

THE HERITAGE JOURNAL

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors	3
Ancient Paths	4
Articles	6
Christianity 101	6
Why Confessions?	12
Bleating Hearts	18
The First Commandment, Case Law, and the Christian	18
Members in Focus	21
Catechism Corner	26

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Editors

Rev. Michael Myers, MDiv

Pastor, Heritage Presbyterian Church (OPC)

82 Franklin Springs Street

Royston, GA 30662 USA

myers10332@pm.me

Taylor Sexton, MDiv

Principal, Providence Academy

taylor_sexton@protonmail.com

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82 Franklin Springs Street

Royston, GA 30662

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are humbled and grateful to the Lord for his immense blessings to us, his unworthy servants, that by his providence he has granted us the privilege of presenting this, *The Heritage Journal*, to you.

The journal you have before you is a labor of love undertaken by Pastor Mike and me. Our vision for this publication is, first, to honor the Lord Jesus Christ with our words and thoughts. Second, we wish to serve Heritage Presbyterian Church through the written word. If perhaps the Lord would see fit, we would also wish that this be circulated more widely for the benefit of the broader Church.

The content of this journal is simple and, perhaps, meager. Inside it you will find a helpful lengthy quotation from minds past (“Ancient Paths”), various articles pertaining to Christian doctrine and life, writings from those in our congregation (“Bleating Hearts”), a member spotlight (“Members in Focus”), a short commentary on a portion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (“Catechism Corner”), as well as a small section for administrative information and announcements.

The *Heritage Journal* will be published once every quarter, during the second month of the quarter, Lord willing.

We pray that as you read this journal you will be edified—namely, that your faith in Christ would be strengthened, that your mind would be sharpened, and your heart enriched in awe and wonder at the inexhaustible grace of our Lord Jesus.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Taylor Sexton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Taylor Sexton, MDiv
Co-Editor and Member of Heritage Presbyterian Church
February 2020 – Royston, GA

Ancient Paths

“Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.”

— Jeremiah 6:16



“Ancient Paths” stands at the beginning of every issue of The Heritage Journal. It contains an excerpt from an old writer that either has been notably impactful for the editors or is relevant to the theme of that particular journal issue.

“It is grievous to hear of declensions, especially in those whom we love, [and] there are many reasons why we ought to be affected, but we must not be cast down. If your friend ever truly knew the Lord, wait and pray and you will see him restored,¹ and when backsliders are well healed, the remembrance of past falls, is sanctified, to make them more humble and circumspect, more sensible of the evil of their hearts, more dependent upon the Lord, and more hearty in ascribing the whole of their salvation to him alone. I shall be glad to hear this may be the event in the present case. But should you live to be an old man, you may count upon meeting many disappointments of this kind. Experience will teach you not to expect that every blossom will prove fruit. We must learn to acquiesce in the Lord’s sovereignty. He knows them that are his and none of the changes they are liable to shall separate them from his love. But there will be too many who make a hopeful appearance for a time and yet come to nothing. When we hear that others fall it should make us thankful and watchful for ourselves. Thankful, for it is grace alone [that] makes us differ. Watchful, for our hearts are equally deceitful and Satan is continually plotting and practising against us likewise. The Lord permits some to fall woefully, for a warning to the rest, that we may learn not to be high-minded but fear, and cry continually to him, who alone is able to hold us up, and preserve us in safety.” ♦

“Letter from John Newton to John Ryland, Jr, 22 January 1774” in *Wise Counsel: John Newton’s Letters to John Ryland, Jr.* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009), 47-48.

NOTES

1. Ryland placed a mark at this point and at the bottom of the page wrote, “Gloriously fulfilled (blessed be God) 1777.”

Articles



Christianity 101

Reflections on Our Membership Vows

Rev. Michael Myers

Over the last couple of years, I began assigning our communicant class participants and prospective church members the task of writing out the membership vows of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in their own words. Doing so presents us with a very unique challenge and sometimes raises a frustrated question: why expand on words that have been so carefully chosen and refined? The goal in working through the questions is not to state them better. The goal is to move beyond mere affirmation of the truths, which is required for membership, to the assimilation and understanding of the truths so stated. As I have worked through the project with several different classes and people, I realized a couple of things. First, I ought to take my own medicine and complete the task myself. Second, and far more significantly, the more I thought about these words, the more I found they outline the simple yet profound basics of the Christian faith and life. Since these are commitments that bind each communicant member of Heritage together, I would like to offer you this “summarizing commentary.” I will expand on what the question asks and then attempt to distill the essence into a sentence or two. May God use it to revive your love for him and commitment to him and his beloved church!

1. Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

Christians must believe that God himself inspired every word of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Since God is the author of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, it bears intrinsically the quality of absolute truth (John 17:17). Therefore, what the Lord affirms in his Word, I must affirm; what he forbids and condemns, I must avoid and reject. Further, this sacred Book teaches our race of lost and wretched sinners about the most wonderful truth “un-imaginable” (1 Cor. 2:9). Although we deserve no mercy from the Lord, he has revealed the Way to life in his Word. Those who discover that Way find that it (he!) is not one among many legitimate options, but rather the exclusive path to life with God (Psa. 1:6, 16:11; John 14:6). Christians must therefore believe that the entire Bible is God’s Word and that it sufficiently and accurately teaches the only way for sinners to receive pardon for their sins and everlasting life (Psa. 119:81).

2. Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

With few exceptions, when I have taught the words of this question, I have noted the difference between believing something sincerely and understanding something exhaustively. These fifty-two words describe truths that all words of all languages in all history could never fully explain. We declare that a Christian must believe the God of the Bible is one (Deut. 6:4, Mark 12:29). He is the God of life, who was and who is and who is to come (Rev. 4:8), the I AM (Exod. 3:14, cf. John 8:58!), the Almighty (Gen. 17:1, Rev. 21:22), and only true God (2 Sam. 22:31-32, Isa. 45:5-6). Unlike false idols, this God is entirely true (Jer. 10:10). Yet as we read the pages of Scripture, we encounter a mystery: while this one God forbids sharing his rightful glory with any other (Isa. 48:11), three identifiable and distinct persons equally share in divine glory! Just as the Father receives worship and titles due to God alone (Eph. 1:3), so

does the Son (Matt. 28:17, John 20:29), and so does the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4, 2 Cor. 3:17). The three persons of the blessed Trinity eternally live in perfect and holy communion, a communion into which he invites sinners! God does this through the Son, Jesus Christ, who in the fullness of time became man to live and to die for his people. Note the important order of this language. Many who have claimed the title Christian have professed that Jesus is the son of God while denying that he is God the Son. Believers must confess *both* in order truly to honor Father and the Son (John 5:23). With open-mouthed wonder we humbly confess and believe in this one God of life and truth, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who possesses all power and glory. Further, our only hope in life and in death rests in Jesus Christ, God the Son, who assumed our humanity in order to bear our sins in his body. Truly this man is the Son of God (Mark 15:39).

3. Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

In our man-centered and irreverent age, we need to remember our natural, miserable post-fall condition. Despite our preference for worthless fig-leaf outfits (Gen. 3:7) and disgusting rag attire (Isa. 64:6), our consciences bear witness to us that our dead works condemn (Heb. 9:14, cf. Rev. 3:16-17). Before the holy, holy, holy God we need less, “Whoa, look at me!” and more, “Woe is me!” (Isa. 6:3 cf. Rev. 4:8). Throughout the Scriptures, sinful man generally assumed one posture when encountering this God: face down on the ground! Why? Because Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John, to name just a few, knew that God’s consuming and penetrating holiness exposes our corrupt hearts and wicked works (John 3:20), both of which we are called to abhor. Do you find your sin revolting, disgusting, odious, damnable before God? If so, what other position can you assume? To the sinner grieved over his wretchedness, however, God reveals himself as One who is merciful and pardoning, who in fact delights in granting forgiveness and

mercy to sinners (Mic. 7:18-20). Through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God the Father takes off our putrid rags, removes the withered fig-leaves, and provides robes of righteousness tailored for eternity (Gen. 3:21, Zech. 3:4, 2 Cor. 5:21, Rev. 3:18). A Christian, therefore, believes he is a wretched, hell-deserving sinner whose sin is blacker than the blackest stain before God's resplendent purity. Hating his sin and forsaking his own efforts and contributions, a Christian looks to another for salvation, namely and exclusively Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through him (Heb. 7:25).

4. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

Have you ever heard of the Carnal Christian idea? Very simply (if not simplistically) supporters of this view claim that someone can genuinely trust in Jesus as Savior, yet not quite get to the point of "making him Lord." Thus, while having his sins forgiven through Jesus' death, the poor soul can limp through life engaged in all manner of ungodliness and maintain a hope of salvation. That, dear friends, is a lie of Satan. Our church believes that Christians, as blood bought sons and daughters of God, will and must always declare total allegiance to their gracious Master Jesus Christ. As Spirit indwelt adoptees, those united to Christ will live lives of holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Out of love for his Father, the Captain of our Salvation walked the bloody path of sacrifice and obedience. Shall his saints do any less? For his sake, and in his strength, his followers live their lives devoted to him, whatever the cost. He calls his disciples to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and to follow him on the road of suffering (Luke 9:23). That is not to say Christians never sin, or never live carnally. Many distractions tempt pilgrims to leave that path—allurements of the world, the deceits of the adversarial accuser of the brethren, and the all-too-present and frequently-powerful lusts of the flesh. Nevertheless, in

Christ a Christian bears the title “More than Conqueror” and strives to forget the things that are behind, to strain for that which lies ahead, pressing on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Php. 3:13-14). What do we require, then, through this question? Those who profess the name of Christ as Mighty Savior will, by his grace, reflect the life of Christ through his mighty power.

5. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

Believe it or not, I have discovered that of the five this final question receives the most resistance and is the object of the greatest amount of confusion. Why? Our world is full of organizations, voluntary and involuntary. We quickly recognize and maintain the difference between sandlot ball and Major League Baseball, between a mob and the Army, even between a mooch and a real Sam’s Club Member! What makes the difference? Authority, legitimacy, and accountability. In the latter half of the examples, you find a well-defined structure, clearly recognized obligations and responsibilities, and usually benefits available to members only. Astonishingly, this rarely offends anyone. Have you ever heard anyone complain about the intolerance of the Atlanta Braves for not allowing everyone to enter the dugout without permission? Having spoken with probably thousands of Soldiers, I have never heard anyone give the slightest thought about going to war alone or detached from a unit! Try demanding access to the members’ only options at Sam’s Club without paying and let me know how that works out. Need I go on? When considering the church, the one and only institution King Jesus has ordained for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, why do we seem to find so many who think membership suddenly becomes optional? Or, why do so many think that membership is focused on the individual? Of the many reasons, let me name a few: bad discipleship/teaching, painful past church

experiences, ignorance, modern day American individualism, a prevalent non-committal attitude, unbelief, and sinful rebellion.

The Bible teaches that God saves sinners into his worshipping people (1 Pet. 2:9). This special people he calls his flock (John 10:16; Acts 20:28). He then calls the sheep to encourage and support one another in their various locations (Rom. 12:13, Gal. 6:2). These flocks receive shepherds to feed them, teach them, protect them, and, when necessary, correct and discipline them (Jer. 3:15; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Will there be problems (Acts 15:38-39; Php. 4:2)? Have there been abuses, neglect, or failure (Isa. 56:10-12; Ezek. 34:1-10; Mark 6:34)? Sadly and grievously, yes. Nevertheless, dear saint, you have been saved to worship and saved to worship with the assembly of saints, a privilege we must not forsake (Heb. 10:25). The gracious God of all has ordained to display his multidirectional and multidimensional glory not for one saint to consider, but for all saints to comprehend together (Eph. 3:17-19). In his wisdom God calls his children to commit their lives to his kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) and to build up the body by doing their part (Eph. 4:15-16). Since we tend to rebellion, or since we are prone to wander, Christians promise to do something completely un-American and anti-human—submit to authority. Why? Because King Jesus has appointed men to watch over and give account for your soul (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17 again)! Therefore, if these shepherds notice something out of line (delinquent) in your beliefs or behavior and they discuss it with you, by God's grace they intend it for your good! Remember this when you receive either encouragements or corrections according to the Lord's Word. Christians, therefore, out of love for Christ and recognition of their weakness, commit to a life of Holy Spirit-blessed association with his people, marked by worship, service, and humble submission to the glory of God (Eph. 5:21).

Has anything you read been helpful? Dear saint, try this exercise for yourself. Reflect upon the heavenly realities of the gospel, take up the cup of your salvation, call upon the name of the Lord, and then, having prayerfully reviewed them, pay your vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people (Psa. 116:13-14)! ◇

Why Confessions?

The Case for Doctrinal Standards

Taylor Sexton

We have often heard the statement, “No creed but Christ!” Whether or not it is ever explicitly stated, this has become the rallying cry for many evangelical Protestant churches, especially here in America. The sentiment behind the statement is this: “We don’t need doctrine. Doctrine divides. We just need Christ.” While it is certainly true that Christ is our one true need, is it true that we do not need doctrine? The great twentieth century Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof noticed this trend in thought nearly a century ago: “The present age is an undogmatic age. There is a manifest aversion, not only to dogmas, but even to doctrines, and to a systematic presentation of doctrinal truth” (Berkhof, 26). One can imagine, then, the horror on many people’s faces when they come to a denomination like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and see that our confession of faith is over twenty pages long! The question we are going to explore here is whether or not there is a place for such statements of doctrine in the Church. Are they helpful, or unnecessarily pedantic?

The first thing we must do is define what we mean when we say “creed” and “confession.” Commonly, one uses the word “creed” when referring to what we call the “ecumenical” creeds of the Church—documents like the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. On the other hand, when one refers to a “confession,” they are often referring to the statements of faith that define the beliefs of a particular denomination or sect. The primary difference between a creed and confession is what we call “dogmatic rank.” The creeds tend to have a generally higher dogmatic rank than confessions. This means that they hold more weight in terms of their weight and command for attention and assent. For example, one can dispute with some of the doctrinal distinctives of the Westminster Confession (e.g., infant baptism or God’s decrees), yet still be called a Christian. But no one may deny the tenets of the Nicene Creed and

still be called a Christian. One may disagree with the Reformed confessional position on covenant theology, and still be considered a Christian. But one may not deny the Trinity (formally dogmatized in the Nicene Creed in 325 AD) and be considered a Christian. While creeds and confessions are thus different, we are only going to be strictly considering confessions here. After all, we are asking about their value in the *Christian* Church. Any church that does not affirm the historic Creeds of the Church (e.g., the Nicene Creed) cannot be considered Christian, and is necessarily excluded from this discussion.

We will here consider the following questions: Is there any value to written and precise confessions? Are they even obligatory? Or do they simply succeed only in dividing bodies of believers and causing strife and quibbles about insignificant points of doctrine? In this article I will attempt to demonstrate that confessions of faith are not only good, but necessary for the health and vitality of the Church of Jesus Christ. To do this, I will offer a series of reasons why confessions are good and necessary.

Reason #1: Scripture itself instructs believers to know what they believe, to hold to it, and to teach it clearly. This is by far and away the most important reason. First of all, Scripture is filled with creedal declarations. Perhaps most known among these is found in Deuteronomy 6, where Moses tells the people, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-5). Another example would be 1 Cor. 15:1 ff.

There is also the express command in Scripture to know, remember, and have the ability to confess out loud with clarity what we believe. The clearest expression of this is found in Paul’s words to Timothy, his son in the faith: “Follow *the pattern of the sound words* that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:13; emphasis added). We are not only to follow the words themselves, but even their *pattern*! This is a strong case for doctrinal standards in the form of creeds and confessions.

Reason #2: Scripture does not express explicitly all the articles of faith we are to believe. While this might on the surface seem like a denigration of Scripture’s authority or clarity, it is nothing of the sort. Rather, all we are saying is that in many cases there are crucial articles of faith that we must believe and yet are not set down explicitly or *in so many words* in Scripture. For example, nowhere in Scripture do we find: “Here is the doctrine of the Trinity...” This is not to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is not biblical. On the contrary, Scripture is *thoroughly* Trinitarian, but the doctrine itself is not expressly stated. This is why our own Westminster Confession states, “The whole counsel of God...is either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture” (WCF 1.6; emphasis added).

For this reason, simply to say, “I just believe the Bible!” is insufficient. First of all, that’s not a terribly helpful statement; every professing Christian except the most hardened liberal says they believe the Bible. Second, it is a statement with no content, and thus is difficult to assess. After all, such a statement begs the question: What does the Bible *teach*? It is difficult, if not impossible, to answer that question without forming some kind of confessional statement, even if it is a personal one.

Reason #3: We must recognize and appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church before us. This is something that the late Dr. R. C. Sproul, a great lover and teacher of Church history, used to say to his students. He is absolutely right. American evangelicals are particularly accustomed to thinking that the Christian faith began with them, and therefore that the Faith must be articulated anew with each generation. Even worse, many merely assume that most everything that came before them is necessarily inferior—a belief similar to the doctrine of evolution.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit has never ceased working in his Church and through his people. That does not mean great teachers from the past were flawless. For example, Augustine confused justification and sanctification; Tertullian was wrong regarding

baptism; Luther was mistaken about the Lord's Supper. Yet to conclude from this that these great men ought to be dismissed wholesale is a grave error and is, in essence, "a virtual denial of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the past history of the Church" (Berkhof, 33). The maintaining of creeds and confessions ensures against this.

Reason #4: It holds church leadership accountable. This is a very important and often overlooked reason for having confessions. In so many churches today false doctrine is preached and taught, and the congregation, especially if they have not been informed about historic Christian dogma, is defenseless. In a very real sense, these churches' confessions of faith are whatever is preached in the pulpit from Lord's Day to Lord's Day. That is why many presbyteries within our own tradition require full subscription to the Westminster Confession and Faith and Catechisms before they will ordain a man, or even license him to preach. Otherwise, churches either become increasingly sectarian (as is the case with rampant non-denominationalism today), or they begin to slide down the slippery slope of apostasy. Confessional commitments, while not an impenetrable barrier, prevent this tendency by holding church leadership accountable to a clear, written standard.

Reason #5: They help us to recognize with whom we have genuine Christian fellowship. The primary purpose of confessions of faith is to articulate clearly and positively what a Christian group does believe. Historically, though, they have also had another function. They have also served to allow Christian groups to distinguish themselves from other groups with whom they differ. This is necessary not because we should love division. On the contrary, this is necessary because we love unity. In our fallen world, there will be Christian groups who differ, sometimes greatly.

In some cases, it is impossible for two groups to function together. This is the case for Baptists and Presbyterians on an ecclesiastical level. With two irreconcilable views on baptism, it is practically impossible for these two groups to function within the same church. Who will they baptize? This is not to say they do not

share in their Christian faith, but it forms a clear dividing line with regard to which groups cannot *practically* function together in the same church body.

In other cases, however, Christian fellowship itself cannot be maintained. This was the case historically with the Reformed and the Socinians, who denied crucial doctrines such as the Trinity and divine, authoritative, special revelation. The Socinians of today are the Jehovah's Witnesses. Christians ought not—indeed, they cannot—have spiritual fellowship of any kind with such people. Without clear confessions of faith, how will these lines be maintained, or even recognized?

Reason #6: It lets outsiders know what we believe. When I was in seminary, one of my good friends was looking for churches in which to candidate. He came to me for counsel one day. “What do you think of this? I found this church looking for a pastor, but their website, and even the church itself, doesn't appear to have a statement of faith or a doctrinal statement of any kind.” I advised my friend to avoid such a church. How is a pastoral candidate to walk into a church without clearly knowing what they believe? Even more, how are we to distinguish ourselves from the Mormon or Roman Catholics gathering down the road? It is really the duty of churches to let others know clearly what they believe.

Reason #7: Everyone, whether or not they realize or welcome it, has a confession. This is the bottom line. It is simply impossible not to have a confession of faith, even if it is entirely personal in its uniqueness and unwritten in its form. Even those whose cry is, “No creed but Christ!” have a creed. One need only ask them, “Which Christ?” What would follow the answer to such a question would of necessity be a confessional statement. As Berkhof says, “Every Church has its dogmas. Even the Churches that are constantly decrying dogmas have them in effect. When they say that they want a Christianity without dogma, they are by that very statement declaring a dogma” (Berkhof, 32). An un-theological, un-doctrinal, or un-confessional church would not in any visible way be a true

church of the Lord Jesus Christ. How would we know? A confession of faith is an inescapable necessity.

Confessions of faith are necessary. If they are not written, they will be unwritten. They exist regardless. Since Scripture enjoins us to keep the sound pattern of the words given to us, and because of all the other reasons given above, it is both helpful and necessary that we have written and clear confessions of faith. As mentioned earlier, unless our churches have these confessions, how will we be doctrinally distinguished as Christians? How will our leadership be held accountable to this pattern of sound words? Hopefully by now the answer is clear: confessions of faith that accurately express the truths in Scripture. As Berkhof said, “They who minimize the significance of the truth, and therefore ignore and neglect it, will finally come to the discovery that they have very little Christianity left” (Berkhof, 29).

WORKS CITED

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Bleating Hearts

“My sheep hear my voice.”

— John 10:27



The “Bleating Hearts” section is for contributions from members of the congregation.

The First Commandment, Case Law, and the Christian

Mae Mallie Davis

The First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut. 5:7).

Related Case Law: “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their alters and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire” (Deut. 7:1-5).

God’s requirement in the First Commandment concerns the all-consuming devotion to himself and purity of his own worship that he requires from his people. This law demonstrates how seriously God takes his holiness and the holiness of his people as

they worship him and represent him to the nations. In the case law, God sets before Israel their duty to eradicate the nations from the land of Canaan. Since the nations that God intended to drive out before Israel were rampant idol worshipers, God commanded their destruction and forbade intermarriage. He knew the weakness and propensity of Israel to be contaminated by the worship of false gods and turn away from him.

God specifically forbade intermarriage for several reasons. First, the Israelites were vulnerable and likely to capitulate to worldliness, the inevitable result of marriage to an unbeliever. Second, intermarriage with the nations would have been similar to political alliance which would have introduced a conflict of allegiance. The failure to obey would—and did—lead to the replacement of God as the sole object of Israel's devotion and worship with the foreign gods that appealed to Israel's sinful inclinations. Although the specific command to destroy the nations physically no longer applies to Christians in the New Covenant, this case law remains very relevant to our lives today.

Since these principles flow from the First Commandment, this case law contains truths that never change and have broad application. Just as the Israelites were to destroy the nations who worshiped false Gods, New Covenant Christians must not tolerate anything in our environment that sets itself up in competition with God and/or hinders our complete devotion to him. We are to purge from our midst anything that corrupts wholehearted commitment to God. For example, Christians must carefully guard what enters their homes and influences their hearts and minds through entertainment, music, and even people who have a negative influence on their life and family. Another broad principle from this case law relates to the purity of God's worship. We must not allow our worship—private, family, or corporate—to be infiltrated and influenced by the world's practices or tolerate it to be polluted.

Finally, the principle of marriage given in this case law still applies to Christians today, specifically that a believer should not marry an unbeliever. Paul says in 2 Cor. 6:14 that believers are not to

be unequally yoked to unbelievers. The intimate relationship of marriage is one that is a beautiful reflection of Christ's relationship to his Church, but the union of a believer and an unbeliever places the believer in an extremely vulnerable position with constant and intense, yet insidious pressure to capitulate to the dictates of the world. ♦

Mae Mallie Davis currently attends Gillespie Academy in Ontario, Canada. She wrote this short essay as part of her requirements for a class on Deuteronomy during which they discussed the continuing relevance of the principles of God's Law in the Old Testament. Although many questions remain about the application of God's Law to Christians today, Mae Mallie identifies several principles that are exceedingly relevant for believers at all times.

Members in Focus

“We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

— Romans 12:5



This section of our church’s quarterly newsletter focuses upon different families within the congregation. By writing about the different experiences, struggles, joys, and lessons from the lives of other people, we hope to accomplish a couple things. First, and of most importance, we want to highlight and bring to remembrance the good things that God has done in the lives of his people. He is always working for the glory of his Son as he conforms us more and more to his image. Second, we want the members of the congregation to grow in familiarity with one another. As we learn more about the lives of others, we hope that the Lord will grow us in affection and understanding of the body to which we have committed ourselves. This edition’s focus: Randy and Joy McCauley, interviewed by Pastor Michael (Mike) Myers.

Mike (M): How did you come to know Christ?

Randy (R): I knew I was lost. So, one day I had a scary feeling in my heart, and I had to do something about it. At my other church I went and talked to the preacher. And there you go.

Joy (J): Well, he is kind of like me. We both grew up in church—you know, church, church, church. I thought I was saved, but I was not living like it. I am not going to blame my pastors at my old church in Atlanta, but I had never heard preaching like I had up here. I had always read the Bible and I knew it, but I did not know God. It was October, and I realized that he was calling me, so I called our pastor at the time and asked him to come over, because I needed to do something about it. I was living as if I was saved, but I was not. That was 2002. Then I was baptized because I had never been baptized.

M: What was your life and marriage like before Randy’s stroke?

R: Before the stroke, the marriage was falling apart. I was not a godly man.

J: It was an awful marriage. It was so bad that I had already made a list of who would get what in a divorce. I even suspected he was seeing someone else. After the stroke, all the things he had been doing came out. I knew he had grown tired of the marriage and me, and Courtney, too [their daughter]. He was never satisfied with what he had. He had a great career and was making a lot of money, but we still lived paycheck to paycheck, we could barely make our bills. Sometimes we even fell behind. But now that he is on disability, we have more than what we need, and we can bless others with it. But yes, before the stroke, things were bad. I was just waiting for Courtney to get out of high school and then planned to finish the divorce. He had left us behind.

M: Tell us about the stroke.

J: It was July 17, 2006.

R: Before the stroke, I was giving warning signs. We went to some experts and they missed it. We felt that God blinded the doctors' eyes because I got what I needed (the stroke).

J: They did the [gall bladder] surgery laparoscopically and had filled him with air to get the gall bladder out. They realized later that he was full of clots. As he walked out of the hospital, he began having the stroke. His eyes glazed over, and he dropped the laptop he had with him. In hindsight, they said that he would have had one eventually, since he was having TIAs for about a year. But it was a massive stroke, right there in the parking lot. I just started screaming and they came and got him. Eventually he came back to himself and they finally brought him something to eat, but he had that droopy look on his face. I told the doctor that I thought he had had a stroke, but the doctor said he had not. They wheeled us up on the second floor and while on the elevator he had the second massive stroke. He stayed there eight hours, and no one looked at him, so I asked for him to be transferred to St. Mary's.

R: One hundred days later I was coming out of the hospital. There were several times in St. Mary's they called the family in and said I would not live through the night.

J: I never read my Bible like I did when I was in that hospital. Randy was in a coma during the first three weeks. They would let me go back into the ICU when it was so quiet. There was a male nurse who was being kind, though I do not think he knew the Lord. He told me that I needed to prepare myself, because it was not going to be good. I told him, "You do not know my husband...and you do not know my God." I didn't say it unkindly! But God really showed himself to people through that time. Several times he should not have lived. Once he threw a clot into one of his lungs. Because of his brain surgery, they could not give him any clot busting medicine because he would have bled to death. If that clot had moved even a little he would have died. Another time, he pushed himself off the operating table. He fell and broke his collar bone, but he fell on his left side. Since he did not have a skull on his right side, had he fallen that way, it would not have been good.

R: I have had surgery on my head nine times. My first cousin tells everyone that I am a living miracle.

J: Yes, there were times through the years that I would get really frustrated with him, but then I remember, he is my miracle. The Lord gave us a second chance.

M: Looking back over the years, how has the Lord used the bitter providence of the stroke for your good?

R: I was headed down the wrong path, and God turned me around. I was ashamed to say I was a Christian before the stroke. Now I brag about it. My knowledge of the Bible has increased. My love for my wife has increased. I used to beg her to leave me, but she wouldn't. Since the stroke we have been able to help a lot of folks. It's how we met Stockton at wheelchair soccer. I came flying around the curve and there was Jennifer with Stockton getting into his wheelchair. And his eyes got as big as saucers.

J: As Christians, we all want to minister to people and put our best foot forward. But at times, even with our disability, it has become easier to let God show through our lives. Where we are is just out in the open, especially if you knew us before. Some people find it hard to talk about God, or to do ministry. It's just life. For us, every day is a testimony. Our church had asked us to speak. We have been very involved with mostly kids around here. We have coached Challenger Baseball and helped in the CSP house (Connections for Special Parents).

R: My job was to encourage them in baseball. I didn't teach them baseball, but one year I was team dad. I was supposed to bring the snacks.

J: We would never have gotten involved in that except for the stroke. Also, probably about three or four years ago, there was a change in Randy. I told him that if he ever asked me for a divorce again, you'll be sorry. I was making all the decisions and he would not always understand why. Falling into the new roles was very hard. For many years, even after the stroke, I worried about his spiritual health. I would plead with him and read the Bible to him. I think the Holy Spirit had settled on him as only he can, so my worry lifted off me like a wave.

M: How has God provided for you since the stroke?

R: I feel God prepared us for it. At my job as a software engineer, I got disability insurance, but I never asked for it.

J: It was \$32 a month. He saw it on his check, and he said he wanted to cancel it. I said for him to do whatever he wanted to do, and that was a couple months before the stroke. Well, he never did it. Because of that we have never missed a beat.

R: That was when I was making the most money of my career, and the disability came from that amount.

J: Everything got turned around since that stroke, for the good. Our marriage has been better in these last twelve years than the previous eight.

M: What brought you to join Heritage?

J: God brought us to Heritage. We started coming late August 2017 when Jennifer invited us. We joined in November. We are two lifelong Baptists born in the nursery of Baptist churches; it's only God. I can see now there were so many reasons he moved us—our spiritual growth, for one. Another is the fellowship, being part of such a special congregation. We've been here for a couple years now. It feels more like what I imagine God intended the Acts Church to be like than I have felt at any church, ever. The love and fellowship are so genuine.

R: And the way the kids are treated.

M: How can we as a congregation pray for you (Randy)?

R: My headaches.

M: Aside from stamina for your service to Randy, what about you Joy?

J: Well, the Lord has always provided that. Please pray for our relationship with our daughter Courtney.

M: What has most encouraged you through the experiences of your life?

J: The goodness of the Lord. ♦

Catechism Corner

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

— 2 Timothy 1:13



The “Catechism Corner” is a small section containing a short commentary on a portion of the Westminster Standards.

Ashbel Green on the Importance of Catechizing Children

The great design and principal use of a catechism, or articles of faith, is to bring together, in proper order, the principal truths and doctrines of the Bible; so that they may be seen at one view, and in a small compass. We believe that this is very advantageous to all, and especially to the young. Hence the practice so general, in our church, of requiring children and youth to commit accurately to memory, at least our Shorter Catechism—frequently, with the whole of the scripture proofs. If it be remarked that much of this catechism cannot be fully understood by children in their early years, it should be remembered, that this is no more than is true of almost all elementary instruction. Scarcely ever is it more than partially understood at first; but being treasured up in the memory, it is there for meditation, and investigation, and application, as the mind gradually advances in knowledge and in strength. Parents and teachers, as I have already had occasion to remind you, should explain the catechism to their children, as far as is practicable. To explain it more fully, and to apply it practically, is what I am to attempt in these lectures; which I am sure will be heard with far greater interest, and better comprehension, by those who have learned the catechism, than by those who have not. [...]

Let me beseech you all, not to content yourselves merely with intellectual improvement—important and commendable as such improvement certainly is. I have known some young persons, who

were desirous to increase their knowledge, and to render it accurate, on the subject of religion; and who, notwithstanding, guarded themselves very cautiously, against the influence of this knowledge on their hearts and lives—They wished to understand religion, but not to practise it. Take, I entreat you, a different course. Endeavour to open your hearts, as well as your understandings, to the sacred truths which you are to hear explained and inculcated. Do I ask too much, when I request you always to pray for a divine blessing, on what you are going to hear, and after you shall have heard it? If you will do this, the happiest result may certainly be expected. ♦

Ashbel Green, *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Addressed to Youth*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: A. Finley and Towar & Hogan, 1829), 14, 19.