

Rev. R. McCurley - Question and Answer Session

Nobleford Presbyterian Church

April 7, 2024

Well, good evening, everyone.

Before we begin, let me just, on behalf of Pastor Beers and Elder Randy Taylor and myself, let me just express to you as a congregation our gratitude. Thank you so much for all of your hospitality. It has been wonderful. We're grateful for all the expressions of love to us, patience with us, and all of the wonderful South Alberta care that you've provided for us over these last few days. It has been a genuine, sincere joy to spend time with you, to get to know you better, and to be able to talk about the things of the Lord together. So thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all of that. So I've been asked to field some questions, and we've had four pages of questions submitted. So amounting to 25 questions, every single question is good. So they're all good questions. It's a mix of theological, historical, practical, principal, and so on. But if I were to give you adequate answers to each of these questions, you would watch that clock turn past 4 a.m. before we leave here this evening. So I'm going to try to do my best with the Lord's help to keep my answers concise and hopefully clear. And I'm going to consolidate because there is some overlap. We may not get through all these questions. I don't think we will. The ones that are left unanswered, you can bring those, of course, to Pastor Backhurst or to a member of the session after this. So let's jump in.

"1. How can we respond (with a Biblical answer) to people who believe that only in a certain denomination can you be saved?"

And the first question is, how can we respond with a biblical answer to people who believe that only in a certain denomination can you be saved? So excellent question. But to be honest, it is astonishing to me that anyone would actually believe that you can only be saved within the confines of one church. This would be, for example, completely alien from any position held in the historic reform tradition. Our confessions actually codify the principles and doctrines regarding this. But just open your Bibles, and that's where we want to go, is the Bible itself. There's the Lord writing to Galatia through the Apostle Paul, and they're a wreck, and yet Paul still believes they're a true church, and he still believes that the gospel is to be found there. You go to Corinth, disaster, all sorts of public scandal, disunity, false doctrine, all sorts of difficulties, and yet it is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he's calling upon them to repent and believe. You go to the other epistles, or to the end, to Revelation 2 and 3, the seven churches of Asia, And there again, just mind boggling scandal, false doctrine, all sorts of difficulties. The Lord's threatening them to take away their candlestick, but there's still churches and he's calling them to repent. To say that the gospel is found or that people can only be converted in one church is to unchurch the rest of the world. And this is a provocation to the king and head of the church. You know, one of our Reformed fathers said, do not bury the church before she is dead. When we talk about the church, we're talking about the bride of Jesus Christ. And so to say that a person cannot be converted in any other place other than one church is something that makes Christ angry. because we're not to speak of His church in that way. Obviously, there's at a more basic level

some obvious problems with this position, and that would mean everybody before that denomination came into existence was lost. So no one was saved, including the churches of the New Testament, because the denomination didn't exist then. It would mean churches in other nations throughout the world, in all of the other countries, that there's no one converted anywhere. And all of this is, it's not just ludicrous, it is a serious perversion. and provocation to the Lord himself. So I would warn you against it.

Our Westminster Confession talks about individual churches having varying degrees of purity and things that are off. And so there's always that mix, but the Lord is pleased in his sovereign grace to continue to draw and convert sinners in lots of places. So that's where I would leave you with that. There's a number of questions on the marks of grace, how we know whether we love the Lord, how do we know for sure whether we're converted, questions related to assurance. Let me try to put this in a nutshell for you. There's four categories of people. Four categories of people. The first category is those who are converted and who have confidence, know that they're converted. Then you have, secondly, those, second category, those who are converted and do not, are not confident, are not persuaded, are not assured that they're converted. Third category is those who are unconverted and yet are persuaded that they are converted. And then the fourth category is those who are unconverted and know that they're unconverted and aren't persuaded otherwise. So questions of assurance boil down to those two middle categories, right? Those who are converted and yet unassured or persuaded of the Lord's good intentions to them or whether they're in a state of grace. and those who are unconverted and yet think that they are. So these questions about marks of grace, assurance, and so on, boiled under those two categories. And the Lord gives us what you can think of as a three-legged stool. And if you look in the Westminster Confession, you'll find these points enumerated under the chapter on assurance. So there's first of all something objective that helps us with regards to the question of whether we're in a state of grace, whether we're converted and so on. And that is the promises. So we begin with the promises. The Lord gives us all sorts of gospel promises. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, right? We can just list them, you hear them regularly from the pulpit and so on. Our confidence rests in the first place on something outside of us, on the reliability of God and his word, the reliability of the promise. If we believe, we turn to him, we will live. If we believe on him, we shall be saved and so on. I am turning to him, I am believing, and therefore the promise is true as far as my being saved. So that's something objective. Then you have something subjective, and that would include what we get in places like Galatians and Romans, where God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we're children of God. So this is the Spirit of God's ministry in coming into the soul. and bringing that persuasion and assurance and confidence that indeed we belong to him. The third leg of the stool you could think of as evidence. And so that's where the marks of grace come in. So, the Bible provides us with a ton of material on the marks of grace. It distinguishes true saving faith from historic faith and temporary faith. It distinguishes worldly sorrow from godly sorrow that leads to repentance, different types of repentance, love, and so on. All of that is an important part of what the Scripture gives to us. But here again, we're coming to an object of standard of scripture to bring ourselves to the test of what the Bible itself says. So the marks of grace are part of the means of grace, the word of God that is used to help us see clearly ourselves in light of what the Bible describes regarding those who are converted. So we actually need all three of these. And if, for

example, all we did was preached on the marks of grace, that would be a problem without preaching the promises. But, likewise, if we only preached on the promises and never brought a discriminating element that included laying out what the Bible says about the marks of grace, that would be a problem, right? There has to be a balance in that in order for the true child of God to be brought under a confident assurance of his gracious dealings with them. And so you can at least begin there, right? This is a topic that you could preach a whole series of sermons on, but that gives you some framework to think of categories of people, and then three categories that are related to the nature of what assurance of faith, assurance of salvation includes. We have to keep moving.

“2. What about church history where the FCC comes from and what the differences are with other Presbyterian churches. Seeing we are all new to this denomination”

All right, next question. Question about church history. What about church history, where the FCC comes from, what the differences are with other Presbyterian churches, seeing we're all new to this denomination. So here again, we have whole seminary courses answering this question, hours and hours and hours of lectures. But in short, I'll give you a few highlights.

So 1560, the Reformation comes to Scotland, and you'll know names like John Knox, right, major figure, lived at the same time as Calvin and others, first generation reformer. So Knox had been in Geneva under Calvin and so on, he comes to Scotland. One of the things that's notable is when you look at the continent, the Reformation in Germany, the German Reformed, that is, not the Lutheran, but the Reformed wing of the Reformation, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, etc., as well as Britain, England, and Scotland. I say this without partiality. I say this with, I think, a measure of objectivity. Scotland reached the highest extent of Reformation. So if you read the writers at the time, the contemporaries during the First and Second Reformation, especially the Second Reformation, you have people on the continent commenting about how far Scotland was enabled to go in terms of a biblical, a thoroughly biblical reformation, doctrine, worship, government, life, and so on. So you start in 1560 with Knox, and then the second reformation takes place in the next century, the 1600s. And there you have, you know, the Puritans in England, you've got the Nadere Reformatie in the Netherlands, things going on in Switzerland and still in Germany as well. Simultaneously, in that sort of spiritual revival, Scotland also had a share. And so the Westminster Assembly, which produced the Westminster Confession, the catechisms, and a bunch of other documents, the Scots were a part of that assembly, in fact had a very influential role in that assembly. But from 1638-ish, and onward, there was a period of Second Reformation. And really, the decade from 1638 to 1648 are some of the brightest, that decade is some of the brightest years anywhere in the history of the world since the apostles. And so people like Samuel Rutherford, I mean, names that you'll be familiar with, Andrew Gray, perhaps you've read some of his sermons, Benning and Dixon, David Dixon, and you've got, you know, Robert Bailey, and there's a whole list of others that were significant figures at that time. Following that period, you had the Covenanter era, and you had a time of great persecution for the Church of Scotland. The Lord delivered them. There was a glorious revolution with help from the Netherlands that unseated the tyrannical reign of James at the time, and Scotland was able to become a distinctively Presbyterian nation. So at that

point, the Westminster Confession is made the confession of the nation and Presbyterian Church, the Church of Scotland, the National Church of Scotland. So you're at the end of the century at that point. We could go on, a lot of things went sideways the next century, 18th century, everywhere in Europe and in the US. We had the Enlightenment that happened, which is really the 'Great Endarkment'. There was ebb and flow, times of strength and weakness there. But when you come to the 19th century, 1843, you have what's called the Great Disruption. And this is where the Free Church of Scotland comes into existence, if you will, out of the Church of Scotland. It would be similar to what took place in the Netherlands with the secession churches. 1834, you have the Great Secession. Following that, you had a period of debates over unions with the Doleantie and so on, Kuyper's church. You had some who stayed out of that union, like the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken and others, those who were predecessors to the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (NRC) in the Netherlands. Something similar was happening in Scotland. So 1843, there had been 10 years of revival leading up to that period. And because of state intrusion into the affairs of the church, there ended up being a disruption in the Church of Scotland. Nearly 500 ministers and most of Scotland, really half of the nation, left and formed the Free Church of Scotland. And it was, really, from then till the year 2000, the biggest evangelical church in all of Britain. So, very robust in terms of its Reformed witness in preaching, confessionalism, and so on. In 1900, there was another crisis and a minority within the free church carried forward the testimony. So there's this lineage from 1560 all the way through where you see in the midst of conflict the torch being carried forward. Same doctrine, same worship, same government, same preaching, and so on throughout that period. So that's kind of history stuff.

Brings us up to 2000. There was another division which resulted in what is now the Free Church of Scotland continuing. In terms of her identity, and I'll try to be brief here, the Westminster Confession of Faith forms a summary of what she believes in terms of biblical doctrine. It would be similar to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. In Britain, you have the Confession, shorter and larger catechisms. So a robust, classically reformed adherence to biblical doctrine. In her worship from the beginning, she sought to order her worship according to the prescriptions that God had given in his word. We can't add anything to worship, can't take anything away. And so the singing of Psalms unaccompanied by musical instrument has been the flow throughout that whole period. Her preaching has always been at the centre. So if you think of the Free Church, okay, they sing the psalms, we don't have an organ, We believe in the obligation for the magistrate to profess protect and promote the true religion We hold strictly to the confession and so on and so forth But if you were to ask the people of Scotland in 1843 All of those things would have been true. But if you had said what's distinctive about them, they would have said the preaching So the preaching, and that goes all the way back to 1560, the preaching of Christ and the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the whole counsel of God in a way that is faithful to the whole counsel of the Lord. So that's distinctive. We may come back to that here in a moment. It gives you a nutshell on the Free Church continuing.

“3. Are women supposed to wear hats in church? Or all the time? 1 Corinthians 11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. According to

this verse our hair IS our head covering so my question is, why do we also need to wear hats in church? If we are supposed to cover our head while praying shouldn't we always wear a covering then? Is this why some Mennonite and Hutterite cultures always wear a covering?"

Next question. Are women supposed to wear hats in church, or all the time? 1 Corinthians 11. And then it speaks about women having long hair, and isn't that the covering, and therefore we don't need something in addition to it. There are lots of places where you can get a longer explanation of this. If you go to our Presbytery's website (www.westminsterconfession.org), you'll find some articles on this question. If you listen to some of our ministers, you'll hear them preach through this portion of God's Word, a much fuller answer. But the short answer is yes, women are supposed to wear hats or have their heads covered in church. And no, they're not to do it all the time. So it's something distinctive to the public worship. If you look at 1 Corinthians 11, You'll notice how he opens the whole of 11, 12, 13, 14. It's dealing with issues in the public assembly of God's people in Corinth. In v. 2, he says, Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I deliver them unto you. And then he begins to talk about head coverings. And then you get to the end of that section, and it flows in v. 17, Now in this time... that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that you come together not for the better, but for the worse. And then he begins to address this problem, some of the problems that were arising within the Lord's Supper. So the context is evidently clearly in the text, referring to the public assembly. You have additional things like, for example, the reference to the presence of the angels, you have to understand, as Hebrews teaches us, that Old Testament worship, you went to Jerusalem, and you had a tabernacle laid at our temple, and God met with His people, the cloud descended, His presence was manifest. It was a microcosm of heaven. It was a picture of heaven and of God dwelling in the midst of His people. That's where worship transpired, the main ordinances that the Lord appointed. You come to the New Testament, all of that's fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. New Testament worship, where is the sanctuary? You say, well, minister, we're in it. It's right here. Wrong. This is a room, this is a building, this is an auditorium, whatever. This isn't the New Testament sanctuary. Read the book of Hebrews. Our sanctuary is in heaven where our high priest is. And so New Testament worship, actually, the transactions of worship transpire in the throne room of heaven itself, before the very throne of God, where our high priest ministers unto us. I could give you a lot more here, but this is part of what's behind the reference to the angels. The angels are in attendance in the public worship that is taking place. As Peter says, they're peering into the things that relate to the gospel that are being preached, and so on and so forth. So, all of that to say, this ordinance of women having their heads covered is for the public gathering of the church in worship, not all the time. You'll notice verse 5, for that is even all one as if she were shaven. But if a woman be not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her head be covered. Those verses make clear that that would make no sense at all if the hair were the covering that we're referred to. Because if you shave her hair, then she wouldn't have a covering, and yet it's saying it's as if you have shaved her hair. You get the point, right? It wouldn't make sense. So it's speaking about a covering that is in addition to her hair. As you come down the passage, he begins to speak about other things as well. It's a shame for a man to have long hair. It's not according to nature. A woman's hair is her glory, and so on and so forth. And so he's speaking of her hair being a covering in that sense. These are two different things that are being

referred to in that way. The point is this, a woman's hair is her glory. And in the public assembly of God's worship, all glory must be covered but His. And so that's part of what's happening, but you could get much more detail if you look at some of the things we have available for you elsewhere.

“4. This might seem dumb, but I really struggle with paying attention in church. I can't understand what the minister is saying and it just seems way over my head. I read the Bible for myself and even the Bible doesn't sound as complicated as my minister. Is it supposed to be this complicated? Or am I just not sober minded enough or whatever. The Bible tells me to knock and it shall be opened, and it also talks about childlike faith (I think that's a simple understanding?) but that's not what I hear on Sunday? Maybe it's just me. I don't know.”

Practical question about paying attention in church and the difficulty at times to follow along. And the question really reflects two things, I think. They're speaking about the simplicity that you find in the Bible when you open it and read it, and by contrast, in some places, the complexity of explaining it in some pulpits. And so the fault there would be in preaching that confuses rather than clarifies. Preaching is to be a bold declaration with plain speech of what the text says, right? The Bible says, preach the word. That's what Paul says to Timothy. We're to preach the word. We have to preach the text, open up the text, unpack it, flesh out, you know, explain and apply with the authority of God those words. So that could be part of the problem. But there can also still be a problem on our part. You know, we may have good, solid, clear, biblical, textual preaching, and yet we're still having trouble following along.

Let me just say something briefly to that. I would say two things. One, appetite is the key. You know, when you are hungry, physically I'm speaking, you can't be fast enough in terms of getting a hold of food and consuming it, eating it, being nourished by it, savouring it, and so on and so forth. And so we don't want to just sit on the surface, we want to kind of get to the root problem. Sometimes the root problem is actually our spiritual appetite is not where it should be. We're not coming under the Word in order to feed on it, we're not hungry for it, we're not eager to hear it, we're not looking, we're not praying, we're not asking, we're not seeking the Lord for it. And that can be a number of things. When you don't have an appetite in your physical body, usually that's a sign of being sick. When you're sick, you don't feel like eating, or something else is broken, something's wrong. And so it could be that we don't have a sense of need. We don't have a sense of our need for Christ and his word, salvation, and all that the Lord sets before us there. And so we need to address our hearts. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart in terms of coming with an appetite to be feeding upon the word. So that's important in terms of maintaining attentiveness under the ministry of the word, obviously, along with the ministry of the spirit in us. It's true, though, that even under the best preaching, some of it is difficult. And the Lord doesn't tell us that we're to be spoon-fed everything. So we said simplicity, clarity, plainness, all that's appropriate. But you'll notice in 2 Peter 3 that Peter says, in reference to Paul, so Peter's an apostle, writing about the apostle Paul as an apostle. And he says, you know, something along the lines of, you know, as our brother Paul has written, some of which is difficult to understand, and men have, you know, rested, they have twisted, to their own hurt, and so on. So Peter's saying, look, you know, even I find some of what Paul's saying difficult. So there are deep things and some things that are more simple. So plainness, simplicity, clarity

doesn't mean that we don't have to exercise our minds, that there aren't going to be times when the text itself is requiring us to think and to work hard in our study. So a couple things there.

“5. What is christian liberty and how does it apply to our lives?”

Keep moving. We're on question five, and we've got 25 questions. So I'm gonna have to try to speed up here. What is Christian liberty? How does it apply to our lives? There's a question right after it. Is it a sin for women to wear pants, jeans, trousers, and so on? There's a whole chapter on liberty of conscience and Christian liberty in the Westminster Confession (chapter 20). You can read that. Christian liberty is chiefly related to the liberty that is found in the gospel in deliverance from guilt and condemnation, condemnation of the law, deliverance from the Old Testament ceremonies and the liberty that we have in Christ now from those. It includes all sorts of things like that. It also includes freedom from the doctrines and commandments of men. In worship, men cannot impose upon us ordinances that the Lord himself hasn't appointed. Our conscience is free from being bound to that. In another case, within the Christian life, no one can impose standards of morality that are not derived from the Bible itself. In other words, no one can call a sin a sin unless God calls it a sin. That's an important principle. Otherwise, we're taking the place of God. He alone is to be lord of the conscience. And so that's another part of Christian liberty. And so we have to be Bereans. We have to be students of the book. We have to be able to say, 'thus saith the Lord' with regards to these things.

“6. Is it a sin for women to wear pants/jeans/trousers?”

So you come to a question like, you know, Attire clothes whether for men or women or whatever the Bible gives us a clear definitive prescription about the obligation of modesty Modesty is something that begins in the heart work of grace and our souls you can have a woman dressed in a burqa like a Muslim who is immodest in terms of her flirtatious and sensual behaviour, right? That's still immodesty. So modesty is more than just what clothes you put on before you go into public and so on. But the Bible does give us some help, I think, with regards to even that. And at least in my own mind, in my study of scripture, the Lord emphasizes the importance of covering. Nakedness and covering. And generally speaking, the descriptions that are given in the Bible are the covering of neck to knee. So, for example, Isaiah warns about the uncovering of the thigh. Or you think of Peter is in the boat and he's described as naked. That doesn't mean bare naked like in the bathtub. He's with his fellow men in the boat. He puts on his cloak, jumps into the water, and goes to the shore where there's going to be mixed company. So there, he's not completely unclothed, but it's nakedness in the sense that, you know, probably working on the boat out at sea where no one can see you with a bunch of other men, he would have had parts of him that were uncovered. So I think for both men and women generally speaking, The emphasis is on covering and neck-to-knee, that sort of thing, and we could talk about that further. So, is it a sin for women to wear pants, jeans, trousers, and so on? You know, whatever is not a faith is sin, so if your own conscience is bound to this sort of thing, you have to be very careful. and not sinning against your conscience while also informing your conscience by the word of God itself. And I can't find anywhere in the Bible where the Lord would define something equivalent to trousers or whatever, pants, as being sinful for a woman to wear in various circumstances. Indeed, there may

be circumstances where it would be immodest, to wear something else. If a woman's climbing up a ladder, or in a tree, or whatever else, that would be immodest, there'd be exposure that's there. So I wouldn't draw myself, I'm being asked a question, so you're getting my answer, I wouldn't draw a hard line on those questions with regards to modesty, I could say more on that. I'm going to have to keep moving. It applies, as I said, to both men and women.

“7. What exactly is the difference in doctrine between the NRC and the FCC?”

What exactly is the difference in doctrine between the NRC and FCC? So this is a big question. Where do you begin? I mean, there's many things, obviously, that are shared that are similar. And we thank God for those points of commonality and united testimony and so on. There's differences, there's some obvious differences. So there'd be differences in terms of practice. So we don't, in some of these points of difference, we actually are maintaining the biblical standards that the Dutch Reformed Church used to hold. and no longer does. So, for example, we do not have an organ in the public worship of God. That was a position held in the Dutch Reformation. In the Netherlands, people like Voetius wrote a whole book on it against the organ and other names that you would be familiar with. Van Mastricht and so on would have opposed these things. So that did change, whereas in Scotland it didn't change. From the days of the apostles to the year 1000, there were no instruments in worship. At the height of Roman Catholic idolatry, instruments along with other things were brought in. In the Eastern Church, they've never been brought in to the present day. Western Church, Rome. You get to the Reformation, Calvin got rid of them. The Reformed wing of the Reformation, they all got rid of them, Zwingli, in England, and so on. The Puritans, no instruments. Scottish Covenanters, no instruments. You go down through history in American soil, Jonathan Edwards, no instruments. I mean, churches generally, even the Baptist, Charles Spurgeon, said, yeah, you can have an organ in the church as long as it's covered and quiet. So he didn't even have, in his gigantic congregation in Oregon. It wasn't in Presbyterian circles until the latter part of the 19th century that instruments began to come into the church. So what's the biblical argument?

The biblical argument is this. All distinctively ceremonial ordinances, Old Testament worship, are abrogated in the New Testament. Secondly, musical instruments were a distinctively ceremonial ordinance of Old Testament worship. Therefore, they are abrogated. That's the argument in a nutshell. We don't have altars. We don't burn incense. We don't have priests. We don't have vestments. We don't have all of that stuff. We don't have instruments. In the New Testament, you will read of no instruments. It speaks of the sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of your lips. The only place you'll find it is in the book of Revelation, where the whole book is using Old Testament imagery to convey spiritual realities. And in chapter 5 and chapter 8, where there's reference to harps, It's alongside reference to incense, which I don't think any Reformed church at the present hour, Dutch Reformed churches, is utilizing. But he says incense, which is the prayers of the saints. It was a picture of the prayers of the saints. Instruments were a picture of spirit-filled, joyous praise. They were a symbol of joyous praise. The coming of Christ, all of that's put away. There's a simplicity and purity in New Testament worship that's been preserved through the centuries.

Another example would be feast days. So this too, the old Dutch Reformed Church, no feast days. You didn't have Christmas and Easter and Pentecost and Ascension Sunday and whatever

else, right? There were no such things in the Reformed churches. So it's not just a Scottish Presbyterian thing. Puritans didn't do them either, et cetera. This too changed, at least in Presbyterian circles in the 19th century, it changed earlier in Dutch Reformed circles due to impositions from the Dutch state, and the desire to take holidays that were being abused and to Christianize them. The problem with that is this. We're talking about worship, we're talking about days that are set apart as religiously significant. The Lord preserves that right to Himself. So in the Old Testament, you had the weekly Sabbath, you had the feast days of the Old Testament, the day of Pentecost, and the feast trumpets, and so on and so forth. He appointed those. The ceremonial days were put away, as you know. We don't do Passover in the New Testament. The only holy day in the New Testament is the Christian Sabbath. We have one holy day, and it's 52 times a year. To add to that is a violation of both the second commandment, which is where we get the Regulative Principle of Worship, the principle that says we can only do and worship what God has commanded, prescribed, sanctioned, appointed. And it's a violation of the Fourth Commandment when He says, *remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy*.

The Lord's saying, I have the prerogative for setting apart holy days. And no one else is allowed to. An example of this would be Jeroboam. There's a division of the north and southern kingdoms. and the northern kingdom under the reign of Jeroboam, all sorts of innovation. And one of the innovations is, they're not going back to Jerusalem for political reasons. He appoints all sorts of terrible priests, but it included the appointment of unsanctioned holy days. He changed the dates. And the Lord calls them out in kings for that sin of appointing feasts that God himself hadn't appointed on days he hadn't appointed. You have the same thing with Aaron and the golden calf. They set apart a feast day, which the Lord had not appointed. And that too is condemned as a sin. And so the Lord's given us ordinances. We wanna remember the Lord's death. Do we do that through Good Friday? No. We do that through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We want to remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do we do that through Easter? No. The Lord has appointed the Sabbath to be observed on the first day of the week so that we have a weekly reminder of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. You say, well, minister, where in the world do we get these days then? Well, open your Bible, you will find them nowhere. You're not gonna find any of those days in the scriptures. So, okay, where did they come from? And the answer is Rome. So Roman Catholicism took pagan days, transformed them into Christian days, and appointed them for sacred purposes and holy observation. The Reformation church got rid of all that Romish garbage and said, we need to stick to the purity of God's word. And lately, Protestant churches began to bring back the Roman Catholic Holy Days, which are more extensive than the ones observed in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches. So that's a problem, as you can see from what I'm saying. So that would be a difference.

Obviously, that's one you would notice walking through the door.

There are doctrinal differences: There's doctrinal differences on the covenant. our understanding of the covenant, the operation and function of the covenant. I'm doing a series of lectures right now in my own congregation, which will be put up. You can listen to those sometime if you're interested. Probably 10, 12 lectures that kind of walk through the classical reform doctrine of a Biblical basis for the classical reform doctrine of the covenant. But in brief, you know, the NRC will equate covenant and election. So these two things are conflated, and that's a problem. It's a problem you can see it in your own Bible. You open Genesis 17 and the Lord says to Abraham,

you know, I'm establishing a covenant with you and your seed after you. Here's the token of the covenant. It's circumcision. And yet we know Isaac is saved. Ishmael's not. Come to the next generation. Isaac has two sons. They both receive the sign of the covenant because they are in the covenant. And yet Malachi tells us, Jacob, have I loved, Esau have I hated. Right? Covenant, the outward administration of the covenant is broader than election. But we're now kind of tiptoeing into like a humongous world of stuff that we need to talk about. The point I want to make is this. These sorts of doctrinal differences trickle down to all sorts of practical differences. It affects the preaching. It affects things like your view of baptism, your view of children in the church, even child rearing, all sorts of practical implications, the nature of the Christian life, and so on. So with preaching, for example, we would insist very strongly, one hand, on discriminating preaching. preaching that distinguishes true and false conversion, and so on, the marks of grace, et cetera. And we would emphasize equally the free offer of the Gospel and the open disclosures of Christ as He's presented in preaching. And both of these are biblical, and both of these must be maintained. And biblical preaching will have both of them. But if you're only preaching discriminatingly without the free offer, you're not preaching the Gospel. Or if you're preaching the free offer, without preaching the elements of discrimination, you also have a skewed form of preaching. And that will affect the life of the whole congregation. So the doctrinal things aren't just kind of isolated. They have practical implications to them. There's more I could say, but I keep looking at the clock. We're in trouble. Gives you a little taste, at least, a little window.

“8. Can you provide a simple (if possible) explanation of election? How do I know if I am elect. Or predestined? On Sundays we are told if we are not one of God's elect we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. On a page here on instagram I recently read that it is a fear filled concept from a reformed calvinist doctrine. Is election 100% from scripture? Thanks.”

Can you provide, next question, can you provide a simple, if possible, explanation of election? How do I know if I'm elect or predestinated and so on? So even the children can get this. The word election refers to choosing. So children think, for example, you have a, there's a political election for a new prime minister. People are choosing who they want the prime minister to be. So when we refer to the doctrine of election, we're referring to the fact that God is the One Who chooses who's going to be saved. This is a biblical doctrine, Romans 9, Ephesians 1, I mean, really, the whole Old Testament, and many, many, many places in the New Testament. So we believe very strongly in the doctrine of predestination, double predestination, and the doctrine of election and reprobation, and so on. The question, how do I know if I'm elect, is a different question. Because sometimes, you know, people will think to themselves, well, I need to know if I'm elect in order to know whether I can believe. Right? So here's how it goes. Only those who are elect believe. That is true. But it is false when you deduce from that, therefore, I must know if I'm elect before I can believe. That is false. Because that would be to lay claim to being God. The secret things belong to the Lord, the things that He has revealed to us and to our children are found in the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 29:29). Only God, in His inscrutable wisdom and divine Being, knows who the elect are. And therefore, we can't say, I must be God before I can believe. I must know I'm elect before I believe. It goes the other way, right? Rather, we come to

understand or know that we're elect because we've believed. And so we hear the Gospel, we lay hold of it, we close with Christ as He's offered in the gospel. We do that by the irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit. We do that because God Himself is bestowing the gift of faith upon us, but having believed and laid hold of Christ and come to behold and see Him and rest and receive Him, we then become, we then realize this is all of God. It is all beginning that the Lord's the one who's done this great work and all glory be to His name. It's all to the glory of his sovereign grace. But the persuasion or consciousness of election is something that comes as a consequence of coming to faith in Christ. Never, ever, ever, ever before one is brought to faith. The doctrine of election is beautiful. It's not something dark, heavy, scary, something that we should avoid. It's absolutely beautiful. It sets forth the glory of God and His grace. We who are dead, who could never do anything to save ourselves, He breaks into our world, mercifully condescends, snatches sinners as brands from the fire, and brings them into saving union with the Son. And this is beautiful, and we should confess it is beautiful.

“9. How much sorrow do we need to feel for our sins before we repent? Or how much misery must there be before there is deliverance and gratitude?”

How much sorrow do we need to feel for our sins before we repent? How much misery must there be before there's deliverance and gratitude? Very good questions. These are all excellent, excellent questions. How much sorrow do we need to feel for our sins before we repent? The answer is easy. You're thinking to yourself, OK, what degree? I have this much or this much or this. No, you've got to get this much, you know, before you can actually come to Christ or know that you've repented and so on. The answer is you need just as much as is necessary to turn you to Christ. The whole point of the Spirit's ministry to convict us of sin and of righteousness and judgment to come is in order that the Spirit might also show us the things of Christ and magnify the Son. Repentance is a turning from sin with apprehension of God's mercy in the language of the shorter catechism. And so it is awakening us to our need in order that we might find the full provision and sufficiency in Christ alone and nowhere outside of Him. And so we need as much conviction, sorrow, misery, as is necessary to turn us and draw us to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for some people, that's going to be more in the wisdom and ministry of the Spirit. And for some people, that may be less. For some, it may be cataclysmic, like a tsunami. And for others, it may be quite quiet in the Lord's dealings with them. But the end is the same. It is wakening sinners to their sin in order to bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

“10. How do we truly pray for forgiveness, can we repent and believe that God will save us and rest assured that we are now saved? Or does there need to be a deeper feeling of salvation? What does repentance have to look like? We often hear that we have to pray the “True prayer” before we can be saved. That we can repent and repent but it's all for nothing if it's not the “true prayer” so what is the true prayer, what does it look like, and when will I know if I've prayed it?”

How do we know, how do we truly pray for forgiveness? Can we repent and believe that God will save us and rest assured that we are now saved? It goes on to say that we often hear that we have to pray the true prayer before we can be saved. We have to repent. Our repentance is nothing without the true prayer. I have not a clue. I have not the foggiest idea what the phrase true prayer means. So obviously this is loaded language in some of your background and circles.

This is the true prayer. I'm not sure what that means. I can kind of extrapolate, I can kind of gather what I think it may mean. But the point is this, go back to the Book. With everything, go back to the Book. So, okay, let's open our Bibles. Where is it now that, where's the text that teaches us about the true prayer and how we have to have the true prayer in order to have true, you know, repentance and so on? And I mean, I know my Bible fairly well, and you no doubt do as well, you're not gonna find it. If what is intended, what it sounds like what is intended, the true prayer, I mean, true prayer is the offering up of our hearts, our desires unto the Lord, right? Praying according to his will, in Christ's name, independence upon him. You know, the prayer that the Lord speaks of is as simple as God be merciful to me, the sinner. It's the cry of the soul that's looking out of its spiritual bankruptcy to the full sufficiency that is found in Jesus Christ. It's the prayer, it's the cry, however it is articulated, that is seeking to lay hold of the Redeemer as our only hope for time and for eternity. And so, this is the point in faith and repentance and love to Christ and so on and so forth. At times, Paul says, you know what? Your prayer, will not be possible to articulate, so that the spirit can work in Romans 8, even with groans that cannot be uttered. Right? So even there, it's not some true prayer, whatever that means, because you can't even express it. But the Spirit who knows the things of God and who is at work is able to accompany those prayers, those groans, if you will, in the soul of the one who is coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“11. What role do feelings play in our faith? How can we acknowledge they are part of the journey of faith, while still not letting them play the primary role in our assurance?”

What role do feelings play? in our faith, how can we acknowledge they're part of the journey of faith, and so on. So feelings are part of our constitution, it's part of how God made us, and so on, but feelings are not faith. So we're thankful for feelings. The Lord brings in our feelings many wonderful things, joy, peace, delight in God, love for God. These are things that are felt and they're the fruit of faith. and the Lord brings them. But the fact is, you can have faith without feelings, and you can have feelings without faith. They're not equivalent. And indeed, in the Christian life, there are times When faith is at its highest, feelings are at its lowest. You say, well, what does that mean? How can that possibly be so? Pretty easy. You're thrown into the midst of a tremendous trial, affliction, suffering, or whatever. And as far as you feel, you feel as if you can't see the love of God. You feel as if this isn't working out for your good. You feel as if there's no way forward. You feel all of these things. And yet the believer can venture out in the midst of all of that darkness, and lay hold of Christ by faith, and exercise confidence and trust in Him while in the dark, while devoid of feeling. and saying, I'm not dependent on what I feel or sense or see, I'm depending everything upon the bedrock of God's Word. Thou hast said this promise and that promise, and so on. And I'm going to build everything on the basis of that promise. I'm going to lay claim to it. So in Job 23, Job is saying, I go forward. He's not there. I look backward. He's not there. I go to my right hand. He's not there. My left hand. He's not there. Job is saying, I feel as if I am absolutely isolated. And yet he speaks faith in the next verse, but he knows the way that I take. And when I come forth, it shall be his goal. No feelings, but strong faith. And so we can't conflate them. We don't want to just chuck feelings as if they're irrelevant altogether. They're not (irrelevant). They're part of our experience. But we don't want to equate the two. We don't want to equate faith and feelings.

“12. What is the difference between the NRC and the RCNA?”

What is the difference between the NRC and the RCNA? No idea. They look the same to me.

“13. If the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in Nobleford is basically the same, why the need for another church? Why are people moving there from the NRC?”

If the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in Nobleford is basically the same, why the need for another church? Why are people moving there from the NRC? I think I've already answered that question. There are differences, and some are making decisions on the basis of that. Yeah, I mean, another question that's related to that, you know, there's people struggling about what to do with church, and how do you make these kind of decisions? And I would just keep it simple. Your conscience must be bound to the Word of God alone, for yourself and in speaking to others. What saith the Lord? Pertinent questions that are related to what church I should be going to. You can't be persuaded by what other people are saying that you respect or by the pressure of peers and family. You can't be persuaded by a sense of nostalgia or attachment to tradition or 50 million other things. Your conscience must be bound to the Word of God alone. That's the basic answer. I have to be able to say, Before the Lord and His all-seeing eye, His gaze, I'm seeking to stick fast to the book. And in doing so, it directs where my feet go to worship the Lord. Well, that leaves a lot of things that you have to work through, but it's pointing you in the right direction, which is back to the word of God.

There's a few questions that are really good questions, but they're more a statement, like a point is being made. And I can say, I agree, I affirm your point, moving on. So I'm not going to even address some of those.

“14. Can Christians fall out of grace?”

Can Christians fall out of grace? No. If that is to mean that can a Christian lose their salvation? Can one who is converted and in union with Christ lose their salvation? Unequivocally, NO. There is nothing, Paul says at the end of Romans 8, nothing in this world, nothing outside of this world, nothing anywhere that can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Chapter 8 opens with no condemnation and ends with no separation. You know, Paul tells the Philippians, the good work that He's begun in you, He will bring to completion. Christ himself says that all that are given to him, he shall by no means lose any. He is the Good Shepherd. He never loses any of his sheep. It's impossible. Can a Christian stumble and fall? You know, can there be struggles in grace? Of course there can. But a person cannot fall out of grace. To me, that sounds like they fall out of Christ. Once we're brought into union with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can't be severed from him.

“15. What is speaking in tongues? Is it biblical in today's day and age? Can we still cast out devils and spirits in the name of Jesus Christ?”

What is speaking in tongues? Is it biblical, today's day and age and so on? The answer is no. The Lord has, He gave to the early church special offices like apostle and prophet in order to be the vehicles through which he would supply the remainder of the Word of God in the New Testament books. He supplied special sign gifts that were not normative and never have been as testimonies that accompanied and, as it were, witnessed to the truth of the word that was being spoken. So, you know, if you think of the whole history of the world, It's not like there were miracles happening in the Old Testament all the time. Great acts of redemption happened, like the Exodus and Sinai. And there were great signs that accompanied it. I think you have these periods without it. And we could give other examples. So the greatest high point in terms of redemptive history, the coming of the Son of God, and so on. There are gifts that come with that. Those gifts are put away subsequently with the putting away of the offices of apostle and prophet and so on.

“16. Why are pictures of Jesus Bad? Why do so many other believers not have a problem with it? IS it okay in children's books for the sake of their young minds?”

Why are pictures of Jesus bad? Because the second commandment forbids them as unlawful. We're not allowed to make any images of any of the three persons of the Godhead. This is something that has not just reformed people, you know, other people believed until recent days. This too is a kind of a spillover from Rome. But the point is that Jesus is the God-man. And there's one Person, two distinct natures. You can't rip Jesus in half and say, well, we're going to present Him or represent Him in His humanity without His deity. That's a distorted Christ, not to mention the fact that it's a lie, because that's not even a likeness of what His humanity was, and so on. The bottom line is it's an idol. We can't make graven images of the Godhead, and therefore it's forbidden. Why do other believers do it? They have all sorts of reasons. It's helpful. People don't read well. Kids need pictures to teach them. This is being overly wise. Let's submit ourselves to the Word of God and use the means He's given, which is the written Holy Scriptures. And children have been taught about who Christ is from the Bible throughout the history of the last 2,000 years. We don't need innovation or idolatry to supplement God's Word. It is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation. Interesting, Timothy we're told, is made wise unto salvation through the teaching of the scriptures, not flannelographs and images, false images, idolatrous images of Christ, and so on and so forth.

“17. We recently switched memberships to a new church and it was one of the most terrifying things we as a family have ever done. For us as parents, but also for our children. We lost friends over it, and our children were bullied because of it. Members of our own family will not speak to us and/or refuse to talk about it at family gatherings. A notice of our moving was posted in the church bulletin for several thousand people to read, and a letter of disapproval was sent. Why is it so scary to switch over somewhere when really, they should be happy that as christians we have a church to go to and worship freely in? WHY is there so much fear pushed and threats pushed on those leaving the NRC?”

All right, we've got three minutes. Yeah, there's another question about really assurance. I think we'll let that one pass. There's an expression which really touches my heart about the loss of friends and stress and family pressures and so on in the transition from one church to another. I'm a pastor. I've got a pastor's heart. This sort of stuff really touches us. It affects us. And there's a lot of compassion and sympathy for that. You know, the question... The question really is, why? Why is this? Why is there so much fear? Why are there so many threats? Why are there so many difficulties? I mean, the answer is sin. Right? It's sinful responses, sinful behaviour, sinful thinking, the refusal to be able to even differ with folk and love them and to respect them. I mean, even with an individual congregation, there's gonna be lots of diversity and differences. And there has to be an ability to love the brethren amidst those differences. And the Lord says, they'll know you're My disciples because you love one another. And so, you know, pride, unbelief, all sorts of other things come into play there. We have to watch our own hearts because it's easy to point the finger at other people when we are actually becoming bitter and we are kind of engaged in rancour and evil speaking and so on ourselves. Let's keep close watch over our own hearts, knowing that out of the heart the mouth speaketh.

“18. Why is there so much hate against the Canadian Reformed Churches by members of the NRC and RCNA churches? What is the difference between all of them? (FRC too)”

There was a question about feast days, so I think I addressed that. Another question about denominations, why is there hatred between the CanRef, the Canadian Reformed, and NRC and RCNA? There's history there, there's divisions in the church, there's theological differences, there's fears, you know, I mean, the NRC think, well, you know, Canadian Reformed think all their children are regenerate, don't need the gospel. Canadian Reformed think the NRC, everybody's going to hell, you know, and there's all sorts of stuff going on in there. Both, if I can say humbly, Yeah, both the CanRef on one side and some like the RCNA on the other, they're both not following the book. They have sort of opposite errors that have similar root problems in terms of their understanding of the covenant and so on.

“19. My question is.. Why in this area in southern Alberta, why is there such little unity between the different dutch reformed churches? So much division and little love towards each other as Christian churches in different denominations.. It's very sad to see and it's difficult to understand.”

The last question that I'll take, because we've got 30 seconds, is Yeah, it's another question about why there's so little unity between different Dutch Reformed churches, so much division. You know, the question reflects pain. And what I want to say is that angst, that anguish, that pain that is sort of expressed in the question, why so much division? You know, why so little disunity? That response is good. It should pain us that there's so much division. The reason for division is error, sin, falsehood, pride, all sorts of things. And sin should sadden us. If sin saddens us, the fruit of sin, the divisions of the church, we should desire, pray for, long for that the Lord's people would be brought together, not in some sort of least common denominator arrangement where

we just forget the truth and light that the Lord's given to us and come together anyway. No. How can two walk together that are not united? But we should pray that the Lord would so work that we're brought to the truth, and loving the truth, and loving all that God has given in His Word, and that union in truth would result in a union and a healing of some of the rifts and divisions and tearings that have taken place in the church. Pray, God, that He would grant us those things. But in the current climate context, we are going to have to have, there will be divisions, some of which are necessary, but it should still grieve us. All right, I'm going to leave it there. I've done my best, brother, to end at half past.

Rev. R. McCurley (Greenville Presbyterian Church, South Carolina)