

THE SALTSHAKER

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

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An Overlooked Passage for Officer Qualifications

By Rev. Jim Curtis

In the life of Covenant Reformed we currently find ourselves considering the officers of Christ’s church. I am confident that all of us have thought not infrequently of the qualifications recently; perhaps the pages of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 in our Bibles are a little more well-worn than before. I think those pages provide wonderful explanations of the expectations of the character of the elders and deacons in the Church.

Yet, not to downplay the significance of these portions of Paul’s epistles, I think there are a few other passages that are worth exploring in this season, in particular the passage of Acts 6:1-7. In this portion of the Church’s early history, a few things stand out that are noteworthy in this story.

The first thing is that officers are the Apostles’ outlet for *problem solving* in the Church. The issue facing the Church is that Greek speaking Jews (“Hellenists” in v. 1) had cause to complain due to the negligence facing their widows in the distribution of resources. In other words, a problem arose in the public life of the Church; that is, the interpersonal relationships of the people there. Rather than sitting down and judging the matter for themselves, the Apostles gather the disciples and indicate their task is in a different area (more on this in a moment), and that rather than giving them a direct answer to the problem, they provide a framework to solve this problem *and more*. Officers are therefore tasked with addressing the concerns facing the people of the Church.

Second, the Apostles tell the disciples to “pick out from among you seven men of good repute” (v. 3). Here we find a remarkable principle in the Church’s selection of officers: they are to be selected not by a select group, but from the “full number of the disciples” (v. 2). The Apostles could have forced officers upon the Church, but instead they follow the example Moses set in selecting elders over the tribes of Israel (Exodus 18:13-27; cf. Deuteronomy 1:13). In both cases, the people of God

were to find faithful and godly men to rule over them, and they were granted their authority by God’s representatives. We see this process mirrored in the Church today through our nomination and examination process; the congregation nominates and the elders examine, ordain, and install those qualified. The Church is granted both the privilege and the responsibility in discipling, encouraging, training, and choosing leaders for herself.

Third, not only do we see the Apostles commend the choosing of officers by the Church *for* herself, but also *from* herself. The apostolic requirement here include the provision that the Church select “from among you.” These officers are not chosen from a distance, then, but from within the Church’s life. These officers should be people known to the congregation, who have shown themselves to love and care for the well-being of the members and community. In a sense, this provision means that those selected are up to the task because they are familiar with both the people in the Church and the processes there. Can you imagine if the Apostles let the Church pick officers who did not even know what the problem was?

Fourth, we need to deal with the Apostles’ response about their own responsibility in verse 2: “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” At first glance, this phrase seems dismissive. Are the Apostles saying service is beneath them? As Paul is famed for saying, “by no means!” In fact, the way they put it only confirms that they believe what the Church needs is a different type of service. The Apostles serve in a unique way (preaching) and if they overburden themselves with two sets of responsibility, then the ministry overall will suffer. Not only will the widows continue to be neglected, but the preaching of the word will likewise suffer. Instead, they institute by their authority a new office (namely, that of deacon). Not to do what they do not want to do—to do

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; office@covenantreformed.net).

The Lord’s Supper

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

During Morning Worship:	During Evening Worship:
September 4, 18	October 30
October 2, 16	

Fellowship Meal:

September 4, following morning worship.

Church Picnic:

October 2, following morning worship.

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 Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road		
Norm Bomer’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
For Women:		
Carol Belz’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday

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what they are not called to do. Think about it in terms of 1 Corinthians 12:18-20: *But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.* The Apostles' wisdom comes through clearly with this in mind. The Church needs leaders who are equipped, qualified, and gifted by God in different areas. They all find unity in their work (and thus, often work together!), but are given complementary tasks. So, the passage ends with the Lord approving of this advice: *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem* (v. 7).

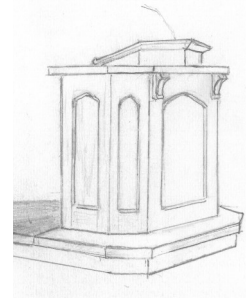
Finally, and I personally believe most amazingly, we see that the men the Church selects are all from a specific side of the issue. All seven men listed in verse 5 have Greek names. This means that in the wake of the problem facing specifically the Greek-speaking widows, the Hebrew-speaking Christians entrusted the entirety of their widows to Greek-speaking officers! The implications of this are staggering, but most notably it re-

veals to us that the Church ought to be careful in its selection of officers to choose men who are trustworthy to handle things *impartially*. The Church's selection is wise; the Hebrew-speaking disciples want unity, peace, and especially comfort for those suffering in the church. Choosing officers, then, is not a time to elevate the desires of self, and most certainly not an outlet for seeking position, privilege, and power. Rather, it is to further the Gospel through choosing others' needs over our own.

Taken all together, what I find most striking about Acts 6 is that it puts the beauty of the Church on display. Only Jesus' life-changing work can turn a group of people from self-serving and impatient into a community of people focused on serving one another. Officers, then, are to imitate Christ in this chief way, by serving the needs of the Church that chooses them. In this way, Acts 6 is just as important to the officer nomination and election process as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Would you join me in reflecting on this wonderful passage during this same season here at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church?

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



Over the past few months we have been in the book of 2 Samuel in our evening preaching series, and during that time we have seen different types of difficulties. One difficulty we saw in chapters 9 and 10 was the difficulty David faced in receiving different reactions to the same faithfulness. Another is the difficulty of David's sin. More recently, we looked at the difficulty of Amnon's exploitation in his sexual sin with Tamar.

In all these difficulties, we see that some difficulty is application (how do we apply this to our lives today?). When we come to the Scriptures, the question of "so what?" is a great question to ask and in stories like the ones we have read it is not immediately obvious how to apply these to our lives. We needed to do some digging, both in the stories themselves and in our own hearts. Asking questions like this present another type of difficulty, the difficulty of being honest with ourselves.

The difficulty of seeing a hero like David go through the infamous sin with Bathsheba and murder of her husband strikes at our basic understanding of David. What are we to make of the man after God's own heart? Should we write David off for his egregious actions? Sitting in the difficulty that the text shows us about the flawed characters of the Bible can be uncomfortable.

Finally, the difficulty that I personally found most challenging was the difficulty of the story between Amnon and Tamar. The text reeks of filth, from Amnon's wicked desire and actions to Absalom's huge miscarriage of justice, and Tamar's unanswered plea for righteousness impacted my own heart and conscience by the extreme selfishness and the isolation of Tamar.

All of these things cannot, and should not, be waved away with a trite phrase or negligent platitude. Rather, these difficulties and challenges should be met head on. The Bible is not ashamed of the fact that much of its telling of history is difficult. The sins of huge names like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, along with new testament characters like Peter, James, John, and Saul/Paul should all tell us of the great difficulty of the Scripture's primary message: sin, wickedness, and death are difficult to rid ourselves of and separate ourselves from, which is another way of saying "impossible." At least in and of ourselves.

This should tell us with crystal clarity our need for Jesus and give us a deeper longing for him and his glory. He is the hero that does not fail. He is the righteous one who judges with perfect justice. He is the one who does not wave away the difficulty but takes it upon himself.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Sep. 4	Est. 6:1-13	
Sep. 11	Est. 6:14-7:10	2 Sam. 14
Sep. 18	Est. 8	Psalm 3
Sep. 25	Est. 9-10	Guest Preacher
Oct. 2	Matt. 10:1-15	
Oct. 9	Matt. 10:16-23	2 Sam. 15:1-16:14
Oct. 16	Matt. 10:24-42	2 Sam. 16:15-17:29
Oct. 23	Matt. 11:1-24	2 Sam. 18
Oct. 30	Matt. 11:25-30	2 Sam. 19

Trials: A Means of Spiritual Growth

by Mr. Wilson Goins

Have you ever spent time laboring to remove pesky weeds from your impeccably green yard? Then, shortly after, a child comes along with a fluffy white dandelion and blows the seeds into gusts of wind which replant a plethora of yellow invasive flowers in your prized patch of grass. So it is with the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ. Though many have sought to extinguish her flame, she continues to grow, expand, and persevere. Tertullian, the early church father, famously wrote "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." When an oak tree Christian was martyred, many little seed Christians began to sprout up, and so on.

If you peruse the Bible's teaching on trials, you will observe that times of suffering serve as opportunities for the spiritual and numerical growth of God's people. For many of us, a trial in our life was the very means God used to awaken us to our need for the savior, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Peter tells us that something precious is cultivated through the fiery refinement of tribulations: faith. He tells us that this faith is more valuable than the most precious of metals. This is why, in James' epistle, believers are exhorted to count their present trials as joy. To those without the Christian hope, trials are inconveniences and even life-destroyers. Yet, to believers, trials produce proven character and the tested genuineness of our faith. What is the end of the one who remains steadfast under trial? Eternal communion with God, a crown which surpasses all the riches of the world.

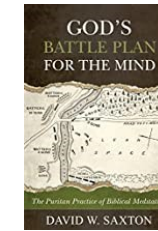
Not only does God's word teach us that times of hardship are more beneficial to God's people than times of prosperity, but the annals of history prove it. When the church's crewmen relax, she loses her moorings and tends to drift from her course into the waters of unfaithfulness and unbelief. The early church was bolstered more during The Great Persecution than even after Emperor Constantine's legalization of the practice of Christianity with the Edict of Milan.

Don't we know these things to be true in each of our lives today? Though we Christians of Asheville, NC in 2022 don't face the possibility of being tossed to lions in the Roman Colosseum, we still face many impending difficulties. Whether we are dealing with depression, the loss of a loved one, cancer, chronic illness, or just the burden of living in a fallen world, God has used and will use these things to sanctify his people. These tribulations are catalysts meant to drive us into our prayer closets and to hang on God's precious promises.

This is what we know: each of us will face trials. It is not "if," but it is "when." So the question is, will we receive them with thanksgiving, knowing that God in his providence is the giver of all good gifts? My prayer for all of the saints here at CRPC is that whatever we may endure, that we would be encouraged, knowing that what the sovereign God allows is for our good and growth in godliness. Indeed, it is a wonderful comfort to remember that we have a savior who upholds us in all things, who can sympathize with our infirmities, as he himself walked among us and experienced the depths of suffering.

God's Battle Plan for the Mind

by Mr. Wilson Goins



Whether you realize it or not, there is a war taking place, not on a battlefield overseas, but on the closest home front: our minds. Everywhere we go, we see glowing signs or catchy advertisements. All the types of media we consume are purposed to fill our minds with some sort of message. We often absorb these things without considering how much time and space they usurp in place of our spiritual exercises. David W. Saxton, in his volume, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind*, petitions his readers to cease their complacency and take up the essential weapon of biblical meditation.

When we hear the word "meditation," many of us picture a monk sitting cross legged for hours with his eyes closed, empty minded, in an attempt to reach an estate of inner-peace. However, that is far from the spiritual discipline Saxton advocates for. Puritan Thomas Hooker aptly defines biblical meditation as "A serious intention of the mind whereby we come to search out the truth, and settle it effectually upon the heart." Biblical meditation is not an attempt to dispel reality, but to fill one's thoughts with the riches of scripture. Its aim is to make the believer experience the far surpassing sweetness of communion with God over the fleeting pleasures of this world.

How refreshing is it to call to mind God's word from the archives of your mind when faced with life's difficult situations? The Puritan practice of meditation consists of reading scripture slowly, storing it up in our hearts and minds, and absorbing the message of the sermons we hear every Lord's Day. When your spouse writes you a love letter, you don't speed through it, but you cherish every jot and tittle as it enlivens your heart. In that same way, Saxton argues that scripture is Christ's precious love letter to his church. Therefore, we should treasure every word of it as balm for our soul.

A Christian without meditation is as one who refuses food, malnourished. In fact, both the Old and New Testaments prescribe to us the necessity of meditation for our spiritual health. In the first Psalm, we are told that the man is blessed who meditates on the law of God day and night. The blessed man spends time in God's word, while the ungodly neglect it, showing that what we set our minds on produces defining behavior. Similarly, the Apostle Paul expresses to us in Philippians 4:8-9, *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Everyone meditates on something. We must ask ourselves, what is it for us? Is it God's word? Or, have we allowed the military campaign of the world, the flesh, and the devil to prevail against poorly fortified defenses in the battle for our mind? David W. Saxton's book is an extremely helpful tool, both for the seasoned and young Christian alike. It is saturated with scripture and poised for our growth in likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.