

“On the broad shoulders of William Perkins, epoch-making pioneer, stood the entire school of seventeenth-century Puritan pastors and divines, yet the Puritan reprint industry has steadily bypassed him. Now, however, he begins to reappear, admirably edited, and at last this yawning gap is being filled. Profound thanks to the publisher and heartfelt praise to God have become due.”

—J. I. Packer, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology,
Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

“Without a doubt, the Puritans were theological titans. The Puritan theological tradition did not emerge out of a vacuum. It was shaped by leaders and theologians who set the trajectory of the movement and shaped its commitments. William Perkins was one of those men. Perkins’s contribution to Puritan theology is inestimable, and this new reprint of his collected works is a much-awaited addition to all who are still shaped and influenced by the Puritans and their commitment to the centrality of the grace of God found only in Jesus Christ. Even now, every true gospel minister stands in debt to Perkins, and in his shadow.”

—R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, The Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary

“The list of those influenced by the ministry of William Perkins reads like a veritable Who’s Who of the Puritan Brotherhood and far beyond. This reprinting of his works, so long unobtainable except by a few, is therefore a publishing event of the first magnitude.”

—Sinclair B. Ferguson, professor of systematic theology,
Redeemer Theological Seminary, Dallas

“The father of Elizabethan Puritanism, Perkins presided over a dynasty of faith. The scope of his work is wide, yet on every topic he treats one discovers erudition and deep reflection. He was the first in an amazing line of ministers at Cambridge University’s main church. A pastor to pastors, he wrote a best-seller on counseling, was a formative figure in the development of Reformed orthodoxy, and a judicious reformer within the Church of England. I am delighted to see Perkins’s works made available again for a wide audience.”

—Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Theology
and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“William Perkins was a most remarkable Christian. In his relatively short life he was a great preacher, pastor, and theologian. His prolific writings were foundational to the whole English Puritan enterprise and a profound influence beyond his own time and borders. His works have become rare, and their

republishing must be a source of real joy and blessing to all serious Christians. Perkins is the first Puritan we should read.”

—W. Robert Godfrey, president, Westminster Seminary California

“This is a welcome collection of the gospel-saturated writings of William Perkins. A faithful pastor, Puritan leader, prolific author, and lecturer, Perkins defended the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation throughout his life. Giving particular emphasis to *solus Christus* and *sola Scriptura*, these Reformed doctrines drove him as a pastor to preach the unsearchable riches of God’s truth with confidence and assurance. Sadly, Perkins is unknown to the modern Christian. However, throughout the centuries, the writings, meditations, and treatises of this Puritan luminary have influenced Christians around the world. It is my hope that many will be introduced and reintroduced to the writings of this Reformed stalwart. May his zeal for gospel advance awaken a new generation of biblical preachers and teachers to herald the glory of our sovereign God in this present day.”

—Steven J. Lawson, president, OnePassion Ministries, and professor of preaching at The Master’s Seminary

“Relatively few in the church’s history have left a written legacy of enduring value beyond their own time. Perkins is surely among that select group. Reformation Heritage Books is to be commended for its commitment to making his *Works* available in this projected series, beginning with this volume.”

—Richard B. Gaffin Jr., professor of biblical and systematic theology emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Christians have heard about William Perkins, especially that he was an extraordinary preacher whose sermons made a deep impression on Cambridge and that they were still impacting the town in the decades that followed Perkins’s death at a mere forty-four years of age in 1602. He was at the heart of the revival of truth and holy living that made the Reformation a glorious work of God. He was the outstanding Puritan theologian of his time, but most of us have not had the opportunity to study his works because of their rarity. After more than three hundred years, this ignorance is going to be ended with the remarkable appearance during the next decade of the complete works of this man of God. We are looking forward to their appearance very much. There will be sufficient gaps between their publication to ensure a sincere attempt at imbibing the truths of each volume, and then we face the challenge of translating Perkins’s teaching into flesh-and-blood living.”

—Geoff Thomas, pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales

The Works of
WILLIAM PERKINS

The Works of WILLIAM PERKINS

—♦♦♦—
VOLUME 3

Commentary on Hebrews 11

EDITED BY RANDALL J. PEDERSON
AND RYAN M. HURD

General editors:
Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas



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General Preface



William Perkins (1558–1602), often called “the father of Puritanism,” was a master preacher and teacher of Reformed, experiential theology. He left an indelible mark upon the English Puritan movement, and his writings were translated into Dutch, German, French, Hungarian, and other European languages. Today he is best known for his writings on predestination, but he also wrote prolifically on many doctrinal and practical subjects, including extended expositions of Scripture. The 1631 edition of his English *Works* filled over two thousand large pages of small print in three folio volumes.

It is puzzling why his full *Works* have not been in print since the early seventeenth century, especially given the flood of Puritan works reprinted in the mid-nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. Ian Breward did much to promote the study of Perkins, but Breward’s now rare, single-volume compilation of the *Work of William Perkins* (1970) could only present samplings of Perkins’s writings. We are extremely pleased that this lacuna is being filled, as it has been a dream of many years to see the writings of this Reformed theologian made accessible again to the public, including laymen, pastors, and scholars.

Reformation Heritage Books is publishing Perkins’s *Works* in a newly typeset format with spelling and capitalization conformed to modern American standards. The old forms (“thou dost”) are changed to the modern equivalent (“you do”), except in Scripture quotations and references to deity. Punctuation has also been modernized. However, the original words are left intact, not changed into modern synonyms, and the original word order retained even when it differs from modern syntax. Pronouns are capitalized when referring to God. Some archaic terms and obscure references are explained in the editor’s footnotes.

As was common in his day, Perkins did not use quotation marks to distinguish a direct quotation from an indirect quotation, summary, or paraphrase, but simply put all citations in italics (as he also did with proper names). We have removed such italics and followed the general principle of placing citations in quotation marks even if they may not be direct and exact quotations. Perkins generally quoted the Geneva Bible, but rather than conforming his quotations to any particular translation of Scripture, we have left them in

his words. Scripture references in the margins are brought into the text and enclosed in square brackets. Parenthetical Scripture references in general are abbreviated and punctuated according to the modern custom (as in Rom. 8:1), sometimes corrected, and sometimes moved to the end of the clause instead of its beginning. Other notes from the margins are placed in footnotes and labeled, "In the margin." Where multiple sets of parentheses were nested within each other, the inward parentheses have been changed to square brackets. Otherwise, square brackets indicate words added by the editor. An introduction to each volume by its editor orients the reader to its contents.

The projected *Works of William Perkins* will include ten volumes, including four volumes of biblical exposition, three volumes of doctrinal and polemical treatises, and three volumes of ethical and practical writings. A breakdown of each volume's contents may be found inside the cover of this book.

If it be asked what the center of Perkins's theology was, then we hesitate to answer, for students of historical theology know that this is a perilous question to ask regarding any person. However, we may do well to end this preface by repeating what Perkins said at the conclusion of his influential manual on preaching, "The sum of the sum: preach one Christ by Christ to the praise of Christ."

—Joel R. Beeke and Derek W. H. Thomas

Preface to Volume 3 of William Perkins's Works

William Perkins defined theology as “the science of living blessedly forever.”¹ The phrase captures well the ethos of *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, his exposition of Hebrews 11:1–12:1, first published in 1607 and here reprinted in a minimally edited form.² Though Perkins is often remembered for his contributions to dogmatic theology (as, for instance, his *Golden Chaine* [1592], an influential discourse on the order of the causes of salvation and damnation³), perhaps his greatest achievement was his ability to take theological concepts and apply them to the needs of daily life. We can see this in his careful handling of such pastoral issues as prayer, repentance, conversion, and assurance of faith.⁴

Perkins's skill with such pastoral issues is especially apparent in his commentaries, of which the present is a prime example, wherein biblical exposition and experiential warmth converge. His comments exude a keen desire to address pastoral issues and objections, which is readily apparent throughout his examination of Hebrews 11.

1. Thomas Nicols, *An Abridgement of the Whole Body of Divinity, Extracted from that ever-famous and reverend Divine Mr. William Perkins* (London, 1654), 1.

2. Fully titled *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses, Leading to the Heavenly Canaan; Or, A Commentary upon the 11th Chapter to the Hebrews, Preaching in Cambridge by that Godly and Judicious Divine, M. William Perkins*. Perkins's exposition was popular, with numerous printings appearing in 1607–1609, 1622, and 1631. In fact, the work was a favorite reading of the merchant class in early British North America. Louis B. Wright, *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 34.

3. For a discussion of Perkins's doctrine of predestination, see Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); and Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 61–122. While acknowledging Perkins's influence as “undisputed” and “uncharted,” Dixon cautions against schemes that would compare every subsequent thinker to Perkins (63).

4. Thus, Charles Hambrick-Stowe opines that Perkins was “the greatest theologian of the [Puritan] movement.” Charles Hambrick-Stowe, “Practical Divinity and Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 191–205.

In this preface, we will first discuss Perkins's role as a parish minister and pioneer in practical divinity, and then briefly examine a few remarkable aspects of the commentary that elucidate Perkins's skills in biblical exegesis and application.



Perkins has been called the “Father of Pietism.” While there are distinctions between the type of piety Perkins endorsed and the later developments of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German pietism,⁵ the epithet, first given to Perkins in the nineteenth century by the German dogmatician Heinrich Heppé,⁶ describes the role of a progenitor of an affective Protestant experimentalism. This experimental piety, which some have mistakenly associated with Jesuit casuistry,⁷ so pervaded Perkins's parish work at Great St. Andrews in Cambridge that it left an indelible mark on those who attended his ministry, as well as inestimable generations of pastors and Christians after him.⁸ In fact, Perkins's preaching was so popular that he drew great crowds from the university town and its vicinity. Thomas Fuller, the noted seventeenth-century

5. According to F. Ernest Stoeffler, Perkins and William Ames helped to lay the essential foundation of German pietism. See F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 233. Theodore D. Bozeman goes further and suggests that Puritanism at its core was its own Pietism (with a capital P); contrary views, he writes, “[obscure] both the originality and the epochal fullness of the Puritan venture into piety...” While German Pietism “diverged in notable ways from the earlier movements...it exhibited no special fullness of type.... In some respects, German Pietism was arguably *less* original and luxuriant.” Thus, the progenitor and originator of Puritan Pietism was its “greatest publicist,” William Perkins. Theodore D. Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 67–68.

6. See Heinrich Heppé, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformirten Kirche* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 24–26; and Peter Damrau, *The Reception of English Puritan Literature in Germany* (London: Maney Publishing, 2006), 14.

7. Thus Eliot Rose writes, “In his major work on the subject, *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience* of 1608, Perkins gives no indication of having consulted papistical precursors at all.” Eliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience: Alternatives Open to Recusants and Puritans under Elizabeth I and James I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 94. Thomas Merrill notes, however, that while it is true that Protestant casuists rejected much of Jesuit casuistry (believing it to be legalistic and morally inferior), they nonetheless “availed themselves of the rich heritage of Roman Catholic casuistry for the general patterns of their practical divinity.” Thomas Merrill, *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist* (Nieuwkoop: Brill, 1966), xii–xiii. Cited in Dennis R. Klinck, *Conscience, Equity, and the Court of Chancery in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 112–13.

8. Raymond A. Blacketer, “William Perkins (1558–1602),” in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 38.

church historian, wrote that Perkins was “constant” in his preaching, able to intimately address the needs of each parishioner, whether scholar or layman; and further, his sermons were presented with such “passionate affection” that he was able to pierce the soul and mollify the conscience in every sermon.⁹ But Perkins’s chief fame was his unrivalled ability to resolve those plagued with doubts about their own salvation. Thus, it is entirely appropriate to call him “the theologian of assurance.”¹⁰

For Perkins, as well as for the budding Puritan movement he was somewhat associated with,¹¹ the sermon was the central event of the church service. In contrast to florid forms of ceremonialism, Perkins emphasized plain-style preaching, with the spoken word of the minister as the representation of the voice of God to His people. As such, the church was to be adorned simply, with the pulpit usually as the centerpiece. “It is not meet that a Christian should be occupied by the eyes, but the meditation of the mind,” he famously wrote.¹²

And it was all a labor of love. Born out of gratitude for the mercy he himself had received, Perkins never sought advancement or preferment, which is remarkable considering how “meager” a salary he earned from Great St.

9. Thomas Fuller, *Abel Redevivus or The Dead Yet Speaking* (London, 1652), 433–35.

10. Margaret Sampson, “Laxity and Liberty in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought,” in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 99–100.

11. Perkins’s ties to Elizabethan Puritanism are not so straightforward. Patterson writes that “Perkins did not identify with those called Puritans, but he did not dismiss their efforts to achieve an inward purity, either.” He further argues that Perkins distanced himself from the Presbyterians, making it known that he wanted to “continue to exercise his ministry in conformity with the established Church and did not wish to be identified as subversive to the English Church or state.” W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 48–49. Elsewhere, Patterson argues that Perkins was “not so much an Elizabethan Puritan as he was an apologist, perhaps the chief apologist, for the Church of England as it emerged from the long English Reformation.” W. B. Patterson, “William Perkins as Apologist for the Church of England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57, no. 2 (2006): 252. While it is true that Perkins never formally criticized the English church, as his pupil William Ames had done, nor spoke unfavorably of its ministry, he did, according to Leif Dixon, implicitly address its deficiencies through his preaching ministry. See Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England*, 76–80.

12. Quoted in Robert Whiting, *The Reformation of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120. See also Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 266. For Perkins’s stance on visual representation within the church, see David J. Davis, *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures: Religious Identity during the English Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 59–60. In short, Perkins rejected the depicting of the Godhead within the church service, but allowed biblical representations for civil and domestic use. See also Tara Hamling, “Guides to Godliness: From Print to Plaster,” in *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Interpretation* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 69.

Andrews. Perkins did not live a lavish lifestyle or spend his time on the entertainments of his age. Few, if any, ever questioned his motives in bringing the gospel to the people.¹³ While acknowledging a place for respite, he devoted himself to the work of the ministry, to writing, to his family, and to relief of the poor. He would write, “Wise and godly men must be chosen to gather and dispense relief of the poor. By God’s providence, like order is established in this our church and land and because it is the ordinance of God, all men must seek to further it: and they that shall neglect their duty herein, wittingly and willingly, are not in this point friends of God and their country.”¹⁴

As his commentary on Hebrews 11 intimates, Perkins was a pioneer in practical divinity. This sort of divinity taught that there was usually some useful or ordinary application of a doctrine or theological concept. Though Perkins wasn’t unique, he was exemplary, especially in that he was the first Englishman to have earned a reputation on the continent.¹⁵ By promoting an all-encompassing spirituality that applied in the parish, pew, academy, and trade, Perkins was able to overcome the deficiencies of the English parish and meet the needs of his congregation in new ways. Chief among his concerns

13. Fuller, *Abel Redevivus or the Dead Yet Speaking*, 435. Perkins had lived an idle, carefree, and sinful life while a student. From this, Francis J. Bremer suggests that he came from an affluent family that could fund his leisurely lifestyle prior to his conversion. Whether this is true or not is uncertain. What is certain is that after his conversion, Perkins consistently preached against both idleness and worldly enrichment. As Caroline notes, Perkins would say, “If God gives abundance, when we neither desire it nor seek it, we may take it, hold it, and use it.... But [the businessman] may not desire goods...more than necessary, for if he doth, he sinneth.” Laura Caroline Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 134.

14. William Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Appelford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 319–20. Within the literature is a tenuous notion that Perkins hated the poor and saw material prosperity as a sign of God’s favor and mark on the elect; poverty was thus “an indicator of sin, failure, and damnation.” Timothy Scott McGinnis, *George Gifford and the Reformation of the Common Sort: Puritan Priorities in Elizabethan Religious Life* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2004), 16. This caricature is carried over from Christopher Hill’s influential essay, “William Perkins and the Poor,” in which he portrays Perkins as a castigator of the unfortunate. In contrast, Patrick Collinson has argued that Hill “read Perkins selectively,” failing to distinguish within Perkins the distaste for willful, flagrant idleness on the one hand, and unfavorable economic and natural forces on the other. Perkins did not promote a worldly materialism, but insisted that such wealth, were God to bestow it, should be used for the good of others and not for personal enrichment. See and compare Christopher Hill, “William Perkins and the Poor,” in Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), 215–38; and Patrick Collinson, “Puritanism and the Poor,” in *Pragmatic Utopia: Ideals and Communities, 1200–1603*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Rees Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 242–58.

15. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, 92.

was his desire to see his hearers come to a thorough and sound conversion to the Reformed faith.¹⁶ His work in casuistry, in which he focused on troubling personal issues or “cases” to bring biblical solutions, was a development of his preaching ministry.¹⁷ As a pioneer in teaching how to practice theology, Perkins helped to usher in the golden age of Puritan pietism.¹⁸

With regard to his commentary on Hebrews 11, there are a few important matters to note. First, the work was not originally penned for wide public consumption. Its origins lay in the pulpit of Great St. Andrew's Church, where Perkins first preached the sermons that would become the commentary on Hebrews 11. It is uncertain when exactly he did so. We only know that the editors of the commentary, William Crashaw and Thomas Pierson, themselves ministers of the Word, had heard the series firsthand and had taken them down, presumably in shorthand, before they were later converted to the printed text.¹⁹ This explains the heavily sermon-like undertone apparent throughout the text. Furthermore, the origin of the commentary probably explains the repetitious nature of the work as a whole. Given the material—the hall of faith—a certain amount of redundancy may be expected; there are times throughout the text, however, where themes, especially applications, are handled again and again (such as assurance of faith) as one would expect in a series of sermons. Nevertheless, Perkins's uses remarkably and consistently flow from his text at hand and thus, regardless of their repetition, are biblically rooted.

Second, as Richard Muller has aptly pointed out, the work is a textual commentary that proceeds “close to the words of the *Epistle*,” but refrains from “direct recourse to Greek.”²⁰ This is not altogether surprising given its homiletical origins, but it does show a distinct characteristic of commentaries in the Puritan tradition in that the centerpiece was not so much the minutiae of the words of the text as it was the derived doctrine and its application. This is not to say that Perkins does not pay careful attention to exegesis. At times throughout the commentary there is manifest attention given to exegetical

16. For Perkins, conversion was usually a gradual process and rarely involved a sudden transformation. In some cases, it could take a long time to complete and consisted of no less than ten stages, four of which were preparatory (e.g., hearing the word, self-awareness of sin) and six gracious (e.g., faith, assurance, sorrow). Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of the Puritan Idea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 68–69.

17. See Ian Breward, “William Perkins and the Origin of Puritan Casuistry,” *The Evangelist Quarterly* 40 (1968): 16–22; and George L. Mosse, *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), 48–67.

18. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, 111.

19. Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, title page.

20. Richard A. Muller, “William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition: Interpretation, Style, and Method,” in William Perkins, *A Commentary on Hebrews 11 (1609 Edition)*, ed. John H. Augustine (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 71–94.

matters. For instance, in his comments on verse 37, Perkins notes that “they were tempted” could “by the change of a letter in the original...be read thus: ‘They were burned.’”²¹ While he concludes in the end that “tempted” is correct, Perkins yet evidences a careful regard for textual issues.

Nonetheless, as Muller has noted, Perkins’s style overall lies in simplicity and plainness, rarely delving into such issues. Furthermore, examining the lives and backgrounds and respective biblical narratives of the various figures throughout Hebrews 11 forms a large part of Perkins’s material, revealing a tendency to go “wide” rather than “deep” into the text of Scripture.

Third, the scriptural quotations found in his commentary are not Perkins’s own translation, as readers might guess, but are derived chiefly from the Tomson revision of the Geneva Bible, and occasionally from the Bishop’s Bible. Muller suggests that variances within the main headings of the commentary arise from posthumous editorial revision, but that variances within the text itself most likely belong to Perkins.²² However, there are often times where it is evident he intends a paraphrase—particularly in the body of his commentary, or when quoting or prooftexting from throughout the biblical corpus. He often will accommodate a particular quotation that lends itself more clearly to the point at hand, giving a sense rather than strict citation. Thus, Perkins’s quotations exhibit variety throughout his commentary.

Nevertheless, on this point, it is impossible to know how much revision Crashaw and Pierson made to the text or whether the text, as a whole, is a faithful word-for-word reproduction of Perkins’s speech. Variances in style and sentence structure throughout the commentary suggest some revision, but given the significant consonance of the whole, such alterations were likely kept to a minimum, and even then only to suitably convert the text to printed medium.

Fourth, Muller notes that Perkins’s exposition “offers a separate chapter or sermon for virtually every verse of the chapter...and uses his own recommended pattern for sermons throughout its length.”²³ Perkins breaks Hebrews 11 up thematically based on the individual figures of the text—thus, there are chapters on Abraham and Moses, but at times (especially at the end) chapters covering several verses.

We will now turn to a brief examination of Perkins’s commentary on Hebrews 11 and discuss a few notable aspects of it.



21. William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins*, Volume 3, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, ed. by Ryan M. Hurd and Randall J. Pederson (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 380. References are to the present volume.

22. Muller, “William Perkins and the Exegetical Tradition,” 77.

23. Muller, “William Perkins and the Exegetical Tradition,” 78.

Perkins's commentary on the exemplars of faith is an extraordinary book in many ways. Notable characteristics of the work as a whole include the following.

First, Perkins's exposition consistently extracts the doctrine from the text and then interweaves its various practical uses. This can be seen from the beginning in his exposition of Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the ground of things which are hoped for: and the evidence of things not seen." Here we can see an example of his method of commentating.

Perkins initially delineates three aspects of faith: historical, miraculous, and saving. The first, says Perkins, belongs to those who assent with their heart to the truths of the Christian religion. Second, with miraculous faith one is persuaded that he will be used by God for some great purpose. Third is saving faith, which concerns persuasion of one's salvation in Christ and is given only by the Holy Spirit.²⁴ The meaning of "faith" in verse 1 belongs to the third sense, says Perkins.

From here Perkins discusses how faith is the "ground" of Christian hope, and what such hope consists of: justification, sanctification, resurrection, glorification, and life everlasting.²⁵ Though believers in the Old Testament did not see as clearly as those in the New, true saving faith gives such an assurance of blessings that it is like one already possessed them entirely. Moreover, faith, as an "evidence," convinces the mind and understanding of the truths and reliability of God's promises, even though no one has seen with their eyes final sanctification, resurrection, and glorification.

Since Christians in the present age hope for things they do not yet possess (and yet these things are real), so believers in the Old Testament, who did not have knowledge of Christ in the same fullness, nonetheless were "truly partakers of the body and blood of Christ." How? "By the wonderful power of saving faith, which makes things that are not in nature to have in some sort a being and subsistence. And so was Christ (though He was yet to come) present to the believers of the old time."²⁶ This conclusion Perkins returns to frequently throughout his commentary.

As Perkins progresses with his exposition of each word and phrase, he continues to draw forth doctrine and application. For instance, since the topic of Christ's physical body arose in his answer of how Old Testament saints could believe prior to the incarnation, before Christ was physically present on earth, Perkins interjects a discussion of the Lord's Supper and specifically

24. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 7.

25. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 8.

26. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 9–10.

corrects the belief of the Roman Catholics that the bread and wine in the sacrament become the actual body and blood of Christ.²⁷

In addition, since faith makes things present which are absent, Perkins admonishes his hearers to make use of this truth during times of vicious and unrelenting doubt. For Perkins, one could wholly lose such a sense of God's favor that he fears he belongs to the "castaways." Nonetheless, faith can restore such a vexed person. Perkins writes,

The Lord after that He has received His children into His favor continues not always to manifest that favor unto them but often times pulls back the feeling of it for a time that afterward He may show it again in more comfortable manner unto them, and that they may afterward more sensibly feel it and more earnestly love it and more carefully labor to keep it when they have it.²⁸

Further, in contrast to "Romish doubting," true faith consists of "certainty and assurance." Somewhat surprisingly, Perkins seems to go so far as to say that assurance is of the essence of faith while at the same time acknowledging that a true believer can doubt his faith, even for long periods of time, and even to such depths that he can be almost persuaded of being in a state of damnation.²⁹ This latter coupling of the dynamic in the believer—faith mixed with doubt—is perhaps the most common theme throughout the commentary. On the one hand is true faith: "But behold the power of true faith in the heart of a holy man. It overgoes all doubts."³⁰ But on the other, as a result of man's carnal reasoning, there "remain[s] some relics of doubting, for as reason cannot overthrow true faith, so the best faith in this world cannot fully vanquish reason."³¹

Finally, in conclusion of his exposition of verse 1, Perkins advises believers to fortify their faith by considering God's promises. For it is only by true faith that one can be upheld in such times as poverty, sickness, famine, and other various crosses the Lord allows.³² This true faith the Christian must labor for all the days of his life.

Second, another noteworthy characteristic of Perkins's Hebrews commentary is his correction of social issues and customs. For instance, in his

27. Perkins, *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses*, 3. As would be expected of a sixteenth-century Reformed theologian, Perkins repeatedly reproves popish doctrine in *A Cloud*. See also Antony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

28. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 11.

29. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 12–13.

30. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 92.

31. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 172.

32. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 11–12.

comments on verse 3, "Through faith we understand that the world was ordained by God, so that the things which we see, are not made of things which did appear," Perkins first discusses the nature of a general faith in the things of religion and then progresses to discuss the creation of the human body. Here, says Perkins, God "gave us apparel to cover that shame that sin had brought upon us"; thus, he reasons, one could make use of "gorgeous apparel," but only faith could cover the shame one feels in the presence of God. Moreover, God gives such "costly apparel" not to bring glory to the body, but to "honor...the place you are in and to adorn that part of His own image which He has set in you by your calling."³³ What began with faith progresses to counsel on the proper and prudent use of clothing.

Another similar example is Perkins's advice to those of his day on eating "meats." Advising moderation, he adds the necessary duty to accompany partaking of food—to "make good use" of it: "For the meat that he loves best, let him be humbled for his sin, knowing that if he had not sinned he should have had much more sweetness in other meat, which notwithstanding should not have cost any creature his life."³⁴

Finally, perhaps where Perkins excels best is in his illustrious and everyday examples by which he drives home the doctrine. One such instance is as follows: "We know that those who keep clocks, if they would have the clock still going, must once or twice a day wind up the plummets which cause the wheels to go about, because they are still drawing downward. Even so, seeing our hearts have plummets of lead, which are worldly cares and desires to press them down from seeking up to heaven, we must do with our hearts as the clock keeper does with his plummets: wind them up unto God every day."³⁵ Thus may we follow what Perkins argues is the main exhortation of the entire chapter of that great hall of faith: to "persevere in faith unto the end."³⁶

It is undeniable that Perkins's commentary on Hebrews 11 had a profound impact on those who read it. As we have seen, if only briefly, Perkins was adept at exegesis and application. Unlike modern critical commentaries, those from a precritical era, especially those that had their origins in sermons, made less use of Greek and Hebrew and more use of doctrine and the multifaceted ways it could be applied to the needs of the parish. While the church today needs both, it is hoped that the publishing of this work will again serve the church, not only by offering a glimpse into the fascinating exegetical world of a Cambridge pastor but also by showing how doctrine is first and foremost for life.

33. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 25–26.

34. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 26.

35. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 404.

36. Perkins, *Commentary on Hebrews 11*, 6.

In an age of cheap faith and easy believism, Perkins offers us something more substantial: a way to put our faith to the test, to try it against the faith of the “great cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 11, and, in the end, to put it into practice, assured that God’s mercy will uphold us for life.

We would like to thank the people whose help, guidance, and inspiration made the publication of this book possible. First, we would like to thank Joel Beeke and Derek Thomas, the series editors, for asking us to take on this project and doing a final edit on it, and for bringing Perkins to a wider audience. Our typists, Lau Yeong Shoon and Ann Dykema, who transcribed the script—many thanks to both of you. We thank Jay Collier, director of publishing for RHB, for his tireless efforts, and Annette Gysen, whose supreme expertise in editing is only outshined by her servanthood and kindness. And finally, we would like to thank our typesetters, Linda and Gary den Hollander, for their careful work and cooperation.

—Randall J. Pederson and Ryan M. Hurd

A CLOUD OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES,
LEADING TO THE HEAVENLY CANAAN:

Or,

A Commentary upon the 11th Chapter to the Hebrews,
preached in Cambridge by that godly and judicious divine,
M. William Perkins.

Long expected and desired; and therefore published
at the request of his executors, by Wil. Crashaw, and Th. Pierson,
Preachers of God's Word: who heard him preach it,
and wrote it from his mouth.

Philippians 3:17.

“Look on them that so walk, as ye have us for an example.”

Hebrews 13:8.

“Whose faith follow, considering what hath been the
end of their conversation.”

To the noble and virtuous gentlemen,
Sir John Sheaffield, Knight, and Master Oliver S. John,¹
Sons and heirs to the Right Honorable Edmund Lord Sheaffield,²
Lord President of the North,
and Oliver Lord S. John, Baron of Bletso:³

Grace, and peace.

The gracious promises of God (honorable and most worthy gentlemen) made to the holy patriarchs touching the land of Canaan were singular comfort to the believing Israelites in their bondage of Egypt. And the renewing of the same by the hand of Moses (whose words God confirmed by so many miracles) must needs augment their joy abundantly, although their bonds at that time increased. But the pledge of God's presence in the cloudy pillar, whereby He led them in the wilderness both night and day, did so far exceed all His promises for matter of consolation that even Moses himself desired rather to be detained from the promised land, than deprived of the comfort of that His presence in the way: "If thy presence," says he, "go not before us, bid us not depart hence" [Ex. 33:15]. Now, these things, being "ensamples" [1 Cor. 10:6] unto us, and evident types of our estate who live under the gospel, show apparently that howsoever believers be greatly cheered in their spiritual travel by the gracious promises which God in Christ has made unto them, yet this their joy is much increased by the view of those that have gone before them in the way of faith, who are unto them as a cloud of witnesses or a cloudy pillar. For howsoever the truth of God be the only ground of sound consolation, yet because we are akin to Thomas and will not believe unless we see and feel, therefore it is that by the example of believers (wherein is some sensible evidence of the comfort of God's truth) we are far more cheered than by the promise itself alone.

Here then behold what great cause we have to cast our eyes upon this cloud of witnesses, which the Holy Ghost has erected as a pledge of His presence and a direction to all those that shall follow their steps in the practice of faith, till

1. Oliver St. John (c. 1584–1646), first earl of Bolingbroke, politician, and later a lay member of the Westminster Assembly.

2. Edmund Sheffield (1565–1646), the first earl of Musgrave, a politician renowned for his heroics at sea.

3. Oliver St. John (c. 1545–1618), politician and third Baron of St. John of Bletso.

the world's end. Shall Moses affect that cloud⁴ so much, which led them only the way to a temporal inheritance, and shall not we much more be ravished with delight in this cloud, which leads us to the kingdom of heaven? In all estates “the just must live by faith” [Heb. 10:38], for we “walk by faith, and not by sight” [2 Cor. 5:7]. And what is the hope and happiness of a Christian man but to receive at last “the salvation of our souls, which is the end of our faith” [1 Peter 1:9] and period of this walk. But any faith will not support us herein. Some begin in the “spirit,” who end in the “flesh” [Gal. 3:3], going out with Paul for a while, but at length return with Demas to the world [2 Tim. 4:10]. Neither can they do otherwise, for apostasy is the catastrophe of hypocrisy. He that would deceive in his profession is usually deceived of his salvation.

Wherefore, this shall be our wisdom: to see to our souls that our faith (as the beloved apostle said of love) “be not in word, and tongue; but in deed and in truth” [1 John 3:18]. And for our better direction in trying the truth of our faith, we have here many notable precedents in this cloud of witnesses, consisting of most worthy believers in all ages before Christ's incarnation, all which showed the life of faith by their works. And we in them may see how to put our faith in practice. Now, the rather must we attend hereunto, because in all estates we must practice faith. For “without faith it is impossible to please God” [Heb. 11:6]. And what estate of life can possibly befall us, wherein we have not a lively pattern and forerunner leading us the way to heaven within the compass of this cloud? Are you a king or magistrate? Behold David, Hezekiah, and the judges. Are you a courtier? Look on Moses. Are you a martial man? Behold Samson, David, Joshua. Here is Enoch, Noah, and the prophets for ministers; the patriarchs for fathers; Sara and the Shunammite for mothers; Isaac and Joseph for children. Here is Abel for shepherds, and Rahab for victuallers.⁵ Here are some that lived in honor, in peace, and plenty; some in want, and some in sickness—but most of all in persecution, because therein is the greatest “trial of faith” [1 Peter 1:7]. So that which way soever we turn us, if we walk by faith, we have here some faithful witness to go before us. And to clear their steps the better to our sight, that so we may “follow hard toward the mark” [Phil. 3:14] without wandering, we have here a notable light in this learned commentary, which we must confess is much obscured for lack of the refining hand of the godly author himself, but now, seeing that shining light is quenched, use this our lamp. It is fed with such oil as we received in the Lord's sanctuary, from that olive tree whence many an one did fill his vessel. And being importuned to expose the same for the common good, we have

4. Ed. note: Likely, “Shall that cloud affect Moses so much....”

5. *Victuallers*: those who provide or sell food or drink.

presumed to place it under the shelter of your honorable names, beseeching God it may help “to guide your feet in the way of peace” [Luke 1:79].

The religious precedents of your honorable parents (right noble and hopeful gentlemen) must persuade you much to be sound and constant in the faith, for declining in religion brings stain of honor [Jer. 28:15, etc., to the end] and decay even of temporal portion [1 Kings 11:11]. But labor you to increase in grace and trust the Lord with your outward greatness. Honor Him, and He will honor you [1 Sam. 2:30]. Delight in Him, and He will give you your holy heart's desire [Ps. 37:4]. His faithfulness will be your shield, to the grief of those that envy your happiness. But beware of bad example and evil counsel, which are the bane and poison of younger years. Walk with God like Enoch [Heb. 11:5]; use the world as Abraham did [v. 10] and follow Moses [v. 24, etc.] in the matters of delight, forsaking them when they become the pleasures of sin. So shall you “obtain good report” [11:39], and your memories shall be blessed with your posterities, like these faithful witnesses.

November 10, 1607

Yours in the Lord to be commanded,

William Crashaw⁶

Thomas Pierson⁷

6. William Crashaw (c. 1527–1625/6) was a Church of England minister, controversialist, and chaplain to Edmund Sheffield.

7. Thomas Pierson (c. 1573–1633), a zealous Puritan, was a Church of England minister, graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and rector of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire.