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...AND PETER

But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter.
Mark 16:7

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, go to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body with sweet spices. Upon their arrival, they find an empty tomb and an angel clothed in white. The angel tells the women of the good news of the resurrection. They are told, *“But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter.”* The disciples, who have forsaken Jesus, and Peter, who denied the Lord, are to hear the glorious news.

The fallen disciples are given a special announcement mercifully from a special messenger. An angel of the Lord proclaims the victory of their Savior over sin, death, and hell. Have you ever seen yourself as a fallen Peter? Have you experienced heartfelt tears and grief over your sin? Without a sense of your guilt there is no room in your heart for God’s grace. But Christ does not forget His grieving ones, His fallen ones. There is an announcement of joy for those who have fallen and sorrow in grief. They also may go along to Galilee to meet the Lord. They may go with fear and trembling, but they may go!

Of the disciples, it seems that Peter sank the lowest. All the disciples of Jesus fled in desperation at His impending crucifixion. In fleeing, they gave evidence that they did not belong to the enemies, because you do not flee from your friends. Peter, however, was different. He ended up in the hall of Caiaphas swearing an oath that he belonged to the enemies. In denying His Master and Lord, He associated himself with the enemies of Jesus. And the Lord Jesus had said, *“He that is not with me is against me”* (Matt. 12:30).

Peter came to Caiaphas not to confess Christ but to deny Him. To be sure, this was not his intention. When he went into the hall of Caiaphas, he thought he was strong. But it was not long before he was saving his own life frantically at the expense of His Master. Jesus, spat upon by His enemies, observes Peter as he sides with the enemies. This surely must have filled His cup with bitter gall. He had told Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Now Jesus watches in sorrow as Peter fulfills His words.

Who expected this from Peter? Peter expected it least of all. If Peter had known ahead of time that one day his name would be mentioned separately, surely he would think it would be for some laudable act. He would not deny His Lord. He was faithful and prepared to give up his own life for His Master. But now,


because of his exceptional unfaithfulness, he is singled out and his name is recorded for all posterity.

But Peter wept bitterly, and they were tears of true repentance. Peter did not sin cheaply. It cost him wounds, grief, and darkness. His soul wrenched in pain. Likewise, each sin of a child of God should cause him great wounds, great grief, and great darkness. But realize, dear friends, that tears of sorrow cannot pay for guilt. Though they are tears of true sorrow over sin, the sinner who has sinned himself outside of God's communion cannot thereby place himself back into communion again. No matter how abundant the soul's tears may be, they were not enough for Peter to be reconciled to His Lord. And neither can tears of repentance pay for our guilt.

Christ knew of Peter's sorrow and guilt. Jesus, therefore, after His resurrection, sent an individual message to Peter: *"Tell his disciples and Peter."* The living Christ thought particularly of Peter, for He knows His own. He knows what each individual needs. In guilt, Peter did not dare to join himself with the others so a distinct message is sent especially for Peter. Oh, what love Christ had for Peter! When Peter stood swearing that he did not know Jesus, Christ stood before Caiaphas swearing that He was the Son of the living God. When Peter swore to the enemies that he did not know Him, Christ swore to God His Father that He did know Peter, for He entered into death for him.

"Tell his disciples and Peter." As Peter, you too may grieve over your sins against the Lord of glory. You may feel unworthy of any touch of God's grace in your life. You, who experience pride in your life, are humbled by feelings of unworthiness. In this way God's Spirit teaches His people. We see this in the life of Paul. Paul thought that he himself, not Peter, was the least, and concluded that the risen Christ was seen last of all by him, as one born out of due time. He saw himself as the chief of sinners. And yet all God's people can echo the thoughts of Paul. They see themselves as the chief of sinners. But when Christ arose from the grave, He thought especially of these people. They have been bitterly disappointed in themselves, but they could not disappoint Him. He knew them better than they knew themselves and therefore He entered into death for them.

Oh, what a comfort for those who are most unworthy! For now the greatest question is not how deeply we are fallen, but whether this King can bestow His merits upon you. This is a question that greatly frightens self-righteous people, for people who recognize no sin, for people who have never fallen and therefore can still find life in themselves. May this indeed become frightening to you, unconverted sinner, for as long as you remain in your spiritual death the risen Christ cannot give you life! The fact that you think you have no sin will result in your death. If you have never, like Peter, wept bitterly about your sin, then death will be yours eternally. Must you live on like this and leave this life in such a condition? In spite of a living Christ, will you still remain dead? Perhaps you say, "I cannot rise out of my state of death." But what kind of inability is that? Is it a genuine inability or is it unwillingness to fall on your knees in repentance before the King of kings?

But what ought to be a terror for the one, may now become a comfort to the other, for the exalted Christ is also set for the fall and rising again of many, for the fall of those who think to stand, but for the rising of them that have fallen, yes, for those who are doubly unworthy. 

*Rev. Frans Bakker (1919-1965) served the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken. This meditation is taken from two daily devotions contained in *The Everlasting Word: A Daily Devotional*, published by Free Reformed Publications.*

But Peter wept bitterly, and they were tears of true repentance. Peter did not sin cheaply. It cost him wounds, grief, and darkness. His soul wrenched in pain. Likewise, each sin of a child of God should cause him great wounds, great grief, and great darkness.

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THE LINE WE CANNOT CROSS (2): THE REVEALED THINGS

We noted last time that it is both humbling and liberating to know that there are things that God has kept us from knowing. Scripture gives us examples of these secret things, such as the origin and depth of evil, why suffering happens, and when the judgment will occur. We need to turn away from questions about things not revealed, the answers to which God retains with Himself, and instead give our full-orbed attention to the things God has revealed.

The Mercy of Having Revealed Things

First, we should note what a mercy it is that God has revealed things to us. If He would have kept all things hidden, God would not have been unjust. He is God. He may do what He pleases. But He has revealed Himself to us. It is true that creation reveals His majesty, His goodness, His wisdom, His power, and so much more. But the clearest revelation of God is Scripture, the sixty-six books of the Bible. What a spectacular revelation that is! Some things in it are indeed hard to understand, but there is plenty that children and uneducated people can understand as well. In fact, Jesus says that God has hidden the truth from the wise and prudent. They are too occupied with the distracting and high mysteries of life and of Scripture. But God has revealed His truth to babes (Matt. 11:25). That means that you do not need to be educated. As we sing, His word “To simplest minds the truth conveys” (Psalter # 337:1).

Second, we should note how close the Lord comes in revealing Himself. In the words of Deuteronomy 29:29, He makes this truth to “belong to us.” The revealed things *belong* to us. That means He has given them to us as a gift, so that we have a right to have, hold, and use them. In fact, we have a holy obligation to use them. Just as our bodies and souls belong to us for a time to use for good and to give account of someday, so we also must give account of what we will have done with the Word of God. It belonged to us here in life.

We err when we act as if we cannot take to ourselves anything from the Scripture unless we have some special experience, belong to some special group of people, or have attained special things. No, the opposite is true. The revelation that God gives in His Bible is “ours.” The Bible we hold in our hand and all it contains is *ours*: ours for the asking; ours for the knowing; ours in life and death, in struggles and joys.

Third, notice how it belongs to us *and to our children* forever. God includes the generations to come in this great gift. The Bible belongs to the children as well. See God’s care and concern for the

future, for the generations, one after another, until His return. He says they belong to us and our children *forever!* Do you teach your children that? Do we teach our children that they have a priceless gift: the revelation of God. God will demand an answer to the questions: what have we done with this inheritance? Have we told our children of the inheritance they have in the word of God? It is theirs by gift and grant. They must follow it, use it, obey it, and seek its blessing. They will one day give an account of how they have used what belonged to them.

Fourth, this revelation is there that we might do it – all of it. Moses says in Deuteronomy 29:29 “that we may do all the words of this law.” The Lord doesn’t just want hearing, but doing, and that comprehensively. How this presses upon us the practice of godliness!

What Are Some Revealed Things?

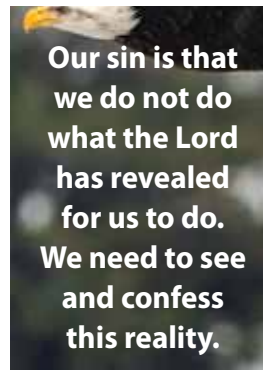
What does God’s Word tell us? So much! I will list ten things that God has revealed to us in His Word. As you consider them, remember that they belong to you and to your children forever that you might do them. There are, of course, many more things, but I give these as a sampling of the things that belong to us to do.

1. The Lord tells us to cease from man and the fear of man and fear God instead.
2. The Lord tells us to repent of our sins and seek God with all our hearts.
3. The Lord commands us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to Him, believing His promises, to fall on His righteousness, throwing away our own righteousness.
4. The Lord tells us to walk humbly with God and holy in our world, living as pilgrims and strangers in our world. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3).
5. The Lord tells us to worship Him in spirit and in truth with fellow Christians, in our homes and in private, day by day, and to live to the glory of God.
6. The Lord tells us to devote ourselves to study Christ, to learn Christ, to know Christ, which is everlasting life, and to prayer. Pray always!
7. The Lord tells us to love God with our hearts, souls, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.
8. The Lord tells us to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to a dying world and live generously and self-denyingly, taking up our cross and following Him.
9. The Lord tells us to suffer affliction leaning on the promises of God and enduring whatever God sees fit to bring our way with patience, hope, and even joy, counting it a privilege to suffer affliction with the people of God.
10. He tells us to cast our cares upon Him, and cleave to Christ as our Bridegroom and Lord, submitting to all His revealed will, and wait for His coming again with the clouds.

We should note that none of these things are secret; rather, they are revealed. This begs the question: are you doing them? There is no excuse.

Sovereign Grace of a Triune God

Our sin is that we do not do what the Lord has revealed for us to do. We need to see and confess this reality. God the Holy Spirit convinces of this reality, not just once in initial conversion, but repeatedly in the life of faith. He teaches sinners in the way and makes them to know, more and more: “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Yet, the Lord who reveals all these things does give the reality of obedience in and through Jesus Christ, who performed all that should have been done. We call this Christ’s active obedience. In addition, Christ paid the price for sin, bearing the curse for disobedience against and neglect of God’s revelation. This was a bitter price, but He paid it in His death on the cross once and for all. He has obtained and poured forth His Holy Spirit to grant repentance and remission of sin, and to lead into the



EDITOR: Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes
2692 Bridge Place NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
USA · T: 616.977.0599 ext.121
E: jerry.bilkes@prts.edu

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Rev. David H. Kranendonk
T: 616.290.4125 · E: kranendonk@frcna.org
The Editors report to the Synodical Publications Committee.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
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Janey Slingerland
(Publications Administrator)
18 Chapala Cres. S.E.
Calgary, AB T2X 3M4 CANADA
T: 403.254.6591 · E: bookorders@frcna.org

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Mrs. Rhonda Kroesbergen
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E: messenger@frcna.org

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This bi-monthly publication for children is under the direction of the Free Reformed Publications Committee:
Rev. Jerrold Lewis, General Editor
160 West Parkway
Pompton Plains, NJ 07444
E: jlewis@frcna.org

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MISSIONS AND OUTREACH CAUSES SHOULD BE DIRECTED AS FOLLOWS:

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T: 905.659.7413
· E: john.wilbrink@gmail.com

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ways of new obedience in union and communion with Him, the Vine, and His people, the branches. This is the gospel, which all creatures should hear and all may believe. In fact, there is no other name whereby we must be saved. And this name is *revealed*. Christ's name is revealed to us and to our children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And that revelation belongs to us and to our children forever.

Final Lessons

First, in this light, should we not repent of all the times we have tried to know, pry, and control the secret will of God? God is not pleased with this. It is no innocent pass-time. Should we not humble ourselves and acknowledge this as great sin in the sight of God? When Jesus was telling Peter what He would suffer, Peter looked over his shoulder and asked what Jesus was going to do with John, the beloved disciple. Jesus looked at him and simply said: "What is that to thee... follow thou me." How many times have we not been like Peter, trying to meddle in the secret things that belong to the Lord alone?

Second, we and our children must embrace the whole will of God, without exception, today. Let us flee to Christ, for whose sake, and in whom there is a beginning of new obedience in sinners like you and me.

Finally, a word to those who struggle with the secret doctrine of election. Many times, people want to know whether God has chosen them from eternity before they trust the gospel of Christ. They try to peer in the Lamb's book of life, and they can stay there trying this for many years. No sinner has ever come to Christ because she found out she was elect. The call of the gospel is to sinners, not to the elect.

After conversion, the Lord may so assure His believing people of their election. In His mercy, He seals to their hearts that He has loved them with an everlasting love. But He says to sinners to come not based on some special right or revelation about their election. That would exalt sinners, not abase them. All sinners come to Christ based on the wide invitation of Christ, not a special revelation of their status or right to come. The mystery of the gospel is not hidden. It is revealed: Come to Christ and you will not be cast out (John 6:37). ¹¹

HAS THE CHURCH FAILED THE COVID TEST?

WORSHIP AND WITNESS IN CRISIS: Has the Church Failed the Covid Test? Edited by Matthew A. Vogan. Published by Ettrick Press, 98 The Brow, Brighton, BN2 6LN.2021, 291 pages.

Although it seems the worst of the Covid pandemic is over, the question the editors of this book pose should concern us. Were our responses biblically warranted? Were they pleasing to the Lord and God-honouring? Were we concerned mostly about self or inspired by concern and love for others – "our neighbours"? After reading this book, it is doubtful anyone will be able to say that they are beyond reproach in either word or deed.

It is important to note that this book was not published to criticize the church, but instead to analyze the questions Covid has posed from a biblical and historical perspective. Its aim is to equip the church for the future. It also raises and brings to the fore the critical roles of church and state.

Worship and Witness in Crisis presents the reflections of a range of respected pastors with post-graduate degrees in the UK, who serve a variety of conservative church backgrounds: Strict Baptists; Presbyterian Church of Scotland; Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland; Free Church of Scotland (including Continuing); Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland; an itinerant Baptist preacher; and Dr. Catherine E. Hyde, a relative of Pastor Ian Macleod. Surprisingly, and perhaps not so surprisingly, because we have a common doctrinal and confessional basis, it is barely noticeable that these authors are based in the UK, except that perhaps some of their government's Covid restrictions were stricter than in most of Canada and the US.

The opening chapter points out that "the world has seen many diseases and disasters, natural and otherwise, which claimed the lives of multitudes of people" (pp. 19-20), beginning with the disaster of the Fall, Noah's flood, the plagues of Egypt, famines, natural disasters, and diseases such as leprosy which the Lord brought upon people in Bible times. The Levitical laws concerning leprosy and other diseases may be compared with methods of social distancing and quarantining, although the author of this chapter, Iain Smith, points out that today's practice where the healthy are socially distanced is different. "God insisted that only the infected should isolate" (p. 22).

Church history is replete with plagues such as the Plague of Cyprian in the third century, which lasted 20 years and at its height killed 5,000 people per day. Other widespread plagues were the bubonic plague or Black Death, the Russian flu, and the Spanish flu in the 20th century. God's faithful servants, especially the Old Testament prophets and faithful ministers in the history of the Christian church, pointed out that this life is filled with troubles and God rules sovereignly. He has given many instructions in His Word on how believers may experience and handle calamities and crisis situations. There are lessons to be learned, and one of them is to develop a Christian mindset, learned from "the Word of God, especially the Ten Commandments, as crucial to moulding the believer's moral and ethical parameters" (p23). This is explained in

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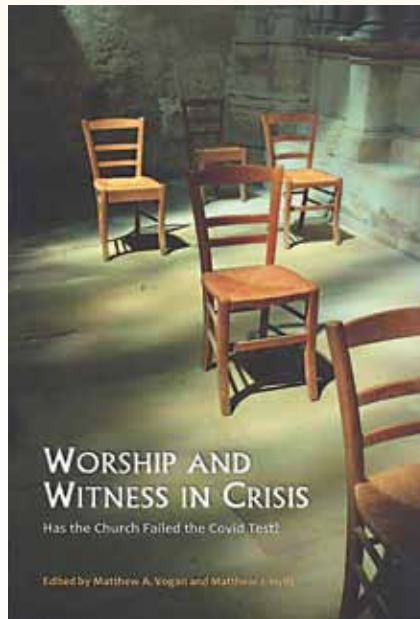
detail by subsequent authors.

First, the question, "How may the Church Preserve Unity in the Midst of Disagreement?" (Chapter 2) is answered. Issues such as streaming of sermons, singing in public worship, maintaining public worship in the face of prohibition by the civil authorities, wearing of masks in church, and the morality of the various vaccines are dealt with. It is to be understood that there will be disagreement. "Different Christians will come to different opinions in these areas of disagreement, and there will also be different conclusions as to how important or fundamental these issues are" (p. 37). Our first duty is to be humble, willing to learn, and ready to modify our views if they are not accurate. If the brother is deemed to be wrong, be patient and meek and show from Scripture where he is wrong. We also need to consider a sense of proportion, be aware of our own limitations, and remember our duty of not hurting the weaker brother.

There is the danger of divisions and the call to unity. This has not always happened in the history of the church, and here the authors draw on the history of Scotland, where deep divisions occurred. Paul and Barnabas separated by disagreements, but were later reconciled. The responses of the Reformers, the Puritans, Spurgeon, and many others have much to teach us. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) dealt with a smallpox plague by recognizing the duty of taking precautions, but died from a primitive (untested?) smallpox inoculation (p.31).

During a time of crisis, Christians must be mindful to keep on following the ordinary duties of the Christian life, particularly in regard to the advancement of God's kingdom. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58)" (p. 53). This admonishment is addressed to individuals, but also to the church. The church's response to plagues (and persecution) is to maintain public worship, which is also a witness to the world, as much as possible.

Chapters 3, 4, and subsequent chapters answer the fundamental and crucial questions: "Should the Church ever Suspend Public Worship?" and "How Important is it for Believers to Gather Together Physically to Worship God?" These questions cannot be answered without answering the question, "How should Church and State Interact during a Crisis?" Here the authors focus on the importance and application of the Ten Commandments. The first table of the law shows the primacy of worshipping God, and the second table deals with man's relationships. Using the summary of the law as given by Christ (Matt. 22:37-40), these maxims are applied to public worship. "Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17) is the Scripture verse that introduces the chapter, entitled "Exactly how much must the Church Render to Caesar?" Decisions regarding the why and when of suspending public worship, the importance of believers gathering physically to worship God, and the interaction of church and state as they impact these areas are discussed in great detail. Here the authors may have an advantage over the Heidelberg Catechism in the use of the Westminster Confession, which has more



specifics in explaining the Decalogue.

The authors have also delved deeply into their history, especially of Scotland. The reader will be convicted by arguments brought forth from Scripture and church history to not barter away Christ's right to His church and kingdom, also because, in corporate worship, "Something mysterious, something spiritual is happening. There is a real, if intangible, *connection* between speaker and hearers," as Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) explained so well (p. 110).

The closing chapters by the editors focus on the present situation of the church, where the idols of the age – worldliness, secularism, faith in science, and even a willingness to attribute the health crisis to natural causes only – have made believers sluggish and lukewarm. The reader is advised to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2). Quoting

R.C. Sproul:

It's not so much that the contemporary Christian has consciously embraced worldliness, it's more that we have been so influenced by a manner of viewing the world that anything beyond this world seems obscured by eclipse. Gone is a vital sense of Providence. The world is seen as operating according to its internal mechanistic laws (p 254).

The answers given by the authors in this book overlap, but indicate unity, primarily as it relates to the obligation of public, corporate worship and witness, when possible, in crisis situations. As stated in the *Prefatory Note*, not everyone will subscribe to all the views or conclusions by each author. Their challenge is that the reader is encouraged to ensure their views and conclusions are based on the same Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. 📖

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PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (16)

ROGER WILLIAMS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE COMPARED WITH ARTICLE 36 OF THE BELGIC CONFSSION



Our previous articles have shown that Roger Williams's basic position regarding the relationship between Church and State was to view them as completely separate entities. The state or government has no say in the affairs of the church, and the church may not interfere in the business of the state. The state's responsibilities are limited to material matters such as maintaining law and order in society. The government's basic role is to enforce only those laws that belong to the second table of the Decalogue, i.e, commandments relating to the way human beings treat one another socially.

Williams' views were not shared by most other Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as continental Reformed churches in Europe, particularly those in the Netherlands. Like our Dutch sister churches, the Free Reformed Churches in North America subscribe to the Belgic Confession, which states in Article 36 that God has given the government a twofold task: 1) it must restrain the dissoluteness [or wickedness] of men and see to it that "all things [are] carried on among them with good order and decency;" 2) they must "protect the sacred ministry," and "remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship"¹

While none of us will disagree with the first statement, the second one raises questions. We would like to see the ministry protected and idolatry removed and prevented, but who is going to do that today, living as we do in an increasingly secular society?

The Government's Role to Protect and Promote the Church

Article 36 begins with God. In Romans 13, Paul says that the higher powers or governing authorities have been ordained or instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists these powers resists what God has instituted. Guido De Bres, the author of the Belgic Confession, follows Paul's example. Not we, but "our gracious God" has appointed kings, princes, and magistrates.

This was not considered a radical statement in the sixteenth century. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, and even Anabaptists to a lesser extent, agreed that the state is divinely instituted. Today, that

consensus no longer exists. Most modern views on government go back to Rousseau's *Social Contract Theory*, which views the government as the product of an evolutionary development in history. As human society developed, it became necessary to introduce some kind of order. People gradually came to see that some restrictions had to be imposed on the individual's ambitions and aspirations, and so they drew up laws whereby they agreed to live. This *social contract* concept of government is based on the consent of those governed and implies that the people, rather than God, are sovereign.

Our Confession, however, takes a position directly contrary to the notion of the people's sovereignty. Government, we confess, is of divine origin. It is instituted by our gracious God. "By me, kings reign," God says, "and princes decree justice" (Prov. 8:15). "For he [the government] is the minister of God to you for good" (Rom. 13:4).

Why has God instituted government? According to Article 36, it was because of the "depravity of mankind." Sin made our government necessary. A sinless humanity would not need the kind of government that exists today, even though it would have some form of authority structure for the organization and division of labour.

Mutual Responsibilities of the Civil Government and the Church

Today, we have a magisterial or civil government, whose purpose is to restrain man's sin. When man fell and broke God's law, this breach rendered him hopelessly lost.

But God, in His common grace, willed "that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness [or corruption] of man might be restrained. and all things carried on among them with good order and decency." This government is "for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well." So far, we will agree with what Article 36 states about the function of the government. Transgressors of the law must be punished. Governments that fail to do so, as God's servants, are remiss in their duty. But there are also restrictions or limitations the government needs to observe when it comes to exercising authority over its subjects.

Here we have to ask questions regarding the mutual responsibilities of the church and the state. Article 36 clearly reflects the thinking of sixteenth century Christians. Guido De Bres and other Reformers were children of their time. They believed that the task of the government went much further than is allowed today. The prevailing view was that the church and the state were like two sides of the same coin, and God had equipped them with two swords: the spiritual sword of the word and other sword being the power of the state.

When the fourth century emperor, Constantine I, declared

Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire, he became the *de facto* head of the Church. Later, the roles were reversed and the Church, through popes, took charge of the affairs of state. By the sixteenth century, the Reformers sensed that this tug-of-war church-state relationship was not according to Scripture and tried to assign to each institution its proper role and sphere of authority.

Confusion Regarding the Authority of Church and State

The Reformers did so with limited success. They were unable to draw clear distinctions between the two spheres. Both Catholics and Protestants continued to assume that the sword of the state should back up the work of the church. If someone was delinquent in doctrine or life, the church would call on the government to exercise discipline. Heresy had to be curbed and the true religion protected and promoted! That is why Article 36 includes this sentence: "Their office is not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry and *thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may thus be destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted*" (italics mine, CP).

The Reformers and the Two Tables of the Law

In this way, the Reformers wanted to make sure that the government's task concerned not only the second, but also the first table of the law. As we have seen, Roger Williams disagreed with this approach. Along with many others, including the Anabaptists, he wanted complete separation between church and state responsibilities.

Today, we tend to lean towards Williams' position on this matter. Why? Because we do not know what to do with this part of Article 36. We are not the only ones. Some Reformed churches have dropped the above sentence from the Belgic Confession on the grounds that the state should not perform tasks assigned to the church, such as identifying and rooting out heresy, as well as disciplining delinquent members. Following the example of her Dutch sister churches, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of America in 1910 deleted this section or relegated it to a footnote. The Free Reformed Churches have not taken this action.

The Religious Situation During the Reformation

During the Reformation era, Protestants and Catholics alike believed that every nation should have only one official church. They did not allow the existence of any rival religions in their

While most Puritans agreed with Calvin's balanced view of a distinct yet unified purpose of church and state, by the middle of the seventeenth century, many Englishmen had become deeply troubled by the growing tension between the roles played by the church and the state in society.

nation. They looked to the government for protection of the true church and demanded that all rival churches and spiritual movements be suppressed.

The main opponents of the Protestants at that time were the Anabaptists. They also believed they were true churches, but they had a different view of the role of the state as protector of the church. According to Anabaptists, the church of Christ is not a mixed gathering of true believers and nominal Christians who live under the supervision of a magistrate entrusted with disciplinary authority. They insisted that the church ought to be disciplined by her elders and not by state officials. For their views, they were persecuted by Catholics, Lutherans, and even Reformed people.

De Bres used very strong language in condemning their views on government. We must realize that not all Anabaptists deserved such negative criticism. Only a lunatic fringe stirred up trouble and took control of cities by violence. Most Anabaptists did respect the higher authorities and agreed with Romans 13 that the sword is an ordinance of God, but believed that sword

The duty of the magistrates extends to both tables of the law. Even the heathen recognize the principle underlying this truth. No government can be happily constituted, unless its first objective is the promotion of piety, and that all laws are preposterous which neglects the claims of God.

was never to be used by the church through the agency of the state.

Isn't that what we also believe? I think many of us do, but then we should also understand the implications of De Bres' statement regarding the use of the sword and the destruction of heresies. For him, not to mention these things would mean omitting any references to the first table of the Decalogue and restricting the role of the government to enforcing only the commandments of the second table. De Bres was also not alone in his statements, but showed himself a student of Calvin. As P. Y. De-

Jong indicates, quoting Calvin: "The duty of the magistrates extends to both tables of the law. Even the heathen recognize the principle underlying this truth. No government can be happily constituted, unless its first objective is the promotion of piety, and that all laws are preposterous which neglects the claims of God."²

Consequences of Abandoning the First Table of the Decalogue

History shows that governments that enforce only laws belonging to the second table will not only neglect what Scripture teaches about man's relationship to God, but also eventually fail to pay attention to those who break moral laws such as murder, anarchy, adultery, theft, and dishonesty.

When Jefferson and other framers of the American Constitution wrote the First Amendment, which deals with the separation of Church and State, they followed Roger Williams' concept of total freedom of religion. For the first time in history, man could choose whatever religion he preferred, even if he chose no religion at all. But he was still required to behave himself civilly in harmony with moral precepts rooted in the Christianity prevalent at that time.

For a while, the commandments of the second table of God's law were maintained and enforced. But as time went on and the Christian religion underwent changes, its moral standards changed with it. The laws of the second table continued to be observed for a long time, but they morphed into so-called "blue laws," which gradually lost their connection with God's law and became mere social customs. Laws governing Sabbath observance, murder, stealing, and immorality, such as sodomy, etc. remained on the books until they were modified and finally scrapped.

We do not need to explain what our government has done with the law of God since De Bres, Williams, Jefferson, and the Supreme Courts of America and Canada. Both tables of the Decalogue have been set aside and replaced with human laws, regulations, and innovations. Only some churches still honour




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Whether the courts and other government branches realize it or not, they are accountable to God and under obligation to uphold both tables of God's law. The government may be neutral with respect to the various religions practiced in its realm, but cannot be neutral with respect to God. Here the church has an important task, namely, to remind the government of God's demands regarding the duties of magistrates.

The church also must be diligent in teaching its members to respect the government and all who are in authority over us. Scripture commands us to pray for those in authority. Part of the minister's prayers on Sundays is to make supplications to God that He may rule and guide the governments in all their ways. We must approach our government leaders and warn them whenever they pass legislation that contradicts God's law, whether it concerns matters relating to sexual orientation or health issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as other current social and religious problems.

One of the problems that has caused Christians much pain has to do with government rules and regulations regarding the withholding of permission to gather for public worship. For many Christians and congregations, the last two years have been very difficult and, although things have improved considerably, the negative effects are still with us. Differences of opinion as to how to deal with this issue have led to tensions and divisions in congregations and families and placed heavy burdens on consistories.

The question that remains is to what extent must we obey the government? Article 36 answers this question briefly and clearly. It begins by mentioning the obvious: Pay your taxes. Respect those who rule over you. Obey your leaders in all things that are not against the Word of God, and finally, pray for them. I think the most important requirement here is the third one: Obey them in "all things which are not repugnant to [against] the Word of God."

Article 36 confronts us pointedly and addresses our conscience uncompromisingly. We are reminded that God demands total obedience and submission to His law, comprising both the first and second table. As Rev. C. Schouls writes, "All of us have to obey rules. This is the Christian way; it is what our Lord who always obeyed perfectly taught us. Living out of grace, we must strive to have this realized in our own hearts and lives and in our own surroundings. This order can only be achieved when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords."³ 

Endnotes

- 1 *The Confession of Faith*, Article 36 (*The Psalter*, p. 24).
- 2 P. Y. DeJong, *The Church's Witness to the World*, p. 400.
- 3 C. A. Schouls, *Simply, Faith: Exposition on the Belgic Confession*, p. 314.

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"But you are ... a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

1 Peter 2:9

BIBLICAL CHURCH-PLANTING (1): **THE FOUNDATION**

SCRIPTURE READING: TITUS 1:1-4

The mandate Christ gave to the apostles after His resurrection was to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). They were to do so through the preaching of the gospel. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him “that utterance may be given unto me. . .to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Together, Christians are called to be “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). In this way, existing churches will remain focused on the gospel and other churches will be planted through the preaching of the gospel.

An increasing number of books, articles, and manuals is being written on church planting, and much of it can be helpful. In this brief series, however, we want to look specifically at the Bible’s teaching on church planting, especially from the epistle to Titus. We will find that our times should not at all deter us from the work of spreading the gospel and seeing churches planted; in fact, God’s Word stirs us up to pray and work to see God’s kingdom spread no matter how dark the time is in which we live.

In this first installment, we wish to see the foundation of all the labour of the church lies in God, the Triune God, without whom there would be no church, no gospel, and no hope. Paul emphasized this in the opening verses (1:1-4) of the epistle to Titus, who had been raised up by God to plant churches on the island of Crete.

A Culture of Lies

Just a word about Titus and Crete. Titus was a Gentile convert (Gal. 2:3) and a co-laborer with and assistant to the apostle Paul. He had proven himself useful in the ministry in various ways, not least in being an instrument in God’s hand to see the Corinthians come to repentance (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13-14; 8:8, 16, 23; 12:18). Towards the end of his ministry, Paul commissioned Titus to strengthen the churches in Crete (Tit. 1:5). This would be quite a task. The island of Crete was home to all sorts of religious idolatry, with shrines to all kinds of gods and goddesses, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian. In addition, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, immorality was rampant, as well as deceitful speech. Like our own world, in many people’s minds, truth was elusive, beside the point, and dispensable. Paul quotes the statement from a Cretian author: “Cretians are always liars” (Tit. 1:12), meaning that false speech and treacherous dealings were rampant on Crete. Apparently, the idea of absolute truth was, in the mind of most Cretans, obsolete.

Many today likewise proclaim to us with nothing less than religious zeal: There is no absolute truth! Never mind that this statement then also could not be a statement of truth. How must we do? To bring the gospel to a world that loves and practices lies may seem to be an

insurmountable impossibility. How can anyone minister in a world in which truth lies slain in the streets and no one speaks or seems to care about truth? Who will believe anyone or anything?

A God of Truth: Here's Our Foundation

Over against the culture of lies, Paul proclaimed that there was a God of truth. He was not fazed by the subtleties of the depraved mind. He knew “the work of the law written” in people’s hearts (Rom. 2:15). By nature, we might suppress the idea that there is truth, but Paul proclaimed the God of truth. He is the foundation of everything, of life, of the gospel, of morality.

Notice the opening lines of this epistle. This servant of God boldly stresses the absolute, unwavering truth of God: “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Tit. 1:1). Paul has not thought long and hard about some personal truth that had a ring of plausibility to it. He had not come to serve himself, but God. And this God is the Father of Jesus Christ. This Savior has sent Paul to preach into a world fallen and allied with Satan, the father of lies. But the God of truth would have His truth known. Paul explains in verse 3: “But hath in in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (1:3). Paul and others would speak it. God’s Word would proclaim it.

Paul stresses secondly that his espousal of truth is not peculiar to him. He does not have some private, personal, provincial take on the truth. No, he calls himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect” (v. 1) In other words, all those whom God has chosen from before the world’s foundation believe the same thing, worship the same Savior, and proclaim the same faith. By referring to God’s people as “the elect” or “chosen,” he makes clear that it is the sovereign will of God that has made a difference where there was no difference. When sinners are saved, it is not because of anyone’s works or merits. And these chosen ones all acknowledge or confess “the truth which is after godliness.” In other words, there is not a confusing conglomeration of disparate voices of each espousing their own truth. God’s people recognize the truth that is revealed by God. They acknowledge and confess it distinctly and exactly in accordance with God’s revelation. According to one Greek dictionary (Thayers), the word “acknowledging” literally

means a “precise and correct knowledge.”

Sound Doctrine for Life: Here is our Focus

There is a crying need in our world for sound doctrine. Those who would plant churches based on people’s felt needs, or busy themselves encouraging people to find themselves and invent their own expression of truth not only will fail of the biblical calling, they allow and encourage souls to deceive themselves for an unending eternity.

We ought instead to press and stress sound doctrine. This doctrine is found in the Scripture and is summarized in our standards, the creeds and confessions of the church of all times. It is the doctrine according to godliness (v. 1). In other words, it is a doctrine that fosters godly living. By godly living, Paul means everything that evidences the salvation and power of God and the gospel in our lives. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and where there is the true fear of Him and His truth, our lives will radiate outside the power of truth. Right believing produces right living. When our minds are renewed, our lives will radiate a new orientation on God and His Word. Instead of respecting lies, we will reverence the truth. Instead of loving falsehood, we will desire truth within.

hood, we will desire truth within.

A Promising God Who Cannot Lie: Here is our Fortress

Many people have become disillusioned with institutions and people because they will not keep promises. People view institutions like marriage and family with suspicion, as they do churches and politicians as well. People can relate to the feeling of betrayal, and many no longer can endure the idea that God stands by, unable to really change things or people. This notion was embraced by people a few decades ago as some thought it would console people to think that God stood by wringing His hands because He really could not help things though He empathized with suffering people. However, people have realized how empty this is.

The Bible makes clear that God is a covenant God. He keeps covenant, and what He promises He fulfills. He is, Paul celebrated, a God “who cannot lie.” Those who wish to plant churches must be utterly devoted to a covenant-keeping God. God is faithful. He can be trusted entirely. It is an utter impossibility that He would lie (Tit. 1:2). When everything around us is crumbling, the only foundation for gospel-preaching and church-planting is a God of truth, who reveals sound doctrine, and who cannot lie. We must live anchored in Him. ①

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 01 What is the relationship between preaching the gospel and planting churches? Can we do one without the other? How are the two connected?
- 02 Why is it important to have the right foundation for church planting? Won't God bless whatever we do in His name and for His glory?
- 03 What are similarities between Crete and our contemporary world? Doesn't preaching and doctrine turn people off? Should we hide our doctrine? Are there bad ways to present doctrine? What are good ways?
- 04 How can the truth that God cannot lie guide us in bringing the gospel to people in a culture filled with broken promises and deceit?

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THE GOD WHO SEPARATES

EXODUS 11:1-8 AND 12:21-23

Whether adults or children, we do not like separation, especially separation from our family members or our dear friends. But some separation is healthy and good, especially when it separates us from potential dangers or from our enemies. This is the case in this passage.

The Grace of Separation

Exodus 11 is God's final warning to Pharaoh and Egypt. Previously, God had brought nine plagues upon the land of Egypt, each of which was intended to humiliate and strike one idol which the Egyptians worshiped at that time. The ultimate aim of God is to show the Egyptians that there is only one God who is worthy of their worship. It is noteworthy that, starting from the plague of flies, God has set apart the people of Israel from the Egyptians. When the houses and ground of the Egyptians filled with swarms of flies, no swarms of flies could be found among the Israelites in the land of Goshen. When all the livestock of the Egyptians died, not one of the livestock of Israel was found dead. The same thing happened with the plague of boils, the plague of hail, the plague of locusts, and the plague of darkness. Now, we come to God's final warning. Will God continue to separate His people from this last most fearful and terrible plague?

Exodus 11 shows that the final plague will bring a complete reversal. Previously, Pharaoh did not even allow the people of Israel to go. Now, God says, after the tenth plague, Pharaoh shall surely thrust you out altogether. The Israelite people will not need to leave any of their possessions in Egypt. Instead, God gives them the right to plunder their Egyptian neighbors' possessions as compensation. Even after the tenth plague, the Lord will give the Israelite people and Moses favor in the sight of the Egyptians. All of these things are the grace of God.

What is this final plague? Verses 4-6 tell us it is the killing of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. While the first nine plagues were all executed through the hands of Moses and Aaron, this time Jehovah the LORD will execute the judgment by Himself, striking down all the firstborn of Egypt. Neither the highest nor the lowest, neither human being nor livestock could escape this horrible judgment. Throughout all the land of Egypt, "there shall be a great cry...such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it anymore" (Ex. 11:6). In contrast, verse 7 tells us that the land of Goshen will be so quiet and peaceful that not even a dog will move his tongue. In the beginning

of the book of Exodus, all the firstborn of the Israelites had to be killed, but now all the firstborn of the Egyptians are killed. In the beginning, the Israelite people had to beg Pharaoh for mercy, but now all the Egyptians cry out, and all the servants of Pharaoh bow down and beg the Israelite people to leave. Why is there such a dramatic change? Because “the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Ex. 11:7) What amazing grace for the Israelites to have such a differentiation and separation! But for Pharaoh and all the Egyptians who stand in the way of the LORD, what a nightmare it is!


The Reason for Separation

Why could the people of Israel enjoy such an amazing grace of separation? Was it because the Israelite people are too miserable, too pathetic? Or, is it because they are in any way somehow better than the Egyptians? Or, is it because they trust in the Lord and their faith moved God to give them this redemption? No! Exodus 12:21-23 reveals the real reason: the blood of the Passover lamb. When the most holy God comes into our midst, no one can stand. Scripture is so clear that what the Israelites deserved was simply death, just as the Egyptians deserved. Whether Israelite or Egyptian, all are the same sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God.

Only because of the blood of the Passover lamb were the people of Israel separated from the judgment of death. Only with blood could the problem of sin be solved! Only with blood could there be reconciliation! This is the most holy and righteous God’s principle of dealing with sin. The Egyptians did not have the blood of Passover lamb to cover their house and the result is obvious: their firstborn had to shed blood. Finally, they understood. Without the blood of the Passover lamb, without the grace of separation flowing from the God of Israel, they would have to be constantly under the judgment of this most fearful almighty Judge.

What about you, my dear reader? Maybe some of you are just church-goers or you just follow tradition, follow what your family and friends are doing. Your desire is still to seek your own glory or to be your own god, rather than submitting your life to the only true God. Maybe even, the Lord Jehovah has started to bring plagues in your private life or in your family, one by one, small or big, in order to destroy all the idols you may have at this moment of your life. He is sending them to let you know that only He is the true God, only He is your true comfort and hope!

Whether you like it or not, one day all of us will meet our final plague on the earth, which is the death from which none of us can escape. Is that the final end for everyone? No! After death the last judgment awaits us all. The ten plagues here are just prototypes or rehearsals of the most horrible final judgment. No more tolerance, no more patience, no more mercy will be shown during that last judgment. You have to face the most holy and most dreadful Judge, the judge of heaven and earth.



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MATTERS OF THE HEART

All your hidden sins, the things you do in secret, will be revealed in the light.

In that day, all of those who still have not reconciled with God will cry out loud, not merely for the loss of their firstborn, but for themselves. Revelation 1:7 tells us that on that day all the tribes of the earth will wail for their own inescapable punishment in the hell. Dear reader, do you have the blood of the Passover Lamb to cover yourself? If not, this judgment will be your final end and there is no way you can avoid that judgment without the blood of the Lamb.

You may ask: how can I be covered by the blood of the Lamb of God? Do I need to celebrate the Passover like the Israelites and sacrifice a lamb for myself? Definitely not. The Old Testament history has shown clearly that even sacrificing a lamb daily does not solve the problem of sin. But the good news is that *you do not need to prepare the sacrifice by yourself!* This time, God Himself has prepared the sacrifice and it is a much better sacrifice: Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God and the eternal only begotten Son of God. This time, Jehovah did not strike the firstborn of sinners, but instead crucified His own Son on the cross on the day of Passover. This time, the Lord almighty did not request a perfect sacrifice without any blemish from you, but He sacrificed His own beloved Son who knows no sin at all. This is the way, the only way, that God prepares for all sinners to escape from the final judgment. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, the apostle Paul declares that Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. His sacrifice has already been finished 2,000 years ago, completely and absolutely.

Christ the Lamb has been sacrificed and the only thing left is to believe. Do you believe, my dear friend? Are you willing to confess all your sins and to be covered by the blood of this Passover Lamb? Come to Him, embrace Him, eat His flesh and drink His blood! Union with this Christ is through genuine faith. Then, all your sins will be taken away, all of His righteousness will become yours, the most dreadful Judge of heaven and earth will become your heavenly Father, and the eternal punishment of hell waiting for you will turn to be the eternal felicity in the new heaven and new earth. Are you willing to embrace this amazing exchange? Have you ever tasted this wonderful grace? If not, come and taste it!

The Life of Separation

If God has already covered you with the blood of this Passover Lamb and has already separated you from this evil world under judgment, *then the final question for you is whether you really have a life of separation.* At a certain level, our community is doing very well in separating from society and its culture. But it should always be kept in mind that the essence of this separated life is not the external or physical separation, but a sanctified life, a life of obedience, a life of holiness, a life separated unto the service of God.

First Peter 2:9 tells us that the grace of separation serves the purpose of showing forth the praises of our Lord Jesus Christ, this Passover Lamb, who has bought you with His precious blood and called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You have then been chosen and separated to be the holy, royal priesthood of God. Behind all your external physical separation from the world, do you still keep this grand mission and vision in your mind, in your heart? Do you show forth the praise of Jesus Christ with your deeds and words? Parents, can your children see from your spiritual life the grace and mercy, justice and holiness of your God? Husband, can your wife see in your love the self-denial and the sacrificial love of your Savior? Wives, can your husband see in your obedience the obedient life to and of your Master? If you are in your older years or confined to your home, you may think there is really nothing you can do, but still, you can show forth the praise of Jesus Christ, maybe even in a better way. When people see your hope and peace in illness, your patience and love in tribulation, they know that that joy and peacefulness could not be from you. It can only come from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Outside of the home, brothers and sisters in Christ, have your neighbors heard the praise-worthy name, the sweet name of Jesus from your mouth? Have you ever truly suffered for the name of Christ? What cost have you ever paid for this faith? Our Lord Jesus has already told us there would be cost, and you had better count the cost ahead, right? Therefore, to show forth the praise-worthy name of Christ challenges us to break down our external physical separation from the world and get out of our spiritual comfort zone. It calls us to reach out to those with whom we are not comfortable speaking, to spend time to really understand them, and to show them why and how the gospel of Christ is the good news for their personal life. This interaction takes time and effort, because it takes love. But that is just what our Lord Christ did to us.

As long as we are still in this world we carry that sinful flesh with us and can never reach a perfect state of separation. Indeed, there is only One who led a life of perfect obedience and perfect holiness on earth. That is our Lord Jesus Christ. The truth is, apart from Him, we can do nothing. Our hope is only in Him! That means we not only need Jesus Christ this Passover Lamb to sacrifice for our sins, but we also need this resurrected Savior to empower us with His Spirit and resurrection power to fight with our flesh, the world, and Satan daily.

Confess then you are needy before Him. You need His grace, mercy, and resurrection power every day, every moment, every second! Turn your eyes upon this Jesus Christ, in your struggles, in your weakness, in your failures! In Him alone there is forgiveness and comfort, in Him alone there is power and the best example of the life of separation. Ultimately, this separated life is not from us. It is not our power or ability to

53RD
ANNUAL

LADIES' CONFERENCE

of the Free Reformed Churches

TUESDAY
MAY 31, 2022 D.V.

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CREATING SAFE HAVENS

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COFFEE: 9:30

MORNING SESSION: 10:00
SPEAKER: PASTOR ERIC MOERDYK

AFTERNOON SESSION: 1:30
PANEL DISCUSSION

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Online pre-registration will be required. A link will be sent to each society and church bulletin in advance.



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separate ourselves from others or sin, but the Lord's power.

I am sure many of you could record how God's grace of separation has functioned in your life, family, or in your spiritual journey. If you have tasted this grace of separation which is given by the Lord Jehovah, then you can be assured that His grace of separation will continue to sustain you and guide you until the day we meet Him face to face, until the last day of separation. You can trust this most faithful God! 

Mr. Jason Zhao is enrolled in the doctoral program at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and a member, together with his wife and children, of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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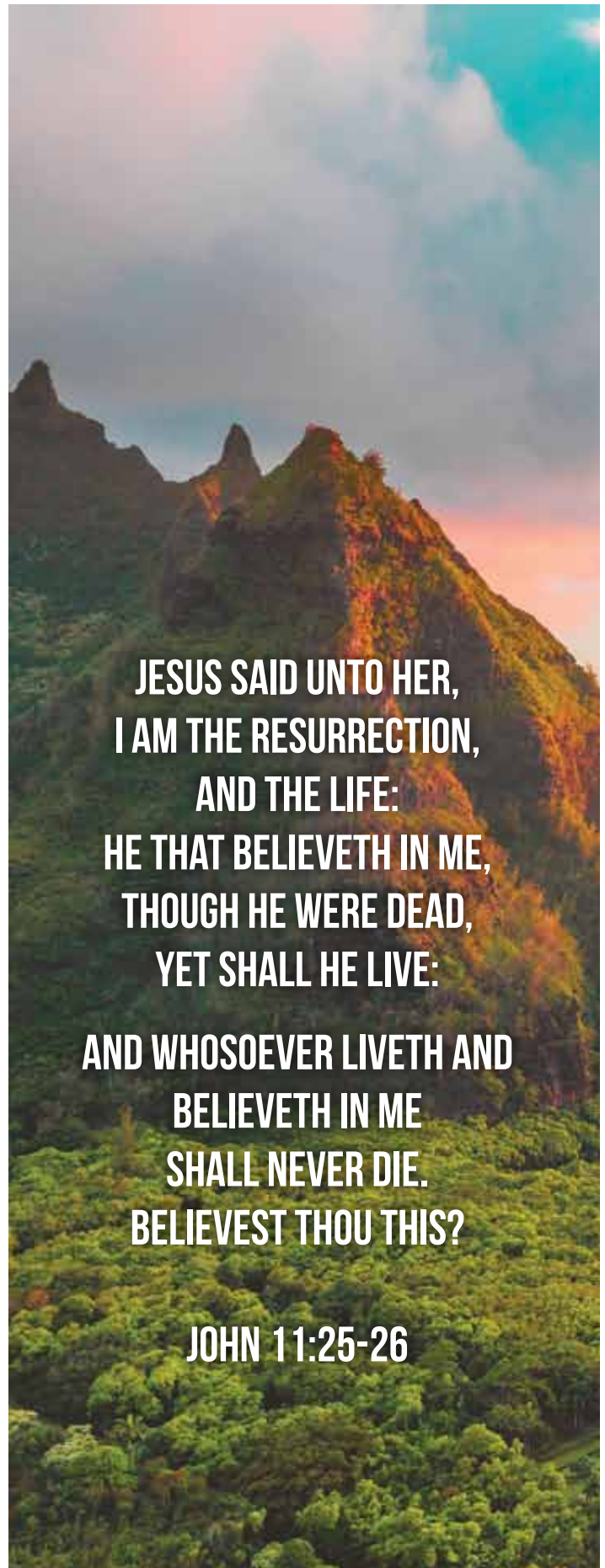
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AND THE LIFE:
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THOUGH HE WERE DEAD,
YET SHALL HE LIVE:**

**AND WHOSOEVER LIVETH AND
BELIEVETH IN ME
SHALL NEVER DIE.
BELIEVEST THOU THIS?**

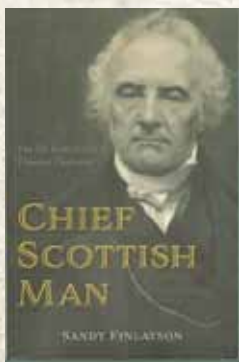
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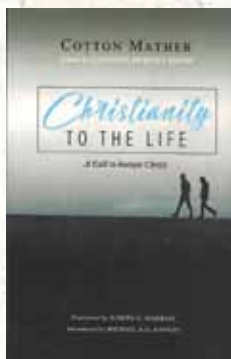
Chief Scottish Man: The Life & Ministry of Thomas Chalmers

By Sandy Finlayson
On Thursday, 18 May 1843, Dr.

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) walked out of St. Andrew's Church in Edinburgh, along with two hundred and two other ministers

and elders, leaving the Church of Scotland's General Assembly. He was appointed the first moderator of the newly constituted Free Church of Scotland. A scholar, a philosopher, an economist, a churchman, but above all a Christian preacher, the light of the gospel shone forth, lives were changed by his ministry, and he is honored and quoted until this day. Softcover, 171 pages, EP Books

RBS Price \$ 15.00



Christianity to the Life: A Call to Imitate Christ

By Cotton Mather

Cotton Mather (1663-1728) was born in Boston, MA, and is one of the most well-known of the New England

Puritans. A prolific writer, he authored over 400 works, including his magisterial Magnalia Christi Americana. In this timeless sermon, he asserts that it is not enough to simply say that you are a Christian. There must be evidence in the "walk of a Christian" as believers imitate and develop the virtues, or character qualities of the Lord Jesus Christ.

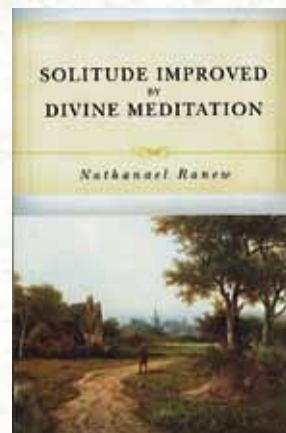
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RBS Price \$ 12.75

Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation

By Nathaniel Ranew

This is a scarce book by a little-known Puritan, but was widely read and loved in his day. The premise of the book is that one should never waste time when alone, for that time could be spent in meditating upon God. Ranew along with many other Puritans left the Church of England, though he would continue to preach and minister to the people of Essex. Softcover, 341 pages, Soli Deo Gloria Publications

RBS Price \$ 14.00



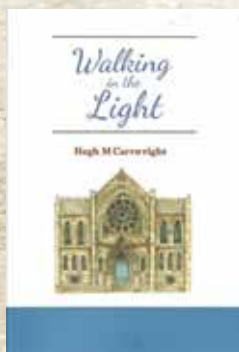
CONTEMPORARY

Walking in the Light

By Hugh M. Cartwright

How should we respond to the glorious news of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ? This collection of addresses by beloved preacher, Hugh M. Cartwright (1943-2011), moves from presenting the gospel itself to pointing out its implications in several dimensions. Always realistic about the darkness of sin, Walking in the Light extends great comfort and encouragement to those who love and trust the Lord. Softcover, 253 pages, Ettrick Press

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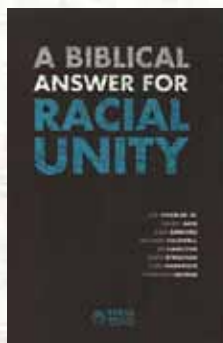


A Biblical Answer for Racial Unity

By various authors

This book is a compilation of nine biblical expositions and one biographical survey. Though it is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of the Bible's teaching on racial unity, it does offer biblical insight into the core elements of the Scripture's answer for racial reconciliation and unity within the church--and in our world. It is their prayer that it will help bring biblical clarity to our age that is so filled with confusion on this matter--and ultimately, glory to our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Softcover, 128 pages, Kress Biblical Resources

RBS Price \$17.50



What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord?

By Michael Reeves

The Bible says that a wise person fears God and keeps His commandments. But what does it actually mean to rightly fear God while also trusting Him? In this booklet, Michael Reeves calls Christians to see God as the object of their fear—a fear marked not by anxiety but by enjoyment of God. In Scripture, believers learn to truly fear the Lord, and see how they may take part in the pivotal role the church plays in exhibiting to the world his divine qualities of holiness, blessedness, happiness, wholeness, and beauty. Softcover, 71 pages, Crossway

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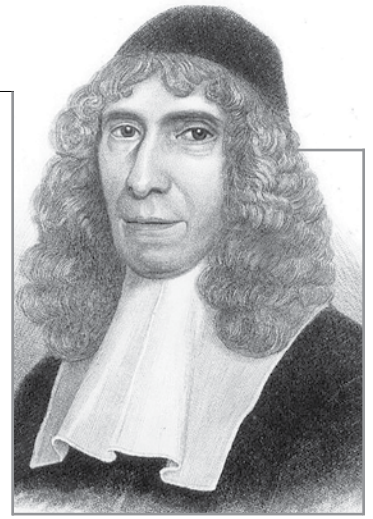
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PERILOUS TIMES (2)

BY JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

Last time, John Owen introduced what perilous times are according to the Bible and began to speak about our duty in such perilous times. He made a special reference to public plagues, concerning which he says that “death lies at every door; times that I am sure we shall not all escape, let it fall where it will,” and “here is a hand of God in this business.” In this segment, Owen will speak of apostasy when “men are prone to forsake the truth, and seducers abound.”



A second perilous season, and one in which we shall hardly stand, is when men are prone to forsake the truth, and seducers abound to gather them up that are so. You will have always these things go together. Do you see seducers abound? You may be sure there is a proneness in the minds of men to forsake the truth, and when there is such a proneness, they will never lack seducers who will lead off the minds of men from the truth.

There is both the hand of God and Satan in this business. God judicially leaves men, when He sees them grow weary of the truth, and prone to leave it, and Satan strikes in with the occasion and stirs up seducers. This makes such a season perilous. The apostle describes it: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times” (these perilous days) “some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1). Peter also warns them to whom he writes that “there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their pernicious ways” (2 Peter 2:1-2). There shall come times full of peril, which shall draw men from the truth into destruction.

Our Dangers

If it be asked, how may we know whether there be a proneness in the minds of men in any season to depart from the truth? There are three ways whereby we may judge it:

1. The first is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:3: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” When men grow weary of sound doctrine—when it is too plain, too heavy, too dull, too common, too high, too mysterious, one thing or other that displeases them, and they would hear something new, something that may please—it is a sign that such an age has many who are prone to forsake sound doctrine, and many such we know.
2. When men have lost the power of truth in their conversation and are prone and ready to part with the profession of it in their minds, it is a perilous time. Do you see a such a man retaining the profession of the truth under a worldly conver-

sation? He only lacks baits from temptation or a seducer to take away his faith from him. An inclination to hearken after novelties and loss of the power of truth in the conversation is a sign of proneness unto this declension from the truth. Such a season, you see, is perilous. And why is it perilous? Because the souls of many are destroyed in it. The apostle tells us directly, in 2 Peter 2:1, of “false prophets among the people, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destructions.” Will it abide there? No: “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” Brethren, while it is well with us, through the grace of God, and our own houses are not in flames, pray do not let us think the times are not perilous, when so many turn into pernicious errors and fall into swift destruction. Will you say the time of the public plague was not perilous because you were alive? No. Was the fire not dreadful because your houses were not burned? No. You will, notwithstanding, say it was a dreadful plague and a dreadful fire. Then consider, is not this a perilous season, when multitudes have an inclination to depart from the truth, and God, in just judgment, hath permitted Satan to stir up seducers to draw them into pernicious ways and their poor souls perish forever?

Besides, there is a great aptness in such a season to work indifference in the minds of those who do not intend utterly to forsake the truth. Little did I think I should ever have lived in this world to find the minds of professors grown altogether indifferent concerning the doctrines of God’s eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace in the conversion of sinners, and justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Many are, as to all these things, grown to an indifferency; they know not whether they are so or not. I bless God I know something of the former generation, when professors would not hear of these things without the highest detestation, and now high professors begin to be leaders in it, and it is too much among the best of us. We are not so much concerned for the truth as our forefathers; I wish I could say we were as holy.

3. This proneness to depart from the truth is a perilous season because it is the greatest evidence of the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from His church. The Spirit of God is promised to this end, "to lead us into all truth." When the efficacy of truth begins to decay, it is the greatest evidence of the departing and withdrawing of the Spirit of God. I think that this is a dangerous thing, for if the Spirit of God departs, then our glory and our life depart.

Our Duty

What, now, is our duty in reference to this perilous season?

Forewarnings of perils are given us to instruct us in our duty.

1. The first is not to be content with what you judge a sincere profession of truth, but to labor to be found in the exercise of all those graces which peculiarly respect the truth. There are graces that peculiarly respect the truth that we are to exercise. If these are not found in our hearts, all our profession will issue in nothing.

And these graces are the following:

- (a) Love: "Because they loved not the truth." They made profession of the gospel, but they received not the truth in the love of it. There was a lack of love of the truth. Truth will do no man good where there is not the love of it. "Speaking the truth in love" is the substance of our Christian profession. Pray, brethren, let us labor to love the truth and to take off all prejudices from our minds, that we may do so.
 - (b) It is the great and only rule to preserve us in perilous times to labor to have the experience of the power of every truth in our hearts. "If so be ye have learned the Lord Jesus." How? So as to "put off. . . the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24). This is to learn the truth. The great grace that is to be exercised with reference to truth in such a season as this is to exemplify it in our hearts in the power of it. Labor for the experience of the power of every truth in your own hearts and lives.
 - (c) Zeal for the truth. Truth is the most proper object for zeal. We ought to "contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints," to be willing, as God shall help us, to part with name and reputation, and to undergo scorn and contempt, all that this world can cast upon us, in giving testimony unto the truth. Everything that this world counts dear and valuable is to be forsaken rather than the truth. This was the great end for which Christ came into the world.
2. Cleave unto the means that God hath appointed and ordained for your preservation in the truth. I see some are ready to go to sleep and think themselves not concerned in these things—the Lord awaken their hearts! Keep to the means of preservation in the truth, namely, the present ministry. Bless God for the remainder of a ministry valuing the truth, knowing the truth, and sound in the faith. Cleave unto such remainders. There is little influence upon the minds of

men from this ordinance and institution of God, in the great business of the ministry. But know there is something more in it than that they seem to have better abilities to dispute than you: more knowledge, more light, better understandings than you. If you know no more in the ministry than this, you will never have benefit by it. They are God's ordinance; the name of God is upon them. God will be sanctified in them. They are God's ordinance for the preservation of the truth.

3. Let us carefully remember the faith of them who went before us in the profession of the last age. I am apt to think there was not a more glorious profession for a thousand years upon the face of the earth than was among the professors of the last age. And pray, of what faith were they? Were they half Armenian and half Socinian, half Papist and half I know not what? Remember how zealous they were for the truth, how little their holy souls would have borne with those public defections from the doctrine of truth which we see, and do not mourn over, but make nothing of, in the days wherein we live. God was with them, and they lived to His glory and died in peace. "Whose faith follow," and example pursue. Remember the faith they lived and died in. Look round about and see whether any of the new creeds have produced a new holiness to exceed theirs. ①


To be continued

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"Let the people praise Thee, O God; let ALL
the people praise Thee" Psalm 67:5

PASTOR G.R. & MRS. ETTY PROCEE



Emeritus... What does life look like for a pastor of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken upon receiving such status? Rev. G.R Procee and his dear wife Etty started upon this pathway in April 2021 after saying farewell to the congregation of Middelharnis, the Netherlands. Their desire was to spend their retirement years in the vicinity of many of their children and grandchildren, as they made their home in Tillsonburg, Ontario. They moved their earthly possessions in April 2021 and also transferred their membership to the Oxford Free Reformed congregation. They trusted and prayed

that the Lord would still have a work for them in His kingdom doing the work they loved, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of the gospel of free and sovereign grace to poor sinners.

In July 2021, Rev. L.J. Bilkes said farewell to our congregation and took on the labours of the Oxford congregation. Our new vacancy opened an opportunity which the consistory capitalized on, and a request was submitted to Rev. Procee to consider accepting some pastoral work in the midst of our congregation. To our joy, he was led to accept the re-




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quest, and thus was initiated a period of Sunday preaching services and catechism instruction for the youth throughout the fall of 2021. During this period, Pastor and Etty Procee also made many visits of acquaintance or reacquaintance to the homes of the members of our congregation, which were greatly appreciated. Their membership was subsequently transferred from Oxford FRC to our congregation, and in November, the male membership of our congregation extended a call to Pastor Procee to be in the special office of a teaching elder. He accepted this call and was ordained to this office on January 9, 2022, in a service led by Rev. Pronk. In this role, Pastor Procee leads many of our weekly worship services, instructs catechism, and looks after many other pastoral cares, including the sick and elderly of the congregation.

So what does the life of an emeritus pastor and his wife look like? We expect our Pastor Procee and Etty would agree that it looks like a busy life in the congregation, fulfilling the duties and joys of a servant of God and experiencing the privilege to still labour in His kingdom in their period of retirement. May it all redound to the praise of God Most High! 

1st Annual Seniors' Day

(formerly Dutch Day)



When:

Tuesday
May 3, 2022 D.V.

Where:

Hamilton Free Reformed Church
1114 Old Mohawk Rd.,
Ancaster, ON L9G 3K9

Speaker:

Pastor Henk Bergsma

Lunch will be provided.
The speech will be in English, with a Dutch hymn-sing at the end of the afternoon session.

Times:

Coffee: 9:45 am
Morning Session: 10:30 am
Afternoon Session: 1:00 pm



Free Reformed Historical Centre

"What do I do with these things?"

Contact the Free Reformed Historical Centre

The Free Reformed Historical Centre is to gather and preserve materials relating to the Dutch roots and North American establishment, development, and ongoing life of our churches. Specific materials are classified as unrestricted access (available to all), restricted access (available only to approved persons), and/or time-specified access (available after a specified future date).

The Historical Centre is looking for:

- Printed materials from the churches.
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- Publications from our 'mother' churches.
- Pictures of people and events.
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If you or your (grand)parents have materials that may be of interest to the centre, please contact:

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OBITUARY

ELISABETH JOHANNA VAN VARIK

nee Heikoop

July 21, 1920-February 9, 2022

It pleased the Lord to take out of our midst our beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother in her **102nd year**. She was predeceased on November 12, 1985 by her beloved husband Gerard.

Mother to **Gerry and Audrey Van Varik** - St. George, ON

Jenny Van Varik

Heidi and Nick Gorter (Kylie, Chase, Preston)

Deanna and Gerrit Huls (Hudson, Denver, Makenna)

Gerald and Breanna Van Varik (Brayden, Aaron)

Adrian and Alexandra Van Varik

Sara and Dylan Stryker

Survived by her brother Henry and Marie Heikoop. Predeceased by siblings Dick and Mary, Martin and Tina, Wouter, Alice and Len Visser and in-laws in the Netherlands.

The funeral service took place on **February 11, 2022**, in the Dundas Free Reformed Church, with Rev. L.J. Bilkes officiating. Interment followed at Jerseyville Cemetery.

John 10:11 *«I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.»*

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We will be joining with this year's 28 graduates and their families to celebrate the successful completion of their programs and to thank the Lord for His sustaining grace as they seek to service Christ and His church throughout the world. We will also be awarding honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees to **Rev. Cornelis (Neil) Pronk** of the Free Reformed Church of North America, and **Professor Franklin Ferreira** of Martin Bucer Seminary Brazil for their distinguished vocations in the service of the church and academy. We are also honored to have **Dr. John W Tweeddale** of Reformation Bible College as this year's commencement speaker. Dr. Tweeddale's message will be **The Ministry of Christ in the Life of the Church**, taken from Acts 1:8.

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