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“Work out your own salvation!”

Rev. Dennis Lee

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and work does God call you?**

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Why? (2)

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A precious jewel (1)

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REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois

“Work out your own salvation!”

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Philippians 2:12-13

This text is very important in helping us understand our salvation. To begin with, because God calls us to work out our salvation, it rejects the idea that Christians are inactive spiritually, and should sit back and let God “do all the work,” so to speak. On the other hand, it also rejects the idea that God is dependent on us with regard to our salvation. For the apostle here gives the one reason for our calling to work out our salvation: “For it is *God* which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Yet the text is not only of great doctrinal importance; it is also of great practical significance. Set here in the context of Philippians 2, it is the key for the church to be strong, growing, and unified. Each member is to put on the mind of Christ, so that in lowliness of mind each esteems other better than himself, and each looks not just on his own things, but also on the things of others. But that growth in having more and more of the mind of Christ comes only in the way of taking heed to this calling to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

What can we say about this calling? At the outset, we should note that the text does *not* say to us, “Work your own salvation!” If that were the case, it would call us to do good works in order to earn our salvation—and that would be contrary to the very Word of God as a whole, as well as in particular (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). No, we are not to seek to work our salvation but, rather, we are called to “work *out* our salvation.” This calling comes to those who *already* possess the salvation of God. The apostle makes that plain when he addresses the letter to “all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi” (1:1), and also speaks there of that good work of *God’s* salvation already begun in them (v. 6).

Positively, this calling rules out all inactivity, laziness, and passivity on the part of believers. It rules out the false idea that believers are just to “sit back and let God do what He does.” This calling rules out a lack of interest and activity in evangelism and a life of thankful service in the church. It rules out what some in Reformed circles have mistakenly concluded because, they say, “God is sovereign.” Contrary to passivity and inactivity, the sovereign God here gives us this calling unto activity. “Work out your salvation! Be busy with the Word! Meditate upon it! Apply it diligently to your thought and life! Be not only hearers but also doers of it! Exercise yourselves spiritually! Strain and stretch every spiritual fiber and muscle of your heart, mind, and soul for the cause of God!”

When we say these things, we must also be clear that God *has* worked His salvation in us; yet in such a way that, when He saves us, He does not work salvation in us all at once and to such a degree that it is *perfect and complete*. We have a wonderful beginning of it! And yet, it is only a *small* beginning. This small beginning of our spiritual energy, power, and life needs to grow and must grow in every department of our lives and all through our lives! Just as in physical life, where a healthy child grows in the way of activity, so also in spiritual life there is spiritual growth and development in the way of spiritual activity. God calls us to spiritual exercise in every sphere and in all seasons of life.

To be sure, the salvation of God comes to all believers in the same way—that is, through Christ alone, by His grace alone, and through faith alone. We all receive justification for all our sins. We all receive the same power of God’s holiness that causes us to devote ourselves to God and reject the way of sin. And yet, this spiritual workout that God calls each believer to takes on a unique and personal form for each of us—not only at various times and stages of our lives (when we are a covenant child, a teen, a young single, a young parent, a grandparent), but also for each of us with our own besetting weaknesses and sins (some of us are more inclined to committing sexual sin, others struggle more to handle anger, yet others struggle with being good

stewards of their possessions). Moreover, this calling also comes to us in the unique earthly trials and circumstances we face in our lives. God's Word here calls each believer to work out his salvation under the unique, personal circumstances and conditions of his life.

This is an important calling, and this importance is made known to us in four ways. First, it is made known through the apostle's reminder of our need to be *always obedient* to this calling: "...as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence..." (v. 12).

Second, it is made known to us in the form in which the calling is given. The Holy Spirit does not give an objective statement: "Every believer is to work out his own salvation." That all by itself would be sufficient for believers to obey. But here, the Holy Spirit issues a command, "Work out your own salvation!"

Third, the importance of this calling is made known by the phrase "with fear and trembling," which appears at the *beginning* of the original Greek: "*With fear and trembling*, your own salvation—work out!" The idea is that this is to be done with great, meticulous care, like the care of a sculptor at work, an artist painting his masterpiece, or a surgeon performing surgery! Work out your salvation with great care! This idea not only rules out all inactivity and passivity, but also all carelessness and recklessness in our spiritual lives. It puts to death the false idea that since God preserves every one of His children in salvation, we can enjoy the pleasures and pursuits of this world when we are young. Not so! The young person who fears and trembles as he/she works out his/her salvation is one who will take great care in choosing friends, avoiding drunkenness, and fleeing fornicating while dating. The parent who fears and trembles as he works out his salvation is one who will take great care in nurturing and even disciplining his children when the need arises. All of us who fear and tremble as we work out our salvation will not do something if we are in the slightest bit unsure whether it will compromise our blessed relationship of friendship with our covenant God. Again, we point out that one does these things not in order to merit righteousness with God, but because he desires to please God in love, devotion, and thankfulness to Him for the precious salvation so freely given to him.

Fourth and finally, the importance of this calling is made known by the intimate way in which the apostle under inspiration leads in to the command: "Wherefore, my *beloved*...." This calling is not given to the world, but to the children of the living God! We are ones who are not only loved by the apostle, but by God Himself in Christ!

The call to work out our salvation may be further emphasized from three points of view. First, it may be emphasized that we are to be active and grow spiritually from the *personal point of view* of our own salvation. And in order to grow, we need to feed on and be nourished by the Word of God, especially in its preached form (cf. I Pet. 2:2). Do we cherish the preaching?

Second, this calling may be emphasized from the *viewpoint of the church*. In the way of giving heed to this command, the mind of Christ will more and more fill our thinking, willing, and doing. And then, what happens in the church is that we will humble ourselves more and more as our Savior did, with the result that less and less there will be strife and vainglory. More and more will we esteem one another better than ourselves. Not only will we look on our own things, but also on the things of others (cf. Phil. 2:1-4). The secret to such a prosperous church flourishing with the mind of Christ is that her members take seriously this calling to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Will it not be such a joy to see this in the midst of the church? Will it not please God to behold this in His church and in her members? It certainly will!

For third and finally, this calling may be emphasized from the *point of view of God Himself*. The blessed, spiritual growth of each child of His in personal salvation and of His church is dear and precious to Him!

And this, therefore, is good reason for having such a firm foundation for this calling to work out our salvation: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (v. 13). *God's working* in us is the firm foundation of all our working out of that salvation! God Himself! Here, God addresses and answers those who misuse the sovereignty of God to undermine the calling to live the true Christian life; even those who object to the apostle's command by asking, "Since God is sovereign and accomplishes all of my salvation, why should I work out my salvation?" The answer that the inspired apostle gives is simple: "Because that is how God works!" It is not we, but God working in us! And He works in us in the way of obedience to His every word and calling, including this calling to work out our salvation.

What blessedness there is in this word! How this blessed word ministers to every child of God who knows and feels in his own heart the greatness of the power of besetting sin and weakness he is fighting against! How can we with such sins and weaknesses be victorious in that fight? It is only the power of God at work within us that gives us the victory! While that victory is not

perfected in this life, God is working His salvation in us so that we do work out our salvation. By His great work inside of us, sin does not rule over us but rather He and His grace! The result of this great work of God in us causing us to work out our salvation is that the beauty of Christ shows forth more and more in our hearts and lives. For the God of our salvation not only accomplished salvation outside of us at the cross, but also continues to apply it to us and in us by His indwelling Spirit and His powerful Word!

What a solid work this is! What a firm foundation we have to this calling! For it is God Himself who is at work within us! It is the very same One who “spake and it was done,” who “commanded and it stood fast” (cf. Ps. 33:9). Is there anything that He is unable to do? Listen to the answer the apostle gives in Ephesians 3:20-21: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

The firm foundation of God’s work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure with regard to this calling gives us a wonderful assurance. A wonderful assurance that we will be kept safe by the power of His amazing

grace unto the great day of our glorification! A wonderful assurance that also produces in us a blessed motivation to keep on stretching forth, straining forward to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

That precious motivation for us to heed this calling is also set forth in three other ways in the text. First, it is indicated by the connection made to it at the beginning of the text: “Wherefore, my beloved....” For that address points us back to the blessed and perfect example of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, for you and me, for all His beloved. Ought we not respond in love to that great love He has for us? Second, we are told that it is the good pleasure of God Himself to work in us to accomplish this calling. Shall we not live to please Him by being obedient to this calling He has given us? Third and finally, this being the secret to a spiritually prosperous church, with members who have and display the mind of Christ, shall not we who love the church to which we belong work out our own salvation with fear and trembling?

May He give us grace to do exactly just that.



Editorial

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

Vocation, or, To what life and work does God call you?

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” This question, often addressed to children or grandchildren in the range of four to ten years old, can yield some very entertaining answers. “A fireman!” “A nurse!” “I want to be a doctor!” “A teacher!” “A mommy!” It is especially interesting when the young girl answers very emphatically, “I want to be a minister!” Ah, we have some instructing to do here. This is harmless fun, and it is interesting to chart where the children’s interests lie and how their aspirations change as they mature.

Yet, at some point in our children’s lives the ques-

tion should be changed to something like, “What do you think God might be calling you to do with your life?” This is the question that Christians must face, and that parents should help their children consider seriously. For the Christian, the question never is, “What do *I* want to do with my life?” Rather, it is, “What does *God* will for my life?” The path to knowing God’s will is relatively easy and straightforward for some. For many it is not. It is the search for the right path that this and a subsequent editorial will explore, with a particular goal of encouraging the youth seriously to consider serving God and His

church as directly as possible, specifically as teachers and ministers.

What is your God-given calling in this life? This question makes two assumptions that require demonstration. First, it assumes that God has a specific calling for each and every Christian. Second, it assumes that each Christian can discover what that calling is.

I Corinthians 7:20 speaks of the Christian's calling. The inspired apostle exhorts the believers, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." The "he was *called*" refers to the call of God by the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel—the effectual call unto salvation. However, the "same *calling*" refers to the believer's work, for the apostle continues in verse 21, "Art thou called being a servant?" that is to say, "Were you a slave when you became a believer? Was that your place in life—your calling?" That place and work was the calling in which God had placed them.

The Belgic Confession, Article 12, points to the reality that God has a calling for each person. Describing God's work of creating all things, it begins,

We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created of nothing, the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, as it seemed good unto Him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator.

While the article gives an overview of the various creatures that God made, it applies to each individual person as well. God gave to every human being his "being, shape, form, and several *offices* to serve [His] Creator." An *office* is a particular position or a specific work. In other words, it is a calling. You, believer, were created in a specific way to serve your Creator in a specific calling.

The truth of God's sovereign, all-comprehensive counsel also supports the idea that all Christians have a God-given calling. God's counsel is His eternal will or plan of what He has determined, which plan includes all creatures and events. Isaiah 46:9-11 sets forth this truth as explicitly as can be found in the Bible. God testifies through the prophet:

I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird

from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.

Truly, God has planned all things, and He executes the same by His powerful, governing providence. In this counsel, your life is determined. If God in His counsel knows "the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:9); if God's own Son was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" in order that He might be by "wicked hands...crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23); if God could say to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5), why would anyone think it would be different for his or her life? Each one has a God-determined path, which includes his calling.

This doctrine of predestination likewise has implications with regard to calling. God has predestined each one of His beloved unto the adoption of children (Eph. 1:4, 5). Each one of those predestinated ones is part of a temple, built on Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, "in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22). Each member is called a "lively stone," and together the living stones form a "spiritual house" (I Pet. 2:5).

From this it is clear that, not only is your life determined by God in His eternal plan, but God also has a place, a function, and a work in His church for you. And these two things are, in God's perfect wisdom, in complete harmony—your life's calling, and your place and work in God's church on

this earth, whether that earthly position and work is that of an auto mechanic, an accountant, a homemaker, a doctor, an engineer, assembly line worker, truck driver, farmer, or teacher. God determines the church, with all the "living stones" perfectly planned. All the members are unique, and all have gifts, experiences, and *labors* that shape them for their respective places in the church.

It truly is exciting to observe the gifts that the various members possess to serve the church. Some members excel in scholarship and love to study. One such member might research past decisions of synods on a matter and report back to the consistory. Another searches the Scriptures and is a fount of wisdom and knowledge in the Bible society meetings. Some members have no-

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table gifts in writing, whether it be a consistory report, or a lovely and encouraging letter to the missionaries. Still others are blessed with good, sanctified common sense—one of the most important qualities ever found in an elder or deacon. Others work with their hands and do astounding work serving the church through physical labors. Other members have great compassion for the weak members of the congregation. The point is, God chooses His church eternally and forms the members according to His perfect plan, so that each will be able to serve His church in some way for the blessing of the church and the glory of His name.

Part of that perfect plan of God is the vocation, the individual's life-work. God uses their respective vocations as part of the molding process that fashions men and women for their places in the church here on this earth, and, in some mysterious way, understood only by God the Master Builder, for their places in the church universal in the new heavens and earth. To that end, God has formed you for a particular work in this life, and He calls you to labor in that calling, that vocation.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches the same in Lord's Day 49. Expounding the petition "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," the Catechism instructs:

[G]rant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

The *will* of God on the foreground in this petition is not the will of God's *command*—that is part of the prayer for forgiveness and sanctification in later petitions. Rather, it is the will of God's *counsel*. In all the circumstances of our lives, we are to renounce our will and obediently submit to God's will. We are to desire that God's will be done in our lives.

As we have seen, that will of God includes our calling. The angels in heaven have a station and calling, and they fulfill their calling perfectly. We all have a station and calling. Whether it is wife, mother, husband, father, carpenter, nurse, or machine operator, our work a station and calling.

Do you know that station and calling for yourself? For many who read this, it *is* clear to you. Your life, or better, God's counsel, has directed you into a certain path, and you have a place and position in this world to which you know you are called. It would be very

difficult to change that calling. A husband and father must provide for his family, and may not simply quit his job and see what might come up. A wife and mother may not simply desert her vital post and try a new career, leaving husband and children to fend for themselves. For many individuals, their vocation is pleasing to them—they enjoy what they do. Others go to work purely out of necessity—unsatisfied and not relishing another day on the job—obviously not a pleasant thing. But the believer must seek to work in his or her calling as faithfully as the angels in heaven. This includes

working not to please men, but to please the Lord. And (in the previously quoted I Cor. 7:20) the Lord even admonishes the worker not to be too quick to change vocations, charging that a

"man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." May one never change occupations, then? Does one's vocation never change? John Calvin dismisses that idea in his commentary on this verse. He also gives good counsel based on this admonition.

Now it were a very hard thing if a tailor were not at liberty to learn another trade, or if a merchant were not at liberty to betake himself to farming. I answer, that this is not what the Apostle intends, for he has it simply in view to correct that inconsiderate eagerness, which prompts some to change their condition without any proper reason, whether they do it from superstition, or from any other motive. Farther, he calls every one to this rule also—that they bear in mind what is suitable to their calling. He does not, therefore, impose upon anyone the necessity of continuing in the kind of life which he has once taken up, but rather condemns that restlessness, which prevents an individual from remaining in his condition with a peaceable mind.

We trust that is has been made plain that every believer has a particular calling from God. We turn next to the way of coming to know what that calling is. The focus will definitely be on the youth, and on the parents seeking to guide their youth in this endeavor. It is not an option for the believer. Each must seek to know that particular work to which God calls His own.

In all the circumstances of our lives, we are to renounce our will and obediently submit to God's will. We are to desire that God's will be done in our lives.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Further conclusions

Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

In this section of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is drawing a series of conclusions from the truth that death closes the door of life as the one event that comes to all, whether the righteous or the wicked. In natural man this truth stirs him to sin (Eccl. 9:3). For the believer, it means that his life in this world is shaped by the transitory vanity of life under the sun. The first conclusion, therefore, is that our focus must be to serve God with thanksgiving, rejoicing in marriage and in our daily bread and labor as our portion under the sun (Eccl. 9:7-10). We are not to set our heart upon the things of this life.

This brings us to the second conclusion the inspired writer would draw so that he leads us to return and again ponder what we see under the sun. **“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all”** (Eccl. 9:11). This conclusion might at first seem counterintuitive. Has he not said that we are to labor with all our might? Is not the logical conclusion then that the swift wins the race and the strong the battle? These are not denied as such, but he points us to what is seen in that “time and chance happen to them all.” The Authorized Version uses the word “chance” here to describe what appears to us under the sun to be a random occurrence that man could not anticipate. It happened and descended upon someone in the midst of his activity. The idea is that our works are in the hand of God (Eccl. 9:1).

Man’s life under the sun is governed by God’s providence, the working out of His almighty sovereign purpose or counsel. Man’s strength is not in himself nor is his life in his own hand. God sets the time and boundaries of our lives and circumstances, which “chance” upon us, that is, occur when we did not look for them. Therefore, the race is not to the swift, or favor (in the presence of men) to men of skill, except the Lord will. He is the God, “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11). By the Lord’s appoint-

ment the race is won and the battle victory achieved. He gives bread to men, riches and honor under the sun.

As God is no respecter of persons and all things come alike to all under the sun, so also time and “chance” occurrence happen to them all. Man is not his own master. This is true generally of God’s providence, but especially when we contemplate it in the light of the truth that we shall die. Solomon points, therefore, to our finite character and how it works out in our lives under the sun. **“For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them”** (Eccl. 9:12). Our life and times, the measure of our days and our circumstances, are in the hand of God. We know not what is hidden from us in God’s counsel, so that man “knoweth not his time.”

He uses the figure of fish caught suddenly in a net and birds in a snare. They swim and fly freely in the activity of life when suddenly the net and snare come upon them and they are caught up in it and taken. So is the life of man under the sun generally with trial and affliction, “in an evil time,” but particularly when death falls upon him and takes him from this life as it were in the midst of his activity. “When it falleth suddenly upon them,” man too is caught unawares, though he knows he shall die. This sober reality underscores the calling to labor while it is day as sojourners in the world.

There is also a third consideration or illustration that he now brings forth. It arises in part out of what he has said, that the dead have no more “a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten” (Eccl. 9:5). It also arises out of what he has just said about the battle not being to the strong. **“This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man”** (Eccl. 9:13-15).

While the form of this narrative or story approaches

that of a parable, Solomon is evidently describing, or drawing upon international events of his day in the kingdoms of the nations about him. His court was an international court, and he also studied the events of his day. He describes, therefore, what “I [have] seen also under the sun.” Events which, while he does not give us the specific details, he has observed. He says: “It seemed great unto me.” What he saw appeared important for the lesson it taught about life and also the place of wisdom.

A strong and mighty king was defeated in battle by one weaker through the wisdom of one poor man. God’s providence set the poor man and his wisdom in the city, and by his wisdom brought the strength and might of the great king and his siege of the city to nothing. “Yet no man remembered that same poor man.” The works of the poor man and his wisdom, which wrought a great deliverance for the city, passed away. He himself was not remembered. This again underscores that, under the sun, all that is of man is a passing vanity. Even man’s wisdom passes away.

He then concludes: **“Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard”** (Eccl. 9:16). The illustration of the besieged city leads to further reflection. Wisdom overcame strength, physical strength and power, in the illustration just given. Wisdom is the better portion; but this also was seen: it was not remembered, nor the man who possessed it.

Wisdom encounters a certain problem to which the illustration points, in that wisdom is not regarded or remembered and the poor man to whom it was given is despised. He and the memory of his deliverance are forgotten, not only in death but also in life, so that the problem is broader. For even in life, the wise man and his wisdom are not listened to; his words are ignored. The problem is rooted in the pride of men, so Solomon speaks of despising the wisdom of the poor man. The word “despise” here, has the idea of one lifting the head in proud disdain for something beneath one’s notice. The man who is wise in the illustration is of no account. He is a “poor man,” a beggar. Who would notice him? Though in the illustration he delivered the city, his words are dismissed. “His words are not heard.” This may have been the case up until he delivered the city. But after delivering the city, he is again ignored and his wisdom forgotten.

While God is no respecter of persons, man, who shall die, is such a respecter of persons. In pride he disdains his neighbor who is poor. He will not turn his ear to listen, and the poor man’s words are not heard, which is to the proud man’s own hurt and ruin. His own fol-

ly is his undoing. As the believer is often set forth in Scripture as the poor and wisdom that of faith, the text also illustrates the place of a believer and his witness in the world.

To the subject of wisdom itself, Solomon now begins to turn his attention. This leads him to the conclusion of this chapter and into the subject of the next. He brings up the contrast between wisdom and folly, which has occupied much of Ecclesiastes. In considering this, the wise man and his wisdom go hand in hand. Despise the one and you despise the other. Verses 17 and 18 still draw on the illustration just given, but they could also well go with the next chapter.

“The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good” (Eccl. 9:17, 18). Wisdom is the ability to put knowledge and understanding to use. While there is a certain practical “wisdom” in the world, true wisdom is founded in the fear of God, in acknowledging Him in all our ways and works. The truly wise man is one who walks by faith as a child of God. It is to the words of that wisdom and the hearing of them that our text turns.

Proud, natural man cannot hear nor retain the words of wisdom, because they are contrary to our sinful flesh and our old man of sin. But they are also learned, not in the midst of a world of shouting noise and tumult, but in quiet. Preaching, meditation on God’s Word, hearing and receiving instruction, require focused attention and spiritual reflection. “The words of the wise men are heard in quiet.” The cry and shouting of the world is set before us by way of contrast. Men rule by might and power over others. They exercise dominion by lifting up their voice. Such is the governance among men, who are here called “fools.” The word and the will of the ruler is driven home as it were by force. Wisdom cannot be acquired that way. The way of the world is one of force and contention of earthly strength and the power of the arm of the flesh.

Thus he says, **“Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.”** The illustration of the poor man delivering in the city shows this. Spiritual wisdom in the needs and cares of life and death gives a strength that weapons of war in the hand of a great king cannot. But this leads to an additional sober thought: **“but one sinner destroyeth much good”** (Eccl. 9:18). This is Solomon’s own trouble in certain respects. To this we will return in chapter 10, D.V.



Things pertaining to the churches

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

News from the Seminary

Greetings from your seminary—your “medical school” that trains physicians of souls; your “military academy” that equips mighty warriors for the army of Jesus Christ; your “music conservatory” that prepares men to give a clear sound on the gospel-trumpet; your “greenhouse” where seedlings are nurtured up to be strong plantings of the Lord, able to withstand the hot sun and strong winds of persecution and error; and there are other images that are useful to describe the work we do here on your behalf. Greetings from *your* seminary.

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

In my last report from the seminary (September 15, 2017 issue of the *Standard Bearer*) I spoke of “Professor-elect Rev. Douglas Kuiper.” The Rev. Kuiper is now Professor Kuiper. In September he was formally installed as Professor of Church History and New Testament Studies, to be replacing Prof. Russell Dykstra.



Prof. Doug Kuiper family:
Jared, Ryan, Prof., Teresa, Sarah, Daniel

Our members sometimes misunderstand this replacement, imagining that Prof. Dykstra is now gone home and Prof. Kuiper is teaching all his classes. Little could be further from reality. I asked Prof. Kuiper to explain what he is doing while Prof. Dykstra continues *full-time* for a few years, only gradually to hand over the work to Prof. Kuiper.

Prof. Kuiper: *Synod 2017 appointed me to replace Prof. Dykstra as professor of Church History and New Testament. The transition between two professors will*

take up to five years, enabling me to get my Master of Theology degree (ThM) from Calvin Seminary (as our synod requires), and to develop my seminary course work. For the first two years, I am focusing on getting my degree, with a concentration in the history of Christianity. To do this, I must take five classes and write a thesis. I took two classes during the Fall 2017 semester, and am taking two more during the Spring 2018 semester. In addition to these four classes, by the end of the Spring semester I will have audited three other classes at Puritan Reformed Seminary, all in the area of church history.

For two reasons at least, the studies toward a ThM degree are beneficial for our professors, seminary, and churches.

First, our professors must continue to study, research, develop, and write for the rest of their lives. Obtaining a ThM degree requires a new professor to read and research in academic journals, and teaches him how to write at a higher level of scholarship. To this end, both Calvin and Puritan seminaries require incoming ThM students to take “Research Methodology” (teaching how to research and write at a Masters level) as their first class, and to apply the principles they learned in that class in all subsequent classes. Perhaps the person in the pew thinks this advanced instruction unnecessary because all our pastors have skills to read and write. While this is true, getting a ThM degree requires the new professor to hone those skills and learn to use them at an advanced level.

Second, studying for a ThM enables our professors to gain more in-depth knowledge of the areas in which they will be teaching. Our seminary courses cover broad topics, for example, the history of Reformation in every country from 1517-1648, or the principles of Bible interpretation (called “hermeneutics”). The ThM courses concentrate more intensely on aspects of these broad topics. For example, I have taken one class on the history and principles of New Testament textual criticism—a topic that will occupy a few lessons in my hermeneutics course. And I took a class on the “Nadere Reformatie” (the “Further Reformation” move-

ment in the Netherlands from 1600-1750) and am taking another on the development of the doctrine of the covenant in the 1600s and 1700s. By taking courses that concentrate on a narrower aspect of a topic, our professors are equipped to know more than our seminary students, not only at the beginning of a course but also when the professor concludes the course. We desire that our professors know more than they have time to teach.

Such instruction comes with a price (the cost of tuition), which our churches cover. I am grateful for the generous financial support of the denomination in my work, as well as for your continued prayers. And I pray that I be a good steward of all that is entrusted to me, so that our churches may reap the benefits for years to come.

Prof. Kuiper spends most of his time in his newly remodeled office at seminary, just down the hall from my office. If you are in the area, you are welcome to look in. I can report that Prof. Kuiper is fitting in very well with the faculty and staff. And his wife Teresa already plays an important part when the wives of the professors meet with the wives of the seminary students to talk about life in the ministry.

Current students

The three full-time students continue to work diligently. Mr. Matthew Kortus and Mr. Jacob Maatman finish their third year of studies in May. Beginning on July 1, they will labor in their six-month internship. Trinity PRC consistory (Hudsonville, MI) and Rev. Nathan Decker have accepted our invitation to take Mr. Kortus; and Hudsonville PRC and Rev. Garrett Eriks will



Kortus':
Sarah, Matt, Abigail

have Mr. Maatman. The men will take on preaching, catechism teaching, and pastoral work; they will visit consistory meetings and observe family visitations and more. For six months they will be observing and doing almost all of what any pastor does in the ministry. In addition, they must



Maatmans:
Jacob, Rachel, Calvin

read about a dozen books related to the ministry and report on them. It is hard to imagine that less than 25 years ago our students did not have the privilege of an internship. (Prof. Kuiper and Rev. Allen Brummel were the first in 1995.)

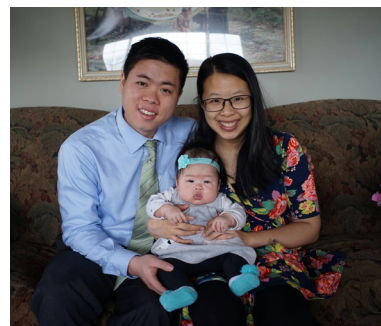
Our sole second-year student is Mr. Josiah Tan, student from our sister church in Singapore, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church.

We have no first- or fourth-year students.

For 2018, there are a couple of prospective students, but none for the PRC.

There are three Greek students (pre-seminary) who could begin seminary in 2019, God willing.

The need for students is urgent.



Tans:
Josiah, Abigail, HuiQi

"Send us wood!"

When John Calvin, in the early years of the Reformation, wrote to the churches in France of the dire need for students, it is reported that he said, "Send us wood, and we will send you arrows." In fact, Calvin's letter was in response to a plea from the churches, "Send us pastors!" But because Calvin could not send pastors unless the churches sent him men to train, Calvin said: "Send us wood and [from it] we will send you arrows." The analogy is clear.

You, members of the PRCA and sister churches, have a high calling to send your sons to this institution to be prepared for the ministry.

Please pray fervently, in your homes, from your pulpits, and in all your gatherings, for *able* and *faithful* men who are willing to give themselves to this high calling. The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 45) teaches a biblical principle when it has us confess, "God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desire continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them." He teaches us to pray for laborers in the harvest. And God will give what we need in terms of laborer-pastors only when we ask. Let us *ask* for pastors. Let us also be *thankful* for them. Lest the Lord not provide them. Consider whether there is negligence on our part here.

Consistories, please remind your pastors to preach special sermons at times, and make applications in other sermons, regarding the high calling and pressing need

for preachers (and teachers). And pray that the Lord not send a famine of the Word among us.

Elders, please remember to speak to the young men regularly at family visitation, ministers in catechism, teachers in school, and parents at the dinner table.

The PRCA have 10 men aged 62 or older. This year, *six* of them will be 65 or older. We have only 2 graduates in view. That we are aware of, no other PRC students are ready for their first year in the seminary in

the Fall of 2018. We can wait until we have six vacant churches before we pray for students. Or we can plead now: “Haste to hear us, Lord of the harvest! Send ministers!” The members who have experienced a long vacancy know that to have *visiting* ministers is nice for a *little* while. But churches need pastors.

Please pray.

Pray that the Lord will provide ‘wood.’



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California

Why? (2)

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2018, p. 207.

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”
Ephesians 2:20-21

John Calvin comments:

They are built on the foundation—they are founded on the doctrine, of the apostles and prophets. We are thus enabled to distinguish between a true and a false church. This is of the greatest importance; for the tendency to error is always strong, and the consequences of mistake are dangerous in the extreme. No churches boast more loudly of the name than those which bear a false and empty title; as may be seen in our own times. To guard us against mistake, the mark of a true church is pointed out. Foundation, in this passage, unquestionably means doctrine; for no mention is made of patriarchs or pious kings, but only of those who held the office of teachers, and whom God had appointed to superintend the edification of his church. It is laid down by Paul that the faith of the church ought to be founded on this doctrine. What opinion, then, must we form of those who rest entirely on the contrivances of men, and yet accuse us of revolt, because we embrace the pure doctrine of God?

We are answering the question: Why take heed to doctrine? Doctrine is a thematic summary in formulated propositions of what the Bible teaches on a certain

subject. Reformed doctrine is the system of the truths of divine revelation that are embodied in the Reformed standards and declared by Reformed churches to be the expression of their faith. Why hold on to and pay close attention to this doctrine? Our first two answers given were:

1. Confession: Because doctrine is what we say about God, and what we say about God is enormously important.

2. Love: Because knowing doctrine is knowing the God whom we love.

We continue with four additional answers derived from the reality that the foundation of the church is the pure doctrine of Christ as taught in Ephesians 2:20-21; therefore, the whole structure of the church in her faith and life is determined by her doctrinal foundation. Asking the question “Why take heed to doctrine?” then, is like asking the builder “Why take heed to the foundation?”

3. Worship: Because doctrine is the foundation for worship.

The goal of all things is the worship of God. The redeemed church exists for God’s glory. Unlike the reprobate wicked whom God uses to glorify Himself in spite of their hatred for Him, and unlike the brute creation that gives glory to God without conscious awareness of it, believers in the church have an intellectual understanding of God by faith and willingly,

consciously, and joyfully extol Him from the heart. But how can we arrive at an understanding of our covenant God apart from a careful study of His revelation to us in the doctrines (teachings) of the Bible? We must worship God in Spirit *and in truth* (John 4:24); therefore, doctrinal knowledge is a *sine qua non* for worship.

To put it differently, doctrine exists for the purpose of doxology and is necessary for doxology even as the foundation exists for the house and is necessary for the house. No doctrine means no doxology, and false doctrine tends to idolatry. We take heed to doctrine so that we might rightly know and then fittingly praise our God. The energetic worshiper producing spirited worship is an abomination to God if he is not baptized with the fire of the Holy Spirit kindled in the heart by sound intellectual knowledge of the doctrine of God in Christ. If the Spirit is generating fervor in a man's heart and doxologies from his lips, it is because his heart is being warmed at the fire of God's Word rightly interpreted.

Careful attention to doctrine in public worship—as opposed to whatever else it may be that man in his vanity craves, like the inspirational pep talks or gospel jams of “contemporary worship”—does not make worship dull and barren. When a congregation of believing sinners is brought to stand under the shadow of the cross and see the eternal, unchangeable, particular, saving love of God through a faithfully explained, sensibly applied, and dynamically delivered exposition of Scripture by a preacher who cries, “Behold your God!” hearts come alive in fruitful worship.

Who exclaims in doxology, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!...for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever, Amen”! (Rom. 11:33-36), but that blessed Jewish or Grecian soul that has sat spell-bound at the feet of the holy apostle listening to him explain with careful doctrinal precision the righteousness of God that is revealed from faith to faith?

Who sings in doxology, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen”! (I Tim. 1:17), but that humble speck of dust who has first given himself to serious contemplation of the loaded doctrinal statement, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief” (I Tim. 1:15), and made it his own?

Who cries in doxology, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Is. 6:3) and cries so loudly that the posts of the doors move (Is. 6:4), but that creature, heavenly or other, who has stood in the immediate presence of the enthroned God?

We take heed to doctrine. Why? It is the foundation of our worship. The church must take heed to *sound*

doctrine, for only the foundation of *sound* doctrine—Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone—makes possible a fitly framed building of doxology to God. Orthodoxy! Orthodoxy not for the sake of orthodoxy; orthodoxy for the sake of *doxology*.

4. Salvation: Because doctrine is the foundation for the enjoyment of salvation.

While it is possible for an infant or a severely mentally handicapped child of believing parents to be saved and taken to glory apart from an intellectual apprehension of the doctrines revealed in Scripture, the rule is that God saves His people by an active, conscious faith in the Lord Jesus, whereby the elect, believing sinner smites his breast and urgently pleads, “I cry in deep need and Thy help I implore, make hast to the rescue I pray! My Savior Thou art, and my strength evermore, no longer Thy coming delay!” (Psalter, #188). Romans 10:13 states, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Those who call upon the Lord are those who have been given faith, and faith is worked to activity by God through the preaching of the holy gospel, so that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:14-17). God saves us by faith in the teachings (doctrines) of His Word—Christ being the Word incarnate. Therefore, doctrine is foundational for salvation—for the personal enjoyment of salvation's comfort and peace.

How can it be that an individual says he is a Christian who enjoys salvation in a personal relationship with Christ, but is ignorant of the teachings of the Bible or has an aversion to doctrine? How can any possess assurance of salvation when with conviction they believe in erroneous doctrine that makes salvation dependent upon their own worth, will, or works? Where you find a building of spiritually healthy saints enjoying communion with God, you find beneath a foundation of true doctrine.

That doctrine is the foundation of the enjoyment of salvation is what makes the pastoral ministry not only possible but a privilege. To be pitied is the poor pastor or congregation that disparages or is deprived of doctrine. What comfort is there apart from knowledge of the truth? The pastor visits the diseased, the lonely, the betrayed, the heartbroken, the grieving, the frustrated, the doubting, the dying, and the wayward and he comes with one thing—the doctrine of Christ in the Scripture. To a spiritually battered woman plagued by doubts and fears, to a grief-stricken family in a cold cemetery, or to a physically broken and discouraged young man suffering from the ravages of months of chemo treatments that did not knock his cancer numbers down one point,

the Reformed pastor, like the apostles and prophets before him, comes with the doctrine of God's Word, which the Comforter, through prayer, applies to the troubled heart. If all that one can offer suffering sinners are pills, drugs, massages, exercises, hugs, oft-repeated mantras, or psychological tricks to help them escape to their mind's happy place, even though some of those means actually are helps, their souls will never rise out of their mire. God's people need doctrine. God's people need right doctrine, or they will be buried in their sins. The Spirit gives comfort to the believing heart through the reading of Scripture and the explanation of such glorious doctrines as divine providence, the preservation of the saints, the attributes of God, and always the effectual redemption of the cross from which victory was announced, "It is finished."

To live and die happily we must *know* the doctrines of sin (how bad we all by nature really are), deliverance (how gracious, comprehensive, and precious our everlasting salvation in Christ really is), and gratitude (how liberating it really is to keep the law and pray from a grateful heart of praise).

We take heed to doctrine. Why? Right doctrine is the foundation for the enjoyment of salvation.

5. Life: Because doctrine is the foundation for the Christian life.

There must be an active, antithetical, fruitful Christian life of holiness. What good is the doctrinal foundation shaped by creeds, preaching, catechism, good books, and polemics if there is no holy temple sitting on that foundation? What good is maintaining doctrine if there is no serious devotional life, no hatred for evil, no humble witnessing of the gospel, no gracious tongue, no love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, but a house of adulteries, unclean mouths, lasciviousness, hatred, bickering, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, laziness, and haughty self-righteousness doctrine-confessors? To the great shame of the church, sometimes this filth flows out her doors in the lives of those who profess to know God but deny Him in their works. But this is not the doctrine's fault! Nor is the command to take heed to the doctrine at fault. The sinner is at fault. Shame on you, sinner, for marring Christ's name and church and doctrine! Are you that sinner? Am I? Bow your head and plead for mercy right now if you are.

An active, antithetical, fruitful Christian life of holiness has only one foundation and it is the saving knowledge of and proper appreciation for the doctrine of God. Hosea 4:1 says there was "no truth, nor mercy,

nor knowledge of God in the land," and in verse 6 God declares, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The evidence of Israel's lack of knowledge was obvious, and it was not merely their ignorance of God; it was their appalling wickedness of life described in verse 2 as swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery, and breaking out with blood touching blood.

Where true doctrine is faithfully taught there *might be* instances of wickedness for a variety of reasons; but where true doctrine is minimized, ignored, rejected, or corrupted there *will necessarily be* indifferent lives devoid of serious convictions and profane lives of wickedness. There is only one foundation for a building fitly framed together in holiness and that is the doctrinal foundation of Christ. Where there is no Christ, there is no life.

Some professing Christians have a serious misunderstanding of doctrine when they say that doctrine is a collection of irrelevant, abstract, heady propositions stifling a free and happy life of godliness. They claim they are doers while others are hearers and their church is practical while others are doctrinal. Doctrine is the truth concerning God and man and sin and the world and Christ and salvation and the church and the future of all things, and as such it is the only foundation for life.

What we believe determines how we live. If your doctrine is that a monthly trip to the chiropractor is the key to a wholesome life, and you really believe it and have even experienced the truth of it, then you will adapt your whole life, including finances and time, to live according to that doctrine. If you operate a burger chain and your doctrine or core business philosophy is "customer-friendly service at all costs," then you live accordingly and keep your restaurant clean, your food hot, and your workers cheery. If your doctrine is that there is no God, no final judgment, and no hell, then you live for the flesh. If your doctrine is that the whole or part of your righteousness with God is founded upon your good works, then you live your life arrogantly, trying to merit with God and, consequently, have a poor conscience that is continually vexed. If your doctrine is that doctrine is evil, then you, ironically, criticize people who maintain doctrine.

But if your doctrine is the doctrine of Christ that you hear preached, believe by faith, and confess in sincerity, then the Spirit will see to it that you live an active, antithetical, fruitful life. For example, sovereign, eternal election is a lofty subject. When you begin to grasp the truth of your own election by faith, then you do not believe you may safely perpetuate every species of the most atrocious crimes under the sun, but your heart is

overwhelmed, you adore the depths of God's mercies, cleanse yourself, and walk with a humble heart and willing hands.

We take heed to doctrine. Why? Right doctrine is the foundation for the Christian life.

6. Unity: Because doctrine is the foundation for unity.

It is commonly said that love unites and doctrine divides. Doctrine does not divide. Sin divides. Doctrinal deviance divides. Right doctrine unifies by giving a solid basis for true spiritual agreement.

Throughout the ages, Christians have always united on the basis of doctrinal truth and separated from those who do not agree in those doctrines. This is not strange. A gang of notoriously violent thugs in Mexico or worshipers in a Buddhist monastery in Asia or campaigners for an American political party are not held together by their dress or language or feelings, but by some objective, propositional truth-claims, written or unwritten, to which everyone in the group implicitly or explicitly agrees; otherwise they leave or are excluded. This is how groups form and stay united. Yet when a Reformed church pursues and seeks to express unity only on the basis of the essential truths of God's Word, she is regarded as proud, divisive, and narrow-minded.

Unity is especially the emphasis at the end of Ephesians 2. Former curious art-using, impious book-reading, fornicating, idolatrous Gentiles from afar off and Law-of-Moses-observing, bullock-sacrificing, Pass-over-keeping Jews could come together in Ephesus as one habitation of God builded together through the Spirit. For, in spite of all their differences, they were fitly framed together upon the foundation of "by grace in Jesus Christ are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any of us should boast."

We take heed to doctrine. Why? It is the foundation of our unity together.

In conclusion

The urgency in earnestly taking heed to doctrine is that Satan knows sound doctrine is the foundation of the church he detests and, therefore, he will fiendishly contend against it until his time is up.

The comfort in taking heed to doctrine is that God loves Himself and, therefore, loves right doctrine. No more than it is possible for God to be destroyed is the absolute and universal deprivation of His doctrine possible on earth. God will always preserve a remnant that steadfastly holds to true doctrine. By this doctrine the true church is known.



Believing and confessing

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Of the providence of God

Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 6a

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2017, p. 130.

Introduction

With chapter 6 of the Second Helvetic Confession, Heinrich Bullinger directs our attention to the providence of God. Along with the other Reformers, Bullinger subscribes to a robust doctrine of divine providence. God's providence includes all things; no one and nothing is outside of the scope of God's providence. Everything that takes place in time and in history is directed by the providence of God.

Interestingly enough, Bullinger treats the truth of providence *before* the truth of creation and the fall of man into sin. That is not the usual order. The usual or-

der among the Reformed is: creation, providence, and the Fall of man. That is the order found in the Belgic Confession of Faith and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. On the surface, that would appear to be the more reasonable order. Providence is treated after creation because providence presupposes a creation that is preserved and governed. And providence is treated before the Fall to demonstrate the Reformed conviction that the Fall into sin took place according to the appointment of God. The Fall did not take God by surprise, but was under God's providential rule.

The explanation for the treatment of providence be-

fore both creation and the Fall is that Bullinger's emphasis in chapter 6 is on the *decree* of providence, not so much on the *work* of providence. Since the decree of providence is an eternal decree, it makes sense to consider it before God's great work in time of creation and before the fall of man into sin, which also takes place in time. That the decree of providence is on the foreground is evident from the title of the first paragraph: "All Things Are Governed by the Providence of God." The emphasis in the chapter is on providence as "government." But "government" presupposes the will and counsel of God, which stands behind that government. To govern is to control, to direct, and to determine. But God controls, directs, and determines all things according to His eternal counsel. The decree of providence, therefore, is the basis for God's actual work of providence. And that decree takes place in eternity, before and altogether apart from any of God's work in time.

All things are governed by the providence of God

We believe that all things in heaven and on earth, and all creatures, are preserved and governed by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God. For David testifies and says, "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" (Ps. 113:4-6). Again: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me...and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps. 139:1-4). Paul also testifies and declares: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Therefore Augustine most truly and according to Scripture declared in his book *De Agone Christi*, cap. 8, "The Lord said, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will'" (Matt. 10:29). By speaking thus, he wanted to show that what men regard as of least value is governed by God's omnipotence. For he who is the truth says that the birds of the air are fed by him and the lilies of the field are clothed by him; he also says that the hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 6:26ff.). (SHC, 6.1)

Bullinger does not identify the literal meaning of "providence" or evaluate the usefulness of the word to describe the biblical doctrine of the providence of God. He simply accepts the use of the word and proceeds to

describe what we ought to understand by the providence of God.

Strictly speaking, the word "providence" is not a biblical word. The word does not occur in Scripture to describe divine providence. It only occurs once in the Bible, in Acts 24:2, where the orator Tertullus flatters the Roman governor Felix by saying that "very worthy deeds are done unto this nation," that is, the Jews, "by thy providence." He does not refer to God's providence, but to the "providence" of Felix.

Besides the fact that it is not a biblical word, the word "providence" is really inadequate to describe what the Reformed faith confesses concerning the providence of God. As with so many theological terms, the word "providence" is derived from the Latin. It is made up of two Latin words: the preposition *pro*, which means "before," and the verb *video*, which means "to see." The word means literally "to see before." That is certainly not an adequate description of the providence of God. God's providence is not simply that He sees beforehand what is going to happen and then reacts to what is about to happen. That leaves altogether out of view the decree of God that has determined all things. God sees beforehand everything that takes place *because* He has determined all things.

Although Bullinger does not begin chapter 6 with a definition of God's providence, we can define providence in a way that is in keeping with all that he teaches about providence in the chapter. On that basis, we can say that providence is the almighty and everywhere present power of God whereby He upholds and governs all things.¹ Although the word "providence" does not occur in Scripture, a very closely related word does occur. That word is the word "provide." God's providence is His provision for all the creatures that He has made. The assumed answer to God's question of Job in Job 38:41, "Who provideth for the raven his food?" is, of course, God. In Psalm 65:9 the psalmist praises God in these words: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided it."

The elements of providence

Significantly, in his exposition of the teaching of providence, Bullinger appeals to the virtues of God. That, in fact, is where he begins. Before he identifies the elements of providence, he identifies the God

¹ This is basically the definition of providence that is given in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27.

of providence. Who and what God is impacts our understanding of what God does—His works, and particularly the work of providence.

Providence is “the providence of [the] wise, eternal, and omnipotent God.” Providence is the outworking of the all-wise, the perfectly wise God. As the wise God, He makes no mistakes in His work of providence. The God of providence is also the eternal God. He is above time and infinitely exalted over time. All that takes place in time, therefore, is subject unto Him. And the God of providence is the omnipotent God. He is almighty or sovereign. That implies that nothing and no one is outside His control, but, on the contrary, everything and everyone is subject to Him. Providence gives testimony to the “wise, eternal, and omnipotent God.”

The first paragraph of this sixth chapter identifies the two main aspects of God’s providence: preservation and government. God provides for all that He has made. The creation did not only in the beginning receive its existence from God. But thereafter, moment by moment, He upholds and preserves the creation and every individual creature within the creation: “We believe that all things in heaven and on earth, and all creatures, are preserved...by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God.”

But besides sustaining all His creatures—providence as preservation—God also governs all things that He has created. That takes the doctrine of providence a step further. God upholds all things, but He upholds them in such a way that they serve His purpose. Of the two elements of God’s providence, this aspect is on the foreground in this sixth chapter of the SHC. This is the element of providence that is mentioned in the title of the chapter: “All Things Are Governed by the Providence of God.” In the body of the chapter, God’s government is included with preservation as the two elements included in God’s providence. And then once more, towards the end of the paragraph, Bullinger speaks yet again of God “governing all things by His omnipotence.” Clearly, this is the outstanding element of providence. For it is especially in this element of providence that God displays that He is the “wise, eternal, and almighty God.”

In His providence, the whole creation and every creature in the creation accomplish God’s sovereign will. Two things are involved in this aspect of God’s providence. First, God’s eternal decree, which is His predetermined will according to which He controls all things, is involved. And, secondly, providence involves God’s everywhere present power—His everywhere *present* power. Providence is God’s active power within the creation, according to which He actually causes everything that happens to serve the purpose that He has ordained.

God has a “plan” and every event in history, no matter how monumental or inconsequential in our estimation, is included in this plan. All creatures, no matter how great or small, good or evil, angelic or demonic, the God-fearing and the God-denying, confessors of Christ and those who blaspheme His holy name, accomplish the purpose of God according to providence.

In the end, that purpose of God is His own glory. That is *the* great purpose that God’s providence has in view. All His upholding and governing of the creation has in view His own glory by all that He has made. But in the goodness of God, to His own glory He has joined the salvation of His church. The salvation of the church is not a distinct purpose of God in providence. It is one and the same purpose as God’s own glory. For God is glorified in and by His church. His great glory is accomplished perfectly and ultimately in the salvation and glorification of His beloved church. This is exactly what God’s providence ensures.

The scope of God’s providence

Admittedly, Bullinger does not specifically address in this sixth chapter of the SHC the issue of the scope of God’s providence, that is, what is included in God’s providence. Nevertheless, he does make plain that nothing is outside of God’s providence and that all things are included in and subservient to God’s providence. He does that in especially two ways.

First of all, he teaches the all-comprehensive nature of God’s providence when, along with Augustine, he cites Jesus’ word in Matthew 10. Bullinger appeals appropriately to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 10 regarding God’s care of sparrows and of flowers. Jesus’ argument here—a solid, logical argument—is an argument from the least to the greatest. If God has a care for the least of His creatures, sparrows and flowers, does He not have a care for *all* His creatures? Clearly, He does. If these most insignificant of His creatures are comprehended in the providence of God, then all things are included in God’s providence.

In the second place, Bullinger teaches the all-comprehensive scope of God’s providence when he teaches clearly that God’s rational, moral creatures are included in His providence. Without specifically calling attention to this fact, the Scripture passages to which he appeals support this truth. According to Psalm 113, God beholds all who are in heaven and on the earth. That clearly includes the angels, who inhabit heaven, and men who are on the earth. He quotes Psalm 139, in the first verse of which the psalmist exclaims, “O LORD thou hast searched me, and known me.” And in verse 4 of the same psalm he confesses, “For there is not a

word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.” And in Acts 17:28, the apostle teaches that “in him [that is, in God] we live, and move, and have our being.” In God “we,” that is, “we rational, moral creatures,” have our existence.

God’s providence includes His rational, moral creatures. That means not only human beings, but also angels and demons. Without violating the nature with which God has made His rational, moral creatures, without making them automatons, without making them stocks and blocks, in a way that is incomprehen-

sible to us, God’s providence governs also all rational, moral creatures. Everything, absolutely everything is included in the providence of God. All things are subject to the government of God in providence.

This is the comfort of the truth of providence. “We believe that all things in heaven and on earth, and all creatures, are preserved and governed by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God.” And, therefore, we rest assured that nothing can be against us, but that all things must be for us.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Brendon Looyenga, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Calvin College and member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

A precious jewel (1)

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”

Psalm 8:3-6

It is hard to read the central verses of Psalm 8 without pausing in wonder. Or perhaps puzzlement is a better way to describe my initial feelings about the passage. In it David compares humanity to two of God’s most awesome creatures: the vast expanse of our physical universe and the angelic host. He goes on to note that in God’s divine wisdom, He chose to honor humanity with dominion over the entire universe, and then to endow him with powers that are just slightly less than that given to the angels. And finally, greater than even these gifts, God chose to bestow humanity with a glory and honor that is unique in the creation! When I read that passage and proceed to have a look at myself in the bathroom mirror—not to mention the mirror of God’s Word!—I do not see that crowning glory. All I see is another sinful, weak human being. One saved by God’s grace, but just a weak human being nonetheless.

That observation is one that we probably all make of ourselves at one time or another, and it should right-

ly lead us to the question of what God is revealing in Psalm 8 about the special creation of humans. What is this “crown” of glory and honor that He has placed on humans in a unique fashion? It is my firm belief that this passage refers to the first chapter of Genesis, which describes all of God’s wonderful acts of creation and culminates in His fashioning of a man and a woman in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 27). What greater honor and glory is possible for any creature than that it should be endowed with the image of its Creator? That this is what David had in mind—and through him the Spirit of God—seems apparent from his reference to the dominion of man over the physical creation, which is an exact parallel to the words spoken by God in Genesis 1:26. The crown of man, the symbol of his unique lordship in the creation, is the *image of God* that he bears.

If, in fact, the glory of man is his display of the image of God, it is exceedingly important that Christians correctly understand what this *image* is, and how it is properly displayed by humanity. Since the time of the early church, theologians have recognized this importance and have struggled repeatedly to articulate a clear doctrine regarding the image of God. This debate continues in the modern church world and has found resurgence in evangelical movements that are vocally opposed to the societal evils of abortion and euthanasia. Despite the apparent prominence of the doctrine in our modern context, it is often hard to know exactly what evangelical and Reformed proponents of the doctrine

mean when they contend that every human being is created in the image of God. If this is true, how is that so?

Two central issues need to be resolved for us to answer these questions. First, we require a precise definition of the *image of God*, and second, we need to know whether the image is common to all humanity or confined only to the elect people of God.

The Old Testament Scriptures refer to the ‘*image*’ or ‘*likeness*’ of God in just four passages.¹ The content of the image is not clear from these passages alone, which simply state the fact that humans were originally created in God’s image and use this fact as the basis for prohibiting murder.

A better understanding of the image of God can be extracted from several New Testament passages, particularly in the epistles of Paul.² It is on the basis of two of these passages (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24) that the Heidelberg Catechism defines the proper image of God to be “knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness” in Lord’s Day 3, which deals with the original, perfect creation of Adam. Whether this creedal definition encompasses the entirety of God’s image has been a subject of intense debate in the Reformed tradition, however, since many theologians see it as being too narrowly focused on the spiritual qualities lost in the Fall at the expense of other unique qualities evident in all humans, such as rationality, creativity, moral awareness and the need for communion with others.

The suggestion that there exists a ‘wider’ definition to the image of God is based primarily on two passages of Scripture (Gen. 5:3; James 3:9), which forbid the physical or verbal murder of any another person based on God’s creation of humanity in His image or ‘similitude.’ How we ought to understand these two passages in the broader context of this topic will not be revisited here since it has been addressed recently and in fine detail by others elsewhere.³ The position taken by the Protestant Reformed Churches distinguishes between the ‘*formal*’ image of God given in the threefold definition of the Catechism, and the ‘*material*’ capacity to bear the image of God that is unique to humans among

other creatures.⁴ An oft-used metaphor for this distinction is that of a wedding ring composed of a setting of precious metal, which displays an even more precious stone of diamond. In this metaphor, it is the diamond itself that represents the *image* of God, while the setting represents the unique *capacity* of humans to bear and display the image. I find this metaphor wonderfully fitting for what follows in this article, as the choice of a diamond—perhaps unintentionally—becomes an even richer metaphor for the image of God when we consider its chemical composition and physical properties in more detail.

Diamonds are among the most rare and precious of all naturally occurring materials. Crystals of diamond form under extremely high pressures and temperatures on the order of 3,000-5,000°F and 1 million pounds per square inch! Needless to say, there are very few natural environments where such conditions are achieved, though synthetic processes have been developed to replicate them. Naturally occurring diamonds are thought to form deep in the crust of the earth—about 90 miles below the surface—under the extreme pressures and temperatures that are found where continental and oceanic tectonic plates meet one another. These diamonds subsequently find their way to the surface of the earth by volcanic activity, which explains their presence in solidified volcanic magma relatively near the surface of the earth. Despite popular myth, diamonds do not form from coal, which is understood to be composed of decayed and compressed plant material that never exists under the temperature and pressures required to produce a diamond.

The popularity of that myth, however, is not without substance given the chemical composition of diamonds. Like coal, diamonds are composed of carbon atoms and are in fact among the purest forms of this element. Another especially pure form of carbon is the material graphite, which was used for decades as the writing material in pencils. This may seem surprising to many readers, as there is very little apparent similarity between diamonds and graphite, the former being hard and clear and the latter relatively soft and black in color. These differences exist because of the unique ability of carbon atoms to form an amazing variety of chemical bonding patterns that yield different two- and three-dimensional shapes. These different shapes of carbon have remarkably different properties, such that pure carbon can be formed into tubes, balls, sheets, and solid crystals, as is the case with diamonds.

1 Old Testament references: (“image of God”) Gen. 1:26, 27; Gen. 5:3; Gen. 9:6; (“likeness of God”) Gen. 1:26; Gen. 5:1

2 New Testament references: (“image of God”) I Cor. 11:7; II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Col. 3:10; Heb. 1:3; (“the same image”) II Cor. 3:18; (“image of his Son”) Rom. 8:29; (“similitude of God”) James 3:9

3 Angus Stewart, “The Image of God in Man: A Reformed Reassessment.” *British Reformed Journal* (No. 37 Spring 2003): 18-32. Cf. also <http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/imageofgod.htm>

4 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 204-213.

The properties of diamonds that gem experts look for include the “four C’s” of carat, clarity, color, and cut. All these properties come into play when a young man goes in search of a diamond engagement ring that will fit his budget as well as his beloved’s finger. The larger, clearer, more regularly colored and beautifully fashioned a diamond is, the more it will cost. Of all these properties, however, it is perhaps the *cut* of a diamond that makes it beautiful as a gemstone. As might be expected, the cut of a diamond is maximized to yield the most brilliant display of light through the top of the crystal, making it sparkle and shine in its setting. The most common cut used today—called the ‘ideal’ or ‘brilliant’ cut—yields a cone-shaped stone that contains 58 symmetrically organized facets. When fashioned

correctly, a many-faceted diamond crystal is undoubtedly beautiful to look at, which is why it has become the choice stone to adorn the hand of a young bride-to-be.

In the following article, I plan to return to the metaphor of a diamond as a fitting way to understand how the image of God is displayed in humans. We will especially consider two of the key properties that were noted in this article. First, we will consider the relevance of a diamond’s chemical composition and, second, we will consider the importance that a diamond be fashioned as a many-faceted jewel. Together these properties serve as a fitting means to deepen our appreciation for the *corporate* nature of the image of God in His elect people, which is an oft-neglected feature of this doctrine worth considering in more detail.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Margaret Laning, wife and mother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa

Marriages and mercy

(The following paragraph is a modern lament I call, *How*. Traditional Hebrew laments, such as Lamentations, began their text using the word “How”—see Lamentations 1:1, 2:1, and 4:1. Thus, the title of Lamentations is *Ekah*, “How.”)

How did this marriage turn so cold when, once upon a time, it was beautiful and loving? The young Christian couple shared everything together and lived as one. The years passed and their relationship deteriorated to a mere outward performance of duties and responsibilities. Sometimes they verbally attacked one another. Usually, they did not talk at all. Each prided himself/herself that the other was not worthy to know his/her inner thoughts. Rather than constructively discussing the problem, this silent treatment was a convenient way to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Its main

purpose, however, was to inflict pain. “How,” begs the question as we ask incredulously, “did this happen?” No one remembers the events for sure, but an offense took place along the way. It may have been relatively small, yet one angry comment led to another one back. There were no sincere apologies and plenty of grudge bearing. The couple continued to go to church regularly, sit next to one another, and the congregation was none the wiser. Though they resided in the same house, they lived separate lives. They wept sore, but there were no cries for forgiveness, no cries for mercy. Their children suffered and grew up confused and bitter. The End.

The End? How? The Christian couple just gave up? Why bother with such hopeless fiction. Wait—did you say this is not fiction but reality for some Christian couples? This is heartbreaking news! How can we help

our brothers and sisters in Christ? So, this story really has a point to it. Indeed, marriages need mercy. Every couple will have disagreements, but how they work through their problems is so important. We have a sinful nature and are prone to sin in our relationships, to our shame, but a marriage that lacks mercy is especially cruel.

During this upcoming wedding season, many of our engaged couples will plan to have the “Form for the Confirmation of Marriage Before the Church” read during their wedding ceremony. It is an edifying form, especially while contemplating God’s mercy and our need to show it in our marriages. The Form says, “He will aid and protect married persons, even when they are least deserving it.” This is mercy—receiving aid and protection from the One we sin against. How we need to meditate on this humbling truth!

The beginning of the Marriage Form states, “Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions....” Yes, this is a realistic opening for our newlyweds. Our sin is the reason for many troubles. Without mercy, troubles will surely increase. Yet, a couple that shows mercy has a humble, ready attitude to forgive each other. There is a mutual respect. They delight, not in winning arguments, but in living closely as one.

In the section of the Form where the groom is instructed on how to behave towards his wife, he is told to love, comfort, honor her...and be not bitter against her..., “that your prayers be not hindered.” A Christian who understands mercy knows that God has forgiven him or her many grievous sins. To our shame, we can become bitter against our spouse for much smaller offenses. Jesus teaches us, “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). An unforgiving attitude can hinder our prayers and must be repented of.

After the bride and groom exchange vows, the minister continues reading this in the Form: “The Father of all mercies, who of His grace has called you to this holy state of marriage, bind you in true love and faithfulness, and grant you His blessing.” Our heavenly Father is the Father of *all* mercies—every one of them. He redeems our life from destruction. He is gracious, slow to anger, forgiving. He inclines His ear to our prayers. Truly, His tender, healing mercies are a soothing balm upon our sin-sick souls. “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). May we never forget all His merciful benefits.

It is a great blessing to learn mercy from God who shows us mercy. Perhaps you see, as I do, personal fail-

ings. Yet, does your soul not cry out to God and ask for forgiveness and for this grace? Marriages need mercy. The more, by faith, we see God’s glory, the more we are conformed to His image (II Cor. 3:18). Likewise, the more we taste of His mercy, the more we desire to show mercy to others, especially our spouse and our children.

Mercy is compassion, tenderness, forbearance, forgiveness, pity, kindness, patience. When we have mercy, we desire to relieve one who is in pain and distress. Most notably, we relieve one who has sinned against us through forgiveness. A merciful person not only apologizes but says, “I forgive you.” It is a happy couple that is humbly aware of their own faults, for God’s love and mercy is shed abroad in their hearts.

Marrying in the Lord is essential for mercy in marriage. This is a truth we stress to our children and a joy when we see them take it to heart. Not long ago at our Christian school, a five-year-old girl was chasing a boy on the playground. When she caught him she gave him a kiss. Eventually, the mother of the girl heard of her daughter’s displays of affection. They had a talk after school. In the course of the discussion, the mother made clear her daughter should not be kissing boys for reasons including her age. “But Mom,” protested the kindergartner in all sincerity, “he loves the Lord!” Indeed, what a gracious gift from God to be married to one who loves the Lord! In God’s good time, may our young adults who seek a spouse have this wisdom.

Christian couples who are happily married usually have some good advice. After all, we are, by God’s grace, learning from our mistakes, are we not? At some of our children’s wedding receptions and others we have attended, the guests are given index cards to jot down a thought or two. The purpose is to give advice and wishes for the new “Mr. and Mrs.” Some are serious and others light-hearted, but a common thread in the advice my children received was related to mercy. Here is a sampling: “Don’t keep score of past wrongs”; “Always forgive each other”; “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1); “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). This was a common theme among the advice cards, and for good reason. As in the sad story at the beginning, sinful anger is destructive to a marriage. Those of us who are married know how easy it is to offend one another, due to our own selfishness and pride. The Scriptures exhort us to confess our faults and forgive right away. Do not go to bed angry. Another card said, “Don’t ever fight. It’s dumb!” Well said!

If any couple could have blamed one another for the rest of their marriage, it would have been our first parents after their fall into sin. Their loss was monumen-

tal. It was soon after that Adam named his wife. He could have chosen a name that would be a reminder of her sin—perhaps Mara, meaning bitter, or a name meaning temptress or misery. Upon each hearing of her name there would be overwhelming guilt and grief.

Yet, God came to the couple first in His mercy. He gave them hope in the promise of Genesis 3:15. He made known He would place enmity between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed, giving victory to His suffering people in Christ. The couple's blaming was short-lived; by faith, Adam believed God's promise and named his wife accordingly. He named her Eve, the mother of all living. Adam showed his wife mercy.

Certainly, there are some marriages where a spouse is wickedly abandoned despite (or because of) a merciful, godly witness. In such cases, the church family is called to extend loving, compassionate mercies upon the abandoned spouse and children.

There is a sense that all of us ask "how" when we go through great difficulties. As our Marriage Form again reminds us, "Whereas married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions...", our hope in God for His mercy gets us through. Though mercy is gentle and soft, it is by no means weak. God's mercy is enduring, abundant, and everlasting.

The faithful, weeping prophet Jeremiah asked "how" in the book of Lamentations. His life was filled with hardship, sorrow, and persecution. After years of having kings fight him, prophets speak against him, priests want to kill him, his people reject the Word of God he proclaimed, it was then that Jeremiah writes about God's mercies. Mercy is shown God's people all of the time, but it is especially in the more difficult moments that we delight in it. "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23). When we wake in the morning with heavy burdens to bear, a fresh store of God's mercies are ready for us right there.

May we sing from the heart with our families this truth:

O come, my soul, bless thou the Lord thy Maker,
And all within me bless His holy Name;
Bless thou the Lord, forget not all His mercies,
His pard'ning grace and saving love proclaim.
Bless Him, ye angels, wondrous in might,
Bless Him, His servants that in His will delight.
(Psalter #283, "Motives to Gratitude")



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

When it is 7:00 P.M. in Doon, IA, what time is it in Antipolo City, Rizal, The Philippines, where our missionaries live? Answer later in this column.

Young people's activities

Chaperone and nurse registration for the 2018 Young People's Convention hosted by the five Midwest churches remains open. The convention is planned for August 13–17, 2018, at Lake Geneva Christian Center in Alexandria, MN. To register, go to www.prcconvention.com

and follow the instructions under the chaperone or nurse tab. If you have any questions, email Chaperone@prcconvention.com.

Congregational activities

From the bulletin of Hudsonville, MI PRC:

Internship: The consistory announces to the congregation that they have approved the request of our seminary to supervise the internship of Mr. Jacob Maatman from July 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018. The internship is valuable in preparing men for the ministry

and, we trust, will be a blessing for the congregation as well. We will provide more details closer to the beginning of the internship.

We note here too that the internship of Seminarian Matt Kortus will take place under Rev. Nathan Decker and the Council of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI.

Sister-church activities

Rev. Arie denHartog and his wife Sherry are making their home in Singapore to help with preaching and other work while the group there is vacant. The following is from the CERC of Singapore's bulletin in its "pastoral voice" section:

Finally, we want to express our hearty thanks to many members of Covenant who have helped to prepare a home for us at Bishan Park. Many we know have also donated articles to use while we live in our condo. We have pretty much all that we need and more for a daily comfortable home. We want you to know how much all of this is appreciated by Sherry and me. Over the course of our stay in Singapore we hope many will have an opportunity to see the inside of this condo and we will be able to enjoy your visits and fellowship.

And this encouraging note of correspondence is addressed to Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland:

I would like to tell you that I have benefited a lot from listening to mp3s from the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church. Thus far I have read some articles written by Prof. David Engelsma and listened to some of his sermons and teachings and Prof. Herman Hanko's teachings on Ephesians and am currently listening to his teachings on I Peter. I have also listened to several of your teachings on various subjects and some other mp3 files from the CPRC. All this has been of considerable benefit to me. Furthermore, I have bought the 2-volume e-book of *Reformed Dogmatics* written by Herman Hoeksema. So far I have read most of the first one and it has been very encouraging and also a learning process to me.... I wish to thank you for the faithfulness and love you show towards the holy Word of God. We live in a time where most people hate the truth and we who preach the truth are being ridiculed and hated for it. So I just wanted to let you know that you are not alone. It is very encouraging for me to listen to things from the PRC and CPRC. Thank you. Keep up the good work to the honour and glory of God. All glory be to God.—Denmark

Also from Northern Ireland, we note that among those planning to attend the July British Reformed Fel-

lowship Conference are those from Germany, Wales, America, Northern Ireland, Brazil, England, Australia, Hungary, and the Republic of Ireland. Wow! Time for you to sign up?

Mission activities

The annual delegation of the Council of the Doon, IA PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee made the trip to the Philippines February 15-27. Deacon Joel Van Egdom (and his wife Michelle) represented Doon PRC, while Rev. Cory Griess represented the FMC. The Classis of the PRC of the Philippines met February 26 at Maranatha PRC with the delegation in attendance. Rev. Griess preached once each in Provident Christian Church in Marikina, the Berean PRC of Antipolo City, and Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela City.

Denominational activities

Classis West of the PRCA met on March 7 in Loveland, CO PRC with routine business on the agenda.

Trivia answer

When it is 7:00 P.M. in Doon, IA..., it is the time that the Philippine sub-committee of Doon's Council meets via Skype with our missionaries on the last Thursday of each month. And it is the time that the entire Doon Council meets with the missionaries via Skype on the first Tuesday of each month. It is also the time that the FMC meets with our missionaries on the third Tuesday of each month. And in all cases...it is 9:00 A.M. in the Philippines (the next day). Unless...it is daylight savings time in the USA! Then 7:00 P.M. in Doon equals 8:00 A.M. in the Manila area. So the missionaries are greeted with a "good morning," while they greet the various bodies in Iowa with a "good evening." And through the open windows in Beverly Hills Subdivision roosters are heard greeting the day.

Also, when the annual delegation travels from Iowa to the Philippines, they cross the International Date Line (line of demarcation) and add or move forward one day. A delegation traveling from northwest Iowa to Manila can expect to travel roughly 8,300 miles (via Tokyo, Japan) and be in the air more than 17 hours total. From home in the USA to home in Antipolo it may be more like 25 hours. Quite the trip!

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Immanuel PRC expresses their sincere Christian sympathy to Wilbur Linker and family in the death of his wife, their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother, **Hattie Linker**. Our prayer is that they may receive comfort and assurance from God's Word: "... Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yeah, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. Brian Feenstra, President
Hilgard Goosen, Clerk

Teacher needed

Trinity Christian High School of Hull, IA, is seeking a Bible/church history teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The position involves other courses, and the school will try to be flexible according to the applicant's areas of expertise. The successful applicant will be a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches and willing to seek Iowa certification. To find out more information or to apply for the position please contact principal Jim Regnerus (jregnerus@trinitychs.org, 712-470-0424) or education committee chairman Craig Hoksbergen (crghoks@outlook.com, 712-441-6139).

Synod

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2018, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Rev. Ron VanOverloop
O-11243 8th Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534
(rvanoverloop22@gmail.com)

One hundred years¹

We give thanks to God for **Marion Ondersma**, one of the remaining original members of the PRC. On Easter Sunday March 31, 1918, 100 years ago, Marion was born. Congratulations, and to God be the glory for His unfailing faithfulness. Psalm 100:5: "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generation."

Kaye Moelker

Rose and Gary Moelker

Judy and Larry Meulenberg

102 grandchildren, great and great-great

grandchildren

Jenison, Michigan

¹ The *SB* does not normally publish birthday notices, but this one is unusual and worthy of special notice. The *SB* editors too congratulate Mrs. Ondersma on this significant milestone in her life and in the history of the PRC.

Teacher needed

The **Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The school will be starting from grades 1-3, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.