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Water for the thirsty

Rev. James Slopsema

The covenant and Dordt: Election, the foundation

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Premillennialism—Postscript: Antinomism (4)

Prof. David Engelsma

Graciousness: Tempering Truth with Love

Mrs. Brenda Hoekstra



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Editorial office

Prof. Russell Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

Church news editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Water for the thirsty

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isaiah 55:1

It was common in the Bible lands to come across vendors selling water. Water was often scarce in the Bible lands. And so vendors would sell water, calling out to those who were thirsty to come and buy their water.

The word of God before us compares the Lord to such a vendor selling water.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth.” This is what the vendors would call out to the crowds. “Ho” means, “let me have your attention.” They would call out to the thirsty. This was what the Lord was doing in Isaiah’s day. He was calling out to those who were thirsty in Judah to whom He had sent His prophet. He is doing this today—calling out to all who are thirsty.

The call of the Lord to the thirsty is, “Come ye to the waters.” We understand that this water is not earthly, physical water. The Lord is not in the business of pedaling earthly water. The water of this passage is obviously the water of salvation. The Lord calls all who are thirsty to come to the waters of salvation to drink deeply of them unto life eternal.

But the thirsty to whom the Lord calls out have no money to buy the waters of salvation. And so the Lord calls out to them to come and buy without money. This water is free to all who are thirsty.

We must come as those who are thirsty but have no money to buy the waters of salvation.

The water of salvation!

Some view the water in this passage to be no more than the physical blessing of God upon Judah with her return to Canaan from the Babylonian captivity. In the first part of his prophecy, Isaiah foretold Judah’s captivity in Babylon on account of her sins. In the latter part Isaiah speaks of Judah’s restoration to Canaan. Some see the water in this passage as referring to the earthly blessings of Canaan for Judah upon her return from captivity. The Lord would return Judah to Canaan, a land well-watered, a land of milk and honey.

However, the water in this passage looks beyond the earthly blessings of Canaan to the greater blessings of salvation through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in his prophecy Isaiah connected the earthly showers that the Lord would bring upon the land to the Spirit whom the Lord would pour out upon the people. “For I will pour water upon him [that is, the land] that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Is. 44:3).

This prophecy of the pouring out of the Spirit was fulfilled on the Jewish day of Pentecost immediately following Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven.

Consider the following passages.

To the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well Jesus indicated that He possessed the water of salvation. In fact, He claimed to be a well of water springing up unto eternal life, which if a man drank he would never thirst again (John 4:14).

Then, during the Feast of Tabernacles, in which Israel commemorated her wilderness wanderings, “Jesus stood [in the temple] and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” The inspired writer John added by way of explanation, “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

Finally, some unusual events took place in Jerusalem on the Feast of Pentecost following Jesus’ death. There were the sound of a mighty wind, cloven tongues of fire appearing on the heads of Jesus’ followers, and the gift of speaking the word of God in different tongues. The apostle Peter interpreted these as signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as foretold by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-18). The Jesus whose crucifixion the crowd had sought was now risen and glorified. And now He had poured of the Holy Spirit with rich blessings of salvation upon the church, the likes of which the church never before enjoyed.

These rich blessings of salvation through the work of the Spirit are the waters to which the thirsty are called

to buy without money and without price. They include the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God in the blood of the cross. They include a new life of fellowship and friendship with God in the power of Jesus' resurrection. They include being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. They include the final resurrection of the body into glory in the day of the Lord.

To show the richness and fullness of these blessings Isaiah also makes mention of milk and wine. Those who are called to buy water are also called to buy wine and milk. Wine and milk are symbols in Scripture of luxurious living. Water is necessary to sustain life. Wine and milk speak of the riches and luxury of life. The salvation that God provides in Jesus Christ is a life overflowing with the wine and milk of joy and feasting.

The thirst of faith!

One who thirsts for water has a craving for water. We all need water. When we lack water, we become thirsty and desire water. Thirst is one of the greatest cravings that man can experience.

Isaiah is speaking about those who thirst for the waters of salvation. We all have need of the waters of salvation. In Adam we all fell so that we are hopelessly lost in sin, headed for eternal destruction. Without the water of salvation in Jesus Christ we will most certainly perish. However, many do not see their need for this water, do not thirst for it and, in fact, despise it. This is evident from Isaiah's rebuke to Judah immediately after the call to the thirsty to come to the water of life. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (Is. 55:2). Here Isaiah expands on the idea of water to include also the bread of life. In Judah there were those who labored for and spent their money not in the pursuit of the water and bread of life but on that which satisfied not, namely, the pleasures of this world. This is due to the depravity of sin. It blinds a person to his real needs.

One thirsts for the water of salvation only when God works faith in the heart of a person. Faith gives one eyes to see the reality of sin and the need for the water of salvation. In that faith one also thirsts for these waters.

But those who thirst for the waters of salvation have no money to buy it. Those who bought water from the vendors in Bible lands needed money. The vendors were in business to make money. Without money you could not have their water. But we have no money to purchase the water of salvation. In our fallen state we are spiritually bankrupt and are not capable of purchasing the water of salvation. Neither our money nor our works are sufficient to purchase the water of salvation. Nor are we deserving

of it anyway. We deserve to perish in our sin. Those who have the thirst of faith see this clearly. Many think they can earn or merit the salvation of God by their works and efforts. Others think they are deserving of the water of God's salvation because of their birth, their baptism, or membership in the church. But those who have faith see that they have nothing with which to purchase the water of salvation. They thirst for it. But they are deeply aware that they can bring nothing to God to purchase it.

The call of God!

The Lord calls to these thirsty, bankrupt souls to come anyway to buy water without price.

To buy something without money or price means to receive it free.

Certainly the waters of salvation have a price. In fact, the price is very high. The price of the waters of salvation is twofold. There must be a bearing away of the terrible wrath of God against sin. And there must be a perfect obedience rendered to God that meets His approval. Since we are not able to pay this price, God did it for His people in Jesus Christ. He caused Jesus Christ to bear away the full penalty of sin all His life long but especially at the cross. And during it all Jesus walked in the perfect obedience we did not and could not. In this way God has purchased and secured the waters of salvation for His elect people.

And He freely gives this precious water to His people. He calls out to His people in their thirst to come to Him to receive the waters of salvation freely, without money and without price. This is a call to acknowledge one's sin and need for the waters of salvation. It is a call to acknowledge that one has nothing with which to pay. It is a call to seek the waters of salvation only on the basis of the perfect work of Jesus Christ.

This is God's call to all who are thirsty. And this call is effective. It is by this call that God creates faith and thirst in the hearts and lives of His people. And it is by this call that He also brings the thirsty believer to the waters of salvation that are Jesus Christ. And as they come in faith to Him, the Lord gives freely of the waters of salvation. Freely He forgives all their sins. Graciously He strengthens them to turn from sin to the living God in loving obedience. Tenderly He cares for and preserves them as they pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Most amazingly He draws near to them in His loving friendship and fellowship.

Ho, every one that thirsteth!

Come ye to the waters!

You have no money? Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price! God has already secured it for you in Jesus Christ!



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

The covenant and Dordt: Election, the foundation

The doctrine of election is the foundation of the Reformed truth of salvation by grace alone. The first head of the Canons of Dordt establishes the doctrine of double predestination in answer to the first point of the Remonstrants. The Arminians placed this doctrine first in their five objections (remonstrances), knowing that if they could successfully change the Reformed teaching of election to a conditional election, the rest of their teaching (errors) would follow logically. If election (and therefore, salvation) depended on man's choosing it, then Christ died for all to make that choice a possibility, and fallen man is not dead, and grace is resistible, and perseverance unto eternal life depends on man.

The fathers at the Synod of Dordt understood well that this doctrine was crucial for the entire doctrine of salvation, and accordingly, established the truth of sovereign, double predestination in the first head. The Canons define election in Head I, Article 7:

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race...a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.

Election governs the rest of the doctrines of grace, determining those for whom Christ died (the elect only, II, 8), those saved by irresistible grace (III/IV, 11-14), those who persevere to everlasting life (V, 9), as well as those left in their sin and guilt (the non-elect, I, 6). Eternal, sovereign election is the foundation of the salvation that is all of God, all of grace, and all in Christ. Christ is the Elect of God (Is. 42:1), and the Head of all those chosen in Him. Because of this headship, Christ legally represented the elect of God and accomplished salvation on their behalf.

Election, God's eternal and unchangeable plan, is the certainty of the salvation, accomplished in and by Jesus Christ and worked in His own by Christ's Spirit.

Election is also the foundation of God's eternal covenant of grace.

Ephesians 1 is the classic passage on election, and there the Spirit ties election to the covenant. First, the passage indicates that election is 1) in Christ, and 2) from eternity, for God "hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (v. 4). Then verse 5 connects election to the covenant—"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." Having predestined some to adoption, God chose them in Christ. Adoption captures the heart of the covenant's life of love and fellowship. God predestined (pre-determined) from eternity that His people chosen in Christ should be His adopted children. That adoption is "by Jesus Christ," for in His cross Jesus made His people righteous, giving them the right to be called God's children and His brethren. In time, Christ sends forth His Spirit to form the living union of faith, giving elect sinners the life of Christ and forming them in His image, thereby making them to be the living children of God. But all of that was pre-determined by God in His decree of election. God determined that His chosen would live in the sphere of His love, holy and without blame (v. 4) as His sons and daughters.

Election is the foundation of the covenant. Further biblical and confessional proof will be brought in a future article, but Ephesians 1 makes the direct connection.

Reprobation is also important in the doctrine of the covenant. For reprobation indicates that not all are predestined unto adoption. In fact, some are, out of God's "sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure," predetermined to destruction (Canons, I, 15). As regards the doctrine of the covenant, reprobation explains why some children are not chosen, though born to believing parents (parents who are elect in Christ). God does not establish His covenant of love and friendship with these non-elect children. They are in the sphere of the covenant by their birth, but it is not God's intent to adopt them as His children. Therefore, He does not falsely offer to take them as His children, nor promise them the blessing of sonship. God is always faithful and His Word always true.

Election determines the covenant people not merely in a general way, that is, the group of elect people. Rather, election determines the specific people, the individuals whom God has chosen in Christ, adopts as His own, and brings into the eternal covenant of grace.

In order to understand election and reprobation in relation to the doctrine of the covenant, it is necessary to grasp the organic nature of the covenant.

Organic means living. A tree is organic, a stone is not. A corn plant is an organism, while a computer and car are not. How does this apply to the covenant?

An organism is a living thing, having one and the same life in every part, but having also a diversity of parts. A corn plant, for example, has roots that grow deep into the soil, a sturdy stalk, leaves, an ear, corn kernels, and the husk that covers the kernels. Although diverse, each part has the same life of the corn plant sustaining it. Each part of the plant has a specific function.

Notice that the function of each part ultimately serves one and the same purpose, namely, to feed and nourish the corn kernels. Roots draw the water and nutrients from the ground. The stalk supports the plant so that it stands erect; it does not lie on the ground and rot. The stalk also transports the water and nutrients from the roots to the rest of the plant. The leaves are the photosynthesis factories—using what the roots supply with the power of the sun to produce food for the plant. Leaves also protect the ear of corn from the harsh winds and burning sun. The cob supports the kernels as they grow, and the husk protects them.

Every part of the one living plant is perfectly planned and created by God to produce corn. At the same time, the whole plant is identified by its fruit, whether it is root, stalk, leaves, ear, or husk—it is corn.

Similarly, God's covenant people must be seen as an organism. God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed. We speak of covenant parents and covenant children. We speak of our covenant schools, and identify the students there as covenant children. They are identified as covenant children because they are part of the "plant" of the covenant—children born to believing parents, many of whom were also born of believing parents. Others of these parents were grafted into the living "plant" of covenant people, coming to faith later in life. The whole group is identified with the term "covenant people" because of the elect seed with whom God does establish His covenant. It would be perverse at a Christian school program to address the students as *covenant children* and *seed of the serpent*, or *reprobate*. That the reprobate seed are among the students is almost a certainty. But the students are identified as

"covenant" children with the group to which they belong organically.

This is not to be confused with presupposed regeneration. This theory wrongly assumes that all the children born to believers are regenerated and, on that basis, they are baptized. We are not given the biblical right to assume that all the children of believers are elect, nor that they are all regenerated. But we identify them as *children of the covenant* because of their organic connection to the covenant people.

This is biblical. In the Old Testament, Israel as a nation was called God's chosen people. They were His children. Yet history demonstrates well that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). The nation of Israel was made up of an elect core and a reprobate shell. The elect core was sometimes so small that it was described as a remnant. Yet God called the nation His people.

When God spoke the promises of salvation to Israel, were those promises to every individual Israelite? Did God promise salvation and eternal life to Esau? To Dathan and Abiram? To Ahab? Of course not. The promises spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel were for the elect core of the nation, and for them only. The entire nation might enjoy some of the earthly benefits that God rained upon the nation, but the true blessings were for the elect alone.

Similarly, when God pronounced terrible judgments on Israel because the nation forsook Jehovah and turned to idols, was God declaring that the entire nation would be cut off and cast from Him forever? No.¹ But the judgment that God brought on Israel as a nation was God's chastisement on the elect seed in Israel, sent to draw them from their sins and back to God. The same judgment on the nation of Israel was punishment on the reprobate seed, sent to destroy them.

Israel was God's covenant people. But God established His covenant of love and friendship with the elect in Israel, and them only.

Why then were the reprobate seed included in the nation if they were not adopted as God's children and not given the promises of an eternal inheritance? For the same reason that the corn has roots, stalk, leaves, ear, and husk. They serve the good of the corn kernels. Likewise the reprobate seed in Israel, in God's perfect

¹ Even after God turned away from Israel as a nation and began gathering His people from the Gentiles, Paul reminded the church in Rome that God had not cast away His people entirely. Romans 11:1, 2 "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew."

wisdom and power, serve the good of the elect seed—those with whom God does establish His covenant.

This, then, is foundational: election governs God's covenant of grace. The elect are predestinated to the adoption of children and are heirs of eternal life in the

covenant of grace. Because this is so crucial, the next article will demonstrate more completely from Scripture and the confessions (especially the Canons), that election governs the covenant.

Letters

Faith, good works, and doing

I have some problems with the recent article by Prof. B. Huizinga on “The nature of good works as works.” I appreciated that faith was called an activity, a demand of the gospel call, and obedience, but in plain language, an activity is done and obedience must be done. The definition of “work” or “doing” provided in the article excluded this common usage since it also required:

1. Exertion
2. Producing
3. External work through the body

As a software engineer, I spend much of my time thinking. This involves much more exertion than typing on a keyboard, and it produces abstract (but real) solutions or designs, yet it is merely internal. My employer knows this doesn't mean I'm not doing a work.

These three components were given as reasons why the activity of faith could not be described as a doing, but really only the third would exclude it. Faith produces products, such as comfort, thankfulness, and joy. Faith even produces all our good works! When we lack these things, we must exert ourselves to exercise faith, to know our God and trust in His salvation (Heb. 3:18-19, 4:11). Faith is not merely the eyes, but “the hand and mouth of the soul” (Belgic Confession, Art. 35).

As the article applies its definition to the doing of God's commandments, the problem becomes more serious, since merely internal activities are not included. Then our [Heidelberg] Catechism would be incorrect to emphasize internal activities as first of all what God's law requires. And how do we then “do” the law's command not to covet (Q&A 113)? The exertion in keeping God's commandments is especially the battle in the soul (Q&A 127).

The article's conclusions even directly contradict our Catechism: “The law never commands a man to believe.” This is precisely what Q&A 94 says that the first commandment requires when it speaks of “know” and “trust” (since these are how Q&A 21 defines true faith).

It seems that places in Scripture that refer to internal activities as doing or work were overlooked (for example, Matt. 23:23, Acts 16:30, John 6:28-29). For example, the word *poieo* or “do” is used in James 2:19 (not

in an “auxiliary” sense) to describe a merely internal fruitless “faith.” If even this mere monotheistic belief is still a doing, even a doing well, then how much more is the living activity of faith worked by God in us?

I don't think that we need to prohibit common historical usages of “doing” or “work” in relation to faith when we understand that we are not justified by anything that we do (HC, Q&A 62; BC, Art. 23). The confessions provide the necessary clarification against erroneous views of faith by explaining that God works faith in us, and that we are not justified by faith itself, but by the imputation of Christ's righteousness received through faith (HC, Q&A 61; BC, Art. 22).

Much love in Christ,

Sam Watterson

Limerick, Republic of Ireland

Response:

Dear Sam,

Thank you for writing. I have outlined my response to keep it organized.

A. As to exertion: While I did not say that faith does not involve exertion, I see how that implication was left. In no way do I want to minimize the conscious, purposeful, spiritual activity of the believer who exercises his faith by embracing Jesus Christ revealed in the preaching of the gospel and sacraments. If it is helpful to teach the activity of faith by speaking of the believer exerting himself to know and trust God, then I do not object, for indeed, the flesh of unbelief within us is powerful. Moreover, regarding the activity of faith, I agree that “faith is not merely the eyes,” but “the hand and mouth of the soul” (Belgic Confession, Art. 35). My point in the illustration of the eye and hand was to liken the activity of faith to seeing and liken the activity of working to the hand—not as the hand receives another's work, but as it brings forth one's own work.

B. As to producing: You state, “Faith *produces* products, such as comfort, thankfulness, and joy. Faith even *produces* all our good works!” I wholeheartedly agree that every good work the believer ever performs proceeds from his faith (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 33)

as the inevitable fruit of his faith (LD 24). However, I am making the point that there is a fundamental and crucial distinction between faith and works. The activity of faith (believing) is one thing, while the activity of working (doing good works) is another. That distinction can be understood in terms of “producing.” In the activity of faith, when I am believing in response to the gospel command “Believe!” I am not producing anything to bring to God but I am holding God at His Word, trusting that He will bring to me what He has promised in Christ. However, when I am doing good works out of a true faith and in response to the law’s command “Do!” I am producing all kinds of deeds that I am bringing to God as my sacrifice of thanksgiving. To put it differently, faith does not work to receive saving blessings promised by God in the gospel, but of course, upon the reception of saving blessings, faith always works itself out by love in a life of praise and gratitude to God according to the law (Gal. 5:6).

C. As to external work through the body:

1. First, you state, “As the article applies its definition to the doing of God’s commandments, the problem becomes more serious since merely internal activities are not included.” In my article I said that when we do good works, “We are not merely willing or thinking or desiring internally in the soul but we are performing something through the instrumentality of the body.” I do not deny that the working involved in doing good works includes internal soul activity, for every good work proceeds from faith and is done in love according to God’s command. My point is that doing good works includes more than internal soul activity, for all the internal activity comes to expression through the deeds that we do in the body, that is, through the life that we live (II Cor. 5:10, Rom. 12:1). Your objection does caution me here to be careful in my teaching not to deny the good work of purely internal activities such as the soul’s meditation upon God and His wonders in creation, history, and salvation. Yet, even such an internal activity that no one but God can see carries through and inevitably comes to visible manifestation because the believer cannot but shout God’s praises, tell of His mighty works to others, and go up to His house on Sunday to worship Him.

2. Secondly, it seems you are also concerned that I am reducing the law to nothing more than a code governing external conduct. To be sure, the law is spiritual. To be sure, when the law commands “Do this!” it penetrates to the heart and demands that everything a man does begins in and arises out of a perfect heart of love for God and the neighbor. But the law addresses more than the heart. God lays demands upon man in the whole of his nature. God demands that every man be perfectly consecrated to

Him in soul and body, in heart and life. The tenth commandment not only forbids a certain wicked heart attitude (covetousness) but it also demands a certain holy heart attitude (contentment), and then out of that heart an entire life of doing works of love for the neighbor with respect to his house, wife, servants, ox, and ass.

3. Thirdly, you object to my statement, “The law never commands a man to believe,” when you state that my “conclusions even directly contradict our Catechism.” I do not want to contradict our Catechism. Lest I do, let me say it this way: The law is never satisfied with faith. God’s law of Ten Commandments demands the doing of works. Even if the law should demand faith, the law will never be satisfied with faith. In that regard if there is a man anywhere who desires justification by the law, then that man must know, “For not the hearers of the law are just before God but the doers of the law shall be justified,” (Rom. 2:13). The law will only ever be satisfied when it receives perfect doing. Hallelujah for Jesus Christ, who stood in our place as the Doer of the law and declared, “It is finished!” Our doing of works is gratitude for His.

D. As to the Bible passages you cite: There is no need to find Bible passages that prove that doing/working includes internal activities of the soul because we both agree on that point. Perhaps these passages are cited to prove that faith is something we do, for all of these passages link faith/believing with work/doing. In that regard, I do not contend in absolute terms that the Bible *never* speaks of faith as something we do, but only that I have never seen an instance of it. That is, I have not seen the following construction, or some variation of it: subject + the verb “do” + the object “faith.” These passages do not teach that faith is something we do or work.

1. James 2:19, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” James is not equating believing and doing. With “Thou believest” James is only referring to a historical faith, which even devils possess. And by “doest well” James is either being sarcastic or he is using a kind of idiomatic expression teaching that although a historical faith is no saving faith, insofar as it acknowledges the existence of God, it is good. You believe there is one God? Well done! Good for you! Glad to hear it! By no means is James making the theological point that faith is a deed we do, for this chapter of Scripture distinguishes faith and works as sharply as any in order to make the point that the good works we do *demonstrate* our faith.

2. Matthew 23:23, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye

to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” According to Thayer’s Greek lexicon, “faith” could better be translated “fidelity”—being faithful and keeping one’s promises—even as it is in Titus 2:10. The Pharisees ought to have done deeds of judgment, mercy, and *faithfulness*.

3. Acts 16:30, “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Acts 16:31 continues, “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The evangelistic setting in which Paul and Silas were confronted with the urgent question of a heart-pricked sinner, “What must I do to be saved” was not the time and place to begin a detailed and technical lesson on the nature of faith and works. However, when Paul and Silas respond to the Philippian jailor’s urgent question with the command, “Believe!” they are, whether the guilt-stricken sinner understands it yet or not, teaching that you do not have to do some work to be saved. You do not have to run to this temple and make a sacrifice or go amass great wealth or even one coin and give an offering of money to God, and so on. Instead, the call is “Believe! Turn away from your wicked works and believe in what Jesus did by His saving works!” When my heart is crushed by the guilt of my sin and I stand conscious of the impending judgment of God that I deserve, I also would ask “What must I do?” and I would be willing to go and do anything. No deed would be considered too much. But not only is the gospel beautiful, so is its fitting call to faith. For when I frantically ask, “What must I do?” the gospel does not say, “Here are the works you must do.” The gospel says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

4. John 6:28-29, “Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Appeal is often made to these words of Jesus to legitimize calling faith a work. I recognize that some of our greatest theological forefathers have on occasion called faith a work. But I fail to see how it is helpful to anyone to call faith a work, especially when the heresy of the Federal Vision tries to smuggle the concept of working, or faithfulness, or obedience to the law into the concept of saving faith so that we are justified by faith and the works of faith. Strikingly, in this passage Jesus is actually distinguishing faith and works. The Galileans are guilty of stubborn unbelief as they reject Jesus, His Word, and His miracle of feeding five thousand of them. They want bread and other material bounties, but not the Christ whom the Father hath sent. The unbelievers ask Jesus, “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” Then Jesus gives an ironic answer that

uses their terminology but does not line up with their expectation. They are thinking of all kinds of works they can do. But Jesus upbraids their unbelief when He says, in essence, “Works?! Why don’t you begin with faith! Don’t worry about what works you can do, when you do not even believe in me. This is the work of God: Believe!” Jesus is not equating faith and works, thereby contradicting His own Spirit who later in Paul makes the sharpest distinction between faith and works (Rom. 3:27-28; 4:5). Jesus is calling faith a “work” in an ironic response to the Galileans’ question, which is why Calvin says, “it is plain enough that Christ does not speak with strict accuracy when he calls faith a work....”

E. As to the main point that faith is not something we do: You wonder how faith can be an activity but not something we do because “in plain language an activity is done and obedience must be done.” Here I respond to you, Sam, but also very conscious of all the readers in the churches of which I am a part.

1. On the one hand, I am sensitive to your point regarding how we use the verb “to do” and I do not want to make too much of this verb. I do not want to demand such a restrictive meaning that I hinder our English vocabulary and go beyond the confessions. While the confessions, like Scripture, consistently and repeatedly use the verb “to do” to connect the believer as subject and his works as the object (we do good works), they do not call special attention to this verb in order to make the theological point that doing and working are synonymous, therefore, I do not want to impose anything upon the confessions or churches. Moreover, as I demonstrated in my article, there are times when the English verb “do” is used with faith as in I Peter 1:21, “...who by him do believe in God...” (although “do” in that verse is not the Greek word for “perform” or “accomplish” and the verb is not taking “believe” as its object). Thus, I do not want anyone to raise suspicions about the orthodoxy of their minister, who in the course of his sermon, happens to use the verb “do” to explain the activity of faith or some component of faith. Nor do I want anyone to question the orthodoxy of any brother who repudiates the notion that faith is a work we do for salvation but still refers to faith as a doing, by which he only means that faith is an activity.

2. On the other hand, I want to preserve and protect *faith*—and the great Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*. I want to preserve and protect faith in the interest of that to which faith clings—the person and perfect work of God’s Son, our faithful Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. To that end, I want to preserve and protect the necessary and crucial biblical and confessional distinction between faith and works. Faith is faith. Works

are works. These may not be confused. For salvation, the activity of believing and the activity of working are qualitatively distinct.

a. In light of the biblical meaning and use of the verb “to do,” which, when that verb joins together the believer and his works, means “to perform or accomplish or work,” is it not understandable that if you would say to me, “You must do something if you want to be saved. You must believe,” I would object? You might mean that salvation is only experienced by means of faith and therefore you are urging the exercise of faith; nevertheless, I would, understandably, take such a statement to mean that salvation depends upon me and my working. Faith seems to be this onerous thing I must perform in order to enjoy salvation. I would not be objecting because I deny the necessity of faith, or the call to faith, or the activity of faith but because I deny

that salvation is in any sense dependent upon me and what I do.

b. My prayerful desire is that we teach the necessity of faith as the instrument of salvation and that we boldly, unashamedly, and unhesitatingly issue the call of the gospel, “Repent and believe!” But my prayer is also that we surround that teaching of the necessity of faith and the issuing of the gospel call with *the gospel itself*. And the gospel is the good news that all of salvation is of God, who has accomplished the entirety of our salvation in the doings of Jesus Christ. This salvation God sovereignly applies by the Spirit. Faith too is of God. Faith is God’s gift sovereignly conferred, breathed, and infused in the elect and quickened unto conscious activity by the Word and Spirit.

Respectfully in Christ,
Prof. Brian Huizinga



All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

The messenger matters; Another irrelevant debate and decision in the PCA

The messenger matters

Readers of the *Standard Bearer* may remember Joshua Harris and his book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (published in 1997), as it was the occasion for some discussion in the pages of this magazine a number of years ago. Harris’s book became very popular as “a manual for young evangelicals looking for love.”¹ There were also many Christians who were critical of Harris’s proposal to replace dating with his prescribed method of courtship. Sometime last year I discovered that Harris himself has come to disagree with “the central idea” of his book that “dating should be avoided.”² So firm was his conviction of error that he decided the book should not be reprinted again. When I heard that Harris had changed his mind, my thought was that this

illustrates how careful parents and teenagers need to be about whom they listen to when it comes to dating, marriage, and sex. Harris has shown himself to be an unstable and unreliable teacher. This is even more evident from the latest news that Harris and his wife of 20 years are separating from each other. The man to whom many looked for advice on how to begin and enjoy a relationship of purity and commitment is now divorcing his wife, and even expressing doubts about the Christian faith in general.

It is, of course, easy to look at subsequent developments in a person’s life and say, “See, we should have never listened to the man.” That is not my main point. Nor is it my point to criticize a man for changing his mind. And we may not reject the truth because of the weaknesses of the messenger. Children have to listen to imperfect parents, and congregations must receive the word that is brought to them by preachers who are earthen vessels. Yet, in the case of parents in our Christian homes and of pastors in our Reformed churches

1 <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/21/743926857/evangelical-writer-who-influenced-purity-culture-announces-separation-from-wife>.

2 <https://joshharris.com/statement>.

there is an official way in which God calls and sends them to act on His behalf. Children and church members must be discerning about whom they will respect and listen to. And from the time Harris's book was published there was reason for the discerning Reformed believer to be cautious and to recognize that this man does not come with the same credentials from God as my pastor.

R. Scott Clark explains that in contrast to what he calls the "the churchly model" for training and calling ministers, Harris was selected and promoted through "the business model" that is used by "entrepreneurial North American evangelicals." I quote from Clark at length:

Harris rose to prominence within the Sovereign Grace Ministries orbit, under the umbrella of C. J. Mahaney, ...former president of Sovereign Grace Ministries.... Harris is perhaps most famous for his 1997 book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. Harris succeeded Mahaney as pastor of the flagship congregation of the SGM movement until he resigned to move to Vancouver, BC to attend seminary at Regent College. When he became pastor of the Maryland megachurch and when he published his widely-read and influential book on dating and courtship, he had no formal theological education. Since attending Regent he has left ministry and opened a communications consulting business.

This story is symbolic of the way entrepreneurial North American evangelicals often operate. Mahaney saw a talented young man, he plucked him from obscurity, and groomed him to become his successor. This is not how a real church operates but it is the way American evangelicals often operate. Christian, you need to learn that there is a difference. In a rightly ordered church, a real church, a historic church with a church order, with genuine accountability, with historic roots in the Reformed, medieval, and Patristic church, with a public confession to which ministers and members alike are accountable, things are done differently.³

Clark explains that in a "real church" a minister must "get an education before beginning ministry, before preaching, and before writing books"; must "present himself to the churches for examination and testing" [be approved by the churches for ministry]; and is "accountable to other churches for...doctrine and life." Clark also points out that in a real church a minister who expresses doubts about the faith would be disciplined and stripped of his ability to speak on behalf of

Christ and the church, rather than go start a new podcast for the purpose of subjecting listeners to his new ideas. The true church of Jesus Christ is careful about calling and overseeing the men whom it authorizes to preach in His name.

Far be it from me to tell the readers of the *SB* to stop reading books by various authors or to stop listening to various preachers on the radio or the Internet. But let's be discerning and remember that God has determined to send us the truth mainly by means of ministers whom He has called and sent through a faithful church. The truth matters. Because the truth matters, where we seek it also matters. Clark does not explicitly state it, but the implied calling of Christians is to join a "real" church where the one who does the teaching is properly called and sent.

There were many reasons to be wary of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* solely based on its content. But there were also reasons to be wary because of Harris's credentials (or lack thereof). Now subsequent events (Harris's own disagreement with the book, and his divorce from his wife) confirm that both the message and the messenger matter.

Another irrelevant debate and decision in the PCA

Interesting is perhaps one way to describe the debate regarding the Presbyterian Church in America's General Assembly decision to "affirm the Nashville Statement and launch its own study committee on sexuality."⁴ Have you ever heard of a distinction between a "Side A" and "Side B" Christian/church? If you are interested, I suggest reading Andy Webb's article "Has the PCA Become A De Facto 'Side B' Church?" If you are interested in hearing different sides of the debate, I suggest spending some time on Youtube where you can watch various men speak for and against affirming the Nashville Statement. To hear the "pro" side you may want to listen to Kevin DeYoung's speech first (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QW2h5HEDLA>). DeYoung makes some important points about using Scripture as the only standard for evaluating the Nashville Statement. For the "contra" position on the Nashville Statement, I suggest starting with Greg Johnson's speech (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkWdMBQyVkc>). Johnson identifies himself as a celibate gay Christian pastor and argues passionately against the Nashville Statement, especially the seventh article of the statement. Article 7 states, "WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined

³ <https://www.agradio.org/time-to-kiss-new-calvinism-goodbye.html>.

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/june/pca-nashville-statement-lgbt-revoice-sbc-ecc-vote.html>.

by God’s holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God’s holy purposes in creation and redemption.”

Interesting is also perhaps a good way to describe the analysis and debate taking place after the General Assembly’s decision. For a good explanation of why identifying as gay is sinful and should not be allowed in the church of Christ, I suggest R. Scott Clark’s article “Revoice, Nashville, and the Therapeutic Revolution.” And for an explanation of where things stand in the PCA regarding homosexuality, I point the reader to Bill Peacock’s article, “Where Does the PCA Stand on Revoice? A Look at the Numbers.”⁵ Peacock’s article provides interesting statistics, such as that 40% of the 541 delegates who voted against affirming the Nashville Statement did so because they see nothing wrong with someone identifying as a gay Christian. The article also includes a tweet (yes, Twitter has now come to the SB) from Greg Johnson. Johnson tweeted,

Last night NS [Nashville Statement] won the battle, but they will lose the war. 1. We had a seat at the table. That’s new. 2. Notice the average age of the proponents and opponents. Big shift. 3. About 40% of the PCA leaders rejected NS. 4. We got a study committee whose report will supersede NS in PCA.

Yes, there is much that is interesting in all the above for those who are concerned about the spiritual welfare of the PCA. However, Johnson is almost certainly correct in his analysis that the debate and the decisions that

occurred at the PCA’s General Assembly are toothless and irrelevant if the goal is that the PCA rid itself of the presence and influence of those who embrace unbiblical positions regarding human sexuality. I suppose that you could say that those who have this goal have a battle plan (although they do not have any stomach for actual battle). That plan seems to be: 1) affirm the Nashville Statement; 2) write a position paper on human sexuality that condemns unbiblical views; and 3) hope that the finished position paper will rid the PCA of the presence and influence of those who hold to the unbiblical views. Sadly this is a replay of an already failed battle plan used by the PCA to address the Federal Vision. The PCA commissioned a report condemning the Federal Vision (presented to the General Assembly in 2007). But, alas, this report has not rid the PCA of those who

identify with and promote the FV. Jeff Meyers, Mark Horne, Rob Rayburn, and others continue to reside comfortably in the PCA.

Why do these men not repent or leave? The same reason that Greg Johnson is unlikely to repent or leave—the PCA has chosen to hold debates and make toothless reports rather than exercise the key of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus Christ has given to the church to address impenitent sin—Christian discipline. Greg Johnson should not have been given a place at the table for debate. It is not an act of love to waive the Nashville Statement or a report on human sexuality at Greg Johnson. Christian love for Greg Johnson requires that he be “brotherly admonished to renounce his errors and wicked course of life, and if he despises his admonition, he is to be forbidden the use of the sacraments and excluded from the Christian church; and he is to be received again as a member of Christ and His church only if he promises and shows real amendment of life” (a paraphrase of A. 85 of the Heidelberg Catechism).

Yes, there is much that is interesting in all the above for those who are concerned about the spiritual welfare of the PCA. However, Johnson is almost certainly correct in his analysis that the debate and the decisions that occurred at the PCA’s General Assembly are toothless and irrelevant if the goal is that the PCA rid itself of the presence and influence of those who embrace unbiblical positions regarding human sexuality.

⁵ Revoice is the name of a conference that met last year and this year to “support, encourage, and empower gay, lesbian, same-sex-attracted, and other LGBT Christians” (see, purpose of Revoice).



Things which must shortly come to pass

Prof. David Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Premillennialism (28)

Postscript: Antinomism (4)

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2019, p. 465.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”

Hebrews 10:16

“Why will God...have the ten commandments so strictly preached? ...That we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come.”

Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 115

Introduction

These concluding articles in the series on premillennialism are a kind of “postscript.” They examine an aspect of premillennialism which, although it does not consist of what is commonly regarded as having to do with the last things culminating in the bodily return of Jesus to earth, nevertheless is fundamental to the false doctrine of premillennialism. It is also an aspect of premillennialism that sets that teaching at odds with the Reformed faith.

This “postscript” concerns dispensational premillennialism’s antinomism—its opposition to and rejection of the law of the Ten Commandments as the rule of the Christian life.

Premillennialism denies the truth of Hebrews 10:16, quoted above this article. Premillennialism does not conceive the salvation of the New Testament believer as God’s putting the Ten Commandments into the hearts of New Testament elect believers, and writing them in their minds, so that we continually think the Ten Commandments as laws of God that we are commanded to obey in gratitude for His gracious salvation, including the gracious salvation of putting His laws into our hearts.

Premillennialism violently condemns and repudiates the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A 115, quoted at the head of this article. Premillennialism de-

nies that the Ten Commandments are to be preached, much less “strictly,” or sharply, preached, as the rule of the thankful life of the Christian and as the means God uses to further the holiness of life of the believer.

Dispensational premillennialism, particularly with regard to its antinomism, has been and still is a threat to Reformed churches in North America. This threat has come closer to home than merely that Reformed Christians in the Chicago area listen uncritically to the radio programs of Moody Bible Institute.

In the early 1900s, the Christian Reformed Church was troubled by controversy over dispensational premillennialism. A gifted, prominent Christian Reformed minister, the Rev. Harry Bultema, fell away to premillennialism and began spreading the error, not only in his own congregation in Muskegon, Michigan, but also throughout the denomination. Especially in his book, *Het Wettig Gebruik der Wet* (English: *The Lawful Use of the Law*), Bultema advocated and defended premillennialism’s antinomism. What this consisted of, I showed in the preceding article in this series.

With the then young, Christian Reformed minister, Herman Hoeksema, playing a leading role, the Christian Reformed Synod of 1918 condemned Bultema’s premillennialism, including his antinomism.

Hoeksema’s involvement in this controversy has been of great benefit to the Protestant Reformed Churches, to put them on guard against the prevalent premillennialism of our day, and to form them to honor and use the law of God, as God intends it to be honored and used by His New Testament church.

The appeal of antinomism

The antinomism of dispensational premillennialism is appealing to nominal Christians. It makes the way to heaven broad and easy. Antinomism does more, and worse: It excuses and encourages lawlessness of life on the part of those who consider themselves, and are considered, genuine members of the church of Jesus Christ.

No wonder that multitudes of professing Christians today, whose life proves them to be thoroughly carnal, are attracted to dispensational premillennialism and fill the pews of the premillennial churches!

When at a high-powered international congress, or conference, of Christian churches held in Chicago in the early 1980s some proposed and brought to the floor a strong resolution that marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life, so that remarriage after divorce is forbidden as adultery, the premillennial pastors of the big churches, especially in California, immediately squashed this effort to apply the seventh commandment to their churches. As one of the pastors said publicly, apparently without any shame, “If this resolution would pass, I would lose more than one third of my congregation.”

“Thou shalt not commit adultery”—the seventh of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament—is simply not applicable to members of churches in the dispensation of the new covenant. This is standard premillennial doctrine. The evil fruit is that premillennial churches are filled with impenitent adulterers, who suppose that they are saved, and will one day share in the rapture with all the church of Jesus.

The day is coming, however, when both the adulterers and their pastors will discover to their eternal shame and damnation that the seventh commandment was binding in the present age, binding also upon members of large, dispensational, California churches, and that the preachers were called to proclaim it.

As is typical of all antinomians, Bultema had a special animus against the fourth commandment. He attacked the Reformed doctrine that the law applies to the believer as the rule of the Christian life by criticizing the Reformed understanding of the Sabbath commandment. “The fourth commandment, for example, one [that is, the Reformed believer—DJE] abandons or one knows how to explain it in such a way that finally Sunday is intended. The [Seventh Day] Adventists have an appearance of right when they rage against this, for the law does not allow itself thus to be mutilated.”¹

Bultema applied his theology of the law to the practice of the church. He forbade the reading of the Ten Commandments in the worship of the church.² Thus, he and his church became “lawless” in the fullest and most literal sense of the word.

Herman Hoeksema, then a young, recently ordained Christian Reformed minister, was deeply involved in the controversy over dispensational premillennialism raised by Harry Bultema. Hoeksema wrote the report condemning Bultema’s theology that was adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1918. The report centered on Bultema’s erroneous, premillennial eschatology. The decisive issue in the report was Bultema’s premillennial denial that Jesus is King of the church, thus insisting on the essential difference between the (Jewish) kingdom and the (largely Gentile) church. The report appealed to Article 27 of the Belgic Confession, which calls Jesus the King of the church.

This tactic of the committee condemning Bultema’s premillennial theology was correct. Positing an essential difference between Israel and the church is the fundamental error of dispensational premillennialism. In combating heretical teaching, the church must take hold of the root of the false teaching.

Hoeksema’s regard for the law

But there can be little doubt that Hoeksema had Bultema’s rejection of the law and the controversy with Bultema in the back of his mind when he—Hoeksema—himself preached the law, as required by the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism, and when he wrote his commentary on the third section of the Catechism.

At the outset of his exposition of the law as it occurs in the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism, Hoeksema considered the two main objections to the use of the law as a guide to the Christian life.

First of all, there are those who insist that it is in conflict with the freedom of the Christian, that it is contrary to the nature of grace, to confront the Christian with the law once more.... The fulness of time has come, and we are no longer under the tutorship of the law.... To confront the Christian with the law of the ten words is to insult him and to deny the freedom of grace.³

Secondly, there are those who in general are known as Antinomians, who would lay all the emphasis on justification in Christ. They are afraid that the preaching of the law may have the effect of inducing the Christian to seek his salvation in the way of fulfilling the law of God. The only effect of the preaching of the law as a rule of life, they say, is and must be that we become Pharisees, that once more we seek our salvation in the way of our own righteousness, the righteousness

1 Bultema, *Het Wettig Gebruik der Wet* [English: *The Lawful Use of the Law*] (Muskegon, MI: Bereer Publishing Comm., 1922), 48. The translation of the Dutch of this quotation, and of all subsequent quotations, is mine.

2 Bultema, 88-91.

3 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 124, 125.

of good works, and that thus we deny the atoning blood and the perfect obedience of Christ.⁴

To these objections against preaching the Ten Commandments as the rule of the Christian life, Hoeksema responded: “I cannot agree with the conclusion that is supposed to be deduced from these arguments, namely, that it is a mistake or unprofitable for the believer to be instructed in the law of God.” He added: “Nor is it true that the law cannot be and is not a safe and necessary guide to direct his way according to the will of God.... Well may he [the Christian wholly saved by grace alone—DJE] daily take the law for his companion, to instruct him, enlighten him, and warn him from the way of sin.”⁵

And then Hoeksema devoted some 320 pages to the exposition and application of the Ten Commandments as the rule of the Christian life.⁶

Wrapping up his explanation of the law, Hoeksema called attention to “Antinomians of every shade.” He charged against them all that they are “inclined to minimize, to say the least, the significance of the law of God for the Christian, and the calling of the people of God to walk in sanctification of life.”

He affirmed that “the proper preaching of the law

has through the grace of God a sanctifying influence upon the Christian.”⁷ This affirmation, all premillennialists abhor, and repudiate. Against this distinctively Reformed affirmation of the right use of the law by the Reformed preacher, and by God Himself, Harry Bultema had raged in his little book, *The Lawful Use of the Law*.

As he wrote these words affirming the use of the law in the divine work of sanctification, it is inconceivable that Hoeksema did not have in mind Harry Bultema and the doctrinal controversy with Bultema in which Hoeksema was intimately involved.

By the Bultema controversy, therefore, God directly and significantly blessed the Protestant Reformed Churches by impressing on their ecclesiastical mind the right understanding of the continuing place of the law in the church and in the life of the Christian.

As little as the Protestant Reformed Churches are nominalists, so little are they antinomists! Thus, they show themselves soundly and confessionally Reformed.

Thus also, already some one hundred years ago, God safeguarded the Protestant Reformed Churches and others against the widespread and deadly threat of premillennialism, with particular regard to its antinomism!

[Note: This concludes Prof. D. Engelsma’s comprehensive treatment of premillennialism.]

4 Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, 125, 126.

5 Hoeksema, 126, 127.

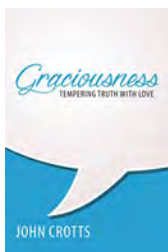
6 Hoeksema, 447.

7 Hoeksema, 449.



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Seminary



Graciousness: Tempering Truth with Love, John Crotts. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. 137 pp. \$14.00. ISBN 978-1-60178-586-2 [Reviewed by Brenda Hoekstra]

Most *SB* readers have heard of and believe that they live by the scriptural truth of Ephesians 4:15, ‘speak the truth in love.’ When the truth is a real part of you because you wholeheartedly believe it, your zeal can actually get in the way of the very truth you are trying so fervently to present. When

we are bringing important things that need to be said to others, when we are delivering truth, graciousness is not an optional ingredient. This distinctive property of graciousness is commanded to be included. God cares about more than just the words you say; He cares about *how* you say those words. This book teaches the graciousness that God requires of those who speak His truth.

This book uses the Bible to describe graciousness. It includes positive examples and commands about graciousness as well as the negative consequences for those who lack grace. There is also a wide variety of practical

methods for cultivating graciousness. The book teaches that growth in graciousness should match our growth in knowledge, otherwise knowledge is a trap for our pride. This book shows what it is to use truth inappropriately. The author frees us from thinking that we are responsible for any results; we can become simply the instruments of delivering God's message with graciousness while leaving the results to Him. He also teaches us to guard our hearts from evil, not only the evil from outside ourselves but most importantly from inside ourselves. This is the evil that may bubble up and over into our attitudes and from our mouths, causing us to bring God's truth ungraciously, with pride and harshness. I have heard many in our midst ask how to go about witnessing; this book helps equip believers for a graciousness that corresponds to a passionate commitment to truth. This is the essence of witnessing.

The thing I really liked about this book was the encouragement to grow in graciousness *as* a body, *in* the church; with each other, by each other, for each other, and through each other; and then, out to those around each of us in our daily lives. Apart from the body of Christ, one is unable effectively to practice and implement graciousness in life. We learn from Christ and, by Him, from each other. God has built the imitation dynamic into the fabric of the human soul. We are able to grow in graciousness by imitating those gracious peo-

ple around us who are fed by the Word and who may have more life capital. The author promotes listening to sermons and reading books about graciousness. There is a beautiful emphasis on graciousness as learned and increased through corporate worship as these examples show:

Coming to church services faithfully cultivates graciousness as members seek to serve and encourage one another for the Lord's sake...your gaze is moved from you...and is fixed on the Lord and His people;

The context for Paul's command to speak the truth in love [I Cor. 13:1-2] is the mutual ministry of one member to another, which produced spiritual maturity of the parts, which results in maturity of the whole...that we should no longer be children,...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love' (Eph. 4:14-16).

The Scripture in the book was from the New KJV and easily recognizable. This book challenged me personally to examine and work on my own graciousness and respect the truth that I bring as God's rather than mine.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

You may have heard the Latin phrase *in loco parentis*. Do you know what that means? Answer later in this column.

Sister church activities

There is a Protestant Reformed Theological School—a seminary—in the Philippines! That is a noteworthy statement! Here's what more we know: Regarding the school, the first week was completed. Classes were taught as scheduled on Tuesday through Friday

mornings. Bro. Jeremiah Pascual seemed to enjoy his first week as a seminary student and seems glad to be underway with training. Our missionaries are too! Rev. D. Holstege teaches the class in Hermeneutics; Rev. D. Kleyn the classes in Homiletics and Church History, and Rev. R. Smit the classes in Greek and Reformed Dogmatics. All of the classes are held in the upstairs sanctuary of the Provident PRC church building in Marikina. There are also two pre-seminary students taking the New Testament Greek Grammar course: Bro. Ace Flores and Bro. Emmanuel Jasojaso. For a time there was discussion who could best teach Greek

to Filipinos, an Aussie or a Canadian? We shall see.

The semester began on August 13 and will end in the week of final exams scheduled for December 10-13, the Lord willing. A one-week reading break for the students and instructors is scheduled from October 7-11. Daily devotions of 10-15 minutes are shared among the three instructors and student by alphabetical rotation. The student's turn is on Thursday, while each instructor is assigned another day. Class instruction along with daily commutes of a total of about 2 1/2 hours to and from school in Marikina has filled up the missionaries' days. They are busy men, an understatement for sure. May God provide the daily needs of all.

The Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, through the decisions of the Maranatha consistory and Classical Committee 2, planned to send Rev. L. Trinidad to the CERC in Singapore to fill their pulpit and administer the Lord's Supper on Sunday, September 8.

Minister activities

Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, Alberta) called Candidate Matthew Kortus, as did Hope PRC (Redlands, CA).

Grandville PRC called Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA) to be the minister on loan to Singapore. Rev. Engelsma answered on August 18, revealing that God had led him to remain in Doon, IA PRC. While the saints in Doon were joyful at this news, we remember before God's throne of grace the congregation in Singapore. We pray that God will soon send the man of His choosing to this sister congregation.

Southeast PRC (Grand Rapids) called Candidate J. Maatman.

It is likely that this month's meetings of Classis East and Classis West will include student examinations.

On Wednesday, September 4, a special worship service for the installation of Rev. B. Huizinga as professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary was held in Grandville PRC, with Prof. R. Cammenga leading the service. Seminary convocation was also included, with the students being introduced and a time of fellowship afterwards. The service was live-streamed on Grandville PRC's Sermonaudio channel. May God be with Prof. Huizinga in this time of transition! May the King of the Church be with our seminary students in their studies!

Congregational activities

From Byron Center, MI PRC comes this note: At a recent meeting our Council approved the request of those desiring to organize a daughter church and is forwarding this request to Classis East which will meet

on September 11. There are 55 families, 17 individuals and a total of 215 souls that have signed to be part of this new church, which, if the Lord wills to be organized, will be named Unity Protestant Reformed Church. We thank our heavenly Father for His blessing upon this work. To God be the glory!

First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada held their annual church picnic on Saturday, August 24th. Lunch consisted of hamburgers and hot dogs with sides and drinks provided. Games were planned for the young and young at heart. All had a time of good fellowship.

Professor Robert Decker and his wife Marilyn made the trip to northwest Iowa recently to visit relatives there and to worship in his old stomping grounds at Doon PRC. It happened to be their 58th wedding anniversary that day. It's always good to see them. One of this writer's first catechism teachers.

Young people's activities

At the time of this writing the annual Young People's Convention had just concluded. The weary travelers had returned home in safety. We are very glad for that! In talking to some of the conventioners they spoke excitedly about the good time they had. Every minute of the long bus ride was worth it to be able to enjoy the week at the convention. The speeches were appreciated, the activities were exciting, the new and renewed friendships were priceless. Some spoke already of going to the convention again next summer. What a great place for the young people of our churches to enjoy one another's company! Thanks to all who made it happen!

Trivia answer

The Latin phrase *in loco parentis* means "in the place of the parent." This is often used to describe the place of the school teacher who labors many hours each day with students of all ages. In recent days and weeks our covenant schools have re-opened their doors to educate our children. We are especially mindful of godly teachers who labor in love for their students. We pray for them. May they not only impart knowledge, but godly wisdom to those they teach! We thank the men of the school boards who labor behind the scenes to keep our schools running smoothly! More trivia next time.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:3

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Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Calvary PRC, Hull, Iowa, on Wednesday, September 25, 2019, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Announcements continued

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Address change

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3295 Beckie Dr.

Wyoming, MI 49418

Phone:

Email: b.huizinga@prca.org

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