Dear readers,

I hope that you enjoy reading this new edition and new format of Good News. We hope to produce it four times a year, Lord willing, and are excited with our plans for future editions. The aim of our magazine is to give everyone within the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland something that will benefit them in their walk with God. Not everyone is the same or at the same stage, and like all churches we have our diversity of age, spiritual maturity, and interests. However, I trust that you will find most or all of the articles in this edition to be useful for you. We have some helpful one-off articles and also the beginnings of regular series. Once you have read Good News perhaps you can pass it on to someone outside our church that could benefit too.

Good News will look at a variety of topics that will help us in our walk with God, such as doctrine, Church history, and practical and contemporary issues. Just like the pilgrims of old who went “from strength to strength (Psalm 84:7), I hope Good News helps you in your walk with God or as the New Testament says, “add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

It would be remiss of me to fail to thank Rev. Andrew Quigley, the first editor and designer of Good News. Having worked on this edition, I more appreciate how much work is involved. Thank you for your service.

Every blessing,

Stephen
Some anniversaries are celebrated with great joy and thanksgiving, some with sadness and regret, but there are some that should be remembered with shame and loathing. Such a one is the anniversary of the passage of the “Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill” (later the Abortion Act 1967) which came into force fifty years ago. Since that time, it is reckoned that 8,400,000 unborn babies have been aborted (based on Department of Health figures and pro-rata projection by SPUC). The last available figures for the year 2016 show that 190,406 abortions were carried out in England and Wales (Department of Health website), 98% of which were for “risk … of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman,” 99% of those were for the risk to “mental health.” The number in Scotland for 2016 was 12,063, with 98.2% for “risk … of injury to physical or mental health.” (Information Services Division, NHS National Services, Scotland)

It seems incredible that such a continual destruction of unborn life can be accepted with equanimity in any civilized society let alone one that is supposedly built on Christian principles. Whilst there are undoubtedly difficult cases in relation to rape or fatal foetal abnormality, the strident cry of the so-called “pro-choice” lobby that a woman must have rights over her own body makes the killing of the unborn incidental to the convenience of the woman. The question of morality never seems to enter the equation.

It is certainly true that some of those who supported the original 1967 Act were genuinely concerned by the number of illegal or “back-street” abortions that were being carried out, and it was never envisioned that it would lead to the situation that obtains in 2017 where there is virtually abortion on demand. Even the chief mover of the Bill, David Steel, said, “Nobody is advocating abortion on demand in this Committee or anywhere else…” (David Steel, Standing Committee F, 15 February 1967, col 250), and yet in 2004 the same David Steel said in a BBC interview, “If it’s simply the decision of the mother then the limit should be 12 weeks” (BBC, 4 July 2004). In the discussion of “rights,” the rights of the unborn child are totally ignored!

How then should Christians approach what is euphemistically called the “termination of pregnancy”?

I. An Understanding of Biblical Truth

The Christian believer should always seek to base his thinking upon the infallible law of God. It is very unwise to be guided or persuaded by seemingly persuasive or compassionate arguments that are not firmly based on the Word of God. In relation to the issue of abortion there is some very clear teaching in the Scriptures:

a. Man is made in the image of God.

In Genesis 1:26, God determines to create man “in our image and in our likeness” and then in Genesis 2:7, he is portrayed as breathing his own breath into man. Bearing the image of God set man over the animal kingdom and made him fit to exercise dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). As the image bearer of God, man is able to communicate with God and is a rational, moral, and social being. As a reasoning being, man reflects God’s intellect and freedom; as a moral being he was created “very good” as a reflection of the perfect holiness of God; and as a social being, man was created for fellowship, with God (Genesis 3:8) and with other humans (Genesis 2:18).

b. Life begins at conception.

The Bible is not silent about life in the womb and it certainly gives no credence to the commonly held view amongst “pro-choice” advocates that the foetus in the womb is simply a bunch of cells in the process of becoming human or is a “potential person”! In Psalm 139 there is the wonderful and detailed description of unborn life, “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works and that my soul knows well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:13-16, NKJV). Writing on this Psalm, John Stott speaks of Creation; “the process of embryonic growth is neither haphazard nor even automatic, but a divine work of creative skill”; Continuity, “he who is thinking and writing as a grown man has the same personal identity as the foetus in the womb”; and Communion, Stott draws attention to the personal communion between the writer and God and shows how the “I-You” relationship is in almost every line. He sums up by saying, “the foetus is neither a growth in the mother’s body, nor even a potential human being, but already a human being who, though not yet mature, has the potentiality of growing into the fulness of the individual humanity he already possesses.” (Abortion, Marshalls Paperbacks (1984) pp 14-16).

It is also important to recognise that both in the Old Testament and the New there are examples of God’s knowledge and choice of individuals before they were born: this was true of Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV), and also of Paul, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace…” (Galatians 1:15 ESV). What was true for Jeremiah and Paul is true of every believer in Christ, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:3-4 NIV).

c. Harm to a pregnant woman or her unborn child is very serious.

It is sometimes suggested that the Bible has nothing specific to say about abortion, but that however, is not true! In Exodus 21:22–25 there is a case of accidental abortion or injury to a pregnant woman. If two men are fighting and they hurt a pregnant woman so as to cause her to give birth and yet no harm is caused either to her or the child, the men responsible must pay a fine. If, however, serious injury is caused, “you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” If accidental harm to an unborn child is treated so seriously, how much more so planned and deliberate harm? John Calvin puts it well when he says, “The foetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being...If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light.” (Commentary on the last four books of Moses, vol. 3).

2. A Concern for those in need

Believers are to be compassionate and have a care for those who find themselves in difficult situations:

a. For women facing a crisis pregnancy.

Many women who find themselves pregnant are distressed and uncertain about what to do and believe that the only alternative is abortion. They need to be made aware that they are alternatives to the destruction of unborn life. It is without question that the circumstances surrounding some pregnancies are devastating, especially concerning rape or incest, and those who are victims of such atrocious crimes need all the care and support that it is possible to receive. Even in these situations however it must never be forgotten that there are two lives in view, that of the woman and that of the unborn child. Christians ought not simply to condemn abortion but should also be able to show the compassion of Christ to those in need and work with organizations that provide counselling and care for girls and women facing difficult choices about their pregnancy.

b. Concern for the unborn child.

It could be said that Christians have been all too silent about the scandal of wholesale abortion. Whilst most evangelicals would be opposed to abortion, they do not feature as heavily as they should in groups and organizations that campaign against the ever-increasing destruction of unborn human life. Christian compassion should be focused upon the weakest and most defenseless and thus in the greatest need. Who could be more defenseless than an unborn child in the womb of his mother?

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov. 31:8-9).

If you would like to be able to present an intelligent, well-reasoned defense of the unborn without engaging in a shouting match, this series can help. Abortion: A Rational Look At an Emotional Issue can give you the confidence you need to influence our culture with the truth about the value of life.

Available at http://www.ligonier.org/store/abortion-dvd/
Several years ago an old friend and colleague learned of my convictions about songs in worship when I transferred from one dearly loved denominational connection to another. The reasons for joining the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) were not solely due to exclusive psalm singing. In fact, there were a multi-fold collection of theological reasons, especially including the vast importance of being clear about the mediatorial kingship of Christ. When my friend asked me about the change of denomination and especially why I would choose to sing only the psalms in worship, his incredulity splashed out as a simple gasp of “Why?”

The following reasons are not in order of importance but form a collective weight of consequence that convince me of not only the value of singing psalms in the service of worship, but also their exclusive place in worship.

1. **Inspiration**

First of all, we must remember that the psalms, although they are poetry, are meant to be sung. They are not principally of human composition. Unlike any other form of song, they are among other things universally profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When we sing the psalms, we are doing something more than expressing ourselves. We are both addressing God and we are also listening to Him tell us what we ought to be and what we may be saying back to Him in song.

2. **Reverence**

God’s Word is holy. It is to be treated with the utmost sacredness. It is to be revered by listening to it as the very voice of God speaking directly to our hearts. The psalms are written to be sung and as such are to be sung to God with a reverence no human composition could rival. That hymns are sung in worship often gives to them a sentimental value and weight approaching a reverence they do not deserve. Therefore, we must treat the psalms as the holy Word of God with reverence, treasuring them above any human composition and understand them as an integral part of Reformed and Presbyterian religion.

3. **Canon**

In our day, a favorite pop cultural Christian question asks, “What would Jesus do?” I like to change it to say, “What did Jesus do?” In this context we might add “What would Jesus have me to sing in worship?” And we might say, “What did Jesus sing?” And of course, the answer is: Jesus sang the psalms with His disciples. However, there is even a more important question, “What did Jesus give us to sing?” Wouldn’t it be grand if there were a hymnbook composed only of the songs that Jesus gave us? Well, there is a completed book of the Bible which is an inspired collection of His inspired song, namely the Psalms. This hymnbook is part of the canon of Scripture. There are no New Testament hymns. To what book of the Bible that is already completed are we allowed to add or subtract?

4. **Prophecy**

In Acts chapter 2, Peter quotes Psalm 16 and he explains why it does not refer first of all to David but rather is a prophecy spoken by David and in the voice of the messianic king of which David is the type. This very helpful principle of interpretation reminds us that the psalms are not first of all to be interpreted by their historical setting or the circumstances of David’s or others’ lives. They are to be interpreted first of all by their relation to the suffering of Jesus and the glory that was to follow. This will show itself in many different ways. Sometimes, Jesus is speaking in the first person. Sometimes, He is leading us in praise of the Father. Sometimes, He is taking us by the hand and leading us in what we should say as sinners as He is our choir director. In all this, it is the prophetic work of the messianic king as mediator, orchestrating our praise.

5. **Typology**

The psalms have a lexicon surrounding them in both Old and New Testaments. So for example when the psalms pray for Zion, they are praying for more than just the military citadel of David. They are praying for all of Israel under the rule of God’s chosen king. In the New Testament this is the church of Jesus Christ. And that is always what the Holy Spirit meant for us to understand. Israel was never a complete idea without us as the church under Jesus’ rule. Any such interpretation, without the church and Jesus ruling from David’s throne, is a dispensationalist interpretation unworthy of Reformed understanding. Typology is the key to understanding the psalms in New Testament terms. That is apostolic doctrine.

6. **Christ’s Kingly Authority and Authorship**

There is a reason why it is David who writes the psalms. Of course, there were others who wrote psalms under David’s direction or who wrote after the style of David. It is David who establishes God’s rule over His people. David has administrative
duties to perform as the mediator over Israel. It fell to him to administer the temple worship so that everything was ready for the construction and service of the temple under his son, Solomon. So David not only collected building material for the temple that his son would build, and he engaged from Hiram the artisans that would do the work along with a huge workforce of laborers, but he also provided the musicians, singers, and ranks of those for temple service. Uniquely, he was inspired to provide the words to be used in worship for singing. As all of these had to be commanded, and all these had to be done in the name of Yahweh, by Yahweh’s administrative power and authority, it fell to the king. David exercised the office of the one who ministered Yahweh’s kingly authority over Israel. God said of him, “He’s a man after my own heart.” David wrote the psalms as the Lord’s anointed. Therefore, the psalms are songs of the King who commands us to use them. They bear the authority of the Messiah.

7. Purpose
The purpose of the psalms as a collection was to be the hymnal of Israel. Not only are the individual psalms inspired for singing, but the collection of the psalms itself is a prophetic work by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have what Jesus intended for us to have. If there are songs not included, they are not meant for our singing in worship. There are songs in the Old Testament that are not included and therefore are not to be used in worship. However, if the song finds itself in the Book of Psalms as a collection then it is meant to be sung in worship. The first question that has to be asked of any psalm is, “How is this to be used in New Testament worship?” The answer to that question will direct us to the real meaning of that psalm. Easy examples may be found in Psalm 2, 16, and 110. Some have argued that psalms like Psalm 51 cannot be meant as a psalm in which Christ is speaking. However, that forgets that Psalm 51 may be understood as Jesus through the mouth of David taking us by the hand and teaching us the words of repentance. Much like Jesus teaches us the Lord’s Prayer when the disciples asked Jesus “How should we pray?” He taught them what we know as the Lord’s Prayer which includes forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. This is a prayer that Jesus says with us bearing our words and our hearts before our Father in Heaven as our mediator.

8. Redemptive History
Those of us who respect the whole Bible as the Word of God recognize that there is an unfolding story to the Bible. The early part of the story is to explain the end of the story. If we want to know Jesus intimately, we cannot rely on the Gospels alone. Everything that is in the Gospels is based on and only understood by the Old Testament record, including the psalms. When we sing them as New Testament song put in the mouth of Old Testament saints, then they are understood as being interpreted by what is fulfilled in the New Testament. The Gospels do not tell us what Jesus is thinking and feeling and praying. For instance, what is Jesus going through on the cross? Psalm 22 is the full prayer of Jesus from the cross. There are many other psalms that speak out of the heart of our Saviour.

9. Attributes of Scripture – Necessity, Authority, Sufficiency, and Perspicuity
Most of the arguments against the use of all the psalms being used in worship, much less using the psalms exclusively in worship, argue too much to be valid. They argue against the continued sufficiency for worship. They say that the psalms are not enough for present day gospel worship. They also argue that the psalms are not clear enough to be useful in worship without much explanation. These arguments could be used against the usefulness of all the Scripture. All Scripture is designed to be interpreted by preaching, the Scripture interpreting Scripture. All the imagery of the Psalms is to be found and explained by the rest of Scripture.

10. Regulative Principle
The regulative principle of worship may be stated this way: What is commanded is to be done, what is not commanded is not be done. The Bible in the Psalms commands us to sing psalms. There is no command to write our own new collection of song to be sung in worship. Paul’s exhortation to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual song has no new novel collection of song in view. In fact it can only be exegetically understood to be a command to sing the canonical collection of song because spiritual song means inspired song. Therefore, the regulative principle requires us to sing only psalms in worship.

11. Cultural (Universal Application)
In the evangelical church, the old collection of hymns is no longer used. They are considered obsolete. Furthermore most of the hymns are not culturally transferable. However, the psalms as the Word of God are universally culturally transferable as they carry their own culture with them. They were designed to mold the spirituality of all believers everywhere. What we sing becomes what we believe, what we pray, and what we feel. Singing impoverished hymns and choruses yields an impoverishment of our spiritual experience.

12. Hermeneutical Importance
Jesus and the apostles used the psalms at key moments in their ministries. When we sing the psalms and become familiar with the whole corpus we begin to hear echoes of the psalm language all over the New Testament. Even beyond explicit quotes and obvious allusions much of the New Testament language is informed by the psalms. Without the memory of the psalm language much of the New Testament seems like foreign ground.

“Not only are the individual psalms inspired for singing, but the collection of the psalms itself is a prophetic work by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”
To write a series of short articles on prayer: what a necessary, joyful but humbling, daunting task! To quote the apostle Paul, “Who is able for such things?” My subject is “Prayer from an experiential and practical point of view.” I will attempt to address this subject more fully in later articles, but first we will carry out a check to see if our foundations for prayer are sound. I want to lay down two prayer-principles which should help a little to redirect the errant and re-orientate flagging practice.

Where do we learn about Prayer?

To locate correct answers we must look in the right places. It is exactly at this point of outset we can veer off in wrong directions. Those who penned the Shorter Catechism were wise beyond their years. Q.99 counsels students of prayer the place from which to take their bearings. “What rule” we are asked “hath God given for our direction and prayer?” The reply is salutary: “The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer.”

Thou shalt not glean prayer answers from Christian Bookstore or Amazon free-delivery popular titles! Many books on prayer help us as far as they stick to the Bible. Popular “prayer gurus” can spout a lot of “old guff.” Pietistic, Pentecostal, and Prosperity prayer has led many down long, devotional “blind-alleys.” “The Reformed” may be more vulnerable to the excesses, extremes, or eccentricities of their favourite, much-fabled, heroic, prayer-warriors. It is wonderful to learn of ministers found kneeling with shining faces; or to hear of revered preachers overheard walking around the house speaking in sweet familiar tones with Christ; or to be totally psyched-out by Luther’s daily four-hour prayer; and to forget biographies rarely include the less awe-inspiring, failure bits - like the remark of Luther about himself having less appetite for prayer than his dog had for his dinner. Please don’t get me wrong! Better saints can teach us much! Yet, extra-canonical sources are not the means appointed to teach us prayer with power that will drop us to our knees as we seek the Father’s face. Scripture alone is the “gold-standard” of prayer.

Scripture is sufficient for every spiritual discipline. If the Word does not stimulate deeper, more fervent, regular prayer, there is no prayer “magic-bullet” to lastingly reboot our frozen-screen devotional life. The Word is the curative means the Lord appointed to treat prayer-sickness. This is the mouth of God – here Jesus speaks His power. Seek soul-moving heat and light as your read, study, and meditate to discover what prayer is, and enjoy this means of grace. What lies at the back of much confusion, weakness, laziness, infrequency, or dryness in prayer? Not as we should do believers mine Scripture’s gold or receive teaching from God’s mouth.

This was also the recommendation of Luther. The Wittenberg Reformer did not always find prayer easy and often struggled with coldness. As he wrote to his beloved barber, Peter Beskendorf, Luther used the mighty Word to stir His soul:

First, when I felt that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled, and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and if I have time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do.

The prayers of David are tailor-made for saints every circumstance, mood, and need. There are no more rousing requests than those found in the prayer archives of Moses, Solomon, Ezra, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Nehemiah. “Eager beavers” of prayer, will find much to arrest in the prayer life of Christ: loud cries and tears, in mountains, deserts, gardens; His Great High Priestly prayer in John 17; His parables and instructions correct errors, solve problems and to train us in true prayer; and the sparkling jewel in crown of prayer, His specific, detailed framework of how disciples should pray “Our Father.” This brings us nicely to consider a second question.

What do we mean by Prayer?

Down the years, many have tried to provide a working definition for prayer. One recent book recommends thinking of prayer in terms of our relationship with God. Less helpful evacuated suggestions, like “prayer is talking to God,” are surely far too vague. I won’t test your patience with my own personal thoughts. I cannot improve on the definition given in the Shorter Catechism. Q98 is a very reliable compass to guide your path in prayer. “What” it queries “is prayer?” The reply is crystal clear. “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ,
with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.”

For economy of words and clarity of expression, the comments of Roderick Lawson, have rarely been surpassed:

Prayer means asking of God, and here we are told the following three things respecting it: 1. As to its form, it should be offered to God in the name of Christ; 2. As to its substance, it should be for things agreeable to God’s will; 3. As to its manner, it should be made with humble acknowledgement of our sins, and grateful acknowledgement of God’s mercy.

If you believe this is “old hat” you’d probably be correct. Yet, if you pause and think, you will certainly find help to un-complicate your prayers. The handy mnemonic A.C.T.S. helps quite a lot so no part is left out, yet if we adhere to it rigidly, prayer soon becomes lopsided, for if we adore, confess and thank we may have no time left to ask. Forgiveness of sin, of course, is the first, chief, request we make — washing of our stains in the blood of Jesus is the key to unlock every other grace. Certainly there is a danger if we treat prayer as a list and only supplicate. However, we are urged and tasked to pray precisely because believers, as weak, foolish, sinful creatures, need much help to do God’s work. By all means, of course, pray with adoring, thankful, broken hearts but don’t forget to ask because, at its most basic, that is what prayer is!

The catechism helps restore the vital “asking” prayer-time balance. Take James 5:13-18, might lead us to wrong conclusions, unless we come to realise, the focus here is asking. Elijah asked for the curse which God threatened for Covenant breach, then later asked for blessing once the Covenant was renewed (see 1 Kings 18). “Stop the rain, O LORD! Start the rain, O LORD!” These, in brief, are his two fervent, clear, requests. “He prayed” just means “he asked.”

What is the key lesson to learn from Elijah’s prayer? Know what God wants. Really want it too. Then, with His mind, ask for what you also want.

The same stress on asking is found in Philippians 4.6-7. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication... let your requests be made known to God.” Prayer and supplication are both alternative words for asking. To be garrisoned by God’s peace we only, simply, have to ask. The needy, of course, are also unworthy, so Paul adds the note of thanks so we patiently and gratefully do not presume upon His gifts.

Is this not the focus of Jesus’ own teaching on prayer? Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount,” implies prayer means “asking right.” The issue with hypocrites is that they ask so people hear (6:5-6). The problem with pagans is that they think they need to multiply words to try to twist God’s arm (6:7-8). Secret, simple, short requests are the “big asks” that God rewards. As the Shorter Catechism explains, the substance of the Lord’s Prayer, is a series of requests (or petitions), top and tailed with reverent worship: three requests concerning God’s Glory come first (6:9c-10) followed by four requests for believers (6:11-13a).

In case we miss the point, Christ drives home the need to ask. In Matthew 7:7-10, “ask ...seek ...knock” are simply three varied expressions of gradually intensified, escalated, and persistent request. “Receive ...find ...be opened” are just three modes of expression of immediate, delayed, and eventual answer to our requests. If bread and fish are daily requirements for Palestinian children, the wisest heavenly Father will surely honour if we ask, if we do not ask amiss (7:11).

Sight of Scotland’s present, spiritual landscape might lead us to despair: moral decay in society, dead and worldly churches, well-structured fruitless sermons, love dying within homes, unbelievers sickened by a history of ecclesiastical wars, with pulpits hiding in fear of the foul Rainbow Coalition. Long gone are the days when Mary Queen of Scots feared foreign armies less than the mighty prayers of Knox. What is our recourse in the current malaise? James 4:2 is as blunt as he is clear: “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” Get back to basics and besiege heaven with accurate asking.

Conclusion

Will you return to the fountain where truth on prayer is sourced? Do you see that prayer is not nearly as complicated as some have made out and that you only need to ask? Next time, I hope to address some difficulties and questions. Till then, little children, ask your heavenly Father to pour out needed gifts from the abundance of His grace - He is more ready to give and forgive than you are willing to request or receive!

“We are urged and tasked to pray precisely because believers, as weak, foolish, sinful creatures, need much help to do God’s work.”
What is a Covenant?

A covenant is a solemn agreement. For example, marriage is described as a Covenant relationship in Malachi 2:14.

First and foremost, God enters into covenants with man. In the Covenant of Grace, God promises to be the God of His people in Christ Jesus.

In the Bible, we see people and nations responding by in-turn making covenants with God, particularly in times of crisis. Biblical examples of covenants are seen in Joshua 24:16-25; 2 Chronicles 15:12-15; 2 Kings 11:17; 2 Kings 23:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:31, 32; Nehemiah 9:32, 38. And we believe that anything in the Old Testament not cancelled in the New still applies today.

In the Bible, even unwise covenants could not be cancelled unless it could be shown that what the people promised in them was wrong (see Joshua 9), or unless their aims had been fulfilled. And covenants also apply to the descendants of those who originally swore them (see this in practice in 2 Sam 21:1,2).

The National Covenant (1638)

By February 1638, the Presbyterians in Scotland were facing accusations of treason by the king for their protests against the bishops, the Book of Canons and the Book of Common Prayer. They decided that they needed some way of uniting together so they could stand firm against these attacks on their religion.

They agreed to renew the 1581 King’s Confession with two extra sections. These were a legal section which listed over sixty acts of Parliament (many against Roman Catholicism) which supported the Presbyterian cause, and a practical application. The legal section was written by Archibald Johnston of Wariston and the practical application by Alexander Henderson.

The National Covenant pledged those who swore it to defend the true religion against innovations, such as those that had recently been introduced, that were against the Bible, the teachings of the Reformers and the acts of Parliament listed – and which would lead to Roman Catholicism. This desire of the covenant was to maintain ‘the true worship of God, the majesty of our King, and the peace of the kingdom’, for the happiness of those who swore it and their children. They also promised to live lives that showed they were in covenant with God, and to be good examples to others.

The covenant was first signed at Greyfriars churchyard in Edinburgh on the 28th of February 1638, after any objections to it had been heard and answered. Within days, it had been signed by the people of Edinburgh and copies were then sent around the country for other people to sign. In a few weeks it had been signed by people throughout the Lowlands of Scotland, including almost all the nobles. The covenant made slower progress in the north of Scotland, but many eventually signed it. Signing the covenant was not rebellion but an appeal to the law of the land against the tyranny of the king. To sign it was to say that Jesus Christ was the only head of the church, and so it should be free from any control by the king or the government. The first free General Assembly for 36 years was held in Glasgow in November.

* Taken from the Reformed Presbyterian Church’s Reformation History website with permission.

“The National Covenant pledged those who swore it to defend the true religion against innovations, such as those that had recently been introduced, that were against the Bible, the teachings of the Reformers and the acts of Parliament listed – and which would lead to Roman Catholicism”
THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS US TO TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH LOVE, HUMILITY, AND RESPECT. WE ARE ALSO TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BE UNIFIED.
Dead is Dead

Have you ever heard the story of the old preacher who stood in his pulpit and explained the doctrine of election? With great excitement, he said pointing down to the floorboards at his left, “Election is when Satan casts a vote for your soul!” And then, pointing to the ceiling to his right, he growled with equal enthusiasm, “And then God casts a vote for your soul!” But then under pinched eyebrows looking down the barrel of his finger he says to the congregation, “And you cast the deciding vote, either for the Devil or for God. That is the doctrine of election!”

Now, we might smile at that story and rightly so, but perhaps we are still left to wonder what election actually means. Well, before explaining the doctrine let me add something important. Reformed theologians don’t just talk about election. They use an adjective to describe it. Election is, they say, unconditional. Let’s think about that adjective for a minute.

A condition is something that has a serious influence on the outcome of some event. For example, if a military leader’s force is surrounded after a hard fought battle, he may offer his surrender upon certain conditions. However, the victorious leader may refuse the conditions. In other words, he demands an unconditional surrender. Now, this is not difficult to understand militarily. But what are the theological implications?

Let’s think in terms of soteriology or salvation. If God’s election or choice of an individual was conditioned, then that would suggest that a person possesses something that might influence the outcome of their salvation. For example, some who believe that faith comes before the regenerating work of the Spirit would see that as a condition met by the individual. Reformed theologians see things differently. Why? It’s because of the way the Bible describes man’s fallen condition. Paul, writing to the Ephesians is clear when he pens, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Dead is dead.

I once spoke to a group about this very subject. In order to impress them with spiritual death I asked a friend who was unknown to them to accompany me - as a dead man. I worked for a funeral director at the time and borrowed his stretcher to complete the effect. After setting a solemn tone, I asked two men to wheel in the stretcher with my sheet covered friend. After throwing back the shroud, I waved my hand before his closed eyes, put flowers to his nose, spoke loudly in his ear, asked him to speak, and asked him to tell us what he could feel when pricked with a pin. He was motionless. My point was simple, a dead man is unable to meet any condition that might lead to the accomplishment of his salvation. Dead is dead.

So, what is unconditional election? It is God’s gracious eternal decree to predestine spiritually dead men, women and children to eternal life through no condition met by them but wholly through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear friends, it was God’s Spirit who brought God’s decree to fruition when He made us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Why don’t we take a minute to bow and thank God for his unconditional election?

The Practical Use of Unconditional Election

Are the Doctrines of Grace practical? Let me be more specific, more practical in my question. Is the doctrine of unconditional election a user-friendly doctrine? Let me put it another way, will this doctrine help form piety, deepen love, and strengthen my faith? Maybe you would respond, “Couldn’t prove it by me.” Now, that may not be true of you but for some it is true. Some folks just cannot see how these doctrines are practical or even important. For instance, someone may say of the Doctrines of Grace, “The five points of Calvinism are not essential truths of the Christian faith. In fact, they seem only good for dividing the church.”

Well, let me suggest otherwise. Let me try to persuade you of the deeply practical nature of unconditional election. In fact, I will give you five reasons for the practicality of this doctrine.

First, unconditional election intensifies my understanding of God’s love for me. Think about what Paul says to the Ephesians. He writes, “In love he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself” (Ephesians 1:4b-5). Think of it! God’s unconditional election of men, women and children was motivated by His love for us. What makes that even more incredible is what...
Paul said to the Roman Christians, "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Now, call me crazy but I think that kind of love motivates godliness, which leads to my next point.

Second, loving election produces belonging. What do I mean? Remember that in love God predestined us to adoption as sons. In other words, while we were yet sinners he chose us to belong to His family. Years ago, I was listening to a lecture on the history of the college from which I graduated. It was magisterial. What is more, it gave me a sense of belonging to something bigger than myself. I was part of long faithful tradition. Now, that is a college! God adopted me to live in His family! I belong to the family of God.

Third, belonging produces behavior. The fact that God chose me is foundational for my belonging. But my belonging to the family leads me to adopt family likenesses and behaviors. I am often amazed when outsiders meet a family with adopted children. As they study the family they say things like, "She looks like her mother" or "He walks just like you" or "I can see where she gets this or that." This should not surprise us! The decree of predestination leads to adoption, which eventually leads to family likeness.

Fourth, unconditional election reminds me of enormous sacrifice. In other words, my place in the family of God came at a price. God's choosing me meant Christ's death on my behalf. How can I reflect on God's electing love and grace apart from the person and work of Christ? How can I reflect on the sacrifice of Christ and not be humbled by God's choice of me?

Fifth, unconditional election motivates me to speak the gospel. Not knowing who are and are not the elect I speak the gospel of God. Like Paul said to Timothy, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10). That is the attitude of a person who has experienced all that flows from unconditional election. Unconditional election does not stultify evangelistic zeal it kindles it. In fact, unconditional election rightly understood and applied can be a wonderfully useful and practical doctrine. Why don't you make some use of it today?

Questions for further thought

How would you answer someone that believed that God elected them on the basis of His knowledge that they would believe the Gospel?

Why did God elect some people and not all people?

Does the teaching of unconditional election contradict that God is a God of love?
Airdrie

Mission Team

The Airdrie congregation was happy to host the 19th RP Mission Team to Scotland this summer. Based in Airdrie, the Team visited each of the RP congregations in Scotland. While in Airdrie the Team distributed 2,000 leaflets inviting people to worship services, gave their testimonies in 3 Religious Education classes at St. Margaret’s High School, did some painting in the church building, and helped with Kids Club.

Young People at Camps

Seven young people from Airdrie attended Junior and Senior Camps in Northern Ireland. These Camps are an encouragement to our young people as they grow in their understanding of God and His Word and build Christian friendships. Here are some of their thoughts: “I like getting to know other Christians and feeling comfortable to speak and ask anything.” “I would seriously recommend the talks to everyone.” “I loved writing notes and listening to the talks. The week just went by so fast. I didn’t want it to end, I wanted to spend another week there.” “My favourite thing about Camp is learning more about God.”

Glasgow

The summer months, as usual, are quieter months in the Glasgow congregation although we see a considerable number of visitors and we know as well that many of those away from us are visiting some of our congregations elsewhere!

Next week, we hope to have our long-awaited lift installed which will make access to our large upper hall available to everyone. That will be followed in September by the installation of the again long-awaited three new toilets which will add hugely to the functionality of the building.

In the absence of the Minister, we have been thankful for 5 weeks of pulpit supply from Mr Gary Gunn who preached on the Kingdom parables in the morning and on the work of the Holy Spirit both on Sabbath evenings and at the prayer meetings.

We are looking forward to weddings and births – God willing – in the near future and are looking forward also to the beginning of a new term with students returning and new students arriving who are intending to worship with us.
North Edinburgh

Social Night with Elders
On Friday 19th May, two of our elders from Airdrie, Sam Bell and George Rodger, joined us for a night of pizza and fellowship together. A very enjoyable evening was rounded off with Erin Lane and Ben Lowery sharing their testimonies with us, and Sam Bell speaking about running the Christian race at his stage of life.

Baptism of Andrew Somerville
On Sunday 18th June, many friends and family of Chris and Jenny Somerville joined us for the baptism of their son Andrew. Peter Loughridge preached on the theme ‘Teach Your Children Diligently’, based on Deuteronomy 6 (especially v4-7). It was another special day in the life of our church family and we thank God for it. We pray for Chris and Jenny as they raise Andrew along with their daughter Daisy. We give thanks for Andrew’s safe arrival and his health and we continue to pray that God will bring Andrew to know Him.

Five Year Review
Presbytery, at its meeting on Friday 23rd June, conducted its 5 year review of the North Edinburgh church plant. We are encouraged and excited that the specific review criteria set by Presbytery is being met, and that Presbytery agreed to constitute the North Edinburgh work as a congregation at its next meeting (in October, God willing). We praise God for His work in bringing us to this next stage. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes (Psalm 118:23).

Stornoway

We are thankful for the ordination and induction of our new minister and continue to pray for him regularly in his work preaching the Gospel.

The congregation hosted the RP Mission Team in June. The team was put to good use giving out around 3,000 leaflets, visiting Bethesda Hospice, and doing practical jobs at Providence Christian School. The message on the leaflet was on the theme of “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” We hope that those who received the leaflet will be challenged to think through the condition of their souls.

We are thankful for all those who have been able to visit with us through these summer months. It is an encouragement for us to be able to fellowship together.

Stranraer

Our summer has been bookended by two mission teams – the American RP Mission Team for a week in June, and then a Scottish/Irish GO Team at the end of August. The focus on the months before the Mission Team had been on refurbishing the church hall – made possible by very generous donations from individuals and churches in America and Ireland. During the week of the team we had a Thanksgiving Service to mark the completion of the work to the hall, and a three-night mission on the theme ‘Your life has a purpose’. We were glad to see many people in the church building for the first time at some of these services. With the GO Team the focus was more on building up the congregation, and they helped us organise our first Church Family Weekend.

One of our biggest encouragements during the summer was seeing the first young person from the congregation for decades attend one of the RP camps in Ireland. We pray often that our young people would have good Christian friends, and the camps are a great opportunity for those friendships to develop.
Global News

Australia

The sixth Geelong Bible Conference took place in June. Held every two years, the conference provides an opportunity for solid Bible teaching and fellowship. There were members from all three Australian RP churches (Frankston, Geelong, and McKinnon) able to attend, who enjoyed spending time learning and serving together. Barry York (Professor of Pastoral Theology and Dean of Faculty at RPTS) was the key note speaker and his expository preaching was appreciated and enjoyed by all who attended. A three person RP Mission Team also visited Australia in June and had the opportunity to assist the three churches in various ways including running a Holiday Bible Club and attending a Presbytery Young Adult Camp.

France

The church in Nantes is thankful for good conversations at the outdoor music festival in Orvault on 21st June and for those who accepted Bibles and books. It was very encouraging that many from the fellowship enthusiastically took part in this witness. Pray that those contacted may seriously reflect on their reading and what they heard and that the Holy Spirit may soften the hearts of those who reacted in a hostile way.

India

On June 27, 2017, the South Asia Commission of the Synod of the RPCNA formalized Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship, in Bangalore, India as a new work with a temporary governing body consisting of the members of the South Asia Commission. “Anugraha” (pronounced a-noo-grah-ha) means “grace” in many Indian languages. We rejoice at the birth of this church plant in India, as they now can take people into membership and celebrate the sacraments.

Ireland

The Synod of the Irish Church took place in June. Amongst other items of business, one of the highlights was focusing on the 50 year anniversary of the Mission work in Galway. Summer is a busy time for the RP Church in Ireland with a number of Holiday Bible Clubs, 9 GO Teams, various outreach evenings by different churches, and the Senior and Junior Camps for young people. Rev. David McCullough of Dromore RPC chose to accept the call to become organising pastor of the Woodstock RPC, a newly formed fellowship in East Belfast. Plans are well underway for the Gold Coast International Conference in 2018. With space for up to 400 people. Saturday 14th- Saturday 21st July 2018 are the dates for your diary and applications will open in early Autumn for online booking. We are already anticipating brothers and sisters coming from Scotland, Ireland, Japan, Canada, and America and we look forward to sharing in fellowship with them all as we study God’s word, pray for the Kingdom, and sing Psalms together. The Speaker is Rev. Matt Kingswood from Russell RPCNA.
Japan

The Higashisuma RP Church had a special anniversary service to give thanks to God for ten years in their current building. They also had the opportunity to hear about the history of mission in Asia and the hopes for the future of world mission in the context of the Reformation. A RP Mission Team was in Kobe this summer and had the opportunity to visit each RP Church and help with English classes and Vacation Bible Schools that take place in the different churches.

Central & South America

The RPCNA’s CASA (Central & South America) Committee continues to communicate with believers in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, and Venezuela. The Presbytery of the Alleghenies (USA) recently accepted Rev. Marcelo Sanchez from Chile into the Presbytery, so that there is now an RP work underway in Chile—believed to be the first RP work ever in South America. There is a congregation of 15 meeting in his home in the Santiago area, with interest from other areas as well.

RP Global Missions also requests prayer for a licentiate from Argentina to be granted a visa so he too can be examined and received into the RPCNA. Edgar Ibarra and Drew McKelvy are regularly leading services in Spanish via Skype, hosted by Trinity RPC in Burtonsville, Maryland. CASA is overseeing the work of translating the RP standards into Spanish.

USA

The Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary had eight Reformed Presbyterian students who graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in May. Ryan Bever, Josiah Bull, Joseph Friedly, Patrick McNeely, and Brian Wright were joined by three other RP men from another nation. Ryan Bever was ordained as minister of Grace and Truth RPC in Virginia, and Brian Wright was ordained as minister of Sterling RPC in Kansas.

Rev. Steve Rockhill also accepted a call to Living Way RP Church in Texas; Rev. Noah Bailey accepted a call to First RPC Cambridge in Massachusetts; Rev. Lucas Hanna accepted a call to First RPC of Beaver Falls in Pennsylvania; and Mr. Gary Gunn accepted a call to Covenant RPC Meadville in Pennsylvania.

At the Synod meetings in June over 20 delegates were introduced for the first time reflecting the number of men who have been ordained as ruling elders over the last year. The Synod dealt with a wide variety of doctrinal and disciplinary issues. For a fuller report, visit http://rpglobalalliance.org

Several RP Mission Teams worked with congregations in the United States; a number of churches had Vacation Bible Schools and congregational weekends; and each Presbytery had their annual family camps. The Seminary’s Theological Foundations for Youth Programme and Westminster RPC’s TFY Backpacking Trip also took place over the summer months. For a fuller report of these events visit the news section of the RP Global Alliance website.
Is light different from darkness? Yes! That’s the picture Jesus gave in Matthew 5:14, when He described His followers as the light of the world. It answers our question for us. Should a Christian be different from non-Christians? Yes, because light is different from darkness.

Amazingly Jesus (here in Matthew 5:14) uses the same phrase to describe Christians as He used in a different place (John 8:12) to describe Himself! There He says – I am the light of the world. It doesn’t mean that Christians are exactly the same as Jesus. But there should definitely be a similarity. Part of how He shines His light in this world is through His people.

One of God’s commands that is repeated many times in the Bible is: Be holy, because I am holy (e.g. Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Our question touches on part of what holiness is. Something that was holy was set apart, or different. For example, where the Israelites worshipped for much of the Old Testament, the tent and the table and the lampstand and all the utensils were holy (Exodus 30:26-29). They weren’t considered ‘holy’ because household items like this were pure or good in some way. Their “holiness” was that they were different from your tent or your table, because they had been set apart for God. So being holy means being set apart and different.

This doesn’t mean that Christians are different just for the sake of being different, as if differentness (of any kind) is what pleases God. We are different because Christians are citizens of another kingdom (Philippians 3:20). We need to always keep in mind why we are different, why we do what we do, or don’t do what we don’t do. A lifestyle that is only different because “that’s what we do” or “that’s what we’ve always done” probably won’t stay very different for long as you get older.

Remember too that being different doesn’t mean that we always separate ourselves completely from any non-Christians. Jesus, straight after calling Christians the light of the world, points out that a light is not supposed to be hidden (Matthew 5:15). It’s supposed to shine into the darkness! And so Christians do need to be among those who are in darkness — but carefully, and guarding our own brightness.

Also remember, finally, that holiness doesn’t mean being deliberately strange or unnecessarily odd. Our holy living should be appealing and attractive — a beautiful differentness! As Jesus said: let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16; see also 1 Peter 2:12).

“We need to always keep in mind why we are different, why we do what we do, or don’t do what we don’t do.”
What is God like? I wonder how you would answer that question. You are very privileged to be able to go to a church where you learn about God each week. Perhaps your parents teach you more about God at home. Not everyone in Scotland enjoys the privileges that you do. Many children don’t know what God is like at all. If they hear God’s name it is probably used as a swear word.

God is _______ (o y h l)
God is ___________ (w f u p r o l e)
God is _______ (u s j t)
God is ___________ (e c f u m r l i)
God is ___________ (v g o s e n i r)
God is ___________ (i h f l u f a t)

How many other words can you come up with that describe God? Why not see if you can write down more than your mum or dad? If you are feeling brave why not try to find a Bible reference for each one?

The following verses describe what God is like. Use the secret code to find out what it says. Check if you are right using your Bible.

Uif Mpse, uif Mpse Hpe, nfsdgvm boe hsbdpvrt, mpohtvagfsjoh,
________, ______, ______, ______, ______, ________,
boe bcpvogjoh jo hpeofft boe usvui, lffqjoh nfsdz gps uipvzboet,
________, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ________
gpshjvjoh jojrvjuz boe usbothsftiptjpo boe tjo, cz op nbot
________, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ________
dmfbjoh uif hvjmuz, wjsjoh uif jojrvjuz pg uif gbuifst vqpo
________, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ________
uf dijmesfo boe uif dijmesfo’t dijmesfo up uif uijse boe uif
________, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ______, ________
gpvsui hfsbujpo. (Exodus 34:6-7, NKJV)

Colossians 1:15 tells us that we can know God through Jesus who is the image of God. Jesus is God.

Why not write out this verse in nice letters and memorise it?
Recommended Reading

Frederick S. Leahy
The Cross He Bore: Meditations on the Sufferings of the Redeemer
Banner of Truth

In preaching through the conclusion of Mark’s Gospel, I’ve found myself turning again to the first part of F.S. Leahy’s trilogy on the cross. For those who aren’t familiar with him, Professor Leahy was a Donegal man who trained for Irish Evangelical Church ministry at the Free Church College in the 1940s under men like Finlayson, before joining the RP Church by conviction. No words are wasted in this short book. One quote sums it up: “Schilder is right. “Gethsemane is not a field of study for our intellect. It is a sanctuary for our faith.” Lord, forgive us for the times we have read about Gethsemane with dry eyes.”

Rev. Stephen Steele

Greater than Gold: from Olympic Heartbreak to Ultimate Redemption
David Boudia with Tim Ellsworth
Thomas Nelson

I first came across Olympic diver David Boudia when I saw him and his excellently named teammate Steele Johnson talk about having their identity in Christ when interviewed after winning silver at Rio 2016. This book, written before Rio, recounts Boudia’s life and conversion up to and after he won gold in the 2012 Olympics in London. This is far more than just a Christian sports autobiography however – it’s a portrait of someone trying to apply the gospel to every area of life. This is an unexpectedly refreshing book that will be an encouragement to Christians, and would make a good present for someone who isn’t yet a believer.

Rev. Stephen Steele

Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis
Murdo Macaulay
Puritan Publications

Aspects has long been out of print, with copies occasionally found on the second-hand market. It was written by Rev Murdo Macaulay, Free Church Minister in Back, after his retirement in 1975. The book gives an account of the history of the Christian faith on the Isle of Lewis from earliest times up to 1843, an Island that has experienced much by the way of Gospel blessings over many years. Mr Macaulay was a native of Carloway and was converted in a revival in his home village in 1936. Further to that, he was a keen historian and the combination of these two factors resulted in the publication of this well-researched and engaging work. Originally published in 1985, Aspects has now been republished and made available to a new generation through Puritan Publications, in both print and e-book. This is a book that will stir up Godly affections and thankfulness for past blessings along with a spirit of prayer for future blessings. Recommended for old and young alike and also to the student of church history.

Scott Maciver

Irish Covenanters: Politics and Society in the 19th Century
T.C. Donachie
Written by our very own Tim Donachie, this book is well worth a read to understand the how the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland engaged in its own context in the 19th Century. Dr Donachie analyses how Covenanters interacted with the State in general and more specifically in areas such as political dissent, opposition to the National system of education, and in the threat of Home Rule. As with all well written history books, this book will prompt careful thinking about our own context in the 21st Century.

Rev. Stephen McCollum
“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

- John 7:38