

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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The State of Things

By Rev. Sean McCann

Many of you have asked about the 47th General Assembly of the PCA held in Dallas, TX, in late June. The unofficial theme of this year's Assembly seemed to be human sexuality, with about a dozen overtures submitted on the need for our denomination to speak clearly and biblically on the matter. While the Bible is abundantly clear and the PCA has reaffirmed her biblical position on human sexuality a number of times through the years, there has recently arisen a conference called *Revoice* that has caused some to question where the PCA really stands in the rapidly changing sexual revolution. *Revoice* is a para-church conference with ties to the PCA that seeks to minister to believers who struggle with homosexual desires. Despite this admirable mission, *Revoice* has at times promoted unhelpful and erroneous views on the historic biblical and reformed doctrines of sin and temptation, sanctification, and identity in Christ. As a Session we have been concerned about the teachings of *Revoice* since its inception, and were therefore glad to see the Assembly act to address these issues.

The first action the Assembly took was “to declare the Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood’s ‘Nashville Statement’ on biblical sexuality as a biblically faithful declaration.” The Nashville Statement is a clear and concise summary of the Bible’s teaching on sexuality, and by voting to approve this measure the Assembly took a strong stand for the current and future health of the denomination. Despite this stand, some have questioned why this motion passed by only a 20% margin (803 to 541). While it is impossible to know the mind of all 541 elders who voted against it, the predominant reason given was the desire to produce a better and more pastorally sensitive document ourselves. This desire led to the second significant action of the Assembly: to form a study committee to write a report on the topic of human sexuality. It is somewhat concerning that we would form a study committee to speak on an issue that is already so clear in Scripture, but I am hopeful the committee will produce a biblically faithful report that

can bring unity and clarity to our denomination.

Regardless of these encouraging actions, there are some within our denomination and churches who see the discussion on these matters as a harbinger of things to come. As any student of American history knows, Christian denominations and institutions are always in danger of drifting away from their biblical moorings into theological liberalism. This departure from Scripture now marks most of our country’s mainline denominations and oldest theological schools; therefore we must not be naïve and think it will never happen to us. Yet despite this sobering reminder of the reality of indwelling sin, and the concerns I have about some of the conversations happening in our churches, I urge caution and patience for those ready to depart the PCA.

Just as there are no perfect Christians and no perfect churches, there are also no perfect denominations. And just as we must be patient and tolerant with imperfect brothers and sisters in our local body, so too must we strive for patience and tolerance with sister churches in our denomination. As our Confession states, even “the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error” (WCF 25.5). So while we are always watchful for erroneous teaching, we are also commanded “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). There may very well come a time when the light of Christ has grown so dim in our denomination that we have no choice but to depart, but that time has not yet come. When the PCA was formed in 1973 it was because of the theological drift in the PC (US) and her departure from such vital truths as the deity of Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture—foundational doctrines that are not in question today. The PCA—though subject to mixture and error—remains faithful to the Scripture, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.

So we patiently pray, love, and wait “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son

September–October

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord’s Supper

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

During Morning Worship: September 1, 15 October 6, 20	During Evening Worship: September 29
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Church Picnic:

September 1, following morning worship.

Shepherding Groups:

October 6, following morning worship.

Veterans’ Restoration Quarters Meals:

September 4 and 19; October 2 and 17.

Weekly Events

Sunday:

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

Except for 1st Sundays

Wednesday Evenings:

Supper	6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:

Men’s Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:

Carol Belz’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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of God” (Eph 4:13). But our patience does not mean inactivity. While others will sow seeds of division or fearfully stand by and do nothing, we will redouble our efforts and prayers for the peace and purity of our imperfect denomination.

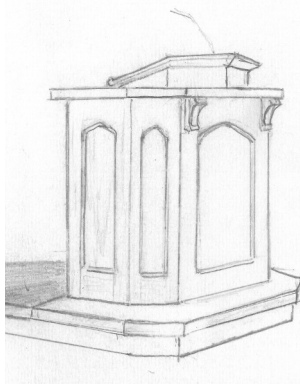
First and foremost, this means that we will never waiver in our commitment to preach the whole counsel of God’s word and proclaim the true gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Along with that commitment comes our whole-hearted devotion to, and teaching of, biblical morality and ethics. We will never shy away from God’s truth and will always herald his gospel with clarity and compassion. Second, our elders will continue to be heavily involved in the courts of the church. We faithfully attend and vote at our regional Presbytery meetings, and a number of our elders serve on committees of the Presbytery, including myself (the Mission to North America Committee) and Pastor Chris (the Nomination Committee). We also have plans to allocate funds in our budget to send Ruling Elders to upcoming General Assemblies. This is not a cheap commitment, but we believe it is worthy and necessary for the ongoing health of our church. Third, we support and benefit from the ministry of the Gospel Reformation Network, an organization that seeks to cultivate healthy Reformed churches in the PCA. This year the GRN hosted a con-

ference the day before the Assembly began in Dallas entitled “A Time to Stand.” Over 300 elders attended and were encouraged to remain biblically faithful and pastorally sensitive in their preaching and shepherding ministry. (If you’re interested, the audio from this conference can be found at gospelreformation.net.)

This winter and into next year I plan to teach a Sunday School class on “The Church” and I plan to address some of these topics – I hope you’ll be able to attend. In the meantime, join me in praying for the health and unity of the PCA. Presbyterian church government can feel clumsy, inefficient, and even exasperating at times, but as has been said about democracy, “it is the worst form of government...except for all the others.” Though at times we cannot see God’s plan through the clouds of overtures, motions, and debates, we are confident that Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I believe the trajectory of the PCA can be recalibrated, and that with faithful prayer and involvement from her elders, congregations, and presbyteries, our beloved denomination will continue to shine as a faithful witness in the coming generations. So “let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Gal 6:9).

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



This fall we will begin a new sermon series entitled “Pilgrim Songs” in which I hope to preach from Psalm 120 through Psalm 134. Each of the fifteen psalms in this section share the same heading - “A Song of Ascents” – that refers to the journey ancient Jewish pilgrims would make to Jerusalem. As the pilgrims would travel to Jerusalem they would ascend Mt. Zion. This upward journey was undertaken not only for the three annual feasts in Jerusalem, but also in the singular act of the Israelites returning from exile to their own land (Ps 126:1). Some even speculate that the fifteen psalms in the collection match the fifteen steps leading up to the temple in Jerusalem, though this seems unlikely.

The psalms themselves are shorter than most in the Psalter, possibly for ease in singing while on a journey. Thematically they are a diverse group, consisting in psalms of lament, confidence, thanksgiving, wisdom, and royalty. The uniting thread among them does not arise then from a

thematic unity, but rather from their collective purpose: to give words to the pilgrim to face whatever he might encounter along the way. In this way these Psalms speak ancient truth into our modern-day lives.

The Bible tells us that we are “strangers” and exiles” on this earth, that we “desire a better country, that is a heavenly one” (Heb 11:13, 16). The physical journey then of our ancient fathers and mothers in the faith – who likely included the adolescent Jesus as he traveled with his family to Jerusalem – serves as a sort of metaphor for the Christian life. We are on a journey through a strange land to Zion, our great heavenly city, and the road is full of ups and downs, joys and sorrows, the mundane and the extraordinary. By studying these psalms I hope we can grow together on the pilgrim’s road and learn to press on to that city that our God has prepared for us.

Pastor Eugene Peterson writes of the psalms of ascents: “There are no better ‘songs for the road’ for those who travel the way of faith in Christ, a way that has so many continuities with the way of Israel. Since many (not all) essential items in Christian discipleship are incorporated in these songs, they provide a way to remember who we are and where we are going.” I look forward to beginning our journey together this Sunday!

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Sept. 1	Psalm 120	
Sept. 8	Psalm 121	1 Samuel 29
Sept. 15	Rev. 4	1 Samuel 30
Sept. 22	Psalm 122	1 Samuel 31
Sept. 29	Psalm 123	TBD
Oct. 6	Psalm 124	
Oct. 13	Psalm 125	1 John 1:1-4
Oct. 20	Psalm 126	1 John 1:5-10
Oct. 27	Psalm 127	1 John 2:1-2

Evangelism for the Non-Ideal

by Rev. Chris Brown

Imagine that you’re walking around downtown Asheville when someone abruptly interrupts you. They say, “Hey! Hey you! What do you believe? I would like to believe what is true.”

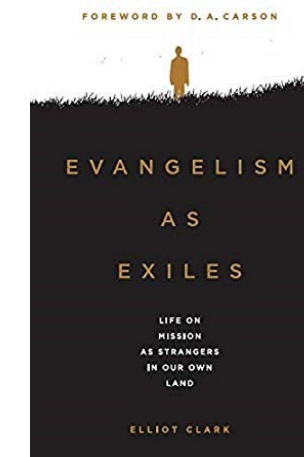
How will you respond? Where will you begin? This is an unlikely scenario, because most people do not wish to solicit the ideas or views of others. People are really happy with their own opinions. In fact, Romans 1, verse 18 says that “men” (Paul’s generic word for sinful, and unregenerate humanity), “men...by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” People normally, actively fight against knowing what is true! Paul’s point in this verse is that the natural state of humanity, since the fall of man, is to work to stifle or obscure the reality that God is worthy of all worship. Paul argues that all humans know God exists! “Although they knew God” he says, “they did not honor Him as God” (v. 21). Even further, the selfish, sinful desire for human autonomy from God manifests itself as a purposeful exchange. A few verses later, Paul writes, “they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images,” and, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”

So, it should surprise you, then, if someone enthusiastically and sincerely asks you about what you believe. This would be the most optimal but least likely situation in which to evangelize. They are ready to hear the hard truth that we are sinners in rebellion against a holy God. They are interested in learning about what God has done, out of His love and mercy, to save sinners from the wrath they deserve. They will joy in learning that the Son of God became a man, gave His life as a redemption price, and is alive now to call His brethren out of darkness into light. They will have hope ignited as they learn that Jesus will return to restore their bodies, and judge the living and the dead. Will you be prepared to share the good news with someone like this?

But beyond this idyllic convert, this is not how evangelism usually works. We are surrounded by people who are thoroughly uninterested in the truth, because humans naturally want to serve sin rather than God. People will not ask you what you believe, and if they can believe the truth. You, on the other hand, love people. You want them to know the truth! This means you have to be prepared to speak to someone who doesn’t want to listen to you. You will have to give them bad news and then good news. How can you do this with patience and love? Consider joining our evangelism training class to grow in your ability to do this, or read through a recommended book about it. Let’s pray that we all grow in our ability to evangelize in the non-ideal situation.

Evangelism as Exiles: Life on Mission as Strangers in Our Own Land

by Rev. Chris Brown



There are many contemporary-ish books on the proper method of evangelism. There are even books on the theology of evangelism. But few books have been written as an exposition of one passage of Scripture on evangelism. *Evangelism as Exiles* is unique in that the author, Elliot Clark, has chosen to explicate 1 Peter’s instruction on the nature of evangelism. “Why 1 Peter?” you might ask. 1 Peter is not necessarily a manual on evangelism, is it? But Clark has focused on

this powerful epistle for several reasons, each of which is broken down into a chapter. For one, 1 Peter sets the Christian within their proper context. Peter writes that we are exiles, and that our endgame is the hope of glory. We are not in our forever-city, and have no lasting home here. We are exiled, for now, away from our heavenly home. We do not experience the fullness of the presence of God for which we long and for which we strive to know each day. This is particularly poignant for the American who seeks to be an evangelist. It is sharp and unsettling because we are so enamored, even beyond our own realization, with this-worldly-ness. We want to make this world, this economy, this political structure into our final and perfect place of residence. But we are not at home here. We are strangers and exiles. Without this proper context in mind, the Christian’s efforts at evangelism come off kind of pointless, flabby, and weak, don’t they? Clark proves he has chosen his text wisely as he begins by calling us to embrace exile, and live for the hope of glory.

But he moves on from these basic points about telos (or purpose), and shows next how Peter is concerned with our fearfulness, our temperament, and our self-conception (or identity). We grow as evangelists when we fear the right thing, we explain what we believe out of love, and we remember why we were constituted Christians in the first place. He ends his work by distilling Peter’s arguments about the need for Christian holiness and hospitality. These two ideas are not “add-ons” to the Christian life, but indicate the reality of our claims. If God saved us from sin, and is powerfully at work in us, then why would we live in sin and neglect to care for others? I highly recommend this work as an up-to-date, biblical, and challenging read on how we can evangelize as exiles in a strange land.