

A hand holds a green, textured stone pitcher, pouring water into another hand held below it. The background is a soft-focus green.

# *the* Banner

*of Sovereign Grace Truth*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Serving the Bride of Christ:  
Reflections from a  
Seasoned Pastor's Wife

Tested by Fire

Here Come the Greens!

A Periodical for Young and Old

THE BANNER OF  
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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THEME ISSUE: SERVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

This issue presents three entries under the rubric, "Serving the Bride of Christ"—one, two poems related to ministerial loneliness; two, lessons from a seasoned pastor's wife; and three, practical advice from a seasoned elder's wife. The opening meditation and the editorial also touch on this theme of serving and working for the well-being of the church.

The goal of these articles is threefold: first, to assist and encourage ministers and elders; second, to serve every reader by providing insights to understand your pastor(s) and elders better, so that you can pray for and relate to them more effectively; and third, to provide better understanding of and motivation for the essential biblical principles of service and self-denial that are so deeply embedded in every calling we have to serve the church as Christ's bride, whether it be singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, engaging in neighborhood evangelism, or raising children to be God-fearing and stalwart sons and daughters of the church of Jesus Christ.

No work of service for Christ's bride is too small in Christ's eyes—not even the giving of a cup of cold water. In His eyes, there are no trivial assignments in the church. Charles Spurgeon wrote: "The humblest work for Jesus is a grander thing than the dignity of an emperor. It is better to be God's dog than the devil's darling."

Let us ever remember that the joy, beauty, and dignity of serving Christ by means of serving His bride is second only to the joy, beauty, and dignity of belonging to His family. Let love then be our motive for serving and joy be our strength while serving. And let's never forget John Calvin's wise observation: "The highest honor in the church is not government but service. We shall never be fit for the service of God if we look not beyond this fleeting life."

## MEDITATION

DR. BRIAN DeVRIES

*The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

—1 Corinthians 3:13c

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” This is a question young boys often ask each other as they begin to think about getting bigger. It is a good question, and not just for young boys. This is a question we should all be asking ourselves.

But let me change the question a bit: What legacy do you want to leave once you are old? Now the question is focused on what will remain of all our efforts once we retire. This is also a good question, for it motivates serious reflection on the purpose of life.

These questions, however, are only stepping stones to a much more important question of life: What of our work will remain eternally after being tested by God's perfect judgment? Now this is a serious question indeed!

The Apostle Paul suggests this question in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. He describes the Christian ministry as the work of a skillful builder. Christians doing ministry are like construction workers. They are building a temple for God's glory. All Christians are busy building; it is as if they are using different types of material—hay, wood, stone, gold, etc.—to construct a beautiful house of worship. But not all work is equal. Paul says that some work will have lasting value while other work will be burned up when tested by fire. The hay and wood will be burned; the stone and gold will remain.

For example, Ananias and Sapphira gave a large sum of money to the early church (Acts 5). This gift would otherwise have appeared as a wonderful work with lasting value. But God judged their work with His perfect discerning judgment. The Holy Spirit tells us that their motives were wrong, and so they were immediately killed. When tested by fire, their work had no lasting value. The Apostle Barnabas, however, is an opposite example. He also gave a large sum of money to the church. God alone knew his heart, for he, too, was a sinner. Yet God's record describes him as a good man, full of the Spirit and faith (Acts 11:24).

1. Are you building on the solid rock, the foundation of faith in Christ's finished work? Have you been justified by faith in Christ alone?
2. Are you building a temple for God's glory or are you building something for yourself? What building plan are you using?
3. Will the materials you are using pass through the final fire? Are your good works of lasting value in God's holy sight, or do they only have superficial value to the undiscerning?
4. What value will your present efforts have after you have died and after God's perfect judgment?

All Christians are building on the same foundation: faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work of salvation. Building on anything else will not last. The reason Barnabas's work had lasting value is because he had faith in Christ and was building on this foundation alone.

The focus of Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 3, however, is not about this foundation of faith alone, but rather about the faithful work that should be built upon it. Paul is describing the importance of good works in the Christian life. He cautions that while many are busy with good works, not all works have equal value.

The work of every Christian will be tested by fire. This test by fire on Judgment Day will determine the lasting value of each work. “Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13). The eternal value of all your efforts will be made public on the last day. Then the outward appearance will not be important because the test of fire will publicly display the motives and desires of the heart. Paul goes even further: “If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:14). In other words, God will graciously reward those Christians who, through faith in Christ with the power of the Spirit, have faithfully worked to build a lasting contribution for God's glory.

So what do you want to be when you grow up? Or put differently, what eternal legacy do you want to leave after you have died and have been tested by fire? These are good questions because they cause us to seriously examine all so-called good works that keep us busy from day to day.

A wise builder is very careful to examine every aspect of the building process. We Christians, who are building on Christ's finished work, should do the same. Here are a few questions to prepare yourself for the final test:

tested by fire



## HOW CHRIST'S RESURRECTION SHAPES OUR

# HOPE

PART TWO

*Last issue, we have considered our miserable condition if Christ had not risen from the dead. We then considered three aspects of our magnificent hope in Christ because of the resurrection: our magnificent Christ-centered hope, conscience hope, and corporate hope. Now we look at the resurrection's magnificent corporeal hope and comparative hope. Next month we will conclude by considering the resurrection's chronological hope and by commenting on a moving yet immovable hope.*

• *Consider the resurrection's corporeal or physical hope.* Our resurrection bodies will have continuity and identity with our present bodies and yet be substantially different. To explain this, Paul uses the image of a seed that is planted and gives birth to a plant. The seed doesn't actually die, but exists no longer as a seed but as a life-giving nutrient to the plant. Paul's point is that the seed's identity continues in a different form.

We are already familiar with this transition in life. We look at baby pictures of a friend and see some features in the adult that were already evident in the baby. And though we are told that our entire physical molecular composition changes every seven years, we still look much the same. Still, we wonder what our resurrection bodies will be like. If a baby dies, will she be resurrected as an infant? We do not know the answer, but we do know we will be recognizable. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John immediately knew who they were. Likewise, when we sit down to eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven, we will not need nametags for identification.

First Corinthians 15 offers the fullest explanation of the differences between our present body and our glorified body. In verse 35, Paul asks, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" He answers, "And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be.... But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him.... So also is the resurrection of the dead" (vv. 35, 37, 42a). Paul goes on to mention five differences between our present body and our glorified body in heaven.

First, he says, in verse 42b: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." I am dying as I write this. Your bodies

are dying as you read this. Our teeth get cavities, our eyes grow dim, our hearing fails us. There is an inevitable process of deterioration at work in every cell in our bodies, which is remorselessly going on until we die. Paul tells us that in heaven there will be no such deterioration. Our bodies will be imperishable and incorruptible. We will be rejuvenated beyond the reach of sickness and injury and death. Imagine what it will be like to have a body that never knows pain, disease, or weakness!

Second, Paul says in verse 43a, "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory." A casket contains the poor, weak, wasted shell of someone who has been ravaged by disease. If you look at that poor, dead flesh, which will decay to dust, do you not agree that it is sown in dishonour? But Paul says, "It is raised in glory." I do not know everything that means, but the verse does assure us that in heaven our bodies will be healthy and radiant. Jesus said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Our culture puts a high premium on appearance, but no matter what you look like today, you will be even more beautiful in your resurrection body. You will be strong and glorious and magnificent!

Third, Paul says in verse 43, "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." How weak we are! We so often have to put up with our lack of strength, our fatigue, our weariness. We get tired and fall asleep, we are stressed and feel we cannot cope, and our energy drains away because of problems and people.

Do you have some disability that you have coped with all your life? Like the lame and blind people who were healed by Jesus, you will one day experience deliverance from that limitation, not only in the functions that you regard as normal in this life, but also in powers you can scarcely imagine. Think

of people with mental impairments who will one day operate faster and more accurately than any computer. Think of a world beyond this world of color that will be so multidimensional and so glorious that we will realize what we see today is but a shadow. “Raised in power” means that our bodies will pulsate with energy and dynamism and power. We will not know weariness. No disability will hinder us. We will carry out all the impulses of our holy wills and our holy desires, engaging in continually blessed, worshipful activity forever and ever!

Fourth, verse 44 says, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” The word *natural* here means our bodies are subject to the limitations of this age, implying they are weakened and damaged by sin. The natural body is what we have inherited from Adam. It was created good, as only God could make it. But what awaits us in the resurrection is even better—we will have bodies like the resurrected body of Christ.

Cornel Venema says, “The word *spiritual* here harks back to Genesis 1 when Adam was breathed into by God’s Spirit and he became a living soul. It was an in-souled body. The language used for the spiritual body is that of a body that is animated and energized by the Spirit.”

Gerhardus Vos says *spiritual* here should have a capital S. What Paul means is that we will have physical, material bodies of flesh and blood that are energized and ruled by the Spirit. A spiritual person not only thinks about spiritual things; he is indwelt by the Spirit. A spiritual body is not a non-material body; it is a body irradiated by the Holy Spirit and perfectly suited to the environment of heaven. Our bodies will be the servants of our spirits in heaven. Our body and spirit together will enable us to serve and worship God.

So *spiritual* here means our bodies will be totally submissive to the Spirit of God. Jesus was totally submissive to the Spirit while He was incarnated, yet He was subject to temptation in His natural body. But in our resurrection bodies, we will enter into the ultimate freedom that Augustine says is “not the ability to sin that Adam had, or the ability not to sin that the redeemed now have as compared with the inability not to sin that characterized our unredeemed state, but rather, in our spiritual bodies we will have the greatest freedom of all—the inability to sin.” Our resurrection bodies will no longer experience the temptations to which we are now subject.

Finally, in verses 53–57, Paul says the “mortal must put on immortality.” All the wonderful traits of the resurrection body already described will not end in death. Our bodies will be the same in essence, but they will have new qualities designed for immortality.

When Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus still had to die again. I have often wondered how he felt about that. He must have been torn; happy to be raised for the glory of Christ, yet longing to be with Christ forever in glory. Paul says those raised by Christ at His Second Coming will not have such mixed feelings. Christ is “the firstfruits” (vv. 20, 23) and “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). Those who follow Him will be raised with bodies that are immortal like His, no longer subject to death. You can see why Paul, in Philippians

3:10–11, says he longs to be with Christ in eternity: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” In the end, the resurrection makes us like Christ.

• *Consider the resurrection’s comparative hope.* What kept the Apostle Paul going in all of his sufferings was knowing that the good he would have in glory would be so magnificent that it would make the troubles of this world seem miniscule. Those joys and comforts are negative, but they are also positive.

The negative is that all the troubles that we experience with Satan, the tempting world, our old nature, tears and sorrow, ill health, and ill treatment from others will pass away when we get to heaven. We will never again fear temptation, death, falling, bringing shame on our Savior’s name, or departing from the faith.

Heaven will be full of positives. The greatest positive is saying like Robert Haldane, who witnessed revival in Geneva when he preached to students: “Oh, to be forever with the Lord.” In heaven, Christ will never be out of your sight, dear believer. He will be in your eyesight, before your face, and within earshot for you to talk to, to worship, to question, to understand the Word of Life, to adore, and to thank Him for what He has done for you.

Heaven will be a place of perfect worship of God, perfect service to God, perfect reigning with Christ, perfect fellowship with saints, perfect education about God and His truth, and perfect rest. It will be a place of gracious reward for faithfulness on earth and abundant compensation for suffering on earth. Heaven will be a place of perfect holiness—an eternal Holy of Holies and a sin-free land. As Rowland Hill says, “If an unholy man were to get to heaven, he would feel like a hog in a flower garden.” Heaven will be pure and clean. There will be no infirmity there and not one speck of dust. All evil will be walled out; all good walled in.

Finally, heaven will be a world of love. Spurgeon puts it this way: “A fish can more easily drink the oceans dry than we can ever exhaust the love of God in heaven.” He adds: “Drink away little fish, you’ll never drink it all dry!” Oh, magnificent hope, magnificent love! Edwards says God’s love in heaven is an ocean without a floor and without a shore!

Our magnificent hope of heaven ought to teach us not to live just for this life and this world. In living more for the world to come, the Christian should moderate his hopes for this world. Throughout his writings, Paul says that the true Christian has the best of this world, though his heart is not here. His hope in this world falls far short of his hope for the life to come. It is a moderated and tempered hope that comes out of the “now-not-yet” tension of this present age. Now we are in Christ and live by hope, but we are not yet what we will be in glory.

You might say, “What should my attitude be toward this life if I am focused on the life to come? How can I live out this moderate hope with regard to this world?”

*(continued on page 159)*

# the *Hopeful* Parent & Teacher

*And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town;  
and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught.  
And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees walking.*

—Mark 8:23–24

How would you describe the condition of the man in this passage? Could he see clearly at this time? No, people looked like trees to him. But was he still blind? No; he could now see. Previously, this man was totally blind. But now, as a result of the miraculous touch of Jesus, there is hope. Blurred as his vision may be at this point, he is seeing something. Hope has replaced hopelessness!

A person in this type of spiritual condition can be a puzzle. Is one's new sight the work of the Lord or not? If it is God's work, why is it so faulty? Doesn't Jesus grant full deliverance? Doesn't the Holy Spirit perform a complete work? But this man's sight is quite imperfect. The man who was blind is now seeing; this cannot be denied. Some real change has taken place, and this change is nothing short of miraculous. The man could not have produced this change himself.

In a similar way, dear teacher, your student can be a puzzle. You may have observed some signs of spiritual sight. It seems like there is a real change. Your student was blind before, but now he sees. And yet, on the other hand, his view of some things appears so inaccurate and mistaken that you question whether this can really be God's work. Spiritually speaking, your student "sees people as trees walking."

This is so puzzling! How am I to judge my child's state when he or she is in such a condition? What a blessing, dear parent, that you do not need to judge! God knows. It is His judgment that matters, not yours. You may go forward with hope—hope that God will grant further light and clarity. Hope that He who begins a saving work will finish it. Hope that clearer fruits of repentance, faith, and obedience will appear. Let hope spur you on to believing, praying, and working all the more.

God most often performs His miracles gradually, step by step. Consider the first light of a new day. A new day does not instantly change from midnight to noon, from total darkness to mid-day sun. No, first just a glimmer of light is seen so gradually that you may not know the exact time of sunrise. It slowly becomes lighter and clearer and then you know that a new day has dawned. Or think of a human being. When a baby is born, can this infant recognize objects, convey meaning in words, or

even understand that he is a human being? Of course not, but he is really human nonetheless.

God can grant instant cures, great knowledge in a few moments, and full assurance of faith in an instant. It is His normal way, however, to work gradually. Dear child of God, is this not true in your life? Did God teach you all that you know by experience in one day? Were there not many errors that still needed to be corrected after God began in your life? Was there not much that had to be rooted out during the following years and much that needed to be planted? And is there not more growth and pruning required, in order for you to bring forth more fruit to God's honor and glory?

Do not become overly confused, discouraged, or depressed when your son appears to see some things spiritually but clearly mistakes other things, or when your daughter appears to spiritually see "men as trees walking." Hope in God. Be encouraged. Plead with Him in prayer. Pray that, if these are the first signs of His work, He will nurture and cause it to grow. Pray that this first faith may take root downward and bring forth fruit upward. Pray that the tree of your child's life will become more clearly recognizable by its fruit.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, when Christian crossed the Jordan River of death, it was Hopeful that held his head above the water until Christian could see God's deliverance more clearly. The problem was not in God or in His Word or in the Lord's promise of salvation. The difficulty was with Christian's perception of it. He could not see it the way he expected or with the clarity that he wanted.

Do not rush God. Do not prescribe to Jesus how He must save your child or student. Do not grieve the Spirit by doubting His work because it does not fit your timeline. Trust it in God's gracious hands; He will perform His saving work in His way and in His time. Allow the day to slowly dawn, and look forward with anticipation to His deepening and clarifying work.

*Are you a hopeful parent, an anticipating teacher?*

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# Do You Understand Your Pastor's Loneliness?

## A Pastor's Loneliness

I've friends around on every hand,  
A true, devoted, loyal band;  
But, solve the mystery if you can,  
I still remain a lonely man.

Yes, though it may be hard to see,  
It's ordered that it thus should be:  
And though kind friends in part atone,  
'Tis needful I should walk alone.

A pastor's is a lonely life,  
But much exposed to inward strife;  
More private in my life and walk,  
More public in my work and thought.

My bread comes in a different way,  
From those who labor every day;  
Yet though I sow the gospel seed,  
My God supplies each temporal need.

I have the greater need to cry,  
For I have sins of deeper dye;  
These sins are known to One alone,  
O that the fountain may atone!

How oft, alas, does pulpit stain  
Upon my heart with pain remain!  
And oft I pray, with one of old,  
To say the thing that's right of God:  
To take the precious from the vile,  
Without hypocrisy and guile;  
To use the shovel and the sieve,  
Needs grace which God alone can give.

Strong men need meat both rich and good,  
Weak babes need nursing with their food;  
Our sons should be as plants well grown,  
And daughters shine as corner stones;

That poor and halt and lame and blind,  
May in His time true mercy find;  
And earnest seekers after God,  
Rejoice in sin-atoning blood.

These points, as we may look them through,  
Engage my thoughts and prayers, too;  
They cause one many a secret sigh,  
When Sabbath days are drawing nigh.

—JESSE DELVES (MAY 1941)

## A Member's Reply

My pastor's lines gave me much thought;  
I thank him, for they came unsought;  
Therein he kindly draws aside  
The veil, which otherwise would hide  
Much secret exercise and care—  
A burden he is *called* to bear.

A lonely man? Yes, he needs be  
Oft with his God on bended knee.  
Ah, blessed posture! May the Lord  
Oft speak home then the living Word,  
Cause him to know that mighty grace  
And power suffice in every case.  
And when he feels the tempter's thrust,  
O then, Lord, be his shield and trust.

And does he pace the study floor  
In search of food from heavenly store?  
Lord, give him large supplies of bread,  
That his loved flock may still be fed.

But let him not discouraged be  
By loneliness; grant him to see  
His Master trod the lonely way  
From Bethlehem to Calvary.  
Oft turn his mind to Olivet;  
Let him those labors ne'er forget;  
Think of the nights the Savior spent  
Beneath the stars; the prayers He sent  
With fervor to His Father, God,  
As He the path of obedience trod.

Thus, though I at a distance stand,  
And scarce advance to shake his hand—  
Thus I would pray with free access  
That God will still my pastor bless.

His constant prayers and exercise!  
They call from me grief and surprise  
That I, one of his flock, should be  
So fruitless and oft slovenly.  
O God, once more with power descend,  
To rouse Thy sheep the heavens rend.

—REGINALD WEST (JUNE 1941)



# REFLECTIONS FROM A SEASONED PASTOR'S WIFE

MAGWEN DAVIES

*Editor's Note: Some months ago I had the privilege of staying again in the home of dear Welsh friends, Dr. Eryl and Magwen Davies. Since her husband was about to retire as President of WEST, a seminary in Wales, I asked Mrs. Davies to share with me what she had learned from a lifetime of supporting her husband in pastoral and seminary ministry. Mrs. Davies, who oozes with Welsh warmth, responded in such an honest, helpful, and moving way that I asked if she would be willing to write out her thoughts so that I could share them with our Banner readership.*

We'd been married only a month when my husband began his ministry in a large South Wales Presbyterian Church. I felt apprehensive and the responsibilities ahead were daunting. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Certainly not me, but "our sufficiency is from God," and our experiences over the years have proved the truth of these words.

What lessons did I learn during that time as the pastor's wife? One of the first was "without me you can do nothing"—even things I thought I was good at doing. I had to depend on God for wisdom and enabling even for the smallest jobs.

Forty years ago in the United Kingdom, a pastor's wife was expected to help lead children's meetings and sisterhoods and speak regularly at those; then there was some visiting of the sick, the bereaved, keeping open house, and giving hospitality to visiting speakers—a formidable list. I came to see I just had to be myself and not try to live up to the public image of the ideal wife. God had made me as I was and could use me as I was. I would never please everyone anyway and I certainly wasn't perfect. In the early years I tried too hard to please and was worn out as a result. In a certain meeting in our home, the speaker said something I've never forgotten. It helped me tremendously. "It's not what God wants you to do for Him, but what He wants to do through you." What a release! It changed my perspective completely and the weight on my shoulders lifted.

It took me a long time to learn to know myself and my vulnerable points. I had to stop myself having a "post mortem" at the end of the day, going over conversations with awkward members, for example. I learned not to start thinking of problems in the evenings because they'd get out of perspective. The following morning, they weren't half as threatening. I read somewhere that it's not right to let thoughts master us—we are to master them—and that's been helpful, too.

Early on, my husband and I became very aware of the need to keep confidences. We had seen the damage in churches

made from passing on personal details spoken in confidence. If an individual said something very confidential to my husband or vice versa, we didn't talk about it together unless we were given permission. I didn't need to know everything. Actually, it was better I didn't know some sordid facts or they would have stayed in my mind and affected my attitude to the person concerned. For people to confide in you, they must know you can be trusted not to gossip. Linked with this is the need to keep quiet about one's husband's idiosyncrasies, not embarrassing him in front of others to get a laugh from members!

It's important to be approachable, genuinely interested in people and their needs. I found it helped me, because I was shy, to remember relevant details (e.g. So-and-so's aunt is in the hospital) so asking about her would get a conversation going. Being a good listener was a big asset, but half-listening could be dangerous or meant sometimes putting my foot in it!

I remember clearly at a young pastor's funeral thinking, "I can't hide behind my husband's spirituality and usefulness." I would have to give an account of my own life to God, so I must aim to be godly and guard my own soul. It was easy to be very busily involved in church meetings and commitments, yet be personally far from God. It was easy to be hypocritical and make pious comments without experiencing their reality. Sometimes I'd be so concerned about the relevance of the sermon for a particular member I'd miss receiving spiritual nourishment myself. Absurd! It's God's work and the Holy Spirit brings to life the Word and applies it to the heart.

Often, at the end of meetings, I would ask God to guide me to speak to the right person and to be helpful in what I said. At one time, I tried to speak to as many people as possible, but I found I couldn't follow through any conversation; so I had to change my approach, without giving one person more attention than another. I tried to treat every member the same, for a pastor's wife is watched and resentment can easily creep in. It's a difficult and lonely path as one can't have any

special friends in the church despite taking naturally more to some than others. It is said, “A wife can make or break a man” and as my friend, a young pastor’s wife, was told, “What you are, your husband will become”—frightening thought!

Then there were the invitations to members’ homes for meals. Some had very lavish homes and when we returned to the manse everything looked shabby. I’d have to school myself to count my blessings, realizing how much better off we were than so many others. Our furniture would get scuffed by youngsters crowding into our living room on Sunday evenings and there was the inevitable squash spilled on the carpet. So the saying “Thank God for what you have and don’t concentrate on what you don’t” was a timely reminder. Amy Carmichael’s words remain true—“In acceptance lies peace.”

Linked with this was learning to cope with a small salary with its frustrations, but God showed us His care in a way unnecessary had we had plenty. For example, during our ten years in North Wales, coffee and biscuits were provided for the women’s meeting in our home each week. We didn’t find it easy to accept money gifts but folk wanted to give and, according to Mathew 10:42, they were blessed themselves. When receiving a gift, I would often quote Mathew 25:40.

What do you do when unexpected visitors arrive at a very inconvenient time and there’s a children’s doctor’s appointment to keep, for example? This happened to us on one occasion. And though we explained why we had to leave them, they were offended and we didn’t see them in church after that. That upset me. We were always very careful when women came to the house to see my husband. We made sure I was there, too, and made it obvious by offering a cup of coffee or noisily doing my work! You can’t be too careful or give Satan half a chance.

There were times when I resented so many demands on my husband’s time and I felt I had to be Mum and Dad to the children. But God and His work had to come first. Occasionally, we’d promise to play with the children in the afternoon and then someone needy turned up on our doorstep; it was difficult to explain and I could feel their resentment. We tried hard to make up for the disappointment. And then a member’s funeral in the middle of our annual holiday! It wasn’t always easy to see it in the light of God’s providence and sovereignty, but we were learning lessons about ourselves, our reactions, and our willfulness. It’s easy to feel as if one is “playing second fiddle.” The phone would ring—“I would like to speak to Pastor, please”—or I would answer the door to be told, “I’d like to see Pastor, please.” Having said that, there were times I was glad to pass the buck! These experiences taught me the pride of my heart.

Self-pity would rear its head, so I had to learn to think scripturally, as my husband often reminded me! But it wasn’t all negative, for he didn’t have to leave early for work and come back late, so we were able to do things together and go visiting. While he was preparing sermons, I had to resist

calling for help when there was a mini-crisis I could cope with myself. I failed in this respect: if a member phoned while he was praying or preparing the message, I would call him instead of asking the person to call back. It was a fear of offending; it was unbalanced, really.

We were conscious of being in the front line of the spiritual battle, so there was constant need to be on guard. If my husband preached on the devil or hell, we learned to ask for special protection for ourselves and for our family. We were very grateful for the whole armor of God. I was also aware that Satan would try to use me to hinder my husband, especially on Saturday evening, so I had to restrain my words and reactions. We noticed the children would often succumb to being sick during Saturday night. As a result, we lost sleep when my husband needed to be fresh for his Sunday preaching. So we prayed especially hard for protection for Sunday and Monday, too! We knew that the Lord is “stronger than the strong man” and He has gained the victory.

Home was a place of contrast. We had excited young people arriving, asking my husband to conduct their wedding. Perhaps within the hour there would be sad news about a member’s sudden death. I found it extremely difficult to visit a bereaved family, arriving when there was a room full of people all turning to see the pastor and his wife. Slowly I realized I was saying too much. Just listening was the much better way.

It was a privilege to be involved with folk in joy and sorrow and it was a humbling experience to have them trust us with very private and personal matters. We had to be flexible—not my strong point—but, having committed the day to the Lord, we had to believe the unexpected was allowed by our God. I was very slow to learn this. How grateful I’ve been countless times for James 1:5-6! I’d say something like this—“Lord, I need wisdom and Thou hast it, so here I come asking for it. I thank Thee, Lord” (asking in faith)—then into the situation.

Home should be a place of relaxation and calm for the pastor—not easy to achieve when the central heating broke down and there was a leak just when we were expecting a visiting preacher to stay a few nights in the dead of winter! Living by faith and not by sight and working out practically what one claims to believe takes a lifetime for someone like me to achieve. I often flapped unnecessarily and made things more difficult for a patient, unruffled husband! In the light of eternity, these crises were trivial.

My husband has always maintained that it is a very great privilege to be a pastor, and I can say the same as a pastor’s wife. It was thrilling to see God at work and individuals coming to spiritual birth, and then encouraging them in their daily walk. I thank God for entrusting us with that privilege in spite of our frailty and shortcomings. “His strength is made perfect in weakness.” ❖

# AN ELDER'S WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE



*It is not our practice to publish anonymous articles, but this is an exception to the rule because it might have been written by any elder's wife (or office-bearer's wife). We ought to be so grateful for the faithful "band of women" who stand by and support their husbands, whatever their calling. We are particularly thankful for the wives of men in our churches who serve as office-bearers. Without their faithful support and gracious self-denial, churches could not function biblically. May the Lord continue to give us faithful, spiritually minded men to serve in the church, and wives who truly fulfill their roles as they support their husbands in their God-appointed callings.*

Your husband is an elder, you say? Well, join the band of women labeled "elders' wives." Whereas the Bible has specifications for men to be chosen as elders in the church, Scripture contains no special instructions for women to qualify as elders' wives. But the Bible does give a wonderful guideline: the guideline rooted in the creation order, which teaches that God created Eve to be a helper for her husband, Adam. So, how can you, an elder's wife, be a helper to your husband? Let me suggest a few areas to consider.

## BY BEING PRAYERFUL

Truly, this is the basic requirement for an elder's wife. Elders are placed in a position to be spiritual leaders in the church. They make visits to the church families, to the sick, to the elderly, to the lonely, to the discontented, and to the wayward members. They are expected to counsel those in distress and those who have disagreements. They need much wisdom for these tasks. Pray much for your husband for wisdom and compassion and a caring spirit toward all concerned. He is not as trained for these tasks as a minister is, so he needs a double dose of prayer. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) should be your daily motto.

## BY BEING UNSELFISH

Does this heading surprise you? Cultivating an unselfish attitude is an area where many of us need God's grace. Your husband will leave you alone many nights (even days) on account of church-related work. There are the monthly consistory meetings, the regular family visits, and hospital or nursing home visits to make. There are synodical and committee meetings to attend. There are other church meetings that crop up throughout the year. There are Bible studies or Saturday morning men's breakfast meetings. All worthy causes—but it leaves you alone at home with the children. It can get you down when you're home to care for the little ones by yourself. Or, when the children are grown and out of the home, you may tend to feel sorry for yourself because you're home alone again. Pray for God's grace to be caring and unselfish when your husband needs to go out in service for the King of the church.

## BY BEING NON-DEMANDING

Here's another stumper. Why would an elder's wife need this character quality to be supportive to her husband? Well, next to the loneliness factor, the elder's wife must deal with a husband who is home for the evening (hurrah!), but who is out-of-bounds to her. He may need to make phone calls or he may need time to prepare the bulletin message. Perhaps he has to write the minutes of the consistory meeting, or write a letter to a parishioner or committee or organization. Perhaps he is reading through a selection of sermons to pick a suitable one for the coming Sunday church service.

Your eyes may pop in surprise when you see a 300–400 page document he has to read to prepare for synodical meetings. Your husband is home, yes, but he is unavailable to give considerable attention to you and the children because church matters need to be dealt with. As an elder's wife, you may witness how he struggles to compose a letter, or write just the right words for a bulletin message if these tasks aren't necessarily his forte. To accomplish these assignments, he needs undisturbed time—and you must give him privacy to perform these duties. Here, too, an elder's wife needs to pray for God's grace to forego her own desires and leave her husband undisturbed to do his work.

## BY PRACTICING CONFIDENTIALITY

This is another toughie. An elder is faced with many issues that require total confidentiality. He may not share these matters with his wife. That's hard on both husband and wife. The wife must trust her husband and refrain from probing and prying to get information from him. She must respect his call to confidentiality. This can be hard to do. Wouldn't you wonder what's going on when your husband is suddenly called away while you're having coffee at a friend's? Wouldn't you get upset when he cancels a family outing because he has to make a church-related visit? Wouldn't you wonder when your husband cancels a Saturday morning breakfast date with you because he has to make an unplanned visit? Resentment can creep into your heart and your natural curiosity wants to know what's going on! Yet you must trust your husband to do the Lord's will.

You must support him to be faithful and trustworthy. Pray for God's grace to help you to honor your husband's commitment to confidentiality at all times in all situations.

### BY BEING HOSPITABLE

One of the requirements of an elder is to be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2). You, as his wife, must be of a similar mind. Are you timid? Are you fussy about a clean house? Are you worried about making meals? As an elder's wife, you may be put in situations where you have to open your home for meals and lodging to strangers. Don't worry if your house isn't spic-and-span. Most visitors feel more relaxed in a home that's not amazingly clean. And as for making meals, just keep them simple. Most visitors are thankful for your hospitality and do not expect a fancy meal. If this is an area where you have difficulty serving, pray for God's grace to help you. Pray that you

*(continued from page 153)*

Following the teachings of Paul, Calvin teaches us that though we live in hope in the world today, afflictions and cross-bearing are necessary for us to learn contempt for the present life when compared to the blessings of heaven. This life is nothing compared to what is to come. It is like smoke or a shadow. Calvin asks, "If heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile? If departure from the world is entry into life, what else is the world but a sepulcher?" He adds, "No one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection."

Calvin uses an argument of opposites to find a middle way between them when explaining the Christian's relation to this world. On the one hand, cross-bearing crucifies us to the world and the world to us. On the other hand, the Christian enjoys this present life, but with due restraint and moderation as he learns to use things in this world for the purposes that God intended them. Like Paul, Calvin enjoyed good literature, good food, and the beauties of nature. But, also like Paul, he rejected all forms of earthly excess. The believer is thus called to Christ-like moderation, which includes modesty, prudence, avoidance of display, and contentment with our lot, for the hope of the life to come gives purpose to the enjoyment of our present life. Like Paul, Calvin says, "We have here no continuing city, but seek one to come." This life is always straining after a better, heavenly life.

How is it possible for a Christian to maintain a proper balance so he enjoys the gifts that God gives in this world while avoiding the snare of over-indulgence? Calvin offers three principles gleaned from Paul:

1. Remember that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. This should restrain our lusts because our gratitude to God for His gifts cannot be expressed by a greedy reception of them.
2. Remember that we are stewards of the world in which God has placed us. Soon we will have to give an account to Him of our stewardship.

would be an instrument in His hands to serve others. You'll be surprised how you yourself will be blessed. Who knows—you might be "entertaining angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

So...you're an elder's wife? Join the band of faithful women in serving the Lord of the church by supporting your husband. It doesn't come naturally. You need God's Spirit and His grace to help you in this situation. Support your husband with your prayers, your unselfish devotion, your understanding spirit, your trusting attitude, and your hospitable qualities. You will be a blessing to him as well as to your congregation, and you yourself will experience God's blessing as you "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:18a).

*Submitted by an experienced elder's wife in the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Reprinted from The Messenger.*

3. Remember that God has called us to Himself and to His service. Because of that calling, we strive to fulfill our tasks in His service, for His glory, and under His watchful, benevolent eye, always aiming for the maturation of the saints and the salvation of the lost.

In summary, what Paul and Calvin teach is that a Christian *should not expect to find all joy in this present life*. This truth is obvious but worth stressing because we believers tend to feel sorry for ourselves about having to live in self-denial. Deep down, we don't truly believe that denying ourselves for Christ will give us joy in Christ. We struggle against the unfairness of seeing unbelievers living at ease and in prosperity in this world while we carry our crosses to the bitter end. It is hard to accept that throughout life we must put base desires behind us while all around us people are freely acting out their ambitions. They don't have many restraints, while we are called to be temperate and self-controlled, refusing to hanker for things that the world enjoys but which would compromise our holiness and obedience to God.

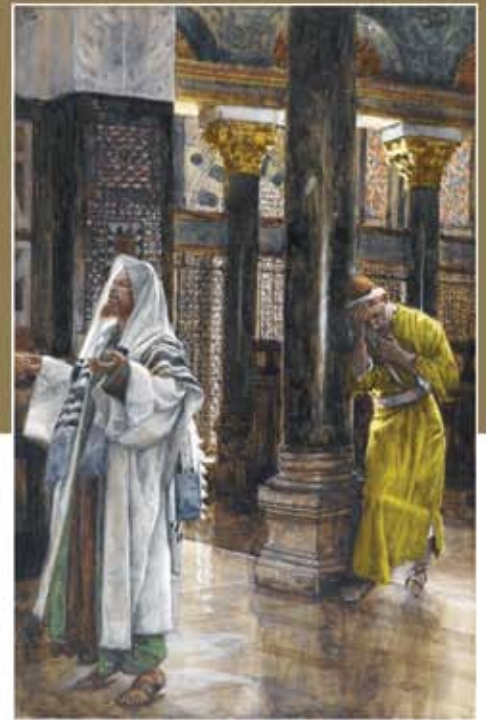
Having said that, we go on to say that the Christian has many blessings, comforts, and joys in this life, and God who is rich in mercy has given us these things to enjoy. He keeps back no good from those that love Him, even now. Even so, the Christian must deny himself many things in this life and must expect that he will not get full joy in this life because of certain things that belong to the essence of Christian faith and life.

The art of being a Christian is not expecting too much of this life. We do not expect God to give us everything; rather, He gives us only a modest share of joys and comforts. In this world, God feeds us with a spoon. In the world to come, God will feed us with a ladle.

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# 3 Parables about Prayer

DR. GERALD BILKES



Read: Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–14

Prayer has often been called the breath of the soul. When God works spiritual life in our hearts, it shows itself by true prayer. For example, Scripture notes that Paul began to pray after Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Prior to this, he undoubtedly said many prayers; after all, most people do at some time or other. However, the Lord noted Paul's new posture with the words: "Behold he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). True prayer proceeds "from the heart" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 117).

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that prayer is always easy for believers. In fact, the opposite is often the case. Many hindrances must be overcome when going to prayer and persevering in prayer. God's Word honestly addresses these hindrances. In fact, Christ devoted at least three parables to the subject of prayer, and, interestingly, each of them aims to overcome common hindrances to prayer.

## 1 The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5–13)

Christ had just given the Lord's Prayer to His disciples, who had asked Him: "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1). Then Christ tells the parable of a man who receives a guest in the middle of the night. Because this guest was unplanned, the man goes to a neighboring friend to ask for some bread. Even though his friend is in bed, the man overcomes all hesitancy to knock on his door and wake him up. The pressing need of the moment, combined with the friendship of a neighbor, cause the man to set usual decorum aside.

It is not difficult to imagine that this friend would come to the door and give his neighbor what he needed. Jesus mentioned two reasons specifically. First of all, the man is his friend; friendship obliges you to help a friend in need. Everyone understands that. In addition, the very fact that you have come knocking at his door at such an odd hour indicates that it is an emergency; any neighbor would give you as much as you need.

Christ is addressing a common hindrance in prayer, namely, *the feeling that the Lord is indifferent to us and our prayers*. We doubt that the Lord is truly concerned about us. This can be a crippling feeling; despite all the promises in the Bible and all our past answers to prayer, we imagine that God would not be concerned about us. This feeling can overwhelm us to the point that we do not pray, or do not pray in faith.

If you would quite easily disturb your friend in an emergency, and he would help you, is there then not even more reason to go to the Lord, who neither sleeps nor slumbers (Ps. 121:4)? Since He is not weary with our asking, should we then be reluctant to pray? It's no wonder that the Lord follows this parable with the words: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (v. 9). Christ clears away the first hindrance.

## 2 The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1–8)

A second hindrance to prayer is the feeling that our prayers have not been answered. It relates to the first hindrance in the sense that we ultimately end up thinking that the Lord is indifferent because He is not answering our prayers. In essence, both hindrances are forms of unbelief. In both cases, the perception that God is not hearing us stifles prayer.

Christ gives the parable about the persistent widow to address this second hindrance. Luke explicitly specifies the purpose of the parable as follows: "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (v. 1). The parable tells of a widow who has suffered some injustice or wrongdoing, and her only recourse is a corrupt judge, someone who fears neither God nor man. The widow

continues to trouble the judge to the point that he helps her simply so she won't bother him anymore. The parable concludes: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (v. 7)

The lesson again is clear. Though the widow faced great odds, she received her request. And would the believer, who comes not only to a just Judge (see Gen. 18:25) but a gracious heavenly Father, find persistent prayer to be pointless? The answer is clear—of course not. The Lord stands ready to hear them. It's true, He can delay for His own wise reasons. Yet isn't it often our own delays and doubts that keep us from praying? Thus Christ clears away the second hindrance.

### 3 The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–15)

One of the most subtle hindrances to prayer is this sense of self-sufficiency where we think that everything is basically fine and we don't *need* earnest prayer. This spirit of self-sufficiency is very different from the previous two hindrances, but it has the same effect: it quenches prayer.

Christ addresses this hindrance in the well-known parable of the Pharisee and publican. Notice how He tells that two men went up to the temple to pray; however, when it comes down to it, the Pharisee only has the form of prayer, and in the end doesn't actually pray *for* anything. He simply expresses his own self-sufficiency under the guise of speaking to God.

This portrait of the Pharisee is an indictment to the spirit of self-sufficiency that we all have by nature. It pervades the unconverted person, even if, like the Pharisee in the parable, he is very religious. However, it can also beset true believers. We begin to think that we are basically alright as we are.

Christ addresses this devastating hindrance to prayer by showing the heart of true prayer in the manner and words of the publican. He knows that he is not "alright" and, in his brokenness, he cries out to God for mercy. This simple but heartfelt prayer brings down the sentence of God's approval upon him, as well as an infinite number of blessings. In fact, this publican lays hold on all the riches of God's covenant—for that is what mercy is—in a simple and sincere prayer for God and God's favor.

By this honest portrait of both the Pharisee and the publican, Christ clears away the third hindrance to true prayer.

## Conclusion

What simple pictures Christ used: a man in need at midnight, a needy widow on the street, and a needy sinner in the temple! The common thread in each is need. If only we sensed our desperate need more, we would pray more quickly, more persistently, and more humbly. And don't you think we would receive more readily all that God wishes to give?

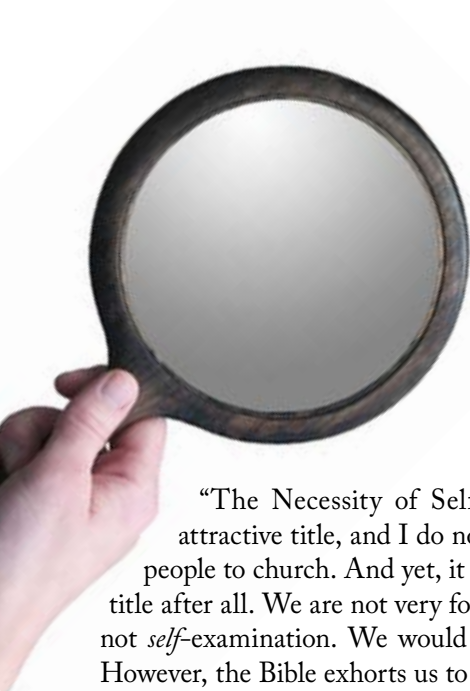
What Christ did in these parables—removing hindrances to prayer—He still does from heaven in the lives of His people. Christ sees us beset by hindrances, and He removes them by His Word and Spirit, and sets His people praying for the mercies of which heaven is so full and earth is so needy.

## Questions

- 1 Hindrances in prayer often relate to a wrong or one-sided view of God. Each parable we looked at helps correct a wrong or one-sided view of God. Discuss how this works in the three parables.
- 2 In Luke 11:9, the word "importunity" literally means "shamelessness." Can prayers that are bold still be reverent?
- 3 Why does Jesus conclude the parable of the persistent widow with the question: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" What does this have to do with prayer (Luke 18:8)?
- 4 Compare and contrast the Pharisee and the publican on the spirit, content, and result of their prayers. Why is the parable so much more powerful with the part about the Pharisee than if it just had the section about the publican?
- 5 What other hindrances to prayer can you think of, and can you think of other parables or passages that address those hindrances?

# The Necessity of Self-Examination

*This is the first of three articles on the vital and often misunderstood subject of self-examination. Additional articles will address the criteria for and the benefits of self-examination.*



“The Necessity of Self-Examination” is not a very attractive title, and I do not think that it will draw many people to church. And yet, it may prove to be a rather useful title after all. We are not very fond of examination—especially not *self*-examination. We would rather examine someone else. However, the Bible exhorts us to examine ourselves.

In this article, and two more to come, I wish to examine this unpopular but important topic with you.

## The Difficulty of Examination

Why do we find self-examination to be such a difficult task? Why do we so often avoid it? I believe there are several reasons for this.

First, it pertains to our inner life and our affections. It is so difficult for us to distinguish between natural affections and those that come from the Holy Spirit.

Second, we are so fond of our ease and rest. The sluggard referred to in the book of Proverbs is also the spiritual sluggard that lives in our hearts. We do not want our rest to be disturbed, and we are not very fond of viewing ourselves in the mirror of the Bible. We love to slumber; when we have found rest at last, we do not wish this rest to be disturbed by renewed self-examination.

Third, many find self-examination unnecessary. Someone will argue, “I believe in Jesus; I am certain that Jesus is my Savior. His work is finished, and that is sufficient. I find it unnecessary to torment myself by examining whether my faith is genuine; as long as you believe, all is well.”

Fourth, we avoid self-examination because we believe it to be harmful for our spiritual life. Maybe all that self-introspection and searching for certain marks keeps us from resting in the finished work of Christ. In so doing, we would in fact trust more in our feelings rather than in the Savior, which frequently leads to depression and doubt.

Finally, I think one of the reasons is that we say, “All this examination of ourselves renders us unfit to be a witness to the world. We will then be more occupied with ourselves rather than our neighbor. And how could anyone be jealous of a Christian who is not certain whether he will ever be saved?”

## The Scriptural Mandate for Self-Examination

Over against these arguments stands the fact that the Bible exhorts us to engage in self-examination and deems such examination necessary. We frequently encounter in Scripture questions that relate to whether our service of God is truly motivated by

love—whether our faith, as Paul says, is “the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1). Do we genuinely trust in Christ, or is it only in a presumptuous or even brazen manner? The Bible therefore insists that we examine whether our lives harmonize with what we confess with our lips. It is with this in mind that Jesus spoke of a wise and foolish builder, of wise and foolish virgins, and of branches that are either fruitful or fruitless.

We can therefore conclude that *Scripture* stirs us up to engage in self-examination. Let me give you an example from the Old Testament: Zephaniah 2:1. The entire chapter testifies of self-examination. On behalf of the Lord, the prophet says, “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired.”<sup>1</sup> Let me also give you an example from the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 13:5. There we read, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

It is of even greater significance, however, that God Himself is presented to us in the Bible as the Searcher of the hearts of men—for example, in Psalm 7:9: “The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:4 we read the same: “God, which trieth our hearts.” Consider Revelation 2:23, where the exalted Savior declares, “All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

In the Scriptures we also encounter *people* who engage in self-examination. With the omniscient eye of Jesus upon them, the disciples examined themselves, asking, “Lord, is it I?” They wanted to know whether they possibly were the traitors Jesus mentioned. Whenever a sermon mentions seed falling into stony places, or Saul who was among the prophets, we quite readily say, “That must be applicable to someone else.” The pure in heart, however, will be fearful of themselves, saying, “Lord, is it I?”

*Believers* in particular examine themselves. In Psalm 139:23–24, David says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” The genuinely godly

1. The Dutch Statenvertaling reads as follows: “Doorzoek uzelf nauw, ja doorzoek nauw, gij volk dat met geen lust bevangen zijt.” The literal translation of this would be: “Examine thyself thoroughly, yes, examine thyself thoroughly, o people void of desire.” Matthew Poole interprets the phrase “Gather yourself together” as meaning, “Being gathered together, search yourselves, your hearts and ways, and repent.” Concerning “not desired” he comments, “neither desirous to return, nor desirable in your return; foolishly unwilling to return, and utterly unworthy to be received on your return.” Thus also the KJV text is a call to self-examination and repentance.

do not trust in their own heart and crave reassurance from the Lord that they are in the right way.

Do you believe that these matters are recorded in Scripture in vain? Would it not be to our detriment if we were simply to ignore them? Why does the Bible speak of self-examination? One reason is the danger of deceiving ourselves. When concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus summons His hearers to self-examination, saying, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Jesus taught that it is not enough to exclaim, “Lord, Lord,” for we must also practice what He teaches. In the final analysis, God will take notice of our deeds rather than our words.

Jesus then continued, saying, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22–23). These are shocking words! No one has ever been so sharp in their word choice as Jesus was here. He focuses on religious self-deceit, confronting us with people who are convinced that they are true believers and children of God while it is not so. Such will confess Jesus’ divinity, for they will address Him as “Lord!” The confession, “Jesus is Lord,” is the original and oldest Christian confession. Their confession as such will therefore be sound. The basis of their confession will demand entry into the kingdom of God. They will claim that their exclusion is unjust. They will plead the merits of their works for God’s kingdom: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” Remarkable things will have been accomplished by them: they will have testified of Christ and of God’s kingdom and have prophesied in the world. And yet, Jesus will say, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23).

What a call to self-examination, and how different is the criterion by which Jesus judges! There is such a difference between how Jesus evaluates us and how we evaluate ourselves. It is therefore so important to know the standard by which God judges us, and this calls us therefore to engage in self-examination.

### Self-Deception Calls for Self-Examination

Furthermore, there are quite a few examples in Scripture of people who appeared to be true believers and yet proved not to be so: King Saul, Jehu, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the Sorcerer, and others. Chapters 4 and 6 of Hebrews also come to mind, where the apostle addresses the danger of deceiving one’s self for eternity. Hebrews 6 gives us reason to shudder as it speaks of people who at one point were enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gifts, and were acquainted with the powers of the world to come (vv. 4–6)—and yet they were not true Christians.

Self-deception is therefore a real possibility. Scripture takes this seriously, and we should ask ourselves whether we do as well. The Bible even presents an entire congregation that walked the pathway of self-deception: Sardis. This is the congregation of

which it is written, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1). Concerning Laodicea, we read, “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

Are there causes for self-deceit? Why are people inclined to deceive themselves? First of all, man has a deceitful heart. Jeremiah 17:9 is well known: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Calvin comments on this text, saying that “the human heart conceals much vanity, is so full of hidden deceit, and is encompassed by so much deceitful hypocrisy, that it often deceives itself.”

Another cause is a misleading ministry of the Word. Jeremiah says of the false prophets, “For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 8:11). This is perpetrated by preachers who put people at ease on the basis of their baptism, reassuring them that they are children of the covenant. As long as someone obediently lives in harmony with God’s Word, he will certainly be saved. Preachers do this when they proclaim that God loves all men and that Jesus died for all; one only needs to believe and acquiesce. Preachers mislead men when they define Christianity in terms of all sorts of ecstatic experiences: speaking in tongues, prophesying, extraordinary revelations and visions, predictions regarding the future, and healing the sick. In short, people are misled when no mention is made of what Jesus addressed, namely, the necessity of regeneration, personal repentance, a living faith in Christ, and sanctification. People are reassured on the basis of a false foundation. Such teaching even breeds churches that are filled with self-deceived people—people who reassure themselves that they are heaven-bound, but who neither know anything of hungering and thirsting after Christ, nor of sanctification and the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). Jesus tells us that this does not merely pertain to a few, but rather, to many: “For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

A third cause is that man is most inclined to trust in himself. We hear this in these words, “Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matt. 7:22); “We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26). They will appeal to something for which they claim credit. They will trust in what they have done for the Lord, but will be silent about faith and repentance.

Someone might ask whether man is capable of examining himself. The answer is “Yes.” The apostle writes, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor. 2:11). A man knows what transpires in his inner being. Ultimately, two know everything about us: God and ourselves. This means that others are incapable of examining us, “for man looketh on the outward appearance” (1 Sam. 16:7). Only God is able to examine us, and only we are able to examine ourselves.

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# HERE COME THE GREENS!

Of all the colors God created, one dominates the social landscape today. It is the color green. Green is *in*. We have green technology, green homes, green cars, green lifestyle, green government. America has its first green president: Barack Obama. To be politically correct these days, one has to adopt the green vision and agenda. Here are some items on that agenda:



1 Our very survival as a human race depends on how we treat planet Earth.

2 We need to drastically reduce CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) emissions into the atmosphere.

3 We need to end our addiction to oil (our main pollutant) and find alternative, renewable sources of energy.

4 Measures must be taken to greatly reduce the size of the world's population.

5 To make sure these goals are met, governments must enact laws to force compliance with them.

## Lifestyle Changes Required

To “save” the planet, the Greens suggest we start with some easy lifestyle changes. Take colder showers. Turn the heat down. Use less air conditioning. Drive small, fuel-efficient vehicles or stop driving altogether. Bring your own bags to the supermarket. Buy energy-efficient lightbulbs. Quit drinking bottled water. Use cloth diapers. Cut down on family size: two children is max; better yet, have just one as in China.

You may wonder what’s wrong with these “recommendations,” except the last one, of course. If they help to keep the earth clean, should we not be willing to make some sacrifices? Besides, do we not have a God-given responsibility to be stewards of the earth? We do indeed. So before we criticize the Green Movement, let’s remind ourselves of our duty in this regard.

## Christian Stewardship

The Bible clearly states that the earth and everything in it was given to man to rule over and subdue (Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:6–8). Stewardship means managing the resources God has given us, using great care to preserve and protect them. An example of this caretaking is given in the Old Testament, where God commanded that fields and vineyards could be

sown and harvested for six years but had to be left fallow the seventh year to replenish the soil’s nutrients and to give the land rest (Ex. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:1–7).

God also wants us to appreciate the purpose and beauty of His creation. He placed on this planet everything needed to feed, clothe, and house the billions of people who have lived on it since the Garden of Eden. In addition, He has decked out the planet in glorious colors and scenic beauty not only for His own glory but also for man’s enjoyment.

It is wrong, therefore, to allow this beautiful earth to be polluted by poisonous gases and other contaminants. Surely we must not find fault with environmentalists for being alarmed about the way this planet is being mistreated. Their zeal in this regard puts many of us to shame.

## The Greens are Pantheists

We need to understand that there is a fundamental difference between Christian stewardship and environmentalism. This difference lies in the motive behind concern for the planet. As stewards of the earth, Christians are more concerned with the glory of the Creator than with His creation, whereas most environmentalists are concerned solely with the well-being of the earth itself. The earth *is* their God. They are

pantheists. Pantheism comes from the Greek word *pan* (“all”) and *theos* (“god”). Pantheists believe that God and nature are one and the same; every blade of grass is part of God. Lakes, rivers, and mountains likewise are incarnations of God. But, most importantly, man is also part of nature, and hence of God. So when environmentalists see pollution harming or destroying the earth, they believe God’s existence and their own are at stake. This explains their repeated and urgent warnings that unless we take drastic action to reduce gas emissions, our planet will go up in flames and all life will be extinguished.

The existence of the God of the Bible, however, does not depend on the survival of the earth. God is from everlasting to everlasting and, when He created the earth, He did so with a plan in mind—a plan that called for the salvation of His elect to be redeemed by Christ and to live forever with Him on a gloriously renewed earth (2 Pet. 3:13). Christians therefore have a totally different outlook on life and the world. Yes, we are to be concerned about the earth and the damage done to it by polluting the air. But our concern is not born of fear. A Christian has no need for panic. God has created the earth and upholds it by His almighty and all-present power (Lord’s Day 10).

### Eco-Spirituality

As surprising as it may sound to some, environmentalism is a religion with deep spiritual aspects. Man is a spiritual being who needs to worship someone or something greater than himself. Having abandoned Christianity and the true God, modern man is now filling the vacuum in his soul with substitute gods. For most Greens, that god, or rather goddess, is Mother Earth. Many people in Europe and North America have become worshippers of Gaia, the Greek word for Earth, and they look to her for comfort and direction. This eco-spirituality is increasingly taking on aspects borrowed from Christianity and other world religions. Earth worshippers everywhere are meeting in nature’s cathedrals: mountain valleys and old-growth forests. They celebrate annual Earth Days and chant their praise songs to Nature. In Vancouver alone, hundreds of eco-spiritualists gather once a week in community circles for fellowship and encouragement.

Here’s what one spokesperson for this movement said recently: “Eco-spirituality has become very much part of my spiritual practice. If I don’t get out and walk by the trees and by the ocean, I start to suffer.” Another Gaia worshipper states, “We need to think of the Earth as a sentient being and to realize that the Earth we are walking on is also conscious of us.... Unlike faiths that promise heaven in the afterlife, we treat the biosphere as our paradise on earth” (Article in *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 26, 2010).

### Impact on Culture

This idea that the Earth is a living, breathing, and conscious being is popularized in our culture, most recently by the film *Avatar*. According to reviews I’ve read, the main characters in this movie are extra-terrestrial, kind-hearted, blue-skinned Na’vi people who worship a biological force that unifies their planet Pandora and all its life forms. This force is so tangible that the Na’vi can literally plug into it by connecting the tips of their long tails to the fronds of sacred trees. The producer of this blockbuster film, James Cameron, is promoting the eco-spiritual message in a very subtle way. Most people watching that movie are intrigued by its spell-binding storyline told with amazing special effects. But they leave the theater with the Satanic impression registered on their subconscious minds that the Na’vi people were better off being “plugged” into pantheistic *natural* forces than those who have grown up in a culture rooted in the *supernatural* and theistic religion of the Bible.

We have seen that today’s environmentalism is permeated with pantheistic and New Age ideas. It is largely an anti-Christian movement. For this reason, we must reject its panic-driven agenda and resist its attempts to force radical changes upon us through legislation and intimidation. As Steve Milloy warns, “A great green tsunami is heading your way, threatening to wash away your standard of living and many of your liberties...it promotes countless new restrictions and regulations designed to reorder society from top to bottom” (*Green Hell*, 2). The biblical principle applies: “Try [or test] the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1).

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## COMMUNICATING WITH INTERNET TECHNOLOGY

David Clark



*In last month's article, we saw how the Internet can be used for good or ill. This month, we start looking in detail at some of the key technologies that have been fueled by the Internet revolution. In particular, we consider the whole issue of communication, from email to text, Twitter, and Skype. This area is fraught with real and deeply troubling dangers but, when used wisely, can bring about immense benefits to individuals and organizations.*

### Driving while intoxicated...

In 2007, Brandi Terry, a 17-year-old from Utah, was on her way to visit her grandfather when she drove through a red light and crashed. In a radio interview<sup>1</sup> she recalled what happened: "I woke up to a bright light—I could barely open my eyes—and paramedics. This man was saying 'Brandi, Brandi,' and I just started crying. I didn't know what had happened." Terry had shattered her right ankle and broken her upper right arm in half. She couldn't walk for six months. When police checked her phone they discovered that she had sent a text within seconds of the accident. Even after recovery, she went on to say of her habit of texting while driving: "I tried really, really hard not to. Then it got to the point where I would do it only once every 5 minutes. I don't know—it's just so addicting, I just can't put it down." So why did she do it?

In a March 2008 BBC report, Professor Cary Cooper, who advises the British government on stress in the workplace, suggested that "e-mail is one of the most pernicious stressors of our time."<sup>2</sup> He went on to say that every year Britons take 14 million sick days due to stress and that e-mail is a major source of employee anxiety: "24/7, we are interfaced by the mobile phone, by Blackberry, by e-mails, by a whole range of technologies, so that we are almost on call all the time."

Wherever we look, we find people addicted to checking messages on their mobile phones. How often have we seen a row of teenagers sitting together, all glued to their phones, with ear buds firmly in place, and wondered if they were in fact communicating with each other—by text!

Teenagers are not the only ones guilty of such behavior, as anyone who has been on a flight can testify. As soon as the plane lands, out come the phones, Blackberries, or iPhones to check up on that message that might just have been missed!

Or take the recent case of a man being interviewed for a teacher's position checking his phone in the middle of the interview as soon as he received a text message. He did not get the job!

### It's all about me

So why do we do it? Why are so many addicted to these new media, defined by the Webster's Dictionary as "to surrender oneself to something obsessively or habitually"?

Is it not a sinful part of selfish human nature that makes us want to think that we are indispensable? So much so that we become addicted to email, text, Twitter, or any number of new communications. It is the opposite of what we read in Philippians 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

### Do you tweet?

Another new technology that has people baffled is Twitter. Started in 2006, it has experienced a monthly growth of 1,382%! Twitter is a service that enables its users to send and read messages of up to 140 characters known as tweets. Anyone can then subscribe to receive these tweets. Some of the biggest showbiz stars and politicians have massive followings. Three and a half million people follow every tweet that Britney Spears sends, while two and a half million need to know about Barack Obama's every move. Perhaps it makes people feel "closer" to their favorite star or politician?

### Emails can get you fired...

Much care should always be taken when sending emails. Not only are they admissible as evidence in court, but they can easily be misinterpreted.

A chief executive of an American health care company, Cerner Corporation, wrote an email that turned out to be disastrous for the company as well as the morale of company employees. In the email, employees were accused of being lazy and managers were also threatened with being fired. It seemed the employee parking lot was not full at 8 a.m. and was nearly empty by 5 p.m. each day. After the email showed up on a Yahoo Financial Message Board investors began questioning the leadership of the company. The result was a plunge of 22% in the share price of the company's stock on Wall Street.

Or consider the case of Vicki Walker, an accountant from Auckland, New Zealand, who was fired for sending emails to work colleagues which "caused disharmony in the workplace." The company she worked for, ProCare Health, claimed that her emails advising colleagues how to fill out staff claim forms were confrontational due to the use of a sentence written all in capital letters and highlighted in blue, with the time and date highlighted in red. For these crimes against humanity, Walker was fired from the position she had held at the company for two years.

## There is good also

Yet, there is still much that can be said in favor of these new media. Consider, for example, the missionary organization that has been able to cut costs significantly by replacing letters with emails. Instantly, they can let people know of prayer needs, a difficult situation, or a matter for rejoicing. Organizations such as the Christian Institute and others are even using Twitter to keep subscribers informed of significant developments.

### How the Christian Institute uses email...

Over 10,000 individuals are signed up to receive email alerts from The Christian Institute. It is a quick, cheap and versatile way of informing Christians about important issues for their prayers and action. To send out the same information by post would take days to prepare and would cost thousands. We simply wouldn't have the resources to do it.

Each Friday the Institute uses email to send an at-a-glance summary of the week's headline stories. It's the kind of thing a person could read in 60 seconds. It helps Christians keep up to date with the latest developments on issues like medical ethics, religious liberty, and marriage. Many church leaders say they find our "In the news this week" email extremely helpful in keeping informed.

One of the great advantages of email is that a user can interact with it. Instead of sending a huge long report in one message, we can give a simple headline with a short description and a reader can click through for more details. In the same way we can send links to online video, audio, and downloadable publications. It's all about making things easy and useful for people. Brief, clear, simple messages that don't waste words are by far the most effective.

To sign up, visit [christian.org.uk/signup](http://christian.org.uk/signup)

*Mike Judge*

Or think of parents, separated from their married children and grandchildren, who can now see them and talk to them over free Internet video services such as Skype. These days, the world is a much smaller place!

It was Twitter, for example, that was at the heart of the recent protests in Iran because it was both very easy for the average citizen to use and very hard for any central authority to control. Similarly, text messages can be of great value in times of emergencies.

All this is changing the way that we interact with each other. It is undoubtedly contributing to a higher level of stress, with people now available all of the time. The boss gives employees a Blackberry and expects to be able to call on their services any time of night and day!

But the change is here to stay, as the postal service will attest, with 10% yearly drops in the physical mail that we send.

### Biblical principles

When considering our 24/7 society, there remain the key biblical principles of self-control, selflessness, and service. The book of James explains it most clearly when it states that "where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:16-17).

In contrast to what is going on around us, we are not to be addicted to email, text, Twitter, or any new form of communications. These are tools to be used for good; they are not to control us.

We should also apply the principle of James 1:19 and "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." In other words, we need to think about how we communicate with people. We need, for example, to consider how a person might read (or misinterpret) an email. Our responses should be considered, measured, and focused on building up. We should consider "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise" and "think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

### Practical Advice

With spam accounting for over 90% of all email traffic, it is important to take simple steps, such as installing a spam filter (though many email providers already have these), and using up-to-date anti-virus software. However, beyond these things, Christian principles such as self-control or humility are critical.

Some Christian couples have found that sharing an email account can be helpful. Other people suggest that not responding to emails or text messages immediately is a good way of avoiding their addictive effects. Particularly helpful is the idea of not responding to a message that has upset us on the same day it was received. Simply putting our response in the "drafts" folder and re-reading it the following day before sending it can avoid many dangers.

I conclude with an interesting true story that can be applied to all forms of new communications. Two friends were together outside, chopping up logs. The phone in the house rang several times, and eventually one friend asked the other if he was going to answer it. The homeowner simply said: "No. The phone is a convenience, and at this moment, it is inconvenient!"

The next article will look at the social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn and others. We will also look at Instant Messaging (IM), concluding with practical, helpful, and positive advice.

1. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113132868>

2. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7281707.stm>

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# Ten Reasons God Made the dust

ROGER FAY



PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

## 1. For glory

God's creative wisdom and intricate design are seen in the dust as well as the stars. The dust displays its Designer's glory just as everything else does in this universe (Gen. 1:31). Studying soil silicate crystals through a microscope reveals God's handiwork as much as using a radio-telescope does to penetrate the secrets of the Milky Way.

Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed  
Where'er I turn mine eye!  
If I survey the ground I tread,  
Or gaze upon the sky.

—Isaac Watts

In an analogous way, God has placed each member of the church, however unimportant, into a firmament of grace that shines universally with His glory. No believer is too insignificant to glorify God. No Christian can infer from a sense of inferiority, "I am not a member of the body [church]!" Nor can any say to another, "I have no need of you!" (1 Cor. 12:21).

## 2. For good

God made dust on the third day of creation week. The dust is an integral part of the dry land's structure (Gen. 1:9; 2:7). When dry, it is easily blown about, especially in dust storms. When wet and mixed with vegetation, it sticks to other mineral and organic components to form the soil's crumb. Without a proper crumb structure, soil has little fertility.

All human communities depend on a complex array of food webs that rely on lowly dust for their integrity. Any child can tell you that a cow eats grass and people eat cows. So it is obvious what happens to animals if the soil's structure has deteriorated through erosion to the point that it cannot support the growth of the grass. Atheists may walk proudly across God's earth, but ultimately even they are dependent on earth's tiny particles for their most grandiose enterprises!

## 3. For dependency

God created Adam when He "formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7). Why did the Lord use such unlikely

material as Eden's soil? Was it to impress upon Adam a deep, innate sense of his creature-hood?

Man is vicegerent of creation (Ps. 8), possessing a status only a "little lower than the angels," yet he is so constructed that for all his dignity he can never eradicate a sense of dependency. His atoms never stop singing "the hand that made us is divine"; there can be no such thing as a real atheist (Rom. 1:20)!

## 4. For compassion

What condescension the Lord God demonstrated in His manner of making man, in forming him from the dust of the ground! To such unpromising raw material the Lord brought His creative wisdom and skill to bear. Having fashioned the dust into a body, He got down, so to speak, on hands and knees to breathe into Adam's nostrils the breath of life—so that Adam became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

This anthropomorphic account indicates a creative process with prolonged "sensory" contact between the Creator and the first human being; we are introduced to God's intimate knowledge of Adam and indeed all his descendants. Here we see the Lord's tender kindness to the whole human family. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.... The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 103:14, 17).

## 5. For comfort

Surprisingly, it is the dust aspect of Adam's origin that David recalls as he celebrates God's care of his own life. "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.... My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (Ps. 139:13–15).

David sensed the connection between the Lord's creation of Adam and tender care of his own life while he was in his mother's womb. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is high. I cannot attain unto it” (Ps. 139:6). Every believer can speak like this. Christians derive deep comfort from realizing afresh that their heavenly Father watches over the most minute details of their lives, and did so even before their birth (Luke 10:22–32).

### 6. For judgment

How appropriate that the serpent should hear his doom from Almighty God in these words: “Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Gen. 3:14)! How appropriate that Egypt’s magicians must acknowledge judgment visited upon them and Egypt’s idolatry when dust thrown into the air by Moses turns into lice. “Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, this is the finger of God” (Exod. 8:19). And what more fitting punishment can there be for fallen humanity than to hear the words: “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19)? The rich and poor alike share the same lowly destiny. The body shall “return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). Never will humanity be allowed to forget the “rock from which it was hewn.” In origin and destiny alike, man is dust. What a testimony to our sin-laden mortality.

### 7. For salvation

Jesus was made a little lower than the angels also, with a sinless human nature (Heb. 2:9, 14). He took on human nature Himself in order to suffer the agonizing death of the cross for His elect people.

The dust of Israel became an unconscious witness of and unwitting participator in Christ’s work as Mediator. It was dust that clung to Christ’s bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane as He stretched out on the ground praying (Luke 22:44). His blood dripped into the dust from Calvary’s cross as it trickled down from His head, hands, and feet (Matt. 27:26; Ps. 22:15–16; John 19:34).

But that blood cried from the ground for mercy, not for vengeance like Abel’s (Gen. 4:10–11; Heb. 12:24). The cry of Jesus’ blood explains why not long afterwards the anguished form of another Jew—his name Saul of Tarsus—pitched into the dust in an agony of conversion (Acts 9). Saul had been traveling to Damascus to throw Christians into prison, but was now confronted with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. “Who art thou, Lord?” he cried. And he learned in the depths of repentance that this Lord was none other than Christ Jesus who “came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15).

### 8. For vision

How many others who now oppose the living Christ will yet, like Paul, be turned to trust in Him? How many of those who have not heard the gospel will one day hear it and will through faith become beneficiaries of Christ’s saving work?

The Scriptures leave us in no doubt. There will be a vast number of people in heaven, saved as a result of Christ’s atonement (Rev. 7:9). “Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth” (Gen. 28:14). Can anyone calculate accurately the number of dust particles in the world, even using the most sophisticated technology? The image is hyperbolic, but no one should be in any doubt that Christ’s gospel will triumph gloriously. Christian believer, be strong and of a good courage!

### 9. For hope

Paul personifies creation’s longing for Christ’s return: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom. 8:22). The dust shares the unspoken yearning of all creation. It is home to the countless numbers of believers whose bodies lie asleep awaiting the resurrection from the dead (Dan. 12:2–3).

When from the dust of death I rise  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
E’en then shall this be all my plea,  
Jesus hath lived, hath died for me!

—Nicholas von Zinzendorf

### 10. For remembrance

When Christ returns, the dust will finally vanish in the great conflagration along with everything else in this created order. All the elements will be burned up in a fervent heat, and the “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” will be ushered in (2 Pet. 3:10–13).

But Christians in that eternal world of joy will retain many precious memories. Among them will surely be this: that our Savior passed through the dusty streets of Nazareth, Galilee,

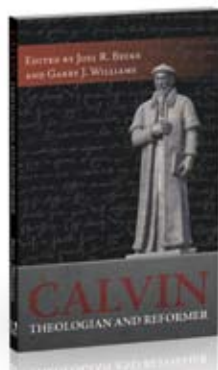
and Jerusalem in the days of His incarnation, on His way to Calvary; that on the cross Jesus was brought into “the dust of death” (Ps. 22:15). What love Jesus demonstrated there for sinners like us! But on the third day He rose again from the dead, ready to return in triumph to the skies.

We too will never forget what the dust so wonderfully witnessed, even when we soar to the heavens.

Can anyone calculate accurately the number of dust particles in the world, even using the most sophisticated technology? The image is hyperbolic, but no one should be in any doubt that Christ’s gospel will triumph gloriously.

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Rev. Roger Fay is a pastor in England and editor of *Evangelical Times*, from which this article is taken.



**Calvin, Theologian and Reformer**

Joel R. Beeke and Garry J. Williams (eds.)

This volume grows out of a conference at The John Owen Centre for Theological Study in London to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformer's birth. Topics covered include Calvin's life and reforming work, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, aspects of his theology, and his commitment to revolutionary living and powerful preaching. The contributors are Joel Beeke, Sinclair Ferguson, Ian Hamilton, Anthony Lane, Ray Pennings, and Paul Wells.

"The quincentenary of Calvin's birth last year produced a veritable host of books on the French Reformer, some tremendous, some so-so. This is one of the best, and no wonder: combine the richest themes of Calvin's theology and a stellar company of authors who know their subjects really well and you have the present volume. Truly a savory entrée of Calviniana!"  
—Michael A. G. Haykin, *Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky*

"Another book on Calvin? Yes! And welcome it is, for these addresses retain their spoken style and read like tracts encouraging us to view Scripture through Calvin's lens—a perspective that proves itself more faithful as each anniversary of Calvin's life or death pass by. Treasure!"

—Derek W. H. Thomas, *John E. Richards Professor of Practical and Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi*  
(176 pages, PB) \$16.00/12.00



**Where Wisdom Is Found: Christ in Ecclesiastes**—J. V. Fesko

The wisdom literature of the Bible is beautiful and inspiring, yet at times it can be confusing and hard to understand. In *Where Wisdom Is Found*, J. V. Fesko helps us think through the book of Ecclesiastes and demonstrates how it finds its fulfillment in the crucified and resurrected Messiah.

Ecclesiastes addresses many of the troubling ambiguities of life, revealing the futility of this world. But as we reflect on life under the sun, we can rejoice knowing that redemption and life in Christ bring more meaning to our existence than the vanity of things around us.

"In *Where Wisdom is Found*, J. V. Fesko provides a sane and edifying overview of this difficult book of Scripture, showing that all biblical wisdom literature finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, who is wisdom incarnate. Only in Him are we

set free from the vanity lamented in the Book of Ecclesiastes. If you have ever wondered how Ecclesiastes contributes to our understanding of Christ and to the life He calls us to live, don't miss this gem of a book by Dr. Fesko."

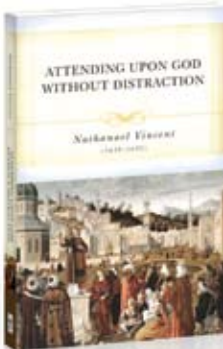
—Keith A. Mathison, *Dean of the Ligonier Academy of Biblical and*

*Theological Studies and Associate Editor of Tabletalk magazine at Ligonier Ministries in Florida*

"Finally, a modern exposition of the book of Ecclesiastes that takes seriously John 5:39 and 1 Corinthians 1:30. If you are a pastor looking for help, a student looking for an expositional model, or a Christian looking for Christ in the Old Testament, this work is a sure guide."

—Miles V. Van Pelt, *Associate Professor of Old Testament and Academic Dean of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi*

(176 pages, PB) \$12.00/9.00



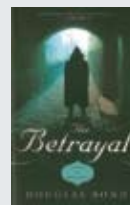
**Attending upon God without Distraction**—Nathanael Vincent

Introduced by Joel R. Beeke

The mind of man is notoriously fickle, and distractions too easily keep him from whole-hearted service to God. Even serious Christians feel the strain caused when their desires to offer God more spiritual and well-pleasing sacrifices are hindered by remaining sin and vanity of mind. Furthermore, obtaining freedom from distractions in religious duties is very difficult. Some think lightly of the disease and imagine the cure needless. Others are discouraged from striving against distractions because they think it is impossible to overcome them.

In this book, Nathanael Vincent convincingly demonstrates how everyone ought to attend upon God, recognize Him as Lord, and serve Him without interruption. In helping us to see the weight of our obligation, Vincent provides an abundance of pastoral guidance and encouragement. This book equips readers to detect distractions and deal with them. It also motivates them by showing the benefits that pertain to a focused pursuit of glorifying God.

(224 pages, HB) \$20.00/15.00



**The Betrayal**—Douglas Bond

Told from the perspective of a sworn lifelong enemy of John Calvin, this fast-paced biographical novel is a tale of envy that escalates to violent intrigue and shameless betrayal. This exciting and fascinating read will bring Calvin and his times alive with every turn of the page. Bond's always lively pen has produced a remarkable story about one of the church's greatest Reformers.

(PB, P&R, 383 pages)

Retail Price: \$14.99 | Our Price: \$10.00



**Ephesians: Reformed Expository Commentary**

Bryan Chapell

In this volume Paul's glorious description of how the triumph of the church will occur and what our roles in Christ's ultimate victory will be are unfolded in profound ways. When we lift our eyes beyond personal borders to share even a glimpse of Paul's expansive vision, then we, too, will join his doxology for God's amazing grace. This exposition is accessible to both pastors and lay readers as it gives careful attention to the biblical text, is doctrinally Reformed, and applies the Bible to our contemporary setting.

(HC, P&R, 383 pages)

Retail Price: \$29.99 | Our Price: \$22.50



**Come Down, Lord!**

Roger Ellsworth

This book is a succinct, readable, and biblically based treatment of the vital theme of revival. Taking as his starting place the absence of the sense of God's holy presence and our need of His grace, Ellsworth traces the analysis of the church's spiritual decay outlined in Isaiah 63-64, and applies its message to our times. While written to expose our spiritual need, *Come Down, Lord* will also stimulate repentance, prayer, and fresh faith in the promised mercy of God.

(PB, Banner of Truth, 57 pages)

Retail Price: \$7.00 | Our Price: \$5.50



**Am I a Christian?**—James Fraser

James Fraser endured a long conflict with doubts. This little book, taken from his *Memoirs*, is a helpful record of how he overcame his fears, and arrived at a firm assurance of his salvation in Christ.

(PB, Banner of Truth, 81 pages)

Retail Price: \$6.00 | Our Price: \$4.50





# God's Tender Care

FOR OUR CHILDREN

BY DIANA KLEYN

Summer is a time to be outdoors, away from schoolbooks and classrooms. Being outside gives you the opportunity to admire God's amazing skill and power in nature. Whether you travel or stay close to home, whether you live in the city or in the country, all around you is the handiwork of the great Creator. God made big things and little things, from the deep oceans, the tall mountains, the great blue whales, and the lumbering elephants to the tiny cells that make up all living things. His wisdom, power, and understanding are evident in everything He created. He made the earth and everything in it to glorify Him. "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Psalm 104:24).

When Jesus lived on earth, He often used nature to illustrate His teaching. He spoke about farming, fishing, trees, birds, and flowers. He did this so that everyone could understand His messages. Sometimes Jesus used the simplest or most common things to illustrate His message. For example, in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13), Jesus taught the people about the coming Judgment Day. In the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 13), He taught a lesson on faith. Jesus' teachings were so different from what the people were used to hearing that they needed parables and stories to help them grasp the truth. How kind and compassionate God is to send Jesus not only to suffer and die for sin, but to teach us so simply the message of salvation!

The more you learn about God's creation, the more you will be amazed at the beauty and design of even the most

common plants and animals. How it must grieve and anger God when people give Him no honor or credit and try to find another explanation for how life came into existence instead! We who believe in the great Creator sin when we take His creation for granted and do not thank Him for His daily care for our every need. We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), but do we remember to give God thanks for His blessings? He watches over us every day, protecting us from danger and providing for our needs. Do we thank Him for His goodness? "Oh that men [all people] would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:21).

Not only is God the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, but He is *our* Creator: He made you and me—and in that sense, He is our Father. He created Adam from the dust and formed Eve out of Adam's rib. Every human being born since then has been shaped and formed by God Himself. "But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isaiah 64:8). "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10a). The fact that we have a soul separates us from the animal world. We are not animals—we are human beings. When God created the earth, He *spoke* and it was so; on each of the six days of creation, He *spoke* life into being. When God created Adam, however, He "*formed* man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7, emphasis mine). When animals die, they return to the dust and cease to exist. When people die, however, their souls leave their bod-

ies and continue to live forever. One day, when Jesus returns on the clouds, the bodies of everyone who has died will be reunited with their souls, and everyone will be judged.

Children, when you look around you at the world God created, you are amazed at the beauty and design of God's wonderful creation. The plants and animals live only a very short time, and they turn back to dust. Now, if God gives such thought to creating these plants and animals that live only a short while, how much more consideration would He not give human beings that live forever? Don't you think that God values you much more than the plants and animals that soon disappear? Jesus spoke about this: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7). Even in Jesus' day, sparrows were everywhere and worth hardly anything, and yet God takes care of every one of them. If God cares so much about every little sparrow that lives only a short time, then He most certainly cares much more about you who have a soul that will never die. He cares more about you than He does about the sparrow—every hair of your head is numbered: God knows every little thing about you! Satan tries to make you believe that God could never care about you. "You are a sinner; you are only a child; you are not important; the great God of heaven and earth—He is not interested in little you!" whispers the father of lies. But God *is* interested in you! He made you, He cares for you every day, and He has given you His Word. The glorious message of the Word of God is that

Jesus gave His life to save sinners. You are a sinner, so the message comes to you! Will you listen?

Do not spend all day worrying about things that do not matter. Jesus spoke about this, too. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the people that if God gives so much consideration to creating each flower which fades and dies so quickly, then He definitely gives much more thought to the needs of human beings. "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:30, 33). The Savior explained that we must not worry about our daily needs, for He has promised to care for us. The most important thing is your soul, which will never die.

Dear children, you are important to God. He tenderly cares for each one of you every day. Do you thank Him for that? He also promises to care for your soul. Are you safe in Him? If not, do you ask Him for salvation? The Bible is full of promises for salvation for those who ask. The almighty God, who created heaven and earth and cares for the little sparrows, can easily save you. Nothing is too hard for Him. Do not ignore His promises. Do not anger Him by taking His daily blessings and not fleeing to Him for your soul's safety. He delights to save sinners, especially children. "I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.

Here are two letters to Rev. Edward Payson Hammond<sup>1</sup> from children who were saved at children's meetings some years ago. I hope this will be an encouragement to you: the same God still lives!

Boston, November 8, 1864

Dear Mr. Hammond,

Sunday evening I attended your meeting (at Dr. Kirk's church) and was deeply convicted of my sins. A kind lady came and spoke and prayed with me, but I did not feel any better. I prayed earnestly that night for a new heart, but God seemed a great way off. The next day I went to the children's meeting again. The same kind lady came and talked and prayed with me. She told me only to repent of my sins and believe in Jesus and He would save me. I tried to, but it seemed as if Jesus rejected me. I went home and thanked God for touching my heart and showing me that I was a sinner, and asked Him to help me to believe in Jesus. He answered my prayer. I gave myself up to Him. I threw myself into His outstretched arms, and He received me and gave me a new heart. O, I was so happy I wanted to tell everybody how I felt, and to sing His praises continually. I think I can sing with my whole heart, "I've found Jesus," just now.

Your friend.

When Mr. Hammond read that letter in one of the children's meetings shortly after, he received the following letter from a little girl.

Dear Mr. Hammond,

Wednesday, when I came to that meeting, I was careless at heart, and I didn't think how sinful I had been until you read that letter from that little girl who became a Christian, and that touched me; and then I began to feel sorry for my sins, and I felt that God, who blessed me with my kind parents and so many kind friends, would not take me home to live with Him if I didn't go to Him in secret and ask Him to pardon and forgive all my sins, and blot them out of His book of life. And so I listened and felt more and more sorry for my sins, and then a kind lady took me by the hand and showed me the way to the blessed Savior. The next day I was so happy that I felt like singing all the time.

From your friend,  
Emma P.

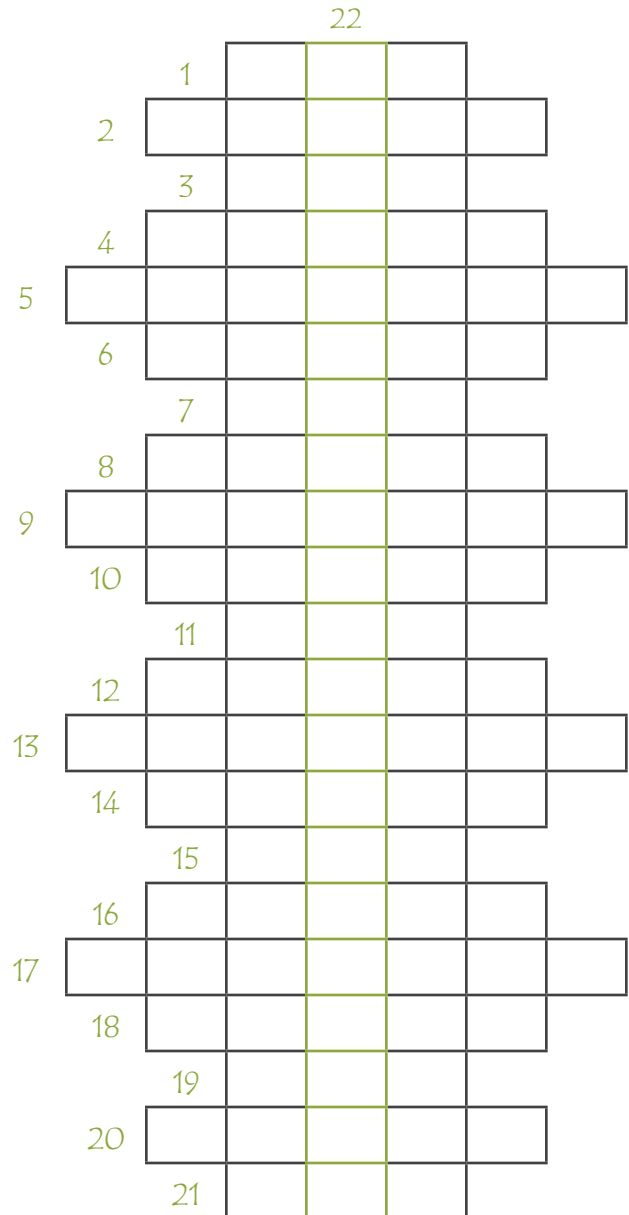
1. Edward Payson Hammond was born in Ellington, Connecticut, on September 1, 1831. He was ordained as an evangelist January 2, 1863. He felt especially called to work with children. He made an extended tour through Great Britain, France, Italy, Egypt, and Palestine and is the author of about one hundred books and tracts, besides many hymns.

Taken from *Children and Jesus; or, Stories to Children about Jesus* by Edward Payson Hammond. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1865.

# Puzzle ○○○○

Find the missing word in the texts to fill in the puzzle.  
Number 22 (down) will spell out part of Zechariah 9:17.

1. "O LORD, how manifold are \_\_\_\_\_ works!" (Psalm 104:24).
2. "Seek those things which are \_\_\_\_\_" (Colossians 3:1).
3. "So God created man in his \_\_\_\_\_ image" (Genesis 1:27).
4. "For wisdom and \_\_\_\_\_ are his" (Daniel 2:20).
5. "The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness \_\_\_\_\_" (Psalm 24:1).
6. "Man doth not live by \_\_\_\_\_ only" (Deuteronomy 8:3).
7. "Neither his \_\_\_\_\_ heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isaiah 59:1).
8. "Who can \_\_\_\_\_ the mighty acts of the LORD?" (Psalm 106:2).
9. "The Lord is very \_\_\_\_\_, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11).
10. "O \_\_\_\_\_ and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8).
11. "\_\_\_\_\_ giveth food to all flesh" (Psalm 136:25).
12. "Who \_\_\_\_\_ loadeth us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19).
13. "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; \_\_\_\_\_ be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).
14. "\_\_\_\_\_ unto \_\_\_\_\_ sheweth knowledge" (Psalm 19:2).
15. "I will praise thee; \_\_\_\_\_ for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).
16. "Even Solomon in all his \_\_\_\_\_ was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:29).
17. "What is man, that thou art \_\_\_\_\_ of him?" (Psalm 8:4).
18. "Thy \_\_\_\_\_ have made me and fashioned me" (Job 10:8).
19. "\_\_\_\_\_ every thing that hath breath praise the LORD" (Psalm 150:6).
20. "The LORD of \_\_\_\_\_, he is the King of glory" (Psalm 24:10).
21. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that \_\_\_\_\_ him?" (Luke 11:13).
22. Part of Zechariah 9:17.



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

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

- |                   |                      |                    |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Lauren Bilkes     | Mark Byl             | Hilton Smith (2)   |
| Robert Boatwright | Don R. Cox (2)       | Hanna Sweetman     |
| Leah Boerkoel     | Janae denHertog      | Janine Sweetman    |
| Neal Boerkoel     | Matthew denHertog    | Kara Sweetman      |
| Becky Boot        | Lukas Meschke (2)    | Megan VanderStel   |
| Shelly Boot       | Nicholas Meschke (2) | Natasha VanGrouw   |
| David Byl         | Emma Ortiz           | Grace Vroegindewey |
| Julia Byl         | Rogelio Rodriguez    | William Ziegler    |

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

- |                |             |              |           |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>Across:</b> | 13. counsel | 24. walk     | 9. shall  |
| 2. which       | 14. Lord    | 25. knowest  | 10. loved |
| 3. heart       | 16. short   |              | 12. you   |
| 5. time        | 17. thou    | <b>Down:</b> | 13. come  |
| 6. ear         | 18. eyes    | 1. youth     | 14. life  |
| 7. receive     | 19. safe    | 2. while     | 15. dear  |
| 8. ends        | 20. ever    | 4. thine     | 16. saved |
| 9. soul        | 22. deliver | 5. truth     | 21. rust  |
| 11. humbly     | 23. renew   | 7. ready     |           |

# The Sea Captain's Story

DIANA KLEYN

The sea captain was a large, noble-looking man. There was no one who could talk faster, laugh louder, or swear more severely. On this particular journey it was no different. The stage coach was full, and all day the occupants traveled together. The captain had many fascinating stories to tell of his travels all over the world. He also told them about surviving a terrible storm he had just encountered in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in Canada. When the storm met them unexpectedly, they hurried to take down the sails, to get the spars<sup>1</sup> down from their heights, to get every boat and every moveable thing tied down securely. The storm swept over the waters, making the waves curl and then come crashing down! Everything was made tight and secure. The storm-sail was set and the helm<sup>2</sup> lashed, in order to attempt to keep the ship headed in the right direction. With all this completed, the men had done all they could. The ship was pounded by the storm, and was steadily being pushed toward the rocky shores of Labrador, Newfoundland. No human power could control the vessel—the wind and the waves were too strong.

All day and all night they were battered by the storm, and then at about sunrise the ship ran aground on a little island. For a few moments the waves lifted the ship over the rocks, but then a huge wave heaved her onto a huge rock, where she twisted and writhed. Everyone on board knew that the vessel would soon be broken to pieces. They could not get her back out to sea because the ship was firmly stuck. The life boats had been torn from the ship during the storm, so the men went to work making a raft. They had just gotten it done, when the groaning vessel broke into pieces. The sailors shouted, “The raft! Get onto the raft!” In the wild scramble to escape the sinking ship, the captain was the only one who survived. The others were either smashed by the waves onto the rocks or were struck by pieces of the broken ship, and still others simply could not get onto the raft or stay on it once they did get on. With much cursing the captain told how awful it was. He tried his best to help the poor sailors as they struggled to hold onto the raft, but over and over, the waves pulled them off till finally they did not return. The captain managed to survive by tying himself to the raft.

“And then,” concluded the captain with a deep sigh, “I was alone. Not a thing saved; not a mouthful of food; not a drop of water! For three days and three nights I was on that raft. Then I saw a ship. I had just enough strength to hold up my red flannel shirt. When they saw it, they came to my rescue. I was too exhausted to stand or even to speak. I almost died on that raft. But here I am, on my way home, safe and sound, though I have lost all I had in the world.”

1. A wooden or metal pole used as a mast, boom, yard, or bowsprit, or in any other way to support a rigging.

2. The tiller or wheel or the whole steering gear of a ship.

The passengers in the stage coach listened with great interest to the captain's story. One man who till now had said very little, suggested that they all contribute a sum of money, and they presented it to the destitute captain. He seemed very grateful, and told them their gifts gave him a great sense of relief.

As they approached a long hill, just before night, the passengers got out of the stage coach and walked in order to ease the strain on the horses. It was then that the quiet gentleman found himself walking alone with the captain.

“Captain, may I ask you a question?”

“Certainly, sir, and I'll be happy to answer it.”

“When you were on that raft alone during those long days and nights, did you perhaps promise the Lord that if He would spare you, you would live a different life and serve Him?”

The captain was stunned. “None of your business!” he sputtered. He turned very red in the face and angrily marched ahead.

The man did not reply, and continued up the hill. At the top of the hill the passengers got back into the coach. The captain was now very quiet, and the gentleman asked no more questions. Soon they reached their destination for the night. After a meal at the inn, the travelers went to bed. At daybreak the captain planned to travel in one direction, while the rest of the passengers intended to journey on in a different direction.

Very early in the morning, the gentleman heard a knock at his door. Quickly, he got out of bed and opened the door, wondering who could be knocking at his door so early. He was very surprised to see the captain. His eyes were red, and his face was flushed. He stepped into the room and exclaimed, “Sir, I am sorry for treating you so rudely yesterday! I have come to ask your forgiveness. You were right—I did indeed vow to God on that raft that if He would spare me I would live a different life, and I would serve Him. After I was rescued I intended to forget about that promise. Oh, what a sinner I am! I have not slept a wink all night. Will you forgive me? Will God forgive me? Will you pray for me?”

The gentleman gladly shared the gospel of Jesus Christ “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Together they prayed for salvation and forgiveness. They prayed for the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sea captain. When it was time to part ways, they grasped each other's hands, and tearfully said goodbye. They never met again in this world. Do you think they will meet in heaven? “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

Adapted from *The Mother Dove and Other Gems* by Rev. John Todd (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, n.d.), pp. 21–24.

## MINISTERIAL CALL

Candidate Scott Dibbet has declined a call extended to him from the Hull, Iowa congregation on behalf of the Plymouth, Wisconsin outreach.

## RECENT MARRIAGES

One of our HRC ministers and two of our theological students were married of late: Dr. Brian and Lanae DeVries, Marty and Jessica Slingerland, and Derek and Frances Baars. We pray God's richest blessings upon all three couples. May Jehovah-jireh be greatly honored in these marriages and may each couple grow even closer to the Lord through their enhanced spiritual companionship. May their joys be doubled in Christ and their sorrows cut in half.

## OBITUARIES

**VANDER MALE, Mae C. (nee Van't Hof)**, aged 88, passed away Friday, June 18, 2010, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was preceded in death by her brother, John Van't Hof, and sister, Mary Rinvelt. She is survived by her husband of 64 years, Carl; Children—Linda (Hank) Kegel, Andrew (Jan) Vander Male, Karen (Christian) Beeke, Kris (Marcy) Vander Male, Martha (Peter) Beintema, Mary (Steven) Vanderjagt, and Lilly (Kelly) Vipond; Brother—Leonard (June) Van't Hof; Sisters—Jeanette Veltman and Edna (Larry) McKay; Brothers-in-law/sisters-in-law—Mina Van't Hof, Gilbert (Agatha) Vander Male, Helene Vander Male, Emily (Jay) Lugthart, Beatrice Potter, and Dorothy Vander Male; 24 grandchildren; 30 great-grandchildren. (Rev. J. B. Zippo).

**SCHMIDT, Gerrit (George)**, aged 72, June 18, 2010, Norwich, Ontario. He is survived by his brother—Dick (Shirley) Schmidt; sisters—Sjaan (Hans) Koenig and Truus Rhodes; brother-in-law—Inge Gelderblom, sister-in-law—Mary (Piet) Groeneweg; and several nieces and nephews. (Rev. Kelderman, Ps. 34:6–9, 15–18.)

*Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.*

## STUDENT SOCIETY

Young people in the workforce, college, and university are invited to three speaker evenings this fall at the Dundas, Ontario FRC meeting room. The meetings are planned to begin at 8:00 p.m. on the Saturdays listed below.

September 25, 2010

**Rev. Jack Schoeman**, pastor of the St. George Free Reformed Church, plans to speak on *Young Calvinism: Is there a problem?*

October 23, 2010

**Rev. David Lipsy**, pastor of Grace Reformed Christian Church in Harrison, Arkansas, part of the Heritage Reformed Denomination, plans to speak on *The Biblical Way to Marriage*.

November 27, 2010

**Dr. David Murray**, Professor of Old Testament & Pastoral Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, plans to speak on *Glorifying God with our Dollars*.

Hosted by the Free Reformed Student Society.

A collection will be taken to defray the costs of the meeting.



## 2010 Puritan Reformed Conference

Mark your calendars, and plan to attend the second annual Puritan Reformed conference this August 26 – 28. Our theme is

the *Beauty* and *Glory* of **CHRIST**

**Speakers at this year's event include** Joel Beeke, Jerry Bilkes, Iain Campbell, David Carmichael, James Grier, Albert Martin, David Murray, Ray Pennings, Richard Phillips, and William VanDoodeward.

This year's messages will address a variety of biblical, historical, and systematic topics related to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

*Once again, Reformation Heritage Books will have a large selection of titles on hand at the conference, all at steeply discounted prices.*

For more information, or to register online, go to [www.puritanseminary.org/conference/index.php](http://www.puritanseminary.org/conference/index.php). Send all questions and/or comments related to the Puritan Reformed Conference to [conference@puritanseminary.org](mailto:conference@puritanseminary.org), or call Chris Hanna at 616.977.0889, ext. 138. You may write the seminary at PRTS, 2965 Leonard Street, NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525.

## NATIONAL NEWS....

### Healthcare Law and Abortion

Bitterly opposed by abortion opponents, the Healthcare Law is now used to impose restrictions. Abortion opponents fought passage of President Obama's health care overhaul to the bitter end, and now that it's the law, they're using it to limit coverage by private insurers. An obscure provision allows states to restrict abortion coverage by private plans operating in insurance markets that open in 2014. Capitalizing on that language, abortion foes have succeeded in passing bans that, in some cases, go beyond federal statutes. Abortion foes pushing limits on coverage of abortion under the new health care insurances indicate there is interest in twenty-nine states in implementing such restrictions. (AP)

### Blasphemy in the Public Square

Comedy Central is once again mocking Christians and Christianity, planning a new series entitled "JC" depicting Jesus Christ as a run-away who moves to New York City to "escape his father's enormous shadow." God is depicted as "an apathetic man who would rather play video games than listen to his son." What is particularly offensive about this new series is that it comes on the heels of Comedy Central caving in to the demands of radical Muslims. The writers of the Comedy Central show "South Park" routinely mock Jesus and Christianity in the most disgusting ways imaginable. But a recent episode that would have featured the Muslim prophet Muhammad was heavily edited: the depiction of Muhammad was blacked out and his speech was cut. And that wasn't the first time Comedy Central edited a South Park show to avoid offending Muslims. (Gary L. Bauer in Campaign for Working Families)

### MP seeks to criminalize those who coerce women to abort

Manitoba Conservative MP Rod Bruinooge wants to make it a crime in Canada for someone to try to coerce a woman into having an abortion, the National Post reported. The *Criminal Code* already forbids the uttering of physical threats against pregnant women. But Bill C-510, a private member's bill that Bruinooge introduced, would go further by criminalizing other forms of intimidation, such as threatening to take away her "financial support or housing" and "argumentative and rancorous badgering." (TFN)

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

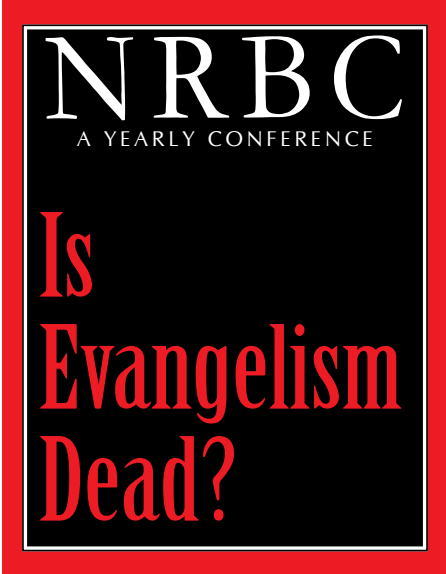
Military officials arrested seventeen young men gathered for prayer in a town called Segenaite in southern Eritrea, Africa. The men are apparently Christian soldiers doing their compulsory national military service. They belong to various churches. These arrests bring to twenty-eight the reported number of Christians arrested since the beginning of March for their refusal to stop worshiping outside of the government-sanctioned Eritrean Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Lutheran churches. Sources announced in February that approximately 2,200 Christians remain in prison for their refusal to stop practicing their faith outside of the government sanctioned religious groups. The figure is significantly lower than the figure

released at the beginning of 2009. Sources explained to Open Doors that many of those released were let go because of poor health. Most were also released on very strict bail conditions. Additionally, many other Christians have been released only to be sent back to the military in anticipation of a renewed war with neighboring Ethiopia. At least 12 Christians have died while being incarcerated in Eritrean prison camps. Eritrea is ranked No. 11 on this year's Open Doors World Watch List of fifty countries which are the worst persecutors of Christians. (Assist News Service)

### Anglican head ready to do battle with liberal Episcopalians

The leader of the world's Anglicans wants to sideline provinces that violate moratoria on ordaining partnered homosexuals and on other contentious activity in the splintering fellowship. The proposal is expected to cost Episcopalians their formal role in shaping Anglican doctrine and in conducting dialogue with other faiths. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said that provinces that fail to heed the requests of Anglican bodies cannot be in a position to "represent the communion as a whole." The Episcopal Church, the Anglican province in the U.S., last month consecrated its second openly homosexual bishop, Los Angeles assistant Bishop Mary Glasspool, who has a female partner. (AP)

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



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Evangelism  
Dead?**

Immanuel ORC, Jordan, Ontario  
Speaker: Dr. Joel R. Beeke  
September 24 & 25, 2010

Vol. 6  
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## North American Launching of Refo500

*Commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation (October 31, 2017)*

June 23, 2010

Atlanta, Georgia

USA

The North American arm of a multi-year project to highlight and celebrate the relevance of the Reformation as a movement of renewal and change was launched in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 21–22, 2010. Meeting at the Emory University Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Dr. Herman Selderhuis, the International Director of the Refo500 project ([www.refo500.com](http://www.refo500.com)), introduced staff and key North American leaders.

Dr. Selderhuis, President of the Theological University in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, commented: “The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was one of the world’s most influential events for the history of North America. The shaping of a new way of life, of religion, of doing politics, of education and commerce resulting from Martin Luther’s message has not only affected the way in which North America developed over the centuries, but is more than ever relevant for people of the 21st century.”

For a complete list of the Refo500 Project Partners please see [www.refo500.com](http://www.refo500.com). Each of these, along with all the other project partners, will guide, coordinate, and begin creative and memorable exhibits, lectures, conferences, publishings, and media events, etc., illustrating the vitality of the Reformation. In addition, Dr. David W. Hall, former director of Calvin500, was appointed as the North American Director for Refo500.

One publishing partner has already been identified (with others to join): Reformation Heritage Books (<http://www.heritagebooks.org/>) of Grand Rapids, Michigan, represented by Dr. Joel Beeke. Also Witte Travel of Grand Rapids ([www.wittetravel.com](http://www.wittetravel.com)) is the official travel project partner for these events; Witte Travel was represented by Jan Peterson and Dan Hermen.



Photo: Patrick Graham, Pitts Theology Library, Atlanta

*Top row, from left: Frank James, Dan Hermen, Herman Selderhuis, David Hall, John Witte. Bottom row, from left: Joel Beeke, Karla Apperloo, John Thompson, Jan Peterson, Michael Haykin, Bob Godfrey.*

Project Leader Karla Apperloo summarized Refo500 as a project that “wants to make connections between the past and the present, and also between partners working together. This Atlanta meeting shows perfectly how it works.” Others are invited to join with Refo500, and the website contains information on upcoming events and conferences.

For more updates, visit the website at: [www.refo500.com](http://www.refo500.com).

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## PERSECUTION: INDIA....

### Hindu Nationalists Plan “Religious Cleansing” In Madhya Pradesh District

Hindu nationalist organizations in Madhya Pradesh state have declared their intentions to rid Mandla district of all Christian influence by starting preparations for a large “reconversion” event next February. A similar event in Dangs district, Gujarat state, in 2006 was filled with Christian hate speech. As a result of anti-Christian sentiment stirred at the April 22 ground-breaking ceremony for the Madhya Pradesh “reconversion” rally, Hindu nationalists attacked a house church in the district’s Bamhni Banjar village on May 2, Christian leaders said. Hindu leaders reportedly announced a list of objectives to be achieved before the festival, with one prominent agenda item being to drive away Christian pastors, evangelists, and foreign aid workers from the district. The rally leaders pledged to “cleanse Mandla of Christians.” A week after the ground-breaking ceremony, around 40 Hindu nationalists from the Bajrang Dal surrounded the home of Pastor Bhag Chand Rujhiya and accused him of forceful conversion as they shouted anti-Christian slogans. Using abusive language, they pelted his house with stones as about sixty people were attending a worship service, Pastor Rakesh Dass said. “The mob was carrying deadly weapons like knives and rods,” he said. Police forced the pastor and his wife to sign statements that they would no longer lead Sunday worship or pray with friends or relatives inside their house, and that they would not evangelize again in the area. (Compass Direct News)



# WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

REV. MARK KELDERMAN &  
REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

Our last article asked the question of how God works salvation in the hearts of sinners. That is a question you have probably wondered about at some point in your life. The simple answer is that He does so by His Holy Spirit. Upon closer examination, however, that statement contains truths that will take an eternity to figure out and comprehend.

First of all, we need to consider who the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is God—the third Person of the Trinity, equal with the Father and the Son. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, as the Athanasian Creed teaches. Without the Holy Spirit and His work, we cannot be saved.

A right understanding of who the Spirit is and what He does creates a vital balance in our understanding of how God works. Many today over-emphasize the Holy Spirit by relying only on the work of the Spirit detached from the Person and work of Christ. This error tends to over-emphasize the emotions and religious experience. Others under-emphasize the Holy Spirit because they fear becoming too mystical and subjective. This leads to an over-emphasis on the mind in religion. But a proper understanding of the Spirit impacts our heads, our hearts, and our hands with the work of Christ. Without Him, we remain spiritually dead. If the Holy Spirit does not inform our heads through His Word, we remain ignorant. If the Holy Spirit does not provide the life we need, our hands and feet will remain immobile. The Holy Spirit is vital to Christianity.

How would you prove the Holy Spirit from Scripture if someone asked you? You can begin by pointing out that the Holy Spirit was present at creation. Genesis 1:2 states, “The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is active in equipping prophets, priests, and kings for office; in saving sinners; and in bringing the Word through the prophets, proclaiming salvation and judgment.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is also clearly active. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism. He also actively supported Christ in every way during His earthly life and ministry. This gives remarkable comfort to those who are believers; this is the same Spirit who is available to us. The Spirit was instrumental in the resurrection of Jesus. He was also powerfully present at Pentecost with the conversion of three thousand souls and inspired Scripture and confirmed the preached word of the apostles by signs and miracles (Heb. 2:4).

What about the Holy Spirit today? How does the Holy Spirit work in the lives and hearts of sinners now? Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11); He is sent to save as biblical history sets forth. The Holy Spirit is sent to be the Comforter of God’s people, to strengthen, to impart power to live unto Christ, and to sanctify.

As they studied the Scriptures and as they were led by the Spirit of Christ, our Reformed forefathers came to logically understand and trace the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. This is called the *ordo salutis* or order of salvation. The order of salvation is as follows: calling, regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, sanctification, adoption, perseverance, and glorification. In the next few articles we want to flesh out what each of these words means and, with God’s help, you can use these articles to examine your own heart and life. But for now, consider this: have you come to repentance and faith in Christ by the work of this Spirit, who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us?

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## GOD MADE ME FOR HIMSELF

God made me for Himself, to serve Him here  
With love's pure service and in filial fear;  
To show His praise, for Him to labor now;  
Then see His glory where the angels bow.

All needful grace was mine, through His dear Son,  
Whose life and death my full salvation won;  
The grace that would have strengthened me, and taught;  
Grace that would crown me when my work was wrought.

And I, poor sinner, cast it all away;  
Lived for the toil or pleasure of each day;  
As if no Christ had shed His precious blood,  
As if I owed no homage to my God.

O Holy Spirit, with Thy fire divine,  
Melt into tears this thankless heart of mine;  
Teach me to love what once I seemed to hate,  
And live to God, before it be too late.

—HENRY W. BAKER

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