

the **Banner** *of Sovereign Grace Truth*

IN THIS ISSUE

The World's Greatest Need

Understanding the Promises of God

Spiritual Maturity

A Periodical for Young and Old

**THE BANNER OF
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH**

Publication Number (USPS 010584)

Official Publication of the Heritage Reformed denomination. Typeset at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Gardner Graphics); printed at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grandville Printing).

Subscription price for ten issues per year: \$20.00 in the United States. \$30.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$35.00 (surface mail) or \$65.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. Rates listed are for one year subscriptions.

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Copy for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is due the 5th of the month prior to publication. All copy (including announcements, obituaries, anniversary notices, and ads) should be sent to the editor. All announcements submitted for publication should be typed, and are subject to editorial policy. Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to the subscription manager. Change of address should be forwarded to the subscription manager one month in advance of moving date. Please provide both new and old address.

PERIODICAL Postage is Paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth," 540 Crescent Street, NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

Additional Sources

For a list of printed Reformed literature (both new and used books in English, and used books in Dutch), write: Reformation Heritage Books, 2965 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525, or visit our on-line bookstore at www.heritagebooks.org; 616-977-0889.

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In all publications, the Heritage Reformed denomination aims to remain true to inerrant Scripture and its Reformed heritage as expounded in the Reformed doctrinal standards: the Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), and the Westminster Standards of the 1640s (the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

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HEAVEN-BOUND TOGETHER

None of us can ever do a complete thing for God. All His works are too great. Nothing we touch is other than a piece of work begun and dropped ere the weary hands had completed their task. And, in turn, nothing we take up can we complete. But there are always others coming on who will continue the toil, for God's work must be done. Let us count it greatest honor to have touched the work at all, and be content to have put in one day's work between morning and sunset.

— G. C. MORGAN

the World's Greatest Need



The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. —MATTHEW 9:37

Many of us know by heart the passage from which this incisive verse is extracted. But do we truly understand what our Lord is telling us when He refers to this “harvest”? Some think He is referring to all the lost who are in need of salvation. Others consider the harvest to be those who are seeking salvation or those who are the elect and still need to be brought in to the fold. We sometimes imagine the harvest as an expansive field, bulging to the brim with crops ready for the picking. This, however, is not the biblical picture of the harvest. This word has an ominous ring to it and speaks more of the judgment of God than anything else.

In Isaiah 17:10–11, we read, “[T]hou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants... but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.” Because the people had forgotten their covenant God, the only harvest they would reap from the lands of their sowing would be God’s terrible judgment.

In Mark 1:17, Jesus calls His disciples, saying, “I will make you to become fishers of men.” This term “fishers of men” brings to mind the idyllic picture of someone going for a day of leisure at the fishing waters; the metaphor is then extended to the evangelist whose task comprises “fishing for Jesus.” But fishing in Old Testament language has a distinct tone of divine judgment. Jeremiah 16:16, 17 states, “Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them [for] their iniquity [is not] concealed from mine eyes.” Pronouncing judgment on Pharaoh, Ezekiel prophesies, “I will put hooks in your jaws...I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams” (Ezek. 29:4). In being fishers of men, the disciples were not called, respectfully said, to go out and “catch fish for Jesus.” They were to go and proclaim the kingdom of God and its radical call to repentance and faith, thereby plucking souls up out of the sea of God’s judgment. The same applies to the harvest which, correctly understood, refers to the harvest of coming judgment. The workers are to go into the field and fervently reap, which means impressing upon people the claims of Christ, thus delivering them from God’s harvest of judgment.

It is in the context of such demanding work that Jesus now says that the “labourers are few.” This is why Jesus ministered with untiring compassion among the lost: He, of all people, knew the nature of the coming judgment upon those who were not reconciled to God through faith in Him. An experiential knowledge of God’s dreadful harvest is what energized

the Apostle Paul’s ministry. “Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). To the Thessalonian church, he wrote, “[T]he Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction” (2 Thess. 1:7–9).

Mission work or evangelism, then, is certainly not going out and encouraging people to make “decisions for Jesus.” It is a known fact that water creatures, such as crocodiles and hippopotami, by instinct, leave the water for higher ground well before the rain and floods descend: a fitting picture of what the mission of the church should be. It is going out, hook in hand, and plucking up perishing souls from the water before the raging torrents of God’s judgment crash in and sweep away everything in its devastating path. The same must be applied to God’s workers in the harvest who go out, sickle in hand, and gather the sheaves before the Harvester comes and sweeps clean the field.

This is the overriding purpose of all missions, but it must, as was the case with our Lord Jesus, arise from a heart filled with compassion for the lost. Our deepest desire must be to reach the lost sheep of this world, not wanting them to suffer the devastating end we know awaits them. If this is not the case, our sinful hearts will secretly be glad that the wicked will get what they deserve and thus be lulled into complacent inactivity. Do we who have tasted God’s grace deserve any better than the wicked in the day of judgment?

With this background in mind, it becomes easier for us to understand why Jesus says, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” The disciples are to cry out to the Lord of the Harvest, the Judge who is to come, this very Jesus who is speaking to them, and ask that He would thrust out more laborers into the field. This must surely be the world’s greatest need! There can then surely be no more urgent activity than to pray for it. But be warned when you pray in this manner because the ones who Jesus calls to pray are the very ones whom He often thrusts into the field: “These twelve Jesus sent forth...” (Matt. 10:5). If you are prepared to pray for more workers, be equally prepared to be sent yourself.

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UNDERSTANDING THE PROMISES OF GOD

This article is the opening chapter of a new book, Living by God's Promises, which is the first of a series of books to be published under the rubric, Deepen Your Christian Life. This new series of books aims to present in contemporary language what the Puritans have said on subjects that are seldom addressed adequately, if at all, today. Living by God's promises is certainly one of those subjects. (Forthcoming books include Living Zealously and Living with a Good Conscience.) The authors have used a variety of Puritans in writing this book on God's promises, primarily Edward Leigh, Andrew Gray, and William Spurstowe. The book also contains Study Questions for group study. The goal of these books is to popularize the Puritans in our day when many people are now finding it difficult to read the more antiquarian language. If you wish to purchase the book, see Book Talk in this issue.

We love the Puritans and enjoy reading their writings. They have had an unmistakable influence on our lives and ministries. One reason they are so impressive is because God blessed them with profound insights into the truths of Scripture, which, in turn, produced appropriate and thorough applications. The Puritans sought to unfold the essence of truth for our understanding even as they drew attention to the wide-ranging influence of this truth for our practical application.

This is precisely the strength and enduring blessing of their treatment of God's promises. The Puritans do not speak about the applications or uses of God's promises until *after* they have instructed the mind and educated the understanding with regard to those promises. "Before we can *apply* the promises," they reason, "we must first *understand* their nature and various kinds, and appreciate their excellence and worth; we must know the foundation on which they are built and the spring from which they gush forth; we must be certain as to whom they belong and the various properties or characteristics inherent in them that urge both our faith in them and our use of them. Only with these track lights in place can we traverse such a broad terrain, avoiding both neglect and presumption, and encouraging both faith and use."

So our love for the promises of God begins with the Puritan understanding of their nature, their kinds, and their excellence and worth, for we are certain that the best structures begin with the best foundations. The tree left standing when the storm is passed is the one with the deepest roots.

THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE PROMISES

Edward Leigh began his treatise on the divine promises by saying the Word teaches us in three ways: through *precepts* or *commandments*, which teach obedience; *threats*, which restrain disobedience; and *promises*, which confirm our obedience.¹ The promises of God must be distinguished from His commandments and threats because the promises do not tell us our duty or what God will do if we fail in our duty. Rather, they confirm what God, motivated by His sovereign mercy and good pleasure, will do for us. Thus, a promise reveals a truth that will benefit us in particular. It declares God's will concerning the good with which He will bless us or the evil He will remove from us. The promises of God are a storehouse of blessings and a chest of goodwill bequeathed to us by our heavenly Father.

Leigh says the promises are "the grounds of our hope, the objects of our faith, and the rule of prayer."² We hope for what

God has promised us because we are unable to look for anything besides what He has already declared He will bestow. If we hope for the things the Lord has promised us, our hope is solid. Without God's promises, we are either hopeless or overly hopeful.

The promises of God are likewise the objects of our faith in that we may believe whatever is promised because of the One who promised it. We may believe the promises of God because they are the promises of *God*, not the promises of man. Balaam urges this belief in God's promises in Numbers 23:19, saying: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" The promises of God are sure words to be believed because God stands behind them. Whatever is believed without a promise is only presumed (Heb. 11:11).

Finally, the promises of God are the rule of prayer. Just as we hope for and believe what God has promised, so we must pray for what God has promised. David makes this evident in 2 Samuel 7:27, when he prays, "For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee" (cf. Luke 1:38). Having the promise of God in hand not only emboldened David's hope and strengthened his faith, but it also fed and informed his prayer. Truly, we do not have a prayer without the promises of God.

Andrew Gray, in the first of five sermons on God's promises, defines a promise as "a glorious discovery of the *good-will* of God towards sinners, and withal, a *purpose* and *intendment*, and, if we may say, an *engagement*, to bestow some spiritual or temporal good upon them, or to withhold some spiritual or temporal evil from them."³ In other words, a divine promise declares God's goodwill, purpose, and intention toward sinners. It reveals what the Lord our God *will* do on our behalf; not what He *hopes* to do or will *attempt* to perform, but what He has already committed and bound Himself to *accomplish* for us. Gray goes even further in using the word *engagement* to stress that the Lord, by making a promise, so binds and engages Himself to it that it will assuredly come to pass. This agrees with Leigh's point that the promises of God are promises of *truth*, for the certainty of their fulfillment rests in the One who made them and bound Himself to them.

William Spurstowe indicates much the same regarding the nature of God's promises when he says that a promise is "a declaration of God's will, wherein he signifies what particular good

things he will freely bestow, and the evils that he will remove.”⁴ In this sense, a promise is a kind of “middle thing,” Spurstowe says, between God’s purpose and performance, between His intention of good and His execution of it upon those whom He loves. This is so inasmuch as the good that God purposes and intends to do for us, He reveals to us ahead of time by way of a promise, to grant us present comfort and to draw forth hope and expectancy. Thus, a promise is both the ground of present comfort and the expectation of future blessings.

Like Leigh, Spurstowe understands the importance of distinguishing God’s promises from His threats and commands. A promise is different from a threat in that in a promise, God declares good rather than evil, and it is different from a command in that it concerns good things freely bestowed rather than a duty to be done.

Furthermore, Spurstowe suggests that the promises are “irreversible obnoxious [seals] and declarations of God, which he has freely made” to believers.⁵ God’s promises are objects of our faith and hope, for faith believes those things that God has promised are true, and hope expects the performance of what faith believes. We believe what God has promised because He has committed and bound Himself to act for us. We hope for what we believe because our faith is rooted in the sure Word spoken by Him who cannot lie.

As if singing three-part harmony, each of these Puritan friends sees God’s promises as sovereign declarations of good to be bestowed or evil to be removed, which God makes known to us *prior* to their performance, so that we might enjoy comfort and assurance as we await the fulfillment of His Word. However, while the divine promises enjoy this essential unity as to their nature, there is a great diversity in the kinds of promises the Lord has made. We should know and understand that diversity so that we might profit from the promises as the Lord intends.

THE VARIOUS KINDS OF DIVINE PROMISES

In a most exhaustive yet helpful outline, Leigh suggests that the divine promises are legal or evangelical, general or particular, principal or less principal, direct or by consequence, absolute or conditional, and pertain either to this life or the life to come. Similarly, Gray distinguishes the promises as absolute or conditional; temporal, spiritual, or eternal; and extraordinary—given to a particular believer as a singular privilege—or common—promises to which every believer in Christ has a right.

Legal promises are conditioned on perfect righteousness. An example of such a promise can be found in Jeremiah 7:23: “But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” Given our sinful nature and inability to keep a single command of God, this class of promises would be ineffective for us had not Christ, as our Head, Representative, and Savior, rendered the righteousness on which they depend for fulfillment. Through faith in Christ, we uphold the law of God (Rom. 3:31; 8:1–4) and thereby become heirs of these promises (Gal. 3:14, 29).

Evangelical promises are conditional on believing and repenting (John 3:36; 2 Cor. 7:10). Leigh says these promises

are given “to the worker, not for the merit of his work, but for Christ’s merit, in which both his person and work are accepted.”⁶ These promises are fulfilled, not for the sake of the person who believes or repents, as if those were meritorious acts in the sight of God, but rather because of Christ, the One in whom we have meritorious acceptance before God.

These two kinds of promises—legal and evangelical—are the root of all others. They not only show the importance of faith but make plain that the faith of those who inherit the promises of God must be in Christ, who alone has satisfied the righteous requirements of God’s law. These promises are not for Christ but for those He came to save and to make partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Any other faith is misplaced and is therefore useless.

General promises are indefinite declarations of good that God offers to all. There is no limit on who may believe and receive such promises because God designed them as the refuge of many and a primary means of drawing sinners to Christ (John 6:44–45). Those who by the grace of God see their sin and great need for Christ are wooed by these unrestricted promises to believe that *even they* may look to Christ and find salvation. John 3:16 states such a general promise: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” By contrast, *particular* promises are directed to special groups of people. In Exodus 20:12, God promises long life only to those *children* who honor their fathers and mothers. Likewise, in Numbers 25:12–13, the Lord promises a perpetual priesthood only to zealous *Phinehas and his descendants*.

Principal promises are spiritual and therefore are of the greatest concern. They include the promise of righteousness (Rom. 4:5) and the remission of sins (1 John 1:9). *Less principal* promises are temporal and include promises such as deliverance from affliction, safety in danger, health, and wealth. Isaiah brought such a promise to Hezekiah when the Lord said, “Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (Isa. 38:5).

Direct promises are made to individuals, such as Paul on his tempestuous voyage to Rome (Acts 27:22–25), when an angel said to him, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee” (v. 24). Promises implied or deduced by *consequences* are evident in the examples or prayers of faithful saints, since what God promises to one He promises to all who are in an equal state. For example, in James 5:11, James encourages us to remain patient in suffering by promising God’s blessing to those who remain steadfast. He grounds that promise in the Lord’s dealings with Job. In the same way, we discover promises in the prayers of the saints by considering those things for which they prayed and afterward obtained. As Leigh says: “The faithful calling upon God and God’s gracious hearing of them are as much as a promise that God in such and such things will hear us calling upon him. David made this a ground of his faith [in] Psalm 22:4–5.”⁷ In addition, some promises can be distinguished as pertaining either to *this life*, whether spiritual or temporal, or to *the life to come*, such as the promise of eternal life.

Finally, and most importantly, we must distinguish between absolute and conditional promises. An *absolute* promise declares what the Lord determines to accomplish without any reference to what we do. Such a promise was indicated in Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin birth of Christ (7:14). The Lord made this promise absolutely and sovereignly. Another example is the absolute promise of a flood that the Lord made to Noah in Genesis 6:13.

Conditional promises, by contrast, are "no further promised than God in wisdom sees to be best for his own glory and his children's good."⁸ In this conditional way, subject to His glory and our good, the Lord promises all temporal blessings (which Lazarus lacked), freedom from all crosses and troubles (which Job suffered), freedom from temptation (which even Christ faced), less principal graces and the common gifts of the Spirit (which are variously distributed, 1 Cor. 12:8), and sanctifying grace (which varies among saints). All of these blessings are promised, but they are conditional on what God knows to be best for His glory and our good in particular situations.

Thus, absolute promises make known a certain and sovereign purpose, while conditional promises reveal what God will do if the fulfillment of those promises glorifies Him and is best for His people. We might say that with absolute promises we are passive recipients of God's sovereign pleasure, while with conditional promises something is first required of us. If we fail to meet this requirement, we may lose much spiritual comfort.

In discussing the important distinction between absolute and conditional promises, Gray says that absolute promises, such as God's sending His Son into the world, have no condition annexed to the performance of them, while conditional promises, such as the promise that he who believes shall be saved, require some condition to be met by the Christian before the promise is fulfilled. Gray then reminds us, "Yet there is not a conditional promise that is in all the covenant of grace, but it may be reduced into an absolute promise, in regard that the *thing* promised... is an absolute free gift, and the *condition* of the promise is another."⁹ In other words, the root of divine promises is the sovereign goodness of God by which He purposes and engages Himself to do good to sinners, not because of any merit in them, but out of free grace, since even the condition required (faith, repentance, or the like) is itself of God (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 13:48; John 6:44-45, 65). Gray's words remind us of what Augustine prayed: "Command what Thou wilt, and give what Thou wilt command."¹⁰

What is the benefit of distinguishing between all of these kinds of promises? Leigh says that as "tradesmen sort their commodities, by which they live; so should believers sort their promises, upon which they trust."¹¹ Some promises, such as Isaiah 40:31, offer encouragement; some, such as 1 Corinthians 10:13, give comfort; some bring rewards (Ps. 84:11); and some, privileges (John 1:12). Knowing what kind of promise we are dealing with not only guides us in appropriating it but also guards us against the evil of presumption.

THE EXCELLENCE AND WORTH OF THE DIVINE PROMISES

Nothing is so excellent, so precious, and so sweet as a promise of God. The Scriptures call the promises the unsearchable

riches of Christ, the bonds of love, and the inheritance of God's people. They are "a rich mine of spiritual and heavenly treasures; a garden of [the] most precious flowers [and] medicinal herbs; they are as the Pool of Bethesda for all diseases, for all sorts of persons, and at all times."¹²

Leigh says the promises are precious because God is the Author who gave them and Christ is the One who purchased them. They are precious in the free manner in which they are given and in the great and inestimable profit that flows from them. They are also precious because they promise eternal glory and virtue, and because through them we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

Gray identifies eight respects in which the promises are exceedingly precious. They are precious, first, because of the great price that was laid down for them, which was the blood of Christ. Second, they are precious because of the great things that are promised in them. Third, they are precious because of the great advantage afforded to a Christian who enjoys them. They are "the pencils that draw the...lineaments of the image of Christ upon the soul."¹³ Fourth, they are precious because of their close relationship with Jesus Christ, for what are the promises but streams and rivulets that flow from Him? As Gray asks, "Can this fountain that is sweet in itself, send forth any bitter waters?"¹⁴

Fifth, the promises are precious because they are the objects of faith, the precious mother of all graces. Sixth, the promises guide and lead us to Christ, for there is not a single promise that does not cry out to us in a loud voice, "O, come to Christ!" and there is no access to Jesus but by a promise. Seventh, the saints of all ages have found great sweetness and unspeakable delight in the promises. Eighth, the saints have a high and matchless account of the promises and thereby commend them to us. How can we doubt the preciousness of God's promises when these arguments surround us like a cloud of witnesses?¹⁵

Spurstowe summarizes the excellence and preciousness of the promises in three main points. He says, first, the promises are precious because Christ is the root and principle from which the promises spring. Second, they are the objects of faith, through which they feed, nurture, and sustain every other grace. Third, the promises are precious because of what they contain to interest believers and give them a right to believe. Thus, we come full circle out of Christ and back to Christ: from Christ to the promises, from the promises to faith, and from faith to the things promised, the chief of which is Christ Himself, in whom are all other blessings!

Finally, as to the great and immeasurable worth of God's promises, Spurstowe suggests that while the principle of every believer's life is faith in Christ, the means of its preservation are the promises.¹⁶ From our implantation into Christ at the first to our full enjoyment of Him at the last, God's promises are the chief aids to our life and our growth. Using 1 John 2:12-14 ("Little children, young men, and fathers") as three stages of the Christian life, Spurstowe shows how the promises are suited to all phases of life. He says:

(continued on page 232)



SPIRITUAL MATURITY:

A Rare Yet Essential Requirement For A Healthy Church

Spiritual Immaturity: A Systemic Problem

Many problems in the church can be traced to a deficiency of spiritual maturity of its members. Many reveal by their conduct that they are spiritually immature, even after they have reached their senior years.

The Apostle Paul often had to deal with this problem in his ministry. In all his letters, he stressed not only the need to be justified by faith in Christ, but also that, after having received Christ, they should be “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Col. 2:6–7). He was often disappointed when he found believers lacking in this respect. The apostle to the Hebrews, recognizing the same problem, reprimanded the readers of his epistle that they were not ready for “strong meat,” even though they had been Christians for years. While you ought to be teachers by now, he complains, you still need to be fed with milk and taught “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb. 5:12).

Spiritual immaturity was not only a problem in the early church. Also among us there are many professing believers who do not seem to rise above the infantile stage of spiritual life. No matter how advanced in years they may be, their conduct and speech is such that one thinks, how childish these people act! I do not say *childlike*; we may always remain childlike in faith, trusting the Lord fully like little children trust their parents. But *childish* is something else. That is a word we apply to people who are combative, dissatisfied, easily hurt, petulant, and annoying when they don’t get their way. There were many people like that in the congregation of Corinth, but also among the Galatians and other Christian communities. We have them, sad to say, in our congregations as well.

Spiritual immaturity shares many characteristics with natural, physical immaturity. That should not surprise us because

God is both the Creator of our natural, psychological or mental life and the re-Creator of our spiritual life.

God Creates and Recreates the Whole Man

When, by God’s grace, we become new creatures in Christ, we need to emphasize both the new and the creaturely aspects of believers. God’s redeeming work aims at the restoration of our total humanity. It is the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—who is restored into a reconciled, loving relationship with God, our neighbor, and ourselves. In conversion, great changes take place in a sinner. But this does not mean that all of a sudden his less desirable character traits will disappear. If he was an angry and impatient man prior to his conversion, he does not immediately or overnight become a calm and patient person. He remains the same person with all his weaknesses and idiosyncrasies, but with this difference: he begins to fight against his ugly character faults. Believers who don’t do this or make little or no progress in this respect remain spiritually immature and should sincerely examine themselves whether their conversion was genuine.

It is important, therefore, to know what are some of the marks or characteristics of spiritual maturity. I will mention just five.

1. Stability and Flexibility

A spiritually mature person is stable and yet flexible. Children are neither, because they still depend on their parents for everything. There is no stability yet because their character is still being formed. Stability comes gradually as they pass through their crisis years of puberty. A distinct personality develops. Convictions are internalized and a specific lifestyle is adopted. Choices and decisions are made. By the time they reach their twenties, their character is formed and maturity is

attained. The truly mature person, however, is not just stable and set in his convictions; at the same time, there is flexibility. There is openness and receptivity for self-criticism and correction from others. He has the ability to discern between what is and what is not important and therefore knows when he needs to stick to his convictions and when he can afford to be lenient and tolerant. We meet people like that in the world. They are unbelieving but nice people and sociable, easy to get along with. Often they compare favorably with Christians from whom more can be expected.

With spiritually mature people, you see the same stability and level-headedness, yet also flexibility. The Apostle Paul longs to have people like that in the congregation. In Philippians 1, he asks the Lord that the Philippians may “abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” so that they may “approve things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:9–10).

Spiritually mature Christians possess the spirit of discernment. They have learned to apply the Word of God to all kinds of situations and problems. The spiritually immature person cannot do this. He does not see through the situation and the problem, and cannot come up with the proper solution. He is unsure of himself, needs help and guidance, but instead of admitting this, he often acts as if he knows it all. He is quick to judge, makes rash decisions, and goes at it harshly. Pity the congregation that has people like that in leadership positions! Such people often know deep down that they are not fit for the office, but they act as though wisdom is with them. They present themselves as defenders of orthodoxy and will not tolerate the smallest changes, even when it concerns peripheral issues. They cannot distinguish between what is important and what is (relatively) unimportant. For them, everything is essential to salvation.

What a blessing it is, therefore, for a congregation to have men at the helm who are able to speak and act with conviction but who also recognize that others may have opinions that are worth considering, especially when it concerns *adiaphora*, or things indifferent.

2. A Balanced View of Self and Self-Worth

A second mark of spiritual maturity is a balanced view of oneself and proper self-esteem. Children do not yet have self-knowledge. They are not able to evaluate themselves properly because they go by what parents and other people say or think of them. They are very sensitive to this, especially when it concerns the opinion other children have of them. Their sense of self-worth is based almost entirely on their peers' approval or disapproval. This is not so bad; it belongs to the normal development of the child. Eventually, he will grow out of that stage and, as every parent knows, this brings other problems with it because now Johnny thinks he knows everything.

What is serious is that many physically mature people stay at the mental level of children with the result that they never attain to a healthy knowledge of themselves. This lack of proper self-knowledge often leads to two opposite results: either to *overestimation* or *underestimation* of oneself. A mature person

has a more realistic view of himself. He will not, in false humility, think less of himself than is necessary. But neither will he rate himself higher than is biblically warranted. He is not afraid to say that he believes he has the gifts to take on a certain task or position. But, on the other hand, he will readily admit that he lacks the qualifications for accepting a certain assignment for which others are better equipped. In other words, this person has a proper understanding of his limitations but also a healthy awareness of his gifts and abilities.

Some people think that these two things cannot go together. But be careful for Christians who seem to be so humble. They think nothing of themselves, they say, but when someone steps on their sensitive toes, they will reveal just how proud they really are.

The Apostle Paul shows us what true humility is and how it can go together with proper, biblical self-worth. In his epistles, he states repeatedly that he is deeply conscious of his sins. He cannot forgive himself that he has persecuted Christ and His church; that he, of all people, had been chosen to become a servant of the gospel is a source of great amazement to him.

But while he often speaks of his sin and guilt and unworthiness, we also find in his letters many statements pointing to his many accomplishments as church builder and preacher. This was not bragging on his part, but a realistic assessment of what he had become by the grace and power of God. Of course, none of us can compare ourselves with Paul and what he has accomplished in the service of his Savior, but it is not wrong to acknowledge God for what He has done for us, in us, and through us.

3. Judging Objectively and Impartially

A third mark of spiritual maturity is that we learn to judge other people and issues objectively and impartially. No one can be completely objective and impartial. We are all people with heads and hearts. That is to say, in all our evaluations of people and things that happen, both our minds and feelings play an important part. With reference to objectivity and impartiality, I mean that we need to make a serious effort to evaluate a person or a matter in as open and honest a way possible. Many people are unable to do this, which causes serious difficulties in church and society. True, our judgments are always influenced to a certain degree by sympathy or prejudice.

However, the question, especially for Christians, is to what extent we allow ourselves to be so influenced. It belongs to spiritual maturity that we are aware of this danger. We need to resist all subjective and partisan tendencies because these can easily lead to injustice toward fellow Christians. We must face the ugly truth that we are by nature prone to hate God and our neighbor. And even where this hatred is removed in principle as a result of the new birth, believers still have to fight against corruptions of the remaining old nature.

One manifestation of this corruption is that we tend to be suspicious toward fellow Christians whom we do not like because they don't agree with us in everything. We tend to view these others as liberal or conservative and evaluate what they

say or do from that perspective. Spiritually mature believers do not take sides with one or the other party, but they will take the side of Christ. Only the Son of Man can set us free from the prison of partisanship. He is the only Party who is always right and never operates from ulterior motives. His Word alone must be our standard and guide for assessing difficult problems and seeking solutions for them.

Problems in a congregation are resolved only when everyone realizes that he or she is part of the problem and stands in need of forgiveness. As imitators of Christ, we will try to be impartial, honest, fair, merciful, and mild in our judgments.

4. Knowing How to Deal With Adversity and Disappointments

A fourth mark of spiritual maturity is the ability to deal with adversities and disappointments in a positive manner. Many Christians cannot do this. They are thrown into confusion at the slightest difficulty that comes their way. When something happens that does not fit their expectations, they panic. Usually such immature behavior can be traced to their having been spoiled as children. They always had to have their way and parents gave in to their every wish. Everything revolved around them and this self-centered attitude stays with them throughout their lives.

Part of a healthy development of children includes that they learn to reckon with others and their rights. Where such social skills are not taught and internalized, people become most difficult to live with. One finds such people also in the church. They are egocentric in much of what they do; they view others and judge them solely from their own selfish perspective and advantage. When they are not recognized for their accomplishments they complain that no one appreciates them. They cannot handle adversities when these inevitably occur. When sickness strikes loved ones or them, they go to pieces and wallow in self-pity.

The spiritually mature person is able to leave everything to God and His wise providence. He lives by the motto "Father knows best." Not that such resignation comes easy. We read of Joseph in Egypt that the Lord was with him and showed him mercy. But there must have been many questions in Joseph's mind. "Here I am in prison. Is this my reward for resisting temptation?" Yet Joseph does not collapse spiritually. He does not become bitter and rebellious. He does not lose his faith, but keeps on trusting the Lord, believing He will bring everything to a good end.

Such acceptance has nothing to do with stoical resignation to whatever fate has in store for us. We do not have to suppress our feelings and refuse to let things bother us. Spiritual maturity allows us to feel pain and experience grief and to shed tears. But it does keep us from despair and from childishly asking, "Why me?"

5. Accepting Responsibility

Our fifth and final mark of spiritual maturity is a willingness to accept responsibility for our words and actions. God created man as a rational being with a sense of responsibility and

accountability. Maturity in this connection means accepting our accountability toward God and man. People who never accept this principle remain immature. Like children, they always have an excuse. They have never done anything wrong. Someone else is always to blame: the wife, the husband, the boss at work, the minister, or the consistory. They usually find a way to justify their actions.

It is true that this tendency to shift the blame is in our blood. That is why spiritual maturity includes a willingness (worked by the Holy Spirit) to let God's voice speak to us, accusing, judging, and even condemning us, so that we end up saying with David in Psalm 51, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

This is no simple matter because there are also other competing voices that address us. Daily, we are told by advertisements, fashion designers, and especially our own sinful hearts, "Just do it; everybody does it; there is no harm in this; you are only human." These voices are idols, false gods that seek our destruction. What we need, therefore, is to hear above all these other voices, the voice of God.

One of the biggest problems facing the church today is that so few of its members seem to be hearing this convicting voice of God. As long as we keep listening to voices that encourage greed, lust, pride, vindictiveness, selfishness, and other vices, we can neither have a healthy personal spiritual life nor a healthy church life.

Accepting responsibility for our actions is essential to our own well-being and that of the church. Only when we ask ourselves to what extent have we contributed to the problems besetting the congregation will we contribute to the solution of these problems. We won't say, "Let the consistory fix the problem." Such an attitude is tantamount to saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Mature Christians know they belong to a body, namely, the body of Christ, of which He is the Head and they the members. All the members of that body need each other, especially when there are difficulties and tensions that threaten to tear apart the body.

I have given five marks of spiritual maturity. No doubt there are more that could be mentioned, but these few may suffice in helping us find out where we are in our spiritual development. Maybe the first question we should ask ourselves is: am I a child of God at all? Yet, important as this question is, we should not think that it is the only question we need to ask. Even if all our members were truly converted, we would still have to face the fact that many of us seem to be without advancement in the infant stage of spiritual life. We saw that the Apostle Paul was grieved when he realized how many believers in his day were still immature in the faith. He took this very seriously. Do we? Is it enough of a problem for us to bring it to the Lord in prayer, as Paul did?

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THE *Parable* OF THE *Talents*



Read: MATTHEW 25:14-30

The Scenery

Christ had just finished the parable of the ten virgins in which He had stressed the need to be watchful. Next, He added the parable of the talents so that His disciples would not interpret this watchfulness to be simply a passive waiting for His return. To that end, He switched from the festive picture of a wedding to a financial picture of stewards, entrusted with their master's good.

Some imagine that this parable of the talents is the same as the similar-sounding parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27). Though there are a number of similarities, there are also quite a few differences. Moreover, the timing and setting of these two parables are noticeably different. There are other parables that, likewise, have similarities, and yet ought to be treated as different parables (e.g., the great supper [Luke 14:15-24], and the wedding feast [Matt. 22:2-14]).

We could summarize the parable as follows: A wealthy man prepared to travel to a far country. Before he left, he entrusted his fortune of eight talents to three servants, according to their ability. To one he gave three talents; to a second, two talents; and to a third, one talent. Even one talent was a very substantial sum of money, equivalent to twenty years of work for a day-laborer.

The parable tells us that the first two servants traded with their money and gained the equivalent number of talents in addition to the original sum. Meanwhile, the servant who had received the one talent went and dug a hole in the ground and hid it.

When the nobleman returned, he commended the first two servants for their faithfulness and declared to both: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (vv. 21, 23).

How differently it went with the servant with one talent. He tried excusing himself, but in the process cast the blame at the feet of his master. He accused him of being a harsh taskmaster (v. 25). In response, the master pulled the veil off of the man's pretenses and ordered this unprofitable servant to be sent into outer darkness.

The Substance

This parable does *not* teach that we can earn salvation by using our talents to do good deeds. Neither does it teach that people will lose their salvation if they do not work hard enough. Instead, the basic message of this parable concerns stewardship of kingdom privileges and blessings in light of Christ's Second Coming.

Many limit the significance of this parable because the word "talent" in our language has the meaning of "special ability." However, talents in Christ's time were measurements of money and, in the parable, refer to *all* the privileges and blessings that the Lord entrusts to those in the professing church. It certainly involves money and abilities, but also time, godly parents, other relationships, freedom in our country, gospel blessings, biblical teaching, and so on.

It does not refer to salvation itself, because the third servant goes lost even with the talent. Instead, it's like we read in Romans 3:2 about the Jews: "to them were committed the oracles of God." Likewise, Paul writes elsewhere that to the visible church "pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). These privileges are not of themselves saving, and yet the Lord gives them so that, when He returns, greater glory would return to Him.

Of course, that doesn't mean that we can trade these talents by our own natural ability. Some have stumbled over the fact that the nobleman gave the talents "to every man according to his several ability" (v. 15). They see it suggesting that the Lord considers natural merit in man as the ground to give more to some and less to others. This opinion, however, is unfounded. In the parable, the Lord gives the talents to servants according to their ability that none might excuse themselves that the Lord gave them more or less than they were able to handle.

Despite what the unprofitable servant says, the problem cannot lie in the master. The servant with the two talents did not bury his because he only had two. Nor did the servant with the five talents bury his because he had so many. The point is that the servant with the one talent had a wrong view

of his master, and along with that, a wrong view of himself, his talent, and everything else. Nothing in this man's heart was in the right place, and it shows especially in his view of his master. Likewise, natural man apart from the grace of God remains unproductive and unprofitable with any and all of God's gifts.

The Savior

Christ spoke this parable after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He was getting ready to depart and return to His Father, who had sent Him as His great Servant. While Christ was on the earth, He did whatsoever pleased His Father. At any and every moment, He could have given a God-honoring account of all that He did. To Him, His Father was no harsh taskmaster; on the contrary, He glorified Him in everything.

Moreover, as He now was going to suffer and die, He would do so “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2). He knew of what He spoke when He said these words to the first two servants: “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21, 23). In fact, by His suffering and death, He had procured a people who would enjoy the entrance into that joy of the Lord for His sake.

As He would shortly leave them to enter that joy Himself, He in turn entrusted them with many talents. He gave His Word and His Spirit. In fact, everything we have in creation and providence comes by way of Christ's hand. Moreover, He gives those who earnestly seek Him the grace, strength, and wisdom that they need to trade with their talents. Meanwhile, He will also send all wicked servants, who neither loved or honored Him, into outer darkness when He returns.

The Searchlight

This parable shines a searchlight into our hearts that we might see our lives as we ought. It puts these questions to us:

- Do we begrudge what the Lord has given us?
- Do we look over our shoulders and wallow in self-pity?
- Do we nurture harsh views of God and what He has allotted us in our lives?
- To what extent do we neglect to use the privileges that God has given us?
- Do we perhaps fail to see that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2)?
- What is our view of God?
- Do we realize that there is nothing we have that we have not received (1 Cor. 4:7)?

This parable not only uncovers for us our sinful nature, but it also should spur us on with the help of the Lord to make use of our time and resources—our gospel blessings, our children and other family members, books and periodicals, the Bible and its promises, tracts, our church family, and so on—to the salvation and edification of our own souls and those around us. We would do well to ask ourselves: How is our own view of God perhaps making us bury our talents? What view of God should we have instead?

Though it is certainly true that we cannot save ourselves, if we neglect the mercies that God has surrounded all of us with, we will have no excuse when it is time for God to judge us. Let us especially look to Him who suffered and died to pay for sin and is now in the joy of the Lord, and await His return with eager expectation.

Questions:

1. What talents have you been given? Is it true that everyone in the world has at least some part of a talent?
2. Could afflictions that God sends our way also be viewed as talents that we are called on to improve (make use of for good) through God's enabling grace?
3. Read the third servant's words in verse 24. What emotions, thoughts, and intentions were motivating this servant? What happens in our own lives when we look over our shoulders at others who have been given different responsibilities and privileges in their lives?
4. If the two other servants could have put into words their view of their master, how different would it have been to that of the third servant in verse 24? What might they have said of him?
5. Some have tried to give spiritual equivalents to the ideas of “trading” and “putting money to the exchangers.” Discuss what graces the Lord is looking for from His people while they wait for His Second Coming.
6. The parable contrasts “the joy of the Lord” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in outer darkness. What do these descriptions of heaven and hell reveal about these places and those who go to each?

why do I believe...

the Bible is the Word of God?

Many books claim to be divine. Muslims trust the Koran; Mormons, the Book of Mormon. Many Chinese base their moral beliefs on the teachings of Confucius. What makes the Bible different from those writings? How can we know that the Bible is the true Word of God? Let us look at twelve things that testify that the Bible is not a book of man but the actual Word of God.

1. **The Bible's order and completeness.** The Bible is comprised of sixty-six books written by more than forty people. Its writers included judges, tentmakers, kings, herdsman, priests, soldiers, prophets, doctors, presidents, and fishermen. The Bible was written in tents, deserts, mountains, cities, palaces, and prisons. The last writer lived more than two thousand years after the first. Yet, the Bible has perfect unity throughout. From Genesis through Revelation, it teaches a single code of ethics, a single system of doctrine, one plan of salvation, and one rule of faith. It is clearly one book. What other book is written by forty authors of different occupations, from different backgrounds, living in different eras, whose writings come together in perfect unity with no differences of opinion concerning the core issues of life? We, as human beings, could never produce the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

2. **The Bible's indestructibility.** Countless Bibles have been confiscated, burned, or shredded during eras of persecution. Emperors have waged wars to destroy the Bible. Governments have outlawed its printing and possession. People who have owned a Bible or confessed its truths have been burned, thrown to wild animals, and tortured to death. Yet the Bible has survived and continues to be distributed across the world to this very day. The Bible is the most widely read book in the world. Since the invention of the



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printing press, the Bible has remained a best seller. Never has a book been so hated and so loved by mankind as the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

3. **The Bible's universality.** The Bible speaks to all types of people. It has spoken to the hearts of people of different ages from different cultures, backgrounds, occupations, and periods of history. Despite these differences, thousands of people have found the Bible speaking personally to them. This book reveals God to them, helps them understand their human identity, and teaches them the purpose of their lives. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

4. **The Bible's power.** The Bible has influenced people and countries across the world throughout all time. Think of missionaries who enter a foreign territory, not with weapons to force people to believe in Christ or money to bribe them to believe, but only with the Bible. In many areas of the world, the Bible has replaced savagery with civilization, cruelty with kindness, and lust with purity. Think of nations throughout history, from the children of Israel to our nation today; when they followed the teachings of the Bible, they prospered, but when they departed from its truths, they declined. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

5. The Bible's inexhaustibility. Hundreds of commentaries have been written on the Bible. Countless sermons have been preached on single texts over thousands of years. Yet, the Bible always offers something new. That is because the Bible's author, the one true God, is infinite, while we humans are finite creatures who cannot fathom the limitless depths of the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

6. The Bible's honesty. Biographies about people often portray them in the best light. The author smooths over personal faults and mistakes, and enlarges positive traits and achievements. This is also true of the foundational writings of other religions. But it is not so with the Bible. The Bible tells us about Noah's faith as well as his sin, David's trust and his doubt, Solomon's wisdom and his foolishness. The Bible is honest about the sins and failures of its saints. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

7. The Bible's teachings concerning God and man. Most ancient religions worshiped idols similar to human beings. These gods were not infallible; they had faults and made mistakes. But the God of the Bible is different. He is one God who is perfect and infinite in all His attributes. The books of other religions also look at man differently than the Bible does. They teach that man is either good, or that he is somewhat sick but by improving his attitudes and beliefs and by doing good works he can improve and eventually earn his salvation. These religious beliefs reveal their human authorship, for they reflect what mankind wants to hear. We like to think of ourselves as basically good, or at least good enough to improve our condition, for this appeals to our pride. But the Bible has a different view of mankind. It proclaims that man is spiritually dead in sin and cannot save himself. Only God can deliver him from his fallen condition. The Bible rightfully exalts God to the highest and abases man to the lowest. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

8. The Bible's historical accuracy. Critics of the Bible have long questioned some of the historical events and locations described in the Bible. But archaeologists are continually proving the truth of the Bible. For example, the story of the flood in Genesis has been verified in myths and traditions of ancient peoples in many countries on most other continents of the world besides the Middle East. The former site of Sodom and Gomorrah has been identified. Under huge quantities of sulfur, bitumen, and volcanic rock, the large amounts of sulfuric gases in the soil of the southern Dead Sea verify the biblical account of the overthrow of these cities.

Solomon's large stables and copper furnace at Ezion-gaber have been uncovered. Sennacherib's threats to capture Jerusalem and his subsequent return without taking the city have been translated from stone records. Hezekiah's pool and water conduit have been discovered intact. In short, Nelson Glueck, a well-known authority on Israeli archaeology, states: "No archaeological discovery has ever disproved a biblical record. Scores of findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible." Errors and exaggerations have been identified in the ancient records of the Assyrians, Egyptians, and other nations living during Bible times, but no historical mistake or exaggeration has been found in the Bible. Why not? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

9. The Bible's scientific accuracy. Many books, some printed only a few years ago, contain mistakes due to a lack of scientific knowledge. This is especially true of scientific books written several hundred years ago. Many offer strange explanations and beliefs regarding scientific matters. No proven scientific fact, however, disagrees with the teachings of the Bible. On the other hand, several scientific facts recently discovered were recorded in the Bible thousands of years ago. For example, for centuries people were obsessed with counting the stars. Each time a more powerful telescope was produced, scientists discovered more stars. Not until recently were galaxies beyond our own discovered. With this knowledge, scientists realized the impossibility of ever counting the stars. Yet, nearly 2,500 years ago, Jeremiah wrote in the Bible that the stars of heaven cannot be numbered (Jer. 33:22).

Also, for many years, scientists believed the earth was flat and built upon a solid foundation. Not until the time of Columbus did people realize that the earth was round. Years later, people learned that the earth was suspended in space. The Bible, however, had long testified of these facts. Isaiah said more than 2,700 years ago that the Lord "sitteth upon the circle (sphere) of the earth" (Isa. 40:22). Approximately 3,500 years ago, Job said the Lord "hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7).

In addition, the Bible spoke thousands of years ago of a water cycle, wind circuits, and the circuit of the sun in our galaxy. These truths have only recently been discovered by man. How could the Bible know these things thousands of years before man? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

10. The fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Biblical prophecies are not vague as the predictions of many self-acclaimed prophets. These so-called prophets offer vague predictions and then later interpret actual events in order to claim them as

fulfillments of their prophecies. The prophecies of the Bible are different. They are clear, concise, and plain. For example, Ezekiel 26, written in 590 B.C., predicts seven things will happen to the city of Tyre:

1. Nebuchadnezzar will capture the city of Tyre.
2. Other nations will participate in the destruction of Tyre.
3. The city will be flattened like the top of a rock.
4. It will become a place for spreading fishing nets.
5. Its stones and timbers will be laid in the sea.
6. Other cities will tremble at the fall of Tyre.
7. The old city of Tyre shall never be rebuilt.

In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers surrounded Tyre. They captured the city in 573 B.C. When Nebuchadnezzar entered the city, however, the inhabitants were gone; they had secretly moved to an island about one-half mile from the shore. Nebuchadnezzar could not overpower them on the island without a navy, so he left after conquering an empty city. Tyre stayed in this condition for 251 years, with only the first prophecy of the seven fulfilled.

In 322 B.C., Alexander the Great decided to capture Tyre because of its strategic location. He could not conquer the island city with only his navy so he ordered his army to build a causeway from the mainland to the island. To make the causeway, the soldiers took the stones and timbers from the old city of Tyre and pushed them into the sea. They scraped away the soil, leaving the old city as a flat rock. When the causeway was finished, Alexander's army attacked the inhabitants of Tyre by land and his navy by sea. The neighboring cities were so frightened after hearing about Alexander's conquest that they all surrendered to him.

Today, the flat rock area, the former site of Tyre, is a popular place for fishermen, who spread their nets out to dry on this very spot. Despite its excellent location, the city has never been rebuilt.

How could Ezekiel have written in detail exactly what would happen to Tyre more than 250 years before it happened? The Bible is full of prophecy. Think of the prophecies regarding Samaria, Jericho, Jerusalem, Moab, Ammon, and Babylon. Above all, think of more than three hundred prophecies concerning the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Every one of those prophecies was fulfilled. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

11. **The Bible's plan of salvation.** All but one of the religious and moral frameworks of the world require man to do something to earn salvation. They demand precise adherence to some god's demands, or to some leader's rules, or to some code of ethics. The Bible is different. It reveals a plan of salvation that is graciously given by God and is freely offered to man. Only the Bible unveils a God who

gave His only Son as a ransom to pay for man's sin. Only the Bible presents a Son of God who freely gives Himself to die on the cross to pay the price for human sinners. Only the Bible offers a gracious way of salvation for sinful, rebellious human beings. Only the God of the Bible loves rebels enough to offer such a gracious plan for sinners.

Man-generated religions rely on man to earn or merit salvation. In this way, man receives the credit. God-created religion, however, is based on what God has graciously done and freely offers to man. God therefore receives all the praise, honor, and glory. Why is the Bible's plan of salvation different from all others? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

12. **Personal application of the Bible.** The Bible is the Word of God because of its personal application in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This power produces change in a person's life. It implants new birth and new spiritual life. It convicts us of sin. It teaches us what sin is and tells us we are spiritually lost without God. It goes beyond earthly time and space, making eternity and spirituality real. It convinces us that God is righteous in His demands upon us. It reveals a personal way of escape by God's grace from the just penalty for our unrighteous rebellion against our holy and righteous Creator. It works faith, hope, and trust in a Savior outside of ourselves. It is the power of a sovereign, sinner-electing God. In short, it is the power of God the Holy Spirit blessing His Word to secure our salvation in Jesus Christ. Why does the application of the truths of the Bible to a person's heart produce life-changing realities? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

More than three thousand times, the Bible says that it is the Word of God. The Bible testifies through its order, completeness, indestructibility, universality, power, inexhaustibility, honesty, teachings, historical exactness, scientific accuracy, prophetic fulfillment, plan of salvation, and personal application that it is the inspired Word of God.

Who of us would dare to walk across a frozen lake if we did not know that the ice was solid? Who of us would cross a deep ravine on a plank if we were not certain that it would hold our weight? In the same way, we must not base our lives, salvation, values, ideas, and hopes on shaky foundations. Instead, by God's grace, we must build the house of our hope upon a solid, proven, and immovable foundation. We must base our life on God's own Word, the Bible.

God said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Therefore, seek God's grace to center your heart and life upon the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the Word of God.

Yes, I believe in the Bible as the Word of God. Do you?

This article is available in tract form (see Book Talk of this issue).



“when
I am
weak,”

Thomas Boston (1676–1732) was a man of melancholic disposition allied to a fearless spirit when it came to defending biblical truth. He was the only one to stand up in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to dissent from their leniency in dealing with a Professor accused of teaching Arminian and Arian tenets. Yet he was open to entreaty, and the following day allowed his statement not to be officially minuted in order to prevent a possible split in the church.

One of his continuing trials was from the church system of presbyteries and patrons he was serving. He was himself coerced rather than called to a church. At Simprin, his first charge, the manse was in ruins, so he settled in an old house. This was in such a bad state of repair, that in a storm he had to leave his own bed and sleep with his father “lest the house should have fallen on me.” Likewise, the manse at Ettrick, his other charge, was in a ruinous state. While it was rebuilt, his family had to live in the stable and barn. It was there that his son Ebenezer was born—who died soon after. In fact, he buried six of his ten children.

When he first met his wife, he says that he “discerned the sparkles of grace in her.” Twenty years later, aged forty-six, his wife was afflicted with schizophrenia, which lasted the remainder of their married life. It confined her to bed and was often accompanied by fevers; once she was tempted to suicide.

Boston’s physical health was a sore trial. He ate little as a student in order to eke out his father’s small resources, and he often fainted and appeared to be dying. His condition, probably exacerbated by a diet lacking in Vitamin C, was so severe that his teeth blackened and gradually dropped out. This lack

of teeth occasioned him much pain and embarrassed him with some difficulty in pronunciation.

Boston reluctantly agreed to the publication of some of his sermons and writings, but these suffered many setbacks with delays, lost manuscripts, and on one occasion he “was greatly confounded to see the book pitifully mangled, being full of typographical errors, and besides, Mr Wightman had so altered it in many places, that he had quite marred it.”

The congregation of Ettrick was also a trial to him. They often deserted his ministry, neglected worship, and despised the message he preached, so he could say, “The crown is fallen from my head, and I am brought very low! The approaching Sabbath, that sometimes was my delight, is now a terror to me.”

Growth in grace

It was a difficult path for Boston to new life in Christ. There was no sudden conversion; he had to shed himself of legalistic attitudes and he rarely encountered gospel preaching. Like Jonathan Edwards, he met to pray with friends while a young teenager, and vowed to pray three times a day, a vow he later regretted. His early preaching at the age of twenty-one was much on the wrath of God, so much so that a minister advised him, “[I]f you were entered on preaching of Christ, you would find it very pleasant.” He afterwards remembered this counsel as “the first hint given me by the good hand of my God towards the doctrine of the gospel.” It was not until he was ordained and settled at Simprin that Boston enjoyed a “more clear uptaking of the doctrine of the gospel” and a vision of

“Christ’s fullness, his being ‘all and in all.’” He resembled the Welsh preacher Daniel Rowland in this transformation.

Boston was hampered by a lack of commentaries and other books, and was deeply hurt when a visiting minister smiled condescendingly at seeing his little library. At times throughout his life he would spend hours in prayer and fasting, searching his heart for unrepented sins in order to confess them, and then would draw up a fresh covenant with God. He could say two years before he died, “I have a measure of confidence, that I will get complete life and salvation.”

Praying and preaching

What were Boston’s great strengths? He was filled with a sense both of the majesty and grace of God, and he held the Scripture in great esteem. He therefore applied himself to its study, often in the original languages. He likewise disciplined himself to seek God’s face in prayer, with certain days appointed for personal, family, and church fasting, and also spent the time between services in prayer and meditation. He would never preach on a text until he had assurance on the subject, which could be obtained with “more wasting and weakening to me, than the study of my sermon thereon.” Boston timed himself with a pulpit hourglass. On one occasion, he had a job to stretch his sermon to the hour, but at another time he forgot how many times he had turned the glass over. He records that at one Lord’s Supper, “The sermon was more than two hours, which I think was too much. A certain gentleman said, it was above his capacity...I resolved to be shorter.” At a subsequent communion he preached for an hour and a half, but being “in much weakness, was at length exhausted.”

Providence

Boston was extremely sensitive in ascribing all events to the sovereign providence of God. Occasionally, he should have also seen a lack of common sense as the human cause of a misfortune. For example, on one occasion after saddling his horse he was told that “it was all swelled in the counter and side.” However, he still rode it to a communion at Penpont. There the blacksmith came to see it and advised that “it was more swelled than before; and told me, if the swelling in its progress was as quick downwards as it had been hitherto, he was gone.” In reflecting, he says, “Let the Lord do what seemeth him good. I was obliged to leave my horse behind me at Penpont under care, and he died.” Not only that, but he himself was unwell, so an elder accompanied him, who subsequently died at Penpont, to his great grief.

Yet his other afflictions, especially his wife’s mental illness, were unavoidable. He wrote, “I think I have thereby obtained some soul-advantage; more heavenliness in the frame of my heart, more contempt of the world, as the widow that is desolate trusteth in God...more carefulness to walk with God, and to get evidence for heaven; more resolution for the Lord’s work, over the belly of difficulties.”

Benevolence

Boston records that his “stipend was small” but that “some students continued with us at times; so that we ate not our morsel alone.” His salary was subsidized with income from a house he rented and from his office as synod-clerk, so that “things honest in the sight of men were readily, by the kind disposal of Providence, laid to hand.” On receipt of his stipend, he would lay aside certain amounts, and he kept these in a box in his left-side pocket to give out for benevolences and Sabbath offerings. In addition, he fed the poor who called at his house, but the wool he gave them was bought with money from his fund as he had no money of his own. In all his ministry, he used to pray that he “might attain to habitual cheerfulness in the Lord.”

The man and his Guide

Like his Lord, Boston had “nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.” Yet he would say, “If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him.” He often reflected on Jacob and Job, how Providence seemed to run them aground and break them in pieces, yet the Lord’s final purposes were quite otherwise. To Boston, the Lord was the Great Leader, and the Sovereign Manager; and of His Word he writes, “[A]ll is comprehended in the word, Prov. 3:6; both the promise and the precept take in all. You are neither to look for impressions, nor anything else of that kind, whatever indulgence the Lord makes to some of His people in some circumstances, and...set yourself as a Christian man to perceive what in the circumstances appears reasonable to be done.” He was careful that he “might not make a fortune-book of the Bible,” dipping into it at random for guidance, rather he resolved to read it systematically and “though my case should not be touched there, I would wait on God.” Thus he was safely, if not easily, led to his eternal rest.

How soft we are! How easily we grumble at the slightest difficulty or affront which we encounter! Did our Lord meet with less? Are we going to leave the church in a huff over some disagreement in a church meeting? What about the unity of the church? Do we feel overburdened with duties and family pressures and hardships? Are we going to stay at home on the Lord’s Day because of a headache? Would we rather read a devotional book at home than attend the prayer meeting? Shortly before his death, in much pain and lame and so very weak he could not go to church, Boston still opened the manse window and declared the glorious gospel of Christ.

Do you have problems? Ask God to grant you to experience: “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

Dr. Nigel T. Faithfull, who has his Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry, attends Caersalem Baptist Church, in Cardiff, Wales. Source: *Memoirs of Thomas Boston*, Banner of Truth, 1988.



THE *Benefits* OF SELF-EXAMINATION

This is the final installment of three articles on the vital and often misunderstood subject of self-examination. Former articles have addressed the necessity and criteria of self-examination.

Having looked at various facets of self-examination in two recent articles, I want to conclude our study of this subject by looking at some of the benefits we derive from self-examination. We are inclined to think that there is no benefit in doing so; it is nothing but digging within yourself. It yields no comfort and it is of no benefit to the Christian life. It only promotes doubt and lack of assurance.

Our Dutch forefathers and the Puritans were of a different mindset. Why did they give such prominence to the doctrine of self-examination? First of all, they had a pastoral motive, recognizing that people need it. They defined this pastoral motive as watching over souls. They habitually said that they deemed it important to expose self-deceit in a timely fashion, and they also deemed self-examination to be an important means to confirm genuine faith. They viewed this as belonging to their pastoral duty as shepherds of the flock. They therefore believed that self-examination exposes the hypocrite but also promotes the assurance of the believer.

Biblical self-examination will expose the hypocrite and the nominal Christian, for it confronts us with the very essence of the matter. It confronts us with the question, "What is my confidence for the future? What is the basis for my expectation? Is my expectation truly well-founded? Is my hope in anything other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified? Am I relying on my works, my seriousness, my contrition, my attendance at the Lord's Table, and my impressive and sound confession? Or do I confess with Paul, 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord'" (Phil. 3:7-8)?

Self-examination confronts me with questions as to whether my faith is genuine; whether my love is genuine; and whether my walk is upright. Self-examination focuses particularly on uprightness. In the Bible, the pure in heart are a distinct category of people. The pure in heart are those who are truly born again.

By way of self-examination, we can discover that neither our love and faith nor our sanctification are genuine. What a blessing it is when this is exposed in a timely fashion! Many of our forefathers will say that it is to our benefit when we discover in time that we were never sincere in our departure from evil, for then we can do so at this very moment. If we discover that we have never sincerely confessed our sins, we can do so now before God. If we discover that we never came to Christ in truth, we can come to Him now. Such is the benefit derived from self-examination.

Finally, the intent of self-examination is not that we should endlessly search within ourselves for proofs of the genuineness of our faith. Faith and confidence in Christ are the preeminent features, and the marks of grace will follow. They will confirm and declare that in all uprightness I have put my trust in Christ. However, self-examination is not merely for the purpose of affirming that the exercise of my faith has been genuine and sincere by virtue of the fact that it produced fruits consistent with faith and repentance; it is also the means to foster renewed exercises of repentance and faith.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Perhaps at one point in your life, you had assurance—you observed within yourself the marks of a true Christian. There was a godly sorrow about sin and a departure from all the ways of sin. You fled to Christ because you heard His voice in the gospel, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37). There was, to use the words of the Belgic Confession, a "continual taking refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ." Your private prayer life was healthy, and you desired to avail yourself of the means of grace. Your walk was a sanctified walk, and your heart sought "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and not "things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). You rejoiced in the light of God's friendly countenance.

However, things are so very different now! You now fear that you are but a temporary believer. Where is the joyous

assurance that God is with you and that Christ is your portion? Why have you lost all of this?

When Christians examine themselves, they will have to confess the reason for this to be their departure from the Lord. Their personal prayer life has declined, and they are no longer fleeing to Christ. Their appetite for the means of grace has declined, and the world has become so attractive to them. The benefit of self-examination will then be what we read in Hosea 2:7: "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." It will lead to a renewed contrition. It will prompt us to take refuge to Christ once again. It will make us more cautious in our daily walk. In short, a Christian will benefit much from self-examination.

Repentance and faith are *the* distinguishing marks of the Christian, for the true believer will do battle with sin his entire lifetime. Daily repentance remains necessary precisely because we never will be fully done with sin, and we will never achieve perfection in this life. The holy war is

fought on the battlefield of the heart. It is the Christian's calling to engage in a lifelong battle against sin, the world, and his own flesh, and this necessitates daily repentance and a daily fleeing to the blood of Christ. That struggle is so beneficial! Such a struggle leads to renewed exercises of faith, and that is how the Holy Spirit strengthens our union with Christ, making it ever more intimate. He thereby stimulates our sanctification and causes us to feel ever more deeply that "we have no might against this great company that cometh against us" (2 Chron. 20:12).

Daily repentance and daily embracing of Christ by faith through a fresh encounter with Him is the secret of the true Christian life. Repentance and faith are not matters that occur just once and then are no longer necessary. You will always be able to recognize the Christian by his repentance toward God and his faith in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Cor Harinck is a retired minister of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* in the Netherlands and the author of many books. This article is translated from Dutch by Rev. Bartel Elshout.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/FAMILY GUIDANCE

JAMES W. BEEKE

the COMMEMORATING Parent & Teacher

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.

—EXODUS 12:14

Consider this question. Has God not helped you today? As a parent, has not the Lord upheld you this past week? As a teacher, has not the Almighty provided strength and ability to you this past month? Has not the triune God graciously provided for all your needs during this past year?

We are called to commemorate God's faithfulness. We should rejoice in our Lord's gracious provision and praise Him for it. Dear parents and teachers, commemorate the great truth of God's faithfulness every evening—what an encouragement this will be for the next day! At the close of each week, celebrate this wonderful truth with your family or with your class(es). Each year, observe a special thanksgiving. Do this from generation to generation in your family. What an encouragement for the next year!

By doing so, God's name will be glorified and you will be strengthened.

The context of our verse (Exodus 12) testifies of the great deliverance God enacted when His angel passed over the homes of the Israelites, but entered and killed the first-born in all the houses of the Egyptians. Yes, the Israelites had much to worry about at that time. The Egyptians were so powerful, and things were going from bad to worse with Pharaoh. God had given signs that He would deliver them, but the Israelites often had a hard time not dwelling on the negative to see the positive.

As parents and teachers, we also so naturally allow the negative to overwhelm the positive in our thinking. If our small child obeys us most of the day, we can still spend

most of our time worrying about the times that he or she did not. If our teenaged son or daughter usually does listen to us, we can still spend most of our time worrying about the few times that he or she did not. If most of our students are respectful to us, we can still spend most of our time fretting over the ones who do not. When we do this, we are not honestly considering the facts. We dishonor God by formulating unfair views of our children or students. And in the end, we create discouragement for ourselves.

PRAYER HONESTLY FACES OUR NEEDS AND PROBLEMS; BUT IT ALSO BRINGS THEM TO GOD. IT ACKNOWLEDGES THE LORD AND PRAISES HIM FOR HIS BLESSINGS.

Even worse, we can fret and worry over imagined future misbehaviors and potential problems with our children or students. We can lie awake at night, growing more and more anxious about the future. What if this happens, or what if my son becomes involved in that? We turn fears over and over in our minds, imagining the worst. But again, when we do this, we are not considering the situation fairly, we are forgetting God, and we only succeed in depressing ourselves.

Are we not then to be concerned about our children's misbehavior? Does the future not contain real temptations for my students? Am I not to worry about these things? Yes, we are to be concerned about misbehavior and the future. We are to do our best to correct sinful actions and to plan. But we must not think about the future without including the God of the future. We are not to think of present misbehaviors without also meditating upon present blessings. We are not only called to work but to pray and work. Prayer is so important because it brings God into the equation.

How can we achieve real success as parents or teachers? My thoughts always run to the negative. I naturally worry. My mind fixates on the problems, real or imagined. What am I to do? The solution lies in our verse: remember God's gracious faithfulness. Remember this every evening. Consciously take the time to count His blessings one by one. Think of the real blessings of God each day. Meditate on the blessings of parenting or teaching and the strength, guidance, and care given personally to you that day. Humbly acknowledge the Lord for His provision in the lives of your children or students, particularly when they generally listen, learn, and respond favorably.

Do the same when considering the future. Do not focus solely on the sinful temptations or potential problems that the future may hold. Meditate on the truth that

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not leave God out of your thoughts, as if He will not exist in the future; this is practical atheism. Do not deny the truth that He will be an ever-present help in time of need in all your tomorrows. Has He not proven Himself to be gracious in all your yesterdays and today?

Pray and work. Prayer honestly faces our needs and problems; but it also brings them to God. It acknowledges the Lord and praises Him for His blessings. Do this by regularly raising personal "Ebenzers—hitherto has the LORD helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12). Do this by commemorating memorials to a faithful God every evening, week, month, and year.

Commemorate the positive choices and behaviors of your children and students with them. Do not allow a disposition to develop in which the only times that your children have your undivided attention is when they have made a sinful choice or misbehaved. Above all, commemorate God's faithfulness and blessings together. Thank God in the presence of your children or students for the fruits you witness in their lives—even if these fruits may only be outward or of common grace. Raise memorials to God's honor.



Yes, many things will go beyond your ability to control as parents. Much will take place that is beyond your influence as teachers. But nothing will happen that is outside of God's influence or control. What a glorious truth! What an uplifting thought!

You do not need to carry your parenting or teaching burden alone. What an encouragement to remember that "underneath are the everlasting arms" of God's strength (Deut. 33:27)! Remind yourself daily of this glorious truth, and remember it when you go to prayer.

Are you a commemorating parent, a remembering teacher?

James W. Beeke is an elder in the Chiliwack, B.C. Heritage Reformed Congregation and an international educational consultant.

BOOK TALK

NEW RHB BOOKS



Water, Word, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism—*J. V. Fesko*

J. V. Fesko's *Word, Water, and Spirit* is a major work that both models how to do theology by moving from historical theology to biblical and systematic theology and, most importantly, presents fresh insights for a Reformed understanding of baptism. Fesko's fair-minded, page-turning history of the doctrine of baptism is itself worth the price of the book. Most enlightening, however, is his biblical-theological survey of baptism as new creation, covenant judgment,

and eschatological judgment. The book's emphasis on God's judgment in baptism is particularly innovative and helpful. These insights pave the way for treating baptism systematically as a means of grace and as a sacrament in relation to its recipients and ecclesiology. Highly recommended for all who wish to grapple seriously with the doctrine of baptism and its implications. (480 pages, HB) \$35.00/28.00



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Illustrations by Matt Abraxas

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Joel R. Beeke and James A. La Belle

Foreword by Jerry Bridges

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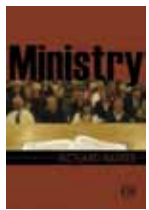
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Illustrations by Evan Hughes

The life of Guido de Bres teaches us that we can find enduring hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ, even during persecution. Author William Boekestein sensitively tells the story of de Bres for children, guiding them through his turbulent life and times—from his birth in 1522 in a small Belgium town, to his call to the ministry and study under Reformers such as John Calvin and Theodore Beza, to his authorship of the Belgic Confession and a life of suffering, to his martyr's death in 1567. Skillfully crafted illustrations and an easy-to-understand narrative combine to capture the interests—and admiration—of the entire family for this amazing Reformation hero.

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Fire from Heaven—*Paul E. G. Cook*

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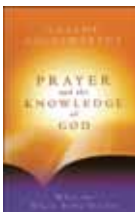
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Facing Grief—*John Flavel*

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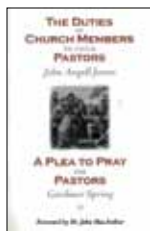


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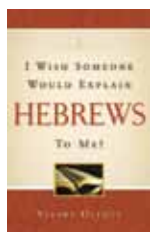


The Duties of Church Members to Their Pastors and A Plea to Pray for Pastors

John Angell James and Gardiner Spring

There are many popular books on the duties of pastors, but very few on the duties of congregants towards their pastor. In the first part of this short booklet, James details the various obligations that church members have. Every minister of the gospel grows weary and discouraged. If you are not praying for your pastors, who will be? The second part of this booklet is a passionate plea for godly men and women to rise up and offer intercession on their behalf.

(PB, SGCB, 25 pages) \$5.00/\$3.00

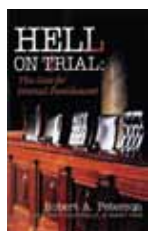


I Wish Someone Would Explain Hebrews to Me

Stuart Olyott

Every Christian should understand Hebrews because it unfolds for us an understanding of the Old Testament and the person and work of Jesus Christ. Olyott explains Hebrews as clearly as possible with the aim to focus our gaze upon Christ so that we might follow Him with renewed courage. This commentary exemplifies both learning and application and is suitable to readers of all levels.

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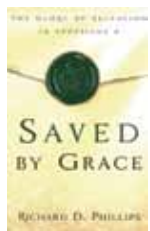


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The hope of the Christian life lies not in this world, but in the security and certainty of the world to come. All fears will one day cease, every tear will be wiped away, and we will be saved to sin no more. Ryle beautifully writes of that future hope stored up for us in heaven and to which we press on day after day.

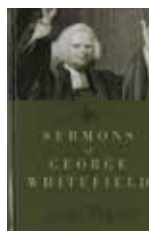
(HC, Evangelical Press, 127 pages) \$13.99/\$11.25



Surprised by Suffering—*R. C. Sproul*

Suffering is one of the most significant challenges to any believer's faith. It can catch us by surprise and test our faith to the limit of despair. But our suffering has a purpose: it is a vocation given to us by our heavenly Father. In this book, pastor and theologian R.C. Sproul seeks to confront the difficult questions we face amid suffering and, through the gospel, provide a sure and steadfast hope in the day of trouble.

(HC, Reformation Trust, 156 pages) \$15.00/\$10.00



Sermons of George Whitefield—*George Whitefield*

John Wesley once remarked about Whitefield, "Have we read or heard of any person who called so many thousands, so many myriads, of sinners to repentance?" Whitefield's ministry throughout England and America was marked with renowned passion, unquenchable zeal, and bold conviction. This volume contains nearly thirty of his sermons which mesmerized and captivated tens of thousands during the Great Awakening.

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Pornography

In the last three articles, we have considered aspects of the Internet that can have both positive and negative ramifications. Sadly, there is no escaping the subject that we now need to consider. There are no positive benefits, only sinful, dark, negative, and life-destroying ones. No one who has an email account or browsed the Internet for more than a few minutes can have escaped the intrusive darkness that this sin- and money-driven industry has cast.

Pornography ruins lives

Let's make no mistake about it: this evil is all about money. The online pornography industry generates some ten billion dollars per year.¹ It is a vicious and deeply addictive industry, taking advantage of our sinful desires, preying on the weak, and destroying lives.

'J,' a 26-year-old man addicted to Internet pornography, says: "I go to work, I go to school, and I spend time with my family. The people around me don't know that I'm a shell of a person. They don't have a clue that I don't feel my life is worth living.... I grew more and more consumed by looking at pornography on the internet for hours on end.... I grew more and more angry at the world.... There's no way to undo it now. The only thing that numbs the pain digs me that much deeper into the hole.... I have ruined my life, and I did it one day at a time as I sat down in front of my computer yet again."²

Responding to 'J,' Max says: "What a sad story. I can feel his pain right now. I was a porn addict myself. I know how destructive this thing is. It doesn't let you think of anything, it breaks you slowly, mentally and physically. Such addicts find no interest in anything, they don't even like to be social, the world becomes a hell for them. This feeling takes them to depression—you stop believing in yourself, you feel like a criminal all of the time. In short, it just destroys your life."

Statistics

Pornography is easily found on the Internet. Here are a few statistics:

- There are 4.2 million websites (12% of total websites).
- Every day, 1 in 4 search requests (68 million) and 2.5 billion emails (8% of total emails or 4.5 for every Internet user) are about pornography.³
- The average age of first exposure to Internet porn is 11.⁴
- 90% of 8–16 year olds have viewed porn online mostly while doing homework.

Don't try a second life

Just three or four years ago, the buzz in the Internet world and in the media was all about Second Life. People would immerse themselves for hours at a time in this virtual world,

first creating computer representations of themselves (avatars) and then flying around a computer world populated by other peoples' avatars, buildings, events, and even companies setting up virtual shops. Today, most of Second Life is deserted, except for one virtual "island." In 2007, after some high profile investigations by the FBI in the US over online gambling activities, Second Life owners decided to try to clean up their act. They closed down all virtual casinos (where real money was being gambled) and relocated its "adult" content to a separate virtual continent called Zindra. Today, the vast majority of the activity of Second Life can be found on Zindra, a place which according to one reporter is full of "downright disturbing activities taking place."⁵ Second Life is not a place for Christians and shows how the heart, untouched by the light of the gospel influence, tends naturally to evil.

Churches are not immune

John Steley is a Christian psychologist who contributed to last month's article in this series and has also lectured at the London Theological Seminary on Internet abuse. In a fascinating article, he writes: "I work with people from a large number of Christian churches and mission societies, including some of the most conservative and evangelical. What I am told by those I meet leads me to conclude that the use of Internet pornography is a significant problem in the church today. None of us should consider ourselves to be immune from this temptation."⁶

Other surveys have confirmed this. A recent US-based scholarly report concluded that "subscriptions [to pornographic websites] are more prevalent in those states where surveys indicate conservative positions on religion, gender roles, and sexuality."⁷ Ironically, the report goes to say that "in such regions, a statistically significant smaller proportion of subscriptions begin on Sundays, compared with other regions!"

This problem is not restricted to men. One in six women (17%), including Christians, struggles with pornography addiction.⁸

It is simply not good enough to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that Internet pornography happens somewhere else. We cannot hide behind the facade that because we are Reformed Christians, it cannot affect us or our church. The privacy that the Internet affords provides the opportunity to visit pornographic web sites without anyone else knowing about it. How many of our church members hide a secret addiction? Can we really say that we are immune?

World, a Reformed weekly publication, reported about a 'Mr. B.,' who for 20 years was a churchgoer and preacher "trusted, revered, and believed to be of impeccable reputation."

But beneath the thick varnish of smooth oration and doctrinally sound sermons, this conservative pastor secretly harbored a monster. “I was a master of duplicity,” Mr. B. said of his addiction to Internet pornography. For the entirety of his ministry and even before, Mr. B. tumbled silently through a cycle of shame, repentance, and broken vows. Despite a guilt-ridden conscience, Mr. B. often preached on sexual purity, slogging through such sermons undetected. “I compartmentalized it in my mind,” he said. “I rationalized. I minimized.” When discovered, his ministry and family lost, his reputation soiled, Mr. B. turned to the church for help and found little. “Churches didn’t know how to handle me,” he said.⁹

Christianity Today agrees: “[D]on’t assume that porn isn’t a problem in the church. One evangelical leader was skeptical of survey findings that said 50 percent of Christian men have looked at porn recently. So he surveyed his own congregation. He found that 60 percent had done so within the past year, and 25 percent within the past 30 days. Other surveys reveal that one in three visitors to adult websites are women.”¹⁰

How can we respond?

In looking at this area, aside from noting that pornography in any form, whether Internet based or not, is wrong, there are three biblical principles that should be applied:

1. *Self-examination.* This is perhaps not often emphasized for the fear of introspection or of the modern obsession with self. Yet, in the Bible, we are called to “examine ourselves” (1 Cor. 11:26, Gal. 6:4). If we have a particular weakness, we are told to “flee” from it (1 Cor. 6:18, 1 Tim. 6:11). The description of sin in James 1:14-15 speaks of being drawn away by our own “lust and enticed.” If this sin of sexual immorality or pornography is one that is a particular weakness for us, we must first recognize it, then either seek help, or stay well clear of anything (including the Internet) that could lead to this particular sin.

2. *Self-control.* As we have said in previous articles, the Christian grace of self-control is listed as one that we must add to our faith (2 Pet. 1:6). Over and over again in Scripture as well as in everyday life, we have examples of people who fell into sin because of lack of self-control. The problem of self-control in the area of sexual conduct can affect even the

A positive response at Carey Baptist Church in Reading

In a society where it is estimated that 70% of men and 21% of women struggle with online pornography, it is not surprising that church leaders come across a number of Christians, mainly men, who want help in this matter. Some are fellows who have been addicted to Internet pornography in the past and never want to go down that road again; others are those who want to keep themselves pure amid all the onslaughts of the age. Both groups are to be commended and encouraged.

Like many churches, Carey Baptist Church in Reading, England, recommends that those who want help should sign up for Covenant Eyes. Started in March 2000, this is a program that helps a person stay pure online by monitoring their internet use and sending an e-mail report of all websites visited to an accountability partner—who may be their pastor, an elder, youth leader, or relative. The idea is that if the user knows the accountability partner will be keeping track of his or her Internet usage, he will be less likely to visit questionable sites. We recommend this scheme because

- It is inexpensive.
- It is difficult to by-pass.
- Reports can be sent to the accountability partner weekly, thus enabling immediate pastoral help if there is a lapse.
- It is based upon the biblical principle that Christians are accountable to the Lord and to each other.
- We want to do all we can to help one another to pursue holiness.

We are sure that Job (Job 31:1), and more importantly, Jesus, would urge people to use this scheme.

—Basil Howlett

best of people. King David was known as God’s Servant (Acts 4:25), but yet he was overcome by his sexual desires for Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) and his lack of self-control in the matter.

3. *Accountability.* We live in an age where we are told that whatever people do in the privacy of their own home is their business. In the minds of some, Internet pornography is justified because it “does no harm” to anyone and is something that is done in the privacy of a home. Yet, as we have already seen, this is simply not true. The Bible tells us that we are accountable to a Holy God for all our thoughts, words, deeds, or lack of action (Matt. 12:36, Rom. 14:12). In addition,

however, the New Testament church emphasizes the idea of mutual accountability. Not only will elders be held accountable for the way they led the local church (Heb. 13:17), but we are encouraged to “confess our faults one to another” and “pray one for another” (James 5:16). True believers are a family; we all depend on one another (1 Cor. 12). We are to develop a familial openness with one another, a desire to share, to help, and most difficult, a willingness to be helped. The strength of mutual accountability is an area that even the secular organization Alcoholics Anonymous has recognized with its “buddy system”; it could be said that such accountability is responsible for much of its success.

Practical Advice

1. *Find a “buddy.”* The idea of making ourselves accountable to one another strains against prevalent culture. Yet, as we have seen, it is a biblical concept. Perhaps a spouse, or a close friend, or someone else in the church, could act as a “buddy.” A good illustration of how this is done in practice can be seen at Carey Baptist Church (see inset).

2. *Protect the computer.* One of the more worrying developments is the story of a man who was charged with child pornography because indecent pictures were found on his computer. In fact, these had been stored there by a pedophile, using a virus to infect his computer so that he could use it to store his pictures and thereby evade the risk of being found in possession of this material.¹¹ The best way to counter this problem is to have an antivirus program on each computer that is kept up-to-date, and to make sure that the firewall is switched on (this comes integrated into Windows and Apple Mac computers).

3. *Install a family filter.* These are pieces of software that filter out sites with pornographic or other undesirable content. The Covenant Eyes software is a specialized example of this (see inset). Others include a number of commercial products (such as Net Nanny and SafeEyes).

4. *Keep away.* For some, the answer may be to stay away from computers. Understanding ourselves and our particular failings is important here. If you or someone you know has this failing, I would urge you to pray, to seek counsel (perhaps with your pastor, elder, or trusted Christian friend), and to trust the wondrous living Savior who can keep you and will never let you down.

In the next article, we will consider how businesses (big and small) use the Internet to market and sell their products, including dubious practices such as viral marketing. You will be surprised by how much they know about you.

1. <http://www.christianity.com/Christian%20Living/Features/11558259/>
2. <http://www.quitpornaddiction.com/true-stories/i-have-ruined-my-life-one-day-at-a-time-js-story/>
3. <http://www.restoringsexualpurity.org/statistics/>
4. *Family Safe Media*, December 15, 2005.
5. From the article on Second Life in the January 2010 issue of PC PRO.
6. *Evangelicals Now*, October 2007.
7. Benjamin Edelman, "Red Light States: Who Buys Online Adult Entertainment?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23, 1 (Winter 2009).
8. *Today's Christian Woman*, 2003, quoted in http://www.freedomyou.com/addiction/Internet_Pornography.htm
9. *World*, April 23, 2005.
10. *Christianity Today*, March 7, 2008.
11. See "Framed for child porn—by a PC virus" by Jordan Robertson, AP Technology Writer—Mon Nov 9, 2009, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33778733>

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(continued from page 214)

The promises are the *babe's* milk by which they are nourished, the full breasts from which they suck both grace and comfort; they are the *young men's* evidences, by which they are animated to combat with the wicked one, and assured of being crowned with victory over him; they are the *old men's* staff, upon the top of which like aged Jacob they may safely lean, and worship God; it being a staff for power like Moses' rod, and for flourishing like Aaron's [rod], budding, blossoming, and yielding precious fruit. So that it is of more than ordinary concernment unto every one of them that look upon themselves as believers...not to be supine [i.e., negligent] and careless in the frequent use, and due application of the promises.¹⁷

We have now sketched with a Puritan pen the nature of God's promises, the various categories into which they are grouped, and why they are so precious to us. May God graciously enable us to appropriate, cherish, and profit from His excellent and worthy promises.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the Puritans wrote so extensively on the promises of God? Why are believers today prone to make so much less of God's promises?
2. Why should God's promises be an important part of the life of His children? If you are a believer, why are you often reticent to plead on God's promises? How could you make more use of the promises than you presently do?
3. Edward Leigh says God's promises are "the grounds of our hope, the objects of our faith, and the rule of prayer." What does he mean by that? In what ways is each of these expressions true?

4. What encouragement should we glean from Andrew Gray's observation that God's promises imply God's goodwill, purpose, and intention toward sinners?
5. What does William Spurstowe mean by saying that a promise of God is a "middle thing" between God's purpose and God's performance?
6. How do God's promises differ from His threats and His commands?
7. How would you define God's promises?
8. Why is it important to distinguish what kind of promise we are dealing with when reading the Scriptures?
9. Explain the difference between *conditional* promises and *absolute* promises. Explain how God's conditional promises are rooted in His absolute promises. How does your explanation prevent you from falling into an Arminian view of God's promises?
10. List ten precious promises contained in the Bible. Provide ten reasons why these promises should be exceedingly precious to believers (2 Pet. 1:4).

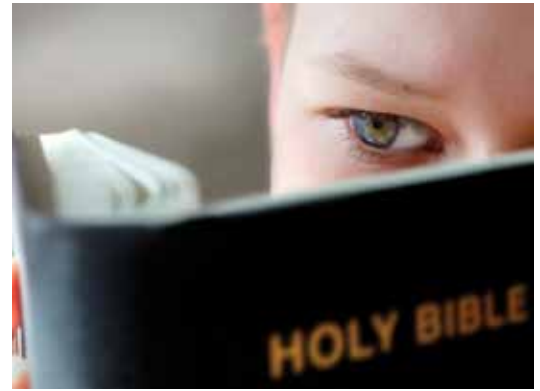
1. Leigh, 1.
2. Ibid., 4–5.
3. Gray, 117, emphasis added.
4. Spurstowe, 10.
5. Ibid., 29.
6. Leigh, 11.
7. Ibid., 12.
8. Ibid., 13.
9. Gray, 117, emphasis added.
10. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/juneweb-only/6-24-53.0.html>
11. Leigh, 16.
12. Ibid.
13. Gray, 157.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 157–58.
16. Spurstowe, 2.
17. Ibid., 2–3.

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What is Truth?

For Our Children

Diana Kleyn



When Jesus stood before Pilate, He told the Roman ruler, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37). Pilate did not understand what Jesus was talking about and responded, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). It seemed Pilate thought everything was a lie. People can claim to be honest, yet the truth is often hard to discern. The Jews brought many false accusations against Jesus, yet Pilate could find no fault in Him. He didn’t know what was true anymore: what is the truth and what is a lie?

We are surrounded by lies and falsehood, too. Sometimes these lies are cloaked in truth, which makes them even harder to detect. Children and adults both lie to one another, causing hurt and sorrow. When God gave Moses the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, He included a law about telling the truth and telling lies. Do you know which one it is? It is the ninth commandment: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exodus 20:16), which means that we may not make any false statements about another person. I am sure you try your best to keep this commandment, but have you discovered how difficult it is to obey any of God’s commandments? Even if you try very hard, sometimes you sin without realizing it, don’t you? What’s more, the Ten Commandments are not just about outward obedience: they are meant to open our eyes to the condition of our heart—our innermost being. For that, we need the Holy Spirit. When He works in our hearts, we learn that not only our actions and words are sinful but our thoughts and intentions are as well. For instance, Sue might tell Mary something that is true, such as, “I saw Michael’s test score—he failed his math test!” Sue did not tell a lie, so technically, she did not sin against the ninth commandment. But *why* did Sue tell Mary that Michael failed his math test? Was it a kind or a cruel thing to do? Did Sue glorify God when she told Mary this? That is why it is so important that we examine our hearts and discover our *motives*. If we are honest with ourselves, we soon realize that we are totally depraved, which means that every part of us is sinful.

Dear children, has the Holy Spirit shown you what your heart is like? If so, you must not be discouraged! There is

help for you! In order for you to be washed from your sins, you must know that you really do have sins that need to be washed away: if you think you have no sin, you will not ask for cleansing. You cannot wash away your own sins, and no one other person can either, no matter how much they love you. Only a perfect Person can make you clean and pure. That Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6a). He is the *Truth!* That means there is nothing false in Him. He is incapable of telling a lie, for no evil can stand in His sight. You can trust Him completely; everything He says and does is true and honest. Because of what He has done, He is able to wash away your sins. When you are cleansed from all your sin, God looks on you through Jesus Christ; He sees only the righteousness of Christ and not your sin.

In the month of October, we think about the great Reformation hundreds of years ago. The Roman Catholic Church, the official church at that time, had strayed far from the truth. The church taught many lies and kept the Bible out of people’s hands. It seemed that Satan, the father of lies, was gaining the victory. The light of the gospel had almost died out, but God has promised that there will always be some people who know the truth and live in the light. The Holy Spirit enlightened men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and many others. These men are called Reformers. A new church was formed (after the original church refused to embrace the truth) and the truths of God’s Word were taught once again. Many people found peace and forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ—the Truth. The Roman Catholic Church hated the Reformers and their teachings. But even though they tried everything to silence the Reformers, God’s Word will not be silenced, and we may enjoy the blessings of the Reformation still today.

Dear children, the fight against the truth during the Reformation was nothing new. Since the first sin was committed in the Garden of Eden, people throughout all ages have turned away from the truth, whether or not they were raised in Christian homes. We all need to believe the truth about ourselves and about God. Because we are full of sin, we cannot tell truth from error. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Have you asked Him to teach

you from His Word of truth? Have you humbled yourself before God, confessing your sins to Him? Has He washed you clean? If you are still unsaved, bow your knees right now and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you the truth about yourself and about God. If you are safe in Christ, do not fall into the sin of thinking that you see everything clearly or that you are more enlightened than those around you. Ask the Holy Spirit for humility; ask Him to teach you more truth every

day so that you can be a light in the darkness all around you. Do you know people who live in darkness and do not know the truth? Pray for them and ask the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. And pray for your pastors, teachers, and parents, asking the Lord to keep them faithful to the truth. Above all, pray that God's holy name would be glorified in you and in all those who love Him.

Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.

Ellen & Anna ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Diana Kleyn

Ellen and Anna were two sisters. The younger sister, Anna, who was five years old, loved the Lord from the time she knew right from wrong. When her mother would call the children at seven o'clock in the evening to go to bed, little Anna would run at once to climb into her mother's lap. Then she would say, "Mama, tell me something about Jesus before I go to bed." Once or twice, her mother was called away by people coming to visit, and she could not put the little ones to bed herself. Afterward, when she went to check on her precious children, she found little Anna crying softly because she had not heard as usual about her beloved Lord Jesus.

Every morning after breakfast, the girls' mother would read the Bible with her children. One morning, when she was reading about the Savior's death on the cross to save His people from their sins, Anna exclaimed, "O Mama, how much Jesus must love us! Nobody would want to die for someone else, except Jesus!"

When the weather was pleasant, the children would go for walks with their mother in the fields along the edge of the woods. They often gathered wild flowers, and Anna sometimes brought one to her mother, saying, "Look what a beautiful flower God has made!" It seemed the little girl was always thinking about God. On one of their walks, they passed a field where sheep grazed. Anna remarked, "How very good of God to make wool grow on the sheep, so we can have nice warm clothes!"

Another day, when Anna and Ellen were walking along the road, each holding one of their mother's hands, their mother spoke of the duty and privilege of praying to and praising God at all times and in all places. She was actually speaking to Ellen, who was almost two years older than Anna. She thought Anna was too young to understand what she was saying, but she was mistaken. After this, she began to notice that several times a day Anna would go into her room and close the door. When she came out again, her little face would beam with pleasure. This had been going on for some time when her mother asked, "Why do you go into your room by yourself and shut the door, Anna?"

Anna blushed and hesitated, but her mother pressed her for an answer. Finally Anna said, "I want to pray to God."

"What do you pray for?"

"I pray to Him to send His Spirit to teach me about Jesus, and to make me ready for heaven."

Little Anna also prayed for others. Once her mother was sick in bed and Ellen had put Anna and her little brother to bed. Anna asked Ellen, "Would you please tell Mama that I hope she will be all better in the morning?"

Ellen soon returned. "Mama says, 'Thank you,' and that she is sure a good night's rest will help her feel better."

Anna sent her sister back to tell their mother that she was praying to God to make her well again.

I will now tell you something about Ellen, the older sister. As part of their morning devotions, Ellen, Anna, and their little brother would recite some Bible verses they had memorized. Their mother would then read a portion of Scripture and explain it to them. On this particular day, when Ellen was about nine years old, the passage was about the Lord's return. Her mother said, "We don't know when He may come. He might even come right now while we are speaking with each other."

Ellen became very frightened, for she knew that she was not ready to meet the Lord. She knew that her sins had not been washed in the blood of the Savior. She trembled to think that the Lord might come and find her unfit for heaven. For a few days she was very miserable, and could find no peace. She did what she had been taught to do and asked the Lord Jesus to wash away her sins and make her ready to meet Him. God was good to her and heard her prayers. In time, by the Spirit's application, Ellen knew that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, had washed away all her sins. Her grief and misery were turned to joy; she was very happy. Anna was happy, too. The two little girls loved to talk to each other about Jesus.

Why have I told you about Ellen and Anna, dear children? It is because I hope the Lord will bless it to your hearts and make you long to be His dear children. Jesus calls to you; the message of salvation is for you, too. Jesus calls you to be obedient. "Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways" (Proverbs 8:32). Many children throughout the ages have been washed in the blood of Christ; their sins were all forgiven because Jesus died and shed His blood on the cross for them. Are you ready to meet Him? Are your sins forgiven? When Jesus was on earth, "He took [little children] up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). Ask Him to draw you close and to bless you, too.

Adapted from *A Wonderful Field and What I Learned About it, and Other Stories*, by C. E. H. (London: The Gospel Book Depot, n.d.), 138-41.

Alice and Her Mission

In the street where Alice lived was an old man who was sick and dying. The worst of it was that this man did not know God, and did not want to know Him. In such a case, what would you do? Would you say, “Leave him alone” or “What can a child do”?

This poor man, whom we will name Charlie, hated all ministers of any kind. One day a minister came to see him, but when Charlie’s wife asked him if he wanted to see him, Charlie answered, “No! I will not see him.” He spoke so sharply that his poor wife quickly left the room. A second time, someone called to see him and told Charlie’s wife that he intended to see Charlie whether he wanted to or not. The sick man heard him, and became very angry, calling out such awful threats that the visitor quickly left.

There was another Christian man, however, whom we will name Mr. Anderson, who determined, if possible, to win this soul for God. He knew that Charlie’s case would require much prayer, but also an unusual method. Mr. Anderson thought of Alice, who lived near Charlie. Mr. Anderson knew that Charlie liked children, and that Alice would often visit Charlie. So, Mr. Anderson asked Alice if she would learn a hymn and sing it to her old friend. Alice promised to do so and quickly learned the hymn. She sang it for Mr. Anderson before she went to sing it to Charlie. Then Mr. Anderson and Alice prayed, asking God to bless the hymn to the stubborn man’s heart. Charlie and his wife welcomed Alice cheerfully. Handing Charlie her hymnbook, she pointed to the hymn and asked him to follow along to make sure she sang it correctly. Folding her hands in front of her, she began:

Come, whosoever will,
Nor vainly strive to mend;
Sinners are freely welcome still
To Christ, the sinner’s Friend.

The gospel-table’s spread
And richly furnished too,
With wine and milk, and living bread,
And dainties not a few.

The guilty, vile, and base,
The wretched and forlorn,
Are welcome to the feast of grace,
Though goodness they have none.

No goodness He expects;
He came to save the poor;
Poor helpless souls He ne’er neglects,
Nor sends them from His door.

His tender, loving heart
The vilest will embrace;
And freely to them will impart
The riches of His grace.



When Alice had finished, Charlie held out the hymnal to her. “That was very good, Alice. Now, I would like to be alone for a while.”

The next day, Charlie was troubled. He had not slept since Alice had sung the hymn. He could not sit still; he paced up and down in his room. Then he noticed a tract on one of the chairs. He picked it up and read it. He then called his wife and asked her how the tract came into his room. She told him that Mr. Anderson had asked her to place it in his room. She added, “Mr. Anderson would like to speak with you.”

For a few minutes, Charlie did not answer. Finally, he said, “Alright, he can come and visit—as long as he does not speak to me about my soul!”

Mr. Anderson kept his promise, visiting Charlie several times without speaking about his soul. At last, Charlie burst out, “Why don’t you speak to me about my soul?”

“Do you have a soul, Charlie?” asked Mr. Anderson calmly.

“I am a miserable man!” exclaimed Charlie. “That hymn—and that tract—what must I do?”

“It is not too late to turn to God,” answered Mr. Anderson, and then he explained to Charlie the glorious gospel of redemption through Jesus Christ. Before he left, Mr. Anderson prayed with Charlie. God answered their prayers, and after some days, the poor man was given faith to receive the forgiveness of his sins. Charlie became unspeakably happy. He lived for some time after this, speaking to anyone who came to visit about the abundant mercy of God. So God blessed the little task that Alice performed so cheerfully and willingly, not complaining about it or wondering if it would be any use, but doing as she was asked with willing obedience.

Salvation! Thus Thine own are blest;
All their fears are put to rest,
Let Thy mercies be confessed;
Very great is Thy salvation!
And how sweet Thy consolation
Throughout every dispensation
In Thy judgments from of old;
Oh, what comfort, though untold,
Nightly doth Thy love unfold.²

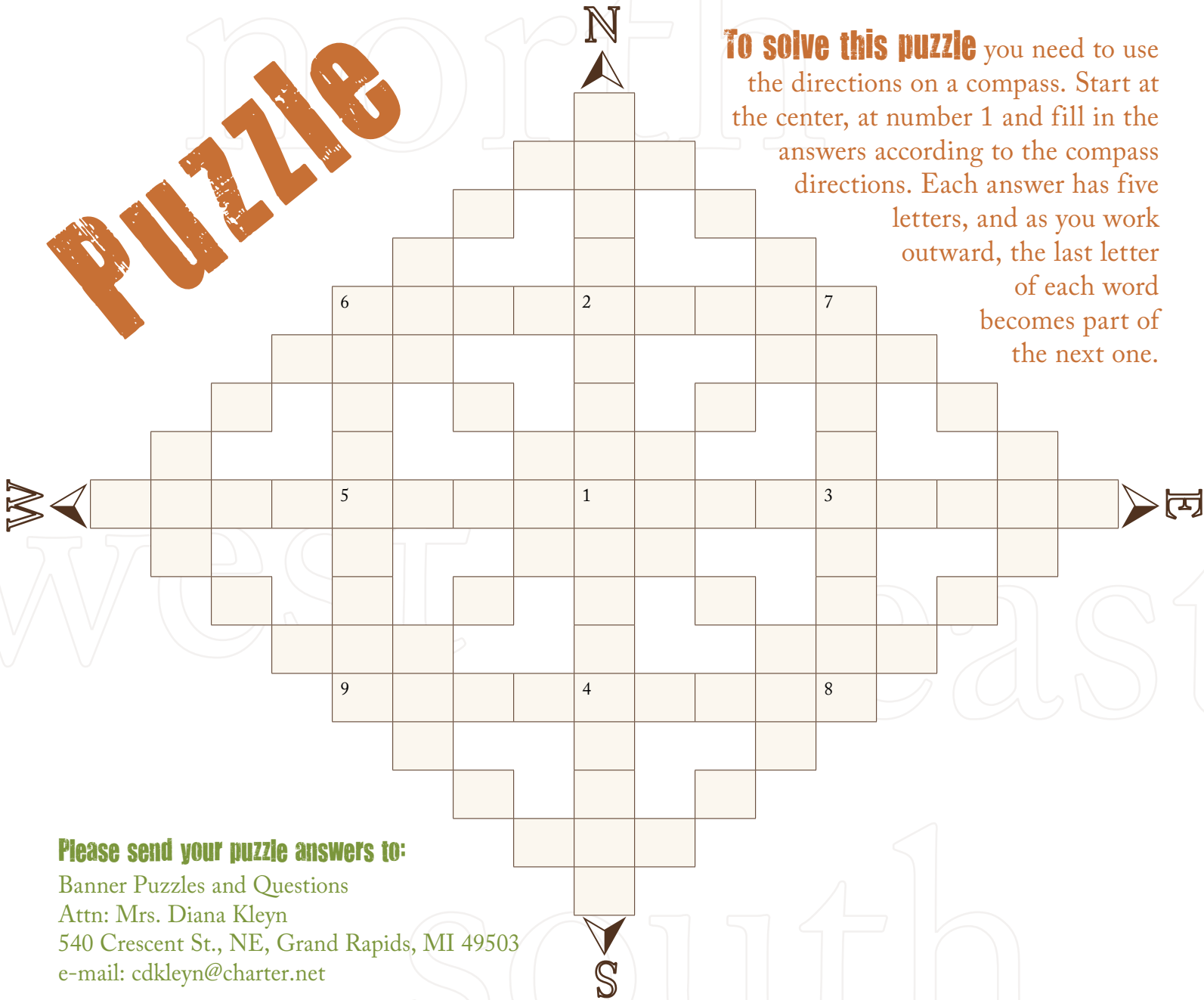
1. Hymn 587 by William Gadsby, *A Selection of Hymns for Public Worship*. (Harpenden, Herts: The Gospel Standard Societies, 1991), p. 444.

2. Psalm 119:41 and 52 by C.E.H.

Adapted from *A Wonderful Field and What I Learned About it, and Other Stories*, by C. E. H. (London: The Gospel Book Depot, n.d.), 80–83.

Puzzle

To solve this puzzle you need to use the directions on a compass. Start at the center, at number 1 and fill in the answers according to the compass directions. Each answer has five letters, and as you work outward, the last letter of each word becomes part of the next one.



Please send your puzzle answers to:

Banner Puzzles and Questions
 Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn
 540 Crescent St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
 e-mail: cdkleyn@charter.net

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. instruct | 11. truth | 21. end | 31. soul |
| 2. teach | 12. heart | 22. delight | 32. learn |
| 3. help | 13. tongue | 23. thing | 33. new |
| 4. pure | 14. envy | 24. good | 34. weary |
| 5. evil | 15. your | 25. Daniel | 35. youth |
| 6. lack | 16. right | 26. love | 36. hear |
| 7. knowledge | 17. three | 27. eighth | 37. red |
| 8. ears | 18. every | 28. hearken | 38. depart |
| 9. Spirit | 19. young | 29. now | |
| 10. taught | 20. grace | 30. words | |

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

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Joel Averink | Matthew den Hertog (2) | Hailey Meerdink |
| Samuel Averink | Sophie den Hertog | Lukas Meschke |
| Leah Boerkoel | Donald Duffin | Nicholas Meschke |
| Phillip Boerkoel | Lindsay Fintelman | Emma Schmidt |
| Silvia Boerkoel | Vanessa Klaassen | Hannah Schmidt |
| Becky Boot | Wynonna Klassen | Laura Schmidt |
| Shelly Boot | Jacob Koppert | Natasha Van Grouw |
| Don R. Cox, Sr. | Rachel Koppert | Megan VanderStel |
| Jonathan DeHaan | Matthew Kranendonk | Danique Veldhuizen |
| Julia DeHaan | Samuel Kranendonk | |
| Janae den Hertog (2) | Eugene Lunsford, Jr. | |

- 1** N—“And all _____, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8).
 NE—“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the _____ book of life” (Revelation 21:27).
 E—“Stand therefore, having your _____ girt about with truth” (Ephesians 6:14).
 SE—“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy _____, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).
 S—“Wherefore putting away _____, speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25).
 SW—“O send out thy _____ and thy truth: let them lead me” (Psalm 43:3).
 W—“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these _____ commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the _____ in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).
 NW—“Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the _____” (Proverbs 3:34).

- 2** W—“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be _____ for my sin” (Psalm 38:18).
 N—“A _____ is upon the liars” (Jeremiah 50:36).
 E—“And for their _____ I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19).

- 3** N—“A true witness delivereth _____: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies” (Proverbs 14:25).
 E—“Thou _____ not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people” (Leviticus 19:16).
 S—“Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor _____ deceitfully” (Psalm 24:4).

- 4** E—“What shall be _____ unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?” (Psalm 120:3).
 S—“We should live soberly, righteously, and _____, in this present world” (Titus 2:12).
 W—“Remove from me the way of lying: and _____ me thy law graciously” (Psalm 119:29).

- 5** N—“He that telleth lies shall not _____ in my sight” (Psalm 101:7).
 W—“Let not mercy and _____ forsake thee” (Proverbs 3:3).
 S—“_____ ye not in lying words” (Jeremiah 7:4).

- 6** SW—“O God, thou hast taught me from my _____” (Psalm 71:17).
 NE—“_____ yourselves unto the LORD” (2 Chronicles 30:8).

- 7** NW—“Who is able to _____ before this holy LORD God?” (1 Samuel 6:20).
 SE—“Bread of deceit is _____ to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17).

- 8** NE—“The _____ is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12).
 SW—“Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and _____” (Psalm 82:3).

- 9** SE—“Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal _____ are his delight” (Proverbs 12:22).
 NW—“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will _____ you the fear of the LORD” (Psalm 34:11).



NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRINCIPAL NEEDED

Plymouth Christian Schools is a K–12 school located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It is a member of the NRCEA and is an independent corporation operated on behalf of the First NRC (Beckwith Street) and the Heritage NRC (Crescent Street) both of Grand Rapids. The Elementary School (K–6) is currently seeking applicants for the position of elementary administrator. The position is presently held by Mr. David Engelsma, who has expressed his desire to begin reducing his workload commencing in the 2011–2012 school year. Mr. Engelsma has welcomed the School Board’s request that he assist the selected candidate in assuming this role in order to provide a smooth administrative transition. The administrative duties are not fulltime, and will be balanced with some teaching assignments depending on the background and experience of the candidate. Interested applicants should contact one of the following members of the PCSA School Board’s Education Committee with their resumé: Mr. Kevin Ash (kevin.ash@gentex.com) or Mr. Randy Carlson (Randall.Carlson@dematic.com).

TEACHER NEEDED

Providence Christian School invites applications for the position of full-time Jr./Sr. High teacher for the current school year. Providence Christian School is situated in a beautiful, southern Alberta rural community, minutes from Lethbridge. PCS has grades K–12 with about 120 students attending and 12 staff members. We offer a four-day school week, competitive salaries/benefits, a growing, committed school community, and a dedicated team of teaching staff.

We encourage qualified teachers who submit to God’s Holy Word and the Reformed confessions, and are committed to educating children and youth in the Reformed Christian perspective to apply.

Please send your resumé, references, statement of faith, and philosophy of Christian education to Mr. G. Van de Haar, Principal, Providence Christian School, Box 240, Monarch, AB T0L 1M0. For more information, e-mail: vandehaar.g@pcsmoarch.com, or phone: 403–381–4418 (school), 403–824–3182 (home).

NATIONAL NEWS....**Court Upholds Expulsion of Counseling Student Who Opposes Homosexuality**

A federal judge ruled schools could expel students from their graduate program in counseling who believe homosexuality is morally wrong. U.S. District Judge George Steeh dismissed Eastern Michigan University student Julea Ward's lawsuit against the university. She was removed from the school's counseling program last year because she refused to counsel homosexual clients. The university contended she violated school



Photo of Julea Ward, Courtesy of Alliance Defense Fund

policy and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Ward's attorneys claim the university told her she would only be allowed to remain in the program if she went through a "remediation" program so that she could "see the error of her ways" and change her belief system about homosexuality.

The case is similar to a lawsuit the ADF filed against Augusta State University in Georgia. There, counseling student Jennifer Keeton was allegedly told to stop sharing her Christian beliefs in order to graduate. Keeton's lawsuit alleged that she was told to undergo a reeducation program and attend "diversity sensitivity training." These cases should be a warning to Christians attending public colleges and universities. "Public universities are imposing the ideological stances of private groups on their students," commented Todd Starnes for Fox News.

Poll finds Canadians more accepting of same-sex marriage

An online survey conducted last month by Angus Reid Public Opinion suggests that while a majority of Canadian adults are supportive of same-sex marriage, majorities of both British and American adults remain opposed. The survey found that 61 per cent of Canadians favor keeping same-sex marriage—which has been legal in Canada since 2005—the law of the land. By comparison, 41 percent of Britons and only 36 per cent of Americans said they would like it to become the law in their countries. Younger Canadians also appear to be more supportive of same-sex marriage than their British and American peers. Fully 81 percent of Canadians born after 1980 support it, as opposed to 56 percent of Britons and 48 percent of Americans in the same age bracket. According to Focus on the Family Canada's senior vice-president of research, Derek Rogusky, this is the continuation of a trend away from God's ideal for marriage. "It started with the liberalization of divorce laws, then the acceptance of common-law unions as the equivalent of marriage and now the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex partners," he explained. "Going against the flow of culture can be a slow and difficult process, but committed Christians need to persevere in proclaiming and personally modeling God's plan for marriage." (TFN)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....**Adoption for same sex couples**

LONDON—Britain's charity regulator says a Catholic adoption advisory service that refuses to help same-sex couples has lost an appeal against a ban on its policy. Catholic Care, a charity in Leeds, northern England, had argued that as a religious group it should be allowed to offer its adoption-support services only to heterosexuals.

Britain's Charity Commission ruled Thursday that the policy was discriminatory and breached European human rights laws. The commission said Catholic Care must either stop offering adoption services or change its policy on homosexual couples. Similar Catholic agencies have either withdrawn from placing children or have cut their ties with the church since the British government imposed the anti-discrimination rule in 2007. (AP)

Law chief urges Scots courts: Consult the Bible in judgments

One of the most prestigious figures in Scottish law is calling on the country's courts to take biblical teachings into account when administering justice. Former Conservative Cabinet member Lord Mackay of Clashfern is fronting a campaign which will see Bibles sent to every court in the land. Mackay, who is also the current Lord Clerk Register, now acts as honorary president of the Scottish Bible Society (SBS), and has invited sheriffs and judges to familiarize themselves with biblical principles and act accordingly when presiding over court cases. Critics have labeled the campaign as an attempt to drag the legal system back to the "dark ages" and likened it to a plea for a fundamentalist Christian version of Middle Eastern Sharia law.

The SBS, whose official patron is the Queen, is currently distributing Bibles to Sheriff Courts, the High Court, the Court of Session, the Faculty of Advocates, the Crown Office, and offices of the Procurator Fiscal service. (HeraldScotland)

PERSECUTION FOCUS: INDONESIA....**"Unchecked Extremism" behind Attacks on Churches in Indonesia**

Home to the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia celebrated its 65th Independence Day amid a widespread sense of distrust in the government's ability to check attacks on Christian churches by Islamic groups. Muslims and Islamic organizations, Buddhists, and Hindus joined hundreds of Christians for an ecumenical worship service near National Monument Square in Jakarta to protest "government inaction" over attacks on Christians and "forced closure of churches," reported *The Jakarta Globe*. "Why did it take President [Susilo Bambang] Yudhoyono so many days to speak against the attacks?" the Rev. Dr. SAE Nababan, president of the World Council of Churches from Asia, told *Compass*. "Such carelessness can be dangerous for our democracy. Officials must not forget that they are accountable to the people." Nababan was referring to President Yudhoyono's call for religious harmony a day before the month-long Islamic festival of fasting, Ramadan, which began here on August 11. According to the *Globe*, it was the president's "first public comment" addressing "a recent rash of violence against religious minorities." The president's statement came after a fifth attack on the Batak Christian Protestant Filadelfia Church (HKBP Filadelfia) in Bekasi city, a suburb of Jakarta, on Aug. 8. Endy Bayuni, former editor of *The Jakarta Post*, told *Compass* that churches were being attacked every week but that media were avoiding coverage because it is an "emotional and controversial issue." (Compass Direct News)

John Goudzwaard is a member of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

HOW DOES GOD CALL SINNERS



THE REFORMED FAITH (9)

REV. MARK KELDERMAN & REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

CORNER FOR TEENS

LAST TIME, we considered the external call of God through His Word. This call comes to all who hear the gospel preached or read the Word of God. The call comes to each of you as you sit in church Sunday after Sunday, or when you read your Bible for morning or evening devotions. And yet, without the accompanying internal call of the Holy Spirit, this external call will leave you as it finds you, dead in sins and trespasses. When the Lord saves someone, He accompanies the external call of the gospel with the internal call of the Holy Spirit in a person's soul, calling a sinner from death to life. The external call will not be effective without the internal call. But remember, the internal call does not come without the means of the external call of God's Word.

The internal call is powerful and irresistible. It does not drag a sinner kicking and screaming across the threshold of grace; rather, it makes him willing to embrace the terms of God's means of reconciliation, that Christ has died for sinners (Ps. 110:3). The internal call of the Holy Spirit by the Word of God works upon the will of sinners and gives them power to be the sons of God (John 1:12). Our sinful nature leaves our heart dead, our mind darkened, and our will stubborn and unwilling to receive the gospel. But when God begins working in the life of a sinner, the internal call adds a new nature brought by the Holy Spirit, now an eternal indweller and guide into all the truth. A dead heart is brought to life, a darkened mind is enlightened, and a stubborn will softened and made willing. Such is the beauty of the beginnings of God's grace and power.

The internal call is worked by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father calls sinners in His electing and compelling love. This love surpasses human understanding and conquers sinful human resistance, though it differs in its expression from person to person. At the root of this call by God the Father is a fatherly, loving call to sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Some are called sternly, undergoing deep conviction of sin; others are called tenderly and lovingly,

gradually being led to see their sin and then the Savior. God calls each one according to the nature and character and the need of that person.

A sinner is called by Jesus Christ as well. He is the living, incarnate Word of God. In John 10:27, we read that Jesus says of Himself, "My sheep hear my voice and follow me." Do you hear the call of the Shepherd? Do you recognize His loving call for you to repent and believe the gospel? Do you heed His command to "stretch forth your hand and be healed" (Mark 3:5)? He not only calls, invites, and commands, but He grants sinners the power to do these things (Acts 5:31)!

He grants this by His Word and Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes the living, written Word and applies it to the heart of a sinner. The sinner is enabled to grasp the promises of the gospel and cling to them for life and liberty from sin. The Spirit uses the Word of God as the means to draw a sinner: gospel promises sweetly draw a sinner, like a flower draws the bee by its sweetness, and threatenings lead a sinner to flee to God for protection from the wrath to come, like a child flees for shelter to his father or mother.

Have you placed yourself under the external call of God? Have you been called internally so that you have turned to God from your sins? Have you been brought to life through the external and internal call of God? These are two sides of the same coin: don't look for one apart from the other, and don't rest until you've been called internally and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then you can confess with the hymnist, "I sought the Lord and afterwards I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me. It was not I that found, O Savior true; no, I was found of Thee."

Rev. Mark Kelderman is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Burgessville, Ontario. **Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a Th.M. theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Feel free to email either of them: makelderman@execulink.com; kuivenhoven.maarten@gmail.com

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*
Publication Number (USPS 010584)
540 Crescent St., NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

PERIODICAL
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

DEAR LORD AND FATHER OF MANKIND

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of Thy call,
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall
As fell Thy manna down.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the hearts of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.

—JOHN G. WHITTIER

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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

A Periodical for Young and Old