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ETERNAL SECURITY IN THE LORD

Psalm 125 is the sixth Psalm of ascents, which pilgrims would sing as they traveled to Jerusalem. As they neared the city built on mount Zion, the LORD presents them with a picture of the eternal security of those who trust in Him, magnificently displaying the permanence and protection that is in Him.

Permanence

Verse one shows the permanence which believers have by faith in God. “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.” When you see the mountains, you realize that you cannot move or shake them, they are permanent. Jerusalem rested on that solid and immovable foundation.

The Lord is saying that all those who place their confidence in Him shall be as immovable as Mount Zion. The LORD who formed the mountains is the eternal, unchangeable, permanent foundation on which we must rest all our hope.

Our lives are characterized by instability, and nothing appears permanent in life anymore. The many storms we face in life attempt to blow us off the mountain. But those who trust in the Lord are anchored into the eternal foundation by faith in Jesus Christ. That foundation can never be removed, but abides forever, even if the earth is removed and the mountains are carried into the sea.

Protection

Verse two shows how the mountains represent the protection of the LORD, “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about His people from henceforth even for ever.” As the pilgrims walk up the mountain towards Jerusalem, they also see the mountains which surround the city. To the east was the range known as Olivet. There also were mountains to the north, the west, and even to the south was a small mountain.

These mountains provided protection and a natural wall of defense which the enemies would first need to scale before reaching the city. The mountains provided natural vantage points from which they could see the enemy approaching.

From His eternal vantage point, the Lord sees every enemy approaching. The Lord surrounds you with His protection, so that every enemy must scale the mountains of His defense before it can reach you.

Nothing can reach you without the will of your Heavenly Father.

Everything that does pass through those mountains is permitted to come for your good and for His glory. Nothing can cause that foundation to shake, but troubles do test us to see if we are firmly anchored into that foundation.

The results of the tests are displayed by the disposition of our heart, which, for those who trust in the Lord, are the postures of patience and prayer.

Patience

Verse three shows the patience of the saints through the trials in life: “For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous.” The rod refers to the power of wicked rulers, which will not rest or remain there. There is no permanence to the wicked.

Trust in God produces patience. Each tribe of Israel received their plot of inheritance in the promised land, and each child of God has an eternal inheritance laid up in heaven for them which no enemy can remove. Patience waits for the time when that inheritance will be received.

Meanwhile, patience is needed to endure the current trials so that we do not resort to sin: “Lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.” In our current national situation and individual lives, there are many temptations to reach out to do iniquity, either by responding or joining with evil.

Only a firm trust and confidence in the unchangeable LORD will produce patience to respond in love within our family, church family, and to our neighbors. Can we acknowledge that everything that is happening today has passed under the omniscient eyes of God and filtered through the mountains of His permission? These troubles will not last, but let patience have her perfect work. Rest in the LORD and keep yourself from evil.

Prayer

Verse four shows the posture of **prayer** that is produced: “Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.” If our trust is in the LORD alone, that is where we will go for help in prayer. Patience comes by trusting that the LORD will ultimately bring you safely to the promised land, and patience needs strengthening. Romans 12:12 speaks of “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.”

From underneath the heavy burden of the trials arises the prayer for God to do good to those who trust in Him. It is a plea, based not on our own merits, but trusting in Jesus Christ, who alone is righteous.

The prayer ascends to lay hold onto that eternal, immovable foundation that we may be kept by the power of God and our souls held in life even if the earth is shaken. Your prayer ascends to God to defend you, to surround you in mercy, and to protect you from evil. Your prayer ascends to God to give you patience amid the trials to keep you from responding with evil.

The Lord also provides the eternal perspective to encourage you through this life by distinguishing between the punishment of the wicked and the peace of those who trust in the LORD.

Punishment

Verse five lays out the eternal perspective of punishment upon the wicked: “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, The Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.”

We might be tempted to turn aside from trusting and obeying God in our current circumstances and to turn to a crooked way, where we attempt to find our own way out of the trials

“Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.” If our trust is in the LORD alone, that is where we will go for help in prayer. Patience comes by trusting that the LORD will ultimately bring you safely to the promised land, and patience needs strengthening.

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or oppression. Then we begin to stretch out our hand to do evil and respond in sin.

God's way often leads through difficulties, but it is the only road that leads to eternal safety. If you reach out your hand to sin, there are consequences. There will be chastisements for the people of God, but also eternal consequences for those who are never brought back onto that way of salvation.

"The LORD shall lead them forth" means He will get rid of those who stray from Him. Your sins will lead you further and further from God. If you reach out your hand to sin, to take a side path, you will be led forth with the workers of iniquity, whose end is eternal destruction.

Peace

The final words of verse five provide the believer with the perspective of eternal **peace**: "but peace shall be upon Israel." The Lord says there is no peace to the wicked, but peace shall be upon Israel.

Though the rod of the wicked oppress the people of God often in this world, it will not rest upon them forever. Jesus Christ said that "*in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33).

The believer can rest in a future expectation that this troubling day will pass and all things shall be made new. An eternal peace awaits the people of God. God provides this peace now already in the hearts of those who trust in Him. There is an eternal security that, like Mount Zion, cannot be removed but abides forever.

There is a peace that passes all understanding knowing that if God is for you, nothing can be against you. There is a peace in the heart knowing who God is as He surrounds you as the mountains. There is a peace knowing that nothing happens in your life outside of God's Divine will.

Draw near to the Lord and trust in Him alone. ①

Rev. B. VanLiere is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Langley, BC.

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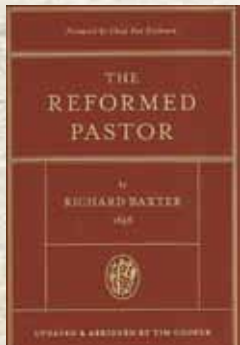
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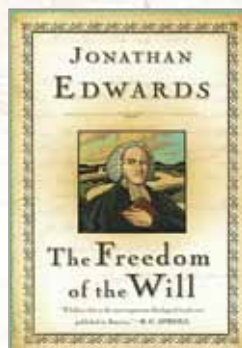


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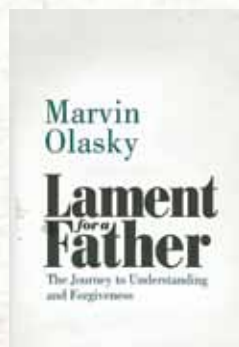
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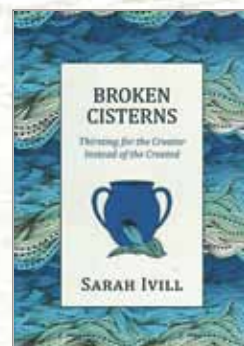
By Sarah Ivill

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A NEW GENERATION AND THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

“Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow after thee.” 1 Kings 19:20b.

God has shaken many things through COVID-19. Will God use it to thrust a new generation into the fields that are white and to be harvested (John 4:35)?

Though there are differences between the three-and-a-half-year drought in Elijah’s day and COVID-19 today, in both cases life as people knew it has been upended. Many who have been in the ministry during these last few tumultuous years have felt themselves very alone like Elijah. The Lord knows how weary some in ministry have felt, like Elijah lying under the juniper tree. Could it be that God would also raise up a new generation for ministry, as he did with Elisha and the school of the prophets in the later parts of Elijah’s ministry?

From Behind the Plow

Where do you think God would find a companion and successor for His lonely prophet, Elijah? At a prestigious school of the prophets, perhaps, or at a training school of the scribes? Perhaps someone who lived close to the temple in Jerusalem and knew all the activities there would be the best candidate? Surely it must be someone of good name and reputation, with sterling qualifications, if he were to follow in Elijah’s footsteps? But, no, God bypasses all the places that might seem logical to our human minds. His good pleasure has decided, as it most often does, on a much less likely person from a less likely place. God “calleteth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). And “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor. 1:26).

After the events at Mount Horeb, the prophet Elijah walked with determination north to Abel-Meholah, which means “Meadow of Dancing.” This fertile area is around midway between the Sea of Galilee in the north and the Dead Sea in the south, just west of the Jordan. This area is mentioned only a couple of other times in the Bible, and seems to have had little significance. It may have been relatively close to (perhaps 15-20 miles from) the region of Gilead, from which Elijah himself had come. Elisha’s father, Shaphat, was probably the owner of an extensive piece of property. We can assume that Shaphat, his wife, and Elisha were three of the 7000 Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

To be one of the 7000 is one thing, to be the successor of Elijah is another. Elisha would have thought: “My father is a farmer, and I am a farmer.” Elisha was used to the literal plow, except that for the last 3 or 4 years, the drought gave little reason to use it. On this particular day, he was at the end of the line of twelve yoke of oxen, overseeing their work. Much like the Galilean

fishermen, whom Jesus would call to follow Him during His earthly ministry, he no doubt had figured that he would live out his days close to nature, working in the sweat of his brow, sowing, planting, and harvesting the ground that would become his through the family line.

God alone determines how He will dispense His gifts and callings, and He often disposes of His plans in ways that humble our pride and lift the lowly. Who is to say that the next people in whom God will work savingly are not the people we have written off or overlook? Perhaps the country that you now think of as a heathen place, or even a nest of terrorists and other evil people, will soon see days of gospel light and truth. Perhaps God will call someone you now consider an enemy to be one of his own servants. Let us beware of letting our minds limit God's saving and calling work by our unbelief.

The Rough Mantle

What a surprise it must have been for Elisha to look up from his work and see a man walking across the fields toward him. As he came nearer, Elisha and the servants would have recognized him, for his trademark hairy garment would have given away his identity. Elijah was well known through this garment. Second Kings 1:8 records that, when some servants went back to the king with a message from a prophet whom they had encountered, the king asked them what the prophet had looked like. They answered: "He was a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," leading the king to reply: "It is Elijah the Tishbite." This hairy garment was not fine linen, much less royal clothing, but like what John the Baptist would wear, as he preached in the Spirit of Elijah. This garment was rough and scratchy, symbolizing the life of austerity to which this man was called. The gospel ministry does not lead to life of luxury. Instead, we may expect hardship, sweat, and tears. For many in our world today, the price of being a gospel minister is disrepute, imprisonment, and sometimes death.

Elijah continued walking, without saying so much as a word of explanation. However, this action spoke louder than words! Everyone knew what this meant. Elisha was to follow Elijah and train to take his place. He was to turn his back on everything he had known thus far and to follow this prophet to what perhaps would be his death, especially given that Ahab and Jezebel were still on the throne. How would Elisha explain that to his parents as he came walking in with a rough hairy garment around him?

The Gospel Call

Who would be guilty of refusing the call of God? Besides the calling to the ministry, there is the all-important gospel call that comes to all of us. As our Canons say (Head 3/4, Art 8): "As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him; namely, that all who are called should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him."

Scripture is honest with us that this call also is a call to self-denial and cross bearing. "Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me...." (Mark 8:34). The servant will not be greater than His Master (John 15:20). Consider the cross that Christ bore! He bore on His shoulders not a rough garment, but a rough-hewn cross. That cross symbolized His ministry, like the mantle did Elijah's. He is the crucified One.

The cross is not just what Christ bore. The cross is the place where we learn to die to ourselves and to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God. From out of Him, we learn to renounce what we have, do, and trust in, and lean only and wholly on God and God alone.

Saying Good-Bye

We read in verse 20 that Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah. He did not hesitate, but left the life he knew behind and ran after the man who was to be his mentor and friend. God's powerful call worked this obedience in him.

He asked for permission to go say goodbye to his parents. Was he dawdling here and trying to

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EDITORIAL


delay his departure? You may recall the man who told Christ he would follow him, but first wanted to say goodbye to his parents (Luke 9:61). Christ responded: “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (v. 62). This particular man did not really want to follow Christ, so he used his parents as an excuse. But that is not the case with Elisha. This is evidence of the obedience of his heart to God’s call. Elisha is already following Elijah, but he also feels an obligation to his parents, who have been his authorities up to this point. Elisha knew, one commentator writes, “That they must wonder at the sudden change ... and he was desirous to show them at least that his zeal for God had not diminished his regard for them.” His parents were giving up their son to the Kingdom of God, which, ultimately, is not loss, but gain.

Elijah also knew that Elisha would heed God’s call and was not afraid of letting Elisha go home. He did not lecture him on the dangers of indecision or anything like that, but wisely and confidently asked: “What have I done to thee?” as if to say: “Elisha, this call is not from me, but from God. You have to give an account to Him.”

Let us seek to be like Elisha and like our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom we read that, though He had to be about His Father’s business, He first was subject to His human father and mother (Luke 2:50-51). In obedience to the lesser authorities that God has placed in our lives, we learn something of how to serve the great Authority over all. When God works in our lives, He makes us love and respect authority around us, while submitting ultimately to God’s call.

A Life of Service

Elisha took the yoke of oxen, killed them, and gave to the people to eat. There was reason for rejoicing. The prophetic ministry would continue. God still called! Instead of plowing the physical soil, Elisha would plow the hearts of people. Instead of sowing the seed of corn and barley, he would sow the seed of the Word of God. Instead of harvesting grain for his barns, he would reap grain for heavenly barns. More than all this, God was his portion. The language of his life was now: “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps. 73:26).

Finally, we read: “And [he] went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.” Notice that Elisha began to serve. The ministry is not a life of grandeur and self-aggrandizement and fame. For years, Elisha would stay close to Elijah and do very common and ordinary things. He would take the form of a servant, as did none less than the Son of God (Phil. 2:7). Christ served by laying down His life for sinners, and out of Him, the next generation also will come and serve to the glory of Him who is now exalted with a name above every name. 

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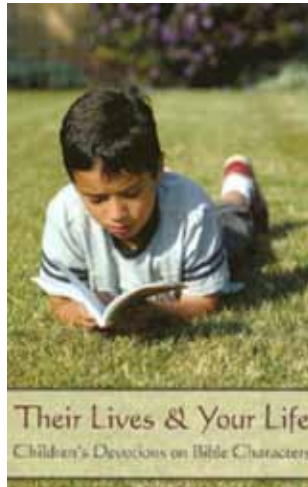
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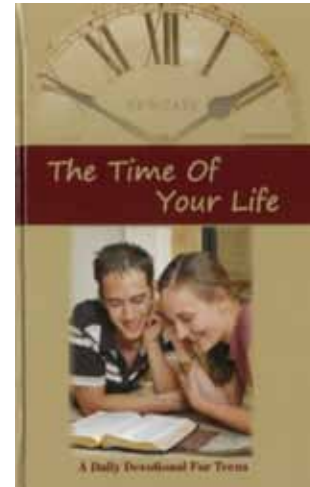
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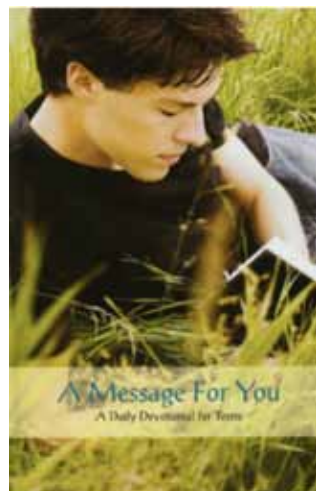
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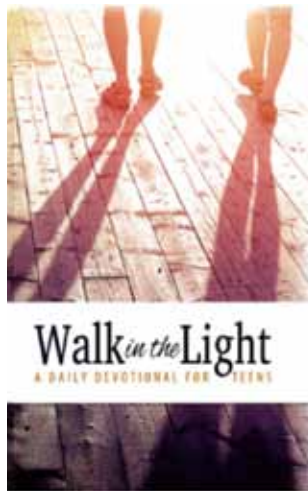
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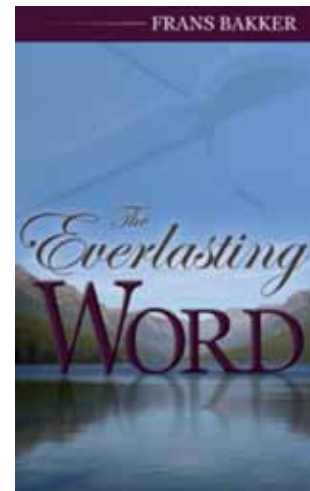
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PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (11) THE HALFWAY COVENANT (2)

Last month, we saw how the New England Puritans lowered the standards for church membership despite their conviction that their congregational churches comprised only born-again Christians. When fewer and fewer young people were able to testify to having experienced the new birth, the church faced the prospect of significantly dwindling membership. After a long and heated debate, they agreed to allow baptized but unconverted parents to have their children baptized, but to deny them access to the Lord's table until they could show evidence of their conversion. In this second installment, we will evaluate their Halfway Covenant "solution" and draw some lessons for today.

The Doctrinal Background to the Halfway Covenant

To understand the concept of a Halfway Covenant, we need to examine three emphases in early New England thinking that were directly responsible for the problems that led to its adoption. These emphases were:

1. The significance of the church covenant and congregational form of church government;
2. The requirements for church membership;
3. The distinction between the external and internal aspects of the covenant of grace.

Congregationalism, Anabaptism, and the Church Covenant

Congregationalism represents a significant departure from classic Reformed covenant theology. Peter Y. DeJong has called it a Reformed-Anabaptist hybrid. The Anabaptists had followed Luther out of the Roman Catholic Church, but later felt Luther had not gone far enough in rejecting her false teaching, especially in connection with the sacraments. They rejected infant baptism, organized themselves into believers-only churches, and developed the concept of the so-called "church covenant."¹

This concept included:

- 1 believers' baptism as the qualification for church membership;
- 2 autonomous local churches independent of each other;
- 3 churches constituted only by baptized experiential believers.

These and some other features of Anabaptism influenced the English Puritan movement, not only in separatist circles (some of whom became Baptists), but also among those who stayed in the Anglican Church and adopted a congregational form of church government. Initially, both separatist and non-separatist Puritans practiced infant baptism. But as time went on, the idea of a pure church of visible

saints only pushed a significant number toward being credobaptist churches in New England.

One way Anabaptist ideas gained influence in England was through the many Anabaptists who fled the persecution raging in Holland during the Spanish-Dutch war in the 1520s and '30s. Many of them settled in the south-eastern part of England where they met and influenced especially Separatist Puritans.²

Anabaptism's influence on the English can also be traced to Puritans who later sought refuge in Holland. Most of these refugees were followers of Robert Browne, a father of Congregationalism. Many of these Brownists met Mennonites who had earlier renounced infant baptism. Some joined Mennonite congregations and began to question the scripturalness of paedobaptism. Although they continued to practice infant baptism for some time, they increasingly gave this sacrament a place and function in the life of the church that did not really fit the Congregationalist model.

Requirements for Church Membership

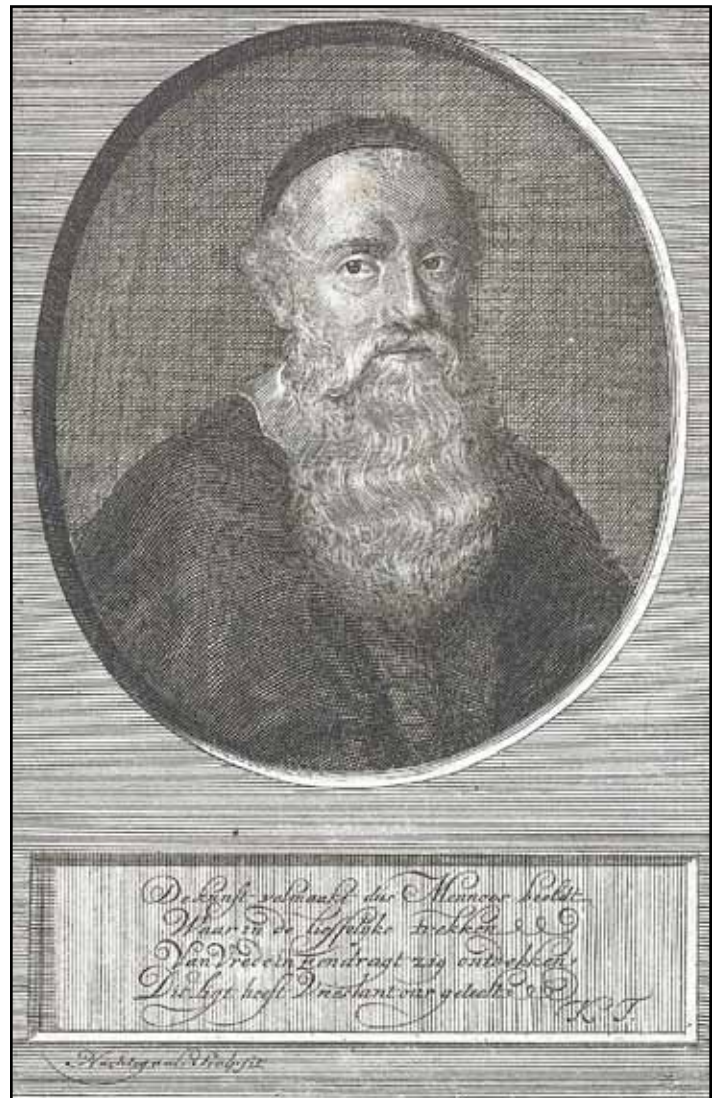
Directly related to the above was the issue of requirements for church membership and admission to the Lord's Supper. Because the New England Puritans believed in a "believers-only" church, membership was, by definition, restricted to those who could produce evidence that they were regenerated. During the early years of the New England settlement, the churches followed the relatively low admission standards of their Puritan counterparts in the Church of England: a credible profession of faith and an inoffensive life.

This changed when men like the influential Thomas Hooker decided to elevate the criteria for church membership. By the time they moved to America, they had come to the conviction, through their study of Scripture and contacts with Anabaptists, that the true church is made up of "visible saints." Having finally the opportunity to start new churches, they decided to do what they had not been able to do in Old England. The church, they believed, was to be built on the model of Solomon's temple. "The stones that were to be laid in that temple were squared and made ready before they were laid in the building; [thus, in a similar way] no members were to be received into the church of Christ but such as were rough-hewn, and squared and fitted to lie close and level to Christ and to his members (1 Kings 6:7)."³

Reactions from European Theologians

The new, rigorous public examinations drew sharp criticism from Puritans in England and like-minded Christians in the Netherlands. One Dutch Reformed minister, William Appolonius, wrote to his New England colleagues: "Is no one to be admitted into the communion of the external visible church unless he is endowed with the real internal holiness of regeneration and with justifying faith in Christ? Must such a person undergo a strict examination?"⁴

The New England preachers replied that they used charitable



discretion in examining candidates for church membership. They pointed to the Cambridge Declaration (1649) which states that

...the weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those who desire to be admitted into the church, because weak Christians, if sincere, have the essence of the faith, repentance, and holiness which are required in church members. Moreover, these weak Christians have most need of the church's ordinances for the confirmation of their faith and their growth in grace.⁵

While this statement reflects a rather mild approach to judging the sincerity and reality of a person's conversion, church leaders still believed they had the authority and duty to probe a candidate's heart for signs of grace. From Scotland came the following observation by the Presbyterian James Bannerman:

Historically there has been a fundamental difference of opinion between Presbyterians on the one hand and Independents and Baptists on the other hand when

it comes to dealing with the issue of qualifications for church membership. With Independents [including Congregationalists and Baptists] a saving belief in Christ is the only title to admission to the Christian society; and the candidate for admission is bound to bring with him at least credible evidence to prove that such a title belongs to him, and that he has been effectively called unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. With Presbyterians on the other hand, an intelligent profession of belief in the Gospel is the title to admission to Church membership; and the candidate for admission is only required to show that his conduct and life are in accordance with and accredit his profession.⁶

The problem with the Independent system of church membership, according to Bannerman, is that it does not distinguish between the invisible and visible Church of Christ. “They believe that the visible church is identical to the invisible church and that the only way to ensure that it remains so is to restrict church membership to those who can produce evidence of their election and regeneration.”⁷ The Church, however, is not competent to judge what lives in a candidate’s heart. “She does have the authority to judge his outward profession and conduct, but when the judgment is transferred from the external profession and character to the inward conviction and experience of the candidate...it is plain that this is a task which the Church is utterly incompetent and unqualified to discharge.”⁸

Internal and External Covenant

Finally, there is the issue of an internal and external covenant. Puritans in general, and New England Puritans in particular, believed that the promises of the covenant of grace were not addressed to all who were in that covenant in the same way. They distinguished between unconditional or absolute promises made to the elect and conditional promises made to the unconverted. These latter promises involved the privilege of being cared for by the church, the use of the means of grace, which under the blessing of God might result in faith and repentance as evidence of election and the new birth.

Until such evidence of grace was forthcoming, one was viewed as being only in the external covenant. This had great implications for baptism and its value for those receiving this sacrament.

The Puritan View of the Sacraments

Although the English Puritans were in basic agreement with the teachings of the early sixteenth century Reformers, especially on the doctrine of salvation, their sacramental theology differed in some ways from that of the continental reformers.

Whereas Calvin viewed the essence of baptism as God’s sincere promise of salvation to all the recipients of this sacrament, the Puritans drew a sharp distinction between the outward administration of baptism and the inward reality of faith. Their view is to be seen against the background of the Church of England and its views of the sacraments. The Church of England over-estimated the efficacy of the sacrament and taught a kind of baptismal regeneration. She regarded this sacrament as essential to salvation because it was thought to remove original sin.

The Puritans rightly rejected this notion of baptismal regeneration. They were more concerned with the work of the Spirit manifested in the life of faith than with sacraments – especially baptism. To them, preaching was the important thing as the means whereby God saves sinners.⁹ Puritan sacramental theology was characterized by this sharp distinction between the external administration of baptism and the internal work of the Holy Spirit. Increasingly, infant baptism was seen as problematic and the main reason for continuing the practice was the fact that Christ commanded it.

Much of the discussion centered on the meaning of baptism as a seal. Calvin believed baptism sealed God’s covenant promises to all its recipients. While the early Puritans agreed with him, they soon began to wrestle with the issue of the relationship between election, covenant, and baptism. If salvation ultimately rests on unconditional election, how can God, in baptism, promise salvation to those who will ultimately perish?

Although they tried, they were not able to harmonize the benefits of the sacraments with the inscrutable divine decrees. Especially for the New England Puritans who held to a “gathered”

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church comprising only true believers, this became an unsolvable dilemma. They wanted to retain infant baptism, but the logic of their system forced them to restrict the administration of this sacrament to infants of true believers. Only such infants were in covenant with God and might be looked upon as objects of electing grace, their baptism being a seal on inward, saving grace.¹⁰

By adopting the *Halfway Covenant*, they compromised their position and allowed unconverted but baptized parents to have their children baptized. Yet their baptism could no longer be viewed as a seal on inward grace, but only on the conditional promises of an outward covenant.

All this could have been avoided if they had simply stayed with Calvin's view that all children of the covenant are to be baptized, not based on inward grace, real or assumed, but on the objective promises of the covenant. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* states in Lord's Day 27: Infants are to be baptized "since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult."

These well-meant promises, however, are not realized automatically, as a matter of course. Although all covenant children are recipients of the promises, they must learn to plead those promises before God, asking His Holy Spirit to fulfill them in the way of faith and repentance.

This approach was not followed by the New England divines, at least not consistently. By stressing the necessity of marks of grace and holiness, they lost sight of the objective promises on which sinners should be encouraged to plead. The preaching of these godly divines did point sinners to Christ as an able and willing Saviour, but too often they neglected to include baptism as an integral part of God's way of bringing covenant children to faith. They did not sufficiently realize that, in baptism, whether administered to adults or infants, the Triune God places upon all recipients of this sacrament His sign and seal as pledges of His good will and grace toward us (Belgic Confession, Article 33).

This emphasis of our confessions on the objective character of the baptismal promises is not intended to down-play the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in appropriating these promises. Rather, its purpose is to show *how* the Spirit applies salvation to us. He works faith in us by the hearing of the Word preached and strengthens it by the same Word preached and by the use of the holy sacraments (*Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. 25, Q.&A. 65).¹¹

Endnotes

- 1 Peter Y. DeJong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, 64.
- 2 De Jong, *Covenant Idea*, 67.
- 3 Quoted by David Boorman, "The Halfway Covenant," in *The Puritan Experiment in the New World*, Westminster Conference 1976, 75.
- 4 Boorman, "Halfway Covenant," 75.

- 5 Cambridge Platform, ed. Peter Murdy, 10:3.
- 6 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1:74.
- 7 Bannerman, *Church*, 76.
- 8 Bannerman, *Church*, 78.
- 9 E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (1974), 47.
- 10 C. Graafland, "Het Puritanisme," in *Rondom De Doopvont*, 330.

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"Behold, children are an heritage from the Lord." Ps. 127:3



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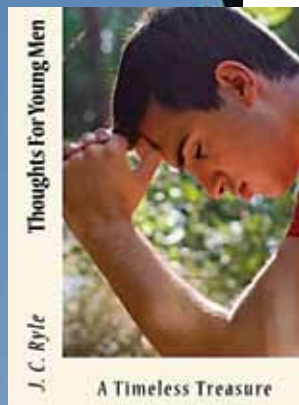
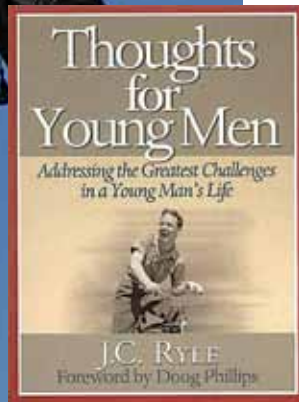
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PASTORAL ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING HOME



An estimated 80% of all young people raised in a Christian home will abandon Christianity when they leave home for university. This is a pandemic far more serious than others we have seen in recent years, though little is said (and still too little is being done) about it. The university is often blamed for that statistic, and there can be no doubt that the left-wing standards of such secular institutions do contribute enormously to the problem.

The university, however, is not the only contributing factor. Even many young people raised in Christian homes, young people who never go to university, turn their backs on the message and influence of the church when they leave home to enter the workforce. Clearly it is not hitting the mark to say that parents must then be to blame. I am not suggesting that parents cannot be part of the problem – sometimes they are – and even the group dynamic within the home may need to be recalibrated through biblical counselling to make it work more effectively. Nor would it be right to suggest that those same young people should never have left home when they did. Some may leave home before they are really ready to do so, that is true. That in itself can be a recipe for disaster, but our offspring are created by God to leave home at some point as part of His plan for them. It can seriously hinder their further development if parents try to prevent that.

Yet, regardless of these contributing factors, the major fault of our younger folk abandoning the faith when they leave home rests with those young people themselves. Let's not try to cover for them or consider them to be helpless victims. Like the rest of us, they are fully responsible for what they do. This article is not meant to address parents with alternative suggestions for schooling, but to alert young people to the dangers ahead of them, to encourage them to get on track before then, and to stay focused. Are you young and about to leave home? Here are three things you need to know:

(1) Let's be very clear about this, that those who abandon the faith were never converted in the first place. Why, then, would we be surprised by their falling away? Should we not expect it? If you are an unbeliever, regardless of your age and circumstance, do not rely on the culture, or the moral standards of society, your own conscience, or even your Christian friends to keep you in check, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:21). The plight of the unregenerate soul is that, apart from the grace of God, the pull of worldly and wicked ways will always be stronger than any supposed drawing power of living a holy life. Are you an unbeliever about to leave home for the first time? You need to know that you are embarking on a very dangerous journey, and that, without the Lord Jesus Christ in your life, it cannot end well!

I do not mean to discourage anyone, whether the young or their parents, by drawing attention to this first point. Instead, it should signal why we in God's covenant community of the church need to pray fervently for our young people and to give them every encouragement to commit to Christ both early in life and with everything they have to give. Something that has proved to be very beneficial to many young people, something that churches and parents alike ought to

consider, especially for teens, is the Christian camp or conference. Such retreats, even for just a few days, have often demonstrated great effectiveness in challenging younger folk to become disciples of Christ. If you, my young friend, have an opportunity to attend one or more of these, be sure you do so. And do not neglect the preached Word which is God's main means of conversion.

(2) One of the distinguishing marks of the present generation is immaturity. This distinction is spreading and becoming increasingly apparent as time goes on. This is another reason why our young people are turning away from Christianity. I remember J.I. Packer said in an interview that adolescence is no longer over with the passing of the teen years, but now lasts for far too many people well into their forties. He was right. A byproduct of this expanding trend of immaturity is an attitude of entitlement, an emphasis on rights over responsibilities, and the socialist notion that government should supply all our needs so that we will not have to work hard in order to get ahead or to improve our lot. Not only does this focus destroy incentive and demolish the strong work ethic of previous generations, it also leaves those so affected apathetic toward others and disinterested in planning even their own future.

But from what does such immaturity and carelessness of thought arise? It springs, in part, from an unregenerate heart. Who among unbelievers in this self-absorbed generation is not going to think that way? It also comes from the material prosperity which we have so long enjoyed. As so many have said over the course of time, "We have had it too good for too long!" That is a fundamental fact of our present existence. We have, indeed, had it too good for too long.

The first half of the twentieth century was plagued with poverty and war. It was a time when people had to work hard and the minds of many were consumed with the bigger issues of time and eternity. For a very long time, however, we have experienced virtually nothing of those same hardships. The early years of the twenty-first century have unleashed upon us a new order of technology and all the gadgets of an easier life. This is a very different world from that of our grandparents and we need to recognize that.

Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament makes it clear that a short period of prosperity, particularly after times of severe affliction, can make God's people thankful for what they have and eager to work. But an extended period of prosperity – when we are inclined to ignore our Creator and forget how much we need Him – will almost certainly lead to taking everything for granted, culminating in laziness and every kind of self-serving debauchery. People operating out of such a worldview do not make wise, carefully conceived decisions, nor do they give any thought to living their life for the Lord.


To everyone living such an irresponsible life, who contributes nothing to the wellbeing of society, but is satisfied to be fully dependent on others, using virtue signaling as a means of easing their own conscience, let it be said that it is time to grow up and to put behind you all such childish ways. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth. Fear God and keep His command-

ments (Ecclesiastes 12).

(3) In addition to the points above, there is still one more reason why so many church-grown young people turn away from the call of God in the gospel when they leave home. They suddenly find themselves with so many new and exciting things to think about, that the bigger issues of one's life and purpose can easily be cast aside. The bigger issues can even be utterly discounted in order to deal with what appears to be the more immediate and pressing issues of the moment. As a result, they never go back to those bigger issues, the real priorities of our existence, but simply allow themselves to become absorbed by this new life and its ways into which they have suddenly been catapulted. Add to that the fact that the brain is not fully developed until age 25. Most students and apprentices have never been properly trained to think through any issues properly – only to write papers and to summarize in print what has been dictated to them in class. Thus, it soon becomes clear why it is that, with little or no thought, they are able to turn their backs on what they have mistakenly come to perceive as the old-fashioned and now outdated practices of their parents.

Here especially, I would like to plead with our younger folk to think very carefully about the bigger issues of life and death, of time and eternity. Only when you do so will those seemingly more pressing issues of the moment come into better, more accurate perspective. Nothing, my dear young friend, is more important for you than your knowing God, which you can do only through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no better life than to serve Him and be completely devoted to Him. If you are an unbeliever, the time to think through these things, to review the Scriptures line upon line and precept upon precept, is now. If you put it off, what makes you think that you will be more disposed to do it later? Is not your lack of interest today an indication of an even more hardened heart tomorrow?

Consider the call of God in the gospel and what little time you have to hear it (Isaiah 55:6-7). Consider what is promised in that call and the only alternative (John 3:35-36). Consider what it is to be "in Christ" and the security of all those who are (Eph. 1:3-14 - Can you name the five blessings to every believer which cannot be taken from him mentioned in this passage?) Do not let your thinking of God be subservient to your plans for the future, but commit all to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23), who works all things together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), and seek His will for your life! "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5,6).

Let me recommend to you the booklet, *Thoughts for Young Men*, by J.C. Ryle. It is also for old men and young women. In fact, I cannot think of anyone in any demographic for whom it would not be profitable. Though it was written more than a century ago, this booklet is still of great practical value today! 

Rev. Tom Aicken is a Free Reformed pastor emeritus residing in Langley, BC.



COMMITTEE UPDATE:

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Theological education has been a concern for our churches throughout their existence. The Theological Education Committee played a vital role when our students were being trained at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Christian Reformed Seminary (Calvin Seminary), and the Canadian Reformed Seminary. This committee provided ecclesiastical oversight, instruction, and mentorship to students who studied in environments which were not Free Reformed. Since 1998 we have been involved in the theological education provided by the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and have been encouraged to consider it “our seminary.” We are grateful for what the Lord is doing at and through this seminary. It raises the question: Does the Theological Education Committee still play an important role? Allow me to share several important aspects of its work:

1. **Mandate:**

The committee is needed for the churches to carry out what they confess in Church Order Articles 19-20

Article 19: Training for the Ministry of the Word. The churches, whenever necessary, shall put forth every effort to ensure that there may be students who are being trained in theology and that these, if necessary, are financially supported. (See C.O. Vol.2 Supplement No. C-7, 8, and 9)

Article 20: Theological Training. The churches shall take care of the theological training for the ministry of the Word, the regulation of which shall be made by the Synod.

In harmony with this primary mandate to provide the best training of our Free Reformed theological students and in distinction from it, is the mandate to be involved in the management of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, which has as its vision the provision of godly, sound, Reformed, experiential men for ministry in the world-wide church (Acts of

Synod 2012, article 9).

Thus, this committee, like all synodical committees, serves the welfare of the denomination and is also under the authority of the churches as their representatives gather and make decisions at synods.

2. **Admissions:**

Dutch Secession churches have always been careful to guard and maintain faithful ordained ministry. As a result, prior to men being accepted for studies preparing for ministry, they are examined by deputies of the churches. This examination is focused on a man’s state of grace, sense of call, and gifts for ministry. The committee receives a letter from the applicant, an attest concerning him from his consistory, and his academic transcripts. With an hour’s preparation, the applicant is asked give a meditation on a text and interviewed. This interview is an important one. At times there is a little discussion and great unanimity; other times there is a general sense of being pulled in two directions. The committee recognizes this interview is not to provide the stamp of approval on one’s calling nor is the criteria whether one is ready to be a pastor. Instead there is to be sufficient evidence to believe that God may be calling him to pastoral ministry and that with further preparation he could be equipped to engage in it. The committee then recommends to synod that a man be accepted as a student for Free Reformed ministry.

3. **Oversight:**

Between Synod’s acceptance of a student and its declaration of him as a candidate for ministry, the committee exercises oversight over the student. This involves meeting with the student at least twice per year. Recently the committee decided to ap-



WILHELMUS À BRAKEL ON THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

Below is an outline of how Wilhelmus à Brakel taught about the call to the ministry.

Internal Call

Regarding the necessary internal call to the ministry, he writes, “An extraordinary, divine declaration is not an element of this internal commission. God does not do this, or does so only on very rare occasions, and thus one need not wait for this” (vol. 2, p. 121).

He lists the following as elements of an internal call:

1. Knowledge of the office — what it consists of and requires of us in abilities and example
2. Aptitude for this work
 - a. Fundamental knowledge of divine truth
 - b. Experience of divine truths in the heart
3. An extraordinary love for
 - a. Christ
 - b. The church
 - c. Souls
4. Willing to deny all that is of the world
 - a. Honor
 - b. Material goods
 - c. Even life itself
5. A great desire for the work (1 Tim. 3:1)
 - a. Continual stirrings to give oneself to the Lord
 - b. Concern about whether or not one is called
 - c. Anxiety when ulterior motives are perceived
 - d. Struggles with heaviness of the work and sense of inability
 - e. Nevertheless the stirrings (see a) will overcome all else, helping to clear the sincerity of the desire before the Lord

External Call

The following considerations are given by à Brakel regarding the external call by means of the church:

1. This calling is also not extraordinary in nature
2. The church always retains this authority to call, even calling men from her midst and initiating them into this service.
3. Examination of prospective ministers by the church
 - a. Performed by elders gathered at classical or synodical meetings
 - b. Examination of life, doctrine, and ability was made (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Tim. 3:10)
 - c. Successful completion of examination led to commission

Examination of Call

Brakel’s questions for examination (or self-examination) of prospective ministers:

1. Have I been sent of God, or did I run myself?
2. Do I know what pertains to this office?
3. Was I convinced that I had some aptitude for this as far as external knowledge is concerned, and am I likewise spiritually acquainted with the experience of:
 - a. Regeneration
 - b. Faith
 - c. Hope
 - d. Love
 - e. Holiness
 - f. God’s dealings with the soul
 - g. Spiritual warfare
 - h. The various conditions of the soul in order to bring forth old and new things out of the treasure of my heart to address every-

Continued on page 19

point a mentor from the committee to each student to maintain contact through the year. Feedback from the churches and the seminary is also received to enable this oversight to function.

Students proceed through four phases. The first phase (of usually one year) is the “probationary phase,” when a man is accepted and begins his studies. The second phase (usually another year) is the “under care phase,” when a man’s development is sufficiently satisfactory for him to stay in the program. The third phase (usually years 3-4) is the “Licensure phase,” when he has permission to speak an edifying word in the congregations. The final phase is the “candidacy phase,” when he is made available for call by congregations. Certain requirements are to be met before proceeding to the next phase. The committee plays an important role especially regarding assessing preparedness for speaking an edifying word.

4. Training:

The denomination has been pleased with the instruction given at PRTS but also realizes that its degree is designed to prepare men of a wide range of backgrounds for ministry. As a result certain more distinctive aspects of the Free Reformed Churches are not covered. Thus, synod has adopted a system of TEC examinations (actually “colloquium doctum” or “friendly discussions”) on various topics such as Heidelberg Catechism preaching, Experiential preaching, Reformed worship, Confession of faith, and familiarity with the Reformed Confessions. The committee also assigns certain courses for the students to take such as Rev. VanderMeyden’s excellent seminars on Free Reformed Church Order. A further aspect of training is its review and critique of sermons by students. Often these critiques are more detailed than what is provided at Seminary due to the greater ecclesiastical focus. The last aspect of training is the facilitation of internships in local congregations. As pastors, we benefit from listening to others critique sermons, realizing our sermons are still so deficient as well. A recent Synod adopted a plan for having students engage in much more extensive internships lasting around a half year. The need was felt to give students more practical experience in

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ministry prior to ordination. These ways of training are important for student formation.

5. Recommendations to Synod.

Throughout this process, the committee recognizes its role as servants of synod. Thus it seeks to be transparent with Synod concerning its activities, and seek approval for changes to policy, and make recommendations to Synod concerning students. The largest step is to recommend a man for the Synodical candidacy exam. This recommendation indicates the committee is sufficiently pleased with what it observes in a student to believe he may be examined, but should not be seen as making the candidacy examination a mere rubber stamp. This examination is an important part of church life and often a highlight of synod. Synod then has opportunity to recognize the way God has given a man grace, a sense of calling, and gifts that could be used in ministry. The crowning confirmation of that call is when a man receives and accepts a call from a local congregation.

The committee continues to engage in self-reflection on how it can better serve its mandate in dialogue with synod, students, and the seminary. Such discussions can be robust, yet within the context of mutual respect, for which we are grateful. The committee is thankful for the support of the churches in the ongoing prayerful and financial support of the training of students for the ministry and commends this work to your continued support. ①

Rev. D. Kranendonk served as a member of the Theological Education Committee until his appointment as professor, which made him an advisor to the committee.

PASTORS ACCORDING TO GOD'S HEART:

A PROMISE TO PLEAD

In Jeremiah 3:15, the LORD promises, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." Often during pastoral vacancies, this promise has been read, reflected on, and pleaded. Is that fitting?

A Surprising Address

Too often we take God's Word as a box of promises out of which to select a fitting one for our situation without reflecting on the context in which a certain promise was made. This promise recorded by Jeremiah concerning pastors is set within the context of the contrast between Judah and Israel. Over a hundred years earlier, Israel had been defeated and scattered by the Assyrians. In the present, Judah appeared to be serving the Lord under the rule of Josiah, the great reforming King. So we might expect this promise to be given to Judah because Judah was faithful and Israel was unfaithful.

However, God declares that Judah's sin is worse than Israel's because Judah did not learn from God's judgments on Israel and did not turn with all their heart to God, despite their many gospel privileges. God then directs His call to the North. As a husband who established a covenant bond with them, He calls out to Israel, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful...only acknowledge thine iniquity...and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors..." (3:12-15)

God's mercy is so great that He calls those long hardened in sin to repentance and promises them blessed pastors within the earshot of a deceitfully worshipping Judah. What a great encouragement this is for those who confess they do not deserve to ever know God's mercy, belong to His church, or enjoy faithful pastoring. What a warning to those who presume upon their privileges while their hearts are far from God. Let this chapter banish all sense of entitlement to God-given pastors since it demonstrates they are a gift of sheer grace to the most undeserving. Let this chapter also banish all coldness toward shepherd-less sheep around us who have been without faithful pastoring, for this chapter demonstrates God's great mercy toward exactly such.

A Rich Gift

God promises to give "pastors." The pastor, or literally shepherd, is a well-known image in Scripture. A shepherd is responsible for the well-being of sheep and thus called to provide for, guide, and protect them. This image was used especially for kings as ones responsible for their subjects as sheep. Ultimately, God presents Himself as the great shepherd of Israel.

Since God is the great Shepherd, the promise that God will give pastors "according to mine heart" is so significant. What tongue can express what is in the heart of the God of infinite glory, holiness, love, grace, wisdom, power, righteousness, and faithfulness? What a pattern His heart is for pastors' hearts!

"Pastors according to mine heart" know so in part and yet are concerned about what pleases God's heart. Rather than walking according to what pleases their own sinful heart or the hearts of sheep, they minister according to what pleases God's heart. They desire to minister according to God's Word as the revelation of what pleases Him. In their ministries, they desire to reflect the heart of God. He shepherds His sheep with all His heart. His heart is filled with loving care, faithful attention, burning zeal, and tender mercy toward His sheep, unlike the selfish false shepherds, or the many hirelings, who care not for the flock.

God says He will give such pastors. Where does He find them? He cannot find anyone who is like this. He saw that every man's heart was so opposite of His heart and that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). His eyes could only rest with satisfaction on one pastor, the *Pastor Bonus* ("the Good Shepherd"). David, who is called a "man after God's own heart," was only a faint foreshadowing of his great Son, who is also the beloved of God's heart. All the heart of the Father is toward Him and all this Shepherd's heart is toward His Father. Their hearts beat as one; their wills align as one; their desires flow as one; their love is one. Christ, the good Shepherd, is the very expression of God's pastoral heart. He displayed that heart especially in doing what none other could


Continued from page 17

one according to his condition, and particularly to give everyone publicly and privately his portion by way of personal experience, and to speak from heart to heart

4. Do I have a special love to preach Christ, to be instrumental to the conversion of souls, and to promote the welfare of the church?
5. Was I continually stirred up in my soul to accept this work?
6. Has it been my concern whether or not the Lord has sent me, and have I prayed much in order to know this?
7. Have I at times been desirous not to be engaged in this work, considering the magnitude of this task and my inability?
8. Were those desires to draw back repeatedly conquered by love for this work, or was I frequently put at ease and confirmed in my intention?
9. Have I been troubled by ulterior motives which time and again disappeared by perceiving my sincere motive in the presence of the Lord?
10. Did I perceive a frame of heart by which I was willing to deny myself by parting with material goods, honor and my life for the Lord Jesus and His church? Or did I only pursue honor and prestige, the acquisition of material goods by which to improve my temporal circumstances, and which outside of this office, would have been poor and insignificant?
11. Had I advanced in my studies to such a degree that I [simply judged that I] of necessity had to proceed?
12. Did I ever really examine myself concerning these matters, or did I merely run without such self-examination?

Qualifications for the Ministry

Brakel lists the following as qualifications for the ministry:

1. Learning (2 Tim. 3:15; Mat. 13:52; 1 John 1:1, 3)
 - a. Hebrew and Greek most essential; Latin, helpful
 - b. Knowledge of philosophy or natural wisdom is helpful (liberal arts education)
 - c. Thorough knowledge of theology an absolute requirement (1 Tim. 4:15)
 - d. Wisdom in using both kinds of knowledge and an aptitude in presenting it in a manner beneficial to others
 - e. Thorough study of Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13)
 - f. Considerable personal experience of religion through the work of the Holy Ghost
2. Apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2)
3. Grave, but not pretentious, surly, stern, nor immature
4. Excel in love for Christ, His cause, and His sheep; for the congregation's spiritual welfare, resulting in much prayer for them (1 Thess. 3:10)
5. Self-denial — a willingness to sacrifice all for the Lord (Acts 20:24; 21:13)
6. Diligence (see 1 Tim. 3:1-2) due to the weight and multiplicity of his duties
7. Be an example (Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Tim. 4:12) 

Taken from The Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, *Academic Catalogue*, Appendix 1: The Call to the Ministry.

For further reflection on calling to the ministry see:

- Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 2, ch. 27.
- Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*.
- Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*.
- Pastor Albert N. Martin, "A Call to the Ministry" (5 part series available on www.sermonaudio.com).

do: laying down His life for His sheep to redeem them from death and give them life. He also rose from the dead to be the living Shepherd today.

Through this one good Pastor, God finds sinners with hearts full of enmity and selfishness, shows them His glory, breaks their hearts, and rescues them from sin and death. He also restores them to Himself to know His pastoral heart of mercy and guides them in His way. In this way of leading sinners to know His heart, He also equips those whom he calls to be pastors according to His heart. His Spirit causes something of what is in His heart to be reflected in their hearts and lives as they minister. As they learn more of His great grace to themselves in their guilt, His tender compassion to themselves in their neediness, His steadfast faithfulness to themselves in their waywardness, His zeal for holiness amid their remaining sinfulness, He equips to pastor others according to His heart.

What a precious promise full of grace this is: "I will give you pastors according to my heart." This is a divine "I will," which He powerfully fulfills as the faithful God. He has ordained that His flock be shepherded through pastors. His heart of mercy toward His flock provides these means of His care. Let us turn this promise into thanksgiving for the ways in which He has fulfilled this promise and turn this promise into petitions for Him to continue to equip current pastors and call others to serve as such.


A Blessed Task

God's gift of pastors according to His heart is His means to "feed ... with knowledge and understanding." The word "feed" has the sense of doing the general work of a shepherd. The point is such will be pastors not only in name but also in practice. Knowing the heart of the divine Pastor equips them to do the work of a pastor in all its breadth. This involves proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, showing personal care to individuals, and exercising discipline within the flock.

This feeding "with knowledge and understanding" means this work will be done with clear knowledge and pastoral wisdom. Knowing the divine Shepherd leads into the knowledge of what He reveals in His Word and the wisdom to discern how to apply that Word in all aspects of pastoral ministry.

In turn, this pastoral ministry will feed with the truth of God in order to lead the flock (further) into spiritual knowledge and understanding. God's Word is the shepherd's staff of correction, his rod of defense, his ointment of healing, his waters of refreshing, and pastures of nourishment. Shepherds according to God's heart cannot but shepherd according to God's Word.

The implication of this promise is that there will be flocks to be shepherded by pastors. Who make up these flocks? The promise is addressed first to long-standing Israelite idolators who are now called to return to the Lord with the reassurance of his mercy. Second, verse 18 tells us that "in those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel." Judah will also be part of this flock. Third, God promises in verse 17: "All the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart." Idolatrous covenant breakers, hypocritical covenant keepers, and outright heathen will flow together to the Lord, know His mercy, and enjoy His shepherding through pastors according to His heart.

Is this text fitting then for vacant churches to plead? Yes, and not only them, but for all to plead. In this promise, God promises to continue to do what He has done especially since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He will gather sinners into His church, give His church pastors, and feed sheep through them. What a merciful heart He has! May His mercy humble us and fill us with a longing to see this passage continue to be fulfilled. 

Dr. D. Kranendonk



A CLARION CALL FOR MORE

Students for the Ministry

One of the great needs of the church today (including evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches) is the need for more ministers of the gospel. Our denomination – the Free Reformed Churches – is no exception to this. Only a few years ago, we had the fewest vacancies and the greatest number of ministers in the history of our denomination. But that is now no longer the case. In fact, with Rev. H. Overduin scheduled to become emeritus in January 2022 and with the departure of Rev. I. MacLeod to the Tillsonburg HRC, Rev. W. Klaver to the CGK in the Netherlands, and Dr. D. Kranendonk to PRTS, and with the addition of a new congregation in Picture Butte, Alberta (a daughter church of the Monarch congregation), soon we will have no less than seven vacancies (Hamilton, Dundas, Bornholm, Grand Rapids, Monarch, Picture Butte, and Calgary).

As troubling as this is, it should not surprise us. The church has always suffered from a shortage of ministers. In Matt 9:35-38, we read how the Lord Jesus “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers *are* few.”

These verses are astounding. During the ministry of the Lord Jesus, the kingdom of heaven had reached its zenith. Countless multitudes were following Jesus. There never was a more prosperous time for the church. The harvest was plentiful, but...the labourers were few! Such is still the case today.

Recognizing this, at its recent meeting, the Theological Education Committee of our churches, deeply concerned about the shortage of ministers in our denomination and our need for more students for the ministry, discussed this matter and decided to lay this need before the churches by means of this open letter. We are asking you to do two things:

1. Pray

After our Lord observed that the labourers are few, He (thankfully) did not leave us to ourselves. He told us what to do about it (verse 38): “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.” The Lord of the harvest is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is called the Lord of the harvest because the field in which the crop is growing belongs to Him. What is more, He is the one who, by His Holy Spirit, planted the seed of the Word and caused it to grow, producing a plentiful harvest. The point is, the ultimate solution to the shortage of ministers is not to launch a recruiting campaign (as is done in some denominations). It is simply to pray for more.

Will you do that?

Make no mistake: only the Lord of the harvest can call and equip men to do this work. Since that is so, let us pray – privately, in our homes, and in our churches – that the Lord would work in the hearts of our young men, filling them with a love for Him and for His church and a burning desire and compunction to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Let us also pray that He would call such men and send them out and use them mightily in the conversion of sinners and the upbuilding of His church to His glory. The shortage of ministers in the church can only be remedied by prayer. Therefore, let us pray. For the harvest is plentiful and the labourers are few.

2. Hold before your young men who possess the necessary gifts and graces the need for more ministers and the glorious calling of the ministry of the Word.

Some might think we should not be so proactive. After all, the call to the ministry must come from God. If God wants a man in the ministry, He will call him into the ministry.

This is true. But the Lord also uses means, and often the means He uses when it comes to the call to the ministry are His own people.

In a sermon entitled “The Duty of the Church To Take Measures for Providing for an Able and Faithful Ministry,” which



Continued on page 22

INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT CHRIS MOURIK

*Would you be willing to answer briefly several questions and provide a picture of your dear family?
Here are some questions:*



1 Please give a brief introduction of your family and background.

I was born in Tiel, the Netherlands and came to Alberta, Canada in 1995 with my parents and two sisters. Connie was born in Fort Macleod, Alberta, and lived in southern Alberta until we moved to Grand Rapids. We met for the first time in 2009 when mutual friends met to practice for a Word and Deed softball tournament. At this time I was going to Lethbridge College for a two-year diploma in Criminal Justice and Connie had just finished her training to be a hairdresser. In 2011, we got married and have been blessed with three sons and one daughter: Jesse (9), Connor (7), Olivia (4), Tyson (1). Before going to seminary I worked at the Lethbridge Correctional Centre for seven years as a correctional officer and Connie worked at a hair salon until Connor was born after which she stayed home fulltime.

2 What were your hopes and fears entering seminary? Have they been realized during seminary?

Our biggest fear as a family was homesickness and leaving family and friends. This was especially daunting for Connie who had always lived close to family. While it wasn't easy to leave family, and certain times of year like holidays

and birthdays are more difficult to be away, we have very much felt at home in Grand Rapids.

Our hope in going to seminary was that I would be equipped for gospel ministry and grow close with other men and their families as they also are studying for ministry. In this regard PRTS is everything we had hoped for and more with a vibrant community, stimulating fellowship, academic yet practical courses, and faculty which show care and appreciation for the students.

3 Would you share one or more special memories of your time preparing for ministry?

As a family a major highlight has been the Grand Rapids FRC family camp which we were able to attend in 2018 and 2021. This was a huge blessing when we first moved as we were able to make many connections and friendships.

Another special memory was the summer of 2021 when we were able visit nine churches we had not been to yet and enjoyed fellowship with many families.

4 What has been planned for you prior to Synod? How do you hope to both serve in and benefit from your internships?

Currently I am in my last semester of fulltime studies at PRTS. We plan to move to St. Catharines in December for our internship in the Vineland congregation. During the internship I hope to be involved in a wide range of pastoral work including bringing God's Word on Sundays, visiting, consistory meetings, and teaching. I am looking forward to this time of putting into practice many of the things I have learned the last three years and getting a taste of what gospel ministry looks like. Having an opportunity to shadow Pastor J. Overduin and Pastor P. VanderMeyden will also help me to prepare for candidacy exams at Synod 2022 D.V.

5 What would you like to express to the churches in relation to the seminary and our Free Reformed students?

We are very thankful for the financial, emotional, and spiritual support we have received from the FRC during our time at PRTS. Without your help we would not be here. Your kindness and hospitality during our visiting this summer did not go unnoticed! For the coming months we would appreciate your prayers as we move to Ontario and settle into a new school and church community. Please also pray that God would richly bless the internship and that He would make His way clear for us. ❧

he preached at the inauguration of Dr. Archibald Alexander as professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812, Dr. Samuel Miller, one of the professors at the seminary wrote the following:

The Church is bound, with a vigilant eye, *to search for, and carefully to select, from among the young men within her bosom, those who are endowed with piety and talents, whenever she can find these qualifications united...* The children of the church are, if I may so express it, *the church's property*. She has a right to the services of the best of them. And as it is the part, both of *wisdom* and *affection*, in parents according to the flesh, to attend with vigilance to the different capacities and acquirements of their children, and to select for them, as far as possible, corresponding employments; so it is obviously incumbent on the Church, the moral parent of all the youth within her jurisdiction, to direct especial attention to such of them as may be fitted to serve her in the holy ministry. And it may be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that whenever young men are found, who unite *fervent piety*, with *talents* adapted to the office, it is the duty of such to seek the gospel ministry; and it is the duty of the church to single them out, to bring them forward, and to endeavour to give them all that preparation, which depends on human means, for the service of the sanctuary.

In making this statement, Miller is not suggesting that the church “recruit” or even coax men into applying for the ministry. That is certainly true in the case of men who do not possess the necessary gifts and who show little or no evidence of saving grace. He is simply reminding the church of her responsibility to hold this matter before them and to encourage them to make it a matter of prayer.

The point is, when there is a serious shortage of ministers (as there is in our denomination at present) the church may not sit back and do nothing.

We also wish to take this opportunity to address the young men in our denomination. Young men, if you love the Lord and His church and if you are endowed with the necessary gifts, and these gifts have been acknowledged and utilized by the church,

prayerfully consider whether the Lord may be calling you to gospel ministry. It is your duty to do so. The church is your mother. You are her son. As such, it is incumbent on you at the very least to wrestle with this matter before the Lord. To quote Samuel Miller again:

We trust no young man will ever think of that holy vocation, until he has first given himself up *a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God*, by Jesus Christ. We would not, for any consideration, be accessory to the sin of alluring into the sacred office, those who know nothing of the power of godliness, and who, on the most favourable supposition, can be nothing better than miserable retailers of cold and unproductive speculations. But while we say this, and repeat it, with all the emphasis of which we are capable, we assert, with equal confidence, on the other hand, that wherever fervent piety appears, in any young man, united with those talents which are adapted to the office of an ambassador of Christ, it is incumbent on their possessor, without delay, to devote himself to the work of the *ministry*. There are only two questions which need be asked concerning any youth on this subject. “Has he a heart for the work? And has he those native faculties, which are susceptible of the requisite cultivation?” If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, I hesitate not to say, that in the present state of the church, it is his duty to seek the ministry. Young men of this College! have none of you any desire to serve your fellow men, and to serve Christ, in this exalted office? You have but one short life to live in this world; and you must, in a very little time, decide how you will spend that life. We confidently pronounce, that it can be spent in no manner so desirable, so noble, so god-like, as in the gospel ministry. If then, you love the Lord Jesus Christ, come—we affectionately invite you to come, and take part with us in the ministry of the grace of God. The example of Christ invites you to come; the tears of bereaved Churches, who can find none to break unto them the bread of life, entreat you to come; the miseries of wandering souls, who find none to lead them to heaven, plead with you to come. Come, then, and take part with us in the labours and rewards of the *ministry of reconciliation!*

Brothers and sisters, we lay this matter before you in the hope that it will stimulate discussion and especially prayer. May the Lord of the harvest remember our churches and be pleased to send forth a new generation of labourers so that the Word of God may continue to go forth with power for many years to come.

On behalf of the Theological Education Committee of the FRCNA,

Rev. J. Schoeman
Chairman

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INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT JEFF OVERDUIN

1 Please give a brief introduction of your family and background.

My name is Jeff Overduin. I am happily married to Mandy, and we have three precious children: Mateo (age 7), Lisa (age 2), and Nigel (about 6 months). I was born in Chatham, Ontario to Pastor Hans and Nelly Overduin, but spent most of my formative years growing up in Chilliwack, BC. After I moved to Mitchell, ON, the Lord worked through various and sometimes difficult circumstances to lead me to study at PRTS in the fall of 2018 and then also to come under care of the FRC Theological Education Committee. Mandy was born to Dr. Greg and Laurie Kenyon and grew up in Mitchell.

2 What were your hopes and fears entering seminary? Have they been realized during seminary?

Entering seminary, my hopes and prayers were that I would become better equipped to serve the church in whatever way God might use me and also that through my studies He would direct me and my family in the way we should go. The Lord has graciously answered those prayers by giving me a rich biblical and experiential training that I trust will serve well in every-day gospel ministry, and by leading us in His providence step by step.

Big transitions in family life always bring us a certain amount of fear and anxiety. Some of those fears were realized to an extent, but never as bad as we feared. Thankfully, the one thing we don't have to fear is that the Lord will forsake us. As I read somewhere recently, that should turn our "what ifs" into "even ifs"!

3 Would you share one or more special memories of your time preparing for ministry?

There are many highlights, but perhaps the most spiritually enriching, heart-searching, and humbling experience happened three years ago while doing a research paper in Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) class. My focus was on what the Puritan John Flavel wrote about how the Lord designs and uses afflictions and suffering for His people's sanctification. He wrote out of personal experience, among other things suffering the deaths of his first, second, and third wives! One can see in his writings a tender, pastoral heart. He knows the intense pain of loss, he humbly acknowledges the natural, unmortified reactions of his own heart, and he points to Christ as the only and all-sufficient hope. I long for the day I can sit down and read some Flavel again! If you've never read anything by Flavel, I would encourage you to start with his little book *Preparation for Suffering*. Referring to the apostle Paul's readiness to be bound and even to die for



the sake of the Lord Jesus in Acts 21:13, Flavel gives his reason for writing this book: "Every Christian can say that I would be ready, and Lord make me ready for suffering, but few can say, I *am* ready."

4 What has been planned for you prior to Synod? How do you hope to both serve in and benefit from your internships?

Lord willing, in January 2022 we will move to St. Thomas area where I will intern under the guidance of Pastor Moerdyk more or less until Synod. I am looking forward to applying what I have learned so far in the study to practical, real-life situations. I hope and pray I may be a blessing to the congregation there as I bring God's Word regularly from the pulpit, and also help in regular, pastoral interactions. I have no doubt that I will learn much from Pastor Moerdyk, the St. Thomas consistory, and the congregation. I am especially looking forward to learning how to cope under the pressure of making weekly sermons along with regular visits. Pastoral care is also something I'm hoping to improve in the area of.

5 What would you like to express to the churches in relation to the seminary and our Free Reformed students?

First, thank you. Thank you for all your support for us as students, financially and through your prayers. We as a family have been personally blessed in many ways through you. Thank you too for your willingness to have students lead services and welcoming our families, and also for your constructive feedback. That experience is invaluable. Second, let us not take the seminary for granted. The teaching here is biblically solid, challenging, enriching, and equipping. For these things we should be very thankful. Let us also pray much for the seminary, including all the faculty and professors, that the Lord would keep them faithful to Him and to His Word. ①

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WHEREFORE HE SAITH,
WHEN HE ASCENDED UP ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE,
AND GAVE GIFTS UNTO MEN. ...
AND HE GAVE SOME, APOSTLES;
AND SOME, PROPHETS;
AND SOME, EVANGELISTS;
AND SOME, PASTORS AND TEACHERS;
FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS,
FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY,
FOR THE EDIFYING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST:

EPHESIANS 4:8,11-12