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# CURRENT

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THE YEAR OF MARTIN  
**LUTHER**

REPORT ON  
**LIBERIA**

INTERNATIONAL  
**FLAVOR**

**RIGHTLY DIVIDING  
THE WORD**

REPENTANCE THAT  
SAVES THE  
**SOUL**



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# THE YEAR OF MARTIN LUTHER

## THE MAN WHO IGNITED THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

by Rev. Ian Goligher

This year we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's stand for the gospel of Christ against the soul-destroying falsehoods of the Church of Rome.

The name "Martin Luther" cuts through religious lines even today. Because he started more than a cultural movement and more than a political movement, his stand for the gospel revealed its power to save men from their guilt of sin.

Martin Luther was born on the eve of St. Martin's Day to Roman Catholic parents who named him after the church's festive day. The church taught that souls earn their way to heaven through personal works. It taught the doctrine of satisfaction to God through personal suffering and pain. Because of the fear that the church instilled in people's hearts, that false notion led Martin Luther into monastic life as a Dominican monk, not a life of peace with God. Even though he nearly killed himself with penances, fastings, and sleep deprivation, Martin Luther found no peace for his soul. He discovered in the cell of the monastery that torture of the body does not relieve torture of the heart.

Through his study of the New Testament Scriptures, Luther came to clear views of the gospel and learned to look to Christ alone for forgiveness of sin. The answer to Luther's struggles for peace with God lay in the death and sufferings of Christ as a sacrifice for sin. It was the study of the book of Romans that led him to understand the truth of justification by faith alone. It was

that soul-liberating doctrine which gave him the personal conviction to be a reformer.

With the arrival of John Tetzel near Wittenberg selling papal indulgences, Martin Luther's indignation was stirred up against the peddling of false pardons. His zeal for gospel truth and a love for the many souls being duped by the sale of indulgences led him to bravely post his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg on the eve of All Saint's Day, 1517. Historians agree that single event ignited the Protestant Reformation, and made Martin Luther Germany's foremost Protestant Reformer. His doctrine of salvation by grace, instead of works, spread like wildfire across much of Germany and went on to spread throughout Europe.

The Protestant church owes so much to Luther's stand for the gospel as it has liberated multitudes from the oppression of Rome. It was not just a German protest, it was a stand for the saving power of the gospel that has shone forth in Protestant churches throughout the world until our time.

Let us learn from Martin Luther's courageous words, "Here I stand, I can do no other," and use them in our defense of the gospel, "Here we stand, we can do no other."

During this anniversary year of Luther's stalwart stand for Christ, we plan to feature some articles on his life and times, though in this issue we return to the witness of Savonarola, the Italian reformer and martyr. His witness and death at the stake exposed the stranglehold that the church of Rome had upon the gospel in medieval Europe before the Protestant Reformation.

### What is an Indulgence?

Albert of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz stated: "The indulgence ensured to those who bought the tickets complete forgiveness of sins, participation in the grace of God, and freedom from purgatory.

"It gave them a ticket or letter, stamped with the Pope's seal, which allowed them to select a confessor, whom they pleased, who would absolve them from all crimes and punishments, and would permit them to exchange any vows they had taken upon themselves for some other more agreeable good words.

"It made them sharers in all the good works of the universal Church, in all the benefits of prayers, pilgrimages and other ecclesiastical good works, performed by all the members of the whole Church.

"It provided a full remission of sins to all departed persons then in purgatory."

John Tetzel went far beyond the letter of his instructions. He shouted, "The soul flies out of purgatory as soon as the money rattles in the box; the red cross of the Indulgence is of equal power with the cross of Christ; the Papal Letters have such power that they would absolve a man who had violated the Mother of God."

### According to Scripture, forgiveness of sin is the gift of God by grace, not by price.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Peter 1:18).

### God alone can forgive sin.

Martin Luther rightly taught that the authority to pardon sin belongs to God alone. It is not within the power of the church, nor the power of the Pope to forgive sin. It is the gift of God, and to be sought from God through Christ alone as God's only appointed Mediator. ❏

### Questions and Answers with **Rev. Colin Mercer**

*For the last seven years, Rev. Colin Mercer has been senior minister of Faith Free Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina. Faith FPC is not only a mother church in the United States, but it also accommodates Geneva Reformed Seminary, located on site. It is a busy church that makes many demands upon its minister.*

*Rev. Mercer is a pastor's pastor, and many look to him for leadership and counsel both within his congregation and within our presbytery. His brethren in the ministry consider him a friend, a wise counselor, and a gracious servant of Christ. Colin has known the Lord's help and power in his preaching. Both older saints and younger believers alike are blessed with his ability to expound the Word of the Lord thoroughly and apply it practically.*

*Born in Northern Ireland, Rev. Mercer ministered for several years in two congregations in Ulster before emigrating to North America where he has adapted well to American life and to ministry in the church. We are thankful for him taking the time to do this interview.*



#### **Please tell our readers something about your boyhood years and how you came to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In the Lord's gracious providence, I was born into a Christian home in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. I am the fourth child in a family of five and have a twin brother. Though I grew up in a city that was affected by terrorism in the 1970-80's, my childhood memories are very happy ones. At that time, we worshipped in the local Baptist church and attended services on a regular basis. I was introduced to the gospel at an early age through the instruction of my parents. I trusted Christ as my Savior when I was eight years old.

#### **How did you become convinced that God was calling you to be a minister of the gospel?**

In 1983, I began to attend the Free Presbyterian Church along with my siblings. I was sixteen years of age and was experiencing a time of spiritual coldness. The Lord worked in my heart under the faithful preaching of the Word, which refreshed and revived me. I left school and commenced employment in 1984, and for the next several years, was content with my office job. I realized, however, the importance of doing God's will and began to pray earnestly that He would guide me. I did not receive an answer to those prayers for eighteen months. Following a series of meetings conducted by Rev. Ivan Foster, God spoke to me concerning full-time ministry. The power of the Word of God was unmistakable and my daily Scripture readings confirmed that God was calling me to prepare for the gospel ministry.

#### **Explain how the call of God to preach keeps you pressing forward through the cares of the ministry.**

The call of God in my life to enter the gospel ministry and subsequent calls to the congregations in which I have served have always included clear texts of Scripture. I have sought to know and to do God's will. My twenty-two years of ministry involved various challenges, burdens, and cares, yet I have always had the assurance that I am where I am because God has placed me there. I have had numerous occasions to return to those texts and claim the promises in them. It is preeminently this that encourages and strengthens me in my weakness. I believe I have received a word from God to direct me and, as I am not my own but His, I trust Him to order all things for His glory and to give me the grace that I need.

#### **What is a typical week for you as you pace yourself to pastor and preach?**

Being a pastor in a busy congregation means planning a week can be difficult. I am conscious of the importance of the pulpit ministry, and seek to give as much time as I can to prepare the Lord's Word.

When I return home on a Sunday evening, I often begin reading for next week's messages. I am usually preaching through a book of the Bible, and therefore, may be thinking of the next section immediately. Pastoral visitation and meeting with members of the congregation are also a large part of my work. I seek to make myself available at all times, and this will necessitate changing my plans to accommodate the schedules of others. Session and board meetings need to be arranged and attended as well as other pastoral responsibilities that emerge throughout the week. I prefer not to leave all my sermon preparation to Saturday. The fear of weekend emergencies looms over my mind, so I endeavor to make as much progress as possible during the week.

#### **Do you have a system of Bible study beyond sermon preparation?**

In terms of my personal Bible reading, I read through the Scriptures systematically and will often consult commentaries

or other helps as I read. I enjoy the Puritans and, in the course of my Bible reading, will often consider their comments on passages. There are times when I seek to do additional study on a particular theme even if it is not related to my sermon preparation. I usually have a selection of books by my bed that I read at night. Some of these are theological and at least one Christian biography.

**What is the number-one pastoral demand made upon you?**

I am conscious that I must experience meaningful fellowship with God if I am to be of any benefit to the people of God. I feel that the personal and pastoral demands of the ministry are connected. I first need to hear God speaking to me before I can deliver that word to the congregation. This is often one of the greatest challenges for ministers and I am no exception. It is possible to be so focused on serving Christ that we miss fellowshiping with Christ. Therefore, my greatest demand is to have a constant and close walk with God. I desire to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

**What is your role in Geneva Reformed Seminary?**

I have a limited role in GRS. I serve on the Seminary Committee as appointed by Presbytery and also on a sub-committee dealing with student financial aid. I have served as an adjunct professor teaching one class on the book of Acts and I also assist Rev. John Wagner in his weekly homiletics class.

**What advice would you give to young men who have a passion for serving the Lord, but are not sure if God is specifically calling them to full-time service?**

My advice to young men in such a situation is three-fold: first, serve God where He has placed you right now. There are opportunities to serve in a local congregation, and while some of that may involve menial tasks and unnoticed work, that is God's will. Second, bring your burden to God in prayer and specifically ask for guidance and direction. Third, recognize that you are not your own and that God may have something other than full-time

ministry for you. Submission to God's will is important. The ministry is not like any other job; therefore, it is important to know that God has called you to it.

**Tell us a little of how you met your wife Heather and when you were married.**

I met Heather in Londonderry when she came from her hometown of Garvagh to a local hospital to train as a nurse. I noticed that she made every effort to be at the prayer meetings and Lord's day services as often as she could, often coming straight from work in her uniform. That impressed me! We were married in 1991 when I had completed the first two years of my four-year seminary course.



**Last summer your daughter Lois was married to Miles Carper, a member of your church, and they now live in Maryland. How did Lois' marriage change your family life?**

Lois is our first-born and we are grateful for the Lord's blessing upon her life. When we moved from Northern Ireland to Greenville in 2009, we could not have imagined the way of the Lord for her. She completed her undergrad studies at Bob Jones University in Elementary Education and was offered employment in Harford Christian School in Maryland. She had been there for two years before marrying Miles. That two-year period gave Heather and me time to adjust to an empty home (our youngest daughter Hannah returned to Northern Ireland to further her education at the same time). It is a blessing for us to see Lois and Miles setting up their home and being involved in a local congregation. We are constantly thankful for salvation in their lives and their desire to serve the Lord.

**How do you keep in touch with your daughter Hannah, who is studying in Queen's University, Belfast?**

We make great use of FaceTime, Skype, and cell phones! Northern Ireland is five hours ahead of Greenville, but we have no difficulty keeping in touch. Hannah is excellent at



Rev. Colin Mercer preaching at Bob Jones University's Day of Prayer in 2014

calling and texting and we are happy to have such technology so that the world seems a smaller place. Of course, trips “back home” are all the more significant now too — though saying “bye” never gets easier!

### How should readers pray for you in your work and for your family in the year ahead?

I greatly appreciate the prayers of God’s people. Ministers owe more to the prayers of the saints than we often realize. I crave the power of God upon the preaching of His word and that I would be kept close to Him. Pray for me that I would be faithful, gracious, courageous, and engaged in a ministry that glorifies my Savior. ❧



Rev. Mercer at Rock Mountain Bible Camp 2014

# DO YOU PRAY FOR YOUR MINISTER?



Did you pray for your minister this week? Will you pray for the man of God who is charged with feeding your soul? If no-one in the church prays for the man called to preach the Lord’s Word to your soul he will be left to carry the load alone. In this brief excerpt from the prayer of Moses for Israel while Joshua went into battle, Rev. Charles Spurgeon demonstrates the need for people to pray for their ministers. Editor.

This Moses-service lay in very close communion with God. Moses, and Aaron, and Hur were called to rise above the people, and to get alone, apart from the company. They climbed the hill as a symbol, and in retirement they silently communed with God. That rod of God in Moses’ hand meant this,—God is here with these pleading ones on the mount; and by His powerful presence He is smiting the enemy. How blessed it is for a people to be led by those whom the Lord has honoured in former times, and with whom He still holds fellowship!

In this sacred engagement, there was a terrible strain upon the one man who led the others in it. In the process of bringing down the Divine power upon the people,

the vehicle of communication was sorely tried. “Moses’ hands were heavy.” Beloved, if God gives you spiritual power to lead in Christian work, you will soon find out that the condition of such leadership is a costly one. Your case requires a deeper humility, a steadier watchfulness, a higher consecration, and a closer communion with God than that of others; and these things will try you, and, in many ways, put a heavy strain upon you. You will be like Elias, who, at one time, could run like a giant, and at another could faint and fly. The burden of the Lord is no feather-weight.

In this hallowed service, help is very precious. When Moses’ hands began to drop down, and he himself was faint, Aaron and Hur gave him substantial aid. They fetched a stone, and put it under him, and they made him sit thereon, with his hands still lifted high, and his eyes towards Heaven. When he was all in a sweat, because of his anxious prayer, and the muscles of his arms grew weary, his brethren stood by him, each one holding up an arm lest the rod should drop; for if it did, the cause of Israel dropped also.

Are you a worker? Have you a leader fit to lead you? Bring a stone, and put it under him—cheer his heart with some gracious promise from the Lord’s Word, or with some happy sign from the work itself. Cheer the good man as much as possible. Do not throw a stone at him, as I have known some workers do; but put a stone under him, that he may sit down, and not be overcome. Copy Aaron and Hur, by staying up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, so that his hands may be steady until the going down of the sun. Happy men, thus to sustain their leader! The sacred power with God, which brings down victory for others, is given to some, and they use it; but flesh is weak, and they faint. Let others of like grace gather to their help, and hold up their hands, one in one way, and one in another way, as Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses. Let spiritual men earnestly help those whom God calls into spiritual communion with Himself, that so the Name of the Lord may be glorified, and victory may follow the banners of His people.

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Excerpt from *Only a Prayer Meeting*,  
by Rev. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

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# RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD

Some contend that the Bible is so plainly written that it requires no interpretation, while others contend that it is so difficult to comprehend that it's dangerous to leave people to understand the Bible on their own. This latter argument has been used by certain cults and the Roman Catholic Church to keep people from in-depth study of the Bible. The Bible, however, was given to be read by every man and every man should endeavor to study to know its meaning while praying for the Holy Spirit's enlightenment. It is true, however, that the Bible is to be read and interpreted with due care. Here are a few basic pointers to follow when interpreting God's Word.

## AVOID EXTREMES

The first requirement is to avoid extremes. In the opening sentence in his book, *Interpretation of the Scriptures*, Arthur W. Pink states, "Man is notoriously a creature of extremes and nowhere is that fact more evident than in the attitude taken by different ones to this subject."

When it comes to handling the truth of God's Word, the truth is usually in the middle, just as there is a ditch on each side of the road. This is not compromise, or a method of avoiding stark

statements which are unpalatable to the modern man. This rule applies to reconciling seemingly opposing statements within the inspired Word of God. The Bible clearly teaches God's sovereignty, but it also clearly teaches man's responsibility. Many statements of Scripture address only one of these subjects at a time without addressing the other. That does not rule out the need to balance single references to God's sovereignty with man's responsibility. Because one text of Scripture states that one is true does not mean that the other is not true.

## LET CLEAR STATEMENTS INTERPRET THE UNCLEAR

The second thing to note is that we should study particular statements of Scripture according to the analogy of faith. That means that we should bring all the revelation of the Bible to bear on specific statements. Let the passages of Scripture which are clear interpret those passages which are unclear.

This is the advice given in our *Westminster Confession of Faith* which states, "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any

Scripture, (which is not manifold, but one,) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

"The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* Chapter 1, sections 9 & 10). This statement shows that every reader of the Word of God is an interpreter. He is not merely to string along various texts to bolster his private opinions. Rather, the passage of Scripture should mould the Bible student's thinking.

## KEEP THINGS IN CONTEXT

Third, in Bible interpretation we should thoroughly study the context. The immediate context is the sentence or paragraph in which the words are written. The grammar of the sentence, or paragraph controls the right use of the word itself. Bible students must not do as unscrupulous journalists often do to the statements of politicians. The mischievous reporter will look for little sound-bites and then draw warped conclusions by presenting them out of context. For a Bible student to do that would be the

same as taking the scissors to the Bible to extract statements rendering them meaningless. Sadly, taking Bible words out of context is much too common, both in private Bible reading and in the public exposition of the Word.

## GRAMMAR RULES

Context matters and grammar also matters. Bible study is not a game of Scrabble where you are at liberty to shift letters and words around at will. In Bible interpretation, the word order, or syntax, is all important. Verb tenses can also make all the difference in the meaning of any statement.

The Bible student is not to be fearful of interpreting the Word of God when he applies right principles of Bible study. He will, however, tremble at the meaning of God's Word itself. The Lord said through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." We should, receive God's Word with faith and pray for a heart to obey the Lord speaking to us through His Word. ❏

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**Rev. Ian Goligher** is the minister of Cloverdale FPC and editor of *Current*.

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# Savonarola: Preacher of Righteousness Part 2

by Dr. Edward M. Panosian

It is now 500 years since Martin Luther took his stand as a reformer in Germany and shook the world with gospel truth. In upcoming issues, we intend to publish some articles on the life and times of Martin Luther, written by our good friend Dr. Edward Panosian. In this article, part two of the life of Savonarola (see our last issue for part one), Dr. Panosian opens a window for us into the state of affairs in pre-reformation Europe when the light of the gospel burned so dimly. Editor.

## SAVONAROLA - PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS A, FORERUNNER OF MARTIN LUTHER

In 1489 and 1490 he [Girolamo Savonarola] began the years of his establishment in Florence. People thronged to hear him. His name was on the city's lips. About 1491 he was made prior of his convent and proceeded to require of its inmates a stricter life, effecting a wholesome internal reform. Two great controversies shaped the last seven or eight years of his life. One was with Lorenzo de Medici—the Magnificent—who represented to him the world; the other was with Alexander VI—the Borgia pope—who represented the devil. And there were plenty of dissolute young nobility to represent the flesh. Lorenzo sought to win over to himself the popular friar by blandishments and praise. For the Medici even to take notice of the monk was condescension. But the temporal power and the luxuriant culture of the fine

banker and patron were alien to the monk's independence; he remained unmoved. Rebuffed and offended, Lorenzo was yet honest enough, when he sensed that his own soul was soon to take its journey of accounting, to call for Savonarola, with whom he had never before spoken face to face. Although reminded that his own regular confessor was nearby, Lorenzo replied, "I know of no honest friar save this one."

The prior of St. Mark's, coming to his bedside, declared three conditions on which he would give the Magnificent his final blessing: first, that he declare a strong faith in God's mercy; second, that he return any ill-gotten gains; and third, that he restore to the people of Florence their liberties. To the first, Lorenzo readily gave consent and to the second, he gave haltingly. But to the third, he made no reply, turned away, and in a few hours was dead. It was 1492.

The death of Lorenzo brought his ill-favored son, Piero, to the leadership of the family. This fact contributed to Savonarola's fortunes. Piero was weak and insolent and lacked the charm and diplomacy of his late father, vacillating in decisions and alienating friends. In 1494 there came into Italy the scourge of the north, King Charles VIII of France. Conquering and pillaging, his presence seemed to lend substance to the Dominican friar's claim that Florence was about to be chastised by God for her sins. He had declared that this chastisement would come

speedily and that the city would be restored. Piero surrendered too much of wealth and land to the French invader in his interest of peace. The price was too great for the Florentines to approve. Their antagonism to this weak son of so magnificent a father had already grown. They would tolerate no more and expelled the Medici from their midst in a bloodless revolt.

Savonarola now ascended to the moral leadership of the city. He was approaching the height of his influence. He interceded with the French invader, gained a lessening of the terms of peace, encouraged the king to be on his way, and warned him against going back on his word. Savonarola now found himself the leader of the city, responsible for building up what had been torn down. Having been a Florentine for more than a decade, and having the public ear, the reformer was the logical leader. He possessed qualities needful in such a crisis: farsightedness, levelheadedness, honesty, conviction, common sense, and "a disinterested zeal for principle." He played the largest role in framing the republican government, modeled after Venice, in which various city councils were to do the actual ruling. He took no office himself, but made Jesus Christ, God Himself, King of Florence. He pleaded for moral regeneration and the removal of public and private vices. He called upon the people of all classes



to repent and do works of righteousness, generosity, and social reformation. A transformation, soon found to be only temporary, followed.

The second controversy of his last years was Savonarola's conflict with Pope Alexander VI. Words are somehow inadequate to convey fully the baseness of this character—the occupant of the falsely-supposed throne of Peter. There is perhaps no better description of this pope than the words of the commission he appointed to examine and bring charges against Savonarola. Their words describing the monk are utterly false; the same words, if applied to Alexander, would have been singularly appropriate: “That iniquitous monster, call him man or friar we cannot, a mass of the most abominable wickedness.” The catalog of Alexander's sin is full. Within its pages are found bribery, lewdness, incontinence, fornication, lechery, nepotism, simony, debauchery, inordinate ambition, perfidy, gross obscenity, blasphemy, robbery, concubinage, and murder. He shrank from no evil to achieve his ends. He held nothing sacred, although he occupied the “most sacred seat.” Surely the pontificate of Alexander VI alone is one of the clearest arguments against the divine origin of the papal institution. As another has asked, “Would God commit His church for twelve years to such a monster?” With such a man, the preacher of righteousness was now in contest. Enemies of Savonarola reported to the pope the tenor of the friar's sermons attacking and condemning unholy priests. The pope invited him to Rome for discussion; the friar demurred, protesting his need to direct affairs in his own city.

Late in 1495 he was forbidden by the pope to preach; for five months he obeyed. But early in the next year he was called by the city fathers to preach the Lenten sermons. In them he lashed out once more against the sins of the pope. Alexander next offered him a cardinal's hat in return for his silence. Savonarola not only rejected the bribe but proclaimed his own preference, not for a cardinal's red hat, but for a hat reddened with blood. In the carnival season of 1497, popular frenzy of religious devotion was at such a pitch that, at Savonarola's invitation, the people fed a huge bonfire in the city square with “vanities”: lewd books, obscene pictures, carnival costumes, playing cards, dice, games of chance, various trinkets, false

hair, and objects of vain luxury. The huge mound was described as 60 feet high and 240 feet in circumference at its base. The burning was to the accompaniment of religious songs.

Next came excommunication of the friar in May of 1497. The council vouched for his good conduct and wrote Rome in his defense, while he retired briefly to employ his pen instead of his pulpit voice. In December he resumed preaching, with no less colorful vigor and denunciation than before. The pope threatened interdict (the suspension of the regular sacraments for the faithful), an ecclesiastical weapon to force the city leaders to bend to papal will. The city would be banned; none could trade with her; no tithe tax could be collected by the city. This touched near; it affected Florence's purse. Consternation and frustration followed. Then came the relaxing of popular support. Having moved from doubt to fanaticism, Florence was moving from fanaticism back to doubt. Never had she become truly devout. Letters were intercepted, written by Savonarola to heads of states of Europe, calling for a convening of a general council to settle affairs of the church. This clearly aimed at a power above the head of the pope. It became more fuel for flames soon to be kindled.

The last incredible straw was a Franciscan challenge to the preacher to prove his innocence and divine commission by submitting to the medieval test of ordeal, trial by fire. A path of burning embers was prepared. A champion had to pass over the path without being burned. Controversy and dispute over procedure delayed the spectacle for which the people had gathered with intense emotion. During the delay, a sudden rainstorm extinguished the embers. The expected was denied; the people were angered and stormed St. Mark's. Savonarola was arrested, tried, and condemned along with two other monks.

In his cell, between periods of torture, the preacher composed meditations on the penitential Psalms, in which his evangelical understanding is left without doubt. Papal commissioners had been sent to Florence charged with seeing to his death. The sentence for Savonarola and the two monks was death by hanging, followed by the burning of their bodies. At the hour of execution, the bishop pronounced, “We separate thee from the church militant

and the church triumphant.” Girolamo Savonarola, preacher of righteousness, replied, “Not from the church triumphant; that is not thine to do.” Their souls were dispatched, Savonarola's last, on May 23, 1498.

The papal triumph was apparent, but in the providence of God, it was brief. Already born, indeed in his mid-teens by that year, was one, farther to the north, who would be used of God to break the monopoly of Rome. The time was not yet ripe, the cup of iniquity was not yet full, but they were soon to be. Martin Luther, empowered by the Spirit of God, would defy pope and prelate and live to die a natural death, twenty-five years after doing so.

In the city of Worms, Germany, today, the city in which that dramatic defiance was spoken before an imperial assembly, is a quiet memory of Savonarola. Two blocks from the main business street, in an open grassy square, is an imposing Reformation monument, composed of over a dozen statues in bronze, well discolored by oxidation and the passage of time. Each of the figures played a part in the movement which culminated in that April in Worms, in 1521. At the feet of Luther, supporting and contributing, with Wycliffe and Huss as fellow pre-reformers, is Girolamo Savonarola, preacher of righteousness.

In Florence today there is no such statue. There is only a bronze plaque set in the pavement of the public square, marking the place of his burning. As another has written: “You may silence a prophet in death, but you cannot stifle the truth, or stay the day; it is of God, and must prevail.” ❧

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**Dr. Panosian** taught Church history at Bob Jones University for 50 years and conducted study tours of Reformation Europe. Now in retirement, he attends Faith Free Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC, and

regularly presents in churches the lives of the Reformers as “Church History in First Person.”



# REPENTANCE THAT SAVES THE SOUL

Repentance is at the forefront of sound gospel preaching. The Lord Jesus commenced and concluded His ministry with a command to repent: “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” From this emphasis on repentance by the Savior and His disciples, we understand how vital repentance is to our salvation.

What does it mean to repent? Is it enough to say “sorry” and then expect to have God’s full forgiveness for sin? No, the Bible-taught Christian knows that a mere “sorry” is not genuine repentance; in fact, the Bible warns about spurious repentance that is merely a pretense or, at best, a short term cover-up for sin.

The apostle Paul warned of the “sorrow of the world” which “worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). This false repentance can be defined “not toward God.” It may be toward man or even toward self in a form of self-pity, but it is not the kind of repentance which invites God’s salvation into the soul.

There is also a kind of repentance which is simply turning over a new leaf: a determination to be different. A change in lifestyle can take place in one who has never repented toward God. A reformed alcoholic or a chronic gambler

can “kick the habit” so that his life is very different, but the state of his heart remains the same. His guilt for past deeds still clings to him.

A religious change can occur without spiritual repentance that comes from regeneration. In Acts 8 we read of Simon who accepted the facts of the gospel into his mind, was baptized, and remained loyal to Philip the evangelist, but he was not truly saved. His impenitence was soon revealed when he sought to acquire spiritual gifts by offering money to the apostle Peter (Acts 8:20-23). Changing one’s way of life does not necessarily indicate evangelical repentance. Men and women may reform their lives to a great degree without truly turning from sin and turning to God.

Gospel repentance is not a form of regret. Prisons are full of those who regret their crimes. A drunkard with a hangover may regret his drinking binge; a gambler with his loss of fortune at the casino may regret his foolishness with hard-earned money; a prostitute with a contracted disease may regret getting into the lowest trade of society; or a thief with his stolen goods may regret being caught. All of these may deeply regret their consequences, but not the cause! Consider Herod, who may have been sorry for John the Baptist’s execution, but he proceeded with the death sentence nonetheless to satisfy those who

dined with him (Matthew 14:9). Herod regretted the ghastly consequences of his actions, but he did not repent in his heart. Mere regret is not godly sorrow.

Evangelical repentance grieves over sin because it is sin. A man’s conscience may torment him while he fails to repent of his ungodliness. For instance, Judas confessed his crimes against the Son of God to his fellow men, but not to God. Not every one in the Bible who said, “I have sinned” was a true believer. The eyes may be wet with tears while the heart is as hard as stone. Remorse with its pangs of conscience is not repentance.

So, what then is true repentance? What are the key marks of turning from sin and turning to God? The first sign will be faith in a Savior for sin that accompanies sorrow for sin. Repenting and believing are inseparable. When the Lord went into Galilee preaching the kingdom of God, He proclaimed: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”(Mark1:15). He linked faith with genuine repentance.

Repentance must be accompanied by faith to lead to a sincere confession of sin and its evil against God. The prodigal son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight.” The repentant sinner makes no excuses for his sin, but freely confesses his guilt as a grief to his own soul as well as a grief to God.

In the regenerate soul a radical work takes place which creates a strong desire to break with the past and seek a new life that pleases God. Though there cannot be “sinless perfection” in the

believer, genuine repentance will show itself in newness of life.

“Repentance is to leave the sins I loved before,  
And show that I in earnest  
grieve by doing so no more”.

True repentance is also practical: “Do works meet for repentance.” The life of the true Christian is no longer dominated by sin. One Puritan wrote, “There is a great difference between a sheep that falls off the path into the mire, and a hog that jumps into the mire to wallow in its filth!” The pig will be true to its own nature, but not the sheep. The Lord’s sheep do not want to go on living in the mire of sin. Those who truly repent will hate sin and flee from it.

Repentance is imperative because heaven is for holy people, not rebels. The state in which we leave this life will be our eternal state: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev.22:11). If you do not love God now, you will not suddenly begin to love Him in eternity. You must repent here in this life, if you are to be in Heaven.

Sadly, repentance may be sought after too late. Puritan Thomas Watson said, “The longer ice freezes, the harder it is to be broken.” Therefore, it is vital to repent without delay! Turn away from sin and turn to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior who can deliver you from your sin. That’s true repentance and it’s the kind that will save your soul. ❧



**Rev. Stephen Hamilton**  
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Walnutport PA



# ALL NATIONS: ONE BLOOD

by J.C. Ryle

“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...” Acts 17:26

THIS is a very short and simple text, and even a child knows the meaning of its words. But simple as it is, it supplies food for much thought, and it forms part of a speech delivered by a great man on a great occasion.

The speaker is the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul. The hearers are the cultivated men of Athens, and specially the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The place is Mars Hill at Athens, in full view of religious buildings and statues, of which even the shattered remains are a marvel of art at this day. Never perhaps were such a place, such a man, and such an audience brought together! And what does he say to these intellectual Greeks? He tells the proud men of Athens that they must not flatter themselves that they were superior beings, as they vainly supposed. He declares that “God has made of one blood all nations.” There is no difference. The nature, the needs, the obligation to God of all human beings on the globe are one and the same. I shall stick to that expression “one blood,” and confine myself entirely to it.

We are all made “of one blood.” Then the Bible account of the origin of man is true. The Book of Genesis is right. The whole

family of mankind has descended from one pair—from Adam and Eve.

This is a humbling fact, no doubt; but it is true. Kings and their subjects, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, prince and pauper, the educated Englishman and the untutored, the fashionable lady at the West End of London and the dock worker dressed in rags on the East End—all, all might trace their pedigree, if they could trace it through sixty centuries, to one man and one woman. No doubt in the vast period of six thousand years immense varieties of races have gradually been developed. Hot climates and cold climates have affected the color and physical peculiarities of nations. Civilization and culture have produced their effect on the habits, demeanor, and mental attainments of the inhabitants of different parts of the globe. Some of Adam’s children in the lapse of time have been greatly degraded, and some have been raised and improved. But the great fact remains the same. The story written by Moses is true. All the dwellers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America originally sprang from Adam and Eve. We were all “made of one blood.”

Now why do I dwell on all this? I do it because I wish to impress on the minds of my readers the plenary inspiration and divine authority of the Book of Genesis. I want you to hold fast the old teaching about

the origin of man, and to refuse steadily to let it go.

I need hardly remind you that you live in a day of abounding skepticism and unbelief. Clever writers and lecturers are continually pouring contempt on the Old Testament Scriptures, and especially on the Book of Genesis. The contents of that venerable document, we are frequently told, are not to be read as real historical facts, but as fictions and fables. We are not to suppose that Adam and Eve were the only man and woman originally created, and that all mankind sprang from one pair. We are rather to believe that different races of human beings have been called into existence in different parts of the globe, at different times, without any relationship to one another. In short, we are coolly informed that the narratives in the first half of Genesis are only pleasing Oriental romances, and are not realities at all! Now, when you hear such talk as this, I charge you not to be moved or shaken for a moment. Stand fast in the old paths of the faith, and especially about the origin of man. There is abundant evidence that Moses is right, and those who impugn his veracity and credibility are wrong. We are all descended from one fallen father. We are “all of one blood.” It would be easy to show, if the limits of this paper permitted, that the oldest traditions of nations all over the

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# INTERNATIONAL FLAVOR



## OCTOBER WEEK OF PRAYER

The Week of Prayer and regular meeting of the presbytery returned to the FPC of Indianapolis the week of October 3-7. For the second October in the last three years, the gathering included men from three countries outside the United States and Canada. Rev. Jason Boyle, the licentiate in charge of the Mexico City mission since its inception on January 1, 2012, presented to the presbytery the petition of the people for constitution as a member congregation in the presbytery and for Mr. Boyle's ordination and installation as the church's first minister.

The presbytery also welcomed to its prayer sessions and business meetings Mr. Miloš Šolc, a member of Toronto FPC, who is carrying on a mission in the Czech Republic under the care of the presbytery and Mr. Ramón Sosa from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Mr. Sosa became acquainted with the Free Presbyterian Church by listening to the preaching of Dr. Ian Paisley through a Spanish language translation on Sermonaudio. Subsequently, he was able to contact Rev. Boyle and to gain information on how to begin the process of being received under care of the presbytery with the goal of becoming a Free Presbyterian minister.

During the week, those who were in attendance testified to sensing the Lord's presence in an impressive way during the seasons of prayer. The week began for the first time with a Monday evening communion service in which Rev. Ron Barnes, the host church's associate minister, preached the word. On Tuesday, Dr. Mark Allison, president of Geneva Reformed Seminary, delivered a compelling message

from Psalm 103. On Wednesday, Rev. Banister spoke from I Samuel 30 about David's recovery of all that he had lost. Rev. Stephen Hamilton spoke on Thursday from Revelation 3:14-22 on the great danger of luke warmness in the church and among the Lord's servants. Rev. Myron Mooney, the moderator, concluded the prayer sessions on Friday morning by speaking from John 2:13-17 about Christ's zeal for the house of God.

Throughout the week, the men in attendance enjoyed the warm hospitality of the Indianapolis congregation's members, led by Rev. and Mrs. Banister. The congregation provided lunches each day and kept the men supplied with snacks during meetings of the presbytery. The church building provided a very comfortable location for the various meetings that took place during the week. Before the week ended, the moderator conveyed to the church's leadership the appreciation of the presbytery for the kindness that the congregation displayed.

On October 4, Rev. Myron Mooney of Trinity FPC in Alabama, moderator of the presbytery, called the fall 2016 presbytery meeting to order. He welcomed the visitors from the Dominican Republic and the Czech Republic. For Mr. Sosa, it was not only his first visit to the United States but his first visit outside his home country. During the meetings, Rev. Boyle was able to provide Spanish language translations for Mr. Sosa whose ability to speak and understand English is not extensive.

One of the presbytery's first items of business was the report of an election held

in the Malvern church on September 16. The election produced an overwhelming vote to call Dr. Stephen Pollock of the Ulster presbytery to become the new minister in Malvern. The presbytery gave praise to the Lord for this singular answer to prayer and voted to ratify the report of the election, referring the matter to the discretion of the Ulster presbytery for its action. At its regular meeting on October 7, that presbytery also voted to ratify the report of the election and presented the call to Dr. Pollock, presently the minister of Ballymagerney FPC. He indicated that he would accept the call, confirming his status as the minister-elect for Malvern. Rev. Stephen Hamilton, interim moderator for Malvern, will continue to arrange for pulpit supply in Malvern until the Pollocks are able to arrive there during 2017.

For the first time in the denomination's history, two proposals to amend the *Confession of Faith* portion of the *Book of Church Order* reached the floor for final action. At least one half of the sessions voted to advance the proposals to the floor for formal debate and final action. The first proposal was to add language to the Additional Statement on the Confession of Faith 28.3-4 that would authorize each session to appoint one of its ruling elders to administer the sacrament of infant baptism, with that authorization limited to that session only. The BCO requirement for adopting such amendments is that two-thirds of those present and voting must vote for it. In this case, the vote fell short of that requirement, and thus the amendment failed. The second amendment proposed to add an additional statement to the

Confession of Faith 24.1 that reaffirms the historic understanding of the requirements for a legal marriage that it be only between one man and one woman, and that the denomination views marriage as beyond the authority of the civil government to redefine it. That amendment passed overwhelmingly and is now incorporated in the *Book of Church Order*.

The presbytery voted to ratify the report of an election in the Port Hope church in which the congregation extended a renewed ministerial call to Rev. Reggie Cranston to continue as the minister of the church, though he is past the specified retirement age. Rev. Cranston has indicated his willingness to continue his pastoral ministry, and the presbytery thanked the Lord for preserving Rev. Cranston in his labor. It was also encouraging for the presbytery to receive from the church in Columbia, SC the request for moderation to hold a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing as many as three elders.

Reports to the presbytery regarding the churches in Fredericton, New Brunswick; Prince George, British Columbia; and Victoria, British Columbia underscored the needs in those churches where there are no ministers. At the same time, the presbytery considered the report of an application from the mission work in Mexico City for its constitution, and acted to approve that application. Planning for a service of constitution of the church and ordination and installation of Rev. Boyle as the church's first minister is ongoing with the service scheduled for February 5th, 2017.

Two of the men who were under the care of the presbytery, Mr. Jeremiah Mooney and Mr. Renton Rathbun, at their request, were granted release from the presbytery's care. The Examination Committee's report concerned the request of Mr. Ramón Sosa to be received under the presbytery's care so that he can begin a course of training toward becoming a minister in the denomination. The presbytery took under its advisement the question of whether the congregation in which Mr. Sosa ministers will be received at some point as a mission of the denomination.

Among the highlights of other committee reports was the adoption of the Finance Committee's proposed presbytery budget for 2017. The Mission Board reported on the visit by Rev. and Mrs. Colin Mercer to Liberia during the month of September and the visit by Dr. Allison to interview prospective members of the church in Mexico City. They also reported on the subsequent visit by Rev. Boyle and Rev. Geoff Banister to the Dominican Republic where they visited Mr. Sosa and his congregation in Santo Domingo. The Liaison Committee for the International Congress secured the authority of the presbytery to proceed in its detailed planning for the fourth session of the Congress, tentatively planned for North America July 30 – August 3, 2018.

The Constitutional Documents Committee reported on the process of planning for the final publication of the *Book of Church Order*, hopefully during 2018. The Seminary Committee reported on the beginning of a new academic year in Geneva Reformed Seminary, and the Publications Committee announced that it had appointed Mrs. Jill Saunders as the new copy editor for *Current*. The presbytery's temporary committee to investigate the subject of music in the church filed its final report in which it acknowledged the challenges facing churches in the current environment and urging the employment of caution and discernment in decisions in that area.

Before the presbytery adjourned during the early evening on October 6, the moderator thanked those in attendance for their diligent contributions during the meeting, and he reminded the members that their next regular meeting, will be held in Faith FPC, Greenville, SC, May 8-12, 2017. ❧




**Rev. David G. Mook** is the minister of Phoenix Free Presbyterian Church in Peoria, Arizona. He serves as clerk of the presbytery of the FPCNA, chairman of the Constitutional Documents Committee, and is an adjunct professor in the field of practical theology at Geneva Reformed Seminary.



## PHOENIX MINISTER ELECTED ACCC PRESIDENT

We congratulate Rev. David Mook, minister of our church in Phoenix, Arizona, and clerk of our presbytery, upon his election as president of the American Council of Christian Churches. He succeeds Dr. John McKnight, senior minister of Reformation Bible Church, Darlington, Maryland. Dr. McKnight held the position of president with distinction for more than ten years. Rev. Mook formerly held the position of vice president. Rev. Dan Greenfield of Orwell, Ohio is the Council's Executive Secretary, having succeeded the late Dr. Ralph Colas one year ago. We trust the Lord will mightily enable Rev. Mook and each officer of the ACCC to fulfil the Council's mandate to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom and the founding principle of biblical separatism that brought the Council into existence in September 1941. The Council's website is [www.accc4truth.org](http://www.accc4truth.org)



# REV. COLIN MERCER REPORTS ON HIS TRIP TO LIBERIA

Thirty-three hours after leaving our home in Greenville SC, my wife and I eventually took our first steps in Liberia in western Africa. Our journey had taken us from South Carolina to Liberia's capital city Monrovia via Brussels. If we expected a warm African evening sun to greet us, we were sadly mistaken. The international airport in Monrovia is a basic facility without covered jet-ways to bring you into a plush airport terminal, so we deplaned into the night air and torrential rain.

This rainy season made our introduction to this African country interesting to say the least. Reclaiming our luggage from the one battered conveyor belt was a slow but straightforward affair. Our cases arrived safely but, like us, they were soaked with the night rain. We had a helpful customs officer who took pity on us struggling with five cases and quickly waved us through with a large smile and pleasant words of welcome. That brought us back out into the torrential rain, but we were thrilled to see our missionaries Joanne Greer and David DiCano appearing out of the darkness and under wide umbrellas to meet us.

It was impossible to bring their vehicle to the terminal doors as the road layout doesn't allow vehicles to drive that way, so we had to take the cases one by one and pack them into the cab of the pick-up truck. The 30-minute journey to the missionary compound was slow because of rain, unlit roads, and the drivers who fail to follow traffic laws in Monrovia. Many vehicles are old, lacking proper lights or equipment. Driving safely here is a test of reaction, speed, patience, and sanctification!

The missionary compound, which is just yards from the beach, comprises two four-bedroom homes, a water tower (which doubles as a guard tower), a dog kennel for two German shepherds, a generator room, and a couple of other storage buildings. The accommodation is well-constructed and comfortable. Bars are on every window and a

security guard is on the property at all times. There is a 12-foot-high wall topped with razor wire surrounding the property and steel gates providing access. This is not usual in Monrovia or in the Silver beach area of Dwazon where the compound is situated. The majority of homes are surrounded by walls and security is taken seriously. The measures in place are designed to provide our missionaries with a safe environment in which to study, fellowship, and rest.

The road from the missionary houses to the main route into Monrovia has to be seen to be believed. Potholes go from one side to another and are deep enough to damage an ordinary sedan car. Four-wheel-drive trucks are best able to navigate the ups and downs and get through the deep water that gathers during rainy season. This road is not unique in Liberia. In the Balla Creek area the road is worse with barely a yard of flat surface. The stress on vehicles is immense and our missionary vehicles spend many weeks in the shop for ongoing repairs. Toyota Land Cruisers seem to be the preferred vehicle for many organizations trying to survive these unpaved and unsafe roads.

Our purpose in visiting Liberia was not primarily to see the country or its beauty but to visit our Free Presbyterian missionary work. This centers in Paynesville and presently involves a bookstore, radio ministry, children's ministry, and the regular church services. David DiCano ministers the Word each Lord's day while Liberian pastor Moses Dahn takes care of one of the Bible classes. David also prepares radio programs, oversees the bookstore with the help of Martin Gban, deals with Liberian officials on legal matters – no easy task at any time, and organizes the necessary maintenance on the property at Dwazon. Joanne is responsible for the increasing work among the ladies, children, and

youth and is involved in teaching some within the church to read. They are both burdened for a Christian school as they see this as essential to the long-term good of the children and families under their care.

During our time there, the services were well attended and conference messages on marriage and the family were well received. The young people are learning the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* while the young children are memorizing the *Child's Catechism*. Worship services involve hymns, psalms, Bible reading and the preaching of the Word. This is unusual in an area where Pentecostal churches are common and people are accustomed to dancing and having drums in the services. Evidently the Lord is blessing as the people hear the Word preached and applied. While every congregation will have its difficulties and this Liberian congregation is no exception, there is a gospel emphasis that is bearing fruit in the lives of the people.

Life in Liberia can be frustrating. There remains a culture of bribes and dishonesty, in which our missionaries refuse to participate. Mundane things such as banking, shopping, and repairs can take hours to complete. It is a developing country and is making efforts to recover from years of civil war, but the progress at times seems painfully slow. David and Joanne cope well with this aspect of missionary work.

The spiritual need in Liberia is great and our small missionary endeavor needs more laborers. A designated radio station would be a great help as would robust vehicles. These are matters for prayer. The families in the Paynesville congregation are appreciative of the ministry of our Free Presbyterian missionaries; however, there is a need to see a gracious work of God in lives. Some show signs of spiritual life and growth while others are unsaved and need to experience the new birth. Christ urges us to pray.

Our trip was a blessing to us and we trust a blessing to David and Joanne. They are thankful for the continual interest shown by the Free Presbyterian family across the world. ❏



**Rev. Colin Mercer**  
is minister of Faith FPC,  
South Carolina and  
secretary of the Mission  
Board of the FPCNA.

## All Nations: One Blood

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globe confirm the account given by Moses in the most striking manner. Geikie [Scottish geologist], in his *Hours with the Bible*, has briefly shown that the story of the first pair, the serpent, the fall, the flood, and the ark are found cropping up in one form or another in almost every part of the habitable world. But the strongest proof of our common origin is to be found in the painful uniformity of man's moral nature, whatever be the color of his skin.

Go where you will on the globe, and observe what men and women are everywhere. Go to the heart of Africa or China, or to the remotest island of the Pacific Ocean, and mark the result of your investigations. I boldly assert that everywhere, and in every climate, you will find the moral nature of the human race exactly the same. Everywhere you will find men and women are naturally wicked, corrupt, selfish, proud, lazy, deceitful, godless, servants of lusts and passions. And I contend that nothing can reasonably account for this but the first three chapters of Genesis. We are what we are morally, because we have sprung from one parent, and partake of his nature. We are all descendants of one fallen Adam, and in Adam we all died. Moses is right. We are all of "one blood."

After all, if doubt remains in any man's mind, and he cannot quite believe the narratives of Genesis, I ask him to remember what a deadly blow his unbelief strikes at the authority of the New Testament. It is easy work to point out difficulties in the first book of the Bible; but it is not easy to explain away the repeated endorsement which Genesis receives from Christ and the Apostles. There is no getting over the broad fact that creation, the serpent, the fall, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Noah, the flood, the ark, Abraham, Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, are all mentioned in the New Testament as historical things or historical persons. What shall we say to this fact? Were Christ and the Apostles deceived and ignorant? The idea is absurd. Did they dishonestly accommodate themselves to the popular views of their hearers, in order to procure favor with them, knowing all the time that the things and persons they spoke of were fictitious, and not historical at all? The very idea is wicked and profane. We are shut up to one conclusion, and I see no alternative. If you give up the Old Testament, you must give up the New also. There is no standing-ground between disbelief of the supernatural narratives of Genesis and disbelief of the gospel. If you cannot believe Moses, you ought not to trust Christ and the Apostles, who certainly did believe him. Are you really wiser than the Lord Jesus Christ or St. Paul? Do you know better than they? Cast such notions behind your back. Stand firm on the old foundation, and be not carried away by modern theories. And as a great cornerstone, place beneath your feet the fact of our text, the common origin of all mankind. "We are all made of one blood."

Are we all of "one blood"? Then we all need one and the same remedy for the great family disease of our souls. The disease I speak of is sin. We inherit it from our parents, and it is a part of our nature. We are born with it, whether gentle or simple, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, as children of fallen Adam, with his blood in our veins. It is a disease which grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength, and unless cured before we die, will be the death of our souls.

Dr. John Charles Ryle was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool, England from 1880-1900. The substance of this paper was preached as a sermon at the Chapel Royal, St. James's, London on March 2, 1884.



## TORONTO FPC CELEBRATES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY

The Toronto congregation celebrated forty years of God's goodness with special services, September 16-20, 2016. Guest speakers included Rev. Thomas Martin, Lisburn, N. Ireland; Rev. Ian Goligher, Vancouver, B.C.; Dr. John McKnight, Maryland, USA; and Mr. Milos Solc, Czech Republic. The theme for the weekend was "Transformed", based on Romans 12:1-2 which admonishes God's people to be living sacrifices not conformed to this world, but "transformed by the renewing of your mind." The theme of transformation was accompanied by the Biblical illustration that God's people are clay in the hands of the great Potter, who is working in us to conform us more to the image of His Son. Great blessing accompanied the preaching of the Word of God. These were important messages at a critical juncture in church history and are available at [sermonaudio.com/toronto](http://sermonaudio.com/toronto).

Commemorative hand-made mugs bearing the words "Thanks be to God" were given to each family. A short video showed the process of forming a lump of clay into a usable vessel, illustrating the theme of our redemption as the Lord has taken sinners and made them His special treasure. Presentations were made to the minister Rev. Larry Saunders and elder George Robinson who have attended the church for forty years. Both men were thanked for their faithful service: Mr. Robinson for his work as treasurer for forty years and Rev. Saunders for his service in the youth and school ministries and now as senior pastor. Presentations were also made to the pastor emeritus Dr. McClelland as founder of the work for his continued service in the church and to his wife May who has been the church organist for forty years. In addition, the church acknowledged the faithful service of associate minister and school principal Rev. Lee Sterritt with a plaque of recognition, as well as bouquets of flowers to the ministers' wives: Jill Saunders, Nicola Sterritt, and May McClelland.

At the Monday evening meeting, Mr. Milos Solc gave a presentation of the work in the Czech Republic, which is now in its ninth year. He presented the challenges of building a work for God amid atheism, but thanked God for the souls that have come to Christ. The Tuesday meeting had a special youth focus when Rev. Thomas Martin gave his testimony of being lifted from the prison to the pulpit by the grace of God in his life.

At each meeting, there was a real sense of the Lord's presence and power. Many testified how much they appreciated the ministry of the Word and the fellowship of the Lord's people. Forty years marks one generation. It is the desire of the congregation, as it embarks on the next forty, that the Lord would lead the church on in the same path that it trod the first forty years of its life and that greater glory would be given to the Savior's Name as a result. Brethren, pray for us.



## CURRENT GOES LIVE

[www.fpcurrent.com](http://www.fpcurrent.com)

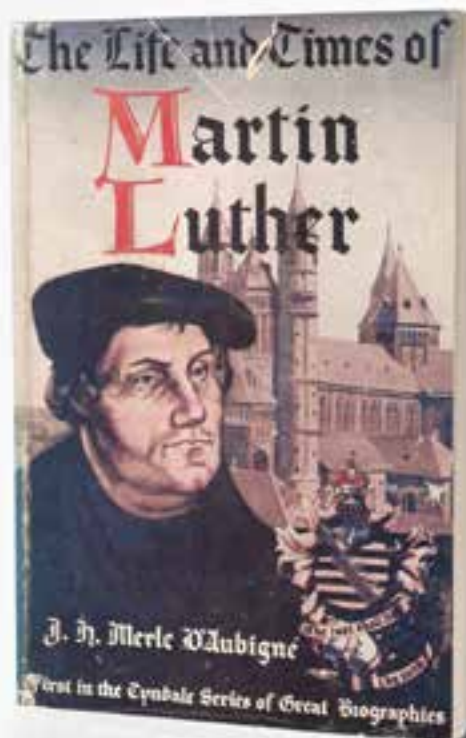
The Publications Committee is happy to announce that our new website is now live on the internet. Thanks to the technical work of Rev. Armen Thomassian, we have moved from the use of a standard PDF file to a dedicated database server. This will enable readers to read each issue in its entirety as it is uploaded to the site, or to search for individual articles by topic or key word. We trust you will enjoy reading *Current* on our new website. Please recommend it to others. To promote the magazine, churches or individuals who have their own websites may wish to add a link to our new site.

## NEW MINISTER FOR MALVERN

Malvern FPC, Pennsylvania, has extended a call to Rev. Stephen Pollock, minister of Ballymagerney FPC, Northern Ireland, to become its minister. The call was presented to the Presbyteries in North America and Ulster in October 2016. Rev. Pollock has accepted the call and is working through the final stages of acquiring visas to move with his wife and family to the United States. As soon as visas are in place the Presbytery will plan for a date for his installation, so he may commence his ministry in Malvern. The Lord be praised for answering the prayers of God's people in our Malvern congregation and our whole denomination.



# BEST BIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN LUTHER



Reading legacies of vibrant believers from long ago is a rewarding and especially inspiring experience if those writings are biblically sound and edifying. Such is the biography *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* by J.H.Merle D'Aubigné.

D'Aubigné was one of the many biographers of Martin Luther; however, no other biography throbs with the same spiritual vigor as D'Aubigné's work. For instance, take the Luther biography *Here I Stand* by great Yale University professor and well-known Luther scholar Dr. Roland Bainton. This is an excellent work for its vast, intriguing detail, but it was written by a scholar outside of the Reformation looking into the great movement. D'Aubigné, on the other hand, wrote from inside the continuing Reformation in Europe. He had been a hopelessly lost seminarian, who had even led a student protest against another who believed in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. So how did he become Luther's foremost biographer?

The bold reform movement, begun by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, continued on into nineteenth-century Europe where the salvation of two Scottish infidels caused momentous impact. They were James and Robert Haldane, once wicked sailors, but converted to zealous evangelists. In

1801, Robert visited Geneva, Switzerland. Like Paul in his visit to Athens, Haldane found the city "wholly given to idolatry." The Swiss clergy were engrossed with a fictionalized Christianity because the French Revolution had done its deadly work on the Swiss churches. When Robert shared the gospel with the young theological students, his words were as foreign to them as Paul's had been to the Athenians. Haldane immediately began to lecture on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the same Epistle that had brightly beamed salvation into Luther's heart. About twenty Genevan ministerial students attended those lectures, and many of them were genuinely converted through the lectures. One day, a seminary professor stood outside the lecture room, recording the names of the students in attendance. As a consequence, those same students were denied lucrative positions in the Swiss churches of whom was Adolphe Monod and his brother Theodore, Cesar Malan, and Jean-Henri Merle D'Aubigné.

In 1817, Merle D'Aubigné went abroad to further his education during the time that Germany was preparing to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Reformation. That was what inspired him to write the history of that great movement, which has become a classic of church history. The following is an excerpt of D'Aubigné's moving account of Luther's famous stand at the Diet of Worms:

"When he had ceased speaking, the Chancellor of Treves, the orator of the Diet, said indignantly: 'You have not answered the question put to you. You were not summoned hither to call in question the decisions of councils. You are required to give a clear and precise answer. Will you, or will you not, retract?' Upon this Luther replied without hesitation: 'Since your most serene majesty and your high mightinesses require from me a clear, simple, and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, *I cannot and I will not retract*, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.' And then looking round on this assembly before which he stood, and which held his life in its hands, he said: 'HERE I STAND, I CAN DO NO OTHER; MAY GOD HELP ME! AMEN!'

"Luther, constrained to obey his faith, led by his conscience to death, impelled by the noblest necessity, the slave of his belief, and under this slavery still supremely free, like the ship tossed by a violent tempest, and which, to save that which is more precious than itself, runs and is dashed upon the rocks, thus uttered these sublime words which still thrill our hearts at an interval of three centuries: thus spoke a monk before the emperor and the mighty ones of the nation; and this feeble and despised man, alone, but relying on the grace of the Most High, appeared greater and mightier than them all." ❧

Merle D'Aubigné's biography is still in print; new and used copies are available from Amazon and ABE. It can also be found in his *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*.



**Rev. Myron Mooney** is minister of Trinity FPC in Decatur, Alabama and presently serves as Moderator of the FPCNA.



# CAN YOU BUY YOUR WAY TO HEAVEN?

by Cosette Landon

Did you know that 2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Protestant Reformation*? Let me tell you what that means. The Protestant Reformation was a very special time in church history when many people in Europe turned to God and His Word instead of believing what their church, the Roman Catholic Church, taught them. People began to realize for the first time what the Bible taught!

One of those people was a man named Martin Luther who began to read his Bible. Soon he was shocked to discover that his church was teaching serious errors. In the next few Kids' Corners, we will explore some important parts of the Reformation for ourselves, and see just how much it has changed things for us today.

What would your life have been like if you had lived in Germany in the years before the Reformation? It would have been very, very different from life as we know it today! For instance, you would not have had hot water at the turn of a tap, or chocolate in colorful packages, or sneakers for your feet, or photographs of your family to look at. We enjoy these things today, but if we didn't have them, our life and happiness wouldn't be affected too much. On the other hand, what a difference the church's teaching made in Martin Luther's day. Today, we can go to church and freely hear the good news that Jesus saves by grace alone. Before the Reformation, there were all kinds of disturbing things taking place that caused hardship and

confusion for people. Let's look at one of the worst of those practices, and why Martin Luther, the leader of the Reformation, began to speak out against it.

First, imagine you are in the 1500's and you are walking down your village street. The first person you might meet would look like a kind of salesman, but he would not be selling something to help your health or your family. He would be selling expensive pieces of paper called "indulgences" that were supposed to be tickets to heaven. Since ordinary people did not have a copy of the Bible, they could not read that the only way to heaven was by accepting Jesus as their Savior. The priests assured them that they didn't need to repent and trust in Christ, but they had to buy indulgences to go to heaven. It looked like an easy way to get there. Indulgences stamped with the church's approval promised to spare them from the torments of hell! Selling indulgences made the church rich, the people poor, and worst of all, gave thousands of people false hope that they could get to heaven another way.

Martin Luther studied his Bible thoroughly and discovered that

indulgences were not even mentioned, so how could they take away sin and get someone to heaven? Then he realized that the church was actually selling indulgences in order to make money! This is what he said: "Those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved."

Martin Luther preached against the Roman Catholic Church's claim that they could "sell" salvation for money. He shared with the people of Germany the truth that he found in the Bible, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17), which means we need to receive God's salvation as a free gift. His message is still true and is a warning to anyone who thinks he can get into heaven another way, like trying to pay with money or good works. What about you? Are you going to heaven the right way? It's really important to make sure you are doing things God's way. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). ❧



## A WORD WORTH KNOWING

### Reformation

A period of time in the sixteenth century when the plain teaching of the Bible was rediscovered, when the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic church were exposed, and the "Protestant" church was born.



### Fall 2016



Nolan Bowman  
Grace FPC (Winston-Salem, N.C.)

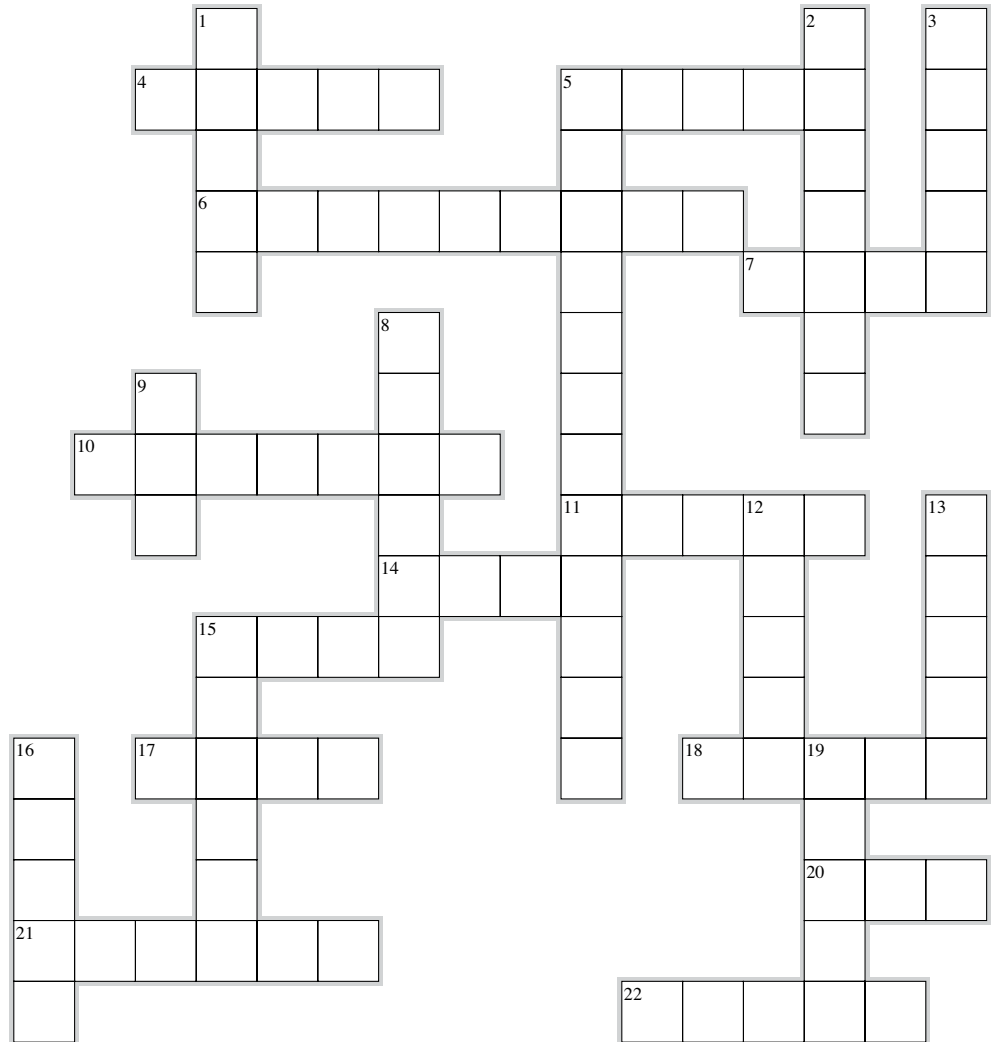


David Vosekalns  
Phoenix FPC (Peoria, AZ.)

# Kids' CROSSWORD Puzzle

## Across

3. "Upon this rock I will \_\_\_ my church." (Matthew 16:18)
4. "Behold \_\_\_ was fallen upon his face." (1 Samuel 5:3)
5. "Thy counsels of old are \_\_\_ and truth." (Isaiah 25:1)
6. "Ye hold the \_\_\_ of men." (Mark 7:8)
7. "Thy \_\_\_ is truth." (John 17:17)
8. "Who can utter the \_\_\_ acts of the Lord?" (Psalm 106:2)
9. "\_\_\_ unto you, scribes and Pharisees." (Luke 11:44)
10. "The LORD ... brought thee forth ... from the house of \_\_\_." (Deuteronomy 6:12)
11. "God ... commanded the \_\_\_ to shine out of darkness." (2 Corinthians 4:6)
12. "Their \_\_\_ is far from me." (Matthew 15:8)
13. "All the knees which have not \_\_\_ unto Baal." (1 Kings 19:18)
14. "\_\_\_ ye not unto idols." (Leviticus 19:4)
15. "Without faith it is impossible to \_\_\_ him." (Hebrews 11:6)
16. "Ye heard the \_\_\_ out of the midst of the darkness." (Deuteronomy 5:23)
17. "When ye \_\_\_, use not vain repetitions." (Matthew 6:7)
18. "\_\_\_ yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21)
19. "Come out from \_\_\_ them." (2 Corinthians 6:17)
20. "I have considered the days of \_\_\_." (Psalm 77:5)
21. "No man \_\_\_ unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)
22. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven \_\_\_." (Exodus 20:4)



## Down

1. "The just shall live by \_\_\_." (Romans 1:17)
2. "He is a \_\_\_ God." (Joshua 24:19)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Please send your completed puzzle to *Current Kids' Corner*, Attn: Mrs. Rachel Carper, 3 Elmira St., Greenville, SC 29615, or by email to rcarper@bju.edu by Feb. 28, 2017. Include your name, address, age, and the name of the church you attend. Five winners will be drawn from all correct submissions received. The contest is open to young people ages 5–12, and winners will receive a \$10 cash prize.



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<b>FEB. 5</b>	Constitution of Mexico City Church and Ordination of Rev. Jason Boyle
<b>APRIL 16</b>	Easter Sunday
<b>MAY 8-12</b>	Presbytery Week of Prayer to be hosted by Faith FPC, Greenville, South Carolina.
<b>JULY 15-22</b>	Youth Camp in Rock Mountain Bible Camp, Scranton, Pennsylvania



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