



FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

50 Days of Prayer for the PCA

May 3 – June 21, 2007

“O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and gray hairs, O God,
do not forsake me, until I proclaim your
 might to another generation,
Your power to all those to come.”

Psalm 71:17,18





Devotional text by Michael F. Ross
Edited by Fred Marsh
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- In Dedication -



MARGIE ANN ROSS

My dearest mother, who taught me as a youth
the Creed, the Commandments and the Lord's Prayer,
and in so doing introduced me to my Father in heaven
and to the Faith of our Fathers.

and

JANE VIRDEN ROSS

My loving wife, who helped me teach our four children
these Three Formulae, so that the Faith of our Fathers
might become the Faith of our children.







Faith of Our Fathers



Faith of our fathers! Living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword:
O how our hearts beat high with joy,
Whene'er we hear that glorious word:
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

Our fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience free:
And truly blest would be our fate,
If we, like them, should die for thee.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our fathers! faith and prayer
Shall win all nations unto thee;
And through the truth that comes from God,
Mankind shall then indeed be free.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

Faith of our fathers! we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife:
And preach thee, too, as love knows how,
By kindly deeds and virtuous life.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

F. W. Faber, 1849





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INTRODUCTION

Our readings for this year's Fifty Days of Prayer are based upon what has traditionally become known as the Three Formulae (plural of "formula"). Historically, the Three Formulae comprise, ironically, four aspects of basic Christian instruction: the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Added to these three basics of Christian doctrine, duty, and devotion was instruction on Baptism, the entrance rite into the Church and the inauguration of the Christian way of life. These Three Formulae form the basis for almost all of the catechisms and confessions of Western Christendom.

The *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* organizes itself around the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Luther's famous *Small Catechism* covers nothing but these three formulae. Our own *Westminster Shorter Catechism* and its companion, the *Larger Catechism*, divide themselves into four sections: questions 1-38 cover doctrine or creedal content (LC 1-90); questions 39-84 cover the Ten Commandments (LC 91-152); questions 85-97 cover the means of grace, including baptism (LC 153-177); and finally, questions 98-107 cover the Lord's Prayer (LC 178-196).

For centuries, Christian pastors and parents have catechized the children of the Church using the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer—the Three Formulae. What perhaps is needed in this twenty-first century is a rediscovery of three traditions of the Church: the value of catechisms, confessions, and creeds; the benefit of catechizing the children of the Church; and the need for adult instruction in the same Three Formulae. James I. Packer states exactly this in the introduction to his book on the Three Formulae, by the title *I Want to Be a Christian: Instruction for Christians and Would-be Christians*. (This book has been revised and republished under the new title *Growing in Christ*, Wheaton, Ill. Crossway Books, 1994.) Here is what Packer observes: "One great need today is a renewal of the catechumenate for adults. It need not be called that, nor need it take the form of rigid drilling in preset formulae, which is how old-time Protestants catechized children; but somehow or other opportunities for folk in and just outside the churches to examine Christian essentials must be given, because there are so many for whom this is a prime need."¹

In 1998 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the last vestige of conservative Lutheranism in America, urged its member congregations "not to substitute informal statements of faith for regular use of the three historic Christian creeds." It seems that the Church Growth Movement and modern leadership training in seminaries encouraged pastors to write their own creeds, in violation of these Lutheran pastors' ordination vows. Commenting on this issue, LCMS minister Jack Cascione wrote, "The question for Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is: What did Luther say about the impor-

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tance of creeds in view of all the Lutheran pastors and congregations who are now inventing and confessing their own creeds?”² Cascione concluded from his study of Luther’s written works:



1. Luther demanded that the words of the creeds and formulas of the Church remain unchanged—nothing added or deleted.
2. Luther equated the Three Formulae with the Gospel and basic Christian truth.
3. Luther saw the Three Formulae as the most important message of the Church.
4. Luther understood the Creeds, the Law, and the Lord’s Prayer as the basis for evangelism and conversion.
5. Luther urged that the Three Formulae be the basis for prayer.
6. Luther saw the Three Formulae as God’s power to preserve the true Church.

Here is but one illustrative comment by Luther: “For I have enough and more than enough revelations when I know what is to be believed, and what is to be hoped for, and what consideration is to be paid to others, and in what way one should pass this life in a godly and honest manner. And this, in accordance with my slender gifts, I communicate to others so that they may know and understand the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer, etc.”³

Perhaps the same concerns could be voiced in the Presbyterian Church in America. Has the Church Growth Movement pushed us to the point where we seldom read the Ten Commandments and recite a public prayer of confession of sins in the worship service? When was the last time, in your local PCA church, you jointly recited the Apostles’ Creed or prayed the Lord’s Prayer? It may well be that in our search for more people we have concocted a basic but bland Christian expression devoid of the historicity and traditional richness of the Three Formulae.

Ninna Jorgensen, in an essay delivered in 1998 at the Symposium on Oral Perspectives, hosted by the Odense University’s Center for Medieval Studies, reminds us how foundational the Three Formulae were to the Western Church and culture. She maintains that Christianity was taught primarily in an oral manner during the middle of the thirteenth century. “Christianity was taught orally through the repetition aloud of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer,” Jorgensen writes.⁴ Manuals for priests, as aids in confronting heresy, were created to help understand and memorize the Three Formulae. These mnemonic-manuals were the middle ages’ precursor to the catechisms and confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

When Jude tells us to “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), he is reminding us that the Church will forever need to



bring to remembrance both the written Scripture and the oral traditions of Creed, Commandments, and “the” Prayer. We have not advanced so far in our postmodern world that the knowledge, memory, and understanding of the historic Three Formulae are no longer important. Quite the contrary.

The Westminster Divines subjoined the Creed, the Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer to their catechisms, “not because they believed the Creed to be composed by the Apostles, but because it is a brief sum of Christian belief agreeable to the Word of God and anciently received in the churches of Christ.’ It was retained by the framers of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States as part of our Catechism.”⁵ The PCA’s neglect of these Three Formulae runs counter to our reformed heritage. It is not just Lutherans, Catholics, and Anglicans who appreciate these historic tools for passing on the faith. We Presbyterians esteem them highly as well.

Ours is an age in which jaw-dropping ignorance about dogma, ethics, and piety is rampant. The average “Christian” has slipped back to such a base and carnal expression of faith that little in modern evangelicalism resembles the faith of our fathers. When the most popular preachers in America are health and wealth teachers who promise us our “best life now” and “release” for women from who knows what, it is time to take stock in just what our people are learning—or not learning!

In this devotional we cannot and will not cover the Three Formulae in depth or in a catechetical manner, as they deserve. But we will seek to show how their topics, truths, and themes touch upon our daily lives. It is the hope of the author of this small booklet that all who read it will be motivated to turn to creeds, confessions, catechisms, and books on the Three Formulae for use in their daily devotional lives and personal study. Who knows? Perhaps some *adults* may even be motivated to memorize the *Shorter Catechism* over the next few years. This is a challenge not beyond most of us.

The beauty and benefit of knowing the Three Formulae may be illustrated by a story I heard as a child. Whether or not it is true, I do not know. But it is that story which motivated me to select Jean-Leon Gerome’s famous painting for the cover of this booklet. That work of art is titled *The Christian Martyrs’ Last Prayer*. It hangs in its original oil in the Walter’s Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland. A print hangs on the wall of my pastor’s study, and it also serves as the screen saver for my laptop computer. It reminds me of the moving story I was once told.

It seems that an aging pastor and his small flock of Christians were led out into the Roman Colosseum to be torn to pieces by wild beasts. The old pastor gathered the little church together for final prayer and spiritual strength to face martyrdom. As they prayed, a hush fell over the great arena. As in our huge stadiums of college football, a large crowd can often become deathly still. In those moments a lone voice, deprecating the referee or urging on the home team, can sometimes be heard throughout the arena. So it was

that day in Rome.

A voice cried out in taunting delight, “What do you have to say for yourself now, old man?” The crowd noise died to a hush. In response, the old pastor lifted up his head and his hands, his face lit with the serene glory of a witness for Jesus about to die for the Faith. And in a voice that began with a quiver of fear, but grew louder and stronger by the moment, the old pastor shouted out:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

At the close of his confession of faith the crowd sat in stunned silence. Then he led the saints in this final prayer...together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

As their prayer concluded, the beasts struck—swift, strong, savagely. The crowd erupted in an orgy of cheers and screams. In a matter of minutes it was over. God answered their prayer before all of Rome. He delivered them from evil—the world—and took them home to heaven where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit waited for them.

They died as they had lived—by the Creed, by the Commandments, by the Lord’s Prayer. These Three Formulae in life had been their three anchors in death: doctrine, duty, and devotion. May our Fifty Days of Prayer help prepare us to meet life and death with the same confidence as the martyrs of old. Profession of Faith, Practical Ethics, and Piety are what we need in this American hour. How will you answer, when the world asks you, “Christian, what do you believe?”

Michael F. Ross
Trinity Presbyterian Church
Jackson, Mississippi



COMMITTEES & AGENCIES

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





DAY 1

THURSDAY, MAY 3

THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

Read Jude 1-4

THE THREE *FORMULAE*

“I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Jude 3

This past fall, two back-to-back issues of *Christianity Today* appeared on the magazine stand. The first had as its cover article “Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is making a comeback—and shaking up the church” (September 2006). It told of how the twenty-somethings were turning in large numbers to a “more reformed” expression of their faith. The leaders of the movement were reported, and what a mixed bag they were: Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, Charismatics, and Baptist General Conference clergymen.

The next issue was a fascinating review of evangelicalism, with cameo pieces on John R. W. Stott, James I. Packer, and Billy Graham. This issue set forth the reality of evangelicalism’s liquid theology and flexible core. The articles left one to wonder where evangelicalism will end up in another two or three decades.

Most of us have experienced the head-scratching, bewildering, and unpleasant shifts occurring in many conservative churches. We are watching philosophies of life pervade the church, whose primary emphasis is on our own satisfaction, effectively replacing the first question of the *Shorter Catechism* as the answer to “man’s chief end.” A new generation has arisen who want contemporary music, what they consider to be authentic worship, deeper relationships, truthful preaching (but some want it not too prophetic or long), mercy ministry, and a mixture of traditions (creeds and prayers) from the ancient Church alongside what many would consider gospel rock. These influences impact each PCA congregation more than we could ever imagine.

In the midst of these changes, is there anything we could grab hold of, across the generations, that would give us a faith to cling to in common? Is there a “faith of our fathers” that can still be embraced as the faith of our sons or grandsons? Are there “things which are most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1, KJV) that can bring the War generation, the Boomers and Busters, Generation X, and “Generation Next” together? I believe so. And those things are found in the traditional and historic Three *Formulae*: the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.

These three formulations of profession, practice, and piety have evolved over time and the history of the Church. David S. Schaff, professor of the Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, wrote in 1914, “The articles of the Christian faith, as they appear in formulated creedal statements, are the product now of devotion to Christ and now of zeal for the Church. How far, in the motive of zeal for the Church, the elements of pure piety were active and how far hierarchal and partisan ambition, it is not easy if at all possible exactly to determine. They have an experimental, a philosophical, and an ecclesiastical aspect; now one element predominates, now another.”¹

Perhaps Schaff has hit the nail on the head. Could it be that the philosophical principles of the founding fathers of the PCA and the ecclesiastical points of the present generation of PCA leaders are being “tweaked” by the experiential hunger of younger Christians? If so, then a study of and deeper appreciation for the Three Formulae can do nothing but help us grow together in “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Let us, nevertheless, despite the tensions between our generations, be assured that there is a definite faith once and forever given by the Spirit, through the Apostles, to the Church. We need not reinvent the Faith. We need only to rediscover and recover it. That is the thrust of these fifty days of prayer and this devotional guide. May God grant us grace to fall in love, once again, with our “holy religion.”²

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 students currently pursuing Master of Divinity (MDiv) degrees at Covenant Theological Seminary. Pray that their studies will spark renewed fire in their hearts for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that their enthusiasm for and joy in the Lord will be infectious, inspiring revived faith in the congregations and other ministries to which the Spirit will lead them after graduation.

MTW: Pray for the fledgling Presbyterian Church in India, ordained its first pastors in March 2007. Ask God to bless and empower these deeply committed men by His Spirit.

RUM: Please pray for the Atlanta-based office staff of RUM as they provide administrative support to the 101 campuses across the country. Pray that they will have fresh encounters with Jesus as they serve behind the scenes.

RBI: Please pray for the spiritual growth of RBI staff as they are challenged in their faith while serving in their various responsibilities.

DAY 2
FRIDAY, MAY 4

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION

“Hold to the tradition that you were taught by us,
either by our spoken word or by our letter.”

2 Thessalonians 2:15

Tradition is a bad word nowadays for many. In fact, *traditional* now gives the connotation to many of that which is stodgy, irrelevant, boring, and dead. Many speak of *contemporary* worship as good, while curling the lip at *traditional* worship. Compounding these problems is that words do change their meaning in these postmodern times, in which the deconstruction of language is common fare.

Paul the Apostle uses the word *tradition* five times in his epistles, and only once in a negative sense (Col. 2:8). His use of the word *tradition* includes ethics, marriage relationships, doctrine, lifestyle, and spiritual heritage—all good things, if according to the Word of God. What our generation needs is a good dose of tradition. There is an arrogance of the modern that looks down on all that we might call traditional—as if anyone old, any age ancient, and any practice timeless could never amount to anything worthwhile.

James I. Packer agrees. Our generation’s greatest theologian and pastoral author has a profound respect for tradition, as we should. Some may think his devotion to the traditions of the Church is rooted in his Anglicanism and the fact that he is, after all, an Englishman. But an honest and fair hearing of Packer reveals that he sees tradition as a gift from God to offset the shallowness and silliness of our postmodern age. He recognizes that we Evangelicals have always been enamored with “the new.” We are frankly idolatrous when it comes to numbers, “growth,” and size—we like it BIG! And we act as if we were the first ones ever to read and interpret Scriptures. Tradition offsets the pride of our modernity.

In fact, J. I. Packer sees four distinct benefits to tradition. The four benefits help to deepen, develop, defend, and direct the Church of the twenty-first century. Here are Packer’s “Four Rs” of tradition:³

- *Roots*: Tradition reminds us that we are becoming what we will be because of what we have been. Our faith is rooted in a people and events of the past.
- *Realism*: Tradition gives us a factual (historical) view of the issues we face and reminds us that we are not the first generation to face



such challenges.

- *Resources:* Tradition helps us meet the issues of our day head-on with the wisdom gathered from four millennia of grace, faith and the Spirit.
- *Reminders:* Tradition will not let us forget the successes and failures of the past. History is a great teacher.

The older I become the more I come to believe that all our struggles of faith and doctrine are answered by the Apostles' Creed and the great confessions of the Church. The more I face issues of morality, ethics, government, gender, and lifestyle the more certain I am of the wisdom and power of the Decalogue. And the more I run into spiritual warfare, spiritual discipline, and spiritual disorientation the more I find myself turning to the Lord's Prayer. These three traditions have shaped the early Church, grounded the medieval Church and refocused the reformed Church. They can guide, guard, and govern the modern Church if we will just be humble enough to listen to them. Remember—"a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Dennis Bennett as he coordinates the training for the denomination in areas of *Equip* Conferences, Regional Trainers, Presbytery Reps, Distance Education, Church Based Ordination, and so on.

CC: The college is completing preparations for a reaffirmation of its accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Much work is required to certify compliance with general principles and to make plans for measured improvement. Please pray for our ability to complete this task in the desired manner.

MNA: Pray that the vision to reach out to Native American/First Nations peoples will catch fire within our churches and presbyteries.

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

RH: Pray for the spiritual health and vitality of the Ridge Haven staff, that each one will give daily attention to his or her personal relationship with the Lord and continually look to Him, rest in Him, and serve Him.



DAY 3

Read 2 Peter 1:1-21

SATURDAY, MAY 5

THE QUEST FOR AUTHORITY

“I think it right, as long as I am in this body,
to stir you up by way of reminder,
since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon.”

2 Peter 1:13-14

The Apostle Peter wrote from the city of Rome, more than likely from a prison cell, his final letter to the churches (c. 67-68 A.D.) It was a letter about doctrine, duty, and discipline, and about false teachers and the challenges of heresy, immorality, and impiety. Like its twin epistle, Jude, Second Peter serves as a warning against infidelity and an exhortation for God’s saints to diligence in the midst of difficult times.

In Second Peter 1:12-15, the leader of the apostolic church acknowledges the coming crisis for the early Church: the quest for authority. With the death of the apostles, the Church would be without the living eyewitness to the Gospel, handpicked and trained by Jesus Himself. The crisis would then become the issue of authority: Who would decide what was true or false, right or wrong, godly or godless? The Holy Spirit would guide the fledgling Church into a tradition of doctrine (*creed*), discipline (*commandments*), and devotion (*the Lord’s Prayer*).

In his book *A History of Christianity in the World: from Persecution to Uncertainty*, historian Clyde L. Manschreck recounts how the Church answered the quest for authority: “The struggle was bitter, complicated by the persecutions, eschatological expectations, burgeoning missions, and invading ideas. But, by the end of the second century the Christian community had an organized clergy, a creed, and a canon. Excrescences and deviations had been answered. A set authority (creed and canon) and a fluid authority (the clergy) had been established. Although these authorities, later designated Scripture and Tradition, often have been buffeted and blemished, they have basically shaped Christianity for 2,000 years.”⁴

In the *Didache* (teaching), known to us as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles: The Lord’s Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, these basic authorities are clearly set forth. Written circa 120 A.D. by some anonymous author(s), this early Church document reveals how Christianity was being shaped by Scripture and Tradition. It also reflects the genesis of the Three Formulae. The Liturgy of St. James (the Jerusalem Church), the earliest church liturgy, recites both the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. In the ensuing years most Western and Eastern liturgies would include creeds, the Lord’s Prayer, and sometimes the use of the Commandments (as confession

of sins).

Perhaps when Peter wrote his last epistle in the waning days of his earthly life he anticipated that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church into a set clergy, canon, and creed. And in the wake of Scripture and Tradition would come the Commandments (from the canon), the Apostles' Creed (from the clergy), and the Lord's Prayer (from the Christ) to guide and grace the Church for centuries to come. We do well to honor the apostles' memory and to obey their teaching by turning often to the Three Formulae—our profession of belief, our practice of holy living, and our pattern for piety.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Pray for Covenant Theological Seminary's graduating seniors as they candidate for ministry positions this spring and summer. Pray that God will give candidates and search committees great wisdom in this process, and that He will use their efforts to advance His Kingdom, bringing new hope or renewed faith to many.

MTW: Mission to the World's third Global Missions Conference will be held Nov 16 - 18 in Atlanta. Pray that planning and preparations will be done well, attendance will be strong, and God will use this time to expand our vision and glorify Himself.

RUM: RUF Campus Minister Reverend Dustin Salter went to be with the Lord on Monday, March 19, four months after falling from his bike and hitting his head in Greenville, South Carolina. Dustin was the RUF Campus Minister at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, for 9 years before his most recent ministry as Campus Minister at Furman University. His wife, Leigh Anne, and children Jacob (9), Nathan (7), and Meredith (2) will reside in Fort Worth, Texas, and are members of Fort Worth Presbyterian. Please pray for the Lord to provide emotional and spiritual consolation as well as continued material provision for the Salter family in the days to come. Also pray for the many TCU and Furman students, Dustin's many colleagues and friends in RUF, his extended family, and all who grieve over this loss.

RBI: RBI provides the denomination with benefit plans for life and disability insurance and retirement. Please pray for the staff of RBI as they serve pastors, lay staff, and missionaries who are recipients of these benefit plans.





THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Amen.



DAY 4
SUNDAY, MAY 6

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-16

THE NECESSITY OF DOCTRINE

“You will be a good servant of Christ Jesus,
being trained in the words of the faith
and of the good doctrine that you have followed.”



1 Timothy 4:6

There are two words that dominate Paul’s Pastoral Epistles. One is *didaskalia* (teaching, doctrine, instruction), used 15 times. The other is *eusebeia* (piety, devotion, religion, godliness), used 10 times. There is therefore an incredible balance to the apostle’s approach to the Christian life: knowing and doing. Ours, unfortunately, is not a balanced age.

David F. Wells, the Andrew Mutch Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (South Hampton, Massachusetts) describes our age as “the world cliché culture.” He states that between the mid-nineteenth century and our day, there lies a great divide. The culture known as “the West” lives on the far side and a new, emerging culture yet to be defined is being born on the near side. “On the other side of the divide, Judeo-Christian values were central to Western culture, even if they were not always believed personally. On our side of the divide, such values have been dislodged and replaced with a loose set of psychological attitudes that we now know as modernity.”⁵

In Paul’s language, what Wells is describing is the search for *eusebeia* (piety, devotion to God, religion) without the underpinning of *didaskalia* (doctrine or theology). The result is pitiful pandemonium in the Church—the likes of what we see on television or find mirrored in our new-age neighbors who concoct their own “spirituality.”

Wells gives deeper insight as to why theology is so important. “In the past Western society was held together by three sinews: tradition, authority, and power.... Of these three, tradition might have been the first to go, although it went hand in hand with authority. Tradition is the process whereby one generation inducts its successor into its accumulated wisdom, love, and values.... At the same time, society finds that it can no longer recognize appeals to authority, for any transcendent realm in which these appeals might be lodged has vanished from sight.... The three tendons have thus been reduced. Tradition and authority have been severed; only power remains. It is power alone that must direct our corporate life, power severed from a moral order that might contain and correct it and from the values of the past that might inform it.” Wells goes on to state that the rise of the



legal profession is proof of power filling the vacuum left by tradition and authority. Seventy percent of all lawyers in the world practice in America! “Now we are left with only the lawyers. ‘It is a terrible thing,’ Solzhenitsyn said, ‘to live in a society (such as that in the former Soviet Union) where there is no law’; it is also a terrible thing to live in a society (such as that in America) where there are only lawyers.”⁶ Wells’ purpose here is not to take a gratuitous swipe at what many practice as an honorable profession, but to make the point that when tradition and authority are abandoned, we lose our moorings.

The Church has left us these three sinews in order to give a beauty, ballast, and a buffer against the world cliché culture. These sinews are the tradition of the Creed, the authority of God’s Law (the Ten Commandments) and the power of prayer—the Lord’s Prayer. This week, beginning today, we delve into the first of these rich resources: The Apostles’ Creed.

Creeds, confessions, catechisms, doctrine, dogma, theology—they are all necessary to guard us from an age of power without principle or precept. God help us to know what we *believe* in order to know how we should live—*didaskalia* that leads to *eusebeia* (1 Tim. 4:7).

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for our Regional Trainers. These men and women make themselves available throughout the denomination offering teacher training, Christian Education directors, small group training, curriculum, making Kingdom disciples, and so on.

CC: Each year we hire faculty members in various departments. This is one of the most important events that shapes the college’s future. Please pray for wisdom as we seek to hire the type of faculty members who will be faithful in their classroom instruction.

MNA: Pray that God will draw out couples willing to live and serve on Native American/First Nations reservations, taking the Gospel of grace to them.

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 ministry.

RH: Pray for the Lord to provide at least 1,000 campers for summer camp. Pray that God’s Spirit will move in the life of each camper for coming to faith, growing in grace, and making a life commitment to be His disciple. We are asking the Lord for 150 conversions.

DAY 5
MONDAY, MAY 7

Read Colossians 1:24-2:15

THE GOD-CENTERED WORLDVIEW

“The knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.”
Colossians 2:2



We live in a world of cold, hard facts. The preeminence of the “hard” sciences, the omnipresence of the media and the internet, the glut of “information,” and the godless craving to give everything a natural explanation have made our brave new world a cold place. Theology is now psychologized away. The mystery of a man’s love for a woman is now dislodged by biological formulas of glands and urges and instincts. Even the child’s sacred (and necessary) world of make believe has been invaded by violent video games and the pressure from parents to “grow up” too soon. We seem to be a people torn between facts and truth.

They are not, of course, antithetical. Spiritual truth and scientific fact are not incompatible. Fact verifies truth and truth gives meaning to fact. They are, as Calvin Miller calls them, “Siamese twins” of reality. But we tend to speak of spiritual things as *Truth* and more technical, secular things as *Fact*. Perhaps that is because the two words are “remote synonyms.”

In his book, *A Hunger for Meaning*, Calvin Miller delineates the fine line between Truth and Fact. “*Truth* is a warm word. *Fact* is a cold one. ‘Jenny, I love you truly,’ is, of course, warmer than ‘Jennifer, I love you factually.’ Truth is philosophical; fact is empirical. Two plus two equals fact, but *truth* is too grand a word to use when we speak of common addition. Truth is elusive; fact is blatant. Truth is amorphous; fact, defined. Truth is prone to be quiet and reflective while fact is often loud. Truth is the fear of the astronaut; fact is the escape mechanism. Here perhaps, we move to the grand distinction that truth is mystical and fact is scientific.”⁷

Why go into all this? One reason: Everything we confess to believe in the Apostles’ Creed is truth. It is also fact, but more importantly, it is The Truth. God, the creation, Jesus and salvation, the Spirit, the Church, and eternal life are the great mysteries of our most holy religion. In fact, when Paul uses the word *mysterion* (mystery) in Scripture he speaks of divine Truth. A *mystery* is not some facts to be discovered via investigative processes. A mystery is a truth we will never know unless God reveals it to us.

Our religion is rooted in fact—both historical and scientific. But more importantly our faith is rooted in truth—the great mysteries of God revealed through Christ. God Himself (in Christ) is the Great Mystery. Theologians speak of Him as incomprehensible yet knowable. That is, God cannot be dis-



covered through scientific method, understood through philosophical systems, or analyzed through rational rules of logic. Yet God can be known through His revelation. Generally, God reveals Himself in creation, the conscience, and cultures. In a special way, God is made known in the Christ, the Canon of Scripture, and the Church.

Although there are logical, philosophical, and theological “proofs” for God, in reality God cannot be proven. He simply is. He is not a fact (although He is real); He is The Truth. God cannot be loaded into a computer, carried about in an iPod, or accessed on line. God comes to us in the Christ, in the Creed, and in the Canon of Scripture. He can be found in the Church.

Our young people are wizards at facts but they are weak in truth. They can fix your computer in a jiffy. They are adept at anything cellular or graphic. Their minds are full of information. But they do not understand the wonders, the mysteries, the Truth about the Father, the Son, the Spirit and their world—the Kingdom of God. What riches lie before them in the Apostles’ Creed. The Apostles’ Creed is the Truth about the facts of God.

Ours is a worldview rooted in Truth more than in fact, because ours is a worldview rooted in God and His things. Ours is a God-centered perspective on reality. And the heartbeat of our life is this: “I believe in God ...”

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Give thanks for this year’s Host Committee members from Covenant Presbytery, who have been diligently working for over a year to make arrangements for this Assembly and for the comfort and edification of the Commissioners and their families.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary students who will soon be beginning summer internships at churches and other ministries around the country. Pray that the Lord will use this time to test their gifts and clarify for them their callings to particular types of ministries. Ask also that He will grow their faith through these experiences and teach them to rely more and more on His strength rather than on their own for ministry effectiveness.

MTW: Missionary kids, also known as TCKs (Third Culture Kids), have unique opportunities and challenges—challenges that vary, depending upon their age and field of service. Please pray that God will provide for each one and that He will use them to show His glory.

RUM: Please pray for the RUF Campus Ministers and their families as they seek to minister to the students’ daily needs by opening their homes and lives to them.

RBI: Moral oversight of RBI is the responsibility of the Committee of Commissioners of the General Assembly. Please pray for them that they will continue to have wisdom to direct this vital aspect of our ministry.

DAY 6
TUESDAY, MAY 8

Read Hebrews 11:1-16

I BELIEVE IN GOD

“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.”

Hebrews 11:6

When a Christian begins to recite the Creed he makes one of the most bold statements a Christian can make. He says, “I believe in God.” There is more to that truth than meets the eye (and the ear). To “believe” (*pisteuo* in Greek) means more than to think that something is true; it means at least that, but certainly more than that. People may believe in ghosts, they may believe in the Democratic Party, or they may believe it is going to rain today. But to believe in God is something more, something grander, something life changing.

The Church Fathers who helped shape the Apostles’ Creed also helped frame our understanding of faith, the act and state of believing in God. Belief in God—true faith—always includes these three facets of faith. First there is *notitia*, the acceptance of certain facts or statements about God. First of all that God *is*—that He exists. Second, there is *assensus*, the agreement with what God says about Himself in the Bible. This includes both mental and emotional acceptance of God: We find Him true and we find Him desirable. We agree with what He says and find who He is to be agreeable to us. Third is *fiducia*, the act of trusting in or depending upon God. We “place our faith in Him,” resting on Him, His character, and His promises for all we need.

Belief in God is a process at which we arrive over time, both as individuals and as the Church. Our articles of faith are the result of what theologians call “the progress of dogma.” David S. Schaff explains that process this way: “At first, articles of faith were the spontaneous expression of an inward religious impulse from within the church. They were statements of Christian experience. Later, they were the answer which councils gave to heretical views, constructed in the heat of doctrinal controversy between parties, both calling themselves Christians. Later still, after the fall of the Roman Empire, they were the assertion of a priestly system, grown strong and dominant in Western Europe, whose strength was contemporary with the decadence of scriptural study and missionary effort. At a still later time, the sixteenth century, they were the protest which the Protestant Reformers, strictly brought up in the ritual of the church, based on the study of the

Scriptures, or the deliverance of the Roman communion in the Tridentine and Vatican standards.”⁸

Faith is the combination of Scriptural information (*notitia*), philosophical agreement and acceptance (*assensus*), and experiential trust (*fiducia*). Faith therefore involves—in fact, consumes—the whole man and the whole Church. To say “I believe in God” is to make a life-changing statement about a personal encounter with the life-changing Divine Being.

J. I. Packer is wise to observe, “In worship, the Creed is said in unison, but the opening words are ‘I believe,’ not ‘we:’ each worshipper speaks for himself. Thus he proclaims his philosophy of life and at the same time testifies to his happiness. He has come into the hands of the Christian God where he is glad to be. And when he says, ‘I believe,’ it is an act of praise and thanksgiving on his part. It is, in truth, a great thing to be able to say the Creed.”⁹

Let me ask you that question asked to one of the martyrs long ago: “What do you say for yourself now, Christian?” Can you say, “I believe in God”?

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for our training conferences, such as Equip, Mercy Ministry, Christian and Home Schooling, and the plans for a big Christian Education conference for 2008.

CC: Our adult degree completion programs in organizational management and early childhood education continue to touch the lives of students returning to the classroom while maintaining a life in the work world. These adult students are influenced significantly by the college and have a significant impact in their respective workplaces. Please pray for our continued influence in this area.

MNA: Pray that God will use the MNA Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP) program as a means to equip men for the Gospel ministry to reach the variety of peoples groups in North America in the twenty-first century.

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: Pray for camper registrations to be evenly spread over the summer so that we will be able to accommodate all who want to come during the weeks chosen.

DAY 7

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9

THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 1:1

Of all the revelations in the Bible, none is as powerful, as significant, or as genuinely awesome as its first sentence, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). No statement in all of written or spoken language can cause the goose bumps of Genesis 1:1. This is the first article of our most holy religion: God is the creator of all there is, seen and unseen, heaven and earth, the world of angels and the world of mankind and his fellow creatures.

In the August 2005 issue of *Reader’s Digest* magazine, the actor/producer Tom Hanks was interviewed about his upcoming IMAX film *Magnificent Desolation*, a film about outer space. *Reader’s Digest* asked the award-winning actor this question: “When you contemplate space, does the complexity, the magnificence, make you think there’s some divine hand in this, or that it’s all random?” Tom Hanks’ reply was most fascinating: “Either one is a tremendous leap of faith, and it could very well be that this is beyond our consciousness. How can you look at it and say this was plotted out on a graph? I think that would cheapen it somehow. At the same time, to say it just happened and is completely random would cheapen it as well. I’m thoroughly delighted by the mystery of it all.”¹⁰

Mr. Hanks reflects the general opinion from general revelation: creation is big and impressive. It could be from a Being, as big and impressive. It is too grand to have just happened, but how do we know who did this, who made this? The Apostles’ Creed summarizes the teaching of Scripture: “God, the Father almighty, (is) the Maker of heaven and earth.” We start, you see, from the fixed point—God— and not from our moving target—the earth.

C. E. B. Cranfield explains this truth. “The starting point for understanding is not the existence of this world with all its multiplicity of life and of the universe of which it is relatively a tiny part, but the reality of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From this starting point and in this light, we begin to glimpse something of the true meaning of the existence of reality other than God.”¹¹ Only in seeing God and then moving to God’s creation does life make sense and our living attain meaning.

When our wife develops breast cancer, when our son is devastated by an unfaithful wife, when we lose our job or lose our temper, when we think

all is lost, then the truth rings truer than ever: “God created the heavens and the earth.” Nothing is random, nothing ever “just happens.” All is under the sovereign control of the Grand Architect of life—God the Creator. Our lives, the creatures around us, and those invisible forces that are very real—good, bad, right, wrong, happiness, and sorrow—are in God’s world for a reason; either by His doing or His decree to permit things to be. And life then maintains that “mystery” Tom Hanks revels in, while at the same time it fits together without cheapening the wonder of it all.

In that interview Tom Hanks summarizes his view of life: “One damn thing after another.” In the Creed the Christian summarizes his view of life: All is under the guidance of God who made me, loves me, and cares for me as part of His divine project called “creation.”

How wonderfully delightful that the little children of the Church are able to answer the question that Hollywood actors cannot understand. “Why ought you to glorify God? Because He made me and takes care of me!” (*Catechism for Young Children*, question 5). Maybe Hollywood should direct its attention away from the stars (both human and celestial) and toward the Apostles’ Creed.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: The Host Committee has chosen as the theme for the 2007 General Assembly, “Then Sings My Soul.” Psalm 48:1 says, “Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise.” This verse articulates our response to the God of creation.

CTS: Pray that God will grant wisdom and strength to Covenant Theological Seminary’s President, Dr. Bryan Chapell, as he handles the many responsibilities of family, leadership, preaching, teaching, writing, speaking, and traveling on behalf of the Seminary. Pray also for Dr. Chapell’s wife, Kathy, and their children.

MTW: Pray for Eric Larson, MTW’s new Director of Youth and Family Ministries, who together with his wife, Rebecca, is raising support to minister to MTW’s TCKs and their parents. They have much experience and are urgently needed, so please pray the process will go quickly.

RUM: The month of May is busy for RUM, as all the new Campus Ministers and Interns attend separate weeks of orientation. Pray for these first weeks of training as the new staff works through the RUF philosophy of ministry and begins to prepare to move to campus.

RBI: Pray for RBI as an agency of the PCA General Assembly, as it shares a common vision with the other Committees and Agencies and fulfills a unique role in the denomination.

DAY 8

Read John 5:18-47

THURSDAY, MAY 10

JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON,
OUR LORD

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord,
but only what He sees the Father doing.”

John 5:19

The Apostles’ Creed is primarily Christo-centric. It places Jesus Christ at the center of the Creed, between the two shorter sections on God the Father and God the Spirit. This is central to the Creed, for we could not know about the Father except through Jesus the Son, nor would we have the Holy Spirit unless Jesus sent Him to us.

The Apostles’ Creed, originally known as *The Old Roman Formula*, was developed in the anti-Nicene age when Christological conflicts were central in the Church. The two great ecumenical creeds were developed in order to define what we believe about the Trinity and, in particular, Jesus Christ. These two doctrinal formulations were the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.).

The opening statement about Jesus is very tight, very comprehensive, and very coherent. “Jesus” is His human name (*Yeshua* in Hebrew, *Joshua* in English, *Jesus* in Greek), pointing to His humanity. Jesus, the Son of God, owns a name, a people, a culture, a place—in short, He takes up humanity. “Christ” points to His divine role as the Savior of God’s people. He is the Messiah (*Christos* in Greek: the anointed one). Jesus bears the offices of prophet, priest, and king for God’s people. “His only Son” informs us that Jesus is divine. He possesses full deity alongside His full humanity. He is *God the Son* and therefore the Son of God. His relationship is generated out of the Father’s will; He is therefore “begotten of the Father, not made” (Nicene Creed). Hence, He is “the only begotten Son” of God and, as such, He is to all mankind—whether people acknowledge it or not—“our Lord.” He is Lord God (Hebrew: *Adonai*), Lord our Master, Lord of the disciples, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

In the Creed, this statement about Jesus Christ sets forth Christ’s unique relationship with God. He is equal with God in His person and nature, but subordinate to God in His will and work. In John 5:18-47, the Pharisees are upset because they believe Jesus is “making Himself equal with God” (v. 18). Christ’s answer to their distress is both brilliant and enlightening. In responding to them, Jesus never uses the word “equal,” but rather chooses to focus on unity. The unity of the Father and His Son is not one of “equality” as much as mutual love and appropriate dependence on the part of the Son to the Father.

Leslie Newbigin, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, explains what Christ was attempting to make clear to the Pharisees and to us. “In his reply,

Jesus shows us that what is being revealed is not equality but unity ... These are two quite different and even opposed patterns of relation. The ideal of equality (which our culture has espoused from the nationalistic elements in our pagan heritage) leads to independence. Those who are, in all respects, equal do not need to depend on each other but can stand on their own feet. In spite of the fact that paternity appears to be a fact of life, paternalism is condemned as a violation of human dignity because it rests on inequality and involves dependence. Our ideal of human dignity is, in fact, the very ancient one advocated by the serpent (Gen. 3:5), needing nothing and independent of any judgment of good and evil other than our own. In total contrast to this vision of equality, Jesus speaks of a relation between Himself and His Father in which filial obedience is as complete and total as is paternal love.”¹²

Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, our Lord is equal with God in nature, but He is, as importantly, one with God in His Word, will, and work. He is in complete unity with God, and He depends upon His Father’s love as much as the Father depends upon His Son’s obedience. Would we not do better as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as employers and employees, and as elders and congregants if we focused less on equality with one another and worried more about our unity?

When we say “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,” we are confessing that Jesus is one with God the Father: “the same in substance and equal in power and glory.”¹³ But we are also stating that we believe that Jesus is one with the Father in the work of creation, providence, and redemption. And we confess that Jesus loves God the Father enough to do His will. For this we sinners shall be eternally grateful: “I have come to do my Father’s will.”

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the development of a system of training that will allow us to begin offering live two-way training through the Internet. This will allow us to help small and large churches alike and keep the costs low. Although it is not as personal as being there, it will allow us to be in many places at one time.

CC: Pray that current capital projects—the new academic building, the new residence hall, Carter Hall renovation, and new baseball field—will proceed on schedule and within budget. Also, pray for the Lord to direct the planning of future projects.

MNA: Pray that the Lord will raise up cross-cultural church planters to plant and develop churches among the many ethnic groups in our cities.

PCAF: Pray for the PCA Foundation’s grant recipients, that more people will be moved to support them with prayer, their time, and their financial resources.

RH: Pray for Curt Rabe, Ministry Director, as he makes final preparation for and begins supervision of the Ridge Haven summer camp program, including counselors, speakers, musicians, and directors, for the sixteen separate camps to be held this summer.

DAY 9
FRIDAY, MAY 11

Read Luke 1:26-38

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power
of the Most High will overshadow you.”



Luke 1:35

When we confess in the Apostles' Creed that we believe in Jesus Christ, “who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,” we are making a statement of profound proportions. In its original form, The Old Roman Formula (circa 200 A.D.), the Creed simply stated: “I believe in Jesus Christ ... who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.” But as time progressed, we have evidence that the word *conceived* (in Greek, *sullamvano*; in Latin, *conceptus*) was added to specify both the divine nature (the Holy Spirit) and the human nature (Mary) found in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Apostles' Creed makes this statement for specific reasons. In an old book on the Apostles' Creed, Bishop John Pearson of Chester, England, informs us of the significance of this article of the Creed and where it is placed.

Although the human nature was conjoined with the Divinity, which is the nature common to the Father and the Son, yet was that union made only in the person of the Son. Which doctrine is to be observed against the heresy of the Patripassians, which was both very ancient and far different, making the Father to be incarnate, and becoming man to be crucified. But this very Creed was always thought to be sufficient confutation of that fond opinion, in that the incarnation is not subjoined to the first, but to the second article. “We do not say, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, which was conceived,’ but in ‘His only Son, our Lord, which was conceived by the Holy Ghost.’”¹⁴

We believe, as Christians, that the man Jesus of Nazareth was conceived by God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who made the virgin named Mary of Nazareth conceive a boy-child in her womb. This made God, not Joseph, the father of Jesus, and Mary His human mother. All of this was quite necessary for two reasons.



First, the total depravity, original sin, and guilt of Adam were not imputed to Jesus. Christ was born a man, but a sinless man. He came through the genetic line of Mary, not Joseph. He shared Adam's nature (human) but not Adam's sin (guilt). Hence, Jesus Christ became for us a "spotless lamb"—a sinless, atoning sacrifice.

Second, by Christ (and not the Father), becoming incarnate, God the Father was free to be as Paul stated, "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The Father remains the Judge and the Justifier, while the Son becomes the propitiation for sin. Any other theories of the incarnation impugn the validity and justice of the redemptive process.

Our Creed is the product of two or more centuries of thoughtful reflection upon the realities of Gospel Religion. It is precise where it needs to be. And the incarnation demands precision: It was God the Son who became Jesus the Christ, so that God the Father might objectively punish Him for our sins and raise Him to life for our future glory. The Apostles' Creed acknowledges the wisdom and wonder of God's way—"conceived by the Holy Spirit"!

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, so that every participant will worship the Most High God in spirit and in truth. Pray for TE Dominic Aquila, TE R.C. Sproul and TE Bryan Chapell as they prepare to exposit the Word.

CTS: Pray for the Lord's blessing as Covenant Theological Seminary begins construction of its new academic and administrative building this spring. Pray that the project will go smoothly and pray for the safety of all those involved in the work. Ask also that God will use this project to enhance greatly the Seminary's ability to carry out its mission of training pastors and ministry leaders for Christ's Church, and that these leaders will have tremendous influence for the Kingdom as they complete their studies and go forth to serve in ministry.

MTW: Pray for Dr. Paul Kooistra and his wife, Jan, and for their children and grandchildren. Ask God to show Himself strong on their behalf, to encourage them and give them grace in dealing with Jan's health challenges.

RUM: Please pray for the new Campus Ministers who will begin working with RUF groups this fall. Pray that they will have a smooth transition from seminary or ministry positions to their campus work and for encouragement as they raise support over the summer months. Pray for their wives and young children as they transition to new lives.

RBI: The PCA Retirement Plan is one of the benefit plans available to PCA employees. Please pray for this plan to succeed in its purpose of providing retirement income for participants.

DAY 10
SATURDAY, MAY 12

Read John 1:1-18

BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

“And the Word became flesh and
dwelt among us.”

John 1:14

In his book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis refers to the incarnation of God the Son in Jesus of Nazareth as “the grand miracle.” Here is what he observes: “The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or results from this. Just as every natural event is the manifestation at a particular place and moment of Nature’s total character, so every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation. There is no question in Christianity of arbitrary interference just scattered about. It relates not a series of disconnected raids on Nature, but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion—an invasion which intends complete conquest and ‘occupation.’ The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depends on their relation to the Grand Miracle; all discussion of them in isolation from it is futile.”¹⁵

Lewis is correct. And John the Apostle related the same perspective on the Grand Miracle of the Incarnation as Lewis does—as do the other apostles. God was in Christ for a specific purpose. So when we say “I believe in Jesus Christ ... who was born of the virgin Mary,” we are making a miraculous profession, and we are attesting to four great truths.

First, we acknowledge (and believe as fact) that a virgin girl conceived a male-child by miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, yet gave birth to a baby boy in a most natural and human manner. We cannot explain (scientifically) how this happened, but it did. It was, and remains, a miracle: *God intervening in nature and either suspending or contradicting the natural laws of His natural order in order to do as He deems necessary*. God gave a virgin girl a baby boy. This is the first great truth about Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, we confess that God entered into the world and into our human experience through Jesus Christ. As Paul puts it, “in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19), because God was in the world, in human history, in our flesh, in Jesus Christ. “The Word (the Son of God) became flesh (in Jesus Christ) and dwelt among us (in a human body and in a human community)” (John 1:14). In this way only was man allowed to see God face-to-face and live to tell about it. That God’s face could be seen in Christ’s face—God in the face of a man—is a bonafide miracle (see 2 Cor. 4:6).

Third, we are certain that God’s plan for atoning for sins included both the divine work and the human will. In Christ, both converge. God worked

redemptively in His divine Son, who also happened to be Mary's boy. It sounds so touching and so appropriate to call Jesus our Savior and Lord "Mary's boy." Just as I am Margie's boy and my sons are Jane's boys, so Jesus belonged to Mary. In this fact resonates the truth that the One who atoned for us was as human as He was divine. In Jesus, God worked to save us from sin. But as well, in Jesus, man willed to submit to God and be used as man's redeemer. What marvelous truth!

Finally, when God came into the world in the baby Jesus, this Child of the nativity became the final wave of God's invasion of the world. As Lewis set forth, this was "an invasion which intends complete conquest and occupation." Jesus came to reverse the Fall. He came to *be with* and *belong to* mankind, whom He would save. In so doing, Jesus re-entered the place God vacated when Adam and Eve fell in the garden. Sin separated God from man. Jesus brings God back to man for good, once and for all. In the end, Christ's invasion is 100 percent effective: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). The Son reclaims for the Father what was lost but what always remained God's—the world of mankind.

How happy we are that Mary had a baby boy and that God has a Son! And how gloriously miraculous it is that these two sons are One great person—the Grand Miracle! For this reason, at Christmastime we all love to sing Cecil F. Alexander's great carol:

*He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all.
And His shelter was a stable, and
His cradle was a stall.
With the poor, and mean, and lowly
Lives on earth a savior holy.¹⁶*

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the Presbytery Christian Education Representatives. These men are responsible for keeping all of our churches informed about all the training that CE&P is offering.

CC: Please pray for the continued revision of the core curriculum.

MNA: Pray that the Lord will move in the hearts of PCA folk to support the growing number of mercy ministries led by PCA churches.

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

RH: Pray for Mo Up De Graff, Ridge Haven CEO, as he continues to serve as the Capital Campaign Director promoting Ridge Haven to the people, churches, and presbyteries of the PCA.

DAY 11
SUNDAY, MAY 13

Read John 18:28 – 19:6

SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE

“Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him.”

John 19:1



I need to make a confession. The one great mystery of the Christian religion I struggle with is suffering. I often wonder, “If God loves us, really loves us, then why do we suffer as we do?” As a father to four children (and now three grandchildren), my goal is to keep them from as much suffering and pain as possible. I have often prayed to God and complained to Him, “If this is how You treat Your friends, no wonder You have so few!” I do not pray this impertinently; these are the words of a troubled soul.

When we recite the Creed we say, “I believe in Jesus Christ ... who suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Note that this statement grounds the Creed in history. Pontius Pilate is the only dated reference to history in the Creed. We are not confessing a fairy tale of something that supposedly happened long ago in a far away land. No, we are talking about the life of Christ in the history of the middle Roman Empire. This “stuff” really happened!

And what God did to Christ through Pontius Pilate impacts us greatly. The Apostles’ Creed makes reference here to what theologians call “the passive obedience of Christ”—that He permitted (passively) evil men to afflict, torture, and kill Him as part of His obedience to God’s mission to atone for sin. We also count this as recognition of the humiliation of Christ. The Catechism explains part of Christ’s humbling as the Savior in these words: “suffering the miseries of this life, the anger of God and the curse of death on the cross.”¹⁷

Jesus suffered. He experienced betrayal, denial by a friend, insults and mockery, slander and false accusations, injustice, government bureaucracy, political correctness, physical abuse, torture, sentencing for crimes never committed, and the cruel and dismissive conduct of a corrupted official: *Pontius Pilate*. Merrill F. Unger insightfully notes, “Destitute of any fixed principles, and having no aim but office and influence, Pilate seems to have consulted the law of personal convenience, and to have done right only when it did not interfere with his selfish aims and purpose.”¹⁸ To suffer is one thing; to suffer unjustly is another, and intolerable, thing! Jesus did both.

Alister McGrath reminds us of how encouraging this phrase of the Creed can be for us. “Suffering is a mystery that causes anguish to many Christians. It seems to call the love of God into question. The suffering of



Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary does not explain suffering. It does, however, reveal that God is willing and able to allow Himself to be subject to all the pain and suffering that this creation experiences. We are not talking of a God who stands far off from His world, aloof and distant from its problems. We are dealing with a loving God, who has entered into our human situation, who became man and dwelt among us as one of us. We know a God who, in His love for us, determined to experience first hand what it is like to be frail, mortal, and human, to suffer and to die. We cannot explain suffering, but we can say that, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, God took it upon Himself to follow this way.¹⁹

So, the next time you or I see our kids suffer unfairly, we need to remember that God watched His Son experience the same thing. The next time pain crashes into the lives of our loved ones and we can do nothing about it, we must remind ourselves that God sat by while man tortured His Son. He could do nothing to interfere and still save us from sin. And the next time we think God has few friends because of the way He treats them, we need to know that God is less interested now with making friends than He is with redeeming souls. In the end, God will not be short of friends, but will be surrounded by billions of loved ones, who will forever thank Him and praise Him that, under Pontius Pilate, Jesus suffered for us.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the peace, purity, and progress of the PCA will be in the forefront of each Commissioner's minds as he prepares for the Assembly.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary students' continued growth in grace as they live and study in community with one another. Pray that the Lord will provide ample opportunities for them to benefit from the wisdom and experience of fellow students, faculty members, and local church leaders during their ministry preparation.

MTW: MTW missionary to Japan Dan Iverson says that he has never "happened upon" another Christian outside of church in all his years in Japan. Pray with Dan that God will raise up a mighty missionary-sending Church for His own glory in the nation of Japan.

RUM: Please pray for the applicants for Intern positions with RUF for fall 2007. Pray for their transition from their role as students or from other jobs. Pray for wisdom as these applicants are interviewed and placed on campus. Pray that they will grow in faith as they raise the necessary funds for their ministry on campus.

RBI: RBI provides term life insurance and long term disability insurance for full time PCA employees. Pray these will continue to be quality products for the needs of participants.

DAY 12
MONDAY, MAY 14

Read Mark 15:16-32

WAS CRUCIFIED

“And they led Him out to crucify Him.”

Mark 15:20



At the heart of the Gospel lies the cross. Paul makes this perfectly clear in First Corinthians 1:17-2:5, where he sets forth his Theology of the Cross. Paul “boasts” in the cross: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1Cor. 1:18, 2:2). Because the cross is the heart of the Gospel, it is therefore at the very center of the Christian religion. Christians are a people of the cross, and the cross is the symbol of Christianity and the Church.

In 1995, the late Peter Jennings and his network did a special called “In the Name of God.” In that hour-long special feature they profiled and interviewed three pastors: John Wimber of the Vineyard movement, Bill Hybels of the Willow Creek movement, and a Christian Reformed pastor of a small church in Michigan. During the feature, Jennings quizzed Hybels about the absence of the cross in the Willow Creek sanctuary. Hybels responded that he did not want to “limit the symbols of Christianity to just one.” In both a spirit of surprise and a sense of criticism, Jennings responded, “But Bill, it’s the cross; Christianity is all about the cross!” It is embarrassing when the world correctly rebukes the Church.

In truth, what Bill Hybels wanted to avoid was the scandal of the cross (1 Cor. 1:23—the Greek: *scandalon*; translated “stumbling block”). To the ones Hybels and associates call “unchurched Harry and Mary,” the cross is offensive. They do not like the frank, gruesome, insensitive reminder of the heart of Christianity: Christ came to die for sinners. The old liberals often spoke in their derision for the cross by calling it “slaughter-house religion.” Moderns are above such talk of blood ’n guts, an angry God who needs to be propitiated (this word is removed from most modern English translations), and a suffering sacrifice.

But the Creed speaks neither to only the moderns nor to unchurched Harry and Mary. The Apostles’ Creed speaks for Christians about what we believe. And if postmodern, unchurched people want to know what we believe, here it is: “I believe in Jesus Christ ... who was crucified.” Plain and simple.

The Crucifixion and its emblematic cross tell us all we need to know about Gospel religion. It speaks of a just and holy God who punishes sin to



death, and of a merciful and loving God who punishes His own Son in the place of His elect. It reminds us that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament pronouncements about atonement for sin; He was cursed at the cross for our sins (Gal. 3:10-14). He suffered outside the camp (Jerusalem) at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles—all men (Heb. 13:12). He was both the sacrificial lamb and the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). He became sin to be put to death that sinners might come to new, eternal life (2 Cor. 5:21). Without the historical fact and theological truth that Jesus was crucified, men cannot be saved. “And without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22).

The Cross reminds us of how wicked we really are; how horrible sin really is, how marvelous the love of God remains, and how majestic is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Martin Luther would remind us that theologians of glory always hate the cross. They seek to escape its shadow and avoid the truth. But theologians of the cross love the cross because only in the naked, crucified, and dying Christ do they find the one, true God. And in the shadow of the cross they say, along with Paul, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the hearts of church and home leaders, the fathers, to turn to the children (Malachi 4:6, Luke 1:17).

CC: 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 intentional learners. Pray that they 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 Dony St. Germain, Haitian Ministries Coordinator, for wisdom and strength as he oversees the planting of healthy, worshipping, and evangelizing Haitian churches both in the United States and Haiti. Pray also that the various short term opportunities available in Miami and Haiti will attract many volunteers and be a blessing to the community.

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

RH: Pray for Dick Hagedorn, Food Service Director, and his assistant, Jennifer Huskey, as they labor long hours six days a week throughout the summer months. Pray that the Lord will provide good health, joyful and creative perseverance, helpful staff, and wisdom to create enjoyable meals with critical efficiency.

DAY 13

Read Luke 23:44-56

TUESDAY, MAY 15

DEAD AND BURIED

“And having said this He breathed His last.”

Luke 23:46



We humans often look at others we hold dear and precious and say to them, “I love you to death!” It is true. What young man is not ready to die for his true love? What mother is not willing to risk her life for her children? What citizen would refuse to die for his or her homeland, if such were the call? When we pledge our love, our devotion, and ourselves to another “till death do us part ... so help me God,” we mean it!

But would we be willing to die for everyone? Would we make the ultimate sacrifice for our enemies or the very ones who would rape our wives, kill our babies, and enslave our fellow Americans? Now that is another question, and one we will never have to answer. But God did.

When we profess in the Creed that Jesus was “crucified, dead, and buried,” we admit that Jesus Christ, by the will of God, died for all those sinners whom God would choose to bring to Himself in grace. Christ died for His enemies—the ones who would persecute His mother and family, who would murder the Apostles, who would work to see the Church extinguished. Out of these evil people God would choose a remnant. And Jesus would “love them to death” long before any of them would love Jesus.

In his book *The Apostles' Creed for Everyman*, William Barclay astutely observes, “If Jesus had stopped before the cross, it would have meant that there was some point beyond which the love of God would not go, some limit to his love. But, in Jesus God says: ‘You may disobey me; you may grieve me; you may be disloyal to me; you may misunderstand me; you may batter me and bruise me and scourge me; you may treat me with savage injustice; you may kill me on a cross; I will never stop loving you.’ This means that the life and death of Jesus are the demonstration and proof of the limitless, the undefeatable, unchangeable, unalterable, infinite love of God.”²⁰ And so it does; the cross reminds us that “God so loved the world” (Jn. 3:16).

But the death and burial of Jesus Christ shows us even more than the love of God. They set forth, as well, the justice of God. The penalty of sin is always death. God warned Adam and Eve, “In the day that you eat of it (the forbidden fruit of Eden) you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). We are told twice in Ezekiel, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek.18:4, 20). And Paul reminds us, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).



So when the Creed tells us that Jesus died and was buried, it reminds us that Christ paid the full penalty of sin: He died. His death was threefold. He died physically, experiencing all the pain, fears, and sorrow of physical death. He died spiritually, in that, for a season, He was separated from God—forsaken by God. He died to sin, once for all, never again to be punished for sin. This was Christ’s eternal death.

Those of us who trust in Christ may well die. Our lives may come to an end on earth before Jesus returns. But we who are believers will never be separated from God nor will we experience the “second death”—hell (Rev. 20:14, 21:8), where we will be eternally dying due to sin because we will be eternally separated from God. Because Christ died and was buried, we will live forever with God after we die. This is the “bottom line” of the Gospel.

Peter reminds us, “Christ also suffered once for sins ... that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). Death for sin need occur but once. No criminal can be punished twice for the same offense. If “Christ died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust,” then we need not die for the same sins. Our beloved Creed reminds us of both the love of God and His justice. And these two attributes of God converge in fullness in Christ on the cross. In the death and burial of Jesus, “mercy triumphs over judgment.” In the dying of Jesus we live.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the AC/SC office staff in these days remaining before the Assembly, that as we face the myriad of details involved, nothing will be overlooked and all will go smoothly.

CTS: Pray for people around the world who are now considering training for ministry at Covenant Theological Seminary. Pray for the Lord to direct their paths, and that the Seminary’s Admissions staff will continue to minister effectively to prospective students and their families. Pray also that God will open many new pathways for student recruitment.

MTW: Pray that God will grow the number of partnerships between missionaries, national churches, and PCA churches so that together they will do works greater than the sum of their individual efforts.

RUM: Please pray for John Stone, Assistant Coordinator for Pastoral Care and Training, and Clif Wilcox, Assistant Coordinator for Administration and Interns. Pray that they will oversee their areas of responsibility with wisdom and commitment to the Gospel.

RBI: The staff of RBI converse with many pastors, church staff, and missionaries concerning benefits. They inform, counsel, and encourage, so pray for wisdom and good advice in these conversations.

DAY 14

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16

HE DESCENDED INTO HELL

“Being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,
in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.”

1 Peter 3:18-19

Did Jesus actually go to hell after He died? That question has dogged Christians since the Creed added the little phrase: “He descended into hell.” In its primitive and original form, known as *The Old Roman Formula*, the Creed did not contain this phrase. This Roman form dates to as early as the close of the second century (c. 200 A.D.). By 390 A.D. the Creed contained the phrase, *descendit in inferna* (He descended into hell). In the Eastern Church, the Greek was used: *eis ton haden* (to the Hades). Our present phrase is misleading.

In the Greek, the word *Hades* corresponds to the Hebrew word *Sheol*—the place of death. In both Greek and Latin, as well as in Hebrew, Hades/Sheol was a dark, shadowy, and mysterious place for the souls/spirits of departed people to dwell. It was not necessarily painful or punitive nor was it glorious or joyous. It simply was where the living souls of dead men lived.

The Scripture gives evidence that between His death on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday, Jesus visited the souls of departed people. He told the thief, dying beside Him, that He would see him, that day, in Paradise (Lk. 23:43). The Psalmist tells us that God would not leave Jesus in Hades (Ps. 16:10, Acts 2:27). Jesus did “descend” somewhere, according to Ephesians 4:8-9; and Colossians 2:15 alludes to some visit to the spiritual realm of angels, demons, and spirits. In Philippians 2:10 men “under the earth,” in Hades, Sheol, or “hell,” bow to the resurrected Christ. And Revelation 1:18 boldly proclaims that Jesus has “the keys of Death and Hades”—presupposing He used them to visit the realm of the dead.

In First Peter 3:18-22, the apostle tells us that Jesus went to make a proclamation to the souls in “prison”—in the grip of death called “Hades.” What He proclaimed to them we do not know, but the important thing is that He did go to the place of the dead and revealed the victory of God over sin, death, and hell.

Philip Schaff states, “As such the descent is a part of the universality of the scheme of redemption, and forms the transition from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation. This is the historical explanation, according to the belief of the ancient church, but leaves much room for speculation concerning the object and effect of the descent.”²¹ We should not leave out this phrase when we recite the Creed. Jesus told Mary that between His death and His return to the Father, He would visit his “brothers” and speak to them (Jn. 20:17). Why does our modern age believe that Jesus would only visit Peter, James, and

John, alive on the earth, and not Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, alive in Sheol?

James I. Packer believes that Jesus did three things when “He descended into hell.” First, He turned Sheol into Paradise by His very presence (Lk. 23:43). Second, He perfected the Old Testament saints and brought them into equality in glory with New Testament saints in heaven (Heb. 11:39, 40; 12:22-24). Third, He proclaimed to all living creatures—in heaven, in hell, on earth—His victorious death and resurrection (1Pt. 3:19).²² “I believe our Catechism alludes to this truth in its phrase, *‘and remaining under the power of death for a time.’*”²³

Jesus descended not into Hell, the place of torment, but into Sheol, Hades, the realm of the dead whose souls are alive. He was active between His death and resurrection. His Gospel of the victory of God was preached to the living and the dead.

What is important for us is not what Jesus did between the cross and the empty tomb, but what His descent into “hell” means for us. Packer once wrote: “What makes Jesus’ entry into Hades important for us is not, however, any of this, but simply the fact that now we can face death knowing when it comes, we shall not find ourselves alone. He has been there before us and He will see us through.”²⁴ The One who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death to the house of the Lord is an experienced guide (Ps. 23). He has been to death and back once before!

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the Children’s Ministry Task Force—Dave Matthews, Tim McCracken, Betty Ann Snider, Elaine Bonner, Helen Holbrook, Barksdale Pullen, and Michele Prince—as they support the CE&P staff in networking with children’s workers across the nation.

CC: Pray for the \$31 million BUILD capital campaign. Pray that God will send 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 campaign will be provided.

MNA: Shari Thomas, Tami Resch, and Leanne Downing are spear heading a ministry called Parakaleo that provides care, coaching, connecting, and celebrating for church planting wives. Please pray for the eight fledgling networks that began in various regions throughout the United States in 2006 to minister among church planting wives. Pray that these groups will provide a strong source of support and encouragement for women ministering in difficult regions around our nation.

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 as well as the benefit of telling their congregations about what we do.

RH: Pray for Rebecca Hagedorn, Executive Assistant to the Board of Directors, as she interacts with office staff, helps with registrations and reservations, handles many administrative responsibilities, and assists the CEO.

DAY 15

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58

THURSDAY, MAY 17

HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

“So we preached and so you believed.”

1Cor. 15:11

The most glorious day of the year must be Easter Sunday. I love Thanksgiving Day and what it means to America. I look forward to Advent and Christmas with my family. I am always delighted to celebrate the Fourth of July as a veteran of the Army. But no day rivals Resurrection Day. And no hymn captures the wonder of this day like K. Lee Scott’s “Joy to the Heart”—

Look there! The Christ our Brother comes,

Resplendent from the gallows tree

And what He brings in His good hands

Is life on life for you and me!

Joy! Joy! Joy to the heart, all in this good day dawning!



When we recite in the Apostles’ Creed, “On the third day He rose again from the dead,” we are proclaiming the most essential truth of Christianity. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He could not be God in the flesh, He could not do what He said He would do, and we could not be saved. Everything is decided by the cross, but everything depends on the resurrection.

It was the resurrection that declared Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and that certified Jesus’ sacrificial death as atonement for sin. The resurrection validated the Savior and vindicated His work (Rom. 1:4).

In First Corinthians 15:1-56, Paul elucidates the centrality and importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus was not alive “again” after the crucifixion, death, burial, and descent, then these three things are true (1 Cor. 15:12-19):

1. The Gospel message of the Apostles is false. It is a lie.
2. We are still in our sins. We have not been saved.
3. Our faith in Christ is futile, and of all men we Christians are most to be pitied for our bogus religion.

“But, in fact, Christ has been raised” (v. 20). What great truth, what grand news, what glorious fact! It is the reality of the resurrection that transformed and empowered the disciples of the early church. George Philip notes this truth: “When that message finally dawned on the disciples not-



ing could hold them back, and they went out and suffered, bled and died, but they could not be stopped, because they knew that the great Savior Jesus Christ, risen victorious from the grave, was with them, and that from then right to the end, He would lead them along with the procession of His triumph. Put very simply: If this risen Christ, alive forever, victorious over all in earth and in hell, is *your* Savior, then *you* cannot be beaten, *you* cannot lose, *you* cannot be turned back.”²⁵ The resurrection of Christ is *the* power of the Christian life.

When we profess to believe that Jesus has risen, then we tell the world that our faith is invincible. Kill us they will. Rise in Christ we shall. Ultimately, we will prevail, for Christ has triumphed over the devil, grace has conquered sin, and death has been swallowed up in the victory of Jesus (1 Cor.15:54-57).

On Easter Sunday (and every Lord’s Day) we exercise our “bragging rights” in Christ. Therefore, we should not shrink back: “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, know that in the [risen] Lord, your labor is not in vain” (v. 58).

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 we handle a wide variety of needs and requests by PCA members and others. We desperately need the wisdom and fruit of the Holy Spirit to be able to serve His people.

CTS: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season ...” (2 Tim. 4:2). Pray for Covenant Seminary students engaged in the study of preaching and the faculty members who teach them. Pray that these students will proclaim Christ boldly as they learn to communicate with precision and skill the living and transforming Word of God.

MTW: Pray for the summer mission trips jointly sponsored by MTW and RUF (Reformed University Fellowship). Ask God to use these trips to spread the Gospel and to grow the college and university students in their faith and their understanding of the Great Commission.

RUM: Please pray for all of the RUF Campus Ministers to grow in their personal devotion to Christ. Pray for the wives that support these men. Pray that these families will be rooted in the Gospel and encouraged and strengthened as they give their lives to minister at universities.

RBI: Through the PCA Ministerial Relief Fund, RBI assists many widows, pastors without call, missionaries, and church workers who are suffering from hard circumstances. Pray for their comfort and also for wisdom as they make many decisions necessary to restructure their lives.

DAY 16
FRIDAY, MAY 18

Read Acts 1:1-11

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

“A cloud took Him out of their sight.”
Acts 1:9



I have always thought that the middle child of three is the forgotten one. So it is with many of the trios in the Bible. Faith and love get a lot more attention than hope. We preach more on grace and peace than we do on mercy. And of the three great events of redemption, Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday get more “press” than Ascension Thursday.

Maybe that is true because the historical celebration of the Ascension had to fall on a Thursday and not a Sunday—forty days after Easter and ten days before Pentecost. As a Roman Catholic boy, I used to love to go to church on Ascension Day, a Thursday, a “holy day of obligation”—just like Easter and Pentecost. I always thought how nice, how fitting, indeed how good it was for Jesus to be back in heaven’s glory with His Father. I still think that way. Ascension Day is the answer to Jesus’ prayer—the only one He ever prayed for Himself: “And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed” (Jn. 17:5).

There are many hymns in our hymnals about the resurrection. There are more than a few on the commission of Pentecost Sunday. But few indeed are the hymns on Christ’s Ascension. Sure, I wish the risen Jesus was with us even today, but it is only fitting that Jesus return to glory. A boy belongs with his dad, and Jesus belongs with the Father in heaven. It is only right.

I remember once, as a boy, that a man in our church committed suicide after Easter. I thought to myself, “How sad! He should have thought of Jesus with God in heaven and waited for his own day of glory.” Years and years later I read this, written by one of our age’s greatest theologians: “In a weary world in which grave philosophies were counseling suicide as man’s best option; the unshakable, rollicking optimism of the first Christians, who went on feeling on top of the world however much the world seemed to be on top of them, made a vast impression. (It still does when Christians are Christian enough to show it!) Three certainties were, and are, its secret.”²⁶

James I. Packer goes on to tell what those three certainties are: Jesus now rules the world from heaven; Jesus lives now in heaven to pray for us; Jesus now brings to every believer a fellowship with God in heaven. Christ’s ascension is a foreshadowing and promise of our own going up to live with



God, in heaven, forever and ever.

Ascension Day is no small event. It is positioned between our task on earth (Pentecost) and our glory in heaven (Easter). Between being born again and rising from the dead, we live in the reality that Jesus is with His Father. This keeps us going. Every boy should be with his dad. Jesus is with His. And someday we will be with ours ... forever ... our fathers and our Father ... in heaven!

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the education and development of men and women called to serve as children's directors in the local churches. Many churches are now searching and there are very few available candidates for this great work.

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

MNA: Pray for Parakaleo, a ministry to wives in church planting. Pray that the women who are leading ministries in their new church plants will daily encounter Jesus in their own hearts and lives and this encounter will influence their marriages, homes, church, and community ministries.

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

RH: Pray for Steve Cobb as he takes, processes, and responds to all reservations and assists with camper registrations. Steve also has oversight of all of the housekeeping staff and procedures. Pray for continued good health and strength, especially during those times when the housekeeping staff is rushed to provide for hundreds of people with less than an eight-hour turnaround time.

DAY 17
SATURDAY, MAY 19

Read Psalm 110

AND SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand.’”

Psalm 110:1

Theologian R. C. Sproul agrees with what I wrote yesterday about the undervaluing of Ascension Day. He comments, “The entire Western world has been heavily influenced by the celebration of Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. The Roman Catholic Church has also paid great attention to Pentecost and Ascension Day. However, these last two celebrations have been relatively obscure in classical Protestantism, having been submerged beneath the splendor of Christmas and Easter. This is indeed unfortunate, as the significance of the Ascension and Pentecost seem to be vastly underestimated in the contemporary Protestant community.”²⁷

I agree, and I add that our lives would be full of much more confidence and peace if we really understood this truth: Jesus Christ now sits in glory at the right hand of God the Father—throne to throne. From the right hand—to this day the position of privilege and power—He administers the Kingdom of God.

A few years back, in 2003, I happened to be in London during the Jubilee celebration of Queen Elizabeth II. During that summer, Buckingham Palace was open to the public. I took the tour and I must say that it was one of the great experiences of my life. What impressed me most was the throne room where royal receptions were held. There, against one wall, were three thrones—Elizabeth’s in the center, Phillip (her husband) the Duke of Edinburgh’s to the right, and on our left, her right, was the throne of Charles, the Prince of Wales—heir apparent. When I saw those thrones, I thought of the Trinity and of our Creed: “[He] sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

What we call “Christ’s session at the Father’s right hand” reminds us of these truths of the Christian Faith. First, Jesus rules on behalf of His Father; He now “runs” the universe for God. Second, Jesus has all the authority and power: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Mt. 28:18). Third, from Jesus and the Father has been sent the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Father and the gift of the Son have come. When we say we believe that Jesus sits at God’s right hand, we acknowledge the historical fact and spiritual reality of the Ascension. Finally, we understand that God is allowing His Son to gather the peoples of the world to Himself, through the Spirit and the Word, as His reward for the atonement. This is

the message of Psalm 110, the Psalm most quoted in the New Testament.

Once one of my children, Joanna, our first-born (and the “serious” child), asked me after we recited the Creed at family devotions, “Daddy, why is Jesus sitting on God’s right hand? Doesn’t that make God uncomfortable?” I chuckled as she frowned. And so it is with many of us. We simply miss the major point of this awkwardly worded, Biblical truth. Jesus reigns! He is the heir apparent of the Kingdom of God. All of history is “His-story.” All the world is His footstool. All of life is at His command. And all we do should be for His pleasure. For never, in all of time and place, has there been such a Prince as Jesus ...

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”

Revelation 11:15

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 enhance the flow of business will serve us well.

CTS: Pray for Covenant Theological Seminary’s Dean of Students, Dr. Mark Dalbey, as he and his Student Services staff seek to provide ongoing opportunities for community worship, family nurture, and Christian fellowship for all those who are part of the Seminary community. Pray for their important work of connecting graduating seniors with appropriate ministry positions.

MTW: The 2007 Children’s Mission Project will feature the country of Bangladesh, and contributions will go toward mosquito nets to prevent malaria, a major killer of children worldwide. Pray that God will greatly bless and use this effort, saving lives and sharing the good news.

RUM: Please pray for the Interns who are returning to serve for another year on campus as RUF staff. Pray that they will have hearts for serving others and that they will seek the Lord's direction as they attend training during the coming months. Please pray for these young men and women, that Jesus and His work will sustain them as they pour themselves out for the sake of the Kingdom.

RBI: RBI employees talk with many PCA pastors and staff who are hurting. Pray for the staff to have opportunities to advise and assist.

DAY 18

Read Revelation 19:11-20:15

SUNDAY, MAY 20

HE WILL COME TO JUDGE THE
QUICK AND THE DEAD

“And I saw the dead, great and small,
standing before the throne, and the books were opened.”

Revelation 20:12

Our reading this day is long, especially compared to yesterday’s short Psalm. But as I thought about this article of the Creed, this text in Revelation 19 and 20 came to my mind. There was no way to shorten the text without robbing us of its full glory. Like the climactic last chapter of a book that brings everything before it to a stunning and satisfying conclusion, so is this text from the end of the Bible.

Every story of romance, adventure, and chivalry ends the same: The champion rides in on a great white steed, rescues the fair maiden, and rides off with her to live happily ever after. The story of redemption is a tale of romance, adventure, and chivalry. And here in Revelation 19 and 20 is the Champion on His white stallion, returning to earth to rescue His Bride, the Church, establish His Father’s rule over His kingdom, and judge all His enemies.

We live in an age of pessimism and opinion. We are without our heroes, and we don’t seem to want any. Ours is an age of relativism—no right, no wrong. So we live with the frustration of no-fault divorces and no-fault insurance, and we do not trust our unjust courts of law; chivalry has died along with virtue and manners. We have become Darwin’s children—the survival of the fittest—but things are different in Christ’s kingdom.

Jesus will come to earth again to set things right. When the Creed says, “from thence He shall come again to judge the quick (living) and the dead,” the words *from thence* refer to the previous phrase in the Creed. From His royal place at the Father’s right hand, Jesus will return to earth. In so doing, He will seal three actions for eternity.

First, He will come to rapture up the Church, transform it for glory, and reward it for faithfulness. Second, He will gather together all His enemies—angelic and human (“great and small”)—and judge them for their evil, rebellion, and unbelief. In particular He will punish them for their persecution of His Church. Third and finally, He will create a new heaven and a new earth for His saints, and a new hell—the Lake of Fire—for His enemies. To the two places will go the quick and the dead ... forever.

I used to joke with the people of Trinity Church in Jackson, Missis-

sippi, whom I served as pastor for fourteen years. We had an 8:00 and a 10:45 A.M. service on Sunday. The early service was sleepy, quiet, and less lively than those who first had coffee and Sunday School. I referred to the two services as the living (10:45) and the dead (8:00). Only half of the church found this amusing.

The English word for living was “quick,” and to enliven something or someone was to “quicken” them. So when Jesus comes to judge “the quick and the dead” there is a double reference intended. He will judge those who are alive physically and alive spiritually—those born again by the Spirit’s quickening grace. And He will judge the dead—those who have died but now have been raised for judgment and those who are dead in their souls because they are dead in sin—the unconverted.

When we read about this *Parousia* (appearing) of Jesus Christ, we should be quick to respond to grace, receive the Gospel, and believe in Christ. The day will soon be upon us when the trumpet sounds and the Hero arrives. That day will be too late to recite the Creed from heart and soul. Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2)!

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the covenant children in the PCA, that all of our churches and families will be diligent in rearing a generation of Kingdom disciples who will joyfully love, worship, and serve King Jesus.

CC: Pray for our in-hall, live-in staff of Resident Directors and Resident Advisors as they care for our students throughout the year.

MNA: Pray for Capitol Service Director Chuck Garriott as he oversees and develops this ministry to those who work in state and national government jobs. Pray that hearts will be prepared to receive the Good News and that many doors will be opened for Chuck to share the Gospel.

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

RH: Pray for the numerous Ridge Haven volunteers who work throughout the summer and assist with registrations, the bookstore, the camp store, the camp bank, food service, housekeeping, and maintenance. Many of these volunteers are retirees who live in the Ridge Haven residential community.

DAY 19
MONDAY, MAY 21

Read John 16:1-15

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST

“And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

John 16:8

The third section of the Creed begins the articles of faith about the Holy Spirit—the Third Person of the Trinity. The old version of the Creed renders this article of faith “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” A *ghost* was that psychic energy in a person that formed the spiritual and immortal life of a human being. In Hebrew the word is *ruach*; in Greek it is *pneuma*. The Holy Spirit is “a personal agent distinct from the Father and the Son and is spoken of as the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11).²⁸

The idea of *ruach*, *pneuma*, or *spirit* is that of wind or breath that moves and that causes movement. “Power in action is in fact the basic biblical thought whenever God’s Spirit is mentioned. In the Old Testament, ‘the Spirit of God’ is always God at work changing things.... In the New Testament ... the spirit is said to hear, speak, witness, convince, glorify Christ, lead, guide, teach, command, forbid, desire, give speech, give help, and intercede for Christians with inarticulate groans.”²⁹

The Holy Spirit is the “Executive” of the Godhead: He proceeds out from the Father and Son to do their will and complete their work. What the Father authors and the Son accomplishes in salvation, the Spirit applies, augments, and achieves.

What the Spirit is said to do, in Scripture, is indeed phenomenal. He is credited with molding creation into its present shape, revealing God’s will and work through His Word; teaching and guiding the people of God; regenerating and converting all the elect; equipping the saints with gifts for ministry, comforting, and defending believers; sealing the redeemed with assurance of salvation; and giving perseverance to every true Christian. But His greatest work is the creation of the New Testament Church and the augmenting of its message and mission (see Acts 1:1-8).

That is why the last section of the Creed attributes five great works to the Holy Spirit. First, He establishes and builds “the holy catholic Church.” He maintains the “communion of the saints” by means of “the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace” (Eph. 4:1-6). He opens the minds and hearts of those called by God, through the Gospel of Christ, to receive “the forgiveness of sins.” He energizes and brings to new and eternal life the dead bodies of believers “in the resurrection of the dead.” And He prepares us through sanctification for a glory in heaven in “the life everlasting.” To say the least, the Holy Spirit is a busy God!

Pregnant in this simple sentence—I believe in the Holy Ghost (Spirit)—is a fullness of faith, adoration, and affection due our beloved God, friend, and helper: the Holy Spirit. Bishop John Pearson of Chester, England (1832), summarized our profession with these words: “I believe this infinite or eternal Spirit to be not only of perfect and indefectible holiness in Himself; but also to be the immediate cause of all holiness in us, revealing the pure and undefiled will of God, inspiring the blessed apostles, and enabling them to lay the foundation, and by a perpetual succession to continue to edification of the Church, illuminating the understandings of particular persons, rectifying their wills and affections, renovating their natures, uniting their persons to Christ, assuring them of the adoption of sons, leading them in their actions, directing them in their devotions, by all ways and means purifying and sanctifying their souls and bodies, to a full and eternal acceptance in the sight of God. This is the eternal Spirit of God; in this manner is that Spirit holy; and thus *I believe in the Holy Ghost.*”³⁰

And so we, too, profess to believe in, to love, to worship, and to serve this Spirit of revelation, regeneration, reformation, revival, renewal, restoration, and resurrection. This is the Spirit of the living God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of holiness.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the upcoming 35th General Assembly in Memphis, June 12-15, that God will be worshiped and honored in all that we think, say, and do in every meeting and gathering.

CTS: Praise the Lord for the great success He has brought thus far to Covenant Theological Seminary’s *By His Grace, For His Glory* capital campaign. Pray for further blessings as the Seminary’s Development staff seeks to raise the remainder of the funds necessary to complete our \$12.5 million campaign goal. These funds will allow the Seminary to further enhance programs and facilities, so that many more Gospel ministers may be trained to preach God’s Word to future generations.

MTW: In 2006 more than 30 MTW missionaries experienced the loss of one or more parents. Others have a parent who is very ill. Please pray for these families, most of whom are currently on the field.

RUM: Many of our Interns and Campus Ministers have experienced great suffering and loss during 2006. Pray for those who have lost unborn children and family members, battled with cancer and chronic illnesses, and those who have encountered heart-breaking family struggles. Pray that the grace of the Lord will be abundant in their daily lives and the abiding love of their Heavenly Father will sustain them.

RBI: Please pray for RBI Relief Ministry that assists pastors, their families, and widows who are living on a fixed income, that these recipients may be able to maintain a standard of living consistent with their needs.

DAY 20

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

TUESDAY, MAY 22

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

“The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...”

Ephesians 4:3

Modern versions of the Creed often change this ninth article of the Creed. They are uncomfortable with the word *catholic*—as if we were confessing that we believe the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church. And so they use the words *Christian*, or *universal*, or even *worldwide* to define the Church. This is unnecessary.

The word *catholic* is an ancient word for “universal,” meaning that it is worldwide in its spread across peoples and nations. The early Church was confessing this catholic Church four hundred years before the first bishop of Rome claimed to be “the pope,” one thousand years prior to medieval Catholicism, and a millennium and a half before the Council of Trent in 1546 officially created Roman Catholicism. Our Roman Catholic friends are Johnny-come-lately to the ownership of this word.

This article in the Apostles’ Creed is best explained by its parallel and expanded phrase in the later Nicene Creed: “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” What we believe about the Christian Church, in general, across the world, and not specific to any denomination, is summarized in these four adjectives.

The Church is *one*. It is one with God through its union with Christ and sealing by the Spirit. And it shares a distinct set of core beliefs outlined in Ephesians 4:1-6—one body (the Church), one Spirit (the Third Person of God), one hope (salvation), one Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith (the Apostolic religion), one baptism (in the triune God), one God and Father (the God and Father of Jesus Christ). There are not several Churches—Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, and others—but only one Gospel Church divided into distinctive expressions of faith, ecclesiology, and piety. They are one in Christ and the Spirit, yet diverse in ministry and mission.

The Church is *holy*. It is not sinless until it rests forever in heaven. But it is holy in that it is set aside (consecrated) to God, sanctified in its Christ-centered message and worship, and in the process of producing holy people (saints) by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Church is *catholic*. It can be found around the world—it is worldwide. And it embraces people from every nation, tongue, and tribe—it is universal. The Church can never be subsumed under one nation (e.g., the *Anglican* Church), co-opted by one culture (the *Roman Catholic* Church), or compromised by one ethnic bias (the *American* Church). The catholic nature of the Church transcends all peoples, all places, and all times.

The Church is *apostolic*. It does not depend upon some direct succession of bishops from the apostles to modern clergy. Rather, it rests upon the Apostolic *kerugma* (proclamation, message) found in the New Testament. Any church true to the Bible is “apostolic.” Our hope is in the canon of Scripture, not in the clergy of the Church.

When we say, “I believe in the holy catholic Church,” we acknowledge that saved sinners must belong to some Christ-centered, Gospel-preaching, biblically organized assembly of believers. By saying the Creed we profess a high view of the Church, contrary to the postmodern fetish for individualized, subjective, eclectic “spirituality.” We agree with Cyprian of Carthage, one of the post-apostolic Church fathers: “He cannot have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother.”³¹ As Alister McGrath explains, “To believe in the Church is to recognize the need for support structures for faith. Individual Christians are not meant to exist on their own—they are meant to be part of a community.”³²

To say “I believe in the Church” is to admit that a relationship with God as our Father, Christ as our Brother, and the Holy Spirit as the One who gives us new birth and who nurtures us as His children also includes a relationship with God’s family—the Church (1 Tim. 3:14-16). We cannot love God without loving His family ... our Church. John put it this way: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). I would add: If anyone says he is a Christian and is not a member of the Church, then a true Christian he is not! This is what the Creed teaches.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the development of more reformed and covenantal resources to equip our parents and teachers in their Great Commission task to make disciples, beginning at home.

CC: Pray for safety for the Advancement (fundraising and marketing arms of the college) team as they travel the country meeting with donors and friends of the college. Pray for their families who are left at home, that God will supply their every need. Pray that the Office for Advancement will continue to present the distinctive of a Covenant College education that promotes Christ’s Kingdom first and foremost, bringing glory to His name rather than our own.

MNA: African American Ministries Coordinator Wy Plummer praises God for the four African American men who were ordained in the PCA in 2006. Pray that many more African American men will be called to ministry. Pray also for God’s direction for Wy as he seeks new ways to expand the ministry.

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

RH: Pray for Dale Hagedorn, Maintenance Superintendent, as he bears responsibility for the day-to-day operations of all of the Ridge Haven vehicles, the water system, buildings, grounds, and many kinds of equipment. Dale is also responsible for ensuring that Ridge Haven is in compliance with many state regulations.

DAY 21

Read 1 John 1:1-10

WEDNESDAY, MAY 23

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you,
so that you too may have fellowship with us.”

1 John 1:3

The second part of the Creed’s ninth article is our belief in “the communion of saints.” By the word *communion* we mean not the Lord’s Supper (although the sacrament of “holy communion” best illustrates our communion with God and other Christians), but rather, we are speaking about *fellowship*. The Greek word that lies behind both words—communion and fellowship—is the word *koinonia*. It comes from the adjective *koinos*, which means “common,” so our *koinonia* is what we have in common as Christians—our shared life with God, through our faith in Christ, and the indwelling of the Spirit. This is our common life with other believers around the world and throughout history

The profession of this facet of our faith in common is immensely important. Here is why. I can guarantee you that God the Father will never call you on the phone and ask you to take your turn in the church nursery. (If He does, would you please check caller ID and let me know His number?) I am also certain that Jesus will never visit you in your home and ask you to complete your pledge to the church budget. And, I am willing to bet my life that the Holy Spirit will never ask you to lunch in order to find out why you haven’t been in church for three months—although He’d sure like to know!

No, all these duties you owe God will be fulfilled by serving other saints in your communion. In the nursery you keep God’s covenant children. You tithe Jesus Christ’s share of your income, and you neglect the Spirit’s house when you neglect church attendance. It is easy to say “I love God”; it is harder to love the saints for God.

If we reviewed the five vows of membership we all took to join the PCA, we would discover that the first three have to do with our relationship with the Triune God. We repent before the Father, believe in the Son, and follow the Holy Spirit. But that is only three-fifths of what it means to be a Christian.

The last two vows complete the process: We support the Church and we submit to our leaders in the congregation. If we are not willing to do vows 4 and 5, then vows 1 through 3 are, quite frankly, meaningless—they are a hypocritical farce! My communion with God is not complete without

my communion with other saints at my local church, and even around the world.

If I want forgiveness from God, I must forgive others. If I want to really love God, I must love others. If I want peace with God, I must protect the peace and purity of the Church. And if I want to be one with God through Christ, I must become one with the saints through the Spirit.

You see, the Apostles' Creed informs us that God indeed has a face. It is the face of the woman in the pew beside you, the tears of the needy brother in the Sudan, and the smile of that child in the nursery you choose to love and serve. God's face is found in the communion of the saints. Tell me, is God's face smiling at you?

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 to the honor and glory of God.

CTS: Remember Covenant Seminary graduates now serving as missionaries and church planters in many countries around the globe, especially those working in areas that are actively hostile to Christianity. Pray that these servants and their families will reflect the character of Christ in all they do, and that His light will shine through them to draw many to everlasting life.

MTW: Pray for funding for national pastors for three current church plants in Berlin. National leadership is an important step in establishing a church that will remain.

RUM: Please pray for the Coordinator for RUM, Rod Mays. Pray for wisdom and direction in his leadership of RUM as he seeks to assist the presbyteries and churches in providing college ministries for the PCA.

RBI: RBI staff work closely with each other in serving PCA churches. Please pray for quality servant hearts in assisting each other.

DAY 22

Read Colossians 1:1-14

THURSDAY, MAY 24

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:14

I believe the two most beautiful words in any language are that language’s words for “God” and “forgiveness.” A. W. Tozer reminds us of the importance of this first of all words—*God*. He writes, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God.”³³

The Christian God, the God of the Bible, unlike all other false but popular gods, is a God who forgives sins. When Christians recite the Creed and say, “I believe in ... the forgiveness of sins,” they are confessing the most radical thing about their most holy religion. The gods punish sin and even participate in it, or at best remain aloof from sinners (like Allah), but only the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to forgive sins.

This is the heart of Christianity, and no text in the Bible captures this heartbeat better than Colossians 1:13,14: “He (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness (the devil’s domain) and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Jesus and the Kingdom of Light), in whom (Christ) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Plain and simple. This is why Jesus came: deliverance and forgiveness. Without both we will never be able to enter the kingdom of God. Christ delivers us from the power of Satan and forgives us of the penalty of sin. This is the good news of the Gospel.

But there is a second side to this article of faith. When I say that I believe in forgiveness, I am not just speaking for myself. Others need forgiveness and, in Christ, are worthy of that same redeeming grace. In fact, Jesus makes it clear that if I want to be forgiven I must forgive others as well (Mt. 6:12-15). When we pray “deliver us from evil” (or the Evil one), and “forgive us our debts,” we must add “as (or insofar as) we forgive those indebted to us”—those who’ve sinned against us. If I don’t give forgiveness to others I don’t get forgiveness from God. No shallow and self-centered view of perseverance and assurance can rob the words of Jesus from their full forces—lack of forgiveness deserves judgment; forgiveness warrants mercy. Our God is forgiving; in Him “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

Finally, there is a third side to this doctrine. It involves repentance.

Only the penitent will be willing both to confess sins and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9), and only the penitent will be humbled enough to grant forgiveness to others. The old Puritan, Thomas Watson, poetically put forth this truth: “We may clearly see the Spirit of God moving in the waters of repentance, which though troubled, are yet pure. Moist eyes dry up sin and quench the wrath of God. Repentance is the cherisher of piety, the procurer of mercy. The more regret and trouble of spirit we have first at our conversion, the less we shall feel afterwards.”³⁴

Herein lies the “triangle of forgiveness,” in which all genuine Christians live: the mercy of God, the repentance of one’s own soul, and a gracious spirit toward other sinners. Our confession of “the forgiveness of sins” is rooted in the character of God. And what is that character like? Let A. W. Tozer again speak and inform us: “The fellowship of God is delightful beyond all telling. He communes with His redeemed ones in an easy, uninhibited fellowship that is restful and healing to the soul. He is not sensitive nor selfish nor temperamental. What He is today we shall find Him tomorrow and the next day and the next year. He is not hard to please, though He may be hard to satisfy. He expects of us only what He has Himself first supplied. He is quick to overlook imperfections when He knows we meant to do His will. He loves us for ourselves and values our love more than galaxies of newly created worlds ... how good it would be if we could learn that God is easy to live with. He remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He may sometimes chasten us, it is true, but even this He does with a smile, the proud, tender smile of a Father who is bursting with pleasure over an imperfect but promising son who is coming every day to look more and more like the One whose child he is.”³⁵

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: For Sue Jakes, Coordinator of children’s ministry, pray for physical health and strength to continue encouraging and training people in the local church to disciple our covenant children.

CC: Please pray for the implementation of a strategic plan that broadens our view, enhances our vitality, and fortifies our vocation.

MNA: Pray that the Lord will encourage all of our pastors and church staff who labor in challenging inner cities, that God will keep them safe, joyful, and productive in winning people to our Lord Jesus Christ.

PCAF: Pray that God will allow the PCA Foundation to serve more PCA churches and their members.

RH: Pray for Ronna Snipes, Ridge Haven Bookkeeper. Her responsibilities include all matters pertaining to financial receipts and accounts payable.

DAY 23
FRIDAY, MAY 25

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us
an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

2 Corinthians 4:17

We believe that God created man as both a physical and spiritual being. Whether we are dichotomists who believe that man is made up of body and soul or trichotomists who see man as body, soul, and spirit, all true Christians believe in the redemption of the whole man. Christ came to rescue and restore both physical and spiritual wholeness of life, free from sin and its ravages.

Jesus redeemed our souls from sin’s death—separation from God. He also ransomed our bodies from physical death—separation from the living. In the world yet to come, He will give eternal life to both soul and body; the first through regeneration, the second through resurrection. And so we confess to believe in “the resurrection of the body.”



In the early Church, Gnostic heretics taught that all flesh was evil. Hence they even denied the Incarnation for fear that God might be polluted by taking on a body. They spoke of life in the body as bad. “The body is a tomb,” they would say. Christians do not agree.

Our bodies are a wonderful gift from God. They are the central focus of God’s common grace to mankind. And they are an integral part of that general revelation of creation that God gives to all men.

It is true that our fallen state has made the body a prison-house of sin: lusts, false conceptions, base passions, and animal-like urges cause us much pain and perversion. Even Paul bemoans this truth, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). As Isaac Watts asks, “Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?”³⁶ The answer is, of course, no. Our human frames are part of this world, this fallen world.

But we do have a friend to lead us on to grace. He is the Holy Spirit, the central figure in this last part of the Creed. It is the Spirit’s intention and plan to raise our bodies to new life and glorify them in heaven. Just as Jesus honored the human body by accepting one for Himself—a Jewish body—so the Spirit will honor the Father’s creation of our flesh by glorifying it forever. This happens at the resurrection. In that moment the believer will be restored to the glory of Adam and Eve in Eden and more—he will possess the glory that Jesus now has. We shall be just like Him!

When we say, “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body,” we are con-



fessing a belief in saving grace that will prepare the whole of each of us for heaven. But we are also confessing an appreciation for common grace. Life in the fallen world is tough, I know. But life in the body is good; it is all I know. They tell us that Martin Luther used to celebrate this fact of earthly life with his classic way of teasing language: “We ought to thank God for three great gifts: the grace of God, the love of a good wife, and German beer—and not necessarily in that order.” We must agree, though we are certain his order is right.

Thank God for a body that enjoys food and drink—is not Christian fellowship always richer over food? Thank God for a good wife whose body, with ours, procreates children of love—other bodies filled with immortal souls. And thank God for the grace that saves us, our wives, and our children—body and soul!

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Pray for Covenant Seminary’s Francis A. Schaeffer Institute (FSI), which seeks to train students to engage contemporary culture with the truth-claims of the Gospel in a compassionate and respectful manner. Pray for FSI’s many outreach ministries, conferences, and lecture series, that God will work through them to renew, redeem, and transform every aspect of our culture.

MTW: “Living in Grace” is a discipleship training seminar produced by MTW’s Spiritual Life Department and originally designed for missionaries. This training is now available to PCA churches. Pray that God will use this seminar to more fully ground His people in the power of the Gospel for daily living.

RUM: Please pray that presbyteries will desire to begin new campus works in the West, the Northeast, and the Midwest, and that existing works in these frontier regions of the PCA will remain strong. Pray that the process will go smoothly and that churches in these presbyteries will join in providing financial support.

RBI: Patience is a great virtue for the staff at the RBI. They often work long hours and serve many people, some who are hurting and anxious about life. Please pray for the patience of the staff.

DAY 24

Read Revelation 21:1-22:5

SATURDAY, MAY 26

LIFE EVERLASTING

“For the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

In every fairy tale the hero and his lady “live happily ever after.” Life is often not that way. In fact, this fallen world brings with it “trouble ever after.” But the story of life ends happily for those who love Jesus. This Hero does ride down out of the sky on His great white steed (Rev. 19:11) to rescue His bride, the Church, and to take her home to His Father’s home—the City of God. And there they do “live happily ever after.” This is the message of heaven, and the last article of the Creed: “I believe in ... life everlasting.”

In his delightful book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn reminds us that a belief in some afterlife is innate to mankind. From Adam and Eve, throughout the generations that followed, a belief in eternity and some place with God (or the gods) has shaped mankind. “The sense that we will live forever *some-where* has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was an island in the faraway east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that in the afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. The *Gilgamesh Epic*, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian Fields while their horses grazed nearby.... Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.”³⁷

The Creed closes the loop in its profession of “life everlasting.” Ecclesiastes tells us, “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7). God creates our world—visible and invisible—then He rescues it from sin, and finally He transforms our world into the New Heaven and the New Earth. And He prepares us, by grace, to live in this life everlasting. From the dust of creation, through the blood of the cross, God takes us to glory and to “life everlasting.”

What is this life everlasting like? The Bible talks less about it than I would like, but we do know this: In heaven we will be with the Triune God. It is Jesus’ presence that makes the afterlife heaven. The world to come is a grand reunion of angels and saints; all the “sons of God” will be there.

Heaven is full of bliss and void of anything sick, sad, or sinister. Heaven is a recreated and glorified Garden of Eden complete with plants, food, animals, and a beautiful physical home for mankind. There are endless joys and mysteries about heaven that we cannot fathom in our sinful state. The bottom line is that life everlasting will be so full of joy that, for now, it is unimaginable.

But “life everlasting” (the phrase) points as well—at least it hints as well—to a life eternal without God. A place called hell. What makes hell so horrible is the absence of God. Hell is the one place God is not present. In a fitting sense of justice, God gives to each of us what we’ve always wanted in life. For those who never wanted God in their life, that is what they get for eternity—a life everlasting without God—hell! But for those who pursued God in this life, through devotion to Christ, what they get from God is eternal life with Him, His Son, and the Holy Spirit—heaven!

How fitting it is for God to use this life as a probationary period in which we choose the life we will have forever. So choose well! And remember, it is possible to live with God “happily ever after.” The Creed tells us so.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Coordinator Charles Dunahoo as he leads the CE&P staff and Committee in carrying out the Strategic Plan for making Kingdom disciples.

CC: Pray that God will prepare the hearts and minds of the incoming new students as they prepare to begin the college experience and that God will protect them 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 heights in their relationship with Him in the context of new acquaintances, greater independence as the body of Christ, and living obediently to the Word of God.

MNA: Pray for Renato Bernardes, Network of Portuguese Speaking Churches Coordinator, and for the churches in the network. Pray that the network will be strong in advancing God’s Kingdom through planting churches with a broad multicultural vision. Pray also that their annual gathering in September will be a time of encouragement to all.

PCAF: Pray that the PCA Foundation brochures and video that we have distributed to all PCA churches will be effective in communicating to the church members our services and ministry.

RH: Pray for JD Wetterling, Resident Manager, as he handles the needs of all of our guests after business hours and on weekends. He has many varied responsibilities, all of which include taking care of our guests. He is the “point man” in the absence of other staff.





THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Exodus 20:2-17



DAY 25
SUNDAY, MAY 27

Read Matthew 5:1-20

OUR NEED FOR THE LAW

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;
I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Matthew 5:17



The Ten Commandments are part of the three sections of the breviary used by the Church, over the ages, to develop the faith and piety of its people. The Law of God is a summary of Biblical and Christian ethics. The Law of God is partner to the Gospel of Christ. They work hand-in-hand to bring a person to Christ and to help him grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The first thing we must remember is that the Law is not antithetical to grace. The Apostle Paul’s contrast between law and grace is specific in its intent and purpose. Law can never justify a person—neither the law of God nor the laws of men (legalism). Only grace can save us (Eph. 2:8-10). But the Law assists the Gospel and is part of the covenant of grace. The Ten Commandments came after Genesis 3:15 and not before. The Decalogue is not part of the old covenant of works, abrogated after the Fall. The Ten Commandments are but one phase of the progressive development of the covenant of grace. The Law is given to help us live as God’s covenant people, not to make us His covenant people.

There is confusion today, even in reformed circles, about these two covenants. The covenant of works existed between Adam and Eve and God in the Garden of Eden. Once that covenant was broken, it was done away with. In Genesis 3:15 God initiates a second, newer, and superior covenant: the covenant of grace. This covenant of grace is unfolded to mankind in six stages through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah, culminating in the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost. The Law of God is part of this covenant development. There was no covenant of grace prior to the Fall, and there is no covenant of works after the Fall.

We live in a lawless age because we live in an era when covenants, vows, and promises mean nothing. With the postmodern denial of absolute truth and the deconstruction of language, covenants mean nothing. All of life is covenantal, hence the taking of oaths and vows at baptism, confirmation, weddings, ordination, installation to public office, commissioning to military office, and the like. Since we seldom really mean what we say, vows and covenants are often broken.

God’s Ten Commandments were part of God’s covenant with a newly



liberated Israel (Exodus 20) and a new generation of those ready to possess Palestine (Deuteronomy 5). O. Palmer Robertson points out this truth clearly in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*.³⁸ But when we break this covenant (the Law) with God, we pay dearly for our unfaithfulness.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes clear two facts. First, the aim of the Law is always inward and not merely outward. It pushes for change of character, not just conformity in actions. Second, Jesus did not come to put the Law aside but to reinforce it, explain its deeper meaning, and fulfill the Law on behalf of His elect.

As we move into the second of the Three Formulae (Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer) we pass from what we believe (doctrine) to how we live (ethics). We move from Creed to commandment because good theology always leads to good ethics. Our lawless age is also a graceless age, and so it behooves us to see the Law afresh—through Gospel eyes—to help correct the foolishness and flaws of our carnal age. Blessed is the person who sees the Law this way and pursues its golden path of virtue.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the members of the Administrative Committee as we meet on June 13, that we will have wisdom and discernment in the decisions we make, especially those relating to the work of the Assembly.

CTS: Remember the many Covenant Theological Seminary staff members who work “behind the scenes” to assist with the mission of the institution. Pray especially for those who work directly with students in areas such as Admissions, Financial Aid, and Registration, that they will serve students with respect, wisdom, love, and a clear focus on Christ.

MTW: Pray for workers in countries considered closed to the Gospel. Safety is often a concern, but they face a complex range of issues, one of which is dealing with the separation of “Christian” from “American” in the minds of people they meet.

RUM: Please pray for RUF to effectively serve and provide pastoral care to PCA students on their university campuses. Pray that RUF's desire to build Christ's church will be made manifest through teaching students the importance of belonging to the body of believers. Pray that the RUF graduates will quickly root themselves in a church.

RBI: Oversight of the PCA Insurance Plans and Retirement Plan is the responsibility of the Board of Directors. Please pray that these men will have wisdom to direct this ministry.

DAY 26

Read Matthew 22:34-40

MONDAY, MAY 28

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

“On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 22:40

When asked by a lawyer—a legal specialist—which of the Ten Commandments was the greatest (i.e., the most important), Jesus answered that all ten of them together summed up the whole moral law and message of the Old Testament. The first four commandments have to do with loving God with all of our being. The final six shape how we love our fellow men. Our *Shorter Catechism* succinctly acknowledges that “the essence of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves.”³⁹

As such, a careful study of the Ten Commandments reveals four facets of these two great commandments. Each of the Ten Commandments tells us:

1. Something about the nature and character of God.
2. How Jesus Christ would fulfill each law.
3. What each commandment requires and prohibits for each person.
4. Why each commandment benefits and blesses civic life.

In our devotional readings on each commandment we will follow this simple four-fold outline. Making sense of all the ramifications of each law may not always be easy, but prayerful efforts to do so will always be beneficial.

Walter Chantry reminds us of our need for biblical balance in handling the Law. “At times error is easier to comprehend than truth. Perhaps that is why in every age so many lazy minds have welcomed both legalism and anti-nomianism. An easy rule of thumb adopts the Old Testament regulations wholesale. Equally effortless is an invalidation of the entire Old Covenant. Both methods will lead to serious doctrinal and practical aberrations, and will certainly fail to harmonize with the New Testament’s own treatment of the Law. It is not devotion to tradition, but love of the Scriptures which drives us back to the position of the creeds. Moral law remains. Ceremonial and judicial laws of Moses have passed away. We must wrestle with these distinctions in understanding God’s Word.”⁴⁰

What will help us is to keep in mind John Calvin’s three-fold use of the Law. First, the Law is given to show forth God’s righteousness and condemn all men for falling short of that perfection (Rom. 3:23). We call this

the *pedagogical* use of the Law. Paul points to this when he calls the Law “our tutor to Christ” (Gal. 3:24). The Law teaches us right and wrong and convicts us of sin. Second, the Law has a *judicial* use that is both “political” and “civic.” It helps restrain evil by the very threat of punishment for law breaking. Like the presence of a traffic policeman on a busy highway, the law’s posted warnings make us slow down and sin less. Third, the Law has a *didactic* function that is “normative.” It serves as a guide to holiness for true believers. It instructs us how to love God and others.⁴¹

I must say, frankly and kindly, that I am not a theonomist, nor am I a dispensationalist, nor am I antinomian when it comes to the Law. I am serious about the Law and Gospel-oriented with the Law. Brother Law convicts me of sin, warns me of punishment, and directs me to Sister Grace for help and healing in the Gospel. But after I am in the family, he continues to warn, guide, and convict. For his presence in this world and our lives I will be forever grateful. Let us learn what Brother Law has to teach us about God, Christ, ourselves, and the American culture.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for CE&P Bookstore personnel as they serve our PCA churches in handling orders and answering questions about good materials. Thank the Lord for their dedication and faithfulness.

CC: Please pray for all of our students and especially those students undecided on a major and/or vocational direction to pursue. Pray that God will provide wise counsel to examine God’s calling in their life, and to encourage students to investigate majors and vocations that complement that calling.

MNA: Lift up Henry Koh, Korean Ministries Coordinator, who has moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in order to be in a more central location for his work. Pray that this move will be beneficial to the Korean churches.

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 for staff protection from the attacks of the Adversary. Sometimes the Adversary attacks by illness, sometimes by discouragement, and sometimes by hindering necessary financial support or creating equipment breakdowns. Sometimes he hinders by keeping us spiritually occupied by the “tyranny of the urgent.”

DAY 27
TUESDAY, MAY 29

Read Exodus 20:1, 2
and Exodus 15:1-21

GOD THE WARRIOR

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you
out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Exodus 20:2



Several years ago media mogul Ted Turner took a swipe at the moral law during a speaking engagement. Turner said, “We’re living with outmoded rules. These rules we’re living under are the Ten Commandments, and I bet nobody here even pays much attention to them, because they are too old. When Moses went up to the mountain, there were no nuclear weapons, there was no poverty. Today, the Commandments wouldn’t go over. Nobody around likes to be commanded. Commandments are out.”

Amazing! Truly mind-boggling that an intelligent man would say such a thing! Let’s analyze Turner’s statement. First of all the Commandments are old. We agree. They are about three thousand five hundred years old. But so is God—He’s eternally the same. The devil has been around for millennia. And man’s fallen nature and sinfulness predates the Ten Commandments by at least two thousand years. In the modern world as in the ancient one, sin remains man’s biggest problem. The Ten Commandments address this problem of sin.

To say that there was no nuclear war when God gave Moses the Decalogue is ludicrous. There was war—“world wars”—between nations, engaged in bloody conflicts that killed tens of thousand of people—civilian and military. A month or so prior to the issuing of the Ten Commandments the greatest army in the ancient world had been destroyed in the sea. And to say that there was “no poverty” in the ancient world—from where does Turner get his information?

But Ted was correct on one account: “Nobody likes to be commanded. Commandments are out.” There is the salient fact we all must face. Precisely because people do not like to be told what to do, they need the Ten Commandments. Without them life becomes unbearable. Life in a lawless world is excruciating.

This morning I opened up the *Charlotte Observer* and read on the first page the sad story of a seventeen-year-old boy sentenced to twelve years in prison for manslaughter. It seems he got drunk, drove down the wrong side of the road, hit head-on a car with a young couple in it, and killed them both. When we break laws there are always serious consequences to follow—poverty, war, death, and worse.



The prologue to the Law reminds us of three timeless truths. First, God is the Lord, and according to Exodus 15, God is a Warrior-King. He is still on a mission to suppress sin and evil, and the Law is one of His chief weapons. Second, there are still evil men in the world who do evil things. Kings imprison and oppress people groups, businessmen blaspheme God and oppose Christianity, teenage boys get drunk and drop out of church. And third, the same painful legacy follows sinful actions—age, after age, after age.

People do not like commandments. They never have; not since a man and his wife broke a commandment not to eat fruit from a specific tree. One law, one commandment, one limit ... broken! As a result God has been in the business of deliverance and discipline, even to this day. In truth, it is not God's Law that gets old; it is man's sin. And I, for one, am sick of our rebellion.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the members of the Committee of Commissioners as they work for the Assembly, audit the General Assembly Committees and Agencies, review their work, and make recommendations to the Assembly.

CTS: Pray for students in Covenant Theological Seminary's Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC) program as they prepare to bring the hope of the Gospel to troubled people and hurting families. Pray also for those who train these future counselors to be means of grace to the broken-hearted.

MTW: Pray for growth in the alliance between MTW/Europe, national pastors in the region, and leaders with whom MTW partners. This group is seeking to encourage and minister to one another and to share resources in difficult, largely post-Christian cultures.

RUM: Please pray that those campus accounts with deficit balances will be built up to allow them to continue their work with RUF. Pray that Campus Ministers will be encouraged as they are reminded to rely on the Lord for provision.

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

DAY 28
WEDNESDAY, MAY 30

Read Exodus 20:3
and Acts 17:16-31

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT
THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Exodus 20:3

Each of the Ten Commandments tells us something about God, Christ, our society, and us. This is most easily seen in the nature of the first commandment. When God said, “You shall have no other gods before Me,” He was not being egotistical. He was simply helping us face reality.

The first commandment reminds us that there is only one true God. He is singularly unique. The Bible refers to Him as “the only living and true God.” All other gods are false, dead, and mundanely similar to one another and fallen man. A. W. Pink brings out the true intent of God’s word. “No ‘other gods’; they are called such not because they are so, either by nature or by office, but because the corrupt hearts of men make and esteem them such”⁴² (see 1 Corinthians 10:19, 20). Only God exists as God; all other gods are demons in disguise or degradations of man’s nature.

The first commandment also points to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Since He is God the Son in human flesh, He is unique among both men and the gods. Jesus makes it clear that He is the only Lord and Master, only Savior of sinners, and only way to heaven (John 14:6). If there were another God-man who could save us from the curse of the Law due to sin, then we could agree with our ecumenical friends that there were other (many) roads to God. But since there is one God, who has but one Son, who came in one incarnation, and who offered up one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sin, there is only one name by which we can be saved—Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 4:12).

Therefore, for each of us the first commandment orders us to avoid all imaginations of the mind or works of the hands that would create a false god in heart or life. It is popular nowadays for people to set forth their self-serving opinions about God with these words, “Well, my God is not like that. My God is ____.” Candidly, we don’t care about “your” God; we are interested only in “the” God. God is self-revealing and self-defined; He relies not upon our imaginations or conceptions to make Himself known. The first commandment drives us to the Bible to discover who God really is and what He is like.

Finally, the first commandment begs for the Great Commission. If societies and cultures are shaped by their gods—and nothing affects a people

like their conceptions of God—their religions—then it is essential that societies and cultures be “Christianized” by the Gospel message. The vast difference between England, Europe, and America compared to Iraq, India, and Japan is the Gospel. The best thing the Church can do for its people is to make God known in Christ through the Gospel. Knowledge of the one true God changes life for good and forever!

This first commandment is fundamental to all of life. James I. Packer writes, “The fundamental commandment first in importance as well as in order, and basic to every other, is ‘You shall have no other gods before Me.’ True religion starts with accepting this as one’s rule of life.”⁴³

The true God is manifested to us in the true Savior, Jesus Christ. And true religion rests upon the knowledge of this true God and His only Son. This true religion should be supported and promoted for its good to all society (Rom. 13:1-7). This is first of all and fundamental to all the rest of life. As long as we have no other god before us than Christ, we will be blessed by God in ways we can’t imagine. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12).

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Jan Magnuson, the librarian of the CE&P video library, as she schedules distribution of videos and DVDs for use in local churches. Ask for the Lord to bless her research for new, good additions to the library.

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

MNA: Pray for Tim McKeown, Hispanic American Ministries Director, and his wife, Becky, as they coach and counsel Hispanic church planters and their wives. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest will raise up laborers to reach Hispanic Americans with the Gospel.

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: Please pray for the Lord to surround each staff member with encouragement that will keep everyone going when the responsibilities are overwhelming and the rewards few.

DAY 29
THURSDAY, MAY 31

**Read Exodus 20:4
and Exodus 32:1-35**

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT
THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image.”

Exodus 20:4

The second commandment is the second longest of all the Decalogue. Only the fourth commandment on the Sabbath Day exceeds it in length (in the NASB, 82 words for commandment 2 and 97 words for commandment 4). In comparison, the rest of the Decalogue includes 137 English words, while commandments 2 and 4 include 179. Why such emphasis on worship? Why does God get so “nit-picky” (and severe) when He speaks about idols and days of worship?

The answer is obvious: How we worship eventually affects what we worship, or should I say “whom” we worship. False ideas about God and false worship go hand-in-hand. This is why the prosperity preachers upset me so: Eventually people who listen to them will conclude that God cares more about health 'n wealth than He does holiness and heaven. That god is an idol.

This commandment tells us that God is a Spirit, and as the *Catechism for Young Children* informs us, “God is a Spirit, and has not a body like men.”⁴⁴ Images of God the Father are always inappropriate, for God is a Spirit, and therefore must be worshiped only “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:22-24). William S. Plummer comments, “God never gave a command more solemn in terms, or in sanctions connected with it.”⁴⁵

Jesus Christ reinforced and fulfilled this commandment. In His famous conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus reminded us that we are to worship only the God we know, not the god we imagine. The God who can be known is the God revealed in the Word, not in artistic expression. There is disagreement, to be sure, about whether one can legitimately depict Jesus in artistic form: paintings, drawings, or movies. American Presbyterianism has distinguished between doxological imagery (for worship) and didactic imagery (for instruction). It has avoided the first and tolerated the second. Francis Turretin draws the distinction for us: “The question is not whether images may be made which ought to be valued by us (whether we regard the artist, material, or antiquity, or even on account of the prototype, if he is a man of some reputation, dear to us). Rather the question is, should any religious worship (whether called adoration or veneration) be paid to images of God and the saints made by the hand of men?”⁴⁶

We may go see *The Passion of Christ* or *The Nativity* at the movie theater, but we should not play clips of them on the overhead screen of the worship center. Even attendance at these films requires caution. If the cinematic portrayal of Christ causes you to picture that actor when you worship Jesus at church or at home, then you should avoid the film.

Therein lies our duty: to protect our minds and hearts from false thoughts about God and concepts of Jesus. A mind that thinks of God as a harsh, cold, and distant father is just as idolatrous as one that “sees” God as an old man with a white beard—Michelangelo’s god. And how we portray God to the culture around us has ramifications for those who listen to us pray and preach. Stuart Briscoe has a warning for the likes of Joel Osteen and Mike Ross: “All our idolatry attempts to whittle God down, suit Him to our way of doing things, fit Him in our comfortable pattern that does not harm our own ideas or challenge our way of thinking. By the time we have finished, we have denied God His power, muddied or defaced His image, and left ourselves with pitiful, empty lives that benefit neither Him nor us. Idolatry is serious business. God cannot ignore it. We do so at our peril.”⁴⁷

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: “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples” (Psalm 117:1). Pray that Covenant Seminary students will gain an even greater passion for God’s world mission. Pray for the Lord to bring forth much fruit from the various short-term mission trips in which students, faculty, and staff participate throughout the year.

MTW: Pray for support needs to be met for missionaries who are itinerating prior to going to the field. Pray also for their families during this transitional time.

RUM: Please pray for the RUM Area Coordinators: Bebo Elkin (Mississippi, Louisiana, West Tennessee, Arkansas Area) and Ronnie Rowe (Southwest Area). Ask that the Lord will give them insight and wisdom as they minister to the many staff under their care.

RBI: Chris Stevens, Myra Davis, Sybil Pullen, Terry Aiello, Sally Kaplan, Debby Brown, and Harry Cooksey are all important staff at RBI. As they carry out the important work of this ministry, please pray they continue to serve our participants in love, and encourage them in the midst of trials.

DAY 30
FRIDAY, JUNE 1

Read Exodus 20:7
and Psalm 8

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT
GOD IS SERIOUSLY HOLY

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”

Exodus 20:7



Profanity is a terrible sin and a difficult habit to break. I have a dear friend who once told me that the day he was converted, his foul speech was instantly changed. I have heard this from other people—male and female. But more often than not, most profane speakers struggle to clean up their speech. Why is this so?

The Ten Commandments are connected, each one building upon the previous ones and flowing logically and spiritually from them. The person who uses God’s name in vain does so because he does not trust God or think of Him in affectionate terms. So when disappointing, frustrating, or painful things happen in his life, his mind relapses to vain (empty or worthless) thoughts. He thinks, “God did this! God could have prevented this! I’m on my own all over again. God could care less about me.” Then the next thing out of his mouth is the profane use of the Holy Name. After all, Jesus told us that the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart (Matt. 12:34). People who truly trust God and who know that He sovereignly loves them do not profane God’s name.

This commandment reminds us that God is holy and that He is sincere about our sanctifying His name. For the name of God is as sacred as His person is. The name of any creature is never to be taken lightly or used inappropriately. God will damn souls to hell, but we do not need to invoke Him to do so. “Jesus Christ” is not an expression of anger, surprise, frustration, or disappointment. And “God” is a name only to be used in worship, prayer, or preaching.

The name of Jesus is as holy as God’s name. He has been given the name above all names—for the sake of worship (Phil.2:9-11). And His name is the name by which we witness to the lost (Acts 4:12). To honor God is to honor Jesus, and to honor Christ, we reverence His name.

What this third commandment calls for is piety: a serious and reverent devotion to God and the things of God. Ours is an impious age in which nothing is sacred. We have become a rude, crude, and repulsive age in many ways. Our lack of reverence for God relates to our lack of respect for other men. An age of filthy language is also an age of “shock jocks” and reality television shows. Irreverence and disrespect are first cousins.



This is why Christians must be known for their piety—*eusebeia* in Greek, translated as “godliness” in the New Testament. Our reverence for God and attendant respect for others set a tone for all of society. This third commandment demands that civil life honor both God and men made in God’s image. Blasphemy, caricatures of religious people on television, the use of God’s name in vain in the public square should all be monitored and, yes, censored by the civil magistrate. Freedom of speech does not extend to profanity. When our presidents plead with us for a “gentler, kinder nation,” we must know that this begins with a personal and civic seriousness concerning the holy name of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Ask the Lord to bless the fledgling ministry to men in the PCA. Thank the Lord for the good leadership of Gary Yagel, who assists CE&P in this area of ministry.

CC: Please pray that the Admissions Office staff will accurately and effectively portray the distinctiveness of a Covenant education to prospective students and their parents.

MNA: Pray for the chaplain training event that will be held in Memphis two days prior to General Assembly. Pray that many of our PCA chaplains will be able to attend, and for speaker Richard Pratt as he prepares to lead this training.

PCAF: Thank God for the PCA Foundation’s Board Chairman, RE John N. Albritton, Jr., and for the attitude of service and commitment to Christ that he exemplifies.

RH: Pray for the success of the capital campaign as it continues to move toward the goal of \$500,000.

DAY 31
SATURDAY, JUNE 2

Read Exodus 20:8-11
and Isaiah 58:12-14

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS OUR PRIORITY

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

Exodus 20:8

Of all the commandments we break, none is discarded as effortlessly and guiltlessly as our Sabbath-keeping. Dismissing all those ludicrous dispensational arguments about the Sabbath day not applying to New Testament saints, we must face the fact that more people are now found in shopping malls on Sundays than in churches. Even for many saints, Lord’s Day observance is increasingly limited to Sunday morning at most; for the general public, the Lord’s Day does not exist.

Sunday is important because it keeps God in our week. It reminds us that God is the priority of life. Take God out of the week and you’ve taken Him out of your life, for time is life. Take God out of enough lives and you’ve taken Him out of your society. Take God out of society (its routine and rhythms) and you’ve taken God out of your culture—you’ve become a godless people! I fear that this is exactly what is happening in America.

The Sabbath day is rooted in the very nature and character of God. Remember, God kept a Sabbath day as our creator (Ex. 20:11), and He rests now because He is a Redeemer who has finished His work of redemption (Dt. 5:15). We are commanded, as creatures made in God’s image and as the elect redeemed by God’s grace, to keep a day set apart for rest from work and for worship focused on the cross. That special day is the Lord’s Day, Sunday, the Christian Sabbath.

This fourth commandment is part of God’s morally binding law that is perpetual. God tells us in Isaiah 58:13-14 how we are to keep the Sabbath. Our duty is four-fold:

- We are to delight in it, to take joy in the Lord’s Day.
- We are to refrain from our daily work on Sunday.
- We are to avoid worldly recreations (“own pleasure”) that will distract us from our worship.
- We are not to idle the day away: worship, rest and ministry are the purposes of the Sabbath day.

And how important it is for Christians to model Sabbath-keeping for all others! Our society needs “blue laws” to protect the Lord’s Day from

profanation. In a society where God's name is profaned we find, naturally, that God's day is also profaned. There are no surprises here. In America, where there are 40 million self-professed evangelical Christians, there are probably 30 million who do not seriously keep the Sabbath day. If God's people are not serious about God, why should anyone else take Him seriously?

Sabbath-breaking is the root of most of our social ills, believe it or not. Any boy or girl, man or woman who will openly violate the Lord's Day will soon trespass other moral and civil laws. Doubt that? In the eighteenth century, the Lord Chief Justice of England, Sir Matthew Hale, once said from Britain's Supreme Court of Law, "I never had a hardened criminal come before my bench who did not begin his life of crime other than by breaking the Sabbath." Robert L. Dabney hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "When we are made to see that the sanctification of this day is the bulwark of practical religion in the world, that it goes hand-in-hand everywhere with piety and the true knowledge of God, that where there is not Sabbath, there is at last no Christianity, it becomes incredible to us that God would make this institution temporary. The necessity for a Sabbath has not ceased, therefore the command has not been revoked."⁴⁸ So true! And thus we are to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." It all fits together, does it not? A Holy God who is alone to be worshipped in a holy manner, whose name is holy, and whose day is holy—this is the essence of saving religion, genuine piety, and civic goodness. We need to focus on the Lord's Day and "call it a delight."

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Many of Covenant Seminary's students come from distant lands. Please pray that these international students will feel "at home" at the Seminary and that the Seminary community will be blessed and sharpened by the unique cultural and geographical perspectives these students bring to their studies, ministries, and worship.

MTW: Pray for church-planting efforts in Bangkok, Thailand. Their goal is to have a full-time Thai pastor/evangelist to lead the church-planting work, beginning regular worship in the Thai language by June 2007.

RUM: Pray for the RUM Affiliated Committees as they give oversight, pastoral care, accountability, and encouragement to the Campus Ministers.

RBI: Please pray for Rev. Craig Branson, Mr. Cliff Eckles, Jr., and Mr. Mark Jaudes, the newest members of the Board of Directors for RBI. Pray the Lord calls these men to seek His face and equips them to carry out His Kingdom's work as they serve on the Board of RBI.

DAY 32
SUNDAY, JUNE 3

Read Exodus 20:12
and Romans 13:1-14

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS OUR AUTHORITY

“Honor your father and your mother.”

Exodus 20:12

If there is one negative trait that seems uniquely American, I would say it is our aversion to authority. Internationally, this is known as “the ugly American”—loud, boisterous, and headstrong. Other nations speak of our “cowboy spirit”—our disregard for other peoples and our lack of team spirit; it’s our way or no way. Americans have little respect for tradition, a low regard for the sovereignty of other nations, and a propensity to go our own way. We euphemistically refer to this as our “pioneering spirit.” Please! The fact is, we are a difficult people to lead. We have given to the world the generation gap, the hippie, the punk rock paradigm, and trash talk. We are, let’s be honest, an arrogant, insolent, and rebellious culture.

Our nation began in a great rebellion and it continues in such. My wife, who is from Mississippi, was once surprised, in an amusing way, years ago when we were first married. She had grown up hearing the Civil War referred to as the “War of Northern Aggression.” Then, one summer, we were visiting some of my relatives in Mount Vernon, Ohio. There, on the town square, was a statue of a Yankee soldier, facing south. Under him was an old inscription dedicating the monument to those who died in the “War of the Great Rebellion.” She had never heard that term for the “Civil” War—a great rebellion. Truth is, there was nothing civil about that conflict; for both the North and the South, it brought great suffering and loss of life upon our entire nation, that has required generations of rebuilding and healing,

We find it difficult to admit, but we are by nature a rebellious lot. God refers to us often as such in the pages of Scripture. The fourth commandment reminds us of four truths that box us in and restrain our rebellious souls—four sides to “civil” life:

1. God is God and all legitimate authority comes from Him: parental, pastoral, and magisterial.
2. Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and He rightly rules *all* aspects of life; everything is under Christ’s authority.
3. All Christians are called to respect and respond to God’s authority exercised at home, in school, on the job site, in the Church, and



by the government.

- 4. All men should respect those who lead. Rebellion may be necessary in extreme cases, but this is a rare exception.

The boy who does not respect his dad and the girl who argues incessantly with her mom are time bombs of rebellion just waiting to explode. The lawsuits against teachers, the firing of pastors, the skewering of politicians in the media, strikes and walk-outs at work, and the abuse referees and coaches take are tell-tale signs of a culture sick with rebellion.

I will irritate some and raise the eyebrows of many by what I am about to write, but I believe that all the talk about unfaithful husbands, absentee fathers, ungodly pastors, and crooked politicians is ill placed. Poor followers deserve, produce, and eventually receive poor leaders. Feminism has led to bail-out husbands. Childish rebellion has caused fathers to neglect their duties. Sincere spiritual men avoid Church office because of the impossibility of herding cats. And low-life men seek public office because good men refuse to take the public abuse we give our elected officials.

God put it this way, “Like people, like priest” (Hosea 4:9). He uses an inverse order, the opposite of what we would think. His intent? The people get priests just like themselves. In other words, a rebellious people deserve poor leadership. Think about it. Are we not still involved in the “War of the Great Rebellion” against God and His authority?

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Dick Aeschliman, Assistant to the Coordinator, as he serves in various training events.

CC: Pray that Covenant will continue to be a place where students are equipped to fulfill their calling from God as they impact the culture for Christ.

MNA: Pray for our deployed chaplains and their families, as well as for our PCA active duty, reserve, and guard service persons who are deployed or about to be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Also remember our civilian chaplains serving in civilian hospitals, retirement homes, prisons, hospice institutions, and VA hospitals.

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 that PCA churches will have a renewed vision for the expansion of Ridge Haven, that we may meet the great need for Presbyterian and reformed camp and conference resources throughout the country. Such a vision will allow us to complete Ridge Haven Southeast and begin work on Ridge Havens Northeast, Central, and West.



DAY 33
MONDAY, JUNE 4

Read Exodus 20:13
and John 10:1-18

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

“You shall not murder.”
Exodus 20:13

The sanctity of life is one of the three crucial issues in the Western world, along with the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of the family. In our nation alone, over 50 million human beings have been aborted since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. Add to this the ever-rising homicide and suicide rates; the proliferation of pornography and incidents of sexual molestation; rapes; violent video games, television and films; and the general surge in “violent crimes,” and we witness a nation bent on a self-inflicted holocaust over time!

God’s relationship with every living soul begins with the gift of life. God causes us to be born. Funny as it sounds, I often thank God for the gift of my simple life. “To be or not to be, that is the question,” Shakespeare placed in the mouth of Hamlet. The answer is obvious: Better to live even a sorrowful life than never to exist at all. Hamlet agrees.

This sixth commandment tells us not to take another’s life, injure another’s person, defame another’s reputation, or assault another’s soul, because we rob another of the gift only God can give—a good life. We are not to judge what a “good” life is, a “quality” life as the medical and therapeutic community call it. God is the sovereign judge of what is good and quality existence. Who are we to say that the Down Syndrome person has a less-happy life than the brilliant man with great success and a trail of shattered dreams and broken hearts?

Jesus reminds us of this truth: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Abundant life is what God gives, what Jesus redeems, and what the Spirit renews. Life in God’s Word, with Jesus, in the Spirit, is *the* abundant life. It is what every soul was made for and longs for.

Our duty as Christians is to preserve the quality of life, the dignity of each person, and the promise of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—inalienable rights from God for each soul. Society is bound, along with us, to protect and preserve all life—especially that life which cannot protect and preserve itself: the fetus in the womb, the handicapped newborn in the doctor’s hands, the special needs child in the fourth grade, the young woman ravaged by depression, the widow, the orphan, and

the lonely.

Mercy is the action word of this commandment. It is that attribute above all others that characterizes God's relationship with every living creature: angels, men, and animals. There is no more tender truth in the entire Bible than that expressed in Psalm 145:9: "The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made." Jesus is the mercy of God in the flesh and His saints are His army of mercy in the world. If we ever truly become a people of mercy, we will transform America as the early church did the Roman Empire. In an age where life was so devalued that murder in the arena was the number one "sport" of Rome, there came a people known simply as "the followers of the Way." Their love for life and their mercy toward all transformed the Western world and the course of history. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Mt. 5:7). We have received this mercy; now it is time for us to give such "abundant life" to others.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Pray that God will grant wisdom and discernment to Covenant Theological Seminary's Board of Trustees as they make plans for the future of the Seminary. Pray that He will continually renew their energy and enthusiasm for the Seminary's mission to transform pastors to transform the church to transform the world.

MTW: In 2006 MTW purchased the Wycliffe Linguistics Center in Huaraz, Peru, as a site for a Bible training institute of Quechua pastoral leadership. Please pray God will supply the needs of the institute, so that many pastors will be trained and the Church will grow.

RUM: Please pray for the training of student leaders while on campus and for the ongoing ministries they will have in the church in years to come. Ask God to prepare Campus Ministers and staff to teach students how to minister to those around them in the campus community.

RBI: Pray for the Service Center staff at RBI as they interact with our pastors, staff, and PCA churches and organizations. Pray for wisdom, guidance, and strength for Myra Davis, Sybil Pullen, Chris Stevens, and Harry Cooksey as they answer questions and administer benefit plans.

DAY 34
TUESDAY, JUNE 5

**Read Exodus 20:14
and Hosea 2:1-23**

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS FAITHFUL

“You shall not commit adultery.”
Exodus 20:14



I remember watching a movie in which Soviet female spies were told to seduce American soldiers and diplomats. “After all,” the KGB officer disdainfully said, “sex is America’s religion.” Fictional but factual at the same time. We use sex to sell automobiles, keep crowds “aroused” at football games, entertain ourselves, and reward politicians. Why are we so shocked that homosexuality and even same-sex marriages are now promoted as acceptable, and even child pornography and incest constantly become more common?

Sexual immorality is sin against God and His natural order for mankind in two ways. Heterosexual immorality violates the design of Genesis Two: one man and one woman become one flesh and one spiritually. Homosexual immorality sins against God’s order for the human race. God made man in His image, male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). God gave marriage to man and woman, protected by this commandment. In the end, all sexual immorality is not just superficial or external behavior, but is sin against God’s character.

God is faithful. He has but one love, one wife, one Bride—His Church. He has “divorced” her at times, as in the Old Testament. But God always takes His bride back again and never fails to love her. More importantly, God has never had another lover. Unlike immoral men, God does not pretend to be the husband of the Church, and the lover of another religious people. He does not live a life as Jehovah with the Church and Allah with the Muslims. God is faithful to one Bride—the Church—and in love with one wife—the followers of Jesus.

This is what makes us love God and His Son, Jesus. We know that they will never leave us or forsake us. We may be unfaithful, but God is never so. He does not repay our spiritual adultery with His own version of unfaithfulness. God’s love is always pure, always singular, always passionately devoted to one end—the good of His people. God is therefore the model husband.

We need not be reminded of how dire is our need for faithfulness in marital relationships and in our sexual behavior altogether. As a boy, I never dreamed that you and I would see the likes of homosexual bishops, pedophile priests, lesbian ministers, and adulterous pastors, let alone a di-



orce rate that, at times in our life, has approached 50 percent of all marriages. This commandment calls Christians to fidelity in marriage and calls society to strict hedges around sexuality.

James I. Packer speaks into our befuddled sexual morals when he writes, “Our benighted society urgently needs recalling to the noble and ennobling view of sex which Scripture implies and the seventh commandment assumes: namely, that sex is for fully and permanently committed relationships, which by being the blend of affection, loyalty, and biology that they are, prepare us for and help us into that which is their archetype—the happiness of being truly, voluntarily united to God, men, and angels.”⁴⁹ Life with God is blissful and life with one wife is blessed—both mirror one another and promise to us the ecstasy of life God intends for men and women in love ... with Him and each other.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for the Bookstore staff, Jennifer Pritchett, Mark Johnston, and Tim Schirm, as they serve PCA churches and individuals who are looking for good books and study materials. Pray also for Mai Nguyen as he handles the shipping for the Bookstore and several other PCA committees and agencies. Also, pray for Jan Magnuson, who serves over 200 churches that are members of the Video Library and use this resource in their ministries.

CC: Pray that Covenant administrators, staff, faculty, and students will honor Christ as they live and work in community. Pray that wounded individuals will be ministered to as we humbly serve each other.

MNA: Pray for Nancy Booher, ESL Ministries Director, for guidance, wisdom, and stamina as she works with churches to begin or expand their ESL ministries.

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 referred to General Assembly.

RH: Ridge Haven has begun the establishment of a regional support plan involving specific and mutually beneficial agreements with more than a dozen presbyteries. Pray that this new concept will be well received by the presbyteries.

DAY 35
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6

**Read Exodus 20:15
and Proverbs 30:7-9**

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS GRACIOUS

“You shall not steal.”
Exodus 20:15

When men want to speak of how easy it is to obtain something from another, they speak with the American idiom “it was like taking candy from a baby.” I have been blessed, to date, with three precious grandchildren. They are all babies: Hannah is two-and-a-half, Harris is thirteen months, and little Mattie Jane is only sixty days old at the writing of this devotion. The last thing I can conceive of is giving them candy and then taking it away to consume it myself. What a low-life!

Even more unimaginable is the thought of God taking away from His children their good gifts. In fact, the concept of “taking” and God seem incongruent. God gives; He seldom takes away. And this is why the eighth commandment is so important. We sin greatly when we take away from others what God gave to them. We steal the candy given by our Father in heaven to His other babies.

I used to think, as a child, that this prohibition against theft was somewhat important but less profound than the other nine commandments. I was wrong. Even though this commandment is about “stuff,” what we earn, purchase, and own is a very personal part of our life and identity. The proof of that comes when people experience a burglary. They often say they feel “violated.” It is intensely personal and unsettling to think that a stranger was rifling through your personal effects and property. It crosses a sacred barrier. Martin Luther is right on when he contends, “Next to your own person and your wife, your worldly goods stand closest to you, and God means them to be secured to you and therefore commands that no one shall take away or lessen any part of his neighbor’s possessions.”⁵⁰

God has made each one of us a steward of the things of His world. He gives to us so that we can give to others. He permits us to own things so that we can share things with others. We own property—a slice of Eden—and are expected to improve it. We work, are paid wages, and invest our earnings in value-added things. We give to charity, pay taxes, tithe to the Lord, and support our families. Every time we unlawfully take from another, we foil another’s stewardship and distort our own.

We rob God and the Church when we do not tithe. We steal from our employers through laziness, deception, theft, and false expense ac-

counts. We take from our children and grandchildren when we spend and never save. We are thieves toward the state when we cheat on our taxes. The ways we steal go on and on.

God blesses the generous, the sacrificial, and the cheerful giver. We are never more like God than when we are giving instead of taking. As I write these devotions, I have just returned from a Christmas shopping spree in which I got two very special gifts for my two sons—gifts I’ve been saving for and planning to purchase for months. I am more excited about giving these gifts to Nathan and Aaron than I am about receiving anything this Christmas. In fact, I haven’t asked for a thing; I really need nothing and want nothing. Jesus is right, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This is a joy the thief never knows.

This Christmas my whole family will be together—my wife, Jane; Joanna, Denver, and Mattie Jane; Abigail and Ken with Hannah and Harris; and Nathan and Aaron. I will delight in their surprise, their giggles of joy, and the simple excitement of my grandbabies and their candy. Such is the joy of God ... the joy of giving. So sad it is, what the thief is missing!

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 for the pastors and other ministry leaders who come to Covenant Seminary to be further equipped to serve the Lord by pursuing Doctor of Ministry (DMin) or Master of Theology (ThM) degrees. Pray for those who are seeking to sharpen their ministry skills or enhance their understanding of Scripture through continuing education opportunities such as the Seminary’s intensive 24-hour classes or Lifetime of Ministry course offerings.

MTW: There is an urgent need for funding of the Children’s Home in Bogphur, India. The loss of an outside source that provided much support has created a crisis.

RUM: Pray for the RUM Permanent Committee members as they oversee the ministry. Pray that as new members join this year, they will quickly grasp the work of RUM and continue the vision with unity and focus.

RBI: PCA Ministerial Relief provides for financial assistance to those who qualify according to need. Please pray that more churches will participate in the annual PCA Christmas Offering this year, as it is the source of this financial help. We praise God for a Church that cares about the needs of their servants.

DAY 36
THURSDAY, JUNE 7

Read Exodus 20:16
and John 8:31-47

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS TRUE

“You shall not bear false witness
against your neighbor.”

Exodus 20:16

“The Cause of Truth is always more important than its consequences.” This is the first of fifteen life principles written on the back pages of my personal Bible. It grows out of the painful process of my conversion.

I grew up a Roman Catholic. My family, especially my parents, were genuinely devout, God-fearing, spiritual people who sought God and loved their church. All five of their children remain, to this day, sincerely religious people. As a child, I was often touched, deeply so, by the thought that I had been blessed by God to have been born a Roman Catholic. I regularly prayed for and felt sorry for my Protestant neighborhood friends, like my little Lutheran friend, Jeff Miller.

I went off to a secondary seminary, during high school, to study for the priesthood. I remained a “faithful Catholic” throughout my college years, my tour of duty in the Army, my graduate schooling, and my bachelor days in Memphis, Tennessee. I trusted in the Roman Catholic Church because it alone had “The Truth.”

How painful a process it was, from February of 1975 to August of 1976, to attend the evangelical Central Church and have all I believed in turned upside-down by the Gospel. I was greatly conflicted for those eighteen months—drawn to the Gospel Truth but seeking to be faithful to the “True Church.” In the end, the Scriptures trumped my family heritage.

For me, nothing is more important than the Truth. I believe Jesus with all my being when He states: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn. 8:32). I also know that this Truth can be very, very painful. It has hurt me deeply—down in the part of the soul where only God and I are allowed to go. And it has hurt my family and loved ones. I have lost friends because of the Truth.

But it has also set me and my family free: my dying father, my living mother, my sisters, my brother, and my four children. The Truth has been good—oh, so good—to me and to mine. This is why I live by this first principle: The Cause of Truth is always more important than its consequences.

Of all the things I love about God and Jesus, this is first and foremost: God always tells me the Truth ... always! He does so because of His unfa-

ing love for me, even when it hurts so much. Every time I read of Jesus saying, “Truly, truly I say to you,” I fall in love with Him again.

Christians must be people of Truth. I believe this is what the world most needs from the Church: the Truth. And all our efforts to affirm the culture, relate to people’s needs, show sympathy for human sorrows, and be relevant to this generation are for naught if we fail to tell them the Truth. They need to be free. They deserve to hear the Truth. They have a right to reality. And God wants them to be free—like I am—even if the liberating process leaves scars.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for a strong attendance of PCA ruling and teaching elders’ wives at the 35th General Assembly and for the training and encouragement planned for them in the seminars and women’s programs.

CC: Pray for construction on the new residence hall to be completed for new students in the fall.

MNA: Pray for the ongoing relief work in Mississippi and Louisiana and for more volunteers to commit to the repair and rebuilding of homes in the Gulf Coast.

PCAF: Pray for safe travel of PCA Foundation staff and their supplies to and from the 2007 General Assembly in Memphis, Tennessee.

RH: Pray for the safety of all guests! Though we make every effort to provide for the safest experience possible, we need the Lord’s protection from human error, equipment failure, and weather related problems, as well as His provision for traveling mercies. Pray for the Lord’s grace for wise decisions.

DAY 37
FRIDAY, JUNE 8

**Read Exodus 20:17
and Philippians 4:8-20**

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT
GOD IS CONTENTED

“You shall not covet.”
Exodus 20:17

When I was in graduate school I hung around with a group of guys: Steve Mc., Bob, Dave, Howard, and Steve G. Two of the guys were married, and their two wives were sweet young women. Terri was like the all-American cheerleader—cute, bubbly, wholesome, and a schoolteacher. Mary Kay was a model—sophisticated, beautiful, and a young woman who was a good conversationalist. Despite these things, both their husbands left them for secretaries at their work.



I never understood it. Why did these men not see the gift God had given them? I was a bachelor at the time and often said to myself, “If God were to give me the likes of Terri or Mary Kay, I’d never be dissatisfied or go asking for another woman!” Well, four years after graduation, God gave me my wife, Jane. And my contentment with her is probably the only promise I’ve ever kept completely before God.

Covetousness is a deadly sin. Rooted in a lack of contentment and fueled by a prideful sense of some entitlement, it becomes a cancer that sucks the joy of life out of every soul it infests. To learn the secret of contentment is the deepest lesson in life. Gratitude is the grace that flows from a soul that does not covet.

I wish I could say I never covet, but I have and I do. I have desired another ministry’s success or notoriety. I have often been discontented with my financial state. I still, at times, lust after any red convertible sports car. And if Ohio State doesn’t win the national championship every other year, I begin to grumble and whine. Contentment has always been a struggle for me, but less and less as I grow older and wiser.

Saints should come to realize the truth Puritan Thomas Watson sets before us: “Believe that condition to be the best which God by his providence carves out to you.”⁵¹ I am learning that, and with that lesson comes a deeper appreciation for God.

God is contented, perfectly so. “Oh, sure,” some will no doubt say, “anyone could be content if He always got whatever He wanted! Why shouldn’t God be satisfied?” Deeper reflection prompts us to ask: Does God always get what He wants?



I have often marveled at how the three persons of the Trinity are never jealous of one another and one never covets the glory of the other two ... never. They are content as Father, content as Son, content as Spirit. If one is generated by the other or if one proceeds from the other two, they are completely content for such to be. God is never dissatisfied with who He is, what He has, or what another has that He does not. And that is why God's joy can fill us and our joy can never add to God's.

God has been good to me. My wife, my life, my children, my calling, and my possessions all give evidence that God has tailor made contentment for me and, I would add, for you. Will we accept, by faith, the gifts of God and rejoice over what God has given our friends?

I can't help but muse over the possibility of how life would have turned out for Bob if he had been content with Terry, or for Dave if he had been satisfied with Mary Kay. They did not end up happy, not as I have. How about you? Can you accept that your condition is carved out for you by a sovereign, loving God? Are you content, or are you still thinking that God owes you something that is being withheld from you?

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Pray for the Ad Interim Committee on Federal Vision as they prepare their final report and recommendations for the General Assembly, that each man will be given the mind and heart of Christ in his deliberations, discussions, and understanding regarding this issue facing the PCA.

CTS: Pray for the students in Covenant Theological Seminary's Master of Arts in Educational Ministries (MAEM) program. Pray that this program will provide a solid biblical and theological foundation for support staff in the local church who are involved in educational ministries to children, youth, or adults, and that the Spirit will use their ministries to raise up strong disciples of Jesus Christ.

MTW: Pray for an increasing spirit of prayer within MTW, both individually and corporately, on our teams, in national church plants, and among our staff.

RUM: Please pray for the five RUF International groups as they reach out to share the Gospel with students from over forty different countries. Many of these students will return to their home countries after a year. Pray that they will be strengthened and equipped to live for Christ and participate in building the Church. Also, pray for these Campus Ministers as they daily strive to overcome their own culture to meet the needs of those in other cultures and to apply the Gospel to these students.

RBI: Pray for wisdom and sensitivity for Ministerial Relief Representative Debby Brown as she works with those applying for assistance from the Ministerial Relief Fund.





THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.*

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil.



DAY 38
SATURDAY, JUNE 9

Read Matthew 6:1-15

THE PERFECT PIETY

“Beware of practicing your righteousness
before other people in order to be seen by them.”

Matthew 6: 1

The Lord’s Prayer is the third of the Three Formulae that make up the foundation of the Church’s catechetical instruction. This is why the last ten questions in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* are devoted to the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer, given to us by Jesus Himself, closes the triangle on experiential religion.



The Apostles’ Creed summarizes our doctrine, our profession of our faith. The Ten Commandments summarize our ethics, the practice of our faith. The Lord’s Prayer summarizes our devotion to God, the piety of our faith. *Piety* is not a popular word today—it gets bad press. This is because we associate piety with being pious—and we despise that word. “Oh, she’s soooo pious!” We hear people say this with much venom and disdain. *Pious* has become synonymous with *hypocritical*, but the connection is not warranted.

In the Greek New Testament, the word *eusebeia* is used fifteen times. In ten of these instances that word is found in the Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Titus, and Second Timothy. In fact, two key words dominate the Pastoral Epistles and are always set as complementary to one another: *didaskalia* (teaching, instruction, doctrine) and *eusebeia*.

Eusebeia is translated as godliness, devotion (to God), religion or “piety.” It is always presented by Luke and Paul as a good thing, a genuine expression of our love for God and devotion to Jesus. To be pious is therefore to be *godly*, deeply spiritual, truly devoted to God and His things. In fact, the other words in this family of piety terms are *eusebeō* (to worship), *eusebēs* (adjective: devout, godly, or god-fearing), and *eusebōs* (adverb: godly). All of these words are the very opposite of hypocrisy.

In the Bible’s way of thinking, piety flows from good doctrine and leads to righteous living. Piety is the link between doctrine and duty. It ties together the Creed and the Commandments as such:

The Apostles’ Creed	→	The Lord’s Prayer	→	The Ten Commandments
Profession		Piety		Practice
Doctrine		Devotion		Duty



Unless a person is truly pious toward God, he will inevitably lean to one of two errors. He will, on the one hand, believe good, solid Biblical doctrine but lead an unholy life. On the other hand, he may well be morally upright but without a Gospel reliance upon Christ. In the first incidence, he becomes antinomian; in the second, he becomes legalistic. Only true piety can give balance and beauty to doctrine and ethics.

When we read the Sermon on the Mount, we discover that Jesus was addressing the issue of piety throughout His message. He was correcting the distortion of both loose living and legalistic practices. His focus on piety—the true religion of the heart—connected what men knew and how they lived. At the center of this Sermon on the Mount is found the Lord's Prayer—the climax of Christ's message. We do well to listen again to how Jesus taught us to pray and to rediscover the power and pleasure of piety.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Allan McLean, who serves as the administrative assistant to the Coordinator. Ask the Lord to bless his work in overseeing so much of the behind-the-scenes details of CE&P's ministry. Pray also for Cindy Bennett as she provides administrative assistance for the Women in the Church Ministry.

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: Pray for Arklie Hooten, MNA ShortTerm and Disaster Response Director, as he develops this ministry; pray that the short term and disaster response seminars he will present at General Assembly will be fruitful.

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 that they will make wise decisions concerning the PCA Foundation's business.

RH: Pray for 10,000 guests for 2007. The continuation of Ridge Haven's services depends on the number of people we serve. Just as an increase allows us to expand ministries and services, so also do decreases hinder our ability to maintain equipment, facilities, and sufficient staff to get the job done.

DAY 39

Read Luke 11:1-13

SUNDAY, JUNE 10

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!

“Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:2

Jesus taught the Lord’s Prayer to His disciples more than once. In the Sermon on the Mount, earlier in His ministry, Jesus taught the prayer to the multitude, who listened to Him (Mt. 6:5-15). Later on, in a private setting in which the Apostles asked for help in learning to pray, Jesus taught the same prayer again (Luke 11:14). Darrell L. Bock connects these two events for us: “Jesus takes a public prayer and makes it a model for the disciples to follow. He offered the prayer to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and now makes it a model, though it is not the prayer’s exact wording that concerns Him, as much as the prayer’s focus on the Father. Dependence on God and submission to His desires are the key lessons of the prayer.”⁵²

We, like the Apostles, need the Lord to continually teach us how to pray. In my years in the pastorate, I have discovered that people do not want to hear preaching on five subjects. They do not want you to preach on the submission of wives to husbands; that is politically incorrect. Second, they do not want to hear sermons on witnessing, because they don’t want to share their faith. Third, they resent sermon series on tithing and stewardship. They don’t want another to tell them how to spend “their” money. Fourth, people resist efforts to teach them even the principles by which their consciences should be informed in how to vote, believing incorrectly that politics and the Scriptures have no point of contact. Fifth, most people desire instruction on child rearing, but do not enjoy it. Few of us see ourselves as successful parents, and sermons on parental duties make us feel all the more a failure.

I would add a sixth category of “no-no sermon ideas” to that list. Sermons on prayer. When asked about what area of life Christians feel the most ashamed, 99 percent will answer, “My prayer life.” Yet pastors hear, “I don’t need more teaching on prayer, I just need to pray more!” But I am not so sure of that.

I would suggest that the issue is *not* praying *more*, but rather praying better! After all, Jesus said, “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Mt. 6:7). He then proceeds to give to us a *pattern* of prayer that includes a grand total of 51 words in English (ESV) and 57 words in Greek. The Lord’s Prayer teaches how to pray *strategically*, organized around

six straightforward petitions:

- God's glory
- God's kingdom
- God's will
- Our needs
- Our forgiveness
- Our protection

Perfect balance. Perfect comprehensiveness. Perfect focus. The perfect prayer. For two millennia, the Church has prayed the Lord's Prayer in both corporate worship and private devotion. It is recited daily in our congressional chambers. We hear it at commencement exercises and in huddles before football games. It is the prayer that military personnel pray together around the world. It remains the chief instrument by which Jesus continues to teach us all how to pray as we should.

We may not want to read another book on prayer or hear another sermon on praying, but we never tire of thinking through the import and impact of those blessed 51 words that begin with "Our Father in heaven."

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Pray for Covenant Theological Seminary faculty members currently engaged in research and writing projects. Ask that the Lord will grant them peace of mind and clarity of thought as they work, and that He will use their publications to edify, enrich, and encourage readers all around the world.

MTW: The Persecuted Church depends upon prayers and support of their brothers and sisters. Pray for steadfastness, growth, and love for their persecutors.

RUM: RUF Students from all over the nation will gather in Florida for two weeks in May for preaching, seminars, and fellowship. Please pray for these 900+ students as they sit under the teaching of the Word. Join the staff of RUF in praying for the safety of the students, and that young men and women will be drawn into the Kingdom.

RBI: Debby Brown, Ministerial Relief Representative, has contact with pastors who are without a ministry call. Pray that their needs will be met during the transition and that the Lord will direct them to a new field of service.

DAY 40
MONDAY, JUNE 11

**Read Matthew 6:9
and Psalm 103**

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven.”

Matthew 6: 9

God is known as “Father” in three ways, according to the Scripture. His fatherhood is multifaceted, and it is crucial to our understanding of what Jesus wants us to learn (and do) when praying the Lord’s Prayer.

In the first place, God is Father by nature. As the first person of the Trinity, He is “The Father.” Theologian Louis Berkhof informs us, “This name (father) is not always used of God in the same sense in Scripture. Sometimes it is applied to the Triune God as the origin of all created things. While in these cases the name applies to the Triune God, it does refer more particularly to the first person, to whom the work of creation is more especially ascribed in Scripture.”⁵³

God is the Father by virtue of the eternal generation of the Son. The Father eternally begets the Son. He does not create the Son, but eternally coexists with the Son. Nevertheless, the Father sets the ground for the Son’s existence and His relationship with the Father.

We are wrong to think that Jesus and the Bible refer to the first person as “Father” because we are seeking for some human analogy by which to understand God. The Father is not our “Dad in heaven.” Certainly not. Our human fatherhood is derived from God’s fatherhood, but it does not define God’s fatherhood (Eph. 3:14). The young German systematic theologian Werner Neuer does a brilliant job describing how essential fatherhood is to God, the First Person. “The fundamental basis for the biblical view of man and woman is in the nature of God as it is disclosed in the biblical revelation: the biblical view of man and woman is rooted in the nature of God.... If God could be portrayed just as well by women as by men, then He could well be addressed in prayer as ‘mother,’ ‘creatoress,’ or ‘Lady.’ Then Christ could just as well be described as God’s daughter as God’s Son. Then Christ could just as well have become a woman as a man. We would then no longer be dealing with the God of the Scripture, for its description of God and Christ completely exclude the picture of God just outlined.... But it is not difficult to see that such ideas not only break with the biblical view of God but with two thousand years of Christian theology. Here the picture of God based on God’s self revelation of himself is being replaced by a view of God nourished by the intellectual streams of feminism.”⁵⁴

That God is addressed as “our Father” is crucial to the Lord’s Prayer. C. S. Lewis comments on those efforts to reshape God as “our mother in

heaven.” He writes, “If all these proposals were ever carried into effect, we should be embarked on a different religion ... a child who had been taught to pray to a Mother in heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child.”⁵⁵ We may sometimes wince at Jesus’ politically incorrect words, but Jesus used “Father” to describe the First Person of God because that is who and what He is: He is the Father of the Son who is Jesus the man. We cannot and dare not try to change that fact.

We may struggle with the opening words of the prayer, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” because we had a father on earth who was painful to live with. No problem. James I. Packer, in his classic book *Knowing God*, gives us assurance that calling God “Father” is a safe thing to do. “God has not left us to guess at 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.”⁵⁶

So go ahead. Say it. Pray it. It is safe to do so. God is our Father and will treat us the way He treats Jesus. Look at the Son. He is the “spitting image” of His Father, our Father (Heb. 1:1-3). I promise, if you like the Son, you’ll love the Father!

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray that God will provide the financial resources that are needed to carry on the ministry of Christian education in the denomination. Ask God to burden local churches and members to contribute to this essential and useful ministry of the PCA.

CC: Pray for the members of the President’s Staff: Jeff Hall, Vice President for Academic Affairs; Wallace Anderson, Vice President for Enrollment Management; Troy Duble, Vice President for Advancement; Greg Rumsey, Vice President for Finance/Chief Financial Officer; Rodney Miller, Dean of Records; and Marjorie Crocker, Chief Information Officer.

MNA: Pray for wisdom for Mission to North America Coordinator Jim Bland and Associate Coordinator Fred Marsh as they meet with churches and donors across the PCA, informing them about MNA ministries and challenging them to join in leadership in the advancement of the Gospel in North America.

PCAF: Ask that the Lord will bless the work of the PCA Foundation’s Administrative Assistant, Sue Bishop, and Clerical Assistant, Jim Standridge, and that they will be encouraged as they provide vital assistance to the Foundation.

RH: Join us in praying that the Lord will help all of us in the PCA to be the best stewards possible of the extraordinary gift Ridge Haven is to the PCA.

DAY 41
TUESDAY, JUNE 12

**Read Matthew 6:9
and Acts 17:22-34**

THE FATHER OF US ALL

“For we are indeed His offspring.”

Acts 17:28



I mentioned yesterday that God was Father in a threefold sense. First He is the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We looked at this truth yesterday. Today we examine the second aspect of God’s Fatherhood. By virtue of creation and providence, God is the Father of all men. Evangelicals are uncomfortable with this truth because liberals use it in order to point the way to ecumenism, a vague idea of the “brotherhood of man,” a social gospel, and the rejection of the unique place of Christ in salvation. Nevertheless it is true; in some sense God is the Father of all men. Because someone ruins a truth by distorting it does not make that truth any less true.

The Bible teaches this very truth. Malachi 2:10 states, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” Paul says in Ephesians 3:14, “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family (literally, *fatherhood*) in heaven (angels) and on earth (men) is named.” And in Acts 17:28 Paul quotes the pagan Greek poet, Aratus, who wrote: “We are indeed His offspring.” The Bible never attempts to qualify or explain away these truths. If a Father begets children then all mankind has been begotten of God. He is the Father of the human race.

I, for one, believe this to be a key truth for three reasons. First, it does remind us that we do share in the same flesh of all mankind. There is a brotherhood of mankind that unites us all. This gives anthropological impetus to the Great Commission—we are reaching out to our “siblings” around the world.

Second, the Fatherhood of God is the basis for our reformed doctrine of common grace. We evangelicals spend so much time defining and defending (properly so) justification that we major on special grace. In my opinion, our theologians have neglected the wonderful aspects of common grace. Remembering that God is Father to us, we focus on the good gifts of a commonly shared life our Father in heaven gives to all men. Matthew 5:43-48 reminds us that this aspect of the Fatherhood of God is what empowers us to love all men.

Finally, when we acknowledge the Fatherhood of God over all mankind we deal a deathblow to all idolatry. It simply is not true that many gods created many peoples and care for them. One God—the Father—made us all.



This truth creates a touch-point with pagans and creates a common ground on which we stand to share the love of God—our Father and theirs.

Why go into all this when Jesus' main point in calling God "Our Father" was to help Christians, not pagans, pray? Simply because pagans *do* pray the Lord's Prayer—at ballgames, inaugurations, proms, and graduations. And when they do, this prayer for the adopted sons of God touches a cord in all human hearts of which we as believers need to be sensitive. Here is the starting place for evangelism—for "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven." This tender prayer reminds us to be compassionate "older brothers" and to go looking for and welcome home our prodigal siblings who have forgotten (or never known) how much the Father loves them too.

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: Many students come to Covenant Seminary with growing families. Please pray that their seminary years will be a time of spiritual nurture, preparing entire families for service in future ministry. Pray that these families will be strong witnesses for the Gospel and will exemplify to all around them the essence of a Christian home.

MTW: Give thanks for a denomination that is committed to missions at home and abroad. Pray that PCA churches will continue to grow in their commitment to Christ's command in the Great Commission.

RUM: The Universities today are alive with conflicting ideas. Please pray that RUF will effectively help college students understand the authority of Scripture, the ministry of the Spirit, and the means of justification and sanctification. Pray that our students will be rooted in the life-giving scriptures as they engage with the world.

RBI: RBI employees meet together every Monday morning for Bible study and prayer. Please pray this will be a rich time for spiritual insight and fellowship.

DAY 42
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13

Read Matthew 6:9
and Galatians 4:1-7

THE FATHER OF ADOPTION

“So that we might receive adoption as sons.”



Galatians 4:5

When Christians pray “Our Father who art in heaven,” we are making a bold and joyful profession of faith in God’s salvific ways. We are told by Paul that Christians are “in Christ Jesus ... sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:26). Once we place our faith in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit seals us in our adoption as God’s sons and daughters (Romans 8:15-17). This is the first great blessing of Gospel salvation: the right to become children of God (John 1:12-13). In fact, this is the grandest truth of salvation.

James I. Packer comments on such in his *Knowing God*. He candidly admits: “Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption. The revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible, just as it was a final step in the revelatory process which the Bible records. Our first point about adoption is that it is *the highest privilege that the gospel offers*: higher even than justification.... That justification—by which we mean God’s forgiveness of the past together with his acceptance for the future—is the *primary and fundamental* blessing of the gospel is not in question. But this is not to say the justification is the *highest* blessing of the gospel. Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves.... The two ideas are distinct, and adoption is the more exalted. Justification is a *forensic* idea, conceived in terms of *law*, and viewing God as *judge*.... Adoption is a *family* idea, conceived in terms of *love*, and viewing God as *father*.”⁵⁷

We must be careful not to make the doctrine of adoption bear the load that rightfully belongs to the doctrine of sanctification. Just as there are three “theological virtues” (faith, hope, and charity), so there are three jewels of salvation: justification, adoption, and sanctification. The first is the heart of the Gospel and the issue by which the Church either rises or falls—justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Adoption is the emotional highpoint of redemptive theology: to become a child of God, through Christ, is the ground of our assurance. But sanctification is the “work horse” of salvation. It is here that we spend 99 percent of our Christian life: working out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in us to make us holy (see Philippians 2:12-13).

There is a corollary between the three theological virtues and the three sides of salvation. Faith is the means of justification. Hope is the essence of



adoption. Love (charity) is the object of sanctification. Without this balance we turn adoption into something that is shallow and emotional at best or antinomian and escapist at worst. The Lord's Prayer will not allow us to do either.

When we pray for our Father in heaven to do what we ask in the Lord's Prayer, we are asking Him to do a bit more than assures us daily, and work in our lives a lot deeper than "preaching the Gospel to ourselves" every day. We are asking God our Father to accept us in Christ, to comfort us in the Spirit, and to work His likeness in us as His children.

When we say "Our Father who art in heaven," we are looking back to our faith in Christ. We are looking forward to our future perfection when we shall be like Him. And we are resting in the fact that between justification and glory we are His children. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for John Dunahoo as he oversees the human, financial, and technological resources used in CE&P's ministry. Pray that he will exercise good stewardship over those resources that God has entrusted to CE&P.

CC: Thank God for the hiring of a new College Chaplain. Please pray for him as he oversees all aspects of Covenant's chapel program.

MNA: Pray for the entire MNA support staff, for their dedication, diligence, and efficiency in carrying out the behind-the-scenes activities that undergird the work of the MNA leadership. Pray for the effective office leadership of Vicki Mathias and Tracy Lane-Hall and for cooperation and communication among the entire staff.

PCAF: Pray that God will provide for the PCA Foundation's own operational financial needs for 2007.

RH: Give thanks with us to the Lord for conversions, renewed commitments, and testimonies of grace. Give thanks for special gifts we've received to improve our ministries and services and for new lot owners and residents in the Ridge Haven community. Give thanks for the prayers He answered in bringing almost 9,000 to Ridge Haven last year. All are blessings!

DAY 43
THURSDAY, JUNE 14

**Read Matthew 6:9
and Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**

THE ONE IN HEAVEN

“For God is in heaven and you are on earth.
Therefore let your words be few.”

Ecclesiastes 5:2

In the Lord’s Prayer we acknowledge that God is in heaven. We believe that God is everywhere; He is omnipresent. By stating that our Father is “in heaven” we are facing four great truths about God, us, and our prayers.

First, *heaven* communicates to us that God possesses divine power in His supernatural nature. Heaven is the realm of God; earth is the realm of men. Heaven is the place of God’s throne and the earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1-2). By reminding God and ourselves that He is “in heaven” we are professing belief in this truth: Nothing is too difficult for God.

Second, heaven is the place of unlimited resources. Just as everything else in heaven is like God—infinite, eternal, and unchangeable—so are the riches God uses to answer our prayers. You never run out of goodness, grace, and glory in heaven. Heaven has more than enough to fulfill all the prayers of earth.

Third, to say that God is in heaven is to confess that His will is really a great mystery to us on earth and always beyond the scope of our comprehension, unless God chooses to reveal His will to us. Heaven is that other dimension of life that lies beyond the thin veil of reality that separates the visible from the invisible, the human from the divine. “Heaven does not refer to a remote residence of God,” writes Robert Guelich, “but rather to the sphere from which God effects his rule and will on earth.”⁵⁸ God put it this way to Isaiah, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

Finally, when we pray to the God in heaven it should humble us. The wise old Solomon pointed to this when he penned his memoirs. “Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few” (Ecc. 5:2). Remember, Jesus said the same thing in this text (Matthew 6:7-8). Point of order: Earth does not tell heaven what to do! Prayer is not our instructing God. Prayer is a request, not a directive. Prayer says, “Thy will be done,” and not, “Now, Lord, let me tell You what I need You to do today.” Be careful how you speak to heaven when you pray!

Sinclair Ferguson catches the gist of what Matthew 6:9 intends in its

form of address: “Jesus is clearly stressing the greatness of God in his heavenly glory, and what we sometimes call the Creator-creature distinction: he is in heaven, while we are on earth; he is heavenly, while we are earthly; he is the eternal one, while we are his creatures, made by him and dependent upon him for every breath we breathe.... At the same time we *dare* to call on him as Father! We know that he is near us and cares for us in a special way because he has given us life as our Creator, and new life as our Savior.”⁵⁹

There’s a lot to these first four words in our Lord’s Prayer: *Our Father in heaven*. There is enough to make us pause and think—long and hard—before we utter another word.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: We ask prayer for our office staff: Bob Fiol, Assistant to the Stated Clerk; Angela Nantz, Operations Manager; Mary Bradley Bayne; Kim Skipper; Susan Cullen; Monica Johnston; Peggy Little; Priscilla Lowrey; and Sherry Eschenberg, that in the day-to-day work of the Stated Clerk’s office, each will demonstrate the mind of Christ.

CTS: Covenant Seminary students encounter many ministry opportunities, both before and after graduation. Pray for their wisdom as they minister on campus, in area churches, and on short-term mission trips. Pray that their service in the field will help prepare them for effective ministry after graduation.

MTW: Pray for Andres Garza, a leader in Mexico with whom we partner. Andres oversees church planting in northern Mexico and is helping to develop the theological institute in Monterrey that will train future church planters and leaders.

RUM: Please pray for the new RUF groups that will begin in the fall of 2007. Pray that they will be used to spread the Gospel of God’s grace on campuses, reaching students with the transforming power of God’s Word as it is taught in these groups.

RBI: A number of our PCA churches have limited financial resources for providing benefits for their pastors and staff. Please pray that these congregations will be able to adequately supply their pastor’s compensation and benefits.

DAY 44
FRIDAY, JUNE 15

Read Psalm 99

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

“Holy is He.”
Psalm 99:3,5



The old English word *hallowed* means “that which is sacred.” A battlefield is often called *hallowed ground* because of all the precious blood spilled on it or the lives lost on it. Students speak of the *hallowed halls* of their alma mater. And a day set aside to honor God or the things of God is a *hallowed occasion*.

When we pray “hallowed be Thy name” in the Lord’s Prayer, we are asking God to make holy, honorable, and renowned His “hallowed” name. In the Bible, a name is synonymous with a person. The name of God is the *person* of God as He has revealed Himself. His numerous names reflect who God is and what He does. He is *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. He is *Jehovah Jire*, the Lord provides. He is *Adonai*, the Lord. And He is *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*—“I am,” the self-existing One. To dishonor God’s name is a serious offense (see Exodus 20:7), one for which the Lord will not hold a man guiltless.

To ask God to “hallow” His name is to petition the Lord to bring all glory and honor to Himself. It is to acknowledge in our prayers the chief end of man—to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Those whose hearts are right will both give all glory to God and take constant delight in Him. This petition divides the self-promoting from the God-glorifying.

Our reformed faith is distinguished primarily by this emphasis: The glory of God preeminent in all things. There is a tendency for us to be somewhat embarrassed by this today, leading us to think that we must have a man-centered approach to the Christian life and mission in order to make the Gospel attractive to non-believers. To believe in the reformation pillar of *solus deo Gloria* seems cold, impersonal, and even unattractive. This is wrong-headed thinking.

“The idea that ‘glory to God alone’ is a motto distinguishing John Calvin and his admirers is no discredit to them,” writes James I. Packer, “but is a damning side-swipe at all other versions of Christianity.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the ridiculous parody of Christianity seen on much of television is embarrassing, with its primary focus on man’s health, man’s wealth, and man’s glory. It appears that evangelicalism has re-written the Lord’s Prayer—“Hallowed be my name.”



To hallow God's name is to worship Him, adore Him, give praise to Him, thank Him, fear Him, obey Him, and see His pleasure as THE ultimate good. It is to see Romans 8:28 in a new light, and to discover that "the good" He works for us, His elect, is the furtherance of His own glory. When God is glorified, the saints are blessed.

There is but one name—one holy name—that always brings together in perfect complement the glory of God and the good of man—the name of Jesus. To glorify God we must begin to see that the will of God is always for our good, and always a pleasant pursuit. In Christ, the will of God is perfected for the glory of the Father and the good of His children. This is why we pray "in Jesus' name": because we hallow the name of God (and Christ), seek the glory of the Triune God, and desire our good from God's honor.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for continued wisdom, strength, and encouragement for Jane Patete, Women's Ministries Coordinator, as she works to oversee ministry to women in the church. Pray for Cindy Bennett, Assistant to the WIC Coordinator, as she serves in this vital role.

CC: Pray for the Advancement Office as we go about fundraising efforts, that we will promote a giver's heart in our donors and in ourselves. We believe that God gifts some with financial resources and the means to support Kingdom efforts. Where Covenant College programs match the hearts of donors, pray that we will be clear; where they do not, pray that we will encourage fellow believers to give to the cause that God has laid on their hearts.

MNA: Pray for the Church Planter Assessment Centers being held in June, September, and November 2007. Ask that God will guide the candidates and assessors to the right conclusions about the proper kinds of ministry for each candidate couple, and that through this experience their calling and placement in ministry will be made clear.

PCAF: Pray that God will sustain the PCA Foundation's office equipment and computers, and that as they need replacing God will provide the funding and other necessary resources.

RH: Pray for increasing opportunities to serve PCA congregations, presbyteries, committees, and agencies, including providing facilities for additional RUF groups; CE&P, WIC, youth and children's ministries; MNA and MTW regional retreats and training opportunities; and HMA missionaries.

DAY 45

Read Mark 1:14-15

SATURDAY, JUNE 16

THY KINGDOM COME

“The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Mark 1:15

The theme of Christ’s life, ministry, and message was the kingdom of God. The first words of Christ’s public ministry that are recorded for us are found in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.” When Jesus described why He had come to earth, in His own words, He said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). He sent His disciples to heal, cast out demons, and preach the kingdom of God. His many parables often began with the words “the kingdom of heaven (God) can be compared to ...” He informed us that the end of history, as we know it, would come only after the Gospel of the kingdom had been preached throughout all the nations (Mt. 24:14). And during His final forty days on earth He spent His time “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Therefore when we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are asking God to align our prayers, our hearts, and our lives with His kingdom-focused interests. Our need to do this is set forth in Christ’s own exhortation: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (i.e., what we need) will be added to you” (Mt. 6:33).

Theologians have argued for years about what exactly comprises this kingdom of God. A careful reading of the key passages about the kingdom of God will reveal that this kingdom comes to earth in three stages, as it grows and develops into the fullness known in Scripture as “The City of God.” First, there is God’s lesser kingdom: The rule of Christ in each of us. This is the kingdom of His *grace*. Here is where Christ asserts His Lordship over individual lives.

Second, there is God’s ecclesiastical kingdom: The rule of Christ over His Church and its various churches. This is the kingdom of His *goodness*. It cannot be denied, as Saint Augustine explained in his book *The City of God*, that there are two kingdoms in this world: The city of man (State) and the City of God (Church). Our efforts to avoid the evils of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy’s paradigm of a church-state cannot be aided by denying the obvious. Jesus Christ rules His people, the Church; and therefore the goodness of God’s reign is first shown in the corporate life of His

Church. The Church *is* the kingdom of God, but not the kingdom in its fullness.

There is a third stage: The eschatological kingdom of God. This is the rule of Christ over the whole world. Here we see the kingdom of His *glory*, when all things are restored to Eden's perfection. This is what John points to when he writes, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Ultimately Jesus rules over all, for God is all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Our greatest sin in praying is our natural propensity to pray exclusively for ourselves, our bodies, and our personal interests: health, finances, the kids. But the Lord's Prayer beckons us to pray bigger prayers, prayers focused on that which is larger than life, greater than self, and lasting forever ... the kingdom of God. The kingdom is here now; it is growing throughout the world in the Church; and it is destined to swallow up and transform all there is in this world. Are our eyes sharpened in the Spirit enough to see this? And can we pray with hearts filled with faith enough to pursue this? For this is what Jesus teaches us to pray: "Thy kingdom come."

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

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

CTS: Pray for Dr. Bob Burns, Director of the Center for Ministry Leadership at Covenant Theological Seminary, and for the work of the Center in providing avenues for growth, renewal, and ongoing education for those serving in pastoral ministry. Pray also for Dr. Wilson Benton as he transitions from his role as long-time pastor of Kirk of the Hills PCA in St. Louis and increases his involvement with the Center through teaching, mentoring, and encouraging ministry leaders. Ask that the Lord will refresh and revive His servants for many more years of fruitful ministry.

MTW: From Matthew 9:37-38, pray that God will continue to raise up workers for His harvest. Many mission organizations are declining in numbers and have been forced to cut back ministries.

RUM: Please pray for the RUF groups that continue holding meetings during the summer months. Pray that this unique opportunity to minister will be a time of fellowship and learning for those who remain on campus.

RBI: Gary Campbell, Mark Melendez, Harry Cooksey, and Chris Stevens travel to Presbyteries, churches, conferences, and schools to make presentations to those in church leadership positions, as well as to church employees. Pray for traveling mercies and effective communication of PCA employee benefit plans. Also pray that those opportunities will continue to flourish.

DAY 46
SUNDAY, JUNE 17

Read John 7:1-24

THY WILL BE DONE

“If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority.”

John 7:17



Everything in the Lord’s Prayer reflects the life that Jesus intends for each of His saints: an integrated, unified, balanced, and God-centered existence in which the interests of God and man are held in perfect complement. To truly pray this prayer and live this life we must fully grasp what the will of God is for us. For this is the perfect end of all prayer: Not to change God’s mind to do my will, but to change my will to follow the mind of God in all things.

In my years as a pastor I have come to see that the greatest obstacle to the pursuit of God’s desires is our deformed minds. Each of us is absolutely clear on what God’s will really is, and it usually looks exactly like what we want! Let us take, for example, the man who objects to children playing ball during the annual church picnic on Sundays, saying it’s against God’s will for anyone to play sports on Sunday. But years later he allows his son to play in a competitive soccer league that has matches on Sunday, with hopes that his son will qualify for a scholarship to college. Suddenly this man has an epiphany—it is *not* contrary to God’s law and will to play soccer on Sundays! How twisted the human heart can be in its reasoning.

In mediating one dispute after another in the Church, I have witnessed just how doggedly certain we all can be when it comes to knowing (and doing) the will of God. In truth, God’s will is usually as plain as the pages of Scriptures and a pure, trusting heart. But there are times when God’s will is not so clear and our hearts are clouded by self-centered desires. It is then that we must pray for wisdom and for God to do what He wants, despite us.

In reality, discerning the will of God may be much more simple than we think. If we desire to do God’s will rather than have God endorse our will, then we will know what to do. The Bible, the teachings of the Church, the advice of godly friends, and a faithful discernment of our circumstances will point us clearly in the direction of God’s will.

When we pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are submitting to God’s ideas about what is best for all and coming under His guidance. Imagine how much better life would be if we were ruled by a heart willing to do what God had planned for us, rather than being twisted



and turned by fears, family pressures, strong-willed children, prejudices, and volatile emotions—all indications of weak faith. Reason can often be the great opponent of faith, when such reason rationalizes how to impose our will on God. Faith prays “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” where faith is no longer needed. This is the heart to whom God reveals His will.

In all likelihood, the man with the pliable conscience could have followed God’s true will and still seen his son get a soccer scholarship. But when we compromise our consciences, we forfeit our good names with others and grieve the Spirit of God. Oh, we get what we want, but at what a price! All because we will not pray “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for a good response to the annual Women in the Church Love Gift offering. This year’s offering goes to RBI and continues to be a great blessing to our PCA denominational ministries.

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: Pray that Revitalization and Evangelism will continue to expand its offerings and that churches in search of revitalization will find what they need to take steps toward greater health. Pray also for all churches that are in decline or plateaued, that God will lead them to seek the assistance they need.

PCAF: Ask that the PCA Foundation’s Administrator, Donna Larson, will be encouraged and given Godly guidance as she oversees the day-to-day operations of the PCA Foundation office.

RH: Pray that the Lord will pour out His Spirit with such a blessing upon Ridge Haven and the PCA that there will not be room enough to contain it, including revival, conversions, and new levels of commitment, faithfulness, and service that are worthy of the price that has secured our justification, sanctification, and glorification.

DAY 47

Read Matthew 6:1-34

MONDAY, JUNE 18

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.”

Matthew 6:25

A woman once told me about her sister who was caught in a life of delusion. I had mentioned in a message how pernicious the teaching of the “prosperity gospel” is; how the health ’n wealth preachers are so immensely popular despite the obvious myth they propound.



It seems this woman’s sister made a profession of faith in Christ years ago. Now there is very, very little fruit to indicate that she is in fact regenerate. Instead she lives in a world of self-deceit: Her husband left her, divorced her, but she refuses to acknowledge that fact. Why? Because she is “claiming the word of faith” that they are not divorced. She is “speaking what will come to pass,” and she is miserable in the process.

When Jesus told us to pray and ask God to “give us this day our daily bread,” He was helping us live with reality. This reality is unfolded for us in this fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. It acknowledges three brutal facts of life ... real life.

First, we recognize that God is the One who provides for us and sustains us. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). We can “name it and claim it” all we want, but unless God decrees it so, it shall never come to pass. Our words have absolutely no “power” to create or grant to us anything. Positive confession is a form of voodoo religion—a pagan idea of shamanism brought into the Christian witness. It is a godless myth bearing the name of Jesus. God, and God alone, grants to each of us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pt. 1:3).

Second, all we can truly expect from God is our *daily* bread. God has not promised tomorrow to any one of us. Jesus put it this way, “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Mt. 6:34). Those in the marketplace may trade in “futures,” but God does not. He deals with each of us today, with daily bread. Our endless attempts to shield ourselves from future trouble are a mindless waste of time. Jesus has a word for such a man: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20).

Third, it is bread we ask for, the essentials of life. Within this category



of “bread” would be medicine, fuel for heat, shelter, clothing, health, work, and so forth. We are out of line to try and slip into this prayer our vacation to Hawaii, a lake house for retirement, or the latest in a series of collectibles for our hobby. Jesus wants us to face the reality of life in a fallen world, not the delusions of the American utopia.

I truly believe that the most difficult part of the Lord’s Prayer for Americans is this fourth petition. Our land of opulence, excess, and waste makes “daily bread” sound archaic—something we really don’t need to pray for. The brethren in Africa, China, or India pray this prayer much more passionately and realistically.

We need to wise up. A lost spouse qualifies as “daily bread.” The latest model of BMW does not. It is time for us to humbly get down on our knees and *ask* God for that which our positive confessions and American work ethic have failed to provide for us. To pray this prayer is to acknowledge the first fact of life: We are creatures who depend upon the Creator for every breath we take or smile we make. May God be merciful to us, and may we be humble enough to face reality and ask for “our daily bread.”

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, Missouri. He records and chronicles the faithfulness of the Lord to His people in the PCA, as tasked by the Assembly’s Administrative Committee.

CTS: Pray for the ongoing work of Covenant Seminary’s faculty in the classroom, in area churches, and in the community. Pray for the Seminary’s curriculum development efforts as the faculty continually seeks to equip students for communicating God’s eternal Truth to a changing world.

MTW: Pray for the expansion of church-planting movements in the Muslim world and for more workers to facilitate the extraordinary ways God is moving in these areas.

RUM: Much of the summer is spent equipping the staff of RUF. Please pray for the various training sessions held during the summer months. Pray that this time of learning and fellowship will be centered on the Gospel and leave the staff encouraged and strengthened. Pray that the instructors will be well prepared and able to communicate the goals and philosophy of ministry to the new staff members.

RBI: RBI purposes to serve those who serve the Lord. Pray that the staff will stay focused on this core goal during the day-to-day business operations of administering the PCA employee benefit plans.

DAY 48
TUESDAY, JUNE 19

Read Matthew 18:21-35
and Luke 7:36-50

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS

“And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant,
as I had mercy on you?”

Matthew 18:33

If we were to survey all the Christians in the world, no doubt the most difficult thing God calls them to do is to forgive others. I must say that, as I grow older and spend more time in the pastorate, I find the grace of forgiveness in shorter supply each year.



Why is this so? How can it be that the greatest of all God’s gifts to us—forgiveness—is that which we find most difficult to give to others? Forgiveness was often the subject of Christ’s parables. It is central to the life of the Christian. And it is something Jesus tells us to pray for: forgiveness from God and forgiveness to other sinners.

The Christian life is a life of forgiveness. This is the essence of justification by faith and life with God through Christ (see Colossians 1:13-14). It must also be said that only the forgiving are forgiven. God’s forgiveness is conditional. It is conditioned upon three things. First, Christ must pay for our sins and offer His atonement to God and for us. Second, the sinner must accept Christ and His righteousness if he is to be forgiven. Third, the sinner must forgive others or he will not be forgiven.

This third truth unsettles us, especially us Calvinists. It seems to smack of merit: We earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving others. This is certainly not true; but just as works do not earn justification but rather prove it, so forgiveness of others does not earn God’s forgiveness, but verifies that forgiving grace dwells within us. In His teaching, Jesus gives us the cure to an unforgiving spirit.

In Luke 7:36-50, a notorious woman offends Simon the Pharisee by the way she pours out her penitent and passionate tears on Christ’s feet. The self-righteous Simon is scandalized that Jesus is not offended as well. Christ, reading Simon’s heart, informs him of the great difference between him and the prostrate woman. Both are sinners, damnable sinners. One realizes this; the other does not.

Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47). Talk about killing a fly with a hammer! Simon never saw his sin as great, much, horrible, or scandalous. The woman did. Both knew Christ would forgive them. For Simon, who was forgiven “little,” love for Jesus was com-



mensurate with the “little” grace he felt he needed from God. For the woman who needed “much” forgiveness, love was also commensurate with all Christ gave to her. When you think about it that way, it all makes perfect sense.

For those who find it difficult to forgive others, the reason is as clear as the nose on your face: If you feel you really haven’t been forgiven that much, your love for Christ won’t be that great. You will find, in your heart of hearts, this lie: God has forgiven you just a little, as He should, but you need not forgive others who’ve done so much more in sinning against you. Sick? Yes. Prevalent among the saints? Very much so.

As long as you see your sins as little and your forgiveness as small, you will find it hard to forgive others. But once you realize that your sins nailed Jesus to the cross and God’s forgiveness of you is truly magnificent, you will readily forgive others of everything they do to you. You will love them much because God has loved you infinitely.

Forgiveness is just that difficult and just that simple. He who is forgiven much, loves much and forgives others as much as he is forgiven. And so he prays: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us.”

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Praise God for the provision and fruit of the 2006 International Women in the Church Conference. Pray for PCA women to boldly embrace a biblical perspective of womanhood and nurture a generation of young women to do the same.

CC: Pray for our 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: Lift up Church Planter Development Director Jim Hatch as he visits college campuses, seminaries, and churches to develop a pool of prospective church planters. Pray for the ability to follow up and maintain contact with these prospects.

PCAF: Ask that the PCA Foundation’s Accounting Manager, Mark Bailey, will continue to manage his responsibilities at work and at home with a focus on pleasing God.

RH: Pray for our ability to communicate and present Ridge Haven effectively to all the churches and members of the PCA through appropriate literature, our website, General Assembly, and presbytery and congregational presentations.

DAY 49

Read James 1:1-18

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God.’”

James 1:13

There are three tools God uses for the development of our character: tests, tribulations, and temptations. James speaks of these things in the first chapter of his epistle. Tests of our faith help to develop our trust in God. Tribulations make patience grow. Temptations ... now that is a difficult thing to ascribe to God.

In fact, James tells us that when we are being tempted we must never ascribe that temptation to God. Yet Jesus tells us to pray “lead us not into temptation,” as if God somehow had something to do with waving sin’s dainties before our eyes!

In truth, God does allow us to be tempted, just as He did Adam and Eve, Job, and His Son, Jesus (Luke 4). God is not the author of temptation; that is the work of the devil. But as a Sovereign God, He gives permission for Satan to tempt or not. In so doing, God helps develop our spiritual resolve and the depth of our sanctification. It is in the crucible of temptation that true saints are refined.

This sixth and final petition seems less strange when we focus on the second half of the request: “but deliver us from evil.” This phrase, in the Greek, really reads “deliver us from the evil (one)”—that is, Satan. It is out of the clutches of the devil that we need deliverance. It is a shame that this word, “deliverance,” has become associated with the ridiculous buffoonery of the charismatic movement. Who has not driven by some ramshackle storefront in the city or some cinder-block home out in the country and seen the name “Apostolic Deliverance Temple,” or some such name? So when we read or hear the word “deliverance,” we say to ourselves, “Thank goodness reformed preachers don’t believe in deliverance!”

I do. And as I have grown older I have prayed this part of the Lord’s Prayer for my children, it seems, a thousand times. I have asked God to deliver my daughters and sons from the temptations open to young people on a date; I have prayed that God would deliver them from the evils of the big secular campus that plunders a youthful mind; I have begged the Lord to spare them from the evil one’s use of drugs and alcohol on the college campus; and I have asked the Lord to protect them from evil when they go out with friends, some of whom think evil is fun. Oh, I believe in deliverance because I believe in evil. And I am no stranger to the evil one; he and I

have had many a tie-in; and not a few have been to my pain and loss.

The more our postmodern American society turns from God, the more I see pure evil emerge from the alleyways and crevices of our new dark ages. We and our children need “deliverance” now more than ever.

Yes, my children need to be perfected by tests, pruned by tribulation, and proven by temptation. But they also need God’s powerful and gracious deliverance. And so I pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one and his evil. Do not put more on me and my children than our spirits can bear. Spare us, O God of deliverance!”

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

AC: Praise God that the print magazine *ByFaith* is a reality. Pray that it will serve to connect people, churches, events, and missions of the PCA through the proclamation of the Gospel. Pray that Editor Dick Doster and his staff will exercise wisdom in handling the many details associated with the magazine.

CTS: Pray for the continued provision for the financial needs of Covenant Theological Seminary. Pray that God will provide funds to cover all the institution’s operating expenses, student scholarships, and other needs, so that this ministry may continue to be productive—by His grace and for His glory. (The Seminary’s fiscal year ends on June 30, 2007.)

MTW: Pray that God will raise up strong national support for a Bible-training institute in the Semuliki Valley of Uganda and ultimately in Rwanda and South Sudan as well. National support is a critical pre-requisite for the success of these crucial developments.

RUM: RUF seeks to reach students for Christ and to equip them to serve. The Lord is gracious in allowing his children to advance the Kingdom. Pray that this ministry will be kept humble and dependent on the Holy Spirit. Pray that in all decisions and actions that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be in-working and out-flowing.

RBI: Please pray that all RBI staff members will continue the pursuit of continuing education, enhancing insurance, plan administration, counseling, communication, and financial skills in order to serve the PCA.

DAY 50 Read First Thessalonians 1:1-10
THURSDAY, JUNE 21

DOCTRINE, DUTY, DEVOTION

“Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith
and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 1:3

Ours is a beautiful religion. What is most attractive about Christianity is its perfect balance of doctrine, duty, and devotion. Christ has provided for us a balance of theology, ethics, and piety. The Church, in response, has passed on over two millennia the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Our minds, our wills, and our emotions are all engaged in following Christ, loving God, and worshipping in the Spirit. Other religions cannot make this same claim. Of the world's four major religions, only Christianity can claim the beauty and balance of God.

Islam is all doctrine. Fiercely devoted to the false teachings of the *Koran*, the followers of Muhammad and worshippers of Allah lack not only Gospel grace, but also holy lives and pious souls. Their external codes of belief create a violent, brutal society and a devotion to external rites and rubrics that contradict the spirit of their own faith. That is why Saddam Hussein, an evil despot, can kill thousands of people, live a life of opulent perversion, and die with the *Koran* in his hand. And while he is being hung to death for war crimes, he can proclaim his confidence that he will soon receive his reward from Allah. How embarrassing.

Hinduism is all about duty. It is a religion of strict compliance to religious cleansings, social mores, and clean living. Its “holy men” (gurus) are professional moralists. It professes little dogma and seems void of personal piety. Most Hindus are devoted to the pursuits of this world while fiercely—even violently—devoted to the traditions of their ancestors. Their belief in over 50,000 deities is mindlessly ridiculous, but it does not affect their sense of religious duty.

Buddhism is a religion of piety. Its ethos is found in prayer, meditation, and the pursuit of inner peace. The Buddhist withdraws from the world. He believes very little. His ethics seem to be minimal. Hence Buddhism has no problem coexisting with the communism of China or the crass materialism of Japan. Its “first cousin,” Shintoism, worships its ancestors while it is capable of great moral evil and social oppression.

Only the Christian religion rests on three pillars: doctrine, ethics, and piety. These three shape our religious institutions, our corporate society, and our spiritual lives. Like triplets from the same womb and with the same

Father, they help build a life that is coherent, cohesive, and comprehensive. Christianity engages the whole man of all men. It is the Law of God the Father, the doctrine of Christ the Son, and the spiritual devotion of the Holy Spirit that forms the cord of three strands that is not easily broken (Ecc. 4:9-12).

I hope that you have been encouraged by these fifty days of devotion based upon the Three Formulae. But even more, I pray that you will be proud of our most holy religion, and give praise to God that you have been numbered among the followers of Christ, by the will of the Father and the grace of the Spirit.

PRAYING FOR THE PCA

CEP: Pray for Jennifer Roman, who coordinates all the publications that are produced by CE&P. Pray that God will give her the wisdom to balance the many projects she coordinates and the strength to meet the many deadlines.

CC: We are grateful for the Board of Trustees as they generously give of their time and energy to support the college. 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: Pray for MNA Church Planting Coordinator Ted Powers in his efforts to find visionary leaders who will think strategically and prayerfully about target sites, and to recruit church planters who are passionate about the Great Commission. Pray also for the material and spiritual resources to begin many new works in North American in 2007.

PCAF: Pray that God will be encouraging to and provide safe travel for the PCA Foundation's Development & Marketing Representative Rick Jacobs as he visits local churches, presbyteries, donors, and prospects to present our services.

RH: Pray for unity, mutual support, encouragement, and dependence on the Lord within the Board of Trustees as it wrestles with financial shortfalls and solutions, implements short and long-range planning, and exercises responsibility for Ridge Haven.





ENDNOTES



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

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