

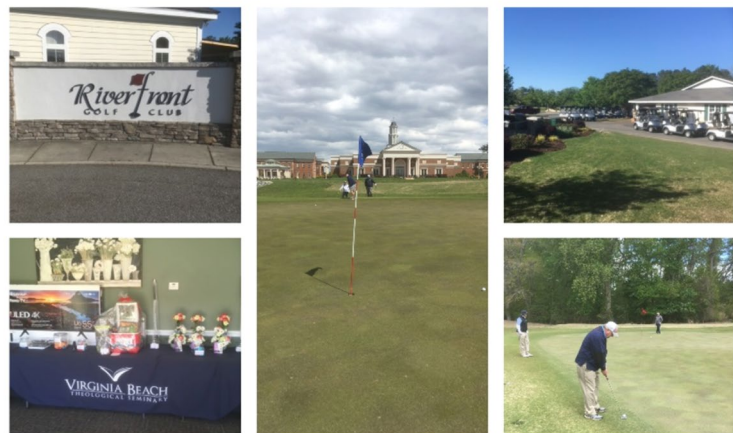
EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

One thorny theological issue in the evangelical church, which continues to raise its stubborn voice, is discerning the proper balance between the moral will/action of man and the sovereignty of God. Though I cannot solve this for you today, I can direct you to a book I read: *The Bondage of the Will*, by Martin Luther. In one lengthy paragraph Luther asks, “Are there problems raised by this Biblical doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God in providence and grace?” His measured response is worth hearing: “Of course there are! Everything that God reveals of Himself transcends man’s comprehension God does not tell men more of His purpose than man needs to know.... Faith [then] will wait patiently ... till the coming of greater light.” These are well-thought words from Luther. So, I ask, am I content to patiently wait for “greater light” on this matter?



2023 VBTS Annual Golf Classic

On April 18th, seventy golfers descended upon the beautiful Riverfront Golf Club to enjoy the **18th Annual Golf Classic**. Our desire was to raise finances for library development. By God’s good grace, we have a theological library of 49,300 volumes, over 30,000 hard copies of periodicals, and access to five periodical databases. However, we are in need of newer technology and more technical language-specific books. On this day, God blessed us not only with beautiful weather, but we also were able to net over \$23,000 for this project. A thank you is in order for the many golfers who played, sponsors who donated, and Meineke Car Care which was the corporate sponsor. Finally, the VBTS Board is very grateful to the Chairman of the Classic, Terry Lackey, for his tireless oversight. It was a wonderful day, and we rejoice!

“Breaking faith with the Lord” Numbers 5:6

Dr. Daniel Davey | President, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary

Reading through the opening chapters of Numbers is not always the easiest undertaking for a 21st century believer. The first two chapters are a bit tedious as Israel takes a census of each tribe and learns how to be arranged around the Tent of Meeting. The next 100 verses explain the specific duties of the tribe of Levi as they “keep guard over the whole congregation” (3:7). Chapter 5 abruptly begins with Yahweh commanding the people of Israel to keep the camp clean because “I dwell in the midst of it” (v. 4). Then, Yahweh explains how to make atonement “when a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the Lord” (v. 6). These words seem to leap off the page of Scripture. What does it mean to “break faith with the Lord?” Let’s consider this.

The phrase “breaking faith” is an ESV/NET Bible translation of both the Hebrew verb *mā’al* (used 35 times in the OT – “to act with fraud or treachery”), and the noun *ma’al* (used 29 times – “a trespass or transgression”), which are coupled together in the Hebrew Text. Interestingly, the actual term for “faith” is absent, but the phrase itself sends the unmistakable message that someone has committed a violation of trust and must face the consequences. Let me demonstrate this with a delicate illustration. In Numbers 5:12, this verb/noun combination is used in the matter of marital fidelity. The law allowed a man to challenge the sexual purity of his wife if he believed she went “astray and breaks faith with him” (v. 12). At its core, sexual infidelity ruptures the sacred trust between a husband and wife. This is exactly the idea of Numbers 5:6. The translation “breaking faith with the Lord” establishes the meaning of the text: Sin is a serious issue before a holy God for it fractures the relationship of trust between God and man.

To support the translation of the noun/verb combination “to break faith,” it is instructive to note a few other examples of the 20 OT passages where these terms are found together. In Leviticus 6:2, someone may commit “a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor.” Again, in Joshua 22:16, the eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar by the Jordan River and were called into question by Israel’s leaders for apparently committing a “breach of faith against God.” Then, in 2 Chronicles 28:19 King Ahaz is said to have encouraged Israel to sin for he “had been very unfaithful to the Lord.” Clearly, these examples validate the notion of shattering a sacred trust.

The question now remains: Is there a way to restore a fractured relationship with the Lord?

The essential issue of the text is this: man has sinned, and God considers this a breach of their relationship. Thankfully, God desires restoration and clearly marks the path of return in Numbers 5:6-8. He states, realize your guilt (v. 6b), confess your sin (v. 7a), make full restitution if the wrong demands it (v. 7b), and submit a blood sacrifice upon which atonement is made (v. 8). This was not only good news for the ancient reader of Torah, but it is also a joy for us today. God is holy, and sin “breaks” our relationship with him. Yet, his nature radiates mercy and grace, so he stands ready to forgive and restore the repentant sinner upon the basis of his Son’s sacrifice (1 John 1:7). Indeed, through Jesus Christ and his completed work on the cross, “we have an Advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1). So, let’s heed John’s words and be humble “repenters” (1:9): “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”