

SO GREAT A SALVATION

50 Days of Prayer for the PCA

May 2 – June 20

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:3-6

Devotional text by the pastoral staff of Christ Covenant Church, Matthews NC
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Published by Christian Education and Publications
Prepared by Gabe Sylvia and Vicki Simpson

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— DEDICATION —

These 50 Days of Prayer devotions are dedicated to the men and women, the gospel witnesses, who patiently and lovingly led each of us to Jesus Christ:

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Bernie Lawrence...Ben Hooks, Rich St. Denis
Bruce Creswell.....Eddie Jenkins, David Rusterholtz
Mike Miller.....Jim Craft
Kris Decker.....Duane Denton
Gabe Sylvia.....Kris Zehm, Kim Floyd Sylvia

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you; always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:3-5.

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AC	Administrative Committee
CC	Covenant College
CEP	Christian Education and Publications
CTS	Covenant Theological Seminary
MNA	Mission to North America
MTW	Mission to the World
PCAF	PCA Foundation
RBI	Retirement and Benefits, Inc.
RH	Ridge Haven Conference Center
RUM	Reformed University Ministries

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
Such a Great Salvation	12
The Order of Salvation	14
Born Again or Evangelical?	16
Christ's Answer to Man's Need	18
The Work of the Spirit.	20
The Hero of It All	22
 ELECTION	
Before the Foundation of the World.	24
“The Council of His Will”	26
The Mystery of God's Will	28
The Foreknowledge of God	30
 CALLING	
The Calling of God	32
The Call to Glory	34
The Gospel Call.	36
The Internal Call of God	38
The Efficacy of God's Word	40
Christ's Call to Life.	42
 REGENERATION AND CONVERSION	
Born of the Spirit.	44
A Living Hope.	46
The Spirit's Renewal	48
The Spiritual Man	50
The New Creation	52
Two Evangelical Gifts	54
Repentance unto Life.	56
Preaching Repentance	58

Saving Faith	60
Union with Christ	62

JUSTIFICATION AND ADOPTION

Justification: Gas or of God.	64
Imputation: The Gas of God	66
No Condemnation	68
In the Fullness of Time	70
Holiness: Life with God, the Motive for Sanctification	72
The Best Thing of All	74
The Spirit of Adoption.	76

SANCTIFICATION AND ASSURANCE

The Father’s Discipline	78
The Non-Negotiables.	80
A Cooperative Work	82
Justified without Holiness?	84
Overcoming The World	86
The Love of the Father	88
The Many Motives for Holiness	90
Good Works	92
The Great Warfare.	94
The Character of God	96
The Promise of Christ	98
The Work of the Spirit.	100

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance	102
Endurance	104

GLORIFICATION

From Glory to Glory	106
Hidden in God.	108
Resurrection: New Humanity...New World	110
EPILOGUE	112

INTRODUCTION

We are in what some call the “age of low information.” Ours is a culture dominated by Google® one-line searches, pop-up advertising, instant internet media streaming, and social media connections characterized by 160-byte exchanges. The time and the space for deep thought wanes and shrinks. Even secular cultural critics highlight these significant changes and their limitations. Consider this excerpt from Nicholas G. Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*:

[The media] supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I'm online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski (6-7).

Indeed, for the balance of his book and an interesting article on the internet (!) titled, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” he considers the age of low information and its impact on us. Surely the church cannot escape the effects of this on our willingness and perhaps even our ability to think about beauties and glories of Christ. The Christian religion is for deep-thinking men. “The Faith” once for all delivered to the saints is richly and robustly comprised of differing literary genres that methodically carry along the historical facts of God’s very acts in Creation. This is not the stuff of “status updates” to be sure!

Great theologians over the millennia have systematized and formulated The Faith into “sound doctrine” that God makes effective in the hearts of His people. While the Scripture presents the Way of Salvation accessible to all whom God would call, there has always been the need and practice of God’s people to bring these facts together so that they might be fully equipped for every good work.

The “ordo salutis” is one such formulation. In it, we find an orderly presentation of our redemption from covenant to cradle to Cross to crown. Our hope in these devotions is to provoke readers away from the shallows unto the vastness of God!

The Pastors of Christ Covenant Church

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Romans 11:33

Day 1

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2013

THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

SUCH A GREAT SALVATION

Today is the National Day of Prayer. On this day, our President and government asks all Americans to join in a day of supplication for our nation. In the wake of a divisive election, with an economy crippled by massive debt, facing the multiple evidences of a deeply divided nation, and in the context of surveys showing that Protestants (and Evangelicals) are declining in America, we have plenty to pray over. Most troubling in this vortex of national pain is a rising generation “who knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8).

Gone are Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John R. W. Stott and James M. Boice. The American evangelical icon, Billy Graham, is now 94 years old and failing in health. In October of 2011, Dr. Graham said, “On November 6th, the day before my 94th birthday, our nation will hold one of the most critical elections in my lifetime. We are at a crossroads, and there are profound moral issues at stake. I strongly urge you to vote for candidates who support the biblical definition of marriage between a man and a woman, protect the sanctity of life, and defend our religious freedoms. The Bible speaks clearly on these crucial issues. Please join me in praying for America that we will turn our hearts back toward God.” Many PCA members joining in the National Day of Prayer share Dr. Graham’s deep convictions and grave concerns.

Our nation has been growing spiritually adrift since the depression (or before) and in the wake of World War II. An “Evangelical Renaissance” in the 1940’s and 50’s, a “Jesus Movement” sweeping millions of Baby Boomers into the kingdom from 1965 to 1980 yet in the past three decades, a great confusion and a falling away has come upon the postmodern generations.

It is difficult to fathom how the homosexual movement has gained such power and prestige in the last thirty years considering that homosexuals make up less than 4% of our nation. How did it come to pass that since 1973 American physicians have aborted over 50 million people in the womb? Could any of us imagine that four presidents after Ronald Reagan, the White House would promote same-sex marriages?

It is good to pray for “family” values in Washington, D.C., state capitols, or mayors’ offices. But these “values” (a subjective term) will only prevail when a strong minority of Americans are truly Christian; when Biblical *virtues* ascend. With the drift of Gospel Religion comes the demise of Judeo-Christian culture in Europe, North America, or the United States. What we desperately need is what the author of Hebrews sets forth in Hebrews 4:1-4: attention to such a great salvation which will save us from the remedial judgments of God and the final retribution of Christ. Biblical virtues only prosper in souls who have experienced such a great salvation as is found in Christ.

Warren A. Candler (1857-1941) was a Methodist bishop who founded Emory University. In a marvelous book, *Great Revivals and the Great Nation*, Candler reminds us all that the society and culture is a direct product of the religion of the land:

The forms and forces of national life take their rise in the religion of the people. National life is feeble or strong according as the faith of the people is faint or vigorous. The fruitful periods of a nation's history are those during which religion is flourishing, and periods of religious declension are marked by the withering of all social and political vitality. When faith begins to perish all things else begin to die, as if the dew of heaven had been denied them, or the former and the latter rain had been withheld. It must be so. The deepest and most influential thing in the life of any people is its religion, and its customs and codes must inevitably be colored and controlled by its moral convictions. Atheism breeds anarchy as life begets life, and in all the gradations of civil government, from the lowest absolutism to the highest types of free institutions, the character of the political system is exactly determined by the faith that underlies it.

May these 50 Days of Prayer on the *Order of Salvation* clarify for each of us just how God makes old men new, and prepares the seedbed of the soul for a harvest of “pure and undefiled religion” (James 1:27) that will transform a people, a culture and a nation.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Give thanks to the Lord for the PCA and for the vision and calling He has given to so many who serve the Lord through the Committees and Agencies of the church.

CTS: Pray that God will grant insight, discernment, and unity of purpose to Covenant Seminary's Board of Trustees, Advisory Board, President's Cabinet, and Faculty as they plan for and make strategic decisions about the future of the Seminary. Ask that the Lord will continually renew their energy and enthusiasm for the Seminary's mission.

MTW: Pray for MTW's ONEChild sponsorship program, which helps restore hope to children and their families in need around the world. There is a great need for more sponsors.

RUM: Please pray for our new Intern Program Director, Mitch Gindlesperger. Pray that he learns his job quickly and feels at home in his new position. We are so thankful for Mitch accepting the job!

RBI: Pray that the leadership at RBI, our President, senior managers and board members will have wisdom in setting the course for a transformational ministry. Pray that we will be more relational and service oriented toward our ministry partners.

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2013

THE ORDER OF SALVATION

There is a reason the Bible begins with Genesis 1:1 instead of John 3:16. Evangelists, Apologists, Church Planters, Denomination Coordinators and Pastors sometimes overlook this obvious fact. The Bible begins its narrative of redemptive history by setting forth a worldview distinctly opposite the prevailing view of the pagan world. God created the world, all by Himself, out of nothing, by the sheer power of His will and the efficacy of His Word: “Let there be!...and there was...”

The Bible doesn’t defend God as Creator, nor does it set out to prove this fact. It simply states the truth of a *mystery*: something man could never know by reason, observation or scientific study, but only through divine revelation. The Bible sets forth a picture of God as Creator, the nature of His redemptive work in history, and an understanding of who human beings are – both creatures and the objects of redemption.

Candidly, this is why it is wrongheaded to attempt to merge evolution with the Bible’s record of history. Science is unable to “observe” that which occurred before there were men and women to witness such things. And the radical change of the earth, due to a universal flood, a divine curse, and millennia of decay, makes it impossible to “work back” from today to the primordial order of things. The fact that evolution is a plausibility structure makes it difficult for Christians to hold on to a faith that popular Darwinism rejects. Even if we attempt to wed some form of evolution to creation by considering Genesis 1 and 2 “myth,” we fail. For myth and science can never be conjoined; they are opposites in nature and in intent.

Genesis 1:1 and John 3:16 are joined together, over time and in history, by the nature of God. For God is a God of order, of process, of means to an end. His creation unfolded over time, in a process of seven days – regardless of how long those days may have been. And His salvation follows the same orderly process. It unfolds, over time, in a process of seven definitive works of grace: *election, calling and regeneration, conversion, justification and adoption, sanctification and assurance, perseverance, and glorification*. (Note: 10 theological terms are used but theologians order salvation in seven acts of God, some encompassing more than one result, or “term.”)

In Romans 8:18-30, the apostle Paul sets forth a skeletal “order of salvation” (Romans 8:28-30). Theologians have named this process of salvation the *ordo salutis* (Latin for “order of salvation” or blessing). Notice Paul’s reasoning: out of the disorder, pain and longing of a fallen creation (8:18-25), comes a process of salvation (8:26-30). Christianity is not an experience. It is about truth. Christianity is a worldview. It is truly impossible to embrace Christianity (Gospel) and hold to a pagan worldview (postmodernity, evolution, etc.). God simply will not allow it!

Christ is the great “founder and perfector” of saving faith; i.e., Christian religion (Hebrews 12:1, 2). Jesus Christ roots Himself, His redemptive life, and His salvific work in creation and in grace. Existing eternally as the Son of God, He was the co-creator of the world (Colossians 1:15-18). He then takes on creatureliness by becoming a child in a virgin’s womb, and a man of history. He sets about, in time and in a deliberate process, to redeem fallen humanity. Finally, He sends His Spirit – the final act of redemption – into the world to shape the church and order the salvation of every elect soul.

This is the Biblical Worldview. This is the true spirit of Christianity and the metanarrative of the Christian religion: creation, order, process, history, Christ, grace, Spirit, and church. We can’t mix-‘n-match. If we leave out one element or redesign the starting point, then the whole system falls apart because the truth has been denied and the order of divine work has been ignored. We can’t have a Savior who is not the Creator. And we can’t have redemption in a world that is still evolving at random. Such a great salvation! God the Creator of an orderly world is the Redeemer of that world in an orderly process of salvation.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for CEP as we develop more study and training resources. We now have a three-year curriculum that will help churches understand how to disciple people from being a non-Christian all the way to being mature believers capable of discipling others and doing the work of the ministry.

CC: Please pray that Covenant College will stay true to its mission to prepare students to serve the church and the world as courageous, biblically grounded, Gospel-centered agents of Christ’s transforming truth and grace.

MNA: Please pray for the church planters and ministries who are seeking volunteers to assist them in their work through MNA SecondCareer. Pray that volunteers will be found and the ministries strengthened, and that God will be glorified through the service of the volunteers. Pray that as believers walking through the process of sanctification our hearts will be awakened to the needs of those serving on the front lines of the church and that we will seek to find ways to put our God-given talents to work serving His church.

PCAF: Pray that God will be glorified in the day-to-day work and activity of the PCA Foundation.

RH: Pray that Ridge Haven will continue to fulfill its primary goal: that all campers, church groups, youth groups, and college groups who come to the Ridge Haven campus will leave knowing Jesus Christ better than before they came.

Day 3

Read John 3:1-21

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2013

BORN AGAIN OR EVANGELICAL?

Are you born-again or evangelical? Many might respond, “I thought these two labels were one in the same? Are not Evangelicals true Christians who’ve experienced the new birth?” Well, I thought so until recently. It appears that Americans (and “Christians”) use these words in a manner inconsistent with their Biblical moorings.

“Evangelical” is a label fewer and fewer are willing to bear. A survey in Great Britain in 2006 revealed that 41% of evangelicals preferred not to be known as such. I would number myself among that super-minority. But for our purposes today, let’s assume “evangelical” means something positive.

In 1976, *Newsweek* magazine declared that year, “the year of the born-again Christian.” So did pollster George Gallup. In that same year, he shocked the world by informing us that his survey revealed that 32% of Americans claimed to be born again! In several polls taken over the next four decades, this number varied but little. But other pollsters were suspect of these numbers.

In 2006, George Barna polled America and found that a staggering 45% of Americans were born again! Not believing his own survey results, he polled again a year later, in 2007, only to find that 38% professed to be born again! But as both Barna and Gallup perfected and refined their surveys, their findings were disturbing, to say the least.

Of the 45% in 2006 who said they were regenerate, almost half of them (21%) were unchurched. As Gallup and Barna pushed into these numbers, they found that the vast numbers of “born-againers” did not hold to a Biblical worldview. They did not believe that God created the world, that mankind (and themselves) was sinful, that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. These “born againers” fornicated, lied, stole, and used abortion clinics and divorced at the same rate as the general public. In the last analysis, Gallup and Barna found that between 7% to 9% (round it up to 10% max) of Americans called themselves born again and held to a basic Biblical (evangelical) worldview. Barna now refers to the serious believers as “evangelicals” and the nominal ones as “born-again.”

It might be necessary to consider the possibility that many – perhaps the majority or at least a super-minority – in the PCA are *not* regenerate. This fact would account for the explanation about why so many “born-again” people have been unable (unwilling?) to stem the spiritual and moral decline of America, and perhaps, this also explains why the PCA is experiencing tension around the subject of salvation: Justification and its relationship to Holiness.

Barna also found that biblically educated and doctrinally consistent self-described “evangelicals” tended to be white, college graduates, middle-class with higher incomes, and sixty years old or older! What about the rest? There appears to

have occurred a shift in our understanding of the Gospel, a Copernican revolution in our worldview among the new generation of American Christians.

All this begs for a closer and more Biblical study of how it is God makes sinful men into new creatures in Christ. Nicodemus, a theologian of first century Judaism, did not understand what it meant to be “born-again.” He would fit nicely into our PCA churches today and find fellowship with almost a third of American churchgoers.

Oh! One more interesting figure: Rodney Stark and Roger Finke did a study about Americans and church membership. Their landmark book, *The Churching of America: 1776-1990*, revealed that church membership stood at 17% at the time of the American Revolution. It rose to 37% in the golden age of Christianity in America during our Civil War. By 1980, 62% of Americans were members of a local church! More people in church and fewer than ever who were truly saved: born again but not evangelical. Staggering.

We need to hear again what Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God...truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God...do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:3-7).

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the upcoming 41st General Assembly in Greenville SC June 18-21, that God will be worshiped and honored in all that we think, say, and do in every meeting and gathering. Ask God to provide increased financial resources so that there may be an increase in the number of ruling and teaching elders in attendance.

CTS: Pray that God will grant great wisdom, vision, and endurance to Dr. Mark Dalbey, interim president of Covenant Seminary, as he handles the many responsibilities of leadership during a transitional time in the life of the institution, and as he seeks to advance the Seminary’s mission and ministry in collaboration with other key members of the faculty and staff. Pray also for his wife, Beth, and their family.

MTW: Praise God for the major advance of His Church in many countries such as the growth of the church in Nepal from 5000 or so in 1990 to over 1 million at present. Pray that growth will soon take place in less responsive countries.

RUM: Please pray for the Intern Program Department—Mitch, Emily Craft, and Casey Cockrum—all of whom are fairly new to their position. Pray that we will work together well as a team and the Lord will give good vision and direction.

RBI: Pray for the daily conversations and contacts that RBI staff have with church employees, volunteers, pastors, and missionaries. Pray that the Lord will bless the RBI staff with wisdom, compassion, and the clarity needed in discussing benefits or giving advice in each particular circumstance.

SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2012

CHRIST'S ANSWER TO MAN'S NEED

We are often told today that Christianity is not a religion but rather a relationship. I was in a church this summer while on vacation and was told by the minister, "If you have a religion, then you're probably not saved!" Woe is me! I'm damned for good, because, indeed, I hold to a religion and so do the majority of you!

James tells us that Christianity is "pure and undefiled religion" (James 1:27). Paul repeatedly uses the Greek word *eusebeia*, translated "godliness" in the ESV, but really means piety, devotion to God or religion. The Christian Faith has a set form of doctrines, rituals (e.g., the sacraments), mission and spirituality. How can anyone rightly tell us that our Christian Faith is not a religion?

If by "religion" simply an outward display of sanctimonious rubric and ritual without a living faith and a genuine piety, then of course "religion" can keep you from heaven. But the reality is that every genuine religion has its nominal members, its fake adherents, and its hypocritical devotees. But such "religiosity" does not nullify or condemn genuine devotion to God through Christ – Gospel religion. Be careful: when one does not adhere to a religion, that person is irreligious. Not a good thing!

We are not the first generation of Christians to be told that we have no genuine religion. The saints who lived in Rome, during the last days of the Apostolic era, were criticized for the same thing: One of the complaints of Romans against first-century Christians is that they were "atheists." Because they worshipped only one God, and did not honor the gods of Rome, they were considered atheists. And because they did not worship in temples before altars and idols with priests and sacrifices, they were considered irreligious. F.F. Bruce explains: "Christians had none of the visible apparatus which in those days was habitually associated with religion and worship – no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priests. Their pagan neighbors thought they had no God and called them atheists."

This bothered the Jews-turned-Christians in Rome. And it tempted them to turn back to Judaism, at least in part. Why not merge some religious rituals of Moses with a true faith in Christ? The answer to this question is the theme and purpose of our Epistle to the Hebrews.

In chapter 13:9-14, the author of Hebrews sets forth this truth: Christians *do* possess a religion with Christ at the center – altars, sacrifices, priests, and holy places, all of this we possess in Christ. The writer's train of thought is beautiful. He expounds upon living faith in chapter 11, calls us to holiness in the company of a "great cloud of witnesses" in chapter 12, and sets before us a dozen exhortations about community in Christ in chapter 13. In verses 9-14 of this thirteenth chapter, the author of Hebrews tells us three truths about true religion.

First, we possess a *new holiness*, a cleansing from sin, through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. Our guilt is removed by Christ (13:9). Second, we possess a *new holy place* in Calvary; an altar where God meets with man in Christ. We possess a union with Christ which brings us an eternal oneness and security with God (13:10-12). Third, we now have a *new home*, a holy city, which is the center of our religion. This is the City of God, spoken about in chapters 11, 12 and 13 of Hebrews; the “lasting city” which is the eternal home of our immortal lives (13:13-14).

In his book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green states that all ancient religions sought to deal with three issues of the soul: guilt, security with the gods, and immortality. Only Christianity actually affords these to man, in and through Jesus Christ. Atonement for guilt, union with Christ for security, the City of God for immortality – Christ alone answers the deep-souls’ needs of all mankind.

This is pure and undefiled religion: an altar, a sacred place, a holy city. Not Jerusalem nor Rome, but the Kingdom that comes from Jesus Christ. It is the Cross of Christ that is the symbol of all this hope and the answer to all man’s need.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray and thank God for leadership women serving locally, regionally, and denominationally. Pray that the Lord will guard their hearts and grow them in His grace as they serve the Kingdom.

CC: Please pray as we prepare to wrap up our BUILD campaign in the summer of 2013. Pray that God will send to us those who have the heart and the ability to partner with us in this endeavor. Pray that all the gifts and talents to support the College through the campaign will be provided.

MNA: The evil one most often attacks church planters in the area of their family and marriage. The most crucial need reported from church planters is for the training and care of their wives. Please pray for Parakaleo as they develop teaching templates so that many others can become trainers and join in the enrichment of church planters’ marriages and families. Pray that their intensive training retreats will prepare women for their crucial role as spouses of church planters. Pray for the Parakaleo staff: director Shari Thomas, associate director Tami Resch, Cristina Caires, Ruth Ann Batstone, Susanne Rodriguez and Maria Garriott.

PCAF: Pray that, as the PCA Foundation cultivates relationships with prospective donors, God will be glorified and that He will move them to take advantage of our services.

RH: Pray for Brave Heart campers, who have recently lost a loved one, to find the healing power of the Lord at the other end of their journey of grief.

Day 5

Read John 6:60-65

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2013

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

In all religions, flesh and spirit co-mingle and react to one another, “embodied souls.” The spiritual interests of the worshiper cannot escape the corporeal limitations of humanity, nor should they. God made man with body and soul, and the devotion of both to God is demanded by Creator and Redeemer.

Jesus often used physical elements to express spiritual realities: flesh and spirit, bread and wine, man and God. In Jesus Christ, both aspects of reality dwell in union, incarnate, in perfect balance. Not so with sinful men.

In every spiritual pursuit and every religious act, we walk a fine line of Biblical tension. Without the ballast of the Holy Spirit, we lean toward one false religion or another. For some, the pursuit of materialism presses down the life of the spirit. For others, spiritualism pushes us toward a subtle unbelief. Both of these strategies are designed to leave man in command of his relationship with God, either through the fleshly externals of a carnal religion or the internal musings of a private spirituality that is completely relative. God will have none of this.

God sent Jesus into this world: the eternal and invisible Son of God into the body of the Man of Nazareth. When Jesus spoke about receiving the gift of salvation and eternal life in John 6, He spoke of “eating my flesh and drinking my blood,” which was the same as “believing in the Son of Man.” Christ would not let them escape the reality of God in the flesh (6:53) or their need for the Spirit who gives eternal life (6:63). In *The Light Has Come*, Lesslie Newbigin writes: “In the juxtaposition of these two statements lies not evidence of textual dislocation or incompetent editing, but the heart of the whole matter – the heart, in fact, of the Gospel.” Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). To attempt to escape these two realities – faith in God incarnate and the work of the Spirit within us – is to turn spirituality into flesh (unbelief) or religion into spiritualizing (denial).

Jesus Christ has come forth from His Father to give to us “such a great salvation” that it makes anew everything about us – inside, out. This is why Paul calls believers “new creatures in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ, upon His resurrection, gave to the elect His Spirit, who makes us into these new creations of grace. In the process, all of life and the totality of our nature are renewed. From the regeneration of the soul to the glorification of the body, flesh and Spirit are made new by God incarnate and God within.

Jesus is clear: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (6:63). The Word of God (a physical book to be held in hand and grasped by sight and sound) is carried by the

Holy Spirit into the sacred recess of the human soul. In a mysterious way which only the Holy Spirit understands (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16), God brings new life, new nature, and new world to the flesh of men in this world.

Flesh alone profits nothing; spirit alone cannot save. God intends for men of flesh and blood to experience the work of the Spirit in their life, this humanity, this world, before we enter into a new life, new humanity, and new world.

Caution is called for. In our spiritual discussions and our ecclesiastical debates, there is a tendency for each of us to lean toward flesh or spirit. Some will focus on rituals, rubrics, outward appearance and activity. Others will be content to give the nod to holiness while in reality, they have spiritual salvation away in some glib catchphrase, devoid of any affect upon how they live. God will have none of that either.

Newbigin is correct: Such tensions exist even among the followers of Christ. "Flesh and blood becomes the place of a new life from above. This can only be an act of God Himself...the flesh of Jesus is the stumbling block because it forbids the kind of spirituality that is exactly unbelief, and it is present in the midst of His disciples."

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Give thanks for this year's Host Presbytery, Calvary Presbytery. They have been working diligently to make arrangements for this Assembly. Pray for the comfort and edification of the Commissioners and their families.

CTS: Pray for Dr. Bryan Chapell, chancellor of Covenant Seminary, in his ongoing ministry of teaching homiletics to our students; preaching, speaking, and writing on behalf of the Seminary; and advising and assisting in the leadership transition of the institution. Ask that the Lord will grant him strength and wisdom as he continues to represent, promote, and raise funds for the Seminary in his travels. Pray also for his wife, Kathy, and their family.

MTW: *The Spirit Moves* is the theme for the 2013 PCA Global Missions Conference to be held in Greenville SC this November 8-10. RUF and MTW are partnering to welcome hundreds of adult and student participants. Please pray for the Holy Spirit's direction as preparations and registrations continue.

RUM: Pray for the upcoming Intern class of 2013. The application/interview process starts in January. Pray that the Lord will raise up a strong class of men and women who will serve their campus well.

RBI: Pray for the continued acceptance of our new SmartBen program. Pray that it continues to be a successful way to aid our participants.

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2013

THE HERO OF IT ALL

I remember my New Testament seminary professor saying that the phrase “in Christ” (or its parallel) was mentioned over sixty times in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. He then said, “What lies at the heart of our doctrine of the church and our view of salvation is union with Christ.” In our passage for today, Paul talks about our salvation with reference to this union with Christ: “in Christ” (twice), “in Him” (6 times), “through Jesus Christ” (once), and “in the Beloved” (once).

Uniquely wonderful is the fact that when a sinner unites himself to Christ, by faith, all the benefits of salvation flow through Jesus Christ into the believer’s life and soul. That is Paul’s point in saying, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” He goes on: election in Christ, holiness in Christ, adoption in Christ, redemption through Christ, forgiveness in Christ, an inheritance in Christ, hope in Christ, the Gospel of salvation, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and a guarantee of salvation’s glory in Christ.

All that the believer possesses in Christ Jesus is truly mind-boggling. Such glorious truth led the late John Gerstner to refer to Jesus as “the Hero of it all.” And so He is. In the 20th century, Ligonier Ministries published a series of audio lectures by John Gerstner on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. When this reformed theologian got to chapter eight of the Confession, he said, “And now we come to the Hero of it all!: It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world, unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glorified” (WCF; 8-1). Christ the Mediator...the Hero of it all! I have not forgotten that acclamation of Christ in these past thirty years: the Hero of it all!

It is easy in our struggle against sin – the world, the flesh and the devil – to forget who saved us, who made us alive to God and who promised us glory in heaven. Paul reminds us, repeatedly, that all we are by God’s grace and all we hope to be in God’s glory comes to us “in Christ.” This is why the author of Hebrews exhorts us to persevere in our faith, “looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Sometimes pastors, church leaders, teachers and theologians argue about the *ordo salutis* – the order of our salvation; and the relative weight and importance of each part of this great salvation. I suppose this is necessary, for over time we tend to swing back and forth, like a pendulum, between emphasizing God’s grace (neglecting our duty) and emphasizing our

responsibility (neglecting God's grace), both of which are gifts from God in Christ. We lack balance, and the spirit of the age always pulls us either toward a lawlessness, worldliness and carnality beyond the Law or toward works, right living and law-keeping beyond the Gospel. Licentiousness or legalism, we tend to swing between the two.

To assume such would be a grave mistake, for the dead center of the pendulum is the weight itself which keeps us from going to the destruction of either of these extremes. And that weight is Jesus Christ. It is neither our theology of salvation or our spiritual practices as believers which get us to heaven. It is, singularly, the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul writes, elsewhere: "Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7). Paraphrased: focus on your union with Christ, in your justification (rooted in Him) and in your sanctification (built up in Him), argue less and be more thankful! He is, after all, the Hero of it all!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for our Regional Trainers. These men and women make themselves available throughout the denomination offering training for teachers, Christian education directors, and small groups, as well as providing curriculum and making Kingdom disciples.

CC: Please pray that God will give strength and discernment to the Student Development team as they seek to create an environment that will assist students in developing life skills and will enhance their ability to take personal responsibility for their spiritual growth, as these students seek to become passionate and intentional learners. Pray that the team members will have wisdom as they assign roommates, design and implement a vibrant orientation week, and train resident directors and resident assistants to mentor students and create hall identities.

MNA: Pray for MNA Metanoia Prison Ministries instructors and students, that relationships will develop that will be encouraging to both and glorifying to God. Pray for the mentoring program at Walker State Prison in Georgia, that God will provide the 200 men needed to mentor the Christian prisoners.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation's grant recipients, that the funds they receive from us will result in material needs being met, souls saved and hearts encouraged.

RH: Ridge Haven's camp ministry grew to almost 1,700 campers last summer. Pray for Executive Director Wallace Anderson and the year-round staff to be ready for the next steps in the Lord's plans for Ridge Haven's growth and to be good stewards of the resources He provides.

Day 7

Read Second Timothy 1:9-14

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2013

BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

I remember, when in the first grade, Mrs. Ertel was explaining to us that Christmas was the celebration of Jesus' birthday. One little girl raised her hand and asked the teacher, "When is God's birthday?" Mrs. Ertel paused, smiled, and said, "God doesn't have a birthday, has no father or mother, and owns no watch." She then proceeded to tell the children about the eternity of God. She said, "For God everything is now. God exists outside of time. He has no beginning, no end, and is always with us now. That's why God does not need or own a watch." I was both baffled and amazed. What sort of Being this eternal God must be!

After sixty-four years of life, twenty-two years of formal education, two theological degrees, and thirty-one years in the ministry, I know little more about the mystery of the eternity of God than what Mrs. Ertel told me in 1955!

Paul tells us that God chose us for salvation "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). He reminds Timothy of this same truth: God chose us and called us by His grace "before the ages began" (Second Timothy 1:9). Before there was anything other than the eternal family of Father, Son and Spirit, the Triune God chose those who would belong to Him, the elect, the saved, and the church. We call this *predestination*, because the Bible does (e.g., Ephesians 1:11).

Since everything is "now" to God, He always sees into our future, and He knows all things. But God is not reacting to our actions, but rather proactively setting forth our destiny in Christ. In other words, God does not choose to save those whom He foresees would believe in Christ. Quite the opposite. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* sets forth this truth called "God's Eternal Decree": "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. But the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death" (Westminster Confession of Faith 3-2, 3).

Because the Bible clearly and consistently sets forth salvation as the work of God's grace, and not predicated upon any work, merit or effort of man, God could not choose those whom He knew "would accept Him anyway" (as people say). This would make God's choice (salvation) dependent upon the merit of a man's faith or the work of a woman's religion. Besides, our "estate of sin and misery" would lead no one to believe in Christ apart from God's choosing to bring them to salvation. "God having, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer" (WSC #20).

The *ordo salutis* begins with predestination, because it begins in a roughly chronological order of salvific events. Before time, as we know it, God has decided whom He would save. Why this doctrine so troubles people is quite obvious. Even in our evangelical thinking and our reformed theology, most of us leave room for a little of man's good works; a tidbit of merit to add to grace. Paul will not allow this, before the foundation of the world and before the ages began God had made up His mind to save you and me.

As a six-year-old, I was awed by such an eternal being as God. As a sixty-four-year old, I am puzzled. The difference is "the pride of life" (First John 2:15) which grows over the years. I could not figure these things out in 1955 anymore than I can in 2013. Though I have a few more theological concepts and more Biblical languages to discuss such things, the truth remains about the same. God has no birthday, no Dad or Mom and no watch. But He has me. And I will rest and rejoice in that.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: The theme for the 2013 General Assembly is "Make All Things New." May all aspects of General Assembly serve to remind us of the privilege, responsibility, and blessing of being connected to one another and the Body of Christ.

CTS: Pray for the members of Covenant Seminary's Presidential Search Committee as they continue working to identify and interview appropriate candidates for the position. Ask that God will grant them patience and discernment as they navigate the many details of this process, and that they will seek God's will prayerfully and in humility as they wait for Him to provide the right person with the right skills at the right time.

MTW: Pray that God will bless and protect the families who go forth into many parts of the world that are either ignorant of or hostile to the Gospel. Pray that these families will not experience the loneliness and depression that so often accompany life in spiritually dark places.

RUM: Please pray for our 125 Interns and Campus Staff. Pray that the Lord will equip them to minister to His children across the Nation.

RBI: Although our insurance transition to online enrollment has been implemented, please pray it will continue to be well received by our churches, and that we will have the wisdom and expertise to handle the billing in-house.

Day 8

Read Ephesians 1:11-23

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2013

“THE COUNCIL OF HIS WILL”

God is neither arbitrary nor capricious. The one thing God cannot do is sin, not because He is incapable of such choices and actions that are wrong, but because to sin is against His nature. God can no more sin than I can presently be perfect. To be arbitrary and capricious are wrong, according to *Webster’s*, for to act in such a manner is to be unpredictable, to act on whim or fancy, to be inconsistent, or to give oneself over to freakish notions or impulses.

At times, in an attempt to protect the mystery of God’s predestination, we give the impression that God acts in an arbitrary manner, guided by caprice. We’ve seen this depicted in the cartoon of a reformed theologian holding a daisy, and picking its petals as he recites, “He loves me...He loves me not...” This mystery and its unwise presentation troubles souls over the doctrine of predestination.

God does have reasons for why He chooses to save some and pass over others, consigning them to eternal Hell. He doesn’t reveal to us what those reasons are. Paul speaks of “the purpose of His will” and “the council of His will,” “the mystery of His will” and “His purpose...set forth in Christ” when he writes about predestination in Ephesians 1:1-23. These describe the mysterious, but righteous, decisions of Father, Son and Spirit; the shape of His redemptive plan (Ephesians 1:11). We can know that nothing is arbitrary or capricious with God: all is purposeful, deliberate, wise, and mysterious (Ephesians 1:8-9).

A few years ago, R.C. Sproul brought one of his Ligonier Conferences to the church that I pastored. Dr. Sproul dealt with this question: “Although I believe in predestination, I am saddened by the thought that some of my family members may well have been passed over by God and are now in Hell. How can I praise God knowing this, in heaven, for all eternity?” He handled this question both artfully and pastorally and said, in effect, that now our finite minds and damaged reasoning could not accept the wise and good decisions of God’s council. But there will come a day when we are glorified, and our minds and hearts will be freed from darkness and disability to rise to the level of Christ’s mind and heart – the glorified state. In that new condition, we will be able to both accept and agree with what God has chosen to do. Unimaginable as this may seem now, there will come a day when we will praise God for those He chose to save and those He chose to condemn. We will no longer grieve over the reprobate but will glorify God in this judgment!

The book of Revelation gives evidence to this for in the halls of heaven, the angels and saints in glory, praise God for the council of His will, to save and to destroy. Hear them sing!

*“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.
The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be
judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the
prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of
the earth” (Revelation 11:16-18).*

*“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!*

*Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been
revealed” (Revelation 15:3-4).*

*After this I heard what seemed to be
the loud voice of a great multitude in
heaven, crying out,
“Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power
belong to our God,
for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her
immorality, and has avenged on
her the blood of his servants”
(Revelation 19:1-2).*

Every decision God makes is good. And, in time, all rational creatures will agree with the councils of God’s will, and will praise Him in heaven for such council, as those in hell quietly receive their just dues. Such is the mystery of predestination.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Give thanks for our Women’s Ministry Team: the eight **WASC** (Women’s Advisory Sub-Committee) members who work with the presbytery women’s ministry leaders (**PresWIC**) in the United States and Canada and the seven **CEP Trainers** who lead seminars, teaching biblical, covenantal, foundational materials to the women in our PCA churches.

CC: Please pray for our live-in staff of resident directors and resident assistants as they care for our students in their residence halls throughout the year.

MNA: Please pray for the greatly expanded team of MNA Special Needs Ministries Facilitators who are now serving PCA congregations all around the country. We are so thankful for our “Team of Ten”!

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation’s Board of Directors, that they will continue to exemplify godly character and integrity as they deliberate and contemplate the direction and progress of the PCA Foundation.

RH: Pray that Senior High campers can come to Ridge Haven to get away from all the noise of technology and hear the voice of God clearly.

FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2013

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

In our text, the apostle Paul sets forth two “mysteries” revealed to him by the Holy Spirit: the mysteries of Jesus Christ’s redemptive work and the forming of the New Testament church. In these thirteen verses, Paul uses the Greek word *musterion* (“mystery”) four times (3:3, 4, 6, 9). In summary, the Gospel makes known to us “the mystery made known” to Paul, “the mystery of Christ” which is the “mystery (of) Gentiles” and Jews in the church, “the mystery hidden for ages in God” but now revealed in Christ.

When Paul uses the word “mystery,” he does not mean the same thing as Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., defines a biblical mystery as “something we know somewhat better because of God’s disclosure on the subject, but which still contains baffling aspects.” A mystery is a truth revealed by God which man would never come to know by way of reason, experience or scientific investigation. In fact, all of the great tenets of the Apostles’ Creed and our Christian religion are revealed mysteries: creation, incarnation, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, resurrection, second coming, the Holy Spirit, the church, the communion of the saints, the miracles of the Bible, the last days, and eternal life.

Dr. Kaiser writes, “Even after we have been treated to an elaborate discussion of the plan of God as it affects the most mundane features of life, and even after we have been warned that the alleged inequalities in the divine plan are often mere hasty influence made by anxious men...there still are some insoluble mysteries in divine providence.” Translated: We can know only what God chooses us to know, and the rest is divine mystery; God is incomprehensible yet knowable only through revelation. Moses put it this way:

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever; that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

In one of my previous pastorates, there was an evangelical Methodist seminary across the street from our church. At this seminary, the professor of Systematic Theology was a friend who sent his children to the same school as my sons. He was an avowed Arminian and a Wesleyan perfectionist.

One day at lunch, he brought up the subject of predestination...yet again! After a few minutes of exchange, I said to him, “Do you see that waitress across the room? Is she able, whenever she wishes, to trust in Christ and be saved?” He answered that she was not; she would need some prevenient work of grace. So I said, “In other words, she cannot choose Christ until the Holy Spirit works in her life, granting her faith?” He answered, “Yes!” Then I asked, “Why would

God choose to work in her life to bring her to faith and not work in her sister's life?" My friend, squinted, pursed his lips and uttered, "I don't know." I said to him, "Then you, the Arminian, and I, the Calvinist, are not really that far apart, because neither of us can explain why grace comes to one but not to the other." He would not concede the similarity!

Yet the fact remains: Why some are saved and others are not is a mystery, which as Kaiser wrote, "Still contains baffling aspects." My Arminian friend would say that prevenient grace makes it possible for the young waitress to be saved, if a deeper work of grace leads her to choose Christ. I would say that irresistible grace would cause her to willingly accept Christ, if she was truly elect.

In the end, the "baffling aspect" is that which the Spirit of God chooses not to reveal to us: Why some but not others? Deep and mysterious is our God and all His ways. He is a God to be trusted, even if a God who is baffling. We are responsible to believe what has been revealed to us – the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The other thing, the "secret things" belong to God. Better that you and I know not these things, for as men and women made in the image of God, we are responsible to act upon all we know!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the Holy Spirit will move powerfully through the men chosen to preach His Word in each of the three evening worship services of the Assembly; the focus of the worship services is based on the theme of the Assembly. Pray that every participant will worship the Most High God in spirit and in truth.

CTS: Pray for Al Li, Covenant Seminary's vice president of business administration, and his Business Office, Communications, Facilities Management, Housing Services, One-Stop, and IT Services staff as they work to steward the Seminary's resources, communicate its message, and maintain its campus and equipment in wise and efficient ways. Praise God for His grace in continuing to provide for the Seminary's material needs in the midst of challenging economic times.

MTW: Pray that our missionaries will be focused securely on Christ.

RUM: Please pray for our Interns and Campus staff who are in need of funding to finish the school year strong. Pray that they will be proactive in their fundraising efforts and bold in their requests, and that people will give generously to their ministries.

RBI: Pray for our work on the new electronic remittance system. Pray that we will be able to define the process and clearly communicate it to the churches, and that they in turn will begin using the online process as opposed to sending in paper checks for retirement plan contributions.

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 2013

THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In my first call to a church, I organized a group of 38 people into the Surfside Presbyterian Church, in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Among these precious folks there wasn't a single Calvinist or a Presbyterian! What made them choose the PCA? They wanted a denomination that was fearless and faithful in preaching *all* of God's Word. There were some "interesting" discussions and heated debates in those early years at that church!

One woman on the search committee asked a revealing question, "Do you believe in the foreknowledge of God?" I replied that indeed I did. She was not happy with my answer, though both voted to call me and was faithful to support me for the ten years I remained at the church. Like others, she loved the Word and those who preached it. Still, foreknowledge challenges.

The apostle Peter opens his first letter by addressing it to the "elect exiles... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." In fact, he identifies those saints as chosen by God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. Theologians have debated for centuries what the "foreknowledge of God" means. Some prefer to believe that it simply means that God knew, before it happened, all those who would believe in Christ. Others, like me, think that Peter was expressing Paul's doctrine of predestination in more personal and relational terms. Thomas R. Schreiner, a reformed Baptist professor and New Testament commentator at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, explains "foreknowledge" this way in the *ESV Study Bible* footnotes: "They are God's people because of His foreknowledge. This does not merely refer to God's foreknowing that they would belong to Him but also means that He set His covenantal affection upon them in advance, foreordaining that they would belong to Him."

Paul says the same thing: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined..." (Romans 8:29). This means that foreknowledge and predestination, though inextricably united, cannot merely be synonyms for the same act of God's saving grace. Because God has loved from eternity a group of people, He has predestinated them to eternal life. This fact is born out in God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34.

When God promised to these patriarchs and prophets a covenant of salvation, He always included in His forecasted blessing "a thousand generations" yet to come – the redeemed, the elect, those who He foreknew. God's faithfulness to this elect people is set forth in the Hebrew word *chesed*. Our English translations render this word as "steadfast love," "loving-kindness," "compassion" or simply "kindness." In truth, we don't have a word in our language to match this rich Hebrew word. The best we can do is a phrase: the covenant love and loyalty of God.

When did God first *think* of you? There has never been a moment in God's eternal life when He did not have you on His mind and in His heart and think of you

as one of His beloved redeemed. When did God first love you? There has never been a second in eternity past, Pastor, nor will there be in eternity future, when God did not love you with the love incorruptible. God has begun His process of salvation in us because He has loved us forever!

*O Lord, you have searched me and
known me!
You know when I sit down and when
I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar:
You search out my path and my lying
down
and are acquainted with all my
ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it
altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for
me; it is high; I cannot attain it
(Psalm 139:1-6).*

*My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of
the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed
substance;
in your book were written, every one
of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of
them.
How precious to me are your
thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
(Psalm 139:15-17)*

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the CEP staff as they go through a number of personnel changes with the transition in coordinators. Ask the Lord to bless them with strong relationships as they serve the denomination together.

CC: Please pray for the staff in our Center for Calling & Career: for wisdom in the counsel offered through many one-on-one conversations and broader group programs. Please pray that graduate schools and employers will look favorably upon Covenant students and alumni as they apply for and pursue various callings. Please pray for courage in our students, that they will boldly pursue whatever God is calling them to next.

MNA: Please pray for Church Planting Coordinator Ted Powers as he provides leadership in church planting initiatives and in recruiting, training, assessing, coaching, and resourcing church planters. Ask God to give wisdom and insight as he works with local leaders to further advance the Kingdom through church planting.

PCAF: Pray that God will allow the PCAF to serve more members of PCA churches.

RH: Pray that God will open up countless opportunities for the year-round staff, summer staff, and guest speakers to share the Gospel.

SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2013

THE CALLING OF GOD

In the salvation of sinners, God decrees the final end (predestination or election), the means of salvation (the atonement of Christ) and the process by which the Holy Spirit applies Christ's finished work of redemption to elect individuals. Part of the ordained process of salvation is the calling of God. Through the Scriptures and by means of the Holy Spirit's power, the sinner is called to God, through Christ, over time.

Theologians speak about the internal call of God and the external call of God. The internal call of God concerns our conviction of sin and our confidence in Christ. By the Spirit's regenerating work, we come to understand just how wicked and godless we really are; while we simultaneously come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is our only hope of salvation. The internal calling moves us from self-righteousness to Christ's righteousness.

The means of grace the Spirit uses to affect this calling to salvation in Christ (hence: "the effectual calling") is the Word of God. It is the efficacy of Scripture, and in particular the Gospel, that changes our hearts and minds and moves us to repentance and faith in Christ. Sometimes the New Testament writers conflate both this external call of the preached Word and the internal call of a regenerate conscience into one phrase: "the calling of God."

In Second Peter 2:3-21, Peter focuses on this calling of God. He bids his readers in Rome to "confirm your calling and election." Or, as another version states: "to make your election and calling sure." It is the regenerating work of the Spirit of God that enables this effectual calling. In fact, theologians often conflate regeneration and effectual calling. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* does this in chapter ten: "of effectual calling."

But Peter also says that there are things men can do to gain assurance of the divine calling. First, we must rely upon and claim by faith the promises of God's Word, especially those concerning Jesus Christ and His saving purposes for us. Peter describes these promises as "the knowledge of him who *called* us to his own glory and excellence" (3:3-4). This is the Gospel call to Christlikeness.

Second, we are to add to our faith a godly life that is born out of "the golden chain of virtue": faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness (piety), brotherly affection, and sacrificial love (3:5-8). Sanctification and the maturation of godly character are evidences of calling and election.

Third, diligence in holy living causes one to grow confident in grace and certain of salvation. Just as the author of Hebrews reminds us that "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14), so Peter reminds us that

a holy life confirms the way to heaven; not that sanctification earns heaven for us, but that it makes clear the way to God – what Isaiah called “the highway of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8-10), upon which “only the redeemed” will walk (3:9-11).

Finally, Peter promises to continue to “remind” the saints of these things: the promises of God, the work of Christ, the virtuous life, the holy way, and the assurance of godliness. He intends to do this through the preaching of the Word of God (3:16-21).

In our modern church, we have departed from this challenge to make our calling and election sure. We are determined to offer a bare promise without a transformed life, only to leave the people in the pew with uncertainty about what God is calling them to be and to do. Because we are so fearful of works righteousness, we have robbed this next generation of Christians of the certainty of God’s calling. We need to return to Peter’s formula, and we need to “remind” the saints of these qualities of a Godward life and the way to heaven; the calling of God.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for an increase in the number of ruling elders and teaching elders in attendance at the 41st General Assembly. Pray that the peace, purity, and progress of the Presbyterian Church in America will be in the forefront of the Commissioners’ minds as they prepare for the Assembly.

CTS: Pray for Rev. Mark Ryan as he assumes the role of director of Covenant Seminary’s Francis A. Schaeffer Institute (FSI) and serves as adjunct professor of contemporary culture for the Seminary. Ask that the Lord will give Mark a strong vision for FSI and enable him to provide inspiring and energetic leadership as he seeks to oversee the Institute’s revitalization and growth.

MTW: Pray for the continued deepening of relationships with our national partners and colleagues related to church planting, and for the sending of missionaries from everywhere to everywhere.

RUM: Pray that, as our Interns minister to students nationwide, the Lord will bring unbelievers into their paths and that these Interns will see conversions.

RBI: The needs of the PCA Ministerial Relief fund are growing. Please pray for Bob Clarke and Vickie Poole as they continue to seek the face and will of God in how to take the ministry forward in the years to come.

MONDAY, MAY 13, 2013

THE CALL TO GLORY

At the end of his first epistle, Peter reminds the church in Rome about to enter into the persecution of Emperor Nero, the purposes of God behind all their sufferings. He writes, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has *called* you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10). This rich verse informs us that the calling of God is not a cold and impersonal summons to faith and obedience, but rather a personal project of God (“God...will Himself...”) rooted in His grace.

Although the calling of God has a definitive beginning when the Gospel is preached and, concomitant with that, the Spirit regenerates the soul; its process goes on for the rest of the believer’s life. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states that the ongoing results of God’s calling include “determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace” (WCF 10-1). What happens to begin our life in Christ continues as we grow in our life with Christ.

Peter tells us that God’s calling to glory will have this great effect upon us over time. First, God will restore us, repairing the damage due to our sinful lives. Sin is not something just to be forgiven or a force merely to triumph over. It is a way of life that does great damage to self and others. When God calls us to Himself and to grace, He calls us to renewal, to reconciliation, to restitution and to restoration. God intends to “restore the years the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25). God calls us to *restoration*. A man who left wife and children can, by God’s calling and grace, restore shattered relationships and repair much of the damage due to his selfishness.

Second, God’s calling intends to confirm us in Christ. There are many forces and many circumstances that can and will shake the assurance of a believer. God desires for us a confirmation of His love and grace. Doubt can motivate the soul to seek the Lord; terminal doubt can destroy the will to follow the Lord. God is always calling us to go deeper into grace and more into Christ. We need the confirmation of both.

Third, God’s calling strengthens our souls. God does not toy with people. His Gospel offer of forgiveness and the Spirit’s prompting to faith are as genuine as God is. Each time God calls us to more repentance, to deeper faith, or to renewed obedience, our souls are strengthened in His love. God continues to call only His elect.

Finally, the calling of God will establish us in the guarantee of eternal life. Persecution may hurt the saints and may scatter the church. Sorrows will fill the heart of those who are afflicted for Christ’s sake. But these trials also wear

us off this world and recalibrate us for heaven. As life gives way under the tyrant's lash, the Kingdom of God is established for us under the Sovereign's scepter. The martyrs of the church often testify to a calm assurance of their home in heaven. And more than a few have heard the call of Christ at the hour of death!

The calling of God stays with us throughout our Christian life – restoring, confirming, strengthening, establishing. We are foolish or vain to think that the calling of God we heard when first converted can carry us the rest of our lives. God knows that the saints need to “hear” the voice of God, again and again and again, even to the end of time: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ And the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Revelation 22:17).

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the development of a training system by which we can offer live two-way training through the Internet. This will allow us to help small and large churches alike while keeping costs low. While it is not as personal as being there, we can be in many places at one time.

CC: Please pray for all of our students, especially those students who have not yet decided on a major and/or vocational direction to pursue. Please pray that the Spirit of Christ will direct students as they identify their calling for what lies after their Covenant experience. Pray that their academic endeavors will lead to work and research experiences that confirm callings to a variety of work opportunities and programs of further study.

MNA: Please pray for MNA Korean Ministries Coordinator Henry Koh and Assistant Grace Song. Please pray that the 8 Korean presbyteries, 260 Korean Churches and 500 teaching elders in the PCA will be truly committed to the Reformed faith and PCA standard in their evangelical ministry. Pray that the first generation church leaders will train up the second generation to plant English speaking multiethnic churches. Pray that God will raise up young second generation leaders who will find mentors from culturally attuned first generation Korean pastors and other pastors.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA presbyteries and churches who are working with the PCA Foundation, that God will continue to meet their needs and that our service and assistance will be glorifying to God and edifying to the church.

RH: Pray that the Lord's voice will be heard clearly through the words of Ridge Haven's guest speakers as they teach and encourage the campers and conference guests.

TUESDAY, MAY 14, 2013

THE GOSPEL CALL

When we speak about the Calling of God, we need to distinguish its two parts. The external calling of God is a *bona fide* offer of salvation issued to all mankind and the subject matter of true preaching. The effectual calling moves the elect to repent of their sins and believe in Christ for salvation. This Gospel or external call is referred to by Christ when He says, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14).

In human preaching, the Gospel call includes three distinct parts. These three elements make up the Gospel call. First, the facts of salvation must be explained to the hearers. All people have sinned and are guilty before God (Romans 3:23). The penalty for sin is the condemnation of God that leads to death and hell (Romans 6:23). Jesus Christ died to pay this penalty and to ransom us from sin, death, hell, and the bondage to sin (Romans 5:8-11).

Second, an invitation to respond to God’s work in Jesus Christ must be issued. People must be told how to repent from sins and trust in Christ (Romans 10:1-10). Those who hear the Gospel must be exhorted to do three things:

- 1) Forsake their self-righteousness grounded in their own religion and good works (Romans 10:1-7)
- 2) Turn away from pet sins, forsaking all that they know to be contrary to God’s will (Romans 6:12-19)
- 3) Trust in Jesus Christ *alone* for salvation, both believing Him in their hearts and confessing His lordship with their mouths (Romans 10:8-10)

The preacher must set forth the promises of God urging people to claim them, and encouraging the people to accept God’s forgiveness and to receive the gift of eternal life. The minister needs to encourage those who hear the Gospel that they will not be disappointed with God but shall receive His abundant loving-kindness.

Sinners are beset with three grave and deadly ailments: darkened intellects, crippled wills, and spirits full of cynicism, fear and doubt. The Gospel call addresses all these sinful ailments. This is why preaching is so vital to the work of salvation: “How then will they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15).

Theologian Wayne Grudem explains how God works through the external, Gospel call: “The Gospel call is important also because through

it God addresses us in the fullness of our humanity. He does not save us ‘automatically’ without seeking for a response from us as a whole person. Rather, He addresses the Gospel call to our intellect, our emotions, and our wills. He speaks to our intellects by explaining the facts of salvation in His Word. He speaks to our emotions by issuing a heartfelt and personal invitation to respond. He speaks to our wills by asking us to hear His invitation and respond willingly in repentance and faith – to decide to turn from our sins and receive Christ as Savior and rest our hearts in Him for salvation.”

How vitally important it is for the preachers in the PCA to preach “the whole Gospel for the whole man.” This is the theme of a pre-Assembly conference, in Greenville, SC, sponsored by the Gospel Reformation Network, a group of PCA ministers concerned about cheap grace, an over-emphasis on justification without a call to sanctification, the call to faith but not repentance, and the pursuit of assurance without holiness. This pre-Assembly conference reminds us that “...faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.” We should listen to God’s Word, the Gospel call, and these Gospel Reformation pastors.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the Administrative Committee/Stated Clerk office staff in these days remaining before the Assembly, that as they face the unlimited details involved, nothing will be overlooked and all will go smoothly.

CTS: Pray for Dr. Mike Higgins, Covenant Seminary’s dean of students, and his Student Life staff as they endeavor to walk with students during their time at seminary. Ask the Lord’s grace in helping to nurture these students through the intense time of learning and self-discovery they experience as God works to reveal to them His will for their lives and ministries.

MTW: Many missionaries are dealing with the issues of aging parents losing their health, loss of loved ones, or difficulties with their college-age children. Pray for them as they deal with these difficult issues at a distance.

RUM: Pray that the Lord will use the Internship to grow and challenge these men and women and make them strong in their faith and faithful to their calling.

RBI: One of the greatest desires of PCA Ministerial Relief is to be able to create a sense of community with the widows of the PCA across the country. Please pray that we will be able to accomplish this in the upcoming year.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2013

THE INTERNAL CALL OF GOD

Salvation is intensely personal. Each regenerate soul must be personally drawn to Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit in the internal recesses of the soul – that sacred chamber inside each of us into which only we and God may enter. As the Gospel goes out, issuing a general and external call for all to come to Christ, this call becomes effectual, efficacious or “effective.” It brings the chosen one to God.

This internal call convicts the sinner of his need for God and of God’s provision in Christ. In Acts 17, when Paul preached to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, in the Areopagas of Athens, we see the internal call of God in action. Paul’s sermon is masterful. Paul sets the stage, noting that despite their philosophical schools of thought, the Greeks were intensely religious people. Their city of Athens was “full of idols” to every god and goddess they imagined. They even had an altar with no statue dedicated “to the unknown god.” Paul saw, on that bare pedestal, the person of Jesus Christ.

So Paul launches into a brief review of sacred history: This unknown God had made Himself known through creation, revelation, and Christ. He is the Creator and the Father of all mankind. We, His “offspring” are made like Him, and in His being and life we “live and move and have our being.” Paul even quotes the philosopher Epimenides of Crete and the Greek poet Aratus – examples of common grace and general revelation pointing to the One True God.

Paul reminds these Athenians that God is invisible, does not dwell in temples made by men, nor needs anything from humanity. We do not create God; He has made us. He has appointed the seasons and events of life so as to bring men to repentance and faith.

The unknown God incarnated Himself in a man: Jesus of Nazareth, so that the invisible, mysterious God can become visible and familiar. The incomprehensible God has made Himself known in His only Son (John 1:18; Acts 17:30-31). Men should repent (turn away from idolatry) and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The response to this external Gospel call is typical and three-fold. Some mocked Paul, no doubt because the truth about Christ pricked their prideful hearts as if ricocheted off their dark minds. Their very mockery betrayed a soul unsettled by the Gospel. Others were awakened from decades of spiritual indifference. They wanted to hear more about Christ and to decide for themselves if this Gospel story was true. A third group was convicted and convinced: They believed in Jesus, were baptized into His church and began the life of a disciple.

In all these groups, the Holy Spirit was at work: sealing their condemnation, raising spiritual interests, sealing salvation. Not one person heard the Gospel call

without some effect. But only the elect received an internal call that awakened their souls to everlasting life.

Our *Westminster Confession of Faith* tells us, “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace” (WCF 10-1).

Over the last 30 years, I have preached twice every Sunday with rare exceptions. In those three decades, I have seen the Word of God harden hearts, grab hold of disinterested sinners, and bring souls to life and faith in Jesus Christ. It still amazes me: same preacher, same text, same sermon, one audience, but some are touched *internally*. How some are saved and why others are not remains the great mystery. But God is the decider of what happens between the Word from the pulpit and the heart in the pew.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that God will bless Provisional Coordinator Stephen Estock as he transitions to his new position. Pray for his family as they prepare to make the move from Saint Louis MO to Atlanta, GA.

CC: Please pray for students who are struggling with personal issues that prevent them from functioning to their greatest potential in a rigorous academic program.

MNA: Please join MNA staff in praying for laborers for the harvest. There continue to be many needs and opportunities in our North American communities for Gospel proclaiming, Kingdom-minded churches. Beginning new congregations is proven to be the most effective way to reach unbelievers with the Gospel. Pray that God will lead many to pursue church planting in the PCA all across North America.

PCAF: Pray that PCA churches will respond to efforts made by the PCA Foundation to communicate its ministry, and that churches will understand the value of its ministry and tell their members about our charitable financial services.

RH: Over 2,000 guests retreated at Ridge Haven in the fall. Thank the Lord for all the new church groups, youth groups, and college groups that He has brought and ask that He will open the ears and eyes of more groups in need of Ridge Haven’s ministry.

THURSDAY MAY 16, 2013

THE EFFICACY OF GOD'S WORD

We all live in a world of broken promises and shallow commitments where words often have little effect and little power to accomplish much of anything. Not so with the Lord, Isaiah tells us. His timely words provide great comfort and encouragement to our hearts especially when one considers God's special call upon us that eventful day when we came to repent and believe in His Son, our Savior.

Whether you came to know the Lord over a lengthy period of time or a specific time and place, you remember as if it was yesterday or perhaps you can't remember a time when you didn't believe. In each and every case, God's word of the Gospel came to bear fruit in your heart with power and efficacy. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "For all the promises of God find their 'yes' in Jesus Christ!"

Isaiah tells us in this passage why God's word never returns void. He is fully convinced of the perfect faithfulness and character of the One stating the promise, God Himself. He begins in verse 6 by exhorting us to seek and call upon the Lord who hears. Isaiah would have never told us that if he didn't believe that the Lord is approachable and wanting to listen. God delights to hear the prayers of His saints, the Psalmist says.

Isaiah recognizes the fallen world around him, and so he, then, calls upon the unrighteous to repent and forsake their ways in verse 7. God is patient, slow to anger, compassionate, and will abundantly pardon those who truly turn from their evil and trust in Him.

In this context, Isaiah tells us in verse 8 that unrighteousness has its root in the thought life of a man or woman. And so he appeals for sinners to exchange their earthly thoughts for heavenly ones. Yet, left to our own ways and understanding, we can never attain the high standard placed before us. How many times have we looked up on a clear night observing the grandeur and vastness of the heavens and felt so small and finite? God is infinite says Isaiah, and we are finite, and so God's ways are sometimes mysterious to us. Yet, all of God's words accomplish all of His purposes. To bring it down to our level, Isaiah observed the rain and snow and how it waters the earth, bears fruit from the seed in the ground, ultimately providing food for you and me to eat. Even more faithful and true are God's words accomplishing His purposes, never returning void. Do we believe that today? We need to be reminded of this often because of the enemy of unbelief that seeks to make us restless, doubting our salvation and wanting us to think that the Gospel has no power to convert a sinner.

It will be a good practice to memorize these verses so that when those thoughts come, we may stand confident in our salvation because God has promised salvation to all who trust in Him. And we may confidently speak the Gospel in all its fullness to our unbelieving friend or family members and perhaps watch a magnificent transformation occur before our eyes.

Isaiah concludes in verse 12 that those who trust and rest in this truth experience a fullness of joy and peace. Are you experiencing today a joyful rest in the faithfulness of God's word? Do you believe that His word will accomplish all His purposes including those that you don't completely understand? Peter tells us "He has granted to us His precious and very great promises." Happy is the Christian who believes and trusts in God who remains faithful throughout life's journey.

Rev. Mike Miller

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Ask the Father, by His gracious Spirit, to enable the staff of the Stated Clerk's Office to serve the Church in wisdom and godliness as they handle a wide variety of needs and requests by PCA members and others. We need the wisdom and fruit of the Holy Spirit to be able to serve His people.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary's Dean of Academic Administration Rev. Chris Florence; Dean of Academic Services Dr. Tasha Chapman; and Dean of Faculty Dr. Jay Sklar as they work with faculty and staff to develop and evaluate curriculum and programs; plan course schedules; identify, hire, and minister to faculty members; and seek continually to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the Seminary's pastoral training ministry.

MTW: Pray for missionary families, especially those new to the field, who face difficulties in a foreign land with education of children, cultural stress, language challenges, and spiritual opposition.

RUM: Pray for Alex Graham, RUF International Campus Minister at Georgia Tech. Georgia Tech attracts over 4,000 international students from more than 100 nations. Each Tuesday evening, 60-85 internationals participate in the "Dinner and Discovery" program in the faculty dining room: a meal provided by over a dozen Atlanta PCA churches, followed by an exploratory Bible discussion. Pray for continued support by Atlanta churches and for many to come to Christ.

RBI: Pray for the distribution of our "Call Package Guidelines." Pray for acceptance and understanding of these guidelines.

FRIDAY, MAY 17, 2013

CHRIST'S CALL TO LIFE

Have you ever doubted someone only to have them say, “No really, it’s the truth!” Some statements seem to be so unbelievable that you question the truthfulness of the claims. In John 5:19, 24, 25, Jesus makes three incredible statements that prompts Him to preempt His sayings with the words “Truly, truly.” This is Jesus’ way of saying “This is really, really true! You can believe what I’m about to say!” These verses are foundational, powerful and informative. John 5:19 tells us Jesus only says and does what He sees the Father doing. John 5:24 instructs us that there are three results for “any who hears My (Jesus’) words and believes Him (God the Father) who sent Me:

1. He has eternal life
2. He does not come under the judgment of God
3. He passes from death to life

Everyone wants eternal life. Everyone wants to avoid the judgment of God. Everyone wants life instead of death. But not everyone wants the key to having eternal life, avoiding judgment, and living. That is, hearing Jesus’ words and believing in God who sent His only Son for us.

It sounds pretty simple and easy doesn’t it? It is and it isn’t; I truly wish it was that simple. Most of the time, truth is reasonable, logical and easy to follow. Gravity, for example, is like this: when we drop something it goes down instead of up. Warnings against being burned are when it truly burns us as we touch it.

These verses tell us there are two abilities we must have to receive eternal life, avoid judgment, and live instead of die. They are the ability to hear and to believe. Do you see it in the beginning of the verse? Jesus said, “Whoever hears my word and believes.” Every human is born deaf to spiritual truth. God must give the ability to hear Jesus’ words; this ability is a gift from God. You can’t simply turn up your spiritual hearing aids and hear God’s Word. He must do this for you. Jesus illustrated this for us in His use of parables. Parables are earthly stories with spiritual meaning, they are stories within stories. In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower. When His disciples ask Him why He speaks in parables, Jesus says, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them” (Matthew 13:11). It’s clear from this story that God must give us the ability to hear and understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God.

Likewise, we must be given the ability to believe. In John 6, Jesus is speaking to His disciples and He says: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh

counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe. Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:63-68).

John 5:25 is a clear call from Jesus to hear His voice, have life, and avoid judgment and death. Verse 28 says "Do not marvel at this." What are we not to marvel at? It's the fact that "an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." One day all will be raised to a resurrection. Will your resurrection be to joy and eternal life or judgment and eternal death?

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that the CEP staff will understand the needs of the members of the PCA and have a clear vision in how to meet those needs in order to be a blessing to the local church.

CC: Please pray that the Office of Admissions staff will accurately and effectively portray the distinctiveness of a Covenant education to prospective students and their parents. Please pray for traveling mercies for our Admission recruiters (and others) as they travel on behalf of the College.

MNA: Pray for a steadily growing number of PCA churches to engage in greater ministry development among the Hispanic peoples in their community. SpanishLAMP offers training for ordination using a Spanish language curriculum. Pray that this curriculum will soon be completed and will be used in training many more church planters.

PCAF: Pray that God will work through the PCA Foundation more and more to financially benefit the other PCA Committees and Agencies.

RH: Over 2,000 guests retreated at Ridge Haven in the fall. Thank the Lord for all the new church groups, youth groups, and college groups that He has brought and ask that He will open the ears and eyes of more groups in need of Ridge Haven's ministry.

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 2013

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

In this familiar passage, Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” John introduces us to a mysterious spiritual dynamic, “water and spirit.”

What Jesus means by His use of the phrase is significant since the result is that one sees the kingdom of God. Surely Jesus intends more than being able to “view” it: in verse 5, the expression “*enter* the Kingdom of God” appears to have a spatial significance which is not present in verse 3 which says “see the Kingdom of God.” However, there is no essential difference in meaning and therefore, the same type of expression is employed in verses 3 and 5. It may be particularly helpful to use a more descriptive phrase to explain the fullness of what Jesus means; perhaps such an expression as “the place of God’s rule and reign” for the Kingdom of God.

The phrase “of water and the spirit” (literally “water and spirit” in Greek) offers challenges that, when unpacked, present richness and depth. First, this phrase is substituted for the phrase “again” in verse 3, yet it may be assumed that John is still speaking of the same topic. However, the mention of “water and spirit” opens an opportunity for a further development of Jesus’ thought.

Second, it is not quite clear just what “water” refers to and several possibilities have been suggested, of which two are the most widely accepted. First, some say that in this context “water” refers to the baptism of John the Baptist or to Jewish purification as a whole, including the baptism of John. Of course, alone, this would be insufficient, in the face of what is needed (hearts of flesh: Ezekiel 36:26) and in contrast to that which the Spirit accomplishes. Second, others have seen in this occurrence of “water” a reference to the sacrament of Christian baptism: “water” being the reference to the outward symbol and “Spirit” a reference to the transforming power of God in the life of the believer. Since the phrase is “water and spirit,” it is important that our understanding join both in such a way as not to suggest any conflict.

The phrase is literally “water and spirit,” without a definite article before “spirit.” However, on the basis of verses 6 and 8 (literally “*the* spirit”), it seems most likely that the Holy Spirit is referred to in this verse. A number of translations make this clear. In fact, the entire context indicates that God’s Spirit is likely John’s intention thus to translate “water and spirit” without reference to God the Spirit would be to fail to bring out the real force of the meaning.

Certain complications may arise from a literal translation of “born of water.” In some languages, this expression is a specific reference to the physical afterbirth. In the present context, however, “born” clearly refers to the *rebirth*. Therefore it may be appropriate in some languages to translate “if he is not born again by means of water and by means of the Spirit....” This rendering would be taken to refer to some kind of baptism by water and the transformation produced by the Spirit of God, spoken of as “the baptism of the Spirit.”

The call then is to ask “are you born of the Spirit of God?” Further, is there evidence that you are being transformed more and more into the image of Christ? Is your worship of God done in such a way that the Spirit of God renews and refreshes you to seek His face with a transformed perspective on life here on earth and a hopeful outlook at the future eternal life with God? If not, ask God for a transformed life and a filling of the Spirit.

Rev. Kris Decker

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the Lord will guard His servants against mistakes in handling the large volume of paperwork necessary to facilitate the Assembly and the other business meetings taking place during the week. Pray also that the technology and equipment used to facilitate the flow of business will serve us well!

CTS: Pray for continued unity and harmony among the Faculty of Covenant Seminary, and that they will always be shining examples of godliness and the power of God’s grace to transform lives. Pray that they will serve the Seminary, the community, and the broader church with humble hearts, a spirit of grace, and an infectious love for Jesus Christ.

MTW: As itinerating missionaries prepare for the mission field, pray for God’s grace to reign in their hearts, for opportunities to share their mission with others, and for God to raise up support partners in His way and time.

RUM: Pray for Rick Brawner, RUF International Campus Minister at Clemson University. Rick leads an English Conversation ministry in partnership with Clemson Presbyterian Church. Internationals are invited to small groups to discuss life’s ultimate questions. Pray for ministry team members who serve as English conversation partners. Pray also for an expanding base of individual and church supporters who will pray for and give to the Clemson RUF-I ministry.

RBI: Pray for our investment managers as they make investment decisions on our behalf as well as on behalf of many others.

Day 18

Read: I Peter 1:3-9

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2013

A LIVING HOPE

The Apostle Peter, known as the Apostle of Hope, writes to scattered Christians throughout Turkey, who were facing trials, sufferings and even persecution. In fact, he calls them in v. 1, “the elect exiles of the dispersion.” As God’s elect, they wrestled with, as we often do when facing trials and sufferings, what it meant to be the object of God’s affections. As exiles, they struggled with what it meant for them to live as God’s people under ungodly rule.

He encourages them by pointing about who God is and what He has done for them. When we start with God, we see our problems in proper perspective. Beginning with verse 3 and ending verse 12, Peter sets forth the greatness of our salvation. John Hart notes that vv. 3-5 have as their central figure the Blessed Trinity: the Father, vv. 6-9 the Son, and vv. 10-12 the Holy Spirit.

With an outburst of joy, he declares “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” The One whom Peter praised is identified in relationship to the Savior as well as to the saved. He reminds his readers that God’s great mercy caused them to be born again. David Wells points out that “Mercy is the feeling of pity and compassion toward the miserable. It assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it.” God the Father displayed the fullness of His mercy when they were hopeless and miserable.

Our salvation gives us a present hope secured in Christ’s resurrection as well as makes us heirs of a glorious inheritance. We are a people of a “living hope.” The word “hope” in the New Testament always relates to a future good. So in the day of Peter’s audience as in ours, Christians can view the future with optimism because of what God has in store for His people. Peter calls our hope “living,” having in itself the very life of the living God (I Thess. 1:9).

Our hope is grounded in the reality of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The Apostle Paul declared that without the resurrection there can be no true hope (I Cor. 15:12-20). His resurrection is our basis for personal assurance as to our past, present and future. Edmund Clowney summed it with these words, “Our hope is anchored in the past: Jesus arose! Our hope remains in the present: Jesus lives! Our hope is completed in the future: Jesus is coming!” His resurrection is the hope and guarantee of our resurrection (I Cor. 15:12-28).

There is another aspect to our salvation and that is the glorious inheritance awaiting us in heaven (v. 4). Peter contrasts our heavenly inheritance and earthly inheritance using three words: imperishable, undefiled and unfading. Our heavenly inheritance belongs to the heavenly realm, where “neither moth nor rust doth corrupt” (Matt. 6:20). Our inheritance is free from defilement from sin.

Our inheritance will never diminish or lose its beauty. MacDonald states that these three adjectives picture the inheritance as “death-proof,” “sin-proof,” and “time-proof.” Internally it is free from destruction, outwardly it is untouched by sin and its abiding characteristic is beauty. Our inheritance is kept in Heaven and is guaranteed by God’s watchful care (v. 5).

Our hope is not a dead hope, but a living hope because of a living Savior who conquered sin, death and the grave. Norman Clayton’s hymn reminds us of this great truth:

*My hope is in the Lord Who gave Himself for me,
And paid the price of all my sin at Calvary.
No merit of my own His anger to suppress.
My only hope is found in Jesus’ righteousness.
And now for me He stands Before the Father’s throne.
He shows His wounded hands, and names me as His own.
His grace has planned it all, ‘tis mine but to believe,
And recognize His work of love and Christ receive.
For me He died, For me He lives,
And everlasting life and light He freely gives.*

Rev. Bruce Creswell

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that the members of the CEP Permanent Committee will have discernment regarding how to support the staff and serve the needs of the church.

CC: Please pray for the transitions that are in process as our sixth president, Dr. Derek Halvorson, begins his leadership. Pray for God’s blessing on Dr. Halvorson, his family, and the college community.

MNA: Pray for a growing number of new leaders to be trained, equipped and empowered to serve the burgeoning Hispanic population in the United States and Canada. Pray for more Spanish language Biblical and theological resources for ministries and churches ministering among Hispanics in the PCA.

PCAF: Ask God to continue to bless current donors to the PCA Foundation and help them in their stewardship of His resources.

RH: One of Ridge Haven’s main goals is to never turn anyone away due to lack of finances. Ask that the Lord provide Ridge Haven with the necessary resources to assist those in need so that every child will be able to attend camp regardless of his or her financial situation.

MONDAY, MAY 20, 2013

THE SPIRIT'S RENEWAL

In Paul's epistle to Titus, the apostle gives us one of his grand summaries of doctrinal truth for which his letters are so famous. In Titus 3:4-7, Paul sets forth the Trinitarian nature of our salvation: The mercy of God the Father, the regeneration by the Spirit, our justification through Jesus Christ. Paul's words, used to describe our regeneration, are particularly fascinating.

When Paul speaks of the "washing of regeneration," he may be pointing to baptism, for the Greek word *loutron* is often used of baptism in the New Testament. Paul, of course, is not teaching that baptism either washes away our sins or regenerates us with new life; none of the apostles teaches that. John Stott explains the usage of these words: "Washing is almost certainly a reference to water baptism. All the early church fathers took it this way. This does not mean that they (or Paul) taught baptismal regeneration, any more than Ananias did when he said to Saul to Tarsus, 'Get up, be baptized and wash your sin away, calling on his name.' Most Protestant churches think of baptism as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace', namely the washing away of sins, and of new birth by the Holy Spirit. But they do not confuse the sign (baptism) with the thing signified (salvation)."

"Regeneration" is the Greek word *palingenesia*; itself a combination of two words *palin* (again) and *genesis* (birthday or birth); hence, to be "born again" is to be regenerated. Jesus used this terminology not only for the rebirth of a sinner into a life with God (John 3:3, 5), but also of the final restoration of creation in the New World (Matthew 19:28). For Jesus Christ when a sinner has been born again or regenerated, they become not only a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) with "life again" in their souls, but also new creatures fit for the new creation. They are part of a new humanity (saints) and a new society (church) made ready for the New World.

Paul's third great word about our regeneration is the word "renewal", in Greek *anakainosis*. Again, the Greeks loved composite words: *ana* (each) and *kainos* (new); renewal is the making of each one (personally) new. Rather than being repetitive for emphasis (a possible interpretation), Paul is more likely referring to an ongoing and repetitive process of moral renovation and inner transformation which follows the new birth. The sanctification process is full of spiritual renewals, from one level of grace to another.

Between these key words – washing, regeneration, renewal, Holy Spirit – is the little Greek word *kai* (and), separating the Spirit's work into two separate forces: the washing or regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Paul is telling us that regeneration has a definitive act and a continuing consequence. It brings us to new life as the Spirit washes away our sin and death. Just as a baby breaks the water of the womb and passes through it, so baptism symbolizes a rebirth in water and in Spirit (John 3:3, 5). And the continuing force of regeneration manifests itself

in repeated renewals in our process of sanctification. For just as every newborn child grows, and seems to do so in stages (childhood, puberty, youth, etc.), so we grow by means of renewal after renewal by the Spirit.

George Knight explains what Paul is saying: “Paul considers this inner transformation from two different perspectives. He arranges the four genitive nouns chiasmatically (i.e., a-b-b-a) with the most distinguishable terms first and last, and with the terms for the result, the transformation, in the center. The first pair focuses on the need for cleansing from past sins: washing and a word that speaks of that washing as an inner transformation, a ‘new beginning.’ The second pair focuses on the new life received and to be lived. The Holy Spirit must do His work within Christians and so is joined to a word that speaks of such a new life as an inner transformation, ‘renewal.’”

There is a world of richness in a few Spirit-inspired words, just as there is a “wideness in God’s mercy,” Frederick Faber writes, “like the wideness of the sea; there’s a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty.” Such a great salvation: regeneration, rebirth, baptism, renewals and growth in grace! All because of the mercy of God, the righteousness of Christ and the life of the Spirit in us!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for wisdom for each of the members of the Nominating Committee, that they will be sensitive to the needs of each Committee and Agency as they work to propose a slate of names for election by the General Assembly.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary’s Advancement staff as they seek to build strong ties with students, donors, and alumni for the sake of the church and to further the mission of the Seminary. Ask especially that the Lord will provide open doors and open hearts as the staff seeks to increase student enrollment, raise funds for scholarships and other institutional needs, and develop strategic partnerships to expand the Seminary’s reach and influence for the Gospel.

MTW: Pray that the children helped by MTW’s ONEChild sponsorship programs will accept Jesus as the one true Lord.

RUM: Pray for Rick Gray, RUF International Campus Minister at the University of Delaware. Give thanks for how remarkably God worked to overcome initial resistance to a new Christian ministry to international students at UD. Pray for the Lord to grow the weekly dinner and investigative Bible class, as well as the international Sunday school class at Evangelical Presbyterian. Pray also that Carole Bryan, the new RUF International intern there, will continue to be effective in her ministry to internationals.

RBI: In regard to the retirement plan, pray that we will be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us and that we will find the best managers and investments for our clients.

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2013

THE SPIRITUAL MAN

Often times, pastors, parents, and Christian friends become frustrated, or even angry, when a sinner not yet converted refuses to respond to God's Word, the Gospel of Christ, or the promptings of the Spirit. We forget that we too were like that, some of us for decades. In reality, the problem is less of matter of their will than it is the results of their nature.

In First Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul presents a marvelous summary of the Christian view of revelation: inspiration (vv. 2-7), revelation (vv. 8-10), and illumination (vv. 11-16). In verse 14, he clearly states that the unconverted man does not accept God's Word because he cannot. He is *unwilling* because he is *unable*. His inability to grasp the things of God is rooted in his nature. The things of God are "spiritually discerned." Since the non-Christian has not yet been regenerated, he has no spiritual life in his soul. He is dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

In fact, Paul divides all mankind into two groups of people: natural and spiritual. The first group he calls the *psuchikos* (from the Greek word *psuche* or *psyche*, for "soul"). This man or woman possesses a human soul but that should never rise above "natural" functions or creaturely aspirations. The word is often translated "unspiritual." The regenerate person is called *pneumatikos* (from the Greek word for "spirit," *pneuma*). The "spiritual" man lives, thinks and acts with his own spirit animated and informed by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual people grasp spiritual concepts and spiritual realities. Again, it is the Holy Spirit at work in them that makes the difference: "...the Spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual" (*pneumatikos*).

I remember in my years before being born again, I heard many sermons, went to church every Sunday, and even read the Bible at times. I can honestly say that I understood very little of what I heard and read. Not until I was saved did the things I heard in my youth and the Word I now devour with spiritual hunger make sense. It was as if someone had switched on a light and given me a new brain! In fact, that is exactly what happened: I received a new mind in Christ (v. 16) and with it the enlightenment (illumination) of the Holy Spirit. As a young, unconverted man, I rejected the things of Christ both out of ignorance as well as rebellion. But it was my inability that led to my unwillingness.

The reason for Jesus Christ's great patience with recalcitrant and stupid sinners, is His realization that apart from Him all men are *psuchikos* – natural, soul-bound, unspiritual. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in Sychar, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given

you living water” (John 4:10). And to the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, “If you knew me you would know my Father also” (John 8:19). But, they did not know about living water, the living God, or life in Christ.

I fear that evangelical Christians (including the Reformed ones) tend to treat unbelievers in a harsh, censorious, and unfair manner. We get upset when they act in accord with their natures. Imprisoned by sin, death, and darkness, they are only as free as their natures allow, and only as able as their soul’s capacity. Until they encounter the Lifegiver, Jesus Christ, and receive His gift of the Spirit, they will always be men of the soul but not of the Spirit.

We were once so. How I remember those dark and dreary days! God had mercy on me. I owe that same mercy to the natural man, with prayer and hope for a supernatural work of the Spirit in his soul. Such a great salvation demands from me, from you, such great empathy and sympathy. Therefore, the grace of God...

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that God will give the members of the PCA “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17) and that CEP will be faithful to provide the resources needed to grow in our love and obedience to Him.

CC: Please pray for our Athletic Department and coaches, as they build into the student athlete’s lives with the idea of all things Christ preeminent.

MNA: Pray for Church Planter Recruiting Director Alan Foster as he labors to find church planters for the multitude of communities across North America that need new PCA churches. Pray also for Church Planter Development Director Jim Hatch as he visits seminaries to talk with students interested in becoming church planters.

PCAF: Ask God to bring to the PCA Foundation new individuals and families who will benefit from our ministry and services.

RH: Pray that the Lord will ensure Ridge Haven can continue its commitment to underprivileged, inner-city children attending camp on scholarship, and that He will demonstrate for them, through the summer staff, the type of love they have been lacking: the love of Jesus.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2013

THE NEW CREATION

There is such magnificence in the new creations of Christ! Men who formerly ran hard after destructive and temporal pursuits changed to know, be and do differently. Women caught up in identities that run afoul of those flowing from Christ changed to bask in the beauty of being called “daughter of God” – these things are glorious, indeed!

The newness of Christ imputed to His own is thorough. Paul tells us that whereas we were once alive to sin, now we are dead to it (5:14). The very thoughts of being dead to sin are freeing...until that sin we mocked because of its death rises up and works death through us. Yes, we are dead to sin and alive to it (at least for now). There are two things Paul does in our text beyond what we’ve mentioned. First, he consoles us and, secondly, he commands us.

The consolation Paul imparts to us is preeminently about the work of Christ on our behalf. He tells us first that Christ died for us, and in His death we also died to sin (5:14). We are now known differently than we were: we are spiritual rather than simply natural (5:16; see 1 Corinthians 2:14). That is, we are “new” (5:17) and reconciled (5:18) and righteous (5:21). Amazing! This is like a fire hose of glory that Paul sprays all over his brethren! Any one of these truths is sufficient to bring eternal comfort to anyone who will search them out. Indeed, there aren’t more glorious truths than that we are the righteousness of God in and through Him alone.

Yet, Paul does more because we need more. It is true that God intends more but also that we need more. The truths of our justification and adoption were never meant to carry the weight of our relationship with God alone. They were meant to be its starting point and foundation. Only God can lay this foundation, and ultimately He alone sustains the weight of our relationship with Him. Perhaps it is better to think that He never intended that the purpose of Christ’s work was only that we be clothed in His righteousness. It seems to be so because here (as in other places: Ephesians 2:10), Paul commands us.

He commands that we no longer live strictly for ourselves (5:15) but that our lives are for Him. We are to dwell on and live in the newness imparted to us in our new creation (5:17). To do so means, in part, that we take this “word of reconciliation” to others (5:19) that they also might have new creation. These are significant ministries that are given to us just as our new life is given to us. God’s expectation, according to Paul, is that our rest in Christ leads to our running in Christ that many would be reconciled to Christ.

A note about why else He may command us. “Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may be recompensed

for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad” (5:9-10). It is difficult to understand how being clothed in the righteousness of Christ, in some sense, is not sufficient for us to stand successfully before the judgment seat. Of course it is, but, by God’s design, it isn’t. That we would be “pleasing to God” is the end for which Christ’s work comes to His own. That is in all respects: righteous through and through because of Christ alone, godly in all aspects because of the work of the Holy Spirit and the determination of each of us (Philippians 2:12-13).

We are commanded by Paul to “live for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” as proof that we are clothed in His righteousness (John argues this point in his first letter as does James in chapter 2 of his). Even more, we are commanded to live this way so that others might be reconciled to God (5:20). Our holy living proves and provides.

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Many of our General Assembly Committees and Agencies will be meeting during these days of prayer in preparation for the Assembly. Ask that these committees will accomplish their work with effectiveness and efficiency.

CTS: Pray for staff members who work behind the scenes to assist with the mission of Covenant Seminary—particularly for those in the Admissions, Financial Aid, Information Technology, and Registration offices—that they will serve students and the Seminary community with grace, wisdom, and a clear love for Christ.

MTW: Give thanks for health professionals who serve in both short-term and long-term missions utilizing their medical expertise not only to heal physically, but also to draw individuals to Christ and build up the Church.

RUM: Pray for Jason Pickard, RUF International Campus Minister at Texas A&M. Jason is completing his second year in a new RUF International ministry among more than 4,000 internationals. Give thanks for Westminster PCA in Bryan TX, who have helped to launch RUF-I at Texas A&M. Pray for Jason’s student contacts and for a growing base of individual and church partners in South Texas Presbytery.

RBI: Pray for all of our vendors. Pray that we can find ways to share the Gospel with them.

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2013

TWO EVANGELICAL GIFTS

People love gifts. The search for a person – even a very small child – who would rather *not* receive a gift of blessing from someone would surely be fruitless. Indeed, our covenant children, as early as they can reach up their arms to their fathers, love to receive.

Of course, the reason the giving and receiving of gifts is a phenomenon across all time and location is that our Creator and our God is a giver by nature. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19), and, indeed, we give because He first gave to us (John 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3-4). We evangelicals rightly highlight this great gift of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the people of God. It is no small thing that God gave the just for the unjust (Romans 8:31-32; 1 Peter 3:18). It is difficult to conceive any gift above this one; surely, there are only those beside it!

The church lives in the post-*Four Spiritual Laws* and *Evangelism Explosion* era. In that time, the free offer of the Gospel was in the hands of and on the lips of thousands. As a result, many now live in the light of the Kingdom of God; those who populate its streets have greatly increased in number. Thanks be to God!

What was the currency of the true conversions wrought in that era? Was it a card signed, an aisle walked or a confession made? Do we possess the means to tap into the saving grace of God? Certain quarters of modern evangelicalism have treated these outward expressions (add believer's baptism to the mix) as Protestant Sacraments: as if these infuse grace into our souls and we are saved! If many who confess to believe and follow Christ are asked, "How were you saved?" we might be surprised by the answers.

Our texts tell a different story. They explain that God came near by virtue of the two evangelical gifts He first gave to men: "repentance toward God" and "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Before the power of Christ's redemption takes root, God gives these gifts to the people of God. These are essential elements of any true conversion: there is no true conversion without them (see WCF 15.3). Men and women naturally live in their trespasses, and sins are unable and unwilling to do anything else (1 Corinthians 2:14, 6:9-11; Ephesians 2:1-3). All who descend from Adam live chained in this eternal darkness: "From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions" (WCF 6.4; Romans 8:7).

Christ comes to us as we are in this condition, "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). If we were to present a gift of a mechanical toy to our children and present him no batteries to power the toy, he would rightly look at us and wonder (or worse!). He would not realize the full joy of having the toy until it actually worked. In

our trespasses and sins, we are deaf to what God offers to us. His goodness, however, overcomes our dullness and through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God (Romans 10:14-15), God grants twin evangelical gifts of repentance and faith. In and through these, God draws us near and saves us from our sins. These are gifts! All who call upon the name of the Lord do so only because God acted to bring us alive that we might turn from our wickedness in repentance and plead with God to save us by the substitution of His Only Son our Lord in faith.

All who would be clothed in the righteousness of Christ must cry out to Him; many who do, sign cards, walk aisles and are baptized. Yet, we can't be confused, the lives that God has in store for His people, ones characterized by worship and good works, depend upon the gifts that He gives to us that allow us to rest in the one true and eternal gift, Jesus Christ.

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Dennis Bennett and Vickie Poole as they work together writing Reformed and inductive Bible studies that will serve the denomination by deepening the faith of its members.

CC: Please pray for the chapel program. Pray that the regular reading and preaching of God's Word will go forth in truth with the blessing and power of the Holy Spirit and will produce deep, ongoing repentance, renewed faith in Christ and the Gospel of grace, and heartfelt commitment to joyful sacrificial obedience in our campus community. Pray that regular faculty lectures and other topical addresses will equip students to understand, submit to, and delight in the preeminence of Christ in all things. Pray that the regular gathering of the entire campus community will serve to bind us together in true fellowship and increase our commitment to one another. Pray for the numerous opportunities for one-on-one discipleship and counseling that transpire throughout the year.

MNA: Please pray for more PCA Churches to realize the importance of the opportunity God has given us by sending the "World to our Doorstep." Pray that He will motivate lay leaders and church volunteers to start new ESL Ministries. Please pray for guidance for MNA ESL on how to spread more ESL Ministry throughout the PCA. Specifically pray for guidance on ways to train our trainers and for opportunities to make churches aware of the training that we offer.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation's many grant recipients; that their respective needs will continue to be met, and that God will encourage them in their ministries.

RH: Ask that the Lord will guide the Ridge Haven Board of Directors in every decision.

FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2013

REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

Peter had returned from his time with the Gentile, Cornelius, and “a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort” (Acts 10:1). It was with him that Peter understood that God was moving to save Gentiles and not just Jews in the Gospel. Word of this action of God spread, and upon Peter’s return to Jerusalem, he was asked to give an account. What he said, Luke records in Acts 11. He records Peter’s conclusion in verses 17-18: “‘If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?’ When they heard these things, they fell silent; and they glorified God saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

The gifts needed to overcome the consequences of original sin, repentance and faith, were given unto the Gentiles. The evidence was the likeness of their worship to what happened to the people at Pentecost, Peter and those with him “were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God” (Acts 10:46). Peter was so moved by this, he declared that they had received the Holy Spirit!

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace. When it comes, it reaches down to the place where original sin is anchored, pries it loose and casts it off forever. When combined with its twin, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the justification event is complete.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, in chapter 15.2, explains in detail what we understand about the nature of repentance unto life, “By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.”

In our text, we see the truths summarized by the Confession. The Confession tells us that a sinner comprehends and then acts upon the grievous nature of his sins. Our text says that there is an “eagerness to clear yourselves” and an “indignation,” and a “fear,” and a “longing,” and a “zeal” and a “punishment.” To what end? Proving oneself “innocent in the matter,” that is, making every effort to accept responsibility for what has been done and putting things in place to see that it doesn’t happen again. All of this not for some selfish gain, but as fruit of a heart changed by God. For repentance unto life embodies humility, submission to God and His judgments, resistance to the devil, drawing near to God in obedience and worship, a continual and repeated grief over and turning away from the sin that remains (see James 4:6-10). Fundamentally, it is disorientation towards the temporal and fleshly living and an orientation unto life with God.

Both in the Standards (see also WSC Q/A 87 and WLC Q/A 76) and the Scriptures, this evangelical grace bears clear fruit of change in thoughts and actions. Consider the examples of Abraham, Moses and the apostle Paul. Were not their lives interrupted by theophanies of grace? Abraham's sojourn in Ur ended, and he followed the Lord into Canaan (Genesis 12). Moses' wanderings in the desert with his sheep ended, and he turned his face back to Egypt and his people (Exodus 3). Did these not lead them to forsake their ways and lifestyles and follow God into the uncertainties of life with Him?

God's actions with Paul clearly resulted in the fruit of repentance (Acts 9), and so we wonder if when he instructed the Corinthians on the shape and face of repentance, he wasn't speaking from his own experiences of working to rebuild and build what he spent his young life tearing down. Repentance unto life is repentance unto God and the pathway to life with Him both here and forever more!

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Rejoice with us in the Lord's goodness to all the Committees and Agencies for the oversight and leadership provided by the various boards.

CTS: Pray for people around the world who are now considering training for ministry at Covenant Seminary, that the Lord will grant them wisdom in making their decision. Pray also that the Seminary's Admissions staff will continue to minister effectively to prospective students and their families by walking beside them caringly throughout the admissions process.

MTW: Pray for more PCA health professionals to desire and commit to serve Christ through the use of the gifts and skills that the Lord has given them.

RUM: Pray for Lee Leadbetter, RUF International Campus Minister at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Lee and his ministry team host a Dinner and Discussion program on Sunday evenings for international students. Pray for God to open doors for receptive conversations with UT international students. Pray for the Leadbetter family as they continue to pray and wait patiently for the arrival in the United States of two newly adopted Haitian daughters.

RBI: Pray for our Board members, for their families, for their secular work and for the work they do on our Board. Pray for wisdom and guidance for RBI.

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2013

PREACHING REPENTANCE

It has been well over fifty years ago, when the late Vance Havner, in his plain matter of fact way, declared, “Repentance is almost a lost note in our preaching and experience and the lack of it is filling our churches with baptized sinners who have never felt the guilt of sin or the need of a Savior.... We are trying to get young people to say, ‘Here am I’ before they have ever said, ‘Woe is me!’”

If it was true in his day, it is all the more so in our day. Unconverted church members, powerless Christianity and a church so much like the world, have come from the neglect of this truth. Yet the Bible shows us the preaching of repentance is very important:

1. John the Baptist began his public ministry by calling men to repent (Matt. 3:12)
2. Jesus began His public ministry by calling men to repent (Matt. 4:17)
3. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach repentance (Mark 6:12)
4. Jesus, instructs His apostles to preach repentance (Luke 24:47)
5. The apostles preached repentance (Acts 2:38; 20:21)
6. God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30)
7. Failure to repent means eternal damnation (Luke 13:1-5)

Human nature revolts against repentance. The devil tries to lead people to bypass repentance because he knows that without repentance and remission of sins there can be no saving faith and no salvation. He substitutes a mental faith for that faith which is wrought of God which only can bring salvation.

So what is repentance and why is it necessary? Our *Westminster Shorter Catechism* answers that question, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, and with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” For true conversion to take place, we respond willingly to the gospel call, repenting of our sin and placing faith in Christ alone for salvation. To repent of our sin, “is a life changing thought reversal orchestrated by the Spirit through the agency of the Word of God” that is “essential preparation for the deliverance only God Himself can provide.”

When repentance comes, you see sin for what it is and you will not excuse it, you desire to let go of it no longer cherishing it, but hating it. When repentance comes, you will know where it is located. You will admit that sin is in your heart. Paul realized his sin was indwelling him, he mentions this four times in Romans

chapter 7: 17, 20, 21 and 23. When repentance comes, you will know the weight of your sin's penalty and the need of deliverance from God. True repentance lays you like a helpless child on the doorstep of God's house of salvation. Your reliance is in Christ alone--as expressed in Augustus Toplady's great hymn, *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*.

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood. From Thy riven side which flowed.
Be of sin the double cure, Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Savior, or I die!*

Jesus said that unless a man comes to a recognition of his own spiritual poverty before God, he will never see the kingdom, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). This is why we must preach repentance!

Rev. Bruce Creswell

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Praise God for CEP's biblical training and resources that equip women in the church of all generations to mature in Christ. Pray for local churches to value these tools.

CC: Please pray for the members of the support staff who work diligently to serve the community and provide learning opportunities for our students.

MNA: Pray for Parakaleo's newly launched virtual network for urban church planting spouses, the "Urbanistas." Pray for Maria Garriott as she seeks to connect geographically dispersed women who are serving multiethnic churches in challenging neighborhoods. In addition to the issues faced by all church planters, these women also navigate such challenges as neighborhood crime, violence, racism, inadequate schools, and serious financial limitations.

PCAF: Pray that the brochures we have provided to all PCA churches will be distributed to their members and will effectively communicate to the church members our services and ministry.

RH: Pray that Junior campers will not only be introduced to how wonderful the camping experience is, but also how wonderful their Savior is.

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2012

SAVING FAITH

We live in an age of confusion and skepticism about the nature of the Gospel's message of saving faith. Yet, that has always been true and there are reasons for it. First, by nature unbelieving men instinctively want "to bring something to the table" in securing their salvation. It is impossible for the natural mind to grasp the Bible's insistence that we are dead in our sins and thus incapable of doing anything to save ourselves (Ephesians 2:1-9). Secondly, nearly everything in our earthly experience demands that we earn our keep. Typical is that every employer (rightly) requires a hard day's work from his people; "No free lunches" describes so much of our experience in this life. Unfortunately, we take this with us to God.

I remember so well when I was first introduced to the Gospel's incredible message that Christ came into the world to save sinners and that He had done everything necessary for me to have eternal life. My new Christian friends pleaded with me to embrace Him by faith. I spent a month arguing with them that my life was too sinful and that I needed to "take care of some things" before I could come to Christ. I was stubbornly convinced that I had to clean up my life before Christ would welcome me into His kingdom.

God was very merciful to me exposing the very shameful things I had in mind so that I had no further excuse to refuse the free offer of the Gospel. I look back to that day often and recall gratefully how the Lord convinced me that His salvation is by faith in Christ alone, nothing more, nothing less.

It is because of my own conversion experience that Hebrews 11 is so dear to me. The author defines saving faith for us in verses 1-2. It is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation." In verse 6 we read this nonnegotiable truth: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him." The rest of the chapter illustrates saving faith through the lives of Old Testament men and women who lived counter-intuitively and counter-culturally in their own generations. They came from all walks of life. Some had wealth. Others were "poor as church mice." Some mentioned are central figures in redemptive history, such as Abraham and Moses others obscure even unnamed. Some lived long prosperous lives while others were martyred in the most ruthless ways. But what they all had in common was saving faith, a faith that informed their lives and choices, a faith that gave them great courage in the face of grave danger, a faith that believed in a saving God who keeps His promises to His people.

I recall in one of my seminary classes remarking curiously to my professor as we looked at Hebrews 11, that many of these "heroes of the faith" were

pitiful men, great sinners on their best days according to the biblical record. I thought to myself cynically that some of those listed in this chapter might not be received into the membership of our church by virtue of the Bible's record of their lives! And yet, there they were! I'll never forget my professor's reply. He said, "All I know to say is that it only takes a little bit (of faith) to save a soul."

And so it is. What is required for the sinner to receive eternal life is a faith that is assured of things hoped for and convinced of things not seen. He must believe that God exists and He is able to keep His promise to save sinners. Romans 10:9-10 only makes sense if we understand this. And lest we think that even this simple faith in any way is our doing, our one small contribution to our salvation, Ephesians 2:9-10 reminds us that even this simple faith is itself a gift of God's grace that no one may boast! Now that is good news!

Rev. Bernie Lawrence

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the members of the Administrative Committee as they meet on June 18, that they will have wisdom and discernment in the decisions made, especially relating to the work of the Assembly.

CTS: Pray for all the students at Covenant Seminary who have given up careers, homes, and proximity to family to pursue ministry training with us. Ask the Lord's blessing on these students and that He will provide for their every spiritual, relational, and financial need as He molds and shapes them into the Gospel servants He desires them to be.

MTW: While missionaries become discouraged when churches or individuals must drop or reduce support, it is also difficult for donors who care about missions. Ask God to encourage the givers and provide for missionaries.

RUM: Pray for Jeff Thompson, RUF International Campus Minister at the University of Georgia. Thank God for providing Jeff's family with housing near the international student dorms, and for the winsome way the Thompson children relate to internationals. Pray for Jeff's relationships at the local mosque and for his contacts in the local Indian community. Pray for Jeff's ministry team members, who host movie nights and international Bible Discussion groups.

RBI: Pray that the Lord will continue to develop godly men with both the desire and the expertise to serve well on the RBI board.

MONDAY, MAY 27, 2013

UNION WITH CHRIST

There are many wonderful mysteries in the Bible beyond theologians' ability to fully explain and our ability to fully comprehend. When all explanations are said and done, we are left to simply accept them by faith as they are revealed in the Bible.

One of those wonderful doctrinal mysteries is the believer's mystical union with Christ. Interestingly, the Bible nowhere uses this precise language to describe the new relationship one has in his life with God by faith. But it is frequently described in the New Testament epistles. Much like the Trinity is nowhere explicitly referred to in the Bible but is inductively proved, so also is our union with Christ as it is found whenever we read in the Bible such phrases "in Christ," "with Christ," "in Jesus," or "in Him."

Our union with Christ is a way of saying that as new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), we mystically but vitally dwell in Him and He in us. We get significant insights from many passages of Scripture that represent our union with Christ as a great benefit and blessing to us. This is so important that Jesus asked the Father for this very thing in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17 just before His crucifixion. And the Father granted it!

The closest analogy I can think of on earth is what happens in a Christian marriage. The Bible says that the man and woman become "one flesh." Whereas once they were solely two individuals, in marriage they mystically become one flesh. While they don't lose their individuality, they gain the benefits of being in a one flesh relationship. They share a name. They are no longer alone. They prefer one another and are best friends. What once belonged to them as individuals now belongs to them both, thus they are richer. They share in each other's joys and sorrows. The husband is to protect, nourish and cherish his wife and the wife is to respect and honor her husband. And their one flesh relationship is inviolable. God intends that nothing is to compete with or threaten it.

Our union with Christ in salvation has much in common with Christian marriage. We take His name. We are no longer alone. He has committed to be with us always and never leave nor forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). We become His friends (John 15:15). What belongs to Christ belongs to us and vice versa (Col. 1:12). He is pledged to protect and care for us (Eph. 5:25, 32). He asks that we honor and obey Him (John 14:21). In our distress and sorrow, He comforts us (2 Cor. 1:3-4). And our union with Him is inviolable. If you will, we are married to Christ and receive all the benefits of that union.

That is why Galatians 2:20 reads as it does. We have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live. Rather He lives in us! We live by faith in Him

who loved us and gave Himself for us. In some real, if mystical way, we share fully in Christ's life, death and resurrection. And we are to think and behave as if this new reality is true.

What are some implications of this union with our Savior? Let me mention just a few of many. In our union with Him, the Bible says we are complete (Col. 2:9-10). His identity is our identity. Just as the Father looks on Christ, He looks upon us. Every provision necessary for our lives now and for eternity has been provided whether it is forgiveness of our sins, victory over sin's domination, comfort in trials, dying grace, a sure resurrection and everlasting life with Christ. It is all safe and secure because we are united to Christ by faith.

It nearly takes one's breath away! We are left to say with the Apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift."

Rev. Bernie Lawrence

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that hearts will be prepared for the viewing of the 2013 Love Gift video and that there will be a strong financial response to this year's recipient, Ridge Haven Conference Center.

CC: Please pray for wisdom and discernment in the work of the search committee as they consider candidates for the open Chaplain position. Pray also for the Chapel Department staff (Christiana Fitzpatrick, Leslie Petree and several student employees) as they continue to handle the logistics of the chapel program and minister to the Covenant community.

MNA: Pray for military chaplains who are serving in remote, war-torn places in the world. Pray for their safety and Gospel creativity. Pray for civilian chaplains who serve in prisons, hospices, hospitals, sports teams, police/fire departments and more. Pray they will know how to serve in a religiously diverse setting.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation's Board of Directors, that their focus will continue to be on helping to financially support God's Kingdom.

RH: Pray that Junior High campers will be equipped to escape the negative peer pressure of adolescence and seek only to please the Lord.

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2012

JUSTIFICATION: GAS OR OF GOD

For two millennia justification has been debated among Christian scholars. What is it? How does it work? Who is or is not righteous? When does justification go into effect? These and other questions seem to plague the church, age after age. And why not? Justification is at the very heart of salvation, the Gospel message, and the Christian faith. Without justification no one could be saved; all would perish in hell. So it stands to reason that this doctrine would continually find itself at the center of controversy because it lies at the center of life. It is, as Luther said, the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.

Historic Protestant Christians maintain that a sinner is justified (declared righteous/not guilty) before God on the basis (by means of) his faith in Christ and not by means of religious performance or his own moral uprightness. More specifically, the righteousness of the sinless Christ is the ground (foundation) of any person's justification. Once the sinner turns from sin, in repentance, and turns, in faith, to both trust in and surrender to Jesus Christ, the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to that sinner, by means of his faith, not his works. Christ's righteousness is transformed to him, credited to him, "reckoned" (considered) his own. We call this "the divine exchange": the believer's sins are imputed to Christ who is punished (killed) for them; Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer who is blessed and rewarded for it.

Understandably, this is very difficult first to understand, and secondly to accept. In fact, unless a person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he will not, and cannot, receive such truth. It makes no sense to him at all (see 2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

In his book *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Anglican Bishop and Theologian N.T. Wright battles against this view of justification by faith. "If we use the language of the low court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance, or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom...to imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how the language works" (p. 98).

It does according to the Apostle Paul. Writing God's Word (his "language"), that is *precisely* how it works. In Philippians 3:1-9, Paul clearly states that he did not have "a righteousness of my own that comes from the law" (i.e., acceptable obedience to God's commandments), but rather someone else's righteousness, received by (through) faith. Whose righteousness? Paul is precise: "the righteousness...that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (v. 9). It is God's righteousness, found in Jesus Christ, that is imputed (transferred/credited) to Paul because he believed in Jesus Christ,

and thereby was united to Christ forever. His union with Christ (Galatians 2:20) enables his own sin to be disposed of by Jesus Christ and Christ's righteousness to be given to him. This is how the language of the Gospel works!

N. T. Wright denies this, "God's righteousness remains, so to speak, God's own property. It is the reason for His acting to vindicate His people. It is not the status He bestows upon them in so doing" (p. 99). But, again, the language of the Gospel tells us otherwise. Paul tells us in Romans 3:26 that the very reason God imputed Christ's righteousness to us, by faith, was "to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He (God) might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." God remains just; His righteousness remains "His own property" (Wright) but God also becomes the justifier who credits His righteousness, in Christ, to those who believe in Jesus. That is, He gives His people His "property," His righteousness. What the Judge has He may both keep and give away at the same time. He is, after all, God.

This is how the language of the Gospel works. This is how saving faith works. Most of all, this is how God works through Christ. And this is why this message is God's good news!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide each member of the committees of commissioners as they work for the Assembly, reviewing the work of the General Assembly Committees and Agencies and making recommendations to the Assembly.

CTS: Please pray that the many students who come to Covenant Seminary from outside the U.S. will feel at home with us and that the Seminary community will be blessed by the unique cultural, geographical, and generational perspectives these students bring.

MTW: Praise the Lord for MTW's financial partners, who make sacrifices to invest in world evangelization during difficult economic times.

RUM: Pray for Bojan Dragicevic, RUF International Campus Minister at the University of Texas. Bojan is RUF-I's first foreign-born Campus Minister (from Croatia) and is chartering RUF-I as a registered student organization. Pray for Bojan to have "Nehemiah-like favor" with university administrators. Pray for many new contacts with internationals. Pray also for the Christians and churches who will serve as ministry team members, pray for this ministry, and partner through giving to this strategic work. The University of Texas campus is a Top 20 US university destination for more than 5,000 students from around the world.

RBI: Pray for good health for our current board members and RBI staff, so that they can continue to serve the Lord in their respective positions.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2013

IMPUTATION: THE GAS OF GOD

Today we are considering a word we don't often use in our everyday vocabulary though it has rich theological meaning for every Christian. It is the word "imputation." *Easton's Bible Dictionary* defines it as "any action or word or thing as reckoned to a person. Thus in doctrinal language, (1) the sin of Adam is imputed to all his descendants, i.e., it is reckoned as theirs, and they are dealt with, therefore, as guilty. (2) The righteousness of Christ is imputed to them that believe in Him, or so attributed to them as to be considered their own; and (3) our sins are imputed to Christ, i.e., He assumed our "law-place," undertook to answer the demands of justice for our sins. In all these cases the nature of imputation is the same."

Imagine waking up one morning and doing the common task of paying monthly bills. You open your checking account online and you immediately notice a wonderful surprise. Your account has \$100,000 more in it than you had the day before. You call the bank after coming back to your senses, and they tell you that you were credited with that money from a generous philanthropist. Even more surprising, you were credited with that for no reason other than a free gift. Though every illustration breaks down and fails to demonstrate the full ramifications of a Biblical idea, this captures a part of what imputation means in the Bible: we are given what we did not earn.

In Romans 4, Paul doesn't use the particular word "imputation," but the full idea and implications are present. He uses another word in its place, "counted." In fact, he uses it eleven times in this one chapter! The Greek word for counted (*logizomai*) has the meaning "to reckon, to consider, counted, credit with, or take into account." In this passage, Paul is describing the way Abraham was declared justified before God. Notice that Paul says in verse 3 that Abraham believed God or had faith and it was counted, credited, or to use our word, imputed to him as righteous. So that we won't terribly misunderstand, he explains in the next two verses that it wasn't because of any merit in Abraham by his good works, but a free gift received by faith.

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* helps us to understand this wonderful, God-initiating transaction by answering the question, "What is justifying faith?" "Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receives and rests upon Christ and His righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation."

When we put all this together, we realize that there are three imputations when God saves us that must be considered. First, Adam's sin was credited to my account and therefore, my sin is held against me before a holy and righteous God. Second, when I trust in Christ and His work on the cross by faith and repentance, the righteousness of Christ is credited to my account and in turn, thirdly, my sin is credited to His account. To make sure we don't miss this in Romans 4, Paul wants us to understand that the example of Abraham was not just for his benefit, but for ours as well. Notice verses 23 and 24, But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.

So as you live the Christian life today, even though you won't probably use the word imputation in everyday conversation, you can rest in the promise of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." You have been credited with the righteousness of Christ!

Rev. Mike Miller

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for our training conferences, such as Equip, Mercy Ministry, WIC Leadership, Officer Training, Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Alternative Theological Training, and Christian and Home Schooling.

CC: Please pray that God will prepare the hearts and minds of the incoming new students as they prepare to begin their college experience and that God will protect the incoming students from the temptations that come with the new freedoms of being away from home. Pray that He will enable them to use their time wisely during this first year and that He will help them grow to new depths in their relationship with Him in the context of new acquaintances and living obediently to the Word of God.

MNA: Please pray for African American led church plants that will begin in 2013. Also, pray for current African American seminary students who are considering whether God is leading them to serve in the PCA.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation's grant recipients, that more people will be moved to support them through the PCA Foundation with their financial resources, and also through their prayers.

RH: Last summer Ridge Haven had 57 extra summer workers and this summer will have even more. Pray that these young men and women will be reflections of God's love as they lead, mentor, and minister to the summer campers.

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2013

NO CONDEMNATION

Condemnation is “*katakrima*” in the Greek; we find it in Romans 8:1. It means, “A damnatory sentence.” Yet, we also find that for the Christian, this verse provides incredible comfort and relief. Romans 8:1 is anything but “a damnatory sentence” for the ones who are in Christ Jesus! These words are a confirmation from God stating the Christian’s liberation and freedom from the universe’s most profound enemy: God’s wrath. The sins of our past and the sins of our future will not be held against us because of our union with Christ! What great news!

This is so because we are in Christ. What does it mean to be “in Christ?” Simply, that we are united to Christ, in relationship to Him by faith. Because of this, Paul says in Romans, among other things, Christ’s death becomes our death and His perfection becomes our perfection. The condemnation we deserved was the punishment He received.

Jesus Christ alone is the ground of our acceptance and communion with God. Faith unites us to Jesus so that His righteousness is our righteousness. Galatians 2:16 tells us we get this righteousness by being justified, “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” As we are justified, we are made righteous in God’s sight. This is the grounds for the no condemnation statement in Romans 8:1.

For a moment, think about the horror if Romans 8:1 wasn’t true. Think about the crushing weight of your sin piling up on you day after day. Ponder the second half of John 3:18 “but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” If you are a believer, hopefully you sense a real relief that the condemnation of God has been lifted from you by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But does the thought of family, neighbors, and friends who, in their sins, are still under the reality of God’s condemnation burden your heart for their freedom? Does the reality of the crushing condemnation do anything to move you to action? If not, you must ask yourselves if you value and have appropriated your own release from the damnatory sentence that was leveled against you. Colossians 2:13-15 gives us the reality of our release from condemnation as it was placed on Jesus:

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.”

For the believer in Christ, we are free from this damnatory sentence and have a new proclamation spoken over us. In Christ, we have a sentence of salvation and absolution. We are saved from the wrath of God and absolved of all our sins.

Peter Marshall, before the U.S. Senate, prayed this prayer; “Lord Jesus, thou who art the way, the truth, and the life; hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make all free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Help us see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to please to do what is right.”

Who is condemned in Christ? The answer is assumed in Romans 8:1. No one! Christ’s death secures our freedom from condemnation. We will never be condemned for our sin because Christ has died once for our sins. Praise the Lord!

Rev. Kris Decker

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for wisdom and discernment for the commissioners on the Overtures Committee as they process and recommend action on overtures brought to the Assembly.

CTS: Pray for students pursuing Master of Divinity (MDiv) degrees at Covenant Seminary, that their studies will spark fire in their hearts for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and inspire revived faith in the congregations to which the Spirit will one day lead them. Pray also that the Lord will use their ministries to strengthen and grow His Kingdom.

MTW: Many fields urgently need ordained men to mentor, train, and provide theological education. Pray that more of these men will respond to this missionary call.

RUM: Pray for Al LaCour, the national coordinator for RUF International. Al provides coaching, mentoring, and coordination for all RUF-I campus ministers. Al also spreads a vision among PCA churches about the mission field God has brought to US campuses. Pray for Al’s preaching at world missions conferences and for his training of RUF-I campus ministers to “welcome the nations and equip Kingdom ambassadors.” Pray for area Presbytery leaders who will help launch and enlist support for many new RUF-I ministries. Pray also for generous givers to the new RUF International Partners Program, designed to provide challenge-matching grants to area churches to start new RUF-I ministries on the most globally-strategic university campuses in the United States.

RBI: Pray for our staff members, for their families, for their ministry here at RBI and for their growth in Christ. Pray for their outreach not only to clients and vendors at RBI, but also within their churches.

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2013

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

In Galatians 4:4, Paul informs us that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son” to save us sinners. The very words give us spiritual goose bumps. Here, in three short verses two great truths are revealed to us: the perfect time for salvation and the perfect Man as Savior.

“The Fullness of Time” is a phrase Paul uses elsewhere for the timing of God’s great decree of salvation to invade human history. Calvin comments on this phrase: “And as it might have created some doubt how this mystery, concealed for so many ages, could have so suddenly emerged, he teaches us, that this has not happened through the hasty doings of men or through chance, but through the eternal ordination of God.” Calvin would go on to say, “At what time it was expedient that the Son of God should be revealed to the world, it belonged to God alone to judge and determine.” So true. Nevertheless, there were historical events, seen in retrospect that shed light on the reason for the time of Christ’s appearing.

A chosen people, with a monotheistic faith, had been given a revelation of God’s covenant and promised salvation. These Jews were scattered, by dispersion and exile, all over the Mediterranean world, establishing synagogues in every place they lived. The Hellenization of the Western World by Alexander the Great had led to a Greek version of the Old Testament: The *Septuagint* (c. 135 BC). The *Pax Romana* had united, connected and stabilized the Western World by means of Roman law, Roman roads and Roman organization. Pagans had grown tired of their empty myths and gloomy religion. They were ripe for some good news about God. And even Israel, under the tutelage of Mosaic Law for 1400 years, was ready for a word of grace and a new covenant. F. F. Bruce was correct when he wrote, “That the sending of God’s Son took place at the nodal point of salvation-history, Paul both believed and affirmed.”

And in this fullness of time came the fullness of God in a Savior. God *sent forth* His Son: giving evidence of the pre-existence of God the Son. He was not “made” or “had” by God; He was sent forth. He moved from eternity to time, from heaven to earth. He was *born of a woman*, as fully human as He was fully divine. He was a man to bear God’s punishment for mankind and God to pay man’s infinite debt to God. He was *born under the law*: a Jew, a *bar mitzvah* (son of the commandment). Salvation was “from the Jews” (John 4:22). Christ kept the law completely and perfectly – the “other half” of what we owed God. He came to *redeem* those under the law (the Jew first, then all mankind). He was able to give to us the *adoption* as sons because He is God’s Son. Once united to God’s Son in faith we become Christ’s siblings in grace, the adopted children of God. And, finally, He grants to us the greatest gift of all, the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus

plants in each believer the indwelling Holy Spirit who brings us into intimate relationship with the father.

Our justification is not something that happens, part and parcel, in disconnected lives, in a fragmented world. Nothing in life is random. All of history builds toward the Cross. All of humanity is connected to the Man of the Cross. All of time is divided between B.C. and A.D. – each measured with the Cross at the center. Human history moves either toward the Cross or out from the Cross. The “nodal point” is Jesus Christ!

Paul would write to the Corinthians these tender words, “Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you’. Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). There is no better time to believe in Christ than now. The fullness of time is really today! Right now!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for wisdom as Jane Patete and Cindy Bennett consult with women who seek guidance for resource recommendations. Also pray as they plan General Assembly programs and seminars to equip and encourage TE and RE wives and as they organize leadership training through the annual leadership conference and training events led by our Women in the Church Trainers.

CC: Please pray for God’s blessing on the advancement team (fundraising and marketing arm of the College) as they meet with donors and friends of the College. Pray that the Office for Advancement will continue to present the distinctiveness of a Covenant College education that promotes Christ’s Kingdom first and foremost, bringing glory to His name rather than our own.

MNA: Pray for MNA Coordinator Jim Bland and Associate Coordinator Fred Marsh as they provide administrative leadership to the MNA Staff. Pray particularly for God’s leading in where MNA can most effectively focus for the advancement of the Gospel through church planting and outreach ministries. Pray for Church Relations Director Stephen Lutz, serving as a key link between MNA and our supporting churches.

PCAF: Thank God for the PCA Foundation’s Board Chairman, David Clelland, and for the attitude of service and commitment to Christ that he exemplifies.

RH: Ask that the Lord strengthen the bonds of faith and love for each family who vacations at Ridge Haven during Family Camp.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2013

HOLINESS: LIFE WITH GOD, THE MOTIVE FOR SANCTIFICATION

I have become, over the years, more and more uncomfortable with our evangelical phrase “to invite Christ into one’s life.” I realize what we are *trying* to say, but I fear that what is communicated (and understood) is quite the opposite of what the Gospel intends. I should state quite frankly that God really is not interested in being in your life, mine, or anyone else’s. His main concern is more majestic and all-encompassing. God wants us to be involved in *His* life. It is God, through Christ, who is doing the inviting, and the focus is His Trinitarian Life, not our finite, human existence.

Life is Jesus’ Word for salvation, according to the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles. Jesus came to give us “abundant life” (John 10:10), “in Him was life” (John 1:4), and whoever believes in Jesus has “the life” (1 John 5:12). In fact, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Lesslie Newbigin correctly states “‘Grace’ is a very precious word to St. Paul, but in the fourth Gospel it appears only in these verses (i.e., in John 1:14-17). When Jesus speaks in this Gospel, He speaks of ‘life,’ but for the grateful believer this life of God is grace. This life, we have learned is also light, and ‘grace and truth’ are perhaps ‘life and light’ seen from the point of view of the believer.” Salvation is a life with God. Because sin separates us from God, the source of life, we die. When we are brought into a “state of grace” we are absorbed into the life of God, and we live a life of holiness. As Henry Scougal said, grace is “the life of God in the soul of a man.” This life produces holiness.

When Jesus calls us to Himself, to salvation, to grace, He is calling us to a life – with God – to a new level of living and a higher realm of existence. He is inviting us to share life with the Trinity. Hymn writer John Bennett beautifully acknowledges this truth in his lyrics: “Good Jesus Christ, our Brother, died in darkest hurt upon the tree, to offer us the worlds of light that live inside the Trinity” (“Joy the Heart” stanza 3).

The divine call of holiness is a call to light, life and grace. It invites us into a life with God the Father and the light of His love, common grace, and self-revelation we call “truth,” seen in Creation, Conscience, and Culture in this world. It invites us into a life with God the Son, Jesus Christ, and the living reality of forgiveness, cleansing and God in the Father, found in the kingdom of God. It invites us into life with the Holy Spirit, and the communion, community, and caring of the church. Holiness, to be seen in its “full color,” must be grasped beyond the word “grace”, beyond inviting Jesus into your heart and beyond mere justification. Salvation involves holiness, and holiness is simply learning how to live a life with God! This great life with God encompasses all we are and all we do. As one writer phrased it:

*O Father God, Creator, in you our world began,
And all throughout creation we see your gracious hand.
Your common grace has filled our lives with gifts of love each day,
And in our souls you did implant the good and noble way.
O Son of God, redeemer, through you the Kingdom reigns,
And all throughout the ages we call upon your name.
Your saving grace you give to us, and all things made anew,
And we are your ambassadors with truth and power endured.
O Spirit God, Our Helper, by you the Church has grown,
And all throughout the nations the Gospel you make known.
Your greater grace you have poured out to once again revive,
And our souls, weak and slum bearing may one day come alive.
O Father, Son and Spirit, we have no life but by you.
Our Hope is in your goodness which each day is renewed.
Our Faith is in the Crucified and Risen Lord above.
Our Worship, work and witness are in the Spirit's Love.*

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the women and children at the Assembly, for their spiritual enrichment, fellowship, education, and enjoyment in the many activities provided by the Host Committee.

CTS: Pray that the Lord will use Covenant Seminary's various Master of Arts programs—the MA in Theological Studies (MATS), the MA in Religion and Cultures (MARC), the MA in Worship and Music (MAWM), and the MA in Exegetical Theology (MAET)—to prepare faithful ministry leaders to serve alongside pastors in the local church. Pray also that those students who go forth to work in non-church settings will bring the Gospel to bear in their chosen fields for the honor and glory of Jesus' name.

MTW: Thank God for continued growth of specific ministry partnerships between MTW, PCA churches and leaders, and national church leaders. Pray God will use these new working relationships to give fresh vision and energy for ministry.

RUM: Pray for the continued financial support of RUF.

RBI: Pray for the Client Service staff of RBI as they plan and implement better ways to reach out and serve our PCA ministry partners.

SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2013

THE BEST THING OF ALL

One of the best things in our spiritual life is this truth: what God requires God supplies. When God demands righteousness, He supplies it in Christ. When God requires us to live by the Spirit, He supplies the Spirit. God requires faith and He supplies it for us so we can believe in Christ and be in His Family as adopted children and fellow heirs with Christ. Sons of God are led by the Spirit. We tend to not take living by the flesh or living by the Spirit as seriously as we should. Remember, living by the flesh can be summarized as ungodly motives, sinful affections, purposes, words, and actions that promote sin in our mortal bodies.

Galatians 5:16-21 gives us a clear picture of fleshly living “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”

The believer in Christ has been freed from bondage to these fleshly sins and now has the ability to say “no” to them. He is also free from slavery and falling back into fear. The implication in Romans 8:13 is that we were once slaves and fearful, but not anymore. We have received the Spirit of adoption as sons which enables us to cry out to God for delivery from slavery and fear. This point is illustrated in Hebrews 2:14-15, “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (see also 2 Tim 1:7; 1 John 4:18).

Not only are we freed from fleshly sins and fear, believers have been adopted into God’s family. The first recorded adoption in the Bible was Moses (Exodus 2:1-10). Esther’s parents died; therefore, her older cousin named Mordecai, who loved her father, took special care of Esther and adopted her (Esther 2:5-11). My favorite adoption in the Old Testament is Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan and only remaining descendant of Saul. David learned of Mephibosheth’s plight and adopted him giving him the land that belonged to his grandfather, Saul, and honored Jonathan, his best friend, by bringing Mephibosheth into his own home where he always ate at the king’s table (2 Sam 9:1-11). These are pictures and examples of how God adopts His children and fulfills the purposes of His will (Eph. 1:5).

Evidence we are in God's family includes the desire to cry out to God. Even Jesus in His darkest hour cried out to God, His Heavenly Father. "Abba" is an Aramaic term of endearment meaning, "Daddy" or "Papa." You can see Jesus' intimate connection with His Father in Mark 14:36, "And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.'"

John MacArthur writes, "The value of an inheritance is determined by the worth of the one who bequeaths it, and the inheritance of Christians is from the Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of the world. God not only is the source of our inheritance but is Himself our inheritance. Of all the good things in the universe, the most precious is the Creator of the universe Himself."

Have you lost sight of your freedom? Of your inheritance and the giver of that inheritance? If so, cry out to God as your heavenly "papa": He *will* listen and hear as His children call out to Him.

Rev. Kris Decker

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: 2020 Vision Conferences have been held around the country to equip the local church and families in the discipleship of the next generation. Pray for the Spirit to work in the churches who are implementing this Kingdom vision.

CC: Please pray for our faculty as they do research and write articles and books in their academic disciplines. Active research is an important factor in enabling our faculty to provide the first-rate Christian education that is at the heart of Covenant's mission, and so your prayers for energy, focus, and fruitfulness in these areas are much needed and appreciated.

MNA: Pray for MNA Native American/First Nations Ministries, that God will open His intended path for the year ahead and provide Coordinator Bruce Farrant with the grace to follow Him step by step.

PCAF: Pray that the PCA Foundation staff will be encouraged by their calling, be effective in ministry, and keep their focus on pleasing God.

RH: Pray for the MTW missionaries and their families who will stay at Ridge Haven this summer to be refreshed and recharged before they enter or return to the mission field. Pray also for spiritual and emotional rejuvenation for all the pastors and church leaders who come for a retreat.

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2013

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

In the marvelous Christian classic *Knowing God*, James I. Packer makes this astounding observation about the truth of our adoption in Christ:

Adoption is the highest privilege that the Gospel offers: higher even than justification. This may cause raising of eyebrows... careful thought will reveal the truth of the statement we have just made...Justification is the primary blessing, because it meets our primary spiritual need. But this is not to say that justification is the highest blessing of the Gospel. Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves. Justification is a forensic idea...Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship—He establishes us as His children heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater (pp. 206-207).

There is no greater thing in the entire world, than to hear the words, “I forgive you.” Still, I think, at times, that I’d rather be forgiven than loved. My soul eventually says, “Not so. The sweetest words in all of life are always, ‘I love you!’” Who can say which is greater?

Paul, in Romans 8, begins with a classic statement about justification, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). He further links our justification to our adoption, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons...” (8-15).

Fear, the mark of slaves and orphans and not sons, springs from guilt due to sin and alienation from God. Neither of these things is true for Christians. Jesus has made us righteous before God in Himself, and has taken us home to God as His “beloved brethren” (siblings). We will never again be condemned, unwanted or unloved. We are God’s righteous children.

Do we in the PCA argue over justification, adoption, and sanctification because of guilt and fear or theology? We live in a licentious and lawless age, prone to compensate for its antinomianism with forms of legalism. This has left its guilt stains on our lives: women who’ve had abortions, men who’ve left wives and children, people caught in adultery, young folks in addictions, those captive to pornography, others tormenting themselves over gender confusion and sexual preference all feel guilty and question whether God could ever really love them as His children.

This vortex of doubt, shame, and pain is made all the more complex by the collapse of the American marriage, family, and home. Children of divorce always question why dad did not love *them* enough to stay! Those who've been abused, or ignored, or used as a pawn in a legal game do not warm to the idea of a father's love. When every institution of stability and care-giving has failed – family, church, and state – then why should we trust in a heavenly Family, a Gracious God, or a Merciful King of heaven?

The answer: The Spirit of Adoption given to us by the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to us that, indeed, we are both forgiven by God and loved by a Father, for our God is both Judge and “ABBA” (Daddy). Many in the church struggle to accept these truths.

James I. Packer, in *Knowing God*, tells us that the Lord has produced undeniable evidence of His acceptance of and love for us. That evidence is Jesus, His Son. “God has not left us to guess what his fatherhood amounts to by drawing analogies from human fatherhood. He revealed the full meaning of this relationship once and for all through our Lord Jesus Christ, his own incarnate Son. For God intends the lives of believers to be a reflection and reproduction of Jesus' own fellowship with Himself” (p. 204).

Stop living in fear and live by faith in Jesus. Stop arguing over justification, adoption, and sanctification and follow the witness of the Spirit. You are forgiven; you are loved. And these things will never change! This is the Good News of such a great salvation!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Please petition our heavenly Father to grant generous giving and the increased participation of each of our churches in financially supporting every General Assembly Committee and Agency. These gifts enable the various arms of the General Assembly to carry out the ministries committed to us.

CTS: Pray for students in Covenant Seminary's Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC) program as they prepare to bring the hope of the Gospel to hurting individuals and families. Pray that they will be a powerful means of grace, encouragement, and healing to those whose lives reflect the pain and brokenness of a fallen world.

MTW: Pray for wisdom and stamina for Paul Kooistra as he leads MTW. Ask God to bless his personal walk with Christ as well as his demanding ministry.

RUM: Pray for the protection of those in leadership roles involved with RUF.

RBI: Pray that all PCA employees will be able to find affordable health insurance.

TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2013

THE FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

Consider two visuals. First, we hear Jesus saying to us, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the little children.... Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.... Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for to such belong the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 12:25; 18:3; 19:14).

Next, on any given Sunday, minutes before the worship service, you might observe in the parking lots, in Sunday school classes, even throughout sanctuaries, children *running*. Parents and other grown-ups will inevitably (and appropriately) put a stop to it for there's a time and a place for running. But, if we were honest, we'd notice that children are *always* running.

Perhaps when these two visuals are combined, we might see some of what we should expect out of the Christian life: childlike faith and childlike running. In fact, the Scriptures do bring these visuals together for us and remind us that the Christian life is a faith-runner's life.

It begins as a race **to the Cross** and the dispensation of the atoning blood of Christ: He awakens us to see that the road we are on leads to destruction and causes us to stop and reverse course to the Cross until we break joyfully under its shadow as new-born children of God. At once, then, He lifts us to begin our race **with the Cross** to the Finish Line, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Paul's near-arrival is instructive to us, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Any race requires discipline in order to complete it. In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul tells us that he set his mind to exerting the energy towards discipline so that he could finish what God had started. "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26). Jesus also made stern warnings about failing to exert the discipline necessary; He called it carrying our cross (see Matthew 16:24).

But this is incomplete. Our effort is required but will not be sufficient. God Himself disciplines us so that we may finish what He started in us (Philippians 1:6). After the author of Hebrews exhorts us to run with endurance, he explains that God is very active in ordering our

circumstances so that by them we are trained unto this righteousness. In fact, this is what good fathers do for their children, “God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline...then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Hebrews 12:7-8).

It is here, perhaps, that modern evangelicals go astray of a proper understanding of our sonship. We are right to understand the Father’s love in justifying and adopting us. Yet, we must **also** be mindful that this work to make and adopt us as sons *must* include the transformation needed to become like His Son, Jesus Christ. It is for this reason, God orders all things for the good of those who love Him and are called by Him, “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

Indeed, this process of God-directed discipline is hard and often unpleasant – of course! “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). The end of this race is our holiness without which we will not see the Lord, our Father.

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Christian Education and Publications and Great Commission Publications as our staffs work together—focused on building strong disciple-making churches and families.

CC: Please pray that our Athletic Department will be diligent in completing our fourth (and hopefully final) year of transition to the NCAA.

MNA: Please pray for MNA Disaster Response staff and volunteers as they respond to meeting the tremendous needs left in the wake of disasters. Pray that God will be glorified through the outworkings of MNA Disaster Response.

PCAF: Ask that the PCA Foundation’s President, Randy Stair, will be uplifted, encouraged, and given godly direction as he manages the ministry, staff, and business affairs of the Foundation.

RH: Pray for the safety of all Ridge Haven campers and guests from any unforeseen transportation accidents, injuries, or health issues.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2013

THE NON-NEGOTIABLES

The next step in the *Ordo Salutis*, that commences at our conversion is called, *sanctification*. Tim Challies calls it the “progressive, lifelong work of God and man that frees us from sin and makes us more like Christ.” The Apostle Paul likens this “lifelong work” to running a race, as he was coming to the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Staying on course in a race is vital to finishing well and so it is in the Christian life. The two Great Commandments are repackaged in Hebrews 12:14, instructing us how to run this race; to “strive for peace with all men” restates, “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). To strive “for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” restates the first great commandment, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37).

Having peace with God, we are then to “pursue peace with all men.” This includes all those in and outside the church. The Lord declares in Luke 6:27-28, “...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” These are not easy words! Often it is when we have been wronged by fellow Christians that we find these words most difficult to apply. It is easy for us to retreat and build a wall of isolation to protect ourselves from getting hurt again. Yet, that provides fertile soil for a root of bitterness to grow and strangle our love for Christ and for others.

This is why we are commanded to “pursue peace.” The word “pursue” means to go after peace with the same effort that a hunter tracks down his prey. We are to be intentional in our pursuit of peace, and go as far as we can to live peaceably with all men.

This begs the question, “Do you practice this command?” Are there those who have offended you with whom you need to seek peace? In a spirit of humility, we are to take the lead as peacemakers to resolve our hurts and misunderstandings. It is a non-negotiable and a necessary part of the race.

Just as we are commanded to pursue peace with all men, we are also commanded to pursue holiness, that is, to grow “in conformity with God’s standards of purity.” For sure, as believers, we will never achieve a state of sinless perfection. The Bible is clear that we will always contend with indwelling sin.

We may sin often, but that does not mean we must or should remain in it. As John says in 1 John 1:9, we confess our sins, turn from them and fight against them with the spiritual weaponry that God has provided for us (Eph.

6:10-20). We pursue building safeguards in our lives to avoid sin. Our minds are renewed through the Word of God by reading and obeying it, by hearing it preached, and taught, so we might not sin against the Lord.

Though these pursuits of loving men and loving God are directed to those who are regenerated, the impact is felt by the whole world. John MacArthur, put it this way, “We are supposed to radiate Christ to the world...there is only one way that anybody in the world is ever going to see Christ, and that is when they see in our lives those things that exhibit Him. Love for men. Love for Christ....If we don’t really live that kind of life, then the world can’t see.”

These pursuits of loving men and loving God are lifelong yet without them, no one will see the Lord. They are non-negotiable. Without them, you simply won’t go to heaven.

Rev. Bruce Creswell

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the continued ministry of the *byFaith* magazine. Pray that it will serve to connect people, churches, events, and missions of the PCA through the proclamation of the Gospel. Pray that Editor Richard Doster and his staff will exercise wisdom in handling the many details associated with the magazine.

CTS: Pray that the Lord will bless church leaders seeking to prepare themselves for further service to God’s people by pursuing Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degrees at Covenant Seminary, or who seek to hone their ministry skills by attending other classes, conferences, or seminars at the Seminary in the coming year.

MTW: MTW is committed to training both missionaries and nationals. Pray for the Global Training and Development Team as they develop and teach curricula for this critical need.

RUM: Pray that the National Staff will communicate and provide all resources needed to assist Campus Ministers and Interns in reaching students for Christ.

RBI: The staff of RBI converse with many pastors, church staff, and missionaries concerning benefits by informing, counseling, and encouraging; please pray for wisdom and good advice in these conversations.

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2013

A COOPERATIVE WORK

Woven throughout the context of Paul's famous commands in our text, are four men: the Lord Jesus, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul spends the first 11 verses on the Lord culminating in discussing His *kenosis*. The Lord's making Himself "nothing" serves as an example to all who hear of one who "count[ed] others more significant" than Himself (2:3). Paul says that we must be like Him.

Still, Paul brings Christ forward into our text with "therefore" in verse 12. The obedience of Christ to the will of the Father (2:8) is both the *example* and the *ground* of our obedience to the will of the Father. As our example: He has done it, so must we do it if we claim to belong to Him. As the ground: we can do it because He has done it and given us His Spirit to complete what He began (1:6). In our text, obedience is clearly in view.

Why does Paul spend the time to mention Christ (2:5-11), his own ministry (2:14-18), that of Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30) in this context? Or, better, how are we to understand the commands of our text in light of the examples of the men in the context?

The commands are clear enough: work out what God has worked in you. That is, there is kingdom business that God is doing in and through His people; He does His work through our work. Commentators chew on the concept of "salvation" in verse 12 and wonder if individual or corporate salvation is in view. Those who strive to live out these commands typically focus on how each individual is to set his mind to walking in a manner worthy of Christ (see, e.g., Colossians 3:5-15). Consider how these go together.

Paul repeatedly exhorts the church at Philippi to get along. In our time, we would do the same thing expecting that *each individual church member* set his mind to getting along with everyone else. But how would he finally "get along" if all the others aren't doing the same? Paul tells the Philippians that he, Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are all united in this effort to see the salvation of God worked out at Philippi. Christ was obedient; Paul was obedient; Timothy was obedient; Epaphroditus was obedient. The result? God's work marches on unimpeded and His good pleasure is realized. It is not only the case that by virtue of one man's work, God's work advances, but rather as each man works in the context of other men who are working, does this work truly redound to God's glory and bring Him pleasure.

We must, on one hand, focus on our individual responsibilities to put our hands to the plow (Luke 9:62). Our personal obedience to God testifies that we belong to Christ (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2). The apostle John is

quite clear that to fail in obedience is to raise alarm about the veracity of our confessions of faith. Christ is both our example and our ground for obedience; because of Christ, there is no better model and there is no stronger force under heaven that can propel us unto obeying the Father. No confessing believer should think that he is unable to obey or that his obedience is not mandatory. This passage calls for action and nothing less. Yet it is more than one man's action. With Christ, the men in God's charge: Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus, provide examples of servants defying enemies (2:15), distance (2:20) and death itself (2:30). Why do they pour themselves out like this for others if their responsibility was only to their own salvation? God intended to bring about the obedience of the people of God as one body; a house of living stones and not just one stone (cf. 1 Peter 2:5). It is a cooperative work that extends beyond how God and one man work but to God and His whole church works. That is, one man working in the context of others and so both he and they succeed in working out the salvation of God with fear and trembling.

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Sue Jakes as she serves as the Educational Specialist of CEP, working with the local church in developing and strengthening their Christian Education ministry.

CC: Please pray for our faculty as they teach and mentor our students. Pray that they will be continually grounded in God's truth in Scripture as the framework for all their academic work, and that God will bless and multiply the impact they have on our students in equipping them for lives of Christ-honoring service in the church and for the Kingdom.

MNA: Pray for MNA ShortTerm Missions, that many volunteer teams will take advantage of the opportunities available this summer and throughout the year.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation's Business Manager, Mark Bailey, as he manages the staff and accomplishes the other responsibilities of the position.

RH: Ask that the Ridge Haven campus, specifically the aging dining hall, be equipped and ready to handle the continued increase of campers, church groups, youth groups, and college groups.

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2013

JUSTIFIED WITHOUT HOLINESS?

In an effort to “protect” the doctrine of justification by faith alone, evangelical Christians – and many in the PCA – have created a theological oxymoron. There is no official title for this aberration, but I would venture to call it the “justified pagan.” Years ago, in dispensational circles, this person was referred to as the “carnal Christian.” Debates raged in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and not a few books were written, about whether a person could accept Jesus as savior but not as Lord, and still be saved; i.e., still go to heaven when they died.

The postmodern version of this same debate uses different, more abstract, and theological language, but the issue is still the same: Can people go to heaven by accepting Jesus Christ, in faith, while continuing to live an ungodly lifestyle? The issue has become highly charged because so many Christians have walked away from spouses and children, have become addicted to pornography, have lived in sexually immoral situations, have purchased abortions, and have engaged in homosexual activity. Great shame, much insecurity, and an overwhelming sense of guilt drive such people to find relief for their tortured souls. Their answer is often justification without holiness, “justified paganism.”

Paul provides the antidote for such soul-trouble. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, he tells us four essential truths about salvation. First, he reminds us that certain behavior patterns are irreconcilably incompatible with salvation. Lifestyles of sexual immorality, homosexuality, non-Christian religion (idolatry), adultery (including unbiblical divorce), alcoholism, theft and a life of crime, a reviling spirit toward God, and of unbridled greed will keep you out of heaven. When Paul says that these people “shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” he means that these folks “shall not be saved...will not enter heaven” in such lifestyles (6:9-11).

He goes on to warn the saints about addictive behavior. He states that “all things are lawful” for a person – we are freed from rules concerning food, dress, lifestyle – but he also warns that not all things are good for us. There are behavior patterns that become imprisoning. Sins have a way of “dominating” or “mastering” us. A closer examination of those carnal practices in verses 6-11, reveal a common thread: all of them are sins that pull us into compulsive, addictive behavior: alcohol, sex, money, lying, anger, etc. (6:12-14).

Sexual sins, in particular, are especially harmful to the soul (6:15-18). Immorality crushes “the body” as well as the soul because it prostitutes man’s essential nature – his gender identity as the image of God – and uses his life-giving powers (sexual intercourse) to create deadly situations: unwanted pregnancy, STD’s, abortion, divorce, all forms of abusive perversion. How many people do each of us know who were devastated by divorce, incest, molestation and so forth?

Finally, Paul reminds us that when Jesus died to save us, He purchased our bodies as well as our souls (6:19-20). The whole person belongs to Christ, so the whole life belongs to God. Gender identity, sexual powers, marriages and family, jobs and wealth, religion and social networks are all under the redemptive power of the Cross.

The Good News is this: Many people in bondage to these sinful patterns have been saved from them and saved for God by Jesus Christ. This is the liberating truth of verse 11 and the Gospel: “washed...sanctified...justified.” These are the Spirit-inspired words Paul chooses to explain salvation. We were washed by the Spirit (cf. Titus 3:5) so that guilt and shame are removed. We are sanctified, over a process of growth in grace and obedience, until our lives are as holy as our standing in Christ. We are justified so that in between periods of success (obedience) and failure (sin) we rest in the righteousness of Christ. Such a great salvation!

Can a “carnal Christian” be saved? No, not really. Can a justified person “skip” sanctification? No, it really doesn’t work that way. Can a person hang on to their immoral lifestyle and still go to heaven? No. Repentance and faith lead to a new creature with a new lifestyle. This is the good news and the frank message of salvation. “You’re bought with a price. So glorify God in your body”...with your life!

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: The General Assembly relies on a cadre of volunteers (local to Greenville as well as from across the country) to function smoothly and efficiently. Pray that we will have sufficient numbers as well as the experience levels needed to accomplish our tasks (Floor Clerks, Nursery and Children’s Care Workers, Ushers, Registration Teams, and numerous other roles).

CTS: Pray for the director and students of Covenant Seminary’s Master of Theology (ThM) program, that God will grant wisdom and grace as they seek deeper understanding of God’s Word and more effective ways to teach and communicate the beauty of that message to others.

MTW: Human trafficking and the sex trade are growing virtually everywhere. Pray for missionaries and nationals who have ministry opportunities in these areas, and that righteousness and justice will prevail.

RUM: Pray that God will open doors on college campuses in the Northwest where Christianity is not the norm.

RBI: RBI employees talk with many PCA pastors and staff who are struggling personally with family and church problems. Pray for the staff to have wisdom as they offer advice and assistance.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2013

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

In the third verse of *Am I Soldier of the Cross*, Isaac Watts asks three questions:

Are there no foes for me to face?

Must I not stem the flood?

Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me onto God?

During his day, there was much persecution inflicted on the English Dissenters—those who had split from the official, state Anglican Church. Isaac Watts, along with others, were strong and fearless in their defense of the faith. Thus, he penned the words of this great hymn to encourage his congregation.

Although the Church in America may not be under the same degree of persecution as in Isaac Watts' day, you and I do have to overcome the world daily. So "yes," there are foes that we must face and "yes" we must do our part to stem the flood, and "no," this world is not a friend to grace. The Apostle John instructs us in his first epistle, chapter five and the first five verses, of three vital elements that enable us to overcome the world: our faith, our love and our obedience.

It has been said, "The Christian life is armed combat against the enemy of our souls." Our faith is the evidence of our new birth (v.1). To believe in Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God means that you "entrust your eternal destiny and your right standing before God not to anything in yourself...but entirely to Jesus and His substitutionary death on the cross for your sins...believing that He paid the debt to God you owe" (vv.1, 5). This faith that God imparts to us, results in a life of consistent victory over the evil forces of this world (v.4).

The second element that John brings to our attention is our love. In vv.1-3, the word "love" is used five times. This love is primarily "a self-sacrificing commitment to seek the other person's highest good." We are to love "whoever has been born of Him" such love crosses over race, culture, doctrine, and gender. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:7, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." In our day, when "lawlessness has increased and the love of many have grown cold" (Matt. 24:12), it is the love of Christ in us that makes the Christian community strong and inviting. John Fawcett expresses this way:

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love!

The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

But this love for others is the outflow of our love for God which is what John says in v.1, "...everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of

Him.” Our source to love, even those who to us seem unlovely, is the love that God gives us as we continue in His love.

The third element that John mentions is our obedience. Jesus tells His disciples in John 14:21, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me....” Out of our love for God flows our obedience to Him. Obedience to God’s commandments is not always easy or effortless. In fact, obedience is often a battle. We must constantly fight against the world, the flesh and the devil, all are formidable foes. But we are able to obey because we have a new nature that has power to overcome.

The grand old Gospel song, *Trust and Obey*, brings out the balance of our faith in Jesus Christ’s finished work and our desire to obey Him and thus overcome the world in our daily lives:

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory
He sheds on our way!*

*While we do His good will, He abides with us still and with all
who will trust and obey.*

Rev. Bruce Creswell

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Sue Jakes as she partners with the MNA Special Needs Ministry to help train churches in beginning and growing their ministry to church and community families with disabilities.

CC: Please pray that God will allow us to honor Him by being good stewards of the resources He has given the College, and that we will have integrity in following federal and state regulations regarding the handling of allocated funds while awarding students financial aid to allow them to obtain a Covenant College education.

MNA: Ministry to State serves US capitols and Washington DC, bringing the Gospel and a biblical world view to those who work in Government. Pray that this ministry will find hearts open to the Word, bringing the light of God’s will to bear on the work of state and Federal government.

PCAF: Ask that the Lord will bless the work of the PCA Foundation’s Sr. Accountant, Lou Anne Ross-Purnell, and its Administrative Assistants, Joan Henry, Jim Standridge, and Jessica Wilson, and that they will be encouraged as they all provide vital assistance to the Foundation.

RH: Pray that all the enthusiasm and momentum God has blessed Ridge Haven with will attract a new group of financial partners who recognize the growing potential of Ridge Haven’s ministry. Thank Him for those supporters who already give so generously.

SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2013

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

Christians love the world and we should. “Love” in this sense is complex. We love the goodness of what God has made: the beauty of man and woman, the richness of relationships even the grandeur of the lands. The Psalmist was right, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). If only our eyes were not dimmed with the remnants of sin!

Yet, in the ways the Apostle John is addressing in our text, we love the things of the world that are neither lovely nor godly. In this way, Christians love the world and we should not. So, here, there are three issues: our love for the world, the shape of that love, and the fact that it is incompatible with the love of the Father.

First, about “love.” Love is acting for the good or the glory of another. It is forward moving, thinking for others, extending itself in ways that may hurt for the good of someone in need, especially in the church. John 3:16 is as simple a statement as any, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Later on in 1 John 3:16-18, John describes love in terms of meeting the needs of others out of the bounty God has given to us: acting for the good of another by opening our wallets.

To heed John’s warning in this paragraph is to recognize that to “love the world or the things in the world” means to act for the good or the glory of the *world*. John isn’t talking about those good things of Creation that capture our joy, but rather the systems of Satan woven throughout the structures of this world. John is clear in his letter that these are the things being taught by false teachers (2:18-19). Love for the world and its things is to order our lives around the attainment and maintenance of the temporal things the world deems essential. Jesus Himself warned us that to do this was to make godly love impossible, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). To love the world is to “hate” what God has called us to love, viz., Himself and our brethren.

Secondly, John gives us the categories for our ungodly loves: “the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (NASB). Our flesh lusts for its own satisfaction and, the world tells us to do what’s necessary to satisfy it. Not so fast, says the Apostle Paul, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Likewise, the command for us to refrain from coveting is to battle the lusts of our eyes. The things of the world are pretty; their shine is promising. But, to live for the accumulation of worldly things and

accolades, the “boastful pride of life” ultimately fills our storehouses, brings us an uneasy soul rest (see Luke 12:19) and in the end may reveal a profound unbelief.

Lastly, this world-directed commitment and action cannot coexist in the heart of one who confesses to love the Father (2:15). This is a competing worship even in its smallest manifestation. It is ungodly every time. Why? It is not from the Father (2:16b). He is not the author of our inclinations to set aside the godly and good things of life for the ungodly and sinful ones. A life ordered for the satisfaction of the flesh, the eyes and the barns just *isn't from God*.

If this love were not attractive and winsome, John wouldn't have wasted his time on this warning! The false teachers of his day would not have been selling this snake oil. But, it is attractive and alluring. And it is deadly. John only warns us so that we might turn our love on the one who is love, Jesus Christ!

Rev. Gabe Sylvia

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Join us as we thank our Father for the service of Wayne Sparkman, Director of the PCA Historical Center in St. Louis MO. He records and chronicles the faithfulness of the Lord to His people in the PCA as he has been tasked by the Assembly's Administrative Committee.

CTS: Pray for the Covenant Seminary students who are graduating this spring, that the Lord will provide guidance and insight as they seek to discern the specifics of His call upon the next phase of their lives. Give thanks for the Seminary's Alumni and Career Services staff as they maintain consistently high placement rates for these graduates.

MTW: Pray for a spirit of cooperation between evangelical denominations in getting the message of the Gospel out to a hurting world. Pray that we will grow in love for God's global Church.

RUM: Pray that God will continue to raise up new pastors with a thirst and hunger for the Gospel and campus ministry.

RBI: Gary Campbell, Chet Lilly, Mark Melendez, Terry Aiello and Bob Clarke are in leadership positions at RBI. Please pray that they will be granted divine guidance and strength to fulfill their important roles.

MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2013

THE MANY MOTIVES FOR HOLINESS

In Colossians 3:1-17 Paul exhorts the believers in Colossae to pursue holiness. In this chapter, there are twenty-one imperatives and exhortations. Paul is urging the saints onto holiness and ordering them to pursue sanctification. In so doing, he sets before the church several motives for holiness.

In our therapeutic and (I think) guilt-ridden age, we are often told that there is one *true* motive for grace. That one motive is defined by pastors and authors under a variety of terms: our desire for God, gratitude for grace, our love for God, fear of the Lord, the joy holiness brings us, etc. The truth is that *all* these motives are valid. Christians pursue holiness for a number of good (and some not-so-good) reasons.

Paul puts before the Colossian Christians several motives for pursuing holiness. They should be motivated by the high and noble reality that their lives are hidden with Christ in God and heaven awaits them; so it is the purpose of this life to prepare for heaven (3:1-4). He warns them that the wrath of God comes upon sinful patterns of behavior, and the implication is that they too could fall under this wrath if they returned to godless ways of living (3:5-7). Paul reminds them that their new life in God necessitates a new self in Christ. They are being renewed to the original glory of the image of God by the Spirit's sanctifying work (3:8-11). God's forgiveness will also lead them to "relational holiness." Their hearts of sin will become hearts of compassion, love and forgiveness, because they have been loved, forgiven and treated mercifully by God. Mercy should beget mercy (3:12-14). Their inner peace rests a great deal upon their sanctification (3:15a). Gratitude to God will also move them toward Christlikeness (3:15b). The primary source of holiness will be drawn from the effective power of God's Word, dwelling in them, and the inner work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (3:16). In the end, and perhaps the highest motive for holiness, is the glory of God – reflected in all we do for the Lord (3:17).

There are some in our age who will take exception to the idea that we should try to pursue holiness at all. They are so fearful of moralism, legalism or the burden of a performance-driven life that any imperatives in Scripture or moral exhortations by preachers is looked upon with distrust and even disdain. For them, grace seems to "just work," almost purely by a reckoning of one's position in Christ, but without deliberate effort by the saint.

The Bible is clear about our working at salvation because grace is at work in us (Philippians 2:12-13). We should not be afraid that our feeble

and inconsistent efforts at living a holy life could truncate or quench the Spirit and His grace. Indeed, it is our failure to try that does.

Kevin DeYoung addresses the tension we often feel between God's grace and our efforts at holiness. He writes, "Is it really a dreadful thing for Christians to be intentional about wanting to be more like Jesus? I know that's not where the Gospel starts, but haven't a myriad of Christians through the ages considered that at the heart of discipleship? The mystery of the Christian life is that Christ expects us to flee sin and the devil, but does not expect us to rid ourselves of either on this side of glory. Repentance is a way of life and is the pursuit of godliness. I wish every Christian could be reminded of these two things. And I wish they were less controversial than they have become in our day."

Relax. Don't preach your bias or live by your fears. Don't let your own imbalance redefine the Christian life. God is at work in all His saints. And they all respond to different motives, at different seasons of life. The Good News is God's consistent grace (Philippians 1:6) overcomes our inconsistent efforts to obey (Philippians 2:12-13). DeYoung is wise: "Good doctors know how to give different prescriptions, and my fear is that we can get locked in a one-size-fits-all approach to growth in godliness, short circuiting our sanctification." Christ is the Great Physician. Allow Him to set forth the motive we need at the time.

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Sue Jakes, CEP Education Specialist, travels on average twice a month to a conference or local church for training and consultations. Pray for health, strength of mind and body, and traveling mercies.

CC: Please pray for the senior administration of Covenant College: Derek Halvorson, president; Jeff Hall, vice president for academic affairs and chief financial officer; Brad Voyles, vice president for student development and dean of students; Troy Duble, vice president for advancement; and for our next chaplain.

MNA: Pray for Haitian American churches in North America and for leadership development among Haitian Americans.

PCAF: Pray that God will provide for the PCA Foundation's own operational financial needs for 2013.

RH: Guests from over 30 states stayed at Ridge Haven in 2012. Ask that, if it be the Lord's will, the reach of Ridge Haven's ministry extend even further in 2013.

TUESDAY, JUNE 11, 2013

GOOD WORKS

While it seems the world is changing at frenetic pace, there is something in our experience that is as stable, predictable and true today as ever: the Scriptures. They are timeless in their observations and assertions about God and mankind because the heart of man and his need of salvation and holiness is unchanged.

One place that shows up is in the theological tension between faith and good works. It was a point of confusion and controversy in James' time and it still is! Salvation is by faith alone apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9). But that begs the question: what then, is the place of good works in the Christian experience? Are good works just a nice addition if the Christian feels generous in a moment in time?

James says that saving faith leaves *tracks*! It would be a supreme mistake to conclude that faith in God through Christ that does not result in some evidence of a transformed life through good works is optional or unnecessary. In fact, the Apostle Paul opposes such a view in numerous places. To the rebellious Corinthians, he urged that they examine and test themselves to see if there was sufficient evidence that they were in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5-6). That was a remedial way of asking, "Is there any fruit in your life that demonstrates that you belong to Christ?"

The Apostle Paul reckons with this tension between faith and good works in a most clarifying way in Ephesians 2:1-10. In the first nine verses he maintains that salvation is by faith apart from works as clearly and strongly as it is done anywhere in Scripture. Yet in his next breath, in verse ten, he establishes the necessity of good works for the Christian when he says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Where then is the confusion? I would submit that the confusion isn't with the Scriptures. The confusion lies with the people of God. We welcome the free gift of salvation, but not the terms of life in Christ. I remember, even as an unbeliever, soberly considering the free offer of salvation through Christ. While I understood it was gift I couldn't earn, I nevertheless instinctively knew that my life could and would never be the same again because of the cost of discipleship. It is simply an oxymoron to call oneself a carnal or worldly Christian. There must be holy evidence. And that evidence is found in our good works, which is precisely James' point. It is not enough, he says, to wish or pray that a poor person will be well fed and warm. We must attempt to make provision for them as best we are able.

Historically it has been the people of God who built orphanages, hospitals and schools. It has been the people of God who provided a safety net for the poor. Sadly, that compelling demonstration of good works by the people of God is languishing. This has created a great vacuum that is being filled necessarily by governmental solutions that are not only inefficient but which also are far from effective. Even more troubling is that the pathway to salvation for those whom received faith-produced good works of God's people goes untraveled. The government will not and cannot bear the Gospel message.

What is our response? First, we need clarity in our understanding. Good works do not gain salvation. But second, a life of faith *without* good works is not biblical faith. If you are truly a son or daughter of God, you will hate what God hates and love what God loves. You will daily do your best to make no provision for your flesh with regard to its lust (Rom. 13:14). And you will look mercifully upon your sad, hurting, fallen world and seek to bring the redemptive provision of the Gospel to both body and soul of your fellow sojourners.

That is the place of good works in the Christian life!

Rev. Bernie Lawrence

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Please pray for Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk, and John Robertson, Business Administrator, that they will handle with wisdom, insight, and discernment the many different issues and questions that come to the Office of the Stated Clerk each week.

CTS: Remember Covenant Seminary graduates serving as missionaries and church planters around the globe, especially those in areas that are actively hostile to Christianity. Pray for the Lord's protection over these Gospel servants, and that they will reflect the character of Christ in all they do, drawing many to eternal life in Him.

MTW: Security risks continue to grow in some countries. Join in praying for the safety of missionaries and national believers, but especially for open doors for the Gospel.

RUM: Pray that RUF will be used as an instrument of change by raising up new leaders and sanctifying people for the Glory of God.

RBI: Pray that senior staff at RBI will make Christ known in their relationships with key contacts; pray that, as these relationships are deepened, spiritual growth will occur.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2013

THE GREAT WARFARE

In his closing exhortations in Ephesians 6, Paul urges God's people to "dress for battle." Because human warfare is so dangerous, it is left to professional soldiers who are trained and equipped to identify and destroy their (and our) enemies. No, this battle Paul is referring to is actually of *greater* danger yet isn't left to professional troops. It is every believer's conflict.

He says in verse 12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

What is your first impression of Paul's words? Perhaps a little sanctified hyperbole? But that can't be the case; the context doesn't permit it. Actually, Paul is calling us to a full and sober appreciation of our enemy, his tactics and the universal scope of the warfare. Our inability to fully grasp this is due in part to the fact that the war is being fiercely waged primarily in the unseen world where our physical senses don't have access. Mostly "out of sight, out of mind."

Remaining undetected is a strategic method of the enemy of our souls, variously called in Scripture the ancient serpent, the dragon, the Devil, Satan, the evil one, tempter, murderer, the accuser of the brethren, the father of lies, and the deceiver of the whole world even appearing as an angel of light. He excels at making small failures in our sanctification seem either little consequence or conversely so grievous that they are beyond the reach of the atoning work of Christ. His end game is to destroy our life with God by isolating us from the grace and mercy found only in our union with Christ. All the while, he seems nowhere to be found. Indeed, he is a strategic and cunning enemy!

And so, on one level, Paul is describing a vast spiritual war that is underway in the heavens being fought for the kingdom of God on many fronts between the forces of light and darkness. On the other, he submits that this cosmic warfare is as personal as the sum of victories and defeats for all God's people in their individual lives of sanctification. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the life of God's favored servant, Job. In Job 1-2 Satan chides that Job's love for God is conditioned upon the "good life" and nothing more. The Lord permits Satan to test his theory at great cost to Job. The entire book of Job is, on some level, the experience of one saint doing battle with the evil one and his minions, and I should hasten to add, victoriously! Job's experience may be extraordinary but it should resonate with every believer.

Paul is a good pastor. He understands the nature and danger of both the enemy and the warfare. And since what is at stake is the soul of every human being, he does not call for a volunteer army of professionals. No, Paul conscripts every believer to become a trained and equipped soldier, ready to do battle with the enemy of our souls. The defensive and offensive weaponry Paul lists in Ephesians 6:14-18 are what he describes succinctly in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses...”

Those “divinely powerful” weapons that allow us to extinguish the flaming missiles of the evil one are empowered by the “means of grace”: the Word, biblical fellowship, the sacraments and prayer.

The Apostle Paul loved the Ephesian church. He sacrificially invested several years of his life establishing her (read Acts 20:17-38). He was jealous that she prospers and not languishes. Thus, his last words to her reflect what is uppermost in his mind, a sober call to a robust awareness of the enemy of our souls and a steadfast commitment prepare for and engage in this great warfare for the souls of men through the means of grace.

We would do well to heed Paul’s advice in our own generation!

Rev. Bernie Lawrence

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the Bookstore staff: Tim Schirm, Joseph Hatcher, Dennis Bennett, John Goodman, and our shipping supervisor Mai Nguyen. Pray we will have a servant’s heart and attitude as we deal with customers, vendors, and other employees on a daily basis.

CC: Please pray for Covenant College alumni in their many and varied walks of life, that they will seek first the priorities of Christ and His Kingdom and use the gifts God has given them to serve His church with excellence and passion. Please pray for the Alumni Executive Committee as they engage the alumni community in prayer, admissions, and fundraising opportunities for Covenant.

MNA: Pray for the Network of Portuguese Speaking Churches and for Coordinator Darcy Caires as he works with the churches and their pastors to strengthen bonds and motivate them in spreading the Gospel.

PCAF: Pray that God will provide safe travel for PCA Foundation President Randy Stair in 2013 as he visits local churches, presbyteries, donors, and prospects to present our services.

RH: Pray that new doors will be opened to serve the local community surrounding Ridge Haven in the Western North Carolina area.

THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2013

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

When I was growing up, my father enforced upon his children the absolute necessity for honesty. He could be a harsh disciplinarian, but was surprisingly patient with most of our sinful patterns. There were four things he could not stand: bullying, any form of injustice, lying or being late for supper. (How lateness reached the level of mortal sin I have yet to understand!) My Father was a man of integrity.

In my sixth grade year of school, I was summoned to the principal's office on an errand. While I was away from my desk, a boy in the class slipped a filthy note onto the desk of the prettiest girl in the class. No one saw him do it. When the girl read the vile note, she took it to the teacher, who asked, "John, did you write this note?" He responded, no doubt out of fear and panic, "No! Mike Ross did!" I was sent home with a note to my father and suspended from school until he came, with me, to the principal's office.

At home, that evening, my father read the note, looked me sternly in the eye, and asked, "Mike, did you write this note?" I answered, "No, Sir!" He paused, then said, "I'm about to go and defend your name before the principal of your school. Don't shame me or lie to me. I can forgive this note; it's hard to forgive lying." I said, "Dad, on my honor, I did not write that note!"

The next day my father took off work, went to the school with me, and said to the principal, "My son did not write this note." The principle said, "Are you sure?" He answered, without a pause, "Yes, I am. He told me the truth, and we are not a family given to lying." I was returned to the classroom (incidentally, I had a "discussion" on the playground with John. He confessed to writing the note shortly after recess was over!)

Christians are often assaulted by the "accuser of the brethren" – the devil (Revelation 12:10). In these moments, our assurance of salvation falters. Sin also shakes our confidence of forgiveness; the lack of holiness always troubles the truly converted soul. In these moments, we tend to need assurance of salvation.

Assurance, like sanctification, can come from many sources (see the devotional for Day 40). Scripture can give us assurance, growing in godliness adds to our confidence in Christ, and recalling the moment we trusted Christ, and the promise of the Gospel, bolsters a flagging faith. But there is another source of salvation, a greater one, than all of these.

In Hebrews 6:13-20, the apostle informs us that God's promise of salvation to Abraham was "guaranteed" by two immutable and eternal

things. First, was God’s promise rooted, secondly, in God’s character. God made an oath to Abraham in the covenant of grace. And He rooted that oath in His own holy and righteous character. As the author of Hebrews puts it, “He swore by Himself.” Just as we lay our hand on a Bible to swear an oath, God placed His hand on Himself to seal His promise to Abraham.

In fact, God the Father placed His hands on His Son, Jesus Christ. For in Christ “all the promises of God are yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20), and Jesus is the “testator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15-17). The “two unchangeable things” – God’s promise and God’s character – are rooted in two immutable beings – the Father of Truth and the Son of Righteousness.

The next time your soul or the enemy questions your salvation and the promise of God’s grace, turn in prayer to our “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1 John 2:1). Jesus Christ will give you assurance. “My Father has made you a promise. I have died for your sins. We have given you the truth of the Gospel. And We are not a Family given to lying.”

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the Administrative Committee office staff, without whom we could not function: Bob Hornick, Wayne Herring, Angela Nantz, Sherry Eschenberg, Priscilla Lowrey, Karen Cook, Susan Cullen, Monica Johnston, Peggy Little, and Margie Mallow. Ask that in the day-to-day work of the Stated Clerk’s office each will demonstrate the mind of Christ.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary’s faculty and staff as they seek to encourage and support pastors and church leaders over the entire course of their ministries. Pray also that the Seminary will continue to provide opportunities for these leaders to grow both educationally and spiritually so that our churches will be renewed and transformed.

MTW: Pray for the continued growth and development of church-planting centers throughout the Muslim world, that our workers will help train and resource hundreds of indigenous church planters who will bring the light of the Gospel to needy areas.

RUM: Please pray that God will continue to bless our campus ministers’ work on college campuses across the United States.

RBI: Vickie Poole, Myra Davis, Sybil Pullen, Traci LaVernway, Jim Mansell, Harry Cooksey, Bonnie Nowak, Dave Anderegg, and Susan Hamnett are all important staff at RBI. As they carry out the daily work of this ministry, please pray they continue to serve our participants in love, encouraging them in the midst of trials.

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2013

THE PROMISE OF CHRIST

Most people are very reluctant to try at any endeavor when failure is guaranteed. I, myself, am like this. It both angers and frustrates me to play any game where the rules are already stacked against me, and in favor of the opponent.

Once I was summoned for jury duty when I was living in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I reported for the week-long duty, and the first day the lottery drawing pulled my juror's number. I was questioned by the defending attorney: "Sir, what do you do for a living?" I replied, "I am an ordained minister." The lawyer said, "You believe in the Ten Commandments?" I said, "Sure do!" The attorney said, "Your honor, I want to strike this juror (i.e., not use him on the jury)."

The next day my number was called again. This time a different lawyer asked, "Sir, do you think using street drugs is a sin?" I answered, "Sure do!" He said, "Your honor, I wish to strike this juror."

On Wednesday, the Judge asked if anyone needed to be excused. I said that I did. The Judge asked me why and I responded, "Because I'm a Christian pastor who believes in moral absolutes and every defending attorney will strike me, and I will sit here, all week, for nothing." "Request denied," said the Judge.

Well...you guessed it! My number was drawn but five minutes later – an uncanny third time in three days. This time it was another drug case. I was struck by the counsel for defense. I blurted out, "You see, Judge, I told you so!" The Magistrate brought his gavel down with a sudden thud, and glared at me, "Mr. Ross, you talk to me like that one more time and I'll hold you in contempt of court. This is my courtroom and in here we operate by my rules! Period!" I never did sit on a jury that week, but I sat there for five days – 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. I played by the Judge's rules.

In our sanctification, we often feel overwhelmed. In fact, each of us possessed besetting sins that never seem to "come out" or even to wane much in their power over our souls. It is easy, in moments of such spiritual failure, to want to give up. It feels like the rules are set against us and the chance of victory is zero!

Paul tells us, in 2 Corinthians 7:1 that based on the promises of God, in Christ, we have a great encouragement, even an assurance, that we will eventually become holy. He refers to "holiness to completion" that urges us on to cleansed souls and holy living. The particular promises Paul refers to are those in Leviticus 26:12 (v. 16), Isaiah 52:11 (v. 17) and 1 Chronicles 17:13 (v. 18). These three promises quoted by Paul are taken from the law

(Leviticus), the prophets (Isaiah) and the sacred writings (1 Chronicles). These are the three divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament. Paul's point? All of the Scripture promises us three things: God will be our faithful God, God will make us holy, and God will always love us as His children.

With "these promises" we do have both an assurance of ultimate salvation and an assurance of growth in holiness. We need not fear failure in sanctification. God will never leave us. Our sanctification is His sovereign work of invincible grace. Whether we are "good" or "not-so-good" He will love us as a Father loves His children. So, try, push forward, go on in grace, pick yourself up again and move toward Christ in obedience.

We live in a different world now – the Kingdom of God – with different "rules" and a beneficent Judge. When God says, "This is My courtroom and in here we operate by My rules," we can be assured that these rules are the grace of Christ, the invincible power of the Spirit, and the love of God the Father. Perhaps this is why Paul ends 2 Corinthians the way he does: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Dr. Mike Ross

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the upcoming 41st General Assembly in Greenville SC June 19-22. Pray we will work diligently to get all the resources priced, packed, and shipped safely and that sales will be great and benefit both the bookstore and the recipients.

CC: We are grateful for the Board of Trustees as they generously give of their time and energy to support the College. Please pray for their leadership in this role. Please also pray that the Lord will lead potential Board candidates to the College so that we may continue following the path He has laid out for us.

MNA: LAMP provides a system for training men for ordination in the PCA through mentoring in the local church. Pray for these men as they pursue their degrees while maintaining full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Pray that more churches will seek to be involved in the program as learning sites.

PCAF: Pray that previous and upcoming visits and presentations to local churches and presbyteries will result in new donors and churches using PCAF services in the months and years ahead.

RH: Pray not just that more people will come to Ridge Haven, but that the right people will come -- those most receptive to and in need of the message of the Gospel.

SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2013

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

One of the first Gospel songs that I learned in my youth was, *The Beauty of Jesus*. This prayer transcends generations as it expresses the on-going desire of all true believers.

*Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.
All His wonderful passion and purity;
O Thou Spirit divine, May I truly be Thine
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.*

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer to manifest the beauty of Jesus Christ. He grows within each believer the nine different virtues found in the Savior known as “the fruit of the Spirit.” In Galatians 5:22-23, there are listed: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. At the heart of our assurance as Christians is the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Its absence should tell us that the Holy Spirit has never applied His regenerating power to our lives. The Holy Spirit cannot indwell a life without evidence of His holy presence and influence. Is the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in your life?

There is a harmony built into the fruit of the Spirit. The first three: love, joy, and peace deal with our duties God-ward. The second three: patience, kindness, and goodness deal with our relationship man-ward. The last three: faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control describe our inner character self-ward. The flesh may counterfeit certain of these virtues, but it can never produce them.

I enjoyed putting out a garden of tomatoes and peppers. They were set out in a cypress wood box filled with rich soil and underground watering system. Our family enjoyed eating the fruit all summer and fall. But I never ‘grew’ the tomatoes or peppers. God Himself gave the growth. All I did was to make sure that everything was right for growth to happen.

So it is when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. He is the One responsible for growth of the fruit, but it is our responsibility to make sure that our hearts are right for growth to happen. We must, first, be sure that He has saved us and is our Savior. We then must heed v. 24, “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” We must deal with sin in our lives, that is we are to no longer gratify those passions or desires. Finally, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (v.25), that is as we grow in the Lord, and we grow in the Word we will grow in discerning the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And so as He commands us through the Scriptures, we will do it. When a sinful passion or desire rises up, we are to crucify it. When we

feel the inability to love, to be joyful or any of the other virtues, we ask the Holy Spirit to produce them within our lives.

Hear the heeding of a faithful pastor, “We must remember that the fruit is produced to be eaten, not to be admired and put on display. People around us are starving for love, joy, peace, and all the other graces of the Spirit. When they find them in our lives, they know we have something they lack. We do not bear fruit for our own consumption; we bear fruit that others might be fed and helped, and that Christ might be glorified.”

The last two verses of the hymn *The Beauty of Jesus* echo the heart’s desire of those who want the fruit of the Spirit to grow in them:

*Let my wonderful Savior be seen in me,
His amazing compassion and constancy;
His great love is my goal, By His Spirit’s control
Till my wonderful Savior be seen in me.*

*Let the fruit of the Spirit be seen in me,
Grant me grace all sufficient that I may be
True and faithful each day, Ev’ry step of the way,
Pointing souls to the Savior on Calvary.*

Rev. Bruce Creswell

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the Lord will provide all those associated with the General Assembly countless opportunities for witness to the lost, encouragement to fellow brothers and sisters, and praise to the Triune God, and that each person will use every opportunity to His glory.

CTS: Praise God for His blessing on Covenant Seminary’s newly redesigned and enhanced website and the broader worldwide visibility it provides for the institution. Pray that the site will not only help to draw more students to the Seminary, but also that the hundreds of free Gospel-centered resources available through it will bless increasing numbers of people around the world each month.

MTW: Pray for businessmen to help with new Business as Mission (BAM) startups in South Asia and the Muslim world.

RUM: Pray for new conversions.

RBI: Pray that all RBI staff will be submissive to the will of God in thought, word and action, so that our ministry will not be hindered in any way. Pray that we will work together as a team and as a family to be good overseers of the benefits we offer our clients.

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 2013

PERSEVERANCE

There was never a question in Paul's mind that God would complete His work in every Christian. When we consider "perseverance" we typically think of our own success or failure in being who God calls. Yet, perhaps we should first consider it God's perseverance to see what He began finished. Even though to us God's work in us seems slow and laborious, nevertheless His work continues unstoppably until the day of Jesus Christ. Only two events can stop this work: our earthly death or Jesus' return. Indeed, the pace of God's work in us at times seems slow, so slow we struggle to see progress and growth in it. Look closely: the growth is there. The Holy Spirit is moving us more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

The cooperative work of God and man in us to make us more like Jesus is called "sanctification." This good work of God will be carried out to completion because God began it and, our text says that God finishes what He starts. He is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2); it is He who causes us to grow. When Paul was addressing the divisions in the Corinthian church, he set the people straight when he reminded them: "For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:4-7).

Likewise, when Paul addresses the Colossian church, he reminds them where to find fullness in Christ and where growth as a Christian originates. Colossians 2:16-19, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God."

It's clear from the Bible that God will do His work in our sanctification and growth. Why then does it seem like our growth is so slow? One possible answer is that we don't cooperate with God in a way that accelerates our growth. First Timothy 6:6-7 gives us some insight into how we can fortify our perseverance and accelerate our growth, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing

into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” Did you see that clearly? “There is great gain in godliness with contentment.” Paul tells Timothy, if you want to make gains in godliness, be content. We bring nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of the world. Therefore don’t store up treasures here on earth where moth and rust destroy, but store up treasures in Heaven where neither moth nor rust can destroy (see Matthew 6:19-20).

A fire that is smoldering and about to go out needs an accelerant to become a blazing inferno. God’s Word reminds us that contentment is a spiritual growth accelerant. It sounds too easy and insignificant to be true...but it is true! So many times we spend our lives accumulating things here on earth thinking they will bring us happiness only to find out that we are discontented with what we have and slow to grow spiritually. We would be wise to cooperate with God in the spiritual growth process and live contented with what we have. The fruit of that contentment would produce great growth as we work together and join forces with God in His preserving work. Why not persevere in contentment and trust God to do His work in us...you may just find your growth in spiritual things accelerated.

Rev. Kris Decker

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for our Coordinator Stephen Estock and our Resource Coordinator Dennis Bennett as they decide what new resources should be added to our inventory and website.

CC: Please pray for the Safety and Security Department as they strive to offer the greatest protection available to faculty, staff, and students.

MNA: Pray for current PCA church plants in the Midwest and Western region, and that many more opportunities will open up to plant churches in these areas.

PCAF: Pray for safe travel of PCA Foundation staff and their supplies to and from the 2013 General Assembly in Greenville SC.

RH: Request that God speak to the hearts of many individuals and groups to volunteer a portion of their time and talents to further improving the Ridge Haven campus.

MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2013

ENDURANCE

The Christian life is sometimes characterized in the Bible as a race to be run and finished or a fight for a prize. For example, Paul asks the Corinthians, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” (1 Corinthians 9:24; also note Hebrews 12:1 and 2 Timothy 4:7). The Christian life is also described as a struggle or an athletic contest to be fought. “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). In Hebrews 10:32, we read, “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.” There are other prominent terms used to describe the Christian’s life in the world such as “labor,” “toil,” or “work” (1 Corinthians 3:8, 15:58; 2 Corinthians 11:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

Reflecting on these today makes us realize that no one can continue to run in the race, stand firm in the struggles of life, labor in ministry effectively, or handle the trials of life without endurance or perseverance. In our passage, we read, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” In this context, Jesus is answering questions that the disciples had about the end-times. Here, the word endurance means “to continue to bear up despite difficulty and suffering; to bear up, to demonstrate endurance, to put up with.”

The *American Heritage* dictionary defines perseverance (closely synonymous to endurance) as “steady persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose; steadfastness.” It defines endurance as “the act, quality, or power of withstanding hardship or stress,” “the state or act of persevering.”

The important question is where does the power for endurance come from? The writer and theologian John Owen addressed this question and speaks profoundly in his work called, “Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance.” Though this is a long quote, it is worth prayerful reflection:

“The main foundation of that which we plead for is the eternal purpose of God, which His own nature requires to be absolutely unchangeable. The eternal act of the will of God designing some to salvation by Christ, for the praise of the glory of His grace, is the bottom of the whole, even that foundation which stands forever, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows them that are His’ In Him and for His sake, as God graciously, powerfully, and freely gives His Holy Spirit; faith, and all the things that accompany salvation, to all them whom He accepts and pardons, by being made sin for them and righteousness unto them, so he takes

them into an everlasting covenant that shall not be broken, and has given them innumerable promises that He will continue to be their God for ever, and preserve them to be His people. To this end, because the principle of grace and living to Him, is a thing in its own nature, changeable and liable to failing, He does, according to His promise, and for the accomplishment of His purpose, daily make out to them, by His Holy Spirit, from His great treasury, the Lord Jesus Christ, helps and supplies, increasing of faith, love, holiness, recovering them from the falls, healing their backsliding, strengthening them with all might, according to His glorious power; so preserving them by His power through faith unto salvation.”

According to Jesus, the endurance needed to be saved is a grace-enabled, joyful obedience to be desired and practiced by every true believer. As new creatures in Christ, endurance is a gospel-obedience enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we embrace the promise that our covenant God will faithfully keep us to the end by His power, we can confidently press on in our fight against our enemies, the world, the devil and the flesh. Happy is the believer who is secure in the promise that no matter what trial, fight or temptation he faces, God will bring him safely home to Himself in the end.

Rev. Mike Miller

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Ask the Lord to grant traveling mercies and security and safety to the Commissioners and their families before, during, and after the Assembly.

CTS: Pray that the Lord will build upon the strongly biblical, pastoral, confessional, and missionally focused foundation He has laid at Covenant Seminary so that the institution will continue to produce church leaders who are faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Westminster Confession, and rooted in grace for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

MTW: Ask God to comfort missionaries who have recently lost loved ones, especially when they are separated from family.

RUM: Pray that God will raise these students up to be effective and fruitful churchmen.

RBI: Pray that the Lord will continue to bring the needs of our participants to the attention of RBI, and give us wisdom to develop solutions and come alongside them for those needs.

TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2013

FROM GLORY TO GLORY

One of the many ministries of the Holy Spirit is to show us the glory of Jesus Christ. To “see” the glory of an object is to ascribe to it the worth and value inherent to it; not to fill a glory-deficit but to recognize what is already present. Amazingly, when we behold the glory of Jesus Christ, *our* glory-deficit is filled – we are transformed from one degree of glory to another into the image of Christ by beholding Him!

Believers aren’t alone. In our passage, Paul reminds the Corinthians about Moses and the Ten Commandments recalling Exodus 34 when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face shining with heavenly glory. When the people saw his face they were frightened so he covered it with a veil. The veil hid the glory from them. Like those who feared the glory of God, the glory of the Lord is still hidden from many of our unbelieving friends and family. Paul says, not that we veil it, but there is a veil over it. Notice what Paul says in verse 14, “their minds were hardened” and change only happened when they see Jesus Christ; there is a veil over their minds. He repeats this in verse 15 and 16, when a person turns to the Lord veil is lifted.

Verse 17 says the Spirit is the Lord, the Holy Spirit; He is the Spirit of Jesus. He is the One who liberates people from their blindness and opens their hearts to see His glory. Paul mentions the Gentile unbelievers in chapter 4:3-4, “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, the god of this world has blinded their minds.” The devil has blinded their minds.

“Let light shine out of darkness”! God Himself shines into our hearts the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Paul contrasts those unbelievers with the believers in verse 18 saying “we all with *unveiled* face.” We are not like unbelievers. Our faces are not veiled but rather we gaze upon the glory of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, Moses is the only one who saw it. Today every believer sees the glory!

How do we see it? As we read the scriptures that testify of Jesus Christ, we see Him, this Christ who is beautifully portrayed in the Bible. The One who humbled Himself (Philippians 2), the One who served people in their need, not to be served but to serve, who healed people, fed the multitude, even washed the disciples’ feet. The One who loved His enemies (Matthew 5-7). This is the Jesus we see, trust in and imitate as the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Christ.

Paul says that as we gaze upon Jesus Christ in the scriptures, the Holy Spirit changes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. We are *being* transformed (it is a verb). Paul is not thinking of Moses now but of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (see Mark 9:2-8). It doesn’t fade but increases from one degree to another, getting brighter and brighter. Let’s be careful not to think that we attain

perfection in this life. But in the Christian life we are not at a standstill, rather we are being changed, and we should expect to go on being changed; as John Stott has put it, “a progressive metamorphosis.”

How does this happen? Paul says from the Lord who is the Spirit. We are being made like Christ by Christ, through the Holy Spirit (vv. 17, 18); it is foremost the inward work of the Holy Spirit.

The question for us today is, “Do you long for a deep inward change of character, to be like Jesus Christ?” Fear not: we are being transformed into the image of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. He is the Christ-centered Spirit.

Long for the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh this day.

Rev. Mike Miller

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the daily conversations and contacts that the CEP Bookstore staff have with church employees, volunteers, pastors, and missionaries. Pray that the Lord will bless the bookstore staff with wisdom, compassion, and the clarity needed in discussing books and resources to meet the needs of each person and congregation.

CC: Please pray for students, faculty, and staff as they travel off-campus to locations throughout the world for study abroad and mission opportunities, including Break on Impact mission trips, May Term study abroad programs, and summer internships. Pray that they will learn to appreciate new cultures and be able to navigate cultural barriers. Pray that they will graciously interact with their hosts and share the good news of the Gospel with those they meet.

MNA: Each year MNA receives from PCA churches a special Thanksgiving Offering, which provides grants to help support those who have been called by God to minister to communities of need across North America. Please pray that these grants fulfill the goal of mentoring tomorrow’s leaders and reaching communities not normally served by the PCA.

PCAF: Pray for the men who will serve on the PCA Foundation’s Committee of Commissioners, that they will have a heart for and an understanding of the work and services necessary to help financially support God’s Kingdom, and that they will make wise and proper decisions regarding business related to General Assembly.

RH: Pray that the Lord will watch over the faithful believers of Ridge Haven’s residential community, particularly those elderly residents facing health challenges.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2013

HIDDEN IN GOD

The phrase “your life is hidden with Christ in God” is difficult to understand and communicate. The real focus of these verses is the true life of the believer which truly is hidden in God. This real life has its revealed fulfillment ultimately when Christ appears. The difficulty in understanding these verses is when you try to explain how a believer’s true life is hidden with Christ in God.

“Is hidden” could be interpreted as “has not yet been revealed,” since this would appear to be in line with the explanation of this meaning as it occurs in verse 4. Just as He has not yet been fully revealed, since we are in union with Him, the same is true for us. “With Christ” is rightly understood to be “beside the Christ.” This carries the idea that we are seen with or beside Christ as His possession. When God looks at Jesus, He sees us and when He looks at us, He sees Jesus. God is the one who authored and caused this union that brings life to the believer which will only fully be revealed when Christ appears. When He appears, we will appear. “In God” can be understood as “related to God” or “in relationship with God.” “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” may, therefore, be understood as “your real life, namely, Christ’s true possession in the intimate family of God, has not yet been fully revealed.”

The practical outworking of these truths is given for us in Colossians 3:1-4. Because we have been (already completed) raised with Christ, we should seek the things above and set our minds on things where Christ is seated. These verses and many others call us to focus on the Kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of men. For example, Matthew 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” And Matthew 6:20, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

We are also to remember where Christ is seated...at the right hand of God where (Hebrews 7:25). Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Jesus is the exact representation of God’s Glory (Heb. 1:3), the accomplisher of our redemption by paying for sins once (Heb. 10:12), the founder and perfecter of our faith who joyfully endured the cross (Heb. 12:2), and Jesus at the right hand of God “with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).

We are told not to do some things as well. We are not to set our minds on things of this earth (see Colossians 1:2b). What could these

earthly things be? In broad categories, they can be summarized in 1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

In summary, we no longer belong to the world, but to Christ; and the sources of life that we enjoy come only from Him. The Christian life is a life that is revealed and hidden. As far as the world goes, our life is an “unseen life” because the world does not know Christ (see 1 John 4:1–6). Our true home and life is not found here on earth but in heaven; and the things that appeal to us and animate us belong to heaven, not to earth. This does not mean that we should ignore our earthly responsibilities rather it means that our purposes and our strength come from heaven, not earth.

Rev. Kris Decker

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Please pray that the Holy Spirit will draw the Assembly together in unity of heart, vision, and a deep desire to glorify Jesus Christ. Pray that His unity will pervade the Assembly gatherings during worship, committee meetings, business sessions and beyond. And join us in praise to God the Almighty for His grace, mercy, and care. To His Name be all honor and glory.

CTS: Pray that God will continue to raise up faithful ministry partners to help fund Covenant Seminary’s operating expenses, student scholarships, and other needs, so that this ministry will remain healthy and productive—by His grace and for His glory. (The Seminary’s fiscal year ends on June 30, 2013.)

MTW: Pray that believers will recognize the need for full-time Muslim outreach workers in the US and that they will provide financial and prayer support for these workers.

RUM: Pray for the health and protection of all campus ministers and their families.

RBI: Pray for revival for Christians and non-Christians alike; pray for a true yearning for God within our denomination and throughout the world.

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2013

RESURRECTION: NEW HUMANITY...NEW WORLD

1 Corinthians 15 has to be one of my favorite chapters in the Bible for at least three reasons. First, the Gospel's preeminence and essence are put forward in a single verse! We read in verse 3, "For I delivered to you of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..." How profoundly simple and magnificent!

Second, Paul's argument for the veracity of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ (and ours) is put forward as if he were an attorney defending it passionately before a deliberating jury! His argument is overwhelmingly convincing. It takes the wind out of the sails of Bible critics who deny the miracles found in the Scripture. No, Paul says, if the resurrection didn't happen, there is no Gospel! If it isn't true, we who believe in Christ's resurrection are to be pitied above all men, for we are still in our sins. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

I have a third reason for loving this passage: its profound, confident promise of a life with God in eternity. I preach my share of believers' funerals. All I have to offer a grieving family is the Bible's unqualified, bold promise that their loved one is in heaven and that his body will one day be resurrected and united to his spirit to live forever with God in the new heaven and new earth. My confidence as a minister is derived from this passage and others like it. Without such passages of Scripture, I should find another vocation, for my words intended for comfort would be vain and leave people with false hope!

Our limited and poor knowledge and anticipation of our life with God after death in the new heaven and earth is an unfortunate theological poverty among evangelical Christians in America. I am sympathetic to it: American Christians (like me) are seemingly too busy to think about heaven. Life on this earth is too pressing, difficult and demanding. Whatever margins one has are already spoken for. Or at least we think and act like it is so.

But then a critical illness or even sudden death forces its way onto the center stage of our lives demanding our attention. And *that* is where our lack of familiarity betrays us. I tell our people that calamity rarely announces itself but it always comes; it is only a question of when. To be ready for it either personally or on behalf of one upon whom it falls requires that we become familiar with what the Scriptures promise.

We recently completed preaching through a significant series in the book of Revelation. I had the privilege of preaching about the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21. I realized in my preparation that I had not spent sufficient time over the years thoroughly examining what the Scriptures teach and promise about our eternal future. As I prepared, I was awakened to just how profoundly

wonderful that future is and how much the Lord wants us to anticipate eternity with Him. It has caused me to read about and contemplate it more. That has been an edifying experience!

So, let me urge you to make time to examine what the Scriptures teach about the resurrection, the new humanity and the new heaven and earth. Read a good book on the topic. (Randy Alcorn's *Heaven* would be a good place to start.) Allow the Lord to stir up your affection and anticipation. It is nearer than you think! I am confident you will find that a byproduct of your study will be a greater perseverance in your present sanctification as a fallen man or woman in a fallen world. Our knowledge and anticipation of future realities has present-tense relevance! That is why the Apostle Paul concludes his clarifying instruction on the resurrection with these words, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Rev. Bernie Lawrence

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the effective use of our website www.cepbookstore.com to share our books and resources with as many people as possible in the US and around the world.

CC: Please pray for our international students, students from missionary families, and all diversity students who often face cultural challenges in their transition. Pray that Covenant, and especially those who work closely with the Cultural Diversity Program, will provide an environment that is open and comfortable while celebrating and mirroring the varied textures of the world God has created. Pray that students build relationships, gain support and encouragement, and experience a true fellowship of looking out for one another while fully engaging and serving in the greater Covenant and Chattanooga communities.

MNA: Pray for the entire MNA support staff as they carry out the behind-the-scenes activities that undergird the work of the MNA leadership.

PCAF: Pray that the PCA Foundation's report to General Assembly will be informative and that Commissioners will be supportive of our ministry through prayer and encouraging words, and make wise decisions concerning the PCAF's business.

RH: Pray that the Lord receives the glory in everything, and that it is always abundantly clear that any blessings come straight from Him, far beyond any human efforts.

EPILOGUE

Growing up in my home meant having a soccer ball at your feet almost all the time – I don't think we heard “no balls in the house!” Some of my earliest memories are on the soccer pitch! As I grew older and began to play on select and school teams, eventually my dad, “Pop,” became my coach. Though retired now, through his years of coaching since 1980 Pop logged over 620 wins in high school soccer. I was blessed to have such a “personal trainer”!

One tool he used to galvanize upstart high school students into successful teams was what he called “The Five.” In my time that meant: seniors, underclassmen, offense, defense and discipline. All the elements in an unbroken chain yielded championship teams. When any one of the links in that chain grew weak or broken, the team suffered not just in a loss but in its *heart*. Like many coaches, Pop didn't always have star players, but when he was able to get 18 boys or girls to live by this chain, they found victory and satisfaction.

“The Five” was a great tool Pop used to build teams and earn success. For these 50 days, we have walked through a far more glorious “Five”: the golden chain of salvation, the *ordo salutis*. The apostle Paul records in Romans 8:29-30 the “Five” large movements of God's grace from eternity to eternity: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification. To those, we logically add: regeneration, faith, repentance, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance.

Just as I was privileged to play for Pop for all those years, I am privileged to join Dr. Ross and my brothers in ministry in writing and editing these devotions. Indeed, our time demands a studied consideration of these things. The time for men in pulpits to rise up with the prophets of old to preach the saving work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in its fullness is now. Our prayer all along has been that you also would see your faith revived, your hope kindled and your love strengthened as you consider what God has done to give us life in Him.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Rev. Gabe Sylvia



The pastoral staff of Christ Covenant Church, from left to right: (bottom row) Bruce Creswell, Bernie Lawrence, Andrew Holbrook; (top row) Kris Decker, Mike Ross, Mike Miller, Gabe Sylvia.

