

The Standard Bearer

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What God Begins Shall Be Fully Done

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1:6

To be confident is to be persuaded and, then, to trust. The life of a Christian in this present evil world (Gal. 1:4) makes real, lasting confidence most desirable. Life in this world is filled with many uncertainties. And there is much that opposes every believer. Satan and a host of fallen angels work to destroy every Christian and the church of Christ. And every Christian has countless weaknesses. Every Christian may be in communion with God's Son and may delight in the law of God after the inward man, but he also has a law in his members warring against the law in his mind and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin that is in his members (Rom. 7:22, 23). The result

is daily sins of weakness and spots adhering to his best works. We are weak! And Satan is strong.

Therefore, to live with assurance while yet in this world the Christian must look up. Whenever he looks at himself, at his foes, or at the uncertainties of this world, he will be frightened. Confidence arises from looking up to God. The sovereign God has graciously and unconditionally established a relationship in which He is our heavenly Father. In this relationship, He saves unto Himself a people in Christ. Though sin remains in us, we may be certain and assured that we will receive the inheritance God has prepared for us. We will not perish, but have everlasting life!

The Beginning

Our text speaks of a “work” that God has begun to do in us. It is the “work” of saving us. This is the work of rescuing us from the greatest evil and giving to us the greatest good.

The work of saving unto Himself a people in Christ is a work that God does *for* us and also *in* us. The sav-

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ing work for us is that which God accomplished before the foundation of the world. He sovereignly chose unto Himself a people, which He gave to His Son, Jesus Christ. He wrote their names in His book of life. God works for us when in time He sent His Son into the flesh and blood of His people. In our human nature, Jesus accepted the responsibility of bearing the punishment of all of our sins. He perfectly paid the price for us in His death, so that He could say, "It is finished." This work Jesus did out of loving obedience to His Father, by which devotion He earned righteousness for every one of those given to Him of the Father. And God works for us with Jesus sitting at His Father's right hand ruling over all things for the sake of His church and every individual member. At this position Jesus also works their salvation by interceding for them with the Father. God has done a saving work *for* us.

And God does a saving work *in* us. This He accomplishes in His people by His Spirit. The spiritual heart of natural man is sinful, powerfully contrary to God because it desires only to serve self. God gives us the new life of Jesus in regeneration, and He irresistibly works in us true conversion. To save us, the Spirit powerfully illuminates our minds so we can rightly understand and discern the things of God. This "regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart." He "infuses new qualities into the will," rendering it "good, obedient, and pliable." He "actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruit of good actions" (Canons of Dordt, III/IV; 11).

With a new heart all the regenerated are able to acknowledge their own sinfulness and sin. They are able to see their personal need for Jesus. By faith they embrace Jesus as the Son of God, trust Him, and love Him. The Spirit calls them effectually by the gospel, so they receive it and believe it.

God also works in us so that we begin to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. He changes us so that we love Him, strive to render grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great a love for us. We begin to desire to be like Him.

Paul is inspired to identify this work in us as "good." The Greek word translated "good" can refer to something as being morally right. But this same word can also mean

that someone has accomplished what he designed to do. That is the way we are to interpret the "good work" in our text. God began a good work in the elect that will surely accomplish what He designed it to do. By calling God's saving work "good," we are already assured that it will not fail in its design. God will most certainly accomplish His purpose.

The Perfecting of God's Work

God "will perform it." The idea is that God will do it. The Greek word means that it will be brought to an end; it will be accomplished, perfected, completed.

The clear implication is that this good work of salvation in us is all God's work. It is not the case that God waits for man to initiate the work by opening the door of his heart. Nor is it the case that God does His part and then He needs man to finish it. Rather, our text declares that this good work is all of God! The continuation of the saving work He began in us is something that He will do until He brings everyone of His elect into heaven. The beginning and the end and everything in between are of God. Even our willing and doing are God's work in us (Phil. 2:13)!

This passage of Scripture reveals the truth of the preservation of the saints. God is faithful. Having conferred grace, He mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves each elect in that grace, even to the end (cf. Canons of Dordt, V; 3). Not one of those in whom a work of grace has begun will ever perish or fall away. Every one of them will persevere through every uncertainty, every difficulty, and against all opposition until the day of Jesus Christ.

This means that God's work of regeneration is an irreversible work. What God begins, He will certainly finish! One who is now alive in Christ will live forever in glory. If Christ is with you and in you today, then He will never leave you. It is utterly impossible that any elect will fall totally from faith and grace because "His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession, and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated" (Canons of Dordt, V; 8).

This most comforting truth is taught throughout Scripture. Our heavenly Father will bring to perfect

completion every saving work He begins: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24, 25). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thess. 5:24). He regenerates us unto a lively hope of an inheritance that is “reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:3, 4). All who believe in God’s only begotten Son shall “not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Nothing can “separate us from the love of Christ” (Rom. 8:35), nor will His call ever be revoked (Rom. 11:29). Jesus promises to give to His sheep “eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day (John 6:39).

The Confidence

Of this truth we may be “confident,” that is, be persuaded and assured.

How very sad to have this blessed assurance taken away with the teaching that salvation is man’s choice. Or when God’s people are told that they can fall away from grace and fall out of the covenant. Or when justification is said to be partly man’s work. Or when a believer is told that he cannot know for sure that he will reach heaven.

Our text gives confidence and assurance. Notice that all our confidence is in God and in Jesus. Confidence is lost when it is put in man. But God is sovereign, and thus His grace is irresistible, His work irreversible, and


His promises sure! God is unchangeable (Mal. 3:6) and His plan cannot be changed (Is. 46:10). God is eternal, whose election took place in eternity (Eph. 1:4) and who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). God loves His chosen people and His love is unconditional and eternal (Jer. 1:3), from which we cannot be separated.

God performs His work of salvation in us “until the day of Jesus Christ.” This is the day when Jesus Christ

will be glorified before all and every knee shall bow and confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 1:10, 11). This is the day when all the credit and glory for the work of salvation will be given publicly to Jesus. All the glory for salvation will go to God and to the Lamb.

Thus every believer, who is yet in this world with their sinful nature, may be confident of his salvation and of his place in glory. This confidence and assurance springs from faith in God’s promises, from the Spirit’s witnessing with our spirit, and from a holy desire to

preserve a good conscience and to perform good works (Canons of Dordt, V; 10). While Satan is constantly working to create doubt and fear, God declares that He has begun a good work in us and He will perform it to the end.

This comforting truth does not produce presumption or remissness, but humility, godliness, and patience (endurance) (Canons of Dordt, V; 12, 13). This confidence is an incentive to be serious and constantly striving to practice gratitude and good works. This confidence makes one more careful to continue in the ways of the Lord, so that we experience His gracious countenance, which experience is dearer than life and, if withdrawn, is more bitter than death. 

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God and in Jesus.
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The GKv (Liberated) and Its Grievous Decision

The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches was not the only synod to meet this past June and make decisions settled and binding for their federation of churches. Others did too. One in particular was the General Synod of the Vrijgemaakt-Gereformeerde Kerken (GKv), known to us as the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands, the mother church and sister denomination of what we commonly refer to as the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The GKv synod made a couple of significant decisions this past June, decisions dealing with granting women the right to hold office in Christ's church. We speak of 'decisions' in the plural because the GKv not only made a decision granting women the right to hold the office of deacon, but also a second decision granting its women the right to serve as elders in Christ's church.

Yes, we say 'in Christ's church'! Not because it cannot be challenged whether, when women are ordained into ruling offices in a church, that denomination deserves to be called "Christ's church" any longer, but because that is what a synod that makes such a ruling is saying. They are saying, "We are yet Christ's church! And the decision we now make, we make representing Christ. In Christ's name we inform you that we are convinced Christ grants

women the right to rule as elders in His church!"

That is quite a claim.

One claiming to represent Christ better be sure of himself before making such a decision and claim.

Or, if you will, following this decision, one better be sure of **HERSELF** before making such a claim and then proceeding to make decisions for the church in Christ's name.

We can think of no greater transgression as an officebearer than to misrepresent Christ.

And to do that knowingly!

The decisions are what we call 'watershed' decisions.

We label them 'watershed decisions' because once a denomination's synod makes decisions of this sort, decisions so clearly contrary to the 'settled and binding' statements of the apostolic Scriptures (in this instance, apostolic instruction concerning the governing of Christ's church), that synod has set its denomination on an irreversible course of fast-moving apostasy that must inevitably end up in the sea of destruction, where every teaching of Holy Scripture will be denied as regards both confession and godliness.

What follows is a translation of a report received from a good brother in Europe following the decisions of the GKv synod on the issue of wom-

en in office. The report informed its contacts (translation from the Dutch is ours):

A bullet has been shot through the church!

[On] June 15, 2017, the General Synod (at Mappel) of the Liberated Reformed Churches made a decision to allow women to hold the offices of deacon and elder.

In a long, tiring session (unusual and unplanned) that extended beyond supper, the Synod decided to open up the office of elder to women by a vote of 23 [in favor] to 9 against. Earlier Synod had already decided the issue of women as deacons, with only 2 votes opposing [the recommendation to allow it]. A counter-proposal, in which it was proposed that the church council (composed of men and women) would operate under the overall oversight of a 'nuclear consistory', or council of elders consisting exclusively of men, was defeated; only 10 delegates were in favor [of that proposal].

The Synod has yet to come to a decision about giving its consent to women giving sermons as preachers. But, considering the direction of the discussions and arguments made for women serving as officebearers, that will only be a matter of time—the final hammer blow!

...By these decisions the Synod has broken with the church of all ages and has struck out on

a new path. We expect the decisions will have significant consequences for the relations with various domestic churches (meeting the approval of the NDA, but repellant to the CGK-GTU for example!) and also for foreign churches around the world. Various churches have already indicated that their sister-church relationship with the GKv will be broken if the positions [offices] are opened up [to women]. Also, no doubt, membership in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) will be an issue of discussion.

The report then goes on to give synod's grounds for its groundbreaking decision to grant women the right to serve as elders as well as deacons. The synod declared that it was persuaded that there were scriptural grounds for women as well as men called to service (in Christ's church) in the area of "... pastoral care and education, and thereby to the office of elder." The grounds given were:

1. The characters of Miriam (Micah 6:4) and Deborah (Jud. 4, 5) allowed women in the old covenant to labor in cooperation with men in areas of government and law. They could be called by God to do so, as evidenced by Micah 6:4, where the Lord desires to convey to Israel: "I sent...Miriam to you to go before you."
2. As well, the New Testament also calls older men and older people (seniors), including older women, to serve as examples and for the care of souls (Tit. 2:3-5).
3. Paul's designation of Junia and her husband Andronicus as

spoken highly of by the apostles (Rom. 16:7), as well as reference to other couples and his assistants (Rom. 16:3), and his mention of a couple, of a brother and sister who housed a church (Rom. 16:5, 15), give the impression that male and female were in equal positions of leadership in Christ's church.

The decision to open not only the office of deacon to women but that of elder as well, shows just how far down the road of apostasy the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands have traveled.

[Just prior to this issue going to the printer we learned that the synod also voted (by a 21 to 10 vote with 1 abstaining) to open to women the office of minister of the Word.]

The decisions do not come as a surprise.

Over the last two decades concerned members of the denomination have voiced their concern over various issues: the toleration of sabbath desecration (a growing number of members engaging in common labor and recreation on the Lord's Day with no church discipline applied); the alarming upsurge of members divorcing for nearly every reason and then being allowed to remarry, and yet remain members; and, last but not least, professors and clergy being allowed to challenge the literal interpretation of Scripture, starting with the historicity of Genesis 1-11, of course. Evolution has become an accepted explanation of the origin of creation.

This 'broader perspective' has resulted in declining membership

and a number of congregations 'liberating' themselves from the GKv and beginning new federations.

And now this decision, described by the correspondent as "a bullet shot through the church" (and lodged in its heart, we suppose he means).

A fair appraisal.

What we have always found so intriguing about decisions like the one just made by the leaders of the GKv, decisions that so clearly contradicts apostolic words, in this instance, apostolic words of instruction to pastors of early New Testament churches that were dealing exactly with this issue, namely, who according to the Lord Christ may serve as officebearers and rulers in HIS church (cf. I Tim. 3 and Titus 1, to say nothing of I Cor. 14:34, 35), is how these leaders and their synods try to justify their undeniable departure from apostolic, scriptural doctrines.

By quoting Scripture! That's how.

It is downright ingenious, to say nothing of being devious.

By which I mean, I suppose, it is disingenuous!

"Why may we, in the name of Christ and truth, make decisions that so clearly go contrary to the apostolic teachings on various matters found in Scripture? Because the Scriptures allow us too! That's why."

An attempt to use the Word of God against itself, or if you will, the words of the Holy Spirit against Himself. As if the Holy Spirit speaks out of two sides of His mouth.

Either that, or one is saying that the apostle Paul really did not know the mind of the Spirit when he wrote what he did to young pastor Timothy and his beloved Titus to give them authoritative ‘advice with teeth’ on how to order the churches of Christ entrusted to their care.

Either perspective is an assault on Scripture and a slander of the Holy Spirit.

Why is it that highly educated churchmen who insist on these new policies, imposing them on their denominations against the will of many, do not have the honesty simply to say, “We have come to the conclusion that we are not bound any longer by what the Scriptures say. Those days are past! We have decided to go in a way that has contemporary approval instead.”

But no, instead, having cast aside various plain passages of Scripture in which the apostles are clearly addressing the very issue being considered, which clearly oppose these new notions being proposed, these fellows come up with wonderful committees that latch on to this or that ‘out-of-the-way’ passage that perhaps with some stretch of the imagination could, by some ‘nuanced’ insight that only the intellectual elite can discern, be applied to the issue.

To prove what?

That this present departure from what the Reformed churches of Christ have always maintained is really scriptural after all and the will of Christ for His church.

What nonsense!

And they themselves know it.

Which simply underscores the seriousness of it all.

To appeal to Old Testament references to Miriam and Deborah, as one of the grounds does, and to have these women serve as the standard for the New Testament church age, is without merit.

We are surprised the synod did not make reference to Huldah the prophetess while they were at it, as did the CRC on this issue in their capitulation to our contemporary, feminist-fueled society some years back.

How foolish to make reference to Deborah, whose serving as judge was evidence of what? Of how deeply into apostasy Israel had fallen (as was true of the days of Huldah the prophetess as well). Deborah’s very serving as judge was set forth as a reproach to Israel, because “not a man could be found in Israel” to serve with wisdom and courage

Is that the state of affairs in the GKv?

Apparently.

We doubt, however, the synodical delegates intended their votes to acknowledge that as the reality.

And as for the reference in Micah 6:4 to Miriam whom the Lord used along with her brothers Moses and Aaron to lead Israel out of Egypt, it proves nothing about women serving in office. What is clear from that history is that God did put Moses and Aaron into office, but not Miriam. What we learn from Micah is, that for all that, Miriam was, as a woman, useful to the church and used by God. For that usefulness Miriam did not need a special office.

As for the synod’s reference to the number of couples greeted by Paul in Romans 16 and thanked for their service, and the synod using these references as a ground for their momentous decision to approve of women as rulers in Christ’s church—by which decision, as the report correctly states, “...the Synod has broken with the church of all ages”—simply shows how desperate the synod was to find any scriptural, apostolically sanctioned proof for their decision.

When it came to Romans 16, all that even the synod could say was that the passage “*leaves the impression*” that male and female were in equal positions of leadership....”

Passages that “leave the impression.”

And on that basis a denomination justifies kicking aside I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and I Corinthians 14 (and others), with their clear teachings about whom Christ calls and qualifies to serve in church office.

Demonstrating what?

That what governed the Synod of the GKv 2017 was not the fear of God and His Word, but the fear of men, of contemporary society, and a desire to have its approving words.

Be assured, that spirit will bear only the bitterest of fruits, as has come to evidence in denomination after Reformed and Presbyterian denomination that has chosen this way.

The Christian Reformed Church is clear proof of this reality, as evidenced by a report its synod considered in its recent gathering, one from Classis East (Grand Rapids, MI), calling for a re-examination of its position forbidding gay marriage.

Something the *SB* will report on in a future issue.

Be that as it may, what the report on the GKv synod states is true: its decision is going to force a number of denominations to re-examine their present relationship to the GKv.

This includes the Canadian

Reformed Churches in North America.

We would suppose it means the termination of her relationship with her mother church.

We shall see.

And to think, this is the denomination of Dr. Klaas Schilder, who a short 75 years ago ‘fathered’ a

denomination that was formed to stand for Reformed, biblical truths against the deep-rooted apostasy that had taken hold of its mother church, the GKN of Dr. A. Kuyper.

As our European contact remarked in his cover letter, “How very, very sad!” ☹

LETTERS

New Calvinism

Thanks to Rev. Koole for his four-part critique of K.J. Stewart’s *Ten Myths about Calvinism*. Exposed is a common element of the diverse, loosely affiliated churches espousing “New Calvinism” (Pseudo-Calvinism?). Populism, or being “culturally relevant,” driven by the “success” status of church growth, is the common element. The method? “Watering down” the faith once delivered to the saints in such areas as the historicity of Genesis, the love and reverent worship of God as He has laid out in Commandments 1 to 4, the doctrine of hell, the Trinity, God’s absolute sovereignty, the sinfulness of homosexuality, the truth that Roman Catholicism is heretical, etc. The Reformation creeds, in their uncompromising seeking to faithfully, systematically summarize the whole counsel of God, get in the way—so they must be watered down or relegated to obscurity.

In Australia, “New-Calvinism” has gained “success” in a church world that by and large has no subscribed form of sound words. But it has also attracted some of our own members and been partly responsible for drawing some away.

Rev. Koole’s defence of “TULIP” is appreciated (Part 3 on 4/15/17). K.J. Stewart’s idea of removal of “Total” and “Limited” from Depravity and Atonement militates against historic biblical Presbyterianism, for example, Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 6:

S.2 By this sin they [our first parents] fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God, and so became *dead in sin*, and *wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body*.

S.4 From this original corruption, whereby *we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil*, do proceed all actual transgressions.

What a slander on those 70 or so godly ministers from England and Scotland who met (at great personal cost to some) for three years at Westminster, to suggest that they got together and said something like, “We must ensure that Calvin is followed—Calvin’s view must be our view!” The reality? They swore, “I, A. B., do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this assembly, whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine, but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God’s glory, and the peace and good of his church.”

On this matter of “Total” the Word of God does not equivocate, Genesis 6:5: “...God saw...that every imagination of the thought of his [man’s] heart was only evil continually”; Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me”; Jer.17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”; Eph.2:1, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;”—and much more. Likewise the scriptural basis for “Limited” is clear; and so the statements of the great Reformed creeds are also quite clear in holding forth Limited Atonement.

Peter Torlach, Elder,
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia,
Brisbane.

Ontario's Bill 89 (Canada)

This past June the Ontario Government took another step forward in its push to revolutionize family law in Ontario by its adoption of Bill 89. Bill 89, also known as the "Supporting Children, Youth, and Families Act," is the fifth bill in as many years that represents the swift advance of a left-wing social agenda in Ontario.

Bill 89 is significant because it changes what child protection agencies need to consider in determining the best interests of the children with whom they are working. The previous law required that child protection agencies consider the "religious faith in which the child is being raised." That requirement has been dropped, and now child protection agencies are to consider instead the "creed," "sexual orientation," "gender identity," and "gender expression" of the child. *ARPA Canada* reports that "Bill 89 requires child protection, foster, adoption service providers, and judges to take into account and respect a child's race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, disability, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression."¹

Why is this significant? It is significant because it appears to give the government the right to remove children from the custody of their parents if it is believed that the parents are harming a child by failing to properly respect and support that child's gender identity and gender expression. If a teenager begins to identify as LGBT, and that teenager's parents tell him that his identity is wrong and he should change, that could be considered a form of abuse and a reason for taking that child away from his parents. In fact, this is what Ontario's Minister of Child and Family Services himself said: "I would consider that a form of abuse, when a child identifies one way and a caregiver is saying no, you need to do this differently.... If it's abuse, and if it's within the definition, a child can be

removed from that environment and placed into protection where the abuse stops."²

ARPA Canada also reports the following: "Bill 89 also signals a potential shift towards greater readiness for children's aid societies to intervene in family affairs.... The implication [of Bill 89's wording] is that intervention should not be presumed to be more disruptive than non-intervention."³ In other words, with this bill the government is giving more encouragement for child protection agencies to take children out of their homes if these agencies feel parents are not supporting their children's gender expression sufficiently.

This is simply radical and disturbing. Not only is this turning the authority of the home on its head, so that the parent's authority over the child is limited by the "creed" of the child and what the child chooses to do or believe; but this is also the government effectively dictating to parents what their gender ideology needs to be. If a parent refuses to affirm the liberal gender ideology of the radical left-wing government, the children of that parent may be considered "in need of protection" by the state and be removed from the care of that parent.

What should Christians think about these things? How are we to respond?

In an essay entitled "What's in a Name? Why Christians Should Be Wary of the Word 'Transgender'" Andrew T. Walker, writing for *Public Discourse*, says something that pertains to the issue:

The Christian worldview cannot countenance a movement that plays haphazardly with biological sex and the promise of self-resurrection. The picture seen in the first two chapters of Genesis is one where divinely orchestrated binaries are fixed, intentional goods: Heaven and Earth, Night and Day, Land and Sea, Male and Female. The Christian worldview can, however, countenance a world like that of the third chapter of Genesis—a world in which people have broken perceptions of themselves brought on by the Fall.

The Christian worldview accepts the validity of people's testimony that gender dysphoria [gender iden-

¹ "Bill 89 Pushes Gender Ideology in Child Services," *Association for Reformed Political Action Canada*, January 6, 2017, <https://arpacanada.ca/news/2017/01/06/bill-89/> [accessed July 5, 2017].

Rev. Guichelaar is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

² As quoted in the same article.

³ "Bill 89," *ARPA Canada*.

tity disorder—EJG] is a real experience resulting in heartrending distress. The Christian worldview cannot, however, countenance the idea that men can become women or that women can become men. No amount of self-assertion or self-description, no matter the vehement sincerity, can result in individuals reconfiguring their chromosomes. Seen from this view, to exist as “transgender” is, itself, a social construct offered up by revisionists.

This is why simplistic or unwitting uses of the term ‘transgender’ are problematic. The culture has intentions for the word that are incompatible with Christian anthropology. The culture wants individuals to accept, without a hint of hesitation, the idea that surgically altering one’s body can make a person a member of a different biological sex. Transgender may describe the range of experiences that people encounter, but for those in control of the word throughout dominant culture, “transgender” bespeaks a much weightier construct that Christians should be wary of casually adopting. “Transgender” is a neologism chock full of ideological assumptions that Christians cannot innocently use.⁴

Although Walker is talking specifically about the use of the word “transgender,” his line of reasoning applies also to the Ontario Government’s adoption of Bill 89. To me, the danger for Christians living under a law like Bill 89 is that Christians become so accustomed to how society and government define and understand gender issues, that they lose their grasp of how the Bible itself defines and understands gender issues, and of how they as Christians *should* be defining and understanding gender issues. To explain what I mean, let me refer again to the essay quoted here:

Cultural debates come packaged with new words and concepts. By creating ‘constructs’ that give names to sub-

⁴ Andrew T. Walker, “What’s in a Name? Why Christians Should be Wary of the Word ‘Transgender,’” *Public Discourse*, May 30, 2017, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/05/19362/#> [Accessed July 7, 2017].

jective theories, progressives attempt to crystallize their social theories and give them the appearance of ironclad certainty.

Those who control the language control the terms of the debate. Words create and confirm ideas, and if new words can give meaning to new concepts, over time, these concepts become unquestionable as we grow accustomed to their usage.⁵

The writer is talking about the word “transgender.” But what he states does not merely apply to new words; it applies to new *laws* as well—laws such as Bill 89. New laws confirm ideas, and if new laws can give meaning and expression to these new ideas, over time these ideas start to become unquestionable as we grow accustomed to the laws.

One example of what I am talking about is the term/concept “same-sex marriages.” Built into the very term “same-sex marriages” is the assumption that homosexual “marriages” are true, legitimate marriages. They may be so in the eyes of our government, but the Christian needs to reject the term “same-sex marriages” as being inherently contradictory, simply because marriage, by God’s definition, is the union between one man and one woman, exclusively.

So, the challenge of Bill 89 is that it promotes and further legitimizes a theory of gender that is simply at odds with God’s ordering (and the Bible’s revelation) of human sexuality and gender. And the more we speak about gender as the government speaks about it,

the more we will be inclined to drift away from a biblical understanding—that God created mankind simply as *male* and *female*.

To put this in different words, I can put it this way: The Ontario Government’s adoption of Bill 89 (along with all the other bills it has adopted recently) is simply


⁵ Walker, “What’s in a Name?”

*When you take away
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issues from a
biblical perspective.*

what happens when you give up the authority of Scripture and you attack the literal history of Genesis 1-11. When you take away the account of how God made man and woman in the beginning as male and female, you take away your entire foundation for understanding human identity and human gender issues from a biblical perspective. Our challenge is to continue to maintain that foundation God had given us, in the face of a culture that rejects everything contained in Genesis 1-11. There is a reason Satan likes to cast doubt on the literal historicity of Genesis 1-11—it influences everything.

What, then, is the calling of the Christian? The calling of the Christian is to grow ever-increasingly accustomed to the language of the Bible and the thoughts contained in the Bible, and avoid unwittingly adopting the thought patterns of the increasingly anti-Christian culture around us. The calling of the Christian is to embrace the beauty

and the sensible logic of manhood and womanhood as designed by God. The calling of Christian parents is to model for their children what true masculinity and femininity look like.

And by all means, let this be the overarching rule in all our homes: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).⁶ 

⁶ In preparing this article, I also found the following article to be a profitable read, and mention it here: Andrew T. Walker and Denny Burk, “National Geographic’s ‘Gender Revolution’: Bad Argument and Biased Ideology,” *Public Discourse*, January 6, 2017, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/01/18491/> [Accessed July 7, 2017].

Of the Adoration, Worship, and Invocation of God through the Only Mediator Jesus Christ (Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 5A)

Introduction

The six paragraphs of the fifth chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession are the Reformation’s trumpet blast against the false worship of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome’s false worship, particularly her veneration of the saints, is exposed and on the basis of Scripture condemned as idolatrous. But the fifth chapter is not only negative; it is also positive. In broad strokes Heinrich Bullinger, the author of the SHC, sets forth the fundamental principles of the true worship of God, the

most important of which is that God is to be worshiped through the one Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Reformation, as true reformation in every age, not only tore down that which was rotted and decayed, but on the sure foundation of the Word of God built again the house of God.

In his rejection of Rome’s false worship of the saints, Bullinger is careful not to overreact to the error of Rome. While rejecting Rome’s veneration of the saints, he defends the proper and necessary place of the memory of the saints in the lives of Reformed Christians. This is the “due honor to be rendered to the saints” that he develops in the second part of the chapter, consideration of which must wait until our next installment.

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True Worship Opposed to Will Worship

God alone is to be adored and worshipped. We teach that the true God alone is to be adored and worshipped. This honor we impart to none other, according to the commandment of the Lord, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). Indeed, all the prophets severely inveighed against the people of Israel whenever they adored and worshipped strange gods, and not the only true God. But we teach that God is to be adored and worshipped as He Himself has taught us to worship, namely, "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), not with any superstition, but with sincerity, according to His Word; lest at any time He should say to us, "Who hath required this at your hands?" (Is. 1: 12; Jer. 6:20). For Paul also says, "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything," (Acts 17:25).

The first paragraph of Chapter 5 of the SHC establishes the most fundamental principle of biblical worship, that our worship is to be directed to the one true and living God and to Him alone: "the true God *alone* is to be adored and worshipped." This really is THE *sola* behind the other five *solas* of the Reformation. The Reformation, as the true church in every age, damned the worship of any beside or instead of the one true God. This is the first commandment of God's law: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The teaching of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament, "severely inveighed against" those who "adored and worshipped strange gods, and not the only true God." All worship, therefore, whether private worship, family worship, or public and corporate worship, which is on the foreground in the fifth chapter of the SHC, is to be the worship of God alone.

Two truths that are closely connected to this fundamental principle of worship are also established in the opening paragraph of Chapter 5. The first of these is that God is to be worshiped as He has revealed His will for worship in His Word. This is the second commandment of God's law. Not only the object of our worship, but also the manner of our worship is revealed in sacred Scripture. It is not enough that we worship God, but we must worship Him in the proper manner. And that

proper manner is set forth clearly in God's Word: "But we teach that God is to be adored and worshiped as He Himself has taught us to worship." From what is revealed nothing may be taken away, and to that which is revealed nothing may be added. This was the Reformation's view of worship.

On the basis of this principle, the Reformers condemned the will worship of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome taught that the church, which in her view was above Scripture, had the right to determine *how* God was to be worshiped. The manner of worship was something left for the church herself to determine. And so Rome added to the simple worship of God revealed in His Word her rites and rituals, her pomp and ceremony, not found in Scripture.

But on this matter of the manner of worship, the Reformed also parted company with the Lutherans. Luther taught that whatever was not expressly forbidden by the Word of God might be included in the public worship of God. This is sometimes called the *normative principle* of worship. The Reformed, by contrast, insisted that only that which was expressly commanded by the Word of God belonged in public worship. This is referred to as the *regulative principle* of worship. Without calling it such, Bullinger clearly articulates in the fifth chapter of the SHC the regulative principle. Only that which God "has required at our hands" is to have a place in worship.

The regulative principle concerns especially the outward elements of worship. But the worship of God is not only a matter of outward form and of conforming to the elements of worship. The worship of God, the worship that pleases Him and carries away His blessing, is also a matter of the heart. This crucially important truth was something the Reformers insisted on. Read their writings and you will be impressed with how often they reiterated this biblical requirement of true worship. It is not enough that we worship God outwardly and formally; we must worship Him from and with the heart. Says Bullinger: "not with any superstition, but with sincerity." Appropriately, he quotes John 4:24, Jesus' word to the Samaritan woman: "God is a Spirit [literally, 'God is spirit'], and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Rome's worship at the time of the Reformation and

Rome's worship today is superstitious worship. Worshipers are taught simply to go through the motions, and that is supposed to be sufficient for the true worship of God and the enjoyment of the blessing of worship. Take mass, do your genuflections, cross yourself, pray by rote the prayers of the rosary, and all will be well as far as the worship of God is concerned. Away with such hypocritical worship, said the Reformers. The true worship of God is ever only worship from the heart, "not with any superstition, but with sincerity."

Christ Alone

God alone is to be invoked through the mediation of Christ alone. In all crises and trials of our life we call upon Him alone, and that by the mediation of our only mediator and intercessor, Jesus Christ. For we have been explicitly commanded, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Ps. 50:15). Moreover, we have a most generous promise from the Lord Who said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23), and, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). And since it is written, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" (Rom. 10:4), and since we do believe in God alone, we assuredly call upon Him alone, and we do so through Christ. For as the apostle says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5), "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

God alone is to be worshiped. But God is to be wor-

shiped through the only Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ alone is the Mediator: *solus Christus*. Only in the name of and through the Lord Jesus Christ may men approach God in worship. All worship of God apart from Jesus Christ, all worship of God while invoking other mediators, be they saints, angels, or the virgin Mary, is damnable worship. God alone through Christ alone—that was the gospel of the Reformation. And that is the gospel for all time and in every age and among all peoples. This is the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. This is the reason on account of which Christianity that is true to Christ cannot accommodate the false religions. The gospel is never Christ *and*, but is always Christ *alone*. Christ is the Way to the Father, and there is no other way

to the Father. Christ is the Way to the Father because He alone is the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is "our only mediator and intercessor" with the triune God. He alone is our "advocate with the Father."

The SHC makes this very practical: "In all crises and trials of our life we call upon Him alone." Indeed, the nature of the Christian life is that it is a life of "crises and trials." The Reformers and Reformed believers in the age in which the SHC was written knew that all too well. They knew the sorrows, troubles, disappointments, and losses that are a part of life in a sin-cursed world. More than that, they knew persecution for Christ and the truth's sake. These are particularly the "crises and trials" to which the SHC refers. They

were hunted down, imprisoned, tortured, hanged, and burned at the stake for the sake of the gospel recovered by the Reformation. In all those "crises and trials" of faith, they experienced the truth of this fifth chapter of the SHC, that Jesus Christ is "our only mediator and intercessor." They turned to Him and cried out to Him, and found in Him their strength and comfort.

*Only in the name of
and through the
Lord Jesus Christ
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All worship of God
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is damnable worship.*

The Saints are not to be Venerated

The saints are not to be adored, worshipped, or invoked. For this reason we do not adore, worship, or pray to the saints in heaven, or to other gods, and we do not acknowledge them as our intercessors or mediators before the Father in heaven. For 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, because He has expressly said, "My glory will I not give to another" (Is. 42:8), and because Peter has said, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," except the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). In Him, those who give their assent by faith do not seek anything outside Christ.

Having set forth the truth positively that Christ is the only Mediator, the SHC becomes negative and polemical. The remaining paragraphs of the fifth chapter treat an issue that was very practical at the time of the Reformation: the veneration of the saints and their relics. For Reformed Christians living in the twenty-first century, this is not a burning issue. None of us have likely ever prayed to or sought the intercession of the saints. We

have not made pilgrimages in order to observe and pay for the benefit of seeing the relics of the saints. But the whole cult of the saints was alive and well at the time of the Reformation, as indeed it is today in the Roman Catholic Church. I remind you that when Martin Luther was struck to the ground in that thunderstorm and vowed to become a monk, he cried out to St. Anne, the patron saint of his copper-mining father. One the most significant treatises that John Calvin wrote was entitled, "An Admonition, Showing the Advantages which Christendom might Derive from an Inventory of Relics." In it he blasts the great evil as well as the many deceptions connected to the veneration of the relics of the saints.

The SHC is emphatic: "The saints are not to be adored, worshipped, or invoked." The Reformation condemned the evil of the veneration of the saints, which had become a crass, money-making scheme in the Roman Catholic Church. It did so on the ground that "Christ the Mediator [is] sufficient for us." Because He is our sufficient and only Mediator, we do not "give to others the honor that is due to God alone and to His Son." Thus, "in Him, those who give their assent by faith do not seek anything outside of Christ." ∞

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

"To Teach Them War"

Our Marching Orders (16)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Ephesians 6:10

Go forth in His service and strong in His might to conquer all evil and stand for the right.

From Psalter 407, stanza 3

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The words above are our marching orders for battle. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). Through the inspired apostle Paul, who was writing from prison, our Captain sets the army that was the Ephesian congregation and all of us in order. He does that in the latter half of the epistle to the Ephesians by moving through the various relationships that exist in a congregation: church members dwelling among each other (4:1-5:21), church

members living among the ungodly of the world (5:3-17), husbands and wives in marriage (5:22-33), parents and children in the home (6:1-4), and masters and servants in the workplace (6:5-9). With those relationships and the proper conduct of them clearly established, the soldiers stand in rank and file. Captain Jesus then positions Himself before the troops and raises His voice: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Jesus is the Lord and He charges us to go to battle, and to go to battle strong *in Him*, for without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Our Captain issues many battle commands for the advancing of His kingdom in and through us. Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! Be ye angry and sin not! Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth! Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God! Be kind one to another! Let not things inconvenient, such as fornication or jesting, be once named among you! Reprove unfruitful works of darkness! Honor your father and mother! Then, accompanying each specific call to duty is the exhortation: "And, go forth in the strength of the Lord!" To these words we march.

A Needed Charge

Continually we need to hear our marching orders to be strong in the Lord because we are weak in ourselves. Two outstanding weaknesses are fear and pride.

Beginning with God's word to Abraham (Gen. 15:1: "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward") and ending with the exalted Christ's word to John (Rev. 1:17, "Fear not, I am the first and the last"), Scripture repeatedly commands us not to fear. We youth often *are* afraid. Sometimes we are afraid of God; having a very tender conscience and an acute awareness of the magnitude of our sin against His Most High Majesty, we are afraid of being abandoned by Him and perishing in hell. We are afraid of the future and all the unknowns regarding dating, marriage, a family, single life, our personal health, a career, and the trajectory of the nation in which we live. We are afraid of failure—failure that will cause unhealthy self-loathing and potentially subject us to ridicule. We are afraid of losing loved ones—a parent or sibling. We are afraid of being an outcast who is not able to fit in or find acceptance with peers. We are afraid of change, in us personally or in our life circumstances. We

are afraid of hard situations, and will always choose to flee them rather than face them. We are afraid of perceived imperfections in our bodies or personalities and how we can overcome them. We are afraid of rejection at work or in college because of our identity in Christ. We are afraid of commitment in a relationship. We are afraid of criticism. Perhaps one even falls into sin—grievous, public sin—and is so ashamed to show his face that he thinks it might be better to die. Likely, we are most afraid of what Jesus calls "great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). Satan plays on these fears. Him we also fear. The Captain sees the troubled heart of the trembling soldier, and orders, "Be strong in the Lord!"

We are also proud, inclined to go forth relying upon our own strength. Falls have their origin in pride (Prov. 16:18, I Tim. 3:6). Noah drank too much and undressed; Judah spotted a prostitute and went in unto her; David lay with another man's wife; Jeremiah wished he were never born; and Peter said of His Savior, "I don't know Him." What all these men had in common was that they went to battle strong in themselves, ignoring the marching orders of their Captain. That's pride. That's self-reliance. Should we stumble and fall into "little" sins all through the day, it is because we are walking without the Lord.

Consider pride only as it is manifested in our use of the tongue in communication. When we go through a day proudly relying upon our own strength, then that little tongue will be activated by the flesh and corrupt communication will pour out of our mouths. We will have a big mouth to mother, slam the door, and get into the car in a huff. On the way to school or work we will momentarily pause our singing of one of the top 10 hits of Satan's billboard in order to shout an obscenity at the slowpoke in front of us who forced us to sit through another light cycle at the intersection. Using our phones, we will take to social media and give others a little piece of our mind, and because there is no face-to-face contact with anyone in particular it doesn't really feel wrong to speak arrogantly, crudely, or cruelly like a Belial. We will be presented with a knotty doctrinal or practical problem requiring our response and, instead of taking time to contemplate and pray, we will jump right into the fray with a swift tongue and utter all our mind. Having that little member that is a world of iniquity, we cannot go off to battle in our

own strength for we will certainly not love God and others with our speech but fall into tongue sins over and over again. The Captain sees His haughty soldier and charges, “Be strong in the Lord! Go forth in *His* service and strong in *His* might, to conquer all evil and stand for the right!”

A Mighty Power

What mighty power belongs to Jesus Christ our Captain and Lord!

He is God the Son. We could not create one grain of sand, but by Him the entire vast universe and all the creatures in it came into existence out of nothing. We would die getting too close to the door of the burning fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, but the Son of God walked in the midst of it.

We stand before the devil as helpless as a newborn chick before a hunting serpent, but the Lord bruised the serpent Satan’s head. Men can crush the heads of big snakes, but Satan’s? How do you do that? Where is he? And how do you get him exposed? And what weapon inflicts the deadly blow? To bruise the head of Satan you must take away his right to hold souls captive in sin. How do you do that? God in His just judgment against the sin of man gave Satan the legal right to exercise dominion over man’s soul in sin. Therefore, in order to crush Satan you would have to take away his right by being in one person a perfectly righteous man and very God, so that you could sustain in body and soul the infinite wrath of God against sin and render to God the perfect obedience His law requires. If you could do that, you would satisfy the justice of God and God would take away Satan’s right to exercise dominion in sin. Jesus did that. At the cross Jesus crushed the head of Satan and made an open show of all his demons, triumphing over them.

We stand numbly at a casket, helplessly gazing at the

cold, pale corpse, remembering what was and what by our power shall never again be; but Jesus commands the dead to rise again. We cannot control all the happenings around us, or even in us for one minute, but Jesus is now seated at God’s right hand in heavenly places far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, so that all things in the universe—including His enemies—are in His hand and cannot so much as move apart from His will.

*The Captain sees His
haughty soldier and charges, “Be
strong in the Lord!
Go forth in His service
and strong in His might,
to conquer all evil
and stand for the right!”*

As little paper castles before hurricane-force winds, so are the strongholds of sin in a man’s heart before the gracious, rushing mighty power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus shed forth. In His return to judge, the Captain will show all men His power and might, especially when He destroys that Wicked One with the brightness of His coming. What tremendous, infinite power is the power of our Lord’s might!

All of our strength—strength to be courageous and to be humble—is found

in Him as the Captain of our salvation. The strength of great battle generals like Sisera or Rabshakeh, Alexander or Napoleon, is in their troops. The opposite is true in the armed forces of the covenant. The strength of every man, woman, and child in the army of Jesus Christ is found in Christ alone. Hosts do not make the Lord strong; He makes them strong.

A Strong Soldier

The marching orders given to us naturally fearful and proud soldiers are, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” Only “in the Lord” can we be strong. No unbeliever can follow the marching orders of Jesus and be strong, for that unbeliever is not “in the Lord.” Even as a branch has access to all the life of the tree, so we sinners have been graciously given access to the marvelous power of the Lord Jesus Christ when we were

sovereignly grafted into Him and made believers. This is astonishing. As we live in the Lord, we have access to the power by which heaven and earth were made, demons were cast out, and the dead were raised. No wonder the apostle once said, “I can do *all things* through Christ who strengtheneth me!” We do not always consciously live in the Lord. We are weak, and choose to live out of the fear and pride of our flesh. But we hear our Captain, “Be strong in the Lord!” and His word in the holy gospel is the effectual power that works in us greater exercises of faith by the operations of the Holy Spirit.

First, to be a mighty soldier who is strong in the Lord is to exercise our faith by believing that the Lord *is* powerful. This is first. Faith looks at Christ. Look away from self and danger. Look at Christ. If you are living in fear or pride right now, your eye of faith is not looking at Christ. See *Him* and the power of *His* might!


Second, to be a mighty soldier who is strong in the Lord is to believe that the Lord’s almighty power is *ours*. We do not become the Lord, but His power *does* operate in us. Do you believe that? If you are overwhelmed by fear right now, it may be because you are not believing that Jesus is mighty; or, you are not believing that His might is *yours*. Believe! His strength is yours! Why are we so fearful in the battle when the mighty Lord is on our side? Why are we so proud when none of our strength is our own but the Lord’s?

Third, to be strong in the Lord is to exercise our faith each day by consciously renouncing our own strength and relying upon the Lord. Here is where putting on the whole armor of God comes in (Eph. 6:10-18), and an explanation of that armor is forthcoming. We can already mention something very basic. We need our Bible (and other supplemental devotional readings) and prayer. The U.S. Department of Defense is always designing new and better weaponry, but not our Captain. The old Bible and prayer will never be replaced as long as the battle rages. If you were hoping for something new—something with easier, quicker results, you will not find it, and you are already losing the battle on account of that misguided hope. As we begin our day in prayerful contemplation of the Word and its exposing of our weaknesses and extolling of the Lord’s gracious powers, the Lord will make us strong. Having meaningful personal devotions will not guarantee that you will not fall into fear or pride, but *not*

having meaningful personal devotions *will* guarantee that you *will* fall into fear or pride. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Marching to the orders of our Captain, we are strong soldiers. Unconquerable! When we go into the furnace of persecution, we do valiantly. When we have fallen grievously, even publicly—as Davids and Peters sometimes do—we will confidently plead, as the unclean leper did, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean! Thou canst pardon mine iniquity! Remove my shame! Wash me whiter than snow!” When we are at work, at school, at church, at home, or out and about with our tongues and phones, we are careful and controlled, and more than conquerors through Him that loved us, so that no word we speak or type will bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

You do not doubt this, do you? You do not doubt that you, believing soldier, really *are* strong in the Lord, saying, “I’ve been struggling with a certain fear, or my pride, or my tongue, or a certain bosom sin, or a troubling situation for a long time, pleading to God for help. If the believer has such tremendous strength in the Lord, why am I still struggling?” Maybe the Lord has given you a strength you are failing to see because you are looking in the wrong place? Maybe God has given you greater power of prayer so that you beseech Him for deliverance with greater earnestness than before. That is strength. Without the Lord’s mighty power your sinful flesh would have blown out the flickering light of the prayer of your soul. The soldier who pleads hardest is strongest. Maybe the Lord has given you greater humility in your struggles, and greater hatred for your bosom sins. That is strength. You still struggle, but you are abased. That is strength. You identify as a poor sinner, chief of them all. That is strength. The Lord’s strength is made perfect in weakness, so, dear soldier, gladly glory in your infirmities so that the power of Christ may rest upon you.

Believing soldier, you are strong. Go forth in the Lord’s service and strong in His might; and take the whole armor of God to conquer all evil and stand for the right. 

Structure and Function

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:16

Scripture is the ultimate guide for believers to many marvelous aspects of creation, allowing them to contemplate God's wisdom, power, creativeness, and majesty. God is to be thanked for teaching us how to give Him praise through thoughtful meditation on His creation. Today, our ability to observe the Creator's handiwork has been providentially expanded many fold compared to preceding generations. Our ability to observe the heavens reaches so much farther than David's in Psalm 19. Likewise, our knowledge of the wide variety of the creatures of the deep is broader than the author of Psalm 104 could know. Because we have been given this insight, we are obligated to take a moment to contemplate how they reflect the Creator's praiseworthiness. So let us do that with just a few examples. In our expanded capacity to do so, we would be foolish not to.

An argument can be made that advances in man's understanding of microscopic and sub-microscopic particles in cells dwarf the advances of any other scientific field. In particular, the discovery of the mechanisms by which biological molecules work to support life has risen exponentially over the past two or three generations. We have been given the ability to know and contemplate entire categories of biology never before accessible to us. Out of these new categories of knowledge a principle has emerged that is foundational for all aspects of biology: the *structure-function relationship*. While it has long been appreciated that an organism's unique structural

characteristics are well suited for its various functions (the wings and webbed feet of ducks provide them capable mobility in both air and water), structure-function relationships at the molecular level are so intricate that minute changes in the structure of a single molecule can cause a duck to have no wings or non-webbed feet. Scripture also speaks of a structure-function relationship in the verse quoted at the heading of this article. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul informs us that human bodies and the body of Christ are both constructed or structured to make possible their designated ends: the human body's wide range of motion is possible because of its structure, while the body of Christ is structured to edify itself in love so that it reaches healthy maturity.

So fundamental is the concept of structure-function relationships to biology that it is woven into the very fabric of every cell biology and biochemistry course, from the introductory to the graduate levels. Students who are paying attention will soon realize that if they spend time learning how to understand molecular structures, then understanding and even predicting molecular functions will easily follow. In this context, structure simply means shape or architecture. Every molecule has a specific shape that is a direct result of the number and type of atoms from which it is made. For example, water molecules have a specific shape due to the arrangement of the one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms that form the molecule (water happens to have a boomerang-like shape). Along with a specific shape, additional physical characteristics are included in the concept of structure. Following our example, the oxygen atom in a water molecule has a partial negative charge while the two hydrogens have partial positive charges. Therefore, contained within the structure of a water molecule is a boomerang-like shape with both partial positive and negative charges. Water has myriad functions in biology, from serving as the most common solvent to providing the raw material for photosynthesis, and each function is a direct result

Dr. Lanning is a cellular and molecular biologist and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, California.

of the structure that we just reviewed.¹ Hopefully, this example clearly demonstrates the concept of structure-function relationships: the physical shape and associated characteristics of each molecule and component in a cell are directly responsible for and govern the functions of that molecule or component.

Structure-function relationships at the molecular and cellular level are so sophisticated and critical for life that it is impossible not to stop and wonder as one learns about and studies them. It is my experience that when students themselves begin to recognize molecular structure-function relationships, their excitement for biology is the greatest. When delving into some of the more complex structure-function relationships, students will quite literally be left speechless as they contemplate how the remarkably complicated molecules that they are studying work in concert with other molecules to carry out a biological function. And further, that these molecules have to be *just so* in order for them to function properly, and therefore, for cellular life to exist. Enthusiastic discussions often follow these quiet moments of wonder as students begin to appreciate more fully the relationships.

Today, the Creator has providentially allowed us to know and understand many of the most precise and critical structure-function relationships that He uses to maintain life. As we contemplate a few of these, links to images or videos will be provided in the footnotes. An effective way to meditate on something for the purpose of praising the Creator is actually to behold and carefully observe it (Job 37:14-18). Interested readers are encouraged to do this through the provided links.²

Cell Replication

Cell replication is necessary for living organisms to grow (from fertilization to a fully-grown adult, humans transition from a single cell to trillions of cells), to heal wounds, and to maintain healthy tissues. In order for cells to replicate, they must first duplicate all of their

genetic material and then equally divide that genetic material into two new cells. Genetic material comes in the form of the molecule, DNA, and in humans each cell that will divide contains 46 large DNA molecules called chromosomes. A long and complex series of structure-function relationships is utilized to duplicate each of these 46 chromosomes, and then to attach each chromosome to its duplicated partner. Next, long tendril-like molecules called microtubules capture and corral the joined, duplicated chromosomes into the very center of the cell, lining them up with one set of 46 chromosomes facing one end of the cell and the other set facing the other end. Finally, the microtubules pull each set of 46 chromosomes to opposite ends of the cell, and the cell splits down the middle, forming two new cells, each with exactly the correct number of chromosomes. Throughout all of this, biological molecules called proteins are engaging in extremely specific interactions based on their unique structures to coordinate each step of the process. If a cell does not perfectly select one set of 46 chromosomes for each cell, the replicated cells will either self-destruct or not function properly. Life would not exist without proper cell replication, and this entire complex process is governed by dozens of structure-function relationships.³

Cell Transportation

Cells are constantly transporting items from one region to another, and while simple diffusion and random motion are responsible for a portion of this transport, the Creator has developed a much more regulated method for the transport of many cellular items. This method of transport utilizes molecular complexes called motor proteins and molecular tracks. Dozens of rigid tracks extend through the three-dimensional space of each cell, and it is on these tracks that motor proteins carry their cargo. Motor proteins typically consist of two, long stalk-like structures twisted around each other, each with bulging ends. One end is perfectly suited to bind a particular cargo and the other end is perfectly suited to bind the tracks extending through the cell. Additionally, the end of the motor protein attached to the track can bind and

¹ For a more thorough and edifying presentation of the structure and functions of water, see Mr. Joel Minderhoud's article in the May 1, 2014 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

² A model video demonstrating the breathtaking variety of structures and functions in cells can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_zD3NxSsD8. This video is notable in that most of the structures depicted are remarkably accurate representations of the molecules that they depict.

³ This process in real cells can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7m3WfzgZdI>. The red components are chromosomes and the green components are microtubules. Notice how the cell "struggles" to get the last chromosome to line up correctly.

utilize a molecule that is the cellular form of energy. By harnessing this molecular energy, this end of the motor protein can literally take steps along the cellular tracks, dragging its cargo along with it. The odd structure of these motor proteins in conjunction with the structures of the cellular tracks and energy molecules combine to carry out the critically important function of cellular transport.⁴

Protein Synthesis

One of the most fascinating structure-function relationships is that of the ribosome. It is commonly known that hereditary information is stored in the molecule, DNA⁵, and that this information storage is hugely important for essentially all aspects of biology. However, storing hereditary information alone is not helpful for biology. This information must be “read,” processed, and utilized for biological processes to occur. The hereditary information in DNA is used to construct proteins, and it is proteins that are responsible for virtually all biological actions. This is why hereditary information in DNA is so important: DNA stores the information for constructing proteins. The ribosome is the ultimate molecular complex that is able to decipher hereditary information and produce proteins. Prior to the action of the ribosome, another cellular process transcribes the hereditary information in DNA molecules into a related molecule called mRNA. mRNA, which resembles a molecular string, then carries the hereditary information to the ribosome. When an mRNA molecule comes into contact with a ribosome, the ribosome begins scanning the structure of the mRNA molecule for the information that it contains.

It is here that the structure-function relationship is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated. Hereditary information is actually encoded in the very structure of mRNA molecules, and the structure of the mRNA molecule was constructed directly based on the shape of the preceding DNA molecule. Therefore, the Creator has designed ribosomes so that they deftly assess the structure of an mRNA molecule (information), and from

surveying that structure, they construct a protein molecule.⁶ This is the process that gives each living creature its unique set of heritable characteristics. Subtle changes to the structure of hereditary molecules (DNA and mRNA) can result in ribosomes constructing a protein with a subtly different shape. Small changes in protein shapes can have large effects on the protein’s function. In fact, multiple devastating genetic diseases arise due to miniscule changes in DNA structure.

Cellular Respiration

When performing their various functions, cells use a lot of energy. This cellular energy is harvested from various molecules, with carbohydrates being the most commonly used. Energy present in carbohydrates (and any other energy-carrying molecule) exists precisely because of the particular structure of that molecule. Therefore, the structure of a molecule *is* energy. However, cells cannot just grab a carbohydrate and use its energy. The energy stored in carbohydrates is in a configuration (structure) that is not directly available to cells. Cells must first transform the energy in carbohydrates into a usable form (structure). The processes of cellular respiration take the molecular energy in carbohydrates (and other molecules) and transform it into a different energy storage molecule called ATP. While structure-function relationships govern all aspects of cellular respiration, two structures at the end of these processes stand out.

The first is a compartment or space within a larger structure called the mitochondrion. Mitochondria (plural) are large complexes where much of our metabolism takes place. Mitochondria are three-dimensional objects with two layers, analogous to one elongated balloon inside another elongated balloon, with a small space between these two layers. When carbohydrates are metabolized, large amounts of hydrogen ions accumulate in the space between these two layers. The accumulation of hydrogen ions in this space is similar to the accumulation of water behind a hydroelectric dam. Just as the water behind the dam can be forced to flow through hydroelectric generators to create electricity, so the hydrogen ions are forced through the second notable structure: a molecular motor. This molecular motor in mitochondria actu-


⁴ A model video of motor proteins can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-uuk4Pr2i8>.

⁵ DNA was definitively proved to be the molecule of heredity in 1953.

⁶ A model video of this process can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG7uCskUOrA>.

ally *looks* like a motor, as it has a large central rotor and a drive shaft in combination with other “machine” parts. As hydrogen ions flow through the center of this motor, the rotor and drive shaft spin, and in doing so produce the molecule ATP, which contains energy in a form that cells can use.⁷

⁷ A model video of the amazing structures in mitochondria can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrS2uROUjK4>. The motor process can be viewed here: <http://www.discovery.org/multimedia/video/2013/01/atp-synthase-the-power-plant-of-the-cell/>. Please excuse the gratuitous reference to intelligent design at the end of the video.

The molecular and cellular structure-function relationship is not a human invention. These intricate relationships were conceived and brought forth by the Most High, who excels in wisdom and knowledge far surpassing any human imagination. Contemplate the orchestration of cell replication. Marvel at the mechanism of cell transportation. Stand in awe at the actions of the ribosome. Issue forth praise for the creativity exhibited in the components of cellular respiration. In all of these creatures, the wisdom, power, and glory of the Creator are on display. Let us give Him due praise for this. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Trivia Question

Each Thursday, recently, Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn, our missionaries to the Philippines, are involved in a Tagalog refresher course. When I asked Rev. Kleyn if there are mangoes on the large tree on the west side of his house he replied: “Opo, may mga mangga sa puno na ito. Pero, kaunti lang.” What do you think, mangoes or no? Answer later in this column.

God Sent a Storm!

The God who controls all nature sent a driving windstorm to the Grand Rapids, MI area on July 6 and 7. Winds were measured up to 90 mph and struck down trees and electrical poles leaving an estimated 150,000 residents initially without power. Once again the power of God is shown to all, as we confess even the winds and the waves obey Him! We are comforted to be held in His almighty hand!

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

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada was excited to hold an evangelism seminar this summer on Saturday, July 29 at the church. The seminar consisted of two lectures on our calling to evangelize, both to individuals and to the community as a whole. The speakers were Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, Ballymena, Northern Ireland, and Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor of Heritage Protestant Reformed Church of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The first lecture began at 10:00 A.M., after which a lunch was provided. The second lecture began at 1:30 P.M., following which dessert and coffee were served.

Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD held their annual Evangelism Workshop on July 12. Attendees were asked to read the pamphlet “A Defense of Calvinism as the Gospel” in preparation for the event. Discussion that night centered on the pamphlet. The monthly congregational meal was held that night in conjunction with the workshop.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. M. McGeown, pastor in the Limerick Reformed Fellowship of the Republic of Ireland presented the lecture “Christian Humility” in the Margam Community Center on July 6.

Synod 2017 approved establishing a sister-church relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines! We give thanks to God for the mutual love that our denominations have for the truth of God as confessed in our churches. We look forward to the rich blessings we will enjoy in our mutual encouragement and oversight of each other.

Minister Activities

From the trio of Revs. R. Kleyn, J. Mahtani, and J. Marcus the congregation at First PRC of Holland, MI voted on June 18 to call Rev. R. Kleyn to be their next pastor. Rev. Kleyn declined this call on July 16.

Synod 2017 voted to call Rev. Douglas Kuiper to be professor in our seminary as Prof. R. Dykstra works his way into retirement in the next few years. Rev. Andy Lan-

ning was selected as the alternate should Rev. Kuiper decline. We thank God for able men to fill this important roll. We learned on July 2 that Rev. Kuiper had accepted this call. Interestingly, the man whom he was selected to replace is also the man under whom Rev. Kuiper completed his seminary internship in the PRC of Doon, IA in 1994. Rev. Kuiper planned to preach his farewell sermon August 13. Edgerton, MN PRC's Council subsequently formed the trio of Rev. Brian Huizinga along with Candidates Matthew DeBoer and Justin Smidstra. On July 23, Cand. M. DeBoer received this call.

The congregation in Byron Center, MI PRC voted on July 2 from the trio of Revs. S. Key, R. Kleyn, and A. Spriensma, and chose Rev. Spriensma (her pastor) to receive the call to be home missionary.

On June 25 Rev. Heath Bleyenberg was led of the Lord to decline the call to be the third missionary to the Philippines. On July 11 Doon's Council formed a new trio consisting of Revs. A. Brummel, R. Smit, and C. Spronk. The congregation of Doon called on July 24, with Rev. Spronk receiving the call.

Rev. Nathan Decker declined the two calls extended to him from

Zion PRC and from Southwest PRC, both in Michigan.

Southwest PRC announced the new trio of Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, along with Candidates Joe Holstege and Justin Smidstra, with Cand. Smidstra receiving the call on July 16.

Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada formed a new trio of Revs. A. Brummel, E. Guichelaar, and N. Langerak. On July 2 Rev. Brummel received this call; on July 23 he declined it.

From her new trio of Revs. B. Huizinga, A. Lanning, and Candidate Joe Holstege, Zion PRC called Cand. J. Holstege on July 23.

We are thankful for the sovereign direction of our heavenly Father in all of these activities.

Young Adult Activities

Plan now to attend a Young Adult's Retreat to be held July 2-5, 2018 in California! More details will be coming.

The Edmonton Young Adults annual church hike took place on Saturday, July 15. The group hiked the fairly challenging Two O'Clock Ridge Trail, the trailhead of which is along the David Thompson Highway, about 59 km west of Nordegg. Hopefully, someone remembered the bear spray!

Senior Activities


Senior Retreat: Register now!! At beautiful Gull Lake Ministries, September 26-29. Theme: "Magnifying Christ in Life and Death" (Phil. 1:20, 21). Speakers: Rev. G. Eriks, Prof. D. Engelsma, Rev. J. Slopsema. Discussion groups and many activities planned. See www.hollandgrandvilleseniorretreat2017.com.

Mission Activities

Seminarian Matt Kortus, having completed his second year of seminary, and his wife Sarah, are spending about eight weeks of their summer in the Philippines, where Matt is involved in a brief summer internship with Rev. D. Holstege and Rev. D. Kleyn. Perhaps a carabao ride too?

Trivia Answer

The English translation of Rev. Kleyn's Tagalog reply to my question regarding mangoes on his tree is this: "Yes, there are mangoes on that tree. But only a few." Now you know. I'm sticking to English.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC extend Christian sympathy to Carol Huizinga in the death of her brother,
REUBEN KAPTEIN.

May she find comfort in the words of II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. K. Koole, Pres.
Herman DeVries, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of First PRC of Holland extend our Christian sympathy to Ruth Kaptein and her children in the death of

REUBEN KAPTEIN

on June 22, 2017. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

Wesley Koops, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mrs. Alice Dykshorn and her family in the death of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather,

MR. JOHN DYKSHORN.

May they be comforted in these words from John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, President
William DeJong, Clerk

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Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 14, 2017.

Gary Boverhof
Stated Clerk

Men, women, young people—you are all cordially
invited to attend the

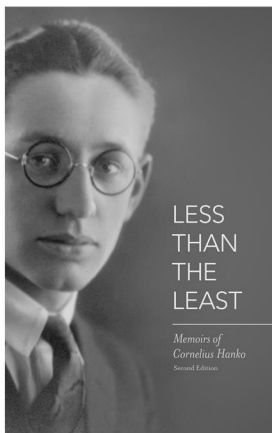
Reformed Free Publishing Association's **ANNUAL MEETING**

Prof. David J. Engelsma will speak on:

"After 500 Years:
What about James on Justification?"

September 28, 2017 at 7:30pm
Southwest Protestant Reformed Church

(This meeting provides the opportunity for men to join the Association.)



Less Than the Least: Memoirs of Cornelius Hanks

Less Than the Least is the memoirs of Rev. Cornelius Hanks' long, fruitful life of nearly a century (1907–2005). He lived through two world wars, the Great Depression, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the rise and fall of communism, and the advent of the space age, and spanned the terms of eighteen US presidents, from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush.

Son of Dutch immigrants to America, Rev. Hanks served six pastorates in five states, most notably in First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1948–1964), along with Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. Hubert De Wolf. Rev. Hanks poignantly describes the grief caused in the PRC by De Wolf's heresy and schism (1953).

More than this, *Less Than the Least* follows Rev. Hanks from his childhood, school days, and seminary training, all the way to his retirement (1977) and beyond.

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FRIDAY

4:00PM What was the Reformation?

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

7:00PM The Reformation's Return to Sola Scriptura

Rev. David Torlach

8:15PM The Reformation's Restoration of the Office of Believer

Prof. Barrett Gritters

SATURDAY

8:30AM The Reformation's Recovery of Right Worship

Rev. Martyn McGeown

10:00AM The Reformation's Response to the 'Radical Reformation'

Prof. Russell Dykstra

11:15AM The Reformation's Progress in the Lowlands

Rev. Steven Key

Join us at Faith Protestant Reformed Church

Visit our website and listen live at www.500thReformation.com

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Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hull, IA, on Wednesday, September 27, 2017, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 28, 2017. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hull's consistory.

Rev. J. Marcus,
Acting Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

August 2017

Rev. Carl Haak

Date

August 6 "A Beautiful Example of Fearless Submission"
August 13 "Homeward Bound"
August 20 "God's Gift of the Family"
August 27 "Christian Education Is Covenant Education"

Topic

Text

I Peter 3:5, 6
II Corinthians 5:1
Psalm 68:6
Isaiah 38:19