The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
And I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

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God Has Spoken

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America believes that Jesus Christ has given the church serious responsibilities to fulfill until He returns to judge the world. The church must preach the Good News about Jesus. It must warn men that their sin will result in God's eternal judgment. It must bring believers together to worship God and to serve as citizens of the Kingdom of God. In this declaration the Reformed Presbyterian Church states briefly what it believes about God and about man and explains how people should live today in serving God.

Can the truth about these things be known? Many people today believe that there are no absolutely true answers to the basic questions of life. Everything is relative, they say. We believe otherwise. We agree that people by themselves cannot discover the truth about the origin or meaning of life, or even about how they should live their daily lives, but we know that God can answer these questions. And in the Bible God has answered them. He has spoken to men. Therefore, it is in the Bible that we find God's answers to the questions which all men ask.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church teaches "Reformed" theology, that is, the theology of the Bible. Many great Christian teachers through the centuries have taught the Bible's theology, particularly Augustine and John Calvin. In governing itself the Reformed Presbyterian Church follows the Bible's teaching that under Christ the elders (presbyters) of the church, meeting in Presbyteries, have the care of the church. In its teaching, therefore, the Church is Reformed and in its organization it is Presbyterian. A more complete statement of what the Reformed Presbyterian Church believes is found in its Constitution.
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Then God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:1, 3-4, 26-27

Where Did Life Come From?

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." These are the opening words of the Bible, and they tell us immediately that the living God is somebody who can think and act. He planned the universe, that is, He thought; then He made it, that is, He acted. God also has emotions. He tells us, for instance, that He loves the world, that He hates sin, and that He pities men the way a father pities his children.

God reveals something else about Himself that is very mysterious. He says that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a Trinity of persons who are nevertheless one God. A hint of God's threeness is found when He says, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." Jesus gives more than a hint of God's threeness when He tells His disciples to baptize people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

After making the stars, the sun and the moon and the earth, God filled the earth with living plants and animals. Where did life come from? God made it. He created all sorts of different living things, flowers and trees, birds, animals and fish; and each kind of life is able to reproduce itself. Last of all, God made man, His greatest creation. The wonderful thing about us is that we are in God's image. Like God we think, act and feel, and, using what He has given us, we too can create new things.

There is one more thing which we must say about God. He is perfectly good and everything He does is good. Although people today are not good like God, in the beginning they were, before evil came into the world. But before we talk about where evil came from, we must look more closely at what God made us for.

1. Some people say that God is just a force, or a name which people give to what they can't understand. What does the Bible say about God to show that these people are mistaken?
2. What does the Bible say about the idea that life somehow happened by chance over millions of years?
3. If God made the plants and animals, what should be our attitude toward them?
4. If God made man in His own image, what should be our attitude toward people?

*All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.
And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:35-40

Most people today seem to think that their main goal in life should be self-fulfillment, but that is not what our Maker says. He tells us first of all to glorify Him and to enjoy Him. That is, our purpose in living does not lie within ourselves but outside of ourselves in God. God wants us to honor Him and to enjoy living as His children in the world He has made.

God put man in charge of the world, to rule it for Him. Taking care of the earth and of the plants and animals, using them for food and to make things, is part of man's job in the world. Another part of man's job is to reproduce himself and thus to spread God's image in man everywhere on the face of the earth.

Once somebody asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. He answered, "To love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength." And the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. He said. Why? Because your neighbor is made in God's image.

People, however, do not naturally love God or their neighbors, and even their natural love for themselves is corrupted into selfishness. And while mankind has covered the earth with its children, people have often not taken care of the world but have ruined it. The reason for this sad situation is that sin and evil have hurt man and God's world terribly, and so all men ask, Where do such evils come from?

1. How is the goal of being self-fulfilled different from that of loving God and enjoying Him?
2. People are not simply another kind of animal in the world, nor are they absolute rulers of the world. What is the proper relationship of people to the world they live in?
3. How are we supposed to love our neighbor?
Then God spoke all these words, saying,  
"I am the Lord your God, who brought  
you out of the land of Egypt, out of the  
house of slavery.  
"You shall have no other gods before Me.  
"You shall not make for yourself an idol,  
or any likeness of what is in heaven above  
or on the earth beneath or in the water  
der under the earth. You shall not worship  
them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God,  
am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the  
parents on the children, on the third  
and the fourth generations of those who  
hat Me, but showing lovingkindness to  
thousands, to those who love Me and keep My  
commandments.  
"You shall not take the name of the Lord  
your God in vain, for the Lord will not  
leave him unpunished who takes His name  
in vain.  
"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it  
holy. Six days you shall labor and do all  
your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath  
of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do  
any work, you or your son or your  
daughter, your male servant or your female  
servant or your cattle or your sojourner  
who stays with you. For in six days the  
Lord made the heavens and the earth, the  
sea and all that is in them, and rested on  
the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed  
the sabbath day and made it holy.  
"Honor your father and your mother, that  
your days may be prolonged in the land  
whch the Lord your God gives you.  
"You shall not murder.  
"You shall not commit adultery.  
"You shall not steal.  
"You shall not bear false witness against  
your neighbor.  
"You shall not covet your neighbor’s  
house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s  
wife or his male servant or his female  
servant or his ox or his donkey or anything  
that belongs to your neighbor."

Exodus 20:1-17

Where Did Evil Come From?

Satan introduced evil into the world from outside. He persuaded the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, to disobey God. Since then, all men from birth have belonged to Satan’s Kingdom, which the Bible sometimes calls the World, and have been naturally inclined to do evil. As a result all men sin and are responsible for their sin.

Men do evil either when they fail to live up to God’s law or when they break it. God summarized His law for us in the Ten Commandments. When people break God’s law, they do not just feel guilty, they really are guilty. They are guilty because they belong to Satan’s Kingdom and because they have broken the good and just laws which God has made for men to obey.

God hates sin and punishes sinners. Sickness, sorrow, pain and death are His penalty for sin. Since all men, even those who try to do good, break God’s law, all men deserve God’s punishment of death which comes on all men. Finally, at the end of the age God will throw Satan and all of his followers into hell. But, praise be to God, He has given mankind a Savior to redeem His people from sin and from death.

1. What is the difference between feeling guilty and really being guilty?
2. What are God’s penalties for sin?
3. According to the Bible who are good?
4. How can God, who is love, punish sinners?
"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged, he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 3:16-18

The Good News of the Bible is that God loves the world and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as His answer to evil. The name "Jesus" means Savior; the title "Christ" means that Jesus is the Savior King, the Messiah promised to the Jews centuries before Jesus' birth. Nearly two thousand years ago a Jewish woman named Mary gave birth to Jesus while she was still a virgin. In Jesus, God the Son united with human nature and entered human history so that He could rescue mankind from sin and misery.

During His years on earth Jesus encountered and defeated Satan. He rejected all of Satan's temptations, and He cast out the demons whom He met. In His death on the cross, Jesus broke the power of the Devil over the rebellious world.

A second thing Jesus did was to obey God's law perfectly and then to die like any disobedient sinner. By His undeserved death He became the perfect sacrifice for sin and paid the penalty for man's sin. After three days God showed that He accepted Jesus' sacrifice for sin by raising Him from the dead. Forty days after rising from the dead Jesus ascended to heaven where He sits today at God's right hand.

From heaven Christ rules all things for the sake of His people for whom He will return at the appointed day. He has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to convince the sinners for whom Christ died that they and the world are doomed, but that in Jesus Christ there is salvation. Everyone who repents of his sin and believes in Jesus Christ will be taken from the world and made a citizen of the Kingdom of God, will be given a new nature so that he will love and obey God, and will be saved from the judgment to come.

1. Who is Jesus Christ?
2. What did Jesus do to save us?
3. Why can people not be saved by their own good works?
4. What are the two kinds of people in the world? Why is it wrong to judge others according to their race or their nation or their class?
But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

II Peter 3:7, 13-14

Because God plans to give men everywhere the opportunity to hear the Gospel and for His people to repent and be saved, He is still waiting to give evil its final punishment. Therefore, until the Last Day evil will continue in the world and sinners will often prosper for a time. And the Devil, knowing that his time is short, raging furiously against God’s people. Nevertheless, history has not escaped God’s control. He makes even the wrath of men praise Him. Indeed, all events are part of His eternal plan and not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His permission.

Despite the opposition of evil powers and evil men, Jesus will spread the Good News about Himself to the whole world before He returns. To do this He is using the Church, as it preaches the truth under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit convinces men of the truth of God’s Word and persuades them to trust in Christ. Even before Peter and the other Apostles had died, the Church had spread the Good News all over the Roman Empire. Since then the Church, though attacked from within and without by evil, has preached the Good News of the Kingdom in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North and South America. Nevertheless, there are still places where the Gospel has not been heard, and millions of people remain ignorant of it.

No one knows when Christ will return except God Himself, but when He returns everyone will know it. The dead will be raised, the wicked will cry out in fear, and the glory of God and of the sons of God will be clearly seen by all. Then God will live with His redeemed people in the new heavens and the new earth, and there will be no more wickedness, no more pain, no more death. Until then God’s people must continue living in this world, serving God.

1. Some people imagine that a different government or a different social system would solve all our problems. Why are they wrong?
2. How should we respond to the statement, “That was just an accident?”
3. What progress has the Good News made since Jesus left the earth?
4. What will Jesus do when He returns?
God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

II Timothy 3:16-17

How Does God Tell Us What He Wants?

God has revealed much about Himself through our own existence and from the created world. Yet we could never discover the full truth about God or ourselves from His creation because our minds are both limited in knowledge and darkened by sin. In fact, because of sin we twist knowledge and erect false gods. Only God, who is both infinite and holy, can tell us what we need to know to live correctly in His world.

In previous times God spoke to His people through prophets. By His Spirit He told them what to say to the people and then guided them to write His message without error. Last of all God spoke to us through His Son and guided the Apostles to write the Good News about Jesus. Since there can be no greater revelation of God than His Son, Jesus finished God’s revelation to humanity.

Today, we have God’s Word in the Bible, with the Old Testament written by the prophets, such as Moses, and the New Testament written by the Apostles, such as Paul. From the Bible we learn what to believe about God and how to live. Any message which claims to come from God, but does not agree with the Bible, is a lie because God’s truth does not change from age to age or from place to place.

To make clear His Word, God has given His people the Holy Spirit. Not everything in the Bible is easy to understand, but as people hear the truth preached in the Church and as they obey and study it themselves, the Holy Spirit reveals its meaning. Since Jesus has given His Spirit to all His people, they should listen to one another as they try to understand and obey God’s Word, and especially the pastors and teachers whom Christ has given to His Church.

As you can see, the Church is very important to God’s people; our next chapter will therefore deal with how we should relate to the Church.

1. Some men think that they do not need God’s revelation. Give several reasons why they are mistaken.
2. What makes the Bible different from other books?
3. Why will the Holy Spirit never tell people something different from what the Bible says?
4. How does the Holy Spirit help people to understand the Bible?
And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, Who is the head, even Christ, from Whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

How Should We Relate to the Church?

By His own blood Jesus bought the Church to be His Body in the World. The Church, therefore, in all ages, is the special object of His love, and every true Church recognizes Christ alone as its ruler. We can recognize a true Church where we see baptism and the Lord’s Supper observed according to Christ’s command, His Word preached; and His love shown in the help and discipline of its members. Counterfeit churches, however, do not faithfully preach Christ’s Word, and obey not God but themselves.

Jesus calls all kinds of people into His Church, without regard to outward appearance, national background, or social standing. God’s people have this in common: they are repentant sinners who trust Christ alone for salvation and want to obey His law. Upon their credible confession of faith, the elders recognize their membership in Christ’s church by baptizing them and their children and by admitting them to the Lord’s Supper. In the Church all have the responsibility of serving one another in love, working with the elders, deacons, and other members to carry out the Church’s mission in the world.

The greatest privilege of the Church is to worship its Lord on the first day of the week, His resurrection day. It assembles to praise God, seek His blessing, hear His Word, and encourage one another. Often it recalls Christ’s saving death by observing the Lord’s Supper. To the Church God has given pastors and teachers to instruct its members in the truth and application of His Word. Not everyone preaches, but all praise God. With their voices alone they should sing the Psalms of the Bible which truly express the experiences of God’s people through the ages. The Church worships to please God; in so doing God’s image-bearers fulfill their purpose of glorifying and enjoying God. Such worship prepares them to serve God every day in all the other relationships of life.

1. Many people like the idea of being Christians, but they do not want to belong to the Church. What is wrong with that?
2. How can a person distinguish a true Church from a false one?
3. What part do all the members of the Church take in its life?
Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:18-25

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,
To eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.
Behold, children are a gift of the Lord;
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127

How Should Our Families Serve God?

God in creation made marriage and the family part of the basic order of life. According to the Bible our families reveal God and His character. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to call God "Our Father," while God calls us His children. Furthermore, Christ names the Church His bride and calls Himself the Church's husband. Therefore, we must work to make our families as clear a revelation of God as we can.

A man and a woman, in leaving their parents to marry, become one flesh. God joins them, and a new family begins. Henceforth, they belong to each other completely, for better and for worse, in sickness and in health. Even their bodies belong to one another. Throughout life each is to help the other, the husband loving his wife as Christ loves the Church, the wife obeying her husband as the Church obeys Christ. Will Christ abandon His Church? Never! And so neither may a husband or a wife break their union by committing adultery or deserting the other.

While not all families have children, most do enjoy this blessing from God. In God's sight children and their parents form a religious unity. Parents must love, protect, teach, and enjoy their children! They must prepare them to become responsible adults before God. Children must obey their parents, and in their old age must not cast them off.

Sin is upsetting the family in North America today. Hatred often replaces love. Adultery and sexual intercourse outside of marriage are common. Parents abuse their children and children despise their parents. Many are practicing homosexuals and claim this is good and right. Multitudes murder the unborn through abortion recently legalized by our society! Such wickedness marks the children of our day. But the Church claims God's grace to make its families reveal the goodness of God and not the evil of men.

1. How should our families reveal God and His ways?
2. How do the Bible's standards for divorce differ from those of your state or province?
3. What is the difference between legal abortion clinics and legal gambling chambers?
Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1-4

How Should We Educate Our Children?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Education either proceeds from this starting point, or it lacks all sure foundation. Much modern education lacks foundation in the truth. While it often tells the truth in small matters, it fails to tell the truth in big ones.

God tells parents to raise their children in the fear of the Lord, teaching them the truth while preparing them for lives of service to God and their neighbor. Christian parents do this at home and through the Church. By law they must also send their children to school for many years. Should their children attend a secular public school?

The secular public school systems in North America today claim to be religiously neutral, but Christians are unable to accept this claim. Jesus taught that neutrality toward Him was impossible. “He that is not with me is against me,” He said. A secular education which leaves God out of account and keeps silent regarding His Son cannot help being either subtly or openly anti-Christian.

Families which have a private Christian school near them should seriously consider sending their children to it. Many families, however, cannot afford a private Christian school or find that none is close or discover that a nearby Christian school is educationally or theologically inadequate. In this situation they have no choice. As did Daniel in Babylon, however, they should also work to minimize the evil consequences of an education which at best is lukewarm toward God. Nationwide, Christians should be protesting the secularism of the public schools and organizing to provide Christian education for the children of the Church, of whom Jesus said, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them. For of such is the Kingdom of God.”

1. Why can a school not be religiously neutral? What social institutions can you think of that can be religiously neutral?
2. What does God tell parents about raising their children?
3. What can Christians do to provide Christian education for their children?
Let every person be in subjectior to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjectior, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them; tax to who tax is due, custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Romans 13:1-7

What Is Our Duty to the Government?

People ask, “Why obey the government?” Believers in democracy answer that in a democracy the people are the source of the government. Therefore, people should obey the government which they have made and the laws which their representatives have passed. But what gives the majority the right to rule? Are the people always right?

Communists answer that the Communist Party possesses infallible knowledge of the laws of history and has the responsibility to rule in the best interests of history’s chosen people, the working class. Therefore, the workers should follow the Party. But what gives the Party the right to rule? Is the Party always right?

The Bible teaches that God establishes rulers to keep the peace and to do justice in society. Since governments do not get their authority from men, the Bible calls on rulers openly to acknowledge that their power and authority come from God and from His Son Jesus Christ and to obey Him. Whether a monarchy, a dictatorship, or a democracy, the ultimate source of the government’s authority is God. That is why we should obey the government.

The government’s main task is to punish evil and encourage good. It should respect the rights of other institutions, such as family and Church. While individuals may not take revenge, the government, as God’s representative, has the duty to punish evildoers, even with death when necessary. Even war may be necessary to deal with evildoers on a large scale. Likewise, the government has the duty to regulate society so that men will not exploit and hurt others and so that people will be encouraged to do good. For any government, the only reliable standard is God’s law.

Sin has affected all governments. Even so, people should obey the government, even a bad one; they should pay their taxes, pray for their rulers, and serve as rulers themselves if God calls them to that job. However, when a government commands people to disobey God, as happened in Nazi Germany, or hinders them from doing good, Christians have the responsibility to disobey the government.

1. What is wrong with the theory that people should obey a government because they have made it?
2. Does an opinion poll provide a sound basis for deciding issues of right and wrong in government? Why?
3. Can any government really be neutral with regard to Jesus Christ?
4. What should candidates and voters do to seek God’s blessing on their government?
How Should We Earn Our Living?

Jesus said that food and shelter are gifts of our heavenly Father who even provides for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. His children, therefore, have every reason to give thanks before eating, and no reason to worry about these things. Through the centuries, in fact, God's people have tithed their income in recognition that all they have comes from God.

Should God's children then quit working? Certainly not! Idleness is not God's plan for man. In the beginning God made man caretaker of His creation and told him to tend the earth. Man shows in his work that he is made in God's image; he can create new things in a limited way and say, "It is good." God even tells men to imitate His rhythm at the beginning of time of six days work, one day rest. Work today, however, is not all creativity and service to God, and sometimes is anything but that. Because of sin God has cursed man's work so that it is sometimes unproductive and often wearisome. Nevertheless, in Christ men with new hearts can experience renewal in their work.

Men do not work alone; they cooperate with one another in society. Such cooperation, however organized, should aim at mutual service and be characterized by fair dealing. Unfortunately, sin makes men exploit one another. Workers fail to work conscientiously, managers pay less than they should, buyers and sellers cheat one another. The large corporation, whether owned by individuals or the state, has greatly complicated moral dealings in the workplace. It is difficult to hold a corporation or its owners responsible for their behavior. The corporation may increase economic efficiency, but such is not a worthy end. Corporate control of the economy may obscure the biblical principle of responsibility, resulting in the depersonalization of modern life. The labor union, though helpful in protecting the employee against exploitation, shares in the guilt of encouraging irresponsibility and greed.

1. Why does man tend to think that he is his own provider?
2. For what reasons should a man work?
3. What has God made to restrain the greed in man's heart?
The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?
A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again.
I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure, so enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was fruitless.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-5; 2:1

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

The American Declaration of Independence claims that all men have a right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Today, North Americans are pursuing happiness in record numbers, and this pursuit is increasingly marked by greed. But is happiness something which can be pursued and caught? Even wise men of this world know that it is not.

God did not create men to pursue happiness, but for love. Thus, it is not surprising that as they seek the utopia of personal happiness, misery increases.

How are people pursuing the false god of happiness? Some seek wealth. Constantly bolstered by lying advertisements which claim that a certain product will make life complete, much of the modern world economy rests on the ever greater accumulation of material possessions. "Thou shalt not covet" is a forgotten commandment. Others seek happiness in new experiences through drugs, alcohol, gambling or sex. These offer fleeting pleasure, leaving people empty and impoverished. Many pursue happiness through religion, while others seek it through music or travel or other wholesome activities. But happiness cannot be caught.

What should men pursue? The Apostle Paul wrote that his one aim was a good conscience before God and men. When we believe in Jesus Christ, He forgives our sins and gives us a clear conscience toward God. Then, as we seek God's purpose for us in His Kingdom, we love our fellowmen and enjoy a clear conscience before all men.

Christians, therefore, do not seek happiness. Does this make them unhappy people? No! The Holy Spirit gives them much joy, even in this present evil world. With confidence in their heavenly Father, they accept life's routines and catastrophes with peace and submission. They know that suffering, sickness, pain, war and death continue until Christ returns to establish the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness will reign forever. The new City which comes down out of heaven is the Christians' goal.

1. How are people pursuing happiness today?
2. What goal should men pursue in life?
3. Why is it not always wrong for Christians to be sad?
And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

How Does the Christian Face the Future?

People who expect something good in the future look forward eagerly to every new day. Christians are like that. They know that Christ rules all things for their sake and that He makes everything work together for their good. Therefore, they can obey the Bible’s command to rejoice evermore and to give thanks in everything, though they often do not. Most wonderfully, Christians have Jesus Christ in their future. He will come back, and then, when they finally see Him as He is, they will become like Him. People with this hope keep away from the sin of this present world and watch for the coming of Christ.

To be like Jesus . . . that is the destiny of every true believer in Him. Jesus is the new Adam, the start of a new human race of born again men and women. The new life in Christ begins at the moment of conversion when believers receive a new nature; it continues throughout this life in the midst of trials and persecutions as Christians grow toward maturity in Christ; it comes to completion at the Resurrection when Christ makes all things completely new.

Newness describes Christians individually and collectively. Together they are a new nation, people gathered from all the languages and nations of the earth. Together, they begin to live the new life of the Kingdom of God, showing how families and schools, businesses and churches, and even governments bring a blessing to man and glory to God when they obey His law. “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” Jesus told His followers. In this age sin still holds them back, sometimes terribly so, but yet they look forward. And they pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” “Even so, come Lord Jesus.”

1. Why do people fear the future? Do they have good reason for their fear?
2. What is Christ doing now to build the new humanity?
3. How does his vision of the future influence a Christian’s thinking and activity now?
4. When the prayer “Thy Kingdom come” is answered by God, what will your future be then?
For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Hebrews 2:1-3

How did the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America get started? Men and women of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the British Isles crossed the Atlantic Ocean in former centuries. Like countless other Christians they brought the Gospel with them and preached it to their neighbors and taught it to their children. But how did the Good News of Jesus Christ get to the British Isles? Missionaries sent by the Church during the Roman Empire and ordinary travelling believers brought it with them.

The Church of Jesus Christ, you see, depends for its survival and growth on believers handing on the truth to the next generation. This seems a weak guarantee of success. As Paul writes, we Christians hold the treasure of the Gospel in weak clay pots. But Jesus said that He is building His Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and in two thousand years He has maintained and extended His Church over all the world.

In some parts of the globe, however, where Christians did not hold fast to what they had received nor pass it on faithfully to the next generation, the light of the Gospel has dimmed to the point of disappearance. The areas of Turkey and Libya, for instance, were once heavily Christian; today the Gospel cannot be legally preached in those countries and there are precious few Christians.

You, the reader of this declaration, live in North America. You, or your ancestors, probably came here from Europe or Africa, or perhaps from Asia or Latin America. Has the treasure of the Gospel reached you here in North America, or did your grandparents perhaps lose it and not pass it along to you? The great question facing our North American civilization is whether it will fully turn away from the truth and become like ancient Israel, or whether it will return to those of its roots which are in the Gospel. Have you repented and believed the Gospel?

When Jesus preached and His message was rejected, He left town. When Paul preached to the unbelieving Jews in Rome, he concluded, “You are to know, then, that God’s message of salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen!” God rejected His chosen people Israel when they rejected His Son. Other nations also have lost the truth. What will happen to North America if it continues proudly to disregard God and His law? The Gospel has now been sent elsewhere to Africa and to Asia and to Latin America, and they are listening. Jesus is building His Church. Where do you stand?