

Fathers and brothers, I don't think it takes a lot to establish this thesis, but Jesus Christ is shaking his church. Just survey the denominations around us that are like-minded, and you see a great shaking, great controversies, great problems all throughout the visible church in the Reformed world, but let's not think about our brothers. Let's think about our small denomination these past few years.

We grieve with our brethren in the Pacific Coast Presbytery, as all of our historic California churches are now vacant. The Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery... It seems like the last several meetings they've had there have been great controversies. There has been a grievous trial that is taking place even this week. But what about our own presbytery? Several of our pulpits are open. Ministers have left the ministry. Four churches have closed in recent years, as you have heard in recent reports.

We lament these things. We should. That is right, and that is proper. We plead, "Lord, give us more ministers. Lord, give us more finances." We beg, "Lord, send us more men for the ministry." But seldom do we ask, "Lord Jesus, do you have a controversy with us? Do you have a controversy with our ministry? Do you have a controversy with our congregations, with our presbytery, with our synod?"

Seldom do we scrutinize our hearts against the word of Jesus Christ and see if he is saying to us, **"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."** In other words, "You think you are alive; you think you are doing well, but you are dead spiritually." He says, "I know your works." The implication is...*Do we?* Does this not strike us with fear that King Jesus might have a controversy with us? Is Jesus asking, "Have you no ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches?"

Our problem is that we often think we are innocent victims, bystanders, rather than those who are in need of repentance, but church history is littered with the rubble of dead churches. History is full of apostate churches that once preached the gospel, that once thundered the words of life from their pulpits, but now the only word from God to them is, "Ichabod. The glory has departed." The church of our text, Sardis, is long gone. The city is a site of ruins. Its end came suddenly, as Jesus promised.

So, I preach today on the theme of our need to be watchful, to continually repent corporately before God of our sins, that ours would be a true, vital, evangelical religion full of the presence of Jesus Christ to the aim that we would strengthen the flock God has entrusted to us, that our candlestick would not be snuffed out but be flamed into a tremendous gospel flame. So, with that theme ahead of us, let's consider it under three heads. First is *the message*, second is *the searching*, and third is *the strengthening*.

1. *The message*. I trust, in a body like this, we understand the context of the chapter, Sardis being one of the seven churches of the Revelation, but as way of reminder, thus far the Revelation has shown Jesus Christ to stand among his churches, each church represented by a candlestick. In other words, he is surveying Zion, the church, and he takes note of her. The seven churches represent the catholic, or universal, church; *seven* being a number of completeness.

So, his message is for all of his churches. As he inspects each and every one, he threatens them, telling them if they will not repent, they will be removed; threatening, as in Revelation 2:5, to remove their candlestick out of their place. Our problem is when we listen to a man say that, we think this is a harsh message, but ultimately, Jesus Christ has said this is a message of love. Verse 19: **"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."**

Here he addresses each church's angel...that is, each church's messenger...meaning, the ministers of the churches, and of course, by extension, as we consider our body here, both ruling and teaching elders as governors of the church. In other words, we particularly are being addressed by this text.

Often, we want to preach it to our members, but really, particularly, the message is for us, both as representatives of our local congregations and of this regional presbytery, and when we're part of the synod, part of the synod as well. This message is for us to take up first and then deliver to our people.

Christ introduces himself in verse 1. He has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Let us not lose sight of our majestic Savior and Lord. He says he is complete, and he is majestic, with power and provision. Our sin begins because we do not see Christ as he is: majestic in his exaltation and utterly complete for all that the church needs.

The seven spirits here are a reference to the perfect Holy Spirit, of course, who is called the *Spirit of Christ*. And who are the seven stars he holds in his hand? His ministers, a perfect number of them. Revelation 1:20 says the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. He reminds you, brothers, where you are located in Revelation 1:16. The seven stars are in his right hand.

Fathers and brothers, you are held in his right hand, which is both an awesome and a terrible place to be. Awesome when you are faithful, for you can have a holy boldness in the ministry. Who can snatch us out of Christ's hand when we do his will? But as the ministers of Sardis found out, a terrible place to be if unfaithful.

So, what was the controversy Christ had with his ministers in Sardis? Verse 1: **"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."** This is important for us to take note of. The reputation the church had was one of being faithful and alive. The other six churches might look at Sardis and her elders and say, "Now *that* is a faithful church...faithful in doctrine, faithful in works." But what did Jesus see in them? "Thou art dead." Spiritually dead. They were hypocrites.

One might look at the Reformed Presbyterian Church or the Midwest Presbytery or our local bodies, and they might perceive a church renowned for her commitment to biblical orthodoxy and biblical worship. They might perceive a church that is renowned for standing on the Confession of Faith and the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures. Yes, very good, but could Jesus perceive something else entirely? Could he be perceiving death?

Could he be perceiving whitewashed tombs? Could he be perceiving hypocrites? Would Jesus look at our assembly right now and say, "You know, in this room there is a form of godliness but a denial of the power thereof"? Is there true, vital, heart religion in us, a faith of repentance and love for God and for neighbor, a desire to discharge our duty from the heart, and for us and our people to grow in the beauty of holiness?

He tells the minister in Sardis, "Be watchful..." Another way you could translate that is, "Wake up." **"Be watchful [wake up], and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God."** He says, "You think your works are perfect." Or another way you could speak of it is *satisfying*. "But they do not satisfy me. You are self-satisfied, but you are not satisfying me, Jesus." He says, "Wake up. Be watchful. Be a watchman, as you are charged to be in the Bible."

He chastises. **"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."** His message exhorts us all to examine ourselves and to be watchful and vigilant, to recall what we have received out of his Word, to fasten our hold on them and repent, to not be satisfied with an outward, dead orthodoxy but to cultivate true heart faith and religion. So, with that to set the message in front of us, at least on a surface level, let's consider the second heading now.

2. *The searching.* What ought to always cause us to be humble before the Lord is the Lord says he knows our works. "I know thy works." Jesus sees them all. He peers into our hearts. Can you know, can I know what he sees? Yes, you and I can. Through the Word of God, you can know exactly what he sees in you. Hebrews 4:12: **"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."**

Do we forget our great call is to be men who are devoted to prayer and the Word? We ourselves are the ones who are called the *instructors of Israel*, so to speak. Before we go and instruct others... This is our charge of hypocrisy. Paul puts before the people of God in Romans, "Isn't it that the name of God is blasphemed through you?" We who teach are often guilty of grievous sins, and as we are men consecrated to the Word of God, we should know what God sees in us if we would reflect on it.

We are called to be men faithful to the Word in both heart and deed. We are called to hold fast to the teaching of this book in every area, and we must search out our doctrine in our hearts, and wherever we fall short, we must repent. We are children of the Reformation. Do we forget what the first of Luther's Ninety-five Theses was? The whole of the Christian life is one of repentance. We teach this to our members, or at least we should if we're faithful. We teach them.

Repentance is an evangelical grace. It is a gift from God. It is blessed of the Lord, for in it he promises, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you," in Malachi 3:7. And who can forget how beautifully Jesus portrayed it in the parable of the prodigal son? The father runs out to meet his repentant son, to embrace and kiss his filthy son. Repentance. It's the grace of God that draws Christ close to us. We remind our people of this.

We teach them repentance is not just confessing our sin but endeavoring to forsake it, that they must turn to the rich mercies of God, turning away from their sin and to new obedience to follow Jesus by the Spirit's help. The question for us this morning and for all of the days of our lives is...*Are we men of repentance?* Not just concerning our personal sins, though that is where we must begin, but also, as elders, our sins of the ministry, as in the Christ's controversy in Sardis.

Are we also men of corporate repentance? Are our sessions as sessions repenting? Do our sessions as sessions search to see if we are holding fast to what we receive? For the guilt cannot be laid merely on one man in Sardis but on all the body of elders who were called to shepherd the flock. Is our presbytery doing the same? Is our synod doing the same? Are our church courts regularly searching to see if the Lord has a controversy against us?

When was the last time your session sat down to examine yourselves, asking questions like these: Are we faithful to the command, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that the Lord's house may be filled"? (Luke 14:23) Are our ministers enduring afflictions, doing the work of an evangelist, making full proof of their ministry? (2 Timothy 4:5) Do we seek the lost? Do we endure afflictions for the sake of the elect or are we cozy in our buildings? Do we ask ourselves these questions?

Are we faithful to exercise pure religion, undefiled before God and our Father, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction? Are we faithful in our worship, neither adding to nor diminishing from God's commandments? Do we search and see if our practices have divine warrant? Do we embrace them warmly from the heart or are we men of cold, dead tradition?

Ministers, in our preaching, can we say with the apostle, "Truly, I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God"? Or are we men who preach our pet doctrines and avoid hard sayings of the Word; instead, prophesying smooth things and pleasing men? Are we, as a court, faithful to shepherd those God has bought with his own blood, as he put it in Acts, chapter 20?

Are we cultivating that great mark of the Christian church...charity, love one for another? Do we, as sessions, love one another? Do the men of this presbytery love one another? So we ask. We go beyond the session. We go to the presbytery, as we believe in our polity that very much these churches may be presbyteries. Are we, as presbyteries, diligent? Are we diligent to shepherd men through exams and ministerial training or have we sinned in some of those areas?

Are we helping support congregations in need? Are we reproofing congregations in grievous error? Are we diligent to reprove ministers and elders who sin or do we wink at them because we like them? Have we tried and tested ourselves, in other words, in every area against what we received in the law and the testimony? I could go on and on with this kind of inquiry. I have no desire or ability to be comprehensive this morning. Maybe a better man than I can be.

All I can say is the Lord says in the second verse, "Be watchful." Fathers and brothers, he says, "Wake up." Are we awake? Are we watching? Are we repenting? Are we examining? If we ever plead with the Lord for favor in our ministry, we must heed this message. Here's an example. We

say we are seeking out more ministers now, and we're bewildered. Why do we have so few men for the ministry? Why do we have so few students seeking the pastorate?

Should we not first ask the question...*Are we faithful in the ministry?* Why would the Lord of the harvest send us a man if we do not go into the ripe harvest ourselves? If we do not seek the lost and we do not shepherd God's people with love, care, and compassion, why would the Chief Shepherd send us a star out of his right hand? It makes no sense.

When we consider the size of our congregations... If we are not diligently caring for those God has purchased with his own blood, why would we imagine the Good Shepherd sending us any more of his precious lambs to tend to? If we will not imitate Christ ourselves in our conduct and our behavior as sessions... If people cannot perceive in our sessions and our presbyteries something of Jesus Christ in us, why would he send us any more to imitate us as we imitate him? It makes no sense.

Fathers and brothers, our greatest need is repentance and holiness. If we resolve to walk blamelessly before him, he will, I believe with my whole heart, send men out of his right hand, and he will draw more of his lambs to us if we strengthen that which remains. So, again, I ask the question. When did your session last examine itself? When was the last time elders have sat down and inquired of the Lord together? "Speak, Lord, for thy servants heareth."

When did you last consider what your congregation's corporate sins might be? The teaching of the seven churches is that every congregation has a certain character about it. You see that here in the Revelation. Some are loveless. Some are full of dead orthodoxy. Some are worldly. Some are heretical. Some are full of the lusts of the flesh, and so on. So, when did you last open God's law as a session and ask, "Who are we?"

Or maybe let's draw ourselves closer, as elders, to something else. When did you last turn and consider your ordination queries and ask, "How have we kept them?" When did you last open the membership covenant, which, in our polity, we each have to take as well, and ask the very same? "How have I measured myself according to the oath I took before God Almighty to do these things?"

Our own session here in Dallas was deeply humbled and convicted by our lack of doing this. At our presbytery's last day of fasting and prayer, we finally did it, long overdue, and how the Lord opened our ears to hear of how many ways we have been unfaithful in the ministry, the many ways we have held to a form of godliness but denied the power thereof. We took stock of our pride, we took stock of our labors, and we saw where we did not hold fast.

It was a deeply humbling thing to do it. In a public worship service at the end of the fast day, we abased ourselves by confessing our sins before God in prayer, resolving by the grace of God to turn away from our sins. It wasn't until that point, I don't think, that our session finally understood that a day of fasting is meant to be a day of deep repentance and contrition, which is what the Bible calls it...a day to afflict our souls under the mighty hand of God.

The early fast, you remember (it's connected to the Day of Atonement), was a day to afflict the soul in Leviticus 23:29. I'm going to draw some applications based on our presbytery's past. Yet in our prayer guide, the bold part, which most congregations noted, we found little or nothing to say about contrition and repenting of our sins. What does the Lord say here in connection to strengthening what remains? **"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."** Repent.

Yet we are adverse, we are allergic to calling for contrition on fast days. What I want to put before you is that it is the self-righteous man, it is the self-righteous session, and the self-righteous presbytery that looks at a text like this and says, "No. Jesus has nothing to say to us." Are we so prideful to think that we discharge our duty so very faithfully, men? Knowing what great sinners we are and how untrustworthy our flesh is and how great a Savior we need, why would we think we need to neglect the grace of repentance? Yet we often do.

I won't speak for your session. Of course not. But I am just asking for you to consider it. The Bible calls for it when we see calamity coming. When we see calamity coming, the Bible calls us to do this. We think about the great calamity in Amos' day. It wasn't a famine of bread; it was a famine of the Word of God, the kind of famine we are facing in our pulpits today in our presbytery.

Do we forget Joel 2 that tells us to corporately repent with all of our hearts, with fasting and weeping and mourning, rending our hearts but not our garments, knowing that the Lord is gracious and merciful to return to us when we do? You know, one of the things I desperately and deeply love about the Covenanter Church is that it has understood this. Do you remember how our covenant of 1871 bewailed our corporate sins? I'll read a significant portion of it, and I hope you endure it, because I think it shows us where our forefathers were in the faith and where we often are today. Listen to the tenor of it.

"We acknowledge, with shame, want of faith in God and in the promises and threatenings of his Word, formality in religious services, pride, selfishness, vanity, conformity to the spirit of the world, lukewarmness, untenderness in our walk and in our dealings with others, unwatchfulness, sinful security, and want of spirituality in our disposition and deportment. We are chargeable with remissness in the duties of the closet, the family, the prayer meeting, and the sanctuary.

We have not hallowed the Sabbath by observing it with the care and sacredness required by the divine commandment. We have shown criminal apathy and unfaithfulness in that we have not cherished love for all men, and especially for the faithful in Christ Jesus, and in that we have not exhorted one another daily, and sought to promote the spiritual growth and holiness of the saints.

We mourn that religion has not been cultivated and practiced in our homes as it should have been. Parents have not felt in any adequate measure their responsibility for the salvation of their children; and in consequence, family worship, reading the Scriptures in the household, instruction in the accepted manuals of the faith of the church, and pleading the covenant and promise of God on behalf of our seed, are mournfully neglected.

We lament that, as professing witnesses for Christ, we have failed in obedience to his command to preach the gospel to every creature, to make known his will and law among the nations, and to administer with fidelity the law and discipline of his own house. While property is hoarded up, or wasted upon the luxuries and vanities of life, and in very many cases upon objects pernicious to both body and soul, means are wanting to make known the way of salvation in the sight of the heathen.

We confess and bewail our forgetfulness of the obligations laid upon us by the Covenants of our fathers, in that we have often walked contrary thereunto, in not testifying fully and clearly in word and act for the claims of Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. We have sinned, too, in that, while witnessing for social covenanting as an ordinance of God, binding under the dispensation of the gospel, we have not as a church in this country, by our own act, performed the duty."

It continues on and on from there...a beautiful picture of how we have searched our hearts, as a corporate group, and repented in times past. I suppose this is a question for another day, maybe. Have we been faithful to that professed repentance or does Christ have a controversy with us because we have not even kept that covenant?

All that to say, brethren, we must constantly ask, as our godly forefathers have asked so often, "Does the Lord have a controversy with us?" We must never assume all is well. The best possible state to be in, as believers, as congregations, or presbyteries, is to be ever humbled under the mighty hand of God, to ever cast ourselves on Christ's mercies, distrusting our sinful flesh.

We have lamented this as a court ourselves. Our church courts, from sessions to synod, are often run as business meetings, not as spiritual meetings to be filled with those glorious first works commended by Christ, courts filled with faith and repentance, love to God, love to neighbor, and consecrating ourselves to God. We can often find in our meetings, whether at the session level or anyplace else, a form of godliness that denies the power thereof.

So, let's search ourselves and do so corporately at every level. This just came into my mind. This is not anything more than a suggestion that just came to me, but what if, for instance, all of our standing committees not only did the work of, let's say, church planting and evangelism or vital churches, or whatever, but also considered and searched our ways and brought to presbyteries and synods, maybe, suggestions on ways we have fallen short of the glory of God and need to amend our ways?

3. *The strengthening.* In verse 2, Jesus instructs. "**Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...**" What does this mean? It means we are to strengthen that which remains spiritually, lest the souls in our care die spiritually, lest they go totally apostate. That is what Jesus demands of us.

As I thought on that... You'll forgive me for pulling out particular examples, but I think they're helpful to us as we consider our meeting. I was utterly haunted by the report of our former member of the Superior, Nebraska, congregation, which says that this man has denounced the

faith and lives a reprobate life, so we're thinking of removing him from the rolls or excommunicating him or something.

I think on Christ's threat here in this very chapter to blot out names from the Book of Life, in verse 5, because his ministers did not strengthen that which remains. I'm not passing any judgment on how the man got to that point, if we were faithful or not. That's before my time in the church, but I simply ask again. Should we not examine ourselves and ask the question...*Are we faithful?*

How did we seek to strengthen that which remained of Superior, Nebraska? Did we search for signs of the man's apostasy? Did we warn him with tears? I don't know. But have we inquired, "Lord, do you have a controversy with us?" Were we not watchful to strengthen the things which remain and were ready to die? I don't know. I'm asking the question. So, he speaks of a remnant in Sardis in verses 4 and 5.

**"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."**

Let's praise the Lord. Who are these undefiled? These are those sinners who have had the garments of Christ's righteousness given to them; whose sins have been washed away by the most potent detergent of all, the blood of Jesus Christ; cleansed and clothed by him so that he will be their mediator, confessing them before God.

But they're also, you notice, those men and women who walk with him. That is what we are called to long for for our people. This is what we are called to point them to. We are called to point them to be clothed in Christ's righteousness, to depend on him alone for salvation, but also clothed in the garments of personal holiness, walking with him.

This is that vital religion that makes itself a habit of exercising faith in Jesus, of repenting often, growing in holiness, loving God and neighbor, desiring worship, longing to evangelize, and committing good works to the glory of the Father. When we speak of strengthening that which remains, we are called to this, to cultivate this vital religion in our flocks, to warn sheep that are going astray of sin's deceitfulness, to send them to Jesus and tell them, "Walk with him all the days of your life."

He says, "Be watchful in this vital duty." So are we? Are we preemptive? Are we doing home visitations? Are we searching out where the sheep may be going astray? Are we strengthening them spiritually in our preaching and our teaching and our shepherding with them one by one? It was said of Sardis before the church was planted that one of Cyrus' soldiers climbed up a rock face so vertical the Sardians did not find it necessary to set a watchman there. That complacency in their security was their doom, and the city fell quickly.

That's what Christ is bringing mind to his ministers, his own city's history. We are to be diligent and watchful and never grow complacent. When we think about the Sardians and their rock face

that they trusted in, we are fools, brothers, if we think our standards will save us or our polity will protect us. Not if we are not watchmen. Our fall will be rapid, and it will be astonishing to watch.

I say this as a confessional man who believes our standards guard orthodoxy, and I say this as a divine right Presbyterian who believes all other polities are sinful, but I am terribly fearful that I might lose vital religion if I don't watch over my own soul first and then don't watch over the souls of my people. I'm terribly fearful my congregation might lose vital religion, experiential religion, if our elders do not take heed to ourselves and to the flock.

The same goes for our presbytery, as presbyteries. Is this not what we were taught of by God? **"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."** That is a watchman being described, Paul to Timothy. Jesus warns us here to be watchful, because as I have said, our doom can come in an instant. He never gave Sardis a timetable. He gives none of us a timetable.

The third verse says, **"If therefore thou shalt not watch [if you are neglectful], I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."** Meaning, they had to repent immediately. Sadly, the minister of Sardis did not heed the message, and today nothing remains. This is an urgent message, not one Jesus allows us to study in committee for three years. It is an urgent message.

Like *this*, in a snap, a congregation or even a presbytery can vanish. You know it. I know it as well. Have we not seen it with our own eyes? One day, what appears to be a healthy congregation or a healthy presbytery there, "Thou hast a name that liveth," but the very next day disaster comes on it. "I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come unto thee." Why? Because we are not watchful.

Our session has trembled as congregations or presbyteries we have admired from afar have instantly, it seems, overnight, been plunged into turmoil or even vanished entirely. Too often, I think, we're quick to say this is Satan's mischief. Sometimes it is, but in our text, Jesus did not say this is anything to do with Satan's mischief. Our first duty is to ask, "Is it our mischief that has caused this? Is it our mischief for not holding fast to what Christ has taught us?"

This is also our duty to gently explain to our brethren in congregations and presbyteries that are hurting as well. An appeal has come to us from our brothers in the Pacific Coast Presbytery. Let's exhort them in this way too. I know this sounds hard. I know some might object and say, "Brother, if we do that, we will be as Job's friends." And we could be, so we have to search our hearts. That's a grave danger we can fall into.

We're to be doing this out of love to them. A proper and right way to go about it is, first, not to presume guilt on anybody we exhort with this message. I do not in any way impute any guilt to anyone here in terms of the message here, but, really, a call to examine ourselves. We're not to needle our brothers, as Job's friends did, but we are to encourage them to search themselves out or gently tell them of our perception, if we have perceived corporate sin in their midst.

Secondly (and this is more important for us), we must not do anything of this until we ourselves have passed the logs out of our own eyes. Our Lord says we are free to help our brothers with the mote in their eyes if we are going to be men of repentance ourselves. These are the things Job's friends never did.

In conclusion... Again, am I saying the Lord has a controversy against us? No. But, please, let us watch and examine ourselves, even as Jesus is doing right now as we assemble before him, as individual elders, as sessions, and as a presbytery. Given the rarity of this practice in our midst and what great sinners we all know we are, I do wonder, though, what controversies the Lord might have with us. We discovered several as a session at Dallas RPC.

So, let me exhort us to search ourselves. Let us never be haughty. A man who refuses to examine himself is a haughty, prideful man. Let us fear not what we discover, but let us fear being unfaithful to Jesus. Let us fear that our churches have a name that looks alive but is rather dead. Fathers and brothers, again, when we turn to him in repentance, he has promised by his own solemn oath to return to us.

You remember that we are called to repent so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord. He has promised he will embrace us, as the father of the Prodigal, because he is good and merciful. What keeps us from examining ourselves? I'll say it again. It's our stinking pride, which is a stench in Christ's nostrils.

Our flesh bristles at the suggestion the Lord might have something against us, but it is biblical and beautiful to be humbled before the Lord. It eases the conscience as well. The Lord again says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." What is the tenor of our repentance? Be zealous. Earnestly desire it. Love the grace of repentance. Love the idea of humbling ourselves before God, that he might exalt us in due time. Christ, out of his great love and care, rebukes and chastens only those he loves. Our duty is to be zealous.

This meeting, he is walking among us and observing us, brothers. He will snuff out candlesticks, but also, we believe he adds to gospel light as well. He carries us in his right hand. He will throw us away if we are unfaithful, but he will also clasp his hand tighter around us all the more if we walk close to him. So, may God help us elders discharge our duty to Christ in such ways, and may we always have ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches. Amen. Please rise for prayer if able.

Father and our God, this is a hard saying out of your Word, so, Lord, we pray for the grace to receive it. Father, in many ways, the men of this presbytery have modeled the grace of repentance. I have seen it on the floor of presbytery and synod as men have repented publicly, but we ask for more, Father, that none of us would ever be prideful and haughty, that all of us would be willing to receive a rebuke from our brother among us, that we would all search our hearts and sessions and see and measure our love for God and love for neighbor against the standard of the Word.

Would you do this, Father? For we love our denomination. We love our presbytery. We love our individual congregations, and the last thing any of us want to ever hear from you, O God, is

"Depart from me. I never knew you." Help us be faithful in the discharge of our duty. Help us review what we are called to as men of God, and, Father, would you help us be faithful, for we cannot be faithful unless you bless us so.

Give us the heart and desire to walk blamelessly before you all the days of our lives, that we would strengthen your flock and that they would imitate us even as we imitate you, O God. We pray all this now for the health and blessing of Zion. In Jesus' name, amen.