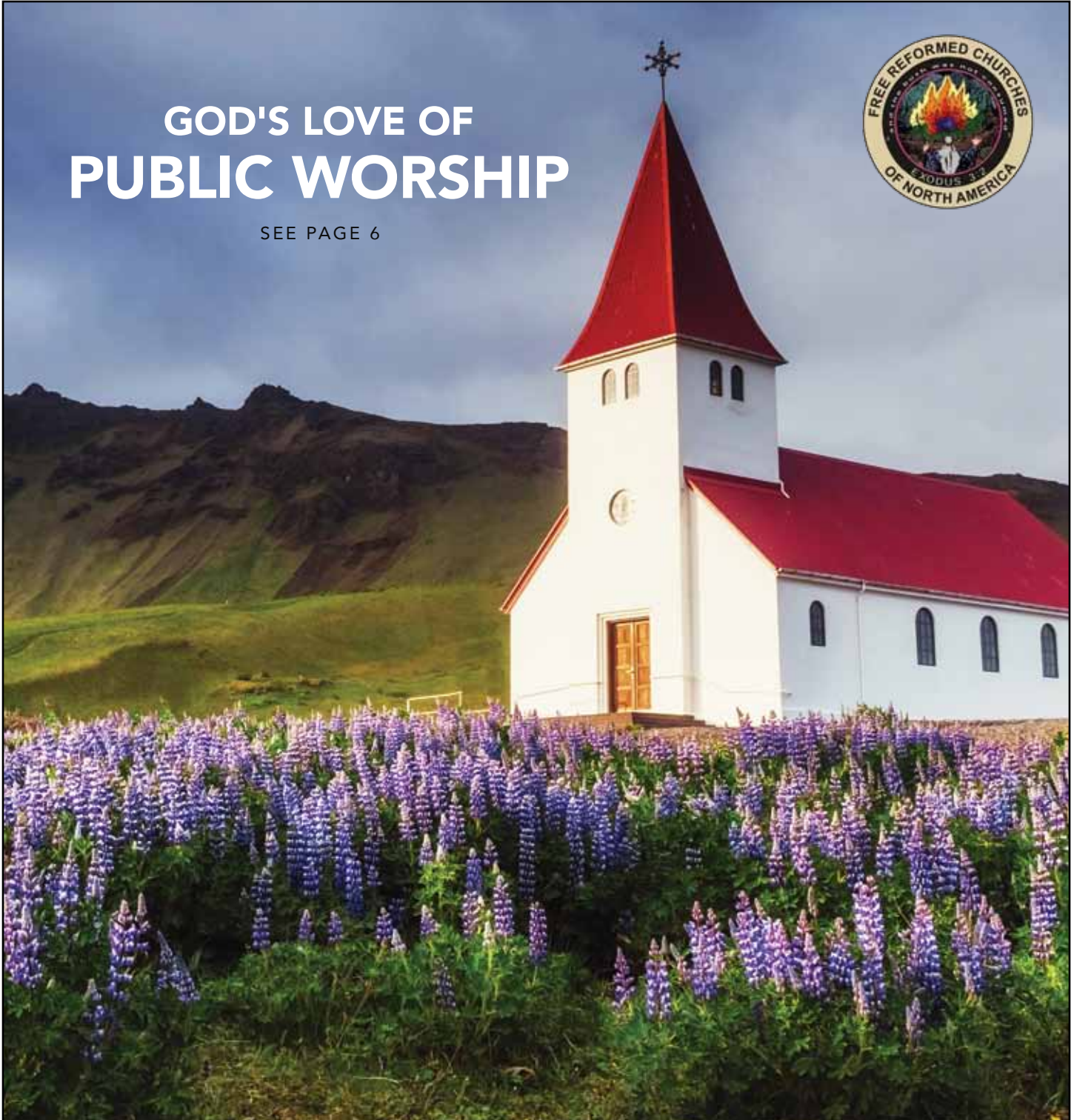


THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



GOD'S LOVE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

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THE POWER OF THE CROSS

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Colossians 2:14-15

You probably know the familiar hymn that starts with these words: “When I survey the *wondrous* cross, on which the Prince of glory died.” There is indeed a great wonder about the cross. While by nature we do not see anything but foolishness or offense in the cross (1 Cor. 1:23), Scripture tells us much about the wonder of the cross. Believers find it an inexhaustible wonder. There is always more to see and understand. In a certain sense, the cross is the lens through which to understand everything. No wonder Paul was obsessed with the cross of Christ: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Part of the power behind Paul’s preaching and writing was his insistent focus on the cross of Christ. In a sense, the gospel simply unpacks all that is contained and bound up in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

An Antidote Against Error

The gospel was under attack in the city of Colosse. Paul was addressing that in his letter. Preachers had come to the Colossians with the message: “It’s true, you’re saved by Christ, not by the works of the law, *but that’s only the beginning*. If you want to enjoy real success in the Christian life, you also need to take on circumcision and the ceremonies of Moses. Following those ceremonies (such as the dietary laws and the sacrificial system) will take your Christian life to a whole new level. Being careful to follow this ‘touch not, taste not, handle not’ approach to life (Col. 2:21) will give you the edge you need in the fight against Satan.”

This is why Paul spoke to the Colossians in no uncertain terms: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him” (2:6-7). “Beware lest any man spoil you” (2:8). “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (2:10). You don’t need to be circum-

cised, because that has happened in Christ already (2:11): “In whom also ye are circumcised.” Paul then continues (2:13): “You, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” In other words, don’t think you need more than Christ! All your sins have been forgiven, regardless of you being uncircumcised Gentiles. You are complete in Christ. You may need to grow more in your knowledge of Him, but you don’t need more than Him.

Defeat of Satan

Let’s first look how the cross defeated Satan. Paul speaks of Christ “having spoiled principalities and powers.” Paul is talking here about hosts, powerful armies, legions under the command of Satan. How sobering to realize that the special targets of these legions of demons are true believers and the church of Jesus Christ! They exert great opposition against the church and the meeting of God’s people. Picture a legion of Satan’s forces arrayed against your church, to destroy it. Picture a number of demons plotting against you, dear believer, and doubly against ministers, evangelists, teachers, and elders.

How tremendously hope-giving for believers is the reality that Christ has *spoiled* principalities and powers on the cross. That means He has routed them and stripped them of their ultimate power. Though they can do certain things, they are all under the authority of Christ and therefore their plots cannot truly succeed. Their power has been spoiled and crippled.

Paul notes that Christ has made a *public shew* of these shameful powers. This is a significant part of Christ’s triumph on the cross. In ancient times, when a conquering king or general returned from battle, he often took a victory parade to make a public display of his conquest. Paul is using that image here. He’s portraying hellish principalities and powers being chained and dragged behind the chariot of Christ’s gospel. He may be the god of this world, but he is a defeated god.

This should be a serious warning to those of us who have not come under the cross of Christ and received all that it affords. You are still on Satan’s side, fighting with him. Such a fight is futile for Satan has lost the battle already. Submit to the victorious Christ, whose cross has victory in it.

The Blotting out of the Handwriting

Prior to this, Paul has told us how Christ could effect this triumph over Satan and his power. He says that the cross involved “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (v. 14). This handwriting represents the Ten Commandments, which are a transcript of the perfect will of God. God wrote them Himself with His own finger (Ex. 31:18). But secondly, it refers to the ceremonies which the Jews were to keep. Paul had grown up with these ceremonial laws. He had to fulfill them. Now, he writes: “That was against us, which was contrary to us.” In other words: “Make no mistake. These ordinances are not our friends. They’re against us.”

In Paul’s day, if you owed someone a sum of money, a certificate of debt would be drawn up. The lender would keep a copy, and another would be registered with the authorities, and you would sign your own name to the debt. This certificate ensured that no matter what happened, the one to whom you were indebted could wave your own signature in your face and remind you of your debt.

Paul is saying here: “Outside of Christ, whenever the law of Moses is read, you are hearing something that reminds of your debt. The handwriting of ordinances is against you. Satan waves it in your face. I have you! You’re guilty. Look here. The law says it.” Friends, do we face that when

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MEDITATION

the law of God is read? Do we see the law as proof of the debt we owe God? Outside of Christ, it's as if your debt is being waved in your face.

The Holy Spirit uses the law to teach us that we need salvation outside of ourselves. We cannot wash away our own sin. Even the ceremonies of the Old Testament, with their lambs, pigeons, and calves, could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). We need a power outside of us: only the power of the cross will do. Paul notes how Christ "blotted out" that which was against us. To blot out means to get rid of, to erase, and to take away even the memory of it. In ancient times, they might blot out the certificate of debt by spilling a pot of ink on it, so you could not see the name, the debt, or anything else. Christ's blood blots out the sinner's debt, so that it is legitimately gone.

Paul says, "He took it out of the way." On the cross, Christ suffered the forsakenness of hell, and thus cancelled and annulled all that was contrary to the sinner. Paul even says: "He nailed it to the cross." We know the nails that Christ bore in His hands and feet. But did you know there was another nail, unseen to human eyes, but declared by the Spirit of God here, on which all the sins of all believers were nailed to the cross, publicly, for all to see? They are pinned there, not as still in force, but as paid in full. What sins are nailed to the cross? If truth be told, heinous sins, all of them, nailed, taken away, and blotted out.

Need for Faith

One of two things is true: Either we are partakers of this benefit of the cross of Christ by faith, or we are still under the power of Satan and the law is against us. If you do not submit to God's way of saving sinners through the death of the Son of God, you must bow under it today. Otherwise, you will need to find some other way, and there is no other way.

Sinner, don't try to defeat Satan yourself, or to pay the debt you owe yourself. Don't try to use the law – it is literally a dead-end road. Why stayed chained to Satan? The only safe place is at the cross. There Satan's power crumbles. There Christ's power is sure and steadfast. Thomas Boston says: "Give your hearty consent to have your names registered in Christ's muster-roll: throw away the weapons of rebellion, and take unto you the whole armour of God, so that you too at length be conquerors over sin, Satan, death, and hell. Christ broke the pillar of sin; then the pillar of death must also fall."

Children of God, don't leave the cross. Survey this wondrous cross all your days. Live under Christ's sway. His dominion will never cease. Satan is no match to Him. And your sin, if you are in Christ, is blotted out. Nothing and no one can pluck you from His powerful hands (John 10:28). The power of the cross stands guarantee for that. ①



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GOD'S CARE FOR WIDOWS

Caring for Widows: Ministering God's Grace by Brian Croft & Austin Walker. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2015. Softcover, 158 pages. *

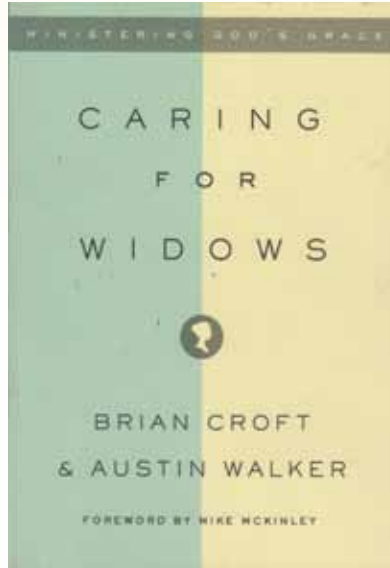
Twenty-four times Scripture tells God's people to care for widows and orphans (the "fatherless"). Yet, few Christian books in print deal with this topic. Perhaps Reformed churches have always taken this care for granted, by way of the reference to Acts 6 in the Form for Installation of Elders and Deacons. This book, by two pastors, spells out in detail the biblical warrant (Part 1) and gives practical applications (Part 2) which are directed to pastors and church leaders, although not only written for them (see pp. 91, 96).

Scripture clearly indicates that the whole church is to be involved in care. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). These two categories, widows and orphans, are often placed together. True, there is more to the practice of true religion than caring for widows and orphans, but it does indicate that caring for them, and by extension, caring for all who are needy, is an indispensable part of true Christianity.

God has a special care for the needy. This care is exemplified in the compassion the Saviour displayed while on earth, more than once placing widows in the limelight. Think of His dealings with the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17); His use of a widow as an example for giving generously (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4); His reference to the Elijah's relationship with the widow in Zaraphath (Luke 4:25-26); and His parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). Anna, an elderly woman, a prophetess and a widow, was also privileged to meet the infant Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:36-38).

Already in the Old Testament, God showed His particular care for widows (Deut. 10:18): "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment" (Deut. 10:18; cf. Ex. 22:21-24, etc.). God is described as "a father of the fatherless, a judge of the widows" (cf. Ps. 68:5). There are marvellous examples in the Old Testament of such care: Naomi, Ruth, and the widow of Zaraphath.

This special care for the fatherless and widows is affirmed in the New Testament. Distinctions are made between younger and older widows (1 Tim.5:3-16) and their special tasks. Responsibility for care rests first with family members, but it is the church's task to see that proper care and appropriate help is given. Neglect of widows caused tension in the early church and led to the estab-



lishing of the office of deacon (Acts 6:1-7).

Someone might well ask: But aren't the widows and orphans mentioned so often because, during Bible times, there were no government or insurance provisions for them? No doubt this is a factor, but this does not take away from the fact that they still need special attention and loving care. Losing a spouse or losing parents are life-changing events. It is as if a person's world is turned upside down. The widow does not only lose her long-term companion and partner and feels as though part of her is gone, but the loss also affects her position in the family, friendships, society, and even in church functions and relationships.

How church leaders can help, not only during the early period of need and grieving, but as long as she is a widow, is dealt with in Part 2 of this book. There are helpful and thoughtful ideas which can involve everyone in the church. Mentioning widows and singles as a separate category in preaching, prayer, and visiting are high on the list. Most Reformed churches do this quite well because of the special task prescribed for deacons in the Church Order.

Some churches mention widows in their church bulletins separately from the shut-ins or in pulpit prayers. Yet, as widows, more so than widowers (males), they often feel forgotten and left-out as "singles" in couples Bible studies. Often they no longer receive information through membership meetings or other "church business" meetings.

Insightful are the authors' statements that "God's provisions for widows tell us about the character of God" (p. 54) and His conduct. In His care for widows and orphans "He sets the standards of goodness, kindness, and mercy. He displays righteousness," and His people are to mirror Him (p. 56). The way "God deals with the widow and others who are poor and needy depicts the way He deals with sinners" (p. 57), the way of salvation, and spiritual truths. These truths and passages of Scripture are explained in a compelling way by the authors and cannot but convince us of James' statement that the special care for the widows and orphans certainly is an indispensable part of "true religion" (Jas. 1:27). ¹

**This book and others in this series may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.*

GOD'S LOVE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

Who loves public worship? Who loves worship services? Maybe you have come to appreciate public worship in a new way this past year. The confession, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD," may have taken on new meaning (Ps. 122:1). Now imagine if we all loved to go to church and one did not love to be there and that One was God Himself. Our worship services would be mere social gatherings. What matters is God's love for public worship.

An Undeserved Love

The most amazing reality is that God loves public worship. In his book, *Public Worship to be Preferred before Private*, David Clarkson makes that point. His basis for this assertion was Psalm 87:2: "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." This text does not say God loves the gates of Zion *rather than* the dwellings of Jacob. He loves the homes of His sinful Jacob, but loves the gates of Zion more. We can wonder why He does, when we realize the people in the homes are the same people who come through the gates of Zion. Why does He love one place more than another if the same people are in both places?

God loving a place means He shows His love in that place. He shows His lovingkindness in homes, big and small. He shows His mercy in sending His Word into our homes, laying His covenantal claim upon our homes, giving His promises and shining with His light into our homes. In our dwellings, he shows His love in a way He does not do so in the world. He especially shows His redeeming love in God-fearing homes.

But the LORD shows His love in a special way in the gates of Zion. Zion was the city of God, where He established his dwelling-place. Zion's gates were those gates through which they entered to worship Him. As Psalm 100:4 sings, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." The Lord has a special love for His house as the place of worship.

Does He love that place because of what the people there are like? Just look around. In the front is a proud pharisee; in the back is a young man living a double life; in the middle is one who comes with a formal sacrifice. If God's love for His house was based on the goodness of the people there, we would despair when we realize we do not have clean hands and a pure heart to offer Him the worship which He deserves. As we look within us or around us in the gathering for worship, we may wonder: how can the Lord love this place?

God's love for Zion's gates is not based on worshipper's godliness. Instead, the godliness of true worshippers is a fruit of His love revealed in Zion's gates. God loving a place means He shows His love there in a special way, just like the omnipresent God being present in a place means He shows His presence there in a special way.

A Shown Love

God loving the gates of Zion means He especially shows His love there in several ways.

First, God especially gives His salvation where the church gathers under His Word. In the temple, God ministered reconciliation and pronounced forgiveness at the altar, which revealed Christ's atoning work. Now, God shows His love for public worship by placing there the greatest gift He can give in a perishing world: the ministry of reconciliation. In God's house, God's servants may testify: God "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:19-21). God has ordained the public preaching to save sinners (Rom. 10). We can be sure the publican prayed for mercy in his home, but when he came into the temple and pleaded, "God be merciful to me, the sinner," he went home justified. What a love God displays in salvation!

Second, God especially gives His blessing in the gates of Zion. There He satisfies the meek. He strengthens the weak. He gives light to those in darkness. He draws near to those bowed down. He comforts His distressed people. He teaches to sing: "There in thy holy habitation, thou wilt thy saints provide with every blessing of salvation, till all are satisfied" (Psalter 419; Psalm 65). What a love He shows in drawing His children week by week into His house to meet them there with His blessing. What a privilege to leave the gates of Zion with the blessing of God: "The Lord bless thee out of Zion." Think of Asaph. He was troubled and envied the prospering wicked until he went into the temple and saw at the altar the end of the wicked and the blessedness of the righteous. That blessing enabled him to sing: "Ever, O Lord, with thee, all shall be well with me, Held by Thy hand" (Psalter 204; Psalm 73).

Third, God shows His love for the gates of Zion by filling them with His glory. Worship is about the glory of God. When the tabernacle, and later the temple, were dedicated, God filled them with the cloud of His glory. In the fulness of time, Christ came as the glory of God to tabernacle among us. Now this glorious Christ promises to be in the midst of those who gather in His name. There Christ reveals God's glory through His Word. That is why our worship services are so filled with the Word of God sung, pleaded, read, confessed, and preached. The greatest gift of love that God can give is to glorify Himself and fill us as sinners with His glory. He does that especially in His house.

Lastly, God shows His love for Zion's gates as the place He especially displays His Spirit's work that brings Him honor. He glorifies Himself in the public witness of worshippers who show He is greater than all the idols people pursue on a Lord's day. God loves to glorify Himself in gathering His people to pray to Him together and sing His praises in unison. He shows evidence of His work as they come with offerings to give rather than spend on themselves and come to "make it their delight to dwell in blest accord" (Psalter 370; Psalm 133). God loves the gates of Zion because there He displays His grace in the lives and hearts, songs and prayers, ears and eyes of His people! In this psalm we see them coming from the darkest, most ignorant, and violent places to worship Him as demonstrations of the greatness of His love.

God shows His love for the gates of Zion by sending and blessing His word of salvation, commanding His blessing to come there, showing His glory there, and displaying the beauty of His own work in His people!

Valued Love

This brings us back to Clarkson's assertion that "Public worship is to be preferred before private. *So it is by the Lord, so it should be by His people.*" If this psalm testifies that the infinite, holy, and glorious God loves the place of worship, shall we not as well? The psalmist sings of God's love for Zion's gates because he loves God and the gates of Zion! How does that love show itself?

1. If God loves public worship as the place He gives salvation, shall we not love to go there as sinners to receive saving, redeeming, reconciling, pardoning love? His love is the force to draw sinners into His house, not to be entertained or to rate a sermon, but to receive salvation! Let us not be like Naaman, who thought he could find better waters and despised God's appointed means for healing. Let us come to His house to receive His salvation through the

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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
Subscription requests, invoices, and
payments should be addressed to:
Janey Slingerland
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**SUBMISSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/
NOTICES:** All articles, notices for family
announcements, obituaries, anniversaries,
and non-commercial advertisements for the
APRIL 2021 issue should reach the editor
no later than **THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2020**
and should be sent to:
Mrs. Rhonda Kroesbergen
(Messenger Administrator)
E: messenger@frcna.org

OPEN WINDOWS
This bi-monthly publication for children is
under the direction of the Free Reformed
Publications Committee:
Rev. Jerrold Lewis, General Editor
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foolishness of preaching.

2. If God loves public worship as the place He gives His blessing in all the various circumstances of life and conditions of heart, shall we not love to go to receive that blessing out of Zion? How blessed to come just as we are with all our need to the God who ministers grace so personally through His Word.
3. If God loves public worship as the place He reveals His glory, shall we not love to go with the longing: “Shew me Thy glory!” The psalmist confessed: “LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth” (Psalm 26:8). Love for the glory of God will also give a concern that what takes place in public worship is indeed to God’s honor.
4. If God loves public worship as the display of His workmanship, shall we not love to gather with the desire to see His work appear in the congregation? How important to go, not to gossip about others afterwards, but to be grieved by all manifestations of sinful corruption and to rejoice in the evidences of His Spirit’s work.

Does this seem idealistic? God’s love for public worship is a reality. This reality is so great that it ensures there will be a people who also love public worship for the same reasons He loves it. Who are these people? We see one bowing before the Lord in repentance, and we ask: who are you? He says: I was a Philistine that fought against God and His people. We see another pleading for mercy and we ask: who are you? She says: I was one in bondage to the darkness of evil spirits in Ethiopia. We see another worshipping the glorious God in utter humility, and we ask: who are you? He confesses: I was a proud, self-centred Tyrian who wasted my life pursuing wealth. How did these come to love the public worship of the living God? This psalm is filled with the wonder of regeneration that makes Tyrians, Ethiopians, Babylonians, and Egyptians worshippers of the true and living God.

If your heart is still set on other things rather than God, His salvation, blessing, and glory, realize you will never be a worshipper in spirit and in truth until you are born again. Let that make you despair of all efforts to make yourself a true worshipper and drive you to Christ who delivers from the sentence of death and gives spiritual life. Let that draw you to His house, where He does such things.

If you have come to love the house of God because of the ways in which God reveals His love there, it is an evidence that you also have been born again. What reason to confess: “all my fountains are in thee.” What reason to sing, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1). ¹

Rev. D. Kranendonk is assistant editor of The Messenger.





PUBLIC WORSHIP TO BE PREFERRED BEFORE PRIVATE

Public worship is to be preferred before private. So it is by the Lord, so it should be by His people. So it was under the law, so it must be under the Gospel.

1. The Lord is more glorified by public worship than private. God is then glorified by us when we acknowledge that He is glorious. And He is most glorified when this acknowledgment is most public.
2. There is more of the Lord's presence in public worship than in private. He is present with His people in the use of public ordinances in a more especial manner, more effectually, constantly, intimately.
3. Here are the clearest manifestations of God. Here He manifests Himself more than in private. Why was Judah called a valley of vision, but because the Lord manifested Himself to that people in public ordinances?
4. There is more spiritual advantage to be had in the use of public ordinances than in private. Whatever spiritual benefit is to be found in private duties, that, and much more, may be expected from public ordinances when duly improved. There is more spiritual light and life, more strength and growth, more comfort and soul refreshment.
5. Public worship is more edifying than private. In private, you provide for your own good, but in public, you do good both to yourselves and others. And that is a received rule, that good is best which is most diffusive, most communicative. Example has the force of a motive; we may stir up others by our example (Zechariah 8:20-21).
6. Public ordinances are a better security against apostasy than private, and therefore to be preferred: an argument worthy our observation in these backsliding times.
7. Here the Lord works His greatest works; greater works than ordinarily He works by private means.
8. Public worship is the nearest resemblance of heaven. In heaven, so far as the Scripture describes it to us, there is nothing done in private, nothing in secret, all the worship of that glorious company is public (Hebrews 12:22-23). They make one glorious congregation, and so jointly together sing the praises of Him that sits on the throne, and the praises of the Lamb, and continue employed in this public worship to eternity.
9. The examples of the most renowned servants of God, who have preferred public worship before private, is a sufficient argument.
10. Public worship is the most available for the procuring of the greatest mercies, and preventing and removing the greatest judgments.
11. The precious blood of Christ is most interested in public worship, and that must needs be most valuable which has most interest in that which is of infinite value. The blood of Christ has most influence upon public worship, more than on private: for the private duties of God's worship, private prayers, meditation, and such like, had been required of, and performed by, Adam and his posterity, if he had continued in the state of innocency; they had been due by the light of nature, if Christ had never died, if life and immortality had never been brought to light by the Gospel. But the public preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the federal seals, have a necessary dependence upon the death of Christ. As they are the representations, so they are the purchase of that precious blood; as Christ is hereby set forth as crucified before our eyes, so are they the purchase of Christ crucified, so are they the gifts of Christ triumphant.
12. The promises of God are more to public worship than to private (Exodus 20:24; Isaiah 4:5; Isaiah 55:2-3; Psalms 36:8-9).

Taken from David Clarkson, "Public Worship to be Preferred before Private," in The Works of David Clarkson, vol. 3 (Reprint; Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1988), 186-209.

PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (4)

SOME OUTSTANDING PURITAN LEADERS IN NEW ENGLAND: GOVERNOR JOHN WINTHROP

In our last instalment, we learned that the Puritans' main motive for leaving England was to escape the oppression of the kings and bishops of the Established Church and to cleanse her from every impure element in doctrine and worship. Upon arrival in the New World, they were determined to reform the church according to the clear teachings of Christ and His apostles. To do so would require that any settlers who disagreed with this objective had to be dealt with immediately and decisively. The result would likely be controversy, conflict, and perhaps even use of force.

Before we turn to the inevitable tensions that would arise within the new settlement, we will first look at some of its leading authority figures. Throughout the colonial period, New England was blessed with exceptionally gifted leaders, both civic and ecclesiastic. We begin with the greatest civic leader of early New England, Governor John Winthrop.



JOHN
WINTHROP

Biographical Sketch

John Winthrop was born in 1588 and grew up in a God-fearing family. His mother, Anne, was a devout Puritan lady who raised her son and his siblings in the fear of the Lord during the long absences of Adam, her husband, on his frequent business trips to London. John, the second born, had three surviving sisters. The Winthrops lived on a large estate, named Groton Manor, located in Suffolk county, not far from London. This county had become an important and fast-growing center of Puritanism.

After completing grammar school, young Winthrop enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he and other students, including John Cotton, often heard the great Puritan, William Perkins, preach. According to Winthrop's biographer, the fact that Cotton and Winthrop were contemporaries at Trinity, "helps to explain the bond that would exist between them in New England."¹

Although Winthrop was brought up in a Christian home and knew the Gospel way of salvation, he wasted his adolescent years pursuing sinful pleasures. He later confessed he had been "very lewdly disposed, inclining unto all kinds of wickedness, except swearing and scorning religion."² At the age of twelve, he began to hunger for true religion and read some of the Puritan books of the day. But "as years came on my lusts grew stronger, but yet under some restraint of my natural reason."³ Lust in those days was a term that covered all temptations of the flesh,

including overeating, drunkenness, as well as sexual sins. Bremer suggests that Winthrop's anxiety was at least in part due to his emergent sexuality. Writing in his diary a few years after he left Cambridge, he recorded that he had made various vows and promises to God that he was unable to keep and had "great need to repent."⁴

Winthrop's marriage in 1605 to Mary Forth cut short his academic pursuits, but the fact that he was only seventeen when he married a woman of twenty-one would suggest that "the two were swept up by a strong physical attraction that forced their families to agree to the hasty march to the altar."⁵

After giving him six children, four of whom survived, Mary died in childbirth. John remarried quickly, but his second wife also lost her life in childbirth, along with the baby. Happily, his marriage to Margaret Tyndal, in 1618, lasted until her death two years before his own.

Like many Puritans, Winthrop struggled for years with lack of assurance of salvation. Even though he did come to saving faith in Christ, he remained susceptible to many temptations most of his life. Writing in his diary years later, he reflects on God's dealings with him in great detail. After his marriage to Mary Forth, he came under the ministry of Rev. Ezekiel Culverwell, a well-known minister in the area, whose preaching was used by God in a heart-changing way. As Winthrop wrote,

For the first time, I found the ministry of the Word to come home to my heart with power... I began to come under strong exercises of conscience... God put my soul to sad tasks sometimes, which yet the flesh would shake off... I had many sweet invitations, which I would willingly have entertained, but the flesh would not give up her interest... But notwithstanding all my stubbornness and unkind rejections of mercy, he [God] left me not till he had overcome my heart to give up itself to him, and to bid farewell to all the world, and until my heart could answer, Lord what wilt thou have me to do?⁶

Although he did come to some peace and comfort in God, grew full of zeal, and acquired an insatiable thirst after the Word of God, the young convert soon fell back into his former sinful condition and was tormented by wicked thoughts. "I began to grow very sad... I could not close with Christ to my satisfaction. I have many times striven to lay hold upon Christ in some promise, and have thought I had received some power to apply Christ unto my soul but it was so doubtful as I could have little comfort in it, and it soon vanished."⁷

For some time, he thought that the only way to come to a more settled peace was to walk more closely with God and to observe His commandments more strictly. But instead of obtaining great-



er peace by his increased efforts toward holiness, he ended up with even greater misery. "I was held long under great bondage to the law," he writes, "until I saw that my problem was want of strength against my corruptions... I knew that my greatest want was faith in Christ but I thought I was not holy enough."⁸

This uncertainty and lack of assurance continued for many years until, at the age of thirty, the time had come for the Lord to reveal Christ to him. As he remembered,

The Lord showed me the emptiness of all my gifts and parts... I became as a weaned child... I could now no more look at what I had been or what I had done...mine eyes were only upon his free mercy in Jesus Christ... The good Spirit of the Lord breathed upon my soul and said I should live. Then every promise I thought upon held forth Christ unto me, saying, I am thy salvation.⁹

Winthrop had first considered becoming a minister, but, partly due to his youthful struggles and uncertainty regarding his spiritual state, he eventually settled on a career in law. He became justice of the peace at Groton Manor. Having acquired a reputation of being a capable lawyer, he was appointed to the Court of Wards, where he often had to decide difficult cases having to do with disputes between the Crown and local residents about land ownership. John became known as a wise and fair arbitrator so that his respect among the people grew steadily.

Migration

In August 1629, after much prayer, reflection, and discussion with his wife and Puritan friends, John decided to emigrate to New England. What caused a man of his stature and age (forty-two years old) to leave the relative comforts of England for a dan-

gerous and uncertain life in the New World? The first reason was that, being a Puritan, he was disappointed at the lack of progress that had been made so far to reform the Church of England. The accession of Charles I to the throne had made things worse for the Puritans than they had been under his father, James I. Life under this king, and especially his archbishop, William Laud, was becoming unbearable. Laud demanded that all members of the clergy adhere strictly to the prescribed liturgy and ceremonies in the Church of England. Any who refused were barred from their pulpits and sometimes imprisoned.

Another motive for leaving England was that Winthrop was struggling financially. He had serious debt problems and economic prospects in England were not good. They seemed much better in New England.

Another reason for leaving was that, though Winthrop was a very gifted leader who could have risen to a place of prominence in England, this was highly unlikely due to him being a Puritan. John Winthrop, always seeking to read God's providence, put all these factors together to conclude that God was leading him to New England.

When some Puritan friends invited him to become a partner in

the Massachusetts Bay Company, which had been chartered by the king, John agreed. Because the charter did not specify where the company should be administered, the members conveniently interpreted this to mean they could do so from New England. Not surprisingly, Winthrop was elected as the first Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

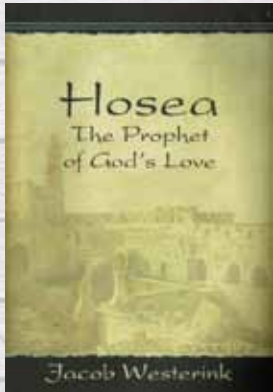
Shortly thereafter, John Winthrop, leaving his wife and all but his two oldest sons behind, departed in April 1630 on the *Arbella* for the new world, arriving on June 12, 1630. His wife and the rest of his children were to follow a year later.

Governor of Massachusetts Colony

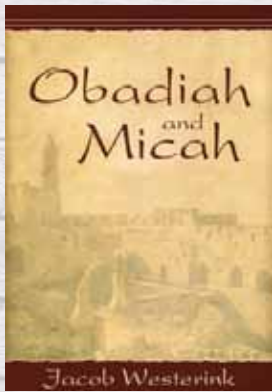
After arriving in Boston in December of 1630, Winthrop's governorship was soon put to the test. His skills were recognized as exceptional by most of the settlers. He was a deeply spiritual man, but his devotion to God and respect for His law were not confined to his private and personal life. His piety characterized his public life as well. His governmental duties were as sacred to him as the responsibilities of ministers of the gospel were to them.

The terms of office of Governor of Massachusetts being only one year, Winthrop was elected to that office for the first four

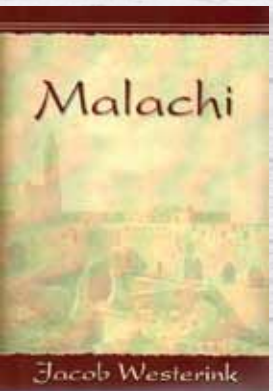
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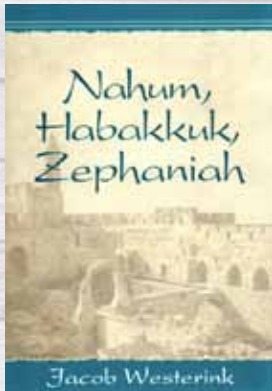
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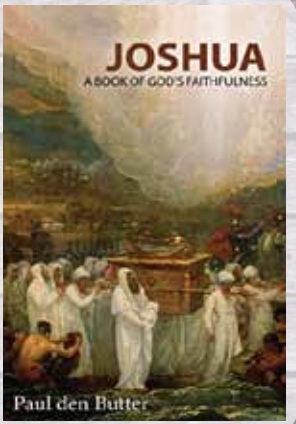


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years, after which he was defeated by Thomas Dudley, his rival, who challenged Winthrop repeatedly. Though far inferior to Winthrop as to gifts and character, Dudley was able to garner enough votes to replace his competitor.

Humiliated by losing his leadership position, Winthrop graciously conceded the election and accepted the lower office as a magistrate. Swallowing his pride, he invited all the magistrates home for lunch that day, as a sign of Christian charity.¹⁰

Winthrop lost the governorship on several other occasions too. Some people thought John was too lenient with those who failed to obey the laws of the Colony, while others respected his leadership but were reluctant to have him serve indefinitely, lest he become a dictator and control the people. This was a great disappointment for John, but he humbly took the abuse and rejection, always looking for wisdom and guidance from God.

Winthrop strove to govern with the Bible as his guide, but also realized that Scripture did not always give specific instruction for specific cases. Therefore, he often judged cases based on precedents of British law. He also believed that, since this was a new colony, some would violate the law unknowingly. Thus, he sought to use prudence in how best to judge individual cases. He discretely decided when to prosecute and when to be lenient. This did not sit well with leaders who insisted on judging cases strictly according to Scripture, especially by Old Testament laws and regulations.

Much more could be said about Winthrop's role as governor of New England and his importance as the first founding father of the United States of America. However, we will next turn to examining the lives and contributions of some of the leading church leaders in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, beginning with John Cotton, a former classmate of Winthrop at Cambridge University. ❶

CORRECTION: in the first installment of this series, I wrongly referred to Mary Queen of Scots and Mary Tudor as if they were the same person. Mary Queen of Scots was the mother of James VI of Scotland who later became James I of England. Mary Tudor was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon and half-sister to Edward VI. She was a Roman Catholic and tried to destroy the English Reformation started by her father and supported by her brother. During her five-year reign, she had 280 Protestants burned at the stake and became known as "Bloody Mary."

Endnotes

- 1 Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father*, 82.
- 2 *Ibid*, 79.
- 3 *Ibid*, 79.
- 4 *Ibid*, 83.
- 5 *Ibid*, 91.
- 6 Quoted by David D. Hall, *Puritans in the New World*, 113.
- 7 *Ibid*, 115.
- 8 *Ibid*, 115-116.
- 9 *Ibid*, 16.
- 10 Bremer, *John Winthrop*, 141.

Rev. C. Pronk is an emeritus Free Reformed pastor residing with his wife in Brantford, Ontario.



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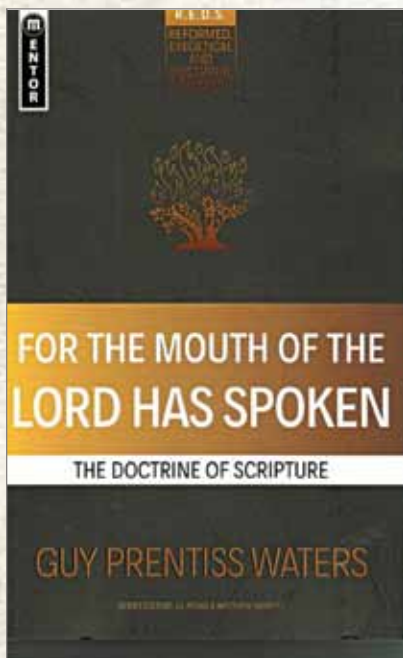


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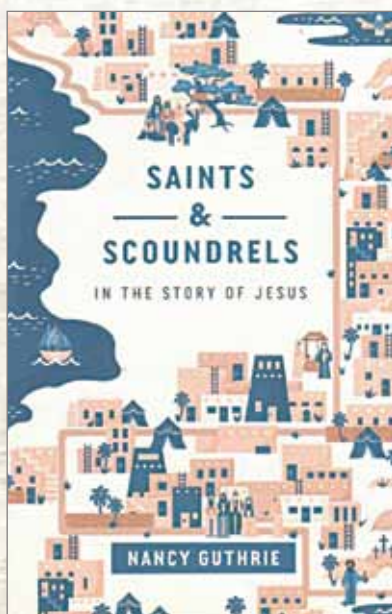
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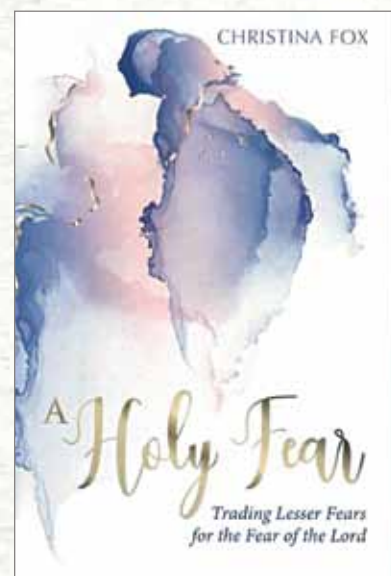
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By Christian Fox

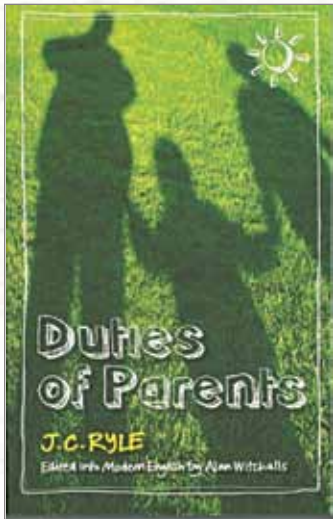
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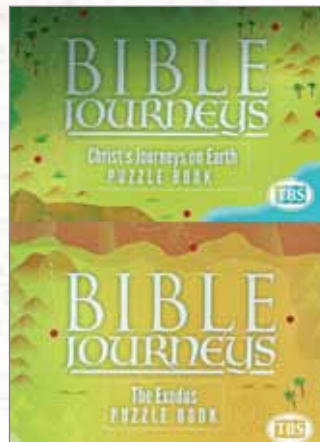
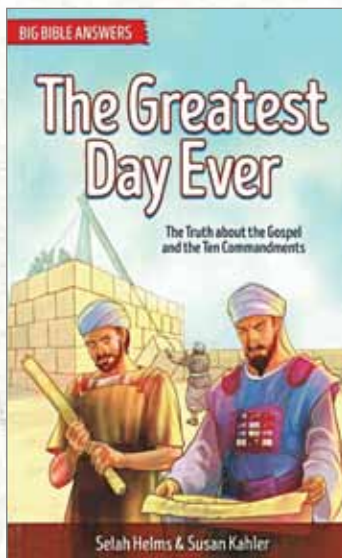
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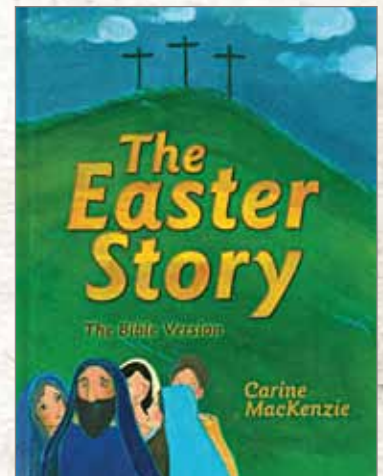
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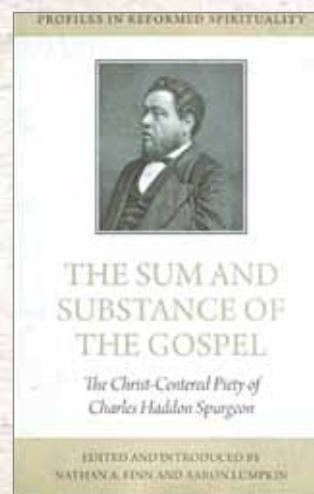
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Rev. Henk Bergsma is an emeritus pastor serving as an elder in the Free Reformed Church of London. He has written this article at the request of the consistory of the London congregation.

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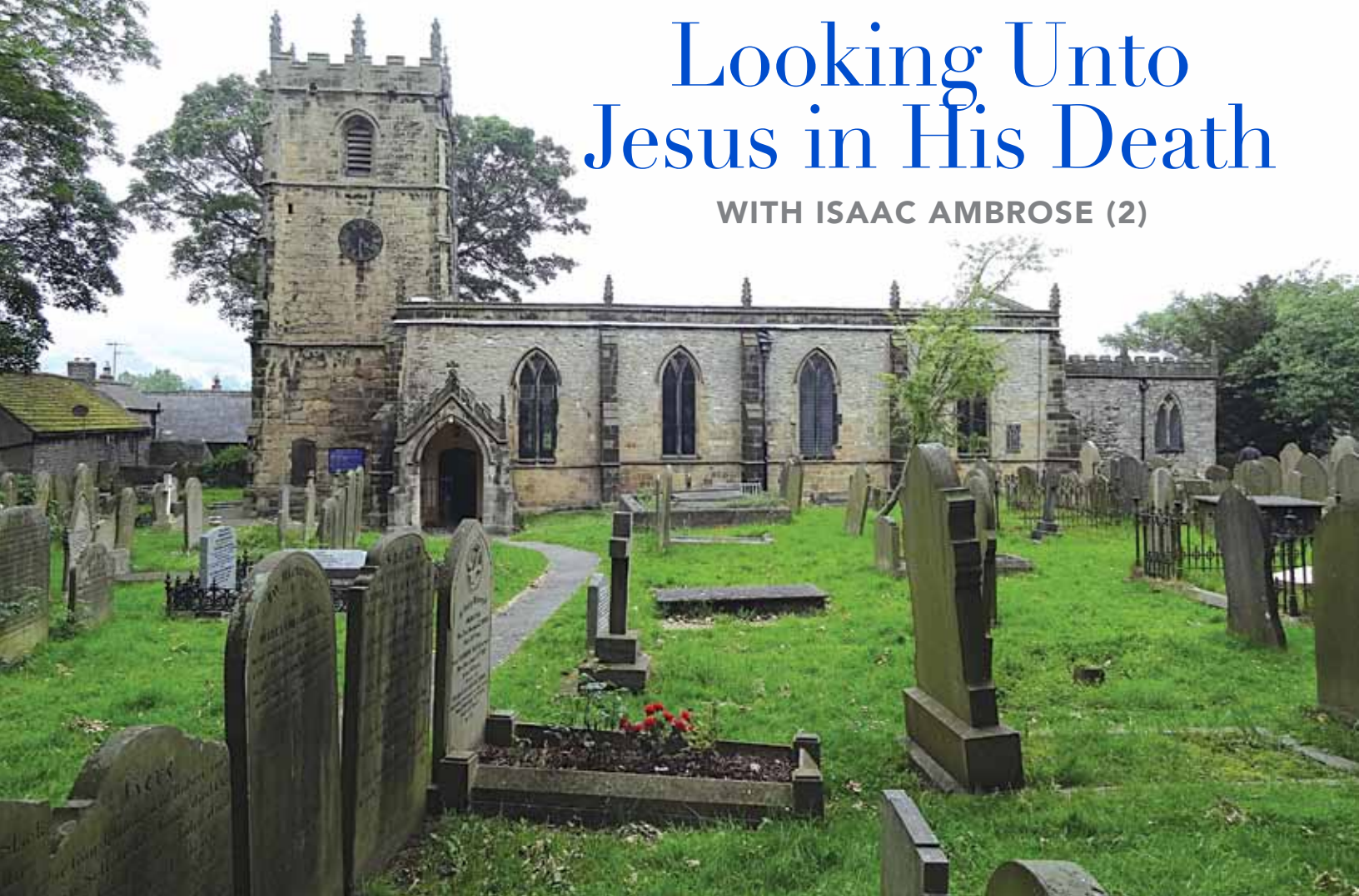
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Looking Unto Jesus in His Death

WITH ISAAC AMBROSE (2)



Last time, we introduced the Puritan preacher, Isaac Ambrose, and his best known book, Looking unto Jesus. In this beautiful book, he goes through the various aspects of the Lord Jesus' work of redemption. For each, he meditates on knowing, considering, desiring, hoping in, believing in, loving, joying in, calling on, and conforming to Jesus in that respect. Last time we reflected on the first five of these aspects in relation to the death of the Lord Jesus. This time we will let him guide our meditations on the last four aspects.

Sixth, Loving Jesus in His Death

The love of the Lord Jesus is beyond words in its greatness and graciousness. Think of this: if Christ had only sent creatures to serve us, prophets to advise us, these acts would have been mercy. If He had come only to visit and weep over us, saying, "if thou had known the things that belong unto thy peace," that act would have been mercy. "But that Christ himself should come and lay down his blood, and his life, and all for his people - and yet I am not at the lowest - that he should not only part with life, but part with the sense and sweetness of God's love, which is a thousand times better than life (Ps. 63:3)... that he should be content to be accursed, that we might be blessed; that he should be content

to be forsaken, that we might not be forsaken; that he should be content to be condemned, that we might be acquitted: oh! What raptures of spirit can be sufficient for the admiration of this so infinite mercy? Be thou swallowed up, O my soul, in this depth of divine love, and hate to spend thy thoughts any more upon the base objects of this wretched world, when thou hast such a Saviour to take them up."

This divine love constrains Ambrose to burst out, "Had I the tongues of men and angels, I could not express it. Oh! Love deeper than hell! Oh! Love higher than heaven! The brightest seraphims that burn in love, are but as sparkles to that mighty flame of love in the heart of Jesus."

A Spirit-worked sight and sense of this love of Christ stirs up love to Christ in return. "Why surely I have heard enough, for which to love Christ for ever," he confesses. The love of Jesus has such power. "If our hearts be not iron; yea, if they be iron, how should they choose but feel the magnetical force of this loadstone of love? For to a loadstone doth Christ resemble himself, when he saith of himself; 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me'" (John 12:32).

The gospel, centering on Christ crucified, is God's means to stir

up love. “Indeed the whole gospel is no other thing than a motive to draw man to God by the force of God’s love to man...but of all the motives we may draw from Christ, and of all the arguments we may find in the gospel of Christ, there is none [like] this, the death of Christ, the blood of Jesus. Is not this such a love-letter, as never, never was the like?” Christ’s love is written on every page of the gospel. “If you cannot read, observe the hieroglyphics, every stripe is a letter, every nail is a capital letter, every bruise is a black letter; his bleeding wounds are as so many rubrics to shew upon record: oh! Consider it, is not this a great love? Are not all mercies wrapt up in this blood of Christ?”

Upon reflecting on Christ’s love, he is stirred to cry in the paradoxical way, typical of spiritual life: “O for a soul sick of love, yea, sick unto death...This only sickness is our health, this death our life, and not to be thus sick is to be dead in sins.”

Seventh, Joying in Jesus in His Death

In the section on joying in Jesus, Ambrose focuses on giving comfort to God’s people in their troubles.

The foundational comfort is this: “What! hath Christ suffered for us? hath he drunk off all the cup of God’s wrath, and left none for us? how should we but be cheered! Precious souls, why are you afraid? There is no death, no hell, ‘no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.’” In a way reminiscent of our beautiful Lord’s Supper form, he leads through a series of gospel exchanges: “Christ was amazed, that we might be cheered; Christ was imprisoned, that we might be delivered; Christ was accused, that we might be acquitted; Christ was condemned, that we might be redeemed; Christ suffered his Father’s wrath, and came under it, that the victory might be ours, and that in the end we might see him face to face in glory.” He then applies these truths, asking: “Is not here matter of joy? It may be the law, and sin, and justice, and a conscience, and death, and hell, may appear as enemies, and disturb thy comforts; but is there not enough in the blood of Christ to chase them away?”

Ambrose knows the objections that may rise in doubting souls. When conscience accuses and the law condemns, one may wonder, How can I stand before God as Judge? Ambrose counsels, “Say not so, for by this death of Christ, free grace and justice are both thy friends.” Do not avoid the judgment seat, but “tender up to him the active and the passive righteousness of Christ his Son for an atonement and satisfaction for our sins.” He then clarifies: “A man by nature may know thus much, that when he hath sinned, he must seek unto God for mercy, but to seek unto God for pardon with a price in our hands, to tender up the merits of Jesus Christ for a satisfaction to divine justice: here is the mys-

tery of faith.” Thus, he gives this comfort to believers: “The very justice of God itself is now your friend, and bids you go away comforted, for it is satisfied to the full; heaven itself waits on you, and keeps the doors open that your souls may enter”

Another may still say, “I fear death.” Ambrose counsels, “By his death he hath taken away the sting of death, that now the drone may hiss, but cannot hurt; come, meditate much upon the death of Christ, and thou shalt find matter enough in his death, for the subduing of thy slavish fears of death.” Another may fear the grave and hell. Ambrose responds: “Christ went down into the grave to make a back door, that the grave which was before a prison, might now be a thorough-fare; so that all his saints may with ease pass through, and sing, ‘O death where is thy sting! O hell, where is thy victory.’” Christ is the comfort: “Let sin, and the law, and justice, and death, and hell, yea, and all the devils in hell unite their forces, this one argument of Christ’s death (it is Christ that died) will be enough to confute and confound them all.”

Ambrose makes application of this comfort by exhorting his own soul: “O my soul, I see thou art poring on sin, on thy crimson sins, and scarlet sins; but I would have thee dwell on that crimson scarlet blood of Christ; oh! It is the blood of sprinkling...it cries for mercy, and pardon, and refreshing, and salvation.... Me-thinks this should make my heart leap for joy.”



Isaac Ambrose

Eighth, Calling on Jesus in His Death

True prayer finds its freedom to come to God through the blood of the Lord Jesus. His death is the motivation behind the exhortation: “Let us call on Jesus, on God the Father, in and through Jesus.”

In turn, he encourages to pray to share in and know the power of Christ’s death. “We must pray that all these transactions of Christ in his sufferings and death may be ours.” This prayer involves both contrition and hope. “Oh! what shall we do, who by our sins have so tormented our dearest Lord? What contrition can be great enough, what tears sufficient, what hatred and detestation equal to those sad and heavy sufferings of our Jesus? And then let us pray, that he would pity us, and forgive us those sins wherewith we crucified him; that he would bestow on us the virtue of his death, that his wounds might heal us, his death might quicken us, and his blood might cleanse us from all our filth of sin.”

Prayer also involves praise. “We must praise the Lord for all these sufferings of X. Hath he indeed suffered all these punishments for us? Then, what shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits?... Especially, if we believe our part in the death of X..., then what manifold cause of thankfulness and praise is here? Be

enlarged, O my soul; sound forth the praises of thy Christ, tell all the world of that love of Christ, which flowed with his blood out of all his wounds into thy spirit.”

Ninth, Conforming to Jesus in His Death

Ambrose’s last section is about the sanctifying power of Jesus’ death. He first gives guidance on the pattern to which believers are to conform. This pattern includes “the graces that most eminently shines in his bitter passion” and death. The suffering Saviour says as it were, “Mark the steps where I have trod, and follow me in humility, in patience, in love, in mercy, in meekness, in contempt of the world, in obedience unto death; in these and the like graces you must conform to Christ.”

Conformity is also in His sufferings. Philippians 3:10 speaks sharing in the “fellowship of his sufferings.” This is not a matter of merit, but a sharing in sufferings from the same cause (Satan and the wicked), born in the same way (humility and patience), and looking for the same fruit (glorification).

Conformity is also in his death, by “carrying in us a resemblance and representation of his death” in the mortification of sin. Christ’s death was voluntary, meaning true mortification of sin is not a forced stopping of sin, but a willing killing of sin. Christ’s death was a violent death, “so in our mortification, it is voluntary in respect of us, but violent in respect of sin.” “When he pulls up those weeds before they wither in themselves, this is true mortification.” Christ’s death was also a “lingering death.” So also, “sin is not put to death all at once, but languisheth by little and little.”

While justification is in a moment, mortification is a life-long activity. “Here is a ground of consolation to a drooping and dejected soul; such a one cries out, ‘Alas! I feel the stirring and vig-

orous actings of sin, and I am afraid my sin is not mortified, as Rebekah said when she felt the children struggling within her, ‘If it be so why am I thus?’...Trembling soul! Let not this discourage: Jesus Christ was not dead so soon as he was fastened to the cross. Hast thou taken the same course with the body of sin, that the Jews did with the body of Christ? Hast thou arraigned it, accused it, and condemned it, and fastened it to the cross?...Why then

be not disheartened, it may be thou feelest it stirring and struggling within thee, and so will a crucified man do, and yet in the eye of the law, and in the account of all men that see him, he is a dead man; surely so is the body of sin when it is thus crucified, though it still move and stir, yet upon a gospel account, and in God’s estimation, it is no better than dead, and it shall certainly die.”

Second, he not only shows Christ’s death as a pattern of mortification, but also the cause of this mortification. It is the meritorious cause that has secured our conformity to Christ (Eph. 5:25-27). It is the efficient cause that “works this conformity by a secret virtue issuing from it” (Phi. 3:10). It is also the “impelling or moving cause”: “Christ crucified doth heal sin, beget grace, encourage to sufferings, by being looked upon with the eyes of faith” (Heb 12:1-2).

Third, he gives pastoral guidance on the means to this conformity.

1. “Go to the cross of Jesus Christ. It is not all our purposes, resolutions, promises, vows, covenants, endeavors without this, that will effect our conformity to Christ in his sufferings and death; no, no, this conformity is a fruit and effect of the death of Christ: and therefore, whosoever would have this work wrought in him, let him first have recourse to Christ’s cross. O! go we more immediately to the cross of Jesus.”

Here is a ground of consolation to a drooping and dejected soul; such a one cries out, ‘Alas! I feel the stirring and vigorous actings of sin, and I am afraid my sin is not mortified, as Rebekah said when she felt the children struggling within her, ‘If it be so why am I thus?’...Trembling soul!



Christian Ministry to Israel commits over \$15,000 CDN annually to support missionary couple Albert and Esther Knoester and their work at a drop-in coffee shop in downtown Dimona in the Negev Desert. Read more about this couple and their work in our next newsletter.

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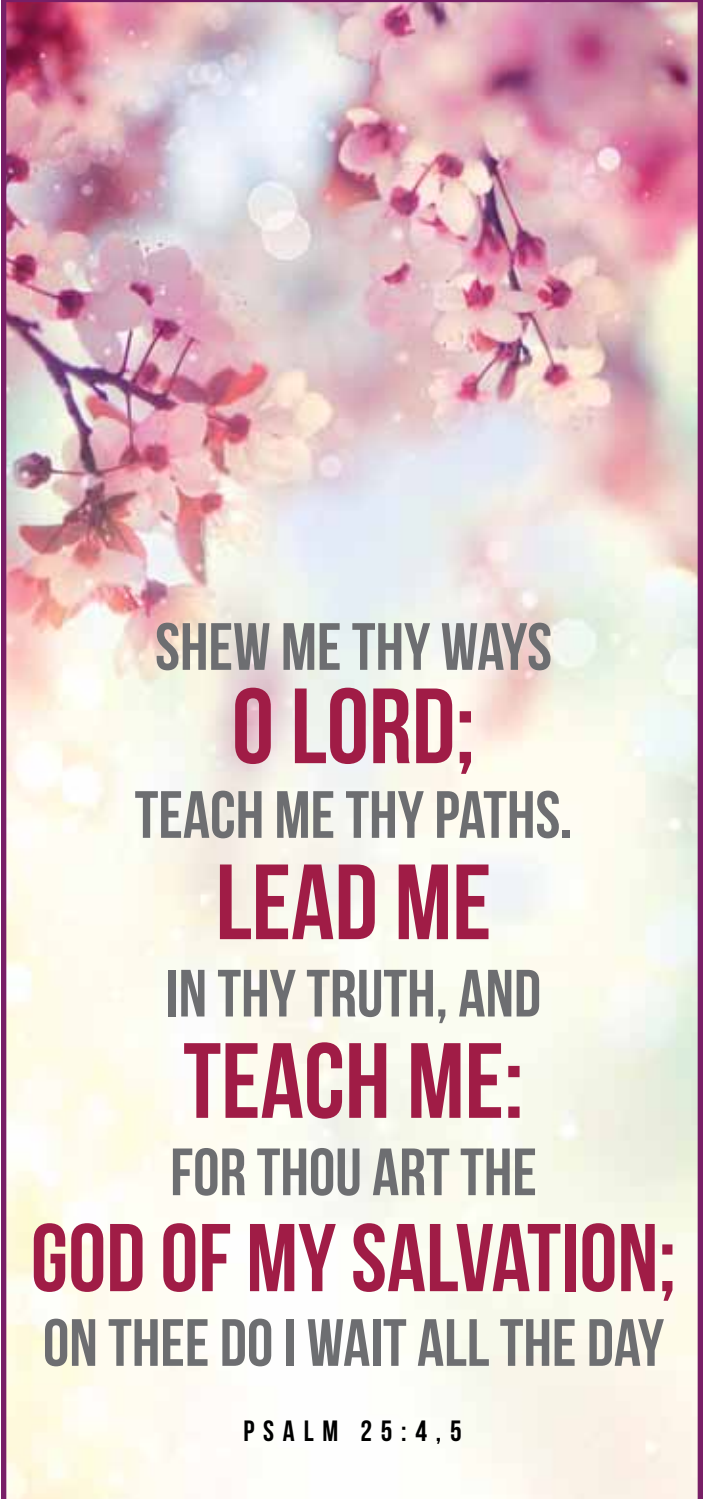
2. “Look upon him that hangs upon it, contemplate the death of Jesus Christ, consider seriously, and sadly, his bitter, shameful, painful sufferings.” “Who can tell how far this very look may work on us to change us, and transform us unto the very image of Jesus Christ?”
3. “Let us humbly bewail our defect, ...and nonconformity either to the graces, sufferings, or death of Christ.” “Oh alas! What a wide, vast, utter difference, distance, disproportion is there betwixt me and [Christ’s virtues]: his graces appeared in his sufferings like so many stars in a bright winter’s night; but how dim are the faint, weak graces in my soul? Christ, in his sufferings, endured much for me, I know not how much. By thine unknown sorrows and sufferings.... have mercy upon us, and save us....”
4. “Let us quicken, provoke, and rouse up our souls to this conformity” He sets arguments before us. For example, “the greatest glory that a Christian can attain to in this world is to have a resemblance and likeness to Jesus Christ.”
5. “Let us pray to God, that he will make us conformable to Jesus Christ. Is it grace we want? Let us beg of him, that of that fullness that is in Christ, we may, in our measure, receive grace for grace.” What specific grace do we need? “Let us cry to God that virtue may come out of Christ’s death to mortify our lusts, to heal our natures, to staunch our bloody issues”

Looking so Personally

As you may recall, Isaac Ambrose was accustomed to withdrawing to the woods to be alone in searching the scriptures and his own heart, meditation, and prayer. On May 17, 1646, he recorded: “(a.m.) I meditated on the love of Christ, wherein Christ appeared, and melted my heart in many sweet passages.” On May 31, he wrote: “I practised (as the Lord enabled) the duty of saints’ sufferings; into which condition as I was cast, so the Lord gave me to see my sin and to bewail it and to pray for the contrary, grace and God’s favour. The Lord was sweet to me in the preparations to, but especially in the improving of, sufferings. Now the Spirit left in my soul a sweet scent and savour behind.”

These glimpses show that what he wrote about looking unto Jesus had gone through his own soul. We need not spend weeks in some forest. Instead, amid times with less social contact, may we heed Ambrose’s exhortation: “Let us frequently return to our looking up unto Jesus Christ, to our believing in Christ as he was lifted up.” In that way there is “a conveyance of an healing, strengthening, quickening virtue, flowing into the soul in the time of its viewing, eyeing, contemplating, reflecting upon Christ crucified, Christ lifted up.” 

Rev. D. Kranendonk is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Oxford County and assistant editor of The Messenger. Quotations from Isaac Ambrose, Looking unto Jesus. The most recent hardcover edition was published by Sprinkle Publications. Ebook editions are available online.



SHEW ME THY WAYS
O LORD;
TEACH ME THY PATHS.
LEAD ME
IN THY TRUTH, AND
TEACH ME:
FOR THOU ART THE
GOD OF MY SALVATION;
ON THEE DO I WAIT ALL THE DAY

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THE PASSING RAINSTORM

From time to time, we experience severe rainstorms. First, a few droplets fall. These droplets change into steady rain and this turns into a heavy downpour. For a brief time, puddles of water are formed in the fields, but it usually doesn't take long before the rain subsides, the clouds break, and sunshine warms and dries the ground. The following day the puddles are all gone. We must be grateful for God's care in providing rain.

There is also another kind of rainstorm. That is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We can compare the proclamation of the Word of God and its influence by the Spirit to a rainstorm. We have seen these rainstorms in days of revival. The Holy Spirit came down, breaking people's rebellion against God, causing them to recognize their evil deeds, and leading them to confess their transgressions to the Lord. In such seasons, man is humbled, God is exalted, and one experiences that grace is a miracle of God's goodness.

If we know the Lord's grace in our own hearts, we will realize that we were just like others who live according to the lusts of the flesh and ignoring God. We lived for ourselves until God intervened. God's child will agree with Isaiah 65:1: "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." When He finds us, we experience personally the rainstorm of God's Spirit. Everything becomes new to us. The Bible is a new book and going to church a new experience. We long above all for the Lord and the knowledge of His grace. We have sorrow for sin and a heartfelt faith in Christ Jesus. We are constrained to surrender to the Lord. The Holy Spirit will continually guide and lead such people, for they are God's people. God will never forsake the works of His hand.

Changes In Our Society

Every generation needs this rain of the Spirit and every child of God needs this rain to preserve spiritual life. In churches or society, the esteem for the Word of God can easily decline. Love to the world can set in, as well as desire for amusement, wealth, and honor, coupled with pride and lust. By these things the Holy Spirit is grieved and, if these sins continue, He will be quenched

and withdraw. Then the rainstorm ceases and the gospel has less and less influence in society. The knowledge of God's Word is removed and society reverts to paganism, be it in a modern form.

In our nation, we have experienced the rainstorm of God's Spirit for many generations. But we must never assume that this will continue. If the Lord is grieved, He will withdraw and He can obliterate that church. To the church at Ephesus the Lord Jesus says: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5). To the church at Pergamos the Lord Jesus says, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight with the sword of my mouth" (Rev. 2:16). If the church at Laodicea remains lukewarm, Christ will spew her out of his mouth.

These passages show the gospel can be removed from people. Never think we are entitled to have the gospel always with us. The preaching of the truth is a rich privilege that we should not underestimate. Vast areas in this world hear hardly any gospel preaching. This becomes the more painful when we realize that some of these places had heavenly doctrine drop as the rain (Deut. 32:2). The rainstorm was present, but the droplets became less and less until they were finally gone. Once the gospel is gone, it rarely returns. This is surely the greatest calamity that can fall upon a nation. This is the grave danger North America is facing today.

Martin Luther

In 1524, the church reformer Martin Luther wrote a letter to the rulers of the German cities, encouraging them to establish schools, because he feared that unless there were Christian schools, the knowledge of the gospel would be removed from Germany.

Luther wrote:

Germany has never heard so much of God's Word as now; at least we find nothing like it in history. If we permit it to go by without thanks and honor, it is to be feared we shall suffer a still more dreadful darkness and plague. Buy, dear Germans, while the fair is at your doors; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and

fair weather; use the grace and Word of God while they are here. For, know this, God's Word and grace is a passing rainstorm, which does not return where it has once been. It came to the Jews, but it passed over; now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks, but it passed over; now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins had it, too; but it passed over; now they have the pope. And you Germans must not think you will have it forever; for ingratitude and contempt will not suffer it to remain. Take and hold fast, then, whoever can; idle hands cannot but have a lean year.

Tunisia

Especially striking is the warning: "God's Word and grace is a passing rainstorm, which does not return where it has once been." There is much evidence for this truth. We live in a post-Christian society. Other post-Christian societies have reverted to spiritual darkness. For instance, at one time, the North African country of Tunisia was an important center for the Christian church. There were many ministers and important theologians. Consistory meetings were held. Youth received catechism instruction. People dressed in their best clothes to attend worship services on the Lord's Day. Various important synods were convened in Tunisia. But love to the Lord waned. Churches were paralyzed by theological strife and backbiting. Today in Tunisia you will find ruins of huge cathedrals, but hardly any Christians. The same can be said of many towns and cities of the Middle Eastern world, but also of Europe.

Analyzing the present is always difficult. There are still many churches in North America, but their influence is diminishing. Christians are being marginalized. Whereas God's Word was once normative in our national legislative assemblies, an increasing deviation from God's Word is apparent. False religions are propagated and true Christianity is disliked. During this Covid-19 epidemic in certain provinces in Canada, restaurants and other venues could remain open, while churches had to be closed. A generation has now come to maturity without any knowledge of the Bible, thanks in part to the public-school education system. The long-term effects of this will prove to be highly detrimental to our society. Turning away from God's Word has immediate repercussions in the realm of broken relationships, distorted families, social injustice, tyranny of the majority, and the prevailing lack of peace and rest within human lives.

Europe and North America

Within Europe, the influence of churches has weakened immensely. Daily, 267 people abandon churches in the Netherlands. In the United States and Canada, Christianity has had a long-standing major influence in society. But we fear that in both countries, neo-social Marxism is evolving, resulting in legislation condoning and promoting ethical standards which are in stark contrast to Scripture.

This trend has been stimulated by a breakdown of biblical perspectives within theological seminaries. Increasingly, the Bible is under attack, as ministers and theologians deviate from the Word

of God. Bible criticism is endorsed on the basis of unproven scientific theories. "Thus saith the Lord" is no longer the norm for many who occupy a pulpit.

William Booth (1829-1912), founder of the Salvation Army, already anticipated this degeneration and said: "The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell."


We have had the inestimable privilege of having the gospel for many generations. Some of us may be able to trace faithful church membership back for generations of forebearers. Yet, such a pedigree is no guarantee for future generations. How we need the mighty working of God's Spirit within our churches, homes, hearts, and lives. We must be on guard not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

Why did the church in Tunisia collapse? Was it because of the Muslim onslaught? Initially, the Muslims did not interfere with Christian churches. Churches had to pay a certain tax but could function as before. But churches became worldly and lukewarm. They were paralyzed by inner fighting, strife, and dissension. They lost the spiritual power they once had. Church members left the church and eventually the church collapsed.

Clarion call

Many people are leaving church. A serious problem is that churches lack vitality and the experience of Scriptural truths. People are content with a form of religion, while denying the power of godliness. We must hear the clarion call coming to us. We may not live for wealth and honour. We may not permit ourselves to become lukewarm. The consequences will be dreadful. Our children will easily live for this life and world.

In our day, we need revivals in our churches and in our own lives. Our families need to be focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. Children should be able to see that parents fear and love the Lord. Fathers and mothers need to be godly examples in their homes. Then our churches will be filled with people who desire the one thing needful: to live with Christ. We must be watchful against church gossip and putting one another down. Let us humble ourselves before God on account of our sins and failings. Our hearts need to be filled with love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us pray continually, for the outpouring of God's Spirit. God is still able and willing to hear prayer.

May God forbid that we are now feeling the last drops of the rainstorm. For "God's Word and grace is a passing rainstorm, which does not return where it has once been." Let us plead with the Lord for He is still willing to give the latter and the former rain (Hosea 6:3). 

Rev. G. R. Procee is a pastor of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk of Middelharnis, the Netherlands. With his wife, he hopes to return to Canada as an emeritus pastor in April 2021.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



On January 13, 2021, at age 91, our father, Grandfather and Opa

ALBERT HUBACH

had fought the good fight, finished his course, and was brought safely home by his merciful God. His beloved wife and our mother, Grandmother, and Oma preceded him there. He will be missed by his children and grandchildren:

Anne and David Faasse

*Emily and Jamie Hart
Linsey and Joey Ghent
Lydia and Will Richert
Kyle and Adrienne Faasse;
and 12 great grandchildren*

Aileen and Ronald Rittner

*Jeremy and Danielle Rittner
Lisa and Tim Cassity
Michael and Summer Rittner
Ryan and Eva Rittner
Lily Ava Karla;
and 7 great grandchildren*

John Edward and Tina Hubach

*John Hubach
Jacob and Savannah Hubach
Joshua Hubach; and 3 great grandchildren*

Elizabeth and Dwight Prince

*Nicholas and Beth Prince
Tyler and Courtney Prince
Betsy and Jordan Timmer
Abigail and Tyler Westrate
Corbin and Ellyne Prince
Madilyne Prince;
and 10 great grandchildren*

as well as his brothers in law and sisters in law, friends, and nieces and nephews, here, in Canada, and in the Netherlands.

The funeral was held on January 16, 2021, at the Free Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, with Dr. Jerry Bilkes officiating and Pastor Ian Macleod leading the interment service.

*"Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him:
God is a refuge for us". Psalm 62:8.*

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