

REDEEMING THE TIME

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 2

◆ SPRING 2019

"We Don't Just Turn to Scripture"

"The United Methodist way of doing theology is to look at Scripture, and then look at church tradition, experience and reason."

United Methodist Bishop Karen Oliveto

BY BRAD K. GSELL

A Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church met in St. Louis from February 23-26, 2019. The matter at hand was whether the church would begin to allow homosexual ministers and marriages. Of course, rebellious ministers and even bishops were already permitting this apart from the rules of the denomination.

Due to the large number of delegates from Africa and other Third World regions, who tend to be more conservative, the prohibition of homosexual relationships was maintained by a slim majority.

Bishop Karen Oliveto, a self-proclaimed lesbian, stated on Public Radio: "This decision has caused a shock wave of trauma across the church and around the world.... We have to care for our young people who are shocked that a church that raised them, that helped them understand God's love for them — they see in this vote a tremendous rejection...."

"We have a message of love. The United Methodist Church has always been a Big Tent theology church. We don't just turn to Scripture. The United Methodist way of doing theology is to look at Scripture, and then look at church tradition, experience and reason. So, when you bring those four things together, it allows us a breadth of difference; and, in the tension of our differences, there's something life giving."

This is a rejection of the Protestant Reformation, which proclaimed *Sola Scriptura* — Scripture Alone. It is a return to the false practice and doctrine of Rome, which puts human reason on an equal footing with God's inerrant Word.

Methodism's founder, John Wesley, certainly did not hold that view. In a sermon, Wesley stated that the Scriptures are "a lantern unto a Christian's feet, and a light in all his paths. This alone he receives as his rule of right or wrong...." In a letter to the Rev. John Law, Wesley wrote: "In every point I appeal 'to the law and the testimony,' and value no authority but this." Wesley, of course was quoting from **Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."** •

CONSIDER MINE ENEMIES

BY ROBERT W. ANDERSON

"Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred" (Psalm 25:19).

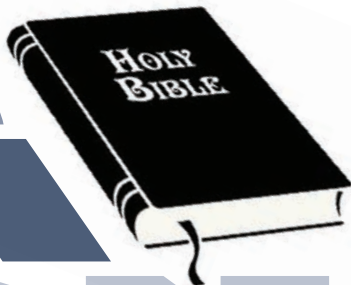
In the prophetic 110th Psalm, David writes that God the Father told Christ, His incarnate, risen Son, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." That prospect is amplified by Paul's words to the Thessalonians, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9). That is a picture to invite a silent, wide-eyed notice of what God intends for His enemies.

We might attempt a survey of the entire Bible on the topic of enemies, but we are going to limit our attention mainly to the Book of Psalms. There are 278 occurrences of "enemies" and 108 of "enemy" in the Authorized Version of the Psalms, plus instances of "foes," "adversary," and the like. That is enough to warrant a specific consideration of that class of people.

Let us ponder some passages from the Psalms describing the stern judgment promised by God on His and our enemies, their identity, character and behavior, how we are to meet enemies in this life, and God's design in letting us contend with them.

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REFORMATION



Beginnings

PART VII

The Body They May Kill

BY MARK W. EVANS

Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, convened the Diet at Worms in January 1521. A critical issue of immense magnitude confronted the assembly. What must be done to silence the Augustinian monk Martin Luther? His teachings from God's Word had condemned Rome's pope, clergy, worship, doctrine, government and discipline.

What was even more alarming is that the people believed him. Aleander, Pope Leo X's premier representative, said "that nine tenths of the Germans cried 'Luther,' and the other tenth cried, 'murder the pope.'"¹ Although an exaggeration, this expression revealed the Reformer's hold on the souls of men.

In fact, his Scriptural teachings had spread throughout Europe and a fresh breeze of liberty from ecclesiastical and civil tyranny had stirred countless hearts.

Charles V determined that Aleander would defend Rome before the Diet and seal Luther's doom. His three-hour, eloquent presentation articulated the strongest and most convincing arguments Rome could mus-

In God's providence, Rome had her opportunity to present her most persuasive and powerful arguments, which fell to the ground in the face of her wretched and blasphemous teaching and practice. The assembly brushed aside the pontiff's excommunication of Luther and determined to hear the Reformer in person before condemning him.

ter. During his address, he turned to Charles V and said: "I entreat your imperial Majesty to do nothing that may lead to your reproach. Do not interfere in a matter which does not concern the laity. Perform your own duties! Let Luther's doctrines be interdicted by you throughout the length and breadth of the empire: let his writings be burnt everywhere! Fear not! In Luther's errors there is enough to burn a hundred thousand heretics...."² At first, it appeared that Aleander and Rome had triumphed.

Within a few days an unexpected voice awakened the Diet. It was a startling event because the voice came from Luther's chief enemy, Duke George. He opposed the doctrines of grace, but was infuriated at Rome's debauchery and her religious scams, robbing Germany of its wealth. The Diet formed a committee to investigate. They listed 101 grievances and presented them to Charles V with these words: "It is our duty to prevent the ruin and dishonor of our people. For this reason we most humbly but most urgently entreat you to order a general reformation, and to undertake its accomplishment."³

In God's providence, Rome had her opportunity to present her most persuasive and powerful arguments, which fell to the ground in the face of her wretched and blasphemous teachings and practice. The assembly brushed aside the pontiff's excommunication of Luther and determined to hear the Reformer in person before condemning him. Church historian, J.H. Merle d'Aubigne wrote: "A dead man returning from the other world and appearing in the midst of the diet, would have been less alarming to the nuncios, the monks, and all the papal host, than the presence of the Wittenberg doctor."⁴

Charles V summoned the monk with these words: "Honorable, well-beloved, and pious! We and the States of the Holy Empire here assembled, having resolved to institute an inquiry touching the doctrine and the books that thou hast lately published, have issued, for thy coming hither, and thy

return to a place of security, our safe-conduct and that of the empire, which we send thee herewith. Our sincere desire is, that thou shouldst prepare immediately for this journey, in order that within the space of the twenty-one days fixed by our safe-conduct, thou mayst without fail be present before us. We will firmly abide by our aforesaid safe-conduct, and expect that thou wilt comply with our summons. In so doing, thou wilt obey our earnest wishes.”⁵

Along with the summons was a signed statement of safe-conduct beginning with these words: “To the honourable, our well-beloved and pious Doctor Martin Luther, of the order of Augustines.” Merle d’Aubigne observed: “Thus did the emperor confer the titles of ‘well-beloved, honourable, and pious,’ on a man whom the head of the Church had excommunicated.”⁶

Another historian, J.A. Wylie, wrote of Luther: “The last link of this bondage was now gone. He stood erect in the presence of a power before which the whole of Christendom well nigh still bowed down. The study of Paul’s Epistles and of the Apocalypse, and the comparison of both with the history of the past, brought Luther about this time to the full and matured conviction that the Church of Rome as it now existed was the predicted ‘Apostasy,’ and that the dominion of the Papacy was the reign of Antichrist. It was this that broke the spell of Rome, and took for him the sting out of her curse. This was a wonderful training, and not the least wonderful thing in it was the exact coincidence in point of time between the maturing of Luther’s views and the great crisis in his career. The summons to the Diet at Worms found him in the very prime and fullness of his knowledge.”⁷

The imperial herald, Gaspard Sturm, arrived in Wittenberg with the emperor’s summons on March 24, 1521. According to Rome’s usual treachery, the Reformer should have anticipated his execution. His friends foresaw his death; his enemies thirsted for his blood. Luther said: “It mat-

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ters not! Pray, not for me, but for the Word of God. Before my blood has grown cold, thousands of men in the whole world will have become responsible for having shed it! The most holy adversary of Christ, the father, the master, the generalissimo of murderers, insists on its being shed. So be it! Let God’s will be done! Christ will give me His Spirit to overcome these ministers of error. I despise them during my life; I shall triumph over them by my death.”⁸ As far as the safe-conduct, John Hus had the same solemn promise, but was burned at the stake.

The imperial herald and a few friends accompanied Luther on his journey to Worms. He met with faces filled with apprehension and others with the look of hate and anger. When he reached Naumburg, a silent priest held a picture of the martyr Savonarola before the Reformer. The message was plain, yet Luther said: “It is Satan that would prevent, by these terrors, the confession of the truth in the assembly of princes, for he foresees the blow it would inflict upon his kingdom.”⁹ There were other attempts to frighten him and to divert him from his destination. He became ill, yet he continued his journey. Perhaps the most trying circumstance occurred when he approached Worms. Spalatin, Elector Frederick’s chaplain and Luther’s friend, sent a messenger

to warn the Reformer not to enter Worms. Merle d’Aubigne wrote: “But Luther, undismayed, turned his eyes on the messenger, and replied: ‘Go and tell your master that even should there be as many devils in Worms as tiles on the house-tops, still I would enter it!’ Never, perhaps, has Luther been so sublime! The messenger returned to Worms with this astounding answer. ‘I was then undaunted,’ said Luther, a few days before his death; ‘I feared nothing. God can indeed render a man intrepid at any time; but I know not whether I should now have so much liberty and joy.’”¹⁰

On April 16, 1521, at 10:00 a.m., Luther entered the gates of Worms. The watchman sounded the trumpet and the streets filled with a crowd of some two thousand spectators — a crowd larger than the one that had greeted the emperor. J.A. Wylie wrote: “[I]n a few minutes princes, nobles, citizens and men of all nations and conditions, mingling in one mighty throng, had assembled to see the monk enter. To the last, neither friend nor foe had really believed that he would come. Now, however, Luther is in Worms.”¹¹

¹Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 130.

²J.H. Merle d’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. II (New York: American Tract Society, 1847), pp. 199-200.

³*Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 209, 210.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁷J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, Vol. I (New York: Cassell and Company, Ltd., n.d.), p. 329.

⁸Merle d’Aubigne, p. 216.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹¹Wylie, pp. 333-334.



The Rev. Mark Evans is a minister in Faith Presbytery, Bible Presbyterian Church, and is pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC.

A WORK FOR CHRIST IN

Guatemala

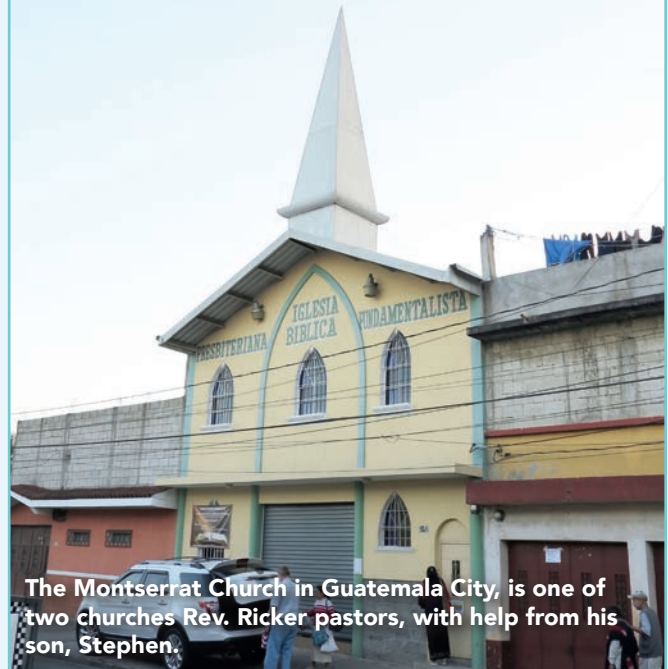
In January 2019 my wife, Sheila, and I were privileged to visit Guatemala on behalf of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) and The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM). We went to observe, encourage and facilitate the works of IBPFM missionaries **Hal and Evelyn Ricker** and **Caleb and Debra Kang**.

We were able to speak at four churches and two schools during our short visit. Intermingled were interviews with the main newspaper in Guatemala, *La Prensa*, as well as magazine, radio and television interviews. The hospitality and kindnesses of the Rickers and Kangs were overwhelming!

—Brad Gsell

The Rickers

The Rickers have been missionaries under the IBPFM for well over 60 years. Yet, you would never know their advanced age by the incredible schedule they keep, preaching and teaching in two churches every week, operating the Trinitarian Bible Society bookstore, visiting church members, producing a magazine, and many other things. Rev. Ricker is also a vice president of the ICCC. Mrs. Ricker is a gifted Bible teacher and musician. Their son Stephen and daughter-in-law Juanita, and their family, are very active in the ministry as well.



The Montserrat Church in Guatemala City, is one of two churches Rev. Ricker pastors, with help from his son, Stephen.



The Trinitarian Bible Society Bookstore in Guatemala City recently moved into this new, larger facility.



Elder Cesar Xocop of the Montserrat Church



Deacon Selvin Martin of the Montserrat Church



Sunday evening at the Los Angeles Church, where the Rickers minister





The Kangs

The Kangs have served as missionaries with the IBPFM since 1998, with the last 11 of those years in Guatemala. Caleb is administrator of the Zion Middle School in Patzicia, Guatemala. Both he and Debra are teachers, and work through Bible classes and other means to bring the gospel of Christ to their students.



With students at Zion Middle School



Rev. Kang in the school computer lab



Stephen Ricker and Brad Gsell with Rev. Ricker at the ICC Latin America office in Guatemala City



With the Mayan language teacher



Mrs. Juanita Ricker teaching a ladies' class



Volcan de Agua from Antigua Guatemala



Getting Out the Word ...

When we went to Guatemala, we were not aware that a number of interviews with the press had been arranged. An interview in Guatemala's main newspaper, *La Prensa*, and a magazine interview with a reporter for *La Palabra*, gave good coverage of the upcoming 20th World Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches. A half-hour radio interview, and an hour-long television interview did the same, but also gave great opportunity to present the gospel, discuss many Bible doctrines, present the holiness of God, the need to separate from ecclesiastical apostasy and worldliness and for Christians to be a part of faithful, Bible-believing churches. Stephen Ricker, president of the Latin American Alliance of Christian Churches, spoke as well, and served as my translator. — Brad Gsell



Radio interviewer holding up a copy of *Redeeming the Time*



FOTOS PRENSA LIBRE: CÉSAR PÉREZ

Brad Gsell, presidente del CIIC, anuncia la celebración del 20 Congreso Mundial de Iglesias Cristianas, en Chile.

GUATEMALA

Organizan congreso cristiano

Invitan a guatemaltecos a ser parte de evento internacional.

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Por César Pérez Carroquín
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La Palabra

Guatemala, semana del 3 al 9 de febrero del 2019

De visita

Presidente de CIIC visita Guatemala

Brad Gsell, con dos años de ejercer el cargo como presidente del Concilio Internacional de Iglesias Cristianas -CIIC-, estuvo de visita en nuestro país con el propósito estrechar lazos fraternales, fortalecer y compartir con pastores y congregaciones que forman parte de la membresía de dicha



www.rttpublications.org



Speaking at the Good Samaritan Church in La Gomera, Guatemala. This church group is in the International Council of Christian Churches.



With Pastor Julio Marin and his son at the Good Samaritan Church



The Mount Carmel Fundamental Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Mazatenango, Guatemala, another ICCC church



Rev. Hal Ricker speaking in Mazatenango

www.rttpublications.org



Left to right: Elder Jorge Farfan and Pastor Virgilio Barillas at the church in Mazatenango

The black volcanic sands of Guatemala's Pacific coast



Dedication Service:

Old Paths Historic Faith Bible Institute

A service of dedication was held to inaugurate the Old Paths Historic Faith Bible Institute in Guatemala City on Sunday, January 27, 2019.



Brad Gsell giving the dedicatory message for the new Bible institute, with Stephen Ricker translating



Cutting drywall for new classrooms



Stephen Ricker and Joshua installing electrical outlets and wiring

CONSIDER MINE ENEMIES

Continued from page 1

Enemies Defined and Identified

1. To commence, our enemies are **DEFINED**. An enemy is one who is hostile to another.

We know there is a holy hostility. God himself hates evil. “The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth” (Psalm 11:5). “Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the Lord thy God hateth” (Deuteronomy 16:22). Also, David wrote, “I have hated the congregation of evil doers” (Psalm 26:5); “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10); and “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?” (Psalm 139:21).

However, a great deal of hostility is evil, desiring to inflict injury to or harm another person. It is these enemies with unholy hostility and hatred that we address here.

Unholy hostility is always in opposition to the law of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments. An enemy is one who murders, one who commits adultery, one who lies, one who covets or envies.

The person, never discovered, who murdered my childhood Sunday school teacher, showed himself to be Mrs. Davenport’s enemy. The man, who was rightly rejected for church membership, but then murdered a fellow seminarian and Bible Presbyterian minister, was that godly minister’s enemy.

Regrettably, husbands and wives, who ought to be each other’s best friends, have often, in our experience, turned out to be the worst of enemies in divorce. Those who pervert God’s moral principles, upon which human society ought to be founded, are — on those grounds — to be regarded as enemies.

Ultimately, all enemies really hate God, which breaks the first command-

ment. Contrarily, Satan has a way of redefining enemies as friends and friends as enemies.

2. Secondly, enemies are **IDENTIFIED** in two ways: by origin and by character. First, enemies are named according to their *place of origin*. The Psalms speak of individual, home-grown enemies. Saul, whom David served zealously, became David’s enemy by reason of jealousy. Absalom, who was raised at the knee of David and saw firsthand his eminent testimony for righteousness, became his enemy.

“The salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.”
(Psalm 37:39,40)

Again, David speaks to one who had, groundlessly, shown himself an enemy: “For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company” (Psalm 55:12-14).

By our own personal experience, when reading those words, we can understand why he had lamented in verse 4, “my heart is sore pained within me.” Sometimes enemies emerge from the ranks of those who were once life’s closest companions.

There are enemies who hate us personally. They know us by name and have a specific reason for animosity.

But, there are others whose hostility is indirect and impersonal. They hate us as part of a class of people to

which we belong — those who profess genuine Biblical Christianity. In certain situations, their animosity might flare up and spew over us personally. An enemy’s hatred can be like the Yellowstone geyser: steam emits from the mouth until it erupts, and then scalding water spews forth.

Thus the enemy’s *place of origin* can also be other nations, people we do not know personally. In Psalm 83, Asaph writes, “For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult” (verse 2). We are not long in learning that God’s enemies were Israel’s enemies: “they have taken crafty counsel against thy people ...” (verse 3).

From there, the Psalmist goes on to identify particular foreign nations as enemies: “The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites: of Moab, and the Hagerenes; Gebal and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre ...” (Psalm 83:6,7). Israel knew her map. Her enemies were many and located at every point of the compass — north, south, east, and west. She was literally surrounded by those whose hostility toward them and their God was stirred up by Satan.

On the basis of Daniel 10:13, where the angel told Daniel, “the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me,” it is thought that fallen angels (demons) may influence the activities of pagan nations.^{1,2,3} If so, demonic powers might incite even greater enmity against the people whom God favors in special ways.

God owned Israel as His covenant people and she, in her best times, acknowledged Him as her God. So also, in a wonderful way, God has historically favored our own land, since its foundation, because of the presence and influence of Christians and Biblical teaching.

Over the years, America has, with greater or lesser numbers and fidelity, embraced the God of the Bible and His law in its way of life and institutions.

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CONSIDER MINE ENEMIES

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Severely flawed as our nation is, to some extent its Christians still say, “one nation under God,” its coinage and currency still say, “In God we trust,” and its believing people still sing,

*Thy love divine hath led us
in the past;
In this free land by thee
our lot is cast;
Be thou our Ruler, Guardian,
Guide, and Stay;
Thy Word our law, thy paths
our chosen way.*

That residue of faithfulness to God in the land is enough, at least in part, to draw to our nation the jealous enmity of foreign countries. We hear the news. In how many times and in how many ways have we learned of the dreadful attacks and demonstrations fired by the hatred of foreign adversaries?

Enemies are identified not only by their origin, but also by their *character and conduct*. In Psalm 5:8,9, David mentions “mine enemies.” He follows up with a pencil portrait: “For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.”

In Psalm 7:6, having written of “the rage of mine enemies,” he goes on in verse 14 to exclaim, “Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.” Further on he mentions his “violent dealing” (verse 16).

In other Psalms, without actually referring to them as enemies, he shows what they are by setting forth their behavior.

Psalm 10:3-11 states, “For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his

thoughts. His ways are always grievous ... he hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he shall never see it.”

These verses are a divine documentary on His and our enemies, with a heart scan that accompanies every kind of wicked activity.

Psalm 35 contains an extensive list of character and behavioral traits. David talks of those that “seek after my soul” (verse 4), of “false witnesses [who] did rise up” against me (verse 11), of those “who laid to my charge things that I knew not” (verse 11). He adds, “But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not. With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth” (verses 15,16).

David as much as says that the enemy “wrongly rejoiced” over him. Those that hated him without a cause “wink[ed] with the eye” (verse 19), as a way of telegraphing their malicious pleasure in the hurts, wounds and distresses they inflicted. All who have ever had even the shadow of such treatment will know about body language in communicating malice.

Still more hurtful moves against David were attacks on his reputation and integrity, “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not” (Psalm 35:11) and, “false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty” (Psalm 27:12).

Most grievous of all that his enemies did against him surfaces in his words, “they took counsel against me, they devised to take away my life” (Psalm 31:13).

In our experience, so often the worst of hateful enemies are the first to pretend love and open arms and neighborliness. “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords” (Psalm 55:21). The Psalms tear off the masks of hypocrisy, which shall all be fully and individually exposed in the final Day of Judgment before the Judge of all the earth. Nothing can be hid from His eyes.

Take the character traits and behaviors that have been singled out above and join them with other such Psalms: you will see and feel the enemies’ antagonism. Read or hear the news from here and across the world: you will hear of threats, deceit, schemes, ridicule, contempt, misrepresentations, bullying, assassination or its attempts. These are all the stuff of cruelty. Such behavior is engaged in by both rich and poor.

Hatred and enmity characterize any unregenerate person against another, as Paul states in Titus 3:3, “For we ourselves also were sometimes ... hateful and hating one another.” However, there is a peculiarly malignant hatred of the world against believers. There was no friendship between Pilate and Herod, but when Christ came on the scene, they laid their enmity down and joined forces against Him: “And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves” (Luke 23:12).

We need a thoughtful, healthy view of our adversaries. On one hand, we certainly do not want to be paranoid, so that we are frozen in silence and inaction in the face of opposition. On the other hand, Christians cannot fall victim to a flippant, casual attitude because of a misguided opinion that God loves everybody in the same

way, or the notion that all men are basically good.

Such erroneous opinions increase the danger from our enemies. How much easier for the enemy to succeed in his warfare if we feel he poses minimal harm to us or we do not even recognize that he exists. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

But for all that enmity by the Jews, Paul wrote the Romans, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). Paul gives the example of loving our enemies by praying for them which despitefully use us.

Our adversaries can operate against us in many ways. Their attacks may not be just open and palpable, but also subtle and insidious. They endanger not just our physical lives, but also our usefulness and enjoyment of life. They can threaten the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, and the right to keep and bear arms to protect ourselves. They can undermine God’s Word so that our thinking is flawed about ourselves, our faith, and our purpose in life.

Evil men are not just barging into our houses with intent to do physical harm. They may be seeking to subvert our way of thinking and way of life and take away what is precious to us. In whatever manner the adversary attacks, Scripture, history, and personal experience teach us that “the wise man’s eyes are in his head” (Ecclesiastes 2:14). In order to preserve all that God has given us to glorify and enjoy Him forever, we must be armed and on the lookout for foes of every kind.

Countless brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are already

enduring face-to-face encounters with hateful adversaries. There is no doubt that open antagonism to Bible Christianity is on the rise, even in our own country. We do not know when our day may come, but we must prepare by laying God’s Word to heart and asking for grace for when the enemy may knock on our doors.

We move on to consider how we should respond to our enemies.

Our Deportment Toward Our Enemies

The enemies of the Christian, to use a phrase we often hear, are “a clear and present danger.” Thus, it is needful for us to weigh how we live with this somber reality. What then shall be our DEPORTMENT in arming ourselves against the varied attacks of our adversaries?

1. First, as in all of life, we will **PERSIST IN LIVING BY GOD’S LAW**. “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Whatever evil enemies might meditate against us, we set our hearts on doing good. By doing this, God may be pleased to restrain them.

As a general truth, Proverbs 16:7 states, “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” In principle, Peter agrees with Solomon when he writes of their adversaries, “whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:16).

God makes our upright behavior somewhat of a brake against the undeserved accusations of bad conduct. Christians overcome evil with good. We take our stand on the second great commandment, “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). That is the summation of the second table of the law, which is of everlasting force.

The Psalmist says, “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth

forever” (Psalm 119:160). When Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, said, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44), that was not new and contradictory legislation.

It was in force all along, from Moses through the Psalms and prophets. Christ’s teaching gave new impetus to do it. There is no room in the Christian life for vindictiveness or vengeance. Paul wrote, “Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord” (Roman 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35).

Five times in the book of Acts, Luke writes of the Jews’ plots to kill the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:23,24; 21:31; 23:15; 25:3), and once Paul speaks himself of the effort to kill him (Acts 26:21). But for all that enmity by the Jews, Paul wrote the Romans, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). Paul gives the example of loving our enemies by praying for them which despitefully use us.

Imprecatory Psalms: But what about the Imprecatory Psalms, such as Psalms 5, 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, and 109? In these, the writers pray passionately for God’s judgments upon their enemies, who have wrongly inflicted fearful suffering upon them.

For example, in Psalm 69:18, 23-24, David prays, “Deliver me from mine enemies.” A few verses further on he prays, “Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not, and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.” In verse 28 he adds, “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous.”

Psalm 109:10-12 finds David petitioning God concerning his enemies: “Let his children be continually vaga-

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bonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children.”

Some commentators find these objectionable, pronouncing such Psalms as wickedly vindictive or savage. Others, scarcely sure what to think of that class of Psalms, feel they seem overly extreme. As grounds for recoiling against this prayer of David, some would rush to the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44). Before we fall in with the critics, who bark out their irreverent judgment upon the Imprecatory Psalms, remember certain things.

For one, David of all men, did not show himself vindictive. When Saul pursued him to take his life, David had an opportunity to kill Saul. However, David said to Abishai, “Destroy him not; for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (1 Samuel 26:9).

Was David a vindictive man? Compare Psalm 3:7 with 2 Samuel 18:5. Psalm 3 bears the God-inspired title, “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his own son.”

The imprecatory element is found in verse 7, where David prays, “Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.” David knew God had “broken the teeth of the ungodly” in the past, so, in essence, he is asking God to “break teeth” again. It is a prayer for God

to deal with David’s son to maintain divine justice.

But, compare his “break their teeth” prayer with what he said to Joab at the time he was chasing Absalom and his followers: “Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom” (2 Samuel 18:5). To God, David says, “Break their teeth” in the interest of justice. To his own officers he entreats, as it were, “stand down; for the sake of mercy be gentle with my son.”

Amputate the Imprecatory Psalms from the body of Holy Scripture and there is an evil ripple effect: the sinner does not fear divine judgment and thus his sense of danger is downgraded; and, he has less sense of guilt or need for God’s mercy and forgiveness, so he has less appreciation for God’s mercy and forgiveness and loses any sense of joy and thanksgiving for it.

Recall also that David was one of those “holy men of old” who spoke by the Holy Spirit, even in his Imprecatory Psalms. Our Lord said, “For David himself said by the Holy Ghost ...” (Mark 12:36). David’s words, then, form a part of the Holy Scripture that is not only “God-breathed” or inspired, but, according to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, “is *profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

Back in Psalm 69, David, as a type of Christ, prophesied of his enemies, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave vinegar to drink” (verse 21). Both Matthew (27:34) and Mark (15:23) cited these verses as being fulfilled in the crucifixion of Christ.

Right after this verse in Psalm 69, David went on to call down judgment

on his enemies, adding, “Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents” (verse 25). Where do we run into that verse in the New Testament? Matthew 23 contains Christ’s scathing rebukes of the scribes and Pharisees as “fools and blind” (verse 19), as “whited sepulchres” (verse 27), as a “generation of vipers” (verse 33), and concludes with Christ telling Jerusalem, as the capital and representative city of the Jews, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38).

The imprecatory petition of David had its ultimate and highest fulfillment in the “imprecatory” pronouncement of the Savior. David’s and Christ’s imprecations were declarations of justice upon wicked and obstinate enemies.

Thus, the Imprecatory Psalms are “Justice” Psalms, as they have been called, and also “Governmental” Psalms. A prayer for divine justice is not the same as being self-vindictive. If they are announcements of God’s justice on the wicked, they ought never serve as fuel for criticism, but be seen to exalt the holy justice of God, of whom it is said, “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Psalm 97:2).

In Psalm 5, David describes his wicked enemies in detail, concluding, “Destroy thou them, O God: let them fall by their own counsels ... *for they have rebelled against thee*” (verse 10). He is seeking justice for their sin against God.

The justice of God is a hiding place for those who suffer at the hands of their enemies. In Lamentations, Jeremiah says, “Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me.... Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands, Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:61,64-66).

We should be thankful for Psalms whose righteous thunder and light-

ning ought to put the fear of God in the hearts of His and our enemies. They are fitted to make men see and feel the evil of sin and their exposure to the just judgments of God on that account. That is a mercy. The “Justice” Psalms are suited to place a restraint upon men in the same way as God’s legislation for capital punishment is suited to restrain any taking of life; and, when life has been taken, to punish the murderer.

Rather than criticizing the Imprecatory Psalms, we should bless God for posting them all around to keep us back from presumptuous sins and to humble men to godly repentance. Critics of the Imprecatory Psalms might imagine they honor God by defaming them and at the same time dream that, by blacking out the cursing elements, they make them more attractive to men.

The opposite is true. Whoever tampers with God’s Word does so to his own spiritual hurt. Amputate the Imprecatory Psalms from the body of Holy Scripture and there is an evil ripple effect: the sinner does not fear divine judgment and thus his sense of danger is downgraded; and, he has less sense of guilt or need for God’s mercy and forgiveness, so he has less appreciation for God’s mercy and forgiveness and loses any sense of joy and thanksgiving for it.

The sinner is so dead to his sin that he needs every word God has given, not one imprecatory sentence less, to awaken him to his plight. Remove the imprecatory Psalms and the consequences will be a downgrading of every aspect of the gospel of grace. To find fault with them is to undermine what is for our own good as well as God’s glory.

Another reason it may be difficult to appreciate David forever lamenting the presence and treatment of enemies is that we think we have none. We are not aware of our enemies in personal experience. We have family, neighbors and fellow workers. We may think, “I know no one, or only

a few at best, who could be classed as enemies.”

In God’s providence, by which He “preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions,” He may be pleased to prevent people from harming us or fellow Christians, as they surely would if left entirely to themselves. This is what we call “common grace,” by which God causes unregenerate men to not act as wickedly as they naturally would, and by which he even moves them to perform acts of kindness.

When Paul was shipwrecked (Acts 27 and 28), those living on the isle of Malta were certainly unconverted people. Other unconverted people on Paul’s missionary journeys had repeatedly sought to kill him — “In deaths oft.” But Luke says of the Maltese that they “showed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold” (Acts 28:2).

Our Savior also acknowledged the good deeds of evil people when He said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children ...” (Matthew 7:11). That thousands around us give good gifts to their own children, as well as perform other good deeds, does not mean that they cannot be our enemies.

Common grace does not negate universal depravity. People may act the part of friends at the same time there is an underlying enmity in their hearts toward Christians. Speak some distinctively Christian belief in their hearing and they bare their teeth.

I knew a minister whose neighbor was very helpful and friendly and briefly attended the minister’s church. But, when the minister spoke of the unbelieving and impenitent going to hell, the neighbor replied, “no man is going to tell me I am going to hell.”

The Bible makes it clear that the Christian has enemies. Christ said, “... the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2), and John

But, the believer’s bitter experience with his enemies, by the Spirit’s working, brings about a deepening experience of God’s friendship — the life and blessedness of the soul.

wrote, “Marvel not ... if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). That should be enough to dig a deep notch in our minds as to the presence of enemies persistently, inexpressibly hostile to us.

If it is thought the Psalms make too much of enemies, perhaps we do not adequately reckon with the danger. After the Babylonians conquered Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Gedaliah was appointed governor over the Jews that were left in the land. When certain Jews informed Gedaliah that a particular man was committed to killing him, Jeremiah 40:14 says Gedaliah “believed them not,” but, in fact, that man did murder him. May God preserve us from minimizing the evil of our enemies by rejecting the Imprecatory Psalms or by accepting our own opinions above the Word of God.

2. Having dealt with the need to love our enemies and the issue of the Imprecatory Psalms, we go on to a second course of action in confronting our enemies: to **ACTIVELY AND CONSISTENTLY RESIST EVIL.**

James says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). The devil is the Christian’s greatest enemy. Spiritually speaking, Satan is the father of sinners. When sinners live the part of the believer’s enemies, the lust of their father, the devil, they will do (John 8:44). Resist him by resorting to the teaching of the Bible, as Christ did when the devil tempted Him, and by looking to Christ in faith and dependence. It will, by God’s own statement, cause him to flee from us.

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Resisting human enemies by which Satan attacks us may be used by God as an inhibiting influence on our foes. The three Hebrew youth resisted Nebuchadnezzar's edict. Joseph resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife. The apostles resisted the dictates of the Sanhedrin.

Though we cannot account for the mechanics by which God's methods are effective, they work because He declares that they do. Ready yourself for the activities of enemies by resisting them as far as can be lawfully done.

You can visit the jail in France where Huguenot Marie Durand (1711-1776) spent 38 years for the crime of honoring God over man's laws. She was only 19 years old, but refused to recant her Protestant faith, and encouraged and helped other prisoners to stay strong. You will see where she reportedly carved with her fingernail the word "resist" (*résister* in French) on the stone wall of the cell. This persevering woman never gave in to temptation.

3. A third way of countering enemies is to **LOOK FOR HELP AND PROTECTION FROM THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT**. A Christian does not look to human government first or exclusively for defense. Neither does he scorn it as unspiritual or intrusive.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the subordinate doctrinal standard of generations of Presbyterians, in its chapter "of the Civil Magistrate," states, "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained magistrates to be under him over all the people ... and ... hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers" (WCF, Chapter 23:1).

When the Christian is harried and tormented by his enemies, he may

resort to the civil powers. The more closely the laws of the civil government coincide with the law of God, the happier he shall be. When our civil government gives us a voice in choosing those who rule over us and allows us to exert our influence in the use of lawful means, we do well to respectfully let our voices be heard as a means of protecting ourselves, and others against the enemies of good order and righteousness.

Paul's appeal to the Roman authorities concerning his rights of Roman citizenship in Acts 22:25 is an example of resisting the hurtful advances of the enemy against the Christian.

The Christian has enemies. They can be many and cruel. But by and by we shall emerge out of "the valley of the shadow of death" where God's "rod and staff" have been our comfort, and there before us will be the table, a banquet table if you will, that God has prepared for us.

4. Last to be mentioned of what we do in response to enmity, which is the first in importance, is **TRUST IN AND PRAY TO GOD AS OUR DEFENDER AND DELIVERER**. "O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust; save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me" (Psalm 7:1).

"Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me" (Psalm 25:1,2).

"But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked,

and save them, because they trust in him" (Psalm 37:39,40).

"Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me ... And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant" (Psalm 143:9,12).

"In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm 56:4).

Those are a very few of the sentences that assert the psalmist's prayerful reliance on God's goodness, His mercy, His justice, and His power to build a wall of security around his covenant people or to rescue them from trouble.

These verses, along with dozens more like them, are beautiful reminders that our safety against the machinations of enemies is found in God alone. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Hear testimonies, even occasionally via the secular media, of God's deliverance from trouble, read the pages of church history, religious periodicals, and the prayer letters of missionaries, and they will display confidence in and dependence on God in withstanding or being delivered from all their enemies.

God assures us we shall have enemies, but along with that there is God's promise of our deliverance and of our enemy's everlasting defeat. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

God's Design Through Enemies

Last of all, there is the issue of God's DESIGN in allowing enemy cruelty. In all their acts of persecution against the Lord's people, the enemy means it for evil, but God means it for good (see Genesis 50:20). When he ordains to permit the enemy's evil, there are really bright spots.

1. One is that the evil is a practical demonstration that **THE ENEMY**

IS REAL AND ACTIVE. A teacher of science will have both theoretical lessons and hands-on lab sessions. So also, in a manner of speaking, this is how God teaches us. What the enemies of Christians do to them is a lab class in cruelty. In it, the doctrine of man's total depravity has its practical display. In meeting up with all the forms of the enemy's persecution, we see that fallen, unregenerate man is precisely what God in his Word says he is.

Real life exposure to unreasonable hatred settles in our minds and hearts the doctrine of human depravity and evokes a holy hatred for it and resistance to it. Furthermore, experiencing the world's enmity will motivate us to love God the more for His goodness, grace and kindness in Christ His Son.

2. Which brings us to the second bright spot: **ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ENEMY WILL SPIRITUALLY STRENGTHEN THE CHRISTIAN.** It is a universal law that strength comes through exercise. We are strengthened in holiness by fighting and standing against evil in the person of our enemies. Just as we see strength increasing in the young, either children or animals, as they have fun wrestling with one another, so in the dead serious contentions with cruel

enemies we grow in strength to do good and oppose evil.

Midway through Psalm 35, with its pictures of his enemies and their activities, David prays to God, "rescue my soul from their destruction, my darling [precious life, NKJV] from the lions. I will give thee thanks in the great congregation. I will praise thee among much people" (Psalm 35:17b,18).

The sight is like the sun breaking through the black clouds. In the middle of the battle, where he speaks of liars, murderers, mockers and the like, David has the presence of soul not only to ask for rescue, but to promise God thanksgiving and praise in anticipation of that rescue.

In Psalm 69 again — one of the Psalms that is thick with depictions of his enemies and their deeds — hear David amid the onslaught of foes: "let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high. I will praise the name of God with song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving" (Psalm 69:29b,30). That David should talk of praise and song and thanksgiving when his life and more hangs in the balance, is inexpressibly remarkable.

God in His mercy, by sovereign providence externally and by the internal operations of His Holy Spirit, inspires our thanksgiving, worship, trust, courage, perseverance, hope, and expectation. Stories of the brightest victories come off the field of the most fearful battles.

In the Psalms, the activities of multiplied enemies are seen — hatred, plots, schemes, misrepresentations, ridicule, and on and on. But, the believer's bitter experience with his enemies, by the Spirit's working, brings about a deepening experience of God's friendship — the life and blessedness of the soul.

For the enemy's hatred there is God's love; in the place of lies there is truth; in place of rejection, a blessed acceptance in the Son; in place of grief, joy; in place of persecution, protection. "Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee" (Psalm 76:10).

What is seen in David's experiences with enemies has countless reproductions in the lives of the people of God across all the centuries. A missionary told us of one. On the way home from a Bible study where Psalm 91, with its verse, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust," was part of the study, a lone woman on a dark, rural road braked at a stop sign. Suddenly the passenger door exploded open and a man with enemy intent jumped in. Startled and frightened, the woman began to exclaim, "Your feathers Lord, your feathers!" The intruder jumped out as fast as he had jumped in. This is only one example of a fearful moment intersecting with Scripture and the faith in God that it elicits.

The Christian has enemies. They can be many and cruel. But by and by we shall emerge out of "the valley of the shadow of death" where God's "rod and staff" have been our comfort, and there before us will be the table, a banquet table if you will, that God has prepared for us. Where? Where but in the "presence of mine enemies." All of them. •

¹*The Geneva Study Bible* (10:13) notes, "this prince is an evil but powerful spiritual being ... affecting Persian rule," p. 1351.

²"The angel (described in Daniel 10:5,6) has been trying to communicate with him [Daniel] three weeks, but has not been able to until Michael, one of the archangels, overcomes the spiritual power (a demon) over the Persian kingdom. Willem A. VanGemeren, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible, Daniel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 599.

³"It is related (20) that the speaker will fight with the prince of Persia (*i.e.* the spiritual power behind the gods of Persia)..." Edward J. Young, *The New Bible Commentary, "Daniel,"* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 680.



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REDEEMING THE TIME

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Redeeming the Time is a quarterly publication with the purpose of encouraging God's people and applying God's Word to the issues of our day.

Individual copies are distributed free of charge, but the generous donations of God's people are necessary for this ministry to continue. Checks may be made payable to "Redeeming the Time," and mailed to: P.O. Box 26281, Charlotte, NC 28221-6281. All donations are tax deductible.

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Sponsored by Publication Fund • Bible Presbyterian Church • Charlotte, NC



Faith Presbytery, Bible Presbyterian Church, held its spring meeting in Chester and Marcus Hook, PA, on March 29, 2019. To celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the local church, the morning session was held in the church's former Gothic building, which is now part of the campus of Widener University. The Marcus Hook Church did a splendid job of hosting the meetings. The Rev. Dr. H. Ronald Vandermey, pastor of Bethany Bible Presbyterian Church, in Glendale, CA, was elected Moderator; the Rev. Hal Ricker, missionary to Guatemala, was elected Vice Moderator; and Elder Brad Gsell, of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, NC, was elected Stated Clerk/Treasurer.

