

THE SALTSHAKER

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

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Membership Vow #2

By Rev. Sean McCann

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

Do you have a favorite chair? Or maybe a favorite spot on the couch? After a long day, when the chores are done and the kids are asleep, you flop down in your spot, let out a deep breath, and finally relax. Your muscles relax for the first time in hours, your body goes limp, and you are finally – at least for a moment – at rest. I hope that from now on when you hear this second membership question, you think of that moment in your favorite chair!

Our second question contains three verbs, but those three verbs are all connected and related to the one idea of faith. Faith is a noun, a thing: something we either lack or possess as a gift. That thing – faith – expresses itself in actions, summarized here in the three verbs: believe, receive, and rest. The second membership question is intended to discover if we have faith; and we answer in a way that displays our faith in action. To better understand the outworking of faith in this promise, we need to break it down into two parts: the object of faith and the instrument of faith.

The Object of Faith

The first of the three verbs in this promise is *believe*. In the Greek language, “to believe” (*pisteuo*) is simply the verb form of the noun “faith” (*pistis*). We believe in something or someone. The power of Christian faith is not in the strength of the faith itself, but rather is in the strength of the object of faith. For example, I can believe very strongly that my daughter’s highchair will hold me when I sit in it, but what matters when I sit down is the strength of the highchair, not the strength of my belief in the chair. When we take this metaphor to the spiritual realm, we know we need to believe in something or someone strong enough to save us from the displeasure of God that we so justly deserve. Who is that someone? The Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the object of our faith; we believe in him. But who is he? We affirm in this promise that he is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. First, he is the Son of God, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made (*Nicene Creed*). We learn this from verses such as John 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (v1-2); “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (v14).

Second, he is the Savior of sinners, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, he suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again (*Nicene Creed*). We learn this from all of Scripture, and from such wonderful verses as 2 Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This Lord Jesus Christ – the Son of God and Savior of sinners – is the object of our faith, and we believe in him. For as Paul assures us, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). So while it is our faith that believes in him, it is not the strength of our faith that saves us; rather it is the strength of his saving work on our behalf.

The Instrument of Faith

What exactly is this faith? The Shorter Catechism asks and answers this very question: “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.” The second part of the second membership promise is

July–August

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:
July 2 and 23	July 30
August 3 and 17	

Guest Preacher:

Steve Lawson will preach for us on July 2.

Fellowship Meals:

July 2, following morning worship.

Wednesday Evening Picnics:

July 12, 5-7 pm
August 9, 5-7 pm

Shepherding Groups:

August 6, 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 night prayer and activities will resume September 6.

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:		
Gail Albee’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday

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taken directly from the catechism and best summaries the nature of faith in two words: *receive* and *rest*. We call faith an instrument because it is how we receive the salvation of God: the mechanism by which salvation comes to us is faith.

The first verb used to describe this instrument is “receive”. Again, to quote John 1: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (v11-12). We are passive recipients of a grace that is given to us by another. Some else - namely Jesus - does all the work of salvation; we merely receive the benefits. We do not achieve salvation, we do not earn or deserve salvation, we simply receive it.

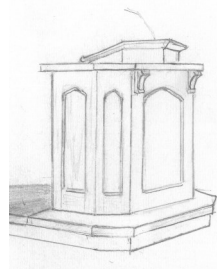
The second verb is “rest.” It seems strange to even call “rest” a verb because the action of “resting” is best defined by a lack of

action! When we rest we stop moving, we cease trying, we relax our muscles and depend on something – or someone – external to strengthen and support us. Go back to the illustration of sitting in a chair: to believe that a chair will hold us is to sit in it, to put all our weight in and trust that it will support us. This is why rest is such a perfect verb to explain faith: because the action is in fact a relinquishing of action. When we trust Christ, we stop trying to earn God’s righteousness and we cease striving for his favor. Instead, we give up, we let go, and we rest upon him alone for salvation.

When we hear the gospel message of salvation in Christ through faith alone, he is offered to us. Without price, without money, we are called to repent and believe. Believe that he is the Son of God. Believe that he is the Savior of sinners. And in faith receive him and rest upon him alone for salvation.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



As we come to a close in our Hosea series in the evening, I am glad for an opportunity to review some aspects of our time in the book. As we began, I indicated that I believe it would be beneficial as both a reminder of what we knew about the book and as a time of deep reflection upon some newer things about Hosea we may not have known. I believe both of these have proven edifying to our church throughout the series! So I want to “recap” some of those aspects:

Something Familiar: Hosea’s Marriage

The most well-known marriage of the entire Bible is probably Hosea and Gomer. It plays a prominent role as “enacted” prophecy, illustrating with stunning clarity Israel’s unfaithfulness. Hosea, called to marry an unfaithful woman, is given a burden and a task. His faithfulness to that burden of an unfaithful wife and to the task of redeeming her proves to continue to give a foretaste of the redemption we, a rebellious and unfaithful people, have in Jesus.

Something Familiar: The Judgment

Another familiar aspect to the book is the judgment it contains. When we turn to minor prophets, it seems we always find judgment—it wasn’t a particularly good moment in Israel’s history, to be fair! As we studied the judgment, I hope a few characteristics of this judgment stood out:

First, the deserved nature of the judgment. Israel was not only guilty, but intentionally so. We explored this when God removes the effectiveness of their sacrifices (6:6; 8:13; 9:4), which were designed to point to atonement. Hosea’s oracles of judgment reveal more than Israel was sinful; Israel was *unrepentantly* sinful. Sacrifices which do not have accompanying faith are useless exercises.

Second, the *goodness* of the judgment. While we likely read this story from the perspective of the Israelites (as the people of God, there are many parallels between the Church and Israel!), many times the oracles caused us to disassociate with Israel (as Paul does in Romans 9:6). This disassociation helps us to see the necessity of Divine punishment of sin. Should the evildoer not face justice? Of course! The problem is that “the wages of sin is death” for everyone, not just those we find personally to be wicked. Hosea’s oracles against the nation’s extreme wickedness aids us in concluding that God must be honored.

Something New: The Redemption

Okay, so redemption is not new to Hosea, but the particulars to redemption that appear in Hosea are unique. This begins with the metaphor of an unfaithful spouse; while the Bible does speak of the Covenant in intimate terms, Hosea uses this metaphor almost exclusively. This shows a particular dimension to redemption that is often overlooked: redemption is due, in part, to *God’s desire for his people*. Deuteronomy 7, for example, contains a similar dimension, but notice the wording of it is more of a rebuke to potential pride in Israel. Hosea plants the flag in the ground that God redeems his people because he loves his people.

Indeed, as Paul wrote, *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Yes and amen!

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Jul. 2	1 John 5:5-13	
Jul. 9	Matt. 22:23-33	Hosea 12:2-6
Jul. 16	Matt. 22:34-40	Hosea 12:7-14
Jul. 23	Matt. 22:41-46	Hosea 13:1-16
Jul. 30	Matt. 23	Hosea 14:1-9
Aug. 6	Matt. 24:1-35	
Aug. 13	Matt. 24:36-51	Prov. 1:1-7
Aug. 20	Matt. 25:1-13	Prov. 1:8-19
Aug. 27	Matt. 25:14-30	Prov. 1:20-33

General Assembly Report

By Rev. Sean McCann

This past month Jim and I had the distinct privilege to travel to Memphis to represent our Presbytery as commissioners at the 50th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). Our annual meeting consists of teaching and ruling elders representing our eighty-eight Presbyteries, and this year was marked by celebration for the 50th year of the PCA as we heard a number of corresponding messages on the theme of “Strength for Today, Bright Hope for Tomorrow” (check out www.pca50.org). We arrived on Monday to serve on different Committees of Commissioners that oversee the work of our Permanent Committees. Then on Tuesday evening we joined with over 2,000 commissioners, plus hundreds of guests for the opening worship service and to kick off the official business of the Assembly. The body elected teaching elder Fred Greco as our Moderator, and he led an efficient and agreeable meeting that ended ahead of schedule, a rarity at GA!

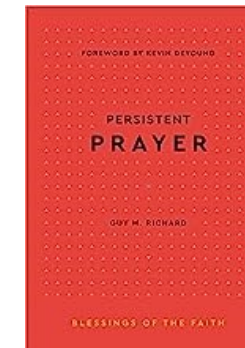
The last two assemblies were somewhat tense and combative on several issues, but this year was marked more by a spirit unity and congeniality. On the “hot topic” of human sexuality and gender, the PCA remains broadly united and faithful to God’s word. We passed the final vote to add language to our *Book of Church Order* (BCO) clarifying that “[elders and deacons] must affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions.” The Assembly also proposed language that officers should “conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity in his descriptions of himself, and in his convictions, character, and conduct.” Finally, the Assembly plans to draft “a humble petition” to the government “condemning the practice of surgical and medical gender reassignment, especially of minors.”

Last year we received a helpful report from a study committee on *domestic abuse and sexual assault*, which has led to several proposed changes to our BCO. These changes will trickle through our Assembly over the coming years as they are drafted, considered, perfected, and adopted. This year we added victim protection provisions in the case of victims testifying in an ecclesiastical trial and we approved proposed changes that would allow victims a bigger voice in trials. Other topics were not as culturally divisive, but just as important to the peace and the purity of the church. As the PCA grows we wrestle with the distinctly Presbyterian tension of how our highest church court (the General Assembly) should exercise its oversight over the boards and agencies of the church. For example, we are now requiring our boards and agencies to present to the Assembly not only their minutes and budget for approval, but also any substantial changes to their policies.

All in all, it was a full and busy week, and I am glad to be home and back among you. And as I often say after GA, I am grateful for our denomination and hopeful for the future of the PCA.

Persistent Prayer

by Mr. Wilson Goins



Why, when, and how should I pray? Who should I pray with? What should I pray about? If you ever find yourself pondering any of these questions, Guy M. Richard’s little book *Persistent Prayer* will be of tremendous value to you. At Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, I think all of us recognize that we spend much of the church’s gathered time praying. We have prayers of invocation, confession, dedication, intercession, and

even a whole evening each week dedicated to prayer because we recognize its vital importance in the Christian life. Sometimes though, in our private time with the Lord, we can find ourselves neglecting prayer. This may be a product of busy schedules or a lack of words and concentration. Nevertheless, the scriptures tell us to pray without ceasing, to continue to ask, seek, and knock, and that Christ always bends His ear to the prayers of His people. I think every Christian can admit there are always obstacles in the way of our prayer closets. There is not one among us who can ever say that our prayer life is perfect. Instead, the healthy believer should always find their soul hungering for more time of intimacy with God.

Richard points out that prayer is just as essential to our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life. For this reason, his book covers topics such as the blessings, nature, result, necessity, and our own growth in the practice of prayer. Richard comments that too often we view the practice of prayer like the lottery. Sometimes we think our prayers have a 1 in 34 million chance of being answered by God, but this is not the case. Rather, Richard wants to remind us that our prayers have a 1 in 1 chance of being answered. They may not always be answered like we want them, or God may not choose to answer them physically, but He always answers with the provision of spiritual blessing. He always knows what is best for His saints, and that the spiritual blessings always outweigh the physical. There is no saint in all of scripture who ever met with God in faith and came away dissatisfied. How could we expect Him not to deliver on His promises to answer our prayers if He did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us? If we look at prayer this way, our lives will be transformed as we develop a flourishing prayer life, by the grace of God. We will want to pray more, we will learn to pray better and bolder as we search the scriptures, and we will love the Lord more as we have intimate communion with Him. This does not mean that the intense challenges in our lives will go away, but it does mean that we have constant access to our caring Father, through the Son, who comforts us by His Spirit. The Bible tells us that we do not have because we do not ask. Imagine what things God will do in us and among us at CRPC if we all seek His face together. For all of these reasons, I found Guy M. Richard’s book to be a force of tremendous conviction and motivation in my own prayer life, and I am sure it will be for you too!