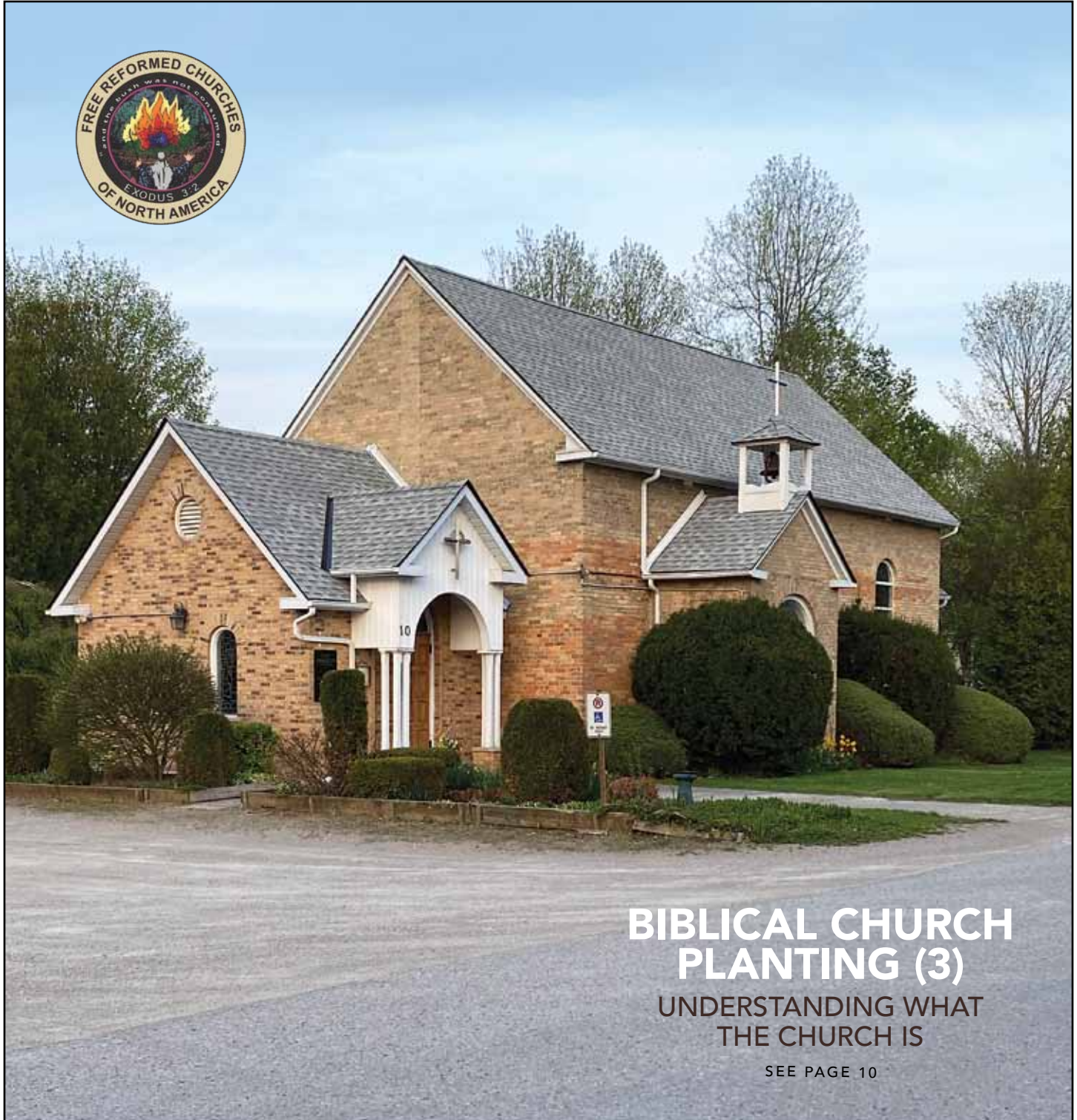


# THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



## BIBLICAL CHURCH PLANTING (3)

UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE CHURCH IS

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UNQUENCHABLE WILDFIRE!

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# PENTECOST:

## REMEMBERING AN UNQUENCHABLE WILDFIRE!

*Acts 2*

As we approach the hot summer months, we may be reminded of the 2021 western North American wildfires. They captivated our attention in our news feeds, possibly impacted some of us, or were sensed through a smoky haze that stretched to the east coast. We are continually reminded that when there are drought conditions, a tiny spark can cause a blazing fire to spread, making it nearly impossible to control and extinguish.

As we celebrate Christ's redemptive work of sending the promised Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, I want to remember an unquenchable wildfire! This wildfire has the power to destroy sin and transform hearts and lives through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. May we have the same urgency to worship God and proclaim the gospel by remembering this redemptive work as Paul had in Acts 20:16, when he was determined to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. In doing so, let us remember the spark, the blaze, and the spread of Pentecost, while praying that the Holy Spirit would send such a wildfire of revival in our day and our land.

### The Spark of Pentecost

Pentecost was the second major annual feast commanded by the Lord to the Israelites. It was celebrated on the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Passover. Therefore, it was called Pentecost or the fiftieth. During this feast the people would bring their first fruits of the harvest and present them to the Lord. In God's providence, Christ waited until the 50<sup>th</sup> day after His resurrection to send the Holy Spirit, which was on the day of Pentecost. Indeed, Jerusalem was bustling with people who had come from far and near to participate in all the festivities of Pentecost. The conditions were ideal! Jesus had suffered, died, rose again, and ascended to heaven. The disciples were able to be instructed, return to Jerusalem, and pray. In Acts 2, we read, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Christ was igniting His disciples by His Spirit! In Acts 1, they had been in the upper room in prayer and supplication, and now as they were gathered. They were being anointed with the graces and fruits of the Holy Spirit as they gathered in unity in one place with their expectation of the fulfillment of the promise of Christ. Do you see the spark becoming a flame as they pray with one accord for the Holy Spirit and in the Spirit?

Do we desire the spark of God's grace to grow into a flame of fire among us? We should ask ourselves, where did this spark come from, and how did it turn into this flame of spiritual graces? The answer is that it comes from God through our ascended Lord in His perfect time, but never forget that He does so in and through His people who are gathered, praying, and seeking to receive the promised blessing of their Lord.

### The Blaze of Pentecost

Luke demands our attention in verse 2: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Several years ago, when I was camping with my sons, the campfire was burning and suddenly the wind picked up, and the fire ignited some pine needles. They burn fast even on a damp fall evening! There we were stamping them out, pouring whatever water we could find on them, and thankfully managed to extinguish them. However, the flame of Pentecost being fanned by the rushing mighty wind of the Holy Spirit was unquenchable and turned into a blazing fire!

This demonstration of heavenly power produced a supernatural event as cloven tongues as fire sat upon each of them! John the Baptist’s prophecy that the disciples would be baptized with the Spirit and with fire was fulfilled and continues to be fulfilled as the Holy Spirit dwells in those who believe in Christ in the New Testament era. However, the disciples had a special gift of “speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Imagine how fitting this was for the conditions in Jerusalem at Pentecost since all who were gathered in Jerusalem from around the world could hear them in their own tongue or language.

The spark became a flame and was fanned into a blaze by speaking according to the will of the Holy Spirit or the Word of God! We could get all caught up in the fact that everyone could understand them in their own language, which profoundly demonstrated the power of God upon them and enabled them. However, what must also demand our attention is that Christians who are partakers of Christ’s anointing of the Holy Spirit, having hearts burning within, are also called to speak! C.H. Spurgeon wrote, “A burning heart will soon find for itself a flaming tongue.” Feed the flame in your heart with the Word of God and the work of Christ, so that your tongue will proclaim it as the Holy Spirit takes that flame and fans it into a roaring fire that can spread wherever God has intended it to go. Do you know what effect a word in the right conditions might have? Would it create a spark, a flame, or even a blazing fire when blessed by God? Do you know where it will spread?

### The Spread of Pentecost

As we continue reading Acts 2, we see Peter step forward to explain what is happening and how the prophecy of Joel is being fulfilled. He then proclaims the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, this wildfire begins to spread as people are pricked in their hearts and cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” When they are called to repent from their sin, believe in Jesus, and be baptized; they gladly receive this word, and God added unto them about three thousand souls! Those added to the church didn’t just go home and say, “Wow, that was a great experience!” They also continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship while manifesting the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the chapter ends with these words, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

However, Acts 2 is not the end of Pentecost blessing because the rest of the book of Acts describes this wildfire spreading throughout the world even as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8: “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” This is the witness of the first-century Christian expansion as the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome in demonstrating the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout history, the witness of the gospel of our Lord Jesus brought blessing from farm to farm, town to town, city to city, nation to nation, continent to continent as this unquenchable wildfire fanned by the Holy Spirit conquers hearts, lives, communities, and nations.

As you remember this Pentecost, praise and worship God for this unquenchable wildfire when the fullness of the Holy Spirit was poured out! Maybe you can even take some time to research how God has set ablaze Europe and the Americas in the past and how that wildfire has leaped over oceans to African and Asian countries. It is encouraging to see the sovereign power of God in sending the Holy Spirit to do His transforming work! However, let us do more than study it; let us desire to participate. Pray for the Holy Spirit to fan the flame of the gospel in your life, family, church, community, and nation! Prepare for the effects of His transforming work! Pray for opportunities to be the mouthpiece that the Lord uses and blesses to the increase of His church and to His glory. ①

*Rev. Scott Dibbet is pastor of Providence Free Reformed Church of St. George, Ontario.*

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

# “AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS” (I)

*In interpersonal relations, repentance and forgiveness are beautiful yet rare. The political scene seems increasingly filled with attacks and refusals to apologize. Covid issues have too often strained or even broken relationships within churches through hurtful words and behaviors. Sadly, among relatives and even within families there can be hurts which lead to conflict or estrangement due to a lack of repentance and forgiveness. These realities call us to return to the basics about forgiveness, revealed in the Lord's Prayer, which some of us pray every day.*

## A Unique confession

The Lord's Prayer is a beautiful gift to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. When the disciples asked, “Teach us to pray,” the Lord Jesus not only taught them, but gave instruction to His church throughout the ages. And ever since then, this prayer has been prayed and has served as a model to guide prayer wherever the gospel has gone.

It is striking that this prayer only confesses one action we perform: “we forgive our debtors.” Some might prefer that the fifth petition simply requested: “Forgive us our debts” and omitted this last clause. “As we forgive our debtors” can be so difficult to pray because it can accuse us and pain us as we think of what others have done or still do to us. Some of us can wonder, how can I forgive them? Some of the deepest pains in life are not inflicted by sudden accidents or impersonal diseases, but by the deliberate hurt from others.

Augustine tells of two men who lived in malice toward each other being asked how they could say the Lord's Prayer. One said he “thanked God there were many good prayers besides.” The other said “when he said the Lord's prayer, he left out those words.” Augustine responded by saying God would respond to them: “because thou dost not say my prayer, therefore I will not hear thine.”

Strikingly, this clause is the only clause that the Lord Jesus comments on after teaching this prayer in Matthew 6:14-15: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Does the Lord Jesus give this clarification because He knows our response to hurt can easily be to try to get even and attack; avoid the person and build barriers; harbour anger, resentment, or bitterness; or sink into depression?

Given this all, we may be thankful for this whole petition: “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The gracious Saviour is showing

there is a better way than anger, bitterness, misery, and gloom. There is the way of forgiveness.

### A Needed Forgiveness

If someone has just been deeply hurt by another, the first thing to say may not be “you must forgive!” Forced expressions of forgiveness often only bury the hurt deeper inside. Yet, we need to begin with forgiveness as a calling.

First, forgiveness is commanded in many places of Scripture. The Lord Jesus teaches generally, “Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). He also calls for repeated forgiveness: “if [thy brother] trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luke 17:4). Concerning prayer, He teaches: “When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any” (Mark 11:25). Pray to God with a forgiving spirit.

The epistles confirm these calls. Toward the brother who has fallen deeply and repented, we hear the call: “ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:7). Among the brethren, comes the call: “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (Eph 4:32); “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any” (Col 3:13). Forgiveness is commanded.

Second, forgiveness is a necessary evidence of sharing in salvation. We already cited the Lord Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:14-15, which make clear that if we are not forgiving, we cannot think we are being forgiven by God. A very clear illustration of this principle is the parable in Matthew 18. When a servant is forgiven a massive debt and refuses to forgive the small debt of a fellow-servant, he is delivered to the tormentors till he should pay his whole debt. The conclusion to the parable is: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” Put simply, persisting in an unforgiving spirit is evidence that one has not been forgiven by God.

### A Misunderstood Forgiveness

When we are convinced forgiveness is required, the next question is: What is forgiveness? We can underestimate or overestimate what it is.

We *underestimate* forgiveness when we reduce it merely to accepting an apology, trying to forget and push away the thought of things we can’t undo, or thinking: “I’ll forgive but will never forget....”

We *overestimate* forgiveness when we think:

- It always involves acting as if the wrong never happened. If you forgive your husband for not paying attention to you when you were talking, you can move on as if it never happened, but if you forgive him for being an alcoholic, you do not pretend he never had (and will never continue to have) that struggle with alcohol.
- It always involves wiping away all the consequences of the wrong. If someone stole from you, you can forgive that person’s wrong against you and not require payment, but often it may be wiser to still receive the payment which a truly penitent thief would want to give you.
- It always involves wholehearted reconciliation with the person who has wronged you. Sometimes the restoration of the relationship is a long process after forgiveness or the same bond is never reestablished.
- It is always the end of the discussion about the wrong. Sometimes the hurt remains after forgiveness and there is a place for working through the hurt even after the sin is forgiven.

A wrong estimation of the nature of forgiveness can easily hinder our pursuit of and true enjoyment of forgiving and being forgiven.

### A Multi-faceted Forgiveness

What then is forgiveness? When we forgive, we promise not to hold the sins of those we have forgiven

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**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:**  
· Mr. David Tamminga  
· Rev. Kenneth Hutton  
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(Publications Administrator)  
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Calgary, AB T2X 3M4 CANADA  
T: 403.254.6591 · E: bookorders@frcna.org

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E: messenger@frcna.org

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Publications Committee:  
Rev. Jerrold Lewis, General Editor  
160 West Parkway  
Pompton Plains, NJ 07444  
E: jlewis@frcna.org

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MISSIONS  
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against them. We resolve not to use the sin they have committed against us against them in judgmental dealings with them or in our talk about them to others. We do not carry the wrong with us in a spirit of bitterness or revenge.

The Puritan, Thomas Watson, asks: “When do we forgive others?” His answer states: “When we strive against all thoughts of revenge; when we will not do our enemies mischief, but wish well to them, grieve at their calamities, pray for them, seek reconciliation with them, and show ourselves ready on all occasions to relieve them.” Let us unpack that definition a little.

1. “We strive against all thoughts of revenge.” We no longer have the desire to get even, get back, or hold grudges that demand payment. We may not be entirely free from such thoughts, but we strive against all such thoughts. Romans 12:19 reminds us: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” You realize you are not the judge. God is the judge. You then leave their case in God’s hands and have no desire to take it into your own hands anymore.
2. “We will not do our enemies mischief, but wish well to them.” We do not want to hurt them but want to see them prosper in body & soul! 1 Thessalonians 5:15 exhorts: “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good”. Forgiveness shows a desire to see the forgiven blessed.
3. “We grieve at their calamities.” We are saddened to see them suffer even the consequences of their sins. We do not simply shrug our shoulders and say: That serves them right. If we have forgiven, we grieve when they suffer!
4. We “pray for them.” Can you pray for that person who has hurt you? A forgiving spirit shows itself in prayer for the other—prayer for God to work or deepen repentance, lead to faith, or further into the knowledge of Christ; for God to sanctify and bless them, guide them, and provide for them.
5. We “seek reconciliation with them.” Forgiveness is directed toward reconciliation. The goal of forgiveness is that the wrong done would no longer come between us and the other. Notice that Watson says, “we seek reconciliation with them.” Regardless of the success, that is our desire.
6. “We show ourselves ready on all occasions to relieve them.” Positively, we are ready to help them in their need. That does not mean we always do whatever they want, but we do desire to truly help them.

These elements make forgiveness concrete, showing that it involves a heart attitude toward the person and a display of that in life.

How do these elements show themselves in different situations? What does forgiveness look like amid daily irritants, towards those who refuse to repent, or towards those who ask for forgiveness? Before focusing on these situations next time, let each of us reflect on the importance and nature of forgiveness and ask ourselves two questions. Are there ones of which I need to ask for forgiveness? Are there ones to whom I need to show a forgiving spirit? ①

## BIBLE STUDY: THE GOD WHO HEARS

**The God Who Hears: How the Story of the Bible Shapes Our Prayers** by Sarah Ivill. Published by Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Softcover, 164 pages.

At this time of year, women’s groups may be looking out for Bible studies for the next season. We are glad there are many which are written from a Reformed standpoint.<sup>1</sup> One author who has not enjoyed much publicity but who has written many Bible studies is Sarah Ivill. *The God Who Hears* is her latest book. Sarah has written Bible studies since she was a teenager and continues writing and teaching Bible studies for women,<sup>2</sup> speaks at women’s retreats and conferences with an emphasis on Reformed theology, and is a member of a PCA church. Currently, she is a stay-at-home mom. She and her husband have four children.

Unlike Bible studies which tend to focus on a woman’s needs, Ivill does not start with our needs, which she freely acknowledges and continuously recognizes, but her emphasis is *first* on God speaking to us throughout His Word about prayer. “This book is a biblical theology of prayer,” she states in “A Note from Sarah.”

So, what does this mean? “Understanding prayer as it unfolds from Genesis through Revelation reveals the foundation and motivation for prayer. We begin with the truth that God has initiated a conversation with us. He has created us to be in relationship with Him.... Studying prayer through the unfolding story of Scripture will teach us how to pray, but more importantly, it will reveal the covenant God to whom we pray.” Elsewhere she states: “We cannot read passages of Scripture about prayer without an understanding of their historical context” (p. 3).

She emphasizes that the whole Bible is concerned with the gospel and is Christ-centered (p. 5). So she begins with Genesis and ends with the book of Revelation, showing how the Lord progressively unfolds the theme of prayer as it intertwines with His revelation of salvation, culminating in the coming of Christ and His Spirit, followed by the teaching of the apostles to the churches in the New Testament, and ending with endless praise and thanksgiving in heaven. Sarah wants women to “dig into the Bible, reading it chronologically and studying texts in light of their original context as well as in the light of the redemptive historical context” (p. 7).

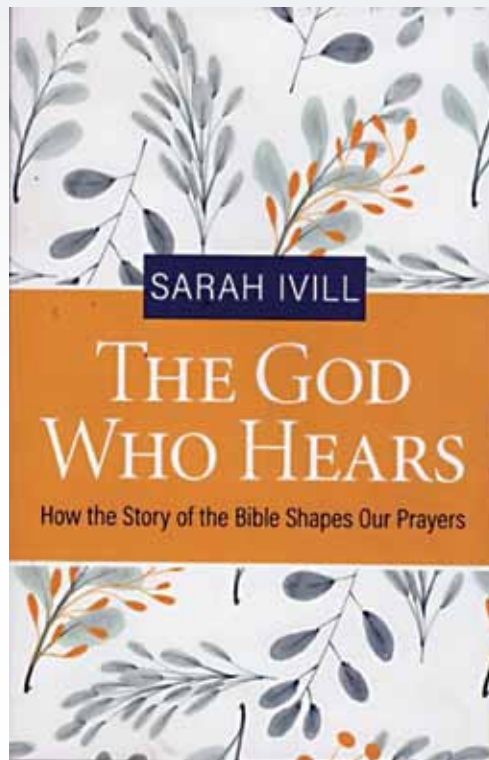
What stands out in these Bible studies is the author’s

knowledge of biblical theology, applying it to the hearts and lives of the readers in a direct, personal, and loving manner with exhortations and encouragements to seek the Lord and His grace for all our needs. Rather than focusing on our needs, which she acknowledges and describes in detail, her emphasis is on the “God Who Hears” prayer and how He provides.

Her method covers the theme of prayer in 10 chapters, dividing the Bible into different chronological periods of redemption, focusing on the wonderful cohesion and interrelationship of Scripture, so we may “glorify God and enjoy Him as we come to know Him better through His Word” (p. 8).

The first chapter is about Creation, when there was a perfect relationship with God in paradise, but which was lost by the Fall. Yet, the Lord continued to relate to a fallen race. Next, this relationship is explained from the Flood to the time of the Patriarchs. From that period, there is progression during the time of Moses, and then from Moses to David and Solomon, and from Solomon to the Exile, where God used His prophets to reveal His judgments and promises unto and during the return from exile. The next chapter focuses on Jesus, “The Lord Who Prays,” where we find the perfect model for prayer. Here the author uses explanations from the Heidelberg Catechism to explain The Lord’s Prayer. The Holy Spirit’s work is explained in the chapter entitled, “The Lord Who Is with Us by His Spirit.” Here the focus is on several portions of Acts and especially the letters to the churches, where the apostles teach the church more explicitly about prayer.

The final chapter, “The Lord Who is Coming Soon,” centers on the book of Revelation. Here prayer turns into a continuous song of thanksgiving and praise, the hosts of heaven joining the



saints in one jubilant choir of worship (Rev. 19:6-7): “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready” (p. 150; she uses the NKJV).

Each chapter concludes with questions under the title: “Time to Ponder and Pray” as well as with an encouragement to memorize a key Scripture verse. Some of the questions are quite personal with exhortations to seek the Lord, which may be too sensitive to discuss publicly. The study requires preparation time by doing some serious reading, but it is worth it. You will be enriched in your prayer life. You will learn to see how the story of the Bible shapes our prayers, as well as learn to see the unity and progression of God’s redemption revealed progressively throughout the Scriptures.

This study is also suitable for personal devotions or small groups. ①

#### Endnotes

1. She references time-honoured Reformed authors such as Geerhardus Vos, Edmund Clowney, Denis Johnson, and others, as well as books on prayer.
2. Hebrews: His Hope, An Anchor for Our Souls; Revelation: Let the One Who Is Thirsty Come; Judges & Ruth: There Is a Redeemer; 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Jude: Steadfast in the Faith; Ezra and Nehemiah: The Good Hand of Our God is Upon Us; Romans: The Gospel of God for Obedience to the Faith; Isaiah: The Holy One of Israel; The Covenantal Life: Appreciating the Beauty of Theology and Community; Never Enough: Confronting Lies About Appearance and Achievement with Gospel Hope; Broken Cisterns: Thirsting for the Creator Instead of the Created.

*These books may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.*



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# ELDERS AND DEACONS AS BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

In some ways, we can compare the church to a hospital where sick people go to get help and healing. Just as a variety of doctors and nurses care for and give counsel to a hospital's patients, so in the church, the office-bearers are called to give counsel and advice to those who are a part of the church body. While it is the calling of all members of the church to give counsel to one another, elders and deacons have also been given this calling and task in their particular offices.

Everyone in this world is getting advice from somewhere, whether it is around the water cooler at work, at a coffee table in a restaurant, a visit with a colleague or friend, or the latest book to be published. It seems everyone is ready to give advice when a problem is shared, but the question is, Is the advice given good or bad? In other words, is it biblical or not? There is only one kind of advice that will honour the Lord and really benefit the believer, and that is biblical counsel. The counsel therefore that is given by office-bearers must be rooted in the Word of God; it must be biblical, wise, and godly. God has promised to equip you for this task even as He has promised to equip all the people of God who are in Christ. Paul says, you are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish (counsel) one another" (Rom. 15:14).

Regarding the elders, much of this begins at family visits, and therefore these visits ought to be used for this express purpose. What takes place there is of critical importance for the health of the church. It would be ideal if there would be particular families in the church who are either assigned to specific elders or if elders reach out to families on their own and seek to disciple them on specific issues. This allows for better communication and follow-up and develops deeper relationships. There are often questions or concerns that arise from family visits and informal meetings that need follow-up. They may be spiritual questions, an observation that was made regarding one of the parents or perhaps one of the older children, or it may be a very practical matter regarding business decisions or work. And, while addressing the one matter, it may well lead to another underlying matter.

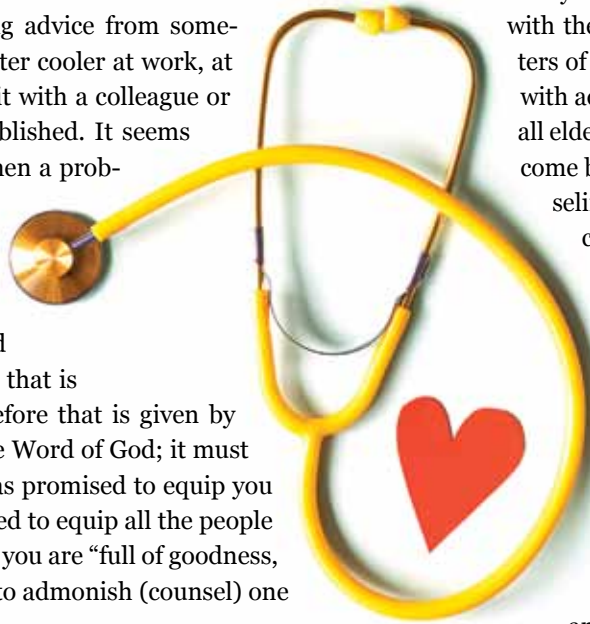
When you take time to speak, to get to know, to disciple, to counsel others, you will build spiritual relationships and be used by God as an instrument in His hand for the good of others. The counsel that you give should be done prayerfully and be based on the Word of God. Of course, there may be things in life you

have learned by experience that are immensely helpful as well; in other words, as an elder, you can be used by God to disciple and counsel those under your care if you will be faithful and take the initiative to do so. In doing this, you will also be edified and corrected yourself and you will see others' lives impacted.

Counseling is not just for the "professionals" or the minister; it is for you to engage in as well. Take a look at the form which is read at your installation. Elders are "to be assistant with their good counsel and advice to the ministers of the Word, yea, also to serve all Christians with advice and consolation." I would encourage all elders, and all members for that matter, to become better equipped in this area through counseling materials, books on the subject of biblical counseling, and instructive seminars.

Regarding deacons, your task in counseling others is no less important. There are often financial issues that arise in families because of either mismanagement of funds or because of difficult providences. It is not simply your task to send some money in the name of Christ, but to precede and accompany those gifts from Christ to His people with words of consolation and advice. As you minister in your office, you are more aware than most about financial concerns that take place in families. Your office requires you to give good counsel and advice to those in need. Often, as noted before, there may be problems that lie beneath the surface in the hearts of those who are mismanaging their financial affairs. There are some deacons who might be tempted to walk away from these situations; however, I am convinced that this is part of the calling you have to minister. This may take several meetings; it may take time you do not think you have. But it may also be that your counsel will save that family or others from great ruin. Doing this kind of work will often require communication between deacons and elders, because, if biblical counsel is not followed after it has been given, it may indicate that discipline is necessary. Regarding the form for installation as a deacon, we are told to read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 9, where much instruction is to be found regarding this very thing. These two chapters should be read if we are to take our office-bearing seriously.

Brothers, just as doctors and nurses give advice and counsel, so you give counsel to those in the church. At times we ourselves





need counsel and we should show ourselves examples in this as well. However, what you will find in giving counsel to others is that your own lives will be profited as well. As you speak to others about heart issues, your own hearts will be confronted. Areas in your life that need to be dealt with become clear as you talk to others about issues facing them or their family. To shy away from counseling situations leads the church of God into dangerous independence, individualism, and isolation, where everyone seems to have everything together and no one really has problems. The reality is we all have problems, though some not as apparent or as large as others. Instead of this independent spirit in the church, there ought to be a leaning on one another, encouraging and admonishing one another through the counseling we are called to give.

Paul mentions to the elders of Ephesus as he is departing from them that he had served the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations. He says he kept nothing back that was profitable to them but had shown them and taught them publicly and from house to house. This is the calling you have as office-bearers: from house to house to offer them biblical counsel for their specific needs. At the end of Acts 20, we read these words of Paul, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." It is clear that Paul was calling these overseers to take their call seriously. They were to take heed for, watch closely, and feed the church of God.

Paul gives this same reminder to those at Thessalonica: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men" (1 Thess. 5:12-14). In these last words is a wealth of counsel for the counselor. Three categories of people are given three categories of advice. If you counsel someone who is unruly, Paul says your counsel must contain warning. If you meet with one who is feebleminded, tired spiritually, or perhaps even depressed, you are to comfort them. And those who are weak, discouraged, and cannot carry on need support with words and with the gifts of the church. As you read the Scriptures, these kinds of things will become useful to you as you counsel others in the spiritual hospital of the church. <sup>11</sup>

Dr. Mark Kelderman, a minister of the Heritage Reformed Congregations, serves as Dean of Students and Spiritual Formation as well as head of the new two-year Master of Arts in Biblical Counselling program at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article is taken from *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* (Sept/Oct 2016): 210-211.

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## BIBLICAL CHURCH-PLANTING (3): UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE CHURCH IS

### SCRIPTURE READING: TITUS 2

The book of Titus was Paul's handbook to Titus, the church planter. The central directive Paul gave to Titus was to set in order the things that are lacking (Titus 1:5). In that vein, Titus was to ordain elders in every city. Through their lives and teaching, God's truth would shine forth in the midst of a culture of lies. With the blessing of God, people in the bondage of sin would be saved and their own lives would begin to reflect the truth of the gospel.

As we come to chapter 2, Paul begins to set forth what they should be if they are to be a church of Jesus Christ. This raises the question: For what purpose do we gather as a church? Of course, we could start listing the elements that make up the worship, the fellowship, and the life of the people who gather today as a church. We could speak of the order that there has to be in church life. These things are important. In fact, that is where Paul begins. He sets forth the basic order and relationships of the community and how these elements should function (vv. 1-10). Secondly, Paul speaks about what is happening through that order (vv. 11-14). God's grace teaches people to live lives that reflect God's grace and God's Saviour, Jesus Christ. The church is nothing less than a school of grace, in which people are to learn Christ (compare Eph. 4:20). Unless we understand this, we will neither be church-planting nor church-living in a biblical way. The whole point will be lost on us. On the other hand, if we see things biblically, we can stand amazed at how God is working His gracious purpose in the lives of sinners like ourselves.

#### **The Pupils and Their Lessons**

Every school has pupils who are to be learning. Verse 1 tells Titus to teach the things to the church that are consistent with sound doctrine. He had warned against false teachers in the first chapter. In contrast to them, Titus is to teach faithful doctrine and apply these doctrines to everyday life.

Whom and what is Titus to teach? We might think that the church first focused on teaching the youth. As important as that is, Paul makes clear to Titus that older Christians should lead the way and set the example in learning. He first addresses older men (v. 2) and women (v. 3) as those who should be learning. Then he turns to young women (vv. 4-5) and young men (vv. 6-8). Finally, he directs Titus what to teach slaves (vv. 9-10), showing that no class of people should be excluded from gospel teaching. Titus should teach by word, but his life should also be an example, a model to those whom he is to teach (vv. 7-8).

Paul stresses soberness. Older ones and younger ones all need a life characterized by sobriety. The Nazarite of the Old Testament could not consume wine or strong drink. True Christians ought to be so dedicated to God that they are not under the influence of any force other than God and His truth. That means that we should not be carried away by wine or strong drink, of course. But by extension, no worldly influence may keep us from being sober-minded. We do well to ask ourselves whether biblical soberness is as high of a priority for us as it was for Paul and for the early Christians which he taught. In addition, older men should be marked by a healthy trust in God, love toward others, and a hopeful perseverance and endurance (v. 2).

The next group for instruction is older women (vv. 3-5). Paul refers to them in an interesting way: “in behaviour as becometh holiness (v. 3). The term designates that which is befitting a holy person, temple-suitable, having the demeanor of a priestess in a temple. In other words, women should be acting in a way that shows they belong to God. Their life should be the expression of inward character. This means that they are not to be slanderers or malicious gossips. While having access to food and wine in the house, they are not to be using excessive wine. They are not prohibited from teaching, but rather called to teach young women what is good, encouraging them in their God-given charge. They are to teach those who have families to focus on love for their families. Also, they are to teach them to be prudent and self-controlled. They are to be chaste, making home their base of operations, continually submitting themselves to their own husbands in all things lawful as unto the Lord.

Next, Titus is to urge the younger men to be what they should be as Christians: sound minded, serious, following the behaviour of Titus, who should be an example to them of godliness. He and they are to be healthy or sound in their speech.

Finally, Paul addresses the slaves as being a distinct element in the church, addressing both positive and negative principles, such as submission to their own masters. Their words and actions should be according to God’s law. They are to be showing all good faithfulness, thus adorning their lives with godliness.

When he was converted, Calvin noted that the first evidence of God’s grace in his life was that he became docile or teachable. All of us should be willing, eager even to be taught. All ages, all classes, all kinds of people need to be taught sound doctrine and the things that flow from sound doctrine. This is the order that should characterize the life of the church from preaching, catechism, evangelism, missions, and so on. Church should be a school of grace.

## The School and Its Teacher

In verses 11-15, Paul lifts the veil on what is happening when in a grace-dependent way we seek to teach and learn Scriptural truth. Grace is the ultimate Teacher. Paul refers to God’s grace as having appeared to sinners (v. 11). Of course, Paul is referring to the incarnation of Christ. Christ teaches us in His prophetic office, through His words, actions, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He teaches us through the Word of God, and the summary of that Word is grace: God’s undeserved favour to sinners.

Paul says that grace is teaching us (v. 12). The literal word for teaching is “disciplining.” This is why we speak of the disciplines of grace! In military school people learn military discipline. But what a blessing it is to learn grace’s discipline! Grace gives a constant, ongoing teaching in all areas of life. It teaches us to need grace, to depend on grace, to exalt grace, to speak about grace, to look away from all that is not grace. What kind of a student of grace are you?

Grace’s teaching is marked by three things, according to Paul. First, *mortification*, or death to the old way of living. This is explained in the first part of verse 12a. It involves denying godlessness and worldly desires. How pervasive and invasive these desires are. Grace is needed to see them, deny them, and cling to Christ in it all.

Secondly, grace teaches *vivification*, or new living through the Spirit of God. Paul explains that this means living self-controlled, upright with respect to others, and in a God-fearing way towards God (v. 12b). This is Christ in believers, the hope of glory.

Finally, grace teaches *expectation* (v. 13). The ministry of grace makes believers hope in God and look for the final redemption which God has promised. Grace makes them focus on the glory and coming of the great God, who is Jesus Christ. Paul has begun this section with the incarnation or first coming of Christ, and now He refers to the return of Christ or the second coming.

Yet, Paul ends with the solid foundation of grace in the life of sinners: the death and resurrection of Christ. He emphasizes especially Christ’s redemptive work, without which there would be no school, no gracious Teacher for any of us, and no learning of the disciplines of grace.

Are our churches places where grace is cherished, grace is taught and learned, and where the biblical evidences of this teaching of grace are there as these verses describe them? Whether we are planting a church or enjoying the life of a church that perhaps was planted decades ago, may we not look for anything apart from God’s grace in Jesus Christ. ①

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 01 What else do churches or Christian organizations teach if they are not teaching grace? What were some of the threats to the early churches that sought to derail them from the grace of God (see e.g., Galatians 3:1-2)?
- 02 What does soberness look like today?
- 03 How does grace make us need grace?
- 04 How do we know that verses 11-14 are taking place in our churches?

## PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# GRADUATION 2022



*Amid the signs of spring-time new life, many made their way to the building of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids for the PRTS graduation dinner and ceremony on Friday, May 6, 2022.*

### **Gifts, Addresses, and Gowns**

A dinner was first served for graduates and their families as well as faculty. The wing of the sanctuary was filled to capacity, since this graduating class of 28 men plus two recipients of honorary degrees was the largest ever. The dinner was opened by Mr. Henk Kleyn as retiring Vice President of Operations, who reflected on the many memories of students as well as Psalm 25:1-11, which he read.

During a delicious dinner, several addresses were given. Dr. Mark Kelderman gave a fitting personal charge from the Lord Jesus' words in John 20:21-23: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Mr. Steven Huisman, a United Reformed student from the Niagara area, spoke words of appreciation on behalf of the students for the many ways they had benefited from their experience at PRTS. Mr. Isaac Bronkema, a student from a community church near Grand Rapids, presented a Student Council gift,

a laminated paper that included all 120 names of students at PRTS.

Mrs. Mary Beeke addressed the graduates' wives, calling them to "be invested" in their husbands' ministries and "be inclined to go" and reach out to those they notice need help. She also presented them with a gift of a book and a guest book. Dr. Joel Beeke presented a gift to students which included the entire set of the Works of Thomas Goodwin. "That's an expensive gift," a student could be heard saying into the live mic of Dr. Beeke as he shook his hand in receipt of this gift.

After dinner, the graduates and professors were to don their gowns, caps, and hoods. "Now is time for the fashion show," one professor quipped with a wry smile. I suppose that is part of being part of academia. After pictures were taken on the front steps of the church, people milled about in the sunshine and more guests arrived for the graduation ceremony.

### **Commencement Address**

In the ceremony, the Commencement Address was given by Dr. John W. Tweeddale, vice president of academics and professor

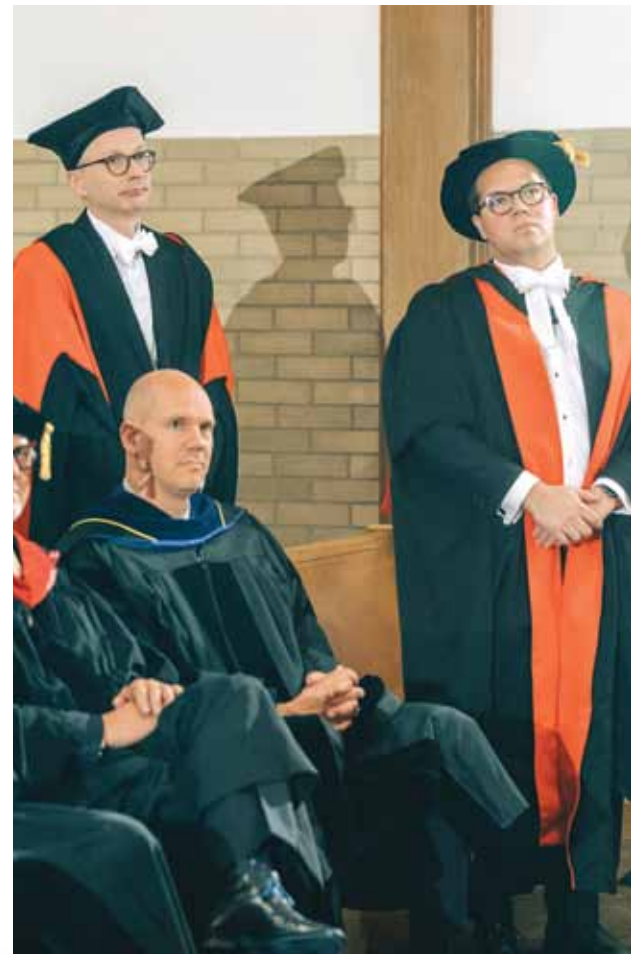
of theology at Reformation Bible College, which is based in Florida and connected with Ligonier Ministries. He spoke on The Ministry of Christ in the Life of the Church, based on Acts 1:8. He began by noting that it takes many to train one seminarian and therefore a graduation is the fruit of the service of many. He emphasized that ministers are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and that degrees are to equip them to serve the Church. Christ is pleased to build His church through witnesses He appoints. The entire book of Acts demonstrates Him blessing ministry of His Word by His Spirit.

Tweeddale then drew three lessons. First, you must know the Christ to whom you point others. As John beheld Jesus and then said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” to others, so ministers must personally know, love, trust, and submit to Christ. Then they can proclaim one they know. Second, rest content daily in the wisdom of Christ to direct and deploy you as a witness. Do not look at others, but be thankful for where God has placed you. Third, be faithful today. As a man of God, a husband, parent, church member, and in whatever office God may have placed you, be faithful now and may God empower you to be a witness now and ever.

### Manifold Students

The chairman of the PRTS Board of Trustees, Mr. Kevin Ash, then conferred degrees to the graduates of the Master of Arts program (4 men—a 2 year program), the Master of Divinity program (18 students—a 3.5 year program), and the Master of Theology (5 students—a 2 year post-MA or post-MDiv program), and the doctoral program (1 student). Dr. Beeke then gave a Bunyanesque name to each student to describe them and a scripture text. For example, he called student Christ Mourik “Mr. Kindness,” Mr. Geoff Otten “Mr. Eager Theologian,” and Jeff Overduin “Mr. Sincerity.”

It was special to see men from many different countries. Some were not able to be present, but the graduates were from 15 countries including Indonesia, Singapore, Turkey, Zambia, Kenya, Korea, Columbia, Lithuania, Egypt, The Netherlands, India, Malawi, Mexico, China, and, of course, Canada and America. Some were young and had never been office-bearers. Other, especially Th.M. students, were already serving in ministry. One was going back to a place of increasing persecution, knowing that his friend there had been murdered for the faith. Another came to PRTS and is unsure whether there is still a place for him in his more liberal denomination. Another



**ABOVE:**  
Departing professors  
standing





**ABOVE: PRTS faculty behind honorary doctors**

is already teaching at a seminary in his home country. Another is heavily involved in translating Reformed materials into his native tongue. Some are anticipating candidacy exams in their denomination. Some are unsure of where the Lord might lead them, and others have already had a congregation reach out with a desire to call them.

We congratulate Free Reformed students Chris Mourik and Jeff Overduin, who hope to be examined at our Synod in the first week of June. We congratulate in the true sense of the word, meaning, we share in their joy, because it is a joy for us as a denomination to see God enable men to graduate with a view to serving in our churches. The HRC also had their students John Byl, Darryl Dedert, and Isaac Epp graduate. We also are thankful Geoff Otten could graduate and wish him God's guidance and blessing.

The doctoral student, Felipe Silva, hopes to return to his



**ABOVE: Graduates of 2022**

home country, Brazil, to start a seminary. The morning of graduation day, he had an official ceremony in which he defended his dissertation on *Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy and Islam: Culture, Polemic, and Theology*. Did you know that 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch pastors and theologians wrote thousands of pages about Islam and how to engage with Muslims? His dissertation explores how they did so.

After addressing each individually, Dr. Beeke gave a personal charge to the students, focused on living out of the three-fold office of Christ, drawing from Luke 22:31-32.

**Changes at PRTS**

Dr. Beeke also noted several changes in staffing at the Seminary. He thanked Mr. Henk Kleyn for his seventeen years of service to PRTS, with the support of his loving wife, Margaret. He also gave thanks for Dr. Michael Barrett's ten years of



service as Academic Dean. Dr. Beeke's nephew, Dr. Jonathon Beeke, will become academic dean and Dr. Barrett, at his request, will be relieved of these administrative duties to let him focus on what he loves most: teaching and writing. Dr. William VanDoodewaard, who grew up in our St. Thomas congregation, was thanked for his 12 years of humble and able service as Professor of church history. He has accepted a call to serve Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary as Academic Dean and Professor of Church History. Dr. Greg Salazar was also thanked for his 5.5 years of valued service as one of the first professors in the Historical Theology Doctoral Department. Feeling called to pastoral ministry, he has accepted a call to First Presbyterian Church (PCA) of Pooler, Georgia. Dr. Beeke also reminded us that Dr. Bruce Baugus, professor at Reformed Theological Seminary of Jackson, Mississippi, as well as Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven, pastor at the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand

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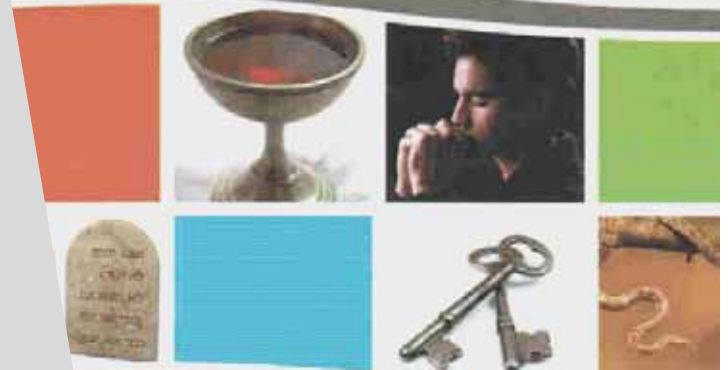
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**Dr. Felipe Silva**

**PRTS Graduation 2022**

**Graduates: 28**

**Honorary Doctorates: 2**

**Countries Represented: 15**

**PRTS Faculty Present: 11**

**Degrees Awarded: 5**

**FRC Men Awarded Degrees: 4**

**Oldest Awardee Age: 84**

**Youngest Awardee Age: 24**



**Mr. Henk Kleyn**

Rapids, are both set to begin teaching at PRTS this fall. He expressed gratitude for Dr. Adriaan Neele’s willingness to serve as Vice-President of the seminary, responsible for the operation and further development of the seminary.

**Doctor C. Pronk**

The last section of the program was a first for the seminary. Two pastors were conferred honorary doctorates. The first was Professor Franklin Ferreira, who was instrumental in founding the Martin Bucer Seminary in Brazil, with which PRTS partners. The second was Rev. Cornelis Pronk. To introduce him, Dr. Bilkes gave an address published in this issue of the Messenger. When asked to respond, Rev. Pronk said, “When I first received the email from Dr. Beeke informing me of the decision... I really was really confused. But then thinking about it, I thought, well, that is their kindness. They want to recognize the work I have done in the churches and outside of the churches. So I decided to accept that nomination—gladly.” His not seeking the degree makes it more fitting that the seminary confer it with gratitude to God for his ministry in our churches and beyond.

**Our Help and Hope**

I was struck by Rev. Pronk’s observation that his degree was given with a view to his past ministry, while others were receiving degrees with a view to future service. What binds those two together is the faithfulness of the God who calls, equips, and uses in ministry. That is the only explanation for why we have emeritus ministers who have finished their full-time active service with honor among us, why we have men continuing in full-time ministry, and why we may still receive men to begin to serve among us. God’s faithfulness is in spite of our unfaithfulness and is for the sake of His faithful servant, Jesus Christ.

We may end this article not simply thanking and congratulating man but directing to this great, triune God who continues to send out men and use them to gather, defend, preserve, and bless His Church. Thus, as the program stated, “We ask that you continue to pray for these graduates, their fellow alumni, PRTS, and its faculty, staff, and student body.”

*Dr. D. H. Kranendonk is a Free Reformed Professor serving at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.*



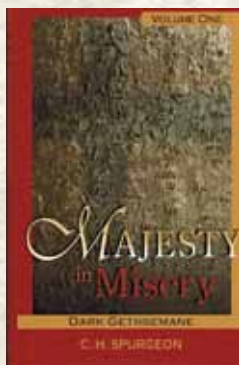


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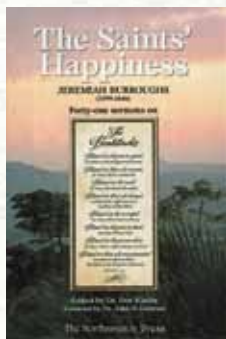
These are the last sermons this great Puritan preached before he died of tuberculosis in 1646.

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Hardcover, 702 pages, Northampton Press.

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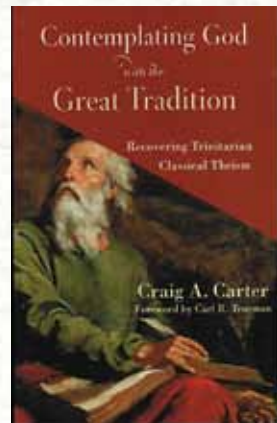


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## CONTEMPORARY

### **Can I Smoke Pot? Marijuana in Light of Scripture**

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Softcover, 106 pages, Cruciform Press

**RBS Price \$13.00**

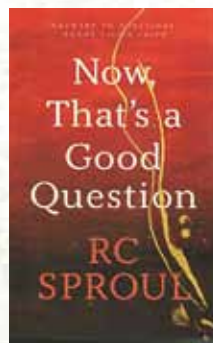
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**RBS Price \$21.00**



### **Contending for the Faith: The Story of the Westminster Assembly**

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## HONORARY DOCTORATE

**Words Spoken on the Occasion of  
Conferring Upon CORNELIS PRONK  
an HONORARY DOCTORATE on behalf  
of the Board of Directors of  
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary  
Anno Domini May 6, 2022, Grand Rapids, MI**

Dear Friends of Puritan Seminary,

Cornelis Pronk was born on July 5, 1937 in the fishing village of Schevingen, The Netherlands. At the age of sixteen, young Cornelis emigrated with his family to Ontario, Canada. Unlike many of his immigrant peers who went into the workforce after high school, he pursued academic studies in history at McMaster University in Hamilton with an eye to becoming a teacher. In 1959, he married Frederika (Ricky) Brunsveld, who was to be his help-meet till today. Together they raised their sons, Dave and Tim, and may now enjoy many grandchildren as well.

Feeling an inward call to the ministry, Neil pursued studies at Calvin Seminary, from which he graduated in 1968, and was ordained later that year to the ministry of Word and sacrament in Aldergrove (now Abbotsford), British Columbia. Prior to his emeritation in 2006, Rev. Pronk served faithfully the Free Reformed congregations of Aldergrove, BC, Grand Rapids, MI, St. Thomas, ON, and Brantford, ON, as well as the whole federation of the Free Reformed churches for decades through church committees, including those responsible for foreign missions, theological training, and interchurch relations.

He also served as editor of the denominational periodical, *The Messenger*, with the untiring and highly competent assistance of his wife, Ricky, for several decades. Since handing over the editorship in 2017, he has continued to contribute monthly articles relating to church history. These ways of service reflect his great love for the churches he served.

This love is also reflected in his interest in studying and writing about historical theology. In 1987, Rev. Pronk earned a ThM at Calvin Seminary, where he defended a thesis on “F. M. Ten Hoor: Defender of Secession Principles against Abraham Kuyper’s Doleantie Views.” He has written countless articles and a number of important books on historical, theological, and practical topics. He has brought the riches of theology in the past, including Augustine, the Reformers, but especially the Puritans, the Second Reformation, and the Secession, in understandable, balanced, and pastorally-attuned ways. His contribution to academic scholarship centers especially on the Dutch Secession and its impact throughout the world, culminating in his recent book *A Goodly Heritage: The Secession*

of 1834 and Its Impact on Churches in the Netherlands and North America. In addition, Rev. Pronk significantly encouraged the mission and model of Puritan Theological Seminary from its early days, and his support of our institution has been greatly impactful, including his regular teaching at PRTS over two decades, mostly in the area of historical theology, but also systematic theology.

His writing reflects his love for the biblical, confessional, and gospel-centered witness of the Reformers and Puritans for an age that has lost its moorings, mission, and morals. His desire to be useful in God's kingdom has made him travel to most continents of the world. Some of these travels were for Word and Deed North America, a Reformed ministry serving developing nations, which he helped establish in 1994. His love for Reformed books led him to established Reformed Book Services in Ontario, in which he and his wife continue to be involved. His own writings have also spread to many places. Several of his catechetical books and Bible messages, as well as his sermons on the Canons of Dort, are being translated into the Korean language.

I first remember hearing as a young boy growing up in Ontario Rev. Pronk's imposingly deep and warm voice over the airwaves on the Banner of Truth Broadcast. For over 30 years, you delivered weekly messages on radio stations in Canada, America, and on short-wave radio in Africa, Asia, and beyond. I still remember some of your broadcasts on Judges in the late 1970s. I also recall being under your ministry for three months in 1978 when my family was in Grand Rapids. As I reflect on the ministry that the Lord has given you to do, you have sought the welfare of the church of Jesus Christ through preaching, explaining, and defending the gospel. Above all, you have been and continue to be a winsome herald of your Master, the Lord Jesus, whose rich salvation is worthy of all acceptance by sinners the world over. This is clearly your greatest love and desire.

You labour with the gifts the Lord has given you, and I and my generation have benefited greatly from your unwavering and untiring service. You are a model to us of a genuine *minister Verbi Dei*, a servant of the Word of God. You refused to seek the accolades of man, and in obedience to Jeremiah 45:5, you did not seek great things for yourself. Therein you are a reflection of Christ, who is the secret source behind and heartfelt focus of your ministry, all by grace and all to the glory of God.

And so, sensing very much our collective debt to you, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, it is my distinct honor to present to you this honorary doctorate of divinity from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary to you, dear brother, Dr. Cornelis Pronk. Please come forward to receive this Doctorate and speak a few words to us. ①



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# POWASSAN CONGREGATION UPDATE



**November 2021 - Services were held in a barn in the fall and early winter of 2021.**



**Winter 2021 - The process to rezone the property to allow institutional use was completed.**

Over the past couple of months, we have had a few requests for an update from the Powassan congregation. Some have heard the news of several families moving “up north,” and others are asking about the purchase of a property and building plans. There have indeed been some changes recently! Most importantly, however, we are thankful for the Lord’s continued faithfulness to His church.

Throughout the COVID situation, it was difficult for the church to find suitable places to worship. Due to building shutdowns, limited capacities, or vaccine passports, the meeting halls that we had rented in the past were not a suitable option. Beginning in the spring of 2020, we often worshipped outdoors or in barns, garages, or homes. Occasionally, we dealt with black flies, snow, rain, or freezing temperatures! We found that the weather was surprisingly good on most Sundays. In the coldest winter months, we had a series of small-group services in various homes.

Throughout these unusual circumstances, the Lord built up His church. The church plant began in 2009 with four families and ten people. At this time, there are 17 member households, consisting of 32 confessing and 39 baptized members. Recently a few new visitors from the local area have been worshipping with us. In addition, about ten more families who are members of various Reformed or Presbyterian churches in southern Ontario are moving to the area. We have also heard of quite a few other families who are seriously considering moving up north, main-

ly due to real estate prices, as well as economic developments in northern Ontario.


About a year ago, the church building fund was at a point where the congregation could purchase vacant land. Though there have occasionally been potential buildings for sale, but they have all required extensive renovations or were in less-than-ideal locations. An offer was placed on a property in the fall, but we are now thankful that the deal fell through. A few weeks later, a large and relatively level 11-acre property was offered to the church at a very reasonable price by a private seller. The property is on Latour Crescent, just a couple minutes north of Powassan, close to highway 11. The purchase was finalized in January and a zoning amendment allowing for institutional use was approved soon after. While constantly looking for suitable places to worship, this development was encouraging.

The total cost for the property purchase was about \$130,000, and we are still thankful to have just over \$100,000 left in the building fund. We anticipate that we will be building a relatively simple facility of 5 to 6,000 square feet. This could accommodate our local gathering of a little over 100 people comfortably in the winter and would have flexible space to accommodate additional visitors in the summers. At this time, the goal is to raise approximately 1.2 million dollars more for a facility. One

**Regular updates on the building project and donation information can be found at [hopereformed.ca/building](http://hopereformed.ca/building). You are also welcome to call Pastor VanDoodewaard at (705) 724-5070 if you have any questions.**

challenge that we face at this point is inflation. With costs for building materials and fuel rising considerably, we are not sure if, humanly speaking, we will catch up to the price of a building. Please pray that the Lord directs our steps and gives us patience and wisdom for the process! We are thankful that many have asked how they can help.

The challenges surrounding COVID have been considerable for the church in Powassan. We confess that there were moments of disappointment, frustration, and complaining. Yet we can also see something of how there was a purpose to God's providences. There have been many opportunities to exercise patience and many causes for prayer. The Lord has given His church both the corrections and encouragement that we need. Wherever

they were held, gatherings for worship have been cherished along the way. We have often been reminded that we are "... strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13) and that we should be "... content with such things as we have" (Hebrews 13:5). Please pray that the Lord continues to gather in his church in Powassan! (Psalm 147:1-3) 

*Rev. Rob VanDoodewaard is pastor of Hope [Free] Reformed Church of Powassan, Ontario ([www.hopereformed.ca](http://www.hopereformed.ca)).*



**October 2020 - Ready for a Baptism service in a garage.**



**May 2021 - Setting up for services.**



**Winter 2021 - The propane heaters helped, but it still got too cold to gather in the barn mid-winter.**



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**Principal:**  
Mr. Shawn Wolski  
519-203-0266  
principal@ccslondon.org

**Education Committee Secretary:**  
Mrs. Madelyn Poort  
905-348-5531  
edcomm@ccslondon.org

# UNDERSTANDING REFORMED WORSHIP

You may wonder why our worship services are plain, simple, and yet structured? We worship in this predictable way because we believe that it is a pattern evident in scripture, and a pattern that has been observed by faithful churches for thousands of years.

## Why an Order of Worship?

About 400 years before Christ was born, Jerusalem was conquered and Solomon's temple was destroyed. The remnants of the nation of Israel were forced to leave their land and scattered across the world. Jewish worship moved to smaller local gatherings, called Synagogue services. In these services an order of worship, called a liturgy, was followed.

It was this type and pattern of worship that shaped the worship of the New Testament local church. As many as 40 times, the gospels speak of the Lord Jesus Christ worshipping in and teaching in Synagogues, and 19 times in Acts we read of the apostles ministering in the Synagogues. Parallels between passages such as James 2:2 and Luke 11:43 also show a link between New Testament church worship and the synagogue.

We believe that the reason the New Testament speaks relatively little about New Testament church patterns is not to give a broad license for worship styles and elements, but rather because the simple and biblical elements of synagogue liturgy were used. The elements of worship mentioned in the New Testament; being prayer, Psalm singing, offerings, and preaching, form the basis for true Christian worship. The following texts are some of those that form the boundaries of what we believe is this God honoring, simple, and timeless approach:

“Let all things be done decently and in order.” – 1 Corinthians 14:40

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;” – 1 Timothy 2:1

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the



Lord.” – Colossians 3:16

“... give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in [you], which was given [to you] by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [eldership].” – 1 Timothy 4:13-14

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...” – Hebrews 10:24-25

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him...” – 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...” – Acts 20:7

Ancient writings from the first centuries of the church, even some from enemies of the church, describe and confirm the use of a liturgy in Sunday morning and evening worship that was very similar to the one we use today. These “timeless” liturgies of the ancient church included opening salutations, Psalms, reading of the Ten Commandments, prayers, opportunities to give offerings, scripture reading, preaching, and the blessing.

### Understanding our Liturgy

The liturgy should be seen as a conversation between God and His people, led by the pastor yet participated in by the church. The pulpit is the centre of our Reformed worship. This is should not focus your attention on the pastor, but rather it is the pastor’s calling to focus hearts and minds on the Word of God as it is read and delivered, and to offer prayers to God on behalf of the congregation. ①

*Taken from the Calgary Free Reformed Church website (<http://calgaryfrc.com/about/reformed-church/>) and written by Rev. Rob VanDoodewaard of the Free Reformed Church of Powassan, Ontario.*

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And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

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