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THE SALTSHAKER

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Thank God I'm A Presbyterian

By Rev. Sean McCann

As we draw near to the end of our officer nomination period and begin to ramp up our Officer Training course, I can't help but reflect on this unique process that we go through as Presbyterians that so sets us apart. I'll save the biblical defense of our form of government for another forum; in this space I want to consider the benefits and duties that are ours as Presbyterians. First, let's consider four ways God cares for his people through his appointed under-shepherds.

God SPEAKS through his under-shepherds. There is a clear call in Scripture for elders to feed their flock the word of God (Jn 21:17) so that they might believe: "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" (Rom 10:14) While this is primarily done as elders obey their calling to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2), it also includes teaching, small group leadership, one-on-one counseling, and so much more.

God SHEPHERDS through his under-shepherds. Over the past few months your elders have been reading through Ezekiel 34 to begin our Session meetings. The chapter begins with an indictment on the selfish shepherds who failed to care for the flock of God, forcing God to intervene and himself be the shepherd of his sheep (Ez 34:15). The Lord goes on to promise a shepherd to come in the line of David who will truly guide the flock. It is this same Good Shepherd – the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 10:11) who charges Peter to "tend my sheep" (Jn 21:16); and Peter in turn repeats this charge in his letter, telling the elders of the early church to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). The perfect, infinite, omnipresent God chooses to shepherd his people – the very ones he has purchased by the blood of his Son (Acts 20:28) – by entrusting them to the shepherding care of imperfect, finite, local elders.

These men are far from perfect, but they are the men God has prepared and appointed to oversee our very souls.

God SECURES through his under-shepherds. In the same speech to the Ephesian elders that Paul reminds them that God has entrusted his blood-bought people to them, he goes on to strongly warn and admonish the elders to pay careful attention to the flock because "after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among our own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). What a sobering thought: the church is the target of evil men who will seek to draw them away from Christ. What is God's plan to thwart such a vicious attack? Local elders who pay attention to the flock and protect them from the wolves. Beloved be encouraged: you have leaders devoted to your spiritual protection!

God SEEKS through his under-shepherds. The same Savior who leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one lost sheep (Luke 15:4), is the one who sends out his elders to do the same. Not a Session meeting goes by when we don't discuss or pray for those who have been absent from our fellowship. Every elder knows that one day he will give an account for the sheep entrusted to his care (Heb 13:17), and this includes those who have wandered from God's presence and God's people. You may not think you need this type of oversight, but there will come a time in your life or that of your family when you will be eternally grateful for such care.

The job of the under-shepherds is clear in scripture, but what are some ways that the flock can participate in the shepherding ministry of the elders? I'll name three.

Upcoming Events

July and August			Weekly Events		
July 2	11:00 am	Elder Groups	Sunday Morning:		
July 9	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
July 23	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Sunday School	9:45 am	
August 6	Noon	Elder Groups	Morning Worship	11:00 am	
August 13	11 am	The Lord's Supper	Wednesday Evenings:		
August 27	11 am	The Lord's Supper	Home Prayer Groups	6:00 pm	
Bible Study (summer schedules may vary)					
<i>For Men:</i>					
			Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
			ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>					
<i>at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge</i>					
			Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
<i>For Women:</i>					
			Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
			Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
			Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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1) *Pray for your elders.* Are you overwhelmed by the responsibilities of the previous points? Well if you are an elder then you should be! Who is sufficient for these things? Pray for your elders. Pray for them often. Pray for their families. Pray for them as they speak, shepherd, secure, and seek. Pray for them publically so they know what you are praying for them. Pray for their words as they teach and preach. Pray that they would be wise, humble, and bold. Pray for their unity as a Session and ministry with the Diaconate. And don't forget to thank the Lord for them as well.

2) *Be seen by your elders.* A few weeks ago we went down to the Catawba River in Old Fort for a family hike. Some of our kids were running ahead on the trail so I called out, "Only go where I can see you." It is my job to care for my kids, and that is a whole lot easier if I can see them! Elders are called to "over see" the flock, and this is a whole lot easier if they can see the flock. It is their job to seek after the sheep, but they are not omnipresent. Make their job easier: come to Elder Group, answer the phone when they call, let them know when something is

going on so they can pray for you. In general, seek to place yourself under their watchful care.

3) *Imitate your elders.* "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, *and imitate their faith*" (Heb 13:7). No verse humbles a leader quite like this one, but it also takes true humility to obey this verse once you learn just how imperfect those leaders are whom you are called to imitate!

John Denver once sang "Thank God I'm A Country Boy," and I know a few of you can echo those sentiments. But are we just as grateful (and hopefully more so) that God has placed us in a church that takes seriously the call to shepherd the flock? If you can't yet sing with a thankful heart for your leaders, then just consider what life would be like without elders to faithfully speak God's word, to lovingly shepherd the sheep with God's care, to vigorously secure the flock with God's truth, and to diligently seek the lost with God's heart. May we all truly say, "Thank God I am A Presbyterian!"

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



I am excited this summer to dive into the Ten Commandments together as we slow our series through Exodus down to a verse-by-verse crawl through chapter twenty. While I have studied and taught on the Law of God before, this will be my first time preaching this famous section. In addition to the usual helpful commentaries on Exodus, I've enjoyed two other books in particular: J.I. Packer's little book *Keeping the Ten Commandments*, and J. Douma's big book *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*. But above all, the best resources I believe we have to understand the Ten Commandments are the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

If you've never read these documents, you may be surprised at the depth of knowledge and breadth of topics covered. And one of the primary topics covered is the Law: the Confession devotes an entire chapter to it, while 61 of the 196 questions in the Larger Catechism cover the Law, and 45 of 107 in the Shorter. In addition to some helpful introductory questions, for each Commandment the Catechisms list what the commandment both requires and forbids, as well as explaining some of the details and rationale in the longer commandments. For example, under the fifth commandment the Larger Catechism asks and answers the following questions: *Who are meant by Father and Mother? Why are superiors styled Father and Mother? What is the general scope of the fifth commandment? What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors? What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors? What is required of superiors towards their inferiors? What are the sins of superiors? What are the duties of equals? What are the sins of equals? Etc.* And that is just one commandment!

I believe the wide scope of these questions are helpful to all of us, but especially for those who know the Commandments by heart and have lived them for many years. The Westminster documents will cause you to take a deeper look into God's word and into your own life of obedience. If you would like a copy of the Confession and Catechisms they are widely available online, or you may contact the church office and we can provide you with a copy. You may also unknowingly have a copy in your home as they are printed in the back of the *Trinity Hymnal*. Scripture alone is all we need for a life of faith, but let us not neglect this wealth of knowledge at our finger tips and strive to use it for God's glory.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
July 2	Ex. 20:7	
July 9	Ex. 20:8-11	John 7:37-52
July 16	Ex. 20:12	John 8:1-11
July 23	Ex. 20:13	John 8:12-38
July 30	Ex. 20:14	John 8:39-59
Aug. 6	Ex. 20:15	
Aug. 13	Ex. 20:16	John 9:1-41
Aug. 20	Ex. 20:17	John 10:1-21
Aug. 27	Ex. 20:18-23:19	John 10:22-42

Revival of Hope

By Rev. Bill Clark

About the time you receive this edition of *The Saltshaker*. I will have completed teaching the Sunday School class entitled, "I Believe in the Holy Spirit". Personally, though the detailed study and lesson preparation is over, I do not want to forget the truths the Lord impressed upon my own heart, and there were many.

One of these lessons was the absolute supernatural nature of the Christian's life. J. I. Packer said, "The Christian's life in all its aspects-intellectual and ethical, devotional and relational, upsurging in worship and outgoing in witness, is supernatural; **ONLY THE SPIRIT CAN SUSTAIN IT.**" We often find ourselves struggling to see our actual lives brought into conformity with what we know the Lord desires and think, "this is so difficult". Well, our living out the Christian life is not just difficult, it is impossible apart from "supernatural" aid. And that is exactly what God has given in sending forth God, the Holy Spirit, into our lives. The conclusion of our thinking then is there is hope for me as a believer in the Lord Jesus.

The hope we have as individual Christians carries over to the Church. The mission of the Church is not difficult. It, too, is impossible! Yet, again, the Lord comes to His Bride and pours forth His Spirit, enabling her to engage all the forces arrayed against her. My recent studies brought back to my attention the following quote from Spurgeon. Be encouraged as you read.

He says: "The fullness of Jesus is not changed, then why are our works so feebly done? Pentecost, is that to be a tradition? The reforming days, are these to be memories only? I see no reason why we should not have a greater Pentecost than Peter saw, and a Reformation deeper in its foundations, and truer in its upbuildings than all the reforms which Luther or Calvin achieved. We have the same Christ, remember that. The times are altered, but Jesus is the Eternal, and time touches him not. . . . Our laziness puts off the work of conquest, our self-indulgence procrastinates, our cowardice and want of faith make us dote upon the millennium instead of hearing the Spirit's voice today. Happy days would begin from this hour if the Church would but awake and put on her strength, for in her Lord all fullness dwells.

"Oh! Spirit of God, bring back thy Church to a belief in the gospel! Bring back her ministers to preach it once again with the Holy Ghost, and not striving after wit and learning. Then shall we see thine arm made bare, O God, in the eyes of all the people, and the myriads shall be brought to rally round the throne of God and the Lamb. The Gospel must succeed; it shall succeed; it cannot be prevented from succeeding; a multitude that no man can number must be saved."

Let us arise in the power of the Spirit and set about our Lord's work.

Book Review

By Tim Challies

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When it comes to evangelism, it seems that Calvinists have quite a poor reputation in the church today. Most of the largest and seemingly most successful mission organizations were founded by Arminians and continue to be based around Arminian theology. Arminian churches seem to grow much faster than churches based on Calvinist principles. It seems that part of the reason for this is that Calvinists have such a high view of God's sovereignty that it is easy for them to assume that there is no reason for Christians to evangelize. After all, if God truly is sovereign, if He does control absolutely everything, what reason is there to evangelize? If God has ordained someone will be saved, they reason, that person will be saved regardless of my efforts. Perhaps evangelism is even sinful, for is it possible that it actually denies God's sovereignty?

It is against this backdrop that J.I. Packer wrote *Evangelism & The Sovereignty of God*, a classic study on the relationship between God's sovereignty and the necessity of evangelism. A short but exceedingly powerful book, Packer shows that rather than precluding evangelism, God's sovereignty provides the most powerful incentive and support for it.

Packer begins by presenting the concept of antinomy, which he defines as "an appearance of contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary." An antinomy we face as believers is that of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Somehow, although God is absolutely sovereign, He has ordained that we would be responsible for our involvement in His plans. Our obedient response to this antinomy is to accept it for what it is and learn to live with it. Any other response would be to minimize something God deems important and even necessary to a godly life. We cannot see Divine sovereignty and human responsibility as opposites or principles that are in conflict with each other, but rather as principles that complement each other and are equally true.

The author turns to a lengthy discussion of evangelism where he defines what evangelism is and what it is not. He speaks of the message of evangelism as well as the motive and means for it. He concludes with an examination of how God's sovereignty affects evangelism. Packer's conclusion is that "We would not wish to say that man cannot evangelize at all without coming to terms with this doctrine [God's sovereignty]; but we venture to think that, other things being equal, he will be able to evangelize better for believing it."

For a book weighing in at a mere 126 pages, this one contains impressive depth and contains a thorough and satisfying treatment of the subject. I highly recommend this book for all believers and trust anyone will be able to learn and grow through it.

(In August we will discuss *A Better Way* by Michael Horton.)