

The *Banner* of Sovereign Grace Truth

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Brave New World?

**Is God Involved in
Politics?**

The Puritan Family

Parables

A Periodical for Young and Old



THE BANNER OF
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HUMILITY

"O for true, unfeigned humility! I know I have cause to be humble; and yet I do not know one half of that cause. I know I am proud; and yet I do not know the half of that pride."

—Robert Murray M'Cheyne

"Men frequently admire me, but I abhor the pleasure that I feel."

—Henry Martyn

"Of all garments, none is so graceful, none wears so well, and none is so rare, as humility."

—J. C. Ryle

Christ or the New Year – Which “Comes” First?

“Surely I come quickly.” Revelation 22:20

It often appears as if Christ is being outrun by the passing years. Outwardly, the years seem to come quickly, while Christ’s coming seems far off. Compare how frequently you think or comment about “how time flies” or “where did 2008 go?” to how infrequently you consider the coming of Christ. Sadly, for many professing Christians, it seems that the coming of each new year is more real than the coming of Christ.

Yet, while this is too often the case from our small and shortsighted view, we may thank God that His Word gives the “big picture” and thereby corrects our sinful distortions with the true reality. In the final chapter of the Bible, we read the words “I come quickly” spoken explicitly by the exalted Christ three times (vv. 7, 12, 20). Add to this several other verses that make the same point (vv. 6, 10, 17), and no less than six times is the truth asserted that Christ is coming quickly.

The word “quickly” is crucial. It means “speedily,” not so much in a chronological sense as in stating the certainty that there are no unnecessary delays or insurmountable obstacles to His coming. To illustrate this, many of us have promised to hurry to be with someone in need, whether a loved one facing death in a hospital or a friend stuck in a ditch. That doesn’t mean that we don’t change into suitable clothes, put on our shoes or boots, gather the necessary items, and obey traffic laws to get there. It may seem long from the needy person’s perspective, but we were still “coming quickly.” Allow me to speak to your mind and heart about what this certain coming of Christ offers believers this year.

First, it affords every Christian the proper framework for life. When we read the Old Testament, we get a distinct sense that the heart of God’s promise is “I am coming.” This is developed gradually and methodically through pictures and prophecies until, as we read in Galatians 4:4, “in the fullness

of time God sent forth his Son.” If the Old Testament culmination came in the “fullness of time,” the New Testament culmination is stated as “I come quickly.” Why the difference? Because Christ has successfully overcome the chief obstacle and impediment to His work—sin. To use a traffic analogy, we can picture the first coming of Christ as the congested collector lanes on a highway while the post-resurrection era may be likened to rapidly moving vehicles in express lanes. There is no slowing down!

Believers participate in this reality through their union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Each New Year gives Christians the opportunity to reflect upon this fact and forge ahead by the power of faith. The Book of Revelation presents this union in its eternal form by picturing the redeemed around the throne of God and of the Lamb (chapters 4–5). More frequently, we are given the temporal view through the call to “walk by faith and not by sight.” For the present, the struggle is living in the temporal enjoyment of communion while longing for the eternal realization of that communion. To Christians who know something of this daily and yearly battle, Christ says, “Surely, I come quickly.”

Second, Christ’s speedy coming gives weight to every moment of our life. Do we live our life with a “quickness” that matches Christ’s “coming quickly”? Business transactions take place quickly, since efficiency is linked to profitability. But how does Christian lethargy in prayer, in searching the Word, and in serving our neighbor appear to leave us in the dust of the rapidly moving world? This is not right! The cause is our sin; the solution is the Spirit of the coming Christ convicting and invigorating the people of God. Weigh each moment of your life in light of Jesus’ words, “I come quickly,” and act accordingly.

Rev. Donald Overbeek is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Bradford, Ontario.





Is God Involved in Politics? If So, How Did He Vote?

This article forms the introductory remarks made in a sermon titled, How Did God Vote?, on the Sabbath after national elections in the United States.

After the elections of last November, many of us in the United States were deeply disappointed with the outcome. Some of us, no doubt, wept tears over those results. We tremble for America. So many consequences are at stake. So many questions are left—not just about the economy or the planned redistribution of wealth, but questions far more important. How will our nation's moral character be affected? With a president-elect who has a very strong pro-abortion voting record, including unqualified support for even the grotesque procedure of partial birth abortion, what will this mean for America's unborn over the next four years? Will the Freedom of Choice Act be put into law as swiftly as he promised, unraveling thirty years of hard work to prohibit at least some abortions? Will a homosexual agenda make great progress in these years? What impact will that have on our society as a whole? Will Hate Crime legislation be passed and stymie attempts to inform the people of the internal machinations of government and of the biblical issues of the day? What justices will be appointed—not just to the Supreme Court, but hundreds and thousands of others to lower courts? What is God saying to America? Does God mean to destroy us? To have our nation self-destruct? Is the cup of our iniquity full in His eyes? Or, does God mean to stir up His people so that we won't settle on our lees with a president who was against abortion and a vice-president who is a conservative evangelical Christian? Does He intend to bring us to our knees, to humble us, to bring revival in this land again?

How did God vote? If God is in control of all things, why

didn't the vote go the other way? To even begin to answer these questions, we need to consider very briefly God's relationship to government—which is a relationship of both involvement and transcendence. God is involved in and yet transcends government in five ways:

1. God determines the purpose of government. That purpose is both positive and negative. Positively, before the fall, Adam was given the assignment to name the animals, steward the creation, and exercise dominion. In a social context, that means someone has to decide whether we drive on the right side of the road or the left side, when and where to build roads and other public infrastructure, etc. Government must reflect the orderly character and personality of God. Though God Himself keeps the planets and stars in alignment in His providential rule, He has delegated to man as His image-bearer some aspects of that responsibility of order.

Negatively, the purpose of government is rooted in man's sin. Prior to the fall, the family was the only social institution required to retain peaceable order among men. After the fall, sin and our need to live to God's glory required two additional social institutions: a religious institution that we call the church—which deals primarily with our relationship to God—and a civil institution that we call the state or government—which deals with our relationship as sinners to other sinners. The state is called to regulate sinful behavior among men. Things such as murder, lying, and cheating require a government to maintain moral order among men. The state is to superintend especially man's violations of the fifth through ninth commandments in his relation to other

people. The state must maintain civil justice; it must reflect the righteousness and justice of the throne of God itself.

2. God determines the *personnel of government*. That was affirmed already by Nebuchadnezzar who states in Daniel 4:17 that the most High, who rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will, can set up even the basest of men if it so pleases Him. In plain words, no matter who it is, God determines who will be in the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court. God does this to accomplish His sovereign purposes among the nations. God transcends kings and uses them for His own purposes. Cyrus is a good case in point; God used Him for His own purpose: so that Israel could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

3. God determines the *policies of government*. God controls the decisions made by governments. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” Here’s a case in point: The Lord thwarted the counsel of Ahithophel in order to bring calamity on Absalom.

God also controls the effects of decisions made by government. Sometimes He uses governmental decisions to bring a nation into need in order to fulfill His own redemptive purposes.

Let us never forget: God’s people — not a nation, not even Israel — are the apple of God’s eye. America is not the apple of God’s eye, but you are, if you are a child of God. As members of His kingdom, you, dear believers, are the supreme concern of God in His dealings in America.

Think of this only in relation to Jesus for just a moment. When Jesus was about to be born, Caesar Augustus gave a decree that everyone should be taxed. Why? Well, God’s transcendent purpose was to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where Jesus would be born (in order to fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2). When Herod slaughtered the innocents, what happened? Mary and Joseph left, went to Egypt, and thereby fulfilled another prophecy. And when the time came for Jesus to be crucified, the entire political climate was precisely what the Lord determined it to be so that Jews, Romans, and Gentiles would co-labor for Christ’s crucifixion — a co-laboring that ultimately was engineered by the predeterminate counsel of God, such that Jesus was crucified (Acts 4:27–28). That’s why, when asked by Pilate, “Don’t you know I have authority to release you or to condemn you?” Christ responded, “You have no authority over me except what has been given you by my Father” (John 19:11). Crucifixion was totally unjust. Everyone knew it was wrong. And they were all accountable for that. Yet it was all according to the purpose of God for our salvation, dear believers.

God directs history for the good of His church. Even when it appears that our biblical perspectives are violated and our rights are being curtailed, God still transcends these for His church’s ultimate good and the glory of His name. When you see evil things happening, don’t despair, dear believer,

but lift up your head, for your redemption draws nigh. All things — even elections — shall work together for the good of those who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). The history of the world, including the outcome of elections, is unfolding to achieve the purposes of a sovereign God. Although this must never be used as an excuse for apathy or to forego responsibility — matters on which the Scriptures speak equally clearly — it provides God’s people with tremendous comfort. God brings all things to pass so that Jesus Christ will be glorified in His church — whether through a time of peace or a time of persecution.

4. God determines the *providence of government*. We don’t know what providences are before us in the next four years. What will happen in Afghanistan and Iraq? Will there be another attack of terrorism on United States soil? What national disasters, hurricanes, and earthquakes will take place? God determines every providence — and He does so for the church, that we might serve to the glory of God.

Jesus Christ is God’s king set on His holy hill in Zion. Today and in all the tomorrows that stretch out before us, Christ exercises supreme, universal government given into His hands by His Father. He alone can say, “All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth.” Do not despair: He who loves you, dear believer, is the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 5:13). His name is above every name (1 Tim. 6:15–16).

5. God is displeased by the *pride of government*. This is a sin to which those directly involved in politics are particularly tempted, but it also is a sin to which voters are vulnerable. How easy it is for us — like the Pharisees of Luke 13 — to interpret the news events of our days in a way that makes definite conclusions and pronouncements regarding things we really are ignorant of. We are called to be obedient and faithful citizens, obeying God’s Word, seeking the peace of the city in which God has caused us to live (Jer. 29:7). We are not called to make final judgments about our leaders. In pride, we easily forget the limits of our own knowledge. As citizens, it was our duty to prayerfully evaluate the candidates that were presented for public office and to select those who seemed best suited to lead our land. We were called to do so using biblical criteria. Against this measure, they and we all fall woefully short. But focusing on ourselves, must we not admit that sometimes we succumb to the temptation to get caught up in the emotion of the moment, to elevate our judgments as being more definitive than they really are? Our conclusions are based on what the media reports and what we find out from the election propaganda, sources we realize have their biases. Like Samuel having to choose from among the sons of Jesse, we can only look at the outward appearance. With such a limited perspective and knowing the limitations of our own hearts, we should take care to neither lionize nor demonize candidates about whom, in spite of all of the media focus, we can only scarcely get to know. Among the many reasons for the decline of a Christian witness and voice in our culture is the sometimes smugness

and arrogance with which we have communicated our judgments to our neighbors, judgments which in some occasions, have been proven by subsequent history to be painfully wrong. In our political communication, too, we must show something of the mind of Christ.¹

For some, the result of November's election has been painful but we must acknowledge God's sovereignty over it. The Bible is clear that no authority is given to mankind except from God. Romans 13:2 makes plain that government is an ordinance of God; political leaders are even called ministers and servants of God (vv. 4, 6). What a solemn responsibility our newly elected president has, and how we need to pray for him—to pray for his conversion, to pray that he will be turned back at every point that he tries to bring an unbiblical and immoral policy into law, to pray that he will be given the desire and wisdom to rule this country in accord with God's Word. We need to pray this way for all those in authority. Let us put a harness upon our tongue and give honor to whom honor is due. And let us be like Abraham as he prayed for Sodom. Let us plead for the USA.

Government is not above the church, nor below the church, but coordinate with the church. Its calling is to support the church, to give the church its peace and freedom to be faithful to the Word of God. Pray that this would take place in America, even under President Obama's administration.

As Christians, we have the privilege of viewing human government from a transcendent vantage point as citizens of the kingdom of our priestly King, Jesus Christ. We know that He is the name above every name, that He is King of kings and Lord of lords, that He is the ruler of the kings of the

earth. Therefore, we are at peace with His sovereign purposes being accomplished while we discharge our rightful responsibilities and our civic duties as unto the Lord, but much more importantly, while we strive to commend the gospel by God-fearing speaking and living, so that others will say of us, "Now, there are some credible, trustworthy people."

Let us not put our trust in princes or horses, but in the Lord our God. And let us remember that ultimately we are citizens of a better country, even a heavenly one. Thanks be to God, the King of heaven has all His government in place. His government of glory doesn't change every four years. His government is safe and secure.

So, how did God vote? God directed the election of 2008, in His wise, mysterious, inscrutable purposes, to fulfill His ancient, unalterable vote—His ancient choice of His people, whom He has loved with an everlasting love. He voted them into the offices of prophet, priest, and king to serve Him forever by means of His gracious, fatherly, eternal election. This is our comfort. This is our resting place. This is our sure hope. Even if an earthly government will bring upon us immorality, trials, and persecutions, we know that God's eternal vote shall stand, for He has said, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. I will do all my good pleasure. All things shall take place in accord with my sovereign will."

1. I am indebted to Ray Pennings for much of this fifth point.

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INAUGURAL ISSUE OF PURITAN REFORMED JOURNAL

As faculty of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, we are grateful to announce that the inaugural issue of Puritan Reformed Journal (PRJ)—the seminary's official journal—is now available. The Journal is being edited by Dr. Beeke, with assistance from associate editors, Dr. Jerry Bilkes and Dr. David Murray, and book review editor, Dr. Michael Haykin. It will be published two times per year, the Lord willing.

Here is a sampling of articles contained in the inaugural issue:

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Preaching Christ from the Old Testament – DAVID MURRAY
 Atoning Blood: The Command against Eating Blood – JOHNNY SERAFINI
 Ezra as a Model of Continuing Reformation – GERALD BILKES

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Regeneration and Faith According to Two British
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 John Murray and the Godly Life – JOHN J. MURRAY

PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND MISSIONS

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“A Sacrifice Well Pleasing to God”: John Calvin and the Missionary Endeavors of the Church¹

DR. MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

It has often been maintained that the sixteenth-century Reformers had a poorly developed missiology—that missions was an area to which they gave little thought. Yes, this argument runs, they rediscovered the apostolic gospel, but they had no vision to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth. It is considered axiomatic that the Reformers had no concern for overseas missions to non-Christians and that they evidenced no recognition at all of the missionary dimension of the church.

But such a characterization is far from the truth. In what follows, one Reformer in particular, the Frenchman John Calvin (1509–1564), has been selected to show the error of this perspective.² John Calvin’s theology of missions is developed by looking first at the theme of the victorious advance of Christ’s kingdom that looms so large in his writings. Statements from Calvin regarding the means and motivations for extending this kingdom are then examined to further show Calvin’s concern for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Finally, there is a brief look at the way Calvin’s Geneva functioned as a missionary center.

The Victorious Advance of Christ’s Kingdom³

A frequent theme in Calvin’s writings and sermons is that of the victorious advance of Christ’s kingdom in the world. God the Father, Calvin says in his prefatory address to Francis I in his theological masterpiece, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, has appointed Christ to “rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth.” In a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5–6, Calvin notes that Jesus came, not simply to save a few, but “to extend his grace over all the world.” Similarly, Calvin declares in a sermon on Acts 2 that the reason for the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost was in order for the gospel to “reach all the ends and extremities of the world.”

It was this global perspective on the significance of the gospel that also gave Calvin’s theology a genuine dynamism and forward movement. It has been said that if it had not been for the so-called Calvinist wing of the Reformation many of the great gains of that era would have died on the vine. While this may be an exaggeration to some degree, it does illustrate the importance of the Reformed perspective.⁴

Calvin, moreover, was not satisfied to be involved in simply reforming the church. He was tireless in seeking to make the influence of the church felt in the affairs of the surrounding society and thus to make God’s rule a reality in that area of human life as well. It was this conviction that led Calvin to be critical of the Anabaptists, the radical left-wing of the Reformation. From his perspective, the Anabaptist creation of communities that were totally separate from the surrounding culture was really a misguided attempt to flee the world. Their spiritual forbears were medieval monks, not the early Christians who had been obedient to Christ’s words in Matthew 28:19–20. In Calvin’s view, they should be seeking positive ways in which they could be used by the indwelling Spirit to impact society in general and reform it, and so advance the kingdom of Christ.

Means for the Extension of Christ’s Kingdom

Calvin is quite certain that the extension of Christ’s kingdom is first of all God’s work. Commenting on Matthew 24:30, he can assert that it is not “by human means but by heavenly power...that the Lord will gather His Church.”⁵ Or consider his comments on the phrase “a door having also been opened to me” in 2 Corinthians 2:12.

[The meaning of this metaphor] is, that an opportunity of promoting the gospel had presented itself. For as an opportunity of entering is furnished when the door is opened, so the servants of the Lord make advances when an opportunity is presented. The door is shut, when no prospect of usefulness is held out. Now as, on the door being shut, it becomes us to enter upon a new course, rather than by farther efforts to weary ourselves to no purpose by useless labor, so where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God.⁶

For Calvin, the metaphor of an “open door” spoke volumes about the way in which the advance of the church is utterly dependent on the mercy of a sovereign God.

Now, this does not mean that Christians are to be passive in their efforts to reach the lost and can sit back and wait for God to do all. In his comments on Isaiah 12:5, Calvin

deals with this common misinterpretation of God's divine sovereignty.

[Isaiah] shows that it is our duty to proclaim the goodness of God to every nation. While we exhort and encourage others, we must not at the same time sit down in indolence, but it is proper that we set an example before others; for nothing can be more absurd than to see lazy and slothful men who are exciting other men to praise God.⁷

As David Calhoun rightly observes: "The power to save [souls] rests with God but He displays and unfolds His salvation in our preaching of the gospel."⁸ While missions and evangelism are indeed God's work, He delights to use His people as His instruments.

The first major way in which God uses His people for the conversion of others is through prayer—our prayers for the conversion of unbelievers. We see this conviction at work in Calvin's own prayers, a good number of which have been recorded for us at the end of his sermons. Each of his sermons on Deuteronomy, for instance, ends with a prayer that runs something like this: "may it please him [i.e. God] to grant this [saving] grace, not only to us, but also to all peoples and nations of the earth."⁹

Moreover, Calvin would admonish believers not to be discouraged if they do not see fruit immediately issuing as a result of their prayers. As he states in his comments on Genesis 17:23:

So, at this day, God seems to enjoin a thing impossible to be done, when he requires his gospel to be preached every where in the whole world, for the purpose of restoring it from death to life. For we see how great is the obstinacy of nearly all men, and what numerous and powerful methods of resistance Satan employs; so that, in short, all the ways of access to these principles are obstructed. Yet it behooves individuals to do their duty, and not to yield to impediments; and, finally, our endeavors and our labors shall by no means fail of that success, which is not yet apparent.¹⁰

Then, believers must actively employ their strength to bring God's salvation to others. In his sermon on Deuteronomy 33:18–19, Calvin can thus argue that it is not enough to be involved in God's service. Christians need to be drawing others to serve and adore God.¹¹

Specifically, how does God use the strength of Christians? Calvin's answer is that it is by their words and by their deeds. Given Calvin's high appreciation of the Word of God one would naturally expect that this would be seen as a major means of witness. Thus, Calvin can state that whenever the Old Testament prophets foretold "the renewal of the Church or its extension over the whole globe," they always assigned "the first place to the Word."¹² Acting on this conviction, Calvin encouraged the translation and printing of the Scriptures in the work of Reformation in Geneva. This also explains his own devotion to regular expository preaching and his penning of commentaries on all of the books of the New

Testament (except for 2 and 3 John and Revelation) and on a goodly number of Old Testament books.

But witness is borne not only by the Word, but also by our deeds. Calvin had established an academy in Geneva to train men to be missionaries for his native land, France. A large number of these men did indeed go back as missionaries and some died as martyrs. To five such missionaries who had been arrested at Lyons and were facing death by martyrdom, Calvin wrote on May 15, 1553:

Since it pleases him [i.e. God] to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel [with the world], he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet in time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express. But as he hath vouchsafed you this privilege, that your bonds have been renowned, and that the noise of them has been everywhere spread abroad, it must needs be, in despite of Satan, that your death should resound far more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby. For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto himself, that he has preserved you hitherto, in order that your long-continued imprisonment might serve as a preparation for the better awakening of those whom he has determined to edify by your end. For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you, in order to be contemplated from afar.¹³

Here, Calvin sees the act of martyrdom as a powerful witness for the gospel, though it is one without words.

Calvin is also convinced that each and every Christian must be prepared to witness, by both word and deed, about God's grace and mercy in Christ and that to all whom they can. When it comes to the spreading of the gospel, it is noteworthy that he makes no distinction between the responsibility of pastors and of other Christians. All believers must be involved.¹⁴

There is one means that Calvin expected God to use in the spread of the gospel that we today in the West probably do not expect, i.e., evangelism through Christian rulers and magistrates. For example, when Elizabeth I came to the throne of England, he saw it as a hopeful sign for the advance of the gospel in England. Over the years, he also corresponded extensively with a number of French noblewomen, especially Jeanne d'Albret (1528–1572), queen of Navarre. This French noblewoman played a significant role in the French Reformation, and Calvin recognized his need of her support, and that of other nobility, if new territories were to be opened up to the spread of the evangelical faith.

Motivations for Extending Christ's Kingdom

What was to motivate the believer in bearing witness to the faith? First and foremost was the glory of God. As Calvin stated in his sermon on Deuteronomy 33:18–19:

When we know God to be our Father, should we not desire

that he be known as such by all? And if we do not have this passion, that all creatures do him homage, is it not a sign that his glory means little to us?¹⁵

In other words, if we are truly passionate about God's glory, this passion will result in witness.

Moreover, bearing witness to the faith is pleasing to God. Consider in this regard Calvin's letter to a Christian landowner on the island of Jersey that was written around the year 1553.

We praise God for having inclined your heart to try if it will be possible to erect, by your means, a small church on the place where you reside. And indeed, according as the agents of the Devil strive by every act of violence to abolish the true religion, extinguish the doctrine of salvation, and exterminate the name of Jesus Christ, it is very just that we should labor on our side to further the progress of the gospel, that, by these means, God may be served in purity, and the poor wandering sheep may be put under the protection of the sovereign Pastor to whom every one should be subject. And you know that it is a sacrifice well pleasing to God, to advance the spread of the Gospel by which we are enlightened in the way of salvation, to dedicate our life to the honor of him who has ransomed us at so costly a price in order to bear rule in the midst of us.¹⁶

Then, we are to evangelize because we have been commanded to do so by Christ.¹⁷ Compassion for the lost condition of people also should drive Christians to witness. "If we have any humanity in us," he declared in a sermon on Deuteronomy 33, "seeing men going to perdition,...ought we not be moved by pity, to rescue the poor souls from hell, and teach them the way of salvation?"¹⁸ In fact, a Christian who is not involved in witness is really a contradiction in terms. As Calvin remarks in his *Commentary* on Isaiah 2:3:

...the godly will be filled with such an ardent desire to spread the doctrines of religion, that every one not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge will desire to draw others along with him. And indeed nothing could be more inconsistent with the nature of faith than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren, and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast.¹⁹

Geneva as a Missionary Center

Geneva was not a large city. During Calvin's lifetime, it reached a peak of slightly more than 21,000 by 1560, of whom a goodly number were religious refugees.²⁰ Nevertheless, it became the missionary center of Europe in this period of the Reformation. Calvin sought to harness the energies and gifts of many of the religious refugees so as to make Geneva central to the expansion of Reformation thought and piety throughout Europe. This meant training and preparing many of these refugees to go back to their native lands as evangelists and reformers.

Understandably, Calvin was vitally concerned about the evangelization of his native land, France, and his countrymen, the French. It has been estimated that by 1562 some 2,150

congregations had been established in France with around three million members, many of them converted through the witness of men trained in Geneva.²¹ But Calvin was concerned for not only France, but also for the reformation of the church in places like Scotland and England, Spain as well as Poland, Hungary, and the Netherlands. He even encouraged a mission to Brazil in 1555, which turned out, though, to be a failure.²²

To further this work of Reformation evangelism, there was also need for Christian literature and the Scriptures. In fact, by Calvin's death, his interest in Christian publishing meant that there were no less than 34 printing-houses in Geneva, with an annual printing capacity of around 300,000 books. This included Bibles in various European languages, like the *Geneva Bible*, the bedrock of early English Puritanism.

Geneva's missionary vision for Europe thus had a deep impact on the European continent. Little wonder Calvin could write: "When I consider how very important this corner [i.e. Geneva] is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over."²³

1. This article first appeared in the online journal *Reformation21*, 13 (September 2006). Reprinted by permission.
2. David B. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review*, 5, No.1 (Spring 1979), 17.
3. The first three quotes are cited by Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 17.
4. Jean-Marc Berthoud, "John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France" in *Fulfilling the Great Commission* (Westminster Conference Papers; [London]: Westminster Conference, 1992), 44–46.
5. Cited Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 18.
6. *Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 2:12.
7. *Commentary* on Isaiah 12:5.
8. "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 18.
9. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 19, n.23.
10. *Commentary* on Genesis 17:23.
11. *Sermon 196*, on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 [*Ioannis Calvinii Opera quae supersunt omnia*, eds. William Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss (*Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 57; Brunswick, 1885 ed.; repr. New York/London: Johnson reprint Corporation/Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, G.m.b.H., 1964), 29:175].
12. Cited Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 22.
13. *Letter 318* [in Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of John Calvin*, tr. Mr. Constable (1858 ed.; repr. New York: Lenox Hill Pub. & Dist. Co., 1972), II, 406].
14. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 22.
15. *Sermon 196*, on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 (*Ioannis Calvinii Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 29:175).
16. *Letter 339* (Bonnet, ed., *Letters*, II, 453).
17. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 20.
18. *Sermon 196*, on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 (*Ioannis Calvinii Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 29:175).
19. *Commentary* on Isaiah 2:3.
20. Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford, UK/Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 121.
21. W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin's Geneva: A Missionary Centre," *The Reformed Theological Review*, 42, No. 3 (September–December, 1983), 69.
22. See the story of this important mission in Amy Glassner Gordon, "The First Protestant Missionary Effort: Why Did It Fail?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8, No.1 (January 1984), 12–18.
23. *Letters*, II, 227.

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NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY

Profiting from the Parables [2]

by
DR. GERALD BILKES

“how readest thou?”

This is the question Christ asked the lawyer who came to Him (Luke 10:26). These lawyers referred to in the New Testament were experts in the laws of Moses. We would call them biblical scholars. They had studied the biblical laws for years, if not most of their lives. They were used to questions such as “What does the law say?” “What does this mean?” “How do you interpret that?”

It is good to ask ourselves whether we are interpreting the Word of God rightly. There is such a thing as “wresting” the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16) and “corrupting” the Word of God (2 Cor. 2:17). Sadly, this has happened a lot with the parables of Christ. There have been many wrong and even strange interpretations. Because the imagery of the parables is so rich, many have stretched the meaning of the parables. And despite their learning, biblical scholars have been no less guilty of this.

Reading Wrongly

I once heard the following interpretation of the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33). The parable tells of a woman who took leaven and mixed it into a large amount of dough until the leaven had spread all through the dough and leavened it. This wrong interpretation went like this: “The woman is a false prophet, or the devil himself. He takes the leaven of error or unrighteousness and brings it into the church, until the whole church is infected with and puffed up by error.”

Clearly, this is a wrong interpretation. In the context, our Lord is teaching about the mystery of the kingdom. God’s kingdom grows in ways that are mysterious and unexpected. Just as leaven makes bread expand in a way that is hidden to our natural vision, so the kingdom of heaven likewise grows in a way that can’t be traced. It surprises all our expectations.

Some in the Ancient Church and Middle Ages were responsible for skewed interpretations that have persisted until today. Augustine believed that the man who built on the rock was the person who builds his life on the church through his

baptism. He also believed that the good Samaritan was Jesus. Jesus takes up Adam, the wounded man, and puts him into the care of the innkeeper, which was Paul, or the Catholic church. Just as the good Samaritan entrusted two pennies to the innkeeper, so Christ, according to Augustine, gave the church the two sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Calvin and others repudiated these far-fetched interpretations.

It was not only the Ancient Church that mishandled the parables, however. Modern theologians have also twisted them. For example, Karl Barth, a modern theologian, believed that the prodigal son was a picture of Christ. In His incarnation, Christ left the Father’s house and went into the far country or this world. Of course, this is bizarre and leads to a host of unorthodox ideas. How could it be said that Christ “wasted his substance with riotous living”? How could Christ ever have said: “I have sinned against heaven and before thee”?

I once read another case of a bizarre interpretation, this time of the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30). Someone argued that this parable supposedly shows the evils of capitalism. The creditor was cruel and unjust and exploited the poor man who hid his talent, and helped the rich get only richer. Even a child can understand that this interpretation goes entirely against the grain of the message Christ intended to convey.

Reading Restrictedly

To avoid mishandling the parables as many have, some people have insisted we look for only one point per parable and no more. This was a common view for the past one hundred years, especially among scholars. How does this work practi-

cally? We're told that we should leave all the details to the side and decide on the one lesson that comes forth from the whole. For example, some say that the parable of the Sower does not really teach about all sorts of different responses to the Word of God. Instead, the only valid point is that the Word of God eventually will be fruitful, no matter what it might look like at first.

Though it is a good exercise to begin looking for the main point of a parable, most parables don't fit this rigid method. Sometimes Christ Himself explains a parable with a number of points. After He spoke the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–9), Christ gave at least four lessons deriving from that parable (see Luke 16:10–13). And again, Christ gave four lessons from the parable of the sower, one for each soil (Matt. 13:19–23).

Likewise, the parable of the prodigal son clearly makes at least two major points, one for each of the sons. If there were only one lesson in that parable, why would there be any attention given to the elder son? Or if the lesson lies with the elder son, why does the parable give so much attention to the repentance of the younger son?

Reading Rightly

There is one thing that we can learn from this simplistic solution: we need to resist the temptation to go where the parable itself does not take us. But that also means that we should go, as much as we can, to all the places where the parable does take us. Practically, that means that if a parable makes three points, we should find those three points. If it makes only a single point, we should find that one point.

How can you do that? How do you make sure you neither under-interpret or over-interpret the parables?

First of all, pay attention to the context. This means that you look at how the parable relates to what precedes and follows it. The three parables of Luke 15 come on the heels of the murmuring of the Pharisees that Jesus sits and eats with sinners (Luke 15:2). The parable of the good Samaritan is the answer to the question of the lawyer: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:30). The parable of the great supper follows the statement of a bystander: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15). In each of these cases, the context helps immensely in getting at the meaning of the parables.

Secondly, pay attention to the ending. Often, Christ will give a key to the interpretation of the parable in the conclusion of the parable. He concludes the parable of the Pharisee and publican with these words: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14). Likewise, Christ ends the parable of the

ten virgins with these telling words: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:13). The ending gives us firm guidance where to seek the meaning of the parable.

Thirdly, pay attention to the characters. Often, each character or group of characters represents a point or a message. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) has a point for each of the three main characters: the rich man, Lazarus, and the five brothers. From the rich man we learn that a good life in this world is no indication of a good life in the hereafter. From Lazarus we learn the corresponding lesson: though a believer might live in poverty here, he will be comforted in the next life. Finally, the point that comes to us regarding the rich man's brothers is that the Scriptures are sufficient unto salvation. Of course, more could be said about these points, but these are the three basic lines emerging from this parable.

Finally, be sober and scriptural. A good caution always when handling Scripture is to rein in our imagination, and be sure we do not go against the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere. We should watch against being overly inventive and subtle.

Questions:

1. Why should we be concerned that we interpret Scripture rightly? How would we answer someone who said: "Scripture is like a deep well. As long as you don't say something heretical, it doesn't really matter what you draw out of a passage"?
2. What's attractive about the common solution to the problem of interpreting the parables? Why is it not necessarily the best solution?
3. Read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). What might be a wrong interpretation of one or other details in the parable? Do you agree that there are three main points to this parable?
4. Read Matthew 13:24–30. How many main points or lessons does this parable contain? Check your answer in Matthew 13:37–43.

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THE Scottish Communion Season (2)

DR. DAVID MURRAY

In the last article we looked at the Thursday and Friday of the Scottish Communion Season. In this article we will cover the remaining three days, from Saturday to Monday. Following our previous pattern, we will characterize each day with one word.

Saturday: Preparation

Saturday is the day of preparation. Of course, Thursday and Friday are preparatory as well. However, these two days look within, for sin to confess and grace to encourage. Saturday prepares Christians for the Lord's Supper by turning their attention outwards, usually to the person of Christ. The morning service might be on one of the gospel accounts of Christ graciously dealing with sinners. There is a twofold purpose in this. First, the devotional tone of the sermons seeks to excite the affections of those who are preparing to sit at the Lord's Table. Second, tender words of encouragement are directed towards those who may be considering sitting at the Lord's Table for the first time.

After the Saturday morning service, those intending to sit at the Lord's Table are asked to remain behind. The minister of the congregation then comes to the front pew to lead the congregation in prayer. This is often a sweet time for the shepherd and his sheep as they reflect with thankfulness on the Great Shepherd's faithful keeping of them since they last sat together at the Lord's Table. Thoughts often turn to dear friends whose place at the table below is now empty.

After this prayer, each member of the congregation comes forward to shake the minister's hand and receive from him a "token" giving them a warrant to sit at the Lord's Table the next day. These small tokens are made of laminated card or even, if very old, of lead. Usually, the name of the congregation is on the token together with a phrase or verse of Scripture. The distribution of tokens to members of the congregation, and visiting members from other congregations, seeks to "protect"

the Lord's Table from those who have no right to be there. On the Sabbath morning, elders stand beside the Communion table and collect these tokens from the communicants as they come forward to sit down.

The Kirk Session (Consistory)

At this point it would be helpful, perhaps, to explain how a person becomes entitled to receive a Communion "token," as it is a bit different from most other traditions.

No one can sit at the Lord's table in Scottish Highland Presbyterian churches without first of all going before the Kirk Session, the equivalent of the Consistory, and giving a credible profession of faith.

After each Communion Season service, the minister intimates that the Kirk Session is willing to meet with anyone wishing to profess faith in the Saviour for the first time. And so, after each service, the elders gather with the minister to see if anyone will come to profess faith and seek permission to sit at the Lord's Table. This is always a time of great expectation and anxious anticipation, as the minister and elders wait to see if all their labors of past months have borne any visible fruit. Sometimes no one comes, and we have to submit to the Lord and patiently labor on. At other times—such blessed times—two, three, or even more might come trembling, one after another, to the Session room, to profess faith and seek admission to the Lord's Table.

Although some are able to give eloquent testimony of their conversion, that is the exception. Usually, at this emotionally charged time, people are very nervous and often tearful. It is obviously difficult for people to sit in front of the elders and describe their spiritual journey. A sensitive pastor and his elders will ask appropriate questions to help the person describe his or her experience of God's grace. Sometimes even that fails

to produce many words. However, usually the person is well known to the elders. They have seen the evidence of God's sovereign grace in his or her life. Although it is sometimes a bit of an ordeal, many can testify to the blessing and freedom they experienced when witnessing to God's grace in this loving and supportive environment. This practice also has a sifting effect by deterring those who have no experience of God's saving grace in their lives.

After hearing the person's testimony, the Kirk Session briefly reviews what was said while the applicant waits in another room. When the Kirk Session is satisfied that the person has a credible profession of faith—that walk matches words—he or she is called in and the minister intimates the Kirk Session's acceptance. A senior elder is asked to pray, the person is given a token, and receives the right hand of fellowship from the elders, together with a few whispered words of encouragement. I count it one of the greatest privileges in the world to listen to trembling souls speak publicly for the first time of the Lord's goodness and mercy towards them.

Word soon spreads that someone has "come forward" and this heightens the joy of the Communion Sabbath when the new communicant member will sit with God's people for the first time. This is also a time of many tears and much love as the new member is embraced and welcomed into the family of God.

Prayer Meeting

But, let us return to the Saturday of Preparation. We've noted that there is a morning service. Early Saturday evening, there is usually a Prayer Meeting led by one of the elders. As is the common practice in Scotland, the names of several male communicant members are selected and called out to lead the congregation in prayer. The prayers look back with thankfulness for the Communion Season thus far, and seek blessing on the ministers and the coming Sabbath services. Prayer is also made for those who might be under particular attack of the devil and especially for those who may be sitting at the Lord's Table for the first time.

After the Prayer Meeting, the minister and elders set out the Communion table and prepare the bread and wine. Then they gather around the table to pray for the flock and beseech heaven for the Lord's presence on the morrow.

Sabbath: Commemoration

"At last!" you might say, the Sabbath, the day of Commemoration.

The morning service is divided into three parts. First of all, there is the main sermon. As the Saturday sermon expounded Christ's person, this sermon expounds an aspect of Christ's atoning work. Secondly, there is the "fencing" of the Lord's Table. The minister will speak briefly from a discriminating text in order to encourage the poor in spirit to take their places at the Lord's Table and to dissuade the ungodly from sitting at the table and bringing judgment on themselves. Like a fence, the aim is to keep out those who shouldn't be there and keep in those who should. It is concluded by reading from Galatians 5:16–26. Thirdly, there is the Lord's Supper itself. As the congregation

sings Psalm 118:15–26, the table is prepared and the communicants come forward, give their tokens to the elders, and sit down. The minister reads the warrant in 1 Corinthians 11:23–28, gives thanks, and then gives a brief, Christ-centered address based on, say, the Song of Solomon or the Psalms, which describe the communion between the Lord and His people. The elements are then distributed by the elders in total silence. What a sacred time this is! After everyone is served, the minister gives one last brief address to encourage the believer to go out and live for Christ, and to impress on those who stayed away from the table their need and the Lord's provision for them. We then rise from the table singing Psalm 103:1–5.

The Sabbath evening service is characterized by unashamed evangelistic preaching to the unconverted—you must be born again, repent and believe the Gospel, death and judgment, hell, or other such themes. There is usually a great air of excitement and anticipation of God being present to save souls. God's people have been brought close to the Lord through the Communion Season, their spirits are revived, and they are anxious for their loved ones to enjoy what they've enjoyed. Many unconverted people come to these services and, throughout the years, many have been converted on such occasions.

After the evening service, the young people are invited to the manse where they are fed with refreshments, and then gather to hear the visiting ministers give their testimonies or speak about a spiritual experience they have had. The young people love these evenings. My sons call them "the children's communion"! In fact, the whole Communion Season is suffused with fellowship. After every service, morning and evening, God's people gather in various houses in small and large groups to discuss the sermons and share their Christian experiences.

Monday: Thanksgiving

On Monday, there is sometimes a service in the morning, but certainly one in the evening, when God's people gather to give thanks to God for all His mercies over the Communion Season. The minister will preach on themes of thanksgiving and the appropriate response to God's goodness.

Tuesday: Revival


The Communion Season officially ends on the Monday evening. However, the effects continue on to the Tuesday. And the effect is usually that of reviving the spirits of God's people. They have enjoyed a spiritual feast, and are ready to face the world again with renewed faith and rekindled longing for the everlasting heavenly communion table and season. Also the minister is revived. He has enjoyed the fellowship and ministry of fellow ministers, and, hopefully, he has seen some of his beloved flock profess faith for the first time. Finally, such Communion seasons have, in the past, been associated with widespread outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon communities leading to the revival of true Christianity. Oh, when will we see such days again?

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Brave New World? (1)

Embryo research is the new holocaust, genocide behind closed doors.

An interview with Dr. Douglas Milne



Dr. Douglas Milne is principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne. Born in Dundee, Scotland, he completed arts and divinity degrees at Aberdeen University, then served as a minister of the Free Church. Dr. Milne also completed post-graduate studies at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, as well as a doctorate in theology from South Africa. He went to Australia in 1978 to take up the position of professor of New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological College, where he has served for thirty years. His academic interests have expanded to include theology, ethics, and philosophy. In recent years he has developed a special interest in bioethics and has completed additional post-graduate research with an Australian university. He has published a number of books and articles on the Ten Commandments, the Gospel of Luke, the Parables of Jesus, the Pastoral Letters, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. In this and a subsequent article, Dr. Milne is interviewed by Peter Hastie, editor of The Australian Presbyterian, from which these articles are adapted with permission.

Dr. Milne, what is bioethics?

Bioethics is the study of ethics in the light of the new biotechnologies that have arisen in the second part of the twentieth century. As a discipline, it focuses on human life and human beings. Since we believe that human beings have ultimate value and intrinsic dignity, the manipulation of human life, for example, raises immediate ethical questions about human worth and dignity. Bioethicists are concerned about the rights and wrongs of manipulating human life at any stage, whether at the beginning of life, where many of these technologies are concentrated, or in the middle of life, through genetic engineering, or even perhaps at the end of life, through questions relating to euthanasia.

So, what are bioethicists attempting to do?

Bioethicists are professionals whose role is to look into the legitimacy of new technologies, therapies, and techniques that arise in relation to modern medicine, and to express an expert opinion, usually to ethical committees or medical professionals, who have the responsibility and the know-how to manage these technologies.

Do they have any special claim to expertise?

They are professionals in their own right. They have now replaced philosophers and theologians, who figured more in the early days of biomedicine. Bioethicists receive special training in ethics as well as in how to relate to hospital committees and other medical professionals who have the responsibility for forming public policies. So, they learn to serve a number of groups of people who have a stake in bioethics.

Do they tend to have a better understanding of ethical issues than theologians or philosophers?

I am not convinced that they do. There is a widespread opinion that for all the bioethical input that is available today, there seems to be a dangerous imbalance between the crucial sorts of decisions that are being made and the kind of serious debate that is required to address the underlying issues. The overall impression that observers are developing is that bioethicists tend to accede to the requests of scientists or those with vested interests in biotechnology.

Who are the vested interests behind the push for biotechnologies? How powerful are they?

The vested interests are easily identified by following the money trail. They are almost always associated with funding because the main stake holders in biotechnologies today are large and powerful bodies like governments, pharmaceutical companies, and multinational organizations. A lot of these bodies give generous grants to research, so they carry enormous influence. It can be very difficult for an individual to stand up to these vested interests and parties. There is a lot of lobbying that goes on in the world of biotechnologies that involves huge quantities of money. What drives most of it is the dollar and profit margins. This goes a long way to explaining why governments have such a vital interest in the area. It certainly explains a lot of the intense interest from researchers and pharmaceutical companies. In a sense, they are all people who support one another.

Who are the main players in the field of bioethics?

At the moment, the main players are probably the state and federal governments. This is so for a number of reasons. First, there is a lot of prestige that attaches to breakthroughs in new research. If governments can capture the very best people in these fields to come and work in their own city or state, then this certainly promotes a state, city, or major research center. So, it's good for kudos. But there's also the money factor. When certain places become renowned for research and development, then there are financial spin-offs. When a place becomes well known internationally, it has to be good for tourism. Foreign investors are also likely to be interested in frontline research in biotechnology. The potential for profits is enormous.

Are there many Christians involved in the field of bioethics?

That very much depends on what country you are talking about. Certainly the United States has a lot of Christians engaged in biomedicine. The Americans are the ones who have mounted the most serious and worthwhile challenges to some of the things that are going on or being proposed. Some centers in America specialize in bioethics and publish some excellent information for the general Christian public.

Who are they?

My own personal favorite is the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity in Deerfield, Illinois. It has a website: www.cbhd.org. The center provides quite outstanding and thoroughly up-to-date resources for people all over the world. It gives a Christian viewpoint on the latest developments and technologies and also provides a global coverage of the most recent events in biomedicine.

Why is bioethics such an important subject for Christians?

It's important for a number of reasons. First, it raises ethical issues. Christianity is an ethical religion. Ethics are an integral part of Christian teaching and form a central part of the teaching of the Bible. We only have to think of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. That's the first reason.

Second, bioethics raises philosophical issues that touch the very foundations of the Christian faith. It raises issues about the nature and identity of humankind, and questions about who we are, why we exist, how we should live in society, and what values we should choose. Further, it raises questions about the status of the institution of marriage and reproduction, and it also puts issues of eschatology on the discussion table as well. For instance, what sort of society do we plan for in the future? What sort of principles should govern life in the world that we are shaping with biotechnology?

Third, bioethics is going to have a significant impact on the shape of the world our children inherit. Since it will be an important formative influence on our cultural values, we owe it to our children to become increasingly involved in this debate. We need to be more aware of the shape of things to come so that we can give informed Christian advice to our children and other believers who are struggling to understand the significance of what is taking place around us.

Finally, I think that bioethics is an important area for Christian engagement with society because it offers an opportunity for the Christian churches to speak a word for God the Creator, and to provide the final Christian answer which we believe is in Jesus Christ. So, bioethics offers evangelistic entry points into society, too.

You said that one of the signs of a civilized society is a respect for the sanctity of human life. What is happening in the West that is threatening a distinctively Christian view of human life?

Basically, the theological view of the sanctity of life is being replaced with a much more secular and pragmatic belief in the quality of life. Belief in the sanctity of life is certainly a Christian distinctive which has played a major role in shaping the Christian Hippocratic tradition for two thousand years in western medicine. In the twentieth century, we have seen the decline of Christian influence and the rise of alternative movements like post-modernism and relativism. What we are discovering at the moment is that we need religious underpinnings to safeguard belief in the sanctity of life. That has been now largely lost and in its place has come a concern about so-called quality of life.

Bioethics raises philosophical issues that touch the very foundations of the Christian faith. It raises issues about the nature and identity of humankind, and questions about who we are, why we exist, how we should live in society, and what values we should choose.

Can you define "quality" for us?

Quality of life for many bioethicists means a life worth living according to their own subjective judgments. Of course, different people will have different views about what constitutes that, but basically quality of life refers to a level of well-being which would enable people to interact socially and enjoy a meaningful existence in a community. It would also be related to their ability to contribute something to the social well-being of that group.

For example, would quality of life include things like deafness or blindness?

Well, the more radical representatives of this position, people like Peter Singer for example, would take the view that such disabilities could well make such a life not worth living. Accordingly, they would place deaf people on a lower scale than hearing persons, and this, in turn, would imply that deaf people were less entitled to legal rights and protection than people without disabilities.

The more radical people in this group would be willing to deny full legal protection to people who, through genetic testing or other scientific means, could be shown to be more likely to suffer significant impairment to their quality of life in the future. This explains their support for abortion and their willingness to eliminate defective embryos. It also affects their approach to the problems of old age. For example, they are in favor of euthanasia. In some countries at the moment, we have voluntary euthanasia but, as we know from history, what starts out as voluntary euthanasia can very easily become compulsory euthanasia.

So, are you suggesting that some of these radicals, based on their line of reasoning, would have eliminated people like Beethoven and Helen Keller before they even came into the world?

That's exactly right. Beethoven suffered from profound deafness and Helen Keller was born blind and without any hearing. Presumably, if they had been subjected to today's genetic testing *in utero*, they would never have been born. We would never have enjoyed Beethoven's famous fifth symphony, for instance. Incidentally, the fact that ethicists like Singer see no problem in terminating embryos which could conceivably develop into famous writers and composers is a strong argument against their position that doesn't entail any religious justification. Some of the accomplishments of disabled people show us that quality of life isn't always tied up with our bodily condition. That reminds us that human existence is more than the life of the body, as Jesus Himself taught us.

What sources of knowledge does a bioethicist rely upon to formulate his or her views?

Most bioethicists (who are usually not Christians) start by accepting the consensus of modern medicine about basic principles, such as non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and autonomy. I mention these four because they are cardinal principles in modern biomedicine, and they have been popularized and established as guidelines through the work of Tom Beauchamp and James Childress. Their book is a classical

In some countries at the moment, we have voluntary euthanasia but, as we know from history, what starts out as voluntary euthanasia can very easily become compulsory euthanasia.

text and it's still a standard text for people in the field today. It draws its values from a number of sources—human experience, philosophical ethics based on generally accepted moral values, a moral understanding of human nature, and pragmatism. So, it lacks the broad foundation of Christian ethics.

Is it enough for Christians to know their Bibles when dealing with bioethics?

The Bible is the best place to start and, indeed, a necessary place to start for Christians doing bioethics. However, I think it's desirable to add other helps to the Bible. I am thinking here of the discipline of Christian theology because I have already said that biomedicine raises conceptual issues. For instance, bioethics raises the issue, "What is man?" So, we need a good biblical and Christian anthropology in order to do bioethics. The whole idea of the image of God is central to that. The problem for Christians doing bioethics is that the Scriptures don't specifically address most of the problems that we face in modern medicine. So the Christian worldview that Scripture gives us needs to be developed if we are to tackle the sort of questions that arise. In addition, I think it's good to be conversant with the history of Christian ethics and ethics in general.

Do you need to have any knowledge of science and medicine?

That is essential as well. You certainly need some knowledge of biology, particularly cellular life and development. You would also need to know something about modern genetics and the scientific techniques for manipulating, dividing, and reconnecting DNA. All of that is basic for understanding genetic engineering and the issues it raises.

What are the major doctrines in Scripture that underpin the sanctity of life?

The first would be the doctrine of divine creation out of nothing. I know that most scientists in the field of biotechnology believe in some form of evolution; nevertheless, I think it's very difficult to sustain a high view of human dignity using these assumptions (even those of theistic evolution). So, I think a clear and strong doctrine of creation, that is, of special creation, is most consistent with a belief in the sanctity of life. I have in mind here the early chapters of Genesis where God creates the human being with a great deal of purpose and forethought, and describes the human being as an image bearer of Himself. And that is true of all human beings, not just Christian believers. This is a defining aspect, if not the most defining aspect of our humanity. It's on that basis that Christians have asserted the sanctity of human life at every stage.

(to be concluded next month)

The Puritan Family (2)

*A holy family is a place of comfort, a church of God.... Oh that God would stir up the hearts of people thus to make their families as little churches, that it might not be in the power of rulers or pastors that are bad to extinguish religion, or banish godliness from any land!*¹

— Richard Baxter

• *Family worship is the most powerful means for child-rearing.* Puritan families gathered for worship once or twice each day.¹ *The Westminster Directory for Family Worship* (1647), written by Puritans, states that “family worship, which ought to be performed by every family, ordinarily morning and evening, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises.”²

Typically, Puritan family worship included several elements. First, there was prayer. The Puritans believed that God would pour out His fury on families that did not call on His name (Jer. 10:25). Family prayer was both a domestic obligation and a privilege. Puritan fathers normally prayed for five to ten minutes. They aimed for simplicity without being shallow. They strove to glorify God in their prayers while being specific in their petitions. They confessed family sins, asked for family mercies, and offered family thanksgivings. Their prayers, which were natural yet solemn, often consisted largely of bringing God’s own Word back to Him.³

Second, there was reading of Scripture. This was usually done by the father as head of the household, though some fathers delegated parts of it to family members who were capable of reading. The family usually read straight through the Bible, out of the conviction that God gave a whole Bible to make a whole Christian. On special occasions, such as the Lord’s Supper, the death of a loved one, or a national day of prayer and fasting, the father would select an appropriate Scripture reading.⁴

Third, there was instruction from Scripture. In accord with Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and 11:18–19, the Puritans believed that the father should interact with his family about sacred truth on a daily basis by means of questions, answers, and teaching. Fathers should undertake this exercise diligently and with passion, the Puritans believed. *The Directory for Family Worship* provides insight into how they were to do this:

The holy scriptures should be read ordinarily to the family; and it is commendable, that thereafter they confer, and by way of conference, make some good use of what hath been read and heard. As, for example, if any sin be reproved in the word read, use may be made thereof to make all the family circumspect and watchful against the same; or if any judgment be threatened or mentioned to have been inflicted, in that portion of scripture which is read, use may be made to make all the family fear lest the same or a worse judgment befall them, unless they beware of the sin that procured it: and finally, if any duty be

required, or comfort held forth in a promise, use may be made to stir up themselves to employ Christ for strength to enable them for doing the commanded duty, and to apply the offered comfort. In all which the master of the family is to have the chief hand; and any member of the family may propose a question or doubt for resolution.⁵

In leading the devotional time, the father aimed to remain pure in doctrine, relevant in application, and affectionate in manner. He asked and encouraged questions and, at times, lovingly examined the spiritual well-being of his children. Byfield says there are eight topics appropriate for family instruction: the fear of God, the meaning of the sacraments, the law of God, the consideration of God’s judgments, God’s great works on behalf of His people, how to hope in God, the general meaning of the Scriptures, and the reinforcing of what was preached in church.⁶ Recent sermons (on which family members took notes), providential occurrences in the family, church, or nation, and pertinent illustrations were fertile fields for the father to plow as he sought to bring home to his family the truth about sin, Christ, grace, spiritual life, holiness, and scores of other doctrines and issues.

Fourth, there was praise in psalm-singing. Most Puritans believed, as did Philip Henry, father of the famed commentator Matthew Henry, that Psalm 118:15a (“The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous”) refers to daily singing in the tents of the Israelite families. By extension, Henry argues that the sound of rejoicing and salvation should rise from Puritan family homes through daily singing. In such singing, God is glorified and families are edified. It promotes devotion as it informs the mind and warms the heart. The graces of the Spirit are stirred up in us, and our growth in grace is stimulated (Col. 3:16). Singing must be biblical and doctrinally pure, and it must be done heartily and with feeling (Col. 3:23).⁷

Daily family worship was a necessity and a privilege in the typical Puritan home. It was viewed as a powerful tool to help parents rear children. Love for the glory of God and the welfare of His church called for family worship. Failure to lead the family in worship was failure to be a father, for no father could neglect family worship and keep a good conscience. William Whately says that a father who does not lead his household in the ways of God through family worship “keeps an household of fiends, a Seminary for the devil, a nursery for hell, and the kingdom of death.”⁸

• *Discipline is an essential part of child-rearing.* Bringing up children in the fear of the Lord included firm discipline, the Puritans said. Such discipline involved more than teaching and modeling proper behavior. “Doctrine and example alone are insufficient,” John Norton writes. “Discipline is an essential part of the nurture of the Lord.”⁹

Reproof plus the rod gives wisdom, the Puritans said. When a child is disobedient, verbal reproof must be administered first. In this, the parent shows the child that he or she has committed sin against God and man, and must repent. If verbal reproof is ineffective, the rod must be used as “a means appointed by God,” Gouge says, “to help good nurture and education of children. It is the last remedy that a parent can use: a remedy which may do good when nothing else can.”¹⁰ Spanking must be measured according to the offense committed, and must be done in a timely manner, with love, compassion, prayer, and self-control.¹¹

Perkins warns against using excessive force in discipline, which will stir a child to wrath (Eph. 6:4), and against being too lenient, as Eli was with his sons (1 Sam. 2:23).¹² On the one hand, the child’s naturally evil will must be broken. “Train them up in exact obedience to yourselves, and break them of their own wills,” Baxter advises.¹³ On the other hand, the Puritans did not want to break a child’s spirit in the process of breaking his or her will, and they advocated that discipline be fair, gentle, and geared to the temperament of the child.¹⁴ Parents were to see that their children’s stubborn wills and selfishness were restrained and repressed, even as their attractive qualities were commended.¹⁵

Thus, the Puritans steered a balanced course between harshness and leniency. Despite their strong convictions about a child’s inner depravity, they were optimistic that God would save that child, for they believed that God ordinarily works to save His covenant seed.¹⁶ Cotton Mather says, “Young saints will make old angels; and, blessed be God, there are such young saints in the world.” Recalling his own childhood, he says, “The great care of my godly parents was to bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: whence I was kept from many visible outbreakings of sin which else I had been guilty of; and whence it was that I had many good impressions of the Spirit of God upon me, even from my infancy.”¹⁷

• *Children should welcome their parents’ help in making major life decisions.* In the seventeenth century, young men and women prepared for a lifelong profession. The Puritans reasoned that God had foreordained a particular profession for every believer, through which he or she was to live and work to God’s glory. As young people entered their early teens, their parents were expected to help them determine what those professions might be. Adams summarizes their task well: “Christian parents are concerned not only to train-up their children for business in the world, but to do what they can to provide an honest, fit, and useful calling or profession, wherein they may serve their generation according to the will of God (Acts 13:36), and the abilities he hath bestowed on them, and the inclinations he

hath implanted in them, whereby they may mostly promote the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁸

Similarly, Christian parents were to help their young people select a suitable mate for life. There were at least five major criteria parents considered, in the following order of priority: (1) Would the proposed spouse walk with their son or daughter with wisdom and genuine godliness in marriage? Such qualities were necessary for the marriage to be “in the Lord.” (2) Would the proposed spouse fit the biblical description of what a marriage partner is to be? Does the proposed husband have good leadership skills and a loving demeanor? Does the proposed wife show submission and reverence to her own father? A biblical mindset about marriage and a character that reflected that mindset was of utmost importance. (3) Was the proposed spouse mature and properly motivated for entering into marriage? It was necessary to avoid marrying out of wrong motivations, such as the love of money or power. (4) Was the proposed spouse fairly equal to their son or daughter in terms of class and financial resources? It was necessary to avoid being “unequally yoked” culturally and socially, because people did not change classes often or easily three centuries ago. (5) Was the proposed spouse somewhat attractive in the eyes of their son or daughter? It was felt that there should be at least some romantic spark to begin with, though the Puritans taught that most romance would develop after marriage. Note that appearance was the last and least matter to be concerned about; marriages were built more on character than on appearance.¹⁹

Puritan pastors advised parents and children to avoid two extremes. First, parents were not to force their children into occupations and marriages to which the children were not attracted. “Though the match may seem meet [fitting] in the parents’ eye, yet he may not force his children thereto,” Gouge writes. “Though the authority of parents ought in this case to be inviolable, yet a middle course is so to be held, as the parties may willingly with a mutual consent join themselves together.”²⁰ Second, children were not to dismiss their parents’ advice because they were not immediately drawn to it. Rather, they were to seriously consider that their parents had their best end in view, were wiser than their children, and often knew what was best for them. When parental advice differed substantially from a son’s or daughter’s desire, the young man or woman was expected to pray about the advice and consider it seriously before, if necessary, politely and reverently telling parents that he or she could not in good conscience pursue the recommended spouse or occupation.²¹

Thorough Parental Involvement

Many other notable tasks of Puritan parents—such as physical provision, recreational guidance, and preparing a will—cannot be addressed here. Suffice it to say that, from conception to marriage, parents were thoroughly involved in the lives of their children. In every area, the parental task was to lead children to God and to do His will. Puritan parents prayerfully awaited

God's blessing on their endeavors. Blessing was measured primarily by their children's walking in communion with God, manifesting holiness in their lives, and exercising their gifts to the well-being of family, church, and society.

The Puritans scorned those who neglected the tasks of child-rearing, regarding them as fools and scoundrels. Puritan preachers frequently issued solemn warnings to parents who were neglectful in child-rearing. On the Judgment Day, Richard Mather says, there will be children who are condemned partly because their parents have neglected to bring them up in the fear of the Lord. These children will then accuse their parents in words like these:

All this that we here suffer is through you; you should have taught us the things of God, and did not; you should have restrained us from sin and corrected us, and you did not; you were the means of our original corruption and guilt, and yet you never showed any care that we might be delivered from it. Woe unto us that we had such carnal and careless parents, and woe unto you that had no more compassion and pity to prevent the everlasting misery of your own children.²²

With such warnings, Puritan parents generally performed their childrearing duties with great seriousness, taking a theological, objective, and uncompromisingly biblical approach rather than a theoretical, subjective, and pragmatic approach. The result was that many families became like miniature churches. In his 1646 tract *The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Nonconformist*, the Puritan John Gere says, "His family he [the ideal Puritan] endeavoured to make a Church, both in regard of persons and exercises, admitting none into it but such as feared God; and labouring that those that were born in it, might be born again to God."²³

According to the Puritans, the well-being of the local church and society depends on what children learn in the family.²⁴ Well-ordered families, Cotton Mather says, "naturally produce a good order in other societies." He concludes, "Families are the nurseries for Church and Commonwealth; ruin families and you ruin all."²⁵

That the ideas summarized in these articles are familiar to many of us is a testimony to the effect Puritan teaching had on later generations of educators. Ultimately, of course, their ideas were sound because they were drawn from Scripture. They were experts at combining personal piety with a comprehensive Christian worldview, one of the hallmarks of biblical Calvinism. Beginning with the premise that the Bible is a reliable repository of truth, they had a basis from which to apply their Christian faith to all areas of marriage and family life. Packer concludes that the Puritans are "the creators of the English Christian marriage, the English Christian family and the English Christian home."²⁶ We need to recover their Calvinist vision, in the words of Philip Arthur, "by recovering their expectation that faithfulness to God in the commonplace things of life will be rewarded; that it is a high and noble aim to attempt the difficult balancing act of seeing that

every relationship is honoured; that we meet our obligations to God, to the local church, community and Commonwealth, that we honour and serve spouse, parents, children, employers and employees, in other words that we do the ordinary things well in dependence on God knowing that he honours those who honour him."²⁷ Here is solid, honorable, practical Calvinism, worthy of emulation and sorely needed in our day of self-gratification and disrespect for authority, a day in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

1. For an excellent treatment of family worship by a Puritan, see Obadiah Heywood, "The Family Altar," in *The Works of Oliver Heywood* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 4:294–418.
2. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 419.
3. See Thomas Doolittle, "How May the Duty of Daily Family Prayer be Best Managed for the Spiritual Benefit of Every One in the Family?" in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689*, 2:194–271.
4. Cf. George Hamond, *The Case for Family Worship* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 2005).
5. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 419–420.
6. Nicholas Byfield, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker Publications, 2001), 42.
7. Cf. Horton Davies, "Puritan Family Worship," in *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Glasgow: Dacre Press, 1948), 278–285.
8. William Whately, *A Care-Cloth or the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage* (Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1975), 16; cf. Matthew Henry, "On Family-Religion," *Complete Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 1:254–257, and Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002).
9. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 80.
10. Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, 403–408.
11. *Ibid.*, 406; cf. John Dod and Richard Cleaver, *A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (London: Thomas Man, 1632), 179–180.
12. Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, 1:694; cf. Thomas Lye, "What May Gracious Parents Best Do for the Conversion of Those Children Whose Wickedness is Occasioned by Their Sinful Severity or Indulgence?" in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689*, 3:154–184.
13. Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 1:450.
14. J. Philip Arthur, "The Puritan Family," in *The Answer of a Good Conscience*, Westminster Conference, 1997 (London: n.p., 1998), 85.
15. John Robinson, *The Works of John Robinson* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851), 1:247; cf. Arthur Hildersham, "Disciplining Children," in *The Godly Family*, ed. Samuel Davies (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 104–137.
16. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 84; Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (London: R. Baynes, 1822), 2:442.
17. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 84.
18. Adams, *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689*, 2:338.
19. Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*, 410–413.
20. *Ibid.*, 412.
21. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 79.
22. Quoted in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 84.
23. Quoted in Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), x.
24. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 74.
25. Quoted in Carden, *Puritan Christianity in America*, 175.
26. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), 341–342.
27. Arthur, "The Puritan Family," 91.

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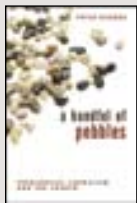
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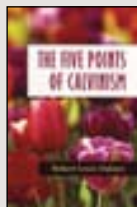
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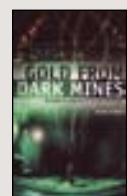
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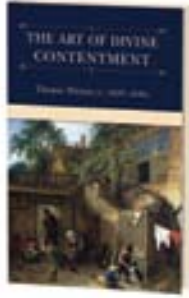
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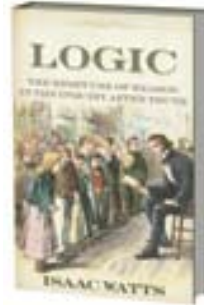
Thomas Watson

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John R. Muether

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The Forgiving Parent and Teacher

JAMES W. BEEKE

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

— MATTHEW 6:12

Do you want God to forgive you? “Yes,” you answer.
Are you forgiving your children, relatives, friends, and students?

“If you knew what he did to me, or what she said about me, you would agree that I cannot forgive this person, or at least not yet!” But notice that our text does not put limitations on forgiveness. Also observe that our text does not speak in a future tense. It refers to the present, as we pray today. “Our Father which art in heaven...forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” God joins two things together here. Prayer that asks God for forgiveness is joined to the act of forgiving others. Let us not attempt to separate what God has joined together.

Some misread our text. They reinterpret the verse to say, “...as we forgive those who have first come and humbly confessed their errors and apologized to me.” Or “as we forgive others once we are convinced that they really mean it and have really repented.” Or “as we forgive others when we feel ready.” Or “as we forgive others, unless they have committed a serious offense against us.” But the truth is that God’s Word does not include any of these stipulations. It simply and clearly states, “As we forgive our debtors.”

This truth does not mean that the rebellious daughter should not be reprimanded or that the misbehaving student should not be corrected or that the abuser should not be judicially punished. What our text does mean, however, is that as a parent or teacher, I am to forgive everyone for anything done wrong against me. “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25).

Heavy burdens are produced by an unforgiving spirit. Parents may feel this weight when they awake each morning and go to sleep each night. A teacher may carry this burden to work. We may groan and suffer under this pressure for days, months, or years. Consider the embittered mother who continually dwells on how her daughter mistreated her years ago. What a heavy burden to carry around wherever she goes! Think of the father who becomes so depressed every time he thinks about his son who rebelled and said such cruel things about him when he left home.

Forgiveness offers release. It allows a parent to break free from a heavy burden of bitterness. It enables a teacher to teach with a new sense of delight and optimism. Forgiveness frees a person to smile with new joy.

You say, “Oh, I want to forgive. I want to be delivered from carrying this baggage, but I can’t. The moment I think of what she said or what he did, I just can’t!” My dear friend, you are right. You cannot. But there is One who can. His name is Jesus. Look to Him.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Dear child of God, how has God forgiven you? Did He not do so from pure grace? Were you not totally undeserving of His forgiveness? So forgive others. Forgive others “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Pray to God for a spirit and courage to freely forgive. Not because your son deserves it or because your student has now earned it or because the offender has demonstrated sufficient repentance. But forgive graciously. Forgive for Christ’s sake.

Do you see what is wrong with waiting to forgive until I feel ready? Or until he confesses to me? Or until I see that she really means it? Or until he has paid the price and truly repents? Adding these to our text turns the focus on me and on the other person. God calls us to lift our vision. Look higher. Do not think, speak, act, or forgive based on your feelings or on the behavior of others. Forgive as God instructs you. Forgive graciously. Forgive while looking to Jesus.

Jesus knows what it means to be slandered, mocked, ridiculed, falsely condemned, abused, hit, spit upon, and yes, even killed unjustly. But as they drove the nails through His hands, He prayed, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). Do you think that He will not help you, when you ask Him for a forgiving spirit?

Why would anyone not want to be relieved from carrying the heavy burden of an unforgiving spirit? If you continue to focus on one person and the wrongs he or she has done to you, you are allowing that person to still control you and bring you into bondage and depression. Do not cling to your burden. Cut it loose. Let it go. Do not look for reasons to forgive in others or in yourself. Focus higher. Look to Jesus. Freely forgive! Graciously pardon! Do this for *His* sake.

Are you a forgiving parent, a pardoning teacher?

James W. Beeke is a member of the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Chilliwack, British Columbia, and an educational consultant and superintendent of schools in China.



FOR OUR CHILDREN

by DIANA KLEYN

Another New Year

On December 31, we look back over the past year. We remember the sad times and the happy times. What sad times can you remember? What happy times come to mind? Are there things in the past year you wish had never happened? Are there days you wish you could repeat? When you look ahead to 2009, what do you wish for? There are many good things that you may ask God for: health, safety, good friends, good grades at school, and a happy family. But you must remember, children, that you also have a soul. One day, sooner or later, our bodies will die, but our souls will live forever. We must care for our bodies, but we must not forget about our soul's needs.

Should children think about eternity? Should children be concerned about their souls? Shouldn't they wait until they are older and understand the Bible better? No, children, it is a mistake to wait until you are older! The best time to think about these things is now. Did 2008 seem like a very long year to you? Does it seem like a long time since January 1, 2008? When you are young, a year seems like a long time; you may think you have lots of time to seek the Lord. Don't put it off. The older you become, the busier you get, and it is harder to find quiet time to spend with the Lord. It is best to seek the Lord when you are young. God tells us, "Behold, now is the accepted [or, best] time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2b).

When Jesus was on earth, some mothers brought their children to see Him. These mothers believed it was important that their children be blessed by the Savior. The disciples, however, believed that the children should not bother Jesus. They thought Jesus had more important things to do. They tried to send away the mothers and their children. "But when

Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer [which means let, or allow] the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). You are not too young: verse 13 says they were "young children"; Luke tells us they were "infants" (Luke 18:15). This passage of Scripture is very short, but it contains a very important message for you, children.

Jesus was upset when the disciples tried to send away the little children. He said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not try to stop them!" Jesus is happy when children come to Him. He is in heaven now, but yet He is everywhere. When you pray, He hears you. He is never angry when little children come to Him in prayer; He is always ready to listen to whatever you want to tell Him.

You might wonder what kinds of things you may talk to Him about. You may tell Him all that is in your heart. Jesus already knows all about you. He made you and cares for you every day. Jesus is interested in everything you say and do. Your parents love you and are interested in you, too, but they cannot always be with you, and sometimes they are unable to give you their attention because they are busy or they don't feel well. The Lord Jesus is never too busy; He is always listening and watching. Jesus wants you to tell Him everything. You may tell Him your disappointments and frustrations, as well as your joys.

Jesus is not just a kind and compassionate Man. He is much more than that. He is the Son of God. He came into this world to save sinners; He is a Savior. You must confess your sins. He knows better than you do that you are a sinner, even though you are only a child. You cannot hide anything

from Him. He saw you when you took another cookie when Mom said not to; He heard what you said to your brother when he wouldn't let you play with his toys; He knew what you were thinking when your dad asked you to do your homework or help your mother in the kitchen. Jesus already knows all these things, but He wants you to honestly tell Him about them. He wants you to ask for forgiveness. He wants you to ask for a new heart that loves Him more than anything else.

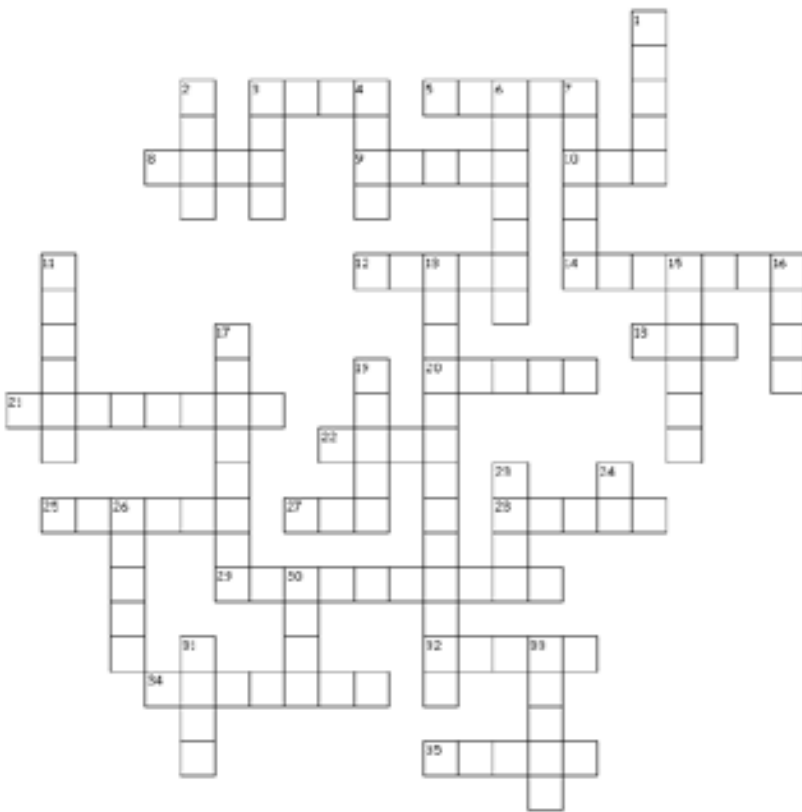
Are you entering 2009 with or without the Lord Jesus as your Savior? If He is your Savior, how blessed you are! Then your sins are forgiven and you are safe for all eternity. Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to work in your heart and draw you closer to God. Ask Him to make you useful in God's kingdom.

If you are still living without the Lord Jesus as your Savior, you must flee at once to Him! Tell Him that you need Him to wash you and cleanse you from your sins. He will not turn

you away. If you ask Him for a new heart, He will answer you. When those mothers brought their little children to Jesus, He "took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). How loving and kind Jesus was to these children! He will receive you just as kindly. Ask Him to make this year the year of your new birth, when you are born into God's family. If you feel that your heart is hard and that you do not feel sorry for your sins, then ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and to give you a heart that longs for Him. Read your Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's Word. Ask the Lord Jesus to be your Savior. Ask Him to make this the best year of your life. He Himself encourages you: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).

Diana Kleyn is the author of numerous books for children.

— BIBLE QUIZ —



Across:

3. "Now set your heart and your _____ to seek the LORD your God" (1 Chronicles 22).
5. "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek _____, which was crucified" (Matthew 28).
8. "Your heart shall _____ that seek God" (Psalm 69).
9. "O LORD, put me not to _____" (Psalm 119:31).
10. "Then shall ye call upon me, _____ ye shall go _____ pray unto me, _____ I will hearken unto you" (Jeremiah 29).
12. "But seek ye _____ the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6).

14. "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set _____ to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20).
18. "Evil men understand not judgment: _____ they that seek the LORD understand all things" (Proverbs 28).
20. "A new _____ also will I give you..." (Ezekiel 36).
21. "... for thou, LORD, hast not _____ them that seek thee" (Psalm 9).
22. "...the _____ is short" (1 Corinthians 7).
25. "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by _____ and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Daniel 9).
27. "They shall go, and seek the LORD their _____" (Jeremiah 50).
28. "For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek _____ the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34).
29. "...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that _____ seek him" (Hebrews 11).
32. "Look unto me, and be ye _____, all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45).
34. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the _____ of God" (John 3).
35. "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the _____ heart" (Psalm 119:2).

Down:

1. "...if thou seek him, he will be _____ of thee..." (1 Chronicles 28).
2. "...I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in _____" (Isaiah 45).
3. "...with my spirit within me will I _____ thee early..." (Isaiah 26).
4. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was _____" (Luke 19).
6. "The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that _____ him" (Lamentations 3).
7. "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall _____ for me will all your heart" (Jeremiah 29).

11. "...Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is _____" (Job 28).
 13. "For it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain _____ upon you" (Hosea 10).
 15. "I _____ the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34).
 16. "Thy _____, LORD will I seek" (Psalm 27).
 17. "So Jotham became mighty, because he _____ his ways before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 27).
 19. "I _____ unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah" (Psalm 3).
23. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, _____ ye upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55).
 24. "...seek, and _____ shall find ..." (Matthew 7).
 26. "He _____ life of thee, and thou gavest it him" (Psalm 21).
 30. "Seek ye the _____ and his strength, seek his face continually" (1 Chronicles 16).
 31. "those that seek me early shall _____ me" (Proverbs 8).
 33. "O God, thou art my God; _____ will I seek thee" (Psalm 63).

Thanks again to all who answered last month's quiz!

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Joel Averink | Joanne Kroesbergen | Anna Van Beek |
| Samuel Averink | Allison Krygsman | Leah Van Beek |
| Emily Beeke | Kristen Krygsman | Colleen VanDalen |
| Marianna Beeke | B.G. Marsh | Megan VanderStel |
| Sarah Beeke | Hailey Meerdink (2) | Olivia VanderStel |
| Lauren Bilkes | Nicholas Meschke | Christian VanManen |
| Leah Boerkoel (2) | Jenna Nieuwenhuis | Christy VanManen |
| Neal Boerkoel (2) | Rogelio Rodriguez | Colin VanManen |
| Andrew Boesterd | Ashlyn Roos (2) | Zachary VanVliet |
| Ronald Clemons | Kimberly Roos (2) | David Van Vugt |
| Janae den Hertog | Emma Schmidt | Lauren Van Vugt |
| Matthew den Hertog (2) | Laura Schmidt | Danique Veldhuizen |
| Phillip Kamp | Britney Spoelstra | Erwin Veldhuizen |
| Joanna Klyn | Derrick Stubbe | Wilena Veldhuizen |
| Amanda Koppert | Heidi Stubbe | Heather Vrugteveen |
| Jacob Koppert | Kaitlyn Stubbe | Kaitlyn Vrugteveen |

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

- meek, humble, kind, Prince of Peace, Son of God, Son of Man, perfect, rejected, despised, loving, Redeemer, Savior, Lamb of God, Messiah, gracious
- "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29b).

Please send your puzzle answers to:
 Banner Puzzles and Questions
 Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn
 540 Crescent St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
 e-mail: ckleyn@comcast.net

STORY FOR CHILDREN

DIANA KLEYN

How God Used a Little Girl

A little girl went to visit her grandparents for a few weeks in a distant city. The girl's name was Abby and she was about nine years old. Since her grandparents lived so far away, Abby didn't know them very well. She wondered how they would get along. Her fears were soon put to rest when the train finally pulled into the station. Her grandparents were there to greet her with hugs and kisses. When they got home, they ate a delicious meal that Grandma had lovingly prepared. While they ate, they caught up on family news. Abby noticed that Grandpa did not close the meal with Bible reading or prayer like she was used to at home, but she remembered that her mother had told her that her grandparents did not know the Lord. Abby was thankful for the Bible she had brought along, and read in it before she went to sleep. She prayed that the Holy Spirit would work in her grandparents' hearts, and that He would help her to be obedient to God's Word.

When Abby awoke the next morning, she got dressed and went to look for Grandma. Grandpa had already left for work. When Abby didn't find Grandma in the kitchen, she knocked at the bedroom door.

"Come in!" called Grandma. "Good morning! I'm just a little tired," she explained.

"Would you like me to read to you?" Abby suggested.

"Oh, that would be nice!"

Abby went to fetch her Bible. If Grandma was surprised to see a Bible in her granddaughter's hands, she didn't say it. Abby began at the book of Matthew and read a few chapters in her clear, childish voice. When she closed the Bible, she looked up shyly and asked, "Would you like me to pray with you now?"

"Of course!" answered Grandma. "That would be nice."

Later, Grandma told a friend, "I thought she meant to 'say her prayers,' and that she only wanted me to listen to her recite the Lord's Prayer. But, when I heard that dear child pray straight from her heart to her Father in heaven, it struck me that I had never prayed in that way. She talked to God like she knew Him. She spoke with so much love and concern for her parents, her brothers and sisters, and for me and my husband! There was no pride, no show, only gentleness and childlike trust."

Abby did not know it, but her grandmother was deeply affected by her simple faith and trust in God. Grandma realized that Abby was a child of God, and this made her careful of her words and actions. She did not want to corrupt this precious girl. In comparison to her granddaughter, Grandma



felt unclean and polluted. She did not realize that the Holy Spirit was beginning to show her what lived in her heart.

Sunday came. That morning at breakfast, Abby asked where they went to church, for it never crossed her mind that people as dear and kind as her grandparents did not attend church. Her grandparents exchanged guilty looks. They did not want to admit the truth to Abby, so Grandpa quickly decided that they were going to attend the church a few streets over. It was a good sermon, but religion was all new to Abby's grandparents and they did not understand much of what they heard. Their interest was growing, however, so that day and the days and weeks following, they asked Abby many questions about God, His Son Jesus, and the way of salvation. Every day, the elderly couple learned more. They gladly listened to Abby's cheerful singing and her heartfelt prayers. Grandpa began to read the Bible after meals and at bedtime. Not only did Abby's grandparents learn about God with their minds, but the Holy Spirit blessed this knowledge to their hearts and souls. Soon this aged couple began to offer up their own prayers, though they were well aware that they had wasted many years in living without God. They knew that they did not deserve God's mercy, but they clung to the promises of God's own Word.

Abby's grandmother later wrote, "In this way the Lord helped me, step by step, till at last I was brought to cast myself entirely on Christ for my salvation. My husband, too, has learned to love the truth as much as I do, and we are both striving to serve God."

What a blessing Abby's visit with her grandparents turned out to be! God used this little girl to bring salvation to an elderly couple. Perhaps you wonder how it came to be that the grandparents were ignorant of God while their granddaughter loved Him as a child. Neither Abby's grandparents nor her parents had been raised in godly homes, but when Abby was around four years old, she was invited to attend the local Sunday school. There she first learned to love the Savior. Abby told her family what she had been taught, and her mother became interested and began to attend church with her. This resulted in her mother's, and later her father's conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear children, do you love the Savior? Do you long to be obedient to Him and useful in His kingdom? The Lord is pleased to use young children in His kingdom. God used Abby for the conversion of her family. If you are one of His children, you may ask Him to make you useful as well. Are you afraid that you are not one of His children? Ask Him to give you a new heart. God will give you the Spirit of Christ if you ask Him. He will wash away your sin and fill your heart with love and kindness. May the merciful heavenly Father guide your feet into the path of salvation. He promises that if you seek Him, you will find Him: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Adapted from *Six Steps to Honor, or, Great Truths Illustrated*, by Rev. H. P. Andrews. New York: Hunt & Eaton, Cincinnati: Cranston & Curts, n.d.

CHURCH NEWS

HRC CLASSIS MINUTES

Following are the abridged minutes of the HRC Classis meeting, recently held in Jordan, Ontario on Friday, October 24, 2008.

Opening of Classis

Rev. J. Neels opened the Classis meeting with the singing of Psalter 428:1–2 and reading Colossians 1:24–2:7. Here Paul shares his burden for the believers in Colosse to become encouraged and united in the gospel of Christ, a burden that we as church leaders also have for our congregations.

Special Events

Classis noted that, since the last meeting, Rev. D. Lipsy accepted a call to The Reformed Church now meeting in Pyatt, Arkansas, and Rev. D. Overbeek's family received another healthy baby girl.

Credentials and Officers

Credentials for the delegates were received and the following officers appointed:

- Chairman: Rev. Mark Kelderman (by vote at the previous Classis)
- Vice-Chairman: Rev. Bart Elshout
- Clerk: Rev. Brian DeVries
- Treasurer: Elder Harry Brouwer

Classis reappointed Rev. Don Overbeek as Minutes Secretary and Mr. William Tanis, Sr. as Preparations Secretary.

Approval of Agenda and Previous Minutes

Classis moved to accept the agenda as supplied by the Preparations Secretary and the Spring 2008 minutes.

Spiritual Welfare Reports

Classis heard reports from each congregation and outreach, following each report with prayer specific to the needs of each flock. In sum, each report gave evidence to the Lord's faithfulness and presence with us. The gospel is faithfully proclaimed from each pulpit and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Word of God. Please pray for continued divine blessings upon these appointed means.

Certain concerns that ran through these reports include the following: the desire to

minister to the young people in a faithful yet relevant way, the continued struggle with weekday service and prayer meeting attendance, and the fear of increasing worldliness or blatant disregard to the authority of the Word.

Visitors and Correspondence

Classis welcomed the following visitors from other churches who brought greetings to us:

- Rev. Michael Ives of the Presbyterian Reformed Churches
- Elder Connor Keuning of the Free Reformed Churches
- Rev. Bert Pohl of the Free Church of Scotland Continuing
- Rev. John Bouwers of the United Reformed Churches

Letters were received from Rev. C. Molenaar and the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Old Business

Classis moved that meetings would be held only once per year, starting after the Spring 2009 meeting. Classis then appointed a committee of ministers and elders to study the ramifications of this decision and to bring recommendations to the Spring 2009 meeting.

In accordance with the church order, Classis decided to no longer retain the ministerial credentials of Rev. Richard DeRuiter as an HRC minister.

Committee Reports

Classis took the following actions after reviewing each committee report:

- appointed Rev. M. Fintelman to the Article 49 committee.
- appointed Mr. Dick Westrate and Mr. Jim Bleeker to the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* Committee.
- approved the BSGT and BTT budgets as presented.
- moved to offer level 1 corresponding relationship to the Presbyterian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches.
- received the adopted Westminster Standards and encouraged all consistories to review them before a vote will be taken on whether or not to accept them as an addition to our denominational confessions at the Spring 2009 meeting.

- appointed Rev. D. Lipsy to serve on the Church Correspondence Committee and approved the committee budget as submitted.
- appointed Mr. Henry Jansen and Mr. Will TerHarmsel to the Denominational Operating Fund Committee.
- approved the Denominational Fund and Student Support Fund budgets.
- reviewed the denominational website and discussed plans for further development.
- appointed Rev. W. Koenen to the Disaster Fund Committee and approved the budget as submitted.
- appointed Mr. Mark Scholten and Elder Case VanKempfen to the Gospel Trumpet Committee.
- approved the Gospel Trumpet budget as presented.
- appointed Mr. Robert Stam to the Canadian Government Correspondence Committee and approved the request that our five Canadian congregations become affiliated with the Association for Reformed Political Action in Canada.
- appointed Mr. Tim denHollander to the USA Government Correspondence Committee.
- adopted a policy to maintain a list of officially recognized independent mission endeavors engaged in by members of our congregations, thus allowing coverage in the *Glad Tidings* publication and other privileges.
- approved the Mission Committee and Tent Making Committee budgets.
- reappointed Mr. Dave VanManen to the Office-Bearers Conference Committee.
- approved the Theological Seminary Committee report, which included the following decisions: to add two FRC voting members to the PRTS Board of Trustees pending final approval at the Spring 2009 meeting, to promote the three HRC students to the next year of study, to approve the 2009 PRTS budget, and to appoint Elder Jake Sinke and Elder John Beeke as the new chairman and vice-chairman of the committee.
- appointed Mr. William TerHarmsel to the Puritan Reformed Theological Foundation.

Points

1. Classis moved to allow the Burgessville consistory to proceed to the second step of Christian discipline with one of its members.
2. Classis forwarded Franklin Lakes' point regarding proposed changes to HRC Student Support to the PRTS Board of Trustees to examine the current practices of determining the amount of financial support HRC-approved students receive.
3. Classis commissioned the appointment of a new committee to oversee the Emeritus Benevolent Fund to be finalized at the Spring 2009 meeting.
4. Classis moved that the members of the Article 49 Committee be selected from four different HRC congregations in all future appointments.

Moderatorships

Classis adjusted several moderatorships to accommodate recent changes. Positive reports were received of a church visitation in Chilliwack, BC as well as verbal reports regarding the Burgessville and Jordan congregations.

Customary Questioning

Classis moved to express its desire that the Bradford consistory be reconstituted, leaving the details and timing of such action to the discretion of the Burgessville and Bradford leadership.

Next Meeting and Closing

The next Office Bearers' Conference, prayer service, Theological Seminary Committee (TSC) meeting, and Classis meeting will be March 25-27, 2009 in Grand Rapids, the Lord willing. Responsibilities were assigned as follows: calling church—Burgessville; Office Bearers' Conference—Mr. Jim Beeke on "Catechizing or Teaching Children and Teens"; Classis prayer service—Rev. J. Green-dyk; and Classis Chairman—Rev. D. Lipsy.

As Vice-Chairman, Rev. B. Elshout made a few closing comments, expressing heartfelt thanks to all present. The meeting was closed with the singing of Psalter 128 and with prayer.

HERITAGE SPRING RETREAT

The first Heritage Spring Retreat, hosted by Burgessville HNRC, will take place from May 18, 2009 (5:00 p.m.) to May 21 (11:00 a.m.), D.V. at the Brantford Circle Square Ranch, just outside of Brantford, Ontario. All 18-30 year old singles and married couples are welcome. This year's theme is entitled "Unspotted" (James 1:27) and will include several

topics and workshops that will challenge and assist you in living this theme out in the world today. Registration and further details will be provided. Visit www.HeritageRetreat.ca and submit your email address so that you can be notified via email.

2009 HNRC YOUTH CONFERENCE

The conference will be held, the Lord willing, Tuesday, June 30–Friday, July 3, 2009 at Camp Michawana in Michigan. All young people (grade 10 through age 25) are invited. Mark your calendar! More information will be available later.

TEACHERS NEEDED

Lewis Independent Christian School invites applications from qualified primary school teachers for the year beginning August 2009. We are a small, Reformed, parent-led school. Please submit your CV, statement of faith, and philosophy of education to: Mr. William Macleod, Secretary, 80 Newmarket, Isle of Lewis, Scotland HS2 0ED, Tel: 01851 703282, E-mail wmacleod4@googlemail.com

Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown Ontario, is soliciting applicants for possible classroom teaching positions in Elementary (K-8), High school (9-12), and Personal Support Workers to begin in October, 2009. For more information, check out our website at www.rehoboth.on.ca. Applicants please send a cover letter and resumé to the attention of: Mr. Jack Westerink, Principal, 198 Inksetter Road, P.O. Box 70, Copetown, Ontario L0R 1J0, tel. 905-627-5977, fax 905-628-4422 e-mail: jwesterink@rehoboth.on.ca

Jordan Christian School is receiving applications for the coming 2009-2010 school year. Situated in a rural setting near St. Catharines, JCS is a small school offering a Reformed academic K-12 education. As we prepare for the coming season, we are looking for

dedicated, versatile teachers who desire to join our teaching team. Please send your application for our review to either the principal, or the secretary of the Education Committee. Please include your resume, philosophy of education, and statement of faith, along with a cover letter.

Principal: Mark Fintelman jcschool@talkwireless.ca
Education Committee Secretary: John Berman
john@tremontwood.com

Jordan Christian School, 4171 15th St., Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada, L0R 1S0.

The Heritage Reformed Christian School of the Hull, Iowa, HRC invites applications from qualified elementary, middle school, and high school teachers for the school year beginning August 2009. We currently offer grades K-10 in a multi-grade setting. Our plans are to add grade 11 in 2009, with the intent to have all 12 grades in two years, D.V. Please submit your resumé, statement of faith, and philosophy of education to Pete Van Beek, 48137 275th Street, Canton, SD 57013, phone 605-940-7444, or email: pevanbe@aol.com.

OBITUARY

OVERWEG, Harlan J., aged 61, passed away from accidental injuries on Saturday, November 1, 2008, in Dorr, Michigan. Surviving are his wife of 40 years, Frances; Children—Michael & Nancy Overweg, Brandon Overweg, Tonya Overweg, Shawn Overweg; Brothers/Sisters-in-law—Hermina & Cornie VanRoekel, Henrietta VanDyke, Jean & Cornie Blom, Nina & Edwin Koedam, John & Sophia Zomer, Rolena & Andrew Walma, Chet & Sylvia Zomer, Alvin & Lois Zomer; Aunt—Minnie Overweg; Grandchildren—Rebecca, Allyssa, Christopher, Jacob, Autumn, Jasmine, & Brianna Overweg. (Rev. F. VanderZwaag, Psalm 39:7; John 11:25).

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EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

Dr. Richard Ryskamp, a former candidate for the University of Michigan (U-M) Board of Regents who is currently a part-time student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, sent us a fascinating report of his visit in late November to the monthly meeting of the U-M Board of Regents to address them on their involvement in embryonic stem cell research. Here is an abridged version of that report.

We went as a party of three to Ann Arbor: Joe Sanger (the other Taxpayers Party candidate in the election for U-M Board of Regents) and Dave Boekestein (a good friend of mine from church) and myself. I spoke; they provided moral and prayer support.

The meeting is held in a large room with two alcoves. The audience sits in the alcoves in three rows of chairs. Around a long

table sit the University President, the eight Regents, and about 15 university administrators.

Public comments are after the regular business meeting. By then some of the audience had left, but there were still about 20 left. I was the only speaker during the public comments. Here are the comments I gave:

Madame President, Esteemed Regents and Administrators,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you. As a Michigan taxpayer I am an involuntary contributor to not only whatever good things, but also to whatever evil things that you do here at U-M.

I am here to object to an evil thing, namely, U-M's involvement in embryonic stem cell research. This is a timely issue inasmuch as earlier this month Proposal 2 passed. This was a great election victory for you. Earlier in this meeting I heard you congratulating each other on it. You did indeed use your considerable resources to influence people to vote for it. As an example, here's a quote from one of your official press releases, dated July 3. "Michigan's restrictive laws on embryonic stem cell research slow the pace of discovery, punish patients and could make the state seem like a scientific backwater if not corrected immediately." Is it really appropriate for U-M to ridicule our state laws and to advocate for their repeal, essentially campaigning for Proposal 2? Is this really fair to the opponents of Proposal 2 who also pay taxes to your institution? Isn't this against the intent of the Michigan Campaign Finance Act? You are a huge institution, the largest in the state of Michigan. You have grown huge because of tax subsidies provided to you over many decades, many of these tax dollars taken from pro-life citizens who look upon killing human embryos as murder. What are these pro-life citizens supposed to think when this behemoth created by their tax dollars starts taking sides against them in the political arena?

But you won the election, your Proposal 2 passed, and there are now no laws holding you back from doing whatever you want to do with human embryos. You don't have to use out-of-state labs anymore to kill human embryos for you. You can kill them yourself here in Michigan. There they are, in the freezers, abandoned by their parents. You are free to kill and dismember them for your research. Maybe your research will be successful and you will create new industries and you can set up huge farms of human embryos to keep up with the demand. Maybe we big people will be able to live forever by cannibalizing and consuming the little people. I hope not, because it would not be worth living in such a dehumanized society.

But, you know, there are other alternatives. You could do something humane for these little ones. You could use your vast resources to promote their adoption so they have a chance to continue their lives. You could use your influence to persuade fertility doctors to stop procreating them irresponsibly. You could pursue research in ethical and more productive pursuits, like adult stem cell research.

As you weigh your alternatives, remember this. The little ones that you kill cannot come here and advocate for themselves. But they have a Mighty Advocate, our Creator, the One who has established the inalienable right to life, as our national Declaration of Independence mentions. Do you think that God is unaware of what happens to these little ones? On Judgment Day we will all stand before Him. Can we expect God to show mercy to us if we have refused to show mercy to these little ones?

Many wonderful things have happened here at U-M, as I can personally attest to. Your political involvement to legalize the killing of human embryos is not one of them; pro-life taxpayers are justified in being annoyed with you. But if you start killing embryos, you will incite the anger of Someone far more frightening than taxpayers. Thank you for your attention.

I had expected that the Regents and administrators would try to ignore me as I spoke. They were indeed fidgeting and not paying attention when I started. But when I got to the words "taxpayer... involuntary contributor" they all looked up at me, and when I used the word "evil" they all seemed to get a disbelieving horrified look on their faces. There was nervous coughing. They continued to stare at me until I was done. Then the President thanked me, and we left without further contact with any of them.

What effect our visit had, we cannot say. I know that they were surprised. I believe that these members of the elite echelons of society live in a very insulated world. Their view of Christians is a product of the mainstream media and is very distorted and filtered. To them, Christians are people "out there" and not real; they are people who cannot speak coherently. They never expect to meet one in real life, and certainly never expect one to come to speak before them. I hope I caused them to doubt some of their preconceptions about Christians and some of their presuppositions about the world.

I do intend to return and speak again. There are so many other things to talk to them about: their promotion of abortion, promiscuity, homosexuality, domestic partner benefits, etc. And when I go back, I would like to bring a delegation of speakers. Each of us can speak for five minutes, up to a total of ten speakers. This is a captive audience made of misguided but influential individuals. Who knows what an impact it would have on them? How can we neglect such an opportunity?

The results of the last election show that Christians are losing ground in the culture war. This is, at least in part, because the younger generation, even many from Christian families, are indoctrinated in anti-Christian dogma by the public educational institutions. But we can change this. We can have an impact on these educational institutions and the people who run them. We can win seats on the boards of these educational institutions. We can speak up at their meetings.

— Dr. Richard Ryskamp

Self-Image (7)

From Sinful Self-Image to the Savior's Image

What should be the goal of our self-image? We started our study of self-image looking at how we were created good in God's image. This image is distorted through sin and, in the last two articles, we saw two of the elements that make up a biblical self-image. The goal of a biblical self-hatred and self-love is to be conformed to the image of Christ. The Bible again and again calls us to be conformed to Christ. When God works His grace in our hearts, He begins to restore that image of Himself in us. We can make two distinctions in God's work in this restoration of His image. First, He restores that image completely in principle. God views us as completely remade when we are united with Christ by faith; He looks on us through Christ, and sees Christ in us. This is the beauty and completeness of God's work in His children. In practice, the second distinction, we find an ongoing process of being restored. To us, living in this world, it seems that this image is continually being shaped and molded. God is at work in our lives if we are His children.

Michelangelo often carved angels from blocks of marble. When people would pass by his workplace, they would see him studying a block of marble before he started. Those who watched saw only a block of unshaped marble, but Michelangelo already saw in his mind the angel that would take shape from the marble. He would start carving with special hammers and chisels, each tool used to get a specific angle or feature just right. This is how God works in us, restoring His image, the image of His Son in us. He sees in us the image of His Son and He sets about working in our lives. He takes the chisel of providence and so directs it that we begin to look like Christ in one area of our lives. He takes the hammer of affliction and shapes us through trial and trouble to look more and more like Christ. Perhaps His hammer is the death of a

family member or special friend that shapes us to look more and more like Christ through our loss. Or maybe He uses the chisel of sickness to beautify us like His Son. He keeps working and working until that image is fully restored in us and we will be both with Christ and like Christ.

This is what the apostle John speaks about in 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." When we are the children of God, we have this hope that we will be made like Christ. Paul also lived with this hope as he speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Paul was looking through a glass or a mirror darkly while living in this world. We often don't see Christ's image reflected in us as we ought to; sin clouds the view of the image of Christ, but we know that God is faithfully at work in us.

If you are not a child of God, however, then you don't have this hope. You will continue to bear a broken self-image. This means that God is not working in your life and that you need His regenerating Spirit to work in your heart. You can be discontented with how you look or how you feel in this life, but your eternal destiny is at stake. Do you see in Christ what you need to have His image restored in you? Do you desire to have your sinful self-image restored to the image of the Savior? Bow before Him and confess that you have a broken image that needs to be restored; cast yourself upon His grace and power to restore you.

Maarten Kuivenhoven is a theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

NATIONAL NEWS....

Voters pass Marriage Amendments – In the recent national election, California, Arizona, and Florida passed marriage amendments, bringing the number of states to 30 whose constitutions define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. California's marriage amendment is unique in that the California Supreme Court ignored its pending outcome when it redefined marriage in a 4–3 decision in May 2008. Because that same court, in a second vote, refused to delay its society-altering decision until after the November 4 amendment vote, there are now more than 18,000 same-sex “marriages” whose legal status is uncertain. That uncertainty guarantees more litigation. Now the amendment is back at the California Supreme Court in a lawsuit filed by homosexual-activist organizations attempting to overturn it; however, it is projected the lawsuit will almost certainly lose. (*CitizenLink*)



Obama Takes Aim at Pro-Life Policies – Americans won't have to wait for liberal nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court to undermine pro-life policies: President-elect Barack Obama reportedly is set to begin his attack on life during his first days in office. Obama pledged during the campaign that one of his first acts in office would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act if it hits his desk, a bill that would overturn many state abortion regulations such as parental notification and waiting periods. He also is expected to rescind Bush administration restrictions on the use of federal funds for embryonic stem-cell research and for abortions and abortion referrals by international agencies. Cecile Richards, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said her organization is regularly advising Obama's transition staff. “We expect to see a real change,” she told *The Washington Post*. Dr. Charmaine Yoest, president and chief executive officer of Americans United for Life, said Americans can expect to see more of their tax dollars going to Planned Parenthood and international abortion businesses. (*CitizenLink*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

Courts slow to act in China – Chinese officials have yet to declare a new court date for Alimjan Yimit, a Christian house church leader and ethnic Uyghur in China's northwest province of Xinjiang, who has been detained since his arrest in January 2008. State prosecutors in mid-October returned Alimjan's case to a Xinjiang court for consideration, the China Aid Association (CAA) reported. Court officials have refused to release details of the case to the public, but sources have indicated that further legal action is expected. Charges against Alimjan include “inciting secessionist sentiment to split the country” and “collecting and selling intelligence for overseas organizations.” Once a Muslim, Alimjan converted to Christianity more than ten years ago and became active in the growing Uyghur church. Friends said they believe his faith is the real reason for his arrest. Officials have threatened to hand down a sentence ranging from as much as six years in prison to execution. (*Compass Direct*)

Christians Fleeing Iraq Face New Hardships in Turkey – In 99-percent Muslim Turkey, most Iraqi refugees are not Muslims. A middle-aged Iraqi refugee in Istanbul who fled Mosul said the only hope for his fellow expatriates is for Western countries to open their doors to Christian Iraqi refugees. “We don't have hope,” he said. “If these doors aren't opened, we will be killed.” Weeks after the mass exodus of Mosul Christians to surrounding villages, Turkey, and other nations, around a third of the families have returned to Iraq. But those returning Christians were recently shaken again when Islamic militants stormed into the house of two Christians, killing them and severely injuring their mother. They then bombed their house and detonated a second explosive when police arrived, which killed three more. Many believe this attack will deter other Christians from returning to Mosul, and there are reports of Christians again leaving the area. (*Compass Direct*)

PERSECUTION FOCUS: INDIA

Anti-Christian Violence in India - Mob violence against Christians has centered on Kandhamal in the state of Orissa (pop. 36 million) located in Eastern India on the Indian Ocean. Approximately twenty percent of those living in Kandhamal are Christian, compared with 2.6 percent in the rest of Orissa. The increase in Christians in this area has exacerbated long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups, and Hindu extremist groups have blamed Christians for the 2007 assassination of a Hindu swami. This assassination was in fact perpetrated by Maoists, who also claimed responsibility for the killing of a Hindu political worker in November. Other factors, such as allegations of “aggressive” proselytization by Christians, are also used to incite the mob violence. However, in sharing their faith, Orissa Christians have not broken the law but have engaged in an activity protected by the Indian Constitution and by international conventions. The anti-Christian violence in Orissa has temporarily subsided, but it is spreading to other regions, partly due to the Indian government's lack of political will to bring order. (*Christianity Today*)

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PERIODICAL
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WHEN ALL THY MERCIES, O MY GOD

When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

Thy Providence my life sustained,
And all my wants redressed,
While in the silent womb I lay,
And hung upon the breast.

To all my weak complaints and cries
Thy mercy lent an ear,
Ere yet my feeble thoughts had learned
To form themselves in prayer.

Unnumbered comforts to my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant heart conceived
From whom those comforts flowed.

When in the slippery paths of youth
With heedless steps I ran,
Thine arm unseen conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

Through hidden dangers, toils, and deaths,
It gently cleared my way;
And through the pleasing snares of vice,
More to be feared than they.

O how shall words with equal warmth
The gratitude declare,
That glows within my ravished heart?
But thou canst read it there.

Thy bounteous hand with worldly bliss
Hath made my cup run o'er;
And, in a kind and faithful Friend,
Hath doubled all my store.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the last a cheerful heart
That tastes those gifts with joy.

When worn with sickness, oft hast Thou
With health renewed my face;
And, when in sins and sorrows sunk,
Revived my soul with grace.

Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue
And after death, in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew.

When nature fails, and day and night
Divide Thy works no more,
My ever grateful heart, O Lord,
Thy mercy shall adore.

Through all eternity to Thee
A joyful song I'll raise;
For, oh, eternity's too short
To utter all Thy praise!

—JOSEPH ADDISON

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