

# The Standard Bearer

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## Treasure in the house of the righteous

Rev. James Slopsema

## Why catechism?

### The covenant goals of catechism (2)

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## Contents

### Meditation

- 27 Treasure in the house of the righteous  
Rev. James Slopsema

### Editorial

- 29 Why catechism?  
The covenant goals of catechism (2)  
Prof. Barrett Gritters

### All around us

- 31 The state would like to educate your children  
Rev. Audred Spriensma

### Pillar and ground of truth

- 33 The Council of Constantinople (AD 381)  
Necessary to address other Christological heresies  
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

### Search the Scriptures

- 34 Jonah  
Rev. Ronald Hanko

### Taking heed to the doctrine

- 36 Assurance and good works (1)  
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

### Believing and confessing

- 39 The final commandment  
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

### All Thy works shall praise Thee

- 41 Born this way (2) An uncertain question  
Dr. Brendan Looyenga

### Strength of youth

- 44 Learning from the judges (1)  
Doing what is right in our own eyes  
Rev. Ryan Barnhill

### Report

- 46 Report of Classis East of the PRCA  
Rev. Clayton Spronk

### News from our churches

- 47 Church profile—Kalamazoo, MI PRC  
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



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## Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Treasure in the house of the righteous

**In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.**

**Proverbs 15:6**

Is there treasure in your house?

What kind of treasure is it?

Not all treasure is good!

Notice the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. There is much treasure in the house of the righteous. There is treasure also in the house of the wicked. That is because he generates revenue or income. The righteous also generates revenue. However, that earthly revenue is not his great treasure. His treasure is heavenly and spiritual in nature. That explains why the righteous finds great joy and peace in his treasure, whereas the wicked finds only trouble.

Pray for wisdom to strive for the great treasure of the righteous.

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At this point we must understand who are the righteous and who are the wicked.

Let's begin with the righteous. The basic idea of righteousness in the Bible is conformity to God's law. Scripture looks at righteousness from two different viewpoints. Sometimes Scripture emphasizes righteousness as a *legal* concept. Then righteousness is a favorable verdict of God as He stands in judgment of His people. Even though His people are sinners, God declares them righteous on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. His people come to the knowledge and enjoyment of this favorable verdict through faith. This is the truth of justification by faith alone. Sometimes, however, Scripture emphasizes righteousness as a *spiritual, ethical* concept. Then righteousness is moral conformity to God's law. This also characterizes the people of God in Jesus Christ. God uses the same faith that justifies them to transform their lives into that of thankful obedience. They are not able in this life to keep God's law perfectly, but they do in Christ begin to

keep all the commandments of God. This is the reality of sanctification and necessarily follows from justification. In the proverb before us, the emphasis falls on the justified believer who walks righteously in thankful obedience to the law of God.

The righteous are contrasted with the wicked. The basic idea of the term "wicked" is upheaval, agitation. It describes those who cause agitation and upheaval by their blatant disobedience of God's law. The wicked, therefore, are those who live in unbelief without Jesus Christ. Without the transforming work of Jesus Christ, they live only in sin. In their sin they create upheaval in all of life—in their marriages, families, business, and social life. We will have more to say about that later.

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In the house of the righteous is much treasure.

The word "treasure" means abundance. It describes prosperity.

The treasure in the house of the righteous is not primarily earthly treasure but heavenly treasure.

The great treasure of the righteous is their righteousness in Jesus Christ and the blessings that flow from it.

To appear righteous in Jesus Christ in God's courtroom (justification) is a great treasure. Without this gift of grace, the elect of God would perish in their sin. With the gift of righteousness, they find forgiveness for all their sins. They find full reconciliation with God, which brings the blessing of peace with God. They are adopted as God's children and made heirs of eternal life. What a treasure!

In turn, to be empowered to live righteously in Jesus Christ (sanctification) is also a great treasure. A life of sin is at best an empty life. More often it is a life of misery brought on by sin. But a righteous life lived in Jesus Christ is a full and satisfying life. It is a life of peace and joy found in marriage, in the home life, and in the church. But above all, it is a life lived in the joy of God's friendship and fellowship.

And then there is the revenue of the wicked.

The term “revenue” originally was used to describe the crops that the ground yields. From that developed the idea of profit and gain. Revenue, therefore, speaks of labor that results in profit and gain. It speaks of the farmer who works the field and through his labors harvests a crop. It speaks of the employee who works for wages. It speaks of the businessman whose business produces a profit. The wicked have these revenues because God providentially prospers the work of their hands.

But the righteous also have revenue. It is important to understand the place of earthly possessions in the life of the righteous. Ordinarily, to serve the Lord in righteousness requires food and drink as well as clothing and shelter. And so the righteous labor for earthly revenue in order to provide for their earthly needs. But the poor and the gospel ministry must also be supported financially. And so the righteous also labor with their hands the thing that is good, in order that they may have to give to these kingdom causes. But in all this, earthly revenue is not an end in itself. It is only a necessary means to a higher end of serving the Lord and enjoying the spiritual treasure of righteousness. Because this is the place that earthly treasure has in the life of the righteous, they do not always abound in earthly treasure. Nevertheless, in the house of the righteous is much treasure! And that treasure is primarily the treasure of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The treasure of the wicked, however, is only earthly and material. The wicked neither seek nor do they find the treasures of salvation. All the treasures that they can amass are material in nature. And the wicked often have much earthly treasure. Scripture often speaks of the plenty that the wicked have. And they often have more because of their wickedness. They are not robbed of their earthly treasures as are the righteous through persecution. They often are able to gain wealth by their wickedness and dishonesty, from which the righteous refrain. Nor do the wicked contribute financially to the cause of God’s kingdom. Great is the treasure of the wicked! But it is only earthly treasure!

And, in reality, in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

This means that the wicked find only trouble in the profits they make and the earthly treasures they amass.

This trouble finds its source in their wickedness. We noted earlier that the idea of wickedness emphasizes disruption and upheaval. When the wicked trample underfoot the law of God, all of life is disrupted by one disaster after another. Their sins tear down their marriages and destroy the family unit. Their disregard for God’s holy law leads to the bondage of addiction, disregard for authority, murder, stealing, lying, and much more. These sins bring only trouble, sorrow, and chaos into their lives. But, ultimately, their trampling under of God’s law brings them to the consciousness of God’s unspeakable wrath, from which they cannot escape.

Under the judgment of God these troubles are made worse by the riches that they have accumulated. The more the Lord gives to the wicked, the more resources they have with which to sin. Sin abounds in their prosperity. And so does their trouble.

Not so with the righteous! God’s holy law is good. It is designed to regulate the life of God’s people in their covenant relationship with Him and with each other. In the keeping of this covenant law is great joy. In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God’s law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they

prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God’s covenant fellowship. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD” (Ps. 119:1).

In the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

Let us be wise and not fools!

Let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Let us not labor for the treasure that perishes but for the treasure that endures unto everlasting life.

And in that treasure the righteous find joy and peace for time and eternity!

**...earthly revenue is not an end in itself. It is only a necessary means to a higher end of serving the Lord and enjoying the spiritual treasure of righteousness. Because this is the place that earthly treasure has in the life of the righteous, they do not always abound in earthly treasure. Nevertheless, in the house of the righteous is much treasure! And that treasure is primarily the treasure of salvation in Jesus Christ.**



## Editorial

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

### Why catechism?

# The covenant goals of catechism (2)

Last time I emphasized that good catechism teachers will teach with *covenant* goals in view. A good catechism curriculum is one thing, and the PRCA have a very good curriculum. But using it properly is quite another thing, and the effort required for that is greater than one might think. Using the curriculum without covenant goals may result in merely filling the heads of the church's children with biblical knowledge. Important as knowledge is (Hosea 4:6), imparting biblical knowledge without covenant goals promotes 'historical faith,' the kind of false faith even the devil has. Knowing *about* God and knowing God as our own covenant Friend are two very different things. A good catechism teacher wants to impart the biblical doctrines in the light of and in the terms of God's covenant, His living relationship of friendship with His people in Jesus Christ. This kind of instruction God will use to work *true* faith in the church's children, the faith that truly embraces and loves God and His Son Jesus Christ.

I have already pointed out that catechism, in the first place, aims at preparing the children to communicate with their covenant Father—to understand His language when He speaks to them, and to reply in language appropriate for covenant sons and daughters. In the second place, catechism aims at preparing children to partake of the covenant meal, the Lord's Supper. A good catechism teacher will keep both aims in mind as he teaches the children. Third, a covenant approach in catechizing aims at sanctification, which we take up next time.

### Living the covenant life (sanctification)

Reformed catechizing aims at teaching covenant living most broadly. Covenant life with God is not limited to the church's official and public gatherings where sermons are preached and the Lord's Supper is administered. Covenantal living encompasses the whole of one's Christian walk. So the children must be taught, in catechism also, to live godly everywhere.

Looking back at their baptism, catechism explains that baptism admonishes them to a new obedience, to

love God, forsake the world, crucify their old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. Looking ahead to their confession of faith, catechism prepares them to make a public vow to live "a new and godly life." Both have to do with *godliness*.

Teaching godliness has precedence in the church. The assembled believers at the early 'synod' of Reformed churches at Wezel (1568) said that children must "be catechized so that from their youth on they can be taught the true religion and *godliness*." The precedent for this, though, roots back in the New Testament era when the original outline of catechetical instruction was: 1) what Christians *believe*—the Apostles' Creed; 2) how Christians *worship*—preaching and the sacraments; 3) how Christians *pray*—the Lord's Prayer; and 4) how Christians *live*—the ten commandments. (Our Heidelberg Catechism was built after this model.) And the New Testament practice of teaching godliness in catechism harks back to the very beginning, when God told Israel to teach the children "these words," which words explain both God and godliness: who God is and what He has done, and how to love Him (Deut. 6:4-7).

Singing the Psalms in catechism teaches piety too. In his integrity (Psalter #69), the young Christian humbly walks with God, everywhere. Whether he is playing or working, he walks with purpose true (Psalter #31) because he understands that the entire "path of truth" is a walk "in godly fear" (Psalter #65). "Steadfast trust in God" means that he does not depart from God's ways (Psalter #69) at school, with his friends, or at home with his parents: "Within my house I purpose to walk in wisdom's ways" (Psalter #271). In catechism he learns to "make God's fear his choice" (Psalter #90) in every sphere of life.

The teens hear the call to a godly walk when they learn the doctrine of sanctification in grade 10, or perhaps already in grade 8 at Lord's Day 32. But even Bible history teaches godliness. For children "learn from history's light to hope in our God and walk in His sight." Bible *history* warns of those who "faltered when battle was near, who kept not God's covenant nor walked in



His fear” (Psalter #213). And these citations of Zion’s songs again illustrate how valuable it is to sing in catechism, and then explain and apply what was just sung.

A catechism teacher even teaches the Christian life by *modeling* it, as Paul did with the Philippian Christians (3:17). In the presence of the children, he testifies his trust in God alone (the first commandment). Children see him worship in a spiritual way (second commandment), hear him confessing with them the truth of God (third commandment) from his heart. He speaks of his own blessed rest by faith in Jesus Christ and his observance of the Sabbath (the fourth). He teaches in such a way that the children learn to respect him (the fifth). By his protection of them, he models how to protect and promote the neighbor’s life (the sixth). Nothing unchaste is ever seen in him, or permitted in them (the seventh). Even his clothing and the car he drives show the children that he’s a good steward of God’s gifts (the eighth). The words he speaks, before, after, and during class are truth spoken in love for the children, never to deceive, demean, or intimidate (the ninth). Everything about the teacher exhibits his love for the people of God (the communion of saints) and his interest in the well-being of the congregation.

“True religion and *godliness...*” (Wezel). Faith and life. A godliness that harmonizes with true doctrine.

### Living orderly in the church

Fourth, catechism with covenantal aims thinks *ecclesiastically*—of decency and order in church life. The questions at confession of faith inquire of a willingness to submit to church government, and catechism ought to give instruction in this as well. Thinking covenantally is more than thinking of our personal relationship to the covenant Father. It includes thinking of our life in and relationship to the covenant community in the church.

The Protestant Reformed curriculum does not have a separate unit on church government. Essentials of Reformed Doctrine students could learn basic principles of church government when the textbook comes to ecclesiology (even though lesson 24 says little about the government of the church), or when the Belgic Confession comes to Articles 30-32. But requiring an oath at confession of faith to “submit to church government” calls for more careful instruction in the working out of these principles in church life. Lacking this instruction risks asking the young people to promise that which they do not understand.

To be positive, including this instruction enables these young church members to understand their relationship to the elders and deacons, and even how to serve as elder or deacon someday. They will learn the

purpose and authority of consistory, classis, and synod. They will learn the principles and practices of worship: why the church sings only Psalms, preaches the Heidelberg Catechism, worships on special days, requires the ministers to be antithetical in their preaching and catechism instruction, and what signing the Formula of Subscription implies. The youth learn what it means to submit themselves to ecclesiastical decisions, and how to object to them if they judge these decisions to be wrong. Church *government*.

Otherwise, these youth will not know how to behave in the church. For this reason, that assembly of Wezel required the churches *especially* to teach how “to behave properly in the churches and meetings” (which means more than just sitting still in worship). Some New Testament epistles, like the book of Romans, deal primarily with the doctrines of *salvation*. Other New Testament epistles, like I Timothy, deal primarily with the doctrine of *the church*. There, Paul teaches the crucially important subject of “how to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15).

One important section of ‘post-Essentials’ catechism instruction ought to be church government.

### Covenant battles against sin

The last needed element of catechetical instruction that has covenantal goals regards the church’s battle against sin. We have already mentioned the Christian’s personal battle against sin, the doctrine of sanctification. Here, we are talking about the *church’s* battle against sin. Having learned to fight against their own sin that threatens them personally, covenant youth must also learn how to battle in the church the sins that threaten the covenant community, the church.

This is another aspect of ecclesiology that must be spelled out for those who will become members ‘in full standing’ in the church. Included in the vows the youth are asked to make at confession of faith is this: “Will you submit to...church *discipline*?”

This is the Church Order’s fourth section, “Of Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonition,” that is, discipline. One of the marks of the true church, according to our Belgic Confession, is proper Christian discipline. Certainly, in public worship on Sundays, the Heidelberg Catechism sermons on Lord’s Day 31 may expand into a *series* of sermons on discipline so that the congregation is taught the biblical doctrine of discipline. But the covenant youth ought to be informed of the manner of Christian discipline before they make confession of faith.

This good instruction will include how to *submit* to discipline as well as how to *engage in* discipline.

Teaching the youth how to *submit* to church disci-

pline will help them know what to expect when they fall into sin and are impenitent; or what to expect, even when penitent, when they fall into scandalous public sin. They must learn the saving wisdom of Jesus Christ who ordained a useful process to rescue sinners from the snare of the devil, and to rescue the church from the corrupting leaven of sin.

Teaching the youth to *engage* in church discipline will instruct in the proper understanding of Matthew 18. The Lord has put into His young people a real interest in the purity of the church. Rather than wring their hands over the sin of others or, worse, backbite, they can learn in catechism the necessity of going to a brother or sister, then taking another with them if necessary, and how to “tell the church” if God did not use their first efforts.

Even more difficult is learning how to keep the church pure from the sins of officebearers and assemblies. But church members who sing the promise to “cleanse from evildoers the city of the Lord” (Psalter #271) want to know how to address error here as well. And in these days, when some are emphasizing the *privileges* of the

office of believer, there must be a corresponding emphasis on the *manner* of exercising this office. The recent flurry of illegal documents brought to classes and synods may well be explained, in part, by an ignorance of how to behave in the church. Let everything be done decently and in order, Paul demanded of the church (I Cor. 14:40).

As the catechism season begins, may God bless the instruction you ministers and elders (and sometimes seminary professors) give to the youth. Let all of us who teach scriptural truth to the covenant youth have clear covenant aims in our instruction: 1) to teach them to understand the language of their Father and to speak His language as they respond in prayers—both spoken and sung; 2) to prepare them to come to the covenant meal in the Lord’s Supper; 3) to teach them to live the covenant life in holiness; 4) to teach them what good order and decency is in church life; and, 5) to teach them how to battle for purity in the covenant community, in doctrine and life.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught.”



## All around us

Rev. Audred Spriensma, home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches

# The state would like to educate your children

The title is a misnomer. Would our children truly be educated, we would ask? The state would really like to indoctrinate them to the current secular and antichristian worldview. Public schools have, by and large, become temples of atheism. The *Christian Renewal* issue dated August 15, 2020, carries a book excerpt by Gene E. Veith. The article is entitled, “The Death of Education.” It begins with the paragraph,

The consequences of the politicization of ordinary life and a constructivist view of reality are evident in what is happening with education. Postmodernism and its offshoots are not worldviews that promote learning. If there is no objective truth, what is there to teach? What is there to learn? Schools instead can indoctrinate. Schools can teach students to construct their own truths.

Veith warns that the modernist education theory stressed teaching process rather than content, focusing on new ideas and minimizing the old ideas of the past....

Postmodernist educational theory of constructivism takes the next step: children are taught to create their own reading texts, histories, and math rules.

This has had disastrous results. Academic achievement has declined dramatically. Veith points out that recent test scores show that in the United States only 37% of fourth graders and 32% of eighth graders are proficient in reading. In math, only 40% of fourth graders and 33% of eighth graders are proficient. What must be noticed is that with more and more schooling, there is a decline in proficiency! There is an even greater decline in the university. “The postmodernist university is having difficulty promoting any kind of expertise.” A study of American higher education done by scholars from the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia found that scores in critical thinking actually decrease in many universities. On the average today, undergraduate students spend only 11.5 hours per week studying. Instead the college students spent 51% of

their time socializing and only 7% of their time studying. Veith notes that part of the decline can be attributed to the lower priority of teaching in favor of research. There is also the negative impact of federal money. The campus culture, which favors partying (with its alcohol abuse and sexual debauchery) over intellectual achievements is also part of the decline. “An even bigger contributing factor is the postmodernist worldview that has come to govern many disciplines.”

There is the belief that much of history and other subjects that were taught in the past were governed, determined, and defined by power dynamics between groups of people, often dictated by sex, race, or sexual or gender identification. Things accepted in the past as based on reality are instead believed to have been created by powerful groups in order to maintain power over marginalized ones. Thus they rewrite history and read materials only by those who hold to their own secular worldview.

Much of what is presented in college teaching courses is really little more than the old “discovery learning.” The idea behind this theory of education is that the students have to work out the answers for themselves. There is no absolute truth, only prejudices and opinions. With this brand of radical skepticism that rejects objective truth, “these scholars are like snake-oil salespeople who diagnose our society as being riddled with a disease only they can cure.”

Is this what you would want your child taught? Would you want sinful and anti-God teachers encouraging their students to redefine what is right and proper according to their own depravity and sin?

From [answersingenesis.org](http://answersingenesis.org) there is a blog post entitled, “Teachers Worry ‘Dangerous’ Parents Might Overhear Classroom Discussions.” It might be the best thing that has happened to state education. These teachers are concerned that parents might hear what they are forcing upon their students. Parents might hear them brainwashing their children. These teachers call Christian parents dangerous. With the global pandemic leading many schools in America to offer or require students to “school at home” with online instruction, some teachers in our state schools are afraid of parents and others overhearing the teacher’s instruction. They believe that this could be damaging, at least to themselves.

Matthew Kay, an educator, recently tweeted,

So, this fall, virtual class discussion will have many potential spectators—parents, siblings, etc.—in the same room. We’ll never be quite sure who is overhearing the discourse. What does this do for our equity/inclusion work? ...How many of us have installed some version of “what happens here stays

here” to help this? While conversations about race are in my wheelhouse, and remain a concern in this no-walls environment, I am most intrigued by the damage that “helicopter/snowplow” parents can do in the host conversations about gender/sexuality. And while “conservative” parents are my chief concern—I know that the damage can come from the left too. If we are engaged in the messy work of destabilizing a kid’s racism or homophobia or transphobia—how much do we want their classmates’ parents piling on?

One teacher expressed and summarized it bluntly: “Parents are dangerous.”

“Parents are dangerous.” They view children as wards of the state, to be indoctrinated and shielded from negative influences of parents, particularly, parents’ personal beliefs. In this view, parents are the enemy. Secular teachers, armed with a radical worldview that opposes the Bible, are the ones who can properly guide, nurture, instruct and really, brainwash these children in the way they should go.

Writing for the *Daily Wire*, conservative commentator Matt Walsh brings up three important points in regard to this kind of thinking. First, “classrooms are certainly not ‘safe places’ for children to be ‘vulnerable.’ Think of the pressure children are under to conform to the values and opinions of teachers and peers.” Second, “an adult keeping a secret with a child and helping the child conceal that secret from his parent is nothing short of predatory.” Third, a public school teacher “is not supposed to be, and should not try to be, educator, parent, spiritual guide, therapist, friend, confidant, and sex counselor, all rolled into one.”

Children are *not* wards of the state! Children are entrusted by God to parents to train and instruct in the way that they should go. One must not think that the state knows better than parents and has the right to indoctrinate children in a secular, naturalistic worldview.

We are thankful for our good Christian schools. But even here, parents have a responsibility to know everything being taught to their children that might influence them in the wrong way. Would it not be wonderful, in light of the training our teachers receive in the universities, if we had our own Christian college for the training of future teachers in the Protestant Reformed schools.

We as Christian parents must pray for our Christian teachers and the school boards of our schools. We thank God for our heritage where we have insisted on parental schools. Keep the state out of the instruction. Will it be education or indoctrination? Both are needed from a biblical foundation of the Word of God. “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).





## Pillar and ground of truth

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

# The Council of Constantinople (AD 381): Necessary to address other Christological heresies

The first ecumenical council was held in Nicea in 325; the second in Constantinople in 381. We note three reasons why a second council was necessary. Our last article (July 2020) noted that the church had to defend Nicea's teaching that Christ is truly God because some continued to deny it. A second reason, which we consider now, is that some who defended Nicea's doctrine of Christ's divinity proceeded to give wrong explanations for how He is God. The Council of Constantinople was needed to declare how Christ is God against these wrong explanations.

The first "canon" (pronouncement) of the Council of Constantinople indicates that the Council dealt with these errors: "That the faith of the 318 Fathers who assembled at Nicaea in Bithynia, is not to be made void, but shall continue established; and that every heresy shall be anathematized, and especially that of the...[here are listed heresies that we noted in our last article]... Sabellians and Marcellians, and that of the Photinians, and that of the Apollinarians."<sup>1</sup>

### Sabellianism

While the Arians had denied that Christ is God, Sabellius (200s; dates uncertain) went far in the other direction. That God's Son was divine, he admitted; but that God was three distinct Persons in one Being, he denied. How, then, to explain that the Scriptures speak of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Sabellius' answer was that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament as Father and Creator; when Christ came to earth, suffered, and died, He revealed Himself as Son and Redeemer; and from Pentecost on He revealed Himself as the Holy Spirit and Sanctifier. In other words, these three names do not refer to three Persons in the Godhead, but to three *modes* in which God revealed Himself to us. Sabellius' view, therefore, became known as *modalism*.

Sabellius lived in the 200s. He had been condemned and excommunicated, and probably had died before the Council of Nicea met in 325. However, his views lived on.

Do you see the error in this teaching? It denies that God has three distinct Persons and, therefore, that He is a covenant God in His Being. Following this, the error denies that salvation is the work of God the Father, through Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit—the work of bringing sinners into God's covenant life and bestowing covenant blessings. Some who understood the error pointed out the absurdity to which it leads: if God the Father is really the same as God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, then when Jesus died on the cross, the *Father* suffered and died!

### Marcellianism and Photinianism

Like Sabellius, Marcellus (d. 374) taught that Christ was divine, and denied that God was three in Person. However, Marcellus modified Sabellius' view; after all, the church had condemned it. Marcellus taught that God's Son (Christ) was not eternal and did not come into existence before Jesus was born. God's Logos (Word) was eternal. That Logos went forth when God created the world, and it entered Jesus when He was born. When Christ died, arose, and ascended, God's Son ceased to exist, but His Logos continues.

Like Marcellus, Photinus (d. 376) also denied that the Son was eternal. Marcellus had tried to explain that Jesus had something divine in Him. Photinus viewed Jesus as simply a human being. Jesus was not God, nor did God dwell in Him. The Bible, when speaking of Jesus as the Son of God, simply teaches that Jesus was supremely human, an exemplary human, and became "divine" in His own power.

Do you see the problem with these teachings? If Christ is not everlasting, how can He make priestly intercession at God's right hand? How can He declare the words of salvation as our chief Prophet and rule in our hearts as our eternal King? If He is not truly God,

<sup>1</sup> "Canons of Constantinople, 381" in *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD 337-461*, ed. J. Stevenson, rev. W. H. C. Frend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 135.

He never saved us when He lived on earth, and cannot save us today.

### Apollinarianism

Apollinaris (d. 382) taught that Christ was God and that Christ took to Himself a human body. But how were the divine and human natures united in the person of the Son of God? Apollinaris taught that man consists of three parts—body, soul, and spirit (I Thess. 5:23)—and that man’s will was a function of his spirit. When Christ became human, He took to Himself a human body and soul. However, in the place of a human spirit, Christ possessed the divine Logos. In other words, Christ was human in two aspects, but divine in the third, in His will. This explained Christ’s sinlessness, according to Apollinaris, for sin is a matter of man’s will.

In this way Apollinaris denied that Jesus was com-

pletely and fully human. Sin has corrupted the whole of man. Certainly, sin also corrupted our will. To deliver us from the bondage of sin, Jesus Christ must be fully human. True, He must also be without sin—but not because the divine replaced part of the human. How could Jesus save us regarding our sinful wills if He did not have a human will?

The Arians and semi-Arians said Christ was not God. Photinus did the same. The other heresies mentioned above said that Christ was God, but explained His divinity in a wrong way. The church needed to face the question of *how* Christ is God. The Council of Constantinople would do that.

What about the Holy Spirit? Is He also truly God? The wrong answers to that question were the third reason why the Council was necessary. We will examine that next time.



## Search the Scriptures

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# Jonah

### Introduction

The appeal of the book of Jonah, for this writer, lies in part in the character of Jonah. Disinclined to preach as sent, disobedient, grudging the repentance of those to whom he preached, Jonah shows himself to be a man “subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17). Yet the prophet was used by God to save His people and to be, in history, an example of the power of God’s Word and the wideness of God’s purpose, even to be a pre-figure of the death and burial of our Savior. That “weakest means fulfill His will” (Psalter #15; Psalm 8) is one of the minor lessons of the book, a lesson that continues to be taught in the use God makes of His people still today. May God so use each of us, poor sinners that we are, in His service and for His glory, whatever place and calling we have in His kingdom.

### The author and main character

Whether Jonah is the author of the book we are not told. That is not impossible, though the book is written in the third person. Most of the prophets, major and minor, are the authors of the books that are named for

them, but there is no direct proof one way or the other in this case.

The main character of the book is identified only as Jonah the son of Amittai. Of his father we know nothing; of him we know little. He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II and spoke of the expansion of the northern kingdom (Israel) during those days (II Kings 14:25). He is further identified in II Kings as being from Gathhepher. Gathhepher is almost certainly the same town in the inheritance of Zebulun as Gittahhepher in Joshua 19:13, but identifying the two adds little to our knowledge of Jonah, except that he was probably a Zebulonite from the area later known as Galilee, a citizen of the northern kingdom, and one who was called to prophesy there.

As is often the case in the Bible, the personal details of the men God used are unimportant. What is important is the work God did through them, the messages they brought and the glory of the great salvation He revealed through them. Jonah himself does not matter very much. What matters is the wonderful demonstration God made through him of the eternal truth that “salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

## The date

That Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II means that he lived around 825 BC, about one hundred years before the demise of the northern kingdom. He was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Amos in the northern kingdom and perhaps of Isaiah in Judah. He prophesied at a time, therefore, when both kingdoms were strong and prosperous but at turning points in their histories. Both kingdoms had begun to decline and were soon swallowed up by the heathen kingdoms around them. This was especially true of the northern kingdom, which though outwardly strong, was spiritually rotten at the time of Jonah's prophesy. Jonah's disobedience is explained by the poor spiritual condition of the nation.

## The historical background

We do not know if Jonah prophesied before or beyond the rule of Jeroboam II. Jeroboam, the greatest king of the northern kingdom, was third in Jehu's dynasty to rule that kingdom. Jehu had been promised four generations of rule over the northern kingdom, but Jeroboam's son, Zachariah, would rule for only six months and the northern kingdom would begin its descent to anarchy and dissolution under him. Jeroboam, his father, restored the original boundaries of the kingdom, even conquering Damascus and Hamath, the great cities of the Syrian empire, adding them to his kingdom so that under his rule the ten tribes reached the height of their power and influence. During his reign Jonah prophesied and though Jonah certainly saw the prosperity of the kingdom under Jeroboam, there is no doubt he also saw its spiritual emptiness.

The prosperity and growth of the kingdom under Jeroboam were part of God's mercy to that kingdom. II Kings 14:26, 27 tell us: "For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

God was not being merciful to all in the northern kingdom, but there was still a remnant there (cf. the history of Elijah and Elisha) and to them God was merciful. It was shortly after Jonah that many who were left of God's people in the northern kingdom migrated to Judah in connection with Hezekiah's passover (II Chron. 30:1-11). God showed them mercy in postponing the demise of their kingdom and in allowing them time for repentance. Perhaps they had heard the preaching of Jonah in their land.

For the most part Israel's prosperity and growth during the reign of Jeroboam was only outward and superficial, for Jeroboam "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (II Kings 14:24). Though the house of Jehu had destroyed the worship of Baal, they kept, under Jeroboam II and the others of Jehu's dynasty, to the worship of the golden calves instituted by Jeroboam I as a substitute for the worship of God.

This spiritual destitution is important in the book of Jonah, for it explains Jonah's reluctance to obey, his disobedience to God's command, and his anger over Nineveh's repentance. He saw Israel's great spiritual need and grudged God's grace to Nineveh, all the more so because Nineveh was an instrument of God in punishing Israel.

Nineveh's place in history, as well as its repentance in the days of Jonah, explains Jonah's reluctance, disobedience, and anger.

Nineveh, one of the great cities of ancient times, was the capital of Israel's arch-enemy, Assyria. Assyria was becoming the world power of that day and was as given to wickedness as any of the great empires of ancient times. Zephaniah and Nahum would prophesy against Nineveh and Assyria, but she had been and would continue to be used by God to punish Israel's wickedness by warring against, scattering, and taking into captivity that nation. No wonder, then, that Jonah begrudged their repentance.

## The historicity

The historicity of the book is often questioned in connection with the story of Jonah being swallowed by a fish. The doubters are answered not only by the reference to Jonah in II Kings 14:25 but by our Lord's comparison of His own burial to Jonah's "three days and three nights in the whale's belly" (Matt. 12:40). If Jesus believed that Jonah was an historical person, so must we. As someone said, "If God's Word told me that Jonah swallowed a whale, I would believe that."

Jesus made further reference to Jonah (perhaps on the same occasion as in Matthew) in Luke 11:29-32 (cf. also Matt. 12:39-41):

And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth

to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here (cf. also Matt. 12:39-41 and 16:4).

He believed, as we must, that Jonah preached in Nineveh and that God used Jonah's preaching to prefigure the salvation of the Gentiles.

The historicity of the book is important, not only because Jesus makes these references to Jonah, but also because the book shows so wonderfully that "salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). It shows this in the Old Testament salvation of the Ninevites and in the salvation of a disobedient and reluctant prophet. To question the historicity of the book and to make the story a mere legend destroys that message.

## The theme

The theme of Jonah is found in Jonah's own confession that "salvation is of the Lord" (2:9). That theme is developed in God's use of Jonah himself, in the repentance of the sailors who tossed Jonah overboard, in the salvation of Nineveh, as well as in Jonah's own confession. It is further developed in the death and burial of Jesus, of whom Jonah, in that one thing, was a figure.

That theme may be said to be the great theme, even the only theme of the Word of God, illustrated in every story, song, and instruction of the Word of God. It is that lesson that we learn through trials and affliction and that will be our theme for eternity. That message ought to speak to the heart of everyone who sees himself in this reluctant and disobedient prophet, as well as to every Gentile believer whose repentance and salvation is as great a wonder as the repentance and salvation of the Ninevites.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

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

# Assurance and good works (1)

## Assurance belongs to salvation

In the goodness of His grace, God not only saves His people; He also gives them the assurance of their salvation. Theoretically, God could have saved us but not given us the assurance of our salvation. Throughout our lives we would, at best, be left to wonder whether we were saved. At worst, we would be assailed by constant doubts and fears concerning our salvation. Then, although God has elected us, we could not in this life know with certainty that we are among the number of God's elect. Then, although Christ has redeemed us, we could not in this life have the assurance of our redemption in His blood. And then, although the Holy Spirit has regenerated us and given us the gift of faith, we could not know in this life with absolute certainty that He dwells in us or that we are believing children of God.

In that case, to be sure, our salvation would still be an altogether gracious salvation, for none of us deserves salvation. Even if throughout our lifetime we could never be sure of our salvation, until the moment that we died and opened our eyes in heaven, our salva-

tion would still be due to the marvelous grace of God. Guilty, damnable sinners that we are, even then our salvation would be a wonder of grace. Considering not only that we do not deserve heaven, but instead deserve the everlasting suffering of hell, that we are afforded a place in heaven magnifies the grace of God.

Nevertheless, the grace of God is greater still. God's grace is truly amazing grace! Not only does He save us, but He also gives us in this life the assurance of our salvation. Here and now, throughout his pilgrim journey, the child of God enjoys the assurance of salvation. So much is assurance a part of salvation that a right understanding of salvation necessarily includes a right understanding of the assurance of salvation.

Election is God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation. Included in the truth of election is God the Father's will that those whom He has chosen should know and be assured of their election: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God" (I Thess. 1:4). Redemption is God the Son's work on behalf of those whom the Father has elected. But Christ's redemption



includes the assurance of redemption on the part of all those for whom He died: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him” (Rom. 6:6). Regeneration and faith are the work of God the Holy Spirit. But those whom the Spirit regenerates and those upon whom He bestows the gift of faith are assured by the Holy Spirit that He will preserve them in the salvation of which He has made them partakers: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The assurance of salvation is *personal* assurance. It is not merely assurance of the doctrine of salvation and the orthodoxy of one’s doctrine of salvation, important as that is. But it is the personal assurance that I am an elect child of God. It is not only assurance of the truth of the atonement, but that Christ died for me, even for me. It is not only assurance of the Bible’s teaching of regeneration and faith, but the assurance that I am a regenerated child of God and that the Holy Spirit has given to me the precious gift of faith.

### Assurance in the Heidelberg Catechism

The personal assurance of salvation is often referred to in the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the dearest and most personal of the Reformed confessions. The theme of the Catechism is comfort, the comfort that the child of God enjoys in life and in death. But comfort presupposes assurance. How could there be any real comfort if we were not assured of our salvation? What comfort could we enjoy, if we had to live in constant doubt whether we are saved? Only because we are assured of our salvation can we enjoy real and lasting comfort.

The first Q&A spells out that comfort. The question is, “What is thy only comfort in life and death?” The answer of the Catechism is,

That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

The answer breathes the confidence enjoyed by the Christian. I am not my own, but I belong to Jesus Christ. With His precious blood, He has satisfied for my sins and delivered me from the power of the devil. My heavenly Father preserves me and causes all things to be subservient to my salvation. The Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me willing and ready

to live unto Christ. That is assurance! Unspeakable consolation!

Many of the questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism give expression to the assurance of salvation that the believer enjoys. The twenty-first question asks, “What is true *faith*?” The Catechism’s response, which is put into the mouth of every child of God, is “that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.” Q&A 44 puts the confession on the lips of the Reformed Christian that by Christ’s suffering and death on the cross, He has “delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.” That is the believer’s undoubted assurance. In Q&A 54, the Reformed Christian confesses “that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member” of the church of Jesus Christ. He is assured of lasting membership in the body of Jesus Christ. Q&A 60 has every believer confess that God “of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin.” Blessed assurance! What peace of heart and mind amid the struggles and sorrows of earthly life! I am justified before God for the sake of Christ’s merits.

This same confession points out the main purpose of the sacraments and the reason on account of which the sacraments have been added by God to the preaching of the gospel. The sacraments have as their special purpose, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, the strengthening of the faith of God’s children, which includes their assurance. The sacraments have been instituted as signs and seals of God’s covenant. By means of the sacraments, God intends to strengthen the assurance of our salvation. That is the special role of the sacraments in the life of the church, that by means of that which appeals to our senses, we may be confirmed in the assurance of our salvation.

In Q&A 65, which introduces the Catechism’s treatment of the sacraments, the question is asked, “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?” The Catechism’s answer is: “From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and *confirms it* by the use of the sacraments.” The sacraments play a confirmatory role; their purpose is the assurance and the development of the assurance of the people of God. Q&A 67 asks, “Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation?” The answer is: “Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us

in the gospel, *and assures us by the sacraments*, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.” The questions and answers that introduce the sacraments are, “How art thou admonished *and assured...*” by baptism and by the Lord’s Supper. The sacraments not only admonish us to seek all our salvation in Jesus Christ, but they also assure us of the certainty of our salvation in Christ and His finished work.

### Assurance the will of God

God wills the assurance of His people. The Heidelberg Catechism is only reflecting what its authors understood to be the will of God for the saints. That God wills the assurance of His people ought not to be questioned. The Scriptures make abundantly plain that God wills that His people live and die in the assurance of their salvation. This is God’s will not only for a select few in the church, the super-saints; but this is God’s will for all His people in every age. It is not an exception that the Christian enjoys the assurance of salvation. Rather, this is the ordinary experience of the saints, that they live and die in the confidence that they are saved, that God is their God and that they are the children of God.

So much is it true that assurance is the will of God that the entire Christian life is built upon and arises out of the believer’s assurance of salvation. This is another of the great insights of the Heidelberg Catechism. What is the Christian life, according to the Catechism? And what is it that motivates the Christian life? The Christian life is gratitude and that which motivates the Christian life is thankfulness to God for His great salvation. But how can the Christian be grateful for that of which he is not assured? How can he be thankful for that which he doubts belongs to him? Only if he lives in the assurance of his salvation and the conscious enjoyment of the blessings of salvation can the Christian be thankful. And then he will certainly be thankful—eternally thankful—no matter what the circumstances of his life may be. The whole Christian life flows forth from the assurance of salvation. So vital is the connection between assurance and the Christian life, that the absence of assurance destroys the very fabric of the Christian life.

Two important considerations establish the will of God for the assurance of His people. Both considerations are connected to God’s covenant. The first consideration is that God’s relationship to His people is often described in terms of the relationship between husband and wife in marriage. In the covenant, God is the Husband and Head of His church, and the church is His bride and wife. This is the teaching of such passages as Jeremiah 3 and Ephesians 5. What Christian husband

is content only with providing for and protecting his wife, and that she submits to and honors him? Is not the Christian husband above all concerned that he loves his wife and that she knows his love for her? Is it not the determination of the Christian husband to assure his wife of his love for her and to surround her with the evidences of his love? We Christian husbands need to do this more often than we do. It is not enough that we love our wives; we must constantly be reassuring them of our love for them. This is what Christ does as the husband of His church. This belongs to the significance of the preaching of the gospel every Lord’s Day. In the preaching of the good news of the gospel, Christ proclaims repeatedly His steadfast love for the church. He assures His bride over and over again of His love for her.

The second consideration is that God’s relationship to His people is described in terms of a father to his children. God is our heavenly Father and we are His spiritual sons and daughters. Times innumerable God calls the people of Israel in the Old Testament His children. God commanded Moses to say to Pharaoh, “Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me” (Ex. 4:22-23). The apostle writes in Romans 8:16-17, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Jesus teaches us in the Lord’s Prayer to address God as “Our Father who art in heaven.”

What Christian father would be content only that his children fear and obey him? Is not the fervent desire of every Christian father that his children know his love for them, that they are more precious to him than any earthly thing, even than his own life? Does not every covenant father surround his children with the tokens of his love for them? How much more is that not true of God our heavenly Father? As the only perfect Father, and as an enduring example to us earthly fathers, God is determined to assure His dear children of His unfailing love for them. We sing of the fatherly love of God in Psalter #278, stanza one: “The tender love a father has for all his children dear, such love the Lord bestows on them who worship Him in fear.”

The two great pictures of God’s everlasting covenant of grace underscore the will of God for the assurance of His people. And in these two relationships in which God’s covenant love for us is reflected, we also are assured of God’s love for us.



## Believing and confessing

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# The final commandment

### Lord's Day 44

*Question 113.* What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

*Answer.* That even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God's commandments never arise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

*Question 114.* But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

*Answer.* No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

*Question 115.* Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

*Answer.* First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

The tenth and final commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," is something like a capstone. The law, and our obedience to it, are not complete until God has spoken in the tenth commandment.

This commandment is unique. Each of the others addresses either a behavior or a relationship, speaking to something observable, something you will either hear or see. This one, however, speaks to something that only God can see, the desires of our hearts. In this commandment the law brings us before God, and sets Him forth as the judge of men's hearts. No man can punish or imprison you for your hidden desires, but God can send you to hell for them. "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10).

This commandment is the door to understanding all of the commandments and brings obedience to a much higher level. There are not nine commandments that deal with external behavior and now one that deals with internal thoughts, but God is concerned in every commandment with obedience from the heart. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6).

### Requiring perfection

The answer of the Catechism to the question, "What does the tenth commandment require of us?" is quite surprising. Though coveting is a sin familiar to all of us and of which we are all guilty, nothing is said about coveting. No definition is given. Nothing is said about the neighbor's possessions and our greed, envy, jealousy or lust for what is not ours. Instead, the Catechism states something impossible: that this commandment teaches that God requires a perfect, heart obedience from us. Notice the absolute language: "That *even* the *smallest* inclination or thought contrary to *any* of God's commandments *never* rise in our hearts; but that at *all* times we hate *all* sin with our *whole* heart, and delight in *all* righteousness." There is no wiggle room, no falling short of perfection.

But, how did we get from coveting to perfection?

Because the commandment addresses desire. God is not concerned merely with obedience to the letter of the law, to the external activity, but with our "inclinations and thoughts" and our "hatred" for sin and "delight" in obedience. We sin without doing. Covetousness is a heart sin, and God holds us responsible for our entire

thought life. The focus in this commandment is not the neighbor or his house or wife; nor is the focus merely your thoughts about your neighbor, but the focus is your heart before God.

And now, we have learned something about all the other commandments, about all obedience to God. The first commandment does not merely forbid the worship of other deities or idols, but it demands exclusive love for God. The fifth commandment does not merely require obedience and respect to an authority figure, but examines our attitudes and demands that we obey “as unto the Lord.” The seventh not only forbids adulterous acts but, if a man looks on a woman with desire, his lust is adultery.

The tenth commandment deepens and strengthens the law. When we might think with the rich young ruler that we have kept all the commandments of God, then this commandment comes and says, How about your heart? Are your desires perfect before God?

But someone objects: How can God require such perfection? Is that not unfair?

God can require it because He Himself is holy and righteous. In stark contrast to our imperfect and impossible obedience stands the perfect active obedience of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Salvation is impossible through our fulfilling the law, but Christ has kept it to the letter and from the heart perfectly for us.

## Exposing corruption

In requiring perfection this commandment exposes our corruption. There is our dark side that we try to hide that this commandment exposes to God. There are lusts and jealousies that we do not share because they are “nobody else’s business;” but God says, “That, too, is my business.” The deep sea of sinful thoughts and desires that lies under the glassy surface God sees. You may outwardly appear so clean and pious, but God sees deeper. “There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known” (Matt. 10:26). “I the LORD search the heart” (Jer. 17:10).

Before this commandment there is an alarming increase of guilt and we begin to see what it means that “daily” we increase our debt. The one who lacks a sense of guilt before God looks into shallow waters and needs to look into the mirror of this commandment, to descend from the pride of his own actions and to pray,

*Search me, O God, my heart discern,  
Try me, my inmost thought to learn;  
And lead me, if in sin I stray,  
To choose the everlasting way.*

“Even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a

small beginning of this obedience.” How instructive is this statement! Notice that it selects for examination not the unholy wicked but the holiest of men, those sanctified by God’s Holy Spirit who have been described as having “a sincere sorrow of heart that they have provoked God for their sin, and more and more hate and flee from sin.”

How far have these—have you as a Christian—progressed in obedience to God’s law?

Putting it positively, we have “only a small beginning.” Negatively, there remains a mountain of sin and corruption. My best works are as filthy rags. “I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes,” said Job. “I am a man of unclean lips and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,” said Isaiah. “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” said Peter. “O wretched man that I am,” said Paul. When it comes to the holiest of men, below the surface is the corruption of that old man of sin.

Is this too hard? Does someone say, “But what’s below the surface, my desires, are beyond my control? Does God really hold me responsible for thoughts that seem to just pop into my head?” The answer is, “Yes!” This is the depth of the law, revealing to us not only the filth of our sinful deeds, but also the stench of our corrupt nature.

And the regenerate heart says, with Paul, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7, 25).

## Awakening resolve

The regenerated heart is not a pool of stagnant water, but rather a flowing stream. Once we have become new creatures, by the power of regeneration, that new life buds and brings fruit in every direction. As the waters are stirred by the Spirit of God that speaks in the law, the believer says, “I delight in the law of God” and have “a sincere resolution to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.” As the sun awakens a flower, so the child of God says when he hears the commandments, “That’s what I want to do. I want to be holy as God, the Lawgiver, is holy.”

In this life, that obedience is never perfect. It is always a beginning, but a beginning that increases, so that we, growing in grace and obedience, “become more and more conformable to the image of God.” The strict preaching of the law to regenerated ears and hearts produces this fruit. We are not wasting words as we preach and apply the commandments strictly to the lives of God’s people. The Word of God is profitable “for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,



that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16-17).

To be built up, we must first be broken down. To be repentant, we must first be exposed. To be equipped, we must first be stripped. For new desires to be awakened, the old and sinful must first be recognized.

A superficial knowledge of ourselves will not do. We need the kind that will make us “more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ.” We do not need to feel good about ourselves and our “small” obedience, but to see the greatness and sufficiency and excellence of the cross and love of Christ for broken, repentant sinners. This is where the law as our schoolmaster leads us.

Perhaps you thought that to die happily you would

need Christ. Now we learn that to live we also need Christ. “Without me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). The branch is fruitless and withers apart from the vine. We cannot do without Christ. We cannot do without His forgiveness. We cannot do without His righteousness. We cannot do without His Spirit. We cannot do without His Word. We cannot do without His grace.

And so, rather than poking around, trying to obtain righteousness by our obedience to the law, we turn in faith and prayer to God, “who will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.”

Next, the catechism will take us to the subject of prayer.

### Questions for discussion

1. How is this commandment different from the other nine?
2. What is coveting? Find some Bible passages that address this sin.
3. Why does the Catechism not say anything directly about coveting? Is there a deficiency here in the Catechism?
4. How is obedience described in the Catechism here? Is it fair that God requires perfect obedience of us? (See also Q&A 9.)
5. What does the tenth commandment teach us about God’s requirement in each of the other commandments?
6. Give examples of emphasizing external regulation while neglecting heart obedience.
7. Do God’s people keep His commandments? Can they? Explain and discuss your answers.
8. Is it a good thing, or a bad thing, to be shown where we fall short of obedience to God’s law? Explain your answer.
9. What are the reasons for the ten commandments to be preached still today?
10. How does the law lead us to Christ?
11. How does delight in the law work to produce holiness in the child of God?
12. How does understanding our sinfulness lead us to prayer?



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

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

## Born this way (2): An uncertain question

Previous article in this series: August 2020, p. 450.

**For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.**

**II Corinthians 5:4**

In the last article we considered the vast changes

in morality that have swept Western society in the last half century or so. As a prime example of these sweeping changes, we considered how society’s view of homosexual behavior has rapidly shifted from the perspective of sin and shame to that of acceptance and normalization—even to the point of celebration. Though this massive shift in public opinion is certainly

not the only indication of how completely Western culture has rejected the moral authority of Scripture and its sovereign Author, it does signal a level of perversity that God's Word describes as man becoming his own idol (Rom. 1:21-25).

Because no man can escape the clear evidence of God in the creation as he slides toward self-idolatry, the justification of *genetic determinism* has been offered as a salve for the collective conscience of our generation. Over the past few years, we have been assured by scientists and cultural icons alike that people are just "born that way."<sup>1</sup> Although the prior article examined and criticized this idea, it left unexplained how the various fields of science have come to embrace the conclusion that human behavior, including sexual behavior, is controlled by genetics.

Here we provide an explanation of how these studies have been done and in the next article, Lord willing, we will discuss how their results may be correctly understood from a biblically Reformed perspective. This is necessary, both for us and our children, because the message of the world around us is aimed at capitulation to the moral corruption of our age. Rather than capitulating to secular explanations of scientific observations, we turn to God's Word as our lens for interpreting science and understanding truth.

This is not an easy task, since the connection between genetics and behavior may very well be the most complicated question that modern science has tried to answer. That there is a connection is effectively undeniable, so the issue at hand is less about the veracity of the science and more about how we ought to understand and interpret it. As noted previously, our everyday experience seems to confirm that at least some aspects of behavior are *inherited*, that is, genetically encoded. Parents and children can have an almost uncanny behavioral resemblance to one another that is hard to explain simply by virtue of family life, especially when siblings from the same family are so different from one another. Putting hard scientific numbers on these everyday observations, however, turns out to be quite a challenge.

To get at the question of whether certain behaviors have a genetic component to them, scientists have turned to an approach known as an 'association study,' which provides statistics to evaluate whether two distinct things are related to one another. Genetic association studies seek to correlate a specific physical trait

that is displayed differently among humans (eye color, for instance) with variation in a specific gene or set of genes within the human genome. If a specific gene or set of genes correlates with a specific physical trait, it is reasonable to infer that these two things are causally related (that is, *associated*) to one another. This approach maintains that behaviors can be viewed as highly complex traits that might arise from the combination of genes that an individual receives from his or her parents.

For much of the twentieth century it was impossible to measure the variation in genetics between different people. While scientists were aware of how heredity worked and that there was a significant degree of genetic variation across the entire human population, there was no good way to obtain and analyze the entire genetic sequence of a human for use in association studies.<sup>2</sup> Without this information, it is impossible to determine whether there is a relationship between a physical trait and genes—unless genetic similarities could be inferred without knowing the actual genetic sequences involved. This caveat is precisely the basis for association studies that use twins, because the genetic relationship between these individuals is known.

Due to the distinct cellular processes by which 'twinning' happens, *fraternal* and *identical* twins are genetically related in different ways. While *fraternal* twins are no more genetically related to one another than any other pair of siblings, *identical* twins are essentially genetic copies of one another. This means that any physical or behavioral trait that is genetically encoded should be shared equally by identical twins, but only in part by fraternal twins. The stronger this statistical correlation is, the more likely it is to indicate a genetic influence on a trait.

While a multitude of twin studies have been done for a broad variety of traits, the most comprehensive of them to study the role of genetics on behavior was initiated by researchers at the University of Minnesota in 1983.<sup>3</sup> Among the more ingenious aspects of this study was to distinguish not only between fraternal and identical twins, but also to identify identical twin pairs who were raised by different families due to their being adopted after birth. The benefit of this practice is to dampen the

<sup>1</sup> This slogan is also the title of a popular book by William Wright, who purported to set the record straight regarding the "nature-versus-nurture" debate. The title provides ample insight into the author's perspective, though whether his book is the source of the well-worn slogan is unclear.

<sup>2</sup> This problem stimulated the international Human Genome Project and subsequent research to catalog the variety of genetic composition across the human race. While it is technically possible to obtain the entire genetic sequence—all 3 billion chemical letters—of a person today, the sheer size of information involved makes analysis amazingly complex and time-consuming.

<sup>3</sup> At this point the ongoing study has registered more than 8,000 pairs of twins. The study functions primarily by "personality and interests tests...via mail." More information can be found on the website for this study, <https://mctfr.psych.umn.edu/research/UM%20research.html>.

influence of the home environment on individual development, which allows for similarities between identical twins to be attributed more to genetics than social influences. This ongoing study and others like it provide the initial basis for studying the role of genetics on behavior.

Over the past few decades, however, advances in genetic technology have opened the door to much more elaborate and specific studies of how genetics influence behavior. Rather than simply presenting statistical arguments about whether genetics must be involved—which is all that twin studies can really conclude—these studies have begun the task of associating complex traits with actual genetic sequences in the human genome. The tools in these *genome-wide association studies* (GWAS) primarily involve technologies that sample only the areas of variety in the human genome, though in recent years it has also become possible to obtain the entire genetic sequence of individuals in a relatively quick and cost-effective way.<sup>4</sup> These technologies have enabled medical scientists to identify genetic risk factors for a host of diseases including cancer, heart disease, and neurological disorders, all of which can be more effectively managed or prevented before symptoms appear rather than after.

The advent of GWAS has also allowed genetic researchers in the field of psychology to begin pinpointing some of the genetic influences on behavior. Much of this work started with the evaluation of genetic influences on complex psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and depression, but has since extended into the realm of “normal” behaviors as well. This article makes no judgment as to whether this is wise or permissible from an ethical point of view—it may very well have been ill-advised to undertake many of these studies. Nonetheless, the studies were performed and we do have results from them. Sometimes these are disturbing and worrisome results for Christians who feel that the role of God in His own creation is slowly being eroded away in favor of the monolith of secular science.

This is especially true when secular scientists assume the authority to interpret their results in a way that contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. And so we turn to the results of association studies that have specifically sought to relate homosexual behavior to genetics, which

include both twin studies and GWAS.<sup>5</sup> Results from twin studies have been around since the 1980s and correlate with broader movements to ‘destigmatize’ unbiblical sexual behavior that grew out of the social revolution of the 1960s “free love” movement. Many of these published twin studies are severely flawed and appear on their face to be driven by the bias of authors who designed them, so great caution should be exercised in accepting their results. Those few that are sufficiently large to permit legitimate statistical analysis and appear to be designed in an unbiased way, however, support a modest role for genetics in human sexual behavior.<sup>6</sup>

In parallel to the twin studies, several GWAS studies have been employed to address the same question of whether homosexual behavior has a genetic basis. Certainly the most famous of these was performed by a government scientist who managed to fund his search for a “gay gene” under the cloak of AIDS research in the early 1990s.<sup>7</sup> While this study generated significant media coverage and was used heavily as propaganda by the homosexual community, attempts to replicate it have been inconsistent and increasingly disputed. A much larger study on genetic data and questionnaires from over a half million male participants, which was completed just last year, provides much stronger data to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a “gay gene.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, the study concluded that there is only a weak effect of genetics on sexual preference that presumably results from the combined influence of many genes in concert.

Even at their best, these results are by no means a “smoking gun” for the idea that homosexuality—or anything apart from the divinely ordained pattern of human sexuality—is genetically determined in any absolute sense.<sup>9</sup> But what of this ‘influence’ of genes? As-

5 The studies described here are largely summarized from the popular history of genetic research written by Siddhartha Mukherjee. While not at all comprehensive, the book presents a relatively dispassionate explanation of the studies relating behavior (including homosexuality) to genetics. Siddhartha Mukherjee, *The Gene: An Intimate History* (New York: Scribner, 2016). 370-390.

6 For example, the Swedish Twin Registry from 2008 used 2,320 identical twin pairs and concluded that genetics could at best account for 35% of sexual behavior in men and 18% in women. (Långström, et al. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* [2010], vol. 39, 75–80).

7 Mukherjee, *The Gene*, 374-375.

8 Ganna, et al. *Science* (2019), vol. 365.

9 The authors explain that while the total effect of genetics suggests a contribution of somewhere between 8-25%, even the very best genetic markers together can account for less than 1% of the variation between heterosexual and homosexual men. As such, the authors of the study have admitted it is “effectively impossible” to identify who is likely to be gay with any genetic test.

4 All humans, regardless of race or ethnicity, represent members of a single *species* created by God and descended from Adam. All humans share 99.9% identical DNA sequences with one another, and therefore the *proportion* of genetic differences between any two individuals is at the very most only 0.1% (or 1/1,000<sup>th</sup>). Given the large size (about 3 billion chemical ‘letters’) of the human genome, however, that means that about 3 million of the ‘letters’ in the genome are variable among humanity as a whole.

suming that the most recent scientific studies are correct in a formal sense, what are we to make of this genetic data as Christians?

For a long time, Christian activists have sought to fight the battle over homosexuality at the level of this article, which is in the field of scientific research and data analysis. While their intent might be laudable, we need to ask whether this strategy is really the one we ought to be concerned about. Although the most recent results noted above are gratifying in some sense, this is

not where our faith ought to lie. Our help is in Jehovah, who made heaven and earth—and has spoken *directly* to us on these matters already.

In the next article in this series, we turn to God's Word as a means to provide a framework of understanding. In that final article we will demonstrate that our inborn human 'flesh' (which includes our genes) may very well put sexual sins before us in a more acute way, but that our genes do not *make* us sin. This is scriptural truth, which has the final authority in this matter.



## Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

### Learning from the judges (1)

## Doing what is right in our own eyes

We will find ourselves in the book of Judges for the next few articles. The period of the fifteen judges takes place after God brought Israel to Canaan, and after the death of Joshua, the successor of Moses. Time and again, two themes arise in Judges: the unfaithfulness of the covenant people, and the faithfulness of Jehovah in His covenant. Both themes will come out in the history we consider in this article.

Judges is rich with lessons for us as young people. We do not have the time or space to consider all the lessons in the book, nor to be exhaustive in the lessons we do have the time and space to cover. Instead, we will focus on a few instructive parts of the history and make applications to the youth. This time, we turn our attention to a sub-theme in Judges: "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6). This idea is embedded in the history of Micah, Micah's mother, and a traveling Levite, which we find in Judges 17.

### A dark history

Before us is dark history. The history is so dark, perhaps you think that this is about a family of the world, say, among the Philistines. But that is not so. Judges 17 is about a family in *Israel*. Let us not be surprised when we find appalling sin also in the church; such has been the case through the ages.

One part of this sobering history is the story of Micah and his mother. Micah was a man from mount Ephraim, a portion of the hill country of Canaan west of the Jordan River that had been assigned to Ephraim after the conquest under Joshua. Micah's mother one

day discovered that her 1,100 shekels of silver were stolen from her. When her own son Micah confessed to the crime, the mother turned from cursing to blessing (Judg. 17:2). The mother dedicated the returned silver to Jehovah: she sent some of the silver to a founder, who made a graven and molten image, through which God would be worshiped. This image was placed in Micah's house, where also the ephod (a garment originally worn by the high priest) and teraphim (household gods) were found. Micah consecrated one of his sons to become a priest in this house of gods.

The other part of this grievous history is the account of the traveling Levite. This young Levite, Jonathan, was a sojourner in Bethlehem-Judah, about twenty or thirty miles south of mount Ephraim. As Jonathan traveled to find a place, he came to the house of Micah. Recall that Micah's own son had been priest in the house of gods; but now, Micah consecrated Jonathan to be the priest, reasoning that the worship in his home would be more legitimate if a *Levite* were the priest.

### Living according to self-standards

The nature of this disturbing history is given to us in Judges 17:6: "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Every man did what was right in his own *eyes*. The eye is the organ of the body that you use to see. Perception is inseparably tied to sight. Often, the scriptural idea "in the sight of" refers to what a man perceives, what he thinks, what his judgment of a matter is. Every



man was doing what was right in his own eyes; that is, each one was acting according to his own perception, thinking, or judgment.

Every man did what was *right* in his own eyes. Right means straight. Here, though, “right” does not mean *actually* straight. Rather, “right” means what each man according to *his sinful* perception, thinking, or judgment determined was straight. In actuality, therefore, what each man was doing was crooked or perverse.

Every man did what was right in *his own* eyes. They were not doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord, what He revealed in His Word, particularly His law. This law is the unchanging standard, what is *actually* right or straight. When Micah, his mother, and Jonathan did what was right in *their own* eyes, this means, therefore, that they rebelled against the standard of God’s law and exalted their own standard. In one word: disorder.

There was disorder in Micah’s home. Consider Micah’s mother. She was a permissive parent. What did she do when her own son confessed to stealing her money? She *blessed* him—no discipline, but only smiles upon her son. What is even more, she encouraged her son to sin against the second commandment (graven images). Micah himself transgressed the first commandment (idols) and the second commandment. Micah had no problem violating the eighth commandment (stealing) when it came to his mother’s money. Besides this, without having any authority to do so, Micah consecrated one of his sons to be a priest, and that son was not even from the tribe of Levi as God required. And later, Micah consecrated Jonathan to be priest—but Jonathan had no right to serve as priest, and certainly not at Micah’s house. On top of this all, Micah set up his own personal place of worship at home, instead of worshiping in nearby Shiloh, where he should have been. Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Micah and his mother covered this self-standard-exalting behavior with a layer of piety. Neither mother nor son came out and said, “We are violating God’s law!” They knew better than to say that; after all, they were Israelites who knew what to say and what not to say. Instead, they clothed their wicked actions with religious talk. The mother said, “I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD...” (Judg. 17:3). Micah said, “Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest...” (Judg. 17:13). What was in reality *wicked*, they twisted to give the appearance of *right*.

Every man does what is right in his own eyes; this is our age, too.

Of course, this sort of disorder characterizes the world. The proof is downtown buildings with low-

er-level windows smashed out, burning car dealerships, and all-out warfare against the police. The right is called wrong, and the wrong is called right.

But Judges 17 is not about Philistia (the world). Judges 17 is about Israel (the church). The applications here are directed to our churches and homes.

Like Micah, one area where we exalt self-standards is worship. Micah set up his personal worship place at home, instead of going to Shiloh. Staying home for Sunday worship is a growing movement today in the Christian church world. Let us not look at other denominations where the young people no longer attend church, and say, “That will never happen in the Protestant Reformed Churches.” With stay-at-home orders during COVID-19, we have discovered just how comfortable and convenient listening to the sermon in sweatpants on the couch can be; perhaps we felt the pull to stay home even after the stay-at-home orders ceased. There might be that attitude in a young person: “I will stay home from church and worship from the living room.” He who resists public worship will never actually say that he is violating the fourth commandment, because he knows better than to talk like that. Instead, he will cover it with a layer of piety: “I *am* worshiping God! The only difference is that I am doing it from home. And I feel that I get so much more out of it when I am in my own home environment.” Do you see what is going on, and how subtle it is? What is sin is called right. Such a one does what is right in his own eyes.

Besides this application derived directly from Judges 17, there are many others. Consider, for example, what exalting our own standards in dating might look like. A young man begins dating an unbeliever. This man knows better than to say, “I am flying in the face of Scripture’s demand that I marry (and date) in the Lord.” Instead, he dresses up the relationship to make it look good. He begins to reason that God doesn’t want him to be lonely, that the girl he’s dating is nice, and that she will likely go to church after they are married; besides, dating this unbeliever is sharpening his ability to witness to others. He does what is right in his own eyes.

May the Lord open our eyes to see this piety-cloaked disorder in our own lives and cause us to turn from it.

### The reminder

Amid all this darkness, there is a reminder in Judges 17: “In those days there was no king in Israel” (v. 6). Israel lacked a king who was representative of God’s kingship and God’s rule among them. The Lord was their King and He had given them His law, but there was no earthly representative of that rule of the Lord among them in this period. Micah, Micah’s mother,

and Jonathan were representative of what was going on more broadly in Israel. Disorderly Israel needed a king.

Jehovah was faithful. The covenant people deserved to be cast off and destroyed. But faithful Jehovah would never cast them off! Jehovah would raise up a king—David, the man after His own heart. But even David would fail. Disorderly Israel had to look for Another—not *a* king, but *the* King.

That King is Jesus Christ. This is the King Israel needed; this is the King we need! The Lord Jesus never did what was right in His own eyes, but always did what

was right in the eyes of His Father. Perfectly He obeyed the law. Always He did the will of His Father. His life was one of orderliness, and nothing less. He came to save His broken, disorderly people who do what is right in their own eyes. For our sins He died. With the robes of His righteousness we are covered. Our King is now in heaven, graciously ruling over us at God's right hand. We have a King who governs us by His Word and Spirit, a King who so works in us that we desire to do what is right in the Lord's eyes. Look to this King alone! Thank God for this King!

## Report of Classis East of the PRCA

### Summary of Classis East

We give thanks to God that Classis East was able to convene on Wednesday, September 9, 2020. Sincere thanks is also directed to Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church for graciously and capably hosting the meeting of classis. In order to meet legally and safely, classis declared that its meeting was “essential to execute the business of Classis East,” and it adopted restrictions concerning who were allowed to be present at classis. Unfortunately it was not possible for visitors to observe the public deliberations of classis in person.

Rev. G. Eriks served as chairman of the meeting, appointing the committees of pre-advice, and presiding over the deliberations of the delegates.

Some of the routine business of classis included approving reports of the stated clerk, Classical Committee, and church visitors.

A classical appointment schedule was adopted for four vacant churches in Classis East: Cornerstone, Hudsonville, Kalamazoo, and Providence. This brings to mind the need to remember in our prayers to ask God to send forth more preachers into our churches. Let us also remember in our prayers the Wingham congregation, a fifth vacant church in Classis East, whose pastor will soon be moving to the First PRC of Edmonton. Border restrictions between the U.S. and Canada will likely complicate providing pulpit supply for our sister congregation.

Rev. Cory Griess was appointed to serve as the Moderator for Wingham during its vacancy.

Questions were asked of the delegates of each consistory to make sure that the consistories are properly governing the churches and to offer the assistance of classis to any consistory that might have a need (see Art. 41 of the Church Order).

Classis approved the expenses of the meeting totaling \$1,941.

Other matters classis treated included:

- Classis received two overtures to Synod 2021 (from two churches) to plan a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the PRCA in 2025. Classis approved the overtures and forwarded them on to Synod 2021.

- One protest against a ground of a decision was sustained. Classis agreed with the protestant that the two points of explanation supporting the particular ground were in error.

- One protest was declared legal but not sustained by classis.

- Three protests were declared illegal because they were against decisions that have been treated by synod.

- One letter asked classis to reconsider an appeal that had been declared illegal at an earlier classis. Classis ruled that the letter was not legally before it because it was not a protest against a decision, nor an appeal, nor an overture.

Classis accepted an invitation from the delegates of Grace PRC to host the next meeting of Classis at 8:00 A.M. on January 13, 2021.

Rev. Eriks thanked the delegates for their work and for their cooperation in doing the work of classis and closed the meeting in prayer. Classis adjourned around noon on Thursday, September 10.

In Christ's service,  
Rev. C. Spronk  
Stated Clerk, Classis East



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

The Protestant Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, MI was organized in 1927. In what year was their first church building constructed? See the Church Profile section for this answer. More trivia next time!

### Minister activities

Rev. M. VanderWal accepted the call to First Edmonton PRC. He planned to preach his farewell in Wingham PRC on September 27. Rev. M. DeBoer declined the call from Cornerstone PRC. Kalamazoo PRC called Rev. R. Kleyn. From Hudsonville PRC's new trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, R. Kleyn, and C. Spronk, Rev. Engelsma received the call on September 20. Wingham PRC has a new trio of Revs. R. Barnhill, J. Engelsma, and C. Spronk. They planned to call on Monday, September 28.

### Congregational activities

On Friday, September 25, Prof. Brian Huizinga gave an interactive lecture entitled "Reading the Scriptures Profitably." The lecture took place at the Lynden, WA PRC church building.

### Sister-church activities

From the September 13 bulletin of the Berean PRC in the Philippines:

Beloved, Metro Manila and the province of Bulacan are under GCQ (General community quarantine) from September

1–30, 2020. Rizal Province is placed under Modified GCQ, nonetheless, mass gathering is still strictly monitored as only 10% of the total capacity of the church hall is permitted to hold a public gathering. Besides this, our church building is currently under renovation (roofing work on the 3rd floor) and all our belongings and church property are temporarily placed on the 2nd floor. The project runs from September 1–November 30 as presented to and approved by the Council. For now, we will continue the live-streaming of the preaching of the Word via Facebook live and other media platform until the restrictions are lifted or until the construction in the 3rd floor of our building is done, the Lord willing.

### School activities

A new Protestant Reformed school is being planned. This school is Redeemer Christian School, which will begin as a pre-K through eighth-grade school, and, the Lord willing, will grow into a high school. To learn more about this new PR Christian school, visit [www.redeemerchrsschool.com](http://www.redeemerchrsschool.com).

Reformed Heritage Christian School in Kalamazoo, MI held their annual mum flower sale fundraiser each Saturday in September at the corner of Nichols and Ravine Roads. There were a variety of colors and sizes.

The Loveland PRCS Fundraisers group is selling CDs and/or mp3s of Hymns and Psalter arrangements by Lisa Hoekstra entitled "Selah" to raise funds for the needs of their ever-growing school.

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

## Church profile—Kalamazoo, MI PRC

Three great men! Rev. H. Danhof, pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo stood side by side with Rev. H. Hoeksema and Rev. G. Ophoff to do battle against the error of common grace. Rev. Hoeksema had a large following in the Grand Rapids area. Likewise, Rev. Danhof had a large following in Kalamazoo. When Rev. Danhof and his consistory were deposed from the Christian Reformed Church, he took with him the vast majority of his large congregation. But the hopes of a vibrant, thriving, Protestant Reformed congregation in Kalamazoo were soon shattered. Rev. Danhof could not see beyond his personal differences with both Hoeksema and Ophoff, and soon parted ways to go it on his own. There were only eleven families that remained faithful to the Protestant Reformed Churches and these organized as the First PRC of Kalamazoo in 1927.

The first two pastors were Rev. W. Verhil, who served from 1932 to 1935, and Rev. J. C. Kooistra, who served from 1935 to 1940. Rev. H. Veldman became the third pastor in 1941. By 1948, under Rev. Veldman's able leadership, this small group of believers had grown to a congregation of three times the size. With approximately 35 to 40 families, Kalamazoo PRC was financially secure enough to build their first church building. It was a beautiful structure on Alamo Ave. in western Kalamazoo.

But the joy of full congregational life was not to last. Rev. Veldman took a call to Hamilton, Canada in 1950, and Rev. E. Knott became pastor of the church. Only five years after the new building had been erected, the congregation with its minister left the PRC, taking with them the building. The few remaining families traveled to First PRC in Grand Rapids for worship for over a year. In the Fall of 1954, these few

families were able to rally a few other families in the area to organize as a PRC. Not until 1958 did they again have a pastor. Rev. A. Mulder arrived that year and stayed until 1961. Rev. R. Harbach, who served as pastor from 1963 to 1974, succeeded him. Rev. B. Woudenberg came to Kalamazoo in 1976 and stayed until his retirement in 1996.

In 1981, the congregation built the church building in which we worship today. Following Rev. Woudenberg's retirement, Rev. W. Bruinsma came to Kalamazoo in 1996 and was our pastor until 2006. Then Rev. A. Spiensma pastored us from 2007 to 2010. Rev. M. DeVries was pastor of our church from 2010 until his retirement on January 5, 2020.

Since the time of our reorganization in 1954, the small congregation of Kalamazoo has had many setbacks and struggles. Yet the Lord has blessed us richly. From

the 7 families that reorganized after the split, we have now grown to 22 families. We believe there is great reason to rejoice in God's mercies as we continue to wait on the Lord's care and blessing.

*Note: This article was written by Rev. Bruinsma in 2004 in commemoration of our 50th anniversary and recently added to by another member.*



## Announcements

### Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents **Randy and Lindy Looyenga**, in celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary on October 17, 2020. We are thankful to God for blessing them with many faithful years together. We are also thankful to God for granting them continued wisdom and grace to lead and guide our family in the fear of the Lord. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them in the days and years to come. "All that I am I owe to thee, thy wisdom Lord hath fashioned me; I give my maker thankful praise, whose wondrous works my soul amaze" (Psalter #383, stanza 1). "Let heaven above His grace and glory tell, let earth and sea and all that in them dwell; salvation to His people God will give, and they that love His name with Him shall live" (Psalter #187, stanza 4).

Brent and Brittany Looyenga

Calvin, Zach, Alexis, Charlie, Josie

Alex and Jeanine Bomers (late Jared Looyenga)

Caleb, Evan, Grant, Ali

Matt and Kristin Jabaay

Mason, Jacob

Wyoming, MI

### 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

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### Reformed Witness Hour

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

**Rev. W. Bruinsma**

October 4—"Children of Truth"  
III John 4

October 11—"The Benefits of Fearing Jehovah"  
Psalm 25:12, 13

October 18—"Perfectly Joined Together"  
I Corinthians 1:10-13

October 25—"Declaring the Testimony of God"  
I Corinthians 2:1-5