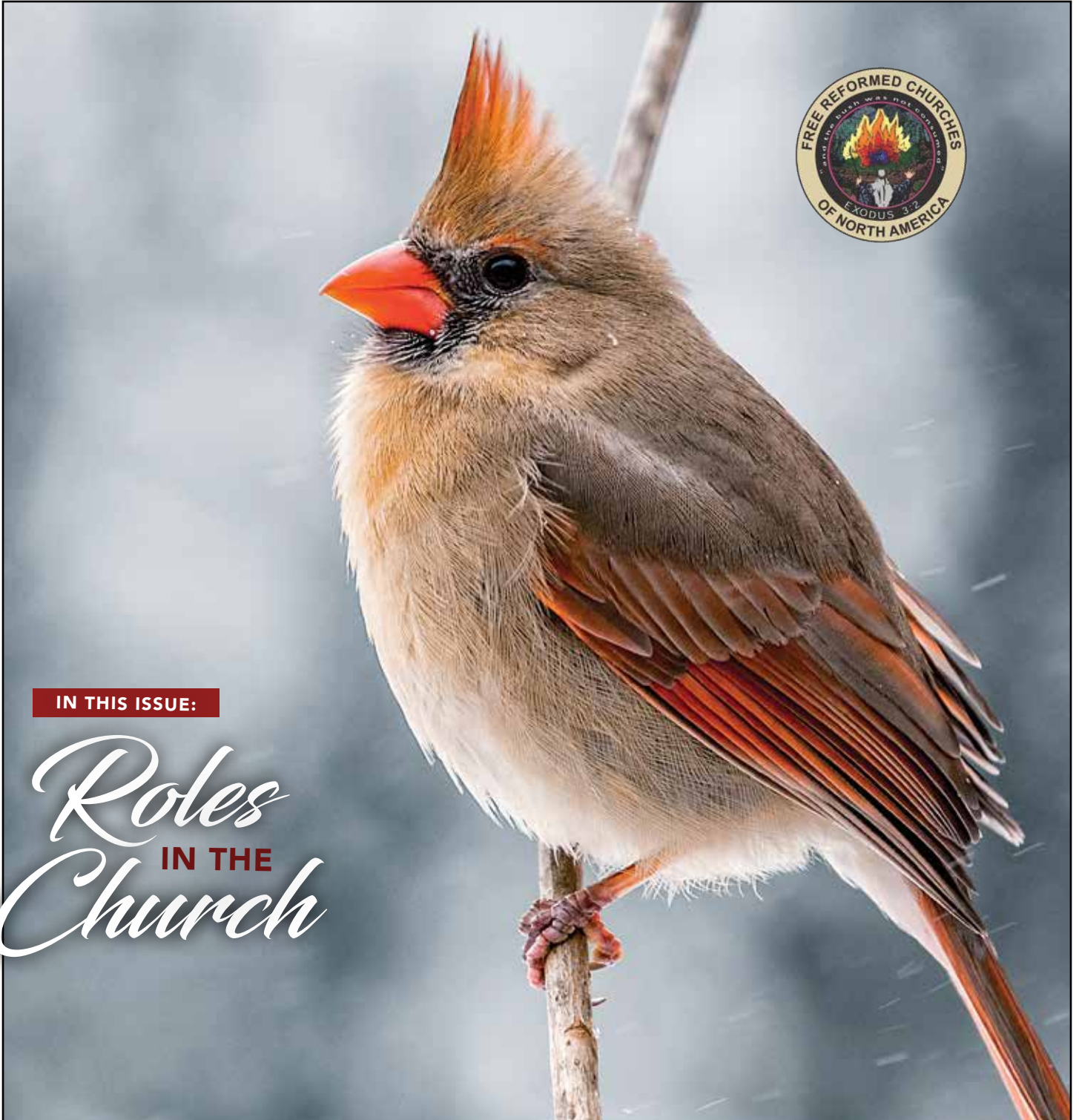


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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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LOOKING UNTO JESUS

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

The human eye cannot focus on two objects at once. Try it. Pick two things in your purview and try to pay equal attention. It cannot be done. The apostle in this chapter speaks of the Christian as a runner in a long-distance race. You can imagine a Spartan runner so focused on the uneven ground that he fails to see the tree right before him. Or so focused on the horizon that he does not see the loose gravel below. An experienced runner tries to look equally at what is around and what is ahead. It is a mixture of the two.

“The race” Paul speaks of is the Christian life. The course is the life of conformity unto the image of Christ. And the goal line is the Author of the course, standing as the finish of our faith. It has been Christ in the heart of that runner all along. Even when he could not feel it, Christ permeated every step. So, looking to Jesus is seeing Him as the source of faith, the giver of faith, and the object of faith. To truly see the Lord Jesus spiritually is the vital object of our everlasting salvation. But to see Him clearly, we must turn our gaze away from all other things, starting with ourselves. We are the most dangerous and dominant thing standing between our eyes and Christ. When we fell in Adam, *Self* removed God from our heart’s throne. *Self* has held onto that throne ever since.

We must look From Everything

We must look *from* ourselves. We need to look from our *righteous self* and from our *unrighteous self*. We have to look away from righteous self, meaning all self-commending works. From our community involvement to our religious observances, from prayer and fasting, to all the works of the law we stand upon to be justified. We must look from all our efforts to make ourselves holy in the sight of God. Paul used himself as an example when he said, “*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ*” (Phil. 3:8)

Just as importantly, we must also look *from* our unrighteous selves. Our sins, transgressions, and iniquities, scarlet in color, numerous as sand, and tall as the mountains, must not prevent us from looking unto Jesus. His name is Saviour, after all. That means He came to free us from our sins, no matter how large or many. It is hard for us to *look unto Jesus* and experience the joy of His salvation while simultaneously looking at the quantity and heinousness of our sins. We cannot look equally at our sins and

the Saviour. Instead, we must look by faith at the One who “*bore our sins in his own body on the tree,*” (1 Pet. 2:24) and was made a sin-offering for us, being wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, who shed His precious blood so that the guiltiest may be cleansed, and the vilest saved. Do it properly. If you must look at your sins (and you must), look at them inscribed upon Christ’s pierced hands (Col. 2:14). When we see Jesus in this way, our sin’s quantity, darkness, and number present no obstacles in our way. Your unworthiness must not be used as a defense to keep you from so great a salvation.

We must also look unto Jesus *from* our sins. When Jesus came into this world, all His actions, words, and suffering were done on behalf of sinners. Saving sinners is His work, His passion, and the jewel of His diadem. For this, He traded heaven for earth, giving up His Father’s bosom for the cross’ embrace. On earth, He was never known to turn away any who came to Him. He never declined to accept the one who sought protection from the law’s judgment. He never refused to take any under His sheltering wing. “*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37). With such a promise, who can refuse the extinction of their sins!? Who can turn away from the majesty of His love, the greatness of His grace, and the strength of His salvation? Only those who hate the light. (John. 3:19)

Then again, we must look unto Jesus *from* man. No church on earth holds the corner on the salvation market. The LORD has decreed that only through the His Son may one find redemption. Therefore, it would be fatal to substitute the church of God for the Christ of God or to replace the Saviour of the church with the church itself. The church of Christ is a poor, powerless, and fallen thing in herself. There is only one holy and glorious Head in whom she can find the strength to believe, forgiveness, justification, and acceptance. “*There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Therefore, whoever looks to any church or church privileges for salvation is lost. Regardless of the church’s name, how much power it asserts, or how vast its numbers are, it will undoubtedly perish forever. So, leave every other refuge, and look unto Jesus.

Look unto Jesus In Everything

The law is righteous condemnation. Jesus is a fitting object for the trembling soul to look through. Are thoughts of your own filth and the spotless righteousness of God troubling you? Do you shudder to think of God’s promise pushed aside? In the face of that storm of conscience, dear one, look unto Jesus. Let your trembling fade into peace in Him. Because to all who believe, He is precious, and their Saviour has become “*the end of the law for righteousness.*” (Rom. 10:4) While simultaneously honouring the majesty of God’s law, Christ’s atonement wraps the sinner in a robe of righteousness, removing all wrath and enmity forever. Oh, the blessing of looking to Jesus by faith to escape the wrath of condemnation. In looking, to find my wrath and condemnation laid on Him. He who wept and bled in the garden, who lingered and died upon that tree, and rising again with the keys of all authority and power hanging from His belt, He closed up hell for us and opened heaven wide.

Dear one, when troubled by sin, solitude, and grief, when ideas of God’s holiness and your sins mix, oh, your trembling soul will be soothed in looking unto Jesus. It is not because God hates you that you are troubled, tossed, and wracked by grief. You are such because God loves you. And in that discovery, you have stumbled upon an accidental grace. Your fears do not live in the unbelieving.

Look to Jesus Through Everything

No situation—humble or exalted—that God puts us in prevents us from turning to Christ for the guidance, strength, and grace the situation demands. Knowing that God condescends to every different case of His children. He is aware that His people’s feet tend to slip when things are smooth and are easily pierced when things get rough. Jesus is to be the one thing to which sight is raised, upon which it rests, whether the race is pleasant or rough. If He humbles you, as He frequently does when dealing with His people, from the depths of humiliation, cast your eyes upon Jesus. He descended to

We must also look unto Jesus from our sins. When Jesus came into this world, all His actions, words, and suffering were done on behalf of sinners.

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MEDITATION

a level of shame infinitely lower than your own. Therefore, He can descend into your circumstances and give you the grace required. As a result, you will understand how to experience satisfaction in abundance and need. Who can we look to more appropriately during times of sorrow than Jesus? He was known as the first man of sorrows. Tell Him. If you want to tell your grief to someone who has experienced grief unmatched; if you want to weep on a shoulder wide and strong; if you want to whisper your sorrow to one who has experienced suffering unimaginable; if you want to reveal your wound to someone who has been wounded unlike anyone else; then turn away from everyone else and look unto Jesus to the end.

And when the world is fading away, and every living, loving thing dissolves, only one person now captures the believer's heart, Jesus.

And when the world is fading away, and every living, loving thing dissolves, only one person now captures the believer's heart, Jesus. He is Immanuel, the God who became flesh. He is the Captain of our salvation, the Victor over death, and the Destroyer of the destroyer. He is also our Friend, our Elder brother, our better Joseph, our better Joshua, our better Moses, and our better Aaron all in one.

Look unto Jesus For Everything.

The church only has one Treasure. The Father has one Treasure too (Mat. 3:17). Jesus is the meeting place of both (1 Tim. 2:5). All fullness dwells in Him: God and man, the law and gospel, salvation and righteous condemnation. Looking to Jesus for everything means our standing before God and men, for each day's need, for each moment's supply. God has made the life of faith in His beloved Son simpler this way. For Christ to be all and in all, He would isolate us from all other saviours, draw us away from all other reliance, and wean us from all self-confidence (Hosea 1,2).

The half-blind man only saw men as trees walking. (Mark. 8:24) Christ has adequately provided for the weakness of faith's eye. His concern for and sympathy toward those with little grace, experience, knowledge, and faith are renowned. For the eye to see and to see more clearly, He has vowed to give His means of grace for your strengthening: His Word, the sacraments, His Church, and preaching. Look unto Jesus through His means. His reflection is everywhere.

The eye of faith looks to none other than Jesus. Think, dear one, of that brazen serpent lifted up on that pole (Num. 21:9). Nothing was written about how vivid or clear anyone's vision was that day. Some vision might have been blurred. Other people may have stood in their way. Yet the command was to look. Turn your eyes. Believe with the heart. Look at the lifted curse. The eye of faith works precisely that way. ¹¹

Rev. J. Lewis is pastor of the Pompton Plains Free Reformed Church.

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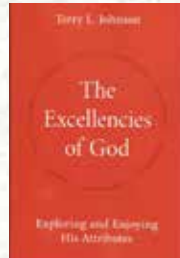
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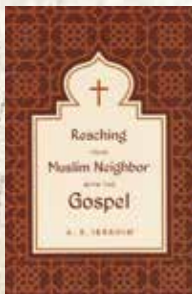
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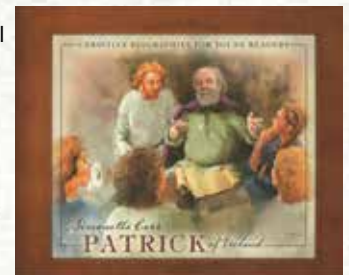


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BIBLICAL MENTORING

Judges 7:17: “And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.”

For a half a century or more, many in our Western world have suffered from fatherlessness. In a way, it is an age-old problem. Children and young people grow up without much consistent and good guidance for life in general, and especially for a biblical life. Much of my generation disregarded authority and as a result their children, millennials and those coming after them, have been left to navigate the challenges of a digital age without biblical authority. Amos 8 speaks about young people wandering, lost, seeking for the word of God and not finding it (vv. 12-13), presumably because their parents went astray. This is what we see: many young people today are hungry to receive guidance. They realize they need to make up for what they have not received or even have resisted.

Mentoring happens when experienced Christians offer to guide younger Christians, like Elijah who cast his mantle on Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). It can also begin with younger Christians asking help from more experienced Christians, like when Samuel was brought to Eli (1 Sam. 1:28). Mentoring is useful when it concerns training for eldership or other leadership in the life of the church. However, it is useful for any Christian. I have benefited much from mentors throughout my life, and I am sure most Christians can think of older people who were like mentors to them, some of whom may now be part of the triumphant church.

A Biblical Description of Mentoring

Mentors are those with deeper and broader Christian understanding, experience, and character. Mentees are those who are hungry to learn and grow. Mentors must have a willingness and even a calling to invest in others. Mentees need a desire and willingness to learn, not just what they want to learn, but what they might not see the need to learn. Mentoring involves building a relationship to give doctrinal and practical guidance based on a biblical worldview.

The word “mentoring” does not occur in the Bible, but there are many instances of mentoring in the Bible: Moses and Joshua; Elijah and Elisha; Jesus and His disciples; Paul and Timothy; Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos, etc. The book of Proverbs suggests a mentoring relationship between Solomon and his son, but by extension, scribes and all those who desire to be wise. Titus 2 speaks of older women involved in mentoring (vv. 3-4) and Titus himself is exhorted to call younger men to be sober-minded, and to show

himself “a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary may be ashamed, having no evil to say of you” (Titus 2:7-8).

Mentoring is more than being an accountability partner to someone. Being mentored is also more than attending a school that gives you academic knowledge. Biblical mentoring involves a relationship with transparency, intentionality, trust, investment, challenge, and faithfulness to God and His Word. Mentoring takes time. A relationship has to develop and trust needs to build. Mentoring can be for an agreed upon time or gradually change, and, as the mentee grows, level off. For example, Barnabas seems to have been somewhat of a mentor for Paul, for when they are mentioned together, Barnabas is mentioned first from Acts 9:27-13:7. From Acts 13:43 on, when they are mentioned together, Paul is usually listed first (Acts 14:14 and 15:12 are exceptions to this pattern). This suggests that over time Paul may have matured in the faith and taken over more leadership.

Mentoring should not supplant other divinely instituted means of grace like worship, Bible reading and study, or prayer. Mentoring should not supplant institutions like the church, marriage, family, Christian education, Christian hospitality, the work of elders, or even biblical friendship. Yet, when the biblical model is followed, mentoring can be very helpful and enriching. After all, Hebrews tells us that Christians must exhort one another (even daily), “lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (3:13; see also Heb 10:25-26). Mentoring can foster community, connection, growth, and usefulness in the body of Christ. Few will ever make a real difference in the kingdom of God without faithful mentoring.

The Practice of Mentoring

Mentoring can happen more or less formal. An occasional discussion over a coffee can be helpful; usually, more formal mentoring involves regular, targeted meetings. It might be wise to set up-front how often you plan to meet: monthly for a year or twice a year for a couple of years. It is important not to over-promise or over-ask. Mentoring relationships with people can grow and develop if both parties are committed to it.

In addition, consider some of the following practical points:

- Being a mentor requires a lot of self-examination, humility, and exemplary living. Without it, we may lord it over our mentees or see our own mistakes in the mentees and be hard on them without dealing with sin in ourselves. This is very damaging.
- When you mentor someone, remember you can also learn from your mentee. In fact, to mentor someone truly means you walk with them and learn from them. You seek to understand life better in light of what they are able to see from their vantage-points.
- As a mentor, do not impose your own struggles, calling, and specific views on people in a way that forces them into a mold that is neither right nor helpful. Do not use the mentoring relationship to proselytize on fine points of doctrine or practice. Help someone to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they have been called.
- Mentoring crosses family, gender, and age boundaries. God can bring people on your path whom you do not expect. God may use your parents in your life, but later someone else can be used to reinforce things or take them further. Pastors in every age have learned much from godly women, all of course in accordance with Scripture.
- It is wise to include books, either from the past or present, in mentoring. To really grow, Christians should read. Reading the Bible, of course, is primary. However, reading doctrinal and practical resources will also help us grow and benefit from the wisdom of Christians, both from the past and the present. Increasingly, good audio teaching can also be helpful (sermons, teaching series, or podcasts). Discernment is always required. Scripture says: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

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- An important aspect of the Christian life is discipline and self-control. We cannot live the Christian life without it. By nature, we simply live life as it comes, or we are driven by emotions or controlled by external forces. We need to be disciplined or we will waste our lives, opportunities God has given us, and whatever growth we have will be “wild” and “fruitless.” The fruit of the Spirit, among other things is “temperance” or “self-control” (Gal. 5:23). Paul often exhorts his younger followers to sobriety and self-control (1 Thess. 5:8; Tit. 2:6; see also 1 Pet. 4:7). To be a mentor you must have disciplined yourself unto godliness, and in mentoring we should call one another to the biblical disciplines of grace, which are so necessary to prepare us for whatever usefulness God gives to us.

A Great Benefit of Mentoring

A great benefit of mentoring is in overcoming timidity and paralyzing fear. Paul reminded Timothy: “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). The account of Gideon (Judges 6-8) shows how someone who is very fearful can be guided to fulfill God’s calling in their life.

The whole narrative of Gideon displays the power of God through the weak, the fearful, and the few. When God called Gideon to the task of delivering Israel from the oppression of the Midianites, Gideon had many objections and was the picture of a trembling, doubting, and fearful young man: “O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Judg. 6:15). In Gideon’s case, it was the angel of the LORD who both encouraged and challenged him. Truly, “the Lord upholds the faltering feet and makes the weak securely stand” (Psalter # 398:1). This angel of the Lord was none other than Christ, who strengthened him with strength in his soul. At the same time, He challenged Gideon to take steps in faith. He called Gideon to tear down the altar to Baal, which Gideon did not quite dare to do during the day, so he did it by night (Judg. 6:27). Yet, God led Gideon every step of the way.

Then, in Judges 7, we see Gideon mentoring others. When they encircled the Midianite camp with nothing but trumpets (probably ramshorns) and oil lamps, Gideon called the band of 300 to imitate him and do what he does: “And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do” (Judg. 7:17). God can use fearful men and women by strengthening them to be an example to others, many of whom are likewise fearful by nature.

Fundamental Calls

The application of this concept on biblical mentoring is not first of all to become or find a mentor, though I hope mentoring will grow among us. The Scriptural calls that are fundamental for mentoring to take place and be blessed by the Lord are as follows:

1. Follow the Lord Jesus Christ

Those who inherit heaven are called “those who follow the Lamb” wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4). The call to follow the Lord is loud and clear in the Word of God (e.g., Matt. 9:9). To follow the Lord means to deny ourselves, take up His cross, and come after Him (Luke 9:23-24). It means to hear His voice and heed it (John 10:27). It means to “flee also youthful lusts” and “follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22). It involves a life of service to the Lord (John 12:26) and to His people (1 Thess. 5:15). May the Lord give faith for this by His Holy Spirit.

2. Grow in grace

Growth is not optional, but commanded by the Lord: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). This call is in the context of great warnings of false teachers and scoffers (2 Pet. 2 and 3). To be “led away with the error of the wicked” and “fall from your own steadfastness” is always a great danger (2 Pet. 3:17). Thus we must seek true spiritual growth. Notice that Peter calls it growth *in grace*, not in self or in skill. Growth is downward in the soil of grace, being planted by the river that is Christ (Ps. 1:3). Grace alone will yield growth and fruit.

3. Follow those who watch for your souls

Elders and pastors have been ordained to watch over people’s souls as those who must give account (Heb 13:17). That calling is a great responsibility. Anyone who is called to that will feel their great need to be mentored. However, mentoring does not replace the ordained offices in the church, but should take place through them and guided by them. Hebrews 13:7 says: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Thus Paul also writes: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

4. Keep your eye on the goal

The goal of the Christian life is to be found in Christ and to know Christ and to face all that God brings our way out of Christ (Phil. 3:8-9). Mentoring that does not help with this is a distraction and a waste of time. It is not about following the crowd or people per se. It is about following Christ, who calls and enables sinners to follow in His steps in all of life, including affliction, struggle, and persecution (1 Pet. 2:21).

Children often play the game “follow the leader.” We are all following someone. Who are you following? May we by grace follow the Leader, Jesus Christ, and may those who follow close behind Him help each other in the footsteps of the flock (Song 1:8). ①

FAMILY DEVOTIONS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

COMFORTING HEARTS – TEACHING MINDS, Family Devotions Based on the Heidelberg Catechism by Starr Meade. Published by P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2013. Softcover, 255 pages.

In a well-documented research project, “The Shifting Landscape of Faith in Canada,” a number of conclusions are drawn indicating that the number of Canadians who practice religion by attending church is declining. Although Roman Catholics and Evangelical Christians (I assume this latter category includes Reformed denominations) come off somewhat better, it cannot be denied that all of us know youth, and perhaps even families, that have turned their back on their upbringing, which includes the teaching and preaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*.

In addition to fervent prayer, concerned parents, grandparents and church leaders are struggling for answers. Was there too much emphasis on the doctrinal teaching of the catechism rather than the Bible, as some suggest? Interestingly, the well-known theologian, John Piper, recommends catechizing as tremendously valuable: “Yes, I need concrete texts in my mind in order to fight the fight of faith. But we also need a sense of what those texts mean in the larger picture. Catechisms are one means that God over the centuries has brought out of the wisdom of the church, which he’s given to provide interpretation for how the texts fit together in a large, coherent meaning... Our children can be left in a great confusion if they only learn random Bible verses.”

In this devotional, Starr Meade wants to help us to teach the Heidelberg Catechism by means of a *family devotional*. Rather than leaving the teaching of the catechism to the church when they are teenagers (the usual practice in Reformed churches), this devotional is intended to expose children at an early age to the Heidelberg Catechism in a family setting. The author takes the family through all 52 Lord’s Days in a year, in less than a half-page per devotional for each day of the week. The language used would be understandable to children about ages six and up. Yet, the truths emphasized are explained in such a clear and comprehensive manner that older children, including parents, will benefit as well.

Giving some quotes from these daily devotions will give a “taste” of the solid Reformed teaching of the author. Beginning with Lord’s Day 1, she asks the question: “What if things went horribly wrong” in your life, such as suffering from sickness and family troubles. “Because of sin, all kinds of bad things can happen in our world... We aren’t ready to face life unafraid and live it fully until we know we have something big enough to comfort us in any ‘what if’ situation. If you belong to yourself, you have to find some way on your own to pay for all your sin and to be so good that you please God. What a dreadful burden it would be to belong to yourself alone... It is so much better to know we belong to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ... If we belong to Jesus, he has bought us, paying for us with his own blood” (p. 12). Meade goes on to state: “Another of the wonderful things Jesus does for those who belong to him is to give them his Holy Spirit... The Holy Spirit comes to live inside those who belong to Jesus” (p. 13).

The catechism tells us in Lord’s Day 2 that we need to know the misery into which we were plunged into by Adam’s sin. We know the full extent of our misery from God’s law. We would not know how sinful we are until we know what God requires from us: to love Him and our neighbour with our whole being. “God in his grace, wanted us to see our sin and misery so we would turn to him to save us from it. So God gave us his law ... the perfectly holy and righteous standard that he requires us to live by” (p. 18). God using the law is a mercy because “Like a dying person won’t go to the doctor if he does not know he’s dying, so we won’t receive God’s way of saving us if we don’t know our misery” (p. 20).

“All humans are born sinners. We aren’t born neutral, choosing to be good or bad when we’re old enough to choose. We’re born ‘inclined toward all evil.’ We sin because we’re sinners by nature. We are corrupt—turning from good and preferring evil—from conception, from the moment we first begin to develop as babies inside our mother” (p. 23). “Our natures are poisoned, ... we are totally unable to do any good, and we are inclined toward evil *unless* we are born again by the Spirit of God... When someone is born again by the Holy Spirit, ... the person becomes a child of God, with new desires to please and glorify God and with power to obey him.” Although “as long as we are on this earth, we won’t be completely free of sin, ... the Holy Spirit gives God’s children new power to live for God out of gratitude” (p. 24).

Commenting on Lord’s Day 4, the author does not gloss over God’s punishment on sin. The answer of Question 10 is that “God is terribly angry with the sin we are born with as well as the sin we personally commit.” We all know the stories of Ananias and Sapphira, of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and the story of Noah and the flood. Meade says: “These are no abnormal explosions of wrath on God’s part; these demonstrate God’s constant, steady anger of sin. Because God is merciful, he often gives sinners plenty of time and opportunity to repent. But God still hates sin, always, and is terribly angry about it...” (p. 26).

“God’s justice demands that sinners who reject God’s gifts, God’s authority, and God’s way of salvation be punished to the very fullest” (p. 28). Therefore, the author thinks that “Question 12 is the most important question in the world! Understanding the answer to ‘how can we escape the punishment we deserve and return to God’s favour’ is a matter of life and death. And not just life and death for our bodies; this question deals with eternal life and death for our souls” (p. 32).

Because we cannot pay the debt, we need a Mediator. He is Jesus who was fully human, born from Mary, but was also truly God, being God’s very Son. It is interesting that the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “How do you come to know this?” (Q.19). The answer is: “The holy gospel tells me.” “The Holy Spirit uses the gospel to create faith in God’s people” (p. 43). Meade states: “Sometimes churches are tempted to use other things to bring about saving faith in people. But God gave his people the gospel, the simple preaching of the simple message of Jesus on the cross. It’s through the gospel that the Holy Spirit calls people to himself and changes their hearts so they will respond to the call” of faith and repentance (p. 42).

She continues by explaining the work of the Three Persons of the Trinity, explaining the wonderful way they cooperate in delivering sinners from their misery. She has some noteworthy things to say about the church (Q.&A.54 and 55). “We begin life belonging to a family, ... but the best and more important group of people we can belong to is the holy catholic church, the community of people gathered by Christ for eternal life” (p. 116).

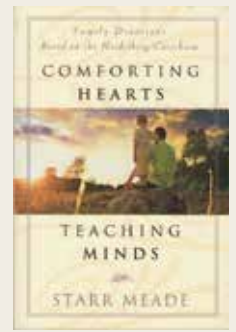
As to the mode of baptism, it appears she herself was baptized as an adult (p. 142). Dealing with Q.&A.74, she states that “Christians who believe the Bible and who believe all the truths taught in the Apostles’ Creed don’t agree on every detail about baptism... What Christians agree on is this: baptism itself does not wash away sins. Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible reality. The reality is that Jesus shed his blood on the cross to wash away the sins of his people” (p. 144). She deals somewhat ambiguously with the part of Answer 74, which states that infants “are included in God’s covenant and people and they no less than adults are promised deliverance from sin through Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith” (p. 147). She takes no position and states: “Some Christians believe that only people who understand and believe the gospel should be baptized. Other Christians believe that since God commanded faithful parents to circumcise their babies under the old covenant, and since the new covenant is even better than the old, faithful parents should baptize their babies.” She concludes by suggesting a discussion based on Acts 2:38-41 (p. 146).

Dealing with the Lord’s Supper (Lord’s Day 28), it seems that the author may be used to a different mode of celebrating this sacrament, but the essentials are the same. The Lord’s Supper is for believers only. “Young children, sitting in church with their parents, are sometimes unhappy that they aren’t allowed to eat any of the bread or to drink from the cup when the Lord’s Supper is distributed. Young children don’t understand that the Lord’s Table is not snack time!” (p. 152).

There is no space to go into the devotions on the “Gratitude” part of the catechism, but the quotes given from the other divisions of the catechism will indicate that this *family devotional* is thoroughly trustworthy in following the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism, one of our denomination’s doctrinal standards.

This devotional is rich in biblical doctrine, explanation and application. Every devotion suggests a Scripture portion to read. And readers should not forget to read the introduction “From the Author,” with whose sentiments I heartily concur.

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THE ORDER OF SALVATION (6)

Regeneration

So far in this series, we have dealt with the biblical doctrine of calling. We have learned that whether God approaches man with an outward or inward call, He always summons us to repent of our sins and to believe on the His Son Jesus Christ. He issues this call with the promise that those who heed that command will receive a full and free salvation, but those who decline this offer will remain in their sins and be lost for all eternity.

One question is whether the same promise is given to both those who believe in Christ and those who do not. Most Reformed Christians are convinced that all sinners who hear the gospel are recipients of God's well-meant offer of salvation and are given the right or warrant to come to Christ for salvation. A minority, however, insists that only those who possess evidence of their election have the right to believe and appropriate the promise of salvation. We must realize that both sides of this question agree that sinners do not come to Christ in their own strength. We believe sinners are drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit, who shows them their sins and their need of a Saviour. By fleeing to Christ, they give evidence of a change which only the Spirit can work in their hearts; but they do not always know that at the time. They do know that they are lost. Only later do they come to realize that their faith in Christ was the work of His Spirit who produced a new birth from above. The outward call had made an inner, effectual call, resulting in a mighty transformation from death into life. This work of regeneration is the next aspect of the Order of Salvation.

Which is First? Calling or Regeneration?

Some theologians believe regeneration comes first because sinners who are spiritually dead need a prior imparting of spiritual life to heed God's call. Others reason that *effectual* calling and regeneration occur simultaneously and should be seen as closely related but distinct aspects of the same act of God in a sinner. In other words, rebirth is another name for effectual calling in the Bible. As Anthony Hoekema writes,

Since effectual calling is the sovereign work of God whereby he enables the hearer of the gospel call to respond in repentance and faith, it is not different from regeneration. These two expressions describe the change from spiritual death to spiritual life by means of different figures: the bestowal of new life (regeneration) or the bestowal of the ability to respond to the gospel call in faith (effectual calling). These two are parallel in that both are new beginnings which lead to continuing spiritual growth. Regeneration issues in conversion and leads to a life of obedience and consecration.

Effectual calling summons us to a distinctive kind of life: a life of fellowship with Christ, holiness, freedom, and peace.

Three Phases in Regeneration

Scripture views regeneration in three different but related phases: first, the beginning of spiritual life, second, the first consequences or fruits of the new life, and third, the restoration and renewal of God's creation in its final consummation or perfection.

In our study of the order of salvation, we will focus only on the first two phases, namely the Holy Spirit's implantation of new spiritual life in dead sinners' hearts and His subsequent work of enabling them to repent and believe. Important for our understanding of regeneration as a link in the chain of salvation is to know how and when the new life begins.

John Calvin and other early reformers viewed regeneration in a wider sense than we do today. They tended to use the term to describe the Christian's total renewal, including conversion and sanctification. Later Reformed theologians felt the need to focus on the *beginning* of regeneration due to the early seventeenth century controversy between the orthodox Reformed and the Remonstrants or Arminians. The latter taught that regeneration was both a work of God and of man. In rejecting this error, the Reformed emphasized man's total depravity and inability to contribute anything to his salvation and that regeneration amounted to a radical change from spiritual death to spiritual life.

The Synod of Dort which dealt with this issue was especially concerned with the Arminian teaching that regeneration occurs by grace as well as by human cooperation under preaching that persuades sinners to accept Christ. Synod strongly rejected this view by declaring that Scripture defines regeneration as

a new creation and resurrection from the dead, a making alive which God works in us without our aid. [Regeneration] is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral persuasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted, but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead.

Some people wonder whether we should view these statements as infallible. What authority do Confessions of Faith like the Canons of Dort have? Are they not opinions of man, even though they were great theologians? Should we not rather go by what God says in His Word? Some churches have not even heard of the Canons of Dort or other confessional statements. They claim to go by the Bible alone. Well, what does the Bible say about regeneration or

the new birth? Who brings it about, God or man? What role if any, does man play in this crucially important event?

Biblical References to Regeneration

In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses describes regeneration as a circumcision of the human heart: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Since the heart is the inner core of man, this passage teaches us that God must cleanse us within before we can truly love Him. In Jeremiah 31:33, the Lord promises: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The clearest Scripture passage in the Old Testament that shows us man's natural condition is Ezekiel 37:1-14, where the prophet is commanded to prophesy upon the dry and lifeless bones of the slain house of Israel lying scattered in the valley. After the Lord tells His servant that there is no breath in them, Ezekiel must say, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live" (Ezek. 37:9). The lesson is clear: the dry and whited bones seen by the prophet describe the state of fallen humanity. Scripture wants us to see man as he is by nature. Death is the condition

of the entire unregenerate human family that died in Adam, our covenant head (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).

We must draw the same conclusion from what the New Testament tells us about the spiritual state of man. He is spiritually dead and cannot give himself spiritual life. Regeneration lies completely outside his capabilities. In John 1:12-13, the apostle reminds us that "As many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power [or right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." As Hoekema explains, "Being children of God is not the result of natural descent or human decision, but of divine action alone."

What Happens in Regeneration?

The Canons of Dort give us the answer: The whole person is renewed in mind, heart and will. This is always the result of the saving work of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 6:17, Paul thanks the Lord that the Roman Christians who had been servants of sin, now had "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine" that had been delivered to them. They had "obeyed," indicating that the will was involved and "from the heart" means that the affections or emotions were involved as well. "That form of doctrine" refers to the apostle's teaching which came into their minds, entered their understanding, went to their hearts, and influenced their will so that they embraced the Christ offered to them in the gospel.

One of the most important operations of the Holy Spirit is that of enlightening the mind of a sinner. In Ephesians 1:17, the apostle

**Important
for our
understanding
of regeneration
as a link in
the chain of
salvation is to
know how and
when the new
life begins.**

pray
volunteer
donate



"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord" Revelation 11:15



Trinitarian Bible Society (Canada)

The Central Ontario Auxiliary of the
Trinitarian Bible Society

Invites you to attend their 2023 Annual Spring Meeting to be held, The Lord Willing, on Thursday April 13, 2023, at 8 PM, at the **Hamilton Free Reformed Church, 1114 Old Mohawk Rd., Ancaster.**

The main speaker will be the Reverend **Pooyan Mehrshahi**, who has been the pastor of Providence Baptist Chapel, Cheltenham UK, since 2007. A native of Iran, he is the main reviser for the current **Persian (Farsi) translation project**. We pray that this work may be used and blessed by God to Persian speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, and around the world. Pastor Mehrshahi is involved in a ministry for Persian speakers through Parsa Trust and is also a trustee of the Bible League Trust.

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God's Providence in opening doors for this work to proceed
Accounts of those involved in this work
Risks
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Rev. Pooyan Mehrshahi



THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Paul prays that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation might be given to the Ephesians in order that they would know God and understand His will. We often describe new believers by saying that the Spirit opened their eyes. This enlightening work of the Spirit is the groundwork of all other operations of the Spirit. Unless this takes place, a sinner cannot be saved.

There is, of course, a vast difference between mere intellectual knowledge of the way of salvation and spiritual, experiential knowledge of it. Mere head knowledge leaves the heart unaffected and the will uninfluenced. That is why, in regeneration, the Spirit also brings about a change of heart. As the Canons of Dort state, "The Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised." The Holy Spirit's work of truly enlightening the mind will affect the heart. The truth will not only be known, but also felt.

A third change that takes place in regeneration is that the Holy Spirit also changes the sinner's will. "The Spirit infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens, from being evil, disobedient and refractory [difficult to deal with]; He renders it good, obedient, and pliable. He motivates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth, the fruits of good actions."

Man has three basic faculties: understanding, affection, and will. All three have been affected by the fall. Therefore, it should not surprise us that in regeneration, God renews these three faculties. God's people are thoroughly transformed. They are transformed from the power of Satan and sin into the kingdom of Christ. Their eyes are opened so they can see that kingdom and its King. The Holy Spirit overcomes their native prejudices. He draws them by His sweet influences so that the sinner flees to Christ acting upon the Saviour's invitation that those who come to Him will by no means be cast out (John 6:37).

In the next instalment, we will continue our focus on the doctrine of regeneration because it is too important to cover in one article. As Lloyd-Jones correctly states, "there is a sense in which we simply cannot understand Christian doctrine and Christian truth without being clear about the doctrine of regeneration... If we do not realize exactly what happens to us in regeneration, then it is but natural that we should be in difficulties about the effectual call and many other subjects."

Endnotes

1. Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 106.
2. Canons of Dort, III/IV, Article 12.
3. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 96.
4. The Canons use the words regeneration and conversion interchangeably. Today when Reformed theologians use "regeneration" to describe the first implantation of the new life and "conversion" to describe the manifestation of the seed of regeneration which has been implanted.
5. Canons, III/IV, Article 11.
6. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit*, 2:75.

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THE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE COMMISSION FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

QUESTION: Is a divine commission necessary for the office of minister?

ANSWER: "We answer affirmatively."

The need for a divine commission is first of all evident from several clear texts.

(1) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt 28:19-20). One cannot maintain that this divine commission is intended for the apostles only and thus not for others, for this is a commission pertaining to doctrine and the administration of the sacraments. As long as this labour continues to be performed within the church, there must also be a commission unto this task. We know, however, that these labours must always continue in the church. They were not meant to cease at the conclusion of the apostolic age—which is therefore also true for this commission. Added to this is the promise of the Lord Jesus to remain with His church until the end of the world. This promise could not have pertained to the apostles only, for they would not live that long. It thus pertains to the ministry and its related commission.

(2) This is also evident from Eph 4:11, "And he gave some, apostles ... and some, pastors and teachers." As you can observe, Christ has given pastors and teachers as well as apostles "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of

the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). Wherever this ministry functions, ministers will also be sent forth. We also read that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles ... thirdly teachers" (1 Cor 12:28). God has therefore appointed ministers as well as apostles. This is likewise expressed in Acts 20:28, where we read, "over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers."

(3) Consider also Rom 10:15, "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" It is as much as being stated that no one can or may preach without being sent. One cannot evade the issue here by saying that Paul only referred to his time period, for such a limitation is nowhere to be found. The time frame is immaterial both then and now, for the matters and their conjunction remain the same in essence. By the manner in which he graduates from one matter to the next, he also shows that no one, either then or now, may preach without a divine commission. Both now and then it is one's duty to call upon God, which is likewise true for all the other duties which he mentions successively. How can one call upon God without faith, believe without hearing, hear without preaching, and preach without a commission? All the inter-related components precedent to being commissioned are true for all ages. This is therefore true for the last component as well, without which, according to the apostle, the others are rendered null and void.

Secondly, this is also evident from God's dealings in both the Old and New Testaments. God called and commissioned the tribe of Levi instead of the firstborn whom, prior to this, the Lord had separated to His service. He chose Aaron and his descendants

to minister in the priest's office. The apostle states concerning this, "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb 5:4). One of the tasks of the priest was to teach, a task which had to be performed as God's ambassador. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7). Sharp threats are issued to those who run without a divine commission. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer 23:21). Likewise no one in the New Testament preached without having been divinely commissioned to do so. The apostles present these credentials at the beginning of their letters, and they in turn commissioned others. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23); "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim 4:14); "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim 5:22); "... that thou shouldest ... ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). From this we conclude that all who have ever preached were commissioned to do so. Consequently, a divine commission is also now a prerequisite.

Thirdly, ministers are God's ambassadors. "For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7); "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20). An ambassador cannot do anything but what he is commissioned to do, and he thus speaks on behalf of his Lord....

We have thus observed that a divine commission is necessary for the ministry. We shall now proceed to consider the particulars of this commission.

The Elements of the Internal Call to the Ministry

This commission is both *internal* and *external*. An extraordinary, divine declaration is not an element of this *internal commission*. God does not do this, or does so only on very rare occasions, and thus one need not wait for this. There are other matters by which one may be assured of his internal calling.

To these belong, first of all, *a knowledge of the office*. One must know what it means to be a servant of Christ, to be the mouth of the Lord, to proclaim that great gospel, to teach ignorant men the way of salvation, to be instrumental in delivering men from the devil, and to lead them to Christ. One must know that it consists in comforting those who mourn, stirring up the indolent, bringing back those who have strayed, exposing hypocrites and temporal believers to themselves, defending the truth against error, rebuking the ungodly, helping to keep out or expelling from the church those who lead offensive lives, and adorning the church, so that by the holiness of those who profess the truth she would bring glory to Christ. One must know that it consists in being an example and in being able to give an account of the souls entrusted to him. How can he who is neither thoroughly acquainted with

these matters, nor perceives the weightiness of it all, nor takes this to heart, have intentions to be faithful? All of this must be known, considered, and experienced in order to be conscious of one's calling.

Secondly, there must be some knowledge of one's *aptitude for this work*. A fundamental knowledge of divine truths and thus being satisfied with a speculative knowledge of these is not sufficient. Rather, one must experience the power of these truths in his own heart, having been converted thereby. He will thus be able to speak from his own experience. He must also have the aptitude to clearly express his thoughts, and must have a voice which is capable of being heard by others. Even though the most qualified person must say, "Who is sufficient for these things" (2 Cor 2:16), one must nevertheless be conscious of some aptitude. Shortly we shall consider this aptitude more comprehensively.

Thirdly, there must be *an extraordinary love a) for Christ* and a desire to make Him known; *b) for the church* to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2), and to cause her to shine forth with light and holiness to the honour of God; and *c) for the souls* of the unconverted to snatch them from the fire, as well as of the converted to strengthen, comfort, and continually provide them with spiritual food.

Fourthly, one must be *willing to deny all that is of the world*, such as honour, material goods—yes, even life itself. If someone is of low social status and wishes to become someone of renown or to acquire material goods by way of the ministry, his objective is entirely wrong. He would be much happier as a shoemaker, for in my opinion there is no man more abominable than an unregenerate minister who uses the holy things of God to his own advantage.

Fifthly, there must be a *great desire for this work* (1 Tim 3:1). There must be continual stirrings to give oneself to the Lord by way of this work, and there must be a concern about whether or not one is called. There must be anxiety when ulterior motives are perceived in the heart which in turn causes one to entertain the thought to refrain from this work; or when the heaviness of the task, and a sense of inability causes one to look up against this work, engendering a desire to be relieved from this work, as with Moses and Jeremiah. The stirrings will nevertheless persist and overcome the objections. This in turn will give him more liberty before the Lord and he will find himself more willing than beforehand because by the objections he will have a clearer view of the motives of his heart. Then his heart does not condemn him, but rather convinces him of his sincerity in this matter. By these and similar arguments one can ascertain his internal calling. ¹¹

Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 2, translated by Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 118-122.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim 4:14)

MEETING AND GREETING VISITORS TO THE CHURCH: TEN BASIC RULES

by Rev. Tom Aicken



Having visited several churches over the years and having encountered a wide variety of responses in doing so (from being warmly received to totally ignored), I have decided to write on the subject with the hope that it might help and encourage those who recognize that meeting and greeting visitors to our churches is not merely a social custom, but an important ministry which needs to be constantly monitored, diligently maintained, and aggressively encouraged. I hope this article will help every church to be strengthened in this area.

Number 1: Realize the importance of contact before and after the service. Just as the two most dangerous times for flying an airplane are taking off and landing, so studies have shown that the two most critical times for anyone visiting a church, especially for the first time, are coming in and going out the door. If newcomers never return, we assume it is because of something that was said or that happened in the service itself. Perhaps the sermon was too long, too dull, or just irrelevant;

perhaps the singing was poor, or the sound system did not work properly that day. I concede that these can all be problems and that any church needs to work at overcoming any such deficiencies. What too many people do not realize is that most newcomers who determine never to return say they do so because of what happened or failed to happen (being ignored) as they passed through our doors, whether before or after the service. There is no excuse for this lack; a few people are enough to make sure it does not occur – ever.

Number 2: Immediately reach out to all visitors. The time that newcomers are most uptight and anxious in coming to an unfamiliar church begins when they take the heart-pumping trek from their car to the church building. Though that may be little more than fifty feet, this hike may take them far outside their comfort zone. That is why they must be met with a warm smile, an inviting hand-shake and a friendly, relaxed word of greeting within five seconds of entering the church door. They

do not need to be pounced on by ten people at once – one or two people who are prepared to give them a simple ‘meet and greet’ will prove sufficient – but remember that five-second rule. Be sure to speak (at least briefly) to everyone in the pack, including children. Visitors’ children can feel very nervous about this new experience, may feel slighted if ignored, and the parents themselves will surely feel better, and come away with a more positive first impression of the church, if they can see that their whole family has been welcomed. What they will appreciate most about it, and need to feel at this critical time, is that this church cares.

Number 3: Be ready to provide a quick and simple presentation of the most basic church information. Let the newcomers know, if they look puzzled, that you are happy to answer any questions they may have. If they ask about any specific church programs, be sure to answer that inquiry, briefly if you can, but then also have a complete list of programs handy which you can give them for future reference. Try also to address certain potential questions even before they are asked. If, for instance, they have young children, point out the washroom location. This kind of thing goes a long way in rescuing first-time visitors from any anxieties that they may have, and in creating something of a comfort zone. Studies show that the need to feel comfortable is much stronger than the desire to be feel welcome, yet a warm and timely word of welcome can satisfy both cravings simultaneously.

Number 4: Be aware of people’s natural fears and take initiative in meeting those people who are new. Do not wait for visitors to make the first move, and do not assume that one or more of the other members will probably welcome them anyway. I remember attending a party with my wife at the house of some people we scarcely knew. On the way home, we talked together of how we were pleasantly surprised to greatly enjoy the party. We realized what made this gathering stand out was that the host and hostess spent their entire time working the room, waiting on people, and doing everything they could to make their guests feel at ease. One might argue that they were just good at it, but I would argue that they were good at what they did because they consciously threw themselves into the role of hosting. One should not expect a worship service to be seeker-friendly. It is to be governed by the regulative principle of worship. But what we do before and after the service ought to have the needs of our visitors in mind.

Number 5: Seek to put yourself in their shoes. Remember what it was like for you the last time that you visited some other church. What did you like? What helped you to relax your

guard? Why not take that same approach and extend that help to someone else? What did you not like and make you think you should never do to visitors to your church? Now you know what to avoid! Some churches today ask visitors to stand up to tell who they are and where they are from. However, since most people list public-speaking as their number one fear, after death, it seems absurd that such a practice should ever be done in any church.

Number 6: If you never managed to reach your visitors before the service, be sure to leave the sanctuary early enough after the service to catch them then. Some visitors are suddenly eager to escape the building as if it were on fire as soon as the service ends. If you do catch up with them, invite them to stay (for coffee if available) and express the hope to see them again sometime. Often that is enough to get them talking, but if it is not let them go. Retreat from the chase if they appear to be taking flight from a possible hostage-taking situation. We need to admit that we cannot hope to succeed in befriending every visitor who pops into the church. Still, it is better to have tried and lost than never to have tried at all.

Number 7: Do not ask strangers too many personal questions or talk to them for too long at one time. Many members of a church are afraid to approach visitors because they do not know what to say. However, the briefest encounter is often better than talking too long or prying too insensitively. Are you not sure what to say? Speak to your visitors positively about your church. If it has been a particular blessing to you, tell them how. If the service is over, you have an advantage in that you can talk to them also about the Word preached. You may be pleasantly surprised to learn that not all strangers to the church are awkwardly tongue-tied; many are happy to engage in conversation, and some, when they see your openness to them, are eager to fill in the empty spaces for you. You might even find yourself to be taken hostage, but that rarely happens. When it does, it usually means that the hostage-taker is a needy soul who desperately needs a listening ear.

Number 8: Do not assume visitors who come with regular attendees are already occupied and may be ignored by you. Remember, this member wants his friends to be well received by everyone, just as you yourself would want that if you were the one bringing them. Moreover, if any visitor is already talking to someone in the church, do not assume that that member would not appreciate some back-up. When you see a situation like that, walk over, listen in a little, and assess how the conversation is really going. If you sense your presence would be of no help, do not interrupt. If, however, the conversation is floundering, and

Studies show that the need to feel comfortable is much stronger than the desire to be feel welcome, yet a warm and timely word of welcome can satisfy both cravings simultaneously and very effectively.

your friend is drowning, do not be afraid to jump in for the rescue. Some of the best hospitality comes as a team effort, and it has happened to me more than once that I have been profoundly grateful for some thoughtful soul who has dared to spare me when he saw me going down for the third time.

Number 9: Direct those looking for help to the appropriate person. Occasionally someone comes to the church who is not technically a visitor, but is on some mission of his own. He may be a minister who wants to rent the building for his own church. Direct such requests to the elders. He may be a homeless person looking for a hand-out. Direct such requests to the deacons. These officebearers are trained in church policy and called to deal with these peculiar needs. If any couple should ask for marriage or family counselling, direct them to the pastor, who will then arrange to meet with them at a convenient time. If anyone should come and simply want to know more of the gospel or a reason for your hope and joy in the Lord, speak to him yourself. Be ready always to give a quiet and reverent answer (1 Pet. 3:15) and have basic gospel tracts on hand at the church.

Number 10: Show hospitality to repeat visitors. Most visitors do not need to be invited to someone's home for lunch on their first visit to the church. That may well invade their comfort zone and scare them off. If, however, they come several times, that in itself is a sign that they are interested and may well want to make this their church home. Someone should then be prepared to invite them for lunch, at least by the fourth week, or perhaps for coffee sometime during the week. In this area of ministry it helps to be creative, and sometimes spontaneous. Not everyone will be able to take this on, but a small group within the congregation may want to volunteer for this purpose. A roster of names of people who are prepared to take their turn in showing hospitality is helpful.

Rev. Tom Aicken is an emeritus pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Langley, British Columbia.




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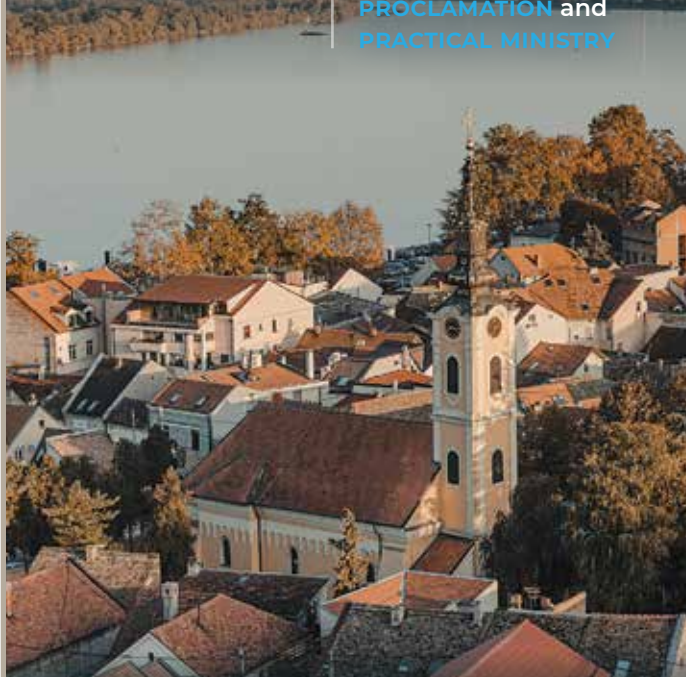
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With joy I heard my friends exclaim,
Come, let us in God's temple meet,
Within thy gates, O Zion blest,
Shall ever stand our willing feet.

How beautiful doth Zion stand,
A city built compact and fair;
The people of the Lord unite
With joy and praise to worship there.

They come to learn the will of God,
To pay their vows, His grace to own,
For there is judgment's royal seat,
Messiah's sure and lasting throne.

For Zion's peace let prayer be made;
May all that love thee prosper will;
Within thy walls let peace abide,
And gladness with thy children dwell.

For sake of friends and kindred dear,
My heart's desire is Zion's peace,
And for the house of God, the Lord,
My loving care shall never cease.





The Call to Serve as an Office Bearer

In our first article on the call to serve as an office bearer, we have focused on Christ's authority in calling men to serve. Christ is the highest authority who, through His Church, calls men to serve as office-bearers in His church. He also specifies the qualifications for men to serve and prepares and equips men to serve. Let us now look at some hindrances to service and also the great responsibilities of service.

PART 2: HINDRANCES TO CHRIST'S CALL TO SERVE AS AN OFFICE BEARER

The Obstacles of the Enemy

How does our love to Christ and His Church grow cold in our day? Matthew 24:12 says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul said that the pursuit of money leads man to stray from the faith. Satan, the great Tempter and enemy of Christ and His Church, will put many stumbling blocks before us.

Paul wrote that he wanted to go to the Thessalonians, but Satan hindered him (1 Thess. 2:18). In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding*,¹ John Bunyan related some of Satan's many ways to try to take him out of service and make him ineffective. He wrote that Satan tempts us to pride for our talents. That is why God often uses men who are very aware of their lack and kept humble and dependent on God. Satan also accuses us of not having a true love for Christ and His people, hoping to make us despair. He makes us think that we might only be tinkling cymbals which make noise without the warmth of love. He makes us doubt our salvation to keep us from speaking to others.

If he cannot make you despair, he will tempt you with sin. Bunyan was tempted by a flirtatious woman. If he cannot allure you into sins, Bunyan says Satan tries another trick: he will stir up hateful people to throw slander on your name. He hopes you will break down under the constant assaults or abandon the work to save your reputation. Bunyan was accused of being a witch, Jesuit, highway man, and adulterous husband. When all these false rumours did not stop him, Bunyan was put into prison to stop him and scare others.

Christ said, if anyone does not hate "his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23-26 and 14:26).

John Owen warned that a leader will bring down more in his fall than what he has built up his whole life. The Tempter tempts you to fall into sin to make you useless in Christ's kingdom and turn many away from Christ. He tempts with many sins, such as pornography, infidelity, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, or greed, so that he can rid the church of competent men of God.

He wants to keep your heart cold by keeping you from Scripture reading, study, and prayer. He wants to keep the church from having men filled with the Holy Spirit who can be chosen for the office! He uses every effort to make your love for Christ and His Church grow cold so that you do not feel compelled to say, "Here I am, send me."

With your faults and sins brought to mind, he will make you despair of God's mercy and lose hope of finding any way of being restored to honour among the brethren. He will bring defamation, false accusations, and ridicule against you to discourage and silence you in the fight. He knows how we like to lie low to avoid being a target. He will imprison you to take you out of service and scare others into stopping the work.

That is why Paul came back to Lystra after he had been stoned there, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). He also said in Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Do not grow weary men! "Fight the good fight of faith!"

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul encourages us saying, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." That is what the uncircumcised Philistines cried out when they saw Israel coming to the battle with the ark of God: Be men and fight! (1 Samuel 4:9)

That fight begins on our knees before God! It involves carving out time to read and study the Scriptures. It involves aspiring, striving, and having an intense desire to know God and be useful in Christ's Kingdom! Be men of God, men of faith, and men of godliness! God says, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

The Inadequacies We Find Within

Is it any wonder that we feel inadequate to serve in the Church of Christ? I hope we all feel our inadequacy. Such are not alone. Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all sensed their weakness, but God provided for them.

Moses even argued with God. When God met Moses in the fire on the bush, He said: "I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt." But Moses answered, "Who am I that I should go?" God said, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exodus 3:10-12). God declared His Name and glory to Moses in such a magnificent way. But Moses said, what if the people won't believe me? (4:1). God enabled him to do miracles to turn his shepherd's staff into a



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

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serpent. Then Moses continued to argue and said, "I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech," (4:10). God replied, "Who hath made [your] mouth?... Go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (4:11-12). Moses still argued and asked the Lord to send someone else. Then the LORD became angry with Moses (4:14).

We have these same objections. The Church calls us to take up the office and lead the people of God, and we say, *who am I?* God sends us to gather the wandering souls and promises to be with us, but we say, *what if they won't believe me?* We say, *I am not eloquent, and I don't know what to say.* Why do we argue with Christ, the King of the Church, the I AM who Moses met in the burning bush?

Is it because we feel our weakness? Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:5, *"not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."* God promises to give you the Holy Spirit. He would teach Moses and Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say even when they were dragged before earthly authorities (Luke 12:12).

Feeling our inadequacy is important, but is not pleasant. We like to feel competent and be well-liked, respected, and gifted. But we need to be humbled, and broken down, because we need to learn that our words will not change anyone, only God's can. Not our gifts or abilities can save, but God's grace alone. That is why we must remember who sent and called us into the office! Christ!

The Unwilling Heart

The question remains, are we unwilling? There is a difference between feeling inadequate and being unwilling to serve. A lack of desire speaks of a lack of an inner call. But what is the reason that you are not willing to serve in Christ's church? That is a spiritual problem. If there is such a spiritual problem, then you do not have the spiritual qualifications essential to the office. Then you need to ask if there is any love for Christ and for His Bride or for the lost souls around you!

Jonah, God's prophet, was also unwilling. He even ran away from God and the call. Jonah had no love for the wicked people of Nineveh. He was more concerned about his own comfort and people than all the souls in Nineveh. He complained about a tree that God caused to grow in a day to give him shade and die the next to expose him to the sun's burning rays. How often are we unwilling to serve the church because it takes away our comforts? God showed His loving concern for the many Ninevite souls about to perish. Do we share Christ's concern for souls?

If you have no Biblical warrant to not accept the call to serve in the office, you are disobeying Christ's authority when you decline the call. Even declining to have your name nominated is resisting Christ's call because you are unwilling for Christ to direct the church to call you.

If we are unwilling, we need to search our hearts as to the

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cause. Are our priorities in life wrong? What is more important to you in this perishing world? Your work or recreation? You know you cannot serve both God and Mammon. Do family or friends influence you or your wife not want to make sacrifices for Christ's service? Yes, we are commanded to care for our family, but are we unwilling to make sacrifices for Christ? Or do we fear man?

To be willing we need more than human persuasion. We need to hear the words of Christ in our soul. Christ Himself came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28; Luke 22:27). That same mind of Christ must dwell in us.

**The Significance of Christ's Call to Serve as an Office Bearer
You Stand in Christ's Place**

The significance of the call is that you stand in Christ's place! Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God!"

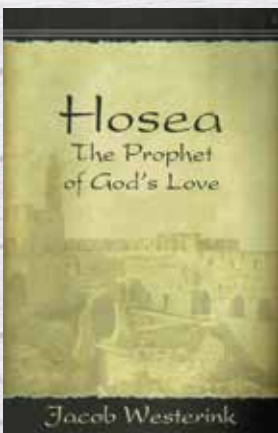
It is a very remarkable question that Christ asked Peter in John 21: "Lovest thou me?" He then showed that Peter's love as an office-bearer was to show in feeding Christ's sheep. Acts 20:28 says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." This verse expresses the love of Christ who laid down His life for His sheep and purchased them with His blood. In His love, He now calls men to the office by His Holy Spirit and says, stand in My place and "feed My sheep" for Me.

You stand in Christ's place to convey Christ's love to Christ's Bride. That means you are directly responsible for and accountable to Christ for how you carry out His commission and use His Authority!

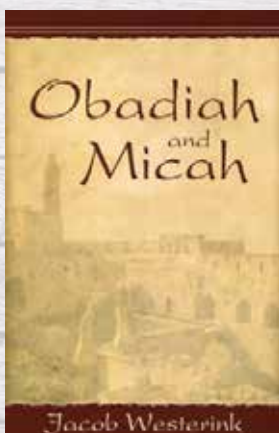
You Minister to Christ's Sheep

Those who are called minister to the needs of Christ's sheep. James 5:14 says, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the

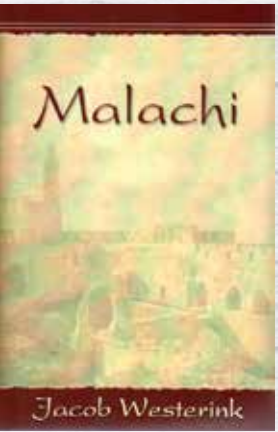
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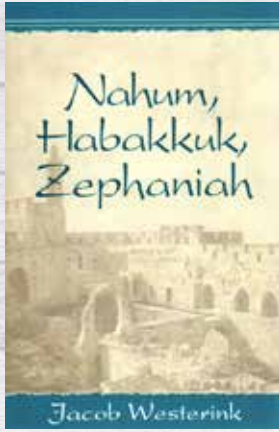
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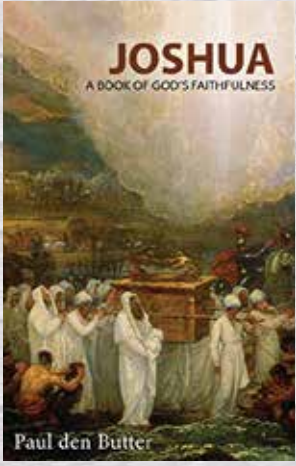


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elders of the church; and let them pray over him.” As you are called to sit at the bedside of the sick or dying, you are the ambassadors of Christ, sitting there in the place of Christ, who is now in heaven, to do His work on earth. You comfort them with the comfort that Christ gives through His word.

Similarly, deacons enter the houses of the needy in Christ’s stead, ministering to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the hurting. As your hand touches their head, or holds onto their hand, you are standing in the place of Christ, be it with a mere cup of cold water.

Will their cry have to ascend to heaven, saying with Psalm 142, Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul? It is no small thing to leave the office empty as if Christ was not concerned to have office bearers stand there through whom He would to minister to their needs. It is no small thing to withdraw from being a means to tell them once more of Christ’s continual intercession and perfect atonement for all their sin, and to look on them with the compassion of Christ’s own eyes in their hour of soul-need.

You Shepherd Christ’s flock

The significance is that you shepherd Christ’s flock and seek her wandering sons. Who will go for Christ to give instruction to the young people being lured away by the shallow religion of nominal Christianity or the empty promises of this perishing world? It does not take very long for the seeds of doubt to grow into an abandonment of the faith altogether. Some have observed that it only takes three to six months from the time they begin to entertain their doubts until they will openly claim they do not even believe in God anymore!

In Ezekiel 34, God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves but did not feed the flocks. Shepherds unwilling to lead the people resulted in the people wandering aimlessly looking for help. “The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye

sought that which was lost; but with force and cruelty have ye ruled them” (Ezekiel 34:4). When those called to care for the flock neglect their duty, the flock scatters.

We are to take oversight over the spiritual wellbeing of the flock, over which God has made you overseers, willingly (1 Peter 5:2-3), and to lead them in the way of godliness. We are to warn them of dangers, like the watchmen on the walls, defending the faith against errors. We are to lead the flock when troubles come against the church as Paul did in Lystra, defending the believers against all opposition that might cause them to stumble. We are to strengthen the souls of the believers and to exhort them to persevere in the faith. We are to walk with them through the trials, not only coach from the sidelines.

Who will continue to teach your children and grandchildren while the world is using every effort to erase God from their minds, hearts, and lives? Can we sit back comfortably in this world and let them take our children away?

Conclusion

Christ is coming again. The gospel will be preached to all nations, and then the end will come. Paul set the example for us in Acts 14:22. Your duty is to strengthen, to exhort, and encourage, because through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of heaven.

Christ has given the gift of office bearers to His Church. Without office bearers, there is no church! Without office bearers, there is no oversight over the lives of the saints, no accountability, no guidance, no correction, and no call to repentance and faith. People can live far from God to their own hurt, no longer living as a separate people, no longer being a light in a sin-darkened and perverse world. Compromise and syncretism overrun the churches. Un-shepherded flocks are left vulnerable to false teachers, as wolves in sheep clothing, and prone to stray and fall with no one to help them. Without office bearers, the church lacks teaching of the youth, house visitation, visiting of the sick, and ministering to the poor, widows, and orphans. Without office bearers, the church gives to the state what rightfully belongs to the church. The church is called to influence the

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world, but when wickedness abounds, the world tends to influence the church. That is exactly what Satan wants!


Will we live in comfort and ease when Christ agonized over His Church and gave His own blood for her? When your brothers are put in prison, or removed from speaking the gospel, are you ready to stand in Christ's place?

When wickedness abounds, rather than letting your love grow cold, manfully take up your cross and follow Christ. Kindle your love and zeal by "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Fight the good fight of faith, strengthen the brethren, and comfort them with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God, all in Christ's name, on Christ's behalf, and for Christ's sake. ①


Rev. B. van Liere is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Langley, BC. The first installment of this series was published in the December 2022 edition of The Messenger.

Endnotes

1. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding: To the Chief of Sinners* (New Kensington, Pa: Whitaker House, 1993), 168.



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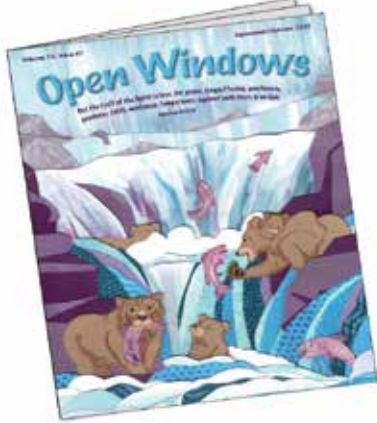


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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



EGBERT WURSTEN

August 27, 1933 – December 11, 2022

On December 11, 2022 the Lord took to Himself Egbert Wursten in his 90th year. He was predeceased by his wives, Agnes (2009) and Marilyn (2021), and great grandson, Jackson (2017).

Dearly loved father of:

Case (Diana) Wursten, Ancaster
Tracey (Raphael) Gritter, Grimsby
Mary-Ann (Dylan) Van Den Assem, Blyth
Bradley (Marije) Wursten, The Netherlands
William (Sarah) Wursten, PEI.
Loving grandfather of 25 grandchildren and
15 great-grandchildren.
Step-father to Rick (Joyce) Zwiep, Lawrence
(Sandra) Zwiep, and Nancy Sommer.

The funeral service took place at the Maranatha Free Reformed Church, on Saturday December 17, with Pastor G.R. Procee officiating.

Psalm 73:26

My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

