

# The Standard Bearer

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## All working for good

Rev. Michael DeVries

## Why catechism?

The covenant goals of catechism

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## Relating good works and justification

Prof. Brian Huizinga

## The decree of the covenant and missions

Rev. Daniel Holstege

## News from the seminary—Fall 2020

Prof. Ronald Cammenga



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#### Editorial office

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

#### Business office

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

#### Church news editor

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

#### United Kingdom office

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

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## Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# All working for good

**And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.**

**Romans 8:28**

The child of God experiences countless times of joy and gladness over the course of his life. But no one can dispute the fact that our earthly pathway is also beset with many obstacles and dangers. There are many hardships, many afflictions, many disappointments, many sorrows and heavy burdens to bear. And always, to one extent or another, there is the hatred and persecution of the ungodly. The circumstances of life can appear so dark, so uncertain, so chaotic, as they do at this time. The trials and tribulations of this present time can seem overwhelming.

This certainly had been the experience of the Roman Christians as well. They had suffered through adversity and persecution, and more was to come. Many were imprisoned, and some would be thrown to wild beasts, crucified, or burned as human torches.

In light of the suffering of God's people, Romans 8 is a song of hope and of victory. For God's children who experience the difficulties and sufferings of this present time, this chapter provides comfort and assurance. We are given to rejoice in the wonder of our salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (v. 14). As children of God, they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. The inheritance will be eternal glory.

But the apostle emphasizes that God's people will experience suffering in this present time. As joint-heirs with Christ, they suffer with Him. But the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. And the sufferings and afflictions of the children of God also point to that final glory.

In this beloved verse, the apostle Paul declares that all things not only point to our future glory, but also actually work together toward that goal. All things—adversity, affliction, even death—work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

according to His purpose! "We know" this, Paul exclaims. What a blessed assurance!

The apostle states that all things work together "for good." Here the word "good" refers to that which is useful or salutary, something profitable. All things work for something that is beneficial or advantageous to them who love God. All things are working together toward an end that is good, toward a beneficial goal. For those who love God, the goal implied can be nothing else than God's glory in the final salvation of His people. The context here indicates that all things are pointing toward that goal of the final salvation of the children of God. Now Paul emphasizes that, in addition, all things work together for this final glory of God's children.

We must understand this "all things" in an all-comprehensive sense. Comprehended in this are things both great and small. Included are the great and important events of life and history: wars, storms, and calamities such as the present pandemic. But also the small, seemingly insignificant things of life are included: the day-to-day activities in our lives. It includes the angels and principalities and powers of heaven; the whole earthly creation—all the creatures thereof, all its history and development—works for the salvation of believers. Even all that is evil is included: the devil and his hosts, wicked men, and wicked powers. Good things, such as peace, health, prosperity, and life are included. But also war, sickness, adversity, and death work for good.

The emphasis here falls especially upon things that we would consider evil or bad. Of course, anyone would agree that good things work together for good. Even the ungodly would say that peace, health, prosperity, and life work together for their good. Man's reasoning easily comes to that conclusion. For us, too, in times of health and prosperity it is not hard to say, "The Lord is good."

But when evil, difficult things come upon us, it sometimes can appear to us that all things are against us. When we lose our job and experience financial hardship, when we lose our health and experience deep suffering

and affliction, when we are overwhelmed by sorrow as we see the power of death in our life, we so easily despair. We cry with Asaph, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will he be favorable no more?” (Ps. 77:7)

Jacob experienced that despair when he left the standpoint of faith and judged things in the light of reason and experience. His sons had returned to him from the land of Egypt where they had gone for corn. They told their father that, in addition to Joseph, now Simeon was also gone, and presently they must take Benjamin back to Egypt with them. Then Jacob cried out, “Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36).

Considering the difficult lives of the believers in Rome, we can say further that Paul has especially in mind suffering for Christ’s sake when he speaks of “all things.” These Christians would experience severe persecution at the hands of the Roman emperors. But Paul assures them that the fierce persecution and their horrible sufferings work for their good, for their final salvation and glory.

For all things “work together” for good. This implies activity. This is work in unison, in harmony. They work together for a common end—the salvation and glory of the elect of God. Though, from our perspective, things seem to work against each other; though we see conflict both in the world and in the church, God sovereignly causes all things to work together for good! Consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, all things work together for good. The example of Joseph is clear. The sons of Jacob certainly intended evil when they sold their brother Joseph to the Ishmaelites. But even through this evil deed, God sovereignly governed their every intention. As Joseph later explains to his brothers, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

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But what then is the basis for this amazing assurance? We read, “...to them who are the called *according to his purpose*.” God’s purpose is His eternal counsel, His decree, His plan. It includes all things. Nothing escapes the determination of God’s purpose. It includes the hairs of our head and the sparrow that falls from the house-top, but also the rational, moral deeds of men and angels. God, according to His purpose, directs all things unto the goal of His glory in the salvation and final glory of His people in Christ.

Consider what this means. This means that our assurance stands unshakably founded upon God’s counsel.

God’s purpose is sovereignly free. He determined all things as He pleased. God’s purpose is unchangeable. Man frequently changes his mind and alters his course. But God declares, “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). God’s purpose is efficacious. Nothing can resist or hinder its execution. God’s purpose is perfectly wise and good. God has determined the best means for attaining His glory.

This means that our assurance finds its heart in Christ Jesus! Christ was ordained to be the firstborn among many brethren (v. 29). All things were created with a view to Him and to His final glory and victory. In Christ all things have their reason and their unity. According to Ephesians 1:10, God’s purpose was “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ.”

But even more *we* are included in God’s purpose as those who are called: “to them who are the called according to his purpose.” This calling is God’s act in Christ by which He translates us irresistibly out of the darkness of sin and death into His marvelous light. This calling is an act of God’s grace wrought by His Spirit. It is a calling unto salvation that comes through the preaching of the gospel. But though the preaching is general and reaches all who hear, this calling of God through that preaching is particular, coming only to the elect. That is plain, for the apostle refers to “them who are the called *according to his purpose*.”

Through this efficacious calling of God we receive spiritual enlightenment—eyes that see, ears that hear, a mind that understands spiritual things. Recognizing our sin and misery, fleeing to the cross, we receive by faith all the blessings of salvation. We see that we belong unto our faithful Savior. And even in the midst of suffering and adversity we see that all things are subservient unto our salvation. Christ assures us of everlasting life and glory, for nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

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Is not that your confession? Paul explains, “We know!” We, with all the saints, must confess, “We know that all things work together for good.” This is the knowledge of a true and living faith, which is the gift of God. Not all men receive this assurance. There is no assurance for the wicked. The wicked can only rightly say, “All things work together for evil to me.” God sovereignly uses all things to work unto the condemnation of the wicked reprobate (Ps. 73:18).

But all things work together for good “to them that *love* God.” True love is not a mere emotional attraction

or a sentimental feeling. True love is a spiritual relationship that unites, which rejoices and finds pleasure in the fellowship of another (Col. 3:14). All true love is essentially God's love. We love Him because He first loved us. He fills us with the Spirit of our exalted Lord. As those who are the called according to His purpose, we are enabled to love God.

Thus, as those who love God, we confess that all things work together for our good. By reason and experience we are often inclined to cry with Jacob, "All these things are against me!" It is not easy, especially in these unsettled times. It is so hard to see why—why this burden of affliction or sorrow or adversity? And the how—how does this work for good? Let us not

forget that the Lord's ways are far higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (Is. 55:8, 9). How little we understand of God's wondrous works and ways! Yet our heavenly Father is doing a perfect work also in our lives.

But even now, by faith, *we know* that all things work for our good! Even in the midst of suffering and adversity, we are confident that all things are for us. We know that neither tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword is able to separate us from the love of Christ. We confess that in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!

Blessed assurance! Thanks be to God!

## Editors' notes

# Editor's notes for the new volume year

With heartfelt gratitude to God, we begin the ninety-seventh year of the *Standard Bearer*. It should be obvious that in order for the *SB* to find its way into your mailbox twenty-one times in the next year, many people put in significant effort. That starts with some forty men and women who have committed to write anywhere from three to twenty articles in the next year.<sup>1</sup> Behind the scenes, managing editor Charles Terpstra sets the schedule for the writers (and reminds them when theirs are due), edits every contribution submitted, and along with the editors, proofreads every issue. Then there is our efficient, capable, and diligent typesetter, Mrs. Don (Judi) Doezeema. You would be amazed at how many years she has devoted to this labor for the kingdom, and at how thorough she still is. And finally, the support staff at the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) receives the copies from the printer, gets them into the mail, and posts them online besides. Let me take the opportunity to express sincere appreciation to all who have contributed to producing the *SB* in the last twelve months, and thank all the current writers for their willingness to write.

I am happy to report that few changes are planned for volume 97. One change is in "When Thou Sittest in Thine House." Mrs. Sue Looyenga asked to be released from her writing duties, and Mrs. Ron (Sherry) Koole agreed to take up the pen in her place. We thank Sue for her contribution and welcome Sherry to the staff. And,

after completing his lengthy and interesting exposition of Ecclesiastes, Rev. T. Miersma has requested a year off from writing. Rev. R. Hanko, no stranger to the *SB*, has agreed to write for "Search the Scriptures" beginning with an explanation of Jonah. We look forward to that. One additional staff writer we welcome is Rev. D. Noorman, who will be writing for "All Around Us."

A "departure" from the staff that is particularly painful to me is that of Mr. Don Doezeema, who asked to be released from writing in "Search the Scriptures." This is painful for me because my dear friend's decades of service to the *SB* come to an end. Into his writing Mr. D. poured his heart and soul. I am certain that no articles in the *SB* were more carefully or better written than his. He wrote and rewrote his articles countless times with the desire to express the truth of the Bible exactly the right way. His carefully crafted contributions will be missed. Again, we express our thanks for the years of selfless service for the cause of Christ and His church.

Trivia Answer: Mr. Perry Van Egdom writes the "Church News" column in all but the special Reformation issue—thus twenty issues. That is diligence. It is also time consuming. And, sad to say, after 6 years at this post, our News Editor is looking to be replaced. The editors are diligently seeking a replacement for this demanding rubric, but that special individual has yet to be found. Until that happens, Perry has agreed to continue writing. Stay tuned.

As most of our readers know, the RFPA handles the business side of the *SB*. They are so efficient that the editors can ignore most all of that stuff, and the *SB* goes

<sup>1</sup> Trivia question: Who writes twenty articles a year? Answer below.



out issue after issue with nary a hitch. But printing, promoting, and mailing the *SB* take money. The RFPA, carefully evaluating the financial side, has decided to change subscription rates. The regular subscription (domestic) rate will be increased to \$30 (less than \$1.50 per issue; consider what it costs to mail *one letter!*) and the foreign rate to \$42. The digital rate, on the other hand, is *decreasing* to \$20 per year.

But as low as that is, the *SB* is of no value if it is not read. The RFPA has started a promotion to get the magazine into more homes. A letter has been mailed to every PRC consistory with this offer: “We are once again going to offer PR Church consistories the opportunity to purchase a half-price subscription for any of

their members who do not currently subscribe to the *Standard Bearer*.” Let’s hope that the consistories jump on this immediately. By the end of the family visitation schedule, if not sooner, every home could be profiting spiritually from the *SB* twenty-one times a year. That is exciting!

Finally, we covet your prayers on behalf of the *Standard Bearer*. This magazine was started in 1924 in order to promote the Reformed truth over against the lie in all its manifold forms. This remains the commitment of every writer and all involved in producing each issue. By God’s grace alone, we continue the work. To God alone be the glory.



## Editorial

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

# Why catechism? The covenant goals of catechism

It is October, now, and for most of our churches the season of catechism instruction is underway. In the Reformed tradition, the churches’ children are catechized in all the truths of Scripture, both its history and doctrine. This tradition holds catechism as a biblical demand, a demand so important that if parents do not send their children, the parents become objects of church discipline. But our parents do send their children, and with gladness. From age six until their late teens, for 25 or 30 weeks per year, for an hour each week, the covenant children come to church to have the minister or elder teach the doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures.

How thankful we may be for this tradition!

As with all traditions, the risk is that we take catechism for granted and the tradition becomes traditionalism and soon is lost. The people of God gradually forget the significant reasons for catechism and simply go through the motions because this is what they have always done. Soon, because the practice takes great effort, the practice is lost. That is how good traditions are lost: one generation believes, the next generation assumes, the third generation rejects. Except for the mercies of God, the tradition will be lost among us as it has been in many denominations.

One important way to maintain biblical traditions is to think deeply about them and even to *develop* our un-

derstanding of them. Traditions are rarely maintained unless they are developed. For example, our tradition of maintaining good Christian *schools* will not be maintained except we develop our understanding of them—as educators and boards think deeply, write carefully, and defend that tradition against threats. Likewise, our tradition of *catechism* instruction will not be maintained unless the church thinks deeply, writes carefully, and defends this tradition against many threats.

One area in which the church must think carefully regards the *aims* and *goals* of catechism. Good pedagogy has goals. Just as schoolteachers have aims and goals, so must catechism teachers. The PRCA has a fine *curriculum* for catechism. What are our *goals*?

That is, *why* catechism?

There is certainly consensus among Protestant Reformed membership that catechism aims at imparting to the children the knowledge of God. By teaching them Bible history for seven years and Reformed doctrine for at least four more, the church aims at indoctrinating the covenant youth, enabling them to understand clearly and speak fluently of the things of God. Without the knowledge of God, the people perish (Hos. 4:6).

But it is helpful to put our aims and goals in *covenant* language, in a covenantal framework. Failure to do this may leave the impression, among the youth as well, that the goal of catechism is simply to fill their

heads with enough knowledge that they are able to pass the confession of faith exam and probably debate Arminians or Baptists. Explaining our aims in terms of God's rich, fatherly relationship with His people enriches our understanding of and deepens our appreciation for this historic practice.

## Fellowship with Father

First, the covenant goal of catechism is to teach the children *fellowship with their covenant Father*. Covenant fellowship starts with learning Father's language, so that when He speaks they understand and can listen with spiritual joy as He describes to them His own being and wonderful name and marvelous works and rich promises. Then, having heard Father speak to them, they must learn to reply to God, praising Him. For public worship, the children learn to listen to God speak to them in sermons, then return praise to God in prayer and Psalm-singing. For family and private worship, the same applies. They learn to listen, quietly and reverently, when Father speaks in the Bible. They also learn, in their own child-like way, to speak to God. This is the life of covenant fellowship that catechism teaches.

Catechism teaches the children God's *name*, by instructing them in the great works of God in Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 47). At a certain age, the children wonder about this God who, their parents say, loves them. They ask about worship, just as the Israelite children asked their parents about the Passover, "What mean ye by this service?" And parents are in duty bound to teach them, also by sending them to catechism, all about God and His works: He created heaven and earth in six days of 24 hours, to show Himself to men. In Adam, we fell into sin and brought the world to ruin. God mercifully gathered, defended, and preserved a church in the Old Testament, who had to battle to survive in the wicked world. But God fulfilled His promises to send His Son to defeat our enemies and give life and restore fellowship with Him. He is coming again, and we will live and reign with Him forever!

Catechism instruction, insofar as it is the ministry of the Word of God, is God Himself telling His children, at their own level, who He is, what He has done, and of His great love for them in His own Son. Then, in their own simple, child-like way, they reply to God: "Oh Lord our Lord in all the earth how excellent Thy name!" These lambs confess, "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want...." Each one exclaims, "Halleluiah, praise Jehovah, O my soul Jehovah praise!" Catechism with a covenant-orientation teaches them such fellowship with God. It also engages them in it.

The difference between catechism instruction that does *not* have this covenantal goal and the instruction that *does* is something like the difference between learning a foreign language by studying a book of grammar or learning the language by living among the foreign people. In catechism, with this covenantal perspective, God's littlest children slowly and sometimes even unconsciously learn the Father's language and grow in their ability to communicate with Him.

If catechism, on the other hand, simply imparts Bible knowledge without this covenantal perspective, it may just create argumentative, pharisaical church members rather than members who love and delight in spiritual fellowship with God, praising Him for His grace to them, unworthy sinners. If the academic rigor of Monday night catechism (and catechism ought to have academic rigor!) as *instruction* is not accompanied by the *worshipful* atmosphere of covenant *fellowship*, the youth who confess their faith will not return to church the following Sunday with anything more than a critical spirit. But for God's mercies, they evolve into the kind of person who waits to assault the minister for explaining a theological concept with slightly different words than their favorite minister used. But catechism with covenantal goals both teaches children the *how* of worship and actually engages *in* worship. The minister leads the children into the august presence of God, reverently opening with humble prayer, reading Scripture with awe, explaining it in behalf of God Himself, and then explicitly asking them to respond to God's grace with song: "The dawn shall hear my song, Thy praise I will prolong, And where Thy people throng Thanksgiving bring" (Psalter #298, stanza 1). Catechism is worship. So much have we viewed catechism as worship that our practice has also included that the children bring an offering.

In the goodness of God, this means of grace creates gracious church members, whose love is a testimony of God's undeserved favor to them.

It is also worth saying that, for these reasons, the children's dress for catechism ought to be appropriate for coming into the presence of God. This is not asking for 'Sunday best,' but for tidy and respectful dress.

## Participation in the family meal

Second, catechism aims at preparing the covenant youth to participate in the church's covenant meal, the Lord's Supper. An important aspect of covenant fellowship for the *mature* Christian is partaking of communion, *mature* being the decisive word. Based on Scripture, the Reformed faith teaches that spiritual maturity is required for participating in the meal, and so a confession of faith precedes it.

Requiring spiritual maturity before partaking is controversial in some Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In these churches there is promotion of child-communion, which practice allows littlest children, ignorant of the faith, to participate in the Lord's supper. Although here is not the place to enter that debate, this is the place to assert that Reformed Christianity's prevailing view is that children must first make a confession of "the Reformed religion" before partaking (Church Order, Art. 61; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 30). Children must "discern the Lord's body," lest they eat and drink judgment upon themselves (I Cor. 11:29). "The ignorant...are not fit to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."<sup>1</sup> Catechism aims at preparing the children for this meal.

Without thorough catechism instruction, the 'gate in the fence' around the table remains closed to children. This Reformed tradition is so strong that, at the very *first* assembly of Reformed churches in the Lowlands, the Assembly at Wesel in 1568, the fathers asserted it:

It will...be fitting to do the examination of the children who have finished their catechism instruction in the presence of the whole church, according to the form of the shorter Catechism to which then should be added the most important parts of the larger Catechism and this should happen eight days before the day set for the Lord's Supper.

"Now children," the minister explains at appropriate occasions, "the church is preparing you for a very important step in your life—that you sit with the adults at the table of the Lord's Supper. You have seen your parents and the other adults partaking the bread and wine. And since not everyone may come to the table, the elders who guard the table need to hear from you that you are sorry for your sins with a godly sorrow, truly know and trust in Jesus Christ, that you want your faith in Him strengthened, and that you want to live more and more holy lives. They must know that you are not a hypocrite, and that you 'turn to God with a sincere heart' (Lord's Day 30). These catechism classes are going to help you to show the elders that you are ready to come to the Lord's table."

Of course, the minister does not call attention to this every week. Yet he speaks of it often enough that the children know the aims of their hard work of memorization and recitation. Thus, if someone asks them, "Why do you go to catechism?" they have some good answers.

There is more to say about the *covenant* goals of catechism instruction, next time.

I conclude here with a hearty exhortation to everyone involved in this holy exercise of catechism.

**Ministers:** Let us take heed to ourselves and to the doctrine (teaching!); let us continue in them; for in doing so we will both save ourselves and those that hear us (I Tim. 4:16).

**Elders:** Take the oversight of catechism. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (I Pet. 5:1, 2). Visit the classes often. And if you teach, aim at the goal of leading the flock to their Shepherd.

**Parents:** Yours is a high and holy calling. Without your help, catechism will not be the means of grace that it will be with your help. So remember the vows you took at the baptism of these children: We "promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine...to the utmost of [our] power." It takes a great deal of power—God-given strength—to do all that is called for in rearing covenant

**It takes a great deal of power—God-given strength—to do all that is called for in rearing covenant children. See that all of them—not just your youngest—are prepared, spiritually, having been taught by you the truths of God, our Father. And remember also God's promises: "I will be a God unto you, and to your children..." (cf. Acts 2:39).**

children. See that all of them—not just your youngest—are prepared, spiritually, having been taught by you the truths of God, our Father. And remember also God's promises: "I will be a God unto you, and to your children..." (cf. Acts 2:39).

**Children and young people:** By means of catechism, you are prepared to confess Jesus Christ and to stand among God's people, singing with spiritual understanding, "Redeemed by Thee, I stand secure In peace and happiness; And in the Church, among Thy saints, Jehovah will I bless" (Psalter #69, stanza 7).

<sup>1</sup> See the Westminster Standard's *Directory for the Public Worship of God*; also WCF 29:8. Both the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions' explanation of what is required to prepare for and to partake of the sacrament *exclude* untaught children from partaking.





## All around us

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

# J.I. Packer (1926-2020)

## Murder: What to expect when the government approves euthanasia

### J.I. Packer (1926-2020)

The obituary posted (July 17, 2020) on *Christianity Today's* website by Leland Ryken reports, “James Innell Packer, better known to many as J.I. Packer, was one of the most famous and influential evangelical leaders of our time. He died Friday, July 17, at age 93.”<sup>1</sup> Packer’s fame and influence makes his death worthy of notice in the *Standard Bearer*.

Packer is well known by most of us because of his writings. His books *Knowing God*, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* should be on your reading list, if you have not yet read them. He also wrote numerous articles and essays that are worth reading.

Packer is well known because he was a capable teacher. According to Ryken, Packer was “dedicated to the systematic teaching of doctrine for the ordinary Christian.” Bruce Hindmarsh describes Packer as “the Robin Hood of Evangelicalism” because he “was able to retrieve riches from the past and employ them for the purpose of renewing the life of Christians in the present.”<sup>2</sup> Theologians who focus on instructing “ordinary Christians” rather than impressing fellow theologians with their scholarly abilities are too rare and admirable.

Because of his fame and influence, it is not surprising that much ink is being used to praise Packer in commemoration of his life and work now that he has died. It is bad form to attack a dead man who cannot defend himself. I have no wish to attack a dead man. But I agree with R. Scott Clark that, when it comes to the legacy of Packer, we do have to note his deplorable involvement in the attempt to heal the rift between Romanism and Protestantism in the project known as “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT).<sup>3</sup>

Packer signed the two important documents that this project produced: ECT and ECT II. Clark writes, “In both [documents], to different degrees, evangelicals signed and affirmed as the gospel and the doctrine of justification equivocations that *subverted* the Reformation (emphasis added).” Clark is right that these documents did not heal the rift between the Reformation and Rome. In these documents the men on the “Reformed” side did not meet the Roman Catholics in the middle. Nor did the Roman Catholics repudiate their position and join the Reformed in confessing justification by faith alone without works (which is the only way truly to heal the rift between Protestantism and Romanism). The “Reformed” men abandoned justification by faith alone and joined Rome in tolerating, if not openly teaching, the idea that works play some role in a man’s justification before God. So Packer, as part of this group, “*subverted* the Reformation.”

Yes, this is a severe criticism of Packer. We may even want to criticize Packer more sharply than Clark who wrote, “Let us all be reminded that all our heroes have feet of clay.” A man who compromises with Rome on justification by faith alone demonstrates more than that he has feet of clay; he demonstrates that he is not worthy of the status of a hero.

Yet the point is not to focus on Packer and criticize him, but to focus on what we should learn from the legacy of his life and work. Sadly, his compromise of justification by faith alone demands criticism and a negative emphasis when we evaluate Packer’s life and work. As Clark points out, the Reformed hold the doctrine of justification by faith alone to be the “article of the standing or falling of the church.” Packer compromised on *the* doctrine of the Reformation, the doctrine that sparked the Reformation, the doctrine the Reformation identifies as the heart of the gospel and that distinguishes between a standing and a falling church. There are those who want to laud Packer for teaching evangelicals that doctrine is important, as well as spiritual experience. But Packer’s compromise of the doctrine of justification by faith alone spoils any attempt to laud him as a teach-

1 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/july/j-i-packer-died-evangelical-theologian-knowing-god.html>.

2 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/july-web-only/ji-packer-robin-hood-of-evangelicalism.html>.

3 <https://heidelblog.net/2020/07/an-appreciation-of-j-i-packer-and-a-dissent>.

er of sound doctrine. Additionally, by his involvement in ECT, Packer has left the legacy that, for him, unity was more important than doctrine, unity with the Roman Catholic Church was more important to him than the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Therefore, Packer's legacy is not Reformed. His legacy is not the same as that of Luther and Calvin. The legacy of Luther and Calvin is that they would not compromise their confession of justification by faith alone; they would find their oneness only with those who confessed justification by faith alone with them; they would willingly part ways with those who confess justification by faith and works; they loved the truth that justification by faith alone put the emphasis on God's glory and the believer's comfort; they hated Rome's lie of justification by faith and works that robs God of His glory and gives it to man's work, replacing comfort with the terror of always doubting whether one has done enough works to be justified before God. We need to know these two legacies, that of Packer and of the Reformers, because we have to decide which legacy we will follow and which legacy we will give to our children. May God give us the grace to reject the legacy of doctrinal compromise and false ecumenism and to follow the legacy of the Reformers, holding tenaciously to the truth as the only basis for unity, especially the truth of justification by faith alone.

### **Murder: What to expect when the government approves euthanasia**

In 2016 Marinou Arends euthanized a 74-year-old dementia patient in The Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> Arends, now a retired physician, does not believe she is guilty of murder. Murder is the wrongful killing of another person. For Arends, this was euthanasia, a just and compassionate act of killing a person whose life of suffering was going from bad to worse.

For some, the actions of Dr. Arends were outrageous because of the way she trampled her patient's rights. Three times the patient was asked if she wanted to be put to death, and each time she said no. So it is argued that the patient never gave her consent to Dr. Arends to administer the lethal dose. The problem with this line of reasoning is that the patient accepted euthanasia as a legitimate way to end one's life. Furthermore, she signed two advanced directives expressing a desire to be

euthanized. She knew that at some point she would lose the ability to make medical decisions for herself and willingly gave to others the right to determine whether she should be given a lethal injection. If she had not signed these directives, Dr. Arends would not have given her a lethal injection. And if she did not believe that euthanasia is a legitimate way to end her life, she would not have signed the directives.

Dr. Arends is not to be excused, of course. She agreed that euthanasia is a legitimate way to snuff out a life. She agreed with the notion that individuals have authority over their own lives and may choose (assisted) suicide. She also agreed that it is legitimate for an individual to give another individual the ability to make the decision to end life for that person. She believed that as a doctor she had the right to put people to death in certain circumstances. In this case, she willingly took the responsibility to make the decision for the patient. She determined that the patient's "unhappiness and suffering" were legitimate reasons to end her life. In her defense of her actions, Dr. Arends seemed to argue that doctors not only have the right but actually the duty to end the lives of their patients in certain circumstances where they are "unhappy" and "suffering." If this thinking is applied to more cases, the ramifications are alarming. God spare us from doctors who think they have the right and duty to end unhappiness and suffering with lethal injections!

Most of the blame for euthanasia rests on the government that legalizes it. We can ask questions about whether a patient or a doctor has the authority to end a life. And then we can get into very difficult questions about how we are to evaluate the authority of the patient and the doctor in situations where there is some kind of conflict between the two. But ultimately each patient and doctor is subject to the rule of their government. The important question is, Does the state recognize the authority of individuals and doctors to end life? Is euthanasia legal?

In The Netherlands euthanasia is legal. The law allows patients in some circumstances to seek medical assistance to end their lives. The law also allows patients to give the right to others to make the decision for them to be euthanized, if it is determined they can no longer make their own medical decisions (advanced directives). The legislative bodies of The Netherlands have determined that euthanasia is not illegitimate murder-killing but legitimate mercy-killing. The Supreme Court of The Netherlands has upheld the laws that allow euthanasia. Dr. Arends was charged with murder for killing her patient. The Supreme Court heard the case in April of this year and ruled that she was not guilty of mur-

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<sup>4</sup> The main sources for this story are <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2020/04/supreme-court-clears-euthanasia-doctor-of-murdering-severe-dementia-patient/> and <https://thefederalist.com/2020/06/23/dutch-doctor-exonerated-after-euthanizing-an-unwilling-patient>.

der. Therefore, euthanasia is the law of the land in The Netherlands, and is not considered to be murder.

But euthanasia *is* murder. What killing is murder is not determined by the state but by God. God has all authority over life and death. There are certain forms of killing in which one human kills another that are not considered murder. A representative of a government may put certain criminals to death without being guilty of murder. A soldier may kill an enemy combatant without being guilty of murder. By some kind of an accident a person might kill another without being guilty of murder. But nowhere does God give anyone the right, by himself or by another, to kill himself because he is sick,

unhappy, suffering, or in some other difficult condition. The state that legalizes such killing is sanctioning murder. Legalized euthanasia is state-sanctioned murder.

The Arends' case demonstrates that legalized euthanasia not only legitimizes but actually promotes murder. Giving depraved human beings unrestricted authority over their own lives and giving depraved doctor's the authority to put people to death is a deadly combination. With the authority she was given by the state, Dr. Arends determined that it was only a matter of when, not if, she would murder her patient. So we see exactly what we must expect when a government legalizes murder in the form of euthanasia: more and more murder.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

### As to our good works (7)

## Relating good works and justification (c)

Previous article in this series: August, 2020, p. 446.

We have strongly insisted that justification is by faith alone and thus excludes all good works of the believer. This same strong insistence by the notable Reformers of the sixteenth century was always met with the charge that their doctrine militates against a holy life of good works, jeopardizes true religion, and if it does not expressly teach, it strongly suggests, that a believer can walk in sweet peace with his God no matter how loose, offensive, or vile his life. When faithfully taught, the doctrine of justification by faith alone invariably elicits the charge that it destroys the holiness of the church.

Perhaps in reading the last two articles there have been questions in your mind about our strong repudiation of good works in the matter of justification, especially our repudiation of the idea that the believer looks to his good works to find assurance of his justification. Perhaps you wonder how this repudiation squares with confessional statements like LD 32, Q&A 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism, “and that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof,” or you wonder if we are slighting the important place good works have in the Christian life.

With this article and the next we are really jumping

ahead a bit into the next major subject of sanctification. However, before we definitively make the transition to the doctrine of sanctification, and while we yet remain in the category of justification, we want to establish the Reformed and biblical truth of the fruitfulness of faith; we want to relate those fruits of faith to the justified believer's walk of life, experience of covenant fellowship, and enjoyment of assurance; and then, finally, we want to circle back to reassert and further develop our main point that our good works are of no account toward our justification because justification is not by the fruits of faith but by faith alone.

### The Reformation and the fruitfulness of faith

With one voice, and in the context of their instruction on the doctrine of justification, the Reformers always responded to their challengers by affirming their own wholehearted agreement with the fundamental truth of the fruitfulness of faith. They taught that salvation is *sola fide*—by faith alone—but the faith by which we are saved is never alone. True faith is always fruitful in all good works of obedience to the law of God. The doctrine of justification by faith alone does not deny the



fruitfulness of faith; on the contrary, the free imputation of the legal righteousness of Christ through faith makes possible and even guarantees a fruitful walk in actual, moral righteousness. God's gracious acceptance of the elect sinner in the Beloved, Christ Jesus, is the basis for the renewing work of the Spirit of sanctification, who quickens the believer unto the production of good works. The Reformers and the confessional statements that followed them said it like this:

**Martin Luther:** "We say that justification is effective without works, not that faith is without works. For that faith which lacks fruit is not an efficacious but a feigned faith.... It is one thing that faith justifies without works; it is another thing that faith exists without works."<sup>1</sup>

**John Calvin:** "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light."<sup>2</sup>

**Heinrich Bullinger:** "Moreover, whereas we say, that the faithful are justified by faith alone, or else by faith without works, we do not say, as many think we do, that faith is post alone ["post" means "after," so that Bullinger means "we do not say...that faith is alone *after* justification], or utterly destitute of good works, for wheresoever faith is, there also it sheweth itself by good works, because the righteous cannot but work righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

**Heidelberg Catechism:** "But doth not this doctrine [justification by faith alone] make men careless and profane? By no means, for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (LD 24, Q&A 64).

**Westminster Confession of Faith:** "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ alone and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love" (Chap. 11 on Justification).

## Scripture and the fruitfulness of faith

The Scriptures teach that true faith always bears fruit.

1 Martin Luther, "The Disputation Concerning Justification," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher Brown, American ed., vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 176.

2 John Calvin, "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent with the Antidote," in *Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 152.

3 Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), I.6: 118.

James 2:14-26 is the outstanding passage, teaching that faith without works is dead. James argues that a man may appear to be a very religious fellow who talks a good pious talk and claims he has faith; however, if that man has no good works, his faith cannot save him because it is dead. He does *not* have true faith. But if a man claims he has faith *and* he has the fruitful life of good works to prove it, then that man is justified by his works, which means, his claim to have faith is demonstrated to be true by the fact that he has works. Underlying all of James instruction is the fundamental truth that genuine faith always bears fruit. Similarly, our Lord taught the fruitfulness of faith in Matthew 7: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit" (v. 17), and "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (v. 20). It is impossible that a believer united to the living Lord in the covenant of grace, as a branch is united to the vine, not bear fruit.

## The way of obedient living

Let's return to the publican of Jesus' parable in Luke 18:13-14 and watch him walk home. Recall his posture in the temple. He stood consciously before the glorious presence of the thrice-holy God, smiting his breast in the agony of his guilt. He dared not cast his eyes upward toward the blinding moral perfection of God or to any works he ever performed, but with a broken heart he cried in faith, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" That publican, not the Pharisee, went home justified. The justified publican represents every justified believer. Possessing the freely imputed righteousness of Christ, the believer has peace so that his raging conscience is stilled. He is assured that he stands faultless before God's glory.

Now watch that justified publican go home, for his walk home represents the path of life trod by every justified believer. Jesus said of him, "This man went down to his house justified" (Luke 18:14). Jesus said nothing more about that man's walk, but the rest of Scripture explains that the believer who has been justified walks in good works on the straight and narrow path of obedience. It was the practice of our Lord to bid farewell to sinners whom He saved by sending them home with the exhortation, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11), or "Sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). The justified believer is exhorted to walk in the Spirit bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26), and those who are freed from condemnation in the wonder of justification do walk after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1).

Going home with profound gratitude and ardent love for his God, the justified believer is more careful and solicitous than ever to walk not in the counsel of the



ungodly but in the undefiled way marked out by God's law. The faith by which he is justified without works is the faith that bears fruit. In contrast to the guilty and proud unbeliever who is not planted into Christ, who does not know God and His favor, and whose walk is characterized by disobedience, the believing child of God lives out of his faith in Christ by living a life of obedience. Thus, you can be sure that if the publican of Jesus' parable had spotted a wounded traveler ignored by every passer-by and dying in the ditch, he would have reached down and shown to his pitiful neighbor the same mercy his Redeemer had shown to him.

### The experience of covenant fellowship

The one path of life trod by the justified believer is the path of obedience marked out by God's law, and on that path the believer walks in sweet communion with his covenant God, delighting in Him, enjoying Him, worshiping and serving Him. Not on account of his own obedience, but on account of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ received by faith, the believer has sweet peace with his God and a way of access unto all the blessed and pleasurable experiences of joy that are at God's right hand. Whereas prior to being justified he cowered before the holy God at whom he dared not steal a glance, now being declared righteous and receiving that reality and the assurance of it by faith, the believer cherishes and delights in the light of God's fatherly countenance shining upon him. Like the sinful woman Jesus forgave, the justified publican and every justified believer walks home to the sweet tune of Jesus' effectual farewell, "Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace" (Luke 7:50). He walks in peace with God his Friend.

This was true of Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith alone (Gen. 15, Romans 4). Consequently, Abraham not only walked in love for and obedience to God, demonstrating his faith by his offering up of Isaac upon the altar (Gen. 22, James 2), but Abraham walked in covenant communion with his God. Being reconciled to God through God's offering up of His own Son according to promise, Abraham was called the friend of God and walked with God in all the sweet communion and happiness that characterizes true friendship (James 2:23).

For the preservation of the gospel of grace, it is important that we understand and insist that the believer's good works of obedience do not obtain or gain for him the experience of fellowship with God. The believer's doing of good works is not the condition of, the cause of, the ground of, or the way of access into that blessed experience. His good works of obedience are not first and foundational as that which he must perform in order to experience covenant fellowship with God. Salva-

tion is by grace, through faith, and not of works (Eph. 2:8-9). When God saves us by delivering us out of all the miserable experiences of sin and death, and delivering us into all the wonderful experiences of union with Christ and life in the bond of the covenant, He does not save us by our works, but by grace, through faith in Christ's works.

To state the relation positively, it is only *in the way of* an obedient life of good works that the believer enjoys the fellowship of God. He who walks in communion with God walks on the path of obedience. The believer's good works of obedience are the inevitable fruits of the faith by which he enjoys covenant fellowship, so that as he consciously enjoys God's nearness, blessings, and favor through the instrument of faith in Christ, his faith is always accompanied by good works as his response of love for, joy in, and gratitude to his covenant God. Exactly because faith in Christ is always fruitful, the justified believer's manner of conduct as he walks in the conscious experience of sweet communion with God is one of grateful obedience. To deny that believers experience covenant fellowship with God *in the way of obedience* is to deny faith and the Reformation principle that, while faith is the alone instrument of justification and the only way of access unto God and all of His blessings, faith is never alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied by fruit.

Nowhere is this relation, as positively expressed, taught more plainly than in that book of Scripture that the children of Israel knew better than any other, that book that gives vivid expression to all of the experiences of the believer's soul—the Book of Psalms. The Psalter begins with "The Blessedness of the Godly," and the words, "That man is blessed who fearing God from sin restrains his feet" (Psalter #1). The believing Israelite who drew near unto Jehovah and received His covenant blessings through faith in the promised Messiah always enjoyed and sang of his blessedness as he walked gratefully in the law of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

The deepest reason for the fact that the path of obedient living and the path of the enjoyment of fellowship with God are harmoniously joined together as one and may not be put asunder is the nature of God. Exactly because God is holy and cannot walk in the way of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful, the way on which His children walk when they walk in communion with Him must be and is by grace a holy way (I Pet. 1:15-16).

<sup>4</sup> The positive expression of this relation between obedience and the experience of God's blessings needs further development and we intend to say more in the future.

And when the believer is seduced by and complies with the lusts of his flesh so that off that straight and narrow path of obedience he swerves, as he does repeatedly to his great shame and to the loss of the enjoyment of the light of God's fatherly countenance, a sincere and godly sorrow again fills his breast. Firmly persuaded that the Holy God against whom he has sinned is the God whose mercy is as great as the heavens are high above the earth, the poor sinner is moved by the Spirit

to acknowledge his sin and seek again remission in the blood of the Mediator to whom he belongs. Restored by grace, he is resolved again to walk in obedience, and more and more he longs for the day when his walk with God will no longer be disrupted by his foul transgressions.

Next time we will continue with the subject of assurance and see how it relates as a third important element that belongs to the justified believer's walk of life.



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

# Feet

Whatever beautiful things the Bible may declare about them, feet are not the most attractive members of the human body. (And that is even assuming we have in mind a regular foot, rather than the six-toed monstrosity of the giant slain by David's mighty men, II Sam. 21:20.) The tendency of sandaled feet to get dirty on the dusty paths of Palestine explains why the first act of hospitality was the washing of feet. Thus Abraham washed the feet of three men in the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18:4), Lot washed the feet of two angels in Sodom (Gen. 19:2), and Joseph washed the feet of his eleven brothers when they came to his house in Egypt (Gen. 43:24). Although, it was almost certainly not Abraham, Lot, or Joseph who did the washing personally, for to wash feet was the job of a servant.

The lowliness of feet makes them an apt biblical symbol of dominance. So Jehovah promised Joshua, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you" (Josh. 1:3). That promise of Jehovah began to be realized when the feet of the priests were "dipped in the brim of the water" of Jordan and the waters gave way to the armies of Israel (Josh. 3:15). It was not long before the feet of Israel's captains were on the necks of the Canaanite kings who defied them (Josh. 10:24). But whereas enemies still remained in Canaan after the death of Joshua, it is said of Jesus Christ that He must reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet," even death itself (I Cor. 15:25, 26). Strange though it may seem, it was not so much by marching into war with sword drawn as it was by the piercing of His feet on the cross that the Lord accomplished this great victory (Ps. 22:16). It was not by a show of

arms and bravado, but by His death that the Seed of the woman brought the heel of His foot down on the serpent's skull (Gen. 3:15). And it is, therefore, to war of a new character that the Christian soldier must march in the New Testament—having his "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"! (Eph. 6:15).

But if trampling enemies under feet is a graphic picture of dominion, placing one's self at the feet of another is an equally startling display of submission. What a pathetic figure we find in Mary, who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair, anointed them with precious ointment, and ceased not to kiss them (Luke 7:44-46)! What a symbol of humiliation when the disciples came and held the risen Jesus Christ by the feet, and worshiped Him (Matt. 28:9)! Indeed, when John saw the brazen and fiery feet of the Lord in His exaltation, he fell down "at his feet as dead" (Rev. 1:15, 17). What an astounding act of grace then, when this risen Lord, who makes heaven His throne and the earth His footstool (Is. 66:1), lifted His trembling apostle back onto his feet with His right hand and His precious word, saying, "Fear not" (Rev. 1:17)! What an amazing blessing when the God whose feet everywhere walk "as it were [on] a paved work of a sapphire stone" (Ex. 24:10) sets us down at His own feet, every one to receive of His words (Deut. 33:3)! What a sword that pierces all our pride when this same Lord of glory dons the garb of the servant, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash the dirty, smelly, unattractive feet of His quarreling disciples (John 13:5)! How the heart of Simon Peter melted—oh Lord, thou shalt *never* wash my feet (John 13:8)! Oh Lord, not my feet only, but also

my hands and my head (John 13:9)! Oh Peter, do you not know, for the Lord to wash your lowly feet is to be clean every whit! And if the Lord your Master has washed your feet, what then ought you to do? “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14, 15).

Now it is exactly the lowliness of the foot that may tempt it to say, “Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body” (I Cor. 12:15). Surely it is much more exciting to be a hand than a foot, since it is the hand that works, shapes, rules, and grasps, while the foot is only dragged repeatedly through the dust. But not so fast! Uncomely is not the same as unimportant or unnecessary. Hands do not get very far without feet. It is unto the feet walking down the path of life that the Word of God is a lamp (Ps. 119:105). It is the foot that has the blessed privilege of standing on holy ground before the Lord in the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). It is with our feet that we enter the gates of righteousness and so stand within Jerusalem’s courts (Ps. 122:2). And it is our feet that the un-slumbering Jehovah promises He will never suffer to be moved (Ps. 121:3). Balaam discovered the value of a foot when his was crushed against a wall by his donkey (Num. 22:25). King Asa understood the importance of healthy feet when his were diseased toward

the end of his reign (II Chron. 16:12). The lame man by the gate beautiful could have told you about the value of strength in the feet and ankle bones as he went praising and leaping into the house of God for the first time by the healing power of Jesus’ name (Acts 3:7).

The foot may complain of his uncomeliness, but the fact that he has toes instead of fingers does not make him less a part of the body. And the head of *this* body is not so foolish as to say to his feet, “I have no need of you” (I Cor. 12:21). On the contrary, Christ the Head died exactly to purchase those feet, toes and all, along with the hands, ears, and eyes, and to incorporate them into His body by His Spirit. And now it is by those very feet that He gives movement to His kingdom below so that every saint declares, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace...that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth!” (Is. 52:7).

Oh Christian, do you consider yourself to be a foot in the body of Christ? Then rejoice, for not only are feet integral and valuable members of any body, but to be a foot in the body of Christ is to belong to Christ. And the declaration of Christ in Psalm 26:12 is therefore your declaration as one of His members—“My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the LORD.”



## I believe

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

# How do we know the Bible is the Word of God? (6) The value of evidences

Previous article in this series: June 2020, p. 400.

## Introduction

In this series of articles, we have covered two *ways* God speaks in Scripture that let us know this book can only be from Him. As He reveals Himself, God speaks about the future before it occurs, and He brings a diversity into unity that is so great no human or collection of humans could accomplish it. We have also examined two aspects of the *content* of the Bible, to see that *what* the Bible says also reveals its origin is from God. Here, we took note of the excellence and power of the content of the Bible, and of the fact that it has as its main purpose to make known God’s glory in all things.

What makes these such strong evidences of the divine origin of the Bible is that they correspond to the God the Bible is revealing. We might expect, knowing Scripture reveals an omniscient God who decrees the end from the beginning, that He would reveal Himself in such a way that the future would be as the past to Him. We might expect that a God who is three Persons in one Being, would reveal Himself in a book that is impossibly diverse yet unified. We might expect that a God who is said to be excellent and all powerful would reveal excellent things having great power. We might expect, if Scripture reveals God as all glorious even as we see Him to be in creation, that the scope of the whole

would be to give Him glory. We might expect the divine Revealer to leave His fingerprints in His revelation, and He does.

Having completed our main task, in this article we examine briefly the value of this information.

### Not strictly necessary

Many, if not most, true believers believe the Scriptures are the Word of God apart from ever knowing these evidences in any intellectual way. This is because in Scripture we meet God Himself, and doing so is not dependent on knowing these evidences. This book is different from any other book. I can read a novel about Abraham Lincoln, but by doing that I do not meet him. In reading God's book, I not only learn *about* this God, I come *face to face* with Him. Calvin says, "...we affirm with utter certainty *just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God Himself*, that [Scripture] has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men."<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures are a window through which we meet God Himself, making it utterly certain that this book is from Him. Just as a person believes a light bulb is on precisely because he sees the light shining from it, so God's people believe the Bible is from God because they see the glorious God shining through it.

The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, therefore, may never be thought of as *merely* the Spirit's work to make us believe *the evidences* of Scripture's divine origin.<sup>2</sup> The work of the Spirit can include that, as will be explained below. But chiefly, the internal testimony of the Spirit is His work to open our eyes and ears to hear God Himself speaking to us personally of the reality of our sin and the power of the cross (Acts 2:37). A reality we come to know by the exposition of Scripture itself.

### Not strictly necessary, but helpful!

Nonetheless, could not these evidences be *part* of seeing God Himself in Scripture? Could they not be *part* of hearing God speak to us in Scripture? All these evidences are *from Scripture itself*. Thus, while it is not strictly necessary that someone know these evidences to believe, these evidences are not contrary to the way God grows faith in His people. The Spirit may use Scripture this way to strengthen faith. For those who come to

learn them they may even be considered *part* of our gazing upon God Himself through this book.

Even for God's elect, coming out of unbelief by the work of the Spirit, the use of these evidences may be part of the process by which they come face to face with God in His Word. Many people have only been told lies about Scripture. In His own in whom the Spirit is working to draw out of unbelief, God Himself may throw down preconceived notions as He goes about confronting them with sin and the cross in a saving way. After all, clearly these evidences "rule out rational doubt and demonstrate that it is not unreasonable to believe, while it is unreasonable to assume the contrary."<sup>3</sup>

### An objection

Yet, sometimes after speaking about how these evidences show how reasonable it is to believe, people (even doubting believers) will ask, "Well, if those things are true, why do not more people believe the Bible is the Word of God? Why is it still the case that so many otherwise intelligent people say the Bible is a ridiculous collection of fables? Why are there so many videos on the Internet saying one must be a fool to believe the Bible is the Word of God, if these things are true?"

But remember the Bible itself leads us to *expect* that the unregenerate will refuse to admit the truth of this, though these evidences are there for them to see and God Himself is revealed in Scripture. In fact, Scripture leads us to believe that unbelievers will do everything they can to dismiss the evidences and will be hardened by the presence of God in Scripture. Should *I* reject the Bible since so many explain away the excellence and power, the other-worldly unity in diversity, and the prophesy and fulfillment in God's Word? Only if I thought those people had no bias against those things in the first place. But they do. I Corinthians 2:14 "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

### Calvin's illustration to put it all together

Our thoughts here should be like Calvin's, "Let each of the prophets be looked into: none will be found who does not far exceed human measure. Consequently, those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds."<sup>4</sup> The unregenerate have no taste for Scripture no matter how reasonable it is to believe it! Say you were going to have a chili cook-

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.7.5.

2 Bavinck says that after Calvin this became the tendency when speaking of the internal testimony of the Spirit. Already, he says, this can be seen in Turretin (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 584). This danger certainly must be avoided. But along with Calvin (and Bavinck) we do not attempt to avoid this danger by dismissing the evidences altogether.

3 Bavinck, 579 (with a reference to Aquinas).

4 Calvin, *Institutes*, I.8.2.



off and you needed judges in addition to yourself. Say also that one chili stands out while all the others are bland. But, then, you discover all the other judges have no sense of taste. When the other judges do not pick the chili that was clearly and obviously best, would you distrust your conclusion because of theirs?

Now add this element: say the other judges really do not like to admit they have no sense of taste and are extremely sensitive about it. They begin to look for reasons to dismiss your choice and to establish their own, though their own choice ultimately hangs on thin air. Though they are smart and can sound like they know what they are talking about, you would still have no reason to doubt your selection, knowing that they have no ability to make the judgment in the first place.

You would ultimately trust your own judgment because of the immediate experience of the taste—you knew which one was clearly better. However, after hearing them attack your choice, to buttress your confidence in your conclusion, you might reflect on their lack

of taste buds, and you might meet some of their arguments by reflecting more intellectually on the attributes of the chili you picked. In the end, in both ways, the conviction arises out of the chili itself.

We know God's Word is His Word by tasting and seeing and hearing Him in the exposition of Scripture itself. This life within us is His; it recognizes Him. Though it is not the main nor necessary part, part of that recognition *can be* tasting and seeing and hearing Him in the evidences of Scripture's divine origin found in Scripture itself. Faith is not a leap in the dark. It is helpful for faith to be made more aware of that. And it is helpful to remember, those who constantly attack Scripture have no taste buds. In the end it is still the Spirit working through the Word itself that gives and strengthens faith. And in the end faith will resist all attack. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith" (I John 5:4).



## Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Holstege, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

# The covenant of God and our mission to the world (2) The decree of the covenant and missions

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2020, p. 282.

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). As God sent His Son, the chief Missionary, to save the world of men whom the Father had given to Him out of all nations and to give them everlasting life in His covenant, even so the Son of God has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of that salvation He has accomplished on the cross and that covenant God now establishes with men throughout the nations.

The covenant...  
and missions.

The *missio Dei*, or mission of God, was to send His only begotten Son into our flesh to save from our sins the world whom He loved, to reconcile to Himself all creatures and those whom He ordained to eternal life

out of the whole human race, to draw the world into His own covenant life.

"God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). "And when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son... to redeem them that were under the law..." (Gal. 4:4-5). "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (I John 4:14).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in turn, has given us a great commission, the *missio ecclesiae*—which is not some little sideshow, but *the* great calling of the church—to go into that world and preach the gospel of the covenant that God has promised to establish with all who are afar off, whom He will call to faith in Christ and their seed after them in the lines of continued generations (Gen. 17:4-7; Acts 2:39).

But before we examine more closely those two areas where God has promised to establish His covenant, I would like to pause and consider the mystery and wonder of the covenant within the blessed Trinity. My reason is that the mission of the Son of God was to draw the world into that divine covenant, and that is the basis of our mission to preach the good news that He has done so by the blood of His cross and is doing so by His Spirit. I am hesitant to go very far into this mystery of God's own covenant life for fear of getting tangled up in vain speculations about things that God has not shown us. For the Most High God said to Moses from the burning bush, "Draw not nigh thither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." As we draw near to behold the inner covenant life of God in the holy Trinity, let us first take off our shoes, for we are standing on holy ground. We will gaze at the brilliant and glorious things God has revealed to us in His Word about His own divine covenant life, the very being of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. May He guard us from transgressing the boundaries of what He would have us to know from the Holy Scriptures.

First of all, let it be understood that many Reformed and Presbyterian theologians of the past and present have posited a covenant within the Trinity between the Father and the Son. They called it the *pactum salutis*, Latin for "the covenant of redemption."<sup>1</sup> They certainly did not all define this covenant within the Godhead in the same way. But they all agreed that it was a mutual contract between the Father and the Son (and sometimes they included the Holy Spirit). In this eternal agreement, the Father supposedly assigned the work of redemption to the Son, promising to give Him a great reward provided He first fulfill the condition of perfect obedience: He had to obey the will of the Father, go into the world, humble Himself to the death of the cross, and accomplish salvation. Likewise, the Son sup-

posedly accepted this eternal assignment, promising to become a man through the incarnation and to give His life a ransom for the salvation of many, while requiring the Father to keep His end of the bargain.

The *pactum salutis* between the Father and the Son, according to these theologians, is the basis of the covenant of grace between God and men. By His mission to the world, the Son supposedly fulfilled the conditions laid upon Him in the *pactum salutis* and paved the way for the establishment of the covenant of grace with men. After the Son received His reward from the Father, their eternal pact served its purpose and fell away. God now establishes His covenant with men, which these theologians also define as a mutual contract with parties, promises, and conditions. As the Father sent the Son into the world, God sends men into the nations to preach the gospel. That gospel announces the promise of God to all men to give them eternal life on the condition of faith in Jesus Christ. By accepting Jesus Christ, a man supposedly fulfills the condition laid upon him in the covenant and receives the reward of eternal life. Once he has received the reward, the covenant with him simply falls away. The covenant for these theologians is always an agreement, a conditional contract, and a means to an end. When it serves its purpose, it falls away.

God has led the Protestant Reformed Churches to a different understanding of the covenant, both within the Trinity and between God and elect sinners. For reasons known only to Him, He has guided us into the truth of the Scriptures that His covenant is not a contract or agreement with parties, promises, and conditions that serves its purpose and then falls away. But His covenant is the warm relation of living fellowship and friendship between two or more persons who know each other and dwell together.<sup>2</sup> That is true of His covenant with us. That is also true of His covenant within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has revealed in His Word (for example, II Cor. 6:18) that His covenant is like the father-child relationship.

Thus, we need only consider our own families to understand the nature of the covenant within the Godhead. I am a father. My wife and I have a son and

1 See Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 401ff. Hoeksema describes the *pactum salutis* as taught by Reformed and Presbyterian theologians of the past (Mastricht, Turretin, à Brakel, Hodge, Vos, Bavinck, Berkhof, and Kuyper). He discusses the passages used to support this doctrine and evaluates it both positively and negatively. See also Davi Charles Gomes, "The Source of Mission in the Covenant of Redemption," in *A Covenantal Vision for Global Mission* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 3-19. In this essay, Brazilian Reformed theologian Davi Gomes calls the *pactum salutis* the source of the mission of the church, which is "to sound clearly the glorious music of the gospel to the ears of the listening world" (p. 16). He refers to Presbyterian and Reformed theologians such as C. Hodge, G. Vos, and R. Muller to support his conviction of the traditional view of the *pactum salutis*.

2 As a Protestant Reformed missionary, what caught my eye in the essay of Davi Gomes is that he mentions Herman Hoeksema with approval, specifically his teaching that the covenant is "the most intimate communion of friendship in which God reflects his own covenant life in his relation to the creature" (p. 10). I was delighted to find Gomes writing favorably about the true idea of the covenant. But my delight was tempered by his description of the covenant as a pact with parties, promises, and conditions. Gomes speaks of intimate communion with God as the goal of the covenant into which God brings the elect in all nations rather than the nature of the covenant itself.

four daughters. What is the nature of our relationship with them? Shall I liken it to my relationship with our Filipino landlord with whom I have a cordial relationship, but whom I do not really know, with whom I have entered into a rental agreement by signing a contract with promises and conditions? Not at all. But by the wonder of conception and birth, God has forged an intimate relationship of fellowship between us and our children. God has structured the relationship so that we as parents have authority over our children and they must submit to us. But at its core, it is a relationship of love and life, knowledge and fellowship. God has taught us in the Scriptures that our blessed Christian family life is only a dim reflection of the unimaginably beautiful family life of God Himself within the Trinity. That intimate relationship of God the Father with God the Son in God the Holy Spirit is the real covenant within the Trinity. That is far from the traditional doctrine of the *pactum salutis*, which supposes that the covenant within the Godhead is just a glorified, divine business contract with parties, promises, and conditions.

However, Reformed and Presbyterian theologians who teach the *pactum salutis* are correct that the covenant of grace that Christ confirmed by the blood of the cross and which God is establishing in the nations of the world is the fruit of an eternal decree of God. They are wrong to confound the actual *covenant* within the being of God with the *decree* of God to reveal and share that covenant with others outside Himself. This has led them into a serious flaw in their exegesis of the Scriptures, which say that God sent His Son into the world and that Jesus did the will of the One who sent Him (for example, John 3:17; 4:34; 5:30). For instance, Jesus said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). They explain this to mean that the First Person of the Trinity, in His covenant with the Second Person of the Trinity, required Him to go into the world. Hence, the Second Person came down from heaven not to do His own will but the will of the First Person. But that explanation distinguishes the will of the Father from the will of the Son and leads us away from the truth that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the whole divine essence equally, including the divine will. Rather, by those words our Lord meant to say, “I came down from heaven and became a man not to do my own *human* will, but the will of *God* who sent me.”<sup>3</sup>

But let us try to penetrate a little farther into this matter. The covenant of grace with men from all nations flows from an eternal decree of God, the decree of the covenant, and that decree includes the will of God to send His Son into the world. Moreover, that decree of God to send His Son into the world to reveal and share His own covenant with others outside Himself is the one will of all three persons of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make the decree of the covenant together, as they make all the decrees of God together. They have one mind, one heart, one will. They have one life, one love, one covenant. In their covenant with each other, God the Father wills the sending of the Son into the world through the incarnation. God the Son wills the same, though from His own unique personal point of view: He wills the sending of Himself, His own going forth into the world and becoming a man. God the Holy Spirit wills the same too, though from His own unique personal point of view. He wills to cooperate with the Father and Son in that sending and going by overshadowing the virgin Mary with all the power of the Highest, so that she would conceive the holy child who is very God and very man. The three Persons willed to work together in their greatest mission to establish the covenant of God with the world.

Now, if these three Persons dwell together in an eternal relationship of communion, can we imagine the free and open communication that must exist between the Father and the Son through the Spirit outside of space and time as they joyfully discuss their one plan to share that covenant with us creatures? Can we even begin to comprehend the boundless joy and infinite pleasure that belongs to them who dwell together in the unity of the Godhead and engage in eternal conversation, with complete oneness of mind, about their mission to draw us into that communion? Oh, the bottomless depth and limitless height of their covenant communion! Oh, the unfathomed width and unknown breadth of their covenant intimacy! How wondrous is that eternal divine covenant! It is the eternal reality of sweet communion that is dimly reflected and slightly tasted in the good relationship between a Christian father and his son, who make and discuss important plans together in a spirit of love that proceeds from the one to the other and back again. The reality of the covenant within the Trinity is not a cold pact or business agreement, but a warm rela-

<sup>3</sup> Gomes refers to Hoeksema again on the next page, saying that “Herman Hoeksema adds further color to this image [of the covenant of redemption—which is actually the decree of the covenant].” He quotes from *Reformed Dogmatics* where Hoeksema calls the decree of the covenant “the decree which dominates all

other decrees of God concerning the ultimate end of all things as God has conceived it in His counsel. Instead of a decree concerning the means...[it] is the decree concerning the end of all things” (p. 11). However, Gomes follows other theologians in confounding the actual covenant within the Trinity with His decree to reveal and share that covenant with others outside Himself.

tionship of friendship. Out of that divine covenant, the three Persons of the Godhead, with one mind and one will, determine to send the Son into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit to draw the world of elect men in all nations into God's covenant forever.

So, when our Lord Jesus Christ speaks *in His human nature* to or about the one who sent Him, He speaks not only to or about the First Person, but to and about the thrice holy God. *God Triune* sent His Son into the world that the world through Him might be saved.

Then, as we saw at the beginning of this article, as God sent His Son, the chief Missionary, into the world, even so the Son has sent us into the world to preach the glad tidings of what He has done.<sup>4</sup> Jesus said so in His high priestly prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Jesus told the disciples too after His resurrection: "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you"

(John 20:21). We see that the mission of the Messiah is the basis for our mission as the church in this present time until the end of time. As the Son was sent, we are sent. As the Son was sent to be the Messiah and save the world of the elect into the covenant of God, even so we ministers of the gospel have been sent to proclaim the good news of that salvation and to summon men in all nations to repent and come to Christ. As the Son was sent, even so we believers and followers of Jesus Christ are called to echo the words of that gospel that we hear from our ministers to our unbelieving neighbors who live in the house next door, who sit in the cubicle next to us at the office or in the seat next to us in the work truck. As the Son was sent to humble Himself and go the way of the cross in great love for us and zeal for Jehovah, even so we are called to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him in sacrificial love both for our own covenant children and for our neighbor, desiring that they too might be drawn into God's covenant, if the Lord wills.

The grand covenant purpose of God is not only for believers and their children in their generations; it also embraces the whole world and reaches unto the ends of the earth. For God sent His Son not to condemn the world of the elect in all nations, but to save them—to reveal and share His everlasting covenant with them. Therefore, the Son of God sends us into all the world to teach all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

<sup>4</sup> The main point of the essay of Davi Gomes, which has also been the main point of this article, is that the glorious mission of God, His eternal purpose to send His Son to save the world of men whom He gave to Him out of every nation, tribe, and tongue, is the source of our mission to proclaim the gospel of that salvation in all the world. He asks the rhetorical question, "Does this instrument of God's glorious grace [the church] make music only for its own sake? [No!]" If its mission is rooted in the very movement of the Trinity outside himself, it is only natural that it must also be a movement that expresses the beautiful music of grace to all of creation" (p. 15).



## Pertaining to the churches in common— seminary

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

## News from the seminary—Fall 2020

### Beginning a new school year

On Tuesday, August 24, 2020 the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary opened its doors for a new academic year. Although we are still under strict mandates in Michigan, we are very thankful that we can meet again in our classrooms. While maintaining the new 'normal,' with its emphasis on sanitizing, social distancing, and frequent hand washing, we have been relieved of teaching our classes via Zoom or relying on prerecorded lectures. That was the way in which the

2019-2020 school year ended. We are grateful that we do not have to return to distance-learning measures. Professors and students alike are grateful for our return to the classroom setting.

Our joy over the beginning of the new school year is tempered by the necessity of canceling our scheduled convocation service, the open house that was planned for the newly remodeled seminary building, and the invitation to auditors to join some of our classes. The COVID-19 restrictions have made it necessary to cancel these activities for now. We sincerely hope that we will



be able to return to these practices in the future, but as in all things, we wait upon the Lord.

## Student body

As is usual, with the new year there are changes in our student body.

We had no graduations at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, which is a good way in which to “lose” students. Two students from last year have discontinued their studies. Doner Bartolon and his family have returned to Mexico, in large part because of the declining health of his parents and his desire to serve the church in his native land. Jeremy Helms is pursuing a different career path than the ministry. We wish both Doner and Jeremy the Lord’s blessing on their future endeavors.

We welcomed two new students: Luke Bomers and Arend Haveman. Luke is married to Sydney and together they have two sons, Lewis and Jacob. The Bomers are members of our Hope, Walker, MI congregation. Arend is a single young man, a member of our Trinity congregation in Hudsonville, MI.

Besides our two first-year students, Matthew Koerner and Isaac Peters are our returning second-year students. Matt is a member of Southeast PRC of Grand Rapids. Isaac, his wife Rebekah, and their children, Donnie, Charlie, Bella, and Lillian are members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA), which has official relationships with the PRCA. Isaac is in a special three-year program, as were previous men from the EPC. It is a special privilege of our seminary to be able to train the men of the EPCA, and we are

grateful that we may be of service to the EPCA in this way. Isaac, Rebekah, and their children attend our Grace PRC in Walker, MI.

Marcus Wee is our lone third-year student. Marcus and his wife Tze Yan and their two young sons, Asaph and Silas, are members of our sister congregation in Singapore. After graduation, Marcus plans, the Lord willing, to return to Singapore to serve in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (CERC). Marcus and his family are under the oversight of and attend Zion PRC in Jenison, MI.

Josiah Tan is in his final year. He and his wife Hui Qi have recently been blessed with the birth of their third child, a baby boy whom they have named Jacob. Jacob joins the other Tan children, Abigail and Caleb. Josiah is currently doing his internship at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, under the mentoring of Rev. Cory Griess. He will return to the seminary classroom in the second semester in order to complete his training. It is also Josiah’s desire to return to Singapore in order to serve the CERC.

Six students in the four years of seminary. Three of the six are not being trained for the ministry in the PRCA. The first potential PRCA graduate will not complete his studies for three years. That on top of retirements, new seminary professors, new congregations, mission opportunities, and whatever else the Lord has in store for our churches. The need is *great*—GREAT!! Let us pray the Lord of the harvest that He sends forth laborers into the harvest (Matt. 9:37, 38). Pray that the Lord will convict capable young men of the call to the ministry and in His providence open the way for their years of preparation. Let this petition go up to God from our family altars, from our Christian school-teachers in their devotions, and from our pastors in catechism and during the congregational prayers. Let the elders and ministers impress the need upon young men who give indication of possessing the necessary gifts for the ministry, perhaps at family visitation. Let the young people press the call upon their friends who display an aptitude for the pastoral office. And may God never send us in His judgment a famine of the hearing of His word (Amos 8:11).

## Faculty and staff

Not only are there some changes in our student body, there are also some changes in our faculty. Last year, synod appointed Prof. Brian Huizinga as the replacement for Prof. Ronald Cammenga. Prof. Huizinga continues to work on his preparations for teaching. Synod 2020 extended by one year his transition into full-time teaching so that he could take a year to study theological



Students

l to r: Matthew Koerner, Josiah Tan, Luke Bomers, Arend Haveman, Isaac Peters, Marcus Wee



Professors

l to r: R. Cammenga, D. Kuiper, B. Huizinga,  
R. Dykstra, B. Gritters

Dutch. That special study has commenced. While Prof. Huizinga continues his preparations, including work on his ThM thesis, Prof. Cammenga continues to teach full-time. Prof. Douglas Kuiper is continuing to teach an increasing number of courses, sharing the course load with Prof. Russell Dykstra whom he is gradually replacing.

Besides preparing for and teaching their classes in the seminary, the faculty also serve in other capacities. Two of the faculty are among the three editors of the *Standard Bearer*. All the members of the faculty regularly contribute articles to the magazine, as well as to the *Beacon Lights*. In addition, the seminary faculty contribute articles and book reviews to the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. All the professors are kept busy preaching in the churches, usually once and often twice each Lord's Day. Some of the faculty have the privilege of regularly preaching the Heidelberg Catechism in local congregations that are vacant. Occasionally, we are able we supply the pulpits of congregations outside of west Michigan. We also serve on various standing and special denominational committees, like the Committee for Contact

with Other Churches and the Psalter Revision Committee. We are frequently asked to give special lectures, as well as annual Reformation lectures. And all the professors are involved in leading Bible study societies or teaching catechism classes. All these activities keep us connected to the churches and afford opportunity to be involved in the life of the denomination. We have no interest in becoming ivory tower theologians.

The faculty are very grateful for the support staff of the seminary. Miss Sharon Kleyn continues in her capacity as the faculty secretary. Her smiling face and cheerful greeting will be the first things you experience when you walk through the seminary's front door. In so many ways she assists the professors and students in their work and has proven to be a very valuable member of the seminary's support staff.

Mr. Charles Terpstra continues to serve as our registrar, librarian, and archivist. He wears many different hats at the seminary, besides the several additional hats that he wears in the service of our churches. As our librarian he is constantly seeking to add new and used books to our library's collection. Our library is constantly expanding. All prospective students are advised to contact him so that as registrar he can assist you with making sure that all prerequisites are met before entering seminary. He can help you map out a program of study in college so that you are able to enter seminary in as timely a fashion as possible.

Mr. Terpstra is assisted in the archives department by Mr. Robert Drnek, who has devoted himself to helping process archival material that has been donated to the denomination. We encourage individuals and consistories to deposit their archives in the newly enlarged archives room at the seminary. Mr. Terpstra can assist anyone who may be looking for material in our archives. And there is a wealth of valuable material contained in the PRC's archival collection. We are hoping that





the denominational archives becomes useful for special studies and research in the PRC.

We want to remind our supporters that the seminary library is open for research and study. We also have a large selection of religious magazines, including back issues, that can be browsed. All our constituency may check out our library books—for three weeks. After three weeks, we impose huge fines, after which all outstanding fines are turned over to a collection agency. Not, of course, true. But we do appreciate it that books

that have been checked out are returned in a timely manner.

The churches have provided a beautiful building and a gorgeous setting in which professors and students are able to work. We are very thankful for the trust that the churches have placed in us. We take it very seriously. May we be found faithful as we prepare the next generation of preachers of the gospel for our churches, our sister churches, and those churches with whom the PRCA have relations.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question:

What did the congregation at Doon, IA PRC use recently to take a full group picture of the congregation? Answer later in this column.

### Sister-church activities

From the August 23 bulletin of the Berean PRC in the Philippines:

Beloved, Metro Manila and other nearby provinces are reverted to GCQ (General community quarantine) to September 30, 2020. We pray earnestly to God that in soonest possible time, He may be pleased to lift us up from this crisis so that our regular corporate public worship services are restored, the Lord willing. The guidelines are reiterated: 1) Everyone should stay home under the GCQ, except front-liners and those who are buying essentials with their Quarantine Pass. 2) Small gatherings, including religious ones, are allowed to ten participants. 3) Island travel and domestic flights are permitted. 4) Classified transportation are allowed to ply with limited passengers only. Let us continue to pray for our Theological School (PRCP), which is currently giving instruction on line. Let us pray for both our instructors and students. Those who wish to visit Hermeneutics (Rev. Holstege), Reformed Symbols (Rev. Kleyn), Church History (Rev. Kleyn), or Reformed Dogmatics (Rev. Smit) should contact the instructor in advance for details about visiting.

From the CERC in Singapore we learn the following: So far, our church has tried out worshipping in group of

50 for the last few weeks and the experience, as testified by some, had been good despite having to follow the strict restrictions of social distancing, not singing, etc. We are able to worship God meaningfully as we hummed along in our hearts when we “sang” the Psalter numbers, prayed together as a church, and attended to the hearing of God’s Word. It was certainly good to see some of us eagerly coming to the Lord’s house to worship. We thank God the COVID-19 situation in Singapore is improving. Recently the authority has allowed a few religious organizations to conduct their meetings with 100 people instead of the 50 allowed. We pray that this arrangement will be opened to our church soon. We can then come to worship the Lord every Sunday at one of the services. In the meantime, Session has made a provision of an extra 10 persons to join each of the worship services on the Lord’s Day.

### Congregational activities

The annual Special Education Peer-to-Peer Walk has been canceled due to COVID-19 concerns. Look for information on the next walk to be held again at Millennium Park in September of 2021, Lord willing. Please remember our special education students, teachers, aides and board members in your prayers.

### Minister activities

From her trio of Rev. Rodney Kleyn, Rev. James Laning, and Rev. Stephan Regnerus, Kalamazoo PRC called Rev. R. Kleyn on September 6. Cornerstone PRC extended

a call to Rev. Matthew DeBoer, which he declined on September 6.

### Denominational activities

Let us remember in prayer the needs of Rev. J. Marcus, who awaits a call to the churches; of Rev. M. McGeown, who awaits permission to enter the States to be installed in Providence PRC; and of Covenant ERC, our sister church in Singapore, as she awaits both pulpit supply from the PRC and a call for minister-on-loan through Grandville PRC—both on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Classis East met in Byron Center PRC on Wednesday, September 9. Classis West was scheduled to meet in Edgerton PRC at 8:30 A.M. on Wednesday, September 23.

### Trivia answer

If you guessed the group in Doon used a *drone* to take the congregational photo, then you are correct. The thing hovering overhead seemed a bit intimidating to some, but the mission was accomplished. You may want to try it! More trivia next time.

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

## Announcements

### Wedding anniversary

With thankful hearts to God, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents, **Pete and Phyllis Miedema**, as they celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on September 15, 2020. We, as a family, see the wonderful gift God has given us through His constant faithfulness and His ability to provide us with God-fearing parents and grandparents who have raised us to love His truths. We are grateful for the years of love, devotion, and sacrifice they have made for us. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them and use them for His kingdom, which is eternal and forever. “For ever, O LORD, thy work is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth....I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me” (Psalm 119: 89-90, 93).

Rick Miedema (in glory)

Joy DeGroot

Jeffry,

Cassandra and Mitch Overweg (Harlyn and Milly)

Brad and Ruth Brower

Austin and Rachel, Brendan and Casey,

Alexandria, Colton, Danielle, Sammantha,

Annikkah

David and Julie Miedema

Rick, Mitch & Anna, Trent

Hudsonville, Michigan

### Bound volumes

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completes volume 96. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

### Special SB offer from the RFPA

The RFPA is once again offering PR Church consistories the opportunity to purchase a half-price subscription for any of their members who do not currently subscribe to the *Standard Bearer*. Contact the RFPA at [mail@rfpa.org](mailto:mail@rfpa.org) or call (616) 457-5970.

### Reformed Witness Hour

[reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)

**Rev. W. Bruinsma**  
**October 2020**