Reformed Herald

GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE IN CHRIST
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When they heard the king, they departed; and behold,
the star which they had seen in the East went before them,
till it came and stood over where the young Child was…

MATTHEW.2:9

COVER ART BY PHOEBE DAWN

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Reformed Herald
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Celebrate Christmas
in Anticipation of His Return

It sure seems that we live in a culture that considers absolute truth to be, at the most, a relic of the past. For present generations who have grown up apart from being taught that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, their celebration of Christmas is pretty much emptied of Christ's incarnation and birth.

But as we Christians celebrate the grace of God whereby God has come to us in the flesh to save us from our sins, we do so in anticipation of His coming again so we for whom He sacrificed Himself might be with Him forever in the consummate promised land. Both advents are necessary for the fulfillment of God's covenant promises, and Christ's incarnation and birth to be the suffering servant, apart from His return in glory would deny us Christians the consummation of the victory of His first advent. God's eternal plan to save a people for His glory provides for both advents of Christ as the Scriptures so testify.

It's good to remember that prophecy does not describe the future in as detailed a manner as history recounts the past. But already in the Old Testament portion of Scripture there are prophecies that demonstrate an underlying assumption of two advents. This editorial is not intended to be exegetical, but for instance, look at Isaiah 53 where we see the first advent prophesied, that of the suffering and dying Messiah, but already at the end of Isaiah 52, there is a clue of the second advent, for that is when kings will consummately shut their mouths before the exalted Lord.

We see clues to the triumph of the Messiah, restoration (2nd advent), in Amos 9:11-15, and the end of Joel 2 looks to the Day of the Lord that will be consummate at Christ's second advent. When Jesus, during his first advent ministry, foretells of His second advent, i.e., Matt.24:29-31, his descriptions are rather parallel with Old Testament prophecy such as Isaiah 52:15 and Daniel 7:13,14. Into the fabric of God's plan of redemption and restoration are woven both the first and second advent of Christ. We Christians confess our belief in the scriptural two advents by way of the oldest and most basic of the Christian Church confessions, the Apostles Creed (go ahead, say it to yourself to confirm).

So, yes, even as we remember and celebrate God's grace of bringing the only Savior into this world for His humiliation even to His death on the cross, we anticipate Christ Jesus' return in His exalted glory. As Titus 2:11-14 ties the two advents together: **For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men** (1st advent), **teaching us that , denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ** (2nd advent),**who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**(NKJV)

But do our lives demonstrate our anticipation of Christ's second advent? That anticipation, that looking for the blessed hope, is it not, according to Paul's letter to Titus, to be evident by our denying ungodliness in the meantime, being zealous for good works? Living, in other words, in the way that is pleasing to God unto His glory…..not giving in to the pragmatism of our culture. Pragmatism, generally, is of ungodliness for it really is an expression of a **way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death** (Prov.14:12) (Being pragmatic to get rid of ants marching across your kitchen floor is a good thing!)

This editorial was prompted in part reading an article by Robert Joustra entitled "The Tyranny of Pragmatism," posted on The Aquila Report. He asserts that "pragmatism is the true rot at the heart of our institutions, political, educational, cultural, the gamut." And he claims that pragmatism is the consequence of a culture in which outcome trumps process.

Process in the USA political/governmental sphere would be following the Constitution. Process in the corporate world would be following the established by-laws.

Process, in living the Christian life in anticipation of Christ's second advent, is waiting on the Lord; process is the orderliness, the way of doing things as is pleasing to God, as set forth in His law as Jesus and His apostles most fully explained its application; process is "Thy will be done", depending on His grace, His strengthening us through unceasing prayer. Process is thankfulness to God whatever our circumstances.

But pragmatism sets process aside for the sake of getting done the things that are perceived as needing to be done. Joustra defines pragmatism: "the commonsense logic that preaches that you gotta do what you gotta do, and that when things stand in your way, you have to find a way around them….action is demanded."

Executive orders, mandates, by Presidents, are pragmatic. Get it (my will) done now with the stroke of a pen, rather than by what could be a lengthy and uncertain-outcome legislative process.

But might we be prone to pragmatism in our Christian lives? Yes, we confess that Christ will return and set all things right and we who are His will be fully healed of these yet sin-cursed mortal bodies and all our enemies will be cast away from us. And as we await His glorious return and then being the church triumphant, we know that all things are working together for the good of us who love God, who are the called according to His purpose.

But what about when things are not going your or my way in some aspect of life. Are we prone then to become pragmatic? Something needs to be done about "this," I gotta find a way around this; I want this outcome, the ends justify the means, never mind process. Pragmatism is focused on this present earthly life without the Christian perspective that this present world is passing away; in terms of Ecclesiastes, this life is but a breath in light of the eternity to come. Pragmatism tends to view this present life from a temporal perspective, which Solomon's wisdom reveals as absurd and utterly vain. Pragmatism's finding a way around things that interfere with the way we want this life to be, loses sight of the apostle Paul's perspective which should be ours, based on Christ's yet coming advent: **For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison** (2 Cor.4:14). It's the "momentary affliction" whatever it is, that gets in our way and pragmatism, if we go there, does whatever it takes to get around it, shoving God and His revealed process for life between the advents into the background.

I knew a church member who suffered from a prognosed terminal disease. That stood in the way of the way he envisioned his life. He wanted to be healed of it in this life, and with that outcome in mind became obsessed with a cure to the detriment of spending time with family and waiting on the Lord in hope; his failed pragmatism made him bitter, sadly, right up to his death.

Pragmatism seeks to make the church relevant in a culture that is indoctrinated with "wokeness" as relates to race and justice and sexual and gender self-definition, never mind the process for church growth God sets forth in the gospel. If the perceived problem is too small attendance, pragmatism might solve it, get it done, by a more man-pleasing worship experience. And as well, it's more pragmatic, less hassle, more me-time, safer, to avoid attending the public worship of the church. That gets church done as pleases me, never mind God's admonition to not neglect to gather together (Heb 10:25).

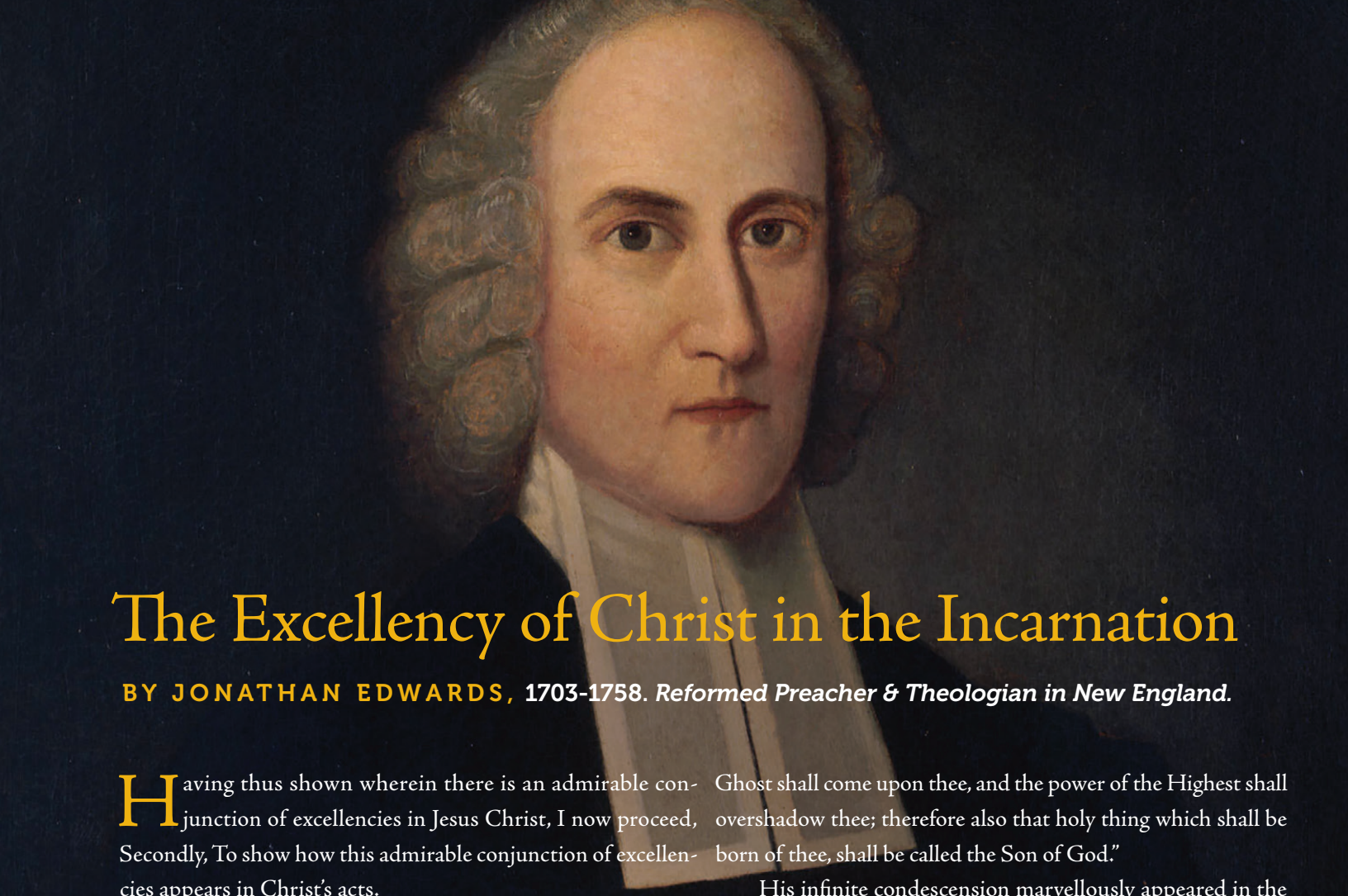
It would be pragmatic to shut out, have nothing more to do with, not attend church with, those whom we perceive as having offended us, or to get even with them, or be bitter, never mind the process of forgiveness and repentance laid out in the Scriptures.

Pragmatism can, in an ungodly way, direct our stewardship; our giving of our resources, our time, ourselves to Christ and to the other members of His body.

Our Christian way, our way of life, is to deny ungodliness as we await the second advent of Christ, for we are longing to be alive with our Savior Lord forever in the new heavens and earth, where ungodliness, where pragmatism, will only be a relic of this yet present age.

Let not pragmatism, but set-apart -to -the Lord living, mindful of God's revealed process, characterize our lives lived in between Christ's advents. rh

Rev. George Horner
Ridgeland, SC



The Excellency of Christ in the Incarnation

BY JONATHAN EDWARDS, 1703-1758. *Reformed Preacher & Theologian in New England.*

Having thus shown wherein there is an admirable conjunction of excellencies in Jesus Christ, I now proceed, Secondly, To show how this admirable conjunction of excellencies appears in Christ's acts.

1. It appears in what Christ did in taking on him our nature. In this act, his infinite condescension wonderfully appeared, that he who was God should become man; that the word should be made flesh, and should take on him a nature infinitely below his original nature! And it appears yet more remarkably in the low circumstances of his incarnation: he was conceived in the womb of a poor young woman, whose poverty appeared in this, when she came to offer sacrifices of her purification, she brought what was allowed of in the law only in case of poverty; as Luke 2:24. "According to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons." This was allowed only in case the person was so poor that she was not able to offer a lamb. Lev. 12:8.

And though his infinite condescension thus appeared in the manner of his incarnation, yet his divine dignity also appeared in it; for though he was conceived in the womb of a poor virgin, yet he was conceived there by the power of the Holy Ghost. And his divine dignity also appeared in the holiness of his conception and birth. Though he was conceived in the womb of one of the corrupt race of mankind, yet he was conceived and born without sin; as the angel said to the blessed Virgin, Luke 1:35. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."

His infinite condescension marvellously appeared in the manner of his birth. He was brought forth in a stable, because there was no room for them in the inn. The inn was taken up by others, that were looked upon as persons of greater account. The blessed Virgin, being poor and despised, was turned or shut out. Though she was in such necessitous circumstances, yet those that counted themselves her betters would not give place to her; and therefore, in the time of her travail, she was forced to betake herself to a stable; and when the child was born, it was wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger. There Christ lay a little infant; and there he eminently appeared as a lamb. But yet this feeble infant, born thus in a stable, and laid in a manger, was born to conquer and triumph over Satan, that roaring lion. He came to subdue the mighty powers of darkness, and make a show of them openly; and so to restore peace on earth, and to manifest God's good-will towards men, and to bring glory to God in the highest; according as the end of his birth was declared by the joyful songs of the glorious hosts of angels appearing to the shepherds at the same time that the infant lay in the manger; whereby his divine dignity was manifested. rh

A Blessed Beginning

In one of my literature courses back in my undergraduate days, the class was instructed by the professor to keep a journal of favorites quotations. I had quite a few from Fyodor Dostoevsky including this one: "Man only likes to count his troubles; he doesn't calculate his happiness. Man is fond of counting his troubles but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up, as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it." (*Notes from Underground, White Nights, The Dream of a Ridiculous Man, and Selections from The House of the Dead Quotes*).

I wondered then if it was even possible to calculate joy—to systematize happiness, to enumerate blessings. Years later when I was studying the New Testament Gospels in seminary, I was puzzled why the longest discourse in the New Testament by the Messiah Jesus Christ, known as the "Sermon on the Mount," would begin with a litany of "Blesseds." Why not continue to work off the earlier gospel pronouncement of "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17)?

Our Lord spoke, as the gospel writer records, preaching first on happiness or what we know as the Beatitudes. No doubt most seasoned pew-sitters have heard multiple messages on how the Christian should feel blessed in the face of trial and affliction, but too often that happiness seems elusive and any prospects of contentment could only be realized in the distant future. However, the blessings of which Jesus speaks are present blessings and can be enjoyed today as well as in the future.

In this day and age can anyone be truly happy? Coming off a season of virus, presidential election madness, woke idealogy, pronoun confusion, men professing to be women, women professing to be men, and the sanctity of everything except life in the womb, can there be happiness amidst persecution?

Jesus answers that for us.

The Spiritual State of Blessedness Is Never Defined by External and Temporal Appearances

Does our Lord's litany of "Blesseds" in Matthew 5 look even remotely like foundational principles for a health and wealth gospel? "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are those who mourn," "Blessed are the meek," and if that is not bad enough: "Blessed are those who are persecuted."

In these evangelical times, revision is a must if the rubric for successful preaching is emoting positive vibes. Perhaps, it should be "Blessed are the upbeat, who have confidence in themselves," "Blessed are those who celebrate and take joy in themselves," and "Blessed are the proud, and those who avenge themselves."

Perhaps not. Jesus is not equating happiness with one's appearance, one's accumulation of stuff, nor with one's self-esteem. The carnal mind cannot conceive the spiritual reality of Jesus' words. His words do not compute for the one who basks in the flesh because the carnal mind can never get beyond the external and temporal appearances.

The so-called happiness that the world holds dear is the curse that will forever leave them miserable. Conversely, the "curse" of humility and service imposed on the Christian according to the world is not a curse but the genuine mark of happiness that will some day be consummated in Christ—the details of which will be the subject of future articles in this series.

But for now, let us observe that a biblical view of happiness and worldly appearances of happiness are vastly different. As impossible as it is for the world to get, an afflicted people can be a happy people if they have Christ. Zephaniah 3:12 states, "But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD." And then in verse 14, "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!"

And all of that because of verse 17– "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

To the world, happiness is all about one's present circumstance. Therefore, it must be the case that an afflicted people must be a miserable people, and for the daughter of Zion to sing in her humility and lowly state must mean, according to the world, that an afflicted people who are happy must also be a crazy people.

What was the evangelist James thinking when he said, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials.*"? What were the early Christians thinking when they gladly entered the arena of martyrdom? They weren't thinking, according to the mindset of the Roman world. But then what happened to the Roman world? What happened to that ancient superpower, that center of global commerce and happiness, that heart of then western hedonism?

The deception that lies in the world's apparent happiness keeps it from seeing its own miserable reality and decline, let alone from seeing the spiritual reality of our text. In this country, you don't have to be happy; you just have to appear happy–you fake it until you make it, but you don't really make it; you just get better at faking it. And that's the tragic game that people play.

True happiness. Is it in the externals? Is it merely temporal?

Is it a feeling that comes when we go shopping, when we are vacationing, when we are relaxing in front of the television, or reading a good book or hanging with friends?

Now, we can say ultimately that's not happiness and respond with a biblical and confessional answer that sounds like, "My chief happiness and end is to glorify God."

What is happiness really to you? Is it maybe a little bit defined by circumstance or those fleeting things which come your way?

The Spiritual State of Blessedness Is Not Determined by Affluence

The biblical silence in the Beatitudes is deafening. Jesus is not giving the church a get-rich-quick scheme. He is not saying that if you pray really hard and think only positive thoughts all the day long your territory will be enlarged and you will be happy. He is not presenting a purpose driven agenda that will meet creaturely needs as defined by the world. This is not to say that you are never blessed in your financial or physical needs.

The essence of happiness does not consist of things and circumstances of this present life. There is absolutely nothing in this world that will ever meet the needs of the soul of man or satisfy the desires of the heart. But how even the most devout Christian will look to his circumstance, at his abundance as that barometer of personal well-being. Every professing Christian does that, defining our day by the flow of the day and the things we receive. How many can say after a series of horrific events or loss of possession that the day was good because God ordained it that way.

Providence is "good" when it goes the Christian's way, when one gets the promotion, the raise, the grade, the latest in this or that, but is providence ever bad?

Is that with which God blesses us or takes away ever bad?

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" cannot be rightly understood outside of Christ.

You might have read about that ambitious farmer who was never quite happy enough, and even as his crops came in plentifully, he kept thinking bigger is better.

So he thought he'd just tear down his old barns and build larger ones, and there he will store his grain and his goods, and once that's done, he would go into retirement mode and kick up his feet, and relax, eat, drink, be merry. Happiness has finally arrived.

Our Lord calls that man a fool in Luke 12:20 for that night his soul will be taken, and so is the fool who lays up treasure for himself; he is not rich toward God.

Proverbs 11:4 reminds us, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." And let's not discount how our Lord warns in Luke 9:25, "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

To our young professionals the corporate ladder is a lie. Each ascending rung is no guarantee of happiness. To our high school and college age young people, do well in school in that office of student and disciple with the purpose of learning God's creation, that you might properly subdue it to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ–not to get a good paying job from which you might support habits and vices that you think will make you happy.

And to our parents who encourage their children to excel, may the prize you teach them to pursue be nothing more, or, really,

nothing less than that which is in Jesus Christ. May our children see the temporal things that we enjoy as significantly smaller than the faith we confess and the fellowship that we embrace.

If we as a church uphold anything greater than the King, not only do we live the lie, we discount the true meaning of the Beatitudes, and not just that, but we also deceive our little ones into thinking that the body of Christ, the church, is just a piece or part of our life.

When Christ sat down and preached, he offered a blessed beginning, a start of a glorious message, a sermon that commences with happiness, defines happiness, and concludes on a most happy note because in part what is so conspicuously absent in His message is the idolatry of self.

The Spiritual State of Blessedness is Not Dependent on Self

When one suffers from anxiety, depression, or some other mental affliction, one goes to therapy, and too often therapy in our country is predicated on self-actualization.

It is said that to be happy is to know oneself, to understand, to embrace oneself in order to love oneself. But consider these passages:

Luke 9:23–"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

Ephesians 4:22–"Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desire."

1 Corinthians 3:18 –"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise."

And speaking of fools, from Proverbs 18:2– "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."

Do you see the pattern? Happiness isn't about being secure in yourself.

With each beautitude, you will not find happiness dependent on man's pleasure.

It is not there in any way, shape or form because man's carnal pleasure is not happiness. The world is the harlot who is out to deceive you and rob you of your true source of blessedness. Proverbs 7 warns us: "She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, 'Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey.'"

Likewise, the world says, "Come, imbibe, enjoy. Your Lord Jesus Christ is away. Partake and what we do in secret will stay a secret." Except God sees everything, and that which you do in secret that profanes the name of the most holy God and makes sport of His statutes will leave you destitute and miserable.

The psalmist declares, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:10).

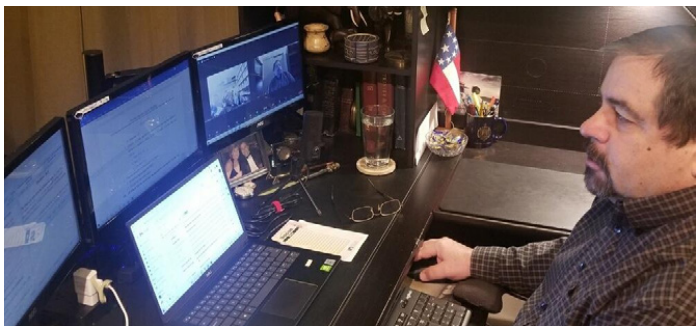
You can be a happy doorkeeper, but you will never be happy in the world's tents.

David says in Psalm 37, "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!" Now David said those things out of faith, but also out of experience.

Later in Psalm 37: "I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found. Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace. But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off. The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him."

In future articles, we will look at these "Blesseds," but know from this blessed beginning, that your happiness begins and remains in Christ.

It is not defined by circumstance, nor determined by affluence, nor dependent on self. And thanks be to God for that! rh



TECHNOLOGY
TO THE GLORY OF GOD

The method used by the RCUS in Foreign Missions is different than what many other denominations use. Many churches send people from the United States to learn the language and customs of a foreign land in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The RCUS trains indigenous people to preach and teach in their own country. They already know the customs and language. What these pastors need is training. This is the primary focus of foreign missions in the RCUS.

In Kenya, the men traveled from their homes in Kisii to Mbale. Uganda to study at Knox Theological College (KTC). Our late Rev. Thomas Mayville taught at KTC for over two-and one-half years. Six men were trained for the ministry there and it was a great benefit to the Lord's people in Kisii. The drawback of this was that men had to spend extended periods of time away from their families and also couldn't earn an income to support their families. Therefore, the RCUS helped establish Gussi Reformed Theological College (GRTC) in Kenyenya, Kisii. The teaching there is good, but the knowledge of the pastors who are teaching

is still somewhat limited. Having a well-trained RCUS pastor live there and teach is not economically feasible at this time.

Therefore, the Synod of the RCUS set aside $2,000.00 for the Foreign Ministries Committee to oversee the purchase of the necessary technology to support online training from the United States via electronic means. The $2,000.00 fell short of what was needed to get all the equipment necessary as well as (semi) reliable internet access in Kenya. A congregation in the RCUS learned of this need and sent another $1,000.00 to enable to complete what was needed there. No funds have been received to cover expenses here in the United States.

Heidelberg Seminary in Sioux Falls has been effectively training men for the ministry in the Philippines via video conference and has determined to pursue a similar program for training in Kenya and if possible, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This fall, the seminary established this program.

Going forward in faith, the process of teaching online to Kenya has begun. At this writing, six weeks of classes have been held. The courses are currently being taught to ten men in Kenya. Six are the present pastors there who are taking the classes for credit toward earning the Master of Divinity Degree. The other four are elders who are auditing the classes.

Dr. Maynard Koerner is teaching two courses. On Wednesday at 7:00 am (will be 6:00 when Standard Time begins) he teaches a class on Reformed Worship and on Thursday, a class on Ancient Church History. This time is 3:00 pm in Kenya.

Rev. Doug Schlegel is teaching a class in Prolegomena. His teaching schedule begins at 12:00 mid-night and ends at 2:00 am on Thursdays. This equates to 10:00 am to 12 Noon in Kenya.

In addition to the regular classes at GRTC on Wednesday morning, the students in Kenya come together on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning and afternoon for these online classes. This also costs them in terms of travel and meals in order to be at GRTC those two days.

Both teachers and students encountered a bit of a learning curve to become proficient with the technology, but the system is now working well (other than the internet connection being frequently interrupted on the Kenya side). The instructors, Kenyan students and Foreign Ministries Committee believe it is working well and should continue for Kenya.

The classes are being recorded and we are hopeful they will be used in the Congo as well. For the most part, those in Kenya understand English to a large degree, but in the Congo, someone will need to translate the lessons into the various languages spoken there.

As stated earlier, there is no funding for this project on this end. Therefore, the Foreign Ministries Committee is establishing a "Ministerial Training in Africa" fund. We know that the people of the RCUS have been very generous in providing funds for pastors in Africa as well as the Congo Economic Development Fund and Compassion Kenya. We praise God for your generosity. It is our hope that you will see the need and blessing associated with this "Ministerial Training in Africa" project and be able to donate to help it prosper.

The Ministerial Training in Africa fund will be overseen by the Kenya Subcommittee of the Foreign Ministries Committee and the Consistory of Providence Reformed Church in Lodi, California. We ask that the Consistories and members of the RCUS prayerfully consider contributing to this cause. If you would like to contribute, please make out checks to Providence Reformed Church and be sure to include a note in the memo space or attach a note stating that you want your donation to go to Ministerial Training in Africa. rh

Providence Reformed Church,
Lodi, CA

Checks should be mailed to: Providence Reformed Church 245 East Vine St. Lodi, CA 95240

SOLA GRATIA

In Paul's letters works are contrasted with two different things. Speaking of how we are justified, works are opposed to faith. Speaking about God's reason for saving his chosen people, works are opposed to grace. If God's choice had been based on works, it wouldn't have been grace (Rom. 11:5–6). In writing to Timothy and Titus, Paul emphasized this aspect of grace. When we ask the question, *why has God saved anyone*, the answer is *grace alone*.

> 2 Timothy 1:9 – *[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*

It's very clear there that God's own grace is the original motive for salvation. Our calling to salvation was not in keeping with our own works at all. The very need for salvation from sin and guilt means that our works deserved condemnation and punishment.

We first received grace in eternity – so not after we had sought it for a long time by strenuous efforts at holiness, not when we believed, nor when we were baptized. Grace was given to us in Christ before time began. In God's plan of salvation we were marked out for salvation before we even existed. So God does not save us because of what he finds in us, but because of his own sovereign favor to the guilty and undeserving.

> Therefore *when the kindness and love of God our savior appeared*, it was *not by works of righteousness that we have done* but he saved us *according to his mercy*. The work of Christ secured all redemption's blessings for us, and the Holy Spirit applied them to us. Thus Paul added, *having been justified by his grace we should become heirs of eternal life* (Titus 3:5–7).

Why are the ungodly ever justified? Because God shows grace. Why are children of the devil adopted as God's children? Because God shows grace. Why do those deserving of everlasting death receive eternal life? Because God shows grace.

The Reformation returned to this simple and Biblical doctrine in the face of many confusions. They understood that this idea of grace was at the heart of Biblical christianity. We have never deserved God's favor; we have deserved just the opposite. But God is gracious anyway.

> So the Heidelberg Catechism in Q.66 captures the Biblical and Reformation message well when it defines "the promise of the Gospel": "that of free grace He grants us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life for the sake of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross."

The forgiveness of sins and eternal life were acquired by Christ's work on the cross. But why did God send Christ to acquire them? Because of grace. God didn't have to, and we didn't earn it. It's all free grace. In fact, "free grace" would be redundant if it weren't that people get so confused. In order to be grace, it has to be free.

Why is anyone saved? Because God shows grace. He does so freely, without any constraint; he does so sovereignly. He shows grace willingly and gladly, delighting to do so. The tremendous blessings of redemption acquired in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit are poured out on us abundantly, because God's grace is sovereign, free, and abundant.

This doctrine of grace should shape our whole view of God.

Do you see God as the twisted tyrant, enjoying the misery of his inferiors? Recognize your error in the fact that he showers grace on the most undeserving for no reason other than his own good purpose.

Do you see God as ultimately angry, just waiting for you to mess up so he has an excuse to smite you? Reject that lie with all your heart, because God's eternal plan was to give grace to us through Christ.

Do you see God as barely restrained from pouring out judgment because Christ holds him back? Abandon that false idea, because it was from his own grace that God sent Christ to be our Redeemer.

Do you see God as reluctantly giving you little odds and ends of kindness? Open your eyes to the glorious abundance of God's eternal riches in grace. To every believer he has given his Son, his Spirit, and every good thing.

This grace should move us to pray, perhaps something along the following lines.

> *Gracious Father, your grace restores and refreshes our hearts. It is so different from the way we often live, it is so surprising, that we often forget its reality. We praise you that you are good and do good, that you have sovereignly, freely, and abundantly granted us grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank you for allowing the church to recover the amazing truth of salvation by grace alone and clear away the cobwebs that obscured its freedom and glory.*
>
> *We pray that this grace would shape how we view you. May we confidently run to you in every trial because it is your good pleasure to show grace to the desperately undeserving. May this truth give us confidence that we have a Gospel suitable for every person. May your church be strengthened in the knowledge of this truth, and equipped to proclaim this Gospel promise to the ends of the earth.*

This grace should also move us to praise, and the words of Horatius Bonar would be quite appropriate.

[1] Not what my hands have done Can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne Can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears Can bear my awful load.

[2] Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, Can give me peace within.
Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.

[3] Thy grace alone, O God, To me can pardon speak;
Thy pow'r alone, O Son of God, Can this sore bondage break.
No other work save thine, No other blood will do;
No strength, save that which is divine, Can bear me safely through.

[4] I bless the Christ of God; I rest on love divine;
And with unfal'tring lip and heart, I call this Saviour mine.
His cross dispels each doubt; I bury in his tomb
Each thought of unbelief and fear, Each ling'ring shade of gloom.

[5] I praise the God of grace; I trust his truth and might;
He calls me his, I call him mine, My God, my joy, my light.
'Tis he who saveth me, And freely pardon gives;
I love because he loveth me, I live because he lives. rh

Rev. Ruben Zartman, Shafter, CA

NEWSLETTER October 2021

FOI & VIE RÉFORMÉES

"PROVIDING SOUND SPIRITUAL ADVICE WHEN ASKED TO DO SO"

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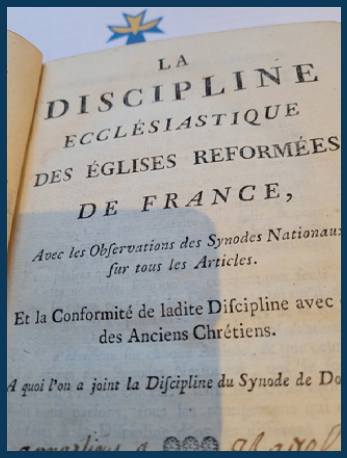


Together, we also study the old Church order in use in the French Reformed churches

Dear friends,

Walking in wisdom

As the year seems to hurry towards its end, it is good to remember the words of the apostle Paul in Col. 4:5 : *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of time.* From time to time the Lord sends across my path persons who thirst for meaningful answers to troubling questions about the meaning of their lives in the midst of all kinds of personal crises. Strict measures enforced by public authorities around the pandemic have dramatically affected their whole lives - personal, financial, etc. Please pray that they will be led to Christ through my sharing the Gospel with them and that they will learn to place their human fears in the hands of our merciful Father, so that they may find true peace and hope in Him alone.

Not only outsiders, but leaders of small Christians communities approach me at times for a word of wisdom about the life of their church. On the one hand it is quite delicate to speak about the internal affairs of a Christian community you are not a member of. On the other hand I see it as a God given calling to provide sound spiritual advice when asked to do so (by spiritual I mean: always true to the Christ centered Word breathed by the Holy Spirit).

Continuing our series of webinars on the Church

In order to provide clear and structured teaching on this vital topic – the Church with Christ as her sole cornerstone and head – on 20 November *Foi et Vie Réformées* will be presenting the 4th of a series of public webinars devoted to *ecclesiology*. We try to advertise them as widely as possible in the world of French-speaking Evangelicals. After our last webinar which dealt with the necessary *discipline* without which there cannot be any true Church of disciples, this time we will focus on the offices of pastors and elders in the local church, and on their complementary roles. Our brother and fellow servant Rev Paulin Bédard, from the Reformed Church of Beauce in Québec, will lead us into understanding the nature of this relationship. He will also give us an introduction to the history and life of the ERQ. My own Power Point presentation follows on those I have already produced on matters of ecclesiology. The recordings of our webinars are made available on our *Youtube* channel, while the *P.P.s* can be

used in local churches, should anyone wish to do so. Parallel to these public webinars, *Foi et Vie Réformées* started organizing internal webinars for its members to look deeper into matters of Church order and discipline, both from a Biblical and a historical perspective. We have the privilege of having access to several historical sources such as a 1760 book published in the Netherlands that contains the old Church order in use in the French Reformed churches before 1685 (the date of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by king Louis XIV that brutally put an end to the official life of the Reformed churches in the kingdom of France).

> " A GOLDMINE OF DEEP THOUGHTS AND SOLID BIBLICAL TEACHING "

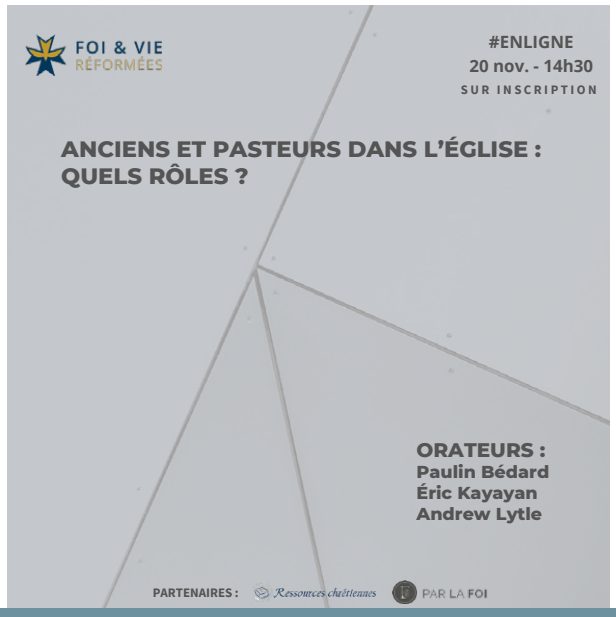
Posting excerpts of old sermons and making videos again

I am currently posting on our website broad extracts of Reformed sermons from the 17th and 18th centuries written and preached by French ministers at the time. It is a goldmine of deep thoughts and solid biblical teaching. Despite the historical and cultural differences between then and today, I find the core of the messages just as relevant for today's believers. After all, Scripture is meant by the Lord for all generations of believers until Jesus Christ returns in glory (Heb. 13:7-8).

After several months of interruption due to technical problems, I have been able to start making new videos again to reach the North African (mainly Muslim) public. Speaking about the promised coming of the Messiah – the true prince of peace and of justice – in Isaiah 9 and 11, is a way to lead our viewers to Jesus-Christ. He only, and certainly not Muhammad, can be called: *Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (9:6). Please pray that these videos may lead as many viewers as possible to a saving knowledge of our Lord and to seek his presence in their daily lives.

In His name

Rev Eric Kayayan



Our next public webinar on the Church will DV take place on 20 November

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RIGHTEOUSNESS YOUR OWN OR ANOTHER'S

Righteousness is a term that belongs to theological jargon. It is a biblical word but probably not used much outside of a theological context. The word righteous, on the other hand, has become part of common slang, although its meaning is somewhat altered. "That's righteous!" may now mean that something is just acceptable to the person or that it is "cool". But the word right is a part of everyday usage. The dictionary has over 30 definitions for the word right in its adjective, adverb, verb or noun form. A popular phrase today is "Do the right thing". Most people intuitively know that the word right has to do with some standard. Most often it is the standard of the prevailing societal mores, the accepted traditional custom of that society. But that standard is relative to the particular society. The moral standards of ancient Greece and Rome would be unacceptable to a Christian society.

The ultimate question, however, has to do with the ultimate standard, an absolute standard. As bible believing Christians we believe the ultimate standard is the revealed will of God, His Law. God's Law reflects His nature of holiness, of perfection. The moral Law of God is encapsulated in the Ten Commandments and summarized by Christ as loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:21-24). Paul said "Love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Romans 13:8). So, if we love God we obey Him and if we obey God we love Him. Now how does this tie in with righteousness? Well, righteousness, doing what is right, means being conformed to that absolute standard. So, righteousness is to love God and our neighbor perfectly. This means not only outwardly, but inwardly as well, not only in letter, but in spirit. It encompasses all of our thoughts, words, deeds and desires, perpetually, consistently and completely. The idea of love is welcomed by most people especially after the Beatles sang, "all we need is love…love is all we need". But I'm sure the Fab Four would not agree with the bible's definition of love as obeying God.

The Bible teaches that because God is holy and righteous and that He is unchangeable, Man, who is a sinner, who has failed miserably at loving God and neighbor perfectly, cannot approach the All-Holy God in his current state. In fact, Man, because of the fall of his federal head Adam, is born into a state of condemnation. He is dead in sin from the moment of conception. This state of sin and misery is the inheritance of all the children of Adam. In Adam ALL die. All therefore are justly condemned by God because they have sinned both representatively by Adam, and practically in their own lives. This is the Bad News and it is worse than we think.

But God, (two of the most wonderful words in Scripture), "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus…" (Eph.2:4-6) This is the Good News and it's infinitely better than we think. God offers us the solution which upholds and magnifies His holy Law and demonstrates His grace, mercy and love towards undeserving, condemned sinners. Only God could do this so that "Salvation is of the Lord", (Jonah 2:9). God offers, in the second Adam, His Son, Jesus Christ, the perfect, everlasting righteousness which satisfies His Law,

His holiness. He offers this as a gift to any who believe this Good News and receives that gift with the empty hand of faith. God then imputes, reckons to the believing sinner "the perfect satisfaction, holiness and righteousness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart" (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A #60). If that doesn't absolutely thrill your soul and fill you with such love for God that you want to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, than nothing will.

Why then, would anyone want to add their attempts at keeping the Law to the perfect righteousness of the God-Man? Why would anyone want a mongrel righteousness, partly Christ's and partly mine?? It is because as Spurgeon said we are all Pelagian at heart. In our sinful nature which we inherited from our federal head and father Adam, we have the inclination to seek autonomy from God. We want to contribute something of our inherent righteousness to God's acceptance of us. We want at least some bragging rights before God that we can boast of. This distinction between an imputed and an inherent righteousness was the crux of the whole debate between Rome and the Reformers. In fact, it is the distinction between biblical Christianity and all other religions. Only Christianity, as recovered by the Reformers in the Protestant Reformation, teaches that we are accepted by God on the basis of another's life and death, upon righteousness imputed to us and not inherent within us. The substitutionary atonement of Christ is the heart and soul of the Gospel. And it is an either/or proposition, an all or none situation. Either you are saved by the righteousness of Christ imputed to you plus nothing of your own inherent righteousness or you are lost. You cannot add anything to Christ's perfect work without denying it altogether. As Spurgeon said, "that if you seek to add one stitch of your own to that celestial robe of Christ's righteousness, you are lost".

Isaiah declared that "all our righteousness is as filthy rags". Notice that he doesn't say "all our sins are as filthy rags", but ALL our RIGHTEOUSNESS is as filthy rags. Calvin said that all our best works are so tainted with sin that they alone would condemn us. Do we renounce our good works as vehemently as we do our sins? William Romaine, in his book "Twelve Discourses on the Law and Gospel", wrote "Your false righteousness will destroy you, if you venture to put your trial upon it at God's bar: for He has already decreed, that since all have sinned, therefore by the deeds of the broken Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight."

Now, the common objection at this point, and Lloyd-Jones said that if people don't raise this objection to your preaching the Gospel, then you probably haven't truly preached it, is "But that will lead to antinomianism!". Paul anticipated the same objection; "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Certainly the bible teaches that a person who believes the Gospel will bear fruit. Good works will follow as surely as a fruit tree bears fruit. Sanctification will flow out of justification. We love Him because He first loved us. But all of that fruit, all of those good works, all of that progress in sanctification contributes NOTHING, absolutely NOTHING (and as Luther said, nothing is NOT a little something) to our justification before God, of our being accepted by Him.

Romaine writes "Believers are not only righteous in Him, but righteousness, and that the righteousness of God too, against which Law and justice cannot make any exception; therefore of this righteousness, though not of their own, may they boast all the day long. The merits of it are their justification, the fruits of it are their sanctification, and when they come to heaven, this righteousness will be their everlasting robe of glory, and to sing His praises, who clothed them with it, will be their employment and happiness for ever and ever". Do you boast of the righteousness of Christ? Do you delight in it and renounce your own for His sake? Do you love Him more dearly who gives you this robe of perfection and makes you a child of God and an inheritor of all God's blessings for the sake of Christ?

Let us echo the hymn writer who penned:

"Upon a life I did not live;
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's death, Another's life,
I'd rest my soul eternally" rh

**By James Snyder, Elder,
Christ Reformed Church,
Minot ND**

ANECDOTES OF CHURCH HISTORY

1. DEATH LOSES ITS STING?

In 1757 the death of the most famous preacher in American history–Jonathan Edwards–occurred. But his "transfer' from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant was "irregular" as far as transfers are concerned. As a result of what seemed like sound counsel and advice, he arranged with his Philadelphian doctor, William Shippen, to be inoculated for smallpox in February, together with his whole family. At first, everything was rosy, as the family recovered routinely until Edwards himself developed smallpox on the roof of his mouth and then his throat. The result was that he strained to swallow liquids, which were necessary to curb the inevitable fever that would keep him sufficiently refreshed. But as time progressed, he became weaker and weaker until the Lord took him home on March 23.

Writing to Edward's wife, Sarah, Dr. Shippen praised Edward's godliness and described the exact circumstance of his expiration, "...And never did any person expire with more perfect freedom from pain; –not so much as one distorted hair–but in the most proper sense of the words, he really fell asleep. *Death had certainly lost its sting, as to him.*" (my emphasis)

Note: Is there such a thing as a stingless departure? Relatively-speaking, yes. And Edwards' death is a paradigm!

2. A BATTLE OF CONSCIENCES ABOUT CHRISTMAS

William Bradford (1589-1657) was the second governor of the Plymouth Colony and worked like a beaver to keep the colony afloat by steady work and faithful sabbath-keeping. The one problem that he did have was the "license" that some Englishmen took regarding the celebration of Christmas. There is one notable occasion: after the arrival of a second multitude of Pilgrims about one year after the initial landing at Plymouth Rock in 1621, the new citizens informed Bradford that his expectation for them to work on Christmas violated their consciences. Bradford took it under advisement, exempted them from work, until the day when he thought they would be more enlightened. That day arrived quicker than anticipated. On December 25 after Bradford lead the colonists home from their work at noon, he found the 'Yuletiders' hard at play, "some pitching the bar, and some at stool-ball, and such like sports." He seized their instruments and preached that although their conscience forbade work on Christmas Day, it "was *against his conscience*, that they should play and others work." [!] He urged them to keep to their houses and "that there should be no gaming or reveling in the streets."

3. A POPULAR BEST-SELLING BOOK IS ATTACKED

In 1991 the book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (edited by John Piper and Dr. Wayne Grudem), was published. The book set forth the Biblical view of men and women in the Church, a view that opposed recent feminist inroads in the evangelical Church. It was even named "Book of the Year" by *Christianity Today* magazine. However, the book was not universally acclaimed, as proved by the unfavorable responses, one of which was a volume titled: *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* [!] What is more, *Christianity Today* magazine decided that in the future "the book of the year" would be honored by means other than its readers. Reacting to the new policy, Dr. Grudem deadpanned, "Hmm."

4. DANCE FLOOR EVANGELISM!

The Rev. Peter Cartwright (1785-1872) of the Methodist Church was a seasoned Christian veteran and preacher on the American frontier. Known as "the Lord's Plowman" and "the Backwoods' Preacher," he was horse-backing toward his home in Christian County, Kentucky, and was forced to stop at the end of the day near a house converted into a hotel for wayfaring travelers. Assured that he would be well-served by the landlord, Cartwright sat in the parlor when–to his complete surprise–dancing began. In his own words:

"I had hardly settled this point in my mind, when a beautiful, ruddy young lady walked very gracefully up to me, dropped a handsome courtesy, and pleasantly, with winning smiles, invited me out to...dance with her. I can hardly describe my thoughts or feelings on that occasion...However, in a moment I resolved on a desperate experiment. I rose as gracefully as I could; I will not say with some emotion, but with many emotions. The young lady moved to my right side; I grasped her right hand with my right hand, while she leaned her left arm on mine. In this position we walked on the floor. The whole company seemed pleased at this act of politeness in the young lady, shown to a stranger. The colored man, who was the fiddler, began to put his fiddle in the best order. I then spoke to the fiddle to hold a moment, and added that for several years I had not undertaken any matter of importance without first asking the blessing of God upon it, and I desired now to ask the blessing of God upon this beautiful young lady and the whole company, that had shown such an act of politeness to a total stranger.

"Here I grasped the young lady's hand tightly, and said: 'Let us all kneel down and pray,' and then instantly dropped on my knees, and commenced praying with all the power of soul and body that I could command. The young lady tried to get loose from me, but I held her tight. Presently she fell on her knees. Some of the company kneeled, some stood, some fled, some sat still, all looked curious. The fiddler ran off into the kitchen, saying, "Lord a marcy, what de matter? What is dat men?'

"While I prayed some wept, and wept out loud, and some cried for mercy. I rose from my knees and commenced an exhortation, after which I sang a hymn. The young lady who invited me on the floor lay prostrate, crying earnestly for mercy. I exhorted again, I sang and prayed nearly all night. About fifteen of that company professed religion, and our meeting lasted next day and next night, and as many more were powerfully converted. ...This was the commencement of a great and glorious revival of religion in that region of country, and several of the young men converted at this Methodist preacher dance became useful ministers of the Gospel."

Cartwright conceded that "in all human wisdom, it was out of season, but I had, from the beginning to the end of this affair,...that I should succeed by taking the devil at surprise, as he had often served me, and avenged of him for giving me so much trouble on my way to General Conference and back thus far." (This mostly hilarious incident is recorded in his autobiography.)

5. LUCKY DIPPING AND UNLUCKY DIPPING

To lucky dip is the technique by which a reader of the Bible blindly chooses a text to read without the use of any thoughtful means of investigation or foresight. While tossing the selection of a text to chance, the technique sometimes "works" and at other times boomerangs. There are two famous cases: the first was the experience of St. Augustine shortly before he was converted. While living in Milan far away from his North African home, and while standing in a garden weeping and beseeching the Lord, he heard the voice of a boy or girl from a neighboring

house. A kind of chant went out: "Take up and read; take and read." He promptly reached for his Bible, alighting on Romans 13:13-14: "Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." He was converted and was so moved that he sought out his overwrought mother who had followed him to Italy, and who he knew would cherish the good news. Previously "a son of [her] tears," he became a son of joyous weeping.

On the opposite pole (implies Princeton scholar, B.B. Warfield), St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), who eventually founded the Franciscan order, was influenced by Christ's command to the Rich Young Ruler, which Francis interpreted as a kind of salvation by self-impoverishment. He misinterpreted Mark 10:21: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell all whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and take up thy cross, and follow me." Thus, by means of Lucky Dipping, Lady Poverty (or what's called "the ragged bride of poverty") was embraced, and her first child, the Franciscan Order, was born.

6. THE HEAD OF A CLERGYMAN ALMOST ON A PLATTER

Michael T. Farrell reported in the *National Catholic Reporter* in December 15, 1995, of a Bishop who loathed liturgical dancing and who was visiting a parish church when a young woman suddenly appeared in the back of the sanctuary and waltzed down the aisle dancing and cavorting in order to lay a lily at the feet of the visiting bishop. The bishop then turned and whispered to the pastor: "If she asks for your head on a platter, she can have it."

7. TRANSFORMED BY THE GREATEST MAJESTY

When Queen Victoria (1822-1903) visited Edinburgh, Pastor Andrew Bonar (1806-1889) escorted his two daughters to see the Queen. Later, they met a friend, Mr. Walker from Perth, and Pastor Bonar said to him, "You see, I brought my children to *see* the Queen. We saw her, but we were not changed; but 'when we *see* Him, we shall be like Him.'"

Late in the evening near the witching hour, when Bonar was traveling from meeting, he found himself lost, and grumbled, "Can I give thanks for this?" He finally came to a house and was about to knock when a girl opened the door and exclaimed, "Mr. Bonar! You're the very person I want to *see*." It seems that the girl was under conviction of sin, and Mr. Bonar was able to lead her to a transforming faith in Christ. True, he had lost his way; but losing his way was God's means of her seeing the majesty of Christ in Bonar's visitation.

8. WE MAY NOT SEE WHAT WE *DO* SEE.

William Sangster (1900-1960) pastored Westminster Central Church in London, which could accommodate 3,000 worshippers. It was almost always filled, especially during special occasions like Easter and Christmas.

One Easter a self-serving woman attended about five minutes before worship. She requested a seat at the end of a row so that she could exit speedily (!) but was informed that no such seat was available.

Angered by the inhospitality, she exclaimed, "If that's the way you treat visitors no wonder the churches are empty!"

9. ONE REASON SPURGEON'S SERMONS ARE MASTERFULLY ORGANIZED.

Spurgeon's sermons are notoriously easy to follow, famous for cookie cutter outlines, avoiding rabbit trials that stray from his theme and text, models of almost mathematical precision. One factor that quickened his organizational genius was an incident that occurred early in his life after his mother sent him to market to purchase a pound of tea, a quarter-pound of mustard, and three pounds of rice. After placing these items in his basket, he started for home when he espied a pack of hounds pursuing a fox. Excited, he was moved to follow the chase over hedge and ditch, thrilled by a sense of adventure. However, when he arrived home, he discovered to his chagrin that all his goods were "amalgamated,"

yes, the tea, the mustard, and the rice coalesced into a royal mess.

From that homey incident, he learned to pack his subjects "in good stout parcels.""People will not drink mustardly tea, nor will they enjoy muddled-up sermons."

10. IF YOUR WIFE ASKS: WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WON THE LOTTERY?

Amazing Grace hymnist and Calvinist pastor John Newton (1725-1807), walked out of his church, on a Wednesday, when a lady stopped him on the steps, and enthusiastically explained, "The ticket, of which I held a quarter, is drawn a prize of ten thousand pounds: I know you will congratulate me upon the occasion.""Madam," commiserated Newton,"as for a friend under temptation, I will endeavor to pray for you."

11. TO THE RELIEF OF PASTOR JOSEPH PARKER

While improper pronunciation can cost you your life (don't pronounce shibboleth *sibboleth*! –Judges 12:6), bad spelling can also be revelatory. A case in point: Dr. Joseph Parker (1830-1902) of the City Temple in London (where he was universally acclaimed for his preaching and oratorical gifts) was notified that he would be visited by a man claiming to be a philosopher, who would analyze his Sunday sermon from a strictly philosophical perspective. Was Parker intimidated? Perhaps initially. But then, relieved, he said: "I may add that my trepidation is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the gentleman spells *philosophical* with an *f*."

12. AN UNHERALDED GODLY MOTHER

Anthusa (324/334–?), the mother of John of Damascus (that is, John Chrysostom, "the Golden mouth"), gets scant attention in Church history. She deserves better, much better. When John was young, his father died so that Anthusa became his sole parent. Famous for her godliness, she was even pursued by unbelieving suitors, but disappointed them all. Her son's Bible-training at home was the passion of her life and would become his, too. One of her denied suitors was so awestruck that he marveled: "Behold, what women these Christians have!" rh

A Christmas Greeting And New Year's Wish

TOM NETTLES

A Baby down from heaven came,
Hiding rebels to reclaim.
Took our flesh,
Took our sin.
Jesus was his name.
From virgin mother, humble birth
Frightening all the kings of earth;
Shepherds quaked,
Magi bowed,
Angels sang with mirth.
Untouched by sin, he lived his life
Tested sore, and pressed by strife.
Wrath he bore,
Ours the blame;
Grace through him is rife.
So now he intercedes above
Lion of strength, yet mercy's dove.
"Come to me."
"Trust my blood."
And know redemptive love.
May Christmas truth protect your year,
Quiet your soul, and dry your tear.
Guilt be Gone!
Death be still!
Life can have no fear.

(This is a republication of an article from the January 1968 issue of the Reformed Herald, written by Rev. Peter Grossmann, whom the Lord called home in 1995)

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

As the editor of the department of the *Reformed Herald*, known as "Christian Life", the undersigned would like to introduce the reader not only to the portion of the paper that bears this name, but to the whole concept of Christians living their lives before the Lord God as is fitting for those who have been redeemed from hell and death by the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. To that end we offer this brief survey and introduction to the subject of Christian living.

When the *Reformed Herald* underwent some reorganization at the 1967 meeting of the Eureka Classis, Reformed Church in the U.S., this department was created along with the others which are named on the masthead of the paper [FYI these other departments were Theology, Biblical Exposition, Youth, Religious News and Missions]. It is proper for a church paper to have such a department, for the application of the teaching and doctrine presented in the other departments must be brought to bear upon the life of the believer in his everyday experience.

Moreover, the Bible itself has a great deal to say about the way the people of God are to live in the world, and it is the practical application of Biblical teaching and theology to which this department will speak God's children are to be informed about their Christian duties by means of preaching the Word, by the setting forth of the whole counsel of God in every possible way. It is through the written word that this column will attempt to deal with the practical problems of being Christians in a sinful world.

Our Christianity is not something abstract, not something "off in the blue" that never has anything to do with our work, our business, our play, our friendships; it is indeed to play the lead role in every aspect of life. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Rom.14:8.

Defining our Subject

The Christian Life might be defined as the life that a believer lives here on earth. This living, this way of life, is *not* lived by those who are not Christians, by those who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, not every human being can live a truly Christian life. This fact immediately shows that there is a difference between those who are Christians, saved by grace through faith in the blood of Christ, and those who are not.

A Christian lives in a certain manner because he *is* a Christian, a child of God, and because he is not longer an unbeliever, a child of the devil. It is he alone who has in him the desire, placed by the Spirit of God, to know the will of God for his life and how to live according to that will. Only the Christian is even remotely able, being moved by the Spirit of God both to will and to of his good pleasure, to apply the teachings of the Bible to the conduct of his life.

Christian doctrine deals with all of life, provides answers to all problems and shapes the Christian's attitude in all situations. Even as Christianity is the only way to eternal life, so Christianity is the only way to holy living in this life. We are, then, dealing with what is called the doctrine of *sanctification* or *holiness*.

The word *sanctify* mean to *set aside*, *consecrate* for a special purpose. And this just what God has done with his Church, the

company of true believers: set them aside to a life of holiness in this life and that which is to come unto the glory of his holy Name. That is why God called Israel out of all the nations of the earth; that they might be a holy nation unto his praise, and that is why God has saved the New Testament Church in the blood of Jesus Christ.

In this department we will be dealing especially with that part of sanctification which is called in theological studies "progressive sanctification" as distinct from "definitive sanctification" which more properly comes under the heading of Theology. Though this is a theological matter, since with concerned with a living, practical Christianity in this column, we might say everything we read here would generally be fit under the classification of developing more and more a holy life before God, or progressive sanctification. This aspect of holiness is, for example, taught in the Heidelberg Catechism in such questions and answers as 1, 32, 43, 45, 49, 64, 70, 75, 81, 86, 89, 91, 103, 113, 114, 115, and 127.

Why a Christian Life?

The over-arching purpose of the Christian life is that God may be glorified, as has been noted in the previous paragraph. This is why man exists (Catechism 6), and this is especially the reason that God saved believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. All of creation is to serve the Creator, and that past of creation that brings the greatest glory to God is the saved church of Christ. It is to the Christian church alone that God has most fully revealed himself in his mercy and love through salvation in Christ, and it is the Church alone which in thankfulness for that salvation bring the greatest glory to God. Again, we can see the difference between the unbelieving world and the believing, redeemed Church; the world has not experienced the blessing of salvation nor seen therein the grace and love of Almighty God and therefore has no reason to glorify him.

The Christian Church glorifies God by being thankful to him for salvation. The Catechism teaches in No 32 that we are to offer ourselves unto him as living sacrifices of thanksgiving on the basis of what Paul teaches, for example, in Romans 12:1: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Even as we thank a person who us a present in this life, should we no be even more thankful, not only with words, but with thoughts and deeds, to him who has given the greatest gift of all, life in his Son! Further, we are to be thankful to God for the daily care which he exercises over us, providing for our every need. So it is with every part of our life we are to show ourselves thankful to God for such marvelous blessings, and this gratitude must include every part of life, every act we perform, from the humblest duty to the most exalted.

Another reason for the life of thankfulness is that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof (to it in the words of the Catechism), and further, that by our godly walk may win others also to Christ. We human beings like to see something work, we like to see the results of any influence in our lives. Even as we see ourselves moved by the Spirit of God to thankfulness and praise of his holy Name, we should recognize this as evidence that we are indeed the children of God! Remember that the unbeliever cannot see this in his life, for the Spirit of God is not at work in the unbeliever as he is in you, the believer.

And more than this, the Christian will have an influence on others with whom he comes in contact, and this is to a good, an holy influence, that others seeing Christ living in him may also come to true faith and salvation by his teaching and example. What a glorious work our God has set us forth to do. What an honor that sinners such as are should be use of God to lead other sinners to Christ!

Fountain-Head of this Life

When we think of living before God and the world as Christians ought, we must always remember that the source of this new life of praise is not to be found in the sinner himself, but it comes from God above. The strength to live according to the Word of God, to resist Satan and reach for righteousness is not inherent in man, but must be given him by God. When the sinner is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit in what we call regeneration, he is made a new man in Christ Jesus. All the old things pass away, and all becomes new. When the unbeliever becomes a believer, when the heathen becomes a Christian, when the natural man becomes the new man, the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon him and the more he learns of himself as a sinner and how wonderful a salvation has been wrought for him in Calvary's cross, the more earnestly he seeks to please and praise God with a life of thankfulness.

It should be obvious, then, that the doctrine of sanctification, the Biblical teaching of the Christian life, is not to be understood as earning salvation by our good works. The natural man can do nothing pleasing before God, and as he cannot earn eternal life by his own efforts, nor can he be thankful for something he doesn't have. It is only *after* the sinner has been fully redeemed in the blood of Christ that he is thankful to God for such redemption.

Please understand, dear reader, that in this column we assume at the very beginning that salvation is by grace and not by works, and what we are discussing as the Christian life is that which must come as a *result* of being saved in Christ. We are *not* talking about what must be done by the sinner in his own strength in order to achieve that salvation, for then it would not be in Christ.

I the saving of a sinner the Holy Spirit uses the revealed Word of God in the Bible to teach us our sin, and working faith in our hearts, causes us to be born again. Throughout this earthly life the believer is taught more and more of his sin and so the more earnestly seeks the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ.

The old man of sin more and more dies off, as the new man is made alive, and the believer comes more and more to hate sin and turn from it, while at the same time he learns to love and seek after righteousness in order that he may the more please God with life of obedience to his holy law and unceasing prayer. All the time he lives on earth the believing sinner is still a sinner who is prone always to all evil and it is impossible for him to be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect. This perfection is taught in Scripture to be attained only when the believer dies and is translated into the eternal heavenly kingdom of life. How gracious is our God who provides us with the willingness to fight against sin and the devil is this life, and despite our continuing iniquity grants us the marvelous privilege of reigning with Christ in eternity.

Standards of Christian Living

The pattern for this life of holiness and praise is first to be seen in the life of our Savior Jesus. The apostle Paul calls upon Christians to imitate him even as he imitated Jesus. I Cor.11:1. Everywhere in the New Testament our Lord is held up before the Christian in his own teaching and that of the apostles as the perfect example which they are to follow. No other human being has lived as He has lived, and He is therefore the perfect pattern for our lives of thankfulness before God. Furthermore, the Christian is renewed more and more by the power of God after the image of Christ until perfection is attained after this life, and thus the image of God in which man was originally created in knowledge, righteousness and holiness is completely restored to him who is saved by grace through faith. Therefore, the holiness that Christ lived with every breath is to be earnestly sought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in this life as the Christian struggles against sin and seeks to serve the Lord in the beauty of holiness and thankfulness.

The life of Jesus is to be found in no other book but the Bible, and so it is once more to the Bible that we turn for our knowledge of what the Christian life should be like. In the Word we are confronted moreover with the law as the standard of behavior. It is interesting to note that the Heidelberg Catechism touches on the law in the first part of our sin misery, so as to teach us how we fall short of the glory of God and how much we need a Savior, but in the third part "of thankfulness", the ten commandments are presented and fully explained as a guide to our proper thanksgiving to God.

Obedience to these commandments is not left optional for any man, and certainly not for the Christian. He must obey them in order to show in the best way possible his love for God and his gratitude for his salvation in Christ. Jesus himself says that if we love him, we will keep his commandments. It is further necessary to that we look to Scripture for instruction concerning the Christian life because our holiness is not be based upon our own ideas or the commandments of men, but only upon the commandments of Almighty God.

In keeping with his instruction, we are further to learn that the major portion of our thankfulness is to be seen as a life of prayer. And how little Christian pray, and what a shame this is in the light of the example that our Savior provided with his own life of constant devotion and prayer to the heavenly Father, and in light of our constant need of his blessings. When the Church does not pray, the Church suffers greatly. When she does pray as is befitting the Bride of Christ the blessings of heaven overflow her cup. Let us remember well the lesson of number 116 in the Catechism, that God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who earnestly and without ceasing beg them from him and render thanks unto him for them.

Although the believer must live in this world of sin and death, he must constantly keep in mind that he is a pilgrim and stranger here, heaven is his home; he can tarry but a night. He is, therefore, not to live his life according to what this world may desire or command, but life it only as God commands. We, the church, are *in* the world, but not *of* it. It is absolutely essential that the Christian life be in full accord with the righteous law of our God on High.

Invitation to the Reader

This, then, is a beginning of the matter before us, and which we hope to discuss in much greater detail as God gives us grace from time to time. We will attempt to apply the teachings to all areas of life, for ours dare not be a Sunday-morning Christianity; it must live and be practiced every moment of our lives! It is the desire of this writer and all others who contribute this department of the *Reformed Herald* (as we trust they will!) to teach our readers on the basis of God's Holy Word how we may live mor consistently with our confession and so give unto him the glory alone. It is not our purpose to become a question-and-answer column, but we welcome any comments that the reader may wish to make, and we will try occasionally to write articles on the subjects of special interest to you, the reader. Let it ever be our purpose as the Redeemed of the Lord to say so, with every thought, word and deed that living as Christians, we ever show ourselves thankful to him for such wonderful blessings! rh

Rev. Peter Grossmann

Membership Updates from Salem Ebenezer RCUS, Manitowoc, WI These updates cover a few months before the start of the pandemic and up until recently.

New Member & Baptism: (Top row, from left) Austin Shillcox (New member: 2019) and Everett Austin Shillcox, covenant son of Austin and Kayla Shillcox (Baptism: 2020)

New Members: (Top row, photo 2) Christopher Bouril, 2019 (Photo 3) Florence Hanson, 2020

Top row, photo 4)
Tim and Amy Harbach and adult daughter Iris Harbach (New members: 2020), with son Harrison and daughter Violet

Confirmations:
(Second row, at left)
Bennett Borgwardt, 2019 with Rev. Kyle Sorensen

(Second row, second picture) Johnathan Voss, 2021, with Rev. Kyle Sorensen

(Second row, picture 3) Clara Sorensen, 2020 with Donielle Sorensen

(2nd row, far right) Emily Stock, 2020

(3rd row, from left) Joslynn Jo Grupe, covenant daughter of Jerad and Melissa Grupe (Baptism: 2021), with big brothers Karsten and Marshal. Joslynn is the 3rd generation to wear this Baptism dress.

Everly Jean Bockelman, covenant daughter of Benjamin and Brittany Bockelman (Baptism: 2020) and big sister Harper

Membership update from Northland Reformed Church, Kansas City, MO

(last picture row 3)"Burgos Family": Anthony and Samantha Burgos, who were welcomed into membership on 6/6/21 with their children Leah, Aiden and Noah, also baptized their new son, Owen Blake Burgos on 8/1/21

Row four, left to right: "Griess Family": Mark and Ashley Griess, with their children Everly and Henry, presented their new daughter, Lucy Marie Griess, for baptism on 6/30/21. Lucy was baptized by her grandfather, Scott Henry. "Moats Family": Austin and Jessica Moats presented their son Jonathan Dean Moats for baptism on 8/29/21. "Sweetin Family": T.J. and Haley Sweetin were welcomed into membership on 10/3/21 along with their children Elsie and Luke.

Grace Reformed Church is excited to begin 2022 Confirmation Classes. This year we have six in class, the most at one time since Pastor Kevin has been here. Bottom row, from left to right, they are Alicia Collins, Jenna Schnee, Makayla Strong, Emri Gottlob, Lillian Strong, and Jacob Savage.

Grace Reformed Church rejoices to welcome its latest communicant member. Rebekah Strong was received by way of making a public profession of faith on September 12.

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Now his father Zacharias was filled with the
Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,

That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,

The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:

To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,

In holiness and righteousness before Him
all the days of our life.

LUKE 1:67-75, NKJV