

THE SALTSHAKER

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

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Membership Vow #3

By Rev. Sean McCann

Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

In 1976 Francis Schaeffer published *How Then Shall We Live?* arguing that a society based on God’s revealed will provides an absolute by which we can conduct our lives. The scope of his work is massive—nothing short of “the rise and decline of western culture”—and somewhat daunting for the average reader. In this article on our church membership vows, I want to consider a similar question, but with a more personal and limited scope. Consider how the third question teaches that we shall live the Christian life “in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit...endeavor[ing] to live as becomes the followers of Christ.”

Our third question introduces a third set of verbs to our study. First, we *acknowledge* that we are sinners; next, we *believe/receive/rest* in Christ, and here we *resolve*, *promise*, and *endeavor*—clearly the most strenuous sets of activities we have yet encountered. As we split this question into its two parts, I want you to see that while we are called to strive for obedience, we do so even as we continue to rest in Christ.

Resolved to Try

Our promise begins with a new word: “resolve.” This word conveys a sort of earnest determination; a thoughtful and solemn decision to begin and continue in a certain direction or towards a certain goal. One who is resolved is not easily distracted or turned aside: with a firm purpose they press on and endure. For the Christian, this determination is focused on following Jesus by faith. God calls us to this resolution in Hebrews 12: “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners

such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

The next key word here is “endeavor,” which simply means “try hard.” (Of course, “endeavor” sounds much cooler than “try hard,” which is why the British Navy named one of her ships the *HMS Endeavor* and NASA named the *Challenger* replacement the *Endeavor*.) This idea of resolving to try hard to live as a Christian comes from, among other places, Philippians 2:12: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” It is the aim of every Christian to live a life devoted to God and for his glory. We aim for this daily, and though we know we will fall short, we are resolved to try. While the famous words from Yoda in *Star Wars* sound cool (“Do or do not, there is no try”), they do not apply to the Christian life.

So, what exactly is it that we *try hard* to do? Answer: “to live as becomes a follower of Christ.” This is an older way of saying *suitable*, *appropriate*, or *proper*. To live in a way that is suitable of a follower of Christ, or even simpler: to live as a follower of Christ. This question implies that the Bible gives certain instructions on how to live as a follower of Christ, and the Christian endeavors to keep those instructions. The Shorter Catechism answers that the duty required of man is “obedience to God’s revealed will.” John Calvin instructs Christians how to rightly use God’s law as we follow him in faith: “It is the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge.”

Resolved to Rely

All this talk of trying and endeavoring, of resolving and

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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:

Sep. 3, 17 Oct. 29
Oct. 1, 15

Church Picnic:

September 30, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm at the Black Mountain Home for Children, 80 Lake Eden Road, Black Mountain, NC 28711

Joint Reformation Day Service:

On Sunday, October 29, 2023, we are excited to host a joint Reformation Day worship service with three other churches in our area. Fairview Christian Fellowship, Grace and Peace, and Trinity Presbyterian will join us at 5:00 pm for this service, with a joint reception to follow in the Fellowship Hall afterwards.

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
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)
at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road
Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm 1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:
Gail Albee’s Home 9:30 am Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall 10:00 am Every Thursday
Fellowship Hall 7:00 pm Every Thursday

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obeying, of failing and getting up and trying again—it all sounds quite exhausting, doesn't it? We all know that we cannot do this in our own strength, so the question makes clear that we resolve and promise “in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit.” If we learn from Philippians 2:12 that we must *try*; then we learn from the next verse that we must *rely*: “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (v13). While we are actively engaged in fighting sin and following Christ, Scripture is clear that sanctification (i.e., becoming more like Christ) is a work of God's free grace. Wilhelmus A. Brakel sums it up well: “Believers hate sin, love God, and are obedient, and do good works. However, they do this neither on their own nor independently from God; rather, the Holy Spirit, having infused life in them at regeneration, maintains that life by His continual influence, stirs it up, activates it, and causes it to function in harmony with its spiritual nature.” Our ability to do good works is wholly from the Spirit, and upon him we must rely.

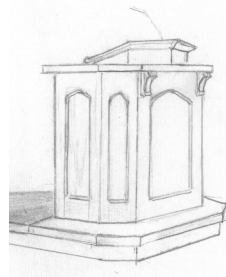
What might it look like to be resolved to rely upon the grace of

the Holy Spirit? It means we don't grow discouraged when we fall short, for this is his work, not ours. Instead, we repent of our sin, trust God to forgive us in Christ, and try again. It means that instead of turning to the self-help aisle at the bookstore, we turn to the ordinary means of grace as God's way of sanctifying us. We depend on Scripture and prayer, on worship and fellowship, on word and sacrament to grow us up in Christ. It means that instead of resenting our circumstances and problems, we say with Paul that God allowed them “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9).

To live as becomes a follower of Christ is not easy, therefore it is something we must resolve to do. We simultaneously resolve to try really hard to live as a follower of Christ, while also resolving to rely really hard on God alone to do the work. Resolve to try, and resolve to rely, for “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



Last month we began a new evening sermon series through the first nine chapters of Proverbs. This practice differs from our norm here at Covenant Reformed for some reasons unique to the book of Proverbs, so I am thankful for an opportunity in this Saltshaker to share some of the rationale behind only looking at a portion of a book. I hope to explain that rationale by looking at the book generally and give a taste of upcoming sermons in this series.

Generally, the book can be broken into two major sections: chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–31. The key difference between these two sections is the format of the actual proverbs written; that is to say, the first section of the book contains longer, extended dialogues—specifically the back and forth speeches between “Lady Wisdom” and “Lady Folly.” This serves as what Pastor Sean called an extended introduction to the entire book.

The second major section contains what you and I would typically conceive of as proverbs: very short (often just two lines!) pithy and memorable sayings which convey principles of wisdom. This section of the book seems to follow little structure comparative to the first major section. For example, Proverbs 19:24–25:

- 24 *The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth.*
- 25 *Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.*

These two proverbs could be connected thematically in a manner (as in, both sluggards and scoffers are dishonorable), but compared with earlier sections of the book, there is no major connection.

So, are we only preaching the first nine chapters because of the thematic jumps? Not exactly. Proverbs, as you would imagine, is deeper than that: *the first chapters of Proverbs provide the method by which to read the rest of the book.* Think of a pair of glasses: to see the immense wisdom in proverbs, we must first don the glasses provided to us by the book itself. To put it a bit more boldly, we cannot truly understand the second portion of the book without putting in the necessary work the first portion provides.

This, then, is why this series looks a little different than the usual full-book preaching at Covenant Reformed: this series is designed after the book of Proverbs' own model. We must first learn *how* to learn wisdom; *how* to hear Lady Wisdom over the din of other voices, especially that of Lady Folly. In other words, we must learn to be *teachable*. Only then can we go to her wise sayings later in the book and understand. Humbling, isn't it? To admit from the jump that we need not only to be taught but also taught how to *be* taught!

What else can we say to this? I suggest nothing more than Paul's reflection on the Gospel in Romans 11:33: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Sep. 3	Matt. 25:31-46	
Sep. 10	Matt. 26:1-16	Prov. 2:1-22
Sep. 17	Matt. 26:17-30	Prov. 3:1-12
Sep. 24	Matt. 26:31-46	Prov. 3:13-35
Oct. 1	Matt. 26:47-68	
Oct. 8	Matt. 26:69-75	Prov. 4:1-19
Oct. 15	Matt. 27:1-10	Prov. 4:20-27
Oct. 22	Matt. 27:11-26	Prov. 5:1-23
Oct. 29	Matt. 27:27-44	Reformation Service

Praying as He Taught Us

By Mr. Wilson Goins

Wednesday nights at Covenant Reformed are central for the life of our Youth Group. At these meetings we get to know each other better by playing all kinds of games and sometimes enjoying ice cream. However, we also take this time to pause and ponder what God is teaching us through His Word and how it affects our daily lives. We have walked through devotions in James, otherwise known as “the book of practical wisdom,” and the Epistle to the Ephesians, which is all about living as those renewed in the Image of God. However, this coming Fall we are going to be delving into something fresh and unique.

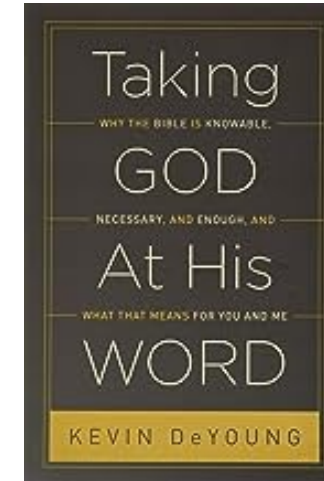
God has entrusted the church with the mission of discipleship and I am so often reminded of the challenges and temptations which our young disciples encounter today. Truly, what Jesus told to Simon Peter in Luke 22:31 applies just as much now for our youth: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat.” We are constantly under enemy attack, he is always trying to hinder and subvert. For this reason we must teach our youth how to use that spiritual ammo which God has given us for the fight. One of those weapons of our spiritual warfare is the practice of prayer! Though, like any weapon, it too requires training. In our Westminster Shorter Catechism questions and answers 98 through 107, we find a wonderful explanation of not just prayer, but the Lord's Prayer. This section on the Lord's Prayer will be the subject of our devotions for the Fall in order to train the CRPC Youth Group what prayer is, what to pray for, and why we pray. These are vital lessons for a healthy Christian life and yet are questions we rarely ask ourselves in the busyness of everyday life. In these nine brief questions and answers, the catechism unpacks the what of prayer, the direction of our prayers, and the seven sections of the Lord's Prayer so that we can learn how to pray for things in our lives which fall under the category of each petition.

There are also several things that I hope you all will do to support the Youth Group in this endeavor to learn to pray this Fall. First of all, parents, pray with your youth no matter what age they are! I can personally attest to the impact my mother had on me by including me in prayer times. Sometimes we prayed on the living room floor, or sometimes it was in the car on the way to school, it doesn't have to be fancy because God always hears! I would even encourage you to download the Westminster Shorter Catechism App on your phone, or take it off your bookshelf and use it to aid your family in praying.

Finally, please pray specifically for the CRPC Youth Group. Even pray for us during prayer meeting as we meet on the other side of the wall in the youth room. Pray that the Lord would create a real desire in them for a robust prayer life, even at this age. Pray that those who know Jesus would find comfort in knowing that He listens to their deepest needs. Most of all pray that those in our group who have yet to come to Jesus will come after learning about how Christ brings his people's every need to the attention of the Father in heaven.

Taking God at His Word

by Rev. Sean McCann



From where I sit in my study, I can count over a dozen different Bibles on my shelves, among them various translations and languages, and that is not counting the hundred or so pew Bibles down the hall in the Sanctuary, and the innumerable versions just a few clicks away on my laptop and smartphone. Truly we live in an age with no shortage of God's word, and yet surveys tell us that biblical illiteracy rates may be at an all-time high in our country, and the church is no exception.

With that in mind, I want to wholeheartedly recommend one of our book table offerings: *Taking God at His Word: Why The Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What that Means for You and Me* by Kevin DeYoung. DeYoung wrote this short book to answer three simple questions: what should Christians **believe about** the Word of God? What should we **feel about** the Word of God? And what should we **do with** the Word of God? In answering these questions, he will both ground your confidence in the Word, and deepen your love for it. I'm convinced that were every Christian to read this book, those biblical illiteracy rates would dramatically reverse course.

The body of the book is taken up with the doctrine of the Word and works through four of the main attributes of Scripture: its sufficiency, perspicuity (“which, for a word that means clarity, is not all that clear”), authority, and necessity. Each chapter is succinct, clear, and helpful, but I think my favorite chapter in the volume is entitled “Christ's Unbreakable Bible,” in which DeYoung attempts to explain what Jesus believed about the Bible. To me this was a novel question with serious ramifications, for surely “we are wise to believe about the Scriptures whatever Jesus believed about the Scriptures.” DeYoung argues convincingly that Jesus had the highest possible view of Scripture, concluding:

It is impossible to revere the Scriptures more deeply or affirm them more completely than Jesus did. Jesus submitted his will to the Scriptures, committed his brain to studying the Scriptures, and humbled his heart to obey the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, believed his Bible was the word of God down to the sentences, to the phrases, to the words, to the smallest letter, to the tiniest specks – and that nothing in all those specks and in all those books in his Holy Bible could ever be broken.

May he give us all this same reverence and confidence in his Word!