

# REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

## CONFESSIONAL CHRISTIANITY

*By Pastor Brian De Jong*

Sometimes it is asked, “What makes the OPC different from other evangelical denominations?” There are many good ways to answer that question. One response is to point to our Presbyterian church government. We are a church ruled by elders who work as a cooperative team of shepherds.

Another response is to point to Calvinistic doctrine – we believe in the so-called “Five Points” – Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints (TULIP).

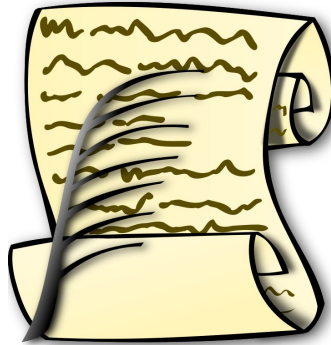
Those who are historically oriented might narrate the great struggle between liberal theologians pushing “modernism” on the church, and the faithful fathers of the OPC who insisted on the full authority of God’s word and all it teaches. Let me say that all of these are valid answers to the question, and do explain vital differences between our church and other branches of the visible church.

An answer you won’t often hear is this: “The OPC is a confessional church, and most evangelicals are not.” While this may seem to be the most BORING answer, it is perhaps one of the most significant and foundational distinctions. We are confessional, most of our brethren are not.

For along time, many in the evangelical world have repeated the mantra, “No creed but Christ, no law but love!” They have wondered out-loud why we need man-made creeds, confessions and catechisms. Isn’t the Bible enough? they ask.

But there is a good reason for valuing these admittedly human expressions of

doctrinal precision. In 2 Timothy 1:13-14 Paul says, “*Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*”<sup>14</sup> *Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*”



This statement tells us that there is a “standard” or “pattern” of sound words. This is the content of sound doctrine – true truths as expressed by Christ and His apostles. The church generally, and her officers

particularly, are commanded to “retain” and “guard” this treasure which has been entrusted to us.

While this includes retaining and guarding the entire Bible, jot and tittle, it goes beyond that. What does the Bible actually teach? What are the main doctrines that make up truly Biblical Christianity?

Back in the 1600’s in England, the Protestant Reformation was sweeping through the land. The English church was no longer under the dominion of the Pope and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Puritan movement had arisen, and was strongly impacting the nation. The English Parliament thought it wise to have a definition of orthodox for the entire realm, and so they commissioned the Westminster Assembly to work on a Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

The Assembly was convened in 1643 and worked for the next five years to produce documents that continue to define Christian Orthodoxy today. One writer has called the Westminster Assembly the

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### Mnemonics...

- *Fellowship Lunch, 13th*
- *Presbytery, 18th-19th*
- *Worldview Movie Night, April 1st*

*Continued on page 6...*

# Christ Will Not Quench the Smoking Flax

By Richard Sibbes

The second observation concerning the weak and small beginnings of grace is that Christ will not quench the smoking flax. This is so for two principal reasons. First, because this spark is from heaven: it is his own, it is kindled by his own Spirit. And secondly, it tends to the glory of his powerful grace in his children that he preserves light in the midst of darkness, a spark in the midst of the swelling waters of corruption.

## THE LEAST SPARK OF GRACE IS PRECIOUS

There is a special blessing in that little spark. "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'do not destroy it for a blessing is in it': so will I do for my servants' sakes" (Isa. 65:8). We see how our Savior Christ bore with Thomas in his doubting (John 20:27), and with the two disciples that went to Emmaus, who wavered as to whether he came to redeem Israel or not (Luke 24:21). He did not quench that little light in Peter which was smothered: Peter denied him, but he did not deny Peter (Luke 22:61). "If you will, you can," said one poor man in the Gospel (Matt. 8:2). "If you can do anything," said another (Mark 9:22). Both were smoking flax. Neither of them was quenched. If Christ had stood upon his own greatness, he would have rejected someone who came with his "if." But Christ answers his "if" with a gracious and absolute grant, "I will: be clean." The woman that was diseased with an issue of blood only touched with a trembling hand, and only the hem of his garment, and yet she went away both healed and comforted. In the seven churches (Rev. 2 and 3), we see that Christ acknowledges and

**"Man, for a little smoke will quench the light. Christ, we see, always cherishes even the least beginnings."**

cherishes anything that was good in them. Because the disciples slept due to infirmity, being oppressed with grief, our Savior Christ frames a comfortable excuse for them, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

If Christ were not merciful, he would miss his own ends: "There is forgiveness with you, so that you may be feared" (Psa. 130:4). Now all are welcome to come under that banner of love which he spreads over his own: "All flesh shall come to you" (Psa. 65:2). He uses moderation and care, "lest the spirit fails before him, and the souls which he has made" (Isa. 57:16). Christ's heart yearned, the text says, when he saw the people without meat, "lest they faint in the pathway" (Matt. 15:32); much more will he have regard to prevent our spiritual fainting.

## SUPPORT THE WEAK

Here we see the opposite dispositions in the holy nature of Christ and the impure nature of man. Man, for a little smoke, will quench the light. Christ, we see, always cherishes even the least beginnings. See how he bore with the many imperfections of his poor disciples! If he sharply checked them, it was done in love, and so that they might shine the brighter for it. Can we have a better pattern to follow than this from him by whom we hope to be saved? "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. 15:1). "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1Cor. 9:22). Oh, that this gaining and winning disposition were more in many of us! Many, so far as it lies in us, are lost for want of encouragement. See how that faithful fisher of men, the Apostle Paul, labors to catch his judge: "I know that you believe the

prophets” (Acts 26:27), and then he wishes him all the saving good, but not the bonds. He might have added them too, but he would not discourage the one who responded. He therefore wished Agrippa only that which was good in religion. How careful was our blessed Savior of little ones, so that they might not be offended! How he defends his disciples from malicious imputations of the Pharisees! How careful he was not to put new wine into old vessels (Matt. 9:17), nor to alienate new beginners with the austerities of religion (as some do indiscreetly). Oh, he says, they shall have time to fast when I am gone, and strength to fast when the Holy Ghost has come upon them.

Assailing young beginners with minor matters is not the best way; rather, show them a more excellent way by training them in fundamental points. Then other things will not gain credence with them. It is not amiss to ignore their defects, to excuse some failings, to commend their performances, to encourage their progress, to remove all difficulties from their way, to help them in every way to bear the yoke of religion with greater ease, and to bring them to love God and his service, lest they acquire a distaste for it before they know it. For the most part, we see that Christ plants in young beginners a love which we call their “first love” (Rev. 2:4); it is to carry them through their profession with more delight, and it does not expose them to crosses before they have gathered strength. This is how we treat young plants, fencing them from the weather until they are rooted. Mercy to others should move us to deny ourselves in our liberties oftentimes, in case we offend weak ones. It is the “little ones” who are offended (Matt. 18:6). The weakest are most ready to think they are despised; therefore we should be most careful to satisfy them.

It would be a good contest among Christians

for one to labor to give no offense, and for the other to labor to take none. The best men are severe to themselves, and tender toward others. Yet people should not tire and wear out the patience of others: nor should the weaker so far demand moderation from others as to rely upon their indulgence, and so become complacent in their own infirmities; that would present danger to their own souls and scandal to the church.

Nor should they despise the gifts of God in others, which grace teaches us to honor wherever they are found; but instead they should know their roles and place, and not undertake anything above their measure; that might make them and their circumstances obnoxious and subject to scorn. When blindness and boldness, ignorance and arrogance, weakness and willfulness, meet together in men, it renders them odious to God, burdensome in society, dangerous in their counsels, disturbers of better

**“We see that Christ plants in young believers a love which we call their ‘first love.’”**

purposes, intractable and incapable of better direction, and miserable in the results. Where Christ shows his gracious power in weakness, he does it by letting men understand themselves enough to breed humility in them, and to magnify God’s love towards such as them. He does it to preserve them from discouragement about their weakness, to bring men closer to grace, to overcome their poverty of spirit, rather than instill a sense of greatness as to their condition and role, which produces from their corrupt nature the fuel for pride. Christ refuses none because of their weakness, so that none would be discouraged; but neither does he accept anyone because of their greatness, so that none should be lifted up with something which has so little account with God. It is no great matter how dull the scholar is when Christ becomes his teacher; for when Christ prescribes what he is to understand, he also gives the understanding, even to the sim-

## The Smoking Flax Continued

plest of us.

The church suffers much from weak believers; therefore we may assert our liberty to deal with them, though mildly, yet frankly. The scope of true love is to make the other party better, which concealment often hinders. With some, a spirit of gentleness prevails best, but with some a rod is needed. Some must be “pulled out of the fire” (Jude 23) with force, and they will bless God for us in the day of their visitation (1Pet. 2:12). We see that our Savior multiplies woe upon woe when he has to deal with hard-hearted hypocrites (Matt. 23:13), for hypocrites need stronger conviction than gross sinners; their will is corrupt, and therefore their conversion is usually violent. A hard knot must have an appropriate wedge; otherwise, in a cruel pity, we betray their souls. A sharp reproof is sometimes a precious pearl and a sweet balm. The wounds of secure sinners will not be healed with sweet words. The Holy Ghost came in fiery tongues as well as in the likeness of a dove; and the same Holy Spirit will grant a spirit of prudence and discretion, which is the salt to season all our words and actions (Col 4:6). And such wisdom will teach us “to speak a word in season” (Isa. 50:4), both to the weary, and likewise to the secure soul. And, indeed, he needs “the tongue of the learned” that will either build up or tear down — though here I speak of mildness towards those who are weak and know it. These we must bring on gently, and drive softly, as Jacob did his cattle (Gen. 33:14), according to their pace, and as his children were able to endure.

Weak Christians are like glasses which are damaged by the least violent use, but if gently handled, they will last a long time. We are to give this honor of gentle use to the weaker vessels (1Pet. 3:7), by which we shall both preserve them, and likewise make them useful to the church and ourselves (Phm. 1:11).

In diseased bodies, if all its weaknesses are purged, you may purge life and all. Therefore, though God says that he will “refine them as silver is refined” (Zech. 13:9), yet he said he had “refined you, but not with silver” (Isa. 48:10), that is, not so exactly as that no dross remains, for he considers our weakness. Perfect refining is for another world: for the world of the souls of perfect men.

*Sibbes, Richard, The Bruised Reed, Chapter 4, Christ Will Not Quench the Smoking Flax*



## CHURCH CAMPOUT

The annual church campout is scheduled for Thursday, September 8 through Saturday, September 10 at Kohler-Andrae State Park. If you are interested in camping, now is a good time to reserve your campsite. See Pastor Brian for more details.



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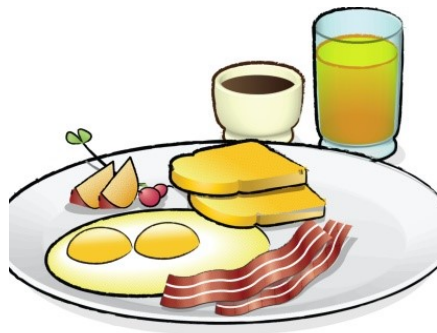
## Camp Westminster

Save the Date! Camp Westminster is coming August 1-5 at Green Lake Conference Center. Our speaker this year will be the Rev. David Veldhorst. Families and individuals of all ages are encouraged to attend. Posters and brochures will be coming soon. For reservation information you can contact Joe & Judy Lewandowski at [judylew1964@att.net](mailto:judylew1964@att.net) or (630) 894-5559. Do not contact GLCC directly.



# Men's Fellowship Breakfast

The men of Grace Church are invited to a Men's Fellowship Breakfast to be held Saturday, March 12th at 8:00 a.m. at Calvary Church in Cedar Grove. The breakfast will be followed with fellowship and a devotion-  
al by Pastor David Cornette.



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## Front Page Concluded...

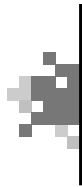
“high water mark of Reformation orthodoxy.” The precision and excellence of the documents produced has never been equaled or surpassed.

The OPC holds to the Westminster Standards as the theological constitution of our church. In these standards we find a yardstick for measuring whether ministers and elders hold to the standard of sound words. Though these documents are of human authorship, and are not inspired, they do adequately reflect the doctrinal teaching of Scripture.

Our Spring Worldview Movie night will be taking place on Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>. (No joke, really!) We

will be watching and discussing a movie called “Cromwell,” which will deal with the English Civil War that was taking place during the same time that the Westminster Assembly was doing its work. This film addresses the question of how believers should respond to governmental tyranny – a very timely topic for our era. But it will also provide helpful historical context for you to appreciate the Westminster Assembly and its work. As always, this is a good event to invite others to attend. I hope to see you there!

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# March Birthdays



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## *Wedding Anniversaries*





Grace OPC

# March 2016

*Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ*



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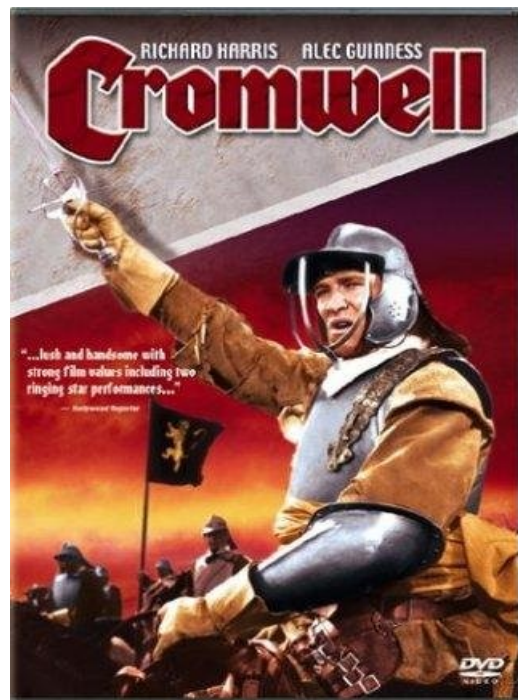
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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	3	4	5
6 Meadowview Manor 3:00 PM	7	8	9 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	10	11	12
13 Fellowship Lunch	14	15 Session Meeting	16 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	17	18 Presbytery at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL	19 Presbytery at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, IL
20	21	22	23 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	24	25	26 Men's Breakfast 7:00 AM
27	28	29	30 Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM	31		



# Spring Worldview Movie Night

Our Spring Worldview Movie Night will be held on Friday, April 1st at 7:00 pm. We will view and discuss the film, "Cromwell," starring Richard Harris and Alec Guinness. This film addresses the question of how believers should respond to governmental tyranny – a very timely topic for our era. Popcorn and drinks are provided; other refreshments are welcome!



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## *Nursery Update*

Due to the shortage of volunteers, the nursery will be changing as of March 1st. We will no longer have scheduled volunteers to staff the nursery. The room will be open and available for parents whose children need a quiet place to be during the service, but

there will be no volunteers "on duty" during worship services. Many thanks to those who have sacrificially served in the nursery in the past!





Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

Grace OPC

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## Spurgeon Corner

*"The wrath to come."  
(Matthew 3:7)*

It is pleasant to pass over a country after a storm has spent itself; to smell the freshness of the herbs after the rain has passed away, and to note the drops while they glisten like purest diamonds in the sunlight. That is the position of a Christian. He is going through a land where the storm has spent itself upon his Saviour's head, and if there be a few drops of sorrow falling, they distil from clouds of mercy, and Jesus cheers him by the assurance that they are not for his destruction. But how terrible is it to witness the approach of a tempest: to note the forewarnings of the storm; to mark the birds of heaven as they droop their wings; to see the cattle as they lay their heads low in terror; to discern the face of the sky as it groweth black, and look to the sun which shineth not, and the heavens which are angry and frowning! How terrible to await the dread advance of a hurricane—such as occurs, sometimes, in the tropics—to wait in terrible apprehension till the wind shall rush forth in fury, tearing up trees from their roots, forcing rocks from their pedestals, and hurling down all the dwelling-places of man! And yet, sinner, this is your present position. No hot drops have as yet fallen, but a shower of fire is coming. No terrible winds howl around you, but God's tempest is gathering its dread artillery. As yet the water-floods are dammed up by mercy, but the flood-gates shall soon be opened: the thunderbolts of God are yet in his storehouse, but lo! the tempest hastens, and how awful shall that moment be when God, robed in vengeance, shall march forth in fury! Where, where, where, O sinner, wilt thou hide thy head, or whither wilt thou flee? O that the hand of mercy may now lead you to Christ! He is freely set before you in the gospel: his riven side is the rock of shelter. Thou knowest thy need of him; believe in him, cast thyself upon him, and then the fury shall be overpast forever.

*Morning, February 25th, by C. H. Spurgeon*

## Fellowship Lunch

We will have a fellowship lunch on Sunday, March 13 after Sunday School. All are welcome to join! See the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board.

