

Continued from Page 1

towards a stated, pre-approved ministry. These designated funds can change based on different seasons; for now, we have the following funds established:

Building Fund – These are funds that we have begun to collect in anticipation of possible future building projects. We have not established a project, nor do we have a building fund “campaign.” Rather, we have recognized that with an aging building and a growing congregation, we need to wisely save and steward our funds for when and where the Lord leads.

Seminary Fund – As the Lord has brought us interns and seminary students, we have established this fund to help offset their seminary expenses.

Diaconal Fund – This fund is overseen specifically by the deacons and is used to assist our members who are enduring financial or physical hardships. We have seen an uptick in draws on this fund, which occasioned the longer sessional discussion in the first place, and it is here that we hope to provide an opportunity for you as members.

We find the following advice in our *Book of Church Order*, in the chapter on the Lord’s Supper: “An offering for the poor or other sacred purpose is appropriate in connection with this service, and may be made at such time as shall be ordered by the Session” (BCO 58-7). Why does our denomination advise a

connection between such an offering and the Lord’s Supper? Rev. Per Almquist answers, “The Church has historically seen the proclamation of God’s love displayed in Christ’s death as an appropriate time to take a special offering to proclaim the message of the gospel, especially through ministry to the poor.”

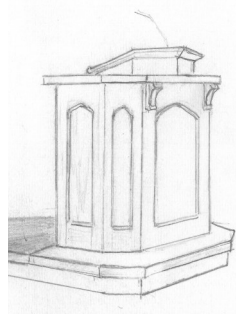
We are still working through the details of what this special collection might look like and when we might take it up, but I hope you see the goodness of such a fund and collection. Paul referenced this priority in the early church in his interaction with the other apostles, “They asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10).

A Final Word

I began this article with a tongue-in-cheek reference to the sensitivity of discussing church finances, so let me end with a sincere word: we desire to be a healthy, faithful, and generous church, both in our income and in our expenses, that trusts in the Lord to build his church. We do this through confident and cheerful giving towards the church budget, and trustworthy and transparent administration of that same budget. May the Lord bless his church, for “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



Recently, we progressed together through Romans 9 in the morning service. This provided me with a unique experience; namely, to turn to the seminal chapter in the Bible on predestination and exposit it before... a group of confessional Presbyterians! The experience was refreshing to my understanding of Romans 9, so bear with me as I give you two main takeaways as final applications.

First, I was struck at the question Paul was raising in its historical context. Up to this point, Paul has done some of the heaviest theological lifting in any of his epistles. And we usually are swept up in our own history reading the wonders of this Gospel. The Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther loom large over the landscape of Romans, and the unflinching emphasis of justification by faith rather than by works has been a theme worth singing for over 500 years. Of course, John Calvin’s explanation of the doctrine of divine predestination, likewise, dominates our thoughts in Romans 9.

I celebrate both of these historical achievements! Yet when we turned to Romans 9, Paul’s emotion from the opening verses pierced through this usual noise. Paul’s argument for God’s Sovereignty in Romans 9 expresses his overwhelming passion for his kinsmen in the flesh. He is not arguing with enemies—he is pleading with his brothers and sisters to repent. Paul, as Jesus before him, pleaded with the Hebrew people to hear the grace of God in his sovereign election. We must do likewise.

Second, when I considered this, I found the passage pointed directly at me. A passage I so often turned to in order to teach, persuade, and guide others into the beauties of Divine Sovereignty began a not-so-subtly assault on my flesh. I found need to repent of trying to usurp God’s throne—I made plans, and forgot it was the Lord who establishes my steps (Prov 16:9). I recovered my clarity of sight over the suffering of loved ones and neighbors, seeing the glory of God’s work in sorrow (Pharaoh and the Exodus). Chiefly, the Lord revealed to me that I had begun, even unknowingly and with seemingly good intentions, to slip into the old habit of blurring the line between Creator and creature.

As I stand and look back upon Romans 9, I see how much more glorious it is than a mere proof-text for Election. Rather than a tool to be wielded to convince others of our Reformed doctrine, then, we should use Romans 9 as Paul and God intended: to plead with brothers and sisters to repent of their sins, come to Christ, and seek after his glory.

| Preaching Schedule | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Date | Morning | Evening |
| July 5 | Romans 10:14-21 | |
| July 12 | Romans 11:1-10 | 2 Kings 14 |
| July 19 | Romans 11:11-24 | 2 Kings 15 |
| July 26 | Romans 11:25-32 | 2 Kings 16 |
| August 2 | Romans 11:33-36 | |
| August 9 | Romans 12:1-2 | 2 Kings 17 |
| August 16 | Romans 12:3-8 | 2 Kings 18:1-12 |
| August 23 | Romans 12:9-21 | 2 Kings 18:13-37 |
| August 30 | Romans 13:1-7 | 2 Kings 19 |

Graduation Reflection—Soli Deo Gloria

By David Livernois

I should not have graduated from seminary. When I was 16, I dropped out of high school; twice. Fast forward to my late 30’s. I am married, have four children, and no undergraduate degree. Whatever this inward aspiration to pastoral ministry is must be wishful thinking. Or worse, foolish. My wife knows I am wrestling with this, but no one else. We are now members in our first Presbyterian church. The non-denominational background I came from did not require pastors to have a formal seminary degree. The Presbyterian and Reformed world which we are now gratefully part of has always placed an unyielding standard on an “educated clergy.” Eventually, I sheepishly share my aspiration with a dear brother, one of my pastors, who was discipling me in the faith. Soon my shepherding elder knows as well.

It is now January 2018. In God’s kindness and mercy, I am taking “Introduction to Pastoral and Theological Studies” online as a Charlotte based distance student of *Reformed Theological Seminary*. It is my first class. Once I finish, I will only have 103 credit hours left. Riley is 13, Sarai is 12, Abigail is 6, and Gabriel is 2.

It is May, 2026, I am graduating from RTS today. I am choking back tears as I look across the sanctuary of Christ Covenant in Matthews, NC. My wife is beaming. Her tears are flowing. Each one tells a story. All four of our children are there with her in the pew. Two are now adults. My extended family is there as well. My mother has prayed me through every paper and exam to get to this point. When they call my name, I will walk across the stage to receive my Master of Divinity degree. My wife and children will remain in the pew, but they will be walking with me. They have walked with me this entire journey, and they will faithfully walk with me as a new journey now unfolds. We have walked this path together because Christ has walked with us and before us. In a way, we are just getting started.

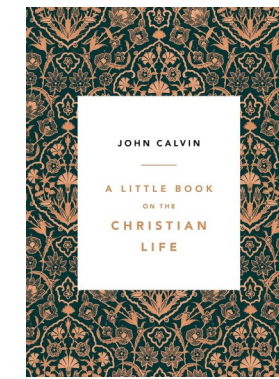
As we seek the Lord’s call regarding where he is leading us next, we know we would never have come this far were it not for the great cloud of witnesses who were not present at graduation. Over the years, dozens upon dozens of brothers and sisters in Christ have supported us in known and unknown ways, both big and small. Many, if not all, who are reading this right now. You have supported us through prayer, encouragement, affirmation, friendship, selfless financial generosity, and more. Though it seems like a massive understatement, “thank you.”

I cannot imagine seminary apart from the local church. No one should. They need each other. Every man aspiring to pastoral ministry needs both. What has been modeled at CRPC, and what I have been a personal recipient of, will stay with me wherever God leads. Raising men up to send them out is beautifully sacrificial; something I aim to prayerfully and purposefully be a part of in a future ministry context as the Lord provides.

Looking back to my first day of seminary, my earnest desire is still what it was then, that by God’s grace, your story and mine would more and more reflect the gospel, for the glory of Christ and the good of his church.

On the Christian Life

By Micaiah Liner



“The Lord Himself providentially opposes, conquers, and restrains the ferocity of our flesh by the medicine of the cross.”

John Calvin’s *A Little Book on the Christian Life* is profound and packs a serious theological punch, especially for a book of its length. Originally included in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, this portion proved so practical and encouraging it was later circulated as a stand-alone

publication. The title is a giveaway as to the material found throughout its brief chapters. In Calvin’s own words, “my goal here is simply to present to godly people a model for ordering their lives.”

The beauty of this book is Calvin’s approach to accomplishing his goal. He does not simply give a list of “do’s and don’t’s”; he masterfully addresses and appeals to the heart. In this way he identifies inclinations common to all people and reveals how our desires compete with God’s vision for a meaningful life. Calvin does this in a way that is far from discouraging or condemning; rather, he sets forth how desirous and good it is when the life of a Christian conforms to that of Jesus. His observations are convicting, certainly—because they are accurate. But his overall conclusions are deeply hopeful and motivating.

One prominent theme is that of suffering and hardship in the Christian life. Calvin takes a strong position arguing for the ultimate goodness of the trials we face. One way he does this is by revealing the connection between Christian suffering and that of Christ at the cross. Bearing the cross is a part of following Jesus, and therefore any cross we bear in this life should not be quickly written off as bad.

He also shows us that God uses suffering for our good in its sanctifying effect. One of the plagues of the human condition (and Christians are not immune) is the way our hearts get attached to the things of this world—particularly wealth, comfort and glory. Calvin explains how God wisely and lovingly applies affliction to our lives in order to loosen our grip from the fleeting pleasures of this life.

Another emphasis I found personally encouraging is that of being content where God has placed you. This is in some ways related to the previous point; however, it broadens out to include practically any area in which we wished things were different—or especially where we find ourselves grumbling. Calvin’s dogmatic approach to God’s intentional placement of his people where he wants them is refreshing. I found myself energized to serve and glorify God precisely where he has me. This is certainly a welcome message when the human heart is so naturally prone to discontentment.

For those who are suffering, for those who find themselves frequently restless or thinking, “the grass is greener on the other side”, for those who need a renewed sense of awe and appreciation for God’s sovereign workings in the world, this book is for you.

THE SALTSHAKER

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Church Finances

By Rev. Sean McCann

At a recent Session meeting, we spent a long time reviewing and discussing church finances, and the elders encouraged me to share some of that discussion with you. Church finances can be a sensitive subject: leaders can be sensitive to members prying into their spending, and members can be sensitive to leaders prying into their giving. Historically, Covenant Reformed has been a church that talks about finances only once a year. For some, that is not nearly enough talk, while for others, it is more than enough! We do not intend to begin to talk about finances more than necessary, nor do I have an agenda to push with this article beyond highlighting a necessary component of the ministry of our church. So, what follows is a brief overview of church finances and a new practice we hope to implement soon.

According to our Presbyterian polity, it is the duty of the deacons to, among other things, “develop the grace of liberality in 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” (BCO 9-2). In this work the deacons are under the supervision of the Session and are assisted by a treasurer, “to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the church” (BCO 9-4). At CRPC, the elders and deacons work together to create an annual budget. During the year, the deacons collect and distribute funds according to the budget, and the elders periodically review the overall finances. We typically give some sort of presentation of the budget in or around January (this is not required) and aim to provide periodic updates to the congregation throughout the year, though we must admit that we have been inconsistent in this of late. When it comes to reviewing the budget, we take into consideration the two big categories of Income and Expenses.

Income

To state the obvious, the church as an institution is funded by the giving of her members. During worship, we give to the church under the heading, “The Collection of Tithes and Offerings” (see 1 Corinthians 16:2). Note those two different titles:

Tithes – A tithe is giving ten percent of one’s income to God. The tithe predates the giving of the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament (Genesis 14:20; 28:22) and is affirmed in the New Testament by Jesus (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). Tithing is further detailed in Malachi 3:8-10, from which we glean the principle that the tithe is to be given to the local church. Rev. Bill Barclay explains: “Malachi 3 says to bring the tithe ‘into the storehouse,’ that is, the room in the temple designated to store the tithes and offerings. Offerings, or ‘contributions’ as Malachi 3:8 says, can be given above the tithe to other organizations. But the tithe itself should be given to the local church.”

Offerings – This second category of our giving is for that which is “above” the tithe. Christians are free to give (or not give) offerings to their church, other organizations, or even individuals. The Old Testament term for this is a “freewill offering,” and it was employed, for example, by Moses to fund the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 35:29).

When it comes to income, the process of making an annual budget is a bit of guesswork and involves both wise planning and true faith in the Lord to give us our daily bread.

Expenses

The expense side of the budget is less guesswork, but still not an exact science, as it is impossible to anticipate everything that might arise in a year, such as staff changes, building maintenance, mercy needs, shifting ministry priorities, etc. The major expense categories in our budget include Administration, Benevolence, Building, Church Activity, Denominational, Diaconal, Education, Missions, and Personnel. In this part of the budget process, we trust the wise proverb: “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

It is our goal to fund the ministry of the church out of the regular tithes of our members. However, there are a few expenses that we deem wise to fund (in part) through designated giving. Designated giving involves a gift made beyond the tithe (i.e., an “offering”)

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July–August

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:
July 5, 19, August 2, 16
Evening Worship
August 30

Youth Events

July 1—Tourists Baseball Game
July 10—Rafting Day in Sylva
July 23—Pool Day at Golden’s
July 29—Event with Arden and Trinity Pres

Summer Picnic

July 15, August 12

Fellowship Meal

August 2

Men’s Second Breakfast

July 11, August 8

Weekly Events

Sunday:
Sunday School 9:30 am
Morning Worship 10:45 am
Evening Worship 6:00 pm Except on 1st Sunday

Wednesday night dinner and prayer will resume on September 9.

Bible Study

For Men:
ROMEOS 7:30 am Every Thursday
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)
at Cornerstone Restaurant
Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm 1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:
Carol Esther Belz’s Home 9:30 am Every Tuesday
Book Discussion at Church 10:00 am July 18, August 15

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:

