

VOLUME 70 NUMBER 06 · JUNE 2023 EDITION

THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



THE EARTH
IS THE
Lord's,
AND THE FULNESS
THEREOF; THE
world,
AND THEY THAT
DWELL THEREIN.

PSALM 24:1

02 MEDITATION:
WE REAP WHAT
WE SOW!

06 EDITORIAL:
REMEMBER THE
WARNINGS (4)

16 PRACTICAL:
LISTENING TO WHAT
IS NOT SAID (4)



MEDITATION

WE REAP WHAT WE SOW!

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Galatians 6:7–8

What kind of sowing do you do and pray to do, day by day, and week by week, and year after year? If we are true Christians by God’s grace, do we not want only always to sow to the Spirit? In that regard, the Apostle Paul gives us a helpful line to always keep in mind: *“For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”* Consider three reflections for our profit from the Biblical, Christian affirmation, we reap what we sow!

For one, what warning gospel truth our text gives. On the one hand, isn’t this such a commonsense fact everyone knows? Yet who hasn’t found how easy it is to forget or suppress the most commonsense facts, also for the Christian life? Who doesn’t have reason to grieve over forgetting or just pushing aside this truth as not relevant? Every time we give in to any sin, are we not actively denying that we reap what we sow? How many think they can sow a “little” sin here and there and escape any sad and bad consequences?

Galatians 6:7 gives us a warning introduced with the solemn words: *“Be not deceived.”* This formulation indicates we are prone to deceive ourselves here. Our default way of life by nature is to fall into deceitful ways (Jer. 17:9) and so allow ourselves to sow to the flesh all too often. How careful we need always to be to guard our minds and hearts from being deceived regarding both right doctrine and godly conduct (1 Cor. 10:12). If we know ourselves at all, we will humbly acknowledge our reasons to pray every day: “Lord, please don’t let me be self-deceived in any way.”

Then comes this added statement: *“God is not mocked”*. We may think we can sneak past others our inconsistencies and sins here and there in our lives, we must realize nothing escapes God’s eye. God is never fooled by us. He always knows our every thought, word, and deed. Nothing is hidden from His holy searching view of us whether by day or night, when in public or in private (Psalm 139).

Shouldn’t this have us take our subject more seriously? Who reading this now has forgotten in this past week, or perhaps even today, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”*? Let God’s word search you and me. We reap what we sow! Will you hear this word as

God’s warning gospel truth for you? May it help us all to sow to the Spirit and not to the flesh!

What does that mean, more particularly? **Our second lesson here is to consider what welcoming gospel truth our text proclaims to us.** Isn’t it welcoming gospel truth that earnestly invites and drives us out of ourselves to look to God Triune alone for His saving grace and strength day by day? Isn’t that the only way truly and steadfastly to say “no!” to the flesh and “yes!” to the Spirit?

What is it to walk in the Spirit and to sow in the Spirit? Does it not mean to depend ever on the LORD in all our ways, and constantly to take care to be guided by what His word teaches us? Walking and sowing to the Spirit is all about living always in daily repentance of sin and continually looking to Christ to be our Saviour and Lord every step of our earthly pilgrimage. We then pray and work to have all our thoughts and words and deeds, without any exceptions, captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) and in obedience to all His word and will. Our concern is sowing in the Spirit with everything, with everyone, everywhere, and every day!

Such living is impossible on our own, but isn’t the gracious joy and distinctive triumph of the Christian life that all we need to become and remain saved and grow in grace to God’s glory comes freely from God’s fulness of salvation, all in Christ, the Saviour of sinners, and through the Holy Spirit? The larger context of the whole letter of Paul to the Galatians shows that some were being deceived thinking they needed more than Christ to save them and bless them and make them a blessing. But Paul strongly rebukes such heresy. He calls them with apostolic authority to understand and grasp the completely gracious and gloriously complete and free gospel of salvation for sinners, received only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

What makes the calling to sow to the Spirit and not to the flesh such welcoming gospel truth is that in this exhortation, the Triune Saviour God is sincerely inviting all to look to Him, draw from Him, and depend on Him alone to fight the good fight of faith. This is the Holy Spirit’s great and gracious, renewing, and refreshing work in His people (John 14-16, especially John 16:14). Doesn’t every true Christian testify thus: “Thanks be to the Triune God of salvation; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!” Hearing God’s gospel call and living out of the gospel as believers is what we need to sow to the Spirit and not to the flesh. By His Spirit, God Himself will provide us freely and fully as we daily look to Him and lean on Him.

By God’s grace and Spirit, God’s true people in this way become increasingly repulsed with living in any way of sin whatsoever before God and our neighbour. When these are not realities in your life, you need to examine yourself whether you are a Christian at all. Let none of us deceive ourselves in this all-important matter! God is not fooled by a pretentious Christian life that is just an outward show and hypocrisy before God and mankind. In that light, what a welcome call this text contains.

Not only is this text’s teaching welcome, but contains wonderful gospel truth. What wonderful gospel forgiveness and renewal is found for us in and with God. Perhaps you have failed miserably for so long, even as a confessing believer. You have let yourself sow to the flesh and fall in sin before God and others most shamefully and painfully. Nevertheless, praise God, the gospel is that with true faith in Christ and repentance for sin, you and I may know that in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice is not only full forgiveness of sins, but also cleansing and renewal time and again, for as long as we live (Acts 5:31 & 1 John 1:9)!

What a most wonderful gospel truth is contained in the blessed fruit of the Spirit compared to the wretched works of the flesh as Paul details them in Galatians 5. How destructive and impoverishing are the works of the flesh! But look how the fruit of the Spirit and walking in the Spirit are pictured and promoted! What the Spirit produces here is only upbuilding, blessed, fruitful, loving, God-honoring, and people-caring! How delightful and enriching is the fruit of the

What is it to walk in the Spirit and to sow in the Spirit? Does it not mean to depend ever on the LORD in all our ways, and constantly to take care to be guided by what His word teaches us?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02

MEDITATION:

We Reap What We Sow!

06

EDITORIAL:

Remember the Warnings (4)

08

BOOK REVIEW:

Following the Lord in Our Senior Years

10

DOCTRINE OF SALVATION:

The Order of Salvation (10)

13

THE SPIRIT AND CHURCH ORDER

14

DENOMINATION NEWS:

Salt & Light at Cornerstone
Free Reformed Church

15

Celebrating the Enthronement of King Jesus

16

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY:

Listening to What is Not Said (4)

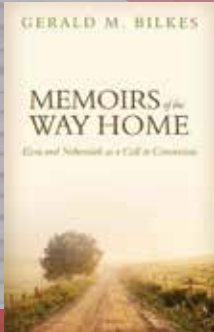
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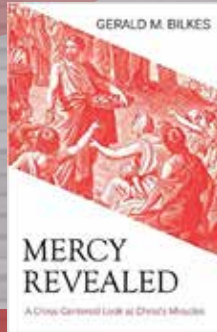
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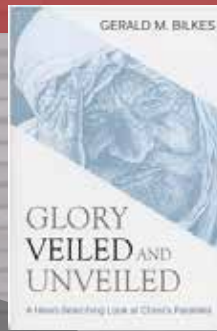
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Spirit! Walking in the Spirit and sowing to the Spirit is living daily to the glory of God and for the wellbeing of our neighbours.

Contemplate also God's additional promise in verse 9 with Spirit-empowered perseverance: *"for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* Ultimately the reaping season is not till when Christ returns. Until then, with constant sowing to the Spirit and not to the flesh, by God's grace and Spirit, oh, how abundantly blessed already in this life are God's people, and what a blessing they become to those around them! It means in Jesus' name, loving our neighbour and not hating him; helping others and not hurting them.

In conclusion then, remembering we reap what we sow, will you sow to the Spirit or to the flesh? God forbid it be the latter but God helping us, let us ever hear and heed the word of God given us in Galatians 6:7-10! *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* 11

Rev. Hans Overduin is emeritus pastor and member of the Free Reformed Church of Calgary, Alberta.

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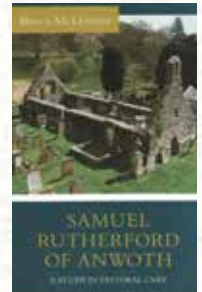
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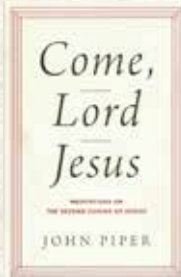
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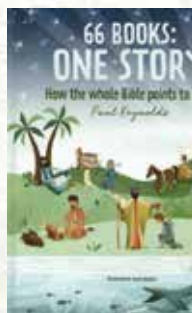


66 Books: One Story: How the Whole Points to Jesus

By Paul Reynolds

This is a family devotional book. If you've read the Bible, you probably know some of the important battles, a good chunk of the life of Jesus, maybe a Psalm or two -- but what do you know about the minor prophets and the epistles? Do you have some loose ends that need tying up? This is where a book like this helps. The Bible has one author - God - so we need to see the Bible as a whole, as God's Word. Every book of the Bible is the breath of God and the plan of Salvation spans all of Scripture. In this Bible overview, each book of the Bible is summarised; background given; and themes and theology explained.

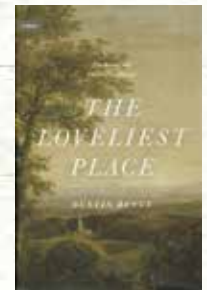
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REMEMBER THE WARNINGS (4)

In this short series of editorials, we are seeking to reorient ourselves by focusing on one or other thing God's Word tells us to remember. We saw the need to remember the days of the right hand of the Lord (see Ps. 77:10-11), Jesus Christ raised from the dead (2 Tim 2:8), and Christians imprisoned and suffering (Heb. 13:3). Now we come to the warnings God wants us to remember.

“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

Are warnings becoming more and more an endangered species in preaching? A warning is a statement, usually pointed, that testifies of a possible or certain danger, difficulty, or disaster. Warnings may not be entirely extinct in preaching, but are they as pervasive as they were in Reformation, Puritan, Great Awakening, and Secession eras? Even more importantly, do warnings occupy in our preaching the place they have in the Scriptures of Old and New Testament? Moses, the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus Himself warned frequently. These warnings themselves should grip us and be examples of how we should warn others.

Paul discharges his God-given responsibility in preaching to such an extent that he could say to the Ephesian elders that he was free from the blood of all men (Acts 20:26). None of his hearers could meet him in the judgment and justly accuse Paul of not preaching in such a way that his or her soul would be required at the hand of Paul for not warning the wicked to flee from their wicked way (Ezek. 33:8). Paul even tells his hearers to remember his warnings. In other words, they are to lay up his warnings in their mind and hearts and recall them to mind as their life unfolds and as they meet with the various temptations and trials for which each and all of the warnings are particularly suited. Let us look in greater detail at this exhortation to remember these warnings and find our sinful forgetfulness of and God's gracious help through warnings.

Remember to Warn

The exhortation to remember the warnings that Paul spoke to the Ephesians means that warnings must be given. Obviously, we cannot only warn or warn out of proportion to the other aspects of preaching such as exposition, application, invitation, encouragement, comfort, etc. Yet, preachers must warn, and must warn frequently. In Colossians 1:28, speaking of preaching Christ, Paul writes: “Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” In Acts 20, Paul tells us that he warned every night and day. That means that every opportunity he had to preach, which was daily(!), he included warnings. That means that not a sermon passed by without some

element or degree of warning.

This shows that the human heart needs warnings. The reason for that is that we too easily convince ourselves that things are good and will continue to be good. We fail to see that our environs and especially our hearts contain capacities that will hurt and even ruin to us unless we avoid the pitfalls and perils that can bring us down. Most of us tend to be too naïve, blind, optimistic, and gullible, easily believing that we do not need warnings to point out what we easily gloss over or explain away.

Warnings should not only be given by preachers, but also by elders, parents, and all entrusted with leadership over others. Friends do well to warn friends and take the warnings of friends to heart. If we care for our neighbours, we will warn them of robbers, charlatans, and identity thieves who may be prowling around. So too, let us realize our obligation to warn those around us of spiritual dangers more sinister and deadly than moth, rust, and thieves who break through and steal.

Remarkably, Paul warns the Ephesians elders of “grievous wolves” entering in among them, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29). He adds that even “of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). How sobering to think that Paul said that in the glory days of the apostolic church! Would not these warnings then apply equally to us today as well?

How sobering to think that Paul said that in the glory days of the apostolic church! Would not these warnings then apply equally to us today as well?

Remember the Love Behind Warning

A parent that would never warn a child of a hot stove, a dangerous street, the danger of playing with matches, and even more so moral evils would be an unloving parent. We might consider warnings harsh, negative, dour, or depressing – and they might be so, if they are unbiblical, tendentious, imbalanced, or truly imaginary. Yet, can anyone accuse Jesus of these things when He warned: “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32)? Only love motivated Jesus to warn of the possibility and calamity of escaping part-way out of the danger of destruction and yet succumbing through love of this present world.

Sometimes people wonder what Christian living means concretely. Hebrews 13 gives many concrete exhortations, which are the outworking of the faith that belongs to all God’s children. Having mentioned brotherly love and hospitality in verses 1-2, the author proceeds to speak about the fellowship with those who are in prison, presumably for their faith (see Heb. 10:33-34). The second group mentioned are those who are maltreated, misused, and mistreated, as the Greek word literally means. This exhortation tells us much of the heart of Jesus. Likewise, Paul tells the Corinthians in a letter filled with warnings that “as my beloved sons I warn you” (1 Cor. 4:14). If we see the love behind the warnings, it will be much easier to accept them and act on them by grace through the Spirit.

Clearly, the warnings should be balanced with directions of what to do, as well as a gospel of hope, and clear exhortations and promises regarding the way of escape through Christ. Warnings by themselves without the full compass of the gospel can depress, discourage, or simply rile people. When Paul heard that the Thessalonians were “soon shaken in mind” and “troubled,” he rushed to stabilize them with truth, knowledge, and comforts, though he also warns against “deceivers” (2 Thess. 2:2-3). All this was born out of love, for especially to the Thessalonians, Paul says that he was “gentle among” them, as a nurse who cherished her children, even “affectionately desirous” of them (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Remember the Many Kinds of Warnings

There are more warnings in the Bible than we can count. The very names of some people are warnings: Lot, Esau, and Demas; Uzzah, the rich young ruler, and Felix. Some warnings are directed at unbelievers; many others at believers. There are warnings for old people and young people. There are warnings against worldliness, idolatry, and false prophets. There are warnings against being at

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PER SUBSCRIPTION The Messenger is published 11 times per year (July & August issues are combined).

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SUBMISSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/NOTICES: All articles, notices for family announcements, obituaries, anniversaries, and non-commercial advertisements for the **JUNE 2023** issue should reach the editor no later than **TUES., JUNE 6TH, 2023** and should be sent to:
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(Messenger Administrator)
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OPEN WINDOWS
This bi-monthly publication for children is under the direction of the Free Reformed Publications Committee:
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ease, being self-sufficient, being a fool or wise in your own conceits, or befriending a fool. There are warnings against unthankfulness, high mindedness, and causing a little one to stumble. There are warnings against gospel hardening, despising the day of small things, and grieving the Spirit of God. There are warnings against going the way of Balaam, disobeying authorities, and provoking the Lord. There are warnings against idolatry, pride, and self-sufficiency. There are warnings against being discontented, loving pleasure more than God, and failing to be watchful. There are warnings against bitterness, clamor, and envy. There are warnings against meeting Jesus at the last unprepared. There are warnings against delaying to obey the Lord, letting ourselves be beguiled of a reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, provoking our children to anger, rendering evil for evil. There are warnings against coming short of the promise through unbelief. There are warnings that the Spirit shall not always strive with men, that Antichrist must come, and that outside God's kingdom will be whosoever loves and makes a lie. Warnings abound in God's Word to us. Perhaps in your daily reading, you could note the warnings that greet you in your reading each day.

To remember these warnings means that we do not just give them a passing glance, or think they are spoken for another generation or simply another person. We should repent of our propensity to forget or exclude ourselves from the merciful and loving warnings of the Bible. We need to keep these warnings in our hearts and hide them there, that we may not sin against the Lord. We should read them repeatedly so that we remember them and won't easily forget them. We should repeat them to others as we have opportunity and in proportion to the prominence the Bible gives them. We should pray for the Spirit's work in our hearts to truly remember them so as to flee from the dangers, difficulties, and destruction about which God himself warns us. ①

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FOLLOWING THE LORD IN OUR SENIOR YEARS

A Good Old Age: An A to Z of Loving and Following the Lord Jesus in Later Years by Derek Prime. Published by 10 Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com. Reprinted 2012 (twice), 2019, 2021. Softcover, 184 pages.

This is a delightful book, published in big print, in short, easy-to-read chapters (of course, because it is addressed to seniors), covering every issue of old age you can think of by using the 26 letters of the alphabet as chapter headings. Pastor and Bible teacher, Derek Prime, writing as a widower in his eighties, had a fruitful pulpit and writing ministry. He is also the author of *Let's Study 2 Corinthians*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust. He went to be with the Lord in 2020 at the age of 89. In this book, he shows us that old age need not be a time of grumpiness, loneliness, and isolation, especially if one is a believer who is open to biblical instruction and willing to take some of the practical advice of the author.

He writes: "But, while there may be bad old age, when we feel 'weighted down with years' (Jer. 6:11), there is 'a good old age'" (Gen. 25:8; Ps. 91:16; etc.) to which we may aspire. Every period of life has its appointed benefits and excellencies (Prov. 20:29) (p. 7). Does this mean the troubles of old age, such as frailty, being stooped down, wrinkled skin, throbbing pains and frightening cramps in the night, can just be ignored? No, the author reminds us that there is no age that doesn't have its own troubles and sorrows (Ps. 90:10). He reminds us that old age can be the most fruitful in our life (Ps. 92:14; 103:5) because believers can give good and wise counsel, and there may still be good works God has prepared for us to do in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. "Every pastor, teacher, elder, deacon, evangelist, Sunday-school teacher, youth worker, missionary, and Christian employee needs the support, encouragement, and prayers of older believers who have already run the same race" (p. 10).

Rather than reminding ourselves of the troublesome prospects of old age, Prime suggests that we focus on reminding ourselves of the great truths of the Bible: the wonder of God's great salvation, His undeserved grace in blotting out all transgressions for His name's sake (Isa. 43:25), and the promise of God's Fatherly care for His children. Our senior years are to prepare us to long for heaven, a place without tears and with a new resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:35-38) without pain. While remembering these key truths, "we would be wise to focus our thoughts daily upon our Lord Jesus Christ" (p. 12). In addition to these spiritual priorities of old age, some practical priorities are suggested, such as using this stage of life to hand over responsibilities "while you are still able to do so competently and can offer initial support" (p. 13). Another practical priority is to downsize while we are fit. There may be items concerning our health and financial affairs, such as power of attorney, wishes for our funeral, passing on personal treasures, and so on. Primary spiritual, biblical truths are further fleshed out and repeated in every subsequent chapter, together with practical suggestions for everyday living. Every chapter ends with a short prayer.

So, the chapter on the letter A primarily focuses on acceptance. Accept the onset of old age, its indignities and embarrassments, gradual loss of independence (like giving up your driver's license), limited energy, the slowing down or inability of achieving simple tasks, which all cause frustrations. Neither should we be surprised "that younger people may not understand the frustrations and physical challenges old age presents." Looking back, "the author says, 'I recognize my own lack of understanding of old age, especially of the loneliness it may bring'" (p. 19). Perhaps the greatest test of

acceptance is “accepting the changing times.” The author warns that it is unhelpful to talk about the past as “the good old days,” even though in a sense they may have been better. What does the Preacher say? “Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.” (Eccl. 7:10). Rather than focusing on frustrations, the author advises to look back on what the Lord has given us during our healthy days and being thankful for what He still supplies.

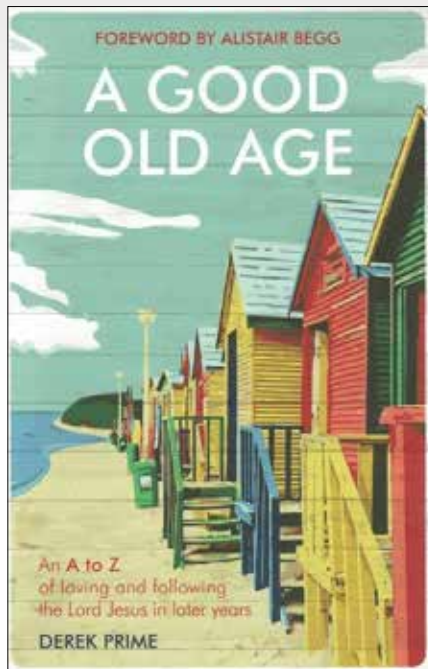
Next is “B is for Believe.” How important it is to know what we believe – the truths of God’s infallible Word – and the importance to know *in Whom* we believe (Acts 16:31). During our senior years, Satan, the enemy of our soul, can be very subtle in tempting us. “Do not be surprised that your sense of sin increases in old age” (p. 24). Here the author turns to the book of Hebrews for perseverance of faith in the examples of those who went before you in Hebrews 11. They too struggled against seemingly unconquerable conditions but persevered by grace.

Use old age as a time of increased prayer for your loved ones and members of your church fellowship. No doubt we all have loved ones who do not serve the Lord. Persevere in prayer, because “some prayers may only be answered after we have died” (p. 25). Persevere in faith, because decision-making “does not become easier as we get older” (p. 26). Scripture gives examples that show how faith enables us to have confidence in the face of death, driving us to look to our heavenly Father and trust Him for His peace and help (p. 27) during frustrations. This chapter ends with ‘A Prayer for Belief,’ which includes the petitions: “Lord, please forgive my unbelief when faced with the growing difficulties and challenges of old age. Give me thankfulness for God’s unchanging character and the Saviour who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Help me to fix my eyes upon Him as I face my ‘Jerichoes.’ May I so live a life of faith that I leave a good testimony to all my family and friends when I am called ‘Home’” (p. 28).

C is for an important grace: “Contentment.” We may have many disappointments. Family and friends may not give us as much attention as we would like, our health may fail, and we may look at others with envy whose circumstances seem to be better. Rather, let us be thankful for what we do have and remember how the Lord has helped in the past. In distress, we are encouraged to cry out to the Lord, as the psalmist did in Psalm 43:5: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.” Let us also look at the apostle Paul’s example who knew both about having plenty and having need but learned the secret of contentment (Phil. 4:10-12). Contentment is something we must learn and keep on learning as our circumstances in life take twists and turns. Reading and feeding on Scripture will feed our contentment (p. 33).

Continuing with the letter D for Discipleship, the author connects it to old age, when our testimony by word and deed of being a disciple of the Lord may be even more influential than when we were younger. Every stage of life brings new challenges, opportunities, and experiences, also during old age. “Discipleship carries the responsibility for passing on to the next generation all we have learnt and gained” (p. 39).

The book continues to use all the letters of the alphabet and is loaded with applicable nuggets of biblical truths and examples from Scripture, interspersed with loving, practical suggestions for using old age to encourage our church family, our present generation, young people, bereaved acquaintances and friends — often expressed in a witty, refreshing way. Always, the focus is on encouragements and exhortations for Godliness (G) which we are exhorted to pursue (1 Tim. 6:11). Godliness,



the author states: “is the best inheritance we can leave our family and friends” (p. 58).

Because there are 26 chapters with different themes, it is unavoidable that there is some overlap and repetition. In certain situations, the author may have broader boundaries of tolerance than the reader, but here is godly and wise advice from an elderly “saint.” This book is eminently suitable to keep with your Bible and other favorite devotional literature and “dip” into from time to time rather than reading in one sitting. Moreover, this is not just a book for old folks, but also for younger people and caregivers to help them understand their aging parents, grandparents and church members. It is warmly endorsed by well-known theologians.

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

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario, and together with her husband, Rev. C. Pronk, involved with Reformed Book Services.

THE ORDER OF SALVATION (10)

Last month, we dealt with the subject of conversion as the next aspect of the “order of salvation.” We learned that conversion relates to the new life implanted in the sinner’s heart by the Holy Spirit and is the outward evidence of regeneration. Conversion is turning away from sin and turning towards God. Born again sinners need divine energy to live to God’s glory, not only initially but throughout their earthly pilgrimage. Old Testament saints understood they had to live to God’s glory and desired to walk in His ways, but they also knew they lacked the required strength to do so and therefore prayed repeatedly “turn Thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jer. 31:18).

This same dependence on the Lord is mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus reminds His disciples that the new life received in regeneration can only continue if they remain in union with Him. “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

While Scripture makes clear that conversion is the work of God, it also tells us that human activity is required. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,” God says in Isaiah 45:22. Here not only God’s chosen nation but the entire pagan world is commanded to turn from its idol gods to the only true God. In the New Testament, when the Philippian jailor asks Paul what he must do to be saved, God’s answer through Paul and Silas is: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:31).

The Two Key Elements of Conversion: Repentance and Faith

In Mark 1:14 and 15, we read that Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” What was the kingdom of God, whose coming Jesus announced? God’s kingdom was not the earthly kingdom of power for which the Jews had been waiting, but His divine rule in the heart and life of sinners. Wherever God is acknowledged as Sovereign Lord and His laws are obeyed from the heart, there you have the kingdom of God.

How do sinners enter that kingdom? By repentance and faith, the two key elements of conversion produced by the miracle of regeneration. Jesus assures Nicodemus and all sinners that without the new birth and its twin fruits, faith and repentance, no one can see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5,7). That is why the basic message of Jesus and His apostles was and is: repent and believe the gospel. Paul could testify to the Ephesian elders that the burden of his preaching had been repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Faith and Repentance and the Reformed Confessions

That faith and repentance must be the basic themes of preaching was laid down confessionally in the great creeds of the Reformation. For example, in the *Westminster Confession* (15.1), we read: “Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof

is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.”

The *Canons of Dort* say: “This promise [of the gospel], together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel” (II.5). Notice that it says: *command* to repent and believe. God commands us to do these things. When Jesus said, “repent ye, and believe the Gospel,” He was not giving a suggestion or some good advice. No, He issued a command. As Paul says in Acts 17:30: “God commands all men everywhere to repent.” When the apostle said to the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he was not making a proposal, but spoke with authority: this you must do, or else you will perish! Those who do not repent and believe will go to hell! In 2 Thessalonians 1:7 and 8, the apostle warns the unconverted that at His second coming, “[Christ will come] in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Some will object: We cannot obey that command. This is true. Apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, no one will obey the call to repentance and faith. But why do they say this? Is it because they have tried to repent of their sins and attempted to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ but found they were unable? Or is it because they *don't want* to repent? Do they love their sins, hate Christ, and find it convenient to hide behind their inability and use the doctrine of total depravity as an excuse to keep on sinning?

Do you reason this way? Let me tell you, your inability is a sin and must be confessed as such. Who is to blame for your inability? Surely, not God! He created you good and after His own image, able to do what is right, and willing to obey His commandments. But in Adam you fell into sin. You became disobedient and a slave of Satan and sin. Therefore, you must go to the Lord and say: Thou hast every right to demand of me that I repent and believe; but Lord, I cannot do it! That is my sin, I admit it; but Lord, do for me and in me what I cannot do myself!

That is the biblical way of salvation, as it was preached by Christ and His apostles, as well as by the Reformers and Puritans. Today's preaching too often departs from this biblical method in two ways. Some say that the command to repent and believe implies ability on man's part. Man is able, if he so decides, to accept Christ. This Arminian 'solution' emphasizes man's free will.

At the opposite end, hyper-Calvinists say, since man is unable by nature to repent, he is not really expected to obey the gospel call. Only the elect are summoned to repent and believe because they have already been enabled by the Spirit's work in their hearts to obey God's command.

Both the Arminian and hyper-Calvinist are wrong. Scripture and true Calvinism stress both man's inability and his responsibility. When both these truths are preached faithfully and forcefully, they will, with the Spirit's blessing, become like the two jaws of a vice, which grip the sinner's conscience. The sinner will be squeezed so hard and long that he will drop all excuses and cry with the publican: “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and pray with Jeremiah, “Turn Thou me and I shall be turned.”

Repentance and Faith are Both Necessary and Inseparable

Repentance and faith are not only absolutely necessary to salvation, but they are also inseparable from each other. Christ says, “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). These two always go together in a true work of grace. Whenever repentance and faith are separated from each other, we are in serious trouble.

Some only talk about the simplicity of faith. All you need to do is trust in Jesus and you are saved. Is that not true? Yes, it is, but unless this simple faith grows and develops simultaneously with repentance, it is not true faith at all, but imagination and self-deception.

On the other hand, others look at repentance as a duty by itself. They exhort sinners to repent, threatening them with the terrors of the law. The result can only be a legalistic repentance. The sinner sees his sins as dangerous; they will bring him to hell if he doesn't give them up. He has remorse; he is sorry for what he has brought on himself by his sinful life. This is not true repentance. True repentance, indeed, springs from a sight and sense of sin, but sin is seen, not only as dangerous, but also as odious dirt that needs to be removed. As David cried, “Create in me a

clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). Such prayer reflects what the apostle Paul describes as a “godly sorrow [which] worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

This evangelical repentance flows from an apprehension or view of the mercy of God in Christ. God is seen as righteous and holy, but also as merciful and gracious. When Christ is set forth as the only Saviour who has satisfied God's law, the heart goes out to Him in ardent desires that He may also be my Saviour. True repentance springs from a believing view of Christ on the cross. Only by looking to Him whom we have pierced, will we mourn in a godly way: the stronger our faith, the deeper our repentance.

Which Comes First? Repentance or Faith?

The question has often been asked: does repentance or faith come first in our experience? This is a difficult question. Some theologians teach that repentance must precede faith because it prepares us for saving faith which is the condition and instrument of justification. Others insist that repentance follows faith. Calvin, for instance, writes in his *Institutes* (III.iii.1):

It ought to be a fact beyond controversy that repentance not only constantly follows faith but is also born of faith. For since pardon and forgiveness are offered through the preaching of the gospel in order that the sinner, freed from the tyranny of Satan, the yoke of sin and the miserable bondage of vices, may cross over into the Kingdom of God, surely no one can embrace the grace of the gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his past life into the right way, and applying his whole effort to the practice of repentance.

Calvin warns against those who reverse the order: “There are some, however, who suppose that repentance precedes faith

Do you reason this way? Let me tell you, your inability is a sin and must be confessed as such. Who is to blame for your inability? Surely, not God!

Providence Christian School Monarch - Alberta

Providence Christian School is accepting applications for the 2023-2024 school year. We are looking for experienced teachers with training and understanding of Christian based pedagogies and methodologies, and who are acquainted with the history, culture, doctrines, and practices of the Reformed churches and schools.

Full-time Principal Position.

A principal at PCS will:

- provide spiritual leadership
- engage in transparent, ethical, and responsible decision making
- lead staff members in defining, developing, and delivering quality learning for all students
- provide insightful stewardship of resources for the operation of the school
- be a spokesperson for the school to the community

Qualifications:

- **Having an MA in leadership or equivalent training is considered an asset.**
- **Having Alberta School Leadership Certification (LQS) or ability to obtain it.**

Part-time Assistant Principal

This is a 35% admin / 65% teaching assignment.

The assistant principal at PCS will be called on to:

- support the principal in providing spiritual leadership
- engage in transparent, ethical, and responsible decision making
- scheduling
- student discipline
- student attendance
- resource management

Potential additional responsibilities:

- Guidance counselor
- Special Education Coordinator

Qualifications:

- **Having an MA in leadership or equivalent training is considered an asset.**
- **Having Alberta School Leadership Certification (LQS) or ability to obtain it.**

Full-time Grade 1 teacher

Qualifications:

- Having a BEd or a BA geared to Education
- Having an Interim or Professional Alberta Teacher Certificate (TQS) or the ability to obtain it.

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit: a letter of application, a résumé containing at least three references, a statement of faith, and a statement of philosophy of Christian Teaching.

- Detailed job descriptions can be found at pcsmonarch.com
- Inquiries and/or applications can be forwarded to Mr. Kevin Slomp, Board President - recruitment@pcsmonarch.com
- For other inquiries check out our website or contact the principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek, principal@pcsmonarch.com , 403-381-4418

**As far as the east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.**

PSALM 103:12

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

rather than flows from it or is produced by it as fruit from a tree. Such persons have never known the power of repentance..."

We must be careful, however, not to press the question of priority too far. Though repentance should be distinguished from faith, they should not be separated. Regeneration produces both of these essential aspects of conversion. The best explanation which keeps the proper balance between these two ingredients of conversion is offered by Professor John Murray, who writes in his book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*:

The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance... Faith is faith in Christ for salvation from sin. But if faith is directed to salvation from sin, there must be hatred of sin and the desire to be saved from it. Such hatred of sin involves repentance... Again, if we remember that repentance is turning from sin unto God, the turning to God implies faith in the mercy of God as revealed in Christ. It is impossible to disentangle faith and repentance. Saving faith is permeated with repentance and repentance is permeated with faith.

There can be no true repentance without faith or true faith without repentance. Spurgeon calls them Siamese twins. They are born together and will die if you separate them. Faith always walks side by side with his weeping sister repentance. Doctrinally speaking, however, it is better to say that faith precedes repentance, not in point of time, but in the order of nature. "Evangelical repentance is a turning from sin to God; but there can be no turning to God, except through Christ; and no coming to Christ, but by believing in Him" (Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith*).

We should ask ourselves therefore: what do I know of these two key doctrines in my own experience? Have I come to true repentance yet? Am I a believer in Jesus Christ? Remember, God commands us to turn from our sins to the only Saviour. This is a most solemn and very gracious command.

We are all sinners in need of salvation and the Good News is that Christ offers that salvation to us in a most loving way. He urges us to repent of our sins and believe in Him. Instead of coming with flames of fire to consume us, as we deserve, He extends a hand of friendship to us. Have we taken hold of that hand and accepted His offer of grace and pardon? Maybe you hesitate because you think you are too sinful to go that far. David felt that way too at times. Even this man "after God's heart" joined other believers who conscious of their besetting sins cried out, "Our sins rise up against us prevailing day by day." But they dared to add to that confession, "but Thou wilt show us mercy and take their guilt away" (Psalter 170:3). Do you still say, my sins are very great? Will the Lord receive me? May I go to Jesus the way I am? Yes, you may. "Come now," the Lord says, "and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Even the greatest sinner is welcome to come to Christ to be washed in His blood that cleanses us from all our sins (1 John 1:7). Go to Jesus then, just as you are, and say: Lord, here I come, a lost sinner, without any hope of saving myself.

My prayer is unto Thee, O Lord, No refuge but in Thee I know,
No portion but in Thee I find, Lord in my need Thy mercy show. (Psalter 388) 11



THE SPIRIT AND CHURCH ORDER

DR. H.J. SELDERHUIS

Keep them together!

After Pentecost, it is good to reflect on the relationship between the person and work of the Holy Spirit and church order. The church must constantly be careful not to get in the way of the Holy Spirit. This can be done, on the one hand, when we appeal to the Holy Spirit moving us to justify dealing very loosely with the rules. As a result, not the Spirit of *God* but rather the spirit of *man* takes charge. On the other hand, so many rules can be made and enforced so rigidly that there is no room for the Holy Spirit's work. This approach also lets the spirit of man become normative.

Reformed church orders have always tried to avoid both extremes. Thus, it has always been pointed out that the Bible does not set the Spirit and order in opposition to each other. Note how the Spirit comes at Pentecost after first filling the vacancy among the apostles through a *duo* (Acts 1). In the first congregation still living under the clear influence of the Spirit, God *Himself* radically exercises discipline toward Ananias and Sapphira to maintain order in the church (Acts 5). Deacons, full of the Holy Spirit, were also *appointed* in that congregation, makes it clear that the work of the Spirit and church order belong together (Acts 6).

Keep it thin!

At the same time, a principle of Reformed church polity has always been to keep church orders as thin as possible. As early as 1568, the Articles of Wesel laid down that the Dutch churches should not bind each other too much. The Spirit-inspired Word of God shows local congregations helping each other but also giving each other space. The principle of Reformed church polity that churches bind each other only in essential matters is related to the conviction that the Spirit does not work everywhere and with everyone in the same

way. A good example of this is the path left open in Article 8 of the Church Order for those who come to the pastorate without theological training. The Church establishes a path by which a person can become a minister, namely the path through the church's seminary, but at the same time leaves open a path to the office of pastor for people whom the Spirit has endowed with special gifts and prepared in His own way for that office.

Keep it balanced!

In dealing with church order, the church wants to take into account its own confession about the work of the Spirit. Therefore, it has always advocated handling the rules in a spiritual manner.

The distinction between *letter* and *spirit* is an example of this. This distinction does not mean that whoever adheres to the letter is making a choice contrary to the Spirit. Instead, the distinction highlights the importance of always following the *spirit* of the letter. In other words, the *intention* of the letter must remain in view. Balance is important here, because in this "letter and spirit" pair, the scales can quickly tip to one side or the other.

That balance is best maintained when each of us personally know and evidence the fruit of the Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22, that fruit consists of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When that fruit is present, then also church order will come to its proper order. ¹

Dr. H.J. Selderhuis is professor of Church History and Church Order at the Theological University of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands (of our Dutch sister-churches). With the author's permission, this article is translated from De Wekker, vol. 131, no. 13 (24 June 2022).

SALT & LIGHT

AT CORNERSTONE FREE REFORMED CHURCH



On the last Thursday of each month our congregation in Blackfalds, Alberta, hosts and serves a free supper for the people in our community. Our church is located on a busy street corner across from the local Elementary School, so there is a lot of traffic. Because of the cold temperatures many people drive their children to and from school most of the school year. So twice a day we have 'rush hour' on our street corner. Early on that Thursday morning one of our members puts the sign out by the sidewalk. He also puts signs on the front and back doors. In the afternoon the volunteers arrive and begin to prepare the supper. We have served spaghetti, chili, turkey, soup and buns, pancakes, etc.

Usually just before six o'clock the people begin to arrive. We have had up to twenty-eight locals show up to share the meal with us. Our guests range in age from babies to people in their 80s. Especially for the seniors this meal gives an opportunity for fellowship with others their age. Some single moms come with their children, and sometimes children come alone. One 12-year-old boy, Alex, came because no one else was at his home and he had seen the sign for a free supper. Usually at about 7:30 our guests leave with the invitation to come again next month. Then the cleanup is done, and we experience that many hands make light work.

One of our men opens with Scripture reading and prayer, after which we serve our guests. We make a conscious effort to mingle and sit with the visitors and talk with them, steering the conversation to the gospel whenever we can. At some point during the meal, we offer them a free Bible, and we tell them that if they are not attending a Bible-teaching church that they are most welcome to join us on Sundays for the worship service. Several of our guests have accepted that invitation and came to the worship services, and we pray that our Lord will incline more of them to come under the means of grace.

The idea for this outreach came from one of our member's past experiences doing something similar in another town. We also read a 'Glad Tidings' article about the same type of outreach in Tillsonburg, Ontario, in which the local Heritage Reformed Congregation was involved. Our consistory approved the idea, and

we began last October with our first supper. Blackfalds is an oil fields town of about 11,000 people, with three small churches but very few locals attending any church. Some travel to Red Deer to attend community churches there. We desire to be a light on a hill and salt of the earth in our local community where the Lord has placed us.

Several of our members volunteer a few hours weekly at the local food bank. There we have the opportunity to place invitations in the food hampers being prepared for about 100 clients. The food bank management is very supportive of our efforts to reach out to the community. Our pastor has been invited to the local Seniors Club to address them and invite them for the meal. Even Family and Community Support Services of Blackfalds places our invitation in their monthly newsletter.

We have a sign-up sheet where our members can volunteer to prepare and serve the meal. So far we have always had sufficient help. Those who have been involved have tasted something of the joy of serving. We have even had occasions when there were more volunteers than guests. Often our helpers bring their children and this way they too learn to serve others. The presence of children and babies has proven to be a blessing for our elderly guests as they love to see such young ones so full of energy.

Our prayer is that the Lord will bless this outreach for the eternal welfare of our guests. We pray for this cause in congregational prayer and at our monthly prayer meeting. We realize that everyone who comes does so because our Lord has sent him or her. We acknowledge that each of our guests is a soul destined for eternity. They are brought to us by the Holy Spirit on Whom we depend to bless our outreach. We ask for your prayers too that our volunteers will not "grow weary in well-doing" (Gal. 6: 9). Please pray especially for our community guests that they might be richly blessed as we reach out to them with food and the Word. Our desire is to truly be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matt 5: 13-16) in the town of Blackfalds. ①

Rev. J. Neels is pastor of Cornerstone Free Reformed Church in Blackfalds, Alberta.

CELEBRATING THE ENTHRONEMENT OF KING JESUS

Saturday, May 6th saw the coronation of Charles III as King of the United Kingdom and the other Commonwealth realms, in a ceremony which included anointment, public acclamation, and enthronement. These core components of the ceremony can be traced over a thousand years for English kings and stretch back further still in our heritage to the coronation of King Solomon. A prominent theme in the coronation service is that the King of kings is the Lord Jesus Christ, whom all monarchs are called to reflect, and to whom all must give account. In the Bible, several psalms are written to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ when He is enthroned as king over all. In the following updated extract, David Dickson comments on the kingdom of Christ from Psalm 97.

A KINGDOM FULL OF JOY, MAJESTY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The psalmist proclaims Christ king among the Gentiles and commends His kingdom to them as full of joy, full of majesty, and full of righteousness.

Besides the sovereignty which God has over all people, He has a special kingdom, in which He reigns by the gospel of Jesus Christ. "The Lord reigneth!" (verse 1). The coming of this kingdom makes available comfort against all grief from sin or misery and gives true reasons for joy and full blessedness. "Let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad" (v. 1).

However insignificant Christ's kingdom may seem to the world, it is full of heavenly majesty. The glory of Christ's kingdom is unsearchable and hidden from the eyes of the world, who are unable to perceive the things of God unless He reveals Himself to them and opens their understanding. "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (verse 2).

Christ's kingdom gives no liberty to sin. It is altogether for "righteousness and judgment" (verse 2). There, righteousness is taught to sinners, and sinners are made righteous, kept in the way of righteousness, and rewarded according to their righteousness.

A KINGDOM THAT VANQUISHES ITS ENEMIES

After the psalmist has set out how comforting Christ is to His subjects, he shows how terrible He is to His enemies. Even though the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom for righteousness and a fountain of joy to all who receive Him, yet He does not lack enemies. When He gave the law at Sinai, "fire went before him." But more, not less, wrath attends those who despise the gospel, and Christ will consume all His adversaries. "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about" (verse 3), however many there are, and however completely they surround His little flock.

There is no match between Christ and His adversaries. "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth" (verse 4–5). However great monarchs they may be, they cannot stand before His presence. Eventually, His judgments on the enemies of the church and His blessings on the church shall be so evident that onlookers will be forced to acknowledge God in them. "All the people see his glory" (verse 6). Those who serve graven images are reckoned as enemies to God and to Christ (verse 7). God will not have the worship that people want to give Him by serving or worshipping Him in, at, or before images. He wants to be served by direct and immediate worship, without the mediation or intervening of anything which may intercept His worship. "Worship him!" (verse 7).

A KINGDOM TO BE GLAD IN

All true worshippers can take comfort. God's wrath against idolaters is certain, and they have clear evidence of Christ's supremacy over all created things.

Whether you think of the church collectively as "Zion" the mother, or in her branches, "the daughters of Judah" (verse 8), they have the same reasons for joy, and the same source of up-building – God's word and works of judgment. The manifestation of the gospel of Christ is the exaltation of God and the manifestation of His excellency. As we grieve when it is dishonoured, so we should have joy when its glory is displayed. The joy of all the saints is, "for thou, Lord, art high above all the earth, thou art exalted far above all gods" (verse 9).

A KINGDOM TO BE HOLY IN

Believers, the true worshippers of God, are here referred to as "ye that love the Lord" (verse 10). The love of God must be joined with, and manifested by, the pursuit of a holy life. We must not only abstain from, but hate and abhor, what is sinful.

Perhaps hating evil and loving God will readily make you subject to malice and persecution from the wicked, yet the godly will have their souls saved. Eventually they will be fully delivered from the harm which Satan and the wicked intend to bring on the godly for their godliness. The Lord "preserveth the souls of his saints: he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (verse 10).

The complete fruit of their righteousness will not be in their possession immediately, however. It is like something "sown" (verse 11), and it takes time for the corn that is sown to spring up and come to a ripe harvest. Yet the Lord sees the heart. If by faith in Christ we have purified our hearts to the unfeigned pursuit of holiness, we are righteous in God's sight, even if we have many infirmities, and even if we have periods of grief and interruption of joy. Yet eventually there will be a full harvest of gladness. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (verse 11).

A KINGDOM TO THANKFULLY CONFESS IN

Whatever our condition in life is, we are exhorted, "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (verse 12). Whatever tribulation the faithful may have in the world, there are reasons for joy in the Lord, and they should make conscience of this commandment to rejoice in the Lord.

Whatever can be taken from the godly, their right and part in Christ can never be taken from them, and so there is reason to give thanks for this gift for ever. "Give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness," or, "Confess to the remembrance of his holiness" (verse 12). That is, acknowledge to His glory the benefit which you have by being a subject of this king. Whatever work or word of Christ brings us to remember His name, it should also bring us to consider and remember His holiness, the untainted glory of all His attributes – wisdom, justice, goodness, power, mercy, truth, etc – and the untainted glory of His word, works and purchase to us. ¹

David Dickson (c.1583–1662) was a Professor of Theology at the University of Glasgow and Edinburgh who wrote commentaries on many different books of Scripture. This article is taken with permission from <https://www.reformationscotland.org/2023/05/12/celebrating-the-enthronement-of-king-jesus/>.

Listening to What is Not Said (4)

In the preceding articles, I identified several important truths that are lacking or even missing in a lot of preaching. However, is there not also another side? Is there not also preaching that emphasizes God's sovereign election, man's radical depravity, the wonder of the new birth, the holiness of God's law, and God's inflexible justice, but is lacking in conveying other things? As I mentioned at the end of the last article, we must honestly face this question as well in terms of listening to what is not said. There are other things, which certainly should not be missing, but sadly do not always sound in certain types of preaching. I will mention three of them in this concluding article.

Thorough Scripture Exposition

The preacher is called to preach the Word. In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul issues the solemn charge: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word." Proclaiming God's Word is no small matter. After all, what is God's Word? This Word is so deep, so rich in content, and so full of truth that it is almost impossible for a puny, sinful human being to understand any of it, let alone present it to others. It requires the illuminating work of God's Spirit to gain sight and insight into it.

While praying for light from above, a thorough and careful study of that Word is also necessary. We will have to search for the meaning of the words we read, the grammatical construction of sentences, and how these words relate to the immediate and broader context in which they appear, as well as how they fit within the whole of God's revelation. None of this is easy. It is no wonder that the minister of the Word is more than once called a "labourer" in Scripture, who at times engages in very difficult labour.

Yet, God's Word deserves such study. God has been pleased to put His thoughts into words and make them known to us. That brings with it the costly obligation to take those words very seriously and make an effort to understand them. Preaching is to tell the congregation what the Lord intended to say in the particular passage being preached. Preaching is to proclaim to the congregation the results of what we have prayerfully discovered in God's Word. The congregation needs to be taught the Word so that it may know the Word. Sound Scriptural exegesis

is a necessary requirement to that end.

Unfortunately, some preaching has hardly any thorough explanation of its announced text. Some preaching quickly explains the text and then spends most time describing what the Christian experiences and what characterizes the false Christian. Of course, these are extremely important matters. Preaching should teach the ways in which the Lord leads His

people and unmask counterfeit religion. But these elements ought to arise from the specific meaning and intent of the text being preached. Otherwise, the preaching will consist of a repetition of the same themes, regardless of the text being preached. Such preaching does not serve to give a sound knowledge of God's revelation.

Other preachers may use a sermon text simply as a peg to explain their own ideas about doctrine, rather than show what God is saying. Yet other preachers may want to be practical and appealing and simply weave together strings of nice stories and motivational messages, without coming as a herald who can stand on a text and say, "Thus saith the Lord." Some of the pressure to gloss over careful exposition comes from the tastes of hearers, but if they are not hungering for the "sincere milk of the word," they need that clear teaching of the Word the more. Let preachers and hearers always remember the serious charge of Paul to "Preach the Word."

Offer of Salvation

The Gospel of God is meant for sinners. It addresses the precise need of sinners by proclaiming redemption, forgiveness, renewal,

and so many other benefits of Christ. How does God's Word speak of this grace? Does the Bible announce it exists and give information about it? Certainly, it does. But it does more. God also offers salvation in all its aspects. The grace presented in God's Word is also warmly and urgently recommended to those who hear the gospel. The promise of the gospel comes with a sincere and earnest offer of salvation.

If the Word of God speaks this way, then God's intention is that this offer of salvation should resound in the preaching of the Word. This gospel call is not just to be mentioned on occasion, but the whole preaching is to be permeated with it, as we confess in our Canons of Dort (Head III/IV, Art. 8): "As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath

2 Timothy 4:1-5
"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

most earnestly and truly declared in his Word what will be acceptable to Him; namely, that all who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him and believe on him” (see also Head 2, Article 5).

It is clear from the quoted words that it is not enough to say that there is salvation in Christ, but that people must also be pressed to receive that salvation. After all, the gospel comes with the command to repent and believe. That call presupposes an earnest and sincere offer of Christ and all His benefits as all that a lost sinner needs. That offer may sound because God has no pleasure in the sinner’s death, but rather in his conversion and life. He is the God who delights in mercy and desires to glorify Himself in redeeming the lost out of mere grace.

Does this resonate in all preaching? Sadly, in some preaching this note is not heard and in other preaching the offer is made and then seems to be withdrawn again. From where does this lack come? Some preaching hardly has a gospel call because the assumption is that since all are believers in Christ they do not need to be called to Christ. Others do not issue the gospel call out of a genuine fear of Arminianism. Arminianism is a life-and-death danger that seriously threatens and has even infiltrated Reformed churches today. However, if we are so afraid of this dangerous ditch that we fall into the opposite ditch, we are not helped.

Amid these dangers, what we confess in the Canons of Dort is most helpful in that they uphold the sovereignty of grace as well as the broadness of the gospel call. Surely, these are not tainted with Arminianism! Let the King’s ambassadors count it a great honor to commend from the heart the service of their King and proclaim in plain language that King’s willingness to save sinners!

Christ

The most serious lack is if the preaching of the gospel hardly speaks of Him who is the content of the gospel: the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, this also occurs. The preaching may be serious, earnest, and proclaim many truths that are valuable and worthy to be heard. But if the only Name under heaven, through which we must be saved, is missing, what good can we expect? Why is He missing in any preaching? Such preachers do not consider Him superfluous or think there can be salvation without Christ. The thought is that Christ is known only at the end of a long road in which many other things are first experienced, such as conviction of sin and godly sorrow. Since these preachers do not see evidence of this knowledge of sin, their main focus becomes preaching about the knowledge of misery in order to prepare people for Christ.

In addition, there can be a reaction to a superficial preaching of Christ which glosses over our sin or the work of the Holy Spirit. Because they hear preaching that speaks so glibly, matter-of-factly, and presumptuously about Jesus, without show-

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

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

ing what it is to experience His grace, they react by failing to give due attention to Him.

Some also believe coming to know Christ as Savior is something that many sincere souls never actually attain. The important thing then becomes that people have the marks of being born again in a way that distracts from Christ and living by faith in the Son of God. Christ as the true object of our faith and the knowledge of Him as indispensable is downplayed.

Others go a different direction and think that the salvation is not such a pressing matter for the congregation. We are all saved. We do not need to hear so much about our sin and the Saviour. Let us hear about how to live. As a result, preaching is considered very practical, but all that practice is no longer rooted in the salvation of Jesus Christ. It may still speak about God but is more moralistic than Christ-centered.

However, our Canons of Dort echo Scripture in confessing that the promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. If salvation, including justification and sanctification, is by believing in Christ Jesus, must we not hear of Him again and again? He who was sent into the world by the Father and of whom the Father said, "Hear Him!"? He, of whom John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"? He, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30)?

If the Word is the revelation of God in Christ, the preaching of the Word must be permeated with Christ.

Conclusion

We began by noting that we must in the first place listen to what is said but also must give attention to what is not said. Often paths that go astray begin not with what is said but by what is not said. Not hearing the whole counsel of God gives room for us to drift into spiritually hurtful and dangerous areas. May elders exercise discernment in their responsibility to have oversight over the preaching, members be Bereans who prayerfully search the scriptures daily whether what they hear is the Word of God, ones like Aquila and Priscilla help lead others into the whole counsel of God, and all of us not have itching ears but pray to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Then preachers will confess with Paul, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26–27). Then hearers will know: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

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ISAIAH 1:18

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