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**He changes the times and the
SEASONS**

He removes kings and raises up kings
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding

DANIEL 2:21



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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: The picture was taken last fall, from a bridge on 120th Ave in Holland, Michigan. It was very cloudy, but the sun broke through for a few moments for a colorful fall display. Photography by Gaylord Haan, a retired Christian school teacher and treasurer for Reformed Fellowship.

Growing Healthy Children: An Alternative to Provocative Parenting

Rev. William
Boekestein

Mr. and Mrs. Jones walked into the counselor's room with smug looks on their faces. They almost let the door slam in the face of their early-teenage son Sam and his younger sister Emma. As the family sat down, the parents locked eyes on their kids as if to say, "We all know you're why we're here. Go on and tell the counselor how you are."

And in truth, the kids had been misbehaving at school. Their church family, too, knew things were not well. Less obvious was the unhappy home the Joneses were cultivating. Mr. Jones, a successful business man, expected everyone else in the family to live up to his unreasonable standards. Mrs. Jones, frustrated and overwhelmed by her husband's heavy work schedule, had made a habit of yelling at their kids and highlighting their failures.

The Joneses had forgotten Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

It is tempting to blame children for our family problems. But Scripture does not allow us to do this. Children bear the responsibility to obey their parents. But God commands parents to raise their children with godly nurture, being careful not to frustrate them. Inestimable damage is done by parents who provoke their children and cause them to become discouraged.

Grasping the Issue

Who Is God Addressing?

While specifically addressing fathers, God is speaking to both parents. The word translated "fathers" is elsewhere used to mean "parents" (Heb. 11:23). Additionally, fathers are spoken to as covenant heads of the families. Fathers are to see that neither parent provokes the children. Fathers cannot stand idly by if their children are being provoked by their mothers.

What Does It Mean to Provoke?

The word used in Colossians 3:21 means to agitate, often to anger. Matthew Henry explains that parents provoke their children by treating them with rigor and severity, by holding the reins too tightly and thereby raising their passions, discouraging them in their duty.

Years ago I was invited to participate in a long and strenuous horse ride. Due to fear and inexperience I held the reins so tightly that the bit began to agitate the horse's mouth. Before long the horse grew restless

and threatened to throw me. I was provoking him to anger by holding the reins too tightly. He was willing to be directed. But I was undermining his willingness by my heavy hand.

In Ephesians 6:4 Paul contrasts two approaches to parenting. On the one hand, parents can provoke their children to wrath. On the other, parents can bring up the children in the training and admonition of the Lord. Failing to patiently and constructively train our children in the things of God, we often substitute more fleshly methods of parenting which provoke our children's anger.

What Is Discouragement?

The word literally means to lose energy or passion. Discouraged children lose hope, stop trying, and give up. When children say, "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter," they are often conveying discouragement. It is tempting to dismiss a dispirited child's behavior as being teenagerish or childish. But parents must resist assuming that their child's indifference is normal. In fact, there are hosts of young people who are passionate about life and enthusiastic in godliness. But sometimes this passion is squelched by parental provocation.

Forsaking Dangers

Mishandling the Rod of Discipline

Surely the rod can be used too little: "He who spares his rod hates his child" (Prov. 13:24). Children need to be taught that sin hurts. If they don't, they may lose interest in pursuing godliness because they don't see the danger of sin.



But the rod can also be used too much. The Apocrypha says, “He who loves his son will whip him often . . . bow down his neck in his youth, and beat his sides while he is young” (Ecclus. 30:1, 12). This is not Christian discipline. Sometimes a wise rebuke is better than the rod (Prov. 17:10). This is particularly so as a child moves past the early years of childhood. Matthew Henry urges parents to exercise authority not “with rigor and severity, but with kindness and gentleness.” If your children can forget that you love them, either during or immediately following discipline, you might be doing it wrong.

Maintaining a Disorderly Home

God is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:33). He has created us in his image to promote order and thrive in the context of order. A disorderly home can discourage children. A perpetually messy or especially an unsanitary home can help produce poorly adjusted children. A lack of regularly scheduled meal times and bed times can frustrate children’s God-given desire for order.

Holding Inappropriate Expectations

Some parents expect almost nothing from their kids. In such settings, children can lose energy or passion because they are never helped to “reach forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil. 3:13). In other homes too much is expected.

Experience teaches that unreasonable expectations are the ideal breeding ground for discouragement. If your children regularly fail to measure up to your standards, you might be expecting too much.

Building a Joyless Home

In some homes children are not treated with the dignity that God requires. Some parents rarely congratulate or encourage their children, focusing instead on their faults. Parents must never forget that their children are people created in God’s image. Children of believers are even included in God’s covenant (1 Cor. 7:14).

Failing to Speak as “One Flesh”

Too often, dad and mom are not operating by the same rules when it comes to interacting with their kids. One parent might be more lenient. The other might be more demanding. But such “accidental doublespeak” is dangerously confusing to our children. In irreconcilable disagreements the wife must graciously acquiesce to her husband’s leadership (Col. 3:18).

There are many more potential causes for childhood discouragement. Like good physicians, parents should evaluate the spiritual health of their children and, where applicable, diagnose the source of their children’s discouragement. Sometimes the answer will be found by looking in the mirror.

Pursuing Goals

Make Jesus Central to Your Family Life

In some “Christian” families Christ is simply not central. Too often we emphasize our own righteousness or the righteousness we expect from our children. How is this ethic different from that in a non-Christian home? We sing, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Do we apply those words in our homes?

Christ-centered parenting also means explaining to our children how they can come to Christ. Too often we tell our children to respect us, to obey us, and to grow up. But we don’t help them bring their troubles to, and find healing in, Jesus. Christ said that his yoke is easy; his burden light. He will give rest for our weary souls (Matt. 11:29–30). We need to lead our children to rest in Christ. God forbid that we would make things more difficult for our children than Jesus would.

Make Grace Shine in Your Family

Is the most powerful principle in your home grace or law? The law merely tells us what God’s will is and that we must obey it. It is grace alone that teaches us how to please God.

William Hendriksen explains that “fathers should create an atmosphere which will make obedience an easy and natural matter, namely, the atmosphere of love and confidence.”

Our emphasis should be on the positive.

Imagine that on the first day of a new job your trainer gave you only negative instructions. “Don’t ever be late to work, interrupt the boss during his meetings, use the phone for personal calls . . .” You would eventually wonder, “What AM I supposed to be doing? How do I do my job?” We often lead children to the same exasperation.

Gracious parenting especially applies to correction. Be sure that your children know that you love them *as they are*, not as you would like them to be. As a good rule of thumb, ask yourself, “What kind of correction is most helpful for me?”

Model Repentance Before Your Kids

Many children are rarely shown what it looks like to seek forgiveness from

others for their sins. We tell them to do it, but we don’t show them how. We tell them to “apologize *like you mean it*.” But we don’t demonstrate what heartfelt sorrow for sin looks like. One way to model repentance is to seek our children’s forgiveness, especially if our provocation has driven them away.

Listen to the Advice of Others

Effective parents seek counsel from their pastors and elders, their own parents, and even their own kids. They also take advantage of good books on parenting. Two great helps on spiritual parenting are *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* by Tedd Tripp and *Parenting by God’s Promises* by Joel Beeke.

Our children are a sacred trust. Our task is not so much to rule over them as to lovingly, graciously train

them to fear God. If you have ever worked with concrete you know that you have only a few hours to work it into the proper shape before it becomes immovable. So it is with children. We have just a few years to help shape the spiritual impulses that will guide them through the rest of their lives. We must do all we can to avoid misshaping our children by provoking them to discouragement.

This article previously appeared at <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/5-dangers-avoid-parenting/> and is reprinted with permission.

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A Catechism on the Holy Spirit (4): The Work of the Holy Spirit Upon the Church

Rev. Daniel R.
Hyde

So far our survey of the Heidelberg Catechism has shown that the Spirit of Christ is central to its structure and content as He is presented as intimately united to Jesus Christ and to the Christian. In light of His work upon the Christian, Heidelberg Catechism commentator Eugene Heideman once again mistakenly concludes concerning the theology of the Catechism:

It must be noticed that in this exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit the Catechism easily leads one to the conclusion that the work of the Holy Spirit takes place largely in the secret places of the heart. In its emphasis upon the individual heart to the neglect of other aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Catechism both showed itself to be still closely bound to the spirit of the mysticism of the Middle Ages, and opened the way to the abuses of pietism which arose in the following centuries and continues in many places today.¹

Of course this leads to the irony that Charismatics, such as Jack Hayford, believe we underemphasize the personal work of the Holy Spirit, while Heideman believes the Catechism overemphasizes His personal work! As we conclude our examination of the content of the Heidelberg Catechism we will see that these are both mistaken notions, the former for reasons already explained in the previous essay,² while the latter misses the plethora of material in the Catechism in which the Holy Spirit is bound with the external means of

grace—the public preaching of the Word and Sacraments of Christ’s church.

Preaching

The Catechism makes a vital link between the work of the Spirit and preaching. Question and answer 65 speaks of the origin of true faith as the work of the Holy Spirit “by the preaching of the holy Gospel” (cf. Q&A 21).³ Here the Catechism’s primary author, Zacharius Ursinus, utilizes the classic categories of causality in saying that the Spirit is the efficient cause of faith while the preaching of the gospel is the instrumental cause.⁴ This means that while the Holy Spirit is the sole creator of faith, He uses the means of the Word as the way He creates this faith. In saying this, we can see that the Word and Spirit are so united that the Word can be said to be the external form of the Spirit, while the Spirit can be said to be the internal power of the Word.

Moving into question and answer 67, the Catechism asks, “Are both these, then, the Word and the Sacraments, designed to direct our faith to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?” In speaking of the preached Word, the Heidelberg answers, “Yes, truly; for *the Holy Ghost teaches in the Gospel* . . . that our whole salvation stands in the one sacrifice of Christ made for us on the cross” (emphasis added). We find in these words a commentary on what the Catechism later describes as the “lively preaching” of the Word (Q&A 98). Preaching is the living Word of the Holy Spirit to His church. As the apostle Paul says, the preaching

of Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2) is preaching that is not in “plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4). The Holy Spirit operates upon men’s hearts through the minister and through the sacramental elements—water, bread, and wine.⁵

The Sacraments in General

These sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Q&A 68), are used by the same Holy Spirit primarily to confirm the faith which He has already created in the hearts of believers. This is taught by questions and answers 65 and 67.⁶ Question and answer 67 teaches us that the Holy Spirit condescends to work through the ordinary. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, then, the mission-minded, evangelistic church that Heideman laments is not sufficiently envisioned in the Catechism is found in the church that preaches the gospel in a lively way (Q&A 98) and that faithfully administers the sacraments (Q&A 65). The Spirit is found in the church that is filled with the preached Word, the waters of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Through these means Christ’s mission of bringing the evangel to the world becomes the church’s mission. Surely this is no damp, passionless, insufficient doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism

Turning to the sacraments in particular, we see an indisputable fact about the Holy Spirit in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Spirit is

sole creator of faith

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sin and bringing us to new life

speaks to the children of
believers through baptism

is that personal, intimate, comforting bond of union between Christ, the
anointed, and His people, who share in His anointing

mentioned in *all* six questions and answers devoted to the doctrine of baptism. What this means is that baptism is no mere symbol, nor is it a work whereby sins are forgiven just by placing water on someone *ex opere operato*, but is a means of the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Question 69 asks, “How is it signified and sealed unto thee in holy Baptism that thou hast part in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross?”

Thus: that Christ instituted this outward washing with water, and has joined therewith this promise, that I am washed with his blood and Spirit from the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water whereby commonly the filthiness of the body is taken away.

The outward sign of water, which in human terms washes the body, signifies the parallel inner reality of the cleansing of the soul by Christ’s blood *and* Spirit. Lyle Bierma describes Olevianus’s parallelism between the outer and inner action of baptism, saying,

It is the Holy Spirit who purifies, not the water. But he will go so far as to say that the water of baptism is more than mere water (*schlect wasser*), for the water is so bound to the promise of

God that the physical cleansing becomes if not the instrument at least the occasion for the spiritual cleansing. In every baptism there are two parallel baptizers, two baptizands, and two washings. As the outer self is washed with the water by the minister, the inner self is washed with the blood of the Christ by the Holy Spirit. Physical baptism is still only a sign or outward testimony of spiritual baptism, but the two events do coincide and are bound together in the relationship between promise and sign.⁷

Question and answer 70 goes on to explain this doctrine, asking, “What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?”

It is to have the forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which he shed for us in his sacrifice on the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblamable lives.

We notice here, again, the theme of the double benefit (*duplex beneficium*) of Jesus Christ in justification and sanctification.⁸ Baptism is an outward sign and seal that Christ’s

blood justifies while the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, by putting to death our sin and bringing us to new life.

Where, though, do the Scriptures promise this? Question 71 clearly wants catechumens to be able to locate this doctrine in Scripture, by answering with a quotation of several texts of Scripture (Matt. 28:19; Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16). Especially in reference to Titus 3:5, the Catechism understands this washing as the work of the Holy Spirit. This renewal spoken of in the Catechism was incorporated into the “Form of Baptism” of the Palatinate Liturgy, which explains what it means to be baptized “in the name of the Holy Ghost”:

we are assured that the Holy Ghost will be the Teacher and Comforter of us and our children to all eternity, and make us true members of the body of Christ. (And further that we have fellowship with all His benefits in common with all the members of His Church, so that our sins shall be remembered no more forever, and that the corruptions and infirmities, that still cling to us may be continually mortified and a new life be commenced, which finally in the resurrection, (when our body shall be made like unto the glorious body of Christ), shall be completely revealed in us.)⁹

At this point the Catechism takes a polemic turn, distancing itself from Rome: “Is, then, the outward washing of water itself the washing away of sins?” (Q&A 72). This question is succinctly answered, “No; for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin.”¹⁰

Question and answer 73 presses this point, no doubt to impress upon catechumens and those listening to catechetical sermons, “Why, then, doth the Holy Ghost call Baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?” The answer:

God speaks thus not without great cause: namely, not only to teach us thereby that like as the filthiness of the body is taken away by water, so our sins also are taken away by the blood and Spirit of Christ; but much more, that by this divine pledge and token he may assure us that we are as really washed from our sins spiritually as our bodies are washed with water.

Although we know that it is the Holy Spirit who washes us from our sins, He interchanges the sign and the thing signified when He speaks. The Spirit does this because it is “through the use of the signs” that our faith is confirmed. Therefore, the waters of baptism are the pledge that our sins are forgiven.¹¹

The final question and answer on the topic of baptism is meant to show the catholicity of the Reformed faith by distancing itself from Anabaptism on the subject of whether infants, too, should be baptized. Even here the Catechism mentions the Holy Spirit, saying that the “sign of the covenant” is to be given to children of believers “since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God, and both redemption from sin and the Holy Ghost, who works faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to their parents” (Q&A 74).

The Holy Spirit speaks to the children of believers through baptism “in a manner adapted to their capacity” to teach them that they belong to the covenant of God.¹²

Lord’s Supper

With its presentation of the holy Supper, the Heidelberg Catechism uses language meant to unite Zurich, Geneva, and the Melancthonians. To do this the technical jargon of the “mode” of Christ’s “real” presence is absent. Instead, the role of the Holy Spirit is put in place of this and any other term in three key questions and answers. In question 76 we are asked, “What is it to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?”

It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the forgiveness of sins and life eternal, but moreover, also, to be so united more and more to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us, that although he is in heaven, and we on the earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, and live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are governed by one soul.

To eat and drink Christ is not only to believe, as Zwingli consistently pointed out, quoting Saint Augustine,¹³ but also to be united to Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit. The inherent polemical note must be recognized here against Rome and Gnesio-Lutheranism (“true” Lutherans as opposed to the followers of Philip Melancthon), as it is the Holy Spirit who unites partakers to the body of Christ, not the eating of the corporal presence of Christ in the bread and wine.¹⁴ It was the role of the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper that distinguished Calvin’s doctrine of the Supper from the Roman and Gnesio-Lutheran doctrine and that is followed

by the Heidelberg.¹⁵ In the words of B. A. Gerrish, “The catechism explicitly teaches a communion with the body of Christ and, like Calvin, makes the Holy Spirit the bond of union between Christ’s body in heaven and ourselves on earth.”¹⁶

This emphasis of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper is also expressed in question and answer 79, which asks, “Why, then, doth Christ call the bread his body, and the cup his blood, or the New Testament in his blood; and St. Paul, the communion of the body and the blood of Christ?”

Christ speaks thus not without great cause: namely, not only to teach us thereby that like as bread and wine sustain this temporal life, so also his crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink of our souls unto life eternal; but much more, by this visible sign and pledge to assure us that we are as really partakers of his true body and blood, through the working of the Holy Ghost, as we receive by the mouth of the body these holy tokens in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly our own as if we had ourselves suffered and done all in our own persons.

Again it is emphasized that Christ is received not by mere eating, contra Rome and Lutheranism, nor by simply remembering, contra Zwingli, but through the Holy Spirit’s powerful and mysterious work. Finally, this is expressed in the controversial question and answer 80, which asks, “What difference is there between the Lord’s Supper and the Popish Mass?” The answer, in part, is that we are “ingrafted into Christ” by the Holy Spirit, not by eating and drinking transformed bread and wine.

As this section of our essay has shown, the Catechism does not teach that the Spirit works in an unmediated way

directly upon the soul of the believer, as Pentecostalism, mysticism, and pietism teach. Instead, it is clear that the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the Holy Spirit works in the church through its public, external means of preaching and sacraments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what we have seen is that far from presenting a bare outline of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, minimizing the person and work of the Holy Spirit for the mission and life of the church and the Christian, the Heidelberg Catechism is a catechetical presentation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. The authors clearly utilized the person and work of the Spirit as an organizing part of its macrostructure. Furthermore, the Catechism teaches throughout that the Holy Spirit is that personal, intimate, comforting bond of union between Christ, the anointed, and His people, who share in His anointing. The Spirit of God permeates question after question of the Heidelberg Catechism, so much so that we can say there is no doctrine in our Catechism from which the Holy Spirit is absent; therefore, there is no doctrine of the Reformed faith from which the Holy Spirit may be absent.

1. Eugene P. Heideman, "God the Holy Spirit," in *Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude: A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. Donald J. Bruggink (New York: The Half Moon Press, 1963), 114.
2. Daniel R. Hyde, "A Catechism on the Holy Spirit (3): The Work of the Holy Spirit Upon the Christian," *The Outlook* (July-August 2015): 6-9.
3. All references to the Heidelberg Catechism are from *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1996), 3:307-55.
4. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (1852; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, reprinted 1985), 340.
5. Cf. *Second Helvetic Confession*, ch. 1.4: "Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully

called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful." Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:832.

6. Ursinus, *Commentary*, 352.
7. Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 87.
8. Ursinus, *Commentary*, 358, 61.
9. John H. A. Bomberger, "The Old Palatinate Liturgy of 1563," *The Mercersburg Review* 2 (May 1850): 280. This form was brought into the Dutch Reformed churches through Petrus Dathenus, the minister of the Dutch refugee congregation in Frankenthal and later preacher in the court of Frederick III. This form from his 1566 *Psalter* is found in "Baptism of Infants: Form Number 1," in *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 123, and reads:

the Holy Spirit assures us, by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

10. Here Ursinus explains the use of "sacramental" language. *Commentary*, 364-65.
11. Ursinus, *Commentary*, 365.

12. Ursinus, *Commentary*, 366.

13. "On the Lord's Supper," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 197-98.
14. Ursinus, *Commentary*, 382, 406-15; cf. Lyle D. Bierma, "The Sources and Theological Orientation of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. Lyle D. Bierma, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 75-80.
15. Lyle D. Bierma, "What Hath Wittenberg to Do with Heidelberg? Philip Melancthon and the Heidelberg Catechism," in *Melancthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg*, ed. Karin Maag, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 112.
16. B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 125.

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"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7

TEACHING VACANCY – NEW ZEALAND

The Reformed Christian School Association in Upper Hutt, New Zealand is seeking a teacher to teach upper primary at our Christian School. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith.

Applicants should be committed to the Reformed faith and to Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a small covenant school, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Short term contracts will be considered. Please forward your C.V. or any questions you may have to: board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz

Ours is an age of stunning multimedia technology. IMAX theaters project images onto a screen so large that we must turn our heads to take it all in. Advanced 3D technology and the advent of hi def has sharpened video images in remarkable ways. Thundering subwoofers help us to *feel* movies, and digital scent technology even lets us *smell* the images on screen. Coupled with computer-generated imagery (CGI) technology, all of this has enabled filmmakers in 2015 to convey experiences and ideas with a power and vividness never available before. Many of us have gripped our seats to prevent falling, plugged our ears in fear, and held up our hands to deflect (seemingly) oncoming objects, all from the comfort of padded theater seating.

It may sound surprising, but the Old Testament prophets also lived in a stunning age of communication. Though they lacked 3D, IMAX, and CGI, they were still able to share remarkable experiences in vivid ways. They had at their disposal a powerful tool for conveying the power and intensity of God's appearances and actions in history: imagery. The prophets stirred the emotions and kindled the imaginations of hearers through a rich array of images, symbols, and metaphors.

In this article, we will consider the oft-neglected power of prophetic

imagery. Though it can be a challenge for modern moviegoers to appreciate the imagery of the Old Testament prophets, we will strive to become better readers of this type of biblical literature. After discussing the method and power of prophetic imagery, we will consider an especially vivid passage of Scripture, Ezekiel 1. I will suggest three interpretive steps to take in order to experience something of the same awe and wonder felt by the original readers of these types of texts.

Imagery as Powerful . . . and Puzzling

Stones growing into mountains that fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:35), trees growing so high that they reach heaven (Dan. 4:10–11), horns that scatter and terrify entire nations (Zech. 1:21), seven lamps which roam about the whole earth as the eyes of the Lord (Zech. 4:10)—images like these were the hi def of the ancient world. D. Brent Sandy explains: “In order to speak to our hearts, the powerful language of prophecy brings God’s might and wrath and humankind’s sin and doom to life with surrealistic images. It is reality described in unreal ways.”¹

Many of us struggle to appreciate books like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah because we have suffered imagination atrophy at the hands of multimedia technology. Filmmakers

have expended a great deal of creative mental energy so that viewers do not have to. Many of us do not even know where to begin when trying to envision image-laden passages of Scripture. To better understand prophetic imagery, we need to use our imagination. By imagination, I do not mean what children use to come up with nonexistent friends and pets. Interpretive imagination is a tool we use to piece together things that do not immediately seem to fit. Kevin Vanhoozer explains: “The imagination is a cognitive faculty by which we see as a whole what those without imagination see only as unrelated parts. . . . Where reason analyzes, breaking things (and texts) up into their constituent parts, imagination synthesizes, making connections between things that appear unrelated.”² In the paragraphs that follow, we will put our imaginations to work in this way.

Another reason we struggle is that prophetic imagery lacks the precision of more literal types of language. This does not mean it is deficient; indeed, this lack of precision is its strength. Images, like metaphors (a closely related literary technique), force us to grapple with both similarities and differences between things being associated. But as Tremper Longman notes, “the similarity is unstated or hidden, and the reader must meditate on the metaphor to



arrive at its interpretation.”³ While this meditation takes work, language experts note that this makes for a more memorable and rewarding experience.⁴

A final reason we struggle to understand prophetic imagery is due to the change in cultural metaphors that happens over time. Today we associate traits (e.g., speed, agility) and abstract concepts (e.g., death, brain activity) with symbols and metaphors that were not shared with people who knew nothing of our modern technology. To appreciate their imagery, we must translate their symbols and metaphors into the symbols and metaphors we use today to express the same ideas.

Experiencing Ezekiel 1

Ezekiel, who was exiled along with King Jehoiachin in 597 BC (see 2 Kings 24–25), ministered to two main groups of people. First, some Judeans had avoided the initial exile of 597 BC and continued living in Jerusalem under Zedekiah. They presumptuously believed they had avoided God’s judgment. Ezekiel had to convince them that God would not remain with them for long; they would indeed be punished for their idolatry. Second, many who were exiled with Ezekiel were true, repentant believers who worried that God had abandoned them. Ezekiel sought to convince them that God was

preserving a remnant in exile which could indeed experience His nearness though far from the Jerusalem temple. In order to convey these realities to each group, God provided Ezekiel with vivid imagery that would fiercely rattle the Jerusalemites and deeply comfort the exiles. The first revelation Ezekiel received from God contained many strange features. In this article we will limit our focus to only two: the four creatures and the “wheels within wheels” that accompanied them.

1. Study how other biblical writers use the imagery. Though some imagery is clarified by studying other ancient Near Eastern writings, it is best to try to understand biblical imagery on its own terms before expanding the inquiry. How do we determine the way other biblical writers use these images? Two tools will help: a concordance and a Bible dictionary. One especially useful volume is the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.⁵

Ezekiel 1:5 describes four creatures emerging from the windstorm. Because of the four points of the compass, the number four is frequently used by biblical writers (especially in visionary material) to depict universality and completeness (cf. Dan. 7:2–7; 11:4; Zech. 1:18–20; 6:1–8; Rev. 4:6–8; 7:1; 20:8). That each of the four creatures has four faces further impresses upon us their

greatness. As applied to the creatures that accompany the presence of the infinite and almighty God (see Ezek. 1:28), this use of four is appropriately grandiose.

The types of faces on each creature detail their abilities. First, each has the face of a man. As man is the apex of God’s creation, made uniquely in God’s image to have dominion (Gen. 1:26–27; Ps. 8:4–8), this face associates the creatures with the greatness of man as God created him.

Second, each has the face of a lion. In Scripture, lions are clever, powerful, and ruthless killers (Num. 23:24; Ps. 7:3; Dan. 6:24). When one is killed, it illustrates the strength and skills of the man who kills it (Judg. 14:5ff.; 1 Sam. 34:17ff.). When one is tamed, it illustrates God’s infinite power (Isa. 11:7; Dan. 6:22). As lions are sometimes agents of God’s judgment (1 Kings 20:35–36; 2 Kings 17:25), the creatures in Ezekiel 1 resemble the ferocity of God’s perfect and righteous wrath.

Third, each has the face of an ox. Biblical writers speak of oxen in terms of strength (Exod. 21:28; Deut. 33:17) and in terms of wealth and prestige (Gen. 32:6; Exod. 20:17). For most of history and across most world cultures, oxen are well-attested symbols of raw power.

Finally, each has the face of an eagle. The eagle is described in Scripture as swift (Deut. 28:49; Job 9:25–26; Jer. 4:13). Eagles’ ability to soar high in the heavens is awe-inspiring (Prov. 30:18–19) and illustrates their incredible stamina (Ps. 103:5).

Before we tie the imagery of these four faces together, let us consider the mysterious wheels that accompany them. Though the wheels do pose interpretive challenges, other passages help us to narrow down the possibilities.

In Scripture, these particular kinds of wheels (Heb. *’ōfan*) are found on chariots (Exod. 14:25; Nah. 3:2), on the ten bronze stands in Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 7:30–39), and on agricultural implements used for winnowing and threshing (Prov. 20:26; Isa. 28:27). Their design, however, is somewhat mysterious. Ezekiel 1:16 calls each a “wheel within a wheel,” which may refer to a hub design, or to two wheels that intersect at 90-degree angles (impossible in our world, though not in the world of imagery), perhaps to help the creatures travel any direction without turning (Ezek. 1:17).

While we sometimes take for granted the availability and utility of wheels, we must not lose sight of the movement that wheels enable. Key to this passage is the ability of wheels to enable the movement of heavy objects like the bronze stands in the temple, each made of solid bronze and carrying 220 gallons of water. (The water alone weighed 1,835 pounds!) But as God is also described as a chariot warrior (Ps. 104:3), the wheels may also convey swiftness and ferocity. As we will see in a moment, however, drawing together a seemingly paradoxical combination of traits (heavy transport and swift attack) is common in prophetic imagery.

2. Imagine the imagery in modern symbols and ideas. We noted above that we must use our imaginations in order to grasp the fullness and intensity of prophetic imagery. How might we imagine Ezekiel 1 in terms of modern metaphors?

What do we make of the fullness or universality conveyed by the number four? Because we still use the four points of the compass in navigation today, there is not quite as large of a gulf to cross. Nevertheless, because the number four may seem like a small number, perhaps expanding the number to reflect the large number of vehicles in a presidential motorcade, or further, envisioning the swarms of watercraft crossing the English Channel on D-Day will conjure up in us an appreciation for these four creatures. This is a complete force of supernatural beings, entirely fit to accompany the grandeur of the Lord’s glory.

The different faces on the four creatures comprise a catalogue of abilities, drawing together into each creature what ordinarily would exist in separate creatures. Eagles are fierce, but not fierce like lions. Lions are strong, but not strong like oxen. Lions are also perceptive, yet not perceptive like humans. And none of these creatures has the speed and stamina of the eagle. The creatures in Ezekiel 1, however, exhibit the ultimate examples of these traits in themselves. Perhaps we can imagine a similar combination of traits by combining the speed of a fighter jet, the power and brawn of a locomotive, the intelligence of a fully staffed NASA mission-control group, and the ferocity of a detail of Navy Seals. (As with the wheels, here too seemingly disparate images of brute strength and swift agility have been drawn together.) The creatures Ezekiel saw were unsurpassed in terms of creaturely abilities, helping to magnify the infinite and perfect strength of the God in whose presence

they served. (Note that the creatures appear again in Ezekiel 10:3–22 and Revelation 6–8, albeit in modified form. This seeming ability to shape-shift is another feature of prophetic imagery.)

Finally, the wheels on the creatures draw our attention to the mobility of these creatures and the God whom they accompany. For a people whose focus had long been on the permanence of God’s presence in the Jerusalem temple, the movability of God and His attendants would be a remarkable thing. Yet in just a few chapters, the people of Jerusalem will witness God’s glory departing from the temple (Ezek. 10:3–11:23). How might we envision such an unexpected move? From October 11–14, 2011, people lined the streets to watch the space shuttle *Endeavour* creep from LAX through the streets of Los Angeles to Exposition Park. It is hard to imagine that behemoth escaping earth’s gravity atop a tail of fire, but there is something almost more surreal about watching it roll past one’s apartment on something as ordinary as wheels.

3. Imagine the emotional response to the imagery. What we have done in the last two steps is a bit like “showing your work” in math. But we must not forget that the goal of this process is to try to experience the imagery with the power and intensity it is designed to convey. Gary V. Smith offers an important warning: “In some ways the reader should not stop to rationally analyze every metaphor; instead, one should subconsciously enter in the world of these prophetic images to experience their richness and internalize the emotional world they depicted.”⁶

The mourning exiles, those who worried that God had forgotten them, received a powerful shot of comfort and confidence from Ezekiel’s opening vision. Yahweh, the God of Israel, had not been outwitted by

Nebuchadnezzar. No, even here by the Chebar Canal in Babylon God remains accompanied by a complete detachment of heavenly escorts. He has not been kidnapped by hostile forces intended to gain control of His realm. His kingship is intact! His rule remains unchallenged!

What is more, this detachment of escorts is not battered and bandaged. They did not protect their master by the skin of their teeth. No, they are strong, fast, brilliant, and fierce! If *they* have remained this way after the exile, how much more the Creator of these beings? The exiles look upon a force that cannot be thwarted, and they are active and at work. Though everything had seemed lost, now it is evident that nothing has changed. God and His servants remain as strong as ever. Can you imagine the waves of relief that begin to wash over the exiles? What is the greatest news you've ever heard? "It was just a little scare, but don't worry, the baby is just fine." "Good news, the tumor is benign." "The company has just secured its contracts through the next ten years; your job is no longer set to be terminated." Imagine this relief amplified even further!

The presumptuous Jerusalemites, however, who felt that God was no nearer or further with or without the Babylonians in control, were in for a big surprise. In a few chapters they will despise God, exchanging worship of Him for worship of images and created things (Ezek. 8:5–16). What is more, they will accuse God of injustice, thereby envisioning Him to be like the fickle gods of the surrounding nations (Ezek. 18:25–29). But here God is revealed as still fully in control. Here the God who hates idolatry and treachery is accompanied by the fiercest and strongest agents of judgment and wrath imaginable. Can you imagine the sinking feeling and fear that must begin welling up in their stomachs?

What about the wheels? What does God's motion convey to these groups? For the many Judeans who had grown accustomed to God's presence in Jerusalem—some of whom wrongly conflated the symbol of God's presence (the temple) with the extent of God's presence (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7–10; Jer. 23:24; Isa. 66:1)—a God prepared to "roll out" would cut them to the core. The presumptuous Jerusalemites would be shaking with fear, desperately wishing to keep God close. They knew His benefits; they had experienced His patience. And now they knew that these were coming to an end.

But for the exiles who had just journeyed some nine hundred miles from Jerusalem, likely carrying their possessions, elderly, and children in carts, seeing God's presence similarly ready to travel would stir in them great excitement. God would Himself make the journey to them! I can imagine that their relief at the mobility of God's presence, coming to them in their exile, conjured in them something like that of the aged Simeon who saw God's arrival in the person of the infant Christ and cried out a blessing to God, saying: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29–32, ESV).

A Journey of a Thousand Miles . . .

Of course, what we have covered here only scratches the surface. More could be said about imagery in general. Many more details from Ezekiel 1 could be studied. Indeed, more details from the creatures and the wheels themselves could have been explored. But alas, space does not allow for us to take more than the initial step of this long but exciting journey. Nevertheless, the steps we have taken have given us a toehold for studying other passages of prophetic

imagery and have opened the door for some wonderful encounters with these powerful passages in Scripture. Though it is tempting to stick to "easier" passages in the Bible, reading and reflecting upon prophetic imagery is worth the effort as it enables us to hear God's voice in vivid and powerful ways. The Old Testament prophets may have not had IMAX, 3D, CGI, or the many other multimedia technologies available to us today, but that did not prevent them from helping their readers to experience God's word in his def.

1. D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 19.

2. Kevin Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation: Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," in *Whatever Happened to Truth*, ed. Andreas Köstenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 121.

3. Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation in Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation: Six Volumes in One*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 176.

4. See Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 134, who notes that literature too easily understood is less informative and "devoid of interest" (i.e., boring) when compared with writings that challenge expectations and take more work to process.

5. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998).

6. Gary V. Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 52.

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Bible Study on Mark

Lesson 15: The Coming of the King

Mark 11:1–12:12

Rev. William
Boekestein

When, in AD 70, the emperor Titus marched on Jerusalem with four legions of soldiers he decimated the Jewish population and destroyed the thousand-year-old temple built by King Solomon. Some forty years earlier another King had entered the city. He brought no sword or shield, but only a small group of fisherman and whatever ragtag crowds might have followed Him from the surrounding countryside. He made no overt declaration of war. Nonetheless, in His triumphal entry Jesus shook the city. The responses He evoked from both friend and foe offer important insights into how we should respond to the King of kings.

Beginning in chapter 11 Mark records the second major phase in Jesus' ministry, often referred to as Passion Week.¹ The intensity of the narrative increases while the pace slows. Almost 40 percent of Mark's Gospel focuses on one week of Jesus' life. For good reason do Christians place special emphasis on Passion Week.

Jesus Makes a Royal Entry (11:1–10)

The town of Bethany, on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, would be the staging area for Jesus' triumphal entry, which, notably, took place on the tenth of Nisan, lamb selection day (cf. John 1:29).²

Preparation for the Entry (11:1–6)

It is critical to see Jesus' triumphal entry as patent fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Matt. 21:5). Zechariah 9:9–10, which foreshadows the event, describes the Messiah in terms of joyfulness, peace, lowliness, justice,

dominion, and salvation. These verses also include such unmistakable markers as the crowd's shouting and the use of the colt, both of which Jesus clearly fulfills. John tells us that at the time the disciples failed to connect Zechariah's prophecy with the fulfillment which took place before their eyes. But after "Jesus was glorified, they remembered that this had been written of him and been done of him" (John 12:16). Sometimes we reflect on Bible events in a spirit of wistful romanticism: "If only we had been there, how strong our faith would be." The disciples were there, and they didn't get the connection. But we, having the luxury of complete revelation and the abundant outpouring of the Spirit, "have the prophetic word confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19).

In terms of immediate preparation, the disciples were sent to retrieve the colt upon which Jesus would ride. Jesus gave detailed instructions, which, as expected, come to pass exactly as He had said. As the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10), Jesus—with perfect propriety—commandeered a young donkey (v. 2) which He had prepared for just this occasion. Still, so as not to give offense the disciples were to insure the colt's return (v. 3). He who had divine right to all things still paid due respect to the law.

The Entry (11:7–10)

Christ's entry into Jerusalem was a public demonstration of His humility. A large city to begin with, Jerusalem would have been overrun with an influx of Passover visitors. In

addition, Jesus had begun to attract a large following, especially after raising Lazarus from the dead (John 12:12, 18). Given the high-profile context, the manner of Jesus' entry is stunning. He rode in, not on a glistening, battle-ready stallion but on a borrowed donkey. Sitting upon a crude clothes-saddle Jesus unassumingly plodded His way through the city street, lined as it was with coats and palm branches. Up to this point, Jesus had constantly warned the crowds not to make His heavenly royalty known (John 6:15). He knew that such a commotion would be a precursor to His death. But now, in the shadow of the cross, the words of Zechariah 9:9 take shape before every watching eye: "Behold, your king . . . lowly and riding on a donkey."

The crowd rightly read the scene as a call to worship. Above the din of the mob the words from Psalm 118:25–26 could be heard loud and clear.

Save now, I pray, O Lord;

O Lord, I pray, send now
prosperity.

Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord!

We have blessed you from the
house of the Lord.

This psalm was written to commemorate the Passover and the Israelite exodus from Egypt. It was, therefore, perfectly suited to honor the Deliverer who was greater than Moses. When we learn to see Christ as our delivering King the response will be heartfelt, unashamed, Spirit-energized worship. Jesus said that if His disciples had kept silent the stones would have cried out (Luke



Jesus Inspects the Temple (11:11)

Jesus' cleansing of the temple was not the result of sudden and rash impulse. The night before the cleansing He had entered the temple and "looked around at all things." What He saw fully warranted His later actions. What if Jesus slipped into the worship service in your church and "looked around at all things"? What would He think about the things we do to distract ourselves during sermons that we feel are too long, about Bibles remaining closed during much of the service, about the lethargic mumbling we sometimes try to pass off as singing? The apostle John tells us that Jesus is "in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" (Rev. 1:13). He does witness what takes place in His churches (v. 20).

As the hour was already late, Jesus went to Bethany to rest, no doubt thinking about what the temple had become. Truly, the glory had departed (Ezek. 10:18).

The Barren Fig Tree (11:12-14)

The next morning, while on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem Jesus grew hungry. Up ahead He spotted a fig tree, which upon closer inspection bore no figs. In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again" (v. 14). Jesus has been criticized for judging a fig tree for fruitlessness

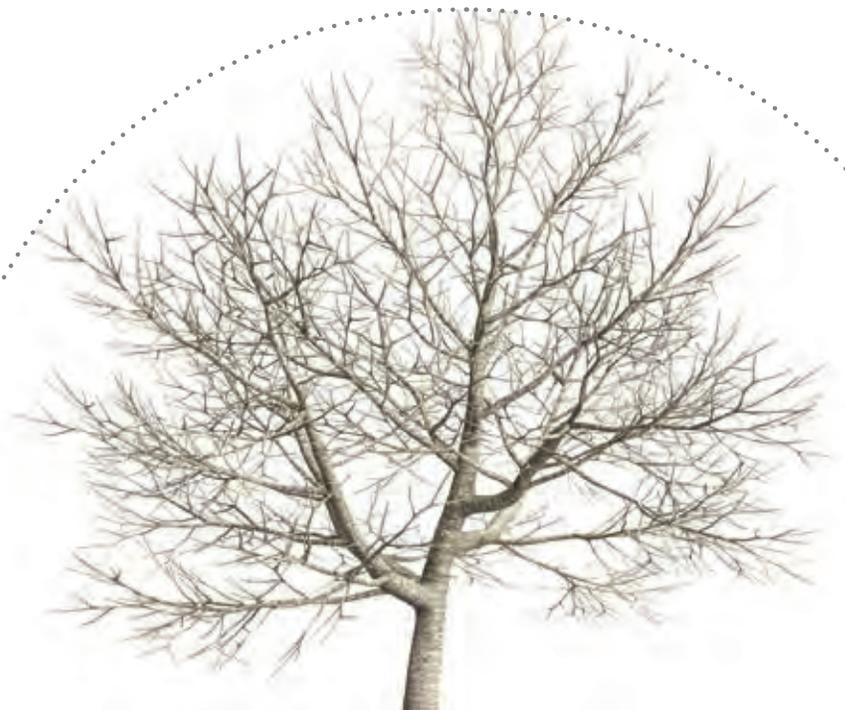
19:39-40). Sadly, the teachers of the law and the religious leaders—those who should have welcomed Jesus with the greatest enthusiasm—became stone-silent at this call to worship. Conversely, Matthew tells us that the next day, children who had gathered in the temple were repeating the crowd's song: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt. 21:15). Jesus humbly but triumphantly entered Jerusalem to the praise of His disciples, including children.

Because He came during Passover, an event that memorialized the Jews' deliverance from Egypt, many onlookers wrongly anticipated that Jesus would deliver them from their own oppressors, the Romans. What they missed is that the first Passover served also as a symbol of deliverance from sin. Appropriately, Christ's triumphal entry symbolizes His present spiritual rule over His people and His power to deliver His own from the enemy's tyranny. But we should not expect Christ to cure all our political or social problems here and now; such an expectation imports into the present age God's plans for the age to come (cf. Col. 1:20). But as He rules our hearts He frees us from an insatiable desire for carnal pleasure, and the shame and hopelessness that always follow. Because of His power and love we can know that He'll answer us every time we cry out, "Save now!"

Christ's triumphal entry anticipates His future comprehensive rule. This event is a window into the age when Christ will be received by eager hearts in heaven. This is what we look forward to when we pray for God's kingdom to come.

Jesus Judges Fruitlessness (11:11-26)

Jesus' triumphal entry captured everyone's attention. While in the spotlight Jesus would perform two great tasks. He would finish His work as prophet by teaching the people, and as priest by dying for their sins. He would begin His teaching in the morning. But He first engaged in a little reconnaissance. In verses 11-24 Mark masterfully intertwines two narratives in which Jesus inspected and judged a fig tree and the temple.



during the fruitless season (v. 13). But Jesus inspected the tree looking for evidence of the onset of fructification. He found nothing but leaves. This tree was not going to bear fruit. Earlier, Jesus had told a parable about a fig tree which had been barren for three years (Luke 13:6–9). Understandably, the owner was unwilling to waste time and resources on such a useless tree. Jesus was creating an analogy between these trees and the people of Israel, who had been given all the benefits necessary to bear fruit. Fruitless but otherwise healthy-looking trees symbolize the faith of hypocrites. Theirs are “the abundant leaves of a boastful yet empty profession.”³ Notably, Jesus’ judgment against the fig tree is His only miracle of judgment⁴ and His last miracle recorded by Mark. Indeed, the ax is already laid at the root of fruitless Israel (cf. Matt. 3:10). Leaving the fig tree, Jesus and His disciples proceeded to the temple.

The Cleansing of the Temple (11:15–19)

If we understand Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree, His actions in the temple will be quite clear. The temple bustled with religious activity but produced little true piety. Without Christ, “Judaism is a dead and fruitless religion; a monument of divine judgment.”⁵

The temple had been built for the purpose of worship. Its sheer size was awe-inspiring. It covered close to a million square feet and was longer than three football fields. It was as beautiful as it was large, exquisitely detailed. But what was meant for worship had become commercialized. Auctioneers sold sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices. Currency exchangers provided proper Jewish coin for the tithe while handsomely helping themselves in the process.

Intolerant of these distractions, Jesus cleansed the temple, blocking off “all traffic across the temple courts. Everything came to a standstill.”⁶ Jesus is foreshadowing the reality that this temple would be made obsolete in Himself (John 2:19; Heb. 9:11). The animals which Jesus drove out would soon no longer be necessary. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world was fast approaching the heavenly altar (John 1:29).

After clearing the temple, Jesus rebuffed Israel’s lack of evangelistic zeal. If God calls His temple a house of prayer for the nations (v. 17), then His people should care about the nations (cf. Ps. 67). Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 56:7 reveals Israel’s self-absorbed neglect of the nations. The Gentiles’ court had been annexed by greedy money changers. The temple had become a sort of good luck charm which the people exploited in a fruitless attempt to alleviate their soiled consciences (Jer. 7:11).

The Shriveled Fig Tree and Prayer (11:20–26)

On their way back to Jerusalem the following day the disciples were amazed to see the cursed fig tree already withered. Jesus used this object lesson to teach on the power of believing prayer. One impediment to powerful prayer is a conscience soiled by grudges (vv. 25–26; cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). Until we lovingly, humbly, and patiently deal with conflict our prayers will be hindered. Through forgiveness we resolve not to hold another’s sin against that person, either in thoughts, word, or actions.

Jesus Confirms His Authority (11:27–12:12)

After Jesus had cleared the temple, the scribes and chief priests met to hatch a plan to destroy Him (11:18). It should not surprise us to read, therefore, that as soon as Jesus entered the temple

the Jewish leaders confront Him on the issue of authority.

Jesus’ Authority Questioned (11:27–33)

Recalling Jesus’ actions from the previous day, representatives from the Sanhedrin (made up of the chief priests, scribes, and elders; v. 28) get right to the point: “Who gave you the authority to do these things?” The question of authority is legitimate. God promises strict judgment on those who pretend to speak on His behalf (Jer. 14:14–16). But His opponents revealed their bias against Jesus in two ways. First, His authority *had* been attested by many miracles. They might not have approved of Jesus, but God clearly did. Second, their question seemingly has no good answer. Without divine credentials, Jesus had no right to teach. But if He claimed that His authority came directly from God, in their minds He would be guilty of blasphemy.

Knowing the Sanhedrin’s insincerity, in response Jesus asked His own question: “The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?” (v. 31). Jesus is not being evasive. If the Jewish leaders had honestly answered Jesus’ question, their own would have been answered too. Everyone acknowledged that John’s baptism was from heaven—and John testified of Christ. In fact, it was while John was baptizing Jesus that God spoke from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus’ question was easy. When the leaders of Israel claimed not to be able to answer, they were lying. They believed that John had just as much divine authority as they attributed to Christ—none. But they knew that such an answer wouldn’t pass public muster (v. 32). Because the Jewish leaders refused to deny publicly Jesus’ authority, Jesus went right on teaching. He treated their reluctance

to follow through on their challenge as if it were tacit recognition of His authority.

Jesus' Authority Affirmed (12:1–12)

Jesus then told a story of an owner who planted a vineyard and leased it to tenants in exchange for a portion of the harvest. Refusing to part with their produce, the tenants harmed and even killed the owner's rent collectors, including his own son. As a result the owner vowed to destroy the tenants and give the land to others. This parable, which was clearly aimed at the Jewish leaders, served two purposes. First, it affirmed that Jesus was indeed sent by God the Father and does bear the authority about which the Jewish leaders asked. Second, it reinforced Jesus' point that Israel was not a fruit-bearing church.

The vineyard was an allegory for the Old Testament church (cf. Isa. 5:1–5). God had given the Jews every opportunity to grow and bear fruit. Despite His tender care the Jewish establishment remained barren, exhausting God's patience. God would not endure their fruitlessness forever. Instead He would judge the Jewish

leaders and give His church to the charge of other vinedressers (literally, "tenant farmers" or "sharecroppers").⁷ To flesh out that metaphor, in the New Testament age believers, and especially ministers and elders, are sharecroppers of the church of God. We not only benefit from church membership but are also charged by God to make His church fruitful and multiply it. We are stewards, not consumers. Christian ministers are fruit collectors who teach the people of God how to bear fruit to the Lord and urge them in this duty (Rom. 10:15).

Jesus concluded His teaching by explaining how we can build the kind of life that will be accepted by our Owner. Christ is *both* the Cornerstone and the Rejected Stone who would soon be killed and cast out of the vineyard.⁸ The stone rejected by the builders of the Old Testament church would be the very support stone of the New Testament church. In what way is your life built on the rock of Christ? Are you building merely on Judeo-Christian values, reminiscent of the values of Jesus' enemies? Or are you building on the only Cornerstone, Jesus Christ?

1. Identifying the days on which certain events of Passion Week took place is challenging. For example, some scholars place the triumphal entry on Monday while others place it on Sunday.

2. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 553.

3. Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible: The Supernatural in Scripture, Its Scope and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 236.

4. Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible*, 235.

5. Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible*, 237.

6. Jakob Van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 209.

7. The significant continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament church is shown in that God does not cultivate a new vineyard but gives it over to different tenants. This fact has implications regarding the practice of both the initiatory and continuing signs and seals of the covenant (baptism and the Lord's Supper), as well as for worship, ethics, and a host of other disciplines.

8. Ironically, Jesus' quotation (from Ps. 118:22–23) comes from the same context as the song which the Palm Sunday crowd sang.

Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. Recall how the children present at Christ's triumphal entry picked up the disciples' song of worship (Luke 19:39). How should this event inform us about the opportunities we have to influence our covenant children?
2. In what ways might churches and families today fail to treat children as disciples of Jesus?
3. How does 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 relate to Jesus' inspection of the temple in Mark 11:11?
4. Take a moment to consider whether you have "anything against anyone." If so, "forgive him" (Mark 11:25).
5. Why would the Jewish leaders be offended that in the temple, Jesus had preached the gospel (cf. Luke 20:1)?
6. Can you think of an example where it would be wise to answer a question with a question, as Jesus does in Mark 11:30?
7. What can we learn about "agnosticism" from Mark 11:31–33?
8. How does the Jews' response to Jesus' parable of the wicked vinedressers (Mark 12:12) teach us about conviction without repentance?

Bible Study on Mark

Lesson 16: Temple Teaching (1) Trick Question

Mark 12:13–44

Rev. William
Boekestein

It's been said that the only bad question is the one we don't ask. But asking questions can be intimidating. You might wonder if you are the only one who doesn't know the answer to your question. What if you have to explain your question and end up confusing and embarrassing yourself? Sometimes it's a relief to hear someone else ask the question you had in mind but couldn't ask.

In Mark 12, three important questions are raised. We can be glad we weren't the ones to ask them, so long as we learn from the answers.

After clearing the temple, in the days leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus was questioned by three groups of religious leaders. They hoped to trip Him with their questions, giving them leverage with the crowds to put Him to death. They questioned him on three major issues: the legality of Roman taxation (12:13–17), the reality of the resurrection (12:18–27), and the priority of the commandments (12:28–34). When the interrogation was over, “no one dared question him” (12:34). Their plan had failed. From this point “the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death” (14:1).

Taxes (12:13–17)

It's no wonder that taxes have been compared with death. Will Rogers quipped: “The only difference between death and taxes is that death doesn't get worse every time Congress meets.” Few issues can stir up stronger feelings than taxes. The same was true in Jesus' day.

The Question and Answer

The question, “Should Jews pay taxes to Caesar?” (vv. 14–15), was put to Jesus by the Pharisees and Herodians, two ostensibly unlikely bedfellows. The Pharisees were scrupulous, formal observers of the law. The Herodians were a pattern of “cultural Christians” who lived worldly lives with merely a façade of religion. In this passage, worldliness and legalism unite in their rejection of Christ. As followers of Herod Antipas's dynasty, the Herodians reaped sordid gain through their support of the Roman government. Content with the status quo, the Herodians were naturally Jesus' political enemies.

Before posing their politically charged question, Jesus' antagonists slather on a generous dose of patently bogus praise (12:14). Of course, as they said, Jesus *is* the true Teacher who makes plain the way of God without showing favoritism. The problem is, the Herodians didn't believe what they said—and Jesus knew it (v. 15). The Herodians were “spies who pretended to be sincere” (Luke 20:20) to “catch him in his words,” testing Jesus (Mark 12:13; 15) as Satan had earlier (1:13). Supporting Roman taxation was social suicide. However, if Jesus opposed Roman taxation the Jews could deliver Him up to the “authority and jurisdiction of the governor” (Luke 20:20).¹ Wisely Jesus answered with few words (cf. Prov.



10:19). Instead, He gave an object lesson using a Roman denarius, the image and inscription of which affirmed Caesar's right to levy taxes. The questioners were astounded at God's wisdom: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (v. 17). What could they say?

What Should We Make of This?

Jesus gives several principles for sorting out the knotty relationship between God and government.

First, Jesus teaches us to respect civil authorities. Jesus could have made His point about taxes in a less respectful way, but He doesn't. It's tempting to believe that only good government, duly elected by the people, deserves our honor. But Caesar wasn't voted into office by popular demand. Rome annexed Palestine by force and ruled with an iron fist. Still, God's people must honor authority (1 Pet. 2:17). One way we do so is to pay for the support of an organized society with police and military protection, reasonably good roads, courts, and so forth. We pay taxes not only out of duty and conscience (Rom. 13:5-7) but also to avoid the shame of delinquency. As a rule of thumb, we should pay every penny that is required and not a penny more.

Second, Jesus teaches us to honor God. Everything in this world bears the impression of God. As Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine! This belongs to me!'" As we look in a mirror we should repeat Jesus' question, "Whose image and inscription is this?" God's people

are made in His image; in baptism we are inscribed with His name. We must render ourselves to God. On its obverse side the denarius featured the head of the emperor Tiberius with the inscription "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus." On the reverse side: "High Priest." Caesar sought his own glory. God promises that those who honor Him will be honored more highly than Caesar.

Third, Jesus teaches us to neither confuse God with government nor radically divorce the two. There is a problem when phrases like "in God we trust" and "support our troops" become nearly synonymous. We sometimes have to make hard choices between obeying God and Caesar (Acts 5:29). Still, as John Calvin reminds us, obedience to authority is always joined to the fear of God.² Romans 13 presents government as a physical arm of God on earth. This was true in Jesus' day under Tiberius and in Paul's day under Nero. It's still true today.

With little chance to catch His breath, Jesus was quickly assaulted with another trick question, this time from the Sadducees.

The Resurrection (12:18-27)

Those who believe in a resurrection often wonder what it will be like, especially in terms of important relationships. Will I know my children? Will I have the same friends? Will I still be married to my same spouse when I get to heaven? Behind these questions is the bigger question, the one asked by the Sadducees: "Is there a resurrection at all?" The way

that we answer is eternally significant (1 Cor. 15:12-19, 29-32).

The Question (12:18-23)

The Sadducees were the sect from which the high priests were drawn. Their monopoly on the priesthood provided impetus to eliminate Jesus, especially as He threatened their control of the temple. The Sadducees believed only in the law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible). They denied the resurrection because they thought it isn't taught in those books.

The Sadducees' question is linked to God's provision of a kinsman redeemer. One of the primary purposes of marriage is the perpetuation of a godly seed (Gen. 1:28). In Deuteronomy 25:5-6 God provided a law to help ensure that a man's family line would continue if he died childless. The man's widow was to marry his closest kin and the firstborn of that relationship would be considered the deceased man's son, redeeming his name. The story of Ruth and Boaz is an example of the kinsman redeemer principle in action. Based on this principle the Sadducees dreamed up a scenario which, in their minds, makes the resurrection absurd. If a woman has been married to seven men, whose wife will she be in heaven? An example of a woman who had married twice (not seven times, the biblical number of completeness; cf. Matt. 18:21) would have sufficed. The Sadducees' insincere and exaggerated question probably got them a few laughs.

The Response (12:24-27)

Jesus responds rather sternly. He begins and ends His answer by saying, "You are (greatly) mistaken" (vv. 24, 27).

The two reasons that the Sadducees got off track touch on many of our own problems, as well. First, the Sadducees had elevated reason above revelation. "You do not know the Scriptures" (v. 24). Regardless of what

Roman Denarius (14-37 CE). The front shows Tiberius Caesar with the inscription TIBERIUS CAESAR DIVINI AUGUSTI FILIUS AUGUSTUS (= "Tiberius, Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Augustus"). The back shows Livia with the inscription, PONTIFEX MAXIMUS (high priest).



you think about the resurrection, what does the Bible say (cf. Gal. 4:30; Rom. 4:3)? We need to apply this same question to all the issues of life ranging from interpersonal relationships to biological engineering. We believe the “Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein.”³ Second, Jesus says that the Sadducees did not know the power of God (v. 24). They had imagined a problem that, to them, was bigger than God. How could God raise the dead with all the resulting marital complications? Numerous additional complications could easily be raised. But the Apostles’ Creed begins, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” If God created heaven and earth, surely our problems are well within His power.

Having deconstructed the Sadducees’ faulty logic, Jesus proceeded to answer the question. There will be no marriage in heaven (v. 25).⁴ God created marriage to meet certain needs which are foreign to heaven. First, marriage answers the human need for companionship. Marriage exists because “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). In heaven there will be no sense of “alone.” Second, marriage provides for the perpetuation of a godly seed (cf. the kinsman redeemer principle). But “where there are no burials, there is no need of weddings.”⁵ Third, marriage helps prevent fornication. Marriage is the appropriate context for expressing natural and appropriate sexual desire. There are no illicit sexual desires in heaven.

Jesus then provided biblical evidence for the resurrection, courteously using the second book of Moses. His argument hinges on the tense of the verb “to be” in Exodus 3 (vv. 3, 15). If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead and gone, God should have said, “I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Because he says,

“I *am* their God,” they must still be alive. With these fathers God made an everlasting covenant which death cannot extinguish. The souls of all departed saints are alive and well, awaiting the resurrection of the body.

Behind this interaction between Jesus and the Sadducees lies a profound reality: Jesus is our kinsman redeemer. In the words of Thomas Boston, before the fall “our nature was in a . . . fruitful condition.” With the fall came spiritual death and “an absolute spiritual barrenness, as to the fruits of holiness.” By nature we are the barren wife *and* the dead husband of Deuteronomy 25; we are totally unable to redeem ourselves.⁶ In His incarnation Christ became our closest kin, taking on our nature to marry us (Eph. 5:32) and preserve our life. In heaven God’s people will be married to the most faithful, beautiful, and caring spouse of all, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:7–10).

The Greatest Commandment (12:28–44)

Before Jesus left the temple (Mark 13:1) his enemies tested Him one more time (Matt. 22:34–35). They dared Jesus to comment on life’s priorities: “Which is the first commandment of all?” In repeating the Old Testament order of love for God followed by love for one’s neighbor, Jesus teaches two principles regarding religious priorities.

Prioritizing Priorities (12:28–34, 41–44)

First, Jesus demonstrated that love is better than religious observance (v. 33). The offerings and sacrifices in the Old Testament were symbolic of Christ’s sacrifice. But they were also a tangible and costly expression of worship; God expected the best of one’s possession. Still, love trumps sacrifice (cf. 1 Cor. 13:3). It is possible to make *great* religious sacrifices without love. The Jews had become lost in a labyrinth of sacrificial duty

minus sincere devotion. But in those in whom God has poured His own love, true devotion flows from the inside out (cf. Gen. 29:20; Rom. 5:5).

Second, devotion to God takes priority over devotion to others. It is possible to become so frazzled taking care of others that we don’t spend time in fellowship with the Lord. We will run ourselves dry if we aren’t being filled up with fresh life from the Lord. To get our priorities in order we need to commune with God devotionally, not merely cerebrally. Read the Bible as God’s personal expression of love toward repentant sinners. Pray to Him with sincerity, as one friend to another (John 15:13–15). Tell him why you appreciate Him, how you have fallen short, why you are thankful, and what you need. This is what makes the gospel so powerful: When we love God (because He loved us first), He pours His love into, and out of, our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

In the light of these principles of priority Jesus said to this theological expert, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34). The expert had an idea of what true religion is all about. But as they say, “Close counts only in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

The Missing Link (12:35–44)

This scribe had not yet entered the kingdom of God because he was a moralist, not a Christian. He hadn’t yet embraced Jesus Christ as Lord. In his close-but-lost state, he was not alone.

Jesus appealed to Psalm 110:1 to correct a pervasive mistaken notion about the Messiah. Jesus “is conversing with these men publicly for the very last time, and therefore asks the most important question of all.”⁷ Who is the Messiah? The Messiah is a Son of David (2 Sam. 7:12–17; Ps. 89:3–4, 34–37; Matt. 1:20; Mark 10:47–48) and the Son of God, David’s Lord (Acts 2:29–31). He could be both only if he existed before and after David as

the everlasting second person of the Trinity who was “conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.”⁸

Clearly, being close to the kingdom of God does not result in a changed life. Jesus warned against several faults of the scribes to which we are not immune. The scribes demanded attention by their long robes and lengthy prayers.⁹ They reserved for themselves the best seats at meetings (cf. James 2:2–3) and required recognition by special greetings in the marketplaces. Worst of all, the scribes took advantage of their religious position by “devouring widows’ houses” (v. 40). By contrast, Jesus used a poor widow to illustrate genuine, sacrificial, godly living (vv. 41–44). She prioritized the first commandment of the law without neglecting the second.

So many people are not far from the kingdom of God. They are like the common people of Jesus’ day who “heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37). Ezekiel’s sermons were similarly well-received by those who had no intention of putting them into practice (Ezek. 32:32–33). God’s words to them are ominous: When judgment comes they will know that a prophet

has been among them. Close enough is not good enough. It is possible to within an inch of heaven and spend an eternity in hell.

Jesus turned each of His enemies’ questions into an apologetic opportunity. We need to learn how to do this so that we can always be ready to explain our hope in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). Some of our friends and neighbors might be not far from the kingdom of God. Far be it from us to not speak a word to those who are close to entering.

Jesus’ enemies put Him to the test. They should have tested themselves. Test yourself in the light of Christ’s law. Even those who do not love perfectly God and their neighbor can still enter into the kingdom of heaven on the merits of David’s Son and Lord, Jesus Christ.

1. According to the Bible and under Roman law, the Jews could carry out executions themselves. But their own tradition forbade them from performing an execution during a feast. So, still fearing the people, they hoped to force Pilate to do their dirty work, avoiding the political fallout. Cf. Jakob Van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 247–49.

2. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 3:45. Augustine explains that believers under the rule of the apostate and wicked emperor Julian “drew a distinction between their eternal master and their temporal master; and yet were submissive to their temporal master for their eternal master’s sake.”

Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, vol. 6 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 64.

3. Belgic Confession, Article 7 (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3).

4. In heaven redeemed saints will be like the angels, in which, ironically, the Sadducees also disbelieved (cf. Acts 23:6–9).

5. Matthew Henry, commenting on Luke 20:34–36.

6. Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (Choteau, MT: Old Path Gospel Press, 1990), 41.

7. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 499.

8. Apostles’ Creed. Cf. Sinclair Ferguson, *Let’s Study Mark* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 204.

9. Jesus is not condemning long prayers per se but showy prayers. Long, truly pious prayers are recorded in the Bible (e.g., Solomon’s in 1 Kings 8:22–53). Many of the psalms are long prayers.

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Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. Why is it important to be firmly convinced of the biblical answer to the question posed in Mark 11:28?
2. How is Jesus’ custom of prefacing constructive criticism with appropriate praise (cf. Rev. 2:2–4) different from what is recorded in Mark 12:14?
3. How does Romans 14:11 comment on the Herodians’ flattering words in Mark 12:14?
4. How is Jesus’ omniscience (cf. Mark 12:15) both comforting and terrifying?
5. Might there be a potential conflict between the kinsman redeemer principle in the Bible and the trend of newly married couples putting off having children?
6. How should Mark 12:24–27 and 1 Corinthians 7:1–8 counsel a couple that is considering marriage?
7. Jesus made a solid argument for the resurrection from the Old Testament. How might He also have used Psalm 16:9–11 and Daniel 12:2?
8. Reflect on how believers today might be guilty of Jesus’ accusations in Mark 12:38–40.

Introduction

"Today," writes C. J. Mahaney, "the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is . . ."

How would *you* finish that statement? What is the church's biggest obstacle?

There are many good answers to that question. Challenges abound from many corners. Satan is alive and well. The world isn't our friend. The hostility is real, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise.

Our tendency is to locate our greatest challenge outside of us. On one level, it is. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). On an ultimate scale, the answer to the aforesaid question is Satan. He is and always will be our greatest challenge, until he is finally and fully silenced.

Yet how does this enemy work? What means does he employ? What are his strategies and tactics?

He is the master of subtlety. Rarely does he show up with a pitchfork, announcing his presence. He is far too crafty. Much more wily. This is what makes him so dangerous. He focuses our attention on what is happening all around us, while slowly blinding us to what is happening inside of us.

"Today, the greatest challenge

facing American evangelicals," argues Mahaney, "is not persecution *from* the world but seduction by the world."

One of the cleverest seductions we face, I will argue in this article, is the unrespectable sin of materialism. What is it? Why does it control us? And how can it be defeated?

What Materialism Is

In his famous work, *The Art of War*, Sun Tsu gives the following perspective: "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril."

The same principle applies in spiritual warfare. Therefore, we must know both the enemy without and the enemy within. We begin with materialism itself.

A quick Google search reveals that materialism is "a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values." On paper, we recoil at such a perspective. Of course material things and earthly comforts are not as important as spiritual values!

But remember that materialism is just that: an "ism." It's not just a common trap we fall into, but a belief system we embrace.

As image bearers of God, we are natural-born worshipers. But as sinners against God, we easily

worship gods of a lowercase variety. "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:24–25).

Materialism, then, like any other idol, is the subject of our affections and the object of our worship. On the surface, it seems benign. It's not like we literally bow down to it, like those embarrassing Israelites used to do. But this is precisely its power. We *do* bow down to it, often in the name of Christian liberty.

It's not that material things themselves are usually the problem. Sometimes they are, but more often it's the control they take over us. Here, the apostle Paul is instructive: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12).

Materialism comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Because money is the root of all kinds of evil and our hearts are desperately wicked, it shows up in both rich and poor alike. Those with wealth need to be careful that money doesn't define them, but the same is true for those who are defined by the desire to be wealthy.

Why Materialism Controls Us

Whether the materials are clothes or cars, a man's hobby or a man's house, the heart of the issue is the issue of the heart—as my college

professor used to say. The reason we are given over to these gifts is because our hearts are easily deceived. We worship what we love. Or in the words of Jesus, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21).

Idolatry isn't something unique to false religions and former generations. It is operative wherever sinners reside. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Whatever a man depends upon, whatever rules his mind, whatever governs his affections, whatever is the chief object of his delight, is his god."

The content of our daydreams reveals our priorities. What we think about when we wake up exposes our affections. How we react to the material accumulation of our neighbors, and especially our friends, says all we need to know about the vise grip materialism has on our hearts.

To cite just one example, consider what happens when the housing market booms. Everyone seems to be upgrading except you. Suddenly your house, perfectly sufficient and once satisfactory, is too small. Not only do you *want* a little more room, you *need* a little more room. A bigger yard, a bigger kitchen, a bigger floor plan. If *they* can have it, why can't *I*?

The reason we thrive at idolatry, of which materialism is simply a symptom, is because we will give our hearts over to anything that we think will make us happy, or at least *happier*.

There is a reason advertising works. We are easily persuaded that what we have is not enough. That we need just a little bit faster, a little bit bigger, a little bit newer. Your iPhone 5? That was so last year. Check out the iPhone 6! It is smaller, yet faster. Lighter, yet clearer. It's just so much better. How can you even function without one?



In the final analysis, we let stuff control us because Christ doesn't. We give ourselves to materialism because we aren't fully satisfied with God. We bow down to earthly things because our hearts aren't captivated by heaven.

Defeating Materialism

All of this brings us to the so what. What good is a diagnosis without a prescription? Our goal is both to locate the materialism that lurks inside us and to replace it with something better.

In theological terms, putting off sin is mortification. We need to kill materialism at its core, getting to the heart and not just what our eyes can see. But as the New Testament shows, the fight against indwelling sin demands more than just mortification. We also must engage in vivification—the putting on of something positive, something righteous, something better.

For example, in Ephesians 4:28, Paul does both: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

The eighth commandment is not only a prohibition against stealing

but also an invitation to replace what is wrong with what is right and better.

So how does this apply to materialism? We don't go deep enough if our solution to the problem is simple elimination. This might be necessary. But the issue really isn't the things themselves, it's the reason we want the things in the first place.

The antidote to materialism is Christ. Joy in Christ, contentment in Christ, and the worship of Christ. Until and unless He is sweet, our hearts will run after created things.

This is the tragedy of the sinful human heart: we grasp after satisfaction in all the wrong places, when Christ offers Himself freely. "Our hearts," Augustine wisely said, "are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Consider the words of God in Jeremiah, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living

waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

But as Jesus promised the woman at the well, all those who drink from the well of Jesus will never thirst again. He is the source of living water and lasting joy. The more He captivates us, the less our hearts are given over to materialism.

When He becomes the object of our worship, two things happen. We lose our grip on the things He's created, and we learn to enjoy the gifts from the hands of the giver. Instead of our being controlled by the things He provides, those things become conduits for praise. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4).

Conclusion

Materialism is a pathetic god. It has eyes but cannot see. Ears but cannot hear. It promises to please but leaves us grasping for more. Jesus is the more.

Let us steward, then, His good gifts—never confusing the gifts for the giver. And may we delight in the Master, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

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Reformed Youth Services (RYS) might well be regarded as one of the best things going for the United Reformed Churches in North America. RYS membership of nearly one hundred churches also includes churches from the Christian Reformed Church, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church of America, Reformed Church in the US, and some independent Reformed congregations. RYS is governed by a board made up of eight men from among its member churches, under the supervision of the elders of Cornerstone URC in Jenison, Michigan, and chaired by one of its elders. RYS sponsors regional retreats for high-school-aged youth and regional Logos conferences for post-high youth.

The highlight that high-school-aged youth from among the member churches look forward to every year is the annual RYS Convention. The 2015 convention drew approximately 720 high-school-aged youth, youth leaders, convention speakers, and staff to Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, on July 13–17. The theme of the week was "Amazing Love," based on Romans 8:37–39: "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." In five main sessions, all were challenged to comprehend, as much as is humanly possible, the eternal, boundless, and revealed love of God in Christ through His Spirit.

RYS Director Ed DeGraaf, who has held that position since before the first convention, assessed that this was perhaps the best convention ever. Ed said, "A gracious servant-minded committee set the tone at convention from day one as we enjoyed a wonderful week of spiritual blessings and fellowship." Ed also observed, "Rev. Mike Schout and Rev. Bob VanManen complimented each other well as the main speakers." The university campus was ideal, leaving minimal walking to get to workshops; the dorms were nice; and the food was good and plentiful. Everyone especially enjoyed the air conditioning.

Convention speakers and workshop leaders are always chosen from among the pastors of the member churches. The workshop leaders for this convention were Rev. Quentin Falkena on "iLead"; Rev. Greg Lubbers on "Amazing Grace"; Rev. Brad Nymeyer on "Loving God's Will"; Rev. Bill Boekestein on "Money Matters"; Rev. Paul Murphy on "Guard Your Heart"; Rev. Chip Byrd on "Gigabytes for God"; Rev. Chad Steenwyk on "Love My Neighbor"; Rev. Stephen Wetmore on "Content, Not So Much?"; Rev. Jon Bushnell on "Do You Believe This Stuff?"; and Rev. Andrew Knott on "Wonderfully Made." There was a mandatory workshop entitled "What's Love Got to Do with It?" One was designed for the guys led by Rev. Jason Tuinstra, and one for the girls led by Rev. Tuinstra's wife, Jody. Everyone had opportunity to attend four out of the ten workshops offered.

Each main session was begun with singing, which was beautiful with more than seven hundred voices in a near-capacity auditorium. The song leader was Julie Bussis, along with Rip Pratt and Brent Cooper, who have been long-time convention song leaders. Thursday evening featured a talent show where various voluntary participants performed. A choir made up of conventioners practiced throughout the week and performed at that time as well. Also at that time a new RYS logo was publicly unveiled for the first time.

RYS conventions always feature a day-away event. On Wednesday, about five hundred people chose to go to Kentucky Kingdom and Hurricane Bay, while two hundred took advantage of spending the day at the Creation Museum. On Thursday afternoon a time was set aside when all the speakers and workshop leaders were seated together up front to answer questions which were submitted by the students in writing.

The days were jam-packed, beginning before 7:00 a.m. with SON-rise groups for devotions after breakfast, and ending late at night

with SON-set groups for closing devotions and a time to share thoughts about the presentations of that day. Ample time was also provided for games and fellowship. Friends from previous conventions were reunited, and new friends were made. It is a great opportunity to bring together covenant youth from churches of like mind from all around North America. Some come from more isolated areas where there are no like-minded Reformed churches nearby and such opportunities are rare.

It takes many adults to run a youth ministry. At one time during the convention, everyone over the age of fifty was asked to rise. It was estimated that there were at least sixty people on their feet. Youth leaders (sponsors) enjoy and benefit from the spiritual blessings and the fellowship during a convention as much as do the youth. Besides the dozen ministers who serve as speakers and workshop leaders, a number of other pastors often come as sponsors and enjoy the fellowship with each other throughout the week.

My wife and I had the opportunity to attend the 2015 convention for the

first time. I am happy to report to the parents and the consistories that as I observed your youth throughout the week, I was extremely proud of all in attendance. It gave a glimpse of the future of the church, and it looks good. These young people were well-behaved, orderly, polite, considerate, attentive, and asked great questions. The convention committee and the board were happy that there were no disciplinary actions required throughout that entire week with so many youth gathered together. We give praise to our God for the many blessings and the safety experienced during this special week.

At the close of the convention it was announced that the 2016 convention is to be held at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, on July 25–29. The 2005 convention was held there, and the campus has since been updated. Next year, 2016, will also be the twentieth anniversary of RYS.

Each year letters are sent out to all member church councils asking for nominations to the RYS board. Councils are encouraged to submit names of mature Christian men able to serve. Men so inclined are encouraged to inform their council that they would like to be considered. This is a great opportunity to be a part of this great ministry to our youth. The lives of countless covenant youth have been changed throughout the years through the RYS programs and particularly the annual convention. It was an honor and a privilege to be a part of this their special week.

Mr. Myron Rau

is a board member of RYS and is the chairman of the board of Reformed Fellowship. He is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, MI.





REFORMED YOUTH SE

AMAZING LOVE



Amid the thronging
Worshippers Jehovah
I will bless
Before my brethren,
Gathered there
His name will I confess



RVICES CONVENTION

WINGS

WINGS



Emma Top (Washington) and her daughter and 5 granddaughters!





RYS Convention 2015

This year, the RYS Convention took place at the (air-conditioned!) Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. The overall theme brought to us by the main speakers, Rev. Schout and Rev. VanManen, pertained to God’s amazing love for us demonstrated to us in the Trinity. We spent the week reading and analyzing Romans 8.

Throughout the week, we each attended five workshops of our choice. In one particular workshop taught by Rev. Nymeyer, we learned about loving God’s will. As high-school-age youth, we are faced with many forks in the road where we must make decisions such as which college to attend, what to study, or who to date. We were challenged to look at the decisions we make on a daily basis to see if we are making those decisions according to God’s will for our lives. This workshop taught me how to better understand the will of God and to go forward in my decisions confidently trusting that God will be with me.

On Wednesday, we had the opportunity to go on our day away to either the Creation Museum or an amusement park. I went with a group to the Creation Museum. This was a great day of making new friends from New York as well as being reminded of the amazing work of our Creator.

Overall, this week was a great time of spiritual growth and fellowship. Whether it was playing Frisbee with both new and old friends in the yard, singing hymns, worshipping our Lord with other members of the body of Christ, spending time in prayer and devotion early in the morning at SON-rise groups, or visiting with friends over a bowl of ice cream in the cafeteria, I enjoyed my final convention and was reminded of the amazing love Christ has for us.

Miss Kaitlynn De Young

Community URC, Schereville, IN

RYS Report

O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble . . . (Jer. 16:19)

My first-time experience with RYS was a perfect blend of fun, friends, and growing closer to God. I greatly appreciated the structured daily schedule. It was well thought out, and there were plenty of helpful leaders willing to point me where I was supposed to go.

Words truly cannot describe the feeling as hundreds of like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ joined voices in wholehearted praise to our Creator. I appreciated the blend of classic hymns and more recently composed songs.

The sessions were great! It was refreshing to be reminded that Jesus is praying for us and how much He suffered so that we might be set free. After a particularly powerful message, I left the auditorium amazed that after all my sins, God still chooses to freely pour out His love on me. The Bible and the Bible only was proclaimed, which is praiseworthy in itself.

Thrown into the mix were enjoyable activities and games that added a sparkle to my time at RYS. I especially remember when we all stopped and circled to pray when an injury occurred, which reminded me of 1 Corinthians 12:26: “if one member suffers, all suffer together.”

RYS provides a perfect opportunity to know your church youth group better and meet new friends. From the workshops, I received the overall message to surrender every area of your life, lay it at God’s feet, and simply trust Him. This convention has challenged me to encourage others, sing with all my heart, and pray for other young people who are walking the same path.

Miss Kaili Prins

Trinity CRC, Sparta, MI

Professing Tweens: Of Worldlings, Hebrews, and Young Christians (2) He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not

Rev. Mitchell
Dick

Devils love young people. For breakfast. First thing. Want to make a great start to a devil's day? Serve him up a tween. He relishes every part of the baptized and raised-to-be-Christian youth. A bicep, a thigh, an eye. Especially their minds in the making. Tender minds, of folks with hours to kill in thoughtless amusement. Surfing Facebooking tweeting minds minding the social more than the divine. Long on looks and passion and short on faith and principle minds . . . these are a few of fiends' favorite things.

God loves young people. Forever. For them, and for infants, children, the middle-aged, and old-timers God gave Jesus. He has saved us from being a meal, from being devoured by devils. We are saved from His own wrath, and the hell we sinners deserve. God gave Himself in giving Jesus. The Son of God became a man. This was and is the perfect Savior. Human greats, even angel greats compare not at all with Him. Even temple bulls could not atone. Elijah prophets might only promise. Only Jesus atones and speaks and saves, comes and sees and conquers . . . sin! In these latter days there is forgiveness through His blood shed once for all. He the Word now spoken is the Word Way back to God. Jesus: very God, perfect Man, perfect Savior, Jesus the Christ of God! That is the message of Hebrews, and of the entire New Testament. It is the gospel.

True You, and Everyone Else

Therefore . . . believe in Him, hope in Him, and love. That is the call

that comes with the gospel. It comes to all of us, including the youth of the church. God has come into this world and come near in the gospel preaching and has spoken of His salvation in and through His Son Jesus. Now what to do? Here is what: believe in Him, hope in Him, and love. There is no other way to heaven than to trust, and hope, and love. Now. Not later. Later is never. Now. Or never. *Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts!*

Today, you youth! You have heard and been taught Jesus. Many young people have not heard, and remain lost worldlings. Many in the church have heard and are like the Jews of old, the Hebrews, the religious lost. These have a creed, maybe, but not Christ, a form but not godliness. These may have and desire circumcision, or baptism, but have not the renewed heart, the regenerating Spirit. These may have a code—a dress code, a vegetarian code, a save-the-planet-and-the-culture-in-the-name-of-God code, a head-covering code, a tolerance code—but have missed and mistrust the grace of the gospel. These may, early on, enlist, as battalion after battalion of Christian youth today are encouraged to do, in the army of a kingdom of God of this earth, which is another kingdom, and not the kingdom of the gospel, of Christ, and of the redeemed.

You, true young believer: believe God, hope in God, and love.

That is the Word of Hebrews at a grand juncture, Hebrews 10:19ff. There already, in the first ten plus chapters, is the great and incomparable Jesus.

Now, a therefore. Not just a good idea therefore. A life-and-death therefore. A wonderful life and a bad death therefore.

The Way, and Believing

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22, NKJV)

Whatever the details of this text, the basics are this: the blood of Jesus shed for sinners, and faith in that blood atonement, is the way to God. This blood way is a new and living way. The blood of bulls and lambs and goats was shed in the Old Testament house of God, the temple, but this only pointed the way to God for sinners. The blood of Jesus paved the way. For His precious blood is shed, and there is the satisfaction of God's justice on behalf of His elect; then is atonement; and now there is forgiveness and a thousand thousand joys in heaven and on earth! This is the new thing of the New Testament and covenant of grace. Jesus is in these latter days newly slain; He, this truth and way to God, is newly revealed. And He who is the way and the truth is the life, because He has risen from the dead to the right hand of God. He lives, and through this marvelous gift of



faith by which all the blessings of His blood flow to us, we have forgiveness and life in Him. We have life in Him and are brought along that way, cleansed by that blood, joined at hip and heart to Jesus by faith, and led into the fellowship of God. So He is altogether the new and living way. It is the King's highway, the Savior's blessed way, the only true way to life with God.

Believing, truly believing, is being confident of this new and living way, Jesus and His blood. We are so confident that we draw near to God in full assurance of faith. Not that we are without sin. But we are trusting, completely, that we are cleansed, entirely, by the blood of Jesus—heart, mind, conscience, biceps, thighs, and eyes. We draw near. That means we want God more. We want less of anything and anyone else for more of God. We want more righteousness, less sin. We withdraw, pull away from, flee whatever interferes with and would compete with our fellowship and life and joy with the Holy One.

So, believing youth, draw near to the

God you believe, to the God who has come gracefully near, in Jesus, to you. Draw near to this God of your peace and of your good conscience. That is how you show your faith is real: when you truly, actively, always and above all love God and being near to God. As you believe that all your sins of youth, of your hormonal body and of your vacillating, hesitating, oft-confused soul, and of your peer-pleasing nature are forgiven. Do you believe that? Then you do the bold thing: approach God, every day, in every situation, with your cares, your besetting sins, and your praise.

Draw near, nearer, the nearest you have ever been, then nearer still. Wondering how? If far from God you've been and felt? Use the means the Lord has given: prayer—real, tearful prayer; hear preaching, hanging on every word; receive sacraments holily; make friends who faithfully and regularly wound your ego; sing yourself near to God, and live the song, though it be trashing the many means and Internet sites and companions even—those means and men and women of disgrace

that have long kept you far from God and godliness. Above all, esteem the reproach of Christ of greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

See You at the Table

Believe. Believe and draw near. Then hope, and hold fast the profession of hope. Then love. Believing is vain without hope. Believing and hope are vain without love. All three are needed to enjoy Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. More on all those three next time.

But for now, and always, let us just remember: this is written so the devils don't have you for breakfast. And so that you, instead, dine with God. At whose table would you rather be?

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Public Relations: A Christian Calling?

Mr. Michael R.
Kearney

In the last issue of *The Outlook* I wrote, “At what point does a faith that calls us to ‘seek the things that are above’ become irreconcilable with a vocational environment whose chief end is the things of this earth?” The following article, adapted from a class paper I wrote this past spring, attempts to provide a model for answering this question as it relates to one particular field of study: public relations. For readers in similar professions, I hope this article will encourage you to think carefully about the implications of the Christian worldview for PR. For readers in other walks of life, I hope this will serve as an example, a template of sorts, for integrating your faith with your own vocations.

Is public relations a form of engineering or ministry?

A fair first response might be, “Neither.” Most people familiar with the field of public relations (PR) would classify it as a communication profession. College students who major in PR spend most of their class time developing speaking, writing, and media skills. Even at a Christian university like mine, neither engineering classes, like physics, nor ministry classes, like biblical counseling, are typical course requirements for a PR major.

Why ask such an oddly specific question? I want to use this distinction to press into the implications of the Christian faith for PR. But in order to do that we must first establish a definition for this profession—in this case, not an easy task.

One thing is for sure: public relations engenders deep suspicion. One of my textbooks frankly admits, “It appears as if the public relations profession

has a public relations problem.”¹ According to many people, PR is simply spin and manipulation masquerading as “image management” or “publicity tactics.” Jacques Ellul, a Christian sociologist, viewed PR with similar skepticism as “a system of propaganda applied to all economic and human relations.”²

Personal experience tends to reinforce these unpleasant perceptions of PR. As one of my professors remarked, “We’ve always looked out for the car salesman.” Twenty-first-century businesses and governments are awash with manipulative messaging and deceptive persuasion. And when PR goes bad, the world knows. Just check the “Trending” bar of your Facebook feed, and you can probably dig up four or five national news stories generated by PR foibles in a single day!

Perspectives on Public Relations

While popular perceptions of public relations can offer us insight into the general contours of this profession, they fall short of identifying PR’s underlying perspective—worldview, if you will. For that, we’ll need to consult the views of PR’s scholars and practitioners themselves, and here I’d like to call your attention back to my original question.

Did you immediately discredit any definition of PR as a form of engineering? Edward Bernays, often considered the father of American public relations, called it “the engineering of consent.”³ As Calvin Troup notes, this approach assumes that ordinary citizens cannot reason and must be told what to think. Thus, the position of the PR practitioner becomes the seat of immense power: “As *their superiors*, PR professionals use their expertise to control the behavior and, presumably, the thoughts and motives of other human beings.”⁴

This is precisely what most modern PR has become: behavioral engineering that tries to dictate not just what we should think about, but what we should think.



Often the communication industry uses tactics of sensationalism and entertainment appeal to squelch public discourse rather than encourage it. The underlying goal is to foist an agenda on one's audience and coerce them into a corresponding course of action.

With this definition in mind, it should be no surprise that Christians tend to approach PR with suspicion, even revulsion. Often they should. The Heidelberg Catechism expounds the ninth commandment as a mandate to "avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are devices the devil himself uses, and they would call down on me God's intense anger" (Lord's Day 43, Q&A 112). The Bible also clearly condemns selfish ambition (Phil. 2:3) and the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10). How can a believer justify entering a profession built on such a thick foundation of sin and deceit?

If this were the only possible definition of PR, Christians would do well to avoid careers in this field. But I'd like to call your attention to the alternative: an approach to PR akin to ministry.

Ed Lipscomb, one of the first presidents of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)—not a Christian organization—envisioned PR as "a new level of leadership midway between pavement and pulpit." Lipscomb encouraged "the integration of spiritual principles and material progress" as an ethical and sustainable approach to public relations.⁵ Whatever Lipscomb's own worldview may have been, he identified a deep-rooted need in the field of PR for ethics such as those preached in the church.

The Christian worldview provides a commitment to truth, an ethical framework, and an attitude of servanthood toward fellow men—values the PR profession desperately needs. The corrupted and falsehood-filled public relations industry all but cries out for humble, faithful, truth-seeking practitioners to recover it as

an honorable profession. In short, PR needs Christians.

The case for Christian PR practitioners didn't originate with Lipscomb. Augustine of Hippo beat him to this argument by at least fifteen hundred years: "Since . . . the faculty of eloquence is available for both sides, and is of very great service in the enforcing either of wrong or right, why do not good men study to engage it on the side of truth, when bad men use it to obtain the triumph of wicked and worthless causes, and to further injustice and error?"⁶ Augustine urged Christian communicators to use integrity and sound rhetoric to call their audiences to the truth. Persuasion need not be a system of manipulative deceit. When truth is at stake, persuasion is a noble venture, a task for the Christian to undertake carefully but also joyfully. The rest of this article will attempt to outline some first steps toward a thoroughly Christian perspective on rhetoric, persuasion, and the field of public relations.

Principles of Public Relations

The foundation for Christian communication begins with the existence of a God who communicates. God reveals Himself to us both generally, by creation, and specifically, by His Word (Belgic Confession Art. 2). Unlike idols who "do not make a sound in their throat" (Ps. 115:7, ESV), the God Christians worship is a God who *speaks*. In the person of Jesus Christ "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" to convey the Father's glory and grace (John 1:14). While Jesus is not now physically present on earth to address us verbally, He continues to speak to us through the written communication of the Bible. Even today God addresses His people directly in the weekly reading and preaching of His Word. This high regard for the authority and truth conveyed by the written Word of God is why many Christians, especially Reformed Christians,

have historically emphasized faithful preaching as one of the primary marks of the true church. M. J. Bosma writes, "The recognizing of this word as the will of God for us distinguishes the Church from every other institution and organization."⁷

The Christian worldview values communication not only as a divine attribute but also as a human one. Made in God's image, mankind participates in his Creator's ability to formulate and convey ideas. Unlike the rest of creation, Adam and Eve received direct communication from God after He formed them from the ground (Gen. 1:28–30). A holy dialogue lies at the heart of God's relationship with His people, as He speaks through His Word and they respond through prayer (Phil. 4:6) and song (Eph. 5:19). Moreover, the Bible reveals that God appoints men and women as His agents to communicate truth to others. The call to communicate God's truth explodes into the Great Commission for all believers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). In the Heidelberg Catechism's words, following Christ means first being "anointed to confess his name," lending a powerful purpose to communication (Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32). Not only is communication inherent to human nature, but also it is fundamental to the Christian's identity.

Delving further into a Christian theory for communication (and specifically public relations), we can apply the Reformational vantage points of creation, fall, and redemption, as outlined by Albert Wolters in *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*.

As already mentioned, the Christian doctrine of creation holds communication to be a unique aspect of personhood. Evolutionism, humanism, postmodernism—no other worldview endows communication with this level of significance. Belief

in an originally good creation ascribes worth to all human beings (believers and unbelievers alike) as imagebearers of God, mandating that interaction with others must involve truthfulness, respect, and love.

In contrast, many secular models for public relations view man as a highly developed animal whose actions can be accurately predicted and coerced by behavioral modification. Without a clear doctrine of creation by a true and righteous God, the concept of personhood grows foggy, ethical codes are reduced to relativism, and deceitful PR tactics can be easily justified. Marvin Olasky identifies an adamant atheism behind Edward Bernays's own theory of PR:

Some of Bernays' predecessors trusted in an "invisible hand" that controlled not only marketplaces but journalistic activities; truth would emerge from the clash of opinions not by chance, but because truth corresponded to the nature of God who had created the world and sustained it. Bernays, however, saw what he called in our interview "a world without God" rapidly descending into social chaos. Therefore, he contended that social manipulation by public relations counselors was justified by the end of creating man-made gods who could assert subtle social control and prevent disaster.⁸

A second focal point for Christian communication concerns the Fall, a historic event of devastating significance—and one that began with a lie (Gen. 3:4). In the Fall, humans transgressed the law of God, subjecting themselves to futile thinking (Rom. 1:21), self-deception, and sin. Because of the Fall, the communication process itself has been corrupted, leading to misunderstanding, manipulation, broken relationships, and outright falsehood. Christian public relations

must recognize the presence of deception and suffering in the world and combat the effects of the Fall by seeking to minister to people's needs for the sake of Christ.

Finally, Christianity confesses the redemption of all things in Christ, including the field of communication. Because Jesus Christ is the incarnation of truth (John 14:6), it is possible to convey truth in interpersonal relationships, limitedly but authentically. Being a faithful communication professional is one way to fulfill the apostle Paul's injunction: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Wolters powerfully summarizes the cosmic scope of redemption: "In the name of Christ, distortion must be opposed *everywhere*—in the kitchen and the bedroom, in city councils and corporate boardrooms, on the stage and on the air, in the classroom and in the workshop."⁹ Bernays's PR theory had turned this doctrine on its head, elevating PR practitioners to an almost messianic role rather than acknowledging the need for an external source of salvation. By comparison, the Christian worldview gives lasting purpose and direction to PR by subjecting it to Jesus the Messiah and His truth.

Personalizing Public Relations

What does a vision for Christian public relations look like in practical terms? My PR professor urges students entering the corporate PR field to look for opportunities to serve as the "conscience of the organization, pointing the organization to truth, authenticity, and transparency—terms that have been abused in our current world." For the conscientious Christian, this may prove to be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, for believers who labor faithfully in this arena, God will provide more than enough grace and strength for each day, along with myriad opportunities

to witness for Christ's kingdom.

In summary, Christians need to reclaim the viability and integrity of the PR profession by treating it more like a ministry than a science. Indeed, the similarities between public relations and pastoral work are more profound than one might think. Both, at bottom, rely on the art of persuasion with integrity. Both, if approached properly, have the building of relationships as their primary goal. And, as with any profession, both are to be carried out for God's glory and our neighbor's good. The integration of the Christian worldview with the field of public relations produces a profession grounded in truth, devoted to honoring others, and filled with the selfless love of Christ. That is a noble calling.

1. David W. Guth and Charles Marsh, *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach*, 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2011), 2.

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964), 373.

3. Edward L. Bernays, *The Engineering of Consent* (<http://provokateur.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/The-Engineering-of-Consent.pdf>).

4. Calvin Troup, "Ordinary People Can Reason," *Journal of Business Ethics* 87.4 (2009), 444, emphasis original.

5. Quoted in Marvin N. Olasky, *Corporate Public Relations: A New Historical Perspective* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987), 127.

6. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009), 123.

7. M. J. Bosma, *Exposition of Reformed Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Smitten Book Company, 1927), 237.

8. Olasky, *Corporate Public Relations*, 81.

9. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 73, emphasis original.

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I was recently tagged in a conversation on Facebook. With the recent turn of events, a mother was looking for good books to prepare her children for persecution. And that's always a good idea, in both alarming and comfortable times.

I immediately thought of Marie Durand, her family, and the *église du désert* ("church of the desert," a reference to the persecuted church in Revelation 12).

In 1730 Marie was arrested by the French authorities for professing what the government described as "the so-called Reformed religion." More specifically, she was arrested for being the sister of a Reformed pastor, Pierre Durand. She was only nineteen, and had just become engaged.

While French Protestants (Huguenots) had enjoyed a certain amount of freedom under King Henry IV (beginning with his 1598 Edict of Nantes), they gradually lost their rights until, in 1685, the edict was revoked. In 1724, a new royal edict called for the execution of all Protestant preachers and the imprisonment of anyone who was caught worshipping, marrying, or baptizing children under a Protestant pastor. Men were often sent to the galleys, while women were locked in a dark and cold prison inside the Tower of Constance, in an unhealthy marshland.

Marie remained in the Tower for thirty-eight years. Being one of the most literate women there, she led daily devotions, taught the prisoners' children, and wrote letters to ask for provisions and relief. Her health

deteriorated. She suffered from rheumatism, sinus infections, and possibly malaria. She never saw her fiancé and her father again. While she was imprisoned, her brother was arrested and executed.

The other women were in similar conditions, and they comforted and strengthened each other with the Word and prayer. Given her good education and her knowledge of Scripture, Marie became a teacher for the prisoners' children. Young girls who were imprisoned with their mothers usually stayed in the Tower, while young boys were taken away after weaning and sent to live with relatives or other families.

In reality, the women had many opportunities to leave. At one point, the Tower's supervisor, moved by the women's plea, gave them a way out: They didn't have to renounce their faith. They just had to say they were sorry and ask for the king's forgiveness.

It's sometimes hard for twenty-first-century Americans to fully understand these women's struggle. They lived at a time when Christians had a deep respect for God-appointed authorities, even those who persecuted them. These women preferred to believe that the king was not totally aware of what was happening. Marie, as one of the most literate prisoners, wrote frequent letters to the authorities to try to explain the Huguenots' position. Far from being a threat, the Huguenots were devoted to their country and willing to give their lives to defend it and promote its prosperity.

The women in the Tower would have gladly asked for forgiveness if they had offended the king or harmed the country in any way. But they couldn't ask him to forgive them for worshipping God according to Scriptures. It would have been an undue admission of guilt and a declaration that the king had the right to decide how God should be worshiped.

By that time, French Huguenots had learned many lessons from centuries of persecution. After decades of guerrilla-like warfare, under the extemporaneous inspiration of self-proclaimed prophets which included women and children, a group of pastors, led by the young Antoine Court (1696–1760), held a series of secret meetings to reorganize the church according to Scriptures. Marie's brother, Pierre Durand (1700–1732), was one of these reforming pastors.

Antoine Court proposed four items of reform: regular worship meetings; the suppression of religious violence; the restoration of church government and discipline by re-establishing consistories and synods; and the careful training of French pastors, mostly in the newly established seminary in Lausanne.

Violent resistance was replaced with a program of persuasion and education of the authorities. Marie's letters even reached Madame de Pompadour, the official chief mistress of Louis XV. Paul Rabaut (1718–1794), a young French pastor who was one of Marie's most faithful supporters, availed himself of every open door to influence the government, even while he was in

Marie's brother being arrested,



Marie teaching the children in the Tower.

Inside the tower looking down on the common room where the women lived, cooked, sewed and read Scriptures.



The Tower of Constance, where Marie lived for thirty-eight years.



hiding. Finally, several men and women of the French nobility became acquainted with the Protestants' plea and worked toward their freedom.

Interestingly, much support came from French philosophers of the budding Enlightenment, such as Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. While disagreeing with the main tenets of Christianity (Voltaire questioned the goodness of God while Rousseau defended the innate goodness of men), they defended Protestants from a human-rights perspective.

Naturally, the Huguenots were grateful to these men. Sadly, their gratefulness went too far and many Huguenots became charmed by the ideas of the Enlightenment. It didn't help that Swiss churches had been slowly abandoning many tenets of the historical creeds and confessions, favoring a new catechism (written by Jean-Frédéric Ostervald) which compromised many important doctrines, such as justification by faith alone and the Trinity.

As time went on, the church felt increasingly compelled to meet the philosophers' standards and to formulate a more rational and practical religious creed focusing on love for humankind and minimizing the mysteries of the faith. Paul Rabaut firmly opposed these changes. "I will not reject a mystery for the only reason that it cannot be understood," he wrote.

Regrettably, some of the most fervent promoters of the new direction of the church were the sons of Antoine Court and Paul Rabaut—Antoine Court de Gébelin and Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint-Étienne. Deeply concerned, Paul Rabaut wrote in 1776, "This freedom for which so many of our people yearn, I fear it as much as I desire it." Still, he concluded, "I have no trouble putting my fate in the hands of Wise Providence."

His fears were justified, as the French Revolution turned fiercely against the Christians who had fully subscribed to the ideals of the Enlightenment at the expense of their historical creeds and confessions. On December 5, 1793, Jean-Paul Rabaut Saint-Étienne, who had become a member of the French convention, was arrested, prosecuted, and executed by the new revolutionary government. After erecting in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, a statue to Reason, the new regime proceeded to close down churches and monasteries, destroy religious monuments, and persecute all religions.

Once again, French Huguenots underwent persecution. Today, we can learn many lessons from their struggles and their mistakes, and be encouraged by the faithfulness of God who has continued to sustain His church, even in persecution and "in the desert."

Marie was released in 1768. She was fifty-seven and very feeble from the time spent in prison. She retired in her house with a woman who was freed with her. At this point, we would like to give the story a happy ending and say she lived free and untroubled for the rest of her life. In reality, Marie's house had been taken over and ransacked by some unscrupulous cousins. Even her niece (her brother's only daughter), whom Marie had always loved very deeply, had married a rich Roman Catholic and had allowed her husband to take advantage of Marie's properties. Thankfully, some churches continued to support Marie until her death in 1776.

While this might not be the happy ending we are inclined to expect, it is in fact more comforting, because God continued to sustain Marie not only through her time in prison but also through every struggle at home, giving her the strength to rely on His promises, grateful for what she

described as "the honor of wearing his uniform for his just cause."

Marie Durand is well known in France. During the Nazi regime, she became an inspiration to a large group of French Christian villages who participated in an aggressive operation to rescue of war prisoners, mostly Jews. Many people still visit the Tower of Constance and look at an inscription Marie is believed to have carved on a stone: *Register* (which means "to resist" in the language of that particular region). Few, however, realize the source of her endurance, and even fewer have read her moving, Scripture-filled letters which reveal a life of sincere conviction in the truth of the Bible and unmoving devotion to the Lord.

The times seem long, and in fact they are. Our flesh complains because we are naturally impatient, but, my dear girl, let's put to death our evil desires. Let's be the violent who take heaven by force. Let's seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto us. Let's forsake our ways and return to the Lord who, in his greatest wrath, remembers mercy. He will have pity on his desolate Zion and will restore her to her renowned condition on the earth. Let's pray for her peace, for God has promised prosperity to those who love her. (Marie Durand, to her niece Anne, November 25, 1755)

Mrs. Simonetta Carr

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Marie Durand

By Simonetta Carr

2015, Reformation Heritage Books

64 pp. \$18

“No amount of freedom is worth the compromise of biblical teachings” (p. 52). This maxim is a fitting response to recent erosion of religious freedom in the West.

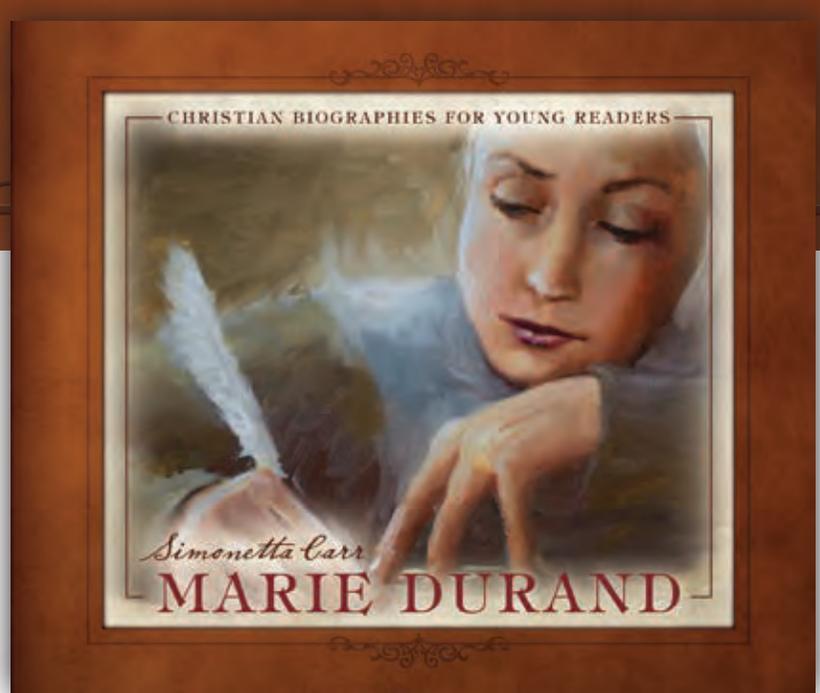
As a reminder that biography can serve as timeless moral philosophy in narrative form, these words reflect the position of the persecuted Protestants living in eighteenth-century France. Many who were unwilling to compromise the gospel lost freedom, livelihood, wealth, and public esteem. Sometimes they lost their lives.

Simonetta Carr’s *Marie Durand*, like the rest of the books in her Christian Biographies for Young Readers series, allows readers to enter the lives of some of the spiritual predecessors upon whose shoulders they unwittingly stand. What readers will see as they taste a thin slice of eighteenth-century France (aided by the always gorgeous artwork of illustrator Matt Abraxas) are sincere believers choosing to endure dire circumstances in order to honor God and their consciences.

In other words, contemporary readers will find in this book a reality check.

We wonder if Christianity is worth it when our convictions become unpopular. We complain when the church air conditioner doesn’t keep up with the temperature or humidity. We start watch-checking when it seems like the minister might not say “amen” within his allotted time. We leave churches because the vote on the most recent nonessential matter didn’t go our way.

Our toleration for persecution is low. This is understandable. Most of us have not resisted sin to the point of shedding our blood (Heb. 12:4) . . . yet.



This is not to say that contemporary believers do not suffer. What Paul says is true—“All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12)—because believers at all times and places have to tread the same ground in which “the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). As we resist the devil we do well to remember that “the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by [our] brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:9); indeed, throughout the history of the world. This is why books like *Marie Durand* are immensely valuable. Her life provides an imperfect but badly needed tutorial on how to suffer well as a child of God.

The author’s tribute to Marie is applicable to believers today: We must simply continue to do what God calls us to do every day, keeping our eyes on the future triumph of glory (p. 53). Because our God is a faithful father and not a false-kissing enemy (Prov. 27:6) our everyday walk will be as hard as necessary in order that we might be conformed to the image of our suffering Savior. Perhaps Marie had read the Puritan Thomas Watson who, like her, exhorted his friends to learn to kiss the rod that strikes us. If God disciplines those he loves (Heb. 12:6), he seemed to especially cherish Marie. We might find it hard to imagine being locked in a cold, drafty, unsanitary tower for thirty-eight years, and emerge as a mature, loving, sober-minded Christian! But during those hard years, in which everything else was stripped from her, Marie learned to say to her God, “There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Ps. 73:25).

What will it take for modern Christians to be able to say the same? The answer will differ for each of us. But Simonetta Carr’s *Marie Durand* might just help us and our children toward the goal.

Reviewed by **Rev. William Boekestein**, pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, MI.

MINTS International Seminary Trains Thousands in Cuba



Norlan
De Groot

In 2006, URC missionary Neal Hegeman was deported from Cuba for preaching without a government-approved license. At the time, he served as the MINTS coordinator for Cuba. When he left, 121 students were studying MINTS courses on a weekly basis. He asked master's level students to continue the program in his absence.

Two coordinators who took over MINTS-Cuba responsibilities were particularly instrumental in growing the program. J. S. in Camaguey organized MINTS classes among Pentecostal students. His denomination, the Assemblies of God, voiced concern about his Reformed teachings and tried to stop the program, but as one participating pastor stated, "What is of God cannot be stopped." The program grew to more than five hundred students.

That's when Dr. Nolberto Quezada, the second coordinator, stepped in. Dr. Quezada is the president of Los Pinos Nuevos Seminary. He completed his doctor of ministry degree with MINTS and then went on to complete his PhD, which involved writing a plan to extend MINTS-like studies throughout Cuba. In 2013, he implemented his plan and signed up seven thousand students, members of house churches scattered throughout Cuba. They established twenty-seven teacher training centers in various parts of the country. In 2014, he signed up an additional three thousand house church members.

In Cuba, house churches are the norm. The Cuban government does not give permits to build churches, so Cuban Christians work with what

they have. They use the largest space available, which is often a garage. When the garage is full, it's time to start a new church. Dr. Quesada estimates that Cuban Christians have established more than fifty thousand house churches on the island.

When asked what factors contributed to the phenomenal growth, Dr. Hegeman gives several reasons. "God is sovereign over the nations," he says. "He took the decree to forbid the building of new churches, to force churches to meet in homes. The restriction to thirty people in a meeting forced churches to multiply to other homes. Each home church needs leaders, hence leadership multiplied."

"But there are more reasons," he says. "The Bible is widely distributed and studied in small house churches. Faithful Cuban leaders sacrifice a great deal to evangelize and to set up house churches. Pastors, elders, and church members preach. Preaching to the unconverted is still God's method for evangelism." God even uses socialism to grow the church. "Since Cuba is heavily socialized, people are forced to depend on the government for their 20 to 25 dollars per month salary. There is little incentive to work. Hence, Christians have a lot of time to visit, evangelize, and study." Computers also play a role. "MINTS has 16GB USB drives with more than four thousand Spanish theological books and over one hundred MINTS courses. If students share computers that are brought in, they can read and study."

Dr. Hegeman continues to assist with the work in Cuba even though he is

no longer personally able to enter the country. He does not plan to return to Cuba without a religious visa, something the Cuban government, up to this point, has not granted. However, he does correct master's and doctoral-level manuscripts. He also helps organize trips for visiting teachers.

On one such trip, the visiting teacher preached in a house church. The garage where the church met was filled to capacity. Others stood out on the street looking through the side door. The temperature inside was ten degrees warmer than outside, but everyone—inside and outside—rejoiced to worship the Lord.

The visiting teacher also taught a class for MINTS students. Later, one of the students wrote a note summarizing his experience as a Christian in Cuba: "As you can see we are poor but rich, prisoners on our own island, but free in the Spirit, without resources but we share what we have with those in need. God has blessed us greatly at our seminary, and I believe we are preparing ourselves well theologically and spiritually."

"The Cuban experience is a lesson in God's sovereignty," says Dr. Hegeman. God used what we would consider oppressive circumstances to build his church. He is now worshiped in Cuba in house after house after house.

Norlan De Groot is the English Communications Coordinator for MINTS International Seminary. He is an elder at Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, IA.

Meeting in a house church

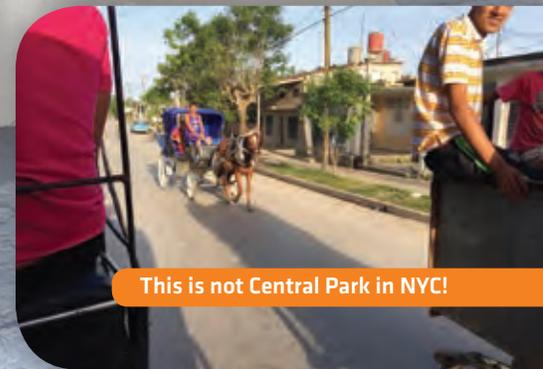


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Seminary student giving a report in front of the class.

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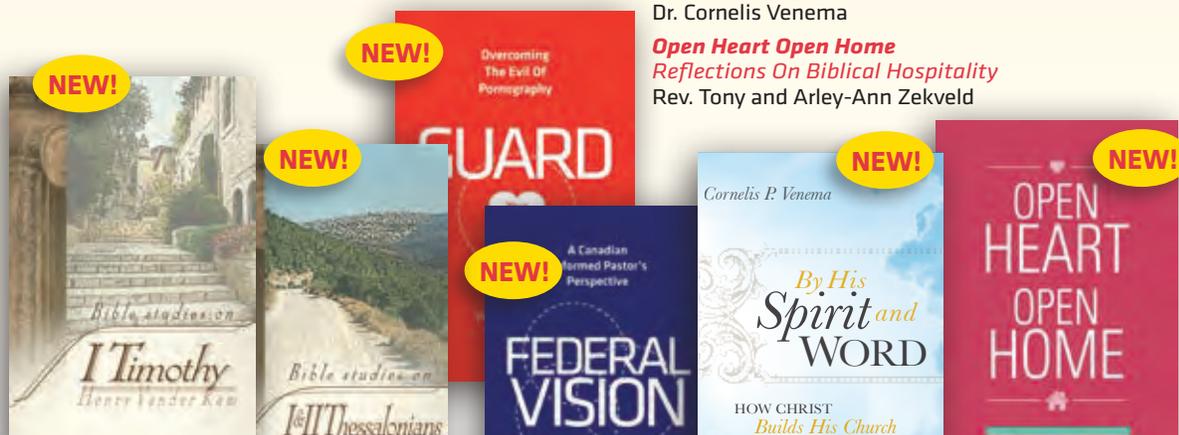
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