

THE SALTSHAKER

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

Office: 828-253-6578—Email: office@covenantreformed.net—Website:www.covenantreformed.net

Church Membership Vow #1

By Rev. Sean McCann

Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?

Today we begin to look in detail at the five membership questions put to those seeking to join a church in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). For an introduction to the vows themselves, please see the previous Saltshaker article entitled “The Use of Religious Oaths.”

This first promise can hardly be called a promise at all. Of all the five questions, the action verb in this first vow is certainly the weakest: “acknowledge.” We are not resolving or promising anything, we are not receiving or submitting to anything, we simply admit and accept who we really are and where we stand in the eyes of God. His word tells us of the true state of humanity – fallen into sin and misery – and while many people refuse to recognize this reality, we begin by humbly acknowledging that we are who God says that we are.

This question rightly comes first because it mimics the plea that an accused person enters before a court of judgment. A case before a judge or a jury will go in two very different directions depending on whether the accused claims to be “guilty” or “not guilty,” and by the first vow we enter a plea – in no uncertain terms – of guilty. This plea plays out in three related parts; each one acknowledging the personal reality of our fallen human condition.

First, we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in the sight of God.

What is sin? The Shorter Catechism answers: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” God has given us his law: he spoke it to Adam and Eve in the garden, he has written it on our hearts, he summarized it in the Ten Commandments, and he fulfilled it in the perfect life of Jesus. When we fail to do what the law commands (i.e. conform to it),

we are guilty of sin and rightly called sinners. When we do what the law forbids (i.e., transgress it), we are guilty of sin and rightly called sinners. We are named as sinners not only because the guilt of Adam’s original sin is counted to us, but additionally because we are individually and personally guilty of sinning against God in thought, word, and deed, both by what we have done, and what we have left undone.

Are we really that bad? Yes: “None is righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10). We might not *feel* that bad, and others may not *see* us as that bad, but as the question makes clear, we acknowledge who we are in the *sight of God*. How does God see us apart from Christ? “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Second, we acknowledge ourselves to justly deserve his displeasure.

It is one thing to admit that we have done something wrong, it is quite another to admit that we rightly deserve the punishment that results from our wrongdoing. The second part of this question makes it clear that we take full responsibility for our sin. We don’t evade like Adam: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” We don’t shift blame like Aaron: “You know the people, that they are set on evil.” And we don’t make excuses like Saul: “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed...” Rather we confess like David: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Psalm 51:4).

God’s displeasure is directed towards sin, and rightly falls on those who are found guilty. He is not rash, unjust, or overbearing towards sinners; rather he is righteous, holy, and just. Again, to quote the Shorter Catechism – What does every sin deserve? “Every sin de-

May–June

Upcoming Events

For more information about these events, see our website (www.covenantreformed.net), call (828-253-6578; or email office@covenantreformed.net).

The Lord’s Supper

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

During Morning Worship:
May 7, 21 June 4, 18

Shepherding Groups:

May 7, following morning worship

Church Work Day:

May 27, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Wednesday Night Summer Schedule: Our midweek prayer meeting and activities will be taking a break during the summer. Our last Wednesday night of dinner and prayer will be May 24, and we will resume our midweek prayer meetings on September 6.

Picnics in the Park: This summer we invite you to join us for a monthly potluck dinner and fellowship at different parks around the city on Wednesday June 21, July 12, and August 9. Be on the lookout for more details for these events!

Guest Preacher:

The Rev. Steve Lawson will preach for us on Sunday morning, July 2.

Weekly Events

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

Wednesday Evenings (through May 24):

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

Continued from Page 1

serves God’s wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.” When we say “I do” in answer to this question, we affirm that it is just and right for God to fully punish us for our sins. His punishment for our sin is not harsh or overbearing, but we truly believe that the punishment fits the crime. We agree whole heartedly with Paul in Romans: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things” (2:1-2).

Third, we acknowledge that we have no hope save in his sovereign mercy.

If these first two parts of the question are true, then the final phrase flows naturally from them. Apart from God’s sovereign mercy, we have no hope. Scripture affirms this in no uncertain terms: “remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Our fallen condition – as sinners rightly deserving God’s displeasure – is so bad that there is no way out and no escape except for Jesus. Our good works will never be enough to atone for our sin, our religious worship is offered by polluted hands and is an offense to God, and every hero except for one is marked by our same condition

and joins us in our hopeless estate.

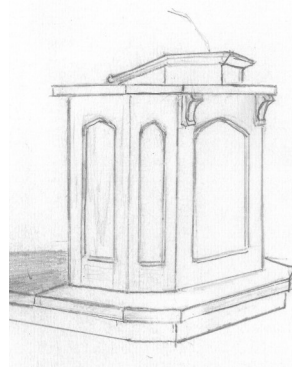
But the last word “save” is not hopeless. We understand “save” to be used here to mean “other than” or “except for.” There is no hope, except in the sovereign mercy of God. Since nothing we can do will ever satisfy his justice, we depend entirely on him to pity us in our sin and act out of his mercy. His mercy is sovereign because he dispenses it upon those whom he wills, for if none are worthy then there is no other explanation *except* for his sovereign choice. We don’t yet confess Christ in this opening question, but we lay the groundwork for him, for the only hope a sinner has is in the sovereign mercy of God.

What kind of people can say “I do” to this first question? People who are honest, humble, and hopeful. We honestly acknowledge who we really are, and don’t hide or excuse what we have done to deserve punishment. We are humbled because we have brought nothing to our salvation and know we deserve nothing but the displeasure of God. And we are hopeful, because despite all we have done and deserve, his mercy is sovereign and his grace is secure!

We have more to come as our next questions get at the heart of the gospel, but we must start here, for though with man it is impossible, with God all things are possible.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



This past month we crossed a significant threshold in our morning sermon series in the gospel of Matthew. The four gospels can be difficult to outline because they often do not follow the patterns of the concise chronological narratives in the Old Testament or the tight logical progressions of the Pauline epistles. And yet, while many commentators disagree on how exactly to outline Matthew, the vast majority agree that chapter nineteen begins the final stage of Jesus’ journey and movement towards the cross. R.T France notes how the previous chapters narrate Jesus’ time in Galilee and his preparation of his disciples for the coming conflict, but “now the scene shifts to Judea, the place of the final conflict... leading up to the inevitable climax in the passion narrative of chapters 26-28.”

We have already read and considered two different occasions when Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, and in the coming weeks we will see the third prediction. Back in chapter sixteen, Peter responded to the first foretelling with disbelief and even began to rebuke Jesus. After the second foretelling in chapter seventeen – when the details of the prediction start to become clearer – the disciples “were greatly distressed.” That is, they believe the prophecy of his death, but didn’t yet grasp the promise of his resurrection. And coming up in chapter twenty we will see the third foretelling, and it will be the most detailed and distressing of the three. Amazingly, even after this third and final prophecy, the disciples still don’t get it and Jesus will continue to drive the point home by speaking of the cup of God’s wrath that he and he alone must drink (20:22).

How are we to understand the continual misunderstanding of the disciples? Is there a lesson in there for us? Might it teach us that his death and resurrection are so radical, so shocking, so mind-boggling that our finite minds cannot grasp the truth without the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit? I think so. We don’t rebuke Jesus, we don’t despair at this death, and we certainly don’t push to sit at his right hand in heaven. D.A. Carson is helpful on how this section of Matthew’s gospel strengthens our faith: “Despite the gross rejection of Jesus; the chronic unbelief of opponents, crowds, and disciples alike; and the judgment that threatens both within history and at the end, grace triumphs and calls out a messianic people who bow to Jesus’ lordship and eagerly await his return.”

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
May 7	Matt. 20:1-16	
May 14	Matt. 20:17-28	Hosea 6:11b-7:16
May 21	Matt. 20:29-34	Hosea 8:1-14
May 28	Matt. 21:1-22	Hosea 9:1-9
June 4	Matt. 21:23-32	
June 11	Matt. 21:33-46	Hosea 9:10-10:10
June 18	Matt. 22:1-14	Hosea 10:11-11:17
June 25	Matt. 22:15-22	Hosea 11:8-11
July 2	Guest Preacher: Steve Lawson	

Youth Update: Rejoice and Pray

By Mr. Wilson Goins

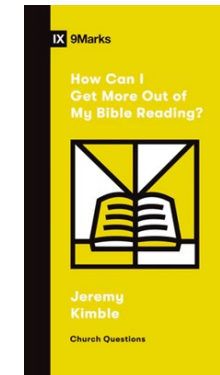
Throughout the scriptures there is a common emphasis on the duty of God’s people to teach the next generation about the wonderful works of the Lord so that they too would come to see and embrace Jesus Christ. It has been such a joy to watch the Lord grow and flourish that same category of the next generation in our little covenant community. Not only have new students been brought into the youth group, but through times of fellowship, bible teaching, and outings, the Lord has cultivated fresh friendships among our youth. Iron has in fact sharpened iron in our midst.

Over the past 11 months, the CRPC youth group has participated in teaching series including: the Attributes of God, surveys of the gospels, and Wednesday night devotionals through the epistles of James and Ephesians. For the most part, these teaching times have focused on what it looks like to live and think like a Christ-follower in the context which they are growing up and interact with daily. As well, the youth group has begun a new tradition of “Ice-cream Socials” on the fourth Wednesday of every month. On those nights, after dinner, we set off for one of the local joints: Whit’s Custard, the Hop, or Chick-Fil-A. Not only this, but the youth have enjoyed a number of special outings and events. These outings have included: mini golf with Rocky’s Hot Chicken Shack dinner to follow, a Christmas game night at the church, bowling followed by celebratory Chick-Fil-A, and a campfire night with all the hotdogs, s’mores, and cake that one could desire. I am pleased to say there are many more of these events to come, and it has often been through these events that the Lord has been pleased to bring unity to our group. These teachings and activities build on God’s ordinary means of grace (word, sacrament, prayer) that undergird the entire life of the church. We love to see our youth serve and worship in the body, as well as grow together during these age-appropriate gatherings.

We have a lot to be thankful for. CRPC has been blessed in that many churches today do not even have enough young people to constitute a “youth group.” According to a poll from the Christian Post, only 28% of Generation Z attends any sort of “religious service” even once a month. It is a delight to see the growth and sharpening of our group, but it is not something for our church to take for granted. I would ask you to pray with me, especially that the Lord would grow the youth group in their faith in Christ, and that any who have yet to come to know Christ would in this place. We also must not be naive to the challenges that Christian teens are facing everyday. Therefore, I would also request that you pray God would keep our youth from the temptations and attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Pray that they would habitually read God’s word and pray. Earnestly pray that the teaching the youth receive here at CRPC would equip them to face the trials of life under the sun, that even as they grow older they would never depart from it.

Book Review: Church Questions

by Rev. Jim Curtis



Recently, we’ve begun a new series in Sunday school through various questions concerning the Christian life and belief. The intent behind this series is to welcome questions as a means of discipleship. As we do that, I want to point our members toward the series which gave birth to this idea for our Sunday school: 9Marks’ *Church Questions* series.

While we will not be covering every book in their series, nor will we be always using one of their books, I do highly

recommend looking into the series for good resources on questions you may have and/or questions others around you have asked. I want to review this series using those two headings:

Questions You Have

First, this series is useful for questions you, as a church member, might already have. These might be theological questions (e.g., *Is Hell Real?*) or more practical questions (*What If I don’t Desire to Pray?*). This series of books will address those two types of questions, and many in between! Perhaps even a sermon on the Great Commission pushes you to look at supporting missions—never fear, the *Church Questions* series has a book for you: *How Can I Support International Missions?*

This is the primary reason I think 9Marks’ series proves itself useful: we all have personal questions! And whether or not we even find our particular question in this series, time and again each book shows itself to point the reader back to biblical principles and calls them to apply those in a specific context. Rather than providing legalistic, “my way or the highway” type of answers, the series provides for nuance and differing contexts.

This means that if they have not (yet) put out a particular booklet on your question, the existing booklets are worth reading in showing you how to search the Scriptures for those principles in answering your questions. Which then helps you...

Questions Those Around You Have

...when you talk to friends, coworkers, family members, and others who ask good questions that you struggle with or that you may not have an answer for immediately (which is totally okay!). This series equips readers to answer the questions *others* have by applying those same principles of searching the Scriptures in the context of various questions. Sometimes, too, there’s a booklet you’ve read that you can hand them!

This series, then, is one I highly recommend; not because I agree with everything they say (I would have some disagreements with their books on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper!), but because I agree with their *approach* to questions, and the helpful way they invite further questions in writing out these helpful answers.