

VOLUME 2
ISSUE 1

THE PRESBYTERIAN
PLUMB LINE

The Presbyterian Plumb Line is an online journal published four times a year and designed to biblically inform the Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church about issues that impact our ability to govern under Christ's authority and faithfully shepherd the flock.

We strive to provide content that is accessible, firmly rooted in God's Word, spiritually guided, and committed to the highest standards of truth. Through viewpoint and observation, news items, sermons, book reviews, and other material, we seek to lead our denomination toward a more biblical expression of our Presbyterian conviction: that biblically informed elders, seeking the mind of Christ in the courts of the Church, is the most faithful way to align with God's plumb line.

The editors welcome all inquiries to info@presbyterianplumbline.org.

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Note from the Plumb Line Editors

As many of you are aware, the EPC is at a potentially dangerous turning point in its history. Sadly, the preliminary report of the Ad Interim Committee (AIC) recommends that the ordination of persons with unnatural sexual desires may be acceptable. We pray that the AIC will modify this recommendation which is out of line with both Scripture and historic Christianity. The AIC is inviting feedback on their recommendations. Go to epconnect.org/feedbackssa and let your voice be heard and encourage others to share their perspectives. Our position on the question of ordaining same-sex attracted persons and our response to the AIC report were in the last issue of the Plumb Line if you missed it (presbyterianplumbline.org/vol1-4).

It's encouraging to hear that Sessions across the EPC are beginning to discuss the issue of SSA and ordination, responding to concerns of church members and ruling elders about where the denomination is headed. Transparency is imperative, and we encourage every congregation to get engaged. If your Session or congregation has not been informed about what is happening in the EPC, be a person who speaks up so discussions can begin. Numerous articles in this and past issues of the Presbyterian Plumb Line may be useful resources — see the [Archives](#) tab at the top of any issue. Also, do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of assistance. The Plumb Line Editors will host a Zoom call on Thursday, September 11, from 7:00-8:30 pm (EST) to discuss: “What’s at stake in the EPC?”

In this issue, Peter Larson’s article describes the 2025 General Assembly lunch discussion of the preliminary report from the AIC on same-sex attraction (SSA) and ordination. He highlights that what the EPC needs most is clarity, which the current version of the AIC report does not provide. There was a presentation at the General Assembly on the EPC ethos. Don Fortson weighs in on

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this topic based upon his research in writing the EPC history, *Liberty in Non-Essentials*. He reveals the EPC founders' wisdom in returning to historic Presbyterian roots. In the article, "Is Racism Our Biggest Problem?" Brian Evans, an African American EPC pastor in urban Detroit, asks that question. We think you'll find his biblically perceptive answer encouraging.

Be sure and check out the News items in this issue. These articles provide updates on overtures to the General Assembly, a status report on financial accountability in the Office of the General Assembly, the launching of a new network in the EPC, and a sobering interview with one pastor whose congregation recently decided to leave the EPC. And don't forget the Moderator's Meanderings by Gordon Miller, which includes links to several excellent articles in other publications that we think are worth reading.

Thanks again for reading the Presbyterian Plumb Line. Please tell others about this website — it is urgent now more than ever that EPC folks are informed about what is happening in our beloved EPC.

Previous issues are available on the [Archive](#) page, where they can also be downloaded in PDF format. As always, we welcome and value your comments.

Clarity is Charity: Report on Same-Sex Attraction Draws Criticism

*By Peter Larson
TE, Midwest Presbytery*

When God speaks, he doesn't mumble. His Word is clear. His commands are not vague, ambivalent, or impossible to understand. As Jesus said, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." (Matthew 5:27).

Satan, on the other hand, loves ambiguity. The serpent, we're told, was the most subtle of all the animals in the garden. The serpent took the clear command of God and twisted it beyond recognition: "*Did God really say you should not eat from any tree in the garden? Well, if God said that, surely, he didn't mean it!*" Satan loves subtlety and nuance because it gives him room to maneuver and work mischief.

Currently, the EPC is seeking clarity. The question is whether a person who is celibate but identifies as homosexual and experiences ongoing homosexual desire should be ordained to ministry. This question caused four years of turmoil in the PCA and now it has come to us.

Unfortunately, the draft report written by the Ad Interim Committee on Same Sex Attraction provides no clear answer to this question. Instead of clarity, the report is cloudy. Instead of a clear standard for ordination, there is only pastoral guidance that carries no binding or constitutional authority. As written, the report provides plenty of wiggle room for presbyteries to ordain someone like Greg Johnson, who is the center and source of this controversy.

The General Assembly will not vote on the Ad Interim Committee's report until next year. However, during a question-and-answer session at this year's Assembly, commissioners voiced serious concern about the draft report and its recommendations. Comments and questions focused on four main issues.

Terminology

Although it discourages use of "gay Christian," the draft report says this term could be a "useful, descriptive term in some settings." Voicing concern, one commissioner said, "We don't identify ourselves by our sin but by our identity in Christ."

Bryan Rhodes, a TE from Gulf South Presbytery, questioned the use of "same sex attraction" to describe homosexual desire. Rhodes urged the AIC to substitute the term "unnatural desire" in keeping with the Bible and the Westminster Standards. "If persistent, unnatural temptation is not disqualifying, the question is why not?" asked Rhodes.

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David Milroy, a TE from Presbytery of the Alleghenies, asked why the draft report avoided the language found in Question 139 of the Westminster Confession, which uses the terms “sodomy” and “unnatural lust.” Another commissioner expressed concern that the draft report says little about repentance.

No Clear Standard

The draft report includes a list of seven questions to be used by congregations and presbyteries when interviewing candidates who have disclosed that they experience same sex attraction. Candidates who demonstrate “godly responses to these and other questions ... may be considered for church office.” The problem, however, is that there is no clear definition of what constitutes a godly response. As a result, approval of candidates becomes subjective and determined by each presbytery. This will inevitably lead to each presbytery having its own criteria for ordaining SSA candidates, or what is known as “local option.”

Not Enforceable

In the EPC, a pastoral letter has no authority or enforcement power but only offers general guidance. As noted above, the draft report only provides similar, non-binding pastoral advice.

“My concern is that (the draft report) is little more than a suggestion,” said TE Thomas Nelson from Midwest Presbytery. Nelson urged the AIC to resolve the issue in a way that presbyteries will share a common approach and standard of ordination.

The draft report also recommends that candidates be considered for ordination only if they have a *“long record of living chase sexual lives, both in their physical conduct and also in their desires and attitudes.”* The problem, however, is that it is impossible to verify a candidate’s physical chastity, much less their desires and attitudes.

Our Christian Identity

Another commissioner voiced concern that the draft report does not go far enough in stating that homosexual identity should be “subordinated” to our identity in Christ. He urged instead that the wording be changed from “subordinated” to “rejected.” A commissioner from Oregon said the term “gay Christian” would create confusion about the fundamental nature of our identity and would be “unhelpful and hurtful” in his ministry context.

Members of the AIC emphasized that the report is still a work in progress and encouraged churches to provide feedback. Responding to a question, committee member Shelley Kral said that the AIC believes it is “unhelpful and unbiblical to call yourself a gay Christian,” but they didn’t want to “police language” or “stifle conversations” between candidates and churches.

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When you look back on the liberal drift of the mainline denominations, there is a common thread: conservative Christians have been too trusting, too conciliatory, too naïve, and too willing to compromise. Many of us witnessed this in the PC(USA). Committees on sexuality were heavily stacked with liberals, and conservatives always comprised a minority. What often happened is that conservatives were co-opted and persuaded to compromise. The gradual erosion of biblical standards was justified in the name of peace and unity. It was a wrecking ball strategy, and it worked. In the end, liberals gained control and many conservatives departed the denomination.

Agreeing to disagree is helpful in some situations. However, it does not work when it comes to core biblical standards of sexuality. It is wrong to seek a third way where none exists. In the words of Ed Stetzer:

“Placing sexuality in the adiaphora category is theologically problematic, biblically inaccurate and historically naïve. For all the ways Christians have disagreed, they have been unanimous for two thousand years about same-sex sexual behavior. Evangelicals have joined the historic Christian witness, rejecting the position that marriage and sexuality are adiaphora. Instead, we believe that marriage and sexuality are central to the biblical witness and the gospel itself. And the gospel is essential for unity.”¹

If we compromise on the issue of same sex attraction and identifying with one’s sinful tendencies, it will not promote peace or unity. Rather, it will lead to churches leaving the EPC (some have left already). When biblical standards become ambiguous, it leads to the ruin and wreckage we have witnessed in the PC(USA) and other mainline denominations. Verbal ambiguity on this issue is not loving or charitable: it is the road to discord and division.

Clarity is charity. If the EPC is going to hold together, we need a clear, unequivocal standard of ordination on this issue. Yes, there is a place in the church for people who identify as homosexual and experience homosexual desire; they deserve our love and compassion. However, that place is not leadership. Those ordained to church office must be an example to the flock, above reproach, and living a Godly life — not struggling with unnatural desires. If a candidate for ordination was struggling with sexual desire for his mother, sister, or little children, we would not ordain such a person — period.

Instead of equivocating, the church needs to clearly say “no” to ordaining those who identify as homosexual, whether celibate or not. The unity of the EPC is not based on our ethos or willingness to compromise; it is based on faithfulness to Christ and obedience to His Word. In the coming months, we must pray for the AIC that God will guide and give them clarity. If the report remains ambiguous, then we must pray for a minority report that provides clarity.

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The Church of Jesus Christ, in all the centuries before the ethical collapse of mainline Protestant denominations, never knowingly allowed individuals with unnatural sexual desires to hold church office. If we are to maintain historic orthodoxy on the issue of homosexuality, we must be clear that only heterosexuals meet biblical standards for church offices.

¹ Stetzer, Ed. “Can Faithful Christians Agree to Disagree on Sexuality?” Church Leaders, June 18, 2025. Available at <https://churchleaders.com/voices/512232-agree-to-disagree-christian-sexuality-gender.html>

The EPC Ethos: Truth in Love

*By Don Fortson
TE, Presbytery of the Central Carolinas*

In the EPC today, we are afraid of conflict. We are reminded repeatedly of our ethos, which calls for charity in all things. Those who speak out and disagree are often perceived as troublemakers who are disturbing the peace. And yet, the EPC was founded by men and women who were not afraid to speak and disagree when they believed the biblical and confessional foundation of the church was in danger of crumbling.

Next year's General Assembly has the potential to be a watershed moment in the 46-year history of our church. To date, the doctrine and ministry of the EPC has been a testimony to biblical and confessional faithfulness. This is not by accident, as from its inception the EPC was founded on fidelity to the Word of God and the Westminster Confession of Faith. We do well to remember this as we take up what I believe is the most contentious issue we have faced in the life of our denomination — the ordination of ministers with ongoing unnatural sexual desires. This article recalls what the founding and succeeding generations of EPC leaders did to ensure our church followed the testimony of two thousand years of biblical orthodoxy.

Founding Generation

By the early 1980s, liberal theology had run its course in the UPCUSA and the PCUS — the final authority of the Bible was questioned, the deity of Christ was challenged, universalism was acceptable, abortion was a legitimate Christian option, and an increasing number of ministers considered homosexuality compatible with professing Christ as Lord. A group of pastors and ruling elders in the northern and southern Presbyterian churches decided it was time to leave a denomination no longer affirming historic orthodox Christianity. The churches, whose consciences convicted them it was time to depart, looked around for a suitable denominational home. Alignment with existing Reformed bodies did not seem an option since these congregations were charismatic or had women elders. However, the EPC's founders were persuaded these two issues could be areas where believers might have liberty of practice within a confessional church since there were biblical reasons for holding these positions.

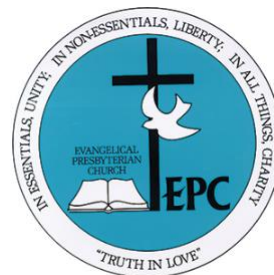
The founding generation of EPC leaders were convinced that one of the culprits of mainline demise was the Book of (multiple) Confessions and feeble ordination vows that had not held officers accountable to Reformed doctrinal commitments. They decided to return to historic Presbyterian practice and adopt the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as doctrinal standards, and resurrected traditional ordination vows that affirmed clear constitutional accountability. These decisions would give the new denomination a strong foundation for the

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future. It was understood that ordination vows would be binding among honorable men and women. A brief statement of essential evangelical faith was written to show solidarity with other orthodox churches.

Logo and Motto

The ethos of the EPC at its founding was captured in the logo and motto of the new denomination. The first official EPC logo had a cross, Bible, and dove (representing the Holy Spirit) in the center, encircled by the EPC motto: “In Essentials, Unity; In Non-Essentials, Liberty; In All Things Charity. Truth in Love.” The final three words of the motto, “Truth in Love,” are a succinct summary of what was central to the founding generation of the EPC. I have written about this early EPC history in *Liberty in Non-Essentials: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church*. When the EPC published its history in 2016, Stated Clerk Jeff Jeremiah wrote a foreword in which he stated:



“An important development that sparked the creation of the EPC was the arbitrary way the mainline determined what was ‘essential’ and what was ‘non-essential.’ Commitment to *biblical truth and confessional orthodoxy* was deemed a *non-essential* while endorsement of women’s ordination was deemed essential.”¹ (emphasis mine)

As Jeremiah pointed out, indispensable submission to biblical truth and confessional orthodoxy was the foundation upon which the EPC was built. This was their solemn resolve in reaction to the crumbling foundation of mainline Presbyterianism where Scripture and the doctrinal standards of the church had become “non-essential.” The final authority of the Scriptures in everything it teaches is the solid rock of Christ’s Church, otherwise the influence of every new wind of doctrine will begin to rebuild that foundation with sand. The founders offered this opening statement of historic evangelicalism in their “Essentials of Our Faith” document:

“All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God’s redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this *sure foundation* we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith.”²

This opening assertion of biblical authority is followed by a list of seven essentials, which according to Ed Davis (EPC Stated Clerk, 1981-2000) was informed by the Wheaton College statement of faith, as well as the brief statement of faith adopted by the National Association of

Evangelicals. The “Essentials of Our Faith” concludes with this statement: “These essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.”

Westminster Confession and Catechisms

The most substantive confessional expression of the Reformed Tradition in the English language is the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. The Westminster Confession has served American Presbyterians well for almost three hundred years. The EPC founders recognized that drift from the Reformed faith expressed in the Westminster standards had brought corruption into the church’s doctrine and practice, and they sought to reverse this by returning to the ancient boundaries as faithful articulations of what Scripture teaches. In the foreword to *Liberty in Non-Essentials*, Jeremiah wrote,

“In the EPC, to be Reformed means that with the church through the centuries we are *unapologetically biblical and orthodox*. We affirm that the Bible is God’s Word, and we are people under its authority. We are also confessional. Our commitment to the Westminster standards is ‘open and honest.’ A careful reading of the Confession (written in the 17th century) can lead to questions, reservations, and even exceptions. For TEs, the Presbytery determines whether exceptions are acceptable — which is in keeping with the Adopting Act of 1729.”³

The EPC constitutionally is a confessional, Reformed church because the founding generation of EPC leaders believed that truth matters! They asserted that biblically we must be “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). “Truth in Love” expresses well the ethos of the EPC where we see ourselves as a family that trusts each other – a place where we can speak the truth to each other in love. Trust in the Christian family is tethered to truth; there is no unity or trust apart from shared truth found in the Holy Scripture. Our unity in the truth as Reformed believers is expressed in our common confession, the Westminster standards. This was the vision of our founders at our inception, a vision that has been faithfully embraced and practiced by succeeding generations in the EPC.

Speaking Up

There is a misperception among some in the EPC that to raise concerns about church issues is inherently divisive, unloving, and violating the trusting ethos of the EPC. This kind of thinking is not biblical. Neither is it consistent with the spirit of the EPC’s founders. One of the reasons the founders of the EPC knew it was time to leave the mainline was because many evangelicals had capitulated and stopped speaking up, resulting in the proliferation of theological error. Observing little willingness to confront false teaching, the founders believed there was little hope for the mainline church being reformed according to Scripture. The lesson they had learned: unless there is vigilance and a willingness to address erroneous doctrine and practice inconsistent with

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Scripture and our constitution, the EPC is destined to repeat mainline mistakes over time. St. Paul's parting words to the elders at Ephesus make this very point:

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." (Acts 20:28-31)

This is a continuous spiritual battle within congregations and denominations. Church leaders must be alert and not hesitate to speak up when God's truth is twisted. A seminary classmate was Mark Jumper, son of Andy Jumper, one of the EPC founding fathers. Mark remembers his father's frustration with evangelicals in the old mainline who would not speak up, but decided "to go along to get along."

I fear that in 2025 this spirit prevails in parts of the EPC, where those speaking up are perceived as "troublemakers" and "malcontents" who need to be quiet and get along with others. This reminds me of the voice heard in the PC(USA) – "We must have peace and unity," meanwhile the ecclesiastical house was burning down! Whenever unity has been valued above truth in Presbyterian history, doctrinal disaster eventually follows. John Calvin, our Reformed forefather, knew the importance of speaking up when God's truth is at stake. He wrote: "A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent."

The reason many of us in the EPC are raising the alarm about the preliminary report from the Ad Interim Committee (AIC) on same sex attraction (SSA) and ordination is that some parts of the report are simply inconsistent with the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards. Members of the AIC surely must know that EPC congregations do not want SSA ministers, so what is the incentive here? There are good folks on the AIC who know Scripture, so we're wondering: Who are they trying to protect? Greg Johnson? SSA ministers currently in the EPC? The EPC's reputation with outsiders? Perhaps all of these. There must be some motivation driving the convoluted preliminary report which is solidly orthodox in parts and then ditches those affirmations when it recommends that SSA candidates may be examined for ordination.

Whatever the motive behind the preliminary report, the EPC must not dismiss what the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:26 about "dishonorable passions ... contrary to nature." Opening church office to individuals with ongoing unnatural sexual desires would be a watershed moment in the history of the EPC — a departure from Scripture, 2,000 years of historic biblical orthodoxy, and

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from its own foundational roots. Sometimes the most loving thing to do in the church is to speak up when God's truth is attacked. The EPC way: "Truth in Love."

¹ S. Donald Fortson III, *Liberty in Non-Essentials: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (Livonia, Mich.: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2016), x.

² See Explanatory Statement to "Essentials of Our Faith" in Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in Modern English (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2004), v.

³ Liberty in Non-Essentials, xii.

Is Racism Our Biggest Problem?

*By Brian Evans
TE, Midwest Presbytery*

The debate over racism and justice in America today is more complicated than we realize. We seem to be making no real progress in this debate; it only seems to be leading to more hostility and division. While I expect this from the secular culture, it saddens me to see the same thing now happening within Evangelical Christianity. As I see it, part of the problem is a lack of clarity over terminology and over the nature of the issues. We seem to be confusing two related but separate issues; one being the reality of racial discrimination against Black people in America's past, the other being the reality of social and cultural breakdown within Black America today, especially within our inner-city communities.

We all know about the social conditions within the inner city and about the wealth, education, and achievement disparities between Black and white Americans. The big question is who or what is responsible for causing these conditions and disparities? The status quo answer being put forward by the culture today is that these conditions were caused and are being perpetuated by racism — more specifically, systemic racism. While we would all agree that racial prejudice and discrimination against Black people have been an ugly reality in American history, is it correct to assume that racism in America's past must be the cause of social breakdown in the Black community today? Is it correct to assume that discrimination must be behind every disparity? Could the old saying apply here, that correlation does not mean causation? Could it be that the issue is more complicated than we realize and that there is much more information to consider?

Being clear on the distinctions and relationships between racism in the past and social breakdown in Black America today has major implications for the current debate over racism and justice in America today. If racism can be proven to be the cause for the social breakdown in Black America today, then we must agree that racism is at least one of the biggest problems facing America today, and that to ignore it is to show a lack of compassion toward Black people. However, what if racism is not the direct cause for this social breakdown or for the disparities between Black and white people? What if there is evidence suggesting that something else could be going on? If racism is not the major problem that some think it is, and if there is something else posing a major problem in Black America, then that changes the whole nature of the debate. It also means that we are focusing on the wrong things and therefore the social problems — and the political division will continue.

During my teenage years growing up in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, I couldn't help being angry over the social and economic conditions of my community. At the time, I believed the status quo cultural narrative about systemic racism being the cause of the modern Black ghetto. I was full of anger and hatred because I believed that America was a racist country and that the

cards were stacked against me. However, after becoming a Christian and renewing my mind through the Word of God, I began thinking for myself and began challenging the narratives I had simply assumed to be true. The more I thought about these things in the light of God's Word, and in the light of real everyday experience, the more I came to see that blaming systemic racism for the problems in modern Black America did not make sense. It was becoming harder for me to reconcile that position with the teachings of Christianity. There were four main teachings from the Bible which made it increasingly more difficult for me to believe that a system could be racist and held responsible for my personal behavior and for the social outcomes in my life.

God's Created Order

The first consideration which led me to challenge today's status quo narrative about systemic racism was what the Bible teaches about the moral nature of God's created order and about the moral agency of human beings. I grew up hearing over and over again that the reason for the disparities between Black and white people was systemic racism. The system turned our neighborhoods into ghettos, the system took away jobs, the system pumped crack cocaine into our neighborhoods, the system created the school-to-prison pipeline. These things were said as if the people in my community had no choice but to let their neighborhoods turn into ghettos. As if they had no choice but to be idle and live off welfare. As if they had no choice but to drop out of school and sell crack cocaine. This position makes Black people out to be passive, helpless victims who lack moral agency. It also leads to the conclusion that Black people cannot be held responsible for their own behavior.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt insulted that anyone could believe this about Black people. I knew that this was not true about the people in my community. I also learned that such a position totally contradicts the teaching of Scripture. Nothing in the Bible justifies blaming an external, impersonal system for one's own behavior. Nothing in the Bible supports the idea that poverty and limited opportunities produce broken families, gun violence, and neighborhood blight. Rather, Scripture teaches that such things happen as a result of choices made by people possessing moral agency. The general teaching of Scripture is that God created human beings to conform to the moral order designed by Him. As a general principle, those who do what is right and conform to God's moral order receive blessing from God. Those who do wrong and go against God's order will suffer (Proverbs 3:3-4; Proverbs 3:33-35; Proverbs 10:4; Proverbs 11:11; Proverbs 12:21; Proverbs 12:24; Proverbs 13:18; Proverbs 13:21; Proverbs 14:11; Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 14:34; Proverbs 19:23; Proverbs 20:13; Proverbs 21:5; Proverbs 22:4; Proverbs 22:9; Proverbs 23:21-22; Proverbs 24:30-34; Psalm 37:9; 37:25; 37:34).

Ultimately, although we all are impacted to some degree by forces outside of ourselves, the Bible does not support us in seeing people as helpless victims whose lives are controlled by external, systemic forces. People are moral beings possessing agency, and as such, they reap the harvest of their own individual behavior, whether that be good or bad (Galatians 6:7).

The Sovereignty and Providence of God

The second consideration that changed my thinking on this subject was my learning what Scripture teaches concerning the sovereignty and providence of God. Nowhere in the Bible could I find any justification for believing that the course of history and the outcomes in people's lives can be controlled by pre-programmed power structures and institutions. From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that the world and all people dwelling in it belong to the Lord (Psalm 24:1). The course of history is not determined by the plans and actions of the nations. Rather, God determines the course of history and controls the destinies of the nations (Acts 17:26). God's sovereignty is universal and absolute. It includes all people, all things, and cannot be thwarted (Psalm 10:11; Psalm 33:10-11; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 4:35).

Because God rules over all things as King of all creation, directing all things for His purpose and according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11), there is absolutely nothing that happens in this world or in our lives that are outside of His will and providence (Proverbs 16:1; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 16:33; Proverbs 21:1; Psalm 75:6-7; Daniel 2:37-38; Matthew 6:26; Matthew 6:30; Matthew 6:33; Matthew 10:29).

Considering what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty and providence of God, one could argue that it is atheistic to believe that the social outcomes of people's lives can be ultimately controlled by systemic racism. To assert that a group of people can set up a social political system that allows them to control the destinies of other groups of people is really idolatry, a denial that God has a purpose for the world and that God is ruling over all things for the fulfilling of that purpose. God does not share His sovereignty with anyone. It is He who ordains our callings and our lot in this world (Proverbs 16:33).

Christ-centered View of History

The third biblical consideration that I could not reconcile with today's cultural narrative on racism is a consideration of the Bible's Christ-centered view of history. As God in His sovereignty rules over all of creation and governs all things by His providence, He is directing history and all things to the goal appointed by Him. God is directing all things to be united in Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10). Christ is the center and goal of everything. All things were made by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16). All authority is in His hands, and He rules over all things for His glory and for the benefit of His church (Ephesians 1:22), even the course of the nations (Acts 17:26-27).

Therefore, the major sin of humanity is not racism, but rebellion and opposition to the rule of Christ (Psalm 2). The ultimate target of every Satanic attack and opposition is Christ and His Church (Revelation 12). History will reach its climax with Christ fully and finally destroying all His enemies and reigning in glory with His bride, the Church. This battle between Christ and

Satan is the battle of all battles. The inbreaking of the Kingdom of Christ and His final victory over Satan, sin and death is the overarching narrative of history and all reality. We see all of history and reality through a Christ-centered filter. By contrast, today's cultural narrative about systemic racism can only make sense when viewed through the filter of a totally different narrative — one that views reality through the filters of oppression and egalitarianism. A narrative that teaches that the struggle against oppressors and the struggle for social and economic equality is everything.

Gospel-centered Nature of the Christian Life

Fourthly and lastly, I could not reconcile the cultural narrative on American racism with what the Bible teaches about the gospel-centered nature of the Christian life. The Christian life is to be a living response to the gospel of Christ. The gospel is a message about the grace and mercy of God towards sinners. All Christians are sinners who have received grace, mercy, and forgiveness through the redemptive work of Christ. Even in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to be the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin (Exodus 34:6-7). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, came into the world as the full embodiment of God's grace and faithfulness. In Him, we receive from the fullness of His grace and faithfulness (John 1:14-18).

As undeserving sinners saved by God's grace, we are called upon to be imitators of God. This means that our lives should be characterized by love, mercy, patience, and forgiveness. These are not the only attributes of God which we are to imitate, but they are at the heart of God's revelation of Himself in the gospel. However, today's cultural narrative on racism has nothing of grace and forgiveness in it. The whole argument that systemic racism is the cause for all the disparities between Black and white people today is based on nothing but assumptions and accusations. Rather than producing the love, grace, and forgiveness of the gospel, the cultural position on racism produces nothing but bitterness, suspicion, blame, unforgiveness, and division. To accuse a whole group of people of being racists based on nothing but baseless assumptions is not in keeping with the spirit of the gospel. Neither is it in step with the spirit of the gospel to convince another group of people that they are nothing but helpless victims and cannot succeed in life on their own ability.

Obviously, walking in the love of the gospel also means hating and condemning real instances of racism. It is true that Black Americans have been subjected to significant racial mistreatment and discrimination in this country. However, the debate is not whether racism exists or not. We all agree that it does. The issue is how much racism still exists and whether it is really the major problem of our time. How are we defining racism and is racism the thing that is responsible for the negative conditions in Black America and for all the disparities between Black and white people? The answer being put forward by the culture today is:

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Yes, racism is the major problem of our time. It is normative, and it's everywhere in every institution and system of our country. The social disparities that exist between Black and white people is the proof. This embedded systemic bias against Black people is the culture's definition of racism.

I find this position to be incompatible with biblical Christianity for the reasons explained above. It denies the moral agency of Black people, it denies the sovereignty of God over the lives of all people, it's inconsistent with a Christ-centered view of history and reality, and it is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. Ultimately, this world and all people in it are under the sovereign rule of God, not the rule of white oppressors. The greatest problem in the world is humanity's rebellion against Christ, not racism. Historically, the church has never taught that systems can be racist and that a racist system can be responsible for the behavior and social outcomes of the people in an entire community. So why is this being taught and accepted as true in Christian churches today?

I agree with those who have been arguing for a while now that these ideas about systemic racism have come into the Church through the influence of Critical Race Theory (CRT). I don't believe that everyone holding these views on systemic racism subscribes to CRT. However, whether they realize it or not their thinking has been shaped by CRT. What I described above as the narrative believed by today's culture is the teaching of CRT. A quick study of the history and teachings of CRT would prove this to be true. CRT is not compatible with the teachings of Christianity. Defending CRT, some claim that all truth is God's truth. The problem, however, is that CRT does not teach truth. If you take some facts that are true and interpret them through a false worldview system, then what you are teaching is false. CRT is a false, secular, humanist ideology based on Marxist and postmodern assumptions.

Rejecting the ideas and assumptions of CRT does not mean ignoring the plight of poor inner-city Black Americans. It is because I love inner-city Black America so much that I hate CRT. CRT points people away from the true problems plaguing Black America and points them away from the only true solution.

Although racism does exist, it is not the major problem facing Black America today. As a Black man from the inner city, not only have I learned from Scripture, but I've learned from my own personal experience that I control the outcomes in my life by my own personal behavior. I have also learned through experience that God is the one who is sovereign over my life and directs it by His providence. I have also come to see that race is not everything. My life is not defined by my ethnicity; Christ is all in all. What happens in this world socially and politically has very little significance other than what it means for the spreading of the kingdom and glory of Christ.

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If we truly love Black people and want what is best for them, then we would stop supporting ideas and narratives that encourage Black people to see themselves as victims. We would reject CRT as nothing but an empty, worldly philosophy. We would determine to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. Lastly, we would support and encourage gospel-centered churches and educational institutions that are devoted to bringing spiritual, moral, and cultural renewal to the inner cities. This is what I have committed my life to doing by planting 5point7 Community Church in Detroit. May the Lord put all Satanic ideologies under His feet and grant true reformation and revival to our country and inner cities.

A Moderator's Meanderings

By Gordon Miller
Moderator, 34th General Assembly

“Meanderings” definition: Rambling or passing from one topic to another.

I hope you find the following collection of articles, quotes, quips, and Scripture to be informative, edifying, and thought-provoking. This information is not as thorough or detailed as the other articles in the Plumb Line. But I hope to stimulate honest and open debate on a variety of topics and challenges facing the church — especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. With cultural changes coming at ever-increasing speed, all of us on the Plumb Line Editorial Board desire that believers will stand firm, rooted in Scripture. I pray that you read this content in the spirit intended: love for Christ and for each other.

Note: The views and opinions expressed here are mine alone, and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the full Editorial Board of the Plumb Line.

Books You Might Enjoy

Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life
by Donald S. Whitney. NavPress, 1991.

Many of you may be more familiar with Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* first published in 1978. Read while I was in seminary (the first week of Greek I knew I was sunk!), Foster's book was an introduction to a more spiritual faith that a lawyer like me badly needed. Recently our Session began a study of Whitney's look at the spiritual disciplines. The church in America would do well to dive into either of these books as an aid to spiritual growth and holiness as we travel the sanctification highway. I have found Whitney's book a pleasant surprise. Easy to read, more detailed than Foster, and just as edifying. As the speed at which we experience life continues to increase and the level of joy or contentment seems to decrease, a book that suggests biblical steps to slow down and enjoy God would be a great addition to your library.

The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict was Fought and Won
by Victor David Hanson. Basic Books, 2017.

If you're a political or YouTube junkie as I am, you have probably heard of the author. Solidly conservative, he is a joy to listen to if your politics lean right. More importantly, he is a respected student of history, especially the history of conflict and war. This 600-page study of the Second

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World War is a must read for those of you who find yourself fascinated by man's feeble efforts to avoid conflict. Despite having read numerous books on the topic of war, I was constantly surprised by the brilliant insights by the author and the surprising amount of "new" information he supplied this reader. Not to worry, he writes as a historian not a political commentator.

Article of Interest

"How and Where Do We Draw the Line?"

Kevin DeYoung

"Clearly Reformed" July 1, 2012

<https://clearlyreformed.org/where-and-how-do-we-draw-the-line/>

As far back as 2012, DeYoung dissected "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity." Considering ongoing denominational disputes, how should a denomination establish doctrinal boundaries? DeYoung suggests seven steps to pursue when facing difficult doctrinal issues. (See my next recommended article.)

"Why No Denomination Will Survive the Homosexuality Crisis"

Kevin DeYoung

"The Christian Post" July 16, 2012

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/why-no-denomination-will-survive-the-homosexuality-crisis.html>

Despite the seven steps DeYoung recommends in the previous article when faced with doctrinal issues, he concludes efforts at compromise on the issues surrounding homosexuality are doomed to fail. His solution is that a denomination "must fish or cut bait" and decide what it really believes. While my heart wants the EPC to discover a brilliant solution, DeYoung presents a strong argument that most proposed solutions just "kick the can down the road." READ THIS ARTICLE!

"Ralph Martin and the Crisis of Clarity"

Greg Schlueter

"Crisis Magazine" July 30, 2025

<https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/ralph-martin-and-the-crisis-of-clarity>

"There is a particular cruelty in offering welcome without truth. It is the cruelty of the smiling gatekeeper who opens the door to a collapsing house." With this opening line, the author responds to what he believes to have been the unfair treatment of Ralph Martin by the Roman

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Catholic Church. Martin had spent much of his life calling upon the church to declare truth with respectful boldness when addressing the gay community, to speak the truth in love. Schlueter notes the church's failure to do so has left those in desperate need of God with a soft-serve gospel that comforts but never convicts.

“Podcast: The False Humility Threatening to Undermine Scripture”

D.A. Carson

“Crossway Articles and Podcasts” November 18, 2024

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-the-false-humility-threatening-to-undermine-scripture-d-a-carson/>

In a most interesting interview, Carson reflects on issues he's addressed that have adversely impacted the church: “Recently, I've been pondering the fact that many Christians slide away from full confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture for reasons that are not so much intellectual as they are broadly cultural.” In the same vein, he points out how often believers decide Scripture is not sufficiently clear. They then use their own method of interpretation that usually employs cultural preference without serious hermeneutical effort. What's left is a faith more interested in being accepted by the culture than one willing to stand for the truth of Scripture.

Quotes

“So often in the age of presentism, we in our narcissism and arrogance confuse our technical and material successes with automatic moral progress. We seem unaware that thinkers of the past — as early as the Greek poet Hesiod some 2,700 years ago — worried about just the opposite: they worried that material progress and greater wealth would result in moral regress, given the greater opportunities to gratify the appetites with perceived fewer consequences and to use sophistry to excuse sin.”

— Victor David Hanson (Hillsdale College Commencement Ceremony, May 10, 2025)

“Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true.”

—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*.

“When Christianity is a dissident choice, one that comes with social stigma and other penalties, a door is opened to the formation of a more robust church community with higher expectations of its members — indeed, such is almost required.”

—Aaron M. Renn, “Positively Christian,” *Touchstone* July/August 2025

Humor

A little boy praying: “Lord, if you can’t make me a better boy, don’t worry about it. I’m having a real good time like I am.”

If you’re sitting in public and a stranger takes a seat next to you, just stare straight ahead and say, “Did you bring the money?”

Interviewer: “So, tell me about yourself.”

Me: “I’d rather not ... I really need this job.”

News from the 45th General Assembly

The 45th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church convened June 18-21 at Ward Church in Northville Township, Mich. Ward Church and its then-Pastor, Bart Hess, were the hosts of the first General Assembly of the EPC in 1981. The 45th Assembly brought together more than 1,100 commissioners, observers, and guests for a week of worship, equipping, and deliberation on key matters affecting the denomination.

The Assembly addressed a range of overtures and reports related to ordination standards, position papers, denominational procedures, and budget transparency.

Ordination Standards Updated

One of the most closely followed areas of business involved Overtures 45-10 to 45-26 and 45-40 to 45-41, which proposed updates to the EPC's ordination standards. Commissioners voted to retain the bachelor's degree requirement for ordination and to remove the "extraordinary clause," which had previously allowed presbyteries to approve candidates lacking ordinary qualifications under exceptional circumstances.

These changes followed recommendations from the Ad-Interim Committee on Ordination Standards, which hosted a well-attended networking lunch on Tuesday. The approved measures are intended to uphold consistent, high standards for pastoral preparation across the denomination.

Divorce & Remarriage Paper Referred for Further Study

Overture 45-27, which proposed revisions to the EPC's Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage, was referred to the Permanent Committee on Theology for further consideration. The referral allows for additional theological study and input from across the denomination before any potential changes are brought to a future Assembly.

Rules for Assembly Revised

Commissioners also approved several overtures (45-29 to 45-33) concerning the Rules for Assembly, resulting in updated procedures for how overtures are submitted, evaluated, and debated. These adjustments aim to streamline the overture process and clarify responsibilities within the Assembly's constitutional framework.

Networking Lunches Highlight Key Topics

Two notable networking lunches provided space for constructive dialogue. On Tuesday, the Ad-Interim Committee on Ordination Standards met with commissioners to answer questions about

their work. On Wednesday, a second lunch engaged the report of the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination, drawing wide participation and discussion on how the EPC can uphold biblical fidelity on this issue.

Churches Meet with OGA Leadership to Address Financial Concerns

In a private meeting held June 18 during the 45th General Assembly, leaders of eleven churches from the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest (PNW) met with representatives of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) to voice concern about financial transparency and the budgeting process.

In response, the OGA agreed to meet with them again later this year with the goal of working together to improve financial practices. The June 18 meeting was attended by Stated Clerk Dean Weaver, Chief Financial Officer Pat Coelho, Moderator-elect Jack Cathey, and other OGA representatives.

The eleven PNW churches first raised concerns about financial transparency in October 2024. In February 2025, the churches sent a letter to the National Leadership Team. In particular, the group wanted to know why the OGA has failed to account for \$1.2 million in unrestricted reserves that were spent during a three-year period between 2021 and 2024, and why these expenditures had not been previously reported.

The PNW churches came to General Assembly with a list of questions they were prepared to ask from the floor during the presentation of the 2026 budget. However, TE John Carpenter contacted Weaver to schedule a private meeting in an effort to avoid controversy.

Carpenter said that he and other representatives from the PNW churches were encouraged by the meeting.

“Everyone was cordial and cooperative,” said Carpenter. “Some of our questions were answered.”

At the June 18 meeting, representatives of the OGA explained that most of the \$1.2 million in unrestricted reserves had been moved to a designated account to cover church planting and church health expenses in the transition from Per Member Asking (PMA) to Percentage of Income (POI) funding models. With the expected rise in income generated by POI, those two gospel priorities are now funded from the general fund.

Another concern raised by the PNW churches is the lack of a supporting narrative to explain and interpret the budget. Without such a narrative, it is impossible to know if funds are being spent effectively. Moderator-elect Cathey, who has a PhD in accounting and a background in finance and banking, said he would be open to collaborating with the PNW churches to create such a narrative, as well as improving the budget reporting system both at and between GA meetings.

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“The encouragement was mostly the consensus that we all want to work toward more robust reporting,” said TE Bill Heming, who attended the June 18 meeting. “Jack Cathey was a big reason for that encouragement,” added Heming.

The PNW churches also expressed concern about the recent expansion of the OGA staff and seek confirmation that there are currently 32 OGA employees and how many are full-time. In addition, the churches are seeking to confirm if 80 percent of the 2026 administrative budget is devoted to staff salaries and benefits and supporting materials and services.

Representatives of the OGA committed to meet again with the PNW churches by early fall, before the next meeting of the National Leadership Team. Although the meeting has not yet been scheduled, Carpenter hopes it will take place sometime in September or October.

Wisconsin Church Votes to Leave EPC

Concerned by the direction of the EPC, Christ Alone Church in Green Bay, Wis., voted in May to leave the denomination and become an independent Reformed congregation.

“I have many friends I love in the EPC but there is a sense that the denomination is drifting,” said TE John Cory, pastor of the 40-member congregation. “In order to grow, we must show that we are in line with Scripture.”

Cory said his elders were distressed by many issues in the denomination, including the Pastoral Letter of Racial Lament and the formation of the Ad Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction. In addition, Cory said his elders believe the EPC is not taking effective steps to reverse a steady decline in membership.

“When we attended presbytery meetings and General Assembly, it seemed very self-congratulatory,” said Cory. “But when I began to do some research, I discovered that membership of the EPC peaked in 2016 and has been declining since then.” As a result, he began to question if the evangelistic programs of the EPC have really been effective.

“The videos that we get from the Office of the General Assembly are like clever trailers for a bad movie,” said Cory. “They’re trying to spin things in a manner that everything is fine.”

Cory said his church participated twice in the EPC church health and refocus programs, but with negative results. “The first time we went through it, we lost one-third of the congregation,” he said. When the church enrolled in the program a second time, Cory said it fizzled out due to a lack of follow-up and support from the church health coordinator.

“Where is the empirical evidence that this stuff works and has value?” said Cory. “To our elders, it seemed more like a business model than a spiritual model. We gave it a shot, but the content didn’t remotely fulfill its promise.”

In recent years, the Green Bay church has shifted to a complementarian position of male-only leadership. The shift has resulted in the loss of several female leaders who ended up leaving the church.

“We had a ton of people come to our church during the COVID epidemic, but we lost most of them because we were not complementarian,” said Cory. “They didn’t consider us a biblical church because we didn’t hold to a complementarian view.”

The Pastoral Letter of Racial Lament was another issue that caused the church to lose confidence in the EPC.

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“When I got that letter, I almost lost it,” said Cory. “It was written from a perspective of white guilt and a Marxist cultural tone. My elders were shocked that the EPC would put forth something like that.”

Another concern, said Cory, was the shift to a more hierarchical style of leadership in the EPC. “It seemed like an inversion of our polity, operating in a way that was top-down instead of coming from the grass roots,” he said.

Controversy over Greg Johnson and the issue of ordaining pastors who identify as homosexual was another major issue, said Cory.

“When I took this back to our elders, they couldn’t believe it,” he said. “What you’re saying is its okay to be unrepentant. Obviously, a person who identifies as homosexual is unrepentant.”

The Green Bay church followed the constitutional process for disaffiliating from the EPC which requires two congregational meetings. According to Cory, the church experienced no resistance or opposition from Rivers and Lakes Presbytery.

When Cory shared his reasons for leaving the EPC, one presbytery official seemed sympathetic.

“He urged me to stay and fight for change,” said Cory. “But at some point, you see that you’re not winning anything. I hate to say it, but as other pastors who have left the EPC have told me, it seems a lot of this stuff is predetermined at a higher level. That is what we were bumping up against. It seems they are squelching discussion in order to fast track things in the way they want to go.”

For the time being, Christ Alone Church has chosen to remain independent.

“We’re feeling gun-shy about reaffiliating with anyone right now,” said Cory. “We’re just taking a breather to see how the Lord leads us.”

New Church Network Formed

A new fellowship group, the Berean Network, is being launched for mutual encouragement of EPC pastors and congregations who share common values and ministry philosophies. Pastor Andy Schuster of Mooresville, N.C., describes the new group:

“The Berean Network is an informal network of EPC churches seeking fellowship so that we might support one another and collaborate in ministry. We share a particular set of convictions and are committed to living them out in our ministry decisions. Our heart is to partner with like-minded churches who (1) adhere to the orthodox Christian faith of the last two thousand years, (2) embrace historic Reformed theology, (3) practice the historic pattern of male leadership (e.g., exclusive male eldership) (4) affirm the enduring relevance of the gifts of the Spirit, (5) practice grassroots Presbyterianism that grounds authority in the courts of elders (sessions and presbyteries). It is our shared belief that careful study of the Scriptures and church history affirms these five tenets.”

Many denominations have networks or affinity groups among their churches that encourage the work of the local church, collaborate on projects, and mutually support one another through fellowship and shared ministry. The EPC, for example, has a number of these supportive partnerships for pastors of large churches, small churches, women ministers, church planting, and world missions. These networks encourage the work of congregational ministry and outreach, and strengthen the overall work of the denomination. Church officers and members are encouraged in these networks to faithfulness in their specific ministry callings.

American Presbyterians have always created networks or affinity groups within their denominations. Often, the groups are centered around a common set of convictions on a variety of issues. Many of us in the EPC participated in these kinds of fellowships during our years in the PCUS, UPCUSA and the PC(USA). These denominations had networks (to name a few) such as the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship, Presbyterians Pro-Life, Presbyterian Charismatic Communion, Presbyterian Layman, Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians, Presbyterians for Renewal, and New Wineskins. They were networks that functioned within those denominations, seeking to support and encourage congregations through meaningful cooperative fellowships — often focused on particular issues, concerns, or ministry objectives. Over the years, many of these groups and others served the church well.

For more information about the Berean Network (<https://bereannetwork.org>), contact info@bereannetwork.org.