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the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation” (BCO 9-2). Not only in the fulfillment of duties, but in the general deportment of their lives, officers promise to adorn the gospel and set a worthy example to the flock.

5. Do you promise **subjection** to your brethren in the Lord?

The final two questions for officers expand upon the fifth church membership vow in which individual members submit themselves “to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace” (BCO 57-5). Far from being “above the law,” our leaders are held to the same standard as our members and commit to subject themselves to the spiritual authority of the session as a whole. Individual elders maintain a modicum of spiritual authority by their office, but that individual authority is secondary to the authority of the court acting in session: “Ecclesiastical power, which is spiritual, is twofold. The officers exercise it sometimes severally (i.e., individually)...and they exercise it sometimes jointly in Church courts, after the form of judgment, which is

the power of jurisdiction” (BCO 3-2). It is to this joint authority that all officers must subject themselves.

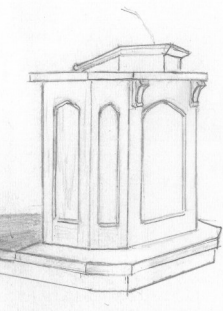
6. Do you promise to **strive** for the purity, peace, unity, and edification of the Church?

In the membership vow, we promise to “study” the peace and purity of the church. That verb always trips people up, but it is made clear here with the word “strive.” Officers promise that they will work hard towards four ends in the church. First, officers strive for purity, a trait addressed in the *Confession of Faith*: “Particular churches...are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them” (WCF 25.4). Second and third, officers strive for peace and unity, which are directly correlated to their keeping the fifth vow of subjection to their brothers. And finally, officers strive for edification, that is, the “building up” of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

May the Lord bless our season of officer training and continue to build his church through the provision of qualified, willing, and faithful elders and deacons.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



Paul begins his new section in Romans (Ch 12–16:24) with a command to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1). This initial imperative launches Paul down a path chock-full of imperatives urging his readers to live out of, and according to, what God has done for us in Christ Jesus (i.e., the glorious indicative of the gospel). Paul makes this change not merely because it corresponds to the standard outline of the body of his letter (first doctrine, second duty), but because it mitigates two common errors regarding the gospel; legalism and antinomianism.

For Paul, the antidote to legalism is Romans 1-11. Legalism, like moralism, is a belief that individuals merit righteousness and favor before God by their actions. Paul puts this belief in his crosshairs and blows it out of the water, arguing clearly and repeatedly in Romans 1:18-3:20 that none – not Gentile, not Jew – is righteous, no, not one. As sinners, we have forfeited original righteousness and can never earn it back. Legalism is alive and well in all types of world religions, and even thrives in various perversions of Christianity, but not in biblical Christianity: “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20). Instead, we are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ: “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).

On the other side of legalism is antinomianism, and, for Paul, the antidote comes from the same book just a few chapters later, Romans 12-16. Antinomianism, literally “against the law,” is the belief that Christians are no longer bound to keep the moral law. While this is a rather extreme view, a somewhat tamer but troubling version still believes in the category of obedience, but diminishes and downplays the law into oblivion. Paul paraphrases the antinomian argument with questions such as, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1) and “Are we to sin because we are not under the law?” (Rom 6:15). Another word for this is licentiousness: the view that because we are freed from the law, we are then free to go and live however our heart desires. In response to this foolishness, Paul gives dozens and dozens of commands, starting in Romans 12:1, that demonstrate the abiding demand of law-keeping for the Christian. Not law-keeping to merit righteousness (that would be legalism), but law-keeping as the “fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 16.2)

As we press on in Romans, we embrace the imperative commands, not as a roadmap to righteousness, but as a grateful response to the glorious indicative of the gospel.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Sept 6	Romans 13:8-10	
Sept 13	Romans 13:11-14	2 Kings 20
Sept 20	Romans 14:1-12	2 Kings 21
Sept 27	Romans 14:13-23	2 Kings 22-23:3
Oct 4	Romans 15:1-7	
Oct 11	Romans 15:8-13	2 Kings 23:4-30
Oct 18	Romans 15:14-21	2 Kings 23:31-24:20
Oct 25	Romans 15:22-33	2 Kings 25

Robert Murray M’Cheyne

By Jim Curtis

Robert Murray M’Cheyne was a Scottish minister born in Edinburgh in 1813. He lived a short life, dying just a few weeks before his 30th birthday. But his impact far outlived several of his lifetimes by now. He is perhaps most well-known for his reading plan, “Our Daily Bread” (which you can find at the book table each January!). But I want you to know him for much more than that.

M’Cheyne’s primary legacy with those who knew him and any who read his memoir (authored by his best friend, Andrew Bonar—brother of Horatio) and sermons was his earnestness for Christ. He pursued nearness with Christ with a doggedness, a fire in his bones, such that few before and fewer still after him have truly emulated the heart he has for Christ. This is an area I long to grow in myself, and M’Cheyne has proven the ablest of tutors.

But what led him to this earnestness? Simply knowing what life was like outside of Christ. He was raised in a Christian home but did not come to Christ sincerely until his older brother David died at 27 years old. His life was forever changed, but not because of an overwhelming sense of sadness or loss. Rather, in his own words, he “began to seek a Brother who cannot die.” The change was fully wrought in Robert’s life. And he refused to countenance the thought of ever going back and living without Christ.

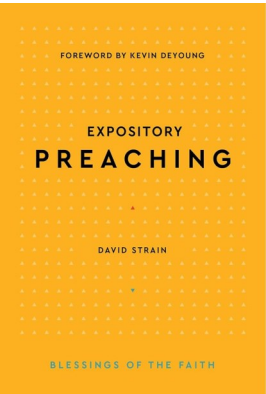
Not all of us have such romantic tales of conversion, with stirring words and tragedy mixed with such a clear redemption. Yet, let me urge us not to look at the whole of M’Cheyne’s life in comparison to ours. Robert would grieve his dear brother for over a decade, and watch as his own flock succumbed to illnesses and death. He himself died gripped by the typhus epidemic in Dundee which plagued his people. To put it succinctly, Robert *lived* this life. He had no knowledge of how God might use him later. He did not write letters to have them immortalized in a book. He lived a rather ordinary nineteenth-century life in Scotland.

Here is the reason why M’Cheyne is so encouraging to me, and I pray also to you: *he was ordinary*. He had parents who wrote letters to him that were filled with frustration, impatience, love, and worry. He had a church grumbling about him preaching at other places. He preached incredibly good sermons and, frankly, some poorly organized ones too. M’Cheyne was *real*. And the love of Christ in him produced good fruits which continue to bless us nearly 200 years later.

So you may not have the flair of Victorian Scotland, nor the romance of writing letters by candlelight, nor even pithy phrases to utter about the older Brother—but you have the same older Brother. And it was He who did all the work in M’Cheyne’s life, and who is willing to change yours all the same. No one may read your letters, follow your Bible reading plan, or even remember your name. But Jesus will, and that means he is worthy of your earnestness.

Expository Preaching

By Micaiah Liner



In his book, *Expository Preaching*, Pastor David Strain seeks to show that the faithful preaching of God’s word allows those who are listening to hear a message directly from God. As he puts it, “the preaching of the Word of God is *the Word of God*.” When the Bible is faithfully preached, God’s people have the remarkable privilege of hearing God speak to them.

It is the book’s aim to instill a fresh appreciation for expository preaching. Strain does this in four ways. First, he considers the Bible itself. Because the Bible is authoritative, inerrant, and Christ-centered, it is the foundation upon which all preaching must be based. Second, he argues that expository preaching is the method which best communicates what the Bible says, since a good expository sermon takes its content and form from the text itself. Third, he considers the ways in which expository preaching serves the church: it fuels our worship, empowers our evangelism, and provides the primary means of discipleship for believers. And last, he gets practical and provides a list of things the listener can do *before*, *during*, and *after* the sermon to better engage with the message God is delivering through the preacher.

The whole book was enjoyable and easy to follow, but what I found most edifying was how it challenged me to rethink how I am listening to the preached Word. It is only right that I come Sunday morning and evening with a sense of real anticipation. I get to hear God speak to me today! Could there be anything more wonderful than that—than to receive a message from the living God? The message may be a rebuke. It may be a word of comfort. It may be an exhortation to radical action or ordinary faithfulness. Whatever the message is, it is precisely the message God’s people need! And God is pleased to send this message through the mouth of the preacher. This is the privilege we have each week.

The more I reflect on the content of this book, the more points of application I discover. Let me offer just three in closing: First, pray for your pastors and their preaching. These are the men God has called to proclaim his life-giving Word, that your soul might be nourished and your faith strengthened. Second, come to church on Sunday with eager expectation that God has a message for his people. And third, praise God and thank him that he has revealed himself in the pages of Scripture and through the faithful preaching of it each week.

I encourage you to pick up this small book from the book table, and see the ways in which it might help you rediscover the remarkable privilege we have, week by week, to hear God speak to us through the preaching of his Word.

THE SALTSHAKER

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Officer Vows

By Rev. Sean McCann

This summer I am teaching the officer training class for our recently nominated church officers. The process to become an elder or deacon begins with nomination, progresses with training (“instruction in the qualification and work of the office”), moves to election, and culminates in installation and ordination. To prepare the officer-nominees for their potential installation, it is important to review the questions that will be put to them, all of which they must answer in the affirmative. Below is an abbreviated explanation of questions found in our *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, 24-6.

1. Do you **believe** the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

We start with the most basic of vows: that the officer believes the Scriptures to be the Word of God. There is a gradation in the officers’ faith that begins with Scripture as the highest authority and descends from there. As church historian Per Almqvist has noted, “The PCA’s founders added ‘inerrant’ in the first vow in response to those in the PCUS who viewed Scripture to be infallible only in matters of faith and practice but containing errors otherwise.”

2. Do you sincerely **receive** and **adopt** the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further **promise** that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

From the Scriptures, we step down to our doctrinal standards that are set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*. These standards are subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures, which is why our officers do not “believe” them, but rather “receive and adopt” them. With this vow, our officers “subscribe” to the

Westminster Standards and promise to make it known to their Session if they ever find themselves out of accord with any of the fundamentals.

3. Do you **approve** of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?

In addition to the *Westminster Standards*, the second and final section of the Constitution of the PCA is the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, which outlines the general principles of our biblical polity. Like the *Westminster Standards*, the *BCO* is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures. The Scriptures do not give us a manual of church government, but they do give us general principles by which we can structure the government of the church “according to the general rules of the word” (*WCF* 1.6). Though the verb here is the mildest of the first three vows (“approve”), the *BCO* still has the force of law and is to be considered binding in all its parts, except for most of Part III: The Directory for the Worship of God.

4. Do you **accept** the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to **perform** all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to **adorn** the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy **example** before the Church of which God has made you an officer?

Here is the longest vow, and the one most focused on the work itself. In this vow, the officer accepts the office and all that comes with it, which includes performing, adorning, and example-setting. Elders “must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto” (*BCO* 8-3). For deacons, it is their duty “to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in

September – October

Upcoming Events

For additional information about any of these events, please refer to our website (covenantreformed.net), or contact the church office at 828-253-6578; office@covenantreformed.net.

The Lord’s Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

Morning Worship:

September 6, 20; October 4, 18

Youth Events

September 18—Putt-Putt Golf
October 16—Corn Maze

Shepherding Groups

October 4

Men’s Second Breakfast

September 13, October 11

Joint Reformation Service

October 25

Weekly Events

Sunday:

Sunday School 9:30 am
Morning Worship 10:45 am
Evening Worship 6:00 pm

Except on 1st Sunday

Wednesday Nights
(Resumes September 9)

6:00 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

ROMEOS 7:30 am
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)
at Cornerstone Restaurant
Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm

Every Thursday

1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Carol Esther Belz’s Home 9:30 am
Gospel of Mark Study 10:00 am
(Begins September 15 at church)

Every Tuesday
Every Tuesday

Watering Seeds Podcast

Be sure to check out our church’s weekly podcast, *Watering Seeds*. Each week our pastors review, discuss, and apply the previous Sunday’s sermon. You can find the podcast on any major podcast platform, such as Anchor, Spotify, or Apple Podcast, by searching for our church name or the title, “Watering Seeds,” or by scanning the following QR code:



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