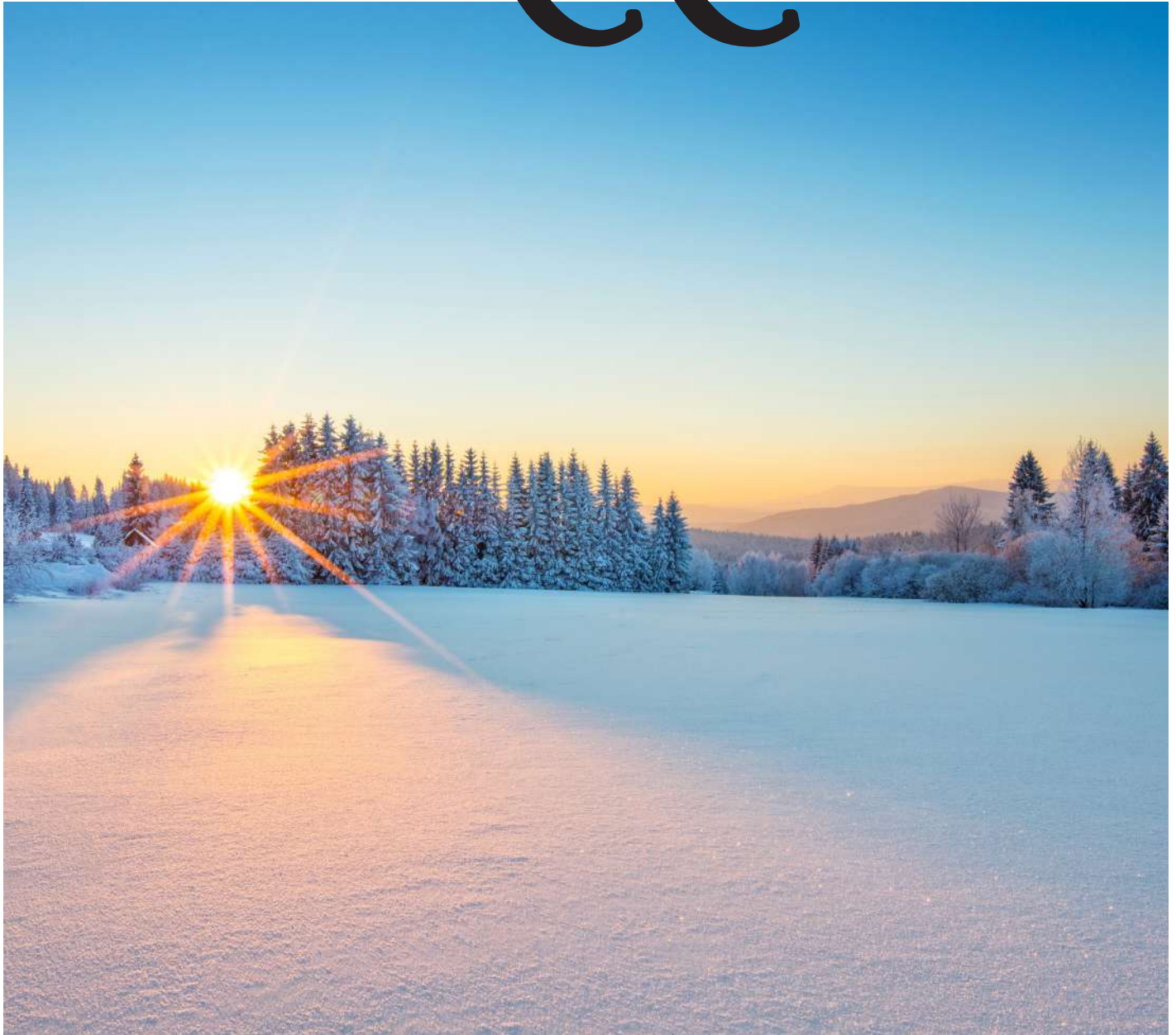


QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA

CURRENT



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SEEKING PEACE

ENOCH

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

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The Free Presbyterian Church of North America is a conservative, Protestant, and Reformed denomination with churches in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. We maintain a biblical position of separation from false ecumenism while seeking to stand with all who stand for Christ and the historic Protestant faith. While we are unashamedly Reformed in our theology, our Calvinism is never a hindrance to our preaching the free offer of the gospel since we always seek to keep our Calvinism Christ-centered and evangelistic. Our great desire is to preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8) in our churches and throughout the world.

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LET US HOLD FAST OUR PROFESSION.

HEBREWS 4:14

LET US

FROM THE EDITOR

A recent hospital visit near Princeton University gave me an opportunity for a walk around the campus of the historic seminary. On the wall of Alexander Hall is a plaque noting the structure as the first to be built in America "for use as a seminary by the Presbyterian church." Those in the Reformed tradition will think with fondness on the names Alexander, Millar, Hodge, and Warfield. They will also consider the events at the turn of the twentieth century that led to the departure of Gresham Machen. Liberalism had crept in, and Machen knew that liberalism and biblical Christianity cannot co-exist.

As I walked around the various buildings, I noticed banners announcing the ethos of Princeton Seminary today. *Reformed and Ecumenical. Traditional and Innovative.* These oxymorons are striking and thought provoking. And yet, they betray the fact that this once-great institution has continued its slide from the days of Machen.

Our responsibility is to defend the faith. We are Reformed and must disavow any tendency to ecumenical unity with the apostate Roman Catholic church. We do this, not out of Protestant bigotry, but out of love for the Savior and love for the souls of men.

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We are called to hold fast to apostolic traditions. Innovation in a theological institution will always invite the ideas of man. Revealed truth is eternal truth and, as revealed to man, is as old and traditional as the Bible itself.

At the turn of the year, many think about making resolutions. These are often sincere attempts to change a pattern of behavior. Given that these good intentions are broken in a day or two, it is understandable that we often keep resolutions close to our chest. But what if Christians came together and resolved publicly and unitedly to live for God? Would that not help us to keep our promises? When the church meets, we have the opportunity to make public resolution in the setting of community. In community, we have people encouraging us and holding us accountable.

The writer to Hebrews understood the benefit of making resolution in community. Thirteen times in twelve verses he uses the phrase "let us", followed by some words of exhortation. It would edify your soul to do a simple study of these verses. They serve as inspired declarations reminding the believers of the need to take responsibility in community. "Let us hold fast our profession" (Hebrews 4:14). "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:23-24). "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:13).

The Free Presbyterian Church is Reformed and traditional. These terms reflect the faith of the gospel—sinners are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We need to resolve to hold fast that profession as the Lord spares us in 2023. And being part of a church will help us in our resolution to persevere in these gospel traditions.

FROM THE PAST

Interacting with men proposing cooperation between Christians and Liberals, J. Gresham Machen stated, "...with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from 'controversial' matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight."

J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*

In 1879, the famous scientist Thomas Edison was working intensely to develop a lightbulb. Tradition tells us that, after a team of men spent twenty-four straight hours putting the finished product together, Edison gave a young boy the esteemed honor of carrying it upstairs. Scared of dropping the highly prized item the young boy anxiously sweated with every step. Tragedy struck and before the last step was reached the hard work of all the team came hurtling towards the floor and smashed into many pieces. It would take another twenty-four hours before another lightbulb was produced and although tired and weary, Edison had a choice to make: to whom would he give the esteemed honor to carry this new lightbulb? With a heart of forgiveness and compassion, he gave it to the same young boy.

A second chance is a great and gracious gift; and to many a new year is viewed in this light—a gift from the LORD to put right the mistakes we made in the year that is past. Is this not what you and I need? If so, there is hope and encouragement in God’s Word for us!

In Genesis 5:22 we read, “And Enoch walked with God.” Enoch did not always walk with God: Enoch’s walk had a beginning. No man or woman is born walking from the womb—be it physically or spiritually. This was true of Enoch. In Genesis 5:3 God makes it clear that Enoch was born in the fallen image of Adam (Genesis 5:3) and “by one man’s disobedience many (including Enoch) were made sinners” (Romans 5:19). One day this all changed for Enoch, for we are told in Hebrews 11:5–6 that Enoch believed God by faith and came to God in repentance—fulfilling the true meaning of his name which means “dedicated.”

Do you need to start walking with God this year? Do you need to get back on track in your walk with God this year? Be encouraged, it is possible! Believe in God’s forgiveness on the merits of Christ and come to God dedicating your life to Him. Christ promises, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37) and “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Perhaps you say you are like Enoch already: already you are walking with God. Not only did Enoch’s walk have a beginning but Enoch’s walk was telling. In Genesis 5:22, 24 we are told, “And Enoch walked with God.” This is different from being told, “And God walked with Enoch.” The former makes it clear it was Enoch’s choice to come and walk alongside God. The Hebrew form of this verb “walk” is intensive, revealing Enoch walked with God with all his heart. **Enoch’s walk clearly reveals Enoch’s delight in God!**

You and I may walk with people we do not particularly like in a line at a supermarket—but to willingly choose to walk with a person for three hundred years as Enoch did highlights that Enoch walked with God because he delighted in God! Enoch enjoyed God. Enoch enjoyed hearing God’s Word, knowing God’s presence, learning God’s will, and communing with God in prayer. Can you and I say the same? If a sermon goes on longer than we expected, do we inwardly sing, “More, more about Jesus. Tell me more about Jesus”? Or

do we inwardly groan, “Less, less about Jesus. Tell me less about Jesus. Less of His saving fullness see; less of His love who died for me”? Do we delight in being in God’s presence, hearing God speak to us through His Word, and talking to Him in prayer? Is such our intense delight and willing choice each day? If not, then let us see 2023 as a gracious gift from God to right the wrongs of 2022!

Enoch’s walk revealed his delight in God. **It also revealed Enoch’s obedience to God.** If two people are walking together for a long period of time they are obviously walking in the same direction. This is why the prophet Amos asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Enoch clearly walked in obedience to God. By Enoch choosing to walk alongside God, God had the leading role in the walk—a role Enoch humbly submitted to and obeyed.

The Spirit of God exhorts us in Proverbs 3:6 to acknowledge the LORD in all our ways. Is this our practice today? Do we not merely ask the LORD for guidance without acknowledging the LORD as the Master and God of our ways—submitting every part of our thoughts, words, and choices to His Will as revealed in His Word? If not, will you and I ask God for grace to accept His gracious gift of 2023 and right this wrong?

Enoch’s walk also revealed his trust in God. I cannot speak for you, but I only tend to follow people I trust. The fact Enoch walked with God for three hundred years shows he trusted God. Often life can have its twists and turns as well as its difficulties and disappointments. Instead of giving up at such times, Enoch trusted God in these times. Like the Psalmist, Enoch’s trust in God was only ever



LET US SEE 2023 AS A GRACIOUS GIFT FROM GOD TO RIGHT THE WRONGS OF 2022

leading him in the paths of righteousness so that goodness and mercy would always be seen as he looked back over his life (Psalm 23:3,6).

Are we those who are characterized by our trust in God or are we characterized by our complaints about God—be it the path He is leading us down or the people He is leading us across? Perhaps we need to ask God for grace to sincerely believe like the Psalmist, “As for God, his way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30).

Enoch’s walk revealed a commitment to God. The English puritan John Owen said, “Every sin is a fruit of being weary with God.” Enoch did not walk with God for one year or two hundred years and then had years away from this walk having grown weary of God. No, Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. Like David, Enoch would say, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed” (Psalm 57:7). Enoch never got weary of God.

Perhaps you say, “But Enoch doesn’t live in 2023 with all its distractions and temptations. It was easier for him.” If so, then notice

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that Enoch’s walk is encouraging.

Enoch was born with the same fallen passions and nature as you and me. Not only was Enoch a normal man without extraordinary gifts or achievements attributed to him, but Enoch walked in a time when it was said of the world, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The wickedness of the days in which Enoch lived were so great God said, “The earth is filled with violence” and “all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Genesis 6:12–13). So wicked were the people of earth that God said, “It repented the LORD that he had made man”; “It grieved him at his heart”; and “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.”

In Jude verse 15 Enoch describes the people of his day not only as sinners but as “ungodly” sinners and so while it is true all sinners are ungodly, yet the sinners of Enoch’s day were especially ungodly: they vehemently wanted nothing to do with God and what God stood for!

Dear reader, Enoch did not live in days of revival. Enoch

lived in days of wickedness and great rebellion against God. Yet in spite of all this, Enoch walked with God!

Do you want a heart that delights in God? Do you want a will that obeys God? Do you want a mind that trusts in God? Do you want a life committed to God no matter the temptation or trial? In summary, in 2023, do you want to be able to say with the apostle Paul, “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21)? If so, then be encouraged! In Malachi 3:6 the LORD declares, “I am the LORD, I change not.” If the LORD was willing and able to save and make Enoch to be the man he was several millennia ago, the LORD is willing and able to save and make you and me to be such today! Christ has promised, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11)

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Rev. Paul Foster
Minister of Dromore FPC, N. Ireland

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SEEKING THE PEACE OF YOUR NATION

And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. (Jeremiah 29:7)

By the time this *Current* goes to print, the latest United States mid-term elections will be in the rearview mirror. It is a truism that elections have consequences, and those consequences must interest the Lord's people. By grace we have a heart for the Word and will of God and it brings grief to our souls when political leaders promote policies diametrically opposed to the Scriptures. This is true not only in the United States, but in the other countries where this magazine is distributed. Our burden as God's people moves our hearts to speak against wickedness and to encourage godliness. I recall the events of 2020. The election of that year was in the tense climate of the coronavirus crisis, civil unrest, and increasing political polarization. In such a climate, should the church have a voice? Do our pastors have the right and responsibility to give direction in the realm of politics and state? The relationship between church and state is always challenging. Several prominent voices have expressed concern as to state overreach and interference in the affairs of religion. But if those concerns are legitimate, does that imply that the church has no right to comment on the affairs of state?

I would argue that it is the duty of the pulpit to preach the gospel and teach the will of God. The examples of New Testament preachers furnish us with ample evidence of the priority of the heavenly kingdom (Matthew 6:33), entered by the rebirth (John 3:7) which produces faith and repentance (Mark 1:15). The evangelists in Acts preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They knew that what really mattered was that sinners

would be saved. Through faith and repentance sinners are pardoned and adopted into the family of God. As sons of God, they are heirs of a heavenly home. Thus, the preacher must take people to Christ and command them to repent. Without denying its importance, politics can distract and dominate, taking people's hearts away from Christ. Politics can cause people to focus on the now and neglect the hereafter. Thus, preachers are rightly cautious when addressing these matters.

Naturally, evangelicals desire that saved individuals hold office. Church members will exercise the right to vote. Some may lobby and petition authorities for change in many areas. But the pulpit should not become a place for political platforming. However, a pastor doing his job well will instruct the people in the will of God. Such people will make electoral decisions based on their understanding of the Word. Putting it simply, it is impossible for a biblical church not to have an impact on the functioning of the state. The members of such a church will carry their convictions with them into the public square.

Wherever you live today, I suspect you find yourself living uncomfortably with the morals and theology that surrounds you. What are we to do in such times? More specifically, how are we to pray? We receive helpful direction on this matter from a text in Jeremiah: "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7).

Jeremiah is writing and giving counsel to exiles living in the moral and theological cesspool of Babylon. False prophets (v8) were teaching that the captivity would be short. Some commentators suggest that some were even recommending rebellion and

revolt. When we read Jeremiah, we know that the Lord warned against resisting His will in the captivity.

Hence, we gain an insight into God's will for His people living in a secular land. Jeremiah tells the people to seek its peace. The word "peace" is the well-known word *shalom*. Wishing someone *shalom* was to wish them well in a very broad sense—involving the absence of war and the presence of prosperity. Jeremiah told the Lord's people to seek the peace of Babylon.

It would be careless application to simply take the text and tell you to do the same for your nation in your day. This mandate from the Lord was time limited. There was to be a 70-year captivity. And in God's timing, it would be right and proper to pray for Babylon's downfall (Jeremiah 51:35; Psalm 137:8). Keeping that in mind there are still some principles in this portion of Scripture that would encourage us to seek the peace of our nations.

The Lord highlights a connection that should motivate obedience. In the peace of the city (speaking of any city in captivity) they would have peace. The same truth undergirds 1 Timothy 2:2. In exhorting prayer for kings, and for all who are in authority, Paul gives the motivation in terms of leading a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. The actions of authorities have a direct bearing on our lives (also consider Ezra 6:10 and Romans 13:1). There is an ongoing truth in this world in all times. The peace and prospering of the Lord's people are related to the prospering of the land. Thus, it is legitimate for the believer to desire and pray for conditions that enable them to live in *shalom*—in peace and in well-being.

Matthew Henry helpfully observed, "...should the country be embroiled in war, they would have the greatest share in the calamitous

effects of it. Thus, the primitive Christians, according to the temper of their holy religion, prayed for the powers that were, though they were persecuting powers. And, if they were to pray for and seek the peace of the land of their captivity, much more reason have we to pray for the welfare of the land of our nativity, where we are a free people under a good government, that in the peace thereof we and ours may have peace. Every passenger is concerned in the safety of the ship."

As we review the history of mankind and nations, we understand that it may not be the Lord's will for those conditions to exist. The churches in Macedonia had to live in a great trial of affliction, resulting in deep poverty (2 Corinthians 8:2). Yet, considering Jeremiah 29 and 1 Timothy 2, it is proper to pray for civil circumstances that enable the Lord's people to prosper. From Jeremiah 29 we can see that peace in the nations gives a measure of freedom even in captivity. We, the Lord's people today may feel captive in a nation dominated by wickedness, but we pray for its peace so that we would enjoy freedom to obey the will of God.

If we are to seek the peace of the nation, then our conduct will manifest obedience to the Lord's directive. Note the precepts, "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished" (Jeremiah 29:5-6). In Babylon, the Lord's people were to work and continue to live as families under God. It is not explicitly mentioned here but in Psalm 137 we read the desire of the godly to be able to worship in Babylon. "How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4) It is God's will for His people to work, to worship, and to wed. We ought to pray that these God-given freedoms are preserved in our nations. After all, these are the creation ordinances, given to man before the Fall into sin. These ordinances are God's good purpose for all men in all nations. Sadly, depraved men would rather pursue their own purposes than the Lord's. It is not accidental that as wickedness increases so we feel the pressure of the world on the family, the church, and the workplace.

In prayer and in our living, we are to seek the peace of our nations. Our well-being, our shalom, is the right to live out the will of God without the hindrance of the civil realm. We must joyfully live out God's will, even in a strange land. We are pilgrims and strangers in this world, but the Lord's will for work and worship and family must govern our lives, even when the atmosphere is not conducive. What the world around doesn't grasp is that living out the will of God would also be for their peace.

The spiritual man or woman will recognize that this world is not their home. They will certainly feel that the ungodly are at enmity with God and that Christ will come and judge the earth. They must acknowledge that they can't change the heart of the rulers. At times we feel impotent in our seeking for the peace of our nations. But we can and must pray. And, by the Spirit's power, we can deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). In doing these things, we are seeking the peace of our cities and nations.

.....
Rev. Stephen Pollock
Editor
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The Lord's Work in Córdoba, Mexico


To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:16)

to “destroy” Calvinist theology, I began to study it in depth and ended up exhausted by the weight of the biblical arguments and the consistency of that perspective. In tears I realized my tremendous error and the glorious reality of God’s grace towards a miserable sinner like me, a staunch defender of free will. From that moment my family life, my pastoral ministry, and my preaching changed radically. Encouraged by the preaching of fellow reformed preachers in the United States of America, with this new knowledge I was able to be strengthened in my resolve not to continue down the path of pragmatism and Arminian doctrinal error.

Finally, after three years of personal struggle, by the abundant grace of the Lord, I left my old church to begin preparing for the opening of the new local church, having reformed theology as the source of inspiration and instruction. In God’s providence I met and discussed matters with Mr. Marcus Reyes. After a season of waiting on the Lord, we decided to start a reformed church together in Córdoba, Veracruz.

We wanted to come under the care of a group of Particular Baptist churches in the city, but our request was refused. Although disappointed, we understood that God was providentially guiding us in a different direction.

Marcus had learned about the Free Presbyterian Church at the end of 2013 and traveled to Mexico City to meet Rev. Jason Boyle, who had already been serving in that city for three years. So began frequent contact with Rev. Boyle and we made regular visits to Iglesia Cristiana El Redentor during the first months of 2014.



This journey in reformed theology began in March 2010, when by the grace of the Lord, as director and teacher of the Bible school of my former congregation, I was assigned the subject of Church History. At that time, I was part of a charismatic church. During the second course of the subject, I had to teach about the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, and I was able to better understand the roots of my Protestant faith. Although I had a moderate knowledge of that period of church history, I was forced to deepen my knowledge of the Reformation. This is how I came to study for the first time what is known as the “Remonstrant Controversy” in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 17th century. For the first time I met the term “Arminianism.” I understood its implications given the focus of the church to which I belonged and served.

As is often the case, in my eagerness

Coram Deo Reformed Church, Córdoba held its first service on Sunday, May 11, 2014, with an attendance of 50 people, in addition to the brothers of the Grace Christian Church of Orizaba where brother Reyes is the minister. The vast majority of those who accompanied us from the city of Córdoba came from a charismatic and neo-Pentecostal background, since they used to attend the church where I was associate pastor for more than eleven years.

In April 2014 we made request to Rev. Boyle for us to come under the care of the FPCNA. He encouraged us to be patient, as denominational decisions could well take some time. To our surprise, during the Week of Prayer and presbytery meeting in May 2014, the brethren resolved to invite us to the presbytery in Cloverdale in the fall of that year. Their desire was for us to get to know each other and then evaluate the possibility of accepting our request to be taken into their care. They also resolved to send a commission, comprised of Revs. Myron Mooney and Reggie Kimbro, to visit Córdoba in September 2014. Rev. Mooney preached the Word on that visit.

Our visit to Cloverdale was a time of great blessing. The presbytery agreed to take us under care and assigned us to the supervision of the Foreign Missions and Seminary Committees. Being taken under their care was an unprecedented decision for the presbytery and involved an immense amount of organizational work.

Since the founding of the local church in May 2014, many people from my previous context have visited us. Upon hearing the Christ-centered sermons, the relentless con-

frontation of sin and observing the distinctives that we had adopted, many have ended up withdrawing and adhering to other less “rigorous” and more “contemporary” churches. I must admit that assuming such a conservative position has made us an “unattractive” church. Most of the churches in the region are Pentecostal, charismatic and the historical denominations have even chosen to accept certain modernist practices that are more in line with the philosophy of the people.

We have seen the hand of God guiding us, taking care of us, sustaining us, and correcting us. Although we do not give up our efforts to faithfully preach the biblical text, the path has not been easy. We thank God for the work of brothers who have invested resources to send supervision teams. In 2016, we received Rev. John Wagner and Mr. Steven Lee. Rev. John Hanna visited while he was in Mexico for the anniversary of the work in Mexico City in 2017. That same year Revs. Myron Mooney, Mark Allison, and Derrick Bowman conducted the ordination of Rev. Boyle and Rev. Mooney again preached in Córdoba.

In 2019 we were very thankful for the work of an international missions team led by Rev. Derrick Bowman, accompanied by his wife, Lydia, and a group of enthusiastic and God-loving young people. Their visit powerfully encouraged and edified us. This was also a year of personal moments of great joy with the marriages of our daughter Pamela and our son Lalo Jr., as well as the arrival of our grandson, Lalo III.

I must acknowledge the persevering work of Rev. Boyle in visiting and orienting us. He has guided me in

the process of my own theological and ministerial formation, and in the process of the church becoming a mission church under the care of the church in Mexico City. In May 2022, by the grace of the Lord upon me, I completed a course of theological study, and the presbytery agreed to me becoming a licensed minister. On August 21, 2022, Revs. Mooney and Bowman visited once more, carrying out the licensing procedure.

By the grace of God, we have at this time a membership of fourteen people who have remained firm, constant, and diligent. We have met in four different locations and have baptized fourteen brothers in the faith.

With the help and blessing of the Lord, we hope to become constituted as a local Free Presbyterian church. If that comes to pass it would be my honor to serve the Lord as the ordained teaching elder of this small but much-loved church.

We long to honor God in the years to come as a church that is faithful to the holy gospel and that conducts itself according to presbyterian government with worship services conducted in order and decency. May God grant it.

Thank you to all who have sustained us with prayers, words of encouragement, and even financial support. We thank God for His providence in joining us to this beautiful denomination.

.....
 Rev. Lalo Peña
 Minister of Coram Deo Reformed Church
 Córdoba, Mexico



Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God (2 Corinthians 3:5).



.....PRESBYTERY REPORT

The October 2022 meeting of the presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of North America (FPCNA) took place in Calgary with several members also joining via Zoom. This was the first meeting of presbytery in Canada since the Covid-19 pandemic. The gathering was marked with thanksgiving for the Lord's hand upon the work in Calgary, where the Rev. Paul Backhurst has been laboring for over 2 ½ years. The members of presbytery joined the church prayer meeting on Tuesday evening and were so grateful for the opportunity to meet many of the congregation and hear their heartfelt prayers.



Another cause for praise is that the Lord's work continues to advance in Mexico. A request for constitution was received from Coram Deo Reformed Church, Cordoba for constitution as a member of the FPCNA. This was passed to sessions for their consideration. Furthermore, the presbytery gladly agreed to the request from Word of Life Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic to be constituted under the FPCNA. Revs. Banister, Saunders, Boyle, and Pollock will travel to Dominican Republic in January to conduct the constitution service and also the ordination of its minister, Rev. Ramón Sosa.

There were several matters during the business meeting that were reasons for joy and gratitude to God for answers to prayer. Following examination by the Examination Committee, the presbytery approved that Messrs. Pablo Enciso and Ruben Ramirez (pictured with Rev. J. Boyle) come under care of presbytery. These young men are members of the church in Mexico City and have a burden for the preaching of the gospel. Please pray for them as they study in Geneva Reformed Seminary via Zoom. Pray also that they will continue to be a blessing in the Lord's work in Mexico.

It is thrilling to consider the Lord's hand at work in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. We long for seasons of similar growth in the United States and Canada. The Lord works sovereignly where, when, and how He pleases. Yet He has shown in His Word and in history that He is pleased to move in answer to prayer. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:7-8a).

The Examination Committee also reported that they had examined Mr. Logan Elder and it was agreed that Mr. Elder would be licensed as a preacher of the gospel under the auspices of the FPCNA. His licensing was conducted in Faith FPC (see picture).



UPDATE ON THE WORK OF REV. JOHN KELLY

In the last issue of *Current*, Rev. Kelly outlined his passion and vision for the preaching of the gospel in New England. After traveling extensively through Massachusetts and Vermont in the summer, it became clear by the end of August that the Lord was not opening doors in those states. Rev. Kelly wrote, "I must admit it was a discouraging blow, but the Lord knows exactly what He is doing, and His providence is always good."

But a door of opportunity did open! That door was in Fort Kent, Maine—the town in which Rev. Kelly had previously pastored. Rev. Kelly continues, "To me it is not 'accidental' that all doors have closed for me in Massachusetts and Vermont. What is more astounding is the fact that the very same day the door slammed shut, the Lord swung wide open the door in Maine. And for that matter, to an area and a people whom I love, know, have wept over, and asked the Lord to save."

During the first week of October, the Kelly family bade farewell to Greenville, South Carolina and made the journey to Maine. Upon arrival, they have held Sunday services and a weekly midweek prayer meeting with a small core group of people. These meetings have been held in the home of a family, but it is hoped that from January 2023 the group will meet in the Fort Kent public library. Rev. Kelly reports, "The Lord has given several opportunities to share the gospel with people in our community. The people coming to our services are excited and very much encouraged. They, too, are inviting people to services."

Please keep this work in prayer—that the Lord would continue to encourage the church and that sinners would be converted.



**Free Presbyterian International Congress
Northern Ireland—July 2024
Details to follow**





DEALING WITH DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

SUMMARY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER ONE

A congregation of Christians growing in happy fellowship with one another is an ongoing miracle! It is the fruit of Christ's redemption at work in the hearts and minds of His people. But it is not always well among the ranks of even the busiest or brightest congregation. When Paul wrote this first letter to the church at Corinth the people had a long way to go to enjoy blessed fellowship, for they were glorying in their divisions, and such deep-seated divisions that we wonder how they kept going. It was almost certain that without the apostle Paul's intervention, the church would have imploded. Through the fallout of unresolved contentions, the light of the gospel in Corinth would have been greatly dimmed or put out, and souls may have made shipwreck of their testimonies.

So, with pen in hand and with godly concern for the church's testimony in Corinth, Paul addressed the issues of divisions. He called each brother and sister at Corinth to reset their priorities as a church. He called them to the true basis of unity that they might avoid schism—rending the body of Christ to become little sects, as pieces of a garment torn off.

OBSERVATIONS ON PAUL'S REMEDIES FOR DIVISION

Everyone must work for unity in the church. That is to be the constant mindset of every worshiper within any church family. Each one must seek to avoid offence and endeavor to maintain the unity of the saints. How can this be done?

Unity in the Lord's church comes through growing in our personal fellowship with Christ.

After calling the Corinthian believers to live blameless in this world, waiting for the coming again of the Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul reminded them that they "... were called unto the fellowship of his [God's] Son..." (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Using the Greek term *koinonia*, which means partnership, Paul wanted them to know they were much more than adherents, or hearers of the gospel. They were much more than followers of Christ's example. They were participants with Him in all the riches of His grace. Their inner strength would not come from sheer mental resolve. Paul contended that by virtue of their "fellowship" in Christ, they would personally aspire to brotherly fellowship in the church: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Note the apostle's use of "same" three times. They were to be the same in mind, the same in judgment, and the same in speech. To accomplish this oneness within any congregation, God's people must give themselves to sound doctrine. Worship and ministry in the church are not to be taken up with little tidbits of carnal thinking. They are founded on the essential truths of the believer's fellowship with Christ, which in turn will lead to fellowship with our brothers and sisters. Inner fellowship with Christ will give birth to strong desires for outer fellowship with his or her fellow Christians. So, each one in the church must grow in partnership with Christ living in the power of union and communion with Him.

Unity in the Lord's church comes by focusing on the preeminence of Christ.

The church at Corinth was personality driven. Contentions came through claims of loyalty to different personalities, to ministers, who had labored among them. Some contended that they were blessed through the name of Paul, others through the name of Apollos, some through Cephas (Peter), and others through Christ.

This dividing of leaders in the church at Corinth was very damaging. It pitted God's ministers against each other. It was also blasphemous for it pitted their ministers against Christ. The terseness of the apostle's rebuke

shows that this focus on personalities distressed him. And rightly so, for it robbed Christ of His rightful role as the fountain-head of all blessing in the church. Paul asked, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" He would have none of this clamoring after names. He renounced the very idea of baptizing anyone in his own name. He had baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanus. These were exceptions, and none of them were baptized in Paul's name. How degrading to the honor of Christ for an apostle or minister to use his own name in baptism.

This outrage is a warning to every brother and sister in the church. Harm is done when we make ourselves foremost in any aspect of ministry in the church. The true servant of God will always, always, put the Lord Jesus Christ first and foremost. Are you doing that? Whether you are praying in the church prayer meeting or preaching at a church conference, are you making Christ preeminent, or are you promoting self? To promote self will divide. To promote the Lord Jesus and His grace to sinners will unite.

Unity in the Lord's church comes by focusing on the wisdom of the cross.

The city of Corinth had been deeply infected by Greek philosophers. These were the worldly-wise men, who were wise in their own eyes, but in God's eyes they were fools. To

Paul, the cross of Christ was God's rebuke to all worldly wisdom—wisdom based on human reasoning.

Paul cited from the book of Isaiah, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Corinthians 1:19). To the Bible reader, one look at God's revelation of the cross is worth more than the endless, foolish reasonings of worldly-minded men.

God's wisdom is revealed in the cross for it cuts through all the false notions of men. Men would trust in human works for salvation, but at the cross Christ did all the work required. Men would make salvation an ongoing process all the days of their lives, never knowing if they have done enough. At the cross Christ died once to put away sin for all time, for there He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). On the cross, Christ offered up to God an all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and it was enough for God. Likewise, the believer who trusts in Christ's death for salvation says, "It is enough for

me." Just to know that Christ died in my place to pay all the debt of my sin so that they are gone forever, is true peace based on true wisdom.

The preaching of the cross, then, will rally every Christian in the church. It is what unites men and women from all walks of life as worshippers of the Lamb. When the cross is regularly set before God's blood-washed people there is no turning back to the reasoning of the world. With the cross-work of Christ before us as the object of our faith there can be no interest in the petty things that divide carnal men. The cross of Christ, then, was Paul's remedy to heal the divisions of the church at Corinth, to end all glorying in men. As Paul closed the first chapter with this revelation of the cross, he wrote, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).



1 CORINTHIANS

APPLICATION

1. If you hate the sin of schism which divides the body of Christ, you must actively work for unity in your church.

Every Christian must ask himself or herself, "What am I doing to promote this fellowship within my church?" If you are not actively seeking to promote unity, your guard will be down, and you will sooner or later cause division. Scripture commands us to promote unity in the church with all our energy.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring [keeping on working at it] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

2. The church must not be personality driven.

In presbyterian church government, followed in the Free Presbyterian Church of North America, personality-following is greatly avoided by the proper function of the church session. There is an equality among the church's ruling elders and its minister, or ministers, who are elected by the local congregation to care for the flock. No elder or minister will make decisions, or make announcements, that have not been discussed, decided upon, and recorded in a duly-held session meeting. When elders and ministers work together with the unity of the church constantly in mind, guiding the committee of deacons, Sunday School teachers, and each ministry within the church, divisions in the church should never arise. When they do, the checks and balances of a session's God-honoring work will act as a remedy to heal hurts and unite hearts. This is God's own provision for the happy fellowship of His people in His church.

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Rev. Ian Goligher
Retired FPCNA Minister
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TC TEEN CONNECTION

By Rev. Derrick Bowman

DISCERNMENT Part Three

In this final part of our series on discernment, I want to begin by giving you a brief review of what we have already considered. Remember that the definition of discernment that we are using is that discernment is “the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.”

In part one, we looked at several passages of Scripture where Paul prays for the believer to have good spiritual discernment. For example, in Philippians 1:10 Paul prays that the believer may “approve things that are excellent.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Paul says that the believer is supposed to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” In Ephesians 5:8b–10, Paul says to “walk as children of light . . . proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” The word translated as prove in those verses is the word for discernment.

In part two, we looked at Hebrews 5:11–14 in much more detail. The outline that we considered had three points. First, “a lack of discernment is proof of spiritual immaturity.” Second, “a lack of discernment is proof of backsliding,” and third, “a continued lack of discernment is proof of spiritual death.” So far, we

have investigated what discernment is and why it is so important.

In this third part, I want us to consider the question of why you are not as discerning as you ought to be. In Romans 7, Paul laments that he often does things he knows he is not supposed to, and he fails to do things he knows he should. Paul wrestled with his sinful heart that still remained with him. The same is true for you. You still make wrong choices. You still confuse what is right and wrong. You might not want to, but you still do. So, the question is why are you not as discerning as you ought to be?

The first reason you are not as discerning as you ought to be is **your sinful heart**. Even if you are already a Christian, your heart is still sinful. That is why the mantra of our culture to “follow your heart” is such dangerous advice. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Your sinful nature makes you drawn to sin. The allurements of this world are still enticing. Because your heart is deceitful, you get confused between what is right and wrong. Sometimes your brain says something is wrong, but your deceitful heart draws you to it anyway. That is why it is so hard for you to resist temp-

tation. If you are a Christian, then you have the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you to enable you to fight against sin.

Spiritual warfare is the second reason you are not as discerning as you ought to be. It is true that you do not wrestle against flesh and blood. The warfare you face is against spiritual wickedness. Satan and all his forces constantly try to lead you astray. 2 Corinthians 2:11 says, “We are not ignorant of [Satan’s] devices.” One of his tactics is to present you with a counterfeit version of the truth. His devices are often far more subtle than you would think. Satan does not need for you to be an axe murderer or have some other vile manifestation of wickedness. That kind of overt sin is not good advertising for him. Satan would much rather you be a good and moral person who thinks everything is okay. He would rather you be peaceful and comfortable in your sin and never have any conviction in your heart. Satan is happy for you to believe subtle lies that are truth mixed with error, or as one preacher said, “Satan continues his efforts to make sin less offensive, Heaven less appealing, Hell less horrific, and the gospel less urgent.”

The third reason that you are not as

discerning as you ought to be is the massive amount of **cultural opposition** that you face. You live in a world that is not a friend to grace. You are constantly presented with an unchristian worldview. You have friends that follow a relativistic view of truth. Sexual perversions are all around you from immodestly dressed girls to homosexuality on parade. The culture you live in praises rebellion against authority, and there is a push to “follow your dreams” rather than to seek the will of God.

Sadly, this cultural opposition has led many to adopt a wrong view of Scripture. Recently, the governor of California purchased billboards to advertize his state as a sanctuary state for abortions. He misapplied Scripture on those billboards in an effort to defend his position. You will often see unsaved people misuse the Word of God as a way to defend their sinful actions. They do not “rightly divide the word of truth.” You can fall into the same error if you are not careful. It is true that you can snatch a verse out of context and misapply it to justify almost anything. You must be careful and discerning in your use of Scripture.

Even worse than a wrong view of Scripture in our backward culture is that most have a wrong view of God Himself. To most, God is irrelevant or ignored. One of the most important studies you can do is on the holiness of God. Learn to understand something about God’s hatred

against sin. God Himself is discerning. I already quoted Jeremiah 17:9 that says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it,” but don’t leave out verse 10. It says, “I the LORD search the heart.” God knows your heart. He searches it and is able to discern exactly what is in it. This ungodly culture does not view God that way. They say that God is only loving and does not punish the person who is just trying to do his best. This wrong view of God can influence you if you are not careful and discerning.

Sin has ruined everything. Ultimately it is because of sin that you are not as discerning as you ought to be. It is your own sin and sin all around you that impedes your discernment. The only way for you to grow in discernment is to grow in the Lord. As you “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” you will grow in discernment. I hope that you, like Paul, lament that you are not what you ought to be, but at the same time, I hope that you, like Paul, can rejoice in the fact that you are not what you once were. As a young person, it is necessary for you to be more discerning. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to discern between right and wrong, and, in the words of the *Shorter Catechism*, enables you to “die unto sin and live unto righteousness.” I leave you with Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”



If you would like to submit a question, please email Rev. Derrick Bowman at dbowman@gracefreepres.org. If your question is selected, it will be presented anonymously.

BOOK REVIEW

ADAM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When poor, benighted Charles Darwin wrote *Origin of the Species*, he was literally bringing into modern currency the beliefs of ancient Greek pagans like Thales. Prior to the Greeks, the Sumerians had recorded their beliefs in biological evolution achieved over vast periods of time. However, the world greeted the publication of Darwin's work in 1859 as though it were presenting novel ideas. Darwin was merely expressing fallen man's age-old autonomy and his basic rejection of the living triune Jehovah.

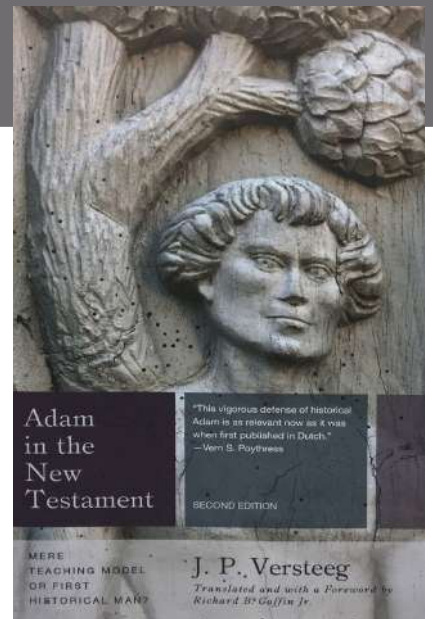
Unbelieving scholars within the professing church quickly jumped on Darwin's bandwagon of evolutionary hysteria, synthesizing evolution with spurious species of Christianity. In these evolutionary ideas, many found the escape hatch through which they could leave the binding nature of biblical orthodoxy. This was particularly the case in the German universities. Those institutions were considered by leaders of various Christian denominations to be the epitome of scholarship. Therefore, young men from the West were sent to those schools to obtain their doctorates. Sadly, even the godly young B.B. Warfield was tainted by the heterodoxy into which he was plunged under Schleiermacher and his colleagues. Because of the acceptance of these evolutionary myths into the professing church, widespread apostasy became apparent to sincere believers.

The fallout from the nineteenth century compromise with falsehood continues to afflict the church today. Increasing numbers of professing Christians are rejecting the literal creation account of Genesis. Dr. Peter Enns, former professor at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia), and his work at BioLogos Foundation advocate persuasively for theistic evolu-

tion. Both Enns and BioLogos downplay the substitutionary atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ. In place of the Savior's cross work, just like the nineteenth century liberals, they emphasize Christ's example to be followed as "the ideal man." They hope by following Jesus that they can gain something hardly equivalent to biblical salvation. Not believing the biblical data on Adam and inherited sin from him (Romans 5:12), sin is no longer viewed as rebellion against God. Augustinianism and Reformation theology's unfolding of the curse and ruin of sin have been abandoned. Instead, sin is simply described as the harmful and manipulative things that people do to each other and to themselves. Man misses the "mark," but nothing is said about what constitutes or determines the "mark" except being distanced from the human ideal that Jesus models. Enns goes so far as to justify sexual promiscuity by actually calling it "an effort to perpetuate one's gene pool to ensure the survival of the fittest."

Today in the history of Christ's church, another man is speaking falsely against the biblical and historical Adam. Dr. N.T. Wright prefers to postulate a race of sub-human apes that he along with agnostics refers to as "hominids."

Thankfully, about 45 years ago, Dutch theologian Dr. J.P. Versteeg saw the looming danger of the war on Adam, on Christ, on Paul, and the gospel. Dr. Versteeg could see that faith in the myth of biological evolution would logically deny the existence of Adam and Eve, and eventually permeate professing reformed churches. In 1978, he published his concise book *Adam in the New Testament*. In this work of only 67 pages, Dr. Versteeg skillfully expounds Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, and



three other New Testament passages, demonstrating the truth of Adam's historicity. Romans 5 clearly identifies Adam as the first man whose action has severely impacted the whole human family. 1 Corinthians 15:45 explicitly declares, "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." Only thoroughly sound, historical theology maintaining the real Adam can preserve sanity and morality in the professing church.

Versteeg's book is right up to date and uncovers the cause of the present insanity. Bible truth is being compromised with evolutionary mythology. With such a destroyed foundation, is it any wonder that people ask, "What gender am I?" Belief in evolution is totally incompatible with believing the Bible, and the denial of the historical Adam is directly rejecting the truth of the eternally inspired Word of God and common sense.

This book can be obtained from Reformation Heritage Books for \$5.

Rev. Myron Mooney
Minister of Trinity FPC, Trinity, AL

REMEDY FOR ANXIETY

*Is there a heart o'er-bound by sorrow? Is there a life weighed down by care?
Come to the cross, each burden bearing—All your anxiety, leave it there.*

Sorrows and cares, hearts and lives o'er-bound and weighed down—Christian women often feel this way! Several women in the Bible certainly had troubles, like Hannah who desperately prayed for a child, and Martha, who was troubled and full of care when Jesus was in her house! Living life in a full-of-care, worried, and anxious state chokes the blessed walk of victorious faith just as the thorny ground in the parable choked the good seed of God's Word. Too often, Christian women are weighed down, stressed out, and cranky, barely surviving from day to day. How can the beauty, calmness, and stability of gracious Christian womanhood and the effectiveness of Titus 2:3–5 be regained? Philippians 4:6–7 presents a powerful, effective rescue!

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The apostle Paul, directed by the Holy Spirit, cuts straight to the heart with “be careful for nothing”! How directly opposite that “nothing” is to the mental webs we weave over the cares of this life. “But you don't understand” is often our first reaction. Paul also said that he suffered

many cares from “without” as well as his daily “care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28). Paul understood what the weight of many cares was, yet he could tell others not to be full of care over anything and shared a powerful remedy.

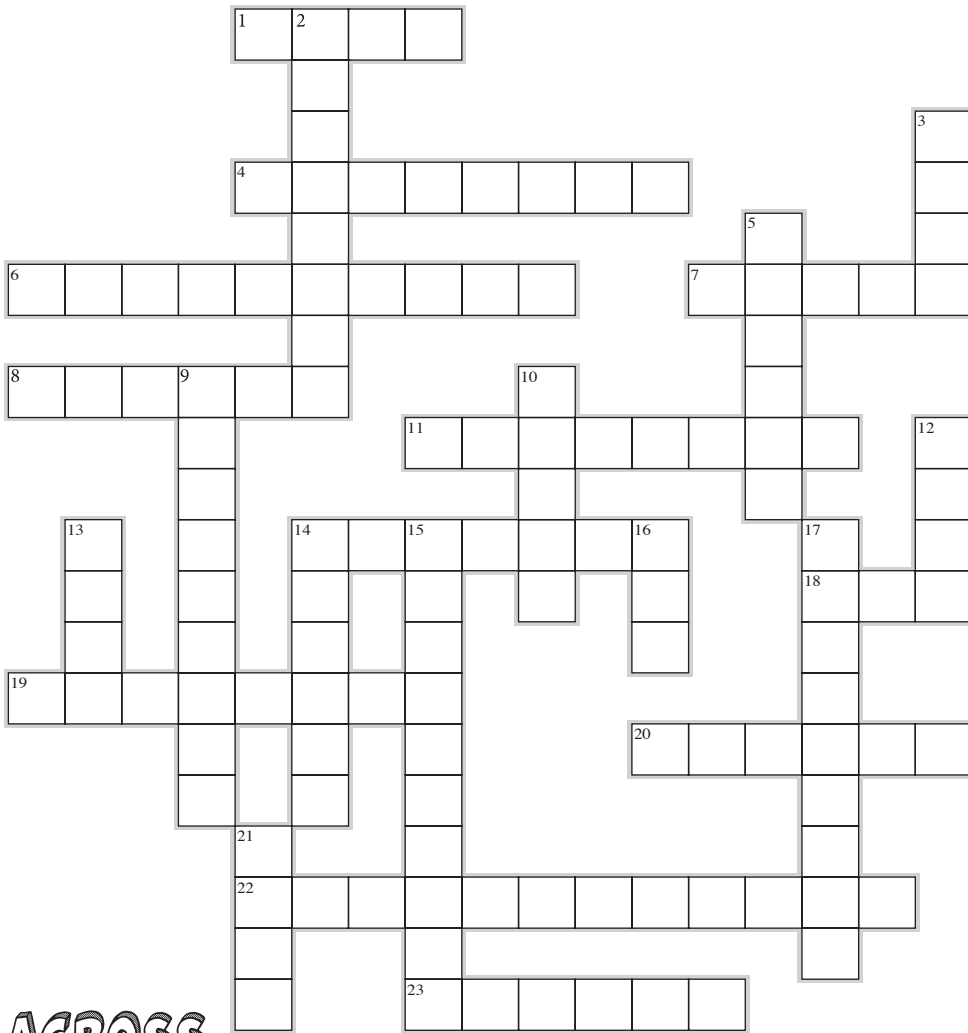
Paul said in everything to pray with supplications (humbly asking your petition) and thanksgivings, and to let your requests be made known to the Lord. A.W. Tozer points out that supplications, thanksgivings, and making your requests known to God are all forms of prayer! In other words, pray, pray, pray, and pray! Notice that prayer is the action commanded, not our natural responses—to figure out things, worry, get stressed out, or other unbecoming actions. How much better to do as Susannah Wesley did: she threw her apron over her head, stood still, and prayed. Her children knew that Mama was talking with God when that apron was over her head! Maybe you don't wear an apron, but we can train ourselves to be still and to pray! God knows our needs and distresses, but He wants us to ask Him. Paul learned to pray over his cares and he gives us the best counsel—pray, pray, pray first of all!

Finally, besides the answers to prayer God bestows, He promises His incredible, incomprehensible peace! Not just any peace, but the very peace of God! What does the peace of God working in our lives look like?

Perhaps the Lord Jesus Himself emulated best the peace of God when He was asleep in the ship during the storm (Mark 4:38–40). He was sleeping while His disciples panicked and became fearful. Jesus was calm when they woke Him up with the accusation, “Don't you care that we're perishing?” The Lord Jesus didn't get offended, but He simply stilled the winds and the waves. Then He challenged the disciples regarding their fearfulness and faithlessness. Aren't we so often just like the disciples? In the midst of a crisis, we often forget to pray, becoming fearful and faithless, worried and anxious. Dear sister in Christ, take everything to God in prayer, and you'll prove Him faithful both to provide and to fill you with an incredible, indescribable peace!

*All your anxiety, all your care,
Bring to the mercy seat,
leave it there;
Never a burden He cannot bear,
Never a friend like Jesus!*

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Mrs. Barbara Mooney
Trinity FPC, Trinity, AL
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ACROSS

1. God's Word is called a ___ for my feet. (Psalm 119:105)
4. He fell asleep during a long, late sermon. (Acts 20:9)
6. The Levites helped the people to ___ the Law and the reading. (Nehemiah 8:7-8)
7. What comes by hearing the Word of God? (Romans 10:17)
8. Keeping God's judgments brings great ___. (Psalm 19)
11. Quoting from Isaiah, Christ said He had been ___ to preach the gospel. (Luke 4:18)
14. Christians in the early church continued in doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and in ___. (Acts 2:42)
18. Jeremiah said he did what with God's words? (Jeremiah 15:16)
19. The Lord told Joshua to ___ on the book of the Law. (Joshua 1:8)
20. This king tore his clothes when he heard God's Law read. (2 Kings 22:11)
22. The commandment of the Lord is ___ to the eyes. (Psalm 19)
23. Christ told His disciples to preach what in all the world? (Mark 16:15)

DOWN

2. Paul says anyone who preaches a false gospel should be ___. (Galatians 1:8)
3. This Old Testament person was called "a preacher of righteousness." (2 Peter 2:5)
5. He said, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." (1 Samuel 3:10)
9. When Ezra read the book of the Law, the people were ___. (Nehemiah 8:3)
10. God's Word is sweeter than ___. (Psalm 19)
12. The people's first reaction when Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites taught them the Law. (Nehemiah 8:9-10)
13. God's testimonies will make the simple ___. (Psalm 19)
14. Paul told Timothy to do what with God's Word? (2 Timothy 4:2)
15. Christians must not forsake doing this. (Hebrews 10:25)
16. Having God's Word in your heart will keep you from what? (Psalm 119:11)
17. The statutes of the Lord bring ___ to the heart. (Psalm 19)
21. The Bible emphasizes that preachers are great blessings by saying they have beautiful what? (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15)

WINTER 2022

God's Word



As you work on this puzzle, think about how important God's Word should be to you.



KIDS' CORNER



PLEASE NOTE: Send your completed puzzle to *Current Kids' Corner*, c/o Judy Brown, 651 Ponden Dr., Greer, SC 29650 or to ljsbrown2@gmail.com by **January 31, 2023**. Include your name, address, age, and the name of the church you attend. Please also include an email address in case we need to contact you about your entry. Five winners will be drawn from all correct submissions received. **The contest is open to young people ages 5-12.** Winners will receive a \$10 cash prize.

BESTOWMENT OF ASSURANCE

God's salvation is entirely of grace, without human works. Our being saved, and "staying saved" is NOT dependent on anything we do. It is ALL of grace! (Ephesians 2:8-9) As believers we are not saved by what we do, but what *He* has done. Yet, as those who have been saved, the assurance of salvation flourishes in the atmosphere of obedience.

We note this in the Psalmist's prayer in Psalm 51:12. The *joy* of salvation may be lost through disobedience! There is an on-going **bestowment** of assurance that we ought to seek for. While it is true that the sure knowledge of sins forgiven and an appreciation of God's forgiveness is an incentive to holy living, it is also true that walking in obedience to the Word gives a greater sense of security in our souls.

Assurance is bestowed upon those who seek to walk in obedience to the Word of God. Our believing hearts are assured where there is the expulsion of sin. Note in 1 John 2:3, 5-6 and 3:17-21, John is not saying that we have to be sinlessly perfect in order to be sure of our salvation. If this were the case no one could ever know assurance! It is clear (1:8, 10) we will always have sins to confess; however, as we grow in grace, we are more aware of our sins and sensitive to God's high demands upon us.

The great gulf between God's holiness and our own appears greater the more we learn of Christ and grow in grace! One writer asserts: "Here then is a paradox—obedience that leads to righteousness is a condition of assurance, but feeling satisfied with any rightness we have attained is a barrier to being sure! Going forward continually to greater attainments is the only safeguard against insecurity." Christians must go on with God. Like Paul we must "press toward the mark for the prize."

The Christian life is a constant battle against sin. There is no discharge in this war (Ephesians 6:10; Galatians 5:17). Often believers are discouraged because of failure to win the battle, whether it be in thought, deed, or word. But they may take comfort in the fact that the consciousness of failure is itself a sign of grace! William Cowper wrote, "I hate the sins that made Thee mourn and drove Thee from my breast." There must be a constant forsaking of sin in our lives. There is a need to keep short accounts with God by daily repenting of our sins. We should never make bargains with sin, or make peace with wickedness (1 John 1:9). Clinging to sin, instead of forsaking it, and confessing it, will rob us of joy and peace in believing.

Assurance is a gift of God, but it cannot be enjoyed when we persist in deliberate disobedience. Sin "grieves" the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). He is not going to fill our hearts with assurance while we are grieving and slighting Him! May God enable us daily to "put away" sin, and to "mortify" the deeds of the flesh. Peace of heart is somewhat dependent upon a "conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God."

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Rev. Stephen Hamilton
Minister of Lehigh Valley FPC, PA
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