

VOLUME 70 NUMBER 10 · NOVEMBER 2023 EDITION

# THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



**02** MEDITATION:  
THE ABUNDANCE OF  
GOD'S GOODNESS

**06** EDITORIAL:  
WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN  
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# THE ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GOODNESS

*And he said unto them, When I sent you without  
purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing?  
And they said, Nothing.*

*Luke 22:35*

Luke 22 leads us to a turning point in the lives of the disciples. The Lord Jesus is now coming close to His sufferings and crucifixion upon the cross. He is instructing His disciples that matters are going to change for them. In the past, the Lord Jesus had sent them out to preach the gospel. We read that in Luke 9: "And he said unto them, Take nothing for [your] journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece."

Here in our text, the Lord Jesus reflects upon those tours and asks the disciples how they fared. He asks them in verse 35: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing."

## **God's Care**

We first see here *God's care*. The disciples lacked nothing. In Luke 9, the Lord had cared for them abundantly. The Lord had sent them out without a purse in which they could take money. He sent them out without a scrip. A scrip is a bag used by shepherds.

The aim of the Lord Jesus here in Luke 22 was to show His disciples that until this point He had treated them gently as children, but now the time had come that the Lord Jesus was going to send them out to proclaim the gospel and there would be sufferings, temptations, and struggles. Therefore, the Lord Jesus tells them that they should buy a sword.

This is figurative speech. The Lord Jesus does not want them to engage in physical war with real swords. The Lord Jesus wants them to be engaged in a spiritual struggle. So far, they had not experienced the intensity of that struggle. They also had to realize that they would need to provide for their needs, taking precautions as they went out on their missionary journeys.

In the meantime, of course, the Lord Jesus would care for them and be with them wherever they would go. But they needed to do all they could, still trusting in His care for them in the future. In like manner, the apostle Paul laboured with his own

hands to supply his daily living.

The Lord Jesus is encouraging them by referring to His care. This is why He asks them if they had lacked anything. Their answer is: *Nothing*. His past provision means that, while they are to be vigilant and careful, at the same time, they were not to be anxious about their present life. They may go wherever the Lord calls them, trusting He will still care for them.

God's people should not complain. Maybe we do not have overabundance or every luxury. But in the meantime, God's children lack nothing. The Lord is their Shepherd. They shall have no want.

Looking back at this past year, we also must conclude that we have lacked nothing. Every day we had an abundance to eat and to drink. The Lord gave again fruitful seasons. He gave rain and sunshine at His time.

With all differences in income, must we not all conclude that we lacked nothing? Even in days of grief and sorrow, or sickness, the Lord was there to strengthen and to deliver.

### Christ's Abundance

We also see *the cause of this abundance*. This provision is because the Lord Himself is gracious, merciful, and full of loving kindness. He is good. His kindness is reflected upon all His works. He has compassion upon this world and therefore He cares. The cause of all God's goodness rests in God Himself, the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is a light shining brightly and in the beams of this light there is provision for all our daily needs. His care is enough for all of us. If you travel by the light of the sun, you do not need a candlestick to lighten your path.

In the Lord Jesus Christ is a fullness of worthiness to satisfy God's justice and to merit man's salvation. In the Lord Jesus, there is a fullness of holiness to sanctify sinners. He is the rock whose strength supports. He is a fountain opened because of His willingness and readiness to wash away our uncleanness. He is called the tree of life bearing twelve sorts of fruit every month, because of the abundance and perpetuity of joy and gladness that He gives. The Lord Jesus Christ is the river of living water, clear as crystal. Having Christ, we have all. In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom. He gives life everlasting.

The Lord Jesus merited this ability to bless by suffering upon the cross as the righteous One. He was deprived of all that is good. For Him was barrenness and drought, for Him was wrath and punishment. Yet, He bore it all out of love for His people, to be able to care for their every need. We should humble ourselves on account of His goodness and care for us.

We need to be focused upon Him. God wants us to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. His voice sounded from heaven telling mankind: *Hear ye Him. This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased*. The Lord does not want us to rest on any other, for our total lives should be dependent upon Christ. In His precepts, we should obey Him. In His promises, we should believe Him. In His judgments, we should fear Him. In His mercies, we should draw nigh to Him and rejoice in Him. We should be content with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He reveals the counsel of His Father concerning our redemption. He gives power to His Word to work out our conversion. He called Lazarus by His voice and raised him by His power and so, He calls us by His Word and converts sinners. Therefore, our calling is to look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our eyes must be upon Him. As the eyes of the people of Israel were upon the fiery pillar, so our eyes must be upon the Lord Jesus Christ. For He is the truth, and He is the life. Look to Christ and not to human reasoning, for human wisdom is foolishness. Man's reasoning is like a lamp without any light. It will not make you wise unto salvation, but in the Lord Jesus, there is fullness of wisdom and of life and therefore we are to listen to Him.

**The Lord Jesus merited this ability to bless by suffering upon the cross as the righteous One. He was deprived of all that is good. For Him was barrenness and drought, for Him was wrath and punishment.**

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## MEDITATION

### Our Calling

See *our calling*. When you have experienced God's care in your life and, looking back upon this past year, you must say: "*we lacked nothing*," then your calling is to trust in the Lord. This trust implies a continual looking to the Lord. He will provide for all those who flee to Him. He will provide above their expectations. He is the fullness. Think of the disciples, what was going to happen to them in this same night. They would be scattered and be at the brink of despair, and when the Lord Jesus was dead and buried in the grave, they lost all hope. Where was now God's care and where were now God's providential dealings? All was lost.

But nothing was lost, and they still lacked nothing. Their perception was wrong, and their faith was lacking, and that is why their hope was shattered. They paid no attention to the words of the Lord Jesus, for He had told them that this would happen. He said He had to be crucified and that He would be raised on the third day from the grave.

They had been told to hear Him. But they had not done that and therefore they were anxious and despairing. The Lord Jesus had to come to them again, the first day of the next week, revealing Himself. Then their sorrow was changed into joy. But their sorrow was needless, had they listened, and obeyed.

Amid the tensions in this world, we may rest in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is in full control. Do you trust in the Lord Jesus? Do you listen to His voice and obey His Word? Do you humble yourself because of your corruption? Do you rest in the Lord Jesus alone?

Knowing this grace, the Lord will guide you through life, and you will be taken up to be with your Lord and Master. If in that moment it is possible to look back upon your life, you will say: *Lord, I lacked nothing*. However, in that moment, you will not be looking back, for you will be absorbed in looking into the holy and loving face of Him who provided for you throughout your life, so that you lacked nothing. <sup>(1)</sup>

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**They had been told to hear Him. But they had not done that and therefore they were anxious and despairing. The Lord Jesus had to come to them again, the first day of the next week, revealing Himself.**



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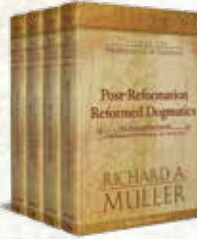
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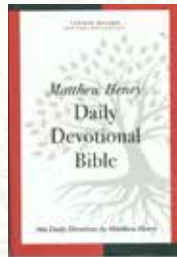
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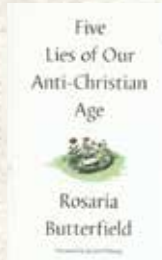


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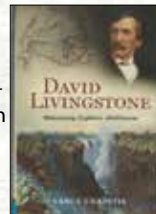
Modern culture is increasingly outspoken against a biblical understanding of what it means to be a woman. Even some Christians, swayed by the LGBTQ+ movement, have rejected God's Word on issues of sexuality and gender in favour of popular opinion. In this powerful book, Rosaria Butterfield uses Scripture to confront 5 common lies about sexuality, faith, feminism, gender roles, and modesty often promoted in our secular culture today. Written in the style of a memoir, this book explores Butterfield's personal battle with these lies--interwoven with cultural studies, literary criticism, and theology--to help readers see the beauty in biblical womanhood, marriage, and motherhood. Written for Christian women, the author inspires women to preserve godly values around womanhood, marriage, and motherhood in their lives, and offers guidance as they shepherd the next generation. Rosaria speaks from her own experience as a formerly militant anti-Christian and outspoken feminist to teach and encourage other Christians. Hardcover, 345 pages, Crossway  
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By Vance Christie

David Livingstone was one of the most consequential individuals who lived in the nineteenth century. An unpretentious Scottish missionary doctor, explorer, and abolitionist, he opened the door for Christianity in southern Africa. Vance Christie's biography is the most comprehensive and accurate ever written about Livingstone. During his lifetime, he was a hero in Britain and beyond and gained a degree of respect, trust, appreciation, and even affection from many African people. He was a man who overcame many deprivations and discouragements and displayed the utmost measure of courage, self-control, faith, wisdom, and ingenuity. Christie takes a balanced look at Livingstone's amazing achievements, but also at his very real flaws. This book is endorsed by Conrad Mbewe, a pastor in Zambia. Hardcover, 767 pages, Christian Focus Publications  
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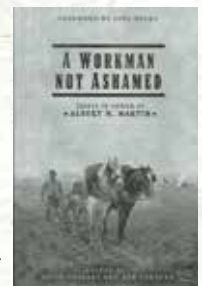


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# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE END?

A consistent refrain throughout the New Testament is that believers should live in anticipation of and longing for the coming of Christ with the clouds. “The end of all things is at hand,” Peter wrote (1 Peter 4:7). When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about their conversion, he highlighted two things: First, they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and secondly, they had learned to wait for the coming of Christ from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Many of us do not give enough thought to the coming of Christ, and we do not expect it as fervently, or pray for it as Scripture requires (e.g., Luke 12:37). Yet, at the same time, when we hear or read of terrifying things happening in the world, such as wars, rumors of wars, persecution, earthquakes, the success of false teachers and the like, we wonder whether these are footsteps of Christ’s imminent coming. Indeed the Lord Jesus prophesied exactly such things are reminders that the world in which we now live is not our final home (e.g., Mark 13:7-10). The world order all around us is not that where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3).

Yet the question remains, what should our attitude be? Are we to be hyper-focused on the end? Are we to just sit back and watch societies implode? Are we to expect anything prior to the end breaking in?

## **Privilege of Suffering**

The early Christians, nearly two thousand years ago, wrestled with these exact questions. For example, after just a few weeks of hearing the gospel and believing it, the Thessalonian Christians had been thrust into fierce persecution. Some were dragged before tribunals for espousing and supporting the teaching that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 17:6). Even under normal circumstances, life was considered cheap in the Roman empire. It could be snuffed out just like that.

Thus, they expected suffering, and they knew and lived out of the privilege of suffering. In his preaching and writing, Paul had not been silent about how suffering for the sake of Christ was part of what God had designed for these times (2 Thess. 1:6). They knew that this was their portion till Jesus would come “with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance” on unbelievers and “come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thess. 1:8-10).

In other words, one of the reasons that time passes between Jesus’ first and second coming is that Christ’s body would know what it is to be a militant church. God desires to have His people experience the reality that this earth is not our permanent home. Christ

is deserving that His people live their lives here, carrying the cross behind the Lord Jesus, and living in the here and now with an eye to the life to come.

That God has designed our life to be this way is part of the test that God has for us. God always tests His own work. Moreover, this is how Christ grows His church. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and the hardship that one generation of Christians endures is a call for the next to follow in their footsteps, all behind the suffering Savior, who “for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). In the same way, God would have His people run the strenuous race set before them with our eyes firmly fixed on the Lamb, who has merited all.

### Focus on Heaven

If Christ simply took us to glory the moment He brought us to faith, He would never need to work in us a heavenly-mindedness that looks away from this transient world to the abiding glory of the next world, where Christ is. In fact, some of the occurrences that alarm us so much are actually designed to make us look away from the world, which can give us no security and calm, for the earth and its foundations shake. Our hope needs a more solid foundation than anything possessions, politics, an economy, or culture can give.

Scripture wants Christians to prepare for the long haul. That does not mean that Christ’s coming cannot be at any moment. The Bible makes clear that we should always watch and be ready for Christ’s coming. It can come at any moment. Yet, at the same time, we should not be easily “shaken in mind” or troubled “as if the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:2). After all, Peter reminds us that a thousand years are with the Lord but a day (2 Pet. 3:8). We can live both patiently and eagerly at the same time only by looking to Christ, and being focussed on the new heavens and the new earth God has prepared for those who love Him.

The Bible makes clear that we should always watch and be ready for Christ’s coming. It can come at any moment.

### Prevalence of Apostasy

Besides wanting us to embrace the privilege of suffering and having a focus on heaven, God has ordered the end of history in ways that show the heinousness of evil. First of all, Scripture makes clear that apostasy will belong to the end-times. God has not ordered an end of time that does not include a great falling away (2 Thess. 2:3). A fall away means that you previously professed the faith but later, for whatever reason, you abandoned your profession. You appeared to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and were thought of as a Christian by many, but you did not abide in that confession. Perhaps hardship or persecution came (Matt. 13:12). Perhaps you were tempted by lusts that drew you away, cares of the world that distracted you, or what the Bible calls the “deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22) that ensnared you. To use the language of the parable, the “plant of their faith” had “no root,” and so it didn’t endure.

Apostasy is a very real thing. For some it is a heart-breaking reality in their own families. How earnestly we should guard our own hearts, realizing that left to ourselves we are in severe trouble. We must keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21), relying on the grace of God, who finishes the work He has begun. However, presumption is deadly, and let us beware of forces in the world, in churches, and in our own hearts, forces far greater than ourselves, and yet under God’s control. They are operating to fulfill what God has said will happen, namely, among other things, a great falling away. This apostasy shows that without the irresistible and preserving grace of God, all of us fall away. This should make us humble, which is exactly what God wants His children to be.

### Appearance of Anti-Christ

In various places, Scripture warns incisively about the forces of evil, concentrated in movements, institutions, and people. 2 Thessalonians 2 speaks of “the mystery of iniquity” (v. 7), as well “that

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Wicked” (v. 8). Other descriptors Paul uses are “the man of sin” and “the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3). This lines up with what Scripture speaks about as the “anti-Christ” (1 John 2:18), or “Mystery, Babylon the great” (Rev. 17:5). To put it simply, there will not be a return of Christ without first the appearance of Anti-Christ.

This is because the devil tries to imitate Christ and appear as Christ, and he will try this through the Anti-Christ. The anti-Christian spirit has been there for a long time (1 John 2:18; compare 2 Thess. 2:7). It opposes God and Christ by mimicking Christ. That is why it is so subtle and powerful. Revelation speaks of the beast out of the earth, who will do many wonders in order to deceive (Rev. 13:11-15). Many have seen the papacy as fitting the descriptions of the Anti-Christ, and this cannot be denied (WCF 25:6). To what extent the papacy is the Anti-Christ, or one of the anti-Christ, and whether there will be another final and personal manifestation of the man of sin could be debated. However, Paul and others who write about this are not writing in order that we might guess or debate who this is, but that we would be on our guard against anything that poses itself as divine, works miracles, and yet is nothing short of the manifestation of the climactic principle of incarnated sin and evil.

We should not be swept along in any movement that heralds anyone or anything as having divine qualities or characteristics, even if it performs miracles. We must be thoroughly watchful and give our allegiance to God alone, and know from His truth who He is, and what He deserves from all of us, namely, exclusive and whole-hearted worship.

### Deception and Delusion

Connected with the appearance of Anti-Christ, the Bible prophesies widespread deception and delusion.

We ought to watch, lest we are beguiled. We ought to stand firmly on truth, and beware of any claims of God-like power. We must watch against giving any improper estimate to the actions and inventions of man, astounding as they may be. Whatever beneficial uses there may be in all the technological advances, including “artificial intelligence,” we ought not to be swayed by language that ascribes to these things God-like attributes, nor be swept up in the worship of anything that opposes and exalts itself against all that is called God (2 Thess. 2:4).

We ought also to beware of all the exalting of self that is happening in our world: the self-promotion, the worship of self, for this is what Paul also links to the Anti-Christ (2 Thess. 2:4). At its deepest levels, sin involves lifting up of self against God and thus the man of sin, who exalts himself, is the epitome of opposition to Christ, who humbled Himself to take on the form of a servant, humbling Himself even further to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

Finally, lawlessness, seeking to throw off the laws and ordinances of God, is also a principle that marks the revelation of the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:7,8,12). We certainly see a lot of such

lawlessness in our societies, and it is rapidly increasing.

God will allow anti-Christian forces and the anti-Christ to appear in order that He may destroy him with the spirit of His mouth and the glory of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8). We ought not to be confused or alarmed by this, nor question why it is that God would allow this.

### A Power That Restrains

Many have asked questions about the power that restrains referenced in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7. Paul writes about something “that withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time” (v.6). He uses the exact same Greek words when he writes about a person, “he who now letteth (restrains) will let (restrain)” until a certain moment he shall be “taken away” (better translated: disappear from the midst; v. 7). Many have thought that Paul had in mind “well-ordered” civic rule, such as there was during the Roman empire. Certainly, we should pray for our governments that we might live quiet and peaceable lives (1 Tim. 2:2). However, civil government does not necessarily restrain the revelation of wickedness. The Roman government did not and neither do modern governments do that.

What does restrain sin and lawlessness is the preaching of the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus specifically emphasized that the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). There is an analogy here to the Spirit striving with people before the Flood (Gen. 6:3). That striving would come to an end, and people then were given over to the rebellion and hardness of their own hearts, just as the Lord Jesus prophesied would happen at the end of time (Luke 17:26). Perhaps some might object that the gospel will never disappear. However, Scripture does make clear that the power of the gospel and the blessings of faith in the gospel will not always retain their pervasive character. Christ asked: “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Yet, the Thessalonians and we too needed to know that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit must continue to spread over the length and breadth of the earth in accordance with God’s purpose. What a restraining power the gospel and the Spirit have in the lives of sinners. When someone is converted, God’s grace sanctifies a person so that grace abounds where sin formerly abounded. Even where there is no true conversion, the gospel and the Spirit can restrain people from going headlong into the worst of sins and utter lawlessness. Let us, however, realize that when the gospel and the Holy Spirit are withdrawn, we should not be surprised to see utter lawlessness and the man of sin appear. However, we should not imagine that the man of sin and utter lawlessness will hold sway for a long time. In fact, Matthew 24 says that “those days shall be shortened” (v.22). Revelation 17 says that “these shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings” (v.14).



## What should we do?

In light of what God reveals about what needs to happen before the end:

1. *We should not be alarmed.* Paul writes: “We beseech you ... that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled .... as that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Indeed, since the coming of Christ, we live in the end times. We should earnestly desire the return of Christ and be looking expectantly toward it. It will mark for all the people of God the end of sin, shame, and all evil works that set themselves against God. Christ’s bride will be with Him forever. If we are true Christians, we should not be *alarmed*, but *anticipate* with longing the glory that will mark that day.
2. *We should not be deceived.* Paul writes: “Let no man deceive you by any means” (v. 3). We need to believe the truth of the Word of God, and we should love the truth. Each believer has received a love of the truth. Every unbeliever does not have a love of the truth. The truth of Jesus Christ applied by the Spirit saves and sanctifies sinners and keeps them from falling entirely for the lies of Satan, even his most subtle ones. Yet, how important the prayer is: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” That is: “Since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes till at last we obtain a complete victory” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 52; A 127).
3. *We should stand fast in the truth and comfort of the Word of God.* Paul writes: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15). Scripture tells us these things to press upon us humility and dependence on God. God will not let a single one for whom Christ died perish. However, we should ask ourselves whether we have a love for the whole of God’s truth. One thing that Paul implies concerning true believers is that they have received “a love of the truth” (see how the opposite is such about unbelievers: “they received not a love of the truth, that they might be saved” [2 Thess. 2:10]).

Friend, if you do not have Christ, you are no match to the forces at work around and inside you. You are fighting on the losing side, and you are fighting a losing battle. Submit to the truth about yourself, and to Jesus Christ, who is the Truth.

Do you by God’s grace stand on the side of truth? Then you will love and cling to the truth. Is Christ alone our hope and do we live turned away from idols and awaiting Christ’s return with the clouds? Let us press forward, knowing that it may be long, and it may be short, but sooner or later, we will see that nothing has failed of the plan of God, and God’s truth is most worthy to be believed and loved. ①



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# THE ORDER OF SALVATION (13)

## JUSTIFICATION (2)

Last time we heard the joyful testimony of the Christian regarding his new relationship to God: “I am righteous in Christ before God and an heir of eternal life” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 23, A.59). We also learned that Scripture teaches that righteousness involves living in complete harmony with God’s law. The sad fact is that by nature no one possesses this kind of righteousness. Man is a sinner and comes woefully short of the obedience God requires. We all transgress God’s holy law in thoughts, words, and deeds.

How then can the believer confess in Lord’s Day 23: “I am righteous before God”? Because he adds the words “in Christ.” The Christian speaking here is righteous in the sight of God, because he possesses a righteousness which he could never produce himself but which he received as a gift of God’s grace. Christ has earned this righteousness for him by paying for his sins on the cross after living a perfect life of obedience to God’s law. The believer now wears the righteousness of Christ as a garment. As Isaiah writes “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). This passage describes the joy Old Testament believers like Abraham, David, and Isaiah experienced long before Christ died on the cross and laid the foundation for the blessing of justification by grace through faith.

### **The Doctrine of Justification in Decline**

One would expect that the joy of justification would be even greater and more clearly understood by the New Testament Church. While this was true during the early years of Christianity, the later period that followed, from the second century onward through the early and late Middle Ages, showed a steady decline in the Church’s understanding of the doctrine of justification.

By the 15th century, when Martin Luther was born, the Roman Catholic Church was riddled with heresies, especially regarding the doctrine of justification. At stake was the essence of the Gospel and the way of salvation. Luther came to understand that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It took him a long time to understand this because he was very much a child of his time and had been raised as an obedient son of the Church. After a long period of soul searching and Bible study, God led him to see that sinners are not saved by works but by faith in the righteousness of Christ and that the key to all of Scripture was the doctrine of justification. These are his words: “This doctrine is the head and cornerstone. If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. It alone makes a person a theologian and enables him to distinguish all other articles of faith.”



### The True Meaning of Justification

Luther was not only convinced of the centrality of justification, but also of its true meaning. For centuries justification had been confused with regeneration and sanctification. What Luther came to see with increasing clarity was that one must make a clear distinction between the righteousness which justifies a sinner and the righteous life or conduct of the justified believer. For Luther, justification is an act of God whereby He as judge pronounces a sinner righteous in His sight. This judicial act of God must never be confused with the inner transformation of the sinner which begins at regeneration and continues throughout the believer's life through the process of sanctification.

Luther understood that when God justifies a sinner, He *declares* him righteous, but He does not *make* him righteous. To be sure, He does the latter also, but that has to do with regeneration and sanctification, not justification. Although God's act of justification cannot be separated from the believer's inner renewal, these must never be confused with each other. As John Murray explains,

Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgement of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does – he gives a verdict regarding our judicial stature.... If justification is confused with regeneration or sanctification, then the door is opened for the perversion of the gospel at its centre.... When a judge declares a person to be righteous in terms of the law which he is administering, the judge simply declares what he finds to be the case.

### The Necessity of Justification

When man transgressed God's law, he became a sinner subject to condemnation. Unless a man can pay the penalty for breaking God's law and keeps the law's precepts perfectly, divine judgment must fall on him. Luther tried to keep God's law. "How can I find a gracious God," he asked, deeply troubled as he was by his sins. The Church's answer was, be sorry for your sins, love God, ask forgiveness, do good works, and you will be rewarded for your efforts.

No human ever worked harder than Luther to earn divine approval for living a godly life. The more he studied the Word and tried to obey God's law, the more he became convinced of his sin. This was necessary, for as he wrote later, the purpose of the law is to show that human nature is unable to keep it and thus to humble man, causing him to long for grace, despair of self, and place all his confidence in Christ and His righteousness.

### The Preparation for Justification

Luther and the other Reformers unanimously stressed that the law prepares sinners for the gospel (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Classic Protestant teaching on justification includes conviction of sin, springing from God-given self-knowledge as a necessary precondition for understanding and experiencing God-given justification.

Luther took very seriously Paul's statement in Romans 4:4-5: "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." To Luther, this passage reflects the essence of justification. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones fully agrees with him. "This is one of the most important verses in the whole of the Bible," he writes in his exposition on Romans 4. Why? "Because it proves once and forever that justification is entirely God's action.... It shows that justification does not make us righteous. God justifies the ungodly, but He does not first make us godly and then justify us. What Paul says is that He justifies the ungodly, not the ungodly made godly, not the unrighteous made righteous or become righteous. They are justified as they are, without works and while still ungodly.

Lloyd-Jones believes that this passage goes completely against Rome's teaching on justification. Rome says that we are made righteous and godly by our baptism, whereby righteousness is infused or injected into us so that we are justified. This means we are justified because we are sanctified. This is the exact opposite of what the apostle Paul is saying, namely that we are justified while we are still ungodly. Rome and many so-called Protestants are totally wrong. They think that after regeneration we leave our ungodliness behind us and start doing good works which God then rewards by viewing us as righteous.

While the new birth does bring about a radical change in our conduct so that we begin to seek God, forsake sin, and obey His commandments, these good works cannot earn God's approval because they come short of perfection. As Lord's Day 24 tells us, "The righteousness, which can be approved of before the tribunal of God, must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."

### Justification By Faith Alone

Who can meet such a high standard? "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" asked Job long ago (Job 25:4). Well, the gospel was designed to answer that question positively. How does Paul answer Job's question and Luther's and ours? The apostle, though being a regenerate, justified

**When man transgressed God's law, he became a sinner subject to condemnation. Unless a man can pay the penalty for breaking God's law and keeps the law's precepts perfectly, divine judgment must fall on him.**

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## THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

believer, is still a sinner (Rom. 7:14). God has solved the sin problem by providing sinners with the very righteousness that He demands from them. The gospel of which he is not ashamed but loves to proclaim (Rom. 1:15,16) is all about a righteousness *from* God, provided by God *in and through* His Son, Jesus Christ, which He offers to us. We do not need to do anything to earn that blessing. It is offered to us free of charge. It is "the righteousness of God without [apart from] the law," apart from any efforts on our part (Rom. 3:21).

**"Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17)**

If that is so, how do we become partakers of this righteousness? Very simply: by faith! "Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17). Paul means that this righteousness becomes ours by faith alone, from start to finish. Faith, according to the apostle, is the opposite of works. Yet it is not a substitute for works. Sadly, many people think so. They have heard that they cannot save themselves by their works, so they think that faith has replaced works. All they have to do now is to simply believe the gospel and they will be saved. *But what does faith mean?* If it is not a work, what is it? How does it originate and function? How does it bring about justification and when? Is it a one-time or repeated blessing? These and other questions have been discussed and debated for centuries. They are important questions which deserve answers and therefore we need another article to deal with them. 



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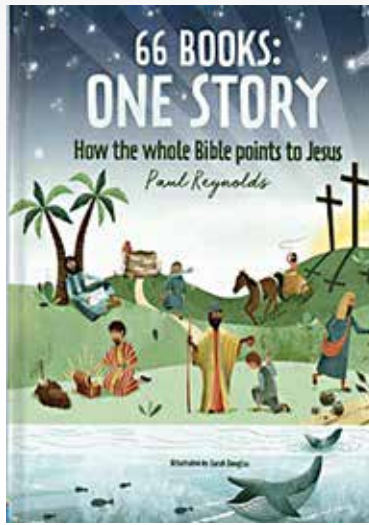
# THE BIBLE HAS 66 BOOKS

**66 Books: One Story: How the Whole Points to Jesus** by Paul Reynolds. Published by Christian Focus Publications, 2023. Hardcover, 264 pages.

Story Bibles are popular means for teaching children Biblical accounts. For many years, children raised in Reformed homes were usually introduced to the Bible and its historical contents by means of a "Story Bible," with personal application to the children by the author. Today's parents can choose from age-appropriate beautifully crafted and illustrated editions for the very youngest toddlers to ones suitable for family devotions for all ages. Mostly, they focus on the stories in the Old Testament and the life of Jesus—that is, until recently. Dr. David Murray's book, *Jesus on Every Page*, published in 2013, drew attention to the fact that the whole Bible, and every book in it, points to Jesus because salvation is in Him alone.

Paul Reynolds' book, entitled *66 Books: One Whole Story*, does something similar, but in a more concise way, making it suitable for children and for adults. This book gives an outline of every Bible book, explaining how it fits into God's unfolding revelation from Genesis to Revelation. It shows how each Bible book points to God's salvation in Christ. It is like a short Bible survey, which fills the vacuum when children are only taught the historical events of the Bible. The trend was to present the historical events of the Old Testament and the life of Jesus, ending with stories of the apostles in the book of Acts, focussing on the missionary activity of Paul. The wisdom books, Psalms, the Old Testament prophets, the epistles, and the book of Revelation were hardly mentioned, if at all, probably because it was thought young children could not understand them. While we realize young children may sooner remember a story than other parts of Scripture, should those other parts not be mentioned? An example of such a disjointed view became apparent some years ago when a Bible knowledge quiz of pre-seminary students indicated that many of them, raised in Reformed homes, could not identify the sequence of the chronology of Bible people or where certain books of the Bible were found.

This book has 67 chapters because Genesis and Psalms are each dealt with in two chapters and the second and third epistles of John are combined into one chapter. Each chapter has a title and a sub-title which describes the content of the book. This is followed by a short in-



roduction which explains who wrote it where and when. In the *Overview*, the contents of the book are summarized in about 350 words or less with paragraph numbers referenced to the "Learning From" section to show where to find each learning point. The "Learning From" section explains how the book applies to our life today and includes cross-references. The section "Salvation Thread" shows how part of the book or the whole book fits in God's story of salvation which is present throughout all of Scripture. There are questions that are objective and deal with the truths in each Bible book, and some of the questions are directed to the child's heart. Each book chapter ends with a *Key Verse*, suitable for memorization.

The layout of this book shows clearly that the Bible has one Author and the Holy Spirit has inspired each book as well as the whole. Every book of the Bible is God-breathed and has a purpose in the plan of His

salvation. It begins in Genesis and includes *all* that follows in the wisdom books (e.g., Ecclesiastes and Proverbs), the Psalms with its songs and poetry, the minor and major prophets, and every epistle, ending with Revelation. It is one story of God's great grace with its climax in the cross of Christ. It is all about Jesus. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are real history and the Great Commission He gave to His disciples is carried out in the establishment of New Testament churches.

Although the canon is closed (only the 66 books of the Bible are inspired and without error), the story of Jesus did not end there. Since that time there has been a church, and it will be so until time is no more. Given the multi-use of the word "story" today, it is especially important to stress that the Bible is really "His Story." All it says is true. It really happened because it is written by people who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. All 66 books of the Bible are the very Word of God.

This book is suitable for readers ages 7 to 12. It will be useful for parents and Bible teachers for a devotional and will also serve as a handy resource to be consulted when reading through the Bible.

*Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.*

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

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## TOWARDS BETTER THINKING: HELPFUL OBSERVATIONS FROM JOHN FLAVEL

It is common and acceptable today for every person to believe they are absolutely right. What they think seems to be perfectly clear to them. Anyone else who sees it differently is just not seeing at all. And so, people are content to be right in their own eyes, following role models filled with bombastic, urgent zeal.

But there are models of more gracious and purposeful thinking. John Flavel is one of those models. Flavel was a seventeenth-century English Puritan who is known for his humble godliness in a learned mind, his perseverance through a life of loss, his commitment to preaching despite persecution, and his writings for the common people.<sup>1</sup>

One of those writings was a treatise Flavel titled *Planeologia*.<sup>2</sup> While the context for his treatise was the religious debates of his own day, in this work he provided some helpful instruction on *how* to think about issues on which people disagree.

The first main part of the treatise is a list of twenty observations regarding the rise and increase of mental errors. Here are some of Flavel's observations:

1. The purpose of knowledge and understanding is to sharpen the pursuit of truth. The fall into sin has produced a "haziness or cloud" of ignorance and error over everybody. People therefore should not dismiss all objections and counter-arguments to their positions.
2. There are diverse kinds of knowledge: some human and some divine; some speculative and some practical; some acquired and some revealed. There are also diverse degrees of error, and diverse kinds of evidence to refute error. The uses of "natural light have their place and use in directing us about natural and earthly things."<sup>3</sup>
4. Three of the many obstacles to obtaining true knowledge are ignorance, curiosity, and error. Ignorance minimizes



truth, or despairs of ever attaining knowledge. Curiosity goes out of bounds and displays pride in talking about things of which it has no knowledge. Error opposes truth.

5. Error can bind the conscience and influence the emotions and affections just as much as the truth can. Even people who are wrong will passionately think they are right. A mind under the power of error is restless and impatient to spread its errors to others, and these passions prey upon and eat up true religion.

6. Errors are like some weeds: almost impossible to remove entirely. This is particularly true when people have inherited, or grown up with, or keep listening to, the error.

7. People are not as careful with their mental errors as they are of their bodies and disease, or their physical activities and immorality. They assume that what they think matters less than a fever, and yet they do not realize that a mental error is just as dangerous as a viral contagion or immoral habit.
9. It is wrong to make an opinion an article of faith; just as it is wrong to be as concerned about a single shingle as the entirety of the basement walls.
10. Error can be defended by appeals to history, reason, scripture, and claims to reformation and piety. In this way, past expressions or supposed traditions are not a reason for something: age, reasons, popularity, and piety can all be cloaks for deceit.
12. If more people would be suspicious of their own opinions, there would be less confusion in the churches.
16. Nothing allows the increase of error as much as a weak or feeble defense of the truth.
17. Errors of judgment are not cured by compulsion or external pressures, but by rational conviction and proper spiritual remedies.



18. The divisions and contentions among Christians are a stumbling-block to others and obstruct conversion to Christ.
19. Regardless of how long an error lasts, and how popular it is, it will end in loss and shame. Truth will prevail.

Flavel then discusses a series of causes and remedies. Any remedy needs to begin with true conversion, as only that is the primary turning of darkness to light. And there lies the main source of mental error. The unrenewed soul is not conscious of its own blindness and uses its little remaining reason against the God who can open eyes.

Because Satan loves lies and error, many of the other remedies Flavel points out require a proper understanding of Scripture. Scriptures need to be compared to other Scriptures. The clearer texts should help clarify the more obscure texts. The obvious meaning of the passages must not be forgotten. While every person is to read and study Scripture for themselves, Flavel makes it clear that Christian liberty does not extend to interpretations that “distort, violate, and abuse” the Scriptures. A proper study of Scripture is humble and seeks the will of God – not the destruction of an opponent.

And so, every believer should seek maturity in the faith. Maturity comes from a consistent use of, and contentedness with, the Word of Christ. Christians cannot be distracted by the brightest teachers of the year – who are like stars that streak across the sky (Jude 1:13), attracting more attention than the fixed stars of thousands of years. Instead, Christians are to “try all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). In Flavel’s words, “it is the will of God that reason in all believers should resign to faith, and all rationalization submit to revelation.”<sup>4</sup> Nothing God does is unreasonable, though many of His works are above human reason.

Flavel then gives a warning about the overly zealous who appeal to emotion and desire and not to rational thought. The mischief and harm caused by rash zeal throughout history should make anybody hesitate before falling to do the devil’s work. Not only that, but those who pressure others with haste and speed to publicly declare and affirm their opinions are acting like Satan who basically told Eve, the sooner the better. Similarly today, misdirected zeal and hasty conclusions, especially in weighty and disputable matters, have cost many souls, and defaced and dissolved the joy of churches. People ought to suspect any opinion that is forced on them as too important to overlook, especially when they are not given full information: after all, “that which is a truth today will be a truth tomorrow.”<sup>5</sup>

The implication is Christians need to be careful in their thinking, but also in their speaking, especially in a public setting. Flavel describes it a “dishonour” to publish unsound notions.

Pretending to have extra knowledge or vision, or clarity from heaven that seem to give credence to one’s personal position is “an old trick and practice of deceivers.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in working towards his conclusion, Flavel advocates for the multiplicity of counselors. Fighting mental error requires honest conversation with many fellow believers, as well as gracious and vulnerable interaction. In his words, “trust not to the clearness of your own unassisted eyes, nor to the strength of your single reason; but consult, in such cases, with others that are pious and judicious.”<sup>7</sup>

Christians of all time need to learn the value, duty, and necessity of love and mutual patience, since all have their errors and blind spots. Innocent mistakes must not be made out as sinister plots.<sup>8</sup> Despite drawing some clear lines about thinking, Flavel himself was careful to demonstrate a gracious attitude: “I do assure the persons with whom I contend, that whilst they hold the Head, are tender of the church’s peace, I can live in charity with them here, and hope to live in glory with them hereafter.”<sup>9</sup> At the end of the treatise, there is an appendix addressing a personal matter between Flavel and a certain Mr. Philip Cary. Flavel’s conclusion to that letter is worth quoting, because despite ‘poking holes’ in the thinking of Mr. Cary, he in no way wanted to aggravate situations or relationships. Flavel’s final thoughts are self-reflective: “If Scripture argument and clear reason will not support the cause I undertake, I am resolved never to call in passionate invectives and weak evasions.... The Lord give us all clearer light, tenderer consciences, exemplary humility, and ingenuity.”<sup>10</sup>

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*Dr. David VanBrugge is pastor of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.*

## Endnotes

- 1 See Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 245-256; John Murray, “John Flavel,” *Banner of Truth*, no. 60 (September 1968): 5.
- 2 John Flavel, *Planelogia: A succinct and seasonable discourse of the Occasions, Causes, Nature, Rise, Growth, and Remedies of Mental Errors*. This can be found in volume three of *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968). There it is also titled, *A Blow at the Root*.
- 3 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:428
- 4 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:465.
- 5 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:490.
- 6 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:481.
- 7 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:489.
- 8 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:492.
- 9 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:424.
- 10 Flavel, *Planelogia*, WJF, 3:494.

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## DR. DAVID VANBRUGGE'S DISSERTATION DEFENCE



Dr. David VanBrugge and his wife, Wendy, and daughter, Katie.



A dissertation defence in theology often receives little attention in the regular life of the church; yet, it is an event worthy of our reflection and thanksgiving for several reasons. First, it marks a significant achievement in the life of the person who has written the dissertation. In this case, Dr. David VanBrugge wrote a dissertation titled, “That Which They Can’t See: A Retrieval of Jonathan Edwards’ Homiletical Use of Imagination.” Second, a defence is also a significant event in the life of the local church. In this case, Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario shared in the labours and joys of the research, writing, and successful defence of Rev. VanBrugge’s dissertation. Third, it also marks a significant achievement in the life of the denomination and wider church because the Lord has raised up yet another man to be His instrument of teaching and preaching for the next generation to build up His Church. The Lord uses such specialized education for the training of men so that they might train other men (2 Tim. 2:2).

On June 22, 2023, Rev. VanBrugge defended his dissertation before the faculty members of the Theological University of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, as well as various guest faculty members from around the world. The men who examined Rev. VanBrugge were as follows.

**Promoters:** Dr. Maarten Kater and Dr. Willem VanVlastuin

**Promotion chair:** Dr. Bram DeMuyck

**Assessment Committee:** Dr. Arie Baars, Dr. Philip Fisk, Dr. Ferdinand Kruger, Dr. Theo Pleizier, and Dr. Doug Sweeney (not present for defence)

Facing such formidable opponents in a formal setting, Rev. Van Brugge was able to defend his dissertation with the help of the Lord.

A dissertation seeks to address a problem or fill a gap in academic research that will benefit the church. Dr. VanBrugge’s dissertation focused on the preaching of Jonathan Edwards to the Stockbridge Indians, particularly his use of imagination in homiletics or the art of preaching.

Imagination is carefully defined as “a heart-based structuring mental activity by which people perceive coherent and significant possibilities that are indispensable in understanding and generating objects and experiences” (p. 63). When applied to the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, this sanctified use of the imagination is an important component of Edwards’ preaching to the Stockbridge Indians. For instance, he used the imagery of the tree planted by the rivers of water and connected that to how Christ is the source of life for all believers. Edwards connected the imagery and Christology with the experience and life of the Stockbridge Indians. He observed the trees and rivers that were so familiar to these Indians and argued in his sermon that just as those rivers were the source of life for the trees, so Christ is the source of life for all believers. He used his own imagination and hooked into the imagination of his listeners to bring them a powerful lesson from Scripture.

In his dissertation, Dr. VanBrugge further explored how such imagination can be of positive and practical use for the church today, especially in the area of practical theology and homiletics. He also showed how it can be of polemical use over against those who argue against expository preaching as dry and sterile in what is called the New Homiletics.

My role during the defence was to stand by as *paronymph*. Historically, this person would step in if something would ever happen to the person defending the dissertation and defend on their behalf. Thankfully, I only had to stand by and provide moral and prayer support throughout the defence. After the defence, there was an opportunity to congratulate the new doctor of the church. In all of this, we give thanks to the Lord and pray He will use Dr. VanBrugge for the building of His kingdom through his preaching and teaching ministry. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

①

*Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven is a Heritage Reformed professor serving at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.*





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# UPDATES ON EDUCATION AND ACHI BIBLE PROMOTION



## Education

The involvement of Free Reformed Missions International (FRMI) in education in Cubulco started around 2004-2005. It was in response to a request made by church leaders who approached the mission asking for support for the education of their children. After some discussion, it was decided that this support should not only benefit the church leadership but also the members of the churches and the communities. Most of the schools in the rural communities surrounding the churches were understaffed. This understaffing affected the quality of education. With the blessing of the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, we initially hired two Christian teachers to work in primary schools in Patuy and Chirramos. These teachers not only taught the regular government curriculum, but also taught Bible classes and promoted the Achi language and Bible. As time passed, more teachers were added and sent to work in the primary schools in

communities where there was a Reformed Church. These communities were Patuy, Chirramos, Pichal, Xeul, and Los Pajales. In time, FRMI helped several communities establish middle schools by providing teachers so that students would not have to walk for hours to attend the nearest middle school.

As the government began investing more in education, the need for teachers in the rural public schools waned. We decided to transition the education program to a formal after school program run out of our churches. Students attend the local public school for half a day and then come to the church for four to five hours each day to get help with their homework and reinforce certain areas like math, reading, and science. Today, we have three after school programs. We initially started several programs in town. Today, we have three full-time programs operating in Cubulco, Patuy, and Pichal, with 275 children attending. These children are sponsored by Word and Deed. In August, we started a pilot program in the community of Chirramos with 75 children attending. If this program





goes well and the church is engaged, it will transition from a two-day program to a full five-day program with the option of the students being sponsored through Word and Deed.

The hope is to expand this program to a few other communities where we have churches. As the program grows and the number of children attending increases, we are helping with building simple classrooms. Currently, all the children meet in churches, which can be challenging for teachers. Classrooms will allow teachers better conditions to teach more effectively. This year, FRMI has agreed to help fund the building of several classrooms in Patuy.



### Translation

Although the Cubulco Achi Bible was completed and dedicated in 2019, there is still ongoing work with the Bible translation. First, FRMI is still involved with a literacy program to teach children, youth, and adults to be able to read and write in Achi. Although this is being done to a degree in local schools, the need is still great and therefore we continue to be involved in this important work. Our aim and desire are not that the indigenous people of Cubulco are able to preserve their language and identity, but that they are able to read the Bible in their heart language and find and learn their identity in Jesus Christ. Second, in collaboration with the Guatemalan Bible Society we are starting the process of recording the New Testament in audio. This will be a dramatized recording which requires a fair bit of work, coaching, and preparation. It also requires wisdom as the pool of godly people with the ability to read confidently and clearly is very limited. Please pray for this important work which will allow the Achi Bible to be listened to and understood by many more who cannot read.

### Promotion

On an exciting note, the Cubulco Achi Bible is available now on the YouVersion Bible app, which will allow Achi believers everywhere to have access to the Bible in their heart language. I was in Nashville a few months ago and had the privilege to meet with around 20 people from some of our churches in Cubulco who have “immigrated” to the United States to find a better life. I showed them how to download the YouVersion app and how to find the Achi Bible on it. They were very excited that the Bible in their language was available to them via their phones. Hopefully, once the NT has been recorded, it will be made available as well on the app. ①

*Mr. Nico Kattenberg is a member of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, BC, who continues to serve as an FRMI link to projects in Guatemala.*



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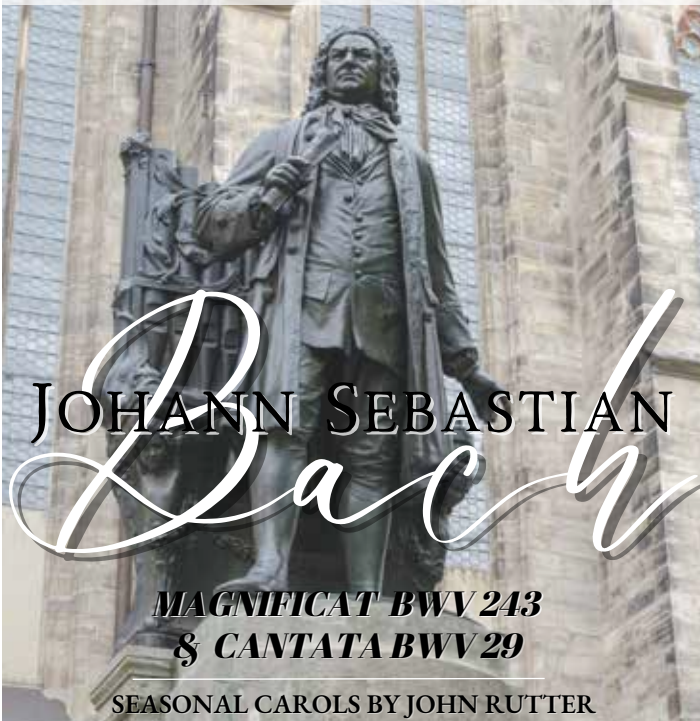
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John 6:12

## BOOK REVIEW

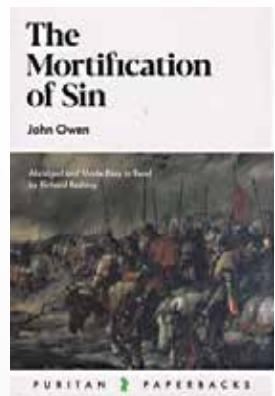
# THEOLOGY MADE EASY

Many find reading the "giants of the faith," the Puritans, in their original form difficult. This is being overcome by presenting them in a series of convenient pocketbooks in an updated format entitled "Theology Made Easy." Books in the series are selected to provide some of the best counsel from former days on important subjects that people continue to wrestle with today. Individual Puritans are chosen on various subjects with each publication "carefully edited with modern readers in mind, smoothing out the difficult language of a bygone era while retaining the meaning of the original authors" (cited from the inside cover of Reformation Heritage Books). Lengthy volumes are abridged, indicating the original source for further reference. Usually, there is also a brief biography of the author and an introduction or endorsement by well-known theologians such as Sinclair Ferguson, J. I. Packer, or Joel Beeke. It is possible to choose from either KJV, NKJ or ESV Bible translations. These Puritan paperbacks may be obtained from several publishers.

- **Puritan Paperbacks.** Published by The Banner of Truth Trust, 3 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh, EH12 5E1, UK. Abridged and Made Easy to Read.
- **Puritan Treasures for Today.** Published by Reformation Heritage Books.
- **Puritan Classics (Christian Heritage).** Published by Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Scotland, United Kingdom.
- **Crossway Short Classics.** Published by Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois.

### Puritan Paperback Series

One of the recent Puritan Paperbacks by *Banner of Truth Trust* is **The Mortification of Sin** by John Owen. Whereas earlier ones were in the original, this is one of the more recent ones that are "Abridged and Made Easy to Read," as stated on the back of the title page. The Publisher's Foreword explains that "the present series of abridgements is not intended to replace the full text, which we hope to keep in print, but to make the treasures contained in Owen's writings more accessible to present-day readers." The main reason given by Owen for writing this treatise is the "obvious difficulty that most professing Christians have in dealing with the temptations that surround them." Secondly, it "is the dangerous mistakes some have fallen into recently.... They have imposed a system of self-wrought mortification on the necks of their disciples which neither they nor their forefathers were ever able to bear" (pp. 1-2). The publisher believes this paperback will be especially helpful because Owen "deals with a topic seldom expounded today, the need for Christians to engage in a life-long struggle, through faith in Christ and by the power of the Spirit, against the sinful and corrupt tendencies which continue to work in them till the day they die" [p. viii].



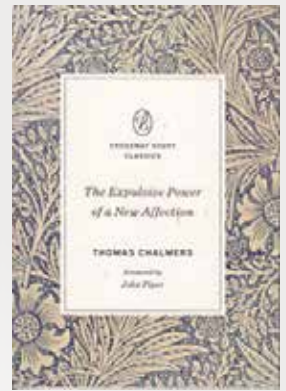


**Puritan Treasures for Today**

Whereas Banner of Truth has the early lead in the many Puritan Paperbacks it has published, *Reformation Heritage Books* is following the same course of abridgment and editing under the heading, "Puritan Treasures for Today." Among the increasing number in print is **The Cure for Unjust Anger** by a rather obscure Puritan, John Downame. He focusses on the theme of anger, based on Proverbs 16:32: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." It is edited by Brian G. Hedges, who states in the preface how this treatise has helped him personally and he is certain it can help others. Downame analyses the spiritual problems of anger, a "universal infection of the contagious disease of unjust anger in the soul" (Introduction, p. 1), but also offers practical counsel by cutting "through the complexities of anger and provide simple but effective strategies for prevention and cure" (p. xiv). In other words, we might say that this is a counselling book on biblical anger management. The Puritans are known for counselling and their methods, beginning with Scripture, still meet the needs of people today.



to 80 pages in easy-to-read print have the spelling and punctuation updated while retaining as much of the classic works as possible. **The Expulsive Power of a New Affection** by Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) is a gem in the series and "is sent forth with the prayer" that the Holy Spirit will use these short works to arrest your attention, preach the gospel to your soul and motivate you to continue exploring the treasure chest of church history, to the praise and glory of God in Christ" (p. 190).

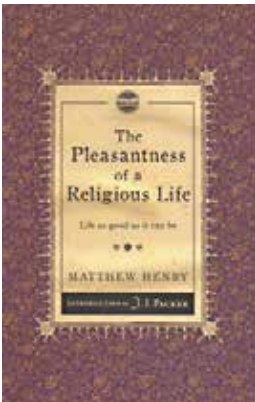


*This book and others may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.*

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

**Christian Heritage**

*Christian Focus Publications* is a prolific publisher established in the early 1970s in Scotland under the managing director, William Mackenzie, that continues to promote the Puritans. In the series, "Christian Heritage," the book, **The Pleasantness of a Religious Life**, by the much beloved Matthew Henry, is enriched with an Introduction by J. I. Packer. Packer looks at Matthew Henry (d. 1714), the son of the godly Puritan, Philip Henry, as a later Puritan. Matthew Henry stands on the shoulders of his predecessors and "sometimes tops them in clarity and precision of statement" (p. 10). To get the best out of their books, Packer believes that "we must get clear on the Puritan understanding of Christianity.... The popular idea of a Puritan has always been of a pharisaical sourpuss who spreads gloom wherever he goes. In fact, however, as the



real-life Puritan practices the discipline of serious Christianity, praying, fasting, keeping his heart, warring against the world, the flesh, and the devil, maintaining an ordered life and doing all the good he could, he found mental pleasure and joy at every turn of the road—in quiet, in tumult, in peace and prosperity, in sorrow and strain—and this is the experience that Henry wants to share and deepen" (p. 16).

**Crossway Short Classics**

*Crossway* states its reason for its series this way: "The broad stream of confessional Christianity contains an astonishing wealth of timeless sermons, essays, lectures, and other short pieces of writing" that have inspired millions of believers throughout the history of the church. The purpose of this series is to preserve these writings in "high-quality" editions with the aim to "transmit them to a new generation of readers, especially readers who may not be inclined or able to access a larger volume" (pp. 17-18). These little booklets of 70

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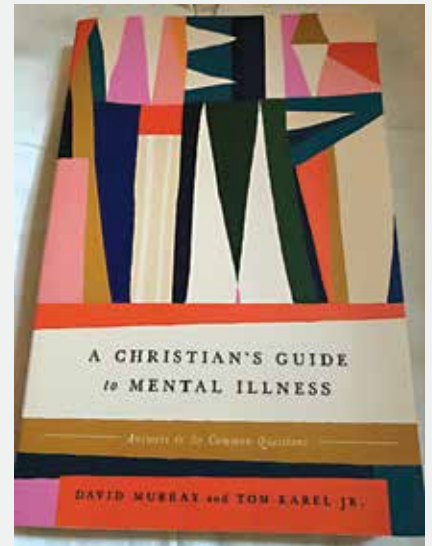
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## A MENTAL HEALTH Q&A FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

A 2023 Crossway Publication – soft cover with 244 pages. (\$15.00 at Reformation Heritage Books)

This book is very useful for church office bearers and for congregations which have members suffering from mental illnesses. When I see members in the church family giving their utmost to serve their

family member struggling with a variety of mental illnesses, I am convinced that we do not pray enough for them and those who suffer. Mr. Tom Karel and Pastor David Murray have given a tremendous resource answering many questions that arise regarding mental illnesses. The reader can appreciate the format and clear Biblical teaching regarding a pastoral approach to needy members of the flock. I highly recommend this



resource for any Christian church member. It is needed teaching which may prove to be a blessing throughout the Church.

The notes below are from the Reformation Heritage Books website promotion of this book.

“After the fall, the world was disordered from structure to chaos—negatively altering the nature of human emotions. Today, we witness its impact as mental health concerns surge and people continue to suffer. How should Christians approach the topic of mental health? What is the most Christlike way to care for those who suffer?”

*A Christian's Guide to Mental Illness* answers 30 commonly asked questions about mental health from a Christian perspective. Intended for caregivers, this accessible resource will equip family, friends, and churches with wisdom for caring for individuals with mental health illnesses. Authors David Murray and Tom Karel use a holistic approach as they share personal stories, professional expertise, and biblical wisdom to tackle difficult questions—ultimately providing hope for the hopeless and rest for the weary.

- Useful for Caregivers of Mental Health Sufferers: Equips family, friends, and church leaders with advice for helping those who suffer from mental illness.
- Q&A Format: Each chapter answers a commonly asked question related to mental health.
- Accessible: Written for everyday people, this book is concise and easy to understand
- Biographical: Authors David Murray and Tom Karel share stories about their own mental health battles as well as those of others.”

*Mr. Henk Kleyn serves as elder in the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



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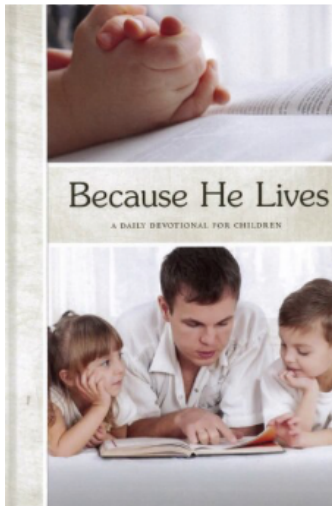
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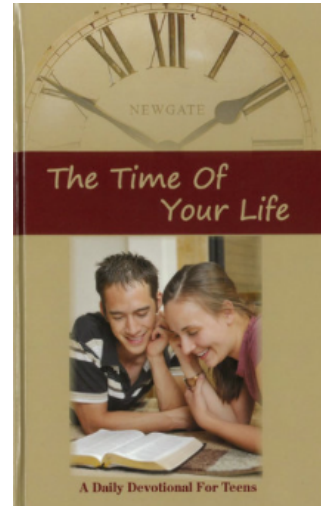
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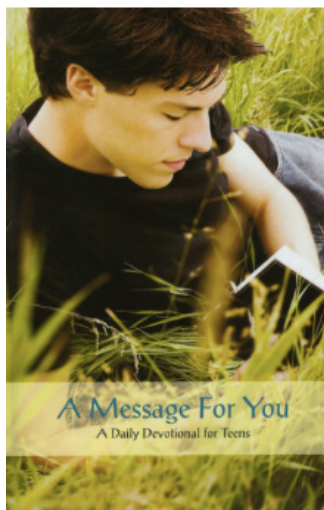
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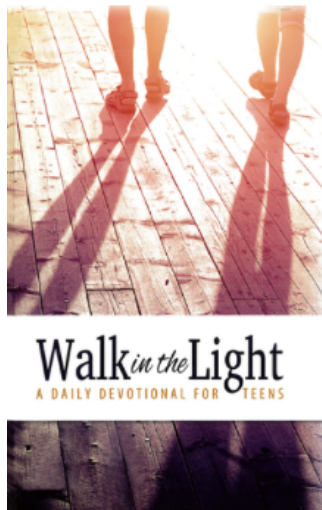
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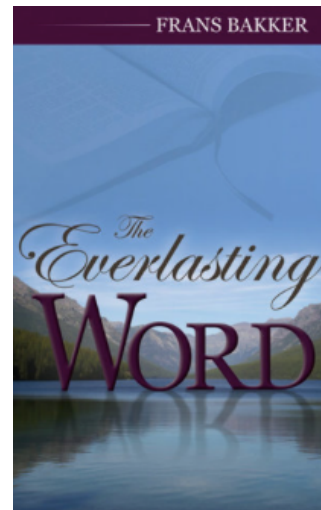
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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## OBITUARY



### MARIA BARGEMAN

passed into Glory on **June 28, 2023**, at Fairview Mennonite Home in her 91st year. Predeceased by her beloved husband of 67 years, Arend "John."

Loving Mom to:

**Jerry (Glenda) Bargeman**  
**Wendy (Alan) Brockleband**  
**Joyce (Gary) Janssen.**

**Forever remembered Oma to**  
Nicholas (Naomi), Lucas, Maria,  
Deirdre, Pamela (Jason), Jason (Jenn),  
Arend (Susan),  
James (Nicole), Marlene (Mark)  
and Great Oma to  
Hannah, Micah, Hunter, Kiara, Avery, Eden,  
Mitchel, Jeffrey, Evan, Blake, Scott, Jared,  
Jocelyn, Kirk and Carson.

Maria will also be missed by her sister Jantina (John) Schaff. Predeceased by her parents Johannes and Wijntje ten Hove, her sisters Antonia, Johanna, Barandina, and her brother, John

## 55<sup>TH</sup> MINISTERIAL ANNIVERSARY



With gratefulness to the Lord, we wish to acknowledge the **55th anniversary of Dr. Cornelis Pronk** in the ministry of Word and sacraments on **November 13, 2023**. We are thankful for Dr. and Mrs. Pronk's service in our local churches, as well as our federation through the Banner of Truth Broadcast, The Messenger, through teaching at the seminary, and in countless other ways. We are blessed by Dr. Pronk's continued preaching among us, as well as the articles from the hand of both **Dr. Pronk and Mrs. Pronk**. Your labours are much appreciated and a blessing to many. We wish you the

Lord's nearness and blessing in the days ahead. Psalm 40:10: "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."

**NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:** In last issue the report on the Refugee Committee was prepared by its Refugee Coordinator, Esther VanMiddelkoop.

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