

# The Standard Bearer

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## Forgiveness with God

Rev. John Marcus

## The United States' demise: Lessons

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## The “happy divorce”: A sign of moral decline

Rev. Clayton Spronk

## Reformed critique of the premillennial explanation of Romans 11 (1)

Prof. David Engelsma

## God's armor for us: The breastplate

Rev. Brian Huizinga



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## Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta

# Forgiveness with God

**But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.**

**Psalm 130:4**

For anyone who has wandered from God and come to see their sins, there are few words sweeter than these: “but there is forgiveness with God.”

All we like sheep have gone astray; we all wander from God to one degree or another. But God, by His grace, draws us back to Himself, leading us to sincere sorrow and repentance. When we call upon Him out of the depths, what a joy to know that there is forgiveness with God! Not just forgiveness for others, but there is forgiveness with God for me personally.

There is forgiveness with God through the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness for sins against our spouse and family members, for the sin of following after the things of this world; for sins of pride and selfishness, for the sin of failing to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. No matter how great the depths of our sin, “there is forgiveness with God.”

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Whatever depths we find ourselves in, out of those depths we must cry to Jehovah. “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD” (v. 1).

When Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, God sent a great storm upon the sea and forced the sailors to throw Jonah overboard into the depths of the raging sea (Jonah 2:3). Those angry billows conveyed the message of God’s anger so that Jonah cries, “I am cast out of thy sight” (Jonah 2:4).

The depths for the psalmist and for us are the places of deep distress because those depths seem to separate us from God. Jonah’s desire was to come into God’s presence again and to look toward God’s holy temple (Jonah 2:4). But, as long as he was wallowing in the depths, he felt far from God.

A multitude of circumstances might bring us into depths of despair: be it illness, or marital strife, financial hardship, grief in the loss of loved ones, or great

persecution. The psalmist teaches us to call upon God out of the depths.

But the psalmist’s greatest need and our greatest need is not deliverance from our circumstances but, rather, redemption from our iniquities. That is why the psalmist confesses, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord who shall stand” (v. 3). We stand in great need because of our iniquities.

Iniquities refer to crooked and perverse and distorted acts. But those very acts incur guilt before God. When we walk on crooked paths away from the straight and narrow way, we bring guilt upon ourselves. Furthermore, our guilt deserves punishment. Iniquities refer to all these things put together: distorted acts, guilt, and punishment. We are miserable creatures because we miss the mark of God’s glory and, therefore, daily increase our guilt. We are especially miserable because of the punishment we deserve.

What if Jehovah would mark our iniquities (v. 3)? What if God would take into account our harsh words? Our proud attitudes? Our selfish deeds? How we spend our precious time? What we watch on the television or listen to on the radio? What if God would scrutinize every thought, word, and deed? What if He dealt with us exactly as we deserved?

If God should mark our iniquities, we would have no hope of standing in His holy presence. Why? Because He hates all workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5). None can stand in His sight when once He is angry (Ps. 76:7). If God would mark our iniquities, we could never enjoy sweet communion with Him.

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“But!”

Then follow the sweet words of our text: “But there is forgiveness with thee.”

That stands in contrast to God marking our iniquities. “But” signifies a given that stands in contrast to the previous possibility. Here is a sure truth we can rely on: “There is forgiveness with thee.”

To say “there is forgiveness with thee” does not mean sometimes there is forgiveness and other times not, as

if sometimes God was a God of forgiveness and other times He was a God of judgment. God “cannot deny himself” (II Tim. 2:13). He cannot repudiate who He is; He must remain true to His character. Bound up in God’s unchangeable character is the fact that He is a God of forgiveness. This is who God is: He is “ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Neh. 9:17). Though we have often sinned against Him, He never forsakes us. He is a God who delights in forgiveness.

Forgiveness, according to the parallel phrase, refers to God not marking our iniquities. When He forgives us, God removes the guilt of our iniquities and the punishment we deserve. When He forgives us, He does not cast us out of His presence. Under the curse of the law, we deserved to be cast into outer darkness. When God forgives us, He allows us to stand before Him in peace.

Someone who has no delight in fellowshiping with God will not care about and seek after forgiveness. But sometimes we have difficulty believing that God is truly a God of forgiveness. We might imagine that our sins are too great; or that God might not forgive us because we keep falling again and again; or that He might not forgive because we are not sorry enough. Then we live in doubt and despair.

But, God’s Word is clear: “There is forgiveness with thee.”

How can there be forgiveness with God? Exactly because God marked our iniquities, every last one of them!

Not as those iniquities were in us. But as our iniquities were imputed to Jesus Christ. Under the burden of our iniquities, Jesus Christ experienced the horrible torments that we deserved. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Is. 53:5). “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). Jesus Christ experienced the depths of God’s cursing wrath so that we might be delivered from those depths. The psalmist puts these words in Jesus’ mouth, prophesying of Jesus’ suffering: “I am come into *deep waters*, where the floods overflow me” (Ps. 69:2). Later in the same Psalm he has Jesus saying, “Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the *deep waters*” (v. 14). The greatest depths that man has ever known could never approach the depths that Jesus experienced as He hung on the cross for our sakes.

There is forgiveness with God because the atoning sacrifice has been offered. The ransom has been paid. Justice has been served in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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How shall we respond to the gracious forgiveness earned by Christ on the cross?

Is there forgiveness with God so that we can enjoy the pleasures of sin and still go to heaven? Is there forgiveness with God so that we can live for ourselves? The Devil would have us think that way.

The psalmist answers, “There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

That is not talking about a legalistic fear that has to do enough or else we will miss out on God’s forgiveness. The psalmist is not talking about a fear that cowers in the corner, wondering if God is going to make life miserable for us. He is talking about a fear of reverence and awe that says, “Look at what God has done for me! What a gracious and longsuffering God who has forgiven me much!” God forgives us in order that we

would live our lives in grateful response to His goodness.

How do grateful people live? How will we respond when we know there is forgiveness with God? Like the psalmist, we will learn more and more to wait upon Jeho-

vah for all things we need: “I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning...” (130:5-6). When we are thankful for what God has already given us in Christ, we will look to Him with eager expectation to continue His work of salvation in us. When we remember God’s bountiful provision, we will look to Him to continue to supply our needs.

So, the psalmist says, “My soul waiteth for the Lord” (v. 6). As if to say, “I am confident that His Word will prove to be true to the very last jot and tittle. Such is his confidence that he waits for God with greater expectation “than they that watch for the morning” (v. 6). The watchman yearns for the morning to come, and he is also absolutely certain that it will come. So, too, we wait for the Lord, knowing He will keep His Word; He will finish the work He started.

Lastly, when we know God’s forgiveness, we will respond to His goodness by telling others. The psalmist does not stop with confessing the truth himself; he wants others to glorify God’s name. So he says, “Let Is-

**There is forgiveness with God because the atoning sacrifice has been offered. The ransom has been paid. Justice has been served in the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

rael hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (v. 7). As he saw God’s goodness, he calls all of God’s people to hope in our gracious Lord.

What a merciful God we have, that He would redeem us! He does not just barely redeem us. His atoning sacrifice did not just barely rescue us from death and hell. His ransom payment was not just barely enough to give us one or two blessings of salvation. Rather, “With him

is *plenteous* redemption” (v. 7). Jesus Christ made the full payment for all of our salvation. “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (v. 8). He will deliver us from all our depths, either removing them altogether or turning them to our profit.

Jehovah hears us when we call to Him out of the depths.

Blessed be the LORD God with whom there is forgiveness!



## Editorial

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

# The United States’ demise: Lessons

The United States of America is in steep decline. She is so because of God’s righteous judgment upon her.

What she has so passionately wanted—sin—the righteous Judge of heaven and earth judges her with: sin and more sin. According to Romans 1, God “gives her over to a reprobate mind,” so that she does “those things which are not convenient.” “Not convenient” is “not suitable” or “not appropriate,” somewhat of an understatement to point out that even *common sense* would not allow one to behave as our society does!

Our society asked for sexual liberty in the name of avoiding puritanical hypocrisy—such was their excuse. God gave it to them in the form of a sewage swamp of pornographic filth that cannot be drained. And now Oprah Winfrey, the former Baptist-turned-actor and current media-mogul-millionaire becomes a presidential hopeful, because she eloquently called out some sex-abusers in Hollywood—the very sewer main that filled the cesspool in the first place and made her rich. Presidential hopeful Oprah Winfrey!

Our nation asked for crudity and vulgarity in the name of free speech, and gets it until it comes out her nostrils, such that even former President Obama reacted by asking for a “Civility Tour” to turn back the tide of hurtful speech and murderous ways.

We asked for violence and became violent in ways we ourselves are shocked at.

The United States and other “developed” countries are in a world of trouble.

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So is there nothing more for us than this gloomy jeremiad? Weeping, shall we write our own prophetic lamentation and say, “Thou art very wroth against us, Amen”? (See Lamentations 5:22.)

That would be wrong because, as I indicated last time, there are vital lessons for Reformed believers in this. As we live in and seek to be faithful in a world of men that profess to be wise but instead have become fools, we can profit from sober reflection on God’s Word.

## First, let us get off (or stay off) our high horse and repent.

The Pharisee that we are by nature shows himself without much shame at times like this. “God, thanks that we are not like them!” In her public voice, the church can sound a lot like the Pharisee, if she is not humbly careful. She can sin in the very way we accuse our society of sinning: go on a kind of self-righteous rampage, fixating on one sin or one form of sin, while guilty of many others. Of course, this caution to carefulness is not a prohibition of exposing error. It only means that exposing the horrible evils in our land must be done in humility, the humility of seeing the



beam in our own eye also. And our hopelessly sinful natures, in which are all these sins. *All* of them.

## **Second, let us learn that God judges sin with more sin in the church, too.**

Romans 1 is so familiar to many of us that we could probably quote much of it by heart. What must not be forgotten, however, is that the reality of God judging sin with more sin applies not only to the reprobate world in paganism, but also to the church. The church or Christian family that embraces, even countenances, a sin may find herself awash in that sin in ways that she is shocked to see. The explanation? The righteous judgments of God.

In martyr Stephen's last sermon, he reminded the Jewish high priest and council of all this. Applying Israel's ancient history to their present situation, Stephen told of when Israel made a calf at Sinai, and "rejoiced in the work of their own hands." In judgment, God "turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7:41, 42). "Gave them up" in the Greek is the same word Paul uses in Romans 1 to describe God's judgments upon the reprobate *pagans*, upon those who never heard the gospel. Acts 7 teaches that God also gave *Israel* over to more sin as punishment for sin. Israel wanted Egyptian idols; God gave them idols until they were inundated with idolatry and worshiped the *host* of heaven! "In the place of light corruptions," says Calvin, "came gross monsters of idolatry." From *one* feigned god, Calvin aptly explains, "there comes, by and by, a *hundred*; and from one superstition a thousand."

Do the people of God want sports and entertainment beyond what is reasonable? In your generations He may give it to you so that your grandchildren are consumed by sport and entertainment in ways that will make even common sense shake her head in amazement. Do you want liberty to use your time in foolish (not even vile, but simply foolish) pursuits on the Internet? Do you imagine that a little sexual sin on television will remain a little sin? God will see to it, in His righteousness, that it does not. Who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

Does your consistory countenance some sin in the congregation because it's too painful, or sensitive, or unpopular, to deal with? The little leaven that will soon leaven the whole lump does so because God makes sin work like leaven. In the chemistry of yeast is the sover-

eign hand of God. In sin's 'leavening' power is the same sovereign hand of God.

## **Third, from the progress of sin learn the dynamics of sin...and addictions.**

God's law according to which sin produces more sin is like the law of gravity. The inevitability of it is plain to all. The difference is that I need not *understand* the law of gravity, only reckon with it. When I get on my roof to clean out the gutters, fifteen feet above the concrete patio below, it is not helpful for me to understand *how* gravity works, only that it's one of God's inviolable laws in creation. But when I deal with sin and God's 'laws' that govern sin, it *is* advantageous for me to know something about it, both with regard to the nature of sin and the sinfulness of my nature. God's Word explains the dynamics of sin.

For example, Paul teaches that communication with sin and sinful people truly influences our lives for evil: "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Cor. 15:33). "Communications" is fellowship, and "manners" refers to conduct. From the word for *manners* in the passage we get our word *ethics* and ethics pertains to conduct. Fellowship with evil corrupts a man's ethics, morals, conduct. Listening to and observing with pleasure what is sin will inevitably lead to a corruption of his own life.

Augustine once illustrated this reality when he told a story of his friend Alypius. Alypius had no interest in the mixed-martial-arts of his day (the combat of the gladiators), but his friends convinced him to join them

at the arena one day anyway. When Alypius could no longer avert his eyes because of the lusty shouts of the crowds, he looked, and was forever changed. Augustine said that his friend "was run through with a wound in his soul more lethal than the physical wounding he longed to look at, and he fell more pitifully than the one whose fall the shouting was about.... He was no longer the person he had been when he came." What changed? Alypius no longer loathed violence. Why? Because communion with sin corrupted him.<sup>1</sup>

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." Bad company changes a man's ethics. Being entertained by sin has its effects as certainly as missing the first step coming off the roof. And with much greater damage.

**Fellowship with evil corrupts a man's ethics, morals, conduct. Listening to and observing with pleasure what is sin will inevitably lead to a corruption of his own life.**

<sup>1</sup> For this story I am indebted to a recent talk by Dr. Carl Trueman, "What Augustine Teaches us Today."

Whether that is watching gladiatorial combat, pornography, or other sin, the ‘law’ has no more ‘give’ than the law of gravity. We observe this.

We can even understand something of it. What we may understand is that God made man’s nature in such a way that those with whom we fellowship *change* us to *be like them*, that is, to *look* like them, spiritually. They change us into their “image.” When we live in the presence of *God*, more and more we become like God. He conforms us to His image. Conversely, as we live in the presence of the wicked, more and more we become like the wicked—in thinking, wanting, speaking, acting, willing, doing. Like it or not, it is the way God made us.

So our parents, wisely, warned against watching television—much of it, in any case. And not only because they realized it would be sinful to watch the swill of sinfulness on it, but because they had the spiritual sense that sin begets more sin.

But it is worse than they may have recognized fifty years ago. Sin begets more sin, lies more lies, slander more slander, sex more sex, until one is enslaved by the sin. Such is the horrible but God-ordained reality of sin’s workings. The day Adam ate, everything changed, fundamentally. So sinful misuse of alcohol engenders more misuse of alcohol until one is enslaved by alcohol. And sinful misuse of the computer to view what is not “convenient” begets more misuse until the Devil has a man by the throat and he will “let goods and kindred go” and probably “this mortal life also” simply to view what is unseemly. Whether or not we understand the psychology or physiology of this, we certainly understand the theology of it: Sin begets more sin, so far as to enslave a man. Sin then “reigns” in his body, has “dominion” over him, so that he obeys its overpowering passions (see Rom. 6:12).

That helps us understand why every country that rejects God is bound to sink into a morass of evil. And attempting to redeem our culture by a so-called common grace (which is no grace) will be no more effective than flapping my arms to break my fall from the roof.

#### **Fourth, let us hear the footsteps of Christ in the USA’s demise.**

I indicated earlier that I was discouraged to see that the country in which I *now* live is not the land in which I grew up: hazy and happy southern California in the late ’50s and ’60s. But the Lord uses such discouragement to pry my cold but very much alive fingers off this world’s goods. We are far too enamored of this earth and not nearly enough in love with the life to come and the return of Christ. The demise of the ‘beloved’ land of my youth reminds me loudly that this earth is not my home;

I’m just a-passing through. I may be thankful when my land prospers outwardly, but must not become this-worldly. The ruin of my country and the fear for my grandchildren must translate into fervent instruction of them and myself: Look for Christ’s return! Without being lazily ‘anabaptistic’ in my worldview, I fix my hopes, not on the renovation of this present world but on the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Did not Jesus teach us so? He made clear that, along with false prophets, damnable heresies, love waxing cold, rioting in the daytime, and wars and rumors of wars, what will mark the last days and forecast His soon return is the very iniquity that we see abounding in our country today. Men and women will continue to eat and drink, marry and give in marriage, as though the world will continue as it always has. Scoffers, walking after their own lusts, will mock our anticipation of Christ’s return, but only because they are willingly ignorant of what we know. He shall come and judge the ungodly; He is not slack concerning His promises (see II Pet. 3). When we see Him, all our Christian hopes will be satisfied.

Because we know these things, so Peter exhorts, be diligent to be in peace, without spot, and blameless. Beware that you do not fall away from your own steadfastness, led away with the errors of the wicked. Grow in grace. And hope for heaven (II Pet. 3:14ff.).

#### **Finally, let us preach the gospel so that God’s people love Christ.**

Preach in such a way that God’s people love Jesus Christ because they see that He is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:15).

Let us preach (pray for your preacher to grow in this) so that God’s people see Jesus, as did John, full of “grace (beauty!) and truth” (John 1:14). So that they behold a lovely Jesus, sexually pure, true to His bride, never unfaithful, with ‘eyes’ for her alone. So that they see the One whose love even for our bodies meant that He subjected His body to the worst violence. So that they see Jesus’ so-great love for our name that, while He spoke truth in love, He subjected His own name to a campaign of hatred that would make Facebook’s worst blush. Beautiful Jesus. Indeed, He is “altogether lovely.”

And when we love the lovely Jesus, we will not love this world. When we love the Christ “full of grace” (spiritual beauty!), we will see the downfall of our nation to be preparation for the rising up of the Son of God in all His glory and beauty.

“By mercy and truth (of Jesus) iniquity is purged (from us)” (Prov. 16:6). Come, Lord Jesus!

## Why stay with the KJV?

I enjoyed reading Prof. Ronald Cammenga's article, "What Saith the Scripture: The Bible's Perspicuity" in the December 1, 2017 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

However, after reading it, it did raise a question for me. If Wycliffe, Tyndale, and others worked so hard and even risked their lives to give the English people an updated, understandable English Bible, why do all the writers in the *Standard Bearer* quote Scripture from a four-hundred-year-old (KJV) version of the Bible when we have several updated versions available? It reminds me of the Amish, who continually use live horsepower for work and travel when modern automobiles and tractors are more efficient. I would appreciate an answer.

Yours truly,  
Herman Vander Vos,  
Bozeman, MT

## Response:

Thanks for your letter, which gives me a good opportunity to explain briefly a practice and principle in the life of the PRCA. Your question, in light of my article(s) on the Bible's perspicuity, asks for an explanation of the use of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible by all the writers in the *Standard Bearer*. You correctly observe the consistent use of the KJV by the different writers. This is true because the ministers in the PRCA use the KJV in all the aspects of their work in the ministry: leading of worship, catechism, pastoral counseling, sick visiting, Bible study societies, and other meetings of the church. The official Bible version of which we make use is, in all our congregations, the KJV. This is also true in our Protestant Reformed Christian schools and in the vast majority of our homes and families. This is not because of an Amish sort of mindset, as you suggest. It is not due to the fact that this is the version we have always used or because we are opposed to any and all change. It is not due to the viewpoint that change is necessarily wrong, and that change is always departure. We continue to make use of the KJV out of the collective conviction that it remains the best translation of the Bible available in the English language. Let me assure you, dear brother, that if a better and equally as faithful translation became available, the PRCA would seriously consider using it in place of the KJV. I might also point out that the PRCA were invited to participate in the early meetings

that eventually produced the New International Version (NIV). We sent representatives to those meetings. But when it became plain that the majority were committed to the theory of dynamic equivalence, we could no longer in good conscience participate in the project. Later, it also became clear that some of those involved in the translation of the NIV were not committed to a consistent view of verbal inspiration. This indicates, however, that we are not in principle opposed to a new and improved English translation of the Bible.

One of the reasons on account of which we use the KJV is exactly the issue of perspicuity. Some admittedly archaic words and language aside, the KJV is a very readable and easily understood Bible translation. Every comparative test that I have seen indicates that the KJV is as readable and understandable as any of the modern English versions and, in many cases, is proven to be more easily understood. One factor, in this connection, is a higher percentage in the KJV of words of one or two syllables, as compared with many modern versions that make use of more words with multiple syllables. You can search the Internet for a number of these comparative studies. Just Google: "Reading level of the King James Bible."

An additional factor is that the cadence and language of the KJV are judged by many experts to be much more easily memorized than so many of the other modern English versions. We find this to be true among ourselves, in our homes and schools. We not only want a Bible that we can easily read and understand; we also want a Bible that is easily memorized. The KJV is such a Bible, and the ease with which our children and grandchildren commit passages out of it to memory is clear evidence of this important advantage of the KJV.

The most important issue, however, is the faithfulness of the KJV to the original text of Scripture. That is the main issue that must decide this question. The PRCA judge the KJV to be the most faithful English translation available today. We are also of the conviction that the manuscripts from which the KJV was translated (the Majority Text), represent manuscripts that are more faithful to the Hebrew and Greek originals than the manuscripts that are the basis for many of the modern versions. On this matter, I recommend that you consult the website for the Trinitarian Bible Society. They have a wealth of material available on this and other aspects of Bible translation and the value of the KJV. Or you may contact the Protestant Reformed



Theological Seminary and we will send you a number of pamphlets produced by PRCA pastors addressing the matter of Bible translation and defending the use of the KJV. Or, if it is easier for you, you may find them on the PRCA website—prca.org.

There are, of course, words and expressions that are puzzling to folks growing up in and living in the twenty-first century: assay, bewray, bruit, carriage (baggage), haply, contemn, meat (food), scrip, shambles, strait, trow, wot. Language changes; words drop out of use and new words are added to the dictionary every year. But with these archaic words and expressions, it is really a very simple matter: Look them up! We have a multitude of Bible study helps available today—make use of them. And almost everyone has a smart phone in their pocket or purse with easy access to the Internet.

Take just a minute and learn a new word and expand your own vocabulary. That is a good thing. And besides, usually the context is sufficient to give a fairly good indication of the meaning of most of these words.

We do not intend to be “old fashioned.” But neither are we ready to give up our beloved KJV, which has served God’s church for so many generations, so long as we judge it to be the best available English translation. When we compare the KJV to the other English Bible translations, for most of us there is no comparison. Maybe an alternative English translation will come along some day, but for the time being we favor the continued use of the KJV.

Cordially in Christ,  
Prof. Ronald Cammenga



## All around us

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

# The “happy divorce”: A sign of moral decline

In an article entitled “How divorce went from a devastating life event to a cause for celebration,” Sabrina Maddeaux demonstrates the way that the divorce culture (especially in the United States and Canada) is “progressing.”<sup>1</sup> She briefly traces the history of divorce, and shows how society’s thinking about and response to divorce is shifting so that the consequences of divorce are mitigated. Her historical analysis is fascinating and most likely accurate. The conclusion she makes on the basis of her historical analysis is chilling and demonstrates the foolish madness of a sinful society that is determined to embrace divorce.

In her historical summary Maddeaux reaches all the way back to ancient Athens; but we are especially interested in what she calls the “two major divorce revolutions” of the twentieth century. She writes,

The first occurred in the late 1960s. Though divorce

laws vary, there are two basic approaches: fault-based and no-fault-based. California Governor Ronald Reagan ushered in the era of “no-fault” divorce in 1969, requiring no proof of fault for either party for a marriage to be dissolved. By the mid-1970s, nine more states would adopt no-fault divorce laws, and by the early 1980s, every state (with the exception of South Dakota and New York) had introduced some form of no-fault divorce. Meanwhile, in Canada, the Divorce Act was amended in 1968 to permit divorce for reasons other than adultery or cruelty, including a separation of at least three years.

The laws reflected general changes in social attitudes at the time and directly led to the divorce boom of the 1970s. Reagan would later call his move to no-fault divorce the biggest mistake of his political career. Between 1960 and 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled, hitting an all-time high of 52 per cent in California. In Canada, the divorce rate doubled in the five years following the 1968 amendment of the Divorce Act. However, it didn’t reach its peak of 41 per cent

<sup>1</sup> <http://nationalpost.com/entertainment/how-divorce-went-from-a-devastating-life-event-to-a-cause-for-celebration>, January 11, 2018 (updated January 12).

until 1986, when the Divorce Act was amended once again to reduce the separation period to one year, and removed any requirements to prove “fault” by either spouse.

As a result of the increased number of legal separations, half of the children born in the 1970s saw their parents divorce—more than any other generation in history. This led to the second divorce revolution, one that came at the hands of those scarred by the messy splits of their parents: the Gen-Xers and older Millennials who have been dubbed the “Divorce Generation.”

Maddeaux explains that society has mostly viewed the consequences of divorce since the 1970s unfavorably. She writes,

Since North America’s divorce rate soared above 50 per cent in the 1970s, we’ve been inundated with visions of restraining orders, depositions, custody battles, alimony payments and traumatized children. As a result, we’ve been lead to believe that few things inspire as much anxiety, anger, resentment and despair as the end of a marriage.

Divorce has often been viewed as especially traumatic for the “Gen-Xers and older Millennials” who are the “Divorce Generation.”

Maddeaux states, “Their greatest life-defining moment can often be discerned by asking, ‘When did your parents get divorced?’” Her analysis of the history is that the first divorce “revolution” led to an increase of the occurrence of divorces, and “the second was more about being conscious of the consequences.” The result of the “acute awareness of the impact a contentious divorce can have, especially on children,” is “a slight decline in the number of splits, but *more importantly*, it has brought about a change in the adversarial status quo that had previously defined a divorced couple (emphasis added).”

Society is responding to the negative consequences of divorce not by repenting of the evil of divorce but by seeking to soften its consequences. Unhappy divorces are not pleasant, so the solution is to have a “happy divorce.” Maddeaux explains how the divorce culture promotes the so-called “happy divorce” with

an entirely new set of divorce-related terminology and customs. Enter the rise of the divorce doula: women who offer emotional and informational

support through the process, and the international DivorceHotel, which claims to seamlessly split couples in just one weekend away at five-star romantic resorts full of red wine, champagne, luxury massages and mediation sessions. For the more tech-inclined, startup Wevorce claims to be the “premier self-guided divorce solution” for those looking for a peaceful and collaborative process.

This change of approach to divorce is supposedly good for all involved and, therefore, also for society in general.

Kids who experience stigma-less break-ups, maintain access to a binuclear family and are part of positive divorce and parenting strategies tend to fare just fine. Unsurprisingly, happy divorces also make for happier exes. Amicable splits routinely save both partners time, anxiety and money.

The discovery of ways to mitigate the negative consequences of divorce lead Maddaeux to “wonder if we had the wrong idea about splitting up all along.” Maddaeux’s timid conjecture gives way to a confident conclusion: *divorce is not the problem*. Rather, “[t]he stigmas, legal hurdles, outdated financial bur-

dens, lack of support systems and grief over all the above are the real evils giving [divorce] a bad rap.” Divorce is not evil but “has the potential to be a positive development for all involved.” Divorce is good! Divorce is worthy of “champagne toast and beach vacation.” In

case you have not heard of it yet, Maddaeux is referring to a “divorce-moon,” which she describes as a “post-divorce honeymoon.” Yes, this is happening. Couples are really responding to their divorces in a way that expresses that divorce and marriage are equally worthy of celebration.

Maddaeux’s conclusion that a “happy divorce” is positive for all the individuals involved and for society so that divorce ought to continue to be embraced by society (she even expresses that it is no concern to her whatsoever “whether divorce rates sink to 10 per cent or rise to 75 per cent”) is foolish madness for especially two reasons. In the first place, while it is conceivable that studies show children (and others involved) fair better in some ways (better performance in school perhaps) when the divorce process is less contentious, this does not mean that divorce is without serious negative

**...it is folly to address the evil of divorce by attempting to deal only with its negative consequences. This is a common reaction of man to sin. He refuses to see his sin as sin. Without the grace of God, he will not deal with the sin itself by repenting.**

consequences. Even Maddeaux is not able to say that in a “happy divorce” children thrive and are spared all suffering. The best she is able to say is that they “tend to fare just fine.” What does “fare just fine” mean? Does it mean that, after all, even in a “happy divorce” the children still go through various kinds and degrees of turmoil? Who judges that this turmoil is fine (probably the stubborn parents who are determined to divorce, regardless of the consequences for the children)? Why is the conclusion that, despite this turmoil, divorce is still “good”? Why isn’t the conclusion that divorce causes problems, which means that divorce is an evil that should be avoided? The word “tend” is also important. This is an admission that some children do not fare fine even in the midst of a “happy divorce.” Why is divorce’s responsibility for causing these children serious spiritual and emotional grief so casually dismissed? Despite the best efforts of sinful men and women to the contrary, they cannot escape the evil of divorce and its detrimental consequences.

In the second place, it is folly to address the evil of divorce by attempting to deal only with its negative consequences. This is a common reaction of man to sin. He refuses to see his sin as sin. Without the grace of God, he will not deal with the sin itself by repenting. The judgments of God against him for sin are unpleasant. So he goes to work to avoid the judgments of God while continuing in his sin. If the consequences of sin can be mitigated, then the sin itself (though it is not thought of as sin) must be justifiable. In the case of divorce, then, it is only evil as long as it results in suffering. But in an “evolving culture” the results of divorce are not so bad, so divorce is not so bad. So what if dad has abandoned mom for another woman? It is better for junior if all amicably embrace the divorce so that junior will more likely graduate from high school. So what if dad and mom break their marriage vows simply because they want to (a “no-fault” divorce)? It is better for junior (and the ex-spouses) if they act like nothing happened. Less money will go to lawyers. Less time will be spent yelling and screaming. Less damage will be done to the children.

The folly of such thinking is easily illustrated by applying such logic to other sins. What if society was able to demonstrate that in some ways children are better off if they have the influence of a father in the home even

if he is a murderer or a thief? Think of the potential emotional trauma caused by the child losing the input of a father because he is put in prison. If instead of responding to such crimes in a “contentious” way, we responded to them by easing the consequences, maybe we could conclude that murder and theft are not so bad after all. Maybe we could conclude that murder and theft are good! Of course, this logic is a stretch. No one would think this way. Such is the folly of trying to justify divorce because some of its negative results can be somewhat alleviated.

That society believes it is possible to have a “happy divorce” is not an indication of societal improvement. It is a sign of increasing rebellion against the Word of God in which God declares that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Society is becoming more sophisticated in its ability to argue that the evil of divorce is good. The result will be more divorce, more trauma to all involved in divorces, and more harm will be done to society in general. Society’s embrace of the “happy divorce” is

more evidence of society’s moral decline.

An even sadder development, that Maddeaux’s article does not address, is that many in the church world have also embraced the idea of a “happy divorce.” Churches (their officebearers and members) embrace divorce as a good

solution, and encourage all involved to put the best face on the divorce. Divorcees are counseled to do what they can to save money, avoid stress, and make things “normal” for the children. Many in the church have the attitude that “a good divorce is better than a bad marriage” (a saying Maddeaux also uses), and believe that the children “tend to fair just fine” if the divorce is done amicably. In my own experience, which I suspect many others share, I have run across Christians who do not understand why the immediate and extended families cannot simply act like divorce is a normal and healthy part of life. Though I have not heard of this yet, it would hardly be surprising to learn churches are already or in the future will promote “divorce-moons.” The church is on her way to embracing and celebrating divorce as if it is as good and holy as marriage. Ideas about divorce are changing in the church. This is not a sign of progress but of apostasy.

**That society believes it is possible to have a “happy divorce” is not an indication of societal improvement. It is a sign of increasing rebellion against the Word of God in which God declares that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).**



## Things which must shortly come to pass

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

# Reformed critique of the premillennial explanation of Romans 11 (1)

## Chapter Five: Premillennialism (17)

Previous article  
in this series:  
December 1, 2017,  
p. 109.

“...blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

Romans 11:25, 26

### Introduction

With Revelation 20 and Daniel 9, Romans 11 is one of the most important passages of Scripture for the dispensational premillennial doctrine of the last days.

According to the premillennial understanding of the chapter, at some time in the future God will complete His salvation of the church among the nations. In the language of verse 25, at that time, “the fulness of the Gentiles” will have “come in.” Whenever that time arrives, all the predominately Gentile church will be raptured off the earth into the clouds.

At that time, “all Israel shall be saved.”

By this language of Romans 11:26, premillennialism understands a mass conversion and salvation of Jews, and their restoration as an earthly kingdom of God in Palestine (Canaan).

How this salvation of Israel will occur is odd. Not Jesus Christ, but the Antichrist will accomplish the salvation of the majority of Jews. After the rapture of the church, the biblical Antichrist will come to power in the world. He will unite the nations to persecute the Jews. The effect of the persecution will be the spiritual salvation of the majority of Jews. Such will be their salvation that it will restore the Jews as the earthly kingdom of God.

At the very end of the period of Antichrist’s persecution of the Jews—three and a half years—Jesus will return to earth, bodily, to rescue the Jews—now the restored kingdom of Israel—from destruction.

Then will begin the millennium—the one-thousand-year period—of the reign of Israel over all the world, with heavenly King Jesus enthroned in old, earthly Jerusalem.

### Criticism of the premillennial explanation of Romans 11

Important aspects of this bizarre doctrine of the last days I have already exposed as erroneous in my treatment of Revelation 20 and of Daniel 9, earlier in this series.

Israel as an earthly nation of Jews will not be restored as the kingdom of God in the world. Nor is there so much as a hint of such a restoration of Israel in Romans 11. The salvation of all Israel, announced in Romans 11:26, is *spiritual*, not *carnal*. The text itself declares the spiritual nature of the salvation of Israel. According to the text, the salvation of Israel consists of turning away ungodliness from Jacob and of God’s taking away their sins (vv. 26, 27). It is this spiritual salvation of Israel that is God’s covenant with Israel (v. 27), not a restoration of Israel as an earthly kingdom.

The longing of all premillennialists for a restoration of Israel as an earthly kingdom, with fleshly glory, finds absolutely no basis in Romans 11. On the contrary, the salvation of Israel is wholly spiritual: deliverance from ungodliness and from sins. And this is the nature of the covenant of God with Israel, for the salvation of all Israel is *covenant* salvation (v. 27).

That Israel’s salvation is spiritual, the older, traditional premillennialists ignored completely. For such founding fathers of the heresy as C. I. Scofield, the future salvation of Israel would be purely carnal, in Calvin’s apt phrase, treating the Jews like a herd of swine.

Contemporary, more “moderate” dispensationalism pays lip service to the spiritual aspect of Israel’s future



salvation. But this spiritual aspect does not have the heart of the “moderate” dispensationalists any more than it had the heart of the traditional dispensationalists. For the “moderates” too, the main aspect of Israel’s coming salvation will be Israel’s restoration as an earthly kingdom, abounding in carnal power and material benefits.

The entire notion, fundamental to premillennialism, of a restoration of Israel as the earthly kingdom of God is completely foreign to Romans 11. There is not so much as a hint of such a national restoration. Premillennialism reads such a restoration into the text of Romans 11, as it does also regarding Revelation 20.

The explanation of this exegetical outrage is premillennialism’s literalistic interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Because premillennialism is committed to the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy of the future power and glory of Israel, it must find a New Testament fulfillment of this earthly power and glory of a nation of Jews wherever it can. Revelation 20 and Romans 11 are the best options, regardless that neither passage offers the slightest opening to premillennialism’s fantasy of a restoration of earthly Israel as God’s kingdom in the last days.

### The fundamental error of premillennialism regarding Romans 11

The fundamental error of the premillennial interpretation of the good news of Romans 11 regarding Israel is the heresy’s mistaken understanding of verses 25 and 26, quoted at the head of this article.

In this passage, the apostle teaches that God has blinded Israel, that is, the Jewish race that in the Old Testament was the kingdom of God, until the entire church, chosen largely from the Gentile nations, has been saved. This blindness of Israel is not total, as though no Jew is saved in the time of the new covenant. But it is blindness only “in part” (v. 25). Always in the present age God has His elect among the Jews, and all of them are saved with the elect from the Gentiles.

This blindness of the Jews in part is a reality “until” the fullness of the Gentiles is realized.

“So all Israel shall be saved” (v. 26).

“So” in Romans 11:26 does not mean, and may not be explained as, ‘then,’ as though a salvation of all Israel *follows* the lifting of the blindness of Israel. Explaining “so” in verse 26 as ‘then’ is the characteristic premillennial error on behalf of their doctrine of a restoration of Israel. The “moderates” are as guilty of the error as were the older, traditional dispensationalists. Writing in the volume that advances a “moderating” dispensationalism, J. Lanier Burns explains Romans 11:25, 26 as teaching

that “the temporal implication is that once Gentile fullness is attained, Israel’s hardness will end.... The text suggests that the divine hardening ends with the fullness of the Gentiles, which accordingly provides the occasion for the conversion of the fullness of Israel’s elect.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Barry E. Horner, confessedly a Calvinistic dispensationalist, explains Romans 11:25 as predicting a “future salvation” of national Israel. Verses 25 and 26 of Romans 11 foretell “a future national conversion of Israel.” Explicitly disregarding that verse 26 begins with the word “so,” or “in this way,” Horner insists that there is “clear *chronological* connection or ‘*temporal* reference’...between vv. 25 and 26.” That is, verse 26 prophesies a future, mass conversion of Jews and their restoration as an earthly kingdom of God sometime in the future *after* the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.<sup>2</sup>

Although he translates the opening word in Romans 11:26 correctly, as “thus,” contemporary premillennialist Dan Gruber also finds it impossible to refrain from explaining the word incorrectly as “then.” “Part of Israel [is] blinded until the full number of Gentiles [is] brought in. *Then* the blindness will be lifted, and all Israel will be saved.”<sup>3</sup>

Gruber insists on giving “so,” or “thus,” in Romans 11:26 the completely different, temporal meaning, “then”: “There will be a point in time when ‘the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.’ *Then*, not even a part of Israel will be blinded.”<sup>4</sup>

All premillennialists err, and err grievously, in this explanation of Romans 11: 25, 26.

The error is not mainly that the premillennialists explain the salvation of all Israel as the restoration of the Jewish people as the earthly kingdom of God in the world, unfounded and false as this aspect of their error is.

But the error is the explanation of the passage as teaching a future mass salvation of Jews in an age, or dispensation, that *follows* the present age of the salvation of the Gentiles.

(to be continued)

1 J. Lanier Burns, “The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 211, 213.

2 Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2007), 259, 260; emphasis added.

3 Dan Gruber, *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship* (Hanover, NH: Elijah Publishing, 2001), 173. The correct translation, “thus,” occurs on page 152. This book is highly praised by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Evidently, Kaiser has no objection to explaining the crucially important word, “so,” in Romans 11:26 as ‘then.’

4 Gruber, 272; emphasis added.



Previous article  
in this series:  
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## Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

# Protestant Reformed missions The depression years: Mission methods developed (1932-1939) [4]

The consistory of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in Illinois was frustrated. This church was working in the Roseland, Chicago area with little results. This frustration was voiced at the June 1935 meeting of Classis: our outreach lacks *personal* labor. Much more must be done than merely hosting lectures. For this reason, this consistory recommended to Classis calling a missionary to labor in the Roseland area. Other congregations had expressed the same complaint in their outreach. For example, in 1933 the small Los Angeles congregation expressed to Classis that there was much work to be done in the Los Angeles area, but a man was needed for the work. While asking for permission from Classis to call a pastor of its own, the consistory reasoned:

There is a field indeed [around the Bellflower/Hynes/Clearwater area]; but a field where a spiritual harvest would be garnered often times needs more intense cultivation and careful, consistent work than a field where natural grain would be harvested. Our aim is to devote all possible time and effort not required for our own congregation to the work in the districts mentioned. It is our aim to do those systematically, consistently, discreetly.... Especially where our cause runs counter to, and causes serious questionings in the ranks of the opposition, it is necessary that our mission be published, for only through a well directed program of publicity may we hope to awaken those who have been lulled to sleep.

Such a program cannot be properly carried out while Los Angeles is served periodically with supplies from classis. Do not infer that the services of the brethren Veldman, Cammenga, and Vos were, or are, unsatisfactory. We have nothing but praise for the consecrated effort of these brethren in behalf of our congregation. But the continual changes in leaders is

hardly conducive to sustain interest on the part of the objects of your missionary effort.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of the compelling grounds submitted to the June 1935 meeting of Classis by the South Holland PRC consistory, it was decided in Article 37 to investigate the request of South Holland by placing the matter into the hands of the Mission Committee with Rev. H. Hoeksema as advisor. This committee submitted a concrete proposal to the next meeting of Classis in January 1936 that our churches call a missionary to labor in missions. This proposal included a request that the classical assessment per family be raised from \$2.00 to \$4.00 a year. A third recommendation advised that the missionary live in Roseland, Chicago, since this was a central location, that the tentative fields of labor be Roseland and Grand Haven, and that Classis appoint South Holland to be the calling congregation. The budget was passed only after long and hard debate. To double the assessment of the families of our churches would place a tremendous strain on them. Remember, these were the Depression years. But the need of a missionary prevailed and the budget was finally approved.

Of interest, however, is the decision Classis made regarding the other recommendations of the Mission Committee: “Fuller Avenue is designated by the Classis as the calling church. Grand Rapids is designated as his place of residence. The field of labor for the missionary will be determined by the Mission Committee along with the calling church.”<sup>2</sup> This decision was contrary not only to what South Holland church had proposed, but also to the recommendation of the Mis-

1 *Minutes of the Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC)*, February 1, 1933, Supplement 9b.

2 *Minutes of the Classis of the PRC*, January 8 and 9, 1936, Art. 75. See also Supplement 6: the Report of the Mission Committee.

sion Committee. There were no grounds recorded for this decision. Was there heavy debate over this issue? Perhaps. Maybe South Holland at this point did not prefer shouldering the responsibility of a mission work, although that seems unlikely. Maybe labor in Roseland was no longer all that promising. We do not know. But in God's providence the labors of the first missionary would be under the control of First PRC in Grand Rapids and the missionary would begin by living there too.

Now the calling process began. Who would become the first missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches? By the June 1936 meeting of Classis no one had accepted the call. First PRC in Grand Rapids received approval from the Classis that *all* our ministers, including those who had not served their congregations the customary two years, be eligible for a call to be missionary. This served to broaden the list of ministers from which to choose a missionary. It was reported to the January 1937 meeting of Classis that, after three unsuccessful attempts to call a missionary, Rev. Bernard Kok had accepted the call in the Fall/Winter of 1936. He was installed on February 18th, 1937 in First PRC in Grand Rapids and immediately began his labors in Highland, Indiana.<sup>3</sup> In his first report to Classis of June 1937, Rev. Kok informed Classis of what he discovered in his initial work as a missionary. There was "very little interest in the Reformed truth."

For the past three months we have labored extensively in the community of Highland, Indiana. At this place we have preached twice each Sunday in the English language. These services were held in the afternoon and evening in the Highland school auditorium. At these services we had an average of 25 to 50 people, the majority however were members of our congregation at South Holland, which is about 14 miles distant. Besides conducting regular Sunday services, we have distributed in this community approximately 600 *Standard Bearers* and 5 or 6 pamphlets published by Fuller Ave. Sunday School. Apparently we have not seen much positive fruit upon our labors. The leaders of the Christian Reformed Church show much more opposition to the Reformed principles we seek to propagate than over against the superficial Arminian and humanistic propaganda of our day. Although

discipline in general in this community is at a woefully low ebb, the people are admonished not to attend our meetings. Even modernism is more welcome than the proclamation of the sovereign grace of God.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Kok continued his labors in Highland for another three months with no further evidence of interest in the area. During that three months he corresponded with saints in Manhattan, Montana and Lynden, Washington. Our churches had been contacted earlier by these saints, asking us to come and preach for them with a view to organizing a church in their areas. In fact, correspondence had already been sent to Lynden in late 1935 that, if our churches would indeed call a missionary, this man would be available to do work in Lynden and vicinity.

Before traveling out to the far West, however, Rev. Kok concentrated his labors for a short time in the Midwest, in a small town named Edgerton, Minnesota. The

result of these labors was the organization on April 11, 1938 of a congregation consisting of sixteen families. After spending six more weeks in Edgerton, Rev. Kok was sent to Manhattan, Montana by First

PRC to investigate a future mission work there. In June of 1939 (the last meeting of Classis before our churches were organized into two classes and an annual meeting of synod) Rev. Kok reported the following concerning his labors in Manhattan,

It is with gratitude to God that we may report that we have found an open door in Manhattan. For the last five months we have conducted two services each Sunday, one in the Holland and one in the English language. We also conducted one service during the week besides having a sort of Bible class every Monday evening. These services were very well attended. Also at Manhattan we have experienced rather strenuous opposition, but the Lord has turned it to our profit. Many have testified and expressed their appreciation that they might again hear the truth of God's sovereign grace. There is a group of about 16 families or more that have been attending our meetings very regularly and who are gradually becoming more and more convinced of the truth. I believe this group is ready for the step of organization....<sup>5</sup>

**In his first report to Classis of June 1937, Rev. Kok informed Classis of what he discovered in his initial work as a missionary. There was "very little interest in the Reformed truth."**

<sup>4</sup> *Classis Minutes*, June 1937.

<sup>5</sup> *Minutes of the Classis of the PRC*, June 7 and 8, 1939, Supplement 5: Report of the Mission Committee.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the Classis of the PRC*, June 2 and 3, 1937, Supplement 13: Report of the Mission Committee.



It should be noted that at the meeting of Synod in May 1940 it was reported by the Mission Committee that Manhattan was organized into a congregation of 12 families and approximately 75 souls. Rev. Kok remained there for several more months before moving to a mission field elsewhere. This was the extent of our mission work during the 1930s.

But there is one other important matter that does not appear in the Minutes of Classis during this decade. It is found mainly in the writings of the *Standard Bearer*. In 1932 Classis had declared that the scope of our mission labors was the Christian Reformed Church *and after that the Dutch Reformed Church* (Reformed Church of America—RCA). At the same time, however, there was always an interest in the events transpiring in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands too. The few pamphlets the Mission Committee published up to this point were written both in Dutch and English and widely distributed in the Netherlands. Likewise, Rev. H. Hoeksema kept the readers of the *Standard Bearer* informed of developments in the Netherlands, especially in connection with controversies over the covenant, baptism, and common grace. Our ministers and churches did not yet realize in the 1930s that the affairs of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands would have a profound effect on our mission work during the 1940s and early 50s.

Dr. Klaas Schilder, a theologian of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands who taught in the Reformed Seminary at Kampen, developed a certain Christian philosophy that addressed the doctrines of common grace and the covenant. These writings and sermons of Dr. Schilder caused quite a stir in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. The ministers and theologians of the Christian Reformed Church kept a close and nervous eye on this controversy, since the Reformed Church of the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church had a sister-church relationship. As early as 1935 Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote *Standard Bearer* articles keeping its readers informed of the controversy in the Netherlands over common grace. It did not take long before an open correspondence between Dr. Schilder in *De Reformatie* and Rev. Hoeksema in the *Standard Bearer* began. It started with a mere spattering of articles here and there in the late 1930s, but increased in the next decade.

In 1939 Dr. Schilder visited America, setting off a series of events that would eventually lead to the split of 1953 in the PRC. These events had a direct bearing on our mission work during these years.<sup>6</sup> During the

visit of Dr. Schilder in 1939 a conference was held in the Pantlind Hotel (now Amway Grand) in downtown Grand Rapids, MI between a few ministers of the CRC and those of the PRC. Schilder helped orchestrate this meeting and was personally present. The subject of the conference was the possible reunion of these denominations. Rev. H. Hoeksema presented a speech there that later was printed in pamphlet form and distributed by our Mission Committee. It was entitled, “The Reunion of the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches.” The Christian Reformed men who attended this meeting were not prepared to give any speeches or to present any kind of position paper. In fact, they showed very little interest in talking about a possible reunion. Dr. Schilder was greatly disappointed with the obvious antipathy shown by the men of the Christian Reformed Church at this meeting. He now turned with interest to the Protestant Reformed Churches. Our churches welcomed him. As a result, Dr. Schilder spent the rest of his visit to the United States touring our churches and lecturing on his view of common grace.

We make reference to this bit of our church history because it had immediate effects on our mission work. The June 1939 Classis approved the following request submitted by the Bellflower, CA PRC Consistory and supported by Hope PRC, Redlands, CA:

The Classis appoint a committee to investigate the desirability of correspondence with the Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

#### Grounds:

1. The unity of the church of Christ requires of us that we join ourselves as closely as possible with churches, which, after sufficient investigation, prove to take seriously the truth that we confess, in order that we may enjoy the spiritual fruit of mutual instruction, admonition and strengthening in the common struggle for God’s covenant.
2. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands maintain with us the same confessions, namely, The Three Forms of Unity, and these churches direct their lives according to the Church Order of Dordt.<sup>7</sup>

The following committee was chosen: Rev. H. Hoeksema, Rev. G.M. Ophoff and Rev. H. DeWolf. We will consider the results of this decision and others in a future set of *Standard Bearer* articles.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account of what happened beginning in 1939, confer Prof. Herman Hanko’s book, *For Thy Truth’s Sake* and Gertrude Hoeksema’s book, *A Watered Garden* (rfpa.org).

<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of the Classis of the PRC*, June 7 and 8, 1939, Supplement 8. See also Art. 29 of the minutes.





## Strength of youth

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

“To teach them war” (18)

# God’s armor for us: The breastplate

Previous article  
in this series:  
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“...and having on the breastplate of righteousness.”  
Ephesians 6:14b

Having girded our loins (tightened our belt) with the truth of God’s Word so that we know the truth, believe the truth, confess the truth, defend the truth, love the truth, and live the truth, we have begun the exercising of our God-given faith whereby we arm ourselves for our life and death struggle against the Devil. Included next in the whole armor of God that we take unto ourselves for battle is the breastplate of righteousness. First comes truth, then righteousness.

### The breastplate of righteousness

When Ephesians 6:14 speaks of, “the breastplate of righteousness,” it means, “the breastplate *which is* righteousness.” Righteousness is the spiritual breastplate of the Christian soldier.

The breastplate of the Roman soldier was a covering of metal shaped to fit and protect the front of his upper body. This breastplate guarded the vital organs like the heart and the lungs so that, if a sharp sword or spear were thrust at the soldier’s chest, the armor would guard the vital organs and keep him from serious injury or death.

We need a spiritual breastplate for the protection of our spiritual vitals in our spiritual warfare. We have been given a new heart with which we love God, and we need protection for that heart so that all of our affections remain pure. We have a new will with which we desire and resolve, and we need protection so that all of our willing is in conformity with God’s. We have sanctified bowels or feelings, and we need protection so that even our feelings remain pleasing to God. We have a conscience, and we need protection so that it does not become defiled or ruin our confidence with its accusa-

tions. A breastplate of righteousness is the armor we need.

Obviously, the righteousness that keeps our vitals in battle is not our own or that of any mere man. Romans 3:10 declares, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” There is no sinner who has righteousness in himself. If any man takes his stand in the field of battle with a breastplate of his own righteousness, he will have nothing to stop the penetration of Satan’s fiery darts and whetted swords. Even ungodly psychologists are presently saying that youth today are developing a toxic, narcissistic entitlement complex, believing they are inherently superior to others and more deserving of certain things. A Christian soldier may not live with a sense of entitlement. Let any young person who trusts in himself and his accomplishments and who thinks he stands, vainly imagining his devotional life, family life, recreational life, work life, and church life are more impressive to God than that of his peers and thus is more deserving of temporal rewards, take heed lest he fall. Ephesians 6:13 opens by stating, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour *of God*,” which means the breastplate is not of man, but *of God*. The only righteousness that will secure us in battle is *God’s* righteousness.

There is what Scripture calls the righteousness of God, and we sing of it often in the Psalms. God’s righteousness is the attribute of His infinite Being according to which all that He does is in perfect harmony with the highest standard for what is right, and that standard is God Himself. When He eternally loves and elects Jacob unto salvation by grace; when He eternally hates and repudiates Esau to destruction in the way of his rebellion; when He outwardly prospers your ungodly and arrogant coworker who attains the favor of the employer and ben-

efits manifold; when He brings tribulation to you so that you incur unjust treatment from your boss and even lose your job, God is righteous. As Romans 9:14 declares, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!” No one can find fault with God in His sovereign dealings with man. God is the Righteous One. Yet, there is no benefit to the sinner in the pure, strict, personal righteousness of God, for according to that righteousness we sinners must be driven from God’s face and die.

There is another sense in which we can understand the righteousness of God, and that is the gracious gift of righteousness God prepares in Jesus Christ for His people. It is this righteousness that Martin Luther began to understand 500 years ago as the great Reformation of the church commenced in his own soul. Romans 1:16 begins, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...,” and verse 17 continues, “for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” In addition, we find these statements in Scripture that speak of righteousness as a gospel benefit appropriated by faith: “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:22); and, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4); and, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30). This righteousness that God prepares for us in Christ is our breastplate.

In Jesus Christ we have *imputed righteousness*, positively changing our status before God. Jesus Christ came as “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:6), rendering perfect obedience to the law of God in our stead. Upon Him God laid the iniquity of us all by imputing our sins to Him. In perfect love for God and us, Christ endured all God’s wrath for our sins and fulfilled all righteousness, God testifying so in raising Christ from the dead. Therefore, for Jesus’ sake, God says to us, “I will not hold your sins against you, because I held them against Christ and He atoned for them. Moreover, I view you as righteous, as if you had in your own person fulfilled all the demands of the law.” Our confidence is expressed in Philippians 3:9, “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

So rich is the righteousness that God provides for us in Jesus Christ that it also includes another aspect—*imparted or infused righteousness*, actually changing our moral condition. In addition to the change of our legal

status, there is a change in the spiritual orientation and activities of our heart. As the obedience of Christ is worked in us by the Holy Spirit and through the unbreakable tie of faith, we become righteous in walk so that like Zacharias and Elisabeth we can be “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of God and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Of Job we read, “that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). God not only reckoned Job righteous before His law, but also wrought obedience in Job so that he was actually righteous in his walk, adoring his God, loving his wife, instructing his children in the fear of the Lord, and keeping himself unspotted from the unrighteous works surrounding him in the land of Uz.

Expressing these two aspects of the gospel righteousness of God that is ours by faith in Christ, we are now drawing out the classic Reformed distinction between justification and sanctification. We not only have justification in the blood of Christ, but also sanctification by the Spirit of Christ. That is, we not only have the *imputation* of Christ’s righteousness into our *account* (justification), but we also have the *imparting* or *infusing* of Christ’s righteousness into our hearts by His Spirit so that we think and will and speak and do righteously (sanctification).

There is no reason to separate these two aspects of righteousness and eliminate either of them in our understanding of our “breastplate of righteousness.” God justifies and God sanctifies His soldiers in the battle. The soldier who lives by faith clinging to the merits of Christ, and who lives out of his faith striving by the Spirit to cleave to the Lord God while detesting every appearance of evil has a chest protected in battle.

### Giving power to stand

When the self-righteous fool marches onto the field of battle spurning the righteousness of Christ in favor of his own law-righteousness, and, therefore, not walking gratefully in obedience but wickedly in defiance, he exposes his entire chest. Armed with the breastplate of righteousness, the soldier stands. Ephesians 6:14, “*Stand therefore...*, having on the breastplate of righteousness.”

Consider the effectiveness of our breastplate from the point of view of its character as *imputed* righteousness. Think of Paul who writes to the Ephesians while in bonds (Eph. 6:20). He passes his time as a prisoner, often alone without the regular preaching of the gospel and communion of the saints. To jail comes Satan, hurling at Paul the spear of doubting questions: “Paul, you have plenty of time to do some reflecting these

days. Remember how you used to blaspheme God—the God who says in the third commandment that He will not hold you guiltless. And, Paul, remember how you persecuted Christians—the ones Christ loves so much He died for them. Does the name Stephen sound familiar? Remember the look on his dying face? You consented to that poor man’s death. And you think God loves you? What makes you think God has not raised *you* up as a vessel of wrath fitted to everlasting destruction? There is a reason you are here in bonds, Paul; God is angry with you! From here you go to hell. You know that.”

What great battles Satan wages with all of us and especially with the vulnerable, lonely saints. He dredges up some of our most shameful sins of the past and brings those sins before our consciousness as certain proofs of our damnation. How will we stand? How will Paul avoid doubt and despair as Satan thrusts spears of doubt right at his heart? There is safety for Paul only in the armor of God. He must have his loins girt about with the truth of the gospel he once preached, and he must have on the breastplate of righteousness so that he does not look to himself and his works for God’s approval, but the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that is his by faith. Then he has power to stand.

Young people, there is power in the breastplate! Should you ever sink so low, as some soldiers do, that you have wicked feelings of unhealthy self-loathing and isolate yourself or even seek cuttings, starvation, and other forms of self-inflicted pain as atoning punishment for your past, you are only joining the Devil in destroying your vitals. When the adversary takes aim at your vitals by showing you your sins and failures as proof for his contention that God hates you, is angry with you, and is ready to lower you into the lake of fire, confess, “Christ took my sin! Christ is my righteousness! For His sake God favors me as my God and my Friend!”

Consider also the necessity and power of our breastplate from the point of view of its character as *infused* or *imparted* righteousness. Think of Job who lived in Uz wearing his breastplate by walking uprightly in the Spirit. Though we have only a small beginning, how important obedience is in war! When walking obediently, we are less susceptible to the power of temptation!

Under the sovereign direction of God, the Devil hurled every conceivable spear at Job. Prior to Job’s great tribulation, the Devil threw the spear of temptation to crave and idolize material goods at wealthy Job. Had Job not been wearing the breastplate of a heart set upon *spiritual*

riches, he would have fallen in love with his possessions and become infatuated with the god of mammon.

Through the plundering of the Sabeans and Chaldeans and the destruction of the great wind, the Devil came at Job with the spear of the temptation to be angry with God. Job suffered great loss, especially in losing ten children. And Job knew God’s hand brought the tribulation. Had Job not been wearing the breastplate, daily confessing, “Bless the Lord, O my soul! His hand is a hand of righteousness! All that I am and have is His, His to give, or His to take,” Job’s heart would have swollen with resentment of God and his bowels would have expanded with bitterness.

In the time of unimaginable calamity after Job had lost all his possessions, all ten of his children, and his own health, the Devil came at him with the spear of a difficult wife who tempted him to curse God and die. Satan must have thought it would be so easy to get Job to curse God, or to lose his temper and start clamoring and arguing with his wife, or to go around Uz grumbling about what a thorn in his flesh his wife was. Job did not do that. He wore a breastplate according to which he kept the door of his lips in love for God and his wife.

In Job 31:1, Job says he made a covenant with his eyes so that he would not think upon a maid (lust). Job’s resolve unto chastity was part of his breastplate. Without that breastplate Job may have walked outdoors one night and seen a maid bathing. Satan would see defenseless Job’s exposed chest and hurl a spear of the temptation to lust after the maid, and it would hit Job in the heart so that he lusted; and perhaps the lust would conceive and bring forth the sin of adultery as Job arranged for the maid to enter his bed chamber. Without that Spirit-worked actual righteousness of a resolve to be chaste before a holy God, Job would have had no power to stand and would have gone the way of David.

There is power in the breastplate. We wear the breastplate every day, saying “I know I am by faith righteous before God in Jesus Christ and in gratitude I will live uprightly by His Spirit, hating what is base and loving what is pure.” Wear that breastplate to school, to work, at home, at church, on vacation, when you hold your phone, and when you go on a date, and you will stand against the Devil’s temptations. We all know that when we fall into sin it is our fault, for we belittled the breastplate.

### Having it on

Having on this breastplate of righteousness, we shall stand. “Stand therefore...*having on* the breastplate of righteousness.”

The breastplate is to be found in Jesus Christ. Christ Himself is the perfect illustration of one who has power to stand with the breastplate of righteousness. Isaiah 59:17 says of the promised Messiah, “For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.” The Devil relentlessly pursued Christ with temptations.

Jesus stood, having on His perfect breastplate of righteousness.

Christ is our breastplate. He is our righteousness as it is legally imputed and as it is actually infused through the bond of faith. He is, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” And through the preaching of Christ in the gospel, Christ Himself sees to it that we have on the breastplate of righteousness we need for battle.



## Bring the books...

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



*Knowing God in the Last Days: A Commentary on 2 Peter*, by Mark H. Hoeksema. Jenison, Michigan: RFP, 2017. 96 pages. (hardcover) [Reviewed by Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh.]

What a fitting title for this worthwhile commentary on 2 Peter—*Knowing God in the Last Days*! By this title

Hoeksema rightly captures the main theme of Peter’s second epistle, namely, the *knowledge* God’s people must have. But particularly, a knowledge we must have as we live in the last days. Peter warns his readers that “there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (3:3). These same scoffers go hand in hand with the false teachers of chapter 2 “who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.” The ignorant man will be taken in by these false teachers and scoffers. The knowledgeable man who abounds “in the knowledge our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:8) will not follow after “cunningly devised fables” (1:16), but will be alert and on guard against false prophets who question and deny the promise of Christ’s coming.

The author begins with a brief introduction, including a defense of this epistle in the canon of Scripture, the date this epistle was written and to whom it was written (the immediate recipients), and an identification of the theme and purpose of the book. Hoeksema also makes clear his perspective. This is a feature lacking in many other commentaries. Has it ever happened to you

that some book (commentary) catches your eye at the book store or at the thrift shop? But you are unfamiliar with the author. Then you wonder “How does this man approach God’s Word? Does he hold to the verbal inspiration of Scripture? Is he writing from a dispensational viewpoint? Preterist? Evangelical? Arminian?” Hoeksema makes clear that as a Reformed Christian his perspective “is that 2 Peter is the inspired and infallible Word of God and must be explained as such,” and that in his interpretation he subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity (the main Reformed confessions). This is helpful for the discerning reader.

This is a brief commentary, numbering 96 pages. This is no criticism, but a commendation. Hoeksema is simple, straightforward, and to the point. Holding to the verbal inspiration of Scripture, he explains what the words mean. As a child of God, that is what I want to know. I do not want every chapter of a commentary I read to begin with an anecdotal story. Give me God’s Word! Tell me what it means! *Knowing God in the Last Days* does exactly that. The book is divided into brief sections in which verses are explained. Individual words are defined. The relationship between verses is set forth. The author compares Scripture with Scripture, showing that his interpretation is in harmony with the rest of God’s Word. This is an exegetical commentary through and through.

The author makes appropriate comments in all his explanation, but limits himself. This ought to whet the appetite of the reader and spur him on into fur-



ther study, examination, and application of particular points of interest. Rev. Nathan Decker, in the foreword, speaks of the usefulness of this book for God's people:

The commentary will be excellent for a quick read to grasp the book as a whole in its general themes, for a needed reference to understand a particular section, for the family to read aloud around the dinner table for family worship, or for believers in a Bible study to generate thoughts and discussions on this portion of God's word.

I trust that, as we enter into the late stages of these last days, Bible societies will be increasingly drawn to 2 Peter and choose it to be the object of their study. Elders in the church of Christ, called to be watchmen upon

the walls of Zion, must be knowledgeable of the machinations of these false prophets and teachers and then sound the alarm to warn God's people. Young adults in Christian colleges must be instructed by 2 Peter in light of the age-old heresy of uniformitarianism, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (3:4), which heresy serves as the basis for evolutionism.

*Knowing God in the Last Days* is a timely commentary and a faithful exposition of God's Word. May God use it for the good of His church, and by our study of God's Word may we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (3:18).

## Reports—Classis East

Mr. Gary Boverhof

Classis East met on Wednesday, January 10, 2018, at Hudsonville PRC. By rotation Rev. J. Smidstra would have been the chairman of this meeting. Due to some weighty matters and the fact that this would be his first Classis meeting as a delegate, he requested of the Classical Committee that he be allowed to step aside as chairman of this meeting. The Classical Committee brought this request as well as a recommendation that Rev. R. Van Overloop chair this meeting. Both recommendations were approved by Classis.

Routine matters such as reports from the stated clerk, Classical Committee, and church visitors were reported. The church visitors reported on their visits with the congregations of Classis East. They used the theme of "Ministering Righteousness in the Congregation," based on Nehemiah 5. They report, "We are thankful that the congregations within our Classis are doing well. The councils reported that there is peace, love, and unity present within their congregations."

Classis considered three appeals and one overture. Two of the appeals dealt with discipline in two different congregations. In both cases these were decided to be not legally before Classis based on the fact that Articles 30 and 31 were not satisfied, that is, the matters were not finished in the minor assemblies. The remaining appeal was declared legally before Classis and assigned a committee of three ministers and three elders. That

committee will bring their recommendation to a special meeting of Classis East on February 28, 2018.

The overture was brought by an individual recommending that, prior to the meeting of Classis, materials be distributed only to active council members and ministers of the PRC, including emeriti ministers. After much deliberation this overture was adopted.

Classis at its January meeting elects delegates for Synod. Elected were the following: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* Revs. G. Eriks, C. Haak, W. Langerak, C. Spronk, and R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* H. Bleyenbergh, W. Bruinsma, N. Decker, K. Koole, A. Lanning. **ELDERS:** *Primi:* Pete Adams, Gary Kaptein, Jim Lanting, Howard Pastoor, Pete VanDerSchaaf; *Secundi:* Bruce Jabaay, Larry Koole, Harlow Kuiper, Joel Minderhoud, and Dave Rau.

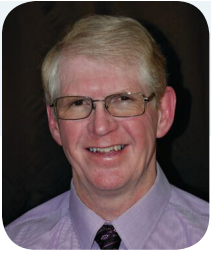
In other voting, for delegates *ad examina* Rev. M. DeVries was elected as *primus* and Rev. N. Decker as *secundus* delegate. Both are for three-year terms. Rev. C. Spronk was elected for two-year term as *secundus* to replace Rev. R. Smit. Rev. J. Slopsema and Rev. K. Koole were elected as church visitors for 2018. Rev. A. Lanning and Rev. R. VanOverloop will serve as alternates. Rev. W. Langerak was elected to another three-year term to the Classical Committee.

Classis approved a 2018 subsidy request from Providence PRC (\$30,000). 2019 Subsidy requests were approved for Pittsburgh PRC (\$109,000), Providence PRC

(\$30,000), Wingham PRC (\$36,000—CAD). Expenses for Classis amounted to \$1,160.24. Classis will reconvene at Hudsonville PRC on February 28. The May

Classis meeting will be held on May 9, 2018 at Faith PRC.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

According to the PRC *Acts of Synod*, which Protestant Reformed Church in Classis West has been served by the greatest number of different ministers? If you know how many, you are a trivia whiz! Answer later in this column.

### Attention young men

Young Men's Conference: Advance notice for high-school and college-age young men—April 28, 8 A.M.-12 noon at Georgetown PRC. The theme is "Run, Fight, Lead."

### Congregational activities

Members at Southeast PRC in Michigan had opportunity to attend a sledding party at Mines Golf Course on a Saturday in January from 2-4 P.M. Barbeque, hot dogs, and hot chocolate were provided, and many brought snacks to share. All ages enjoyed the fun, including the young and the young at heart!

The congregation at Pittsburgh, PA PRC held its monthly fellowship dinner in mid-January.

From the bulletin of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD we learn that

Thursday, February 8, was reserved for a lecture at the church by Mr. Ron Klaasen of the Trinitarian Bible Society entitled: "What are the differences between the King James Version and Modern Translations of the Bible?"

The congregation at Hope PRC in Grand Rapids is looking forward to a new organ installation this Spring.

The Council of Randolph, WI PRC informed the congregation that the building project loan for their sanctuary addition that was taken out in 2009 has been paid in full! They expressed thanksgiving for generous giving and God's blessing upon their congregation. Randolph

congregation also plans to celebrate their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary on August 25 with a special program to be held at the church. A commemorative booklet of pictures and history is planned. An exciting time in Randolph!

### Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of Southwest PRC has produced a new booklet entitled: "Keeping the Sword Drawn, Our Calling as the Church of the Militant Christ" by author Rev. Brian Huizinga. Look for copies in your church or contact SW PRC for one.

### Young people's activities

The Edgerton, MN PRC young people hosted the annual Christmas singspiration of the Siouxland area churches, as they do each year. Many from Iowa and South Dakota made the trip to balmy Edgerton to raise high the praises of our God. Due to ever-increasing crowds in recent years, this singspiration was held in the neighboring First Reformed Church of Edgerton. It accommodated the good crowd well, the singing was uplifting, and refreshments and fellowship followed. The roads were much better than last year. We look forward to next Christmas and the experience it will bring.

Planning is already in the works for the 2019 PR Young People's Convention, as the steering committee of Southwest PRC planned to meet January 24.

### Minister activities

On January 7 Rev. Cory Griess, pastor at Calvary PRC of Hull, IA announced his acceptance of the call extended to him from First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Griess had been in his first charge at Calvary, and was also their first pastor. We are thankful that God made it clear to Rev. Griess that it was time to move

from Iowa to Michigan. Rev. Griess planned to preach his farewell in Calvary on January 28 with a farewell program and refreshments following. The Griess family planned to move to Michigan in late January. Rev. Griess still planned to visit the Philippines on behalf of the Foreign Mission Committee in mid-February, when the next delegation from Doon PRC and the FMC was scheduled to travel there.

The Council of Calvary PRC subsequently announced a trio consisting of Candidate Dave Noorman, along with Rev. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Jonathan Mahtani. On January 21 Rev. B. Huizinga received this call.

Southwest PRC received a letter of acceptance from Candidate David Noorman on January 28.

### Denominational activities

Classis East met January 9 in Hudsonville, MI PRC. At the meeting an overture was adopted; two appeals were declared not legally before Classis as the matters were not finished in the minor assembly. Classis will reconvene on February 28 to deal with another appeal, providing the committee of pre-advice time to formulate advice. Classis provided classical appointments for First GR and Southwest. Classis elected synodical delegates, synodical deputies, church visitors, and a member of the Classical Committee. Subsidy requests for Pittsburgh, Providence, and Wingham were approved. The May 9 meeting of Classis East will be held at Faith PRC. [For more details, see the stated clerk's report in this issue.]

### Sister-church activities

Candidate D. Noorman concluded his visit to and work in Singapore in January. Emeritus minister Rev. Arie denHartog planned to take up his labors there soon after for an extended period of time. May God bless our sister congregation in her vacancy. And we thank

the Lord that these men might be used there during this period.

What follows is a short letter printed in the *Limerick Post* (Ireland) in January:

While Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ (*Limerick Post*, Jan. 6) mocks Christian beliefs, claiming that Christians believe in a "magic Jew" called Jesus, Christians proclaim the good news of salvation which Jesus, the Son of God, has accomplished for sinners through His atoning death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the dead. The message of Jesus is good news for all those who believe in Him, for it gives believers joy and peace through the forgiveness of sins, and removes the fear of death. If a man like the Apostle Paul, who persecuted Christians before he encountered the Risen Lord, received mercy, even someone who mocks the Son of God as "a magic Jew" can find mercy in the way of repentance and faith. I doubt that Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ would publicly mock, or that the *Limerick Post* would print the mockery of, other religions. However, far from desiring to censor him, I welcome the opportunity to engage with him on the topic of Jesus.

Submitted by Martyn McGeown, Limerick Reformed Fellowship.

LRF is a mission field of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland. The City of Limerick is located in the Ennis region of the Republic of Ireland. Not Northern Ireland.

### Trivia answer

There is a tie. It seems the congregations at Doon, Iowa and Edgerton, Minnesota are both enjoying their 14<sup>th</sup> different pastor. More trivia next time.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:1.

## Announcements

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Crete PRC extend our Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Keith VanDrunen and family in the death of **Mrs. Joan VanBaren**. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (I Thessalonians 4:13, 14).

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President  
Ed Stouwie, Clerk

## Announcements continued

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Sarah Bishop, Brad and Lisa Bishop, and Lane Bishop, in the death of their husband and father, **Douglas Bishop**. May their comfort be found in God's Word where we read, "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isaiah 51:11).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President  
Steve DeVries, Clerk

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Loveland PRC on Wednesday, March 7, 2018, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Loveland's consistory.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk

### Seminary

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop. (Phone: 616 669-1504.) This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 6, 2018, 4 P.M., D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

### Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2018-2019 academic year should make application at the March 15, 2018 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website ([prca.org](http://prca.org)).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 15 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418.

Bob Drnek, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.