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"Exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."
—Jude 3

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About the cover: Fall beauty comes to Frankfort Michigan. Photography by Jeff Steenholdt.

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

– John 3:8

The conversation that Nicodemus had with Jesus is one of the most familiar conversations that Jesus had during His ministry. Even so, it is also one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council and a teacher of the Law. He was one to whom the people of Israel turned to for advice, and *he* came to Jesus. Nicodemus does not seem to be a typical Pharisee. He was not likely to be one who would contort his face when he was fasting so that other people could see his suffering. He was not likely one who prayed on street corners so that people could hear his eloquent words. Nicodemus had not externalized his religion as did many other Pharisees. Nicodemus seems to be a godly Pharisee.

The Pharisees believed in man’s moral accountability. They believed that human beings were responsible for their actions and would one day have to answer to God for every deed they had done. They also believed that a person had to earn his salvation. This made them ardent followers of the Law. To make certain that they were keeping the Law, they built law upon on law, precept upon precept.

Nicodemus had seen or heard of the many miraculous signs that Jesus of Nazareth had performed. He had heard of the uplifting teachings of Jesus and witnessed the excitement that surrounded Him. Nicodemus saw in Jesus something the other Pharisees missed: that Jesus was a teacher come from God.

That must have really excited Nicodemus! How nice it would be for this teacher of the Law to ask the Teacher come from God a few questions. As the teacher of the Law approached Jesus, you cannot help but think that going on inside the head of Nicodemus was one burning question: Was he doing the right thing for his salvation?

Isn’t that a question that we often ask ourselves in our own Christian lives? Are we doing the right thing? How can we know for certain that we are going to heaven?

Ascetic monks in monasteries would take vows of silence. They would torture themselves in a variety of ways. I have read of monks who would hold their fists tight until their fingernails grew through the other side of their hands—always wondering, always fearing: Were they doing the right thing? Were they suffering enough for their Savior?

Before the Reformation, Martin Luther would sleep on the cold, damp floor of the monastery rather than sleep in his bed. He would climb up and down the steps of the monastery on his knees in prayer asking for forgiveness. He always wondered if, when he got to heaven, he would have missed salvation by only a few steps. Was he doing the right thing?

Many religions people today—Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, even some Reformed people—have no assurance that they will go to heaven when they die.

The next time people come two by two knocking on your door and engaging you in conversation, ask them what assurance they have that when they die they will go to heaven. As they hem and haw for an answer, tell them that you have the assurance that you are heaven-bound and until they can boldly explain from God’s Word that they are saved they need not come back.

But then you had better be able to explain from God's Word on what you base your assurance. For the early monks, for Martin Luther, for Nicodemus, and for too many others there is always that burning question: "Am I doing the right thing for my salvation?"

A Radical Teaching

This question was so much a part of the life of Nicodemus that he didn't even have to ask Jesus the question. Jesus answered it before he could even ask it. And Jesus came with a radical answer. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

We have heard enough sermons on Nicodemus's encounter with Jesus that we think we know what Jesus meant when He said that. For Nicodemus, who expected that keeping the Law was sufficient, however, this came as a radical answer. It is a radical answer because a radical change has to take place within the heart.

All too often when this passage is read by television and crusade preachers (and, unfortunately, by many Reformed preachers), the conclusion is: "You must be born again. You must make a decision." That is not what Jesus is teaching in John 3. As a matter of fact, Jesus is saying you cannot make the decision to be saved by yourself. It's not up to you. You must be born of water and the Spirit. Just as with our first birth, we are completely passive in our rebirth.

It is not baptism that saves you. It is not the elements of the Lord's Table that save you. It is not living a moral, Christian life that declares you as one of God's own children. It is not "You must . . . you must . . . you must . . ." that gives you salvation. The only "you must" is this: You must be born again—and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. You can't do that! It is a gift to you from God. It is grace!

To be born again is to receive the gift that God freely gives. It involves an abandonment of every attempt to become righteous by yourself and depending entirely upon the sacrifice Jesus made on Calvary's cross. By depending on Christ alone, through faith alone, you can have the assurance of salvation and the guarantee of eternal life. It is all about trusting in Jesus!

Salvation is a gift from God. If you are going to respond to your salvation in the right way, you have to recognize as such. It is really that simple. So simple that it is hard for us to understand.

It is like reading the want ads in the newspaper and finding an ad that says, "2015 Corvette for sale. \$500." Wouldn't it be amazing to get a brand-new Corvette for five hundred dollars? And yet, we won't pick up the phone and make the call because we instinctively think that it is a misprint or that there must be a catch.

Nicodemus and many popular preachers today think that salvation comes through an act of man. Somehow the Bible contains a misprint. There has to be some kind of catch. We have to earn our salvation. How wrong they are!

The Assurance of Jesus

Too often in popular preaching the "must" in "You must be born again" is misinterpreted. When Jesus spoke those words, He was not saying, "By all means see to it that you are born again." Jesus was not saying that this was something you had to do.

Rather, Jesus was teaching, "Something has to happen to you." The Holy Spirit has to plant in our hearts the life that is from above. That is where the assurance comes in. It is not by your own deeds that God decides to choose you for eternal life.





Salvation was something that God Almighty preordained long before the earth was created.

Ephesians 1:4 teaches: “He chose us in Him [that is, in Jesus Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.” He chose us not because we are nice people or because we have gone up and down monastery stairs on our knees or held our hands in fists. It is in Christ! It is according to His good pleasure that God comes to us and implants in us a new life through the Holy Spirit. It is an act of God and God alone!

That should not have been anything new to Nicodemus. As a leader in Israel he should have known about the great power that God has to change lives and to change hearts. God promised that He would do so when He said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26).

Study of the Old Testament Scriptures would have taught the teacher of Israel that God not only can give a person a new heart and a right spirit but also promises that He will do so. It is the rebirth Jesus was speaking of in John 3.

This is an instantaneous change! Ezekiel 36 teaches us that God comes and plucks out the heart of stone that is prone to hate Him and replaces it with a heart of flesh. We are given a heart that loves the Lord and longs to do His will—not out of fear but out of love and gratitude.

Rebirth is a supernatural change. It is the working of God redirecting the governing disposition of the soul. No longer is our life song “I Did It My Way.” Through the Spirit of God we joyfully sing, “Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.”

Rebirth is a radical change. It is changing the very root of our existence. We are given new hearts. Our life-support system is changed from one that will kill us because it is filled with poison and evil to one that will save us through Jesus Christ. We have been removed from the dead tree and are grafted into the Tree of Life. The blood that flows through this new heart that God has given us affects our whole person. Everything we say and do becomes focused upon Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus objected to the idea of being born again because he could not understand how such a radical change could take place in a person. That change comes to us as a promise of God through the Holy Spirit. That change in our lives—our rebirth—is in and of itself our guarantee of salvation. It is our assurance that comes to us by the grace of God, through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross, by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Assurance Is a Promise

For Martin Luther this was the great and marvelous revelation that sparked the Reformation. Climbing up and down those stairs, he recalled the words God had spoken to Paul. “My grace is sufficient for you.” Teaching students from Romans led him to look more closely to Paul’s teaching, “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28) and “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 8:1).

No longer did Luther have to worry how many steps he climbed. It did

not matter. The grace of God was sufficient for him! He could have that blessed assurance because he believed in the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the all-sufficient sacrifice for his sin.

Our assurance comes not from ourselves that we have chosen wisely. Our assurance comes from God—that He has chosen us. Think about that! The most powerful Being ever has chosen us to be His children!

All too often we look at ourselves and respond by saying, “Oh, but my sin it is so great.” Yes, it is! You sin against this most powerful Being every day. But here again, He has chosen you to be His child.

Have you ever had your first-grade or preschool child bring home a picture that he drew in art class?

After you stare at it for a while, your child says, “Mom, it’s a picture of a fire truck.”

Does it look like a fire truck? Probably not. It is not perfect. And yet you love it and put it on the refrigerator. You love it because it is something your child has done. And when he comes home with another picture, it will go on the fridge, as well. You might even get out some paper and crayons and have him make more even though you know it will look nothing like what he claims it to be.

The Bible says, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). God has prepared good works for us to do. He knows those works will come back to Him stained with sin. They will not come back perfectly executed. God says, “Here. Do this. It will come back to me as beautiful because you are my child. You have been clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.”

Our assurance of salvation rests entirely upon the cross of Jesus Christ. Do you believe He died for you? Do

you believe that His blood was shed for you?

The real question is not, “Am I doing the right thing for my salvation?” The real question should be, “How can I express this incredible joy that I have within me because Christ died for me?” The answer is simple: Seek to do the will of God. Do those good works that God has prepared for you to do.

The Law was given to the Israelites in the Old Testament after four hundred years of living in Egypt. After they were freed from slavery, God came to them and said, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

WOW! Four hundred years away from the Promised Land. Cast into slavery. Beaten. Many had to throw their sons into the Nile River. And the great, almighty, sovereign God saved them. He killed Pharaoh’s firstborn son in a horrible plague and set the sons of Israel free. How were they to express their incredible joy?

God said, “Love me with all your heart, mind, and soul. Love your neighbor as yourself.” And then He showed them how by giving the Israelites the Ten Commandments.

Now look at yourself. You were a slave to sin. You were in bondage to Satan. You were dead in your trespasses and sin. God saved you from all of that. Pharaoh’s firstborn son did not die in any plague to save you. God’s only begotten Son had to die on a cross.

You have been set free. How are *you* going to express the incredible joy that you have within you?

Rev. Wybren Oord

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As I write this, two important ecclesiastical assemblies have just met: the ninth synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America in Visalia, California (June 3–5), and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s eighty-first General Assembly in Grand Rapids, Michigan (June 4–9). Both assemblies included a vote regarding the final collection of psalm settings for the new Psalter Hymnal our churches are working on together. And both assemblies overwhelmingly approved this collection.

Adopting a new Psalter Hymnal is no small feat for the URCNA, for several reasons. For one thing, our psalm singing hasn’t changed much in a hundred years; many of our churches have inherited a collection of songs dating back to the 1912 United Presbyterian Psalter, from which the blue and red CRC Psalter Hymnals are both derived. (See the accompanying graphic on the history of psalm singing.) At the same time, the diverse backgrounds of our churches have given rise to varied songbooks, liturgical practices, and

even worship styles, making it nearly impossible for a new Psalter Hymnal to satisfy the needs and desires of every congregation. On top of all this, the Psalter Hymnal project occurs at an incredibly early time in the history of our federation; consider that the OPC, begun in 1936, did not publish the first Trinity Hymnal until 1961, and that the Christian Reformed Church did not have a songbook of its own until almost eighty years after its founding. Unavoidably, the prospect of a new Psalter Hymnal is fraught with at least a little trepidation in the URCNA.

Despite the challenges of adopting a new songbook, however, the Psalm Proposal has many wonderful facets to commend it to the churches. It demonstrates that the URCNA has grown enough as a federation to produce fruit for the benefit not only of our own congregations but also of the church at large. It represents what OPC minister Alan Strange has called “the ecumenical opportunity of a generation,” manifesting our fundamental unity and common

heritage with a broader portion of the body of Christ. And it offers us a complete, beautiful, and accurate set of texts for the whole book of Psalms, providing the URCNA with the opportunity to put its Church Order stipulation of giving the 150 psalms “the principal place in the singing of the churches” (Article 39) into practice. These blessings, and others, will make even the greatest challenges in transitioning to a new Psalter Hymnal worthwhile.

The following statistics and graphics are meant to help familiarize you with the contents of the Psalm Proposal. Due to the complexity of a set of songs this large, much of the information below is given as general categories rather than precise data. Also, as minor elements of the Psalm Proposal are continually being updated, the figures here may be approximate. Nevertheless, I hope this remains a helpful summary.

Compared with the blue Psalter Hymnal’s 310 psalm settings, the Psalm Proposal’s 275 selections form

Size and Scope	Blue Psalter Hymnal	Psalm Proposal
Number of psalm settings	310	275
Greatest number of stanzas	23 (Psalm 106)	27 (Psalm 78)
Greatest number of settings per psalm (besides Psalm 119)	6	4

a respectable collection. Although they are similar in size, however, the actual composition of the two psalters varies significantly.

In general, the blue Psalter Hymnal tends to devote extra space to favorite psalms and sections of psalms (“God, Be Merciful to Me” and “The Tender Love a Father Has,” for instance) while skimming or summarizing certain less attractive sections of the psalter. The result is a collection of psalms that reads, and is often used, very much like a hymnal. Even the numbering system of the blue book (continuous and independent of the psalm) reflects this trend.

Compared with this style of psalm singing, the format of the Psalm Proposal may seem somewhat foreign. The numbering scheme of the collection utilizes letters in addition to the psalm numbers: Psalm 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4, and so on.

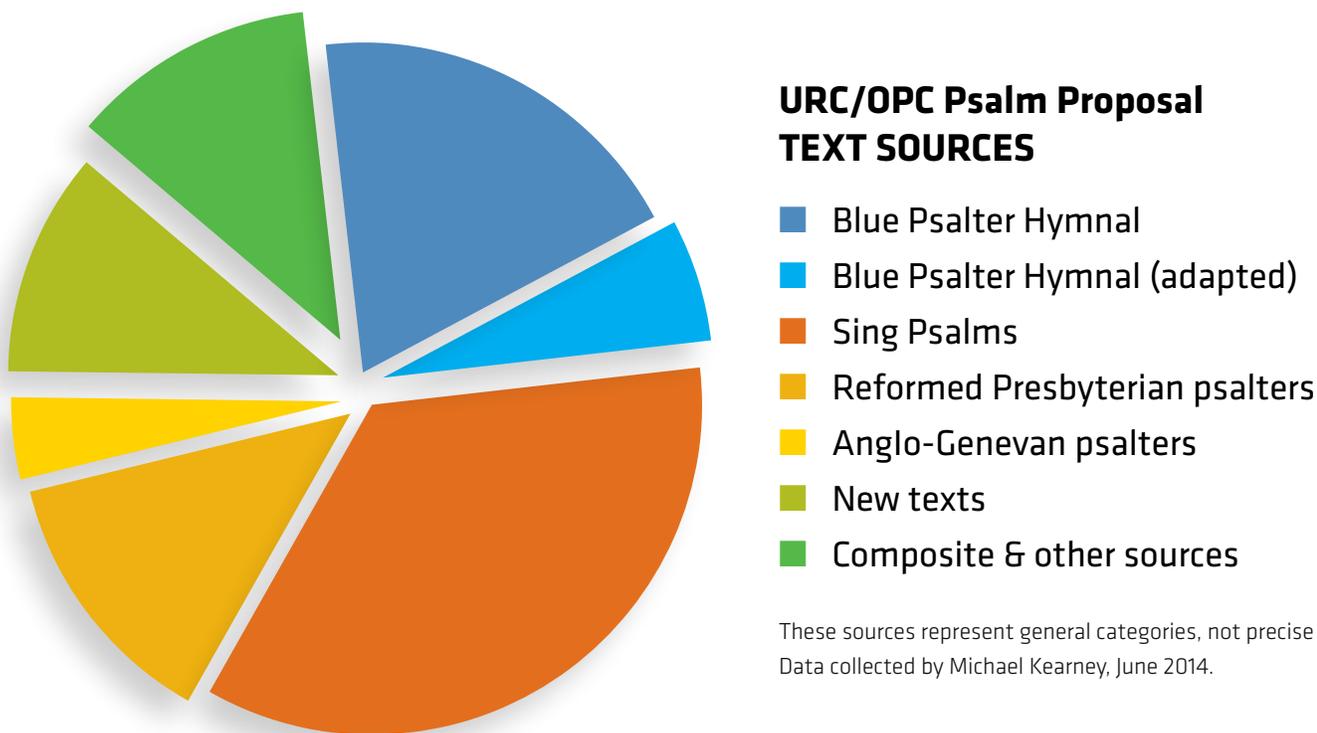
In addition to the stanza numbers, the lyrics include the superscript verse numbers of the psalm text—which, incidentally, demonstrates how closely these settings resemble their sources. Delving into the lyrics themselves, one will find that they are often denser, and perhaps less poetically attractive, than their blue Psalter Hymnal counterparts. The payoff is clear, however: while the texts of the new Psalter Hymnal may represent a slightly different format of psalm singing, they will serve to more deeply hide the Word of God in our hearts.

Primary Sources

One of the greatest strengths of the Psalm Proposal is the diverse yet excellent base for its contents. About a quarter of its texts and more than half of its tunes appear in the blue Psalter Hymnal, but these have been balanced with a large collection of modern psalm texts and tunes

from the Scottish tradition of psalm singing, as well as many new versions created or compiled by the URCNA and OPC committees themselves.

The proposal’s new sources represent the best of twenty-first-century psalmody from a wide swath of Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, including the Canadian Reformed Churches (the Book of Praise, a modern version of the Genevan Psalter, ongoing); the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (The Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973, and The Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009); the Free Church of Scotland (Sing Psalms, 2003); and the Reformed Church of New Zealand (Sing to the Lord, 2013). Below is the approximate distribution of the Psalm Proposal’s texts.

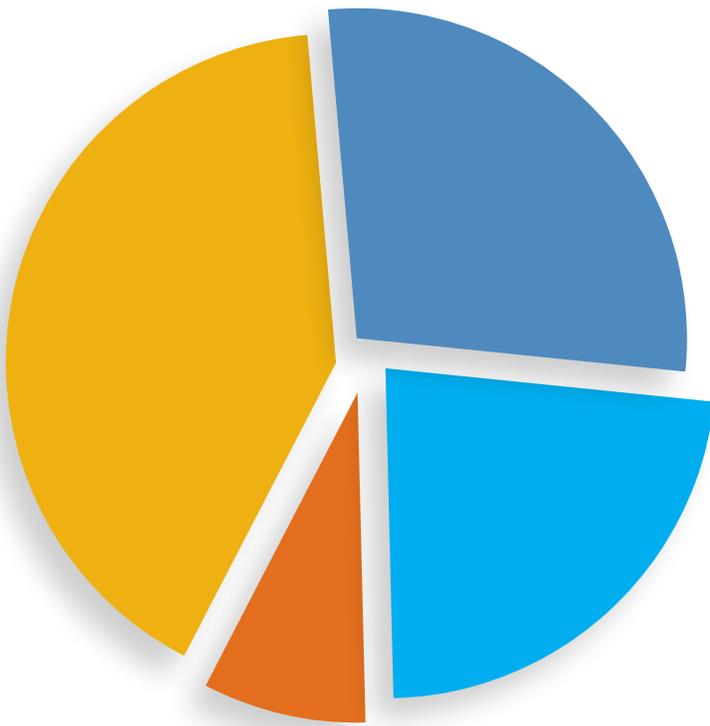


These sources represent general categories, not precise statistics. Data collected by Michael Kearney, June 2014.

URC/OPC Psalm Proposal TUNE SOURCES

- Tunes used with same psalm in blue Psalter Hymnal
- Tunes found elsewhere in blue Psalter Hymnal
- Tunes from Genevan Psalter (most also found in blue Psalter Hymnal)
- Tunes from other sources

These sources represent general categories, not precise statistics.
Data collected by Michael Kearney, June 2014.



Lyric Alterations

In general, it seems that the URCNA and OPC committees have taken a middle-of-the-road approach to textual alterations. While they have eliminated most archaic pronouns (“thee,” “thy”) and the name “Jehovah” wherever it can be done unobtrusively, their report to Synod 2014 notes that they have decided to preserve the original language of “hymns considered classics.” In line with the committees’ default English Bible translation, the English Standard Version, gender-specific language has by and large remained (“That Man Is Blest,” for instance). Many blue Psalter Hymnal favorites have had their original texts preserved.

Music

In several instances the Psalm Proposal lowers the key of Psalter Hymnal tunes by a half step or a whole step to facilitate easier singing for modern congregations. Although I tend to be a stickler for original keys, these alterations are easily justifiable and remain musically feasible.

Although, as mentioned above, more than half of the Psalm Proposal’s tunes appear somewhere in the blue Psalter Hymnal, this collection still presents us with a significant portion of unfamiliar tunes to learn. Without delving into the genre we might call “contemporary Christian music,” the Psalm Proposal makes use of several recently composed tunes, including “Before the Throne of God Above” (Psalm 103A) and at least one tune by Presbyterian church musician Paul Jones (Psalm 106). Some of the late Dale Grotenhuis’s reharmonizations of familiar hymn tunes are also employed (Psalms 11B, 25B, 42B). In my review of the Psalm Proposal I have come across only three or four tunes that are not written in standard four-part harmony. Genevan tunes generally utilize Claude Goudimel’s 1564 harmonizations, as they appear in the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise. All in all, the music of the Psalm Proposal is varied and excellent, including highlights from almost every period of church music.

Summary

The question has been asked, “How many Reformed/Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?” The answer, of course, is a horrified gasp: “Change?!” Although many forms of change need to be combated with the unchanging truths of Scripture, the Psalm Proposal demonstrates one kind of change in the church that is acceptable, necessary, and wonderful to behold. It is a change that accords with the motto of the always-reforming church, *semper reformanda*; it is a change that will, Lord willing, assist us in worshiping God more accurately and more beautifully, “in spirit and in truth.”

Michael Kearney

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In this issue, Dr. James McGoldrick begins a two-part series on the historical necessity for creeds and confessions. There are those who claim that churches that have creeds require their ministers to preach from the creed. The church order of most Reformed churches instructs ministers to preach from the Heidelberg Catechism regularly. Two complaints quickly arise when ministers try to follow this directive:

- 1) They read from the catechism and never refer to it again in their sermon.
- 2) They read from the Bible but never refer to it again in their sermon.

How often haven't ministers been accused of preaching the Heidelberg Catechism apart from the Word of God? The claim then is made that ministers who preach the confessions have a closed Bible. Are they substituting a human invention for the God-breathed Word?

I once visited a church in Pennsylvania that boasted that it had "No creed but Christ." They went on to explain in their bulletin that they believed that

Jesus was the Christ who was born of a virgin. He died on the cross and rose from the grave. He ascended into heaven and would one day return to punish the wicked and save those who believed in Him. While they declared that they proclaimed only the pure Word of God without man-made creeds, they confessed their belief in the twelve articles of the Apostles Creed.

It is strange how so many people will fall for such a superficial slogan about man-made creeds. A little sober thinking would reveal the hollowness of such a phrase.

An Interpretation

When making profession of faith or baptizing a child, the question is asked, "Do you heartily believe in the doctrinal standards contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?"

The creeds and confessions of a true church of Jesus Christ are an interpretation of the fundamental teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Their purpose is not to supplement the Word of God but to safeguard the church from error. The charge is often made that creeds and confessions are man-made. That certainly is true. Sermons are man-made, as well, and yet we declare them to be "Thus saith the Lord." Lectures at Bible conferences are man-made. The commentaries that fill my study are man-made. The footnotes and headings in our Bibles are man-made. All the translations of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek are man-made. It cannot be otherwise.

A Standard

The misgivings that some people may have about creeds and confessions may be rooted in the fear that they may conflict with the Bible on certain points. They would argue that even the best creed or confession would be a fallible formulation of the infallible teaching of God's Word. Even so, every



church and every person must hold to some interpretation of Scripture whether they admit it or not. Some may choose to ignore its teachings, while others mine the Scripture for the great jewels contained therein. Even the atheist holds to a certain view of Scripture.

Doctrinal standards are always composed with great care. They embody the fruit of centuries of diligent study of Scripture by men noted for their profound wisdom, knowledge of the Bible, and godliness. Some of them, like Guido De Brès, author of the Belgic Confession, gave their lives for the faith they professed and penned. They were men who believed that they could not build up a system of doctrine from the Holy Bible without availing themselves of the light that had been shed upon that Word in former centuries.

Our creeds and confessions are built upon the conviction that the Lord leads His church as one generation builds upon the foundations that have been laid by former generations. There is far more likelihood of error in the fly-by-night creeds of sectarian groups whose leaders claim they have no creed but Christ. Whatever “truths” they discover have either been taught or refuted in the historic creeds of Christendom.

For Instruction

The creeds and confession of the church do not close the Bible for us. Rather, they open our eyes to the riches contained in the Bible. For example, a single paragraph from the Belgic Confession on the satisfaction of Christ can teach us more about the completed work of Jesus Christ than we could ever hope to learn in an unaided study of Scripture. In one paragraph we receive a summary that contains several verses from the Bible that focus on a particular aspect of the atonement.

Like the rest of the Belgic Confession, that one paragraph has been studied time and time again. Theologians have discussed its contents in theological conferences and ecclesiastical gatherings. They have written on its teaching and expressed their findings in books and magazine articles. It has stood the test of time.

Even as theologians marvel over the depth of the Three Forms of Unity, it is simple enough to be understood by ordinary people. Who has not derived comfort in reading the Heidelberg Catechism? Who has not been strengthened in the faith by the Canons of Dort?

Our creeds and confessions are brief enough to leave room for differences on minor points yet broad enough

to prevent the proclamation of false views. They serve to give us a thorough understanding of God's Word and widen our vision of revealed truth.

Conclusion

A look at the history of the church will reveal that churches lose their moorings when creeds and confessions are not taught and proclaimed. They begin to drift into broader evangelicalism and become indistinguishable from churches that reject the authority of Scripture. By closing their eyes to the confessions, they have closed the Bible in their teaching.

A church cannot present a practical message on a scriptural truth until that truth has been mastered. Nothing deepens and widens an understanding of God's Word as diligent and prayerful study of the creeds and confessions of the church. To keep an open Bible, the church must teach and preach the creeds and confessions.

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No creed but Christ, no law but love!

Doctrine divides, love unites!

Down with doctrine, up with love!

The above contention may well appeal to Christians today who, like their unbelieving neighbors, have lost interest in truth. In a time when megachurches are competing with one another to give people what they want rather than what they need, a plea for confessional Christianity must appear strange and badly out of step with the trends of church life. Perhaps it is time to reconsider those trends in the light of history and thereby to ask why creeds and confessions are necessary. That is the objective of this article.

The practice of Christians proclaiming their beliefs is an ancient one. Even in Old Testament times it was customary for the Hebrews to affirm their monotheism by frequent recitation of the *shema*, the first Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Public recitation of that text remains the most prominent feature of synagogue worship until the present. It is evident that Jesus required his New Testament disciples to confess him publicly, for he said, “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven” (Matt. 10:32–33).

The earliest Christians readily proclaimed Jesus as “Lord” and “Christ,” as when Peter asserted to the Savior, “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29). The apostle Paul admonished believers in the Roman congregation, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Affirming Jesus’ messianic office and lordship was the practice of believers individually, and it soon became customary when they congregated for corporate worship. Their faith led them to confession. A proverb among Latin Christians was *credo, ergo confiteor*: “I believe, therefore I confess.”

Confessing the faith is an intelligent act, one which indicates the specific content of what a person or an ecclesiastical body believes. It goes beyond acknowledging the existence of God and declares a personal confidence in him, as he has revealed himself. Early Christian creeds affirm acceptance of the historic realities of God’s actions and of the doctrinal implications which those realities entail. When an early Christian stated *credo*, “I believe,” he or she thereby expressed gratitude to God and rendered to him appropriate adoration. Often new believers made their first public confessions at baptism. On that occasion converts recited a brief summary of Christian doctrine and avowed their allegiance to Christ and the church. Ancient baptismal formulas then became precedents for more elaborate

statements of faith, among them the Apostles’ Creed. When heresies challenged the integrity of Christian teaching, the church responded with precise declarations, and the emphases of such documents reflect the issues in dispute at those periods.

Creeds and confessions have been necessary because God left the task of organizing and explaining his revelation to believers. This has been the work of individual scholars, or at times, of small groups or large assemblies. In order to combat heresies, to provide systematic instruction for her own members, and to keep teachers of doctrine united in their instruction, the church adopted the creeds and regarded them as standards of orthodoxy. This insistence upon sound doctrine distinguishes Christianity from most other religions, which often stress cultic duties more than precise theology. As a consequence few non-Christian religions have produced creeds comparable to those of Christianity, although contact with Christians has sometimes led other religions to compose and issue statements of belief.¹

The first Christian creeds enjoyed only local acceptance, and in large cities distinguished bishops promoted their own confessions, with Rome in the forefront because of its prestige as the church in the imperial capital. Although such creeds were diverse in wording, their contents were closely similar. References to a *regula fidei*—a

rule of faith—appeared in the third century, but by the second half of the fourth century, a Roman creed had acquired broad acceptance in the West. This became the Apostles' Creed, although the present form of that document is from the eighth century. Contrary to ancient legend, it was not the work of the apostles but a summary of their teachings.

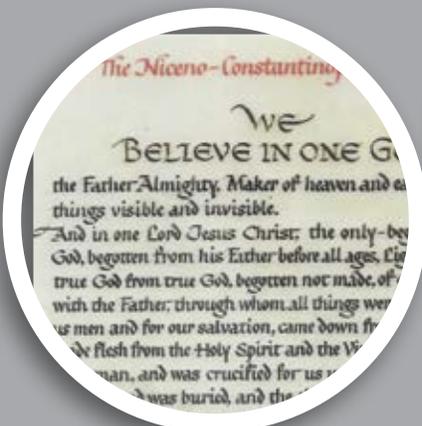
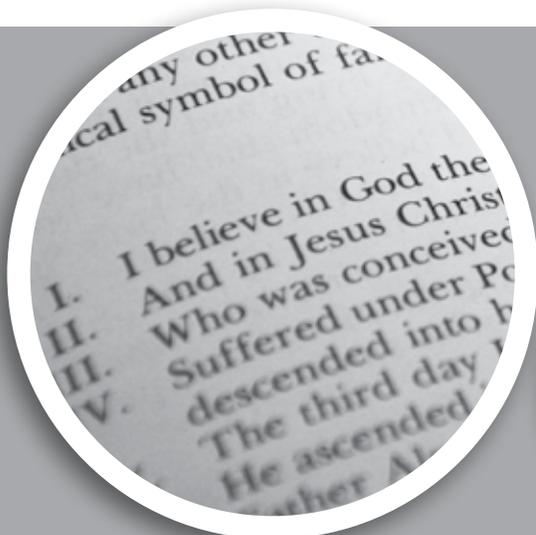
Latin Christians, like their Hebrew predecessors, showed little interest in speculation about mysterious aspects of belief. Greek Christians, however, were less inclined to accept doctrines by faith, and they sometimes subjected the more arcane ones to rigorous analysis. This led to controversies, requiring the church to produce definitive statements about issues in dispute. By the fourth century, the key example was the person of Christ. When Arius of Alexandria (c. 260–336) denied the essential and eternal sonship of Jesus Christ, the church rebuked him and his followers by promulgating the Creed of Nicea as an unequivocal declaration that Christ is fully God and fully man. The Council of Nicea (325) condemned Arianism as heresy. In 381 the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the decision of Nicea and responded to later errors in Christology. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed became the official statement of

the Eastern church and remains in frequent use there. The Apostles' Creed continues to be the most popular affirmation of faith in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of the West. Since the Creed of Nicea was the first such confession authorized by an ecumenical council of bishops it gained acceptance throughout Christendom. Had the ancient church allowed heresies such as Arianism to go unanswered, the damage to the faith would have been incalculable. The crisis required a clear, definitive confession.²

The third ancient confession of great distinction is the Athanasian Creed. Although it is not the work of the famous theologian Athanasius (c. 300–373), it upholds his doctrine as he defended it at the Council of Nicea. The Athanasian Creed originated early in the sixth century, perhaps in Gaul, as a vigorous defense of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ in detailed, exact terms even more precise than those of the Apostles' Creed and the Creed of Nicea. It appears that the compilers of this statement were familiar with Augustine of Hippo's exposition and defense of the Trinity, which appeared about 420. The Athanasian Creed, more than any previous confession, is strongly polemical in denouncing heretics. It contends that belief in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation is necessary

for salvation, and it pronounces damnation upon those who teach otherwise.

Between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, criticism of church traditions and authoritarian policies became increasingly common. Followers of Peter Waldo (d. c. 1216) and others sought to return to New Testament simplicity. Such movements found discrepancies between Scripture and some ecclesiastical practices, so they desired internal reform. Papal authorities often responded with persecution of the dissidents, and that led to schism. By this time there was much controversy about the number and significance of the sacraments. The Roman church replied to dissenters academically through the writings of Scholastic theologians and juridically by means of the Inquisition. The Waldenses, in the fourteenth century, met papal opposition with their Seven Articles of Faith and a catechism to instruct their adherents in doctrine and morality. Supporters of John Hus (c. 1375–1415), after the martyrdom of their leader, issued a *Confessio Taboritarum* as a statement of beliefs for which they suffered persecution. In 1503 the United Brethren of Bohemia presented to their king a confession in which they denied the traditional role of departed saints



as mediators with God, purgatory, and transubstantiation as the correct understanding of the Eucharist. These and other pre-Reformation nonconformists drafted and published confessions to justify their dissent from Rome by showing the scriptural character of their principles.

The growing disaffection from the papacy is evidence that Christians needed confessions that would address matters about which the ancient creeds are silent. The Protestant Reformers undertook that task with relish. While they revered the ancient creeds and often declared their concurrence with them, the Protestants realized that those documents do not assert the sole authority of Scripture, nor do they explain biblical teaching about sin and salvation in any detail. They are silent about supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they make only passing references to the sacraments.

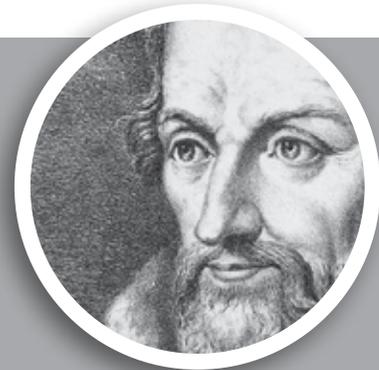
By the sixteenth century Christendom had become confused about many doctrines of the faith, and the Roman church of the Middle Ages had never taken a dogmatic stand with regard to some beliefs Protestants discovered in the Bible, doctrines which for centuries the medieval church had ignored or distorted. The Protestants

invoked the principle of *sola scriptura*, and as they did so, they rejected some traditional teachings of the papal church as incompatible with clear biblical revelation. The Reformers therefore found it necessary to clarify their understanding of Scripture in new confessions of faith. The Lutherans led the way, and their Augsburg Confession of Faith (1530) became the first of several Reformation creeds. Since the ancient statements do not address specific aspects of soteriology, such as original sin, election, regeneration, and justification, the Protestant Reformers stated their beliefs about these matters boldly and in explicit terms.

Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), Martin Luther’s closest associate on the faculty at the University of Wittenberg, was the major author of the Augsburg Confession, which he presented to the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire in order to explain the biblical basis of evangelical (Lutheran) doctrine. He did not include a specific affirmation of *sola scriptura* because that had not yet become the fundamental item of contention with Rome, and some papal theologians were arguing that traditional Catholicism was entirely faithful to Scripture. The emperor and the imperial Diet rejected the Lutheran position, and Charles V (r. 1519–1556), the

monarch, threatened military action against accused heretics in Germany. Melancthon later issued an Apology for the Augsburg Confession in which he answered Roman charges in belligerent terms. The Augsburg Confession rather quickly gained recognition in all the Lutheran bodies of Europe, and it remains, in principle, the official statement of Lutheran beliefs around the world.

By 1577 disputes within Lutheran ranks required a fuller, clearer expression of doctrine, and the Formula of Concord supplied that need. This thorough statement of evangelical theology acknowledges the ancient creeds as accurate summaries of Christian belief, to which Lutherans adhere heartily, but the challenges of the sixteenth century required them to offer more extensive and precise declarations. The Formula affirms *sola scriptura* as the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation. In 1580 Lutherans published the Book of Concord as a compendium of their major doctrinal affirmations. This tome contains the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon’s Apology, Luther’s two catechisms, and the Smalkald Articles (1527), which Luther compiled for an organization of evangelical states, together with the Formula of Concord and the three ancient ecumenical creeds.³



As Protestants applied the formal principle of the Reformation, they developed some disagreements among themselves, especially with regard to the sacraments. This led to a contentious debate between Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the reformer of Zurich, and the confessions of faith they helped to produce reflect their divergent views. In 1523 Zwingli published the Sixty-seven Articles as the first confession to express the distinctive beliefs of that branch of Protestantism which became known as the Reformed churches. He sent his own confession to the Diet of Augsburg while Melanchthon was there, even though neither the Catholics nor the Lutherans had invited him to participate.

When the Reformation spread to Geneva, John Calvin (1509–1564) came into prominence as the leader, and he soon established the reputation of that city as the fountainhead of Reformed theology. Unlike Zwingli, Calvin maintained fine relations with Luther, and at one point he signed a version of the Augsburg Confession as a display of Protestant unity. Calvin had published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536, a treatise for which the Apostles' Creed was the outline—further evidence of the Reformers' eagerness

to align with the Catholic church of antiquity. Their frequent citations from Augustine of Hippo (354–430) also demonstrated this desire.

In 1549 the churches of Zurich and Geneva established fraternal relations on the basis of a joint confession, the Consensus of Zurich, due to the work of Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), the successor to Zwingli as chief pastor in Zurich. Although Philip Melanchthon expressed disapproval of the Reformed view of the sacraments, he was well impressed with the Consensus and discarded his suspicions toward the Swiss Protestants after reading it.

Both Lutheran and Reformed influences spread to England and Scotland during the reigns of Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) and Edward VI (r. 1547–1553). Henry despised Protestantism, but Edward, his son, embraced it heartily. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) eventually became a convinced Protestant, and he composed the Forty-two Articles of Religion as a confession for the Church of England with the king's approval. This statement reflects both Lutheran and Reformed influences, but the articles about soteriology are Calvinistic. In the Book of Common Prayer Cranmer incorporated Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed elements and provided

Englishmen with a manual of worship in their own language. In that way the Church of England preserved catholic, but not papal, traditions in harmony with Scripture.⁴

During the reign of the Catholic Queen, Mary I (r. 1553–1558), there was a violent repression of Protestants. Many Protestants fled to the continent, some to Geneva, where they became vigorous Calvinists. When the Protestant Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) ascended the throne, they returned to England, where some became bishops in the Anglican church. Cambridge University became a center for the teaching of the Reformed faith, and there Calvin's *Institutes* was the principal textbook in theology.

Elizabeth's Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker (1504–1575), supervised a revision of Cranmer's confession to include some more Lutheran elements, and that project became the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, which remain the official statement of the Anglican and Episcopal churches.

When Protestantism arrived in Scotland, it was the evangelical doctrine of Luther, but, as in England, the Reformed faith quickly supplanted it. In 1544 George Wishart (c. 1513–1546) returned to Scotland from Switzerland and



brought the Helvetic Confession of Faith (1536), which a number of Reformed theologians had drafted. The popularity of this statement in Scotland is difficult to explain, but it gained acceptance readily and led the Scottish Reformation away from its Lutheran foundation. Wishart was a close friend of John Knox (c. 1513–1572), who was the chief author of the Scots' Confession (1560), a strongly Calvinistic statement. The stridently anti-Roman language of this confession reflects the suffering Protestants had endured at the hands of Catholic authorities.⁵

The Netherlands was another site of great persecution of Protestants, as Spain conducted an Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) to reduce the Low Countries to obedience and to eradicate heresy by means of the Inquisition. In the midst of this struggle, Protestants adopted the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), the principal author of which was Guy de Brès (c. 1523–1567), an evangelist whom Spanish officials hanged for his efforts to spread the Reformed faith. De Brès addressed the Belgic Confession to King Philip II (r. 1556–1598) in the hope of convincing the monarch to stop persecuting his Protestant subjects. De Brès failed in that objective, but his composition

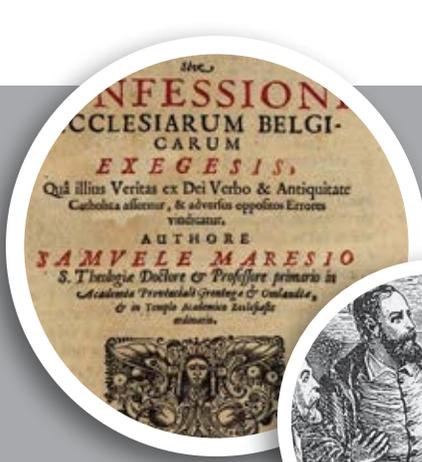
became the official doctrinal statement of the Dutch Reformed Church, a confessional monument to the heroes of the Dutch struggle for freedom.

Late in the sixteenth century, the Netherlands experienced the first challenge to Protestant soteriology to arise within Reformed ranks. The appearance of Arminianism led to the publication of opposing confessions of faith and to a permanent division among Protestants. Disciples of the late James Arminius (1560–1609), a professor at the University of Leyden, in 1610 published a Remonstrance to express their objections to the Reformed doctrine of sin and salvation. A national Synod of the Dutch Reformed church met at Dordt in 1618–1619, and representatives of several other Reformed bodies attended. This synod replied to each assertion of the Remonstrance with a reaffirmation of undiluted Calvinism which became the Canons of Dordt, often cited as the Five Points of Calvinism. The same assembly ratified the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, which had originated in the German state of Palatine in 1562. By requiring strict adherence to its confession, the Dutch Reformed church repulsed the Arminian challenge.

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1. The texts of almost all historic creeds and confessions appear in Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983 reprint of 1931 edition). For an excellent brief review of the creeds and confessions, see W. A. Curtis, "Confessions," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 3, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), 831–901.
2. Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982) and Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of General Councils, 325–1870* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1961) are helpful accounts from Roman Catholic authors. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972) and Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils, and Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984) are Protestant treatments.
3. Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).
4. James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's English Connection* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979) covers the first stage of Protestant development in England.
5. James Edward McGoldrick, *Luther's Scottish Connection* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989) is an account of the earliest Scottish Protestants.

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Bible Study on Mark

Lesson 3: The Kingdom Comes

Mark 1:14–45

Rev. William
Boekestein

Maybe you know someone who takes a long time to get to the point in a conversation. Sometimes these are the same people who (after several minutes of not getting to the point) say, “to make a long story short . . .” but of course by then it’s too late.

The writer of the second Gospel, Mark, didn’t have that problem. Mark’s is the “action gospel” that focuses on the deeds of Christ. It shouldn’t surprise us that after one introductory verse and twelve verses describing Christ’s preparation for ministry, Mark gets right to the point, which for him is the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus began his public ministry some time after John was thrown into prison. John had said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Now John’s hope was being realized. The plan of God was unfolding according to divine schedule, as it always does, and as it is in your life right now.

Mark helps us to understand that Christ’s ministry revolved around preaching, discipling, and healing, three activities of the Savior which God’s children increasingly value as they gain deeper experience with him.¹

Jesus’ Preaching Ministry (1:14–15, 21–22, 35–39)

Jesus began his preaching in an important location, the synagogue (1:21, 39). Jesus’ first mission was to redeem the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:6; 15:24). After all, to them

“pertains the adoption, the glory, the covenant, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4). For thousands of years God had been grooming the Jews to receive their Messiah. Now “the time is fulfilled” (Mark 1:15). All of the messianic arrows of the Old Testament are aimed at Jesus of Nazareth.

The Priority of Jesus’ Preaching

After being tested in the wilderness, the first thing Jesus does is preach the gospel. “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (1:14–15). Jesus later announced to his disciples that preaching was a chief reason why he came to earth (1:38). What a commentary on the importance of preaching!

The Bible teaches that preaching is the main vehicle of the Christian message (Rom. 10:14–15). And although the mission of the church isn’t limited to preaching, churches must stay in step with Jesus in prioritizing the public declaration of the gospel. Churches demonstrate a high view of preaching by ensuring that other elements of worship never supplant the sermon. Churches must maintain a commitment to call gifted and godly ministers and to ensure that their preachers receive ongoing instruction

and encouragement in their heralding task. Individuals within a congregation honor the priority Jesus gives to preaching by being mentally, spiritually, and physically prepared to receive the word from the pulpit as the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). Congregants who are serious about truly hearing God will engage the preaching both during and after the sermon.

Part of engaging the sermon means knowing what to listen for.

The Content of Jesus’ Preaching

There are two main parts to Jesus’ simple message. The first is an indicative statement, that is, a statement of what is: “The kingdom of God is at hand.” The second is an imperative statement, that is, a statement of what should be done: “Repent and believe in the gospel” (v. 15). Biblical heralds help listeners understand the truth about important matters such as grace, sin, and the life to come; that’s the indicative. But they also bring truth to bear on the listeners’ wills by declaring their obligations; that’s the imperative. As the master preacher, Jesus does both.

Jesus announces the reality that the kingdom is at hand (1:14–15) by saying at least four things about the arrival of the reign of God.² First, the kingdom physically came in the incarnation of Jesus. He is the king who is overturning the kingdom of darkness—and he is here! And though bodily absent, Christ is still

ruling from heaven through his Spirit. Second, the kingdom gradually comes as hearts and lives are won over to God through the gospel. Third, the kingdom has structurally come as Christ builds his church on earth. Christ calls people to both a personal and communal relationship with him. Fourth, the kingdom will universally come on the last day. The kingdom is both a present reality and a future expectation.

Jesus answers the important matter of how one becomes a citizen of this kingdom by issuing two imperatives: “Repent, and believe in the gospel.” We could say that he demands a dual response to the preaching of the kingdom. First, Jesus commands: “Repent!” With this command, Jesus is not calling for a one-time

expression of sorrow over sin. Rather, he calls sinners to “undergo a radical change of heart and life, a complete turnabout of life.”³ To repent is to grow increasingly dissatisfied with sin and to turn from it in disgust. Jesus’ second command is to become increasingly satisfied with him. To believe in the gospel is to know the good news that “not only to others, but to me also, remissions of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”⁴ To believe in the gospel doesn’t merely mean to know it is true. It means to stake your life on its truth. I believe the gospel when I trust that Christ provides healing for my sin, remission for my guilt, and a

gracious reward of heavenly glory.

*The Authority of Jesus’ Preaching (1:22)*⁵

Although Jesus preached quintessential good news, not everyone was impressed (cf. 2:7). Notably, however, everyone recognized that Jesus wasn’t just sharing the opinions of men. They could tell that he spoke with a superhuman authority. With unique suitability, Jesus’ preaching was saturated with the Old Testament formula so commonly used by heavenly spokesmen: “Thus says the Lord.” This is what true preaching always says. Martyn Lloyd Jones said that in preaching, “The hearer . . . knows that he has been dealt with



and addressed by God through the preacher.”⁶ Of course, Jesus did so as no other can.

Still, Jesus did not do his preaching alone. In close connection with Jesus’ preaching ministry was his discipling ministry.

Jesus’ Discipling Ministry (1:16–20)⁷

The Son of God chose to call disciples. Think about that. We might wonder, wouldn’t it have been better if the Lord of glory would have worked his ministry of reconciliation alone? Couldn’t he have done it better, without the disciples misunderstanding his mission, putting their feet in their mouths, and often, just plain getting in the way (cf. 8:33)? After all, don’t things usually get messy when *we*

involve other people? These concerns notwithstanding, Jesus chose to call disciples.

Who Are the Disciples?

Although the word isn’t used in Mark 1, Jesus’ followers were disciples, literally “students.” Before they were called they were simple, ordinary men. Some were pious (John 1:47); others were not (Mark 2:13–17). Jesus’ group of disciples consisted of both blue- and white-collar workers. In many ways they were no different from you and me; and for good reason.

In their unique callings the disciples are prototypical Christians; they are like mirrors in which we see our own weaknesses, and how God provides strength to follow him. Their call is reflected in ours.

To What Were the Disciples Called?

First, Jesus calls the disciples to follow him (1:17). The implication is that all else is left behind. They could not stay in their boats and follow Jesus at the same time. Amazingly, they immediately left their nets (v. 18) because God had opened their eyes, causing them to see infinite value in Jesus and his kingdom; they perceived that nothing they could desire could compare with Christ (Ps. 73:25). To this day, no one will forsake the world, take up his cross, and follow Christ unless that person sees him as incomparably more valuable than everything else (Mark 8:34).

Second, Jesus calls his disciples to be changed by him. He says, “And I will make you *become* fishers of men” (v. 17). What these men are, here on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, is not what they will become. Are you planning to be changed in your pursuit of Christ? Are you willing to have your prejudices conquered? Are you prepared to undergo the painful transformation called sanctification (Rom. 12:2)? The Christian life is a constant becoming.

Third, Jesus calls his disciples to become fishers of men (1:17). In calling the disciples away from their nets, Jesus isn’t diminishing their profession. Instead, he uses their secular vocation as a powerful illustration of the call of discipleship. “You know how to fish for fish, now fish for people! Jesus might likewise have called Matthew—the tax collector—to now collect the tithes of gratitude from God’s people. When God converts a farmer, he calls him to cultivate godliness in himself and others. When he calls a carpenter, he calls him to build up the family of God. When people become followers of God, they become acutely interested in the salvation and sanctification of those who are yet swimming in a sea of despair.

Jesus’ Healing Ministry (1:21–34, 40–45)

Jesus came to preach and to disciple. But he also came to heal.

Why Did Jesus Heal?

There are at least seven reasons why Jesus’ healings are integral to his ministry. First, he healed to authenticate his divinity. Anyone can teach, but only God can perform

healing miracles (2:9–12). Second, Jesus healed to authenticate his preaching. The two seem always to go together (e.g., 1:39); Jesus never pursued a mercy ministry divorced from the ministry of the word. Third, Jesus healed to promote faith. Later in his ministry he told his Jewish critics: “Though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him” (John 10:38). Fourth, Jesus healed to gain favor with the people. Sometimes he warned people not to talk about the healings because he didn’t want to become a sensation.⁸ Still, his healing was highly regarded by many (Mark 1:37; 5:20). Fifth, Jesus healed to showcase his love (Mark 1:41, Matt. 9:36). All of his miracles were for the benefit of others.⁹ Sixth, Jesus healed to demonstrate man’s appalling need.¹⁰ Just think about all we learn of human suffering and need for a healer through the healing accounts in the Gospels. Our understanding of our plight would be impoverished without them. Finally, Jesus healed to point to a day when all things will be made right. His earthly mercy ministry foreshadows a day when “God will wipe away every tear” from the eyes of his redeemed people. “And there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Two Types of Healings

Jesus heals both soul and body. He is a total healer!

First, Jesus heals the demon possessed (1:21–28). Jesus’ first healing miracle teaches us the sobering reality that the great battles in this world are not fought against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers (Eph. 6:12). In a culture dominated by philosophical materialism, Christians

still believe in the existence of ghosts or spirits. And because the Bible teaches about the danger of unclean spirits—the Bible says that unclean spirits torment their hosts (Luke 6:18; Acts 5:16)—Christians handle demonology soberly and not for the purpose of entertainment. At the same time, believers are not paralyzed by fear over the world of darkness. Christ has authority over the spirit world. In fact, this is why Christ came, as the demon asked: “Did you come to destroy us?” (Mark 1:24). The implied answer is yes. Even unclean spirits obey him (1:27).

Second, Jesus heals the sick. There are three examples in this chapter of Jesus’ ministry to the sick. Each example highlights a component of Jesus’ healing ministry. First, Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law (vv. 29–31). This was a total healing. A remarkable detail is given in verse 31: After the woman was healed “she served them.” I have heard people scorn the fact that Peter’s mother-in-law served Jesus and his band of followers shortly after having been bedridden with a fever. “The woman was ill with a serious fever and isn’t even allowed time to fully recover before returning to service?” But that’s the point: she was fully recovered! She had no need to rest; Jesus had restored her!

Then, Jesus heals the multitudes (vv. 32–34). Here is a great healing. Too often beleaguered Christians limit, in their own minds at least, Christ’s ability to heal. We give the impression that the Lord’s arm has been shortened (Num. 11:23); that he no longer works wonders on a grand scale. God’s word challenges the limitations which our little faith places on the power of God.

Finally, Jesus heals the leper (vv. 40–45). This was a compassionate healing. If you’ve ever seen *Ben Hur*, you have a pretty good sense of how “untouchable” lepers were. They had their own communities where they could languish well apart from normal society. At one point in the movie, Judah Ben Hur is talking to Pilate after seeing where his “mother and . . . sister live what’s left of their lives.” He reminds Pilate that they have become “lepers and outcasts without hope!” Jesus ignores the societal demarcations of his day. He looked at the leper with compassion “and touched him” (1:41).

We need to grasp the humiliating truth that we are that leper. We do not have rotting skin but, by nature, we have rotting, stinking hearts that separate us from the holy society of God. But in his condescending love Christ comes to us and says, “I am willing to make you clean.” One commentator says, “The whole of the gospel is here in a nutshell.”¹¹

The first hundred days in office have come to be seen as a harbinger of the remainder of a public servant’s term.

Think of Mark 1:14–45 as Christ’s first hundred days in office as the servant of God. What will his ministry be about? It will be about preaching, discipling, and healing. If you had been around during Jesus ministry, how would you have fit in to his ministry? Are you submitting to the preaching of Christ? Are you being discipled? Are you being healed by Jesus? Do you bring your hurts, your sins, your frustrations to Christ and say, “I want to be cleaned”? To use Jesus’ own phrase, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus is calling us to enter in by repenting of our sins and believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lesson 3 Notes

1. Christ also came to suffer and die for the sins of the elect, but Mark doesn’t unveil Christ’s suffering ministry until Mark 8, when Christ sets his face to Jerusalem.
2. This division (with the exception of the reference to the church) is from R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 112. Cf. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 56–57.

3. Hendriksen, *Mark*, 58.

4. Heidelberg Catechism answer 21, from the *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, Inc. 1959), 25.

5. Hendriksen provides five additional ways in which Jesus’ teaching differed from that of the scribes: truth not speculation, significance not trivialities, system not rambling, vivid illustration not dry lectures, love for listeners (*Mark*, 63).

6. *Preachers and Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 56.

7. More will be said regarding Jesus’ call of the disciples in connection with Mark 2:13–17 and Mark 3:13–19.

8. Jesus seems to forbid men to freely publish his reputation until the time when God reveals to Peter just who Jesus is (Mark 8:29). See Cole, *Mark*, 116.

9. One exception is the miracle of the money in the fish’s mouth, which allowed him and Peter to pay the temple tax (Matt. 17:27).

10. Herbert Lockyer, *All of the Miracles of the Bible: The Supernatural in Scripture Its Scope and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 153.

11. Cole, *Mark*, 118.

Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. Reflect on Jesus’ statement “the kingdom of God is at hand.” How can a robust understanding of God’s kingdom affect our Christianity?
2. How does Jesus’ call to his disciples to “follow me” inform our approach to discipleship?
3. How is Jesus’ preaching authority reflected in Christian preaching today?
4. Why is it important to view biblical preaching as being authoritative?
5. Are there ways in which Christians take dark spiritual things too lightly today?
6. What does Jesus’ healing ministry teach us about a ministry of mercy today?
7. How do you suppose Jesus’ prayer ministry (v. 35) related to his preaching ministry (v. 38)?
8. Do we ever underestimate Jesus’ compassion toward hurting sinners (see. v. 41)?

Bible Study on Mark

Lesson 4: Jesus Clashes with Religious “Experts”

Mark 2:1–3:6

Rev. William
Boekestein

Thankfully it’s not too often that you run into someone who loves conflict. Some of us would do almost anything to avoid conflict. And yet, conflict has its advantages. Specifically, conflict often produces clarity. It’s hard to really understand someone until you’ve had a few clashes with him or her. Conflict has a tendency of sharpening views and helping us understand various positions. That’s what happens in the many conflicts recorded in the Gospels. Jesus clashes with the religious elite; they criticize him, he responds to their charges. The result is that Jesus and his mission shine through with greater brilliance.

Mark 2, and the first six verses of Mark 3, consists of four “clash” narratives that clarify, near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, what he came to do. In the process, “each of the four collisions in [these verses] reveals something radically inviting about Jesus.”¹

The objections raised in each of the cases come from religious “experts,” either scribes or Pharisees. The Pharisees were a religious sect whose name literally means “the separate ones.” They separated themselves from the common folk whom they saw as beneath them. They were close students of the Scriptures; however, they added to them the traditions of men—which they kept scrupulously. They were also hypocrites in that they liked to put on a show of their religiosity. The scribes were the professional students and teachers of the law. They are sometimes referred to as lawyers (Matt. 22:35) or rabbis (Matt. 23:6–8). Most of the scribes were Pharisees. Sadly, the Scribes

and Pharisees had departed from the simple, spiritual faith of the Bible and had reduced religion to legal formalism.² When religious formalists meet Jesus, conflict is inevitable.

We will look at these four clash narratives through the lens of a repeating pattern. First, we will try to paint a clear picture of the scene or context of the clash. Second, we will try to understand the objection that the religious leaders raise. Third, we will examine the response Jesus gives and the light it sheds on him and his mission.

Clash over Forgiveness of Sins (2:1–12)

Painting the Scene

Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth by preaching, discipling, and healing. The authority of his ministry became immediately obvious. Once the news of Jesus’ power began to spread, he became very popular (for a while). In fact, his popularity prevented him for a time from entering the cities (1:45).

Before long Jesus returned to a Galilean city called Capernaum. Upon his entering a house, people began to flock to him for healing. One of those who needed healing was a paralyzed man. Because he couldn’t walk he was carried to the house by his friends. But due to the crowd they couldn’t get him and his bed close enough to Jesus. So they carried the paralytic up an outdoor stairway, removed some of the earth and plant material that made up the roof (Luke. 5:19), and lowered him through. Jesus saw their faith and pronounced his sins forgiven.

Before moving to the objection, let’s not miss how much these men loved their paralyzed friend and the length to which they went to bring him to Christ. Many of us have very good intentions toward the lost. But sometimes our good intentions are not combined with equal ambition. Ask yourself, “What will I do to bring the hurting to Christ?” The friends of this paralytic answered this question with tenacity!

Objection: Why Does Jesus Claim to Forgive Sins?

As with the rest of the questions, this is not a sincere quest for clarity. His critics are accusing Jesus of blasphemy, or speaking against God. After all, “Who can forgive sins but God?” Notice how they are setting themselves up for a fall. If only God can forgive sins, then if this Jesus has been given power to forgive sins, he is God.

Answer: Jesus Is Able to Forgive Sins Because He Is God

Here is an example of Jesus healing to authenticate his message and his divinity. The sign of healing “demonstrate[s] that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins” (v. 10). The Pharisees have rightly reasoned that only God can forgive sins. In fact, that’s why Jesus says, “Which is easier?” The answer seems to be “neither.” Both are impossible for man. But with God all things are possible.

Jesus has the power to forgive sins. Are there sins in your life that you cannot overcome? Are there patterns of behavior that you hate and yet continue to do? Are there blots on your conscience that you cannot

remove? Jesus alone has the power to forgive, or send away, sins. Go to him and ask for forgiveness. And listen to Jesus say to you, through his word, “Your sins are forgiven.” To forgive means “to cancel a debt.” Unbelieving legalists have a problem with Christ’s forgiveness. But to God’s children there is no greater reality.

Clash over Associating with Sinners (2:13-17)

Painting the Scene

Some time later Jesus went out by the sea and began to teach the multitudes. Passing by he saw a tax collector named Matthew (his Greek name; Levi is his Hebrew name) and called him to be his disciple. Matthew got up to follow and in his joy invited Christ to dine with him and his friends. As the old saying goes, “Birds of a feather flock together.” So it was with Matthew. Like him, his friends were tax collectors and “sinners.”

The term “sinner” is interesting. On the one hand this was a label that the Pharisees applied to anyone who didn’t observe the law like they did. And tax collectors were hated because they worked for the Romans and tended to be cheats. On the other hand, the friends of Matthew with whom Jesus dined were real sinners. They weren’t simply those whom the Pharisees didn’t accept, but sinners in the sight of God. Most of those at the party lived corrupt lives. They were cheats, swearers, fornicators, and drunks. They were the types of people that you and I might be embarrassed to be seen with.

Objection: Why Does Jesus Associate with Sinners?

Again, this is not a sincere question but an indictment against the character of Jesus. The Pharisees disbelieve that he is the Messiah and now seek to prove their doubts by this accusation which they grammatically

cloak as a question. What they are saying is, “The Messiah, the king of righteousness, would never associate with such sinners.”

Answer: This Is Why Jesus Came, to Call Sinners to Repentance

Jesus’ answer is one of the most hope-giving texts in Scripture. He associates with them because they are such sinners! Jesus came to earth as the Great Physician to heal those who were sick unto death with sin. Jesus came as the great friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19).

This raises a practical question: “Should Christians be friends with sinners?” To answer this question, we need to first assess evangelistic opportunities with both eyes open. The proverb “Evil company corrupts good habits” doesn’t forbid engagements with unbelievers, but it does sound a note of caution. When we wrestle against flesh and blood we must do so clad in the whole armor of God, “being watchful” (Eph. 6:12–18). Second, those who are serious about engaging sinners should check their intentions. There was a purpose in Jesus’ friendship. He was committed to demonstrating the gospel to sinners. He loved them. He called them to repent. We need to love the world on God’s terms, not on the world’s terms.

The Pharisees caught only half of God’s program for sinners. They liked God’s warnings not to blithely associate with the ungodly (e.g., Ps. 1:1). But they missed his expectation that his people would teach transgressors God’s ways that sinners should be converted to him (Ps. 51:13; cf. Ps. 25:8). Like the Pharisees, we run the risk of “arranging our lives so that we are with non-believers as little as possible.” But “the Christian life is not to be one of *isolation* nor *assimilation*, but *mission*.”³

Clash over Fasting (2:18-22)

Painting the Scene

The next clash took place over the issue of fasting. Specifically, the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees were fasting. They wondered, condescendingly it seems, why the disciples of Christ failed to fast as they did.

Objection: Why Does Jesus Not Fast?

In three of the clashes described in this narrative, the scribes and Pharisees accuse Jesus of sins of commission. When it comes to fasting the accusation is over a perceived sin of omission. The disciples of John and of the Pharisees criticized Jesus’ disciples by pointing out their own performance: “Look at us! We’re fasting. Why aren’t you?” Mark is implicitly pointing out that the Pharisees took a wrong approach to fasting. God specifically required that one who fasted should not broadcast his or her piety (Isa. 58:5; cf. Matt. 6:16–18). The Bible does not demand that fasting be done in absolute secrecy, but it does require that one fast without a spirit of pretentiousness.

Jesus’ Answer

This is Jesus’ longest and probably most complex answer. He gives two distinct answers to the Pharisees’ question. First, he explains that there is no fasting while the groom is present (2:19–20).

This answer makes sense if we understand what fasting is. Fasting is an act of devotion in which one voluntarily and temporarily deprives himself of food or other pleasures or necessities. Through fasting believers “are humbled before God, and withdraw from the flesh those things with which it is cherished, to the end that it may be more willingly and easily obey the Spirit . . . Fasting is a help to the prayers of the saints and all



virtues.”⁴ We need to be clear: Jesus is not speaking against fasting. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends fasting as a regular component of the Christian life. Jesus is saying that you would not fast at a wedding. His coming cements a marriage between God and man. Jesus says that while fasting would not be appropriate at a wedding, it would at a funeral. When Christ died for sinners, mourning and fasting were appropriate. In the Christian life there will be alternating seasons of joy and thanksgiving and sadness and fasting.

Jesus’ second answer explains why his disciples should not fast as do the Pharisees. When he talks about old and new cloth and old and new wineskins, he insists that the new is not compatible with the old (2:21–22). When Jesus came he brought something new. In him the kingdom of God is at hand. If you miss Jesus, then you are part of an obsolete religion. That’s what became of the Jewish leaders. The Pharisees were living joyless, man-centered lives because they were outside of the kingdom. Jesus brings a fullness to life, not an emptiness. And that’s why his disciples were intentionally not fasting, to paint a contrast between their religion and that of the Pharisees.

Clash over Working on the Sabbath (2:23–3:6)

Painting the Scene

There are two scenes in this clash in which most of us fail to see any scandal whatsoever. This is because we can hardly relate to how even the godly Jews of Jesus’ day approached the day of rest and worship. We have an even harder time understanding the straitjacket approach which the Pharisees took to the Sabbath.

In the first narrative Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field. When they began to feel hungry, they plucked some grain and had a snack while they walked. You’ve done something like this when you stopped to pick a few blackberries on a hike in the woods.

In the second narrative, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

Objection: Why Does Jesus Violate the Sabbath Day by Working?

The Pharisees thought that the disciples’ eating and Jesus’ healing were offensive to God. This is so because they had adopted a largely negative view of the Sabbath; the Sabbath is a day of “thou shalt nots.” From the start, we see a perverted theology. Granted, there are restrictions placed upon Sabbath activity, but this is one of only two of the Ten Commandments that is stated in the positive: “Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy!”

Answer: The Lord of the Sabbath Has Done Well on the Sabbath

Jesus' answer comes in three parts. First, Jesus did not violate the Sabbath but merely the Pharisees' understanding of it. This is a helpful principle. We are not bound to observe the Lord's Day the same way as everyone else simply because that's the way they do it. Nor can we expect others to honor God's special day exactly as we do.

Second, Jesus defends himself and his disciples by announcing his authority. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath; it's his day. Imagine if someone visited your house and as you reached toward a bowl of fruit to grab an apple, that person cried out, "Why are you eating that apple? Who said you could have it?" You would probably say, "This is my house, my apple. I don't need permission." The Christian Sunday is the Lord's Day. Christ wasn't answerable to the Pharisees; they were answerable to him. So are we. Do we treat Sunday as our day or as the Lord's?

Third, Jesus did what was right on the Lord's Day. He engaged in works of necessity (eating). He engaged in works of mercy (healing). He engaged in works of worship (in the

synagogue). The Lord's Day is the right day to works that anticipate an eternity with God.

In two of the clash narratives Mark tells the reaction of at least part of the crowd. "Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him" (3:6). The Pharisees demonstrate a spirit of judgmentalism and unbelief. When the paralytic is healed, they are critical. When sinners were loved, they were smug. When the bridegroom stood before them, they exalted themselves in self-righteousness. When Christ fulfilled the Sabbath, they debated about tradition. Can you see some faint (or not so faint) reflection of yourself in them?

By contrast, after the healing of the paralytic, we read: "All were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" (2:12). In fact, Luke adds that the former paralytic went home "glorifying God" (Luke 5:25). They saw the glory of God in Jesus Christ, and it changed their outlook on life.

Every time we hear God's Word we have a clash with Jesus. Every glimpse

at God's glory changes our outlook. After every sermon we either see our sin either more or less sharply. After every Bible reading, we see Jesus as more or less sufficient for our needs. From Lord's Day to Lord's Day we either are more or less invigorated to live rightly before his face. How have you clashed with Jesus today?

Lesson 4 Notes

1. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, 2 vols., Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 1:75.
2. James Orr, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), s.v. "Scribes," by Frank Hirsch.
3. Hughes, *Mark*, 71, 72.
4. Second Helvetic Confession 24.4, from Joel Beeke and Sinclair Ferguson, eds., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 174.

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Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. Can you identify someone in your life who you should prayerfully attempt to bring to Jesus (cf. Mark 2:3–4)?
2. Do we need to be more courageous in "eating with tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:16)?
3. What approach or cautions should we take in engaging sinners?
4. Is it possible that we have overlooked the importance of fasting because of its abuses, some of which we read about in the Gospels?
5. How is Jesus like new wine (Mark 2:22)?
6. In what ways might we demonstrate pharisaical attitudes toward the Lord's Day?
7. Do we treat Sunday as our day or as the Lord's?
8. Strictly speaking, Jesus didn't "save life" when he healed the man with the withered hand. Still, how is this an appropriate expression of what he did and what we are called to do?
9. How have you clashed with Jesus today?

A couple of years ago I had lunch with a prominent professor of a prestigious seminary in the southern states. I asked him what he thought was the most difficult aspect of being a seminary professor. Without pause, he responded, “It is seeing how many of our graduates do not remain in the ministry.” He went on to lament how some leave for other vocations but most leave due to the pressures of ministry. And, sadly, he added, many are deposed.

The first set of problems in this series of articles deals with that which leads to an Article 61—leaving the ministry because of disciplinary reasons: being deposed from ministry. Obviously nobody wants that, and yet, sometimes we set ourselves up for it.

I want you to consider with me your besetting sin. A besetting sin is the sin that Satan doesn’t have to work hard at to get you to fall. In fact, your own totally depraved nature leads you in that direction. Satan has been working on you since you were a little child, and he knows what trips your trigger. So much so, that you may even have gotten to the point where you don’t see it as being wrong.

I don’t know what your besetting sin is. I hope you do, because the first

step in overcoming your besetting sin is to acknowledge it. I set before you in this article two such sins. Two sins that are very common; two sins that have ensnared many a minister.

I. Adultery

The first sin is adultery. Obviously, if you have an affair, you have no place in the ministry. I know many young men who were cautioned about the dangers and temptations of adultery who rolled their eyes and said, “That will never happen to me.” They are no longer in the ministry. Some were addicted to pornography; others were engaged in sexual activity with women in their congregations.

One thing a minister can be certain of is this: the opportunity will present itself. Ministers enter into a unique relationship with individuals they are counseling. Those whom you counsel will tell you things they will not tell their own spouses. A trust is built. And, too often, that trust grows beyond the counselor/counselee relationship.

What do you do when you are counseling a young woman in your study and she starts undressing?

My first counseling case happened one week after I was ordained. A young woman came to my study and told me that her minister was sexually molesting her.¹ I informed some of the elders of the church where she was a member of the accusations she had made. After some initial denials, the minister admitted that he was involved in a sexual relationship with the woman. He blamed the woman,

claiming she was a nymphomaniac. He went so far as to declare himself the victim of her prowess.

This would be akin to someone coming to you for help because he loves to give money away and your response is that you can help him—for \$250 per hour. It doesn’t matter who comes to you or what that person’s problem may be. If you take advantage of the confidence that a person has placed in you, you are at fault.

We ministers like to be heroes. We like to help people. We do, however, have to know that we are called to be Minister of the Word and Sacraments. We cannot solve every problem that comes our way. We have limitations. Unless you have taken some advanced classes in counseling, the role of the minister should be to assess a problem and then refer an individual to a professional counselor.

What will happen when² you go to visit a woman in her late twenties who is suffering from depression and she meets you at the door dressed in her bathrobe? That’s not that unusual, is it? After all, she is suffering from depression and sleeps most of the day. She invites you in, and as she sits down her bathrobe flies open and she makes absolutely no move to close it.

And it is just the two of you.

“Oh,” you say. “Nothing will happen.”

Even if that is the case, let us suppose she goes to an elder and says something did happen. How will



you prove it didn't? Don't ever visit a woman alone!

I have a good friend who was accused of inappropriately touching a woman he was visiting. He denied it. He said it absolutely never took place. It was his word against hers.

I believed him. I went to court with him; spoke to his elders; and defended him in classis. Unfortunately, you can't prove something that didn't happen. The woman later recanted and said it never happened, but the damage was done. To this day some people still believe he inappropriately touched the woman.

This episode ruined his ministry. It happened over two decades ago, but the man has never served another church. Who is going to call someone with this charge (whether true or false) hanging over his head? Don't even let the hint of an accusation come against you.

I am so thankful that my office is in the house. I make sure my wife is home and the door is open if I ever have to visit alone with a woman. I meet those who won't come to the house at a restaurant.

Of course, that has a way of backfiring, too.

When several people in the Christian Reformed church I was serving left to become independent, I accepted the call to be their minister. It was a nasty split, and I was *persona non grata* at the church we had left.

An attractive young couple joined our congregation, and it didn't take long before they acknowledged that they

had some marital problems. They asked for help, and I met with them regularly for a while.

One night I got a phone call from the wife. She asked if I could come over and meet with her. There was absolutely no way was I going to her house if she was the only one there. I didn't trust her, and I certainly don't trust myself enough for that. I suggested that we meet at a local restaurant.

We got there at the appointed time and picked a secluded corner where we could talk over coffee and pie. We weren't there for fifteen minutes when twenty people from the church we had left showed up for the restaurant's buffet dinner.

I tell you, the looks I got sitting there with another man's wife!



When that meeting was over I immediately called every one of my elders and explained to them what had happened, because I guarantee you the rumors were going to fly.

Be aware, brothers, that the seventh commandment is not just about another woman. It's about the Internet. It's about the movies and television shows you watch. It's about where you put your eyes when a female jogger runs by. It's about where your eyes focus when you talk to that seventeen-year-old girl in the low-cut blouse or the woman with the short skirt who sits in the front row when you are preaching.

Let me tell you, if wandering eyes are your besetting sin, the devil will give your eyes all kinds of places to wander.

I highly recommend *Every Man's Battle* by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoker. It's not Reformed, but it will convince you that we men have allowed ourselves to be duped by the devil into thinking all kinds of sexual sins are acceptable. Then it offers a battle plan to get over it. I have used it in counseling and strongly encourage you to read it and use it when necessary for people you counsel and for some of your own battles with sexual temptation.

II. Alcohol

The second biggest thing that gets ministers into trouble is something that they don't see as trouble, and that is their use of alcohol.

And I know the arguments—believe me, I know the arguments. Been there, done that. I used to love to drink. I am so thankful that the Lord removed those taste buds from my mouth before I entered the ministry.

Our Christian liberty allows us to drink. I don't disagree with that statement, but I think all too often we use Christian liberty as an excuse for sin. My Christian liberty allows me to go to R-rated movies; my Christian

liberty allows me to watch programs on television where God's name is taken in vain. My Christian liberty allows for this, and my Christian liberty allows for that. We begin to use Christian liberty as an excuse to satisfy the desires of the old nature.

I have seen enough ministers who, if they are not alcoholics, are borderline alcoholics. I knew a minister who carried a flask around with him—even when he was at his study in the church. He claimed it was a gift, and he filled with Kool-Aid. The first thought that came to my mind was, "Why would anyone entertain the thought that a flask would be an appropriate gift to give a minister?"

I have dealt with ministers who have said to me, "I don't have to drink. I just like to drink. I can put it down any time."

Then put it down.

I am not a prohibitionist. However, ministers must remember the influence they have on their own children and on the young people of the church they serve. It is incredible. They will use what a minister thinks he can control as an excuse to go out of control.

Alcohol will get you into all kinds of trouble.

I know a minister who went around picking up empty pop cans and beer cans. In Michigan, some churches don't pay their ministers very well and there is a ten-cent deposit on pop cans and beer cans. This minister would pick up pop cans alongside the road as he went for his morning walk. He picked up some empty beer cans along with them. He kept his empties in the garage.

One day, he hit the mother lode: a whole boatload of empty beer cans. Wow! He picked them up and put them in a bag in the garage.

The key to the church was in the garage of the parsonage next door.

Sure enough, somebody from church needed the keys and saw all the empty beer cans. "Ja. And the young people were over last night."

By the time the rumors and gossip got back to the minister, it was too late. Within six months his ministry was done.

Yes, I know and you know that's not right. But that's the way it happened.

I know these are all anecdotal stories about what happened to other people in the ministry. Sadly, I could go on to list several more tales of capable men whom God had called to the ministry but got caught up in a world of sin. I do not bring up these events to open up old wounds or past sins. They happened to real people—men called by God to serve Him—men whose lives will never be the same.

If you get nothing else out of this series of articles, please be aware of how quickly Satan can entrap you in his clutches through the sins of adultery and alcoholism. There is a reason why the Bible says there shouldn't even be a hint—not even a hint—of malice in us. Ministers are to be examples to others. Whether we like it or not, we live in glass houses. People are watching. They watch because they love us and want to encourage us. They watch because they want us to love them and encourage them. And when we become entrapped by sin, it affects them.

1. I realized quickly that none of my counseling classes in seminary had covered this topic.

2. Notice that I didn't write "if." The devil doesn't work with "if"; he works with "when."

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*Dear Sadie,
As you know, on Tuesday you start first grade. I can hardly believe it! You are growing up so fast. It seems like just yesterday that you came into our lives. You have been a deep source of joy and happiness to your mom and me, and we look forward to watching you become a young woman, and, we pray, a godly follower of Jesus Christ.*

In fact, we have prayed for you every day since we found out that God was gifting us with you. Still, to this day, we never cease to pray for you. We pray about a lot of things in your life: your health and strength, your mind as it continues to develop, your relationships as they form, and your heart as its shaped and shepherded. But we also pray for your future: your future walk with God, your future usefulness in His kingdom, and yes, even your future husband, should the Lord see fit.

But I do not pray simply for a husband. I pray for a specific type. I'm writing you this letter now, while you're young, so that you can read it when you're older and know the kind of husband I've prayed you would desire and, by God's grace, find.

So what type of man do I pray that your husband will be? What characteristics should you look for when looking and waiting for a spouse? What is the desire of my heart for you?

I suppose a lot could be said, but I want to be as clear and to the point as I possibly can. I don't care if he's five feet or six feet. I don't what team he roots for (though being a Michigan fan wouldn't hurt!). I don't ultimately care what he does for a living, as long as he can provide for you. But what I do care about and pray about is that he be a man with the following three traits: a gospel man, a godly man, and a growing man.

A Gospel Man

The Bible is crystal clear when it says that a Christian is not to be "unequally yoked" with an unbeliever (1 Cor. 6:14). As you interact with young men, guard your heart from being swept away by anyone in whom there is not a clear confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet, by gospel man, I don't simply desire that he be a Christian. I pray that you'll wait for a man who has a deep conviction of his own personal sin, joined with a deep-seated joy in the finished and sufficient work of Christ on his behalf.

Sadie, look for a guy who sees his sin and loves his Savior. A humble man. Beware of the guys for whom it seems Christianity is merely a religion of do's and don'ts, rules and regulations. Wait for a man who gets the gospel, embraces the gospel, and cherishes the gospel.

The more of a gospel man he is, the more he'll run to the Spirit for the help and strength he lacks and needs to love you with a gospel-driven love. Remember Paul's words in that great chapter of Ephesians, such a familiar text on marriage, when he writes, "Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (Eph. 5:25).

How do you tell if you've found a gospel man? Look for such traits as humility, thankfulness, and contentment. Listen to how he prays. Does he see his own sin, or just the sin of others? Is he thankful for what he has, or wishing he had more? Is he quick to see his own need for grace, or he is always quick to criticize and judge others?

I pray that you would look for a man and who loves the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ for sinners, of whom your Daddy is chief.

A Godly Man

The second characteristic that I pray for in your future husband is that he would be a godly man. Christians who love Christ and the cross also desire to live obedient lives, that they might make much of Christ.

Look for a young man who is clearly pursuing godliness. Don't be content with a guy who "just goes to church"

but doesn't seem to have much a spiritual pulse or drive for God's glory.

This doesn't mean that you need to wait for a man who has his life perfectly in order and who doesn't struggle against sin! Part of what makes a godly man godly is his hatred for his ongoing sin, much like Paul speaks about the war going on in his own heart against the flesh.

I pray for a godly man because I know that one of his primary responsibilities is to lead you to be a godly woman. Says Paul in Ephesians 5:25–26, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, *that he might sanctify her*, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

As Christ sanctifies His bride, so husbands are called to lead their wives spiritually so that they, together, are growing in holiness before the Lord.

Look for a guy who loves the Word of God. Look for a young man who is committed, devoted, and evidences self-control. A man who attends the means of grace regularly and who puts himself under good teaching and preaching. Look for a guy who loves to study the Bible with others. And if you are watching a particular fella, watch how he treats his mom.

Godly guys aren't embarrassed to honor their moms, to treat them with respect and kindness. If he's not doing that now, what leads you to believe he'll do that for you?

Sadie, I pray that God would bring you not only a gospel man but also a godly man. A man whose life flows out of the grace that is found in Christ, which manifests itself in godliness and gratitude.

A Growing Man

Well, maybe this all sounds too difficult. Am I being unrealistic? Are my standards too high? Should I be happy just as long as you are?

Perhaps this third desire will be an encouragement. In addition to praying for a gospel husband and a godly husband, I pray that you will look for and marry a growing husband.

I don't expect, and neither should you, a man without weaknesses and flaws. In fact, what I pray is that your husband would know exactly how flawed he is, and run to the Savior. I hope that he is a man who wants to grow, and seeks ways to grow.

I'm not the man I was when your mom and I got married. By God's

grace, He's sanctified me. And I pray that in eight more years I can look back and say the same then as I say now.

Marriage is wonderfully sanctifying. When two sinners say “I do,” God will find plenty of ways to expose the sins of each partner. We must be open to His scalpel.

Don't wait for a perfect guy, because he doesn't exist. Look for man who can say, with Paul, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10), and who seeks to keep on growing.

I pray that God would bring you a man who is being mentored by someone wiser, someone godlier, and someone who loves the gospel even more than he does. Writes Paul, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil. 3:17).

Sadie, my desire for you is that you are given a husband who grows into a mature man, a devoted husband, and a faithful leader in your home. A man who will live with you in an understanding way, “showing honor” to you (1 Peter 3:7). This would make your dad very thankful. This is what I pray for when I pray for your future spouse.

Conclusion

As I write this, you're not even seven years old. The future is in front of you. You are still so young, and there is so much to look forward to! But by the time you read this, you'll have grown. And more than likely you'll have marriage on your mind.

As you look and wait and pray and dream, know that I have been praying for you, and your future husband, all along. But there is something even more encouraging. God has known before the foundations of the world.

May God give you the desires of your heart, and mine.

Love always,

Daddy

Rev. Michael J. Schout is the pastor of Grace URC in Alto, MI. He welcomes your feedback at mikeschout@gmail.com

What does it mean to biblically fear God? How do we find true wisdom? How do we find freedom from the fear of man? All of these questions and more were addressed this year at yet another excellent RYS International Convention. The theme of the week was “Got Wisdom?,” a multifaceted topic. Seeking the ways to exercise godly wisdom, attendees were continually pointed to fear God, focus on the gospel, and live intentionally before the face of a holy

God. A spiritually rich week (July 14–18) was experienced by 740 students, as well as speakers and youth leaders from all over the United States and Canada, who gathered at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

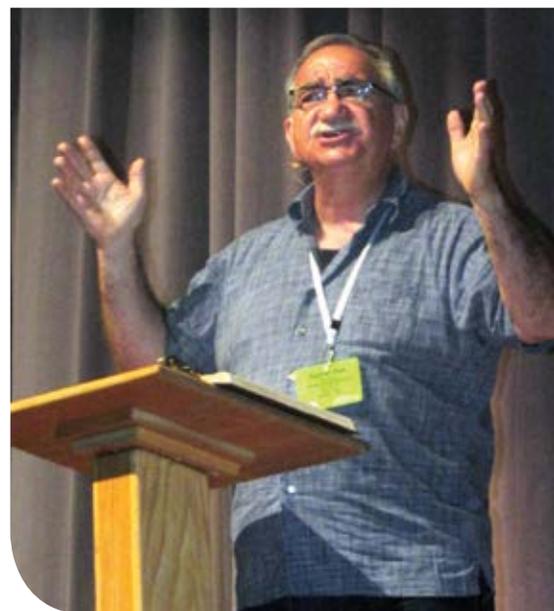
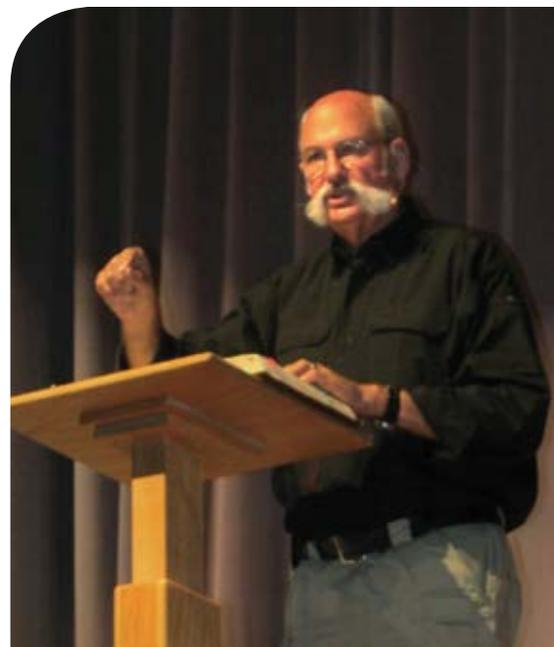
Rev. Paul Murphy of Brooklyn, New York, and Mr. Rip Pratt of Escondido, California, were the two keynote speakers for the week. Their talks illuminated aspects of the theme verse: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.” (Ps. 111:10).

Workshops (topical sessions led by various pastors) were also held throughout the week. It was wonderful to see how each topic of discussion tied back to finding



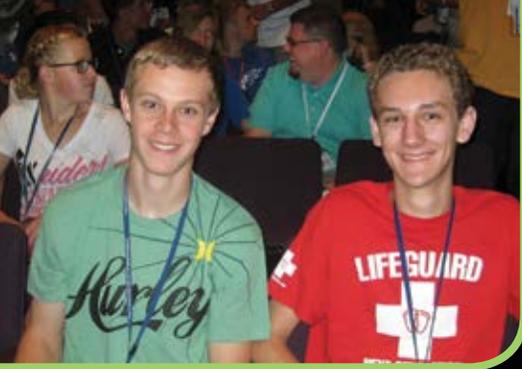
wisdom in the Lord. The weather was quite warm, but students still enjoyed many outdoor activities on the beautiful campus, as well as a day trip whitewater rafting. Devotions twice a day, sports tournaments, singing, and the talent show were just a few of the events that made our week together speed by.

Anyone who attends the national convention would agree that one of the most special aspects of RYS is the sweet fellowship shared by believers who are like-minded. It is truly a blessing to see God graciously work at the convention. As attendees departed, the call to action, “Knowing the fear of God, we persuade men,” echoed in our minds, and prayers were lifted up for Christ’s transforming work in our lives and in the lives of others.

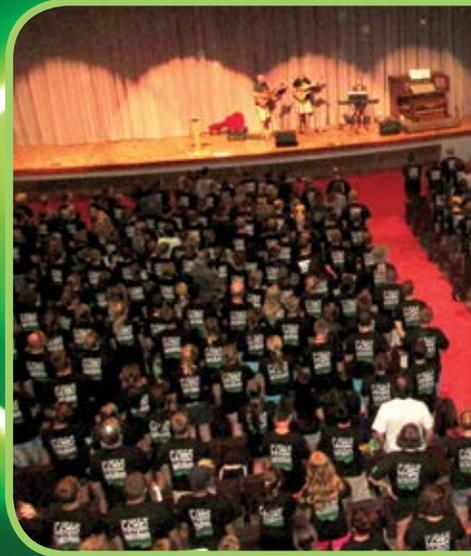


Anne Karsten

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Wisdom?

July 14-18, 2014
University • Newberg, Oregon



The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. (Ps. 111:10)

The theme for RYS this year was difficult to unpack; the phrase “the fear of the Lord” is a phrase deeply misunderstood by many Christians today. Both of our main speakers, Rev. Paul Murphy and Rev. Rip Pratt, expressed their dismay at the general understanding of the fear of Lord that defines fear as a “reverential awe.” While both reasoned that this is definitely part of what we understand as the fear of the Lord, we are taught about a greater meaning. Rev. Paul Murphy characterized the fear of the Lord in two different categories. He explained that the first kind of fear is abject terror at the presence or consideration of God, absent of love for God and devoid of trust in God. It is foolishness, he contended, that apart from the blood of Christ it is impossible not to be afraid of God. The second kind of fear, however, is characterized not by condemnation but by reverence and awe as one contemplates the majesty of God: adoration, love, honor, worship, confidence, gratitude, and fear. Using the account in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah has a vision of the Lord’s throne room, both Rev. Murphy and Rev. Pratt pointed out that Isaiah has actual fear. Isaiah has this fear because he sees the glory of God and is filled with awe for God. At the same time, he realizes his own uncleanness, which causes him to cry out, “Woe is me!” However, when Isaiah is told his sin is atoned

for, his fear causes him to respond to the call of God to bring His Word to the people. Likewise, because our sins have been atoned for, the fear we have should cause us to live lives holy and pleasing to God.

Rev. Murphy immediately made the connection to wisdom when he explained that the fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom, within a relationship with Christ. However, our generation, for all the knowledge we have living in this present age, is unwise. Evidence of this can be seen by looking at the world around us. Our world sees the wisdom of God as foolishness. Rev. Murphy’s definition of wisdom (which we all had memorized by the end of the week 😊) was this: “Wisdom is to live in the fear of God, according to the Word of God, to the glory of God.” He then charged us to be fools for Christ; fools not like the ones of the world but fools living in the wisdom of God, different and not conformed to the pattern of the world.

All the workshops we attended at RYS further explored this theme by dealing with the issue of how we are to live before the face of God (*coram Deo*), in the fear of the Lord, and in specific areas of life. (Unfortunately, each of us had time to attend only five of these wonderful workshops.)

One eye-opening workshop, titled “Got Time?” was led by Rev. Marcusse, who used Ephesians 5:15–16 to explain how Christians should use their time. He began with the startling statistic of the average time Americans spend on social media

on their smart phones each day: 3.8 hours. Multiplied by 365 days, the yearly amount of time equals roughly two months per year! In respect to the knowledge of who ultimately controls our time, Rev. Marcusse admonished us to walk circumspectly, or carefully, before the Lord in the knowledge of what He has done for us. With respect to time, Rev. Marcusse recommended that we redeem the time by looking at this concept from a general viewpoint that says we should walk in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord and living as children of the light. We also talked about applying this to each of our personal lives, where redeeming the time may mean taking a different approach than those around us by recognizing each of our strengths and weaknesses.

In Rev. Lubbers’s workshop on biblical knowledge of one’s self, he began by reading a statistic on the high suicide rates among those who are considered to be in the prime of their lives. As Rev. Lubbers pointed out, this could be explained by how the world looks for its explanation of self apart from the Bible in worldviews such as evolution, secularism, and humanism. In contrast, Christians are to find their identity in the Bible, which affects how we think and live. However, he explained, this is not to say that we should be narcissistic but to remember who we are according to the Bible: fallen creatures because of Adam but redeemed by the blood of Christ. Our value is that we are not our own but belong body and soul to Jesus Christ. We are to fear God and keep His commandments, because that is the purpose of man.

Rev. Mark Stewart led us through seven principles of discernment in his workshop entitled “Got Discernment?” Rev. Stewart began with our understanding of the biblical perspective on the issues presented in the media and how we are to ask ourselves if we are coming away with God’s attitude toward these issues. We were reminded that we need to ask for discernment and the ability to aim for excellence in our choices for what we will spend our time on. Rev. Stewart encouraged us to prepare our hearts to receive the Word on Sunday and to know our own weaknesses when it comes to media and the messages and images it blasts at us, and to pray that we develop a healthy appetite for excellent things when spending our time. Rev. Stewart further gave us a reminder some of us may have been reluctant to hear: to listen to our parents! They have wisdom in these areas and have our best interests at heart. Rev. Stewart also recommended that we encourage each other to engage in excellent activities. He cautioned us that if we are to properly use our senses in discernment, these senses need training and practice; otherwise they will not become sharp. We were reminded once again of our mandate to be in the world but not of it; we were admonished to be careful in our choices as it is also testimony to others! As Christians, we have the best story to tell, His story, and we are advertisements for that story.

Rev. Matt Nuiver spoke about the approach Christians should take when it comes to education in his workshop “Got Education?” He explained how we as Christians are to educate ourselves from a biblical standpoint, and how education is a life-long calling. Using the acronym E.D.U.C.A.T.E, he gave us Bible passages and practical ways to engage, dig, understand, collate, apply, teach and train others, and how to gain experience. He finished with an instruction to work hard in

our education now, because we are learning how to live a life where we never stop learning, a life in which our goal is to glorify God!

Rev. Tuinstra’s workshop, “Got Problems?” encouraged us to live as a community of believers, sharing and helping each other in each with our problems instead of letting those problems isolate us from one another. He reminded us that many of our problems are manufactured but also admitted that many of them are real. Those that are real are either a result of circumstance or a result of sin. Together, we studied Mark 4:35–41, when Jesus calms the storm, and compared the disciples’ perspectives with our own. We had to admit that we, like the disciples, accuse others of not caring about us and the struggles we face because we are only focusing on ourselves. Rev. Tuinstra reminded us that God loves us, sympathizes with us, and gives us the strength to endure the storm because His grace is sufficient. We also realized that sometimes God creates the storm; that He allows problems in our lives so that we will learn to really trust that God will use evil for our good.

The chief encouragement that we gleaned from each session and workshop, however, was the reminder of the hope we have in Christ. Although it is nigh impossible to live in the fear of the Lord according to His Word, Christ has already taken upon Himself our imperfection and imputed to us His righteousness, and made the ultimate sacrifice. The song our annual convention choir sang was especially appropriate this year as it reminded us of this great exchange:

*His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange!
Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered
'neath God's rage.
Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified.
In Christ I live, for in my place
He died.*

*Chorus:
I cling to Christ, and marvel at
the cost:
Jesus forsaken, God estranged
from God.
Bought by such love, my life is not
my own.
My praise—my all—shall be for
Christ alone.*

*His robes for mine: what cause
have I for dread?
God's daunting Law Christ
mastered in my stead.
Faultless I stand with righteous
works not mine,
Saved by my Lord's vicarious
death and life.*

*His robes for mine: God's justice
is appeased.
Jesus is crushed, and thus the
Father's pleased.
Christ drank God's wrath on sin,
then cried "Tis done!"
Sin's wage is paid; propitiation
won.*

*His robes for mine: such anguish
none can know.
Christ, God's beloved, condemned
as though His foe.
He, as though I, accursed and left
alone;
I, as though He, embraced and
welcomed home!*

“His Robes for Mine” (text by Chris Anderson)
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While reading in Alfred Edersheim's *Bible History—Old Testament*, I came across this statement about the angel of Jehovah:

The more carefully we follow His steps, the more fully shall we be convinced that He was not an ordinary Angel, but that Jehovah was pleased to reveal Himself in this manner under the Old Testament. . . . We cannot conceive any subject more profitable, or likely to be fraught with greater blessing, than reverently to follow the footsteps of the Angel of Jehovah throughout the Old Testament. (vol. 1, p. 71)

Indeed, the term “angel of Jehovah” which is translated as “angel of the Lord” in most modern translations, is found more than sixty times in some sixteen books of the Old Testament.

In Genesis we find the first direct reference to the angel of the Lord when he “found Hagar near a spring in the desert” (16:7). The angel converses with Hagar and speaks authoritatively as God would speak, promising “to increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (16:10). Hagar recognized the angel as God by the name she gave to this person who spoke with her: “You are the God who sees me, for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” (16:13).

On a subsequent occasion, after Abraham sent away Hagar and Ishmael to pacify Sarah's complaints against them, Hagar began “to sob” because her son would die of thirst. Then the “angel of God” spoke to her and again promised to “make him a

great nation” (21:18). It would appear that this “angel of God” corresponds to the “angel of the Lord” elsewhere and executes similar commands and makes similar promises. We may consider them as identical angels.

No doubt Genesis 22 contains one of the most significant references to the angel of the Lord. In verse 2 we read that God commands Abraham to take his son, Isaac, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on a mountain in the region of Moriah. Abraham immediately prepared himself and Isaac for the journey. The next day, they set out on the journey to do God's bidding. Once there, Abraham built an altar, bound Isaac and placed him on the altar, and lifted his hand to slay his son. At that precise moment a dramatic thing happened: The angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven (22:11) and stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. Jesus referred to this when he said to the Jews: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Surely, this angel is God's equal, because he reverses a command of the Lord Himself. Moreover, this angel promises to bless Abraham in a manner that only God can do. Abraham will have many descendants, possess the lands occupied by their enemies, and be a blessing to all nations (22:17–18). Just as the pre-incarnate Christ, appearing as the angel of the Lord, cared for his people and provided a ram to sacrifice for sin, so in the “fullness of time” God's Son came into our world as the incarnate God to sacrifice himself as a sin offering “to save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:25). Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Because this angel manifests the qualities or attributes of God, it is not surprising that Abraham places his trust in the angel just as one would in God. Therefore, when Abraham in later years sends his servant to seek a wife for Isaac, he makes him swear an oath to seek one only from his own country and his own relatives; and not from among the Canaanites (Gen. 24:3–4). When the servant questions the possibility of failure to obtain a wife such as Abraham stipulated, Abraham expresses the confidence that the Lord “will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife from my son from there” (24:7). It would seem probable that this angel—entrusted to find a wife for the promised seed of Abraham—would be the angel of the Lord.

As we move on in the patriarchal history, we come to the time when Jacob plans to flee from Laban. Jacob calls his wives Rachel and Leah to meet with him in the fields. There he relates a dream in which the angel of Lord (31:11) appeared to him. This same angel called himself “the God of Bethel” and ordered Jacob “to leave this land and go back to your native land” (31:13). Can there be any doubt that this angel is one with God Himself? Certainly his command is considered by Jacob as a command from God, and Jacob begins to act on it.

Following this incident, and after being reconciled to Laban, Jacob made plans to meet his brother Esau. When messengers told Jacob that Esau was approaching their camp and “four hundred men are with him” (32:6), Jacob instinctively prayed to God for help and safety. Taking steps to appease

any latent anger that Esau might have for Jacob's having stolen his birthright twenty years earlier, Jacob went to bed a troubled man. During the night "a man wrestled with him till daybreak" (32:24). When the man who wrestled with Jacob sought to be released from his grip, Jacob insisted on having the man bless him before releasing him. The man then blessed Jacob and renamed him Israel "because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (32:28). Surely, this man must be identified as God by His admission that Jacob had "struggled with God." Moreover, the authority to bless Jacob and rename him reveals this person as more than a mere man; He is really God!

When it came time for Jacob to leave this earthly home, Joseph brought his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to his father so that they might receive his patriarchal blessing. Jacob crossed his arms to make sure that his right hand would rest on Ephraim's head, and then he blessed the boys in the name of "God" (48:15) and "the angel who has delivered me from all harm" (48:16). We must assume that this particular angel is the angel of the Lord, because He qualifies to bless in God's name. Jacob would not ordinarily invoke an angel to impart a blessing on his grandsons, but this angel of the Lord had shown Himself to be as God to Jacob. This angel was Jacob's divine protector.

Another interesting incident in connection with the angel of the Lord is related in Genesis 18. There we are told that "the Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day" (18:1). When Abraham looked up, he saw three men standing nearby. In keeping with hospitality customs among desert people, Abraham invited the men to stay for dinner, which they did. It was during this visit that the Lord assured Abraham that Sarah would bear a son within the

next year. Of course, Sarah laughed about that because she was well past child-bearing age.

As the men got up to leave, Abraham walked along with them, and we read: "Then the Lord said [to Abraham]: 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know'" (18:20–21). At this point we read: "The men turned away and went to Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord" (18:22). Because two of the angels arrived at Lot's house that evening to effect his rescue, it may be fairly inferred that the Lord spoke to Abraham through the third angel who remained with him when the other two left to rescue Lot. This angel, it would seem, is the angel of the Lord who communed at Abraham's table and later conversed with him about the wickedness of Sodom. He definitely speaks and acts as God Himself.

From all these references in the book of Genesis we conclude that the

angel of the Lord has the same divine attributes as Jehovah God Himself. He speaks with the same divine authority as God. He blesses just as God could and would do. And, finally, He judges between the righteous and the wicked—inflicting punishment on the wicked and saving His people. No wonder Edersheim could write that "the ancient Church almost unanimously adored in Him the Son of God, the Second Person of the blessed Trinity" (*Bible History—Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 71). It seems clear from Scripture that the angel of the Lord is the eternal Son of God who both before and after His incarnation ever watches over His people and seeks their salvation. What a great God and Savior is ours!

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Johannes Wollebius on the Defense of True Religion

Dr. Mark J.
Larson

Johannes Wollebius (1586–1629) was a Reformed theologian and professor of Old Testament at the University of Basel. His theological system is presented in *Compendium of Christian Theology* (1626), an influential book that was published in English in 1660.¹

A Moral Theology

The *Compendium* consists of two books, the second volume containing Wollebius's presentation on theological ethics. Chapter 10 in book 2 presents his discussion on war. He began by asserting, "War is public hostility which the magistrate exercises with armed power, for ends pleasing to God, and profitable to the state." After defining war, he set forth eight rules with respect to war that reflect the medieval concerns of justice of war (*jus ad bellum*) and justice in war (*jus in bello*).

He embraced the three classical constituents by which to judge the justness of a war: the proper authority, a just cause, and a proper end. With respect to the first issue, he said in Rule 2, "War is to be managed by the magistrate, not by private authority." In Rule 3, Wollebius mentioned the just cause criterion: "War must not be made, but that which is just and necessary." In Rule 4, he included the third element, declaring that the war will be just "if it be made . . . for a good end."

Defending Religion by Arms

With respect to the issue of a just cause, Wollebius included the defense of the true religion in book 2, chapter 4. In proposition 9, he



stated, "Religion may be defended by arms, but not propagated by arms." In defense of his thesis, he appealed to "examples of pious kings, the Maccabees, emperors, as Constantine and Theodosius." He had made the same point in proposition 8: "Although the church is built by the Word, not by the sword; yet being built, is justly defended by the sword against unjust violence."

In his affirmation that arms may defend the true religion, Wollebius stood in continuity with Aquinas, who saw the just war as being a defense of the Christian community. It entails "safeguarding the common weal of the faithful" (*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae, q. 40, art. 4). This necessarily included the defense of the freedom to practice the Christian religion in public. John Calvin had

articulated the same perspective in his sermons on 2 Samuel, asserting that a defensive war protects not only the liberty of the commonwealth but also the true religion that flourishes within it (sermon 31).

The Historical Context

Wollebius's position that the sword may defend the church had particular relevance in his lifetime when Protestantism was under attack at multiple points. In the Augsburg Interim (1548) Charles V attempted to suppress Lutheranism within the German Empire. Nicholas von Amsdorf and other Lutheran pastors in the city of Magdeburg defied imperial law and produced the Magdeburg Confession (1550), which stated, "If the high authority does not desist from eradicating true doctrine and true worship of God, then the lower magistracy is required by God's divine command to attempt, together with their subjects, to stand up to such superiors as far as possible" (Preamble).

Suppression of the Reformation gospel occurred elsewhere. The Reformed community, as well as the Lutherans, found themselves on the defensive. The Dutch revolt that began in 1566 was a defensive war fought for the sake of the Reformed religion that was being repressed by Philip II, the king of Spain. Similar developments were happening in France at the same time. On August 24, 1572, Charles IX, the king of France, began to slaughter Huguenots in Paris and throughout France. The Calvinists, like the Lutherans at Magdeburg, appealed to the lesser magistrates to resist such tyrannical encroachments with the sword. Theodore Beza produced a biblical case for such

MAKES A GREAT GIFT!

resistance. Amandus Polanus à Polansdorf, the professor with whom Wollebius studied at Basel, likewise asserted that Scripture allows war to be waged by inferior magistrates.

Godly Warfare

Although Wollebius emphasized the justice of war category, he nevertheless referred to the issue of justice in war. In book 2, chapter 10, he stated in Rule 7: "Policy joined with lying and breaking of covenants, is not to be allowed; but it may be approved with dissimulation." The difference between illegitimate lying and legitimate dissimulation was a standard theological distinction. Aquinas had argued that "the plan of campaign" (which may include the tactic of an ambush) "ought" to be "hidden from the enemy." Conversely, "the breaking of a promise" is "always unlawful." Aquinas emphatically declared, "No one ought to deceive the enemy in this way, for there are certain rights of war and covenants, which ought to be observed even among enemies" (*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae, q. 40, art. 3).

A Digest of Classical Doctrine

Wollebius presented a succinct abridgment of classic medieval and Reformed teaching on a central concern of moral theology, the doctrine of a just war. He paved the way for later Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century such as Johannes Hoornbeeck, who also taught that the true religion may not be propagated by force, but it is to be defended by arms when it is attacked by others.

1. All quotations from this volume are taken from Johannes Wollebius, *The Abridgment of Christian Divinity* (London: T. Mabb, 1660).

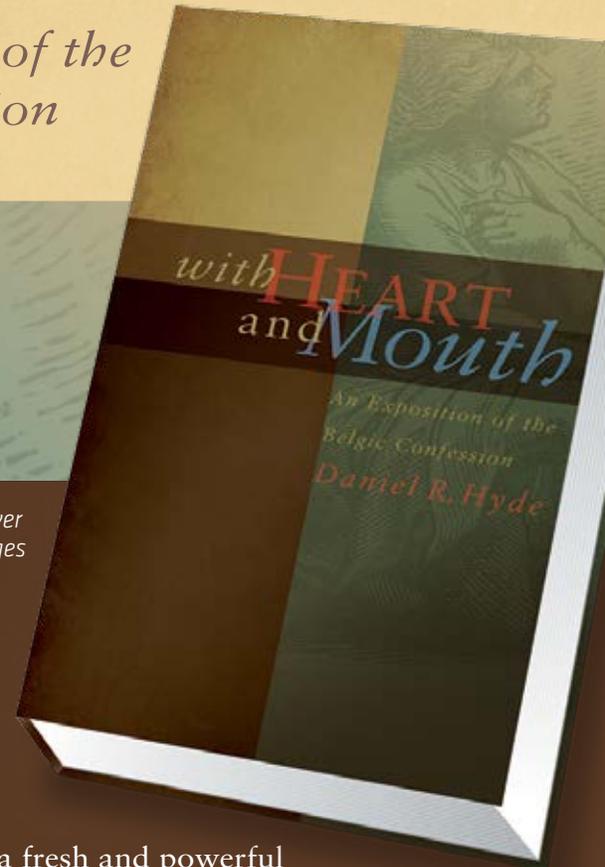
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*Singing of Christ's Church
in the Psalms*

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Daniel

Dr. John Piersma

Amos

Rev. Henry Vander Kam

II Corinthians:

*Gospel Power Magnified through
Human Weakness*

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Ephesians

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I & II Thessalonians

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II Timothy & Titus

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I Peter

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I Peter:

Pilgrims Among Pagans

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman

Bible Studies in Ruth

Dr. L. Charles Jackson

Catechism Materials

Life in Christ: *A Graduated Confessional Study Course for Grades 5-12, Based on the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards*

Learning to Know the Lord

by P. Y. De Jong

First Book of Christian Doctrine

by Hylkema & Tuuk

A Beginning Course in Christian Doctrine

by P. Y. De Jong & John R. Sittema

Other Materials

Called to Serve:

Handbook for Office-bearers
Michael Brown, ed.

Baptism, Election, & the Covenant of Grace

R. Scott Clark

Postmodern Liberalism:

Repainting a Non-Christian Faith
Casey Freswick

Jesus Loves the Little Children:

Why We Baptize Children

With Heart and Mouth:

An Exposition of the Belgic Confession

In Living Color

Images of Christ and the Means of Grace

Daniel R. Hyde

Meeting Jesus at the Feast

Israel's Festivals and the Gospel

With a Shepherd's Heart:

Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of the Elder

John R. Sittema

But for the Grace of God:

An Exposition of the Canons of Dort

What We Believe:

An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed
Cornelis P. Venema

The "Blue" Psalter Hymnal

Little One Lost:

Living with Early Infant Loss
Glenda Mathes

Sacred Bond:

Covenant Theology Explored
Michael Brown and Zach Keele

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