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# THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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# AFFLICTION HAS BEEN FOR MY PROFIT

*“Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God”  
(2 Chron. 33:13b)*

## Cry

From the prison house in Babylon arose a cry . We don't know how loud or soft it was, but it was a cry of anguish. It was the cry of a king, Judah's king, King Manasseh.

Manasseh had a godly father and mother, but he had done the opposite of what his father had done. He had set up altars to Baal and Ashteroth and the host of heaven. What his father tore down, he reared up again, and worse.

But now, in Babylon, Manasseh doesn't cry to Baal or Ashteroth. The host of heaven cannot help him. We read: “He besought the LORD his God.” The sacrifices of God are a broken heart. “Lord, I have sinned against heaven and before thy face.” Notice that we read that he besought the LORD, *his* God. He had never thought of the LORD as his God. He had trampled the worship of this God under foot. He had sinned against this God who had held his soul in life. Now he saw and realized the LORD was his God all along.

Who God was made Manasseh's sin so serious, so blatant, so heinous. He had sinned against the LORD, the faithful, covenant-keeping God. Had God done him any wrong? No, he, Manasseh, was a covenant-breaker. God had been so faithful. God had even sent servants, the prophets, to this ravaging wolf Manasseh. However, Manasseh had killed them one after another. Blood, more blood flowed. He made the streets of the city to run with the blood of prophets. God had been showing him mercy with each prophet, but Manasseh killed them all.

We begin to cry when we realize that the God against whom we have sinned has been the LORD, my covenant God, so merciful and long-suffering.

## Chains

No wonder Manasseh is in chains in our passage. The wonder is that he is not in chains in hell. You would expect what we read of in Jude 6: “Reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” That should be Manasseh.

However, these Babylonian chains had been for his good. Affliction had been for his profit. There he was stopped in his mad dash towards hell. He came to need something. He needed favour. The word “besought,” literally means, “entreated the

favour of.” He needs one thing – not from the Babylonian king, but from the King of kings, against whom he has sinned. The king is now a beggar and nothing more. Many had begged at his feet; many besought him to spare them from death. How many had he not swept away. Now, he begged for favour from the God against whom he had sinned.

Behind this penitential pleading lies the eternal wonder of the undeserved grace of God. What was said about Saul of Tarsus can be said of Manasseh: “Behold he prayeth.” Here is the cry of the new-born heart.

If affliction accomplishes this in our lives, then we thank God for the affliction. “Before my affliction I wandered, but now thy good word I obey.” This is the fulfillment of what God promised: “When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shall be obedient unto his voice” (Deut. 4:30).

### Christ

We read of Manasseh in the New Testament. In its very first chapter God showcases Manasseh. His name says it all. what a grievous sinner! But there is One in the heavens who is not ashamed to be born from Manasseh. His name is Jesus, for He will save His people – including Manasseh – from their sins.

That Manasseh’s sins must be on Him. All the sin, all the idolatry, all the pride, all the presumption, all the unbelief, all the hardness, all the idolatry was laid upon Him. He for me, Manasseh had to learn. Manasseh would learn how low the Lord would come to be His God—so low that He would be in the prison house to hear Manasseh’s cry. In the smell and stink of sin, in the defilement and guilt of a sin-stained life. Christ had to go lower yet— he had to go into the chains of darkness forever, in Manasseh’s place. He had to endure the equivalent of an eternity of hell for Manasseh’s crimes and criminality, so that Manasseh might utter a cry for divine favour and grace. Even the ability and desire to make this plea, Christ obtained in His bitter death, where He cried and all favour was withheld. Smite the shepherd and the sheep, also Manasseh, shall go free. Blood from His head and back ran out over the streets of Jerusalem as He carried the accursed wood. Manasseh, here is your Saviour!

### Why?

Why did the LORD save Manasseh? The deepest answer to this question is hidden in God, in His love, from the never-begun eternity. The Bible also gives more answers, however, as to why God saved Manasseh and every sinner who turns to Him.

- That He might exalt the greatness of His mercy.
- That He might show a pattern of His mercy to those who should afterwards believe.
- That no sinner need despair of mercy.
- That Manasseh might know the LORD as the LORD.
- That Manasseh might know the LORD as *his* God.
- That sinners might know Him as a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

He shows mercy to lead sinners to know Him

- As the One who puts our sin into the sea of everlasting forgetfulness.
- As the One who in Jesus Christ is just and the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.
- As the One who bends His ear over the prison to hear our cry.

Yes, even further, He comes into this prison to even put this cry in our heart. What a wonder! Do you know the LORD, your God, like this? 

**In the smell and stink of sin, in the defilement and guilt of a sin-stained life. Christ had to go lower yet— he had to go into the chains of darkness forever, in Manasseh’s place.**

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# PREACHING: THRILL OR CHILL?

The Bible gives a high place to the preaching of the Word of God. It is the primary means whereby sinners are saved, believers are strengthened, the church is built up, and God is glorified. It is one of the keys of the kingdom whereby the kingdom of heaven is opened and shut (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31).

The days of the Reformation witnessed a wonderful reappraisal of preaching. Every true revival or awakening in the church since then has recovered and highly prized preaching. Think of the American Great Awakening, the Dutch Secession, the Scottish Disruption, and developments down to our own day. How we stand regarding preaching says a lot about where we are spiritually. Is the faithful preaching of the Word of God something that still thrills us, or does it leave us rather cold?

## The Thrill of the Preacher

I sometimes ask my students if they can remember when they consciously began registering the thrill of sitting under preaching. Many who grew up in the church had this dawn on them more gradually, though many remember a sermon or time of sermons that they experienced as formative to their own spiritual life and appreciation of preaching.

Many who grew up outside of the church and later came under the hearing of the gospel often have one of two reactions to preaching. The one reaction is offence that someone would think he was speaking on behalf of God, especially speaking about sin, judgment, and hell. Others are strangely drawn to the idea that there would be someone who dared speak absolute truth. In both cases, however, they came to experience something of the majesty of preaching for themselves, making room for Christ in their lives, which till then had no room for Him.

For preachers themselves, there is both a thrill to preaching and a travail to preaching. It is hard labour. The labour is not just in coming up with the sermon, interpreting the text correctly, using all the appropriate tools, finding illustrations, being faithful, being personal, being understandable and clear, and so on. The greater part of the travail of preaching is the wrestling with the Word and being wrestled down by the Word. It is travail to have the sermon preach itself to your own heart so that as a preacher you are not a tinkling cymbal. It is travail to mortify unbelief, fear of man, bitterness, pride, and to bear up under discouragement. Affliction in your life can sometimes make it easier to preach; other times it can make it more



difficult to have anything to say. Then we have not even spoken about dealing with criticism on your preaching. All this makes for travail.

Yet, there is a great thrill to every gospel preacher who is humbly conscious of what he is called to do. He may and must preach the Word of God, which is the seed of regeneration and food for the soul. He may and must preach the way of escape from a state of misery and condemnation. He may and must preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. He may and must preach leaning on the promise of the God who says that He will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh.

### The Thrill of the Hearer

My dad used to tell me of one of the members of his church, decades ago, who has since passed away. His daily work had been to deliver vegetables to customers on his bike. He was a simple man who had not had more than an elementary education. When we knew him, he was in his nineties and a widower, faithfully in his pew each Sunday. When my dad visited him once a month or so, he could recall the sermons from the previous month by heart and would use the pastoral visit to ask further questions about the sermons. It would go something like this: “Three weeks ago, when you preached on this and that text, under the third point, you said such and such. What did you mean by that and how does it square with this Scripture passage or that spiritual experience?” So, he would probe further into the sermons, like a Berean. The highlight of his week was hearing the Word of God proclaimed. His soul truly lived from the words that proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord. It was as if, three weeks later, he was still “chewing” on the Word.

I believe that there are still people, young people as well as old, who experience the same thrill sitting under the word preached. The second Helvetic (Swiss) confession, authored by Reformer Heinrich Bullinger in 1562, says: “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful: and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good” (Art. 1)

Whereas God could have had an angel preach to Cornelius in Acts 10, instead, the angel tells him to fetch Peter, of whom the angel says: “He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:6). If this is not thrilling, then I’m not sure what is. The faithful preaching of God’s Word is to be treated with very high regard. If an angel from heaven would preach to us next Sunday, we all would be thrilled, wouldn’t we? Why not if the angelic world says to us: “Listen to that man in the pulpit, who will tell you what you should do”?

### Lively Preaching

Many today find film clips or moving images in worship part of the thrill necessary to draw and keep people. The Catechism addressed this hundreds of years ago: “We must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 35).

What is meant by lively preaching? It is probably a reference to the prophesying that Ezekiel was commanded to do to the dry bones in the valley (Ezek. 37). After all, the Word of God is quick (living) and powerful (Heb. 4:12), and able to raise the dead, blessed by the Spirit of God.

Jeremias Bastingius, a student of Beza, Ursinus, and Olevianus, wrote that we might learn more by “Christ alone painted out in the preaching of the Gospel, and in a manner crucified before our eyes” (see Gal. 3:1).<sup>1</sup> God’s Word is a living Word to be preached, depending on the

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help of the Holy Spirit, so that people's minds and hearts would be gripped by a lively affection for the Lord who comes to them in the preaching of the gospel.

Another commentator on the Catechism, reflecting on "lively preaching," says: "Where this is vigorously prosecuted, no other means of instruction or edification are needed in the churches; but the more this is neglected, or the people turn against it, the more is satisfaction sought in outward things...."<sup>2</sup> May God give that that would be true among us.

**Transformed Lives**

We enjoy lively preaching if the following things guide us as we listen to sermons.

First, we will prepare to hear, being eager and ready to hear when the Word comes. We will pray for the preacher and for those who hear the Word, including ourselves.

Secondly, we will "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). A heart-felt reception of the Word, issuing in a transformed life, will prove whether we will not be content to simply be hearers, but desire to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Thirdly, we will not allow the over-abundance of readily accessible sermons on YouTube, Sermon Audio, or various church websites, foster a Corinthian spirit in our hearts. We ought to guard against aligning ourselves with the latest "Apollos, Paul, or Cephas" of the digital media.

Fourthly, we will especially heed the preachers the Lord has entrusted to us. Even if, as we judge it, they have only moderate gifts compared to our favourite online preacher, yet God has sent them to us to watch over our souls, which no YouTube preacher can do.

Fifthly, we will pass on the Word we have heard. About the Thessalonians we read: "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything" (1 Thess. 1:8). On Monday morning in the office or store or school, we do not need to hide the fact that the previous day we heard the voice of God in the preaching of His Word.

May the Lord give us to retain and, if necessary, recover the thrill of preaching that leads to transformed lives among us as churches. ①

**Endnotes**

- 1 John Bastingius, *An Exposition Or Commentarie Upon the Catechisme of Christian Religion which is Taught in the Scholes and Churches Both of the Lowe Countries & of the Dominions of the Countie Palatine. By Ieremias Bastingius ... Translated Out of Latine Into English, Etc* (John Legatt, 1592), 194.
- 2 Otto Thelemann, *An Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Douma Publications, 1959), 359



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By John H. Pratt

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By David Calhoun

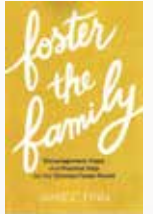
The Twenty-third Psalm is probably the best-known of all the chapters of the Bible and among the most memorable words ever written in any language. It is so familiar that it would be easy to think that we can learn nothing more from it. But through exposition intermingled with prayers and personal testimony, David Calhoun reminds us that this psalm has great depth and that lifelong meditation on its words will help Christians to understand just what it is to be a sheep under the care of the 'good Shepherd.' Each of the ten chapters in A Sheep Remembers contains a version of the Twenty-third Psalm or a hymn that is based on the psalm, followed by commentary on the verse that is being considered; writings from shepherds that help us to understand sheep and their ways; prayers, quotations and stories that illustrate the theme; and in the last place, the author's own personal testimony. This is a striking and profound little volume that will give much spiritual help to readers at all stages in the Christian life. Comes highly recommended by Ligon Duncan. Softcover 182 pages, Banner of Truth Trust. **RBS Price \$14.00**



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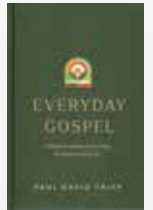
**Foster the Family: Encouragement, Hope, and Practical Help for the Christian Foster Parent**  
By Jamie C. Finn

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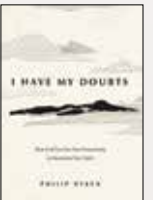
**Everyday Gospel: A Daily Devotional Connecting Scripture to All of Life**  
By Paul David Tripp

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**I Have My Doubts: How God Can Use Your Uncertainty to Reawaken Your Faith**  
By Philip Graham

The book consists of 10 Bible stories of faith and doubt to encourage believers through uncertainty. Will God do what He says He promises? Can we trust His intentions? Is He even good? Without guidance, these doubt-filled questions can hinder spiritual progress and lead to discouragement. Thankfully, the Bible offers encouraging examples of men and women who remained faithful to God even through seasons of uncertainty. Based on a series of Wheaton College chapel messages, this encouraging guide explores 10 Bible stories on the topic of faith and doubt to reassure readers that doubt is normal for Christians. These stories cover a wide range of questions and doubts that most Christians experience at some point in their faith journey—doubts about God's power, protection, justice, healing, and more. Ultimately, readers will better understand the dynamic of faith and doubt, helping them renew their faith in God even through times of uncertainty. This book is Encouraging: it bolsters faith in God and His Word amid inevitable times of doubt. A scriptural study explores 10 stories of biblical believers who experienced doubt yet remained faithful to God. Softcover, 176 pages, Crossway. **RBS Price \$16.00**



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## DOES SELF-CARE EXTEND TO SOUL-CARE?

*Self-care is an important priority for many people today. We are all encouraged to promote and protect our physical, mental and emotional well-being and happiness, especially during periods of stress. In one of his sermons however, William Guthrie challenged people as to whether they really prioritised the most valuable things about themselves – their souls. If we really valued our souls, his point was, we have a strange way of showing it. Contrasting with the slapdash treatment we give our souls is the immense care that the Lord Jesus took over them. In the following updated extract from his sermon, William Guthrie points out the great lengths that Jesus Christ went to, in the interests of our souls. His text was Matthew 16:26: “For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Christ has been urging the company that were hearing Him, and His own disciples also, to sacrifice themselves for the truth, at all hazards. In these words He uses a double argument. The one is, *What are you profited, if you should gain the whole world, and lose your own soul for worldly gain?* The truth is, you are a perfect and an absolute loser. It cannot be told what loss you have, and how bad a bargain you have made. The other is, *If you pawn or pledge your soul for this, you will not be able to set it free again at your own pleasure.* The text says, “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

### **How does Jesus show He values our souls?**

Christ Jesus values the human soul at a very high rate; for He has calculated that He sets the whole world at nought in comparison to one soul. He says, “Though a man should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, he is a perfect and an absolute loser.” “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Christ said this to the man who had enlarged his barns, and provided nothing for his soul. Christ values the souls very much. How does He show it?

### **The care He took in devising the gospel**

That glorious contrivance of the gospel speaks forth what a high esteem God puts upon the souls of men. Great has been the work and business of its contrivance, in order that His will may be revealed and made known to men: all is done with a design to save the soul. And if there were no more to speak of Him than the Bible, it sufficiently shows how He values and esteems the souls of men. He can make thousands of worlds at one word; and yet He has

taken much pains in contriving a way how to deal with men’s souls, and about that great and glorious business of man’s redemption.

### **The depths He stooped down to**

This also says that Christ values the soul so much, that He took on Him our nature, and subjected Himself very low, for such unworthy worms of the earth. None knew how to value the soul except Christ. He knows what it cost Him. In all the great revolutions of the world, He has a principal regard to the soul. There is not an up or down; a dethroning of kings, or protectors, or princes, but it is done with an eye to the good of the soul. He carrieth on some things in order to the good of the souls of men. If there were no more but the keeping up a standing ministry, and the vindication of that ordinance which He keeps up at a great expense, it shows that He values the souls of men at a very high rate.

### **The interest He takes in individuals**

Let us come and take notice of another evidence just at hand. Consider the particular care that He takes of particular persons; even a poor boy or girl. He will be speaking unto them, rebuking, exhorting, comforting, instructing them particularly, and singularly; waiting upon their ups and downs; to ratify the thoughts of their hearts, as if He had no other thing to do; though He has great kingdoms and sceptres besides to rule. All this shows how highly He values the souls of men.

### **Why are souls so precious?**

Now what are the reasons of this doctrine? It is not because of any



good works we can do unto Him. Rather, the reasons include these.

### **Souls carry His image**

It is because He values the souls of men, at least comparatively with other things, as more glorious pieces of His handy-work than any other thing in this lower world. These glorious luminaries, the sun, moon, &c., are nothing to the soul. All the pleasant things that you ever saw, even heaps of gold, and silver, and streets garnished with pearls or precious stones, are nothing in comparison to a rational soul. There was never anything made upon earth that bore the image of God so eminently and singularly as the soul. And this is one reason why the Lord values the soul so much; because it doth represent Himself more than any other creature upon earth.

### **Souls display His mercy**

The Lord values the soul of man very much, because He carrieth on His work by the soul more than by any other thing. He gives the most glorious displays of His power and mercy, by the souls of men. He proves Himself Lord over heaven, earth, and hell, by the souls of men. And,

### **Souls are precious**

I may say, the Lord values the soul much, because it is of the highest concernment. And this is one of the reasons God lays so much weight upon it; "For the redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever."

### **How much do we value our own souls?**

What use then can we make of this doctrine? God loves the soul so much, and we value it so little. It shows us that we differ exceedingly in our thoughts from the Lord. He has put a high esteem on the soul, and we do not esteem it much. And therefore it shows our lack of conformity to Him; since He values the soul so much, and we value it so little. But you will say, "I value the soul very much, and will do anything for it!" Well, if you do put a high price upon your souls, it will be apparent. You can test it as follows.

### **Thinking of our souls**

Test whether you have any serious thought concerning your soul. Do you value your soul much, if you have never a thought of them to see what case and condition they are in, and what will become of them in the end? Do you dare to say, in the sight of an all-seeing God, that you have had serious thoughts of your soul, and of what will become of it in the end? If you dare not say that, your value for your soul is a fancy indeed. And I put it to you all, this day, you who hear me, that if you ever had deep thoughts concerning your soul's case and condition, answer me about it. You who cannot answer in the affirmative, you are not far from the wrath and vengeance of God. You that throw your souls at



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## SPIRITUAL HEALTH

your heels, and undervalue them, and spend more time and pains on the poor perishing things of the world, can you expect to be called Christians? Nay, rather limbs of the devil, worldly worms, and moles of the earth.

### Making an effort for our souls

You cannot value your soul much, if you make no endeavours for your soul. You can tell every year how much progress you have made with your work, that you have now got your oat seed, or your barley seed into the ground. But what have you done for your soul? Surely every one must give an account to the God of heaven for their soul. I dare boldly say that some of you lay more weight on six or seven steps of a rig's end to sow a little flax seed on, than ever you did on your precious and immortal souls. [A rig is a piece of land.]

### Refusing to take risks with our souls

How much do you value your soul if, for a thing of nought, for a very little, or for a frivolous thing, you will risk the wrath of God? You will swear and profane the name of the Lord for a thing of nought. You will lay down your soul against twopence, as if I were to throw down my gold ring, and play it against a few pennies — that's how you take a risk on the wrath of the Almighty for a trifle.

### Giving priority to the needs of our souls

Consider too, what other things come in competition with the soul. Here is something that concerns the soul —there is something that concerns the world. I refer it to your own conscience, which gets the first place. Here is a thing that concerns the soul, but you are called to yoke the plough. Now lay your hand on your heart, and judge whether you value your soul or the world most, and look which of these gets the priority.

### Listening to God's warnings

How much do you value your soul? You can hear threatenings concerning the destruction and ruin of your soul, and yet never be affrighted or alarmed. There is no need of greater evidence that you don't value your soul, when you are saying, "Let threatenings go the same way as they came," and when you are never alarmed, nor affrighted, and when you can hear the ruin of your soul threatened a thousand times in one day, and never be moved more than the timber or stones of these walls. If this describes you, you have no reason to think that you value your soul very much. Your need is to lay your soul's case and condition to heart.

①

*William Guthrie (1620–1665) was minister of Fenwick in Ayrshire who is best known for his valuable book on salvation and assurance The Christian's Great Interest (a Banner of Truth Trust Puritan Paperback). This article was taken with permission from Reformation Scotland (<https://www.reformationscotland.org/2024/12/12/soulcare/>).*



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PURITANS

*Following God Fully: An Introduction to the Puritans* by Joel R. Beeke and Michael Reeves.

Published by Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2019, 2022. Hardcover, 151 pages.

If you are confused about the Puritans and wonder about their influence today, this is the book to read, even though the title is somewhat puzzling. The reason for the title is the author's conviction that "despite their shortcomings, the Puritans strove to be Calebs (and Joshuas) before God, to follow Him fully in every area of their lives" (Preface, p. x).

In seven parts, divided into brief chapters, the authors persuade the readers of how the Puritans desired to follow God. First, it explains who the Puritans were, and they lay to rest some of the myths and stereotypes which have arisen about them through the years. In the public eye, they are portrayed as joyless purists and formalists. The formal representation may be due to the same way our photographs are taken for formal occasions today. Puritan preachers wearing wigs indicate participation in their culture.

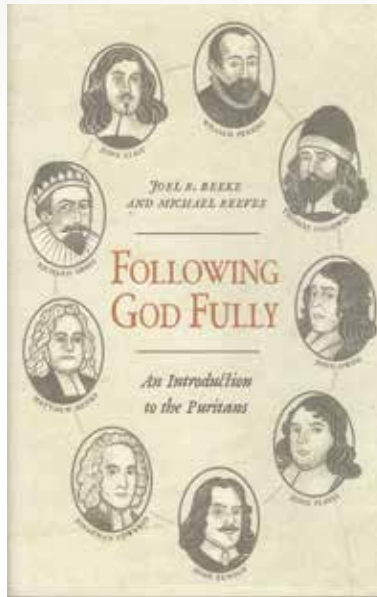
Purists? Yes, but precisely because they were so concerned about the true understanding of the Word of God and how He wants to be worshiped and served. The Reformers, Calvin, Luther, and others had laid the foundations, but Roman Catholic teachings and practices that had accumulated through the previous centuries were not so quickly dispensed with, especially when ruling royals and the politics of governments were involved. It took years of turmoil and even wars, and persecution within and outside the church, before the true doctrines of Scripture were settled into internationally sanctioned confessions of faith (the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confessions). It took even longer before these truths were faithfully preached and became widely accepted and practiced.

The term "Puritan" was coined when the adherents to the Reformation principles sought to live them out in every area of life. "Standing on the firm foundation of Scripture, Puritan preachers and writers found a wide range of topics and issues to address" (p. 12). The major emphases were focused on the Trinitarian doctrine of Christian theology, the centrality of the church and its preaching and worship, and the teaching that man is justified before God only by faith in Christ. The Puritan preachers focused on personal conversion, justification, union with Christ, adoption, assurance of faith, holy living, and preparation for heaven.

The authors of the book state that in "summary, doctrinally, Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism; experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was active and urgent, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it was centered on the triune God and His worship and service; politically, it aimed to be scriptural, balanced, and bound by conscience before God in their mutual relations of king, Parliament, and subjects" (p. 14).

Part One ends with reasons why we need Puritan teaching today and to adopt its lifestyle. The Puritans teach us to balance biblical truth, how to balance unity and controversy, and how to live by faith, enabling us to endure trials, subdue pride, keep us humble, and help us to know how to live in this world.

Part Two gives an overview of the teaching of leading Puritans, beginning with William Perkins (b. 1558) and includes Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, John Eliot, John Owen, John Bunyan, John Flavel, and Matthew Henry, ending with Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758). Part Three deals with their theology and has a chapter on each of the Three Persons of the Trinity. Interestingly, it ends with a chapter on "Covenant Theology" (pp. 58-60). Explanations of three covenants are laid out: The Covenant of Works,



The Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace, ending with the Puritan tradition of personal and family covenanting. "Puritans also affirmed that believers are to rejoice because God's covenant in its visible manifestation as the church of Christ includes all who profess faith in Christ, together with their children. As heirs of God's kingdom and of His covenant, the infant children of believers were received into the fellowship of the visible church through baptism, as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace" (p. 60).

Part Four describes each part of the order of salvation: regeneration, faith and repentance, union with Christ and justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance of salvation, perseverance, and heavenly-mindedness.


Part Five centres on ecclesiology and gives the Puritan view on the church, its worship, the Lord's Supper, church offices and government, the Lord's Day, preaching, listening to sermons, pastoral care and evangelism, which includes catechizing children.

Surprisingly, baptism is never mentioned in this section.

Part Six is about daily life and includes meditation, prayer, the nature of conscience, marriage, child-rearing, and work as a calling. The chapter on work as a calling is very instructive for teens and teachers, since it is seen as a service to the church and society.

Part Seven, "Learning from the Puritans," includes a chapter about the infamous New England "witch hunts," and Puritans as slave owners. The authors make no excuses for these blights on Puritanism and acknowledge that "The Puritans as a whole have paid a heavy price for the sins of a minority among them in these areas" (p. 143), and these are hard to erase. The insistence of some on over-zealous practices, over-spiritualizing, and extreme moralizing were also blind spots. Therefore, the Puritans can teach us about our blind spots whereby Christians can do much damage to others and to themselves. Thankfully, often this is done by a minority, which should put us on watch for our weaknesses and faults. Leland Ryken is quoted extensively to show how such pitfalls may be avoided (p. 144).

So, what lessons can we learn from the Puritans today? What stands out is their faithfulness to Scripture, their love for Christ, their devotional practices, and their daily practicality. The authors close with the advice that we may discuss their ideas, and berate them for their failures, but the real question is: "Will we love Christ the way they loved Him, and serve the triune God as they served Him? Will we live with one eye on eternity as they did?" (p. 149).

The book is highly recommended as an introduction to the Puritans. It is not overwhelming, but is in an accessible format and font, enriched with information and pointers about books by Puritan authors to read for specific issues. Recommended also are the "Puritan Treasures for Today," small pocket books faithfully edited in contemporary English, which can easily fit into a purse or pocket. They are sold in the bookstores listed below, and it is encouraging to see that they are being purchased by young adults and are read and discussed by them. 

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



# THE REFORMED FORM FOR BAPTISM – I

## Introduction

The Reformation of the 16th Century brought the Bible back on the pulpits in European countries and later in other parts of the world. Pure preaching of the Word of God was one of the blessings God restored to His Church. But the Reformers also laboured hard to give the Church a biblical doctrine of the sacraments and a new liturgy.

At first, the Reformers used existing liturgies, removing from them obvious errors which Rome had taught for centuries. Over time, this approach proved to be unsatisfactory. The more light they received from God's Word, the more errors they found, so the need was felt to draw up a whole new liturgy. One of the first parts of this liturgy was a form for the administration of baptism. The men responsible for this work were John Calvin, John à Lasco, and Ulrich Zwingli.

In the Netherlands, the man who laid the groundwork for most of our liturgical forms, including the Baptismal Form, was Peter Datheen or Dathenus. Born in 1531, he was raised in the Roman Catholic Church and educated for the priesthood. In 1550, he was converted and became a Reformed preacher. Persecution forced him to flee to London, England, where he met the Polish Reformer à Lasco. Upon his return to the continent, he pastored several refugee churches. Dathenus soon saw the need for a sound Reformed liturgy and set himself to the task of writing one, making use of existing sources, mainly from Calvin and Zwingli.

In his Baptismal Form, the whole didactic part, that is, the first part in which the meaning of baptism is explained, reflects Calvin's thought, whereas the prayer before baptism shows the influence of Zwingli. The questions addressed to the parents can be traced to à Lasco. For the rest, there is some input by another Dutchman, Casper Vander Heyden, about whom we will hear more later.

The Baptismal Form was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1574 and later slightly amended by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19.\*

The Form is divided into two main sections:

1. the didactic or teaching part; and
2. the ritualistic or practical part.

At its very beginning, we are reminded of the sinful condition and the terrible state into which we and our children have fallen. But there is more, because next, we are instructed in the doctrine of redemption and given a summary of the promises of the Triune God to sinners. Finally, there is the exhortation of gratitude and a reminder of our duties and responsibilities as baptized members of the Church.

## Sin and Misery

At the outset, the Baptismal Form makes a very solemn confession: “we with our children are conceived and born in sin.” This not only means that we are born with a sinful nature, but also that we are born into a state of guilt. That is why the Form adds: “and therefore are children of wrath.”

This truth is not a pleasant thought. Everything in us rebels against this truth. Only grace can enable us to believe this with application to ourselves. Then we will say with David in Psalm 51, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Many people object to the doctrine of original sin. They think it is not fair. How can God hold little children accountable for what took place ages ago in the Garden of Eden? But Scripture teaches this doctrine. In Romans 5:12, Paul writes that sin entered the world by one man, resulting in death for all men because all men sinned in him.

Infant baptism is a clear illustration of what original sin means. It shows that God regards children who are not yet guilty of any personal sin as guilty because of their connection with Adam, who, as our covenant head, represented us all. Since they are born in this state of guilt, they need to have their sins, both original and personal sins they will later commit, washed away by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

How this doctrine of sin and its remedy must be clearly taught! What we need to realize before we bring our infants to the baptismal font is this deeply disturbing truth: we with our children are unclean! From whom do we inherit the pollution of sin? From our parents. Since we fell in Paradise, we produce children after our image and likeness. Our children come into the world with a corrupt nature. They are unclean in God’s sight. “Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Job asked.

The roots of all sins and the seeds of the worst perversions are present in the genes of our dear children. They are children of wrath, the apostle Paul says. Before your conversion to Christ, he writes, you “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3). This means we are born under a dark cloud, and that

cloud stays there until we seek refuge in Christ who has removed it by His sacrifice on the cross. Seeking refuge is another word for faith which the Holy Spirit works in us through regeneration or the new birth.

## The Necessity of the New Birth

As long as we are children of wrath, the Form says, “we cannot enter the kingdom of God, except we are born again.” The kingdom of God was established in Paradise with Adam as its first subject. Living in perfect harmony with His king and lawgiver, he was greatly blessed. But as soon as he rebelled, God expelled him from that kingdom. The gates of Paradise were closed to Adam and all his descendants. Cherubim, armed with flaming swords, were placed at the entrance of the Garden of Eden. There is no way of re-entering that glorious kingdom “except we are born again.”

Here we hear the echo of what Jesus says in John 3 after telling Nicodemus – and us – that we must be born again. We all need a new heart, but we cannot give it to ourselves. The new birth has to come from above, not from below. Only God can bring about this miracle. That is what baptism teaches. The Form continues: “This the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, whereby the impurity of our souls is signified.” We are spiritually unclean and need to be washed with the blood of Christ, of which the water of baptism is a symbol. The message of this sacrament is very clear: You and your children must be cleansed; otherwise, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

## Sorrow for Sin

The Form goes on to state that baptism admonishes us “to loathe and humble ourselves before God.” To loathe oneself means to be deeply grieved or saddened about what you have done. Here it means we are grief-stricken on account of our sins and how they have offended God. The publican in the temple experienced something of this self-loathing. “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” he groaned as he smote his breast. Job felt the same thing when he cried, “Behold, I am vile!”

Notice that the Form speaks of loathing and humbling ourselves

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before God. These two things go together when God converts sinners, the latter being the result of the former. Both of these are the posture of someone who comes “before God.” Where these two, loathing and humbling, are found before God’s face, a third response of the heart will follow, namely, that we begin to “seek for our purification and salvation without [outside] ourselves.”

### Salvation in Jesus Alone

The Form of Baptism directs us to Christ. We are exhorted to seek cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves. That means looking to Christ and His finished work. When we realize how sinful we are, we must immediately look to Christ and not (only) at ourselves. The just shall live by faith, Paul says, and he means faith in Christ. Thus Christ offers Himself to us without conditions or reservations, but freely, “without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1).

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born again. But that is not the only thing He tells this Pharisee. In John 3, he refers to the account of the serpent of brass. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so that snake-bitten people could look to it and be healed, so the Son of man would be lifted up on the cross so that Nicodemus and we may look in faith to Christ as the only

sacrifice for sin. Only by putting trust in this God-given Substitute for sinners, he would be saved; and so will we, if we look away from ourselves to that blessed Redeemer who comes to us with His offer to wash away our sins in His precious blood. We may come to Him in whom God has opened a Fountain to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

There is a Fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.  
The dying thief [not just Nicodemus] rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And here have I, as vile as he,  
Washed all my sins away.

*\*When reference is made to the Baptismal Form, as “our Form,” we are referring to the copy in the back of the latest edition of The Psalter, used by the Free Reformed Churches, Heritage Reformed Churches, Protestant Reformed Churches, and other Reformed churches. ①*



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**AS WE HAVE THEREFORE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN, ESPECIALLY UNTO THEM WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.  
GAL. 6:10**

# THE DEVIL'S MATH

*"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. 11:3*

The redeemed sinner walks in the light of the gospel, unburdened by sin and rejoicing in the grace freely given by his Saviour. He knows that the gospel, pure and untainted, is his treasure. Yet he must beware of the devil's dark arithmetic, hoping to rob the child of God of his joy.

## Addition

Satan would have the Christian believe that the gospel, in its simplicity, is insufficient—too easy, too free. He whispers of adding rules, marks, duties, and rituals, slyly urging him to take on the yoke of legalism. "If thou art truly saved," Satan says, "then thou must also do thus and so, and behave thusly." He seeks to turn the free man into a slave once more, laying burdens upon the soul that Christ never intended. But the redeemed sinner knows that nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ. It is a complete work, spoken with the finality of "It is finished."

## Subtraction

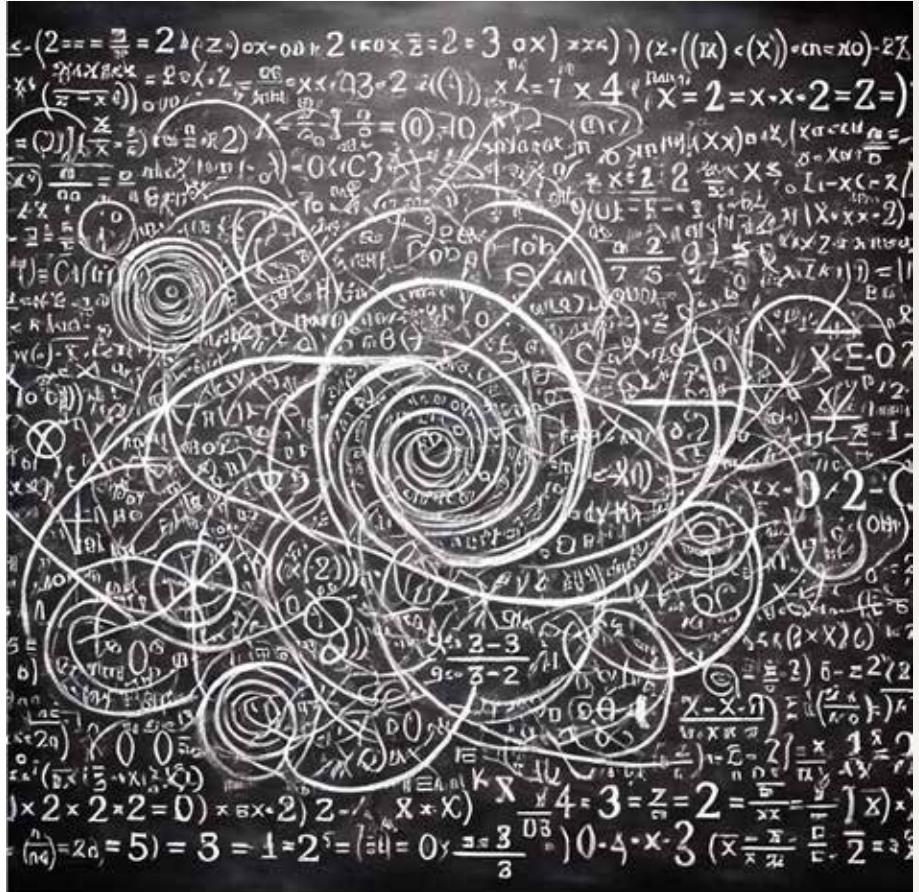
Yet Satan is not content with addition alone; he will also use subtraction. The devil knows that a diminished gospel is a powerless gospel. He entices the heart to set aside the hard truths of Scripture, to soften the call to repentance, to omit the free offer, to remove the fearsome reality of sin and judgment. He whispers that a comfortable, palatable gospel will be more welcome, more loved. But the redeemed sinner knows that such a gospel is but a hollow shell. He must take all that God has spoken, bitter and sweet, for to lose even a part of the truth is to lose the gospel itself. The full counsel of God, in all its majesty and severity, is his only hope and his only joy.

## Substitution

If addition and subtraction won't work, Satan would also substitute. He offers the Christian heart countless counterfeits, urging him to trade the glory of Christ for the pleasures of this world. "Set your heart on wealth, reputation, comfort," he whispers. "Put aside thy cross and take up pleasure." But the believer is awake. He knows that Christ alone can satisfy the longing of his soul. He will not trade eternal riches for the empty promises of earth. To do so would be to barter gold for dust, to leave the fountain of life for salt water.

## Multiplication

The devil, never satisfied, also multiplies. He delights in confusion, in clouding the mind with endless distractions and doubts. He plants question upon question until the soul is ensnared in a web of anxiety. "Is this truly God's Word?" he asks. "Does He really care for you?" "Aren't you deceiving yourself?" "Look at your sin." Soon, the mind is overwhelmed, the peace of the gospel swallowed up in a sea of



speculation. But the redeemed sinner keeps his gaze fixed upon Christ, holding fast to the simplicity of faith, unmoved by the devil's multiplying doubts. He rests in the Word, trusting that the truth shall make him free, knowing that the light of Christ dispels all darkness.

## Division

Finally, Satan delights in division. He sends the little foxes of discord among brethren, stirring up pride, bitterness, jealousy, and suspicion. He divides the body of Christ, setting believer against believer, so that the church, fractured and weak, loses her power. But the believing soul cherishes unity, for he sees in it a similitude of the Godhead. He loves the fellowship of saints, labouring to keep the peace, knowing that where love and truth abide, there is the kingdom of God.

Thus, the redeemed sinner, also a saint, knows the devil's math. He will neither add nor subtract, neither substitute nor multiply, nor divide the truth of the gospel. Instead, he rests in its glorious simplicity: Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ reigning. In this arithmetic, there is no shadow of turning. The gospel math is simple. Here, and here alone, the redeemed sinner finds his everlasting joy. <sup>11</sup>

*Rev. J. Lewis is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Pompton Plains, New Jersey. This article is taken from his blog entry of November 2, 2024 (<https://www.b2g.life/p/the-devils-math>).*

# HOW SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT JORDAN PETERSON?

Many younger adults in the west have had a very different upbringing than was common two generations ago. They have never gone to church and know little about the Bible or history. Many had distant or absent fathers or lived through the divorce of their parents. It seems most were never disciplined in love. Their home-life was likely dominated by television, video games, and the internet. Much of their childhood was spent in institutions such as daycares, schools, and camps. As they grew up, good was called evil, and evil was called good. This has been a generation who struggles with substance abuse, self-abuse, internet addiction, and suicide. Many in this generation seem to especially struggle with meaninglessness.

Jordan Peterson seems to have stepped into that void for many. Perhaps some reading this know little about Peterson, but it is likely that many of the young people in your church or community have listened to his lectures or podcasts or read his books. Peterson was born in Alberta in 1962 and was brought up in a Christian family. As a youth, he left the church behind after his questions about God and the Bible were not answered. For a time, he embraced leftist views, seeing religion as a weakness and socialism as progress. As a university student, however, he grew disappointed with the answers of leftism and turned to the study of psychology. Much of his work seems to wrestle with trying to understand religious belief in a scientific manner. Peterson taught psychology at Harvard University in the 1990s, and then at the University of Toronto. He became prominent around 2016 when he began to push back against rules forcing the use of preferred pronouns for transgender individuals on university campuses. Since that time, Peterson has stood firmly against many of the trends of leftism, especially sounding warnings against concepts of “compelled speech” or “hate speech.” In 2018, he published a self-help book called “12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos,” which became a top bestseller. Since then, Peterson has become a very public figure: going on speaking tours, podcasting, and using social media with a very broad influence. He has faced a degree of “persecution” for his views from various directions. He is certainly the most well-known psychologist of our age and has now become perhaps the most influential expositor of the Bible



as well.

It is probably useful for some of us to review the titles of the chapters in his book and think of them in the context of a generation that is struggling with fatherlessness and meaninglessness. His 12 rules include things like, “Stand up straight with your shoulders back,” “Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world,” and “Tell the truth – or, at least, don’t lie.” Peterson is a gifted writer, and the tone of his writing, as well as his podcasting, is conversational, friendly, and yet firm. He has some clever insights into human behaviours. He is clearly very perceptive, and highly intelligent. He communicates empathy for his audience and has been willing to spend time answering the questions of young people. Peterson actively encourages

prayer, Bible reading, and faithful church attendance, though he himself does not attend church. He has become a virtual father figure, even a virtual pastor, to many young people.

Many, however, do not realize what Peterson’s underlying worldview actually is. Academically, he has been a follower of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who lived from 1875-1961. If you familiarize yourself with the teachings of Jung, you will realize that they are woven through Peterson’s work. Like Peterson, Jung’s views seemed to be strongly shaped by his childhood. As a little boy, Jung had unusual “visions” and mystical experiences, and he even made up his own religious rituals. He struggled with fainting spells, which he later learned were due to anxiety. Jung originally wanted to become a Reformed preacher like his father but instead studied psychology under Sigmund Freud. Jung was fascinated with primitive religions, mysticism, and the paranormal. He explained related experiences by proposing that people have a shared “collective unconscious.” This is the idea that there is an unconscious level on which people share feelings, thoughts, motives or experiences. It is this unconscious which connects the “souls” of people, and which shapes their personality, actions, and identity. This school of psychology emphasizes that religious rituals and dreams which are similar across the world are deeply meaningful yet could also be analyzed and explained scientifically. In time, Jung and Freud diverged, with Freud continuing to believe that sexual development shapes personality, but Jung believing that the “collective unconscious”



was a better way to understand psychology.

Many people believe that we are currently entering a time of spiritual awakening. There is hope in our time! We can rejoice that more young people are coming to church, reading their Bibles, and listening to good sermons. It is important, however, that we have our eyes open to the reality of what is being called “awakening” by some. It seems that part of what is happening in our culture is that many are shifting from Freudian views of psychology, including obsession with sexuality, to the Jungian view of the collective unconscious. This movement has space for religious experience, faith, and tradition. It is a movement that even calls for personal responsibility, and includes pushbacks against atheism and secularism, at least outwardly. It is, however, in many cases, an awakening to psychological principles rather than to God Himself. The Lord may use such a movement to gather in His church, but I have doubts that this is a fundamentally Christian movement at this time. There are serious, even fatal, issues in the thoughts and principles of leaders.

Jordan Peterson, using a method of interpretation strongly influenced by Jung, seems to have become the most popular Bible teacher in the world. He has produced expository lecture series on Bible books that are being listened to by many millions of people. These teachings focus on themes like lust, betrayal, suffering, and strength on levels that many people have never heard. He makes profound points, and he is able to see unifying themes in Scripture which earlier liberal interpreters ignored or denigrated. They tended to criticize and deconstruct the Bible. Peterson tends to show a higher view, and yet it is a view that is not what many might think it is. If we listen to Peterson carefully, we begin to recognize that he has a different way of understanding the Bible than we do. Evolutionary biology is clearly still foundational for him. He often explains human behaviour using animal studies. He sees the Bible as deeply valuable, but as an evolutionary product explained by human collective unconscious. To Peterson, evolution has produced religion and spirituality. Our ancestors created the Scriptures, but they did so from deeply held motives or shared experiences that cross generations. By understanding unconscious thoughts, and those of your ancestors, you can raise yourself up. In this way, Peterson is able to rationalize the goodness of the pre-sexual revolution culture, but he does so by reducing God to a useful product of shared imagination.

It is true that Peterson speaks movingly of Christ at times. Some of his recent interviews seem to have more depth, and more openness to belief in the existence of the true God. He has stated that he believes in a historical Jesus, and in a historical crucifixion. He has stated that he sees the beauty and value of the concept of the bodily resurrection of Christ, though he himself does not profess faith in the resurrection. He still does not profess faith in the God who is Holy or completely



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separate from creation. His god is inside of the universe, even mainly inside of humanity. His god seems to be human souls, mystically connected across generations, and able to endure hardship or make progress through valuing collective wisdom. The cross, to him, is not the place where the holy and loving God manifests His love to the world by atoning for our sin (1 John 4:9-10). To Peterson, the cross is an example of our calling, which is to take up our crosses, follow Jesus as the best possible example, and to struggle uphill. To find help in God, or help in Christ, is to tap into shared human experience and wisdom, and ultimately to improve ourselves.

**What can we learn from this man?**

First, Dr. Peterson is admirable in many respects. He is courageous in the face of opposition. He shows deep care for young people. He recognizes the dangers of communism and practical atheism. He has, in many respects, been an ally of the Christian church in the culture wars of our time. He has faced suffering in his own personal life and is willing to speak about what he has learned. We should consider that perhaps the Lord is humbling His church in using a man from outside His church as an instrument to bring many back to the Bible. On one level, we can rejoice that the Word of God is being opened up (Phil. 1:18).

Second, there is still a serious danger lurking beneath Peterson’s teachings. A sober analysis, in light of Scripture and our confessions, can only come to the conclusion that he is by historic Christian definitions a false teacher. When he is pressed for definitions, his answers come short. When he speaks of “God,” he is still speaking of a god who has ultimately been created by the creation. His god is inside of our collective imaginations. When he speaks of salvation, or the cross, he is speaking of an example for humanistic works. Many of his answers, increasingly, also seem to align with the errors and false teachings of Roman Catholicism. He may be a pathway towards the church for some, but he could also function as a broad way towards humanism for covenant children.

Third, we see the need for true experiential conversion and the work of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that Peterson, and the many who hear him, will acknowledge the Lord as God, will bow before the King of Kings, and depend completely on Christ for salvation. This time is teaching us of the need for the Holy Spirit to grant gifts of true evangelical repentance and faith (Luke 11:13). Yet, let us have hope that when there is a return to studying the Bible, there is an engagement with the living Word of God. (Heb. 4:12-16) True conversion, however, means that we all ultimately have to jettison our life’s work, learn to reject the teachings of humanism, and be joined to the body of Christ. We know from the Word and our own experience that these are impossible things to do, and that we are not sufficient for such things. So, we have great hope in trusting that with God all things are possible. (Mark 10:27) <sup>11</sup>



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Adam Kloostra, Principal  
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*"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord."* Ps. 127:3

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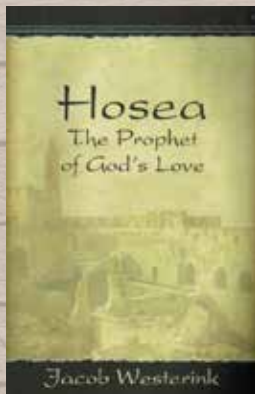
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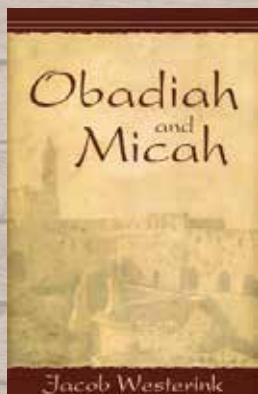
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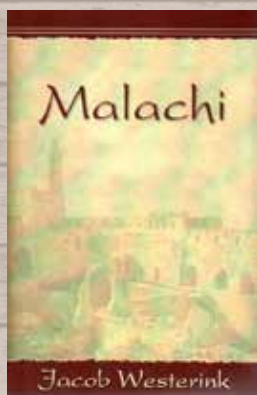
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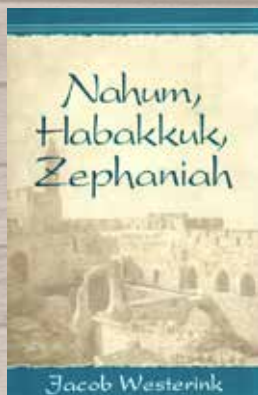
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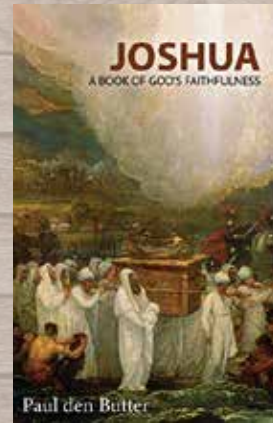


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