

## Choosing Grace above Comfort

July 10, 2012

Dear Friends,

Life is full of experiences and trials. God's faithfulness throughout them all is truly astounding. "The trial of our faith is more precious than gold," Peter says. Let us never forget that, even under our most profound afflictions and most painful exercises. Pray for grace to abide the fiery trial, no matter what it may be. Let us strive to cleave to the loving, triune God, whose hand smites us, and say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

How we need to learn to trust God, however, also in times of prosperity—especially at those seasons of our life when we are prone to forget Him and walk far too independently of Him. Let us pray God that in all of life's checkered experiences we may receive grace to stay close to the good, great, and chief Shepherd, Christ Jesus our Lord.

With this letter, I am finally bringing you up-to-date with my checkered experiences on various itineraries. I am so grateful for your prayers on these journeys, as one does face many ups and downs in such trips. Pray that God may keep me close to Himself throughout these journeys. And thanks so much for your patience with me.

### **Montville, New Jersey (March 23, 2012)**

Trinity Christian School of Montville, New Jersey (est. 1986), has been hosting a special annual fund-raising banquet in a first-class venue for the past few years. This K–12 school of about two hundred students was established by Al Martin's former church. The principal, Doug Prol, has provided the school with low-key, effective leadership for decades. Each year they are inviting an outside speaker to give an address after a special dinner and time of fellowship. Joel Belz and Marvin Olasky from *World* magazine were the previous speakers. This year I spoke on "Christian Education: Taught or Caught." After my address, Jeff Holcomb, the school administrator and able MC for the evening, made an effective appeal to the three hundred guests for donations for the school.

I was surprised that I knew about half of the guests. Several people present were from our HRC church in New Jersey, so it was great to see them again. Book sales were excellent.

I overnights in New Jersey to spend some time with two friends who wanted to speak with me about fund-raising and related issues for our seminary. That proved to be time very well spent, as they were godly, seasoned businessmen who had some very helpful ideas. I hope to meet with them periodically in the foreseeable future.

### **Wyoming and Burgessville, Ontario (March 27–30, 2012)**

On the way to the HRC Synod in Burgessville, I stopped in at the Covenant Christian Church in Wyoming, Ontario, to speak on the subject of family life to approximately three hundred people. They were mostly from the United Reformed Churches in the area.

Afterward, they were some of the most eager book buyers I have ever seen—more than fifty people were trying to reach the table to grab books at the same time. Caroline Heimstra, who helped organize the evening, was a huge help to me in writing up orders. I ran out of every title I mentioned from the pulpit! This proved to be a wonderful evening indeed.

The HRC Synod in Ontario went well. The spirit was good; the brotherly unity was strong; the decisions were made with a conscious eye upon the Scriptures. I'll forego writing about it in detail, as reports have already appeared in the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*. A highlight for me was David VanBrugge's trial sermon. The Lord helped him immensely. For a seminary professor, the joy of seeing a student preach with liberty and authority after only two years of training cannot be put into words. At that point, one knows the Holy Spirit is working and nothing is more humbling than that.

We also enjoyed a pastor's fraternal again this year. We discussed primarily the issues of church discipline and media use.

### **Bradenton and Marco Island, Florida (March 31–April 7, 2012)**

I drove home and left the next day to catch up with my family, who were driving down to Florida. Flying overhead, I beat them there! The following day, I preached twice in Bradenton, Florida, to a few dozen people, then we moved on to our timeshare on Marcos Island. After we arrived, we were shocked to discover that we had the wrong week and other people were in our time share! Suddenly, we were homeless.

We managed to find an opening in a nearby resort for one night, and then, in God's providence, some dear friends who own a condominium on the island allowed us to stay there for the rest of the week, so we went from rags to riches and from homelessness to a palace in a moment! It was great to look down from their balcony to see the dolphin playing in the water each day. It was truly a time of "R and R," and it was so good to have Laura with us too.

### **Grand Rapids, Michigan (April 15, 2012)**

Each year, I preach one Sunday morning for Andrew Willis, pastor of the Maplelawn Baptist Church in Grand Rapids. We appreciate this congregation's prayer and support for our seminary.

This year, I preached on how Christ's resurrection shapes the hope of believers and then taught their Sunday school hour on "Prayerful Praying."

### **Abbotsford and Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada (April 27 to May 1, 2012—by Mary Beeke)**

It is quite an experience to land in Vancouver. The runway begins at the edge of the water, and islands and mountains can be seen all around. Dr. Mark Jones picked us up and brought us to his home for lunch with his wife, Barb, their four children, and his visiting mother. Mark shepherds the only English-speaking Reformed church in the city. There is a huge Asian presence in Vancouver. The Chinese especially have bought much property there, often sight unseen. A modest house can cost a half-million dollars. Mark is coauthoring *A Puritan Theology* with my husband. It is a comprehensive Puritan systematic theology, and it is due out in October.

The Fraser Valley Bible Conference was the primary purpose of our trip to British Columbia, with other events to fill out our schedule. Sponsored by our Heritage Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, and a United Reformed Church, the conference began with a fellowship supper for area ministers and continued with five addresses by my husband and three sermons in the sponsoring churches on Sunday. Under the theme “Living the Christian Life,” the main addresses, “Cultivating Sanctification: How Can I Be More Holy?” “Developing Spiritual Maturity: How Can I Grow in Christ?” and Overcoming Enemies of Holiness: How Can I Conquer Sin?” took place on Friday evening and Saturday morning at the Abbotsford FRC. All believers in all ages find themselves in the battle between sin and holiness, and they must fight it diligently.

A bonus for us was staying with relatives, Jim and Ruth Beeke, in their beautiful new home with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains. We had a gathering Saturday afternoon with four of their five children, their spouses, and sixteen of their eighteen energetic grandchildren. Before we left, another grandchild was born, and we were able to visit Dave and Trichelle and little Emile in the hospital! Saturday evening, we returned to Abbotsford for a youth meeting. Food was prepared for fifty, but 120 showed up, some from five hours away. Pizza to the rescue! Joe addressed them on the subject of living wholeheartedly for God and following Him fully. It is rewarding to interact with young people, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will direct their incredible energy to God’s honor.

On Sunday, my husband preached in Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Abbotsford on cherishing the church. Their pastor is Rev. Steve Swets, who went to Kuyper College about seven years ago and visited in our home a number of times with our nephews when they boarded with us. Joe preached in the afternoon at the Chilliwack FRC on Jacob wrestling with the angel of the covenant. Their pastor is the Rev. John Koopman. In the evening, he preached on enduring in the Christian race at the HRC in Chilliwack. Rev. Elshout is in New Jersey caring for his wife. We enjoyed reconnecting with Rev. and Mrs. Greendyk and their seven children, two of whom are married. We met their two little granddaughters. The whole family is very content in that locale. Rev. Greendyk preaches in various churches in the area on Sundays and during the week does construction, with an ulterior motive: “to bring the gospel to whomever I encounter.”

On Monday morning I addressed a group of ladies from these various churches on “Common Kindness and Uncommon Kindness.” A Q&A session and lunch followed. In the evening, a PRTS fundraiser was held. A delicious dinner was followed by an information meeting, in which current events and future plans were presented. My husband spoke on the importance of sound Reformed seminaries for the worldwide cause of Christianity, a subject that he feels deeply and passionately about. It was wonderful to meet new friends and to meet up with old ones. We go back decades with some of these folks. Everywhere we saw a few more wrinkles and fewer hairs or more gray ones; yet we look in the mirror and notice the same. “Days and hours and years and ages, swift as moving shadows flee...” reads the hymn. That can seem a bit depressing, but when we see God’s grace shining through the lives of His people and we reflect on Jesus Christ dying for sinners and offering a heavenly home with Him forever, then we can sing from

the same hymn: “Faithful doth our God remain.... Guided by His loving hand, To His heart we’ll aye betake us.”

### **Muskegon, Michigan (May 5, 2012)**

I gave two addresses for the Michigan Conservative Congregational Christian Conference pastor’s conference in Muskegon, Michigan, on the first Saturday of May: “Pastoral Ministry: Learning from the Puritans.” A Q&A session was held after each address. Pastor Tom Beetham of Orchard View Congregational Church served as coordinator for the occasion.

### **Toronto, Ontario (May 15, 2012)**

On May 15 David Murray and I met in Toronto with the Free Presbyterian Presbytery (FPCNA) to explain to them how we came to call one of their own, Dr. Michael Barrett, to serve as academic dean at PRTS. The meeting went remarkably well, and the vote was unanimous that Dr. Barrett could retain his seat in the FP Presbytery as he comes to serve us. Truly, the Lord was in our midst, and we were both humbled and grateful.

### **South Korea (May 17–28, by Mary Beeke)**

Our Korean adventure began with a fourteen-hour plane ride, plus two hours to iron out a paperwork discrepancy. “No-Jet-Lag” homeopathic tablets helped though, and we actually felt fairly fresh when Deacon Song and Junior Pastor Kim met us. We were whisked away to the Yullin Church (<http://eng.yullin.org/>), where Senior Pastor Nam-joon Kim and Mrs. Lee (his wife), several secretaries, and others greeted us with flowers. Pastor Kim has visited us several times in Grand Rapids and has done a chapel at our seminary. We had dinner at an Italian restaurant and ate on an outdoor deck that overlooked water. We were very happy to drop into bed that night.

Saturday (and every day of our entire trip) dawned beautifully, a sunny and comfortable 70 degrees. Pastor JaeMo picked us up and took us to Namhansanseong, a fortress on a mountain in Seoul. We hiked up a paved path, as did hundreds of others. Partway up, Pastor Kim appeared and joined us. At the top, there were the two secretaries, Mr. Kyeong Young Lee and Miss EunJeong Choi! They had a table laden with snacks and drinks. This was the start of our being spoiled. Lunch was at a Korean-style restaurant, where they serve the same menu to everyone in separate rooms, sitting on the floor by a table about 18 inches high. We are much stiffer than the Koreans, so while they sit crosslegged, they told us we could extend our legs under the table. But they were surprised when our feet appeared on the other side. “Your legs are so long!” they said. We each had our own rice and seaweed soup, and we shared about twenty-five vegetable and meat dishes. I positively love Korean food. Then we were off to Gyeong-bokgung Palace, where we learned about thousands of years of Korean history, including oppression by the Japanese.

Sunday was spent at the Yullin Church. The sanctuary is a renovated factory, long and narrow, with lots of posts. They have video screens throughout the sanctuary so everyone can see and hear the preacher. Pastor Kim preaches the same sermon four times on a normal Sunday to a total of four thousand people, then a different message—usually more topical in nature—at 4:20 p.m. So Joe preached on “Running the Best Race” at the second and third services in the morning to 1,400+ people at each service, and on “The

Puritans on Marriage and Child-Rearing” at the afternoon service of close to a thousand people.

Christianity in South Korea is only about a century old. Of a population of forty-nine million (thirteen million in Seoul), 25 percent are Christian. Of those, 80 to 90 percent are Reformed. Pastor Kim is very much in line with our experiential, Puritan-minded, Reformed beliefs. He has the gift of being able to go to the pulpit with an outline of his text in his mind and deliver a coherent, quality sermon. He combines being a strong leader with being warm and personal with his people. He is passionate about the gospel and is a visionary in his methods of promoting it. They have “parishes,” groups of members living in a locale, and “parish leaders” who pastor them. Like Koreans in general, the church workers are expected to work long hours and are very dedicated. Members are expected to be actively involved. Although language is a barrier to communication, the warmth and love conveyed in the posture of the people tell us that they treasure the preaching.

Monday was a conference for pastors, seminary students, and church workers. Pastor Kim preached the opening service, “Fire in the Bones,” Joe spoke twice on Puritan preaching, and three other theologians spoke on aspects of Reformed ministry. Those who had any doubt whether this church stood for Reformed beliefs would just have to walk around the church campus. They would see three patios, beautifully landscaped with small shade trees and flowers, named John Calvin Park, John Owen Park, and Jonathan Edwards Park—peaceful oases in a busy city. Between speaking, Joe was interviewed by the publisher of his book *Parenting by God’s Promises*, newly translated into Korean, and on his forthcoming book, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, to be translated into Korean soon. A special treat for Joe was a visit to Pastor Kim’s personal library—a splendid collection of rare books and resources on the Reformed faith.

On Tuesday Joe and I went separate ways. He went to Koshin Theological Seminary, preaching on “Following God Fully,” and spent time with the faculty. I spoke to a few dozen pastors’ wives on “The Kindness of Jesus Christ.” We walked to Pastor Kim and Mrs. Lee’s house afterward for lunch (on the floor) with some of the ladies. Pastors’ wives in many Reformed churches in Korea are part of the pastoral team. In the Yullin Church, they are not allowed to work outside the home. They meet together several times a week for Bible study, instruction, and work. Child care is provided at the church for those with small children. At times they are expected to expend time and energy for the church family over their personal family. It is a sacrifice. After an hour’s drive, we met up with the men at the Korean Folk Village. This is sort of the Greenfield Village of Korea, with buildings, crafts, and customs from all different periods of Korean history. We watched a Korean wedding ceremony and acrobats on horses. Supper was at Mrs. Lee’s favorite Korean restaurant.

On Wednesday, we checked out of our hotel and were driven to Chongshin Theological Seminary for a chapel service. We first had tea with Dr. Ahn, who had studied in the Netherlands. When he heard of our Dutch family background, he started chatting in Dutch. It was amusing for us to hear a Korean speak Dutch. After chapel, he pointed to the library and said, “There is the *bibliotheek*” (Dutch for “library”); he got his English and Dutch mixed up! As before, the chapel was very inspiring. Approximately 1,600 seminary students and faculty were in attendance. Their voices rose up in impressive harmony as they sang. Joe seemed to have special freedom as he challenged

these young men to commit their entire lives to the Lord. The chapel ended with a prayer time, with everyone praying aloud at once for five minutes. We met up with Pastor Kim, Mrs. Lee, Deacon Song (who owns a business that employs two hundred teachers who teach English), and Elder Kim (who owns a business that ships containers around the world). They accompanied us sightseeing for two days. We said good-bye to JaeMoo, who had so faithfully chauffeured us around these days. He was so humble, gentle, wise, and godly. We really became attached to him. After three hours of travel, several naps, a hike, and supper, we settled into our room at the British-themed Kensington Hotel.

We awoke Thursday morning to a lovely view of Mt. Seorak. We took a cable car to a peak and walked around, enjoying the view. This area is east of Seoul, near the coast of the East Sea, and not too far from North Korea, where the mountains are more stunning than others we had seen before in Korea. They are mostly tree covered, with rocks (shaped like groups of mango pits) jutting out in places. No trees are more than seventy years old in Korea because in the 1940s all the wood was used up for firewood, so they began reforestation projects. Plenty of rain falls, so it is green everywhere. Lunch was a few hours south along the coast at Sun Cruise Hotel in an actual ship built on top of a high cliff overlooking the East Sea—very unique! All along the coast, a high fence topped with rolls of barbed wire is a reminder of the constant threat of North Korea, though most South Koreans don't spend a lot of time worrying about an attack. Pastor Kim and Joe had many interesting conversations about the beauty of Jesus Christ and their desire to bring the Word to lost sinners as much as possible. Both men are visionaries. We relaxed the afternoon and evening at Solbeach Resort in YangYang, our home for the night. We were among the first in the world to see the sunrise on Friday, May 25, as we were near the dateline. We ate a genuine Korean breakfast (we are even stiffer in the morning). Aside from the normal Kimchi, rice, seaweed, and fish, we also had tasty tofu porridge with soy sauce added. Back at the Yullin Church, we said our good-byes to our travel companions. It was a wonderful time of relaxation and fellowship. We were speeded to the main office of *Ministry* magazine for an interview with the editor.

We settled into our new hotel and were now under the care of the Samyang Church and our longtime friend, Pastor Cheng Won Shu and his wife, Myoung Ja. The afternoon event was a theological gathering at Chongshin University surrounding the commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, under the organization Refo500. Joe lectured on "Puritan Sacrificial Zeal." We then navigated Seoul through rush-hour traffic to eat at an Italian restaurant and then went on to the Samyang church for the evening address, "What Can We Learn from Reading the Puritans?" We met many old friends and made new ones, experiencing once more that when we gather around Scripture and church history, we are united in purpose to glorify God and promote His kingdom, no matter what our nation or culture. We enjoyed meeting one couple who had visited Grand Rapids and stayed with my parents. Like nearly all Koreans, they think highly of Americans because of the nation's help during the Korean War. So whenever I mention my dad was a soldier in Korea, their eyes light up and there is a connection. They are grateful. On Saturday, Joe was happy to catch up on correcting papers and e-mail. Jiheh Shu and William Honaker took me shopping for gifts, via subway, at a huge market. Some of the consistory took us to Mr. Pizza for supper before Joe's evening session on family worship. This is a special challenge for

Korean Christians. The men are required to work from early morning to late evening, six days a week. Many fathers see their children only on weekends. After work, many are expected to socialize with the boss and coworkers. They consume much alcohol, and college students do as well. For this reason, nearly all Reformed Korean Christians totally abstain from all alcoholic beverages. Church members are predominantly women, yet the male leadership is strong.

On Sunday, my husband preached on Gethsemane's King-Lamb. This church loves to sing. Pastor Shu used to be a professional singer and director, and he inspires them. They are learning more psalms, for which they use the Genevan tunes. It is great to hear the old, majestic Genevan tunes being sung in Korean! It gave me chills to hear them sing Psalm 42 (Psalter 416) with all their hearts. I gave my "Kindness of Jesus Christ" address to a group of ladies in the afternoon. Joe preached on "The Age of the Holy Spirit and Revival" in the evening. It seems that the candlestick of the gospel is dimming in some ways in North America, but it seems to be shining brightly in South Korea. Monday morning Joe fit one more interview in—the religion section of a regular newspaper. The interviewer was very interested to learn about aspects of the Puritans and how their beliefs still apply to today. It was something he had never heard of before. Cheng Won and Myoung Ja brought us to the airport for our long journey home.

### **Canton, Michigan (June 3)**

I preached for Gordon Cook, Al Martin's son-in-law, at Grace Baptist Church in Canton, Michigan, on Sunday morning on the essence of the gospel. Afterward, I gave the congregation an update of our seminary during their Sunday school hour.

### **Dundas, Ontario (June 4–5)**

I had the privilege of traveling with Dr. Jerry Bilkes to Ontario on June 4 to attend the Free Reformed Synod. That evening, Dr. Lawrence W. Bilkes led a prayer service on Jude 21, which stresses that we are to keep ourselves in the love of God. Afterward, the Synod convened to elect its executive (moderamen) for the week. Rev. John Koopman was elected chairman and did an outstanding job.

After some wonderful fellowship with my hosts, Connor and Susan Keuning, I attended a full day of Synod on Tuesday, before returning home late that evening with Dr. Bilkes. The Synod asked me to provide a 30-minute opening meditation, which I did on Hebrews 12:1–2. Shortly thereafter, I was also asked to bring fraternal greetings. Rev. Eric Moerdyk was asked to respond to me, which he did quite touchingly, openly stating that God used my ministry for his conversion and the forming of his spiritual convictions a few decades ago, and pointed out that three of the four men at the executive table had been trained at PRTS. He wished our denomination well. How time flies!

Then, most of the day was spent examining Rob VanDoodewaard for candidacy. I am grateful to report that he was accepted as a candidate.

I regret that, due to having to speak the following morning at our Plymouth Christian School sixth-grade graduation in Grand Rapids, I was not able to stay throughout the Synod. One of the highlights of the Free Reformed Synod for me was fellowship during the break times. I especially enjoyed meeting Dr. Laurence DenButter from the Netherlands, who asked me to come and preach in his congregation in September when I hope to be in the Netherlands with Rev. Elshout. The bond I felt with

this brother in the short time I had to get to know him is something that confirms our apostolic confession, “I believe in the communion of saints.”

**Hackney, England (Evangelical Reformed Church conference, June 29–30, 2012)**

I was up at 3:45 a.m. on Friday morning to fly to London via Chicago. On the flight over the pond, I was bumped up to a “handicap” seat. The leg room was great, but I got more than I bargained for. I sat next to an elderly woman who couldn’t understand a word of English. I tried to help her navigate the best I could, but it was a challenge—especially helping her make it to the bathroom. Then, half an hour before landing, she got up and panicked about something and wouldn’t stay belted in. She didn’t like it one bit that her cane had to go in the overhead. Between the flight attendant and me, we finally got her calmed down. Between times of caring for her, I caught some shut eye, went over the notes of the eight addresses I was scheduled to give, and managed to finish editing the last chapters for *The Beauty and Glory of the Holy Spirit*, which I am editing with Joey Pipa. It contains twenty addresses given at last year’s conferences offered by Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. The book will go to the printer July 10, D.V., and should be out in mid-August, just in time for our August 23–25 conference this year.

A chauffeur provided by the Evangelical Reformed Church drove me to my hotel. A pleasant fellow, he came to England from Nigeria at age twenty. He married an English girl; they now have two girls whom he adores—ages seven and four. To my surprise, he was a Baptist (most of my chauffeurs and taxi drivers in the UK have been Muslims). After a bit of probing, he readily admitted that though his wife attended church faithfully, he attended only occasionally. He pleaded tiredness after working long hours on Saturday night. After I took him to Hebrews 10:25 and stressed the importance of gleaning weekly spiritual food under God’s preached word, he promised me that he’d stop making excuses and would attend. He then told me that he would tell his wife that he had met me and how I had exhorted him. “That way,” he said, “she can hold me accountable, because I really do know I have to change this bad habit.”

I arrived at my hotel at 1:00 a.m., spoke with my wife via Skype, did three hours of e-mail, and slept soundly from 4:00 to 9:00 a.m. I then did a mini-conference for the Evangelical Reformed Church—a great group of 125 people (all black, many hailing from the Caribbean). They were pastored by Rev. Thomas Tuitt from 1957 to 1991, when he died suddenly. Tuitt was a thoroughly Reformed and able preacher who often preached for seventy minutes or more. He left behind a library of nearly ten thousand books, some of which were sold, but the majority remains on bookshelves and in milk cartons in a large upper room in the church. The collection contains a number of valuable old books, some written by Puritans. The church has been vacant since the pastor’s death and is being led primarily by Easton Howes, who serves as elder. This is the fifth trip I have preached at this church and the second time I did a mini-conference for them on a Saturday.

I spoke about what the Puritans can teach us about living the Christian life. My first address dealt with how to live in this world with a pilgrim mentality (Heb. 11:23) and the second about how to live godly in your own home (Ps. 101:1–3).

Afterwards, I fellowshiped close to two hours with the people, especially twenty-two young friends who started attending this church after my last visit. What

happened was a young man named Kenhinde was with a buddy on a subway where he saw a sign that I was the speaker for a conference at the Evangelical Reformed church in Hackney, London.

He turned to his friend: “Hey, dude, isn’t that guy the dude that preaches at Met Tab every now and then? I wonder why he’s preaching at the all-black church.”

“I don’t know, dude,” his friend said. “But why don’t we check it out?”

And they did. They came with a whole row of guys—all from a Pentecostal church. None of them returned to their church. They became convicted by Reformed preaching and then persuaded other friends, twenty-two in all, to come to this church. Since then, seventeen of them have embraced the Reformed faith and have joined this church, and several more are in process. According to Easton Howes, nearly all of them have become genuinely converted.

These dear young people wanted to meet with me afterward to fire dozens of questions at me—and fire they did! I had a great time with them, answering questions about spiritual life, the call to the ministry, backsliding, family worship, head-coverings for women in worship, and more. I spoke with two young men privately about coming to our seminary. I also spoke with a young woman named Leandra, whom the Lord converted under my ministry at the Aberystwyth Conference in Wales several years ago. She is still walking with the Lord and is two weeks from completing her speech pathology degree. She hopes to work with people with speech impediments in a local hospital. Her goal is twofold: help them speak better and evangelize them!

It was so humbling to be with these zealous young people because, of course, I realized that everything about their conversion and coming to this church is entirely God’s doing, not mine. What is more humbling than being used by God for His own glory and the well-being of never-dying souls?

### **London, England (Metropolitan Tabernacle ministry, July 1–5, 2012)**

The next morning I preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle (also frequently called Spurgeon’s church) about the basics of justification in the morning (Rom. 3:23–28) and an evangelistic sermon on how God saves sinners in the evening (Mark 10:46–52). The church has grown since my last visit here of two years ago, due in part to each sermon now being translated into four languages simultaneously, so a number of people have on headsets as they listen to the word coming to them in their own language. Approximately 850 people attended in the morning and 750 in the evening. Before both services, I visited with Dr. Peter Masters, senior pastor of Met Tab for the last forty-two years. About a year ago, his health was declining, and many thought his work as pastor was coming to an end, but he is now feeling better and is working as hard as ever. On Monday, I worked on this pastoral letter most of the day.

The Met Tab School of Theology met Tuesday afternoon through Thursday afternoon, offering nineteen plenary addresses. About 850 people came to the conference during the days and close to one thousand for the evening sessions. The general theme was on living and walking in the Holy Spirit. Five speakers gave two messages each. John Thackway spoke on the Holy Spirit “In Troubles and Distresses” and “In Personal Relationships.” Chris Hand spoke twice on “Weighing Christian Rap/Hip-Hop,” and Ted Williams provided two messages through a reader (he was recouping from surgery) on “Who Are the New Calvinists?” Chris Buss spoke on the Holy Spirit “In Christ-Centered

Speech” and “In Sensitivity and Usefulness.” Jack Seaton spoke twice on “The Holy Spirit’s Objectives for Us.” Roland Burrows gave a message on “The Personal Spiritual Walk of Notable Preachers.”

Dr. Masters and I gave four addresses each. He preached twice on “The Indwelling Spirit” and twice on “Worship and Witness in the Spirit.” I spoke on sanctification: “The Great Calling of Sanctification: Cultivating Holiness”; “The Great End of Sanctification: Knowing the Love of God”; “The Great Progress of Sanctification: Living Submissively by Faith”; and “The Great Obstacle of Sanctification: Fighting Unbelief.”

Between addresses someone was always available to speak with, ranging from young men who are interested in coming to our seminary (one young man hopes to come in January and seems to have considerable promise) and people with counseling problems seeking help. I also kept five appointments with various people who had asked me ahead of time if they could spend some time with me. One was a brother from Malta who would like to start a Reformed church there but knows of only a few other Reformed believers in his country. Spending time with the speakers, eating with friends, and keeping up with e-mail became such a whirl of activity that there was little time to sleep. In the midst of it all, someone hacked my e-mail password. In two hours I received over three hundred e-mails from people, all thinking they might be the first to tell me that I was hacked.

A highlight was a London barrister (lawyer) named Andrew Otchiea, who has been reading my books and listening to my sermons, taking me out for lunch to The Honourable Society of Gray’s Inn, which was the largest of the four great Inns of Court in Puritan times and still remains one of the most important centers in England for the study and practice of law. In England today, law school and the entire profession is still carried out in formal ways, harking back to medieval times. Lawyers are divided into barristers and solicitors—the former doing most of the work in the “High Court.” One of my favorite Puritans, Richard Sibbes, served as a preacher for the lawyers here at Gray’s Inn from 1617 to 1635. The chapel at Gray’s Inn still prominently displays his name. I had the nostalgic privilege of standing in the pulpit, on the very site where Sibbes once preached his “Christ-wooing sermons.” One of Sibbes’s contemporaries, Zachary Catlin, wrote of his famous preaching: “No man that ever I was acquainted with got so far into my heart or lay so close therein. “

I then sat in with my barrister friend on a High Court session. The case we listened to involved two dogs biting each other! The lawyers were dressed in their finery—old-fashioned robes and 750-dollar wigs. Every lawyer is still required to buy such a wig.

On the way home, I sat next to a Muslim mother and her eight-year-old daughter. They grew up in Afghanistan and migrated to Denmark twenty years ago. The girl chatted to her mother the entire trip—eight hours straight. She knows English, Danish, and a local dialect in Afghanistan and is equally fluently in all of these languages.

When I arrived at customs in Chicago, I had a rather unusual conversation with the agent, who looked like he was from India.

“What is your occupation?” he asked.

“I’m a preacher, teacher, and author, sir,” I said.

“How many books have you written?” he queried. When I told him, he just said, “Very interesting. What do you write about?”

I said, "All my books in one way or another are about Jesus Christ and what it means to be a Christian, sir."

"Very, very interesting," he said, as he put my passport into his machine.

I leaned forward and said respectfully, "What about you, sir? Are you a Christian?"

"Well, not really," he said. "I'm too much of a free spirit, but I like to write, too. I wish I could write what I knew was true, though."

"Yes, sir," I said, "that is the joy of writing Christian truth, because you know what you write can truly help people."

"Well," he said, "I certainly respect you for that. May God bless your books."

I replied, "Thank you, sir. May God bless you as well."

My Chicago-Grand Rapids plane was delayed for several hours, so I took another flight to Lansing. But then we sat on the runway for an hour and a half while we were being refueled and waiting for paperwork. Mary picked me up in Lansing, and we finally arrived home at 1:30 a.m.

May God bless you and your family in His super-abounding mercy, so that through prosperity and adversity He may receive all glory in your life. For poor, sinful people like us to yield Him any glory should make us stand in awe of His grace. And it should make us willing to "take pleasure" in whatever we are called to suffer. Let us pray without ceasing for daily sanctification of all life's ebbing and flowing. May God help us to strive, contrary to our nature, to cry out to Him more for His grace and His glory than for human comfort and pleasure.

Warmly, with pastoral love,

Rev. Joel Beeke