

The Standard Bearer

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**“The scepter shall not depart
from Judah”**

Rev. Dennis Lee

**Ecclesiastical
self-examination**

Prof. Barrett Gritters

**After 500 years:
What about James
on justification**

Prof. David Engelsma

Two deaths, one life

Dr. Brendon Looyenga



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Meditation

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

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah”

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

Genesis 49:10

These are the words of an astounding prophecy from our great God Himself! These words spoken by Jacob were a prophecy. To be sure, they were not just a dying man’s words, though it is true that Jacob was dying. And in his dying, we know from Hebrews 11 that he worshiped God, leaning upon the top of his staff and blessed the sons of Joseph. A tremendous twofold act of faith that was, but so also was the utterance of these words!

This was a prophecy! Prophecy, that is, being a statement from and by God Himself—of something that will be true in the future, of something that is surely going to take place. And here it is that the scepter will ever abide with and not depart from Judah.

Further, this was a special prophetic word given to Jacob, one who was not explicitly a prophet of God. Yet, we may be sure that he was no less given a prophecy from God Himself to speak concerning Christ. There is the sure, authoritative tone of Jacob pronouncing blessing in verses 1 and 2, and also in the pronouncing of divine curse in verse 6, just as there is sure certainty in verses 9 and 10. And, as we will see, that this was a divine prophecy from God is demonstrated by the Word of God maintaining the truth and veracity of this Word down through history.

The prophecy concerns the “scepter” and the “lawgiver.” What is the scepter and what is the lawgiver? The word “scepter” is really the same word as the “rod” of the shepherd. This is not the “staff” of the shepherd that is used to guide the sheep, but the “rod” that is used to protect the sheep from threats and dangerous animals by beating them away. In close connection with that idea, the word here is referring to the short decorative rod of a monarch or king, which is the emblem and symbol of the king’s sovereign power and rule. The scepter, therefore, speaks of a king, and specifically the king’s sovereign power and rule.

This sovereign power and rule of a king is developed by the phrase following, “nor a lawgiver from between his feet.” What is the idea of the “lawgiver”? The “lawgiver” refers to the scepter of the king. For the “lawgiver from between his feet” is a figurative description of a longer scepter that a king (especially from oriental lands) would hold also as a symbol of his sovereign power and rule. In addition, it also carries this further idea of law-giving; and law-giving as a king, as we find in Isaiah 33:22: “For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.” In the king’s sovereign power and rule, symbolized by that scepter, the king enacts laws to govern his kingdom. And not to be overlooked is also the fact that he has the teeth to enforce it. This law-giving aspect of the king speaks of his righteous authority. Accordingly, the scepter and the lawgiver spoke clearly of a king not only to us, but also to all the sons of Jacob: where there is a scepter and lawgiver, there is the king! In summary, God’s Word sets forth the sovereign power and rule of the king, and also his law-giving character, speaking of his righteous authority!

This is the prophecy in view, and is altogether astounding—in three ways.

First, this is astounding when you consider the family to whom this prophecy is given, the prophecy of the king with his scepter! This prophecy was not given to a family with royal blood, not even to a family that was rich or noble and had some decent place or ranking in society. But it was given to the family of a poor shepherd, struggling to obtain food, using whatever they had for travel, and leaving the land of Canaan to come into Egypt for that food. This lowly shepherd’s family was more like helpless beggars. But it is to *them* that God gives this prophecy of a scepter-wielding king—sovereign and powerful, and with righteous authority!

Second, it is astounding also when you consider to which son of Jacob it is given to. It was not given to the oldest son, Reuben. Neither was it given to the next two sons in line, Simeon and Levi—these received curses instead! Nor was it given to the wisest and godliest son, Joseph. But it was given to Judah! Judah, who was

not even a son of favored wife Rebekah, but of Leah. Judah, who, though he turned his brothers from their purpose to kill Joseph, nonetheless persuaded them to sell him as a slave to the Midianites at Dothan. Judah, who was a fornicator with daughter-in-law Tamar. Judah was a wretched and guilty sinner! He had no right to obtain a blessing. But he did. For this promise of a mighty, righteous scepter-wielding king comes to him!

Is it not also the same with you and with me, dear reader? We do not deserve any of God's covenant promises of salvation. God graciously gives them to us because, like Judah, we do not deserve them. The only explanation for this is God's sovereign good pleasure. He does so in His wondrous, sovereign, particular love and mercy!

Third, this is an astounding prophecy when you consider the non-departing, everlasting nature of this scepter, and thus the everlasting nature of this King and His kingdom symbolized by it. We all know that kings and kingdoms rise and fall. That is true from the very least of kings and kingdoms to the very greatest: the Roman empire, the British empire, and most recently, Hitler's great Nazi empire all came to an end. But not this scepter, and not this King and kingdom promised to Judah, according to verse 10a.

But what about verse 10b, "until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be"? Does it mean that the scepter shall not depart from Judah, but when Shiloh comes, it will? No. For this Shiloh who is coming is the Messiah! He is the Prince of Peace, as Isaiah 9:6 describes him, for "shiloh" means "peace." So, what verse 10b is saying is that the scepter of this kingdom will not depart from Judah, but when the Messiah, the Prince of Peace and Priest-King comes, that earthly scepter of the king, picturing this true kingly Messiah of God Himself, and from the line of Judah will give way to the real heavenly, everlasting scepter of the real King, King Jesus! And unto this heavenly King of His heavenly kingdom shall something great take place: "unto him shall the gathering of the peoples be." Note the plural: "peoples."

Can you imagine how astounding that was to the ears of Judah and his brothers? A lowly family that was going to be blessed as a people and nation, the nation Israel. That they knew. But now added to that comes this astounding, all-embracing nature of this scepter-wielding King and His kingdom. It will be a truly catholic, universal, international kingdom!

That day will surely come! And this amazing prophecy will be marvelously realized! Much of it has already been. Let us trace its marvelous realization in the Old

Testament. It was realized through the time of slavery in Egypt, through the exodus out of Egypt, and in the wanderings in the wilderness. And amazingly, it was renewed through Baalam in Numbers 24:17: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." It continued to hold steadfast through the time of judges, when righteousness and authority seemed so wanting, and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

But above all, it became clearly manifest in the period of the kings and kingdom of the nation Israel. It did not manifest itself in King Saul: he was from the tribe of Benjamin, and not Judah. But it became manifest especially in the kingship of David, and his son Solomon, who hailed from the tribe of Judah. How the scepter of David so displayed the righteous authority spoken of in this prophecy! For David was the righteous lawgiver who enacted God's righteous laws in his kingdom and also enforced them. And how the scepter of Solomon especially displayed the sovereign power and rule of this king and his kingdom! For under Solomon's rule, the kingdom of Israel expanded and reached out to its outermost boundaries. The sovereignty, power and rule of the scepter of Solomon and of Judah was clear for all to see!

But shortly after that, things took a turn for the worse. The kingdom became divided, the kings of the northern kingdom were all wicked, and then too, gradually, the earthly scepter of Judah seemed to wane when the line of Judah's kings petered out. God's people were carried away captive to Babylon! And even after they returned to the land of Canaan, they did not have a king, but only a governor. In all this history of the earthly type and its scepter failing, God was laying the foundation of the appearance of the true heavenly Scepter and Scepter-wielding King, Jesus Christ!

In fact, God laid the foundation for the coming of Shiloh, King Jesus, from the very beginning of time. For in the failure of our father Adam, who was the crown jewel and king of all God's creation, was already the foundation laid for the *second* Adam, the true Jewel and King of God, the Seed of the woman! David and Solomon—great kings as they were—both had their own sins and failures. They were not the real king, wielding the real heavenly scepter, but only dim pictures of Him!

One great clue to this all-abiding, non-departing nature of the Scepter is how God would have His church through the ages sing of it in His holy, inspired songbook, the Psalms. She does that in particular in Psalm 110, as we have it versified in Psalter #303:

The Lord unto His Christ hath said, Sit Thou at My right hand
Until I make Thy enemies Submit to Thy command.
A scepter prospered by the Lord Thy mighty hand shall wield;
From Zion Thou shalt rule the world, And all Thy foes shall yield!

Shiloh came! The Prince of Peace, heavenly Counselor and King of God, Jesus the Christ came! That earthly scepter left for dead through the centuries, Christ picked up and transformed to His heavenly scepter! But He would be crowned and ascend to His heavenly throne only in the way of humiliation: His lowly birth, His life-long sufferings, and above all His crucifixion and death on the cross! In that way, He would be raised and lifted up! From the dead to glorious, heavenly life! And then, lifted up and ascended into heaven at God's right hand! And He who is now exalted in heaven above will come again—Shiloh will come again! And then, His crown and scepter, His kingship and kingdom, will be perfectly realized!

Marvel at this wonderful realization! In the way of all that history, when all seemed lost time and time again: in the slavery of God's people, in the failure of the earthly kings from the line of Judah, in the inter-testamentary period of 400 years. But also beyond all comprehension and expectation, in the way of God becoming man, one of His lowly creatures—this astounding prophecy made unto Judah would be realized!

Take the time to meditate on this marvelous realization during this season of Christmas! Yes, take the time to gather together with believing family and friends. Take the time to enjoy the occasion around food, fellowship, and even gifts. But above all, take the time to meditate on the unspeakable gift of Christ, who came to us in the way of a wondrous fulfillment of this prophetic word of our sovereign God! And in so doing, may God give to us the enjoyment of His precious comfort, joy, and hope that is ours through His sovereign, righteous, and victorious King and our Savior, Christ the Lord!



Editorial

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

Ecclesiastical self-examination

In the November 1 special issue of the *Standard Bearer*, I wrote on the Reformation principle *Semper Reformanda*, or “Reformed and always being re-formed.” I defined that important principle as the calling of the church *always to be examining herself in the light of the Word of God, and then making necessary correction based on that Word of God*. Always. There never is a time when the church may rest satisfied with herself. She must start with being “Reformed,” and then always be willing to be “re-formed.” She is active in that calling by examining herself. Thus: “ecclesiastical self-examination.”

Because the PRCA and other true churches in the world desire to pay more than lip-service to this great Reformation principle, we must determine how to conduct this self-examination—difficult and painful exer-

cise that it may be. How is this self-examination done?

Ecclesiastical self-examination is like personal self-examination, which believers engage in regularly.

Before the Lord's Supper's administration, the minister preaches a “preparatory” sermon to call the people of God to spend the upcoming week examining themselves in three areas—their *sins* and the curse of God they deserve for their sins; their *faith* in the promises of God; and their *intentions* regarding thankful living and neighbor-love. We who know the Reformed Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper have heard such sermons and calls for many years. We have engaged in a serious, spiritual self-appraisal often.

So the church must engage in serious, spiritual self-appraisal. Often.

And it safely can be said that how carefully we have

personally examined ourselves will likely determine whether we will be able to participate in *ecclesiastical* self-examination.

Ecclesiastical self-examination may be like personal self-examination, but it is different. What I can readily do for myself, I cannot do for the denomination of which I am a member. What I conduct in my home each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper I cannot conduct for the congregation of which I am part. At least not in the same manner—a very personal and quiet introspection. The church is not a “person” and a “self” as a Christian is.

So, is a man appointed to perform the examination of the church(es)? Does synod appoint a special counsel to conduct an inquiry? An objective, unbiased inspection to show the denomination her weaknesses?

In some denominations of which I am aware, the president of the denomination (or some other functionary) is called to give a “State of the Church” address to the body. As the president of the USA gives an annual “State of the Union” address, or the governor of a state a “State of the State” address, the denominational representative offers his assessment of the church's spiritual well-being. If you read such addresses in their church magazines, you will notice the profit of annual self-reflections, but also the manifold difficulties: the difficulty of doing it with sufficient objectivity, the difficulty of having full and accurate information of the denomination as a whole, the difficulty of one man making the assessment, as well as the difficulty of exercising proper discretion—to be bold where boldness is necessary and carefully discrete with sensitive matters that may not belong in a public report.

Already practiced by the PRCA?

In the PRCA, some ecclesiastical self-examination *does* take place on certain levels.

First, each congregation engages in this activity through her own consistory, perhaps almost subconsciously. The preaching regularly comes under review. Quarterly, as the Church Order (Article 81) requires, officebearers ask and admonish one another about the “faithful discharge of their office.” I have noticed and have heard reports of commendable improvement in this exercise of *censura morum* in consistory rooms. Faithful elders are always asking themselves whether the congregation is obedient to Jesus Christ, both in her formal and informal life. Some consistories even hold a special meeting each year, devoting (for example) an entire Saturday morning to a discussion of the spiritual well-being of the congregation. “What are the strengths and weaknesses of our church? Where have we grown?

What ought we change? How can we mature?” This is certainly a healthy and important aspect of ecclesiastical self-examination.

Second, each classis in the PRC mandates an annual “church visitation.” In Article 44, the Church Order requires two of the older and more experienced ministers to visit each congregation to “take heed whether the minister and consistory faithfully perform the duties of their office....” For 20 years I was on the receiving end of these visits. In my experience, a very profitable hour was set aside for these servants of God to hear from and then give due counsel to our consistory. I always looked forward to the visit and encouraged the council never to look at the visit as an intrusion or unnecessary annoyance, but as precisely what we asked our denomination to do for us so that we could grow. As long as this practice does not become a formality, and all the parties involved prepare very carefully for the visit, church visitation is an even better means to examine ourselves ecclesiastically, because it involves others from outside our own congregation.¹

Profitable and necessary as these two exercises are, it must be asked whether there are other means by which we might examine ourselves, or whether there ought to be more intentional and explicit questions regarding our denomination's spiritual well-being.

In love for our denomination, therefore, this editorial begins to have us consider: “Are we asking all the right questions as we examine ourselves? What *other* questions could consistories and church visitors consider? As we ask these questions, are we doing so in keen consciousness of our calling in the Reformation principle *Semper Reformanda*? Being Reformed, are we in need of any *further* re-form? Are there *other ways* that our churches can examine themselves in the light of the Word of God, willing to be re-formed by that Word of God if necessary? And, is there any way to examine ourselves denomination-wide?”

Why we might not like to

The difficulties of such a careful and thorough ecclesiastical self-examination must not deter us from seeing the importance of the exercise.

A church must do more than pay lip-service to the motto, *Reformed and always being reformed*. Lip-service to the motto is praising it in special issues of the church magazine, but not acting upon it, improving ourselves year by year. Lip-service is explaining the motto over against *other* churches who do not embrace

¹ To see the questions for Church Visitation, go to prca.org under “Resources” and then “Official Documents.”

its principle or others who misuse it by always seeking change—for change’s sake—but then misuse the motto ourselves by not asking where *we* need reform.

The dangers of not engaging in this exercise of self-examination are real. Besides the natural, personal disinclination to any exposure of weakness (no little consideration), consider these:

First, in days of great growth and prosperity as we experience today, it would be easy to assume that all is well in Zion. And we are prosperous! Church buildings are not large enough to hold growing congregations. Daughter churches are springing up. Existing Christian schools are expanding and new schools are being established in areas one might not have dreamed a generation ago. Financially, we are rich! We are able to send three missionaries to the Philippines and have a domestic missionary in the USA; to support fully our own seminary in which students pay no tuition and even receive financial aid to support themselves; to send emissaries and sometimes loan ministers to friends and contacts in Australia, Germany, India, Myanmar, Namibia, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Singapore, South Africa, and more. With all this prosperity and growth, what could be wrong? What need to examine ourselves?

Second, there is danger that we do not conduct this constant self-examination because of our sinful tendencies to see faults in others rather than in ourselves. Our resistance to personal self-examination and our tendency to find faults in other people find parallels in ecclesiastical life. It is much nicer to see sin and weakness in other churches than to look for them in our own. It is less painful to read articles about the apostasy of another denomination than ask where *we* may need reform. When our thus-puffed-up sinful natures let themselves loose, we might even find ourselves saying, “God, we

thank Thee that we are not like those denominations who allow this disobedience and embrace that doctrinal error.”

Third, there is the fear of angry reactions. Just as no individual likes to be exposed in his sin or her weakness, no self-respecting congregation or denomination wants to be shown where she is erring or lacking. The defensive huffiness we find in ourselves will also appear in us as churches. A letter to the editor from someone in another denomination who takes offense is one thing; from a fellow church member is quite another.

Indeed, the danger of ignoring ecclesiastical self-examination is high. But it should not be ignored. Truly to be Reformed means a willingness always to open ourselves to the possibility of needing to be ‘re-formed.’ *Semper Reformanda.*

What should be asked?

Some self-examination questions for our congregation or denomination might include:

1. What have we *lost or improperly added*? What practices or teachings that were present in the past no longer have a place among us? What has been added? And why has this happened? Has this been part of on-going reformation, or regression?
2. Where are we *slipping*? If a practice or teaching is not altogether gone, has something lost its proper place, emphasis, or clarity? And why is this happening?
3. What could we *improve*?

Next time I will return to these questions, spell them out with some concrete examples, and then ask whom we might enlist to help us see ourselves as we ought.

To paraphrase the Scottish poet: “O, to see ourselves as God sees us.”

Note from editors

Correction:

In the second special Reformation issue of the *SB* (Nov.1, 2017) a mistake in editing was made in Rev. Cory Griess’ article “How Is Christ Present in Worship?” The opening sentence of the third paragraph as printed reads, “Rome would not have agreed with this then,

and does not now.” It should have read, “Rome would not have *disagreed* with this then, and does not now.” We apologize to Rev. Griess and to our readers for this error.

The Editors



Search the Scriptures

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

Of time and judgment

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2017, p. 83.

Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it. All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Ecclesiastes 8:6-11

The gift of wisdom in the fear of God works both the grace of contentment and a knowledge of God's sovereignty over the life of men, which yields a submissive and obedient heart. Thus it was said, "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment" (Eccl. 8:5). To underscore this truth, Solomon returns to the point made in chapter three: "To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). To that idea of a time or season he now also adds judgment, which wisdom also discerns, for therein lies an element of its blessedness.

"Because to every purpose there is time and judgment" (Eccl. 8:6). The purposes or affairs of life come in time as God disposes. There is a time to every matter that occupies the life of man, whether to be born or die, to gather and build, or to scatter and tear down. God's purpose is realized therein. God also "shall bring every work into judgment" (Eccl. 12:14).

This is reality. Man is not the master of his own existence, but man who is fallen strives with the sover-

eign majesty of God in rebellion, as the inventor of evil things (Eccl. 7:29). The result is, "therefore the misery of man is great upon him" (Eccl. 8:6). Misery is, first of all, that which is evil. The evil of man is great; it multiplies itself in his life, and with it comes the wretchedness and misery of his life. Man is not in control of his life. God indeed, "doeth whatsoever pleaseth him" (Eccl. 8:3), but of man such cannot be said. Of man it must be said, "For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?" (Eccl. 8:7).

Man may indeed claim to be in control of his life and times, but they are not in his own hand. Though he walk in the pride of his heart, yet he is but dust. He does not know, let alone control, what shall be on the morrow. Wisdom teaches a man to say, "If the Lord will, we will do this or that" (James 4:13-16).

Further, God's sovereign government is characterized by righteous judgment. He not only ordains what will come to pass, but does so as One who judges the works of men, in time and in eternity. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and "...the soul that sinneth shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). There is time *and judgment*. Nor does man know what shall be or when. Neither concerning his plans and designs, nor even concerning the measure of his own days is his life in his hand.

Solomon would drive this point home. He says, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those who are given to it" (Eccl. 8:8). Man's spirit is that breath of life in him. "Spirit" comes from the word for wind or breath by which the Spirit of God breathed into man, at his creation, the breath of life and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Death is first described as the departure of that human spirit. It departs and he dies. He has no power over it to stave off the departure of his spirit. It is in the hand of the Spirit of God: "Thou hidest thy face they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Ps. 104:29); "neither hath he power in the day of death" (Eccl. 8:8). Man is like the beast that

dies. Before the power of death he is frail and helpless. Whether it comes by age or disease, accident or sudden event, the time of it is in the hand of God, and it belongs to the judgment of God upon sin.

Wicked man is particularly described here as being at war and as seeking to deliver himself by his wickedness. He strives with death to gain the mastery over it, to put it from him, to be lord over its power. He would retain the spirit; he would remove the day of death. Sinful man seeks to escape that conflict to gain a victory over it. Much of his labor in science and medicine is directed to that end. So likewise he labors to ease the burdens of life and its hardships that death may be thrust away from him. He heaps and gathers riches to make himself secure in an evil day. He pursues pleasures of sin, and yet seeks to escape the consequences of them. When death becomes inevitable, then he may seek to rule it by taking his own life; but he is not its master.

Death is a relentless enemy of man's life of sinful self-indulgence, "and there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" (Eccl. 8:8). And, yet under the sun it may seem that there is no judgment, for all men die, the righteous as well as the wicked.

He now turns to illustrate this dilemma. As man who works evil does not seem to suffer the consequences (the judgment) due to his evil, Solomon says, "All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt" (Eccl. 8:9). Among the works of men are the wicked works of oppression, particularly when one has power over others. The rich, the powerful, the cunning man who oppresses his neighbor, pass in review before his eyes among the works done under the sun. That he has the wicked in view is clear from verse 10. He would have us see it as he also sees it, first of all, under the sun. What of that wicked man? The viewpoint is similar to Psalm 73 and the prosperity of the wicked.

The wicked man dies, seemingly there are "no bands in their death: but their strength is firm" (Ps. 73:4). The inspired writer observes, "And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity" (Eccl. 8:10). Did that oppressor die in shame and misery? No, he was buried, no doubt with great men eulogizing his passing. He was profane, though outwardly religious, like the Pharisees who robbed widow's houses, yet coming and going in and out of the temple and before God's holy presence.

Yes, the wicked man died, but so do the pious and godly. Where then was justice? He lived his days and

departed. While it is true that in departing he also departed from the holy men or godly who were so often the objects of his oppression (an alternative explanation for the place of the holy), yet this explanation does not address the development of the vanity found in the situation. Death is exactly that which is seen under the sun to touch the righteous and the wicked. But the reality is, that the wicked man dies. There was an end to his wickedness. He did not deliver his soul from death.

This pattern is so familiar in human life. Men come and go. A man dies and is forgotten, and the works that he did which were evil are also forgotten. They are caused to be forgotten, that is, put out of mind and remembrance. Therein is the vanity of the matter under the sun. Wicked man takes no instruction from his wicked neighbor's death. It is treated as normal or natural and forgotten. That death is the judgment of God, which he did not escape. That judgment with all its horror, did come upon one who did wickedly and profanely, is not taken to heart. The life of men in the city goes on. The one forgetting is still one who also cannot escape from his own death. The sentence or verdict of God is there, but it is not seen by the eye of men. It is only by faith that the wise ponder the matter.

This leads to a certain conclusion: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the son of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Evil works bring down upon them the just judgment of God. God's condemnation of these evil works in His law is manifest. His Word stands and His verdict goes forth from His throne concerning them as a divine decree and sentence of guilt in judgment. But the sentence is not carried out speedily. The wicked are not instantly smitten in God's wrath. In the moment of sin, judgment does not immediately fall upon the sinner. Adam and Eve did not immediately drop dead physically when they sinned, nor did Cain instantly perish when he murdered his brother.

That the sentence is not speedily executed does not mean it is not there, nor that God's judgment is not at work in the life of the wicked. It is the sentence of physical death that takes a man's name and place under the sun that is under consideration here. For God's people, this seeming delay belongs to the mercy of God who brings His people to repentance, faith, and forgiveness in Christ. The apostle Paul describes the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God as that which "leaveth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).

But with the wicked it has the opposite effect. They see also that the sentence is not speedily executed. This is the issue the passage in Romans addresses. Natural man thinks or deceives himself into thinking that he shall es-

cape judgment or has escaped it (Rom 2:3). He despises God's mercy shown to His people in this delay and it does not lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). This is the same concern that Solomon has here. That God's judgment is not visibly manifested speedily in death leads men's hearts in the way of their own wickedness. "Therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). The effect is that described in Psalm 73. "And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" (Ps. 73:11).

The result in the life of men is that their heart is "fully set to do evil." They develop in sin. Their conscience is hardened. Sin and pride grow in them not only unto the day of their death but unto the day of God's final judgment upon sin, the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. The Word of God makes it clear that behind this is the purpose of God that sin appear as sin in the day of judgment. Sin develops in the life of the wicked individual and in a wicked world and its society. It develops under an operation of the wrath of God, spiritually, so that the full reality of sin as worthy of eternal judgment is made plain. The individual

is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. The cup of iniquity in a wicked world is being filled up (Gen. 15:16). Sin grows like a weed that is to be cut down and burnt. This is the organic development of sin under the wrath of God described in Romans 1:18 ff.

The result is, therefore, that their heart is filled up in them to do evil, and the sons of men, fallen in sin, pursue sin. They seek out many inventions or devices to sin (Eccl. 7:29). Occasionally, the sins of some catch up with the wicked in this life, and they are brought to shame. But often they, seemingly, stand even above the law of men, buy their way out of difficulty, and continue on in their ungodly way. The full judgment of God is not seen under the sun, with one exception: they die and death comes upon them. Death is the norm in human life, but it is not normal; it is the judgment of God upon sin. The wicked perish and with it their hope ceases; their treasures go not with them, and they stand before the judgment seat of God. They do not escape.

Against that background the faith of the believer says, "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him..." (Eccl. 8:12), to which we will return next time, the Lord willing.



Previous article in this series: August 2017, p. 443.

Believing and confessing

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

Of the adoration, worship, and invocation of God through the only mediator Jesus Christ

Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 5b

Introduction

As we saw last time, the opening paragraphs of this fifth chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession establish the fundamental biblical truth that God must be worshiped through the only Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ. They also condemn the worship of the Roman Catholic Church, which raises up other mediators alongside the only Mediator. These other mediators include especially the saints and the Virgin Mary. Over against Rome's insistence that the faithful "adore, worship, and pray to the saints in heaven," the SHC maintains that "God

and Christ the Mediator are sufficient for us; neither do we give to others the honor that is due to God alone and to his Son...." Among the "solas" upon which the Reformation insisted was *solus Christus*, that is, Christ alone. Rome taught then and Rome teaches today that Christ *and* the saints are mediators of believers. The Reformers taught that Christ *alone* is the Mediator between God and man.

Having rejected Rome's false teaching concerning the saints, the SHC now turns to the proper way in which Reformed Christians are to honor the saints.

The Reformers were balanced in their theology and in their practices. That balance is exemplified in this chapter of the SHC. They realized the ditches on both sides of the straight and narrow way into the kingdom. Rather than to overreact, taking an extreme and radical position, the Reformers time and again took the middle way between two equally pernicious errors. That was true of their teaching concerning the saints and the due honor that ought to be rendered to them.

One very important premise of this chapter of the SHC is that the saints are not the “super saints” of the Roman Catholic Church. Saints are not those who have been officially canonized by the church hierarchy, after their alleged miracles had been duly verified. The Reformation rejected this view of the saints. Rather, the saints are the ordinary members of the church who make a confession of Christ and live out of that confession. They are the ordinary members of the church who refuse to recant their confession of the truth and proper worship of God, and therefore have been tortured, hanged, beheaded, drowned, and burned at the stake. These are the saints in the church. They were in the apostles’ days (cf. Rom. 1:7; 16:2; I Cor. 1:2; 6:1; Eph. 5:3; Phil. 4:21). And they are the saints in the church today.

The due honor to be rendered to the saints

At the same time we do not despise the saints or think basely of them. For we acknowledge them to be living members of Christ and friends of God who have gloriously overcome the flesh and the world. Hence we love them as brothers [and sisters], and also honor them; yet not with any kind of worship, but by an honorable opinion of them and just praises of them. We also imitate them. For with ardent longings and supplications [to God] we earnestly desire to be imitators of their faith and virtues, to share eternal salvation with them, to dwell eternally with them in the presence of God, and to rejoice with them in Christ. And in this respect we approve of the opinion of St. Augustine in *De Vera Religione*: “Let not our religion be the cult of men who have died. For if they have lived holy lives, they are not to be thought of as seeking such honors; on the contrary, they want us to worship Him by whose illumination they rejoice that we are fellow-servants of His merits. They are therefore to be honored by the way of imitation, but not to be adored in a religious manner.”

According to Heinrich Bullinger, the author of the SHC, the “due honor to be rendered to the saints” consists

of especially three things. First, it consists of our love and honor of them as brothers and sisters in the faith. Although they are departed from the church on earth and dwell in the glory of heaven, we still love them and speak well of them. Although we do not render to them “any kind of worship,” we hold “an honorable opinion of them and [utter] just praises of them.” This implies, of course, that we are to keep the memory of the saints alive in the church. Part of that keeping alive their memory is that we speak of them among ourselves, and to our children and grandchildren. It includes that we write about them, their lives and struggles, their sacrifices and sufferings, their victories and deliverance. The Scriptures themselves lead the way with their infallible utterances concerning the lives of the saints, as recorded especially in the Old Testament Scriptures, the gospel narratives, and the Book of Acts. Think of how often Old Testament saints are mentioned in the Psalms, in the prophets, and in portions of the New Testament, like Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7. Or think of the catalog of the champions of faith in the well-known eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Beside the record of the lives of the saints infallibly recorded in the Bible, there are a great number of good books that have been written to keep alive the memory of the saints in the church. One of the earliest such books is the classic *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, written by John Foxe (1516-1587), which recounts the persecutions of Christians at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church beginning with the medieval period through the persecution and death of countless Protestants in England and Scotland during the “killing times” of the reign of Bloody Mary. A good number of worthwhile books of church history keep the memory of the saints alive. A book like *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, written by Prof. Herman Hanko, is an excellent example of the “due honor” that is to be rendered to the saints by keeping alive their memory.

What the SHC calls for is not Roman Catholic hagiography. Hagiography is the account of the lives of the saints that focuses, not on God’s work of grace in the saints, but on the saints for their own sake. In such writings the saints are glamorized and attention is called to stupendous deeds and notable miracles that are attributed to them. No such false glorification of the saints for the sake of the saints themselves is in view in the SHC. Rather, what is in view is the sober and honest recounting of their lives, including their struggles, weaknesses, and sins, so that the glory for their lives and deaths may be given to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ, whom the saints served and whose name they confessed.

Second, due honor of the saints includes that “we also imitate them.” We are to imitate them, both in their bold confessions of the truth and in their godly lives unto death, which was often as martyrs at the hand of the false church or an antagonistic government. If we are to imitate them, the strength to do so must come from God, who was their strength. Thus, “with ardent longings and supplications [not to the saints, but to God] we earnestly desire to be imitators of their faith and virtues.” Such saints may be those who lived in a bygone era, in another time and place. They may be our own relatives, whose lives we uncover through research into our family tree. They may be our own parents or grandparents, or some other revered member of the church. The saints as “living members of Christ and friends of God” are worthy of our imitation. But if we are to follow after them and take them as our examples, we will need the abundant grace of God. And God gives “His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 116).

Third, the due honor of the saints includes the earnest desire “to share eternal salvation with them, to dwell eternally with them in the presence of God, and to rejoice with them in Christ.” Implied clearly is the Reformation’s rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. The saints, that is, all those who have died in faith in Jesus Christ go not to purgatory, as Rome taught, but immediately into the presence of God and of Christ. And the hope of God’s people on earth is that at the end of their earthly pilgrimage—at that very moment—they will be privileged to join the saints in glory. Not the specter of purgatory, but the hope of one day joining the saints who have gone before in order with them to praise God in Jesus Christ forever. Certainly our hope is mainly that we will dwell in friendship and fellowship with God in Christ. That will be the great glory of heaven. But it also belongs to our earnest expectation that in heaven we will enjoy the friendship and fellowship of all the saints of God who have gone before us: Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul; but also Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Hendrik de Cock, Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and many more besides. What joy awaits us in the glory of heaven!

Relics of the saints

Much less do we believe that the relics of the saints are to be adored and revered. Those ancient saints seemed to have sufficiently honored their dead when they decently committed their remains to the earth

after the spirit had ascended on high. And they thought that the most noble relics of their ancestors were their virtues, their doctrine, and their faith. Moreover, as they commend these “relics” when praising the dead, so they strive to copy them during their life on earth.

This paragraph concerns the subject of the relics of the saints, a very important aspect of the Reformers’ objection to the prevailing practice in the church of their day. One of the most important treatises that John Calvin wrote was against the multiplication of and the superstitious veneration of relics. The adoration of relics and the payment of money to the church to view and allegedly receive saving power from the relics of the saints the Reformers rejected as false worship: “Much less do we believe that the relics of the saints are to be adored and revered.”

Rather than to adore the saints’ relics, the SHC calls for a proper regard for the saints and their remains. That proper regard begins with “decently commit[ing] their remains to the earth after the spirit had ascended on high.” With the increasing support in the church today for cremation, it is noteworthy that the SHC by clear implication rejects cremation and calls for respect of the saints that takes the form of giving them an honorable burial. The bones of the saints are not to be enshrined and venerated superstitiously, but instead committed to the earth by way of Christian burial.

Over against the physical relics of the saints, the SHC identifies “the most noble relics” of the saints as “their virtues, their doctrine, and their faith.” These are their true relics and priceless treasures that the saints have left behind for the benefit of all Christians: how they lived, what they taught, and that which they confessed. These are the relics that believers ought to “commend... so that they strive to copy them during their life on earth.” This is rendering due honor to the saints.

Swearing by God’s name alone

These ancient men did not swear except by the name of the only God, Jehovah, as prescribed by the divine law. Therefore, as it is forbidden to swear by the names of strange gods (Ex. 23:13; Deut. 10:20), so we do not perform oaths to the saints that are demanded of us. We therefore reject in all these matters a doctrine that ascribes much too much to the saints in heaven.

The Reformation’s rejection of Rome’s false doctrine and practices concerning the saints included the rejection of all oaths sworn to and in the name of the saints. Ironically, in a way the Reformation began with such a wrongful oath. This is not a justification for swearing

such an oath, but it is a historical fact. It was in a severe thunderstorm, in July of 1505, that Martin Luther was cast to the ground and struck with such fear that he swore by St. Anne, the patron saint of his miner father, that if God spared his life, he would become a monk. That vow led him to forsake the study of law at the University of Erfurt and to enter the Augustinian monastery in that city. And thus, the sovereign God brought good out of evil, using Luther's sinful oath to begin a series of events that culminated in the Reformation.

The whole matter of wrongful oaths was a major issue at the time of the Reformation. An indication of this is the Heidelberg Catechism's devotion of an entire Lord's Day to this one application of the third commandment. Lord's Day 37 is concerned exclusively with "swearing religiously." Q. 102 asks, "May we also swear by saints or any other creature?" as was the practice in the church of that day. And the answer is, "No; for a lawful oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that He will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely; which honor is due to no creature."

One important issue having to do with unlawful oaths was the issue of oaths sworn of perpetual celibacy. Were these oaths binding upon former nuns and priests

who had sworn such wrongful oaths while in the Roman Catholic Church? The Reformers were united in their rejection of the binding character of such wrongful oaths, and for that reason they encouraged former priests and nuns to renounce such oaths and to marry. But another important issue was the swearing of oaths by and in the name of the saints. This was common practice in the Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century. It was part of the fabric of everyday life, done almost without thought even by very pious members of the church.

On the one hand, the Reformers rejected the extreme Anabaptist rejection of the use of the oath altogether, defending from Scripture its lawful use by Christians. On the other hand, they rejected Rome's perverse use of the oath, the swearing of oaths in the name of and to the saints. Over against Rome's abuse, the Reformers insisted that this was an honor due alone to God. No one but God can read the heart, judging the sincerity of an oath. And no one is able to avenge an insincere oath or the oath not carried out except God. The concluding line of this fifth chapter of the SHC is worth repeating: "We therefore reject in all these matters a doctrine that ascribes much too much to the saints in heaven."



RFPA annual meeting

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

After 500 years: What about James on justification

Speech at the annual Reformed Free Publishing Association meeting, held in Southwest PRC on September 28, 2017.

Introduction

This year, AD 2017, is the 500th anniversary of the onset of the Reformation of the church in 1517. It is, therefore, a historic year, a year of commemoration. Jesus Christ reformed His church by restoring to her the gospel of salvation by grace.

Since the very heart of the gospel is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Christ enlightened and emboldened first the Reformer, Martin Luther, and then all the Reformers, including John Calvin, to see and

proclaim justification by faith alone. All the Reformed confessions, including the Heidelberg Catechism, clearly explain the doctrine, and defend it against the Roman Catholic heresy of justification by faith and works—the good works of the believer himself (see the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 23-25 and Q. 65).

Defense of the doctrine was necessary on account of the vigorous attack on the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone on the part of the Roman Church. Rightly, Rome saw the Reformation's recovery of the truth of justification by faith alone as the refutation of its entire the-

ology and, thus, the exposure of itself as the false church.

Defense of the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone is necessary again in 2017 because of the introduction today into Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and, indeed, many other “evangelical” churches, of the false doctrine of justification by faith and works. These Reformed churches include those with a name for orthodoxy, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the United Reformed Churches. The name of the movement that promotes the heresy of justification by works in these churches is “Federal Vision.” “Federal” means ‘covenant.’ The source of the heresy is the doctrine of a conditional covenant, as taught by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) and by the Canadian Reformed Churches in North America. That the heresy originates in the covenant theology of these churches is the testimony of the Federal Vision itself.¹

By my speech at the annual meeting of the RFP, therefore, and now by this printed form of the speech, the RFP is not only commemorating the great work of Christ in 1517; it is also defending the gospel-truth that was the heart of the Reformation. The speech is a kind of nailing Luther’s theses more firmly to the door of the church in view of the effort on the part of false brothers to rip them off.

The RFP has also recently done both of these things, that is, commemorated and defended, by the publication of my book on justification, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed*.² The book is a thorough explanation of the truth of justification by faith alone and a defense of the truth against the contemporary heresies. In this article, I draw heavily from the book, especially from the chapter, “Paul and James.”

Today, as in 1517, the enemies of justification by faith alone appeal to James, particularly chapter 2, in defense of their heresy.

It is not impossible that, despite God’s having safeguarded the Protestant Reformed Churches against the heresy by leading them to confess the truth of the unconditional covenant, the Federal Vision and this vision’s ally, the New Perspective on Paul, pose some threat to

the Protestant Reformed Churches. These theological movements, their clever advocates, and the churches and ecumenical organizations that give them cover and respectability are prominent in North America. The false doctrines themselves have the considerable appeal of all heresies in that they make the sinner his own savior.

There is good reason, therefore, for the article, “After 500 Years: What about James on Justification?”

The historical background

I begin with some historical background of the subject: some church history that sheds light on the Reformation’s confession of justification by faith alone in the sixteenth century.

Over the years prior to the Reformation, the church—the *one* church of that day—committed itself to the heresy of justification by good works. By one’s own good works, or those of other humans (which could be bought for oneself or for others), one had to earn salvation and eternal life. The church used the word “merit.” To merit with God, one must have something of one’s own to give to God, and that something was one’s own choice of God by his alleged free will, which free will humans supposedly retained after the Fall. The errors of justification by works and free will are closely related.

Good works were not all that were required for salvation, of course; the work of Christ, especially His death, was necessary also, and the sinner received this as a gift of grace from God. But one’s own good works were necessary, with the death of Christ. Without his own good works, one could not be justified, and could not be saved: works were necessary for salvation. One worked during his earthly life, in order to merit with God, in order to present the works to God as earning justification and salvation. Because most church members never worked enough, purgatory was necessary, to accomplish fully the work of suffering for sins. Jesus did most of the work of suffering on behalf of sinners; the sinners themselves had to add to this work in purgatory.

The false church in the early sixteenth century proclaimed justification by faith *and by good works*. Two aspects of this doctrine are especially important. First, the church that we now know as the Roman Catholic Church never taught justification by works only; she taught justification by faith, but she added works: faith *and works*. This meant that she proclaimed justification by grace—the grace of God. But she denied that justification is by grace *only*. She added works. What was vital for the gospel of the Reformation, therefore, was the confession of the word “only”: justification by faith only; salvation by grace only. The gospel of the

1 See Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (2000); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (2003); *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (2004); and Paul M. Elliott, *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond* (2005). For the Reformed critique of the Federal Vision, see my *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (RFP, 2012).

2 Jenison, MI: RFP, 2017.

Reformation confessed justification by faith and salvation by grace *without works*.

The entire Reformation hinged on the word “only.” Rome knew this well. This explains why Rome raged against Luther’s “insertion” of the word “only” in his translation of Romans 3:28: “a man is justified without the works of the law, only by faith.”

The second important aspect of the false doctrine of Rome concerning justification was that the good works that that church taught were necessary for justification were genuinely good works, the works that the saved man or woman does with the help of the Spirit of Christ. Now, in practice, Rome added many other, spurious works, for example, indulgences, pilgrimages, and more. But the official doctrine was that the good works that were necessary for justification were genuine good works, which can only be done by the grace of God.

Therefore, Rome’s explanation of justification by works could be convincing. The sinner is justified by faith in Jesus Christ; His death is the main part of our righteousness with God. Regarding our works, we perform them only by the grace of the Holy Spirit in us. Thus, declared Rome, as it still declares today, we do justice to the grace of justification.

One more important aspect of Rome’s doctrine, then and now, should be noticed: its defense of its doctrine of good works in justification, that is, why Rome taught justification by works. Justification by works is a teaching that is necessary in order to motivate the people to be diligent in living a holy life. To teach justification by faith alone is to encourage the people to be slack in holy living, or even to cause them to live careless and wicked lives. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works, is a dangerous doctrine.

The relentless charge against the Reformation’s doctrine of justification by faith alone was that it is “antinomian.” The word means “against the law.” The charge was that the Reformation’s gospel of salvation by grace *alone*, without good works, causes believers of the Reformation’s gospel to live lives that are not in accordance with the law. Still today, the favorite charge of Rome and others against justification by faith alone is that it is antinomian.

The biblical basis of Rome’s doctrine of justification

The biblical basis of Rome’s doctrine of justification by faith and works was almost exclusively James 2:14-26. Concerning Abraham, verse 21 teaches that he was “justified by works.” Verse 24 states that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” And verse 25 asks the rhetorical question, “was not Rahab the harlot justified by works...?”

We recognize how seemingly strong, if not conclusive, in the controversy is James 2.

Nevertheless, Rome had to reckon with Romans 3-5 and the entire epistle of Galatians, which teach that justification is by faith, and not by the works of the law. Rome’s explanation ran along these lines. Never does Romans 3-5 expressly state that justification is by faith *alone*. Rome accused Luther of corrupting Scripture when he “inserted” the word “alone” in his translation of Romans 3:28.

Also, Rome claimed that the good works that Romans and Galatians have in mind, when they exclude these good works from justification, are only the civil and ceremonial works of the Old Testament. Romans and Galatians do not exclude all good works. They do not exclude genuinely good works. They do not exclude works of obedience to the ten commandments, works performed by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Rome understood Romans 3:28 thus: “...by faith, without the deeds of the civil and ceremonial law for Israel in the Old Testament, but with the deeds of the law of the ten commandments....”

Fundamental to the doctrine of justification of the Roman Catholic Church is that justification in James has the same sense that it has in Romans 3-5 and in Galatians. Justification in James is the forensic (or, legal) judgment of God upon the sinner, giving him the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ in his conscience, so that he has peace with God.

Only the *works* in Paul and James are different. In Paul, they are Old Testament works; in James, they are genuinely good works.

Against the church’s doctrine of justification, the devout monk, Martin Luther, reacted. He could find no peace for his soul in the doctrine of justification by good works. Although he outworked all other monks, he felt that his works came short of the righteousness that God demanded, and they did. His works were all imperfect, and, therefore, refused for righteousness by the awesomely holy God. Luther knew sin, but he also knew the holy God. Luther wrote that he came to hate the God of Romans 1:17, the God who required righteousness of believers, but whose righteousness only condemns guilty sinners, no matter how hard they worked: “Therein is the righteousness of God revealed....”

Then, in his spiritual struggling and agony was revealed to Luther that the righteousness of God is a righteousness that is *given* to the sinner, not that is *earned* by him, and that God gives this righteousness by means of faith: “...from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17b). With this revelation, cried Luther, “the door of Paradise opened to me!”

God gives righteousness, freely, by faith, not by the

sinner's works. And He gives it by faith alone, not by faith and by works. The righteousness of justification is a gift. Salvation is by grace. This is the gospel-truth of Romans 3-5 and of the book of Galatians. "Without the deeds of the law," that is, apart from the works of the sinner himself!

The works that are excluded from the divine act of justification are all works, including the genuinely good works that the believer performs by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, Luther was the instrument of Jesus Christ to begin the Reformation, at the heart of which was the gospel of justification by faith alone. The Roman Church responded with a monotonous appeal to James 2. This so exasperated Luther that on one occasion he dismissed James as "a right strawy epistle"—a rash judgment that he did not maintain.

Now, I bring this history concerning justification up to date. Today, there is a renewal of Rome's heresy and the corresponding abandonment of the Reformation's gospel-truth of justification in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches. There is the open teaching of justification by faith and works, with appeal to James 2 in support of the heresy. The churches in which the heresy appears and is protected, if it is not given official status by ecclesiastical decision, are those with the best reputation for orthodoxy in North America. They dominate the ecumenical organization known as North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

The false doctrine of justification arises out of and is promoted by these churches' doctrine of a conditional covenant. It is the implication of a particular "federal," that is, covenant, vision. The ecclesiastical source of the heresy in our day is the denomination that calls itself the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), whose daughter churches, sharing their mother's covenant doctrine, are the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Very briefly, the development of the heresy of justification by faith and works in our day is that it arises out of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. According to this doctrine of the covenant, God establishes His saving covenant of grace with every child of believing parents alike, the Esaus as well as the Jacobs. Thus, God gives to every child the beginning of salvation, including justification. But the continuation of the covenant with a child is conditional. The continuation of the covenant of God in Christ, with its benefits of salvation, depends upon the baptized child's fulfilling the condition of faith and the condition of good works. Especially do the men of the Federal Vision, and the men of the New Perspective on Paul, emphasize that the final salvation of the child depends upon his fulfilling

the conditions of faith and of good works. His salvation, therefore, including his justification, is partly by faith and partly by his own works: justification by faith (on the *condition* of faith, really) and works.

Aiding and abetting this promotion of the false doctrine of justification by works is the broader theological movement that calls itself the New Perspective on Paul, especially as this movement is represented by the Anglican bishop, N. T. Wright.³

In passing, I note how important was the church struggle of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s on behalf of the truth of the unconditional covenant.⁴ Our confession of the unconditional covenant enables us to withstand the temptation of the Federal Vision and of the New Perspective on Paul, to deny justification by faith alone in the covenant. It lays upon us the calling to witness to the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America concerning the root of the contemporary heresy of justification by works in the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

Crucial to the controversy over justification in our day is the harmony of Paul and James on the doctrine. In the present-day apostasy, appeal is made to James on behalf of justification by faith and works, exactly as Rome has always done.

The harmony of Paul and James

Two principles concerning the proper interpretation of Scripture govern our explanation of justification in Paul and James. First, Scripture does not contradict itself, and certainly not in its doctrine of salvation, which the truth of justification is. Romans and Galatians, on the one hand, and James, on the other hand, are not contradictory. It is not the case that Romans 3-5 teaches justification by faith alone, whereas James 2 teaches justification by works, both meaning the same thing by justification.

Second, Scripture explains Scripture: Where there is difficulty, including seeming contradiction, the Bible itself must solve the problem. The Bible does this, inasmuch as the clearer passages shed light on the more difficult passages.

3 For a brief critique of Wright and his doctrine of a conditional covenant as the source of his corruption of the doctrine of justification, see my *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 26-44.

4 For a full explanation of the relation of the doctrine of a conditional covenant and the contemporary heresy of the Federal Vision, specifically its teaching of justification by faith and works, as this doctrine was the issue in the covenant controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s, see my *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (RFPA, 2005).

The doctrine of gracious salvation in Romans and Galatians is crystal-clear. It is evident, beyond all doubt, that Romans and Galatians teach the doctrine of salvation: how the guilty sinner is saved from sin and death, particularly how he becomes righteous before God, without which righteousness there is no salvation. Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the works of the sinner himself, that is, salvation is by faith *alone*.

In the interest of space, I appeal only to two texts in Romans 3-5. Romans 3:28, a text always at the heart of the controversy over justification, reads: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." The "deeds of the law" are good works. The text, therefore, teaches justification without good works.

Romans 4:5 is, if possible, even stronger, indeed stunning: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

I add one text from Galatians, a text that expresses the theme of the entire book: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

The works that are excluded in justification are all the sinner's works, including his genuinely good works. The exclusion of our good works is necessary, for our best works are all imperfect, and God demands perfection as righteousness.

It is incontrovertibly evident in the Romans passages that justification, as the saving act of God, excludes any and all good works of the sinner himself. The exclusion of the works of the sinner is absolute: "him that worketh not." With regard to his justification, the one who is justified is "ungodly." One who is ungodly has no godly, or good, work to contribute to his justification. From one who is ungodly proceed only ungodly works—ungodly as concerns justification.

Against the desperate claim that the "works of the law" in Romans 3:28 are only those works that are done in accordance with the civil and ceremonial law of the Old Testament, Romans 3:20 teaches that the law in view is the law by which is the knowledge of sin. This law is the moral law of the ten commandments. In verse 28, therefore, the works that do not justify in whole or in part are deeds done in obedience to the ten commandments. The law of the ten commandments does not, and cannot, justify. This is the powerful doctrine also of Galatians 2:16, as of the entire epistle. Galatians 3 adds that it never was the purpose of God with the law that it should justify. God's purpose with the

law was that it be "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (v. 24). To seek justification from the law is, therefore, to reject Christ. Such is the seriousness of the present controversy over justification.

At issue regarding justification by faith alone, according to Romans and Galatians, are salvation, the cross of Christ, the grace and glory of God, and, not least, the assurance of salvation. Justification by faith alone, without works, is assurance of salvation!: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1).

What now about James 2?

James 2 cannot contradict Romans and Galatians.

Nor *does* James 2 contradict these passages. James means something different by justification than do Romans and Galatians. Justification in James and in Romans and Galatians is not the very same. Or, to say it more accurately, Paul describes justification as a saving act of God, whereas James speaks of justification with regard to its manifestation. James means the *demonstration* of justification to others, not the *declaration* of the forgiveness of sins and of righteousness with God the judge to the sinner himself.

James 2 itself makes plain that it has the demonstration of justification in view. James condemns those who claim to be justified by faith, but live scandalously wicked lives, without repenting. Such a man *says* he has faith, but he has no works (v. 14). James argues that if we have faith, faith that justifies, we will *show* this faith by our works (v. 18). This is the demonstration of faith and, since faith justifies, the demonstration of justification. Faith without works is dead (v. 20), and if it is dead, it is no true faith. Dead faith does not justify. Only a living faith justifies. This is a faith that works. From this, however, it does not follow that the works of a living faith justify in the sense of contributing to justification. Paul denies this. James does not teach this. James calls us to show our faith, that is, to demonstrate our faith by our works. When we demonstrate our faith, we demonstrate as well our justification.

Three elements of the James 2 passage prove beyond all contradiction that James does not teach justification by works in the sense that Paul teaches justification by faith in Romans and Galatians. First, James repeatedly insists on our *showing* our faith, whereas Paul has in view faith as the instrument of our being declared, or accounted, righteous by God. These are two distinct aspects of justification. Second, in verse 23 James relates his demonstration of justification to Paul's doctrine of justification as the imputation of righteousness. When he does this, James teaches justification by faith, not by works: "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for right-

teousness” (v. 23). James quotes Genesis 15:6. Genesis 15:6 taught the justification of Abraham long before his work of offering his son, Isaac, which work James has in mind when he teaches Abraham’s justification by works, in verse 21. When James refers to Abraham’s justification as the imputation to him of righteousness, he teaches justification by faith, in accord with Paul’s doctrine in Romans 3-5 and in Galatians.

The third evidence in James that James speaks of a different aspect of justification than does Paul in Romans and Galatians is conclusive. It is commonly overlooked. This is the truth that James teaches justification by works *only*. The common explanation of James 2, not only by Rome and by the Federal Vision, but also by the orthodox Reformed and the Lutherans, is that James teaches justification by faith and by works. This is a mistake. James teaches justification by works *only*. Abraham was justified “by works” (v. 21). There is no reference to faith at all. Rahab too was justified “by works” (v. 25). The thought is that she was not justified by faith, but by works *only*—the works of hiding and saving the spies. Also, verse 24 must be understood as teaching justification by works only: A man is not justified “by faith only.” Rather, he is justified “by works,” that is, by works only. He is not justified by faith and by works. He is justified by works. Period! By works *only*!

If, therefore, James means by justification the same as Paul in Romans and Galatians, James flatly contradicts Paul, who certainly does teach justification by faith. In addition, James makes Jesus Christ unnecessary for justification. The works of the sinner himself suffice for justification.

But James does not contradict Paul, or render Christ superfluous. James teaches that works justify, as faith cannot: works show the reality of justification. If I say to someone, “I am justified by faith,” he has no evidence of the truth of my assertion. He cannot see my faith. But when my life appears to him, not as perfect, but nevertheless as a holy life of good works, he has the demonstration of my justification by faith, for a true, living faith always works. On the other hand, the wicked life of one who confesses to be justified by faith demonstrates that he lies. His is a dead faith and a spurious claim to justification.

This understanding of the relation of Paul and James implies certain warnings. To explain James as teaching justification in the same sense that it has in Paul is heresy—the Galatian heresy; the Roman Catholic heresy; the heresy of the Federal Vision and of the New Perspective on Paul in our day.

Also, if I preach a strong sermon in someone’s Reformed, or Protestant Reformed, church on justification by faith alone, utterly and totally ruling works out in the matter of justification as taught by Paul in Romans

and Galatians, and a member of the congregation objects saying, “But James 2 teaches...,” that member is for the time spouting the Galatian, Roman Catholic, and Federal Vision heresy.

Nor may anyone harmonize Paul and James by contending that Paul teaches justification as a decree of God away in heaven, apart from the sinner’s consciousness, whereas James teaches justification in the sinner’s consciousness. Paul teaches justification in the believing sinner’s consciousness. Justification in Paul is by *faith*, and faith is very definitely the consciousness, or experience, of the sinner. According to Paul himself in Romans 5:1, the justification that the apostle has been teaching in chapters 3-5 is such an act of God within the believing sinner as gives the sinner “peace with God.” “Peace with God” is the matter of a sinner’s consciousness and experience.

Fact is, the works of the believing sinner do not assure him himself of his justification. He is assured of his justification by faith alone. On the contrary, his works are often the temptation to doubt his righteousness. Even the best of them are only a very small beginning of the obedience that God requires in His law (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 114). Good works are not the demonstration of his justification to the believer himself, but to others. Faith carries the assurance of justification and salvation in itself (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21).

The calling of the Protestant Reformed Churches

In light of current developments in Reformed and evangelical churches regarding justification, the Protestant Reformed Churches have an urgent calling from God. This is a calling that these churches are uniquely qualified by God to carry out. If honoring the anniversary of the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church is more to them than mere outward ritual, they will fulfill this calling with zeal. They must preach on the gospel truth of justification by faith alone, without any works, in season and out of season. They must defend this gospel truth against its historic and its contemporary foes. They ought to do this simply because, anniversary or no anniversary, justification by faith alone is the heart of the gospel of grace. As the heart of the gospel, it is always the object of Satan’s attack upon the gospel.

But this calling is especially necessary because of the spreading heresy of justification by works in the sphere of supposedly conservative Reformed churches, which heresy roots itself in the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

God has uniquely qualified the Protestant Reformed Churches, virtually alone among Reformed and Presbyterian churches, by His leading of them, through the fire of controversy, to the knowledge and conviction of

the gospel truth of the unconditional covenant. The vast majority of Reformed and Presbyterian churches confess a conditional covenant. Thus they lie helpless before the onslaught of the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul. Indeed, by virtue of their doctrine of a conditional covenant, they themselves do in fact teach the heresy of justification by works.

Because of the heresy and its vocal proponents, the Protestant Reformed Churches must be polemical. They must defend justification by faith alone against the Roman Church; against Arminianism; against the New Perspective on Paul; against the Federal Vision; and against any and every doctrine that makes James qualify Paul by teaching justification by faith and works. They must defend justification by faith alone by contending against the doctrine of a conditional covenant, the root from which the contemporary heresy of justification by works springs.

If the Protestant Reformed Churches fall silent, God can, and will, raise up stones to proclaim and defend the gospel of justification. I cannot see why He should have to turn to stones.

And then, as the living demonstration of justification to a watching Reformed community, the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches must live out of justification by faith alone. They must show that they live in peace with God. They must live an active, obedient Christian life, according to the law, not in order to become just, but in thankfulness for free, gracious justification.

“Sola fide iustificat, sed fide non sola est!” That is, “Only faith justifies, but faith is never alone!”

The watchword of the Reformation regarding justification in its relation to good works.

The harmony of Paul and James.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

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

Two deaths, one life

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Matthew 24:23, 24

The Bible presents an alarming picture of what lies in store for believers as the end of the world approaches. The apostasy and persecution foretold by Scripture are indeed fearful heralds of our Lord's return, but perhaps even more concerning are Jesus' words in the verses that introduce this article: *“if it were possible, they [the signs and wonders] shall deceive the very elect.”* These words surely hold hope because it is clearly not possible that the elect will be deceived—but apparently only by a hairsbreadth. Whatever is in store for believers, whatever these impending “signs and wonders” are, there is little doubt that they will be the greatest test of faith that we have ever faced.

I don't believe that anyone can predict exactly what we ought to expect regarding the “miraculous” signs that will herald the appearance of the Antichrist, but I am in-

creasingly convinced that the idol of secular science will be the source of these “lying wonders” (II Thess. 2:9). In just the last century we have gone from a society constrained by the laws of gravity to one that has placed men on the moon. We have split the atom and begun to harness its enormous energy to produce electric power. And perhaps most impressive, we have emerged from a time in which the mysteries of life were entirely unknown to one in which sequencing entire human genomes—all 9 billion chemical letters—can be done in just a few days. All this in just over one century.

One can be sure that these relatively recent technological advances are not the end of scientific achievement for human society. While ‘reading’ the genome of individuals is undoubtedly a huge step forward in medical science, the potential to ‘rewrite’ the genome heralds an even greater advance. I hope to discuss the technologies that are making this achievement possible in a future article, but for now I will focus on one use of such technology that is being discussed in some scientific forums. That use is dramatically to extend the healthy lifespan of humans, with the ultimate goal being the achievement of ‘biological immortality.’

Until recent decades, the goal of lifespan extension beyond the “three-score and ten” described by Moses in Psalm 90 has been more wishful thinking than reality. Though medical advances such as the discovery of antibiotics and the development of treatments for common maladies such as cardiovascular disease have boosted average life expectancy in most developed countries, there is currently no society that has achieved a greater average lifespan than about 80 years of age. But with the combination of recent scientific findings regarding how aging works and the technologies to combat it genetically, it appears increasingly likely that average human lifespan will continue to increase well beyond the apparent ceiling that Moses described.

Some of the most remarkable advances in science over the past few decades have been in understanding the biological basis of lifespan—or *longevity*—and the ability of scientists to extend it significantly in animal models through genetic manipulation and dietary modification. In very simple organisms such as worms and flies, genetic manipulation has allowed scientists to extend lifespan dramatically, up to five times that of their natural counterparts. Similar genetic or dietary manipulation of mammals, most commonly mice, yields a more modest 25-50% increase in healthy lifespan, though a few unusual studies have reported a near doubling of lifespan in these creatures.¹ Though the genetic manipulation required for this effect cannot at present be done in humans—at least not legally—the dietary approach involving an extreme form of nutrient deprivation (“caloric restriction”) is being voluntarily undertaken by many different individuals who hope to achieve the roughly 40% increase in lifespan seen in mice and other mammals. Whether this works has yet to be seen (these are rather long experiments!), but there is strong consensus among scientists that a significant increase to human lifespan is scientifically possible given enough time and research into the molecular basis of aging in humans.

The tantalizing possibility of physical immortality has intrigued humanity for most of recorded history, beginning with Satan’s words to Eve, “thou shalt not *surely* die” (Gen. 3:4). Every culture has been fascinated with this promise, the evidence of which is embedded in a variety of myths from ancient, medieval, and modern civilizations alike.² Things are really no different today. Consider our

culture’s bizarre obsession with zombies, werewolves, vampires, and other supposedly immortal creatures of the occult. Once the ‘undead’ servants of evil, these creatures increasingly have become the heroes of pop culture, celebrated for their inhuman powers and their ability to resist death. Underlying this fascination, of course, is an unspoken desire by our culture to avoid physical death so as to continue in *this* life. No death, no consequences. No consequences, no restraint upon sin. Or so the theory goes.

Perhaps, then, we ought not be surprised that the desire for immortality has increasingly begun to escape the realm of modern myth to become recognized as a ‘legitimate’ field of secular science. Though certainly not part of the mainstream, there are several recognized scientists who are now challenging the idea that human lifespan has any defined limit at all. Groups such as the *Methuselah Foundation* and *SENS Research Foundation*, both founded by the eccentric scientist Aubrey de Grey, have managed to secure large amounts of funding to pursue their bluntly stated goal of turning back the clock on human longevity. De Grey himself has authored a highly-cited book on human longevity entitled *Ending Aging*, in which he suggests that science will be able to ‘reverse human aging in our lifetime.’³ While this proposition remains very much in doubt to most serious scientists, it does beg the question of whether the coming kingdom of man, presided over by the Antichrist, might be allowed by God to overcome the lifespan barrier that He decreed at the time of the Flood (Gen. 6:3).⁴

Let us assume for a moment that one of the “lying wonders” delivered by secular science is ‘biological immortality’ or, perhaps more realistically, an expansion of lifespan to over 200 years. If this were to happen, ought it to shake our faith in the testimony of Scripture? Should we doubt that death is in fact the final enemy, and that the only way to overcome it is through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ?

I can certainly see how that might be the case based on an incomplete understanding of Bible passages such as Romans 6:23, which declares that “the wages of sin is death.” If one were to understand from this passage

3 Aubrey de Grey, Michael Rae. *Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs that Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetime* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2007).

4 A rather interesting corollary to this can be found in the two references at the end of this footnote. In these high-profile articles, two groups of scientists posit that human lifespan is, in fact, limited, regardless of medical advances. Their (secular) interpretation of human lifespan data suggests that the upper limit of human lifespan is between 115-125 years of age, which is precisely concordant with Genesis 6:3. Cf. X. Dong, B. Milholland, and J. Vijg. *Nature* (October 13, 2016), 538:257-59. J. deBeer, A. Bardoutsos, F. Janssen. *Nature* (June 29, 2017), 546:E16.

1 A host of primary scientific articles describe these mouse models, most of which alter the metabolism as a means to extend lifespan. A brief catalog of these can be found at the following website. <https://www.fightaging.org/archives/2009/08/a-list-of-interesting-longevity-enhancement-methods-in-mice/>

2 These include the ancient Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh and the Greek myth of Tithonus, the medieval quest of the Holy Grail, and early modern search for the Fountain of Life, to name a few.

that physical death is all that Paul was referring to, it would be tempting to conclude that humanity would have overcome the consequences of sin if dramatically extended lifespan was to be achieved. But if we understand this passage and the rest of Scripture more completely, our response would be that even the achievement of *physical immortality* by science would not deceive us into doubting our source of hope.

The proper basis with which to begin understanding this issue is a striking verse in Genesis 3, where God reveals that Adam's *immediate* death at the time of the Fall was *spiritual* rather than *physical*.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and *live forever*. Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken (vv. 22, 23).

From this passage, it seems apparent that had Adam been allowed access to the tree of life, he could have remained physically alive, though spiritually dead. It would no doubt have been an increasingly miserable existence for Adam—to be biologically alive with a fallen nature—but apparently it was *physically* possible for him to “live forever” even after the Fall. God quickly ended that possibility, however, by removing Adam from the garden, thus beginning the slow process of corruption that would culminate in his physical death several centuries later. We can, therefore, distinguish the ‘two deaths’ that Adam experienced as a result of divine judgement based on their separation in time. In the day he took of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam's fate was sealed: he *did* die spiritually at that instant, and *began* to die physically as a result of his sin and separation from God.

Several other passages in Scripture present a relevant contrast to Adam's condition immediately after the Fall when he was spiritually dead, but capable of living indefinitely. The contrasting figure in all of these passages is our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:4) and was “in all things...made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17). These passages present the remarkable implication that the second person of the Trinity took upon Himself a physical form that was like ours, with the single exception that He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Rom. 4:15). Precisely what this means is difficult to know, but excerpts from the Gospels make it clear that Jesus experienced physical tiredness and emotional pain, and presumably could contract the same sicknesses and injuries to which we are susceptible. There is also no reason to doubt that

His body aged at the same rate as every other man His age, so that by the age of thirty—when He began His ministry—He looked and felt more or less like other men His age. We can presume from this that Jesus' physical constitution was, therefore, different from that of Adam, whose original body did not age or suffer the physical ravages of disease that humanity faced in Jesus' day and currently suffers in our own. As such, Jesus—the second Adam—was the precise opposite of the first Adam after the Fall. He was morally upright and spiritually alive, but physically compromised in a body that suffered from the corrupting effects of the Fall.

So why does knowing that physical and spiritual death are distinct entities matter? In this case it matters immensely because it provides us with the understanding that *physical immortality* is not the same thing as *eternal life* spoken of in Scripture.⁵ Here we turn to I Corinthians 15, where Paul elaborates upon the nature of the resurrection of believers.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory (vv. 50-54).

From this passage, we can understand that eternal life with Christ has two parts. First, it involves us being regenerated in a *spiritual* sense (“corruptible must put on incorruption”), and second, it involves the *physical* transformation of our mortal bodies into immortal ones. Apart from the former, the latter is simply the continuity of physical life.

And this is precisely the goal of unbelievers: physical immortality, free of life with God. What a ‘miracle’ that would be! What a ‘wonder’ for humanity to be free

⁵ By using the term ‘*physical immortality*’ I am distinguishing from a common usage of the term “immortality” in the New Testament when this word appears in isolation, such as in I Timothy 6:16. In these contexts it is clear that the inspired author refers to both physical and spiritual immortality, which is commonly called “*eternal life*.” At the same time, however, it is also notable that when the word “immortality” is used in the New Testament, it is usually found in combination with another term that specifically denotes ‘*spiritual immortality*’ such as “eternal life” (Rom. 2:7), “eternal” (I Tim. 1:17), “incorruption” (I Cor. 15:53, 54) or simply “life” (II Tim. 1:10).

of the yoke of aging that God has placed on us, free to exercise our will to do as we please. Such an achievement would surely be a crowning glory to the secular age of man. This is what the unbeliever hopes for more than anything else—to avoid meeting his Maker, and having to face the eternal death promised him for his sins. A death with two parts: body and soul.

But the promise of God to believers is not just immortality—it is eternal life! No man, regardless of his scientific advances, can offer eternal life because that requires both *spiritual* life and *physical* immortality. As Paul states, both corruption and mortality *must* be replaced for us to dwell with God eternally. It may be possible for the kingdom of the Antichrist to offer biological immortality—or at least something that looks very much like that. But it will never, under any cir-

cumstances, offer eternal life. That hope is reserved for those who call on Jesus Christ in true faith.

That hope leaves us with a calling too. The calling to believers in these end times is to be vigilant and discerning of Scripture so that when the kingdom of this world rises to power, we do not lose faith in the promises of God despite the “lying wonders” of man. This faith rests heavily on a keen knowledge of Scripture and a right understanding of its doctrine, which leaves no doubt that ultimate deception of the elect is not possible—though only by a hairsbreadth.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (I Pet. 5:8, 9).



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

How many formerly active PRC ministers, now listed as emeriti, are there? Answer later in this column.

Sister-church activities

The Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines met November 1. Two significant matters at Classis were (1) Meetings with the delegation of the Contact Committee of the PRCA (Rev. R. Smit and elder David Kregel), and (2) Classis declaring the PRFA (Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Albuera, Leyte) to be official mission work of the denomination. Regarding the PRFA, the PRC of Bulacan was appointed as the calling church for this mission field and was instructed by Classis to arrange and send a monthly delegation, pending the availability of funds through special collections that all the PRCP congregations have been asked to take for mission work. This is exciting news for the churches there, a mission field on another island!

On November 19 the Berean Protestant Reformed Church of the Philippines celebrated her 11th anniversary as an instituted PRC. There was a special meal together that day. God be praised for His faithfulness to our sister!

The Church Camp committee of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore announces their Church Camp from June 12-June 18, 2018. It will be held at the Bayou Waterpark Resort, Melaka. The theme will be “Ho-

liness: Not a Condition but a Necessity” (I Pet. 1:16).

The CERC has planned a farewell for Rev. Andy Lanning and family on December 23 with a lunch included.

Evangelism activities

From the bulletin of Grace PRC, MI:

INDIA VISIT: Our Consistory granted a request from the Council of Georgetown PRC to send a delegation of Rev. and Sue Van Overloop and Rick and Ronda Wieringa to India for three weeks (November 15 to December 4). Pastor Van Overloop will be preaching in both the Tamil and English congregations, assisting in the teaching of the Sola Gratia Program and area seminars, and preaching in area villages. Our delegation hopes to conduct Church visitation with the Vellore PRC while there, participate in congregational Bible Studies, and visit with many of the members of the VPRC in their homes. The Wieringa’s will also be spending time helping at the GFH and getting to know the needs of the children. Finally, the delegation has been asked to give encouragement to Pastor Paul Raj, Kasthuri, and family in all the many tasks God has given them. Pray for the Lord’s blessing.

Hope PRC’s Reformed Witness Committee invited all to Covenant Christian High School to attend an informative program concerning Hope’s work in Myanmar with the Protestant Reformed Church of Yangon, Myanmar. Rev. Titus

Sanceuluai, pastor of the church in Myanmar, along with his wife Certi, were part of the program. What a great way to learn more about the work there, the fellow saints in Myanmar, and get to know Rev. Titus and Certi personally! Rev. Titus also gave presentations in Hull, IA PRC, Trinity Christian High School, and Hull PR Christian school.

Minister activities

Our home missionary, Rev. Audred Spriensma spent time recently in the Franklin, PA area making contacts there and preaching for a group there on Sunday. Perhaps God will open doors there for future mission endeavors!

School activities

The Ladies' Circle of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN made and sold delicious pigs-in-the blanket as a school fundraiser.

Heritage Christian School's All School program was held on Thursday, November 30 at 7 P.M. at Fair Haven Church in Hudsonville, MI. All were invited to join the K-8th grade students, who presented a program on "The Comings and Goings of Jesus Christ."

Advance notice, 50th Anniversary! By God's grace, Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI is celebrating its 50th year of Christ-centered education. We have much to be thankful for in this work of our Father. To that end, the school Board is putting together a program to commemorate this milestone. The planned date for the program is April 27, 2018 (program at Fairhaven) and April 28th (din-

ner and open house at Covenant). An exciting time for alumni, supporters, and students of Covenant!

Young people's activities

The Young People of Doon, IA PRC invited the five local congregations to their Reformation singspiration. The Young People of Calvary PRC in Hull, IA invited the Siouxland area churches to their Thanksgiving singspiration. A joyful noise was made to the Rock of our salvation!

Congregational activities

The congregation at First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI held a farewell program for their minister and his family on November 19, as Rev. Richard Smit has accepted the call to be the third missionary to the land of the Philippines.

Trivia answer

The 2017 PRC *Acts of Synod* lists 12 Ministers Emeriti of the PRCA. With the recent addition of Rev. Ron Hanko, the count stands at 13. Nine of these men reside in the state of Michigan. The adjective "emeritus" is used to designate a retired professor or pastor, along with its plural, "emeriti."

Also, results of the survey about surviving original members are nearly all in as of mid-November. Soon you should read about the results. We do have a small number of these celebrated folks in our midst! 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 Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Randy and Sue Spriensma and family in the death of their mother, **Audrey Dykstra**. It is our prayer that they and their extended family may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in Psalm 23:5-6 "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
David S. Miedema, Clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to God, we rejoice with our parents **Eugene and Karen Van Den Top** who celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on November 25, 2017. We are thankful for the godly example they have set for their children and grandchildren in the midst of a world filled with unfaithful marriages and broken families. We pray that the Lord continues to bless their marriage in the years to come. "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5-6).

- * Ben and Rochelle Bloemendaal, Malachi and Asher
- * Austin Van Den Top
- * Kyle and Kara Van Den Top, Reuben
- * Matt and Ellen Brummel
- * Eric Van Den Top
- * Ryan and Joni Buiter
- * Paige Van Den Top

Rock Rapids, Iowa

Announcements continued

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2018, at 8:00 A.M., in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 11, 2017.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Teachers needed

The Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School in Doon, IA, is seeking a teacher for grades 3 and 4 for the 2018-2019 school year as well as an Administrator. For more information or to apply please contact Brent Wynia—712-470-2757, brentwynia@hotmail.com or Joey Mantel—712-470-6493, jsmantel@outlook.com.

Teacher needed

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



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Before it, who can stand?

"He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?"
—Psalm 147:17

