reformed perspective, while preparing students with the fundamental skills for further learning. We are currently accepting applications for the following positions for the **2020-21 school year:**

- A PART- OR FULL-TIME ELEMENTARY TEACHING POSITION
- A FULL-TIME SECONDARY TEACHING POSITION
- A FULL-TIME EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT

Please include with your application, your philosophy of education and statement of faith and send it to the attention of Mr. Paul Wagenaar at principal@ourjcs.ca.

POSTMODERN ASSAULTS ON THE BIBLE

During the first 1600 years of church history, the Church realized that God's Word was the truth. There was no discussion about that. This is now referred to as the pre-modern view of Scripture. That is why the discussion between Rome and the Reformation was not about whether Scripture was true or had authority, but focused on doctrines concerning salvation. However, with the rise of the Renaissance and especially the Enlightenment, theologians started to place emphasis on man's intellect, leading to what we call the modern view of Scripture.

The Enlightenment emphasized the autonomy of the individual and trust in the power of reason to discover truth. Scripture had to be made compatible to man's intellectual understanding.

The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) distinguished between understanding and interpreting Scripture. We can understand the linguistics of Scripture, but then we have to interpret the text in agreement with man's current situation and understanding. His fundamental principle is that the source and basis of dogmatic theology is religious feeling as a sense of absolute dependence on God communicated by Jesus through the church, and not the creeds or letter of Scripture. Instead of being concerned about the historical accuracy of Scripture, he wanted to experience the living Christ. This sounds very "experiential," but in focusing on man's feelings, he undercut the authority of Scripture, which he disregarded as rationalism. Schleiermacher has been called the father of liberal theology.

Dissecting Scripture

In Schleiermacher's wake followed a succession of critical theologians who introduced what is called higher criticism. They started to dissect the Scriptures. First, they attacked the five books of Moses. They concluded that Moses could never have been the author of these books, but that they were compiled much later, probably during the days of the kings of Israel. Subsequently, they started to dissect other portions of the Old Testament, such as the book of Isaiah, leading to the so-called discovery that the book of Isaiah was written by various authors who simply described their personal encounter with God.

They then started to undertake the quest for what they called the historical Jesus, in a way that subverted the authority of the Gospels. Of course they then also had to critique the authorship of the Pauline epistles, which led to a denial of basic Biblical tenets, such as the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The Bible had to be delivered from its supernatural and unscientific biases. Now the common man could accept the Bible as a sourcebook of religion for himself. In this modern view of Scripture, Scripture has to be made to fit with science, human knowledge, and perception. Yet, they still desired to ascertain truth.

Postmodern Theology

Today we live in days of post-modernism and postmodern theology. Now the pursuit is no longer for historical truth, because they claim absolute truths and ethical values may not even exist. Truth is fluid and relates to our personal perception. To

a postmodern theologian, whether Biblical facts are true or not is irrelevant. Each view is equally valid and two opposing views can be true at the same time. Relativism is embraced to the highest degree. In explaining postmodernism in relation to Christianity, Dr. Carl Broggi explains:

Today, those who embrace postmodernism ridicule Christianity as intolerant, egotistical, and arrogant because of its exclusive claims about God and morality. To say that there is only one way to heaven through Christ is viewed as intolerant by those who say there are many paths to heaven. To embrace a strict moral code that condemns sexual perversion like homosexuality or sexual permissiveness, like fornication or adultery, is to be restrictive, judgmental, and lacking sophistication. The battle cry of the postmodernist is a redefined understanding of ‘tolerance.’... In practice, since postmodernism cannot possibly coexist with a worldview that embraces absolute truth, they are intolerant of those who do not agree, particularly Christians.¹

Postmodern theology wants us to grasp the message and the Christ within God’s Word. The discussion is not so much on factual, historical, or even ethical truth. It does not matter whether there actually was a worldwide flood, whether the walls of Jericho really collapsed, whether Jonah was inside the whale, or whether the sun stood still in Joshua’s days. The issue is simply finding “the message.”

Postmodern theology constitutes a significant threat to the church today. Sadly, it is confronting Reformed churches in the Netherlands. In North America, we observe a process of evangelical accommodation to postmodern views as well.²

Adjusting the Gospel

Postmodern theology aims to adapt the gospel message to the current cultural worldview. The old theological debates between liberals and conservatives about biblical inerrancy and authority no longer matter. The Bible is considered true in the sense that it inspires people spiritually, not that it is factually accurate. We need to construct truth by means of our language. But our language can never truthfully connect with the extra linguistic reality outside of ourselves. In this way, truth becomes fluid and highly subjective.

In response we must confess that God’s Word is very clear that truth relates to objective and historical facts. What Scripture reveals to us regarding God conforms to reality in God. God is true to His Word and cannot lie. His Word is truth (John 17:17). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). There-

fore, He will lead in all truth. The Lord Jesus is called the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). The whole of God’s Word refers to objective reality regarding God, man, and God’s Kingdom. In the New Testament, we are called to uphold and contend for the truth. We are warned against those who pervert the truth of God through error.

Postmodern theology is wrong in letting man decide for himself what is acceptable in his sight. This is why Reformed theologians in the Netherlands are allowing practicing homosexuals to be church members in good standing. This is also why they promote the ordination of women in all church offices. They consider gender transitions to be fully acceptable. Preaching on the reality of hell is minimal. The sovereignty of God and the total depravity of man are overlooked. These are symptoms of the current culture molding the church. Man is called to decide which biblical injunctions are valid for him and which are not. Man is made the measure of all things.

Eroding the Foundation

Postmodernism also provides no criteria to test the validity of diverse views and calls for toleration of diverse views. As they make truth fluid, they erode religious confidence. The result is a free-floating spirituality largely devoid of certainty or sustained convictions, as Douglas Groothuis puts it.³ Foundational for Scripture is that truth corresponds to reality. But postmodern subjectivism deprives man of a foundation in life. It is a major hermeneutical error to allow theology to be influenced by external cultural convictions and thereby undermine clear Christian doctrines. The results are disastrous. This is seen in the evolution debate, currently raging through churches in the Netherlands. We see this also in changing ethical views within Reformed churches.

However, God’s Word is very clear. As Stephen Nichols says, “God makes it clear that He created us, that He created male and female, and that He designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. Those three foundational truths are clear. All three are rejected today.”⁴

Postmodernism deprives us of the ability to appeal to a specific text of Scripture. Numerous times the Lord Jesus appealed to the Old Testament, because it had full authority for Him. The Bible is the truth and shall always be the truth. God has spoken. As the Lord Jesus said, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*” (Matt. 24:35).

Reliability of God’s Word

Critique of God’s Word is not new. The apostle Paul had to oppose those who refused to adhere to its authority. Repeatedly, he

Postmodern theology aims to adapt the gospel message to the current cultural worldview. The old theological debates between liberals and conservatives about biblical inerrancy and authority no longer matter. The Bible is considered true in the sense that it inspires people spiritually, not that it is factually accurate.



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FROM OVERSEES (Continued...)

had to strengthen the churches by referring them to the truth and reliability of God's Word. He reminded the Thessalonians that they received not Paul's own ideas, but the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). The church may glory in the truth of God's Word.

The Bible is not a difficult book that requires a degree in hermeneutical and philosophical theory to grasp its meaning. We confess the clarity of Scripture. That does not mean that we will understand everything at first sight or ever comprehend the depths of it. Some passages are difficult to understand. But its fundamental truths are simple and clear.

God's Word speaks clearly of a six-day creation. God Himself confirmed this when He spoke all these words to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Adam was clearly the first man. The genealogy of Christ leads back to Adam (Luke 3:38). Adam was not born of a man, but was created (1 Cor. 11:8-12). Eve was tempted (1 Tim. 2:14). Sin and death came through Adam (Rom. 5:12-14). The people of Israel saw the wonders God performed and the disciples clearly witnessed the miracles of Christ. Once we allow unscriptural, so-called scientific truths, which are mere unproven hypotheses, to enter the church, the church will give up the entire Word of God.

God's Word has proven to be a power unto salvation throughout the ages. People's lives have been thoroughly converted from false beliefs and vain ideologies, to follow the Lord Jesus. God's Word must be our guide through life.

Power Unto Salvation

God's Word has proven to be a power unto salvation throughout the ages. People's lives have been thoroughly converted from false beliefs and vain ideologies, to follow the Lord Jesus. God's Word must be our guide through life. It is trustworthy. When we take God's word in our hands, we may know that God has spoken. Therefore God's Word is per definition the truth. God's Word is a standard inerrant revelation of objective truth. The church must always bow to God's Word. This is how the prophets and the apostles viewed Scripture. The Lord Jesus accepted the authority of the Old Testament and spoke of Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation. He spoke of the blood of Abel and of Noah and the flood as historical realities. Jesus spoke clearly about marriage between one man and one woman. The apostle Peter knew the worldwide flood was a historical event. Postmodern theologians deny the historicity of Genesis chapters 1-11, but the Lord Jesus accepted the traditional view of these chapters. In His holy mind, they were objective realities.

When man becomes a sinner before God, realizes he must perish, and experiences the redeeming power of Christ in his life, he receives love to Christ and to His Word. We need to experience God's Word in our own heart, the Puritans taught us. Then we

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

Romans 10:1

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will not depart from it. This is the secret to why people were willing to give up their whole career to follow the Lord Jesus. They met Christ and His Word in their lives. They did not rest on something fluid and subjective.

If we do not experience God's Word and fail to uphold the objectivity of God's unchangeable truths, the church will sink away in the swamp of postmodern subjectivism. No greater danger is confronting Reformed churches today than postmodern theology. *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"* (Col. 2:8). ¹¹

Endnotes

1. Dr. Carl Broggi, "Postmodernism"; available from answersingenesis.org/world-religions/postmodernism/.
2. One proponent is Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). In opposition to this, Millard J. Erickson et al. compiled: *Reclaiming the Center, Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).
3. Douglas Groothuis, "Truth Defined and Defended," in *Reclaiming the Center*, 72.
4. Stephen J. Nichols, *A Time for Confidence, Trusting God in a post-Christian Society* (Sanford, 2016), 50

Rev. G. R. Procee is the former pastor of the Hamilton Free Reformed Church and present pastor of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk (CGK) of Middelharnis, the Netherlands. He is also member of the current CGK synod that was opened in June 2019 and has its fourth week-long session scheduled for November of this year. It normally convenes every three years.

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I WILL FIGHT FOR YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE. WILL YOU?

A PASTOR'S PLEA TO CHRISTIAN PARENTS

This essay comes from the heart as a passionate plea to parents out of our shared concern for our covenant children. It is difficult to pastor a flock in a conservative church today, but not for the reasons that you might think. It is not that we are constantly being attacked from the outside for our music, confessions, and worship style. Such attacks happen, but most people who come to us find what we are doing to be unique and refreshing, especially if they are from a broadly evangelical background. That visitors embrace what we are doing in worship has been one of the pleasant surprises of the ministry.

The True Source Of Challenge To The Church

Some of the biggest challenges in ministry come from *inside* the church, particularly parents between the ages of 45–60. One issue has produced the struggle: their young people are leaving the church. Many parents have watched for years the same old

story happen over and over. As soon as a young person returns from college, that child shows little to no interest in attending church. This is a source of frustration and even grief for Christian parents. I share that concern.

In response, parents are sometimes tempted to blame the church for the way their children now view the church. Desperate to find a way to attract their wandering children, worried parents demand that the church change in some way to attract and retain their young people. This move, church-blaming, creates an unhappy environment of disgruntlement and embarrassment over the identity of their local church. They adopt the criticisms of the Reformed Churches made by our broadly evangelical friends: they are “sticks in the mud,” “stuffy,” etc. How does a Reformed Church compare when the church next door offers a consumer-driven Christianity? Worried parents, however, sometimes give little thought to how they themselves



may have contributed to the problem.

A Reformed Pastor's Commitment To Your Children

These are ways I commit to fight for the youth of our church. God helping me:

- I will love your young people enough to preach the whole counsel of God to them. I am committed to God's Word and I will tell them the whole truth.
- I will call your young people to repentance and faith. This won't be easy. Some who have yet to profess their faith will not like to be told they are wrong. The law will hurt. Some may get angry at the stances I am called to take. It may at times seem like we're losing the battle, but I'm committed to this fight for your young people.
- I will make known to them the riches of Jesus Christ and His gospel. They will never be left without a way of escape from judgment. I want them to enjoy Christ and His forgiveness and live in His peace.
- I will stand for truth and expose error. I will not pander to sinful desires for false worship and golden calves. We live in a day when people do not like to see a minister saying that anyone or anything is wrong, but I promise to tell them *what* is wrong and *who* is wrong (as the inspired NT authors did) to protect them from the path of hell.
- I will pray for your young people. The battle for your children is one that must be fought with prayer. My door is always open for you to come to my study and pray with me for them.


Positive Steps For Worried Covenant Parents

Here are five ways parents can join in the spiritual fight for their young people to help stop the trend:

- Bring them to church and show a delight in the gospel. If you truly believe that the preaching of the gospel is the power of God to save those who believe (Rom 10:13–18; Heidelberg 65), then do all in your power to have your children in worship at a very young age. Do not let them leave to children's church. Train their minds to listen to a sermon. It is God's way of grace to them. They must learn and see from you where the true power of God is found, in the Word. Hold it high, and they will too.
- Speak well of your pastor and leaders. Great damage is done when you speak evil of the church, the pastor, or the leaders before your children. If you want them to have a positive view of the church, you must show them one. Please realize that before disgruntlement often comes a refusal to accept God's Word. A disgruntled and complaining spirit is a certain recipe to drive them out.
- Be willing to tell your children the truth and call them to repentance through loving discipline. Too many parents are scared of their young people and let them do whatever they want to do. You are responsible to discipline them and speak the truth to them in love. There is right and wrong, teach and

expose them to both. If you stand for nothing, so will they. Why then would you expect them to stay in church?

- Be an example to them in life of what it means to be godly. J.C. Ryle commenting on Lot's worldliness says, "Lingering parents seldom have godly children. The eye of the child drinks in far more than the ear. A child will always observe what you do much more than what you say." Be an example to them in doctrine and in life.
- Train them and pray for them. This means gathering at the table to catechize and pray for them before their ears. It also means praying that God would give them new life by His sovereign Holy Spirit. How many people are bringing your child's name in prayer to the throne of grace? What a tragedy if God never hears from you about the salvation of your children.

So dear parents, I made a commitment to fight for your young people. Will you? 

Rev. Chris Gordon is pastor of the United Reformed Church of Escondido, California. This article is taken with permission from his October 19, 2019 blog at <https://agradio.org/i-will-fight-for-your-young-people-will-you-a-pastors-plea-to-christian-parents>.



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WAVES OF EXODUS 6:

THE EXODUS INTO THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF CHRIST

READ: MATTHEW 3:13-4:17

Christ came as Deliverer, but not as the people expected. Despite all that the prophets had said about Jesus saving His people from their sins (e.g. Isa. 53:4-12; cf. Matt. 1:21), most still saw their external circumstances as their chief problem, and hoped Messiah would take care of that problem. Significantly, Jesus' herald, John, preached a message of repentance, and Jesus did as well (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Even more to the point, Jesus submitted to the baptism of John, showing how He would deliver sinners from their sin and fulfill all the Scripture's types and shadows, including the Exodus.

Christ Went Through the Waters

John, the herald of Christ, was profoundly disturbed that the Lord Jesus had come to be baptized by Him (Matt. 3:13). He had prophesied that the Christ would "baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12). No sooner had these words left his mouth than Jesus came for the baptism of repentance (Matt. 3:13).

Christ had committed no sins for which He needed to repent. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). Yet, John proclaimed that He came as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The lambs of the Old Testament sacrifices had also committed no sins. Yet, by God's appointment, they were to bear the sins of the people, at least in a way that foreshadowed what Christ would do.

Into the water Jesus went. The waters that had symbolically washed away the sins of all the people who had come for baptism touched His holy and harmless body and soul. He did this "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). This baptism previewed what Christ would do on the cross, where He would take the curse and fulfill all righteousness. In the court of heaven, God regarded Him as sin, who knew no sin, that sinners might be counted as righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). He did this to deliver His people from their sins.

The symbolism of coming out of water in order to serve God in His public ministry replicates and fulfills what Israel did, coming out of the Red Sea onto dry land, to serve God in the wilderness. Here, however, Christ was the Representative, Mediator, and

Surety of His people, and He did all well. “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (3:16-17). God approved of His Son, His office, His Person, and His work.

Christ Endured Temptation

We all know that the forty years in the wilderness were a testing time for Israel. This was to be the time that Israel was to serve God, devoted to Him. They were to obey Him and all His commandments. Instead, Israel disobeyed God times without number and put God to the test (Ps. 95:9). Like them, Christ must go to the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matt. 4:1; see also Luke 4:1-13). This was no accident or mere scheme of Satan to try to derail the Messianic ministry of Jesus. No, God sent His Son into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mark says it very strongly: “And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). This too was “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15). Indeed, Satan would do his utmost. The trial was only forty days, but what had come to Israel throughout their forty years, and more, is all compressed into these forty days for Christ. Christ had no manna, no water from the rock, and no signs and miracles like Israel had. He did have the voice of the Father ringing in His ears: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). This was the first reality that Satan tempted Him to doubt: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matt. 4:3). He was tempted to doubt the paternal love of God for Him and to use His power and will for the benefit of Himself, through materialism. To turn stone into bread in this moment would not only mean that Christ would be following Satan’s authority, like Adam did in the garden when he sinned, but He would be using His power and anointing for Himself, doubting God, and putting God to the test like Israel had done in the wilderness. This first temptation Christ defeated by quoting God’s Word spoken to the people in the wilderness: “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Deut. 8:3)

The second temptation was to look to and relish the spectacular, and thus to tempt God. Standing on the pinnacle of the temple with Jesus (Matt. 4:5), Satan dangled before Him the prospect of having people acknowledge His Messianic identity through a great feat that merely drew attention to Him. Satan slyly used the Scriptures,

imagining that Christ would not see through this perversion of the meaning of Scripture. Quoting Psalm 91:11-12, Satan suggested that God’s heavenly armies of angels would carry Him up in their hands, and that, instead of a miserable loneliness in the wilderness, unobserved by people, Christ would in an instant exchange shame with fame and come into His right! Christ defeated also this second temptation with the simple Word of God once spoken in the wilderness: “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Deut. 6:16).


The third temptation dangled before Christ was a Satanic concession to Christ of all the kingdoms of the world, provided He bow down and worship Satan, “the god of this world” (Matt. 4:9). This would avoid the suffering to which Christ had given Himself mind, soul, and body in the eternal covenant. There it was determined that

only in the way of suffering would Christ receive the name above all names, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:9-10). To this temptation, Christ spoke: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10).

Christ Conquered with the Word of God

After He resisted the threefold temptation with a threefold answer from Scripture, we read that “the devil leaveth him” (Matt. 4:11). Despite all his efforts and schemes, Satan left defeated. The Word of God that He wielded in the wilderness against Satan, Christ went on to preach to needy people everywhere. He quoted Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth: “The

Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18). Like the Israelites being delivered from Egypt, captives would be delivered through Jesus Christ. This deliverance would be announced in the message of repentance: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). This message of repentance was to be light in the darkness of Galilee. Christ used the victory over Satan for the good of the souls of sinners in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death (Matt. 4:16).

Satan’s departure from Christ would only be for a season, for Satan would return through the rulers and religious leaders, through various temptations, and finally on the cross, which Christ called the hour of the power of darkness (Luke 22:53). Yet, also there, as we will see, He would defeat Satan and deliver those in his grip and under his power. The Exodus would go forward through Christ, the perfect Son of God. 

QUESTIONS

- 01** Why did Christ go through the stages of the Exodus at the beginning of His public ministry? How did this fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah quoted by John the Baptist (e.g. Mark 1:2-3)?
- 02** Why should John the Baptizer not have been surprised that Jesus came for baptism?
- 03** What parallels are there between the passage of the Red Sea and the baptism of Christ?
- 04** Can we defeat and resist Satan’s temptations or must we always succumb to them? How is Christ more than an example to us in our temptations?

GUIDANCE FROM THE PAST:

Our Conversations

The seventh duty wherein we must offer violence to ourselves is holy conversation. Indeed, we are backward enough to it; therefore we need to provoke ourselves. “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another” (Malachi 3:16). A gracious person hath not religion only in his heart, but also in his tongue. “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment” (Ps. 37:30). He drops holy words as pearls. ‘Tis the fault of Christians, that they do not in company provoke themselves to set good discourse on foot: it is a sinful modesty; there is much visiting, but they do not give one another’s souls a visit. In worldly things, their tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, but in matters of religion, it is as if their tongue did cleave to the roof of their mouth. As we must answer to God for idle words: so also for sinful silence.

Oh let us offer violence to ourselves on this, in setting abroad good discourse! What should our words discourse upon but Heaven? The world is a great Inn; we are guests in this Inn. When travelers are met in their Inn, they do not spend all their time in speaking about their Inn; they are to lodge there but a few hours, and are gone; but they are speaking of their home, and the country whither they are travelling. So when we meet together, we should not be talking only about the world; we are to leave this presently; but we should talk of our heavenly country (Heb. 11:16).

That we may provoke ourselves to good discourse (for it will not be done without some kind of violence), let these considerations be duly weighed.

[First,] The discourse demonstrates what the heart is. As the mirror shows what the face is, whether it be fair or foul; so the words show what the heart is. Vain speeches discover a light, feathery heart; gracious speeches are the birth of a gracious heart. The water of the conduit shows what the spring is.

[Second,] Holy conference is very edifying. The apostle bids us edify one another (Eph. 4:29). And how more than in this way? Good conference enlightens the mind when it is ignorant; settles it when it is wavering. A good life adorns religion; good discourse propagates it.

[Third,] Gracious discourse makes us resemble Christ. His words were perfumed with holiness: grace was poured into His lips (Ps. 45:2). He spake to the admiration of all: His hands worked miracles and His tongue spake oracles. “All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). Christ never came into any company, but He set good discourse on foot. Levi made Him a feast and Christ feasted him with holy discourse (Luke 5:29). When He came to Jacob’s well, he presently speaks of the “water of life” (John 4). The more holy our speeches are, the more we are like Christ. Should not the members be like the head?



[Fourth,] God takes special notice of every good word we speak when we meet: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him" (Mal. 3:16). Tamerlain, that Scythian captain, had always a book by him of the names and good deserts of his servants which he bountifully rewarded. As God hath a bottle for the tears of His people, so He has a book in which He writes down all their good speeches, and will make honorable mention of them at the last day.

[Fifth,] Holy discourse will be a means to bring Christ into our company. The two disciples were communing of the death and sufferings of Christ; and while they were speaking, Jesus Christ came among them. "While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them" (Luke 24:15). When men entertain bad discourse, Satan draws near, and makes one of the company; but when they have holy and gracious conference, Jesus Christ draws near, and wherever He comes, He brings a blessing along with Him. ①

Thomas Watson was an English Puritan Preacher who died in 1686. This excerpt is taken from his book entitled Heaven Taken by Storm. Let this taste lead you to take up and read the whole book!

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A PRAYER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Bestow, dear Lord, upon our youth,
The gift of saving grace;
And let the seed of sacred truth
Fall in a fruitful place.

Grace is a plant, where'er it grows,
Of pure and heavenly root;
But fairest in the youngest shows,
And yields the sweetest fruit.

Ye careless ones, oh hear betimes
The voice of sovereign love;
Your youth is sustained with many crimes,
But mercy reigns above.

True, you are young, but there's a stone
Within the youngest breast,
Or half the crimes which you have done,
Would rob you of your rest.

For you the public prayer is made,
Oh, join the public prayer!
For you the sacred tear is shed,
Oh, shed yourselves a tear!

We pray that you may early prove
The Spirit's power to teach;
You cannot be too young to love
That Jesus whom we preach.

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