

# The Standard Bearer

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## From milk to meat

Rev. Dennis Lee

## Herman Witsius: Still relevant (2)

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## John MacArthur and the battle of indoor worship in California

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## Relating good works and justification

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## Meditation

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

# From milk to meat

**Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

**Hebrews 5:11-14**

Midway through a lesson, the teacher encounters a problem. He could not make progress with his lesson. Did the problem lie with the teacher? No. Was it the lesson? No. Or was it the students?

Yes, indeed, such was the case of the inspired writer and teacher in the book of Hebrews in these verses. He has been teaching his audience of mainly Jewish Christians the lesson that Christ is superior over all practices, offices, and persons in the Old Testament. This lesson was urgently needed because these Christians were being influenced by false teachers called Judaizers, who taught people to return to Old Testament practices and, in so doing, reject Jesus Christ. His students needed to understand that this was false teaching and be duly warned about the seriousness of it.

Christ is superior over all! God has, in these last days, spoken to us by His Son and this is a superior revelation and speech over the Old Testament prophets. He is superior over the angels. He is superior over Moses. But, now, as the inspired writer begins to show just how Christ's priesthood is so wondrously superior to that of the entire priesthood of Levi by bringing in the deeper subject of Melchizedek, he finds that he cannot make progress with his lesson. He will have to wait till chapter seven to begin doing that.

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First, the biblical writer had to address a serious problem. The problem is that his students were "dull of hearing" (v.

11). This means that they were "slothful" (6:12) or lazy hearers and students of God's Word. The sin of laziness, characterized by a lack of activity and zeal on the part of the believer, is addressed extensively by Scripture in many places and in various ways. In Proverbs 6:6, we are *admonished* to learn from the example of the ant: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard: consider her ways, and be wise." In Philippians 3:13-14, we are *encouraged* by the Holy Spirit to take heed to the example of the apostle Paul, to be positive and determined in our attitude and thereby make progress in our walk of life: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Here in Hebrews, we are being *instructed* that being lazy hearers and students of the Word is a serious problem and thus *exhorted* to make progress in learning doctrine (6:1).

Whether in the form of instruction, exhortation, encouragement, or admonition, we are roundly being taught by the Holy Spirit *not* to be lazy hearers and students of the Word. Do you take this teaching seriously? When it comes to hearing properly a sermon and learning from it, some people "switch off" the moment the sermon begins. Others "switch off" when the admonitions or commands of God's Word are applied to the congregation. "These things apply to others but not to me," is the thought here. However, such thinking fails to embrace the truth that grace is conferred by means of admonitions (Canons III/IV, Art. 17). Still others "switch off" when the sermon is giving sound explanation of good doctrine. "Doctrine is not for me, but for ministers and elders; the preacher needs to be practical," is the thought here. This likely also was the thought and attitude of some of these Jewish Christians who were not but really *ought* to have been making progress with *further* doctrine and instruction concerning Melchizedek in relation to the topic of Christ's superior priesthood (vv. 10-11a).

Such was the seriousness of the problem that the time

had now come that they ought to have been *teachers* of the Word (v. 12a)! Bible commentators estimate that these people had been believers for well over twenty years, and thus should have been able to teach their children and teenagers and explain their faith clearly with biblical proofs to others outside of the church. They ought to have been spiritually mature, full-grown men and women (v. 14). But instead, they were, in the judgment of the Spirit, mere spiritual “babes” (v. 13)!

They were spiritual babes after being in the church for over twenty years! They were spiritual babes who were unable to discern good and evil in both doctrine and life (v. 14), and were thus in real danger of embracing false teaching and rejecting Christ! They were spiritual babes who needed to be taught again and had not yet transitioned from the milk of God’s Word to the meat of God’s Word (v. 12).

---

There is great need for every believer to transition from milk to meat. To be sure, both the milk and meat of God’s Word provide good, wholesome spiritual nutrients for spiritual life. The milk of God’s Word, also described as “the first principles of the oracles of God” (v. 12), refers to the very basic doctrines of faith such as repentance and faith (cf. 6:1). In our day, this also includes a simple understanding of the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. To be sure, there is a place for basic doctrines and just a simple, perhaps not very detailed, explanation of them in the church. They are necessary and useful for evangelistic purposes and also for instruction of our covenant children when they are young. To young believers who have little background of the Bible, the *milk* of God’s Word is all they can handle. We do not give them the *meat* of God’s Word, which includes not only a fuller explanation of basic doctrines but also less basic but just as important biblical doctrines (cf. the Three Forms of Unity) because they are not yet be able and ready to handle them.

However, while the milk of the Word is good and necessary for spiritual infants, it does not have sufficient spiritual nutrients to support continued growth when age has set in. This is much like earthly life and mother’s milk: while mother’s milk is good and necessary for little infants, it does not have sufficient nutrients to support the necessary growth of a child as he gets older. Just as the growing earthly child needs to transition to solid food, so also the growing spiritual child of God needs to transition to the strong meat of the Word.

The need to transition from milk to meat is great!

Without transitioning to and feeding on the meat of God’s Word, we will not make progress in doctrine or life. We may be at church services regularly, but we will either be childish believers or spiritual babes who have little use for the preaching. Being unskillful in the word of righteousness (v. 13) and thus unable to discern between good and evil (v. 14), we will be weak members in the church, vulnerable to the tiniest of troubles, temptations, and assaults of Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh. This will bring many griefs to ourselves, our family, our church family, and all who love us.

Dear reader, do you not agree that transitioning from milk to meat is crucial for your spiritual health and life? Is it not a great and urgent need?

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Christ recognizes and has met this great need! Because of Him, we are able to, desire to, and will make this transition from milk to meat! For Christ’s death on the cross is not only for our justification but also for our sanctification: “Sanctify them according to thy truth. Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Did not Christ make this petition unto His and our Father in His high priestly prayer leading up to His death on the cross? He, who is the author and finisher of our faith, will necessarily finish the work He has begun! Our salvation in Christ is a *complete* salvation! Thanks be unto God for our faithful Savior Jesus Christ! Thanks be unto Christ for His blood and the gift of His all-powerful, indwelling Spirit!

Will you, therefore, not make this transition from milk to meat, dear reader? We who do so will become of full age and, by reason of the use of this Word in our lives, have our senses exercised or “trained” to discern between good and evil (v. 14). We will make progress in doctrine and life by the grace of God. We will grow and flourish in our mind, heart, and soul—becoming more and more mature thinkers, speakers, and doers of the Word. We will take a healthy interest in the spiritual and heavenly things of God, and be active and zealous servants of His in our homes and families, and in the life of the church where we are members.

What tremendous blessings God gives us in the way of taking heed to His Word!

Seeing this, let us transition from milk to meat, and be diligent hearers and students of God’s Word.



## Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Herman Witsius: Still relevant (2)

We continue our consideration of Herman Witsius and his little book, *Antinomians and Neonomians*.<sup>1</sup>

The book is a treatise dealing with controversial issues that sorely divided the Protestant churches in Britain, issues that the English theologians sent to Witsius, seeking his help in answering and, hopefully, resolving. The issues ranged from what the imputation of man's sin to Christ meant for His sinless character and person; from whether faith and repentance were really even necessary for the elect, seeing they were united to Christ from all eternity by God's decree; to the need in the preaching of stressing the importance and necessity of a life of holiness and good works.

After all, is not salvation all of grace, contrary to all deserving, and "the best works of believers are nothing but filth and dung"? (XV, 152).

It was especially this latter issue that bedeviled the Protestant churches in Britain and dominated the focus of the English divines in their disputations and questions. Hence, the title Witsius gave to his treatise.

In light of controverted issues with which we are dealing in the PRC, we are convinced Witsius' judicious insights are of value to us. The issues as they touch on magnifying salvation being all of God and not of man, the place of the activity of faith in salvation, and *especially* the Christian's calling to good works (their necessity), are not new issues disrupting ecclesiastical unity and theological harmony. Witsius' book published in the late 1600s is proof of that.

In the last article we established Witsius' Reformed orthodoxy. As well, we stated that Witsius was of an irenic character, a man seeking to bring about peace in Christ's church, even when necessity meant errors had to be addressed and dealt with.

We begin this article by giving evidence of that.

<sup>1</sup> *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions, on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, T. Bell, transl. (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807). First published 1696 in Latin in Utrecht. All references in parentheses are to this work and edition. Roman numerals refer to chapters, regular numerals to pages. Unless otherwise noted, italicized words are Witsius' for emphasis.

In the following quote, note well that Witsius makes plain that when it comes to disputation between brethren, it is not only *what* one stands for and maintains that is important, but *how* one goes about it, the words and phrases one uses, and those one avoids. Beware of acrimony!

Be ye willing or unwilling, in battle [for the faith] you must engage; O that it were always that good fight of faith, which Paul recommended to Timothy! However, if we are not persuaded to shun the conflict, the prudence of the just demands that they, who in the defense of orthodoxy show themselves the rigid guardians of truth, should remember studiously to avoid those things which are not lawful for the ministers of peace...; that they seriously rejoice in the harmony of minds, and promote it as much as possible in a consistency with truth: that in differences they should with a judicious lenity [leniency] approve their equity and modesty to God and to men; that they think humbly concerning themselves, and highly of their brethren, not effecting fame of a more exquisite wisdom, but justly esteeming the gifts of God in those who are their neighbors: that they calumniate no man's words, or by caviling, impute opinions to any, to which he professes himself averse... (Preface, 6-7).

Words to take to heart. Especially for those who still view each other as brothers in Christ, saved by His blood. Our calling is to think humbly concerning self, not 'effecting fame,' that is, elevating oneself as if one is superior in wisdom, and not to 'calumniate' (misrepresent) a man's words, giving them the worst possible twist and implication.

Such, as is plain these days, is commonly done between disputing politicians. It ought not so to be in Christ's church. If we do, Christ Himself will judge.

And it is noteworthy, that throughout his treatise, Witsius refers to both parties of the disputation as "brethren," often underscoring the label when he is taking issue with a view and pointing out error. He does not call into question the salvation of those whom he is correcting. We do well to pay heed!

In his treatise, Witsius was confronted with what he labeled “antinomianism.” Hence, the title. Not so much *practical* antinomianism, which is represented by the phrase, “Let us sin, that grace may abound,” and so ‘believers’ justify reveling in immoralities; rather by what is known as *doctrinal* antinomianism, a shade of antinomianism whose adherents do not really like to be confronted in preaching by the *must* of good works, and who, when they are, either object sharply or misrepresent its full implications for the truly Christian life.

There are various ‘species’ of doctrinal antinomianism. One of the more radical views Witsius had to evaluate is set forth in the following question:

Whether God imputes no more in point of guilt to the elect, even when living in all the excess of wickedness and lasciviousness, than when after they are truly sanctified, yea, also perfected and received into heaven (V, 59).

In chapter XII, Witsius deals with a variation of this view. He lists a number of assertions:

That God sees no sin in believers.... That no guilt is contracted by new sin.... That sin does them no hurt. That neither is God offended with any sin of theirs. That confession is not necessary to obtain pardon (XII, 122).

That such could be an issue may sound strange to the ears of the reader. It does not to mine.

In a former congregation, I regularly visited an old, godly woman whose husband had been excommunicated for creating schism. He, pretending to read a newspaper, would listen in and invariably, at some point, would respond to a statement I had made (admittedly, at times, on purpose to prod him). Usually his retorts had to do with how the PRC had left the pure doctrines of sovereign grace, especially those of eternal election and of the truly unconditional covenant. We newer generations of preachers were once again, as men did prior to 1953, beginning to put the emphasis not on salvation all of God’s sovereign, unconditional grace but on what men were ‘required’ to do to be in the favor of God. He listened to sermons by our men, but only, he assured me, because his wife played them on a recorder! “All this *practical* preaching!” The very words were distasteful to him.

Having stated his high esteem for salvation by the grace of eternal election (which, he stated, nothing could change, not even his excommunication from an apostatizing church), he would invariably quote his favorite text, “[Jehovah] hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob” (Num. 23:21). And “Jacob” was God’s name for His elect. Because the elect are eternally in Christ,

God never saw or sees any sin in them—not before they were born, not while they live, and certainly not to be recounted on the judgment day. This was stated with dogmatic finality!

I am familiar with the sentiment. It is a more radical ‘shade’ of doctrinal antinomianism.

Witsius’ perspective is as follows:

Hence it follows, that an elect person, before his regeneration, while he gives himself up to luxury, lasciviousness, and all ungodly lusts, is in the way of perdition and destruction, and in his sins appears before God as odious, abominable, most deserving of all his wrath and curse; and it is impossible for him to escape impending wrath, if he continue with obstinacy to go on in the way of wickedness. *Truly it is much safer and far more candid by sober speech to infuse these doctrines, and such as these, into a man, however certainly elected, that by the terror of the Lord he may be excited to faith* [emphasis added], than to fill him with a persuasion, that provided he be elected, God has no more to impute to him, though he live ever so wickedly, than if he were already received into heaven (V, 65-66).

This, states Witsius, is how all men are to be confronted by gospel preaching, the elect included. Until one is in Christ Jesus by the “actual union of the Spirit” (Rom. 8: 1-2), one is under condemnation (V, 66). States Witsius, “This is the perpetual and the constant doctrine of the scriptures, from which we must not depart, no, not in the form of words” (V, 66).

In other words, God’s election does not mean He turns a blind eye to our sins. As if that magnifies grace. It does not. All that does is minimize God’s holiness and the seriousness of sin, of *our* sins, be we elect in Christ. And that Scripture never does.

This same aberration, though now in the name of eternal justification, was raised elsewhere.

Whether all sins, not only past, but also future, are, in justification, so forgiven together and at once to believers, that God sees no more sin in the justified, that no deformity of sin, no guilt, no burden lie upon them, that no sin however great can truly hurt them, that God is not offended with any of their transgressions, that they need neither humiliation, nor confession, nor prayers, in order to obtain the pardon of sin recently committed; finally, that immediately after the committing of sin, they are as certain of pardon, as after the deepest humiliation [of self] (VII, 74).

Along the same lines the issue was debated, and by some denied, that repentance necessarily had to *precede* the remission of sins.

But this also deserves consideration, whether sorrow for sin, penitence, and repentance, or a purpose to live according to the will of God, go before justification and remission of sins, as a disposing condition, pre-requisite in the subject [the person] (XI, 119).

Note, that Witsius speaks here of repentance not in terms of being a “condition *for*” justification and remission of sins, but as a “*disposing* condition,” a phrase long used in old Reformed circles, that is, as something which, according to God’s stated will, was to precede His granting something else (119). Such as a willingness to forgive one who has sinned against us, before God will forgive us (allow us to lay hold of God’s forgiving our debts, cf. Matt. 6:15).

Witsius’ answer, found in chapter XI, is “judicious.” He answers along the lines, “And here the simplicity of scripture is far more acceptable to me than all the subtleties of the schools, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith” (119).

And then he elaborates:

[T]hat the soul, quickened by the Spirit, should...both see itself defiled and undone with innumerable sins, and see Christ full of grace, truth, and salvation. Such a view cannot but cause, both that with shame and sorrow it [the soul] be displeased with itself, and [also] with ardent desire, be carried out unto Christ. Hence arises the receiving and accepting of Christ, that it may be delivered from the filthiness and guilt of its sins. Now it [the soul] cannot receive him for justification, except at the same time, it receive him for sanctification; nor receive him as a Priest, to expiate sin, unless it also receive him as a King, to whom it may submit, in order to obedience. Hence it follows, that that act of faith, whereby we receive Christ for righteousness, cannot be exercised, without either a previous, or at least a concomitant [accompanying] repentance, and a purpose of a new life. If therefore faith go before justification, as we have lately asserted, the same must be said of repentance, springing up together with it from the same principle of spiritual life (XI, 120).

Witsius does not ignore that statement that God, in Scripture, declares He sees no iniquity in Jacob. It is so stated in Scripture. Witsius’ response is insightful:

But it must be well understood, [God] does not so see it, that he purposes, on its account to condemn [!] them. For in this sense, he is said “to cover their sins, to cast them behind his back...”

[Yet he also sees our sins] with a remarkable displeasure. For he is not a God who hath pleasure in iniquity; no, not in that of those who are his own.

He sees [them] also with anger and wrath, not the wrath of a rigid and a condemning judge, but of a holy and an angry father. So he was angry with Aaron and Moses, though otherwise a pardoning God... (XIII, 137-138).

In other words, neither God’s election nor our justification means the righteous God turns a blind eye to our sins. As if thinking so would magnify grace. It does not and cannot. That would only minimize God’s holiness and the seriousness of our sins. And God’s Word never does that. Hence, the necessity of repentance, and the call to engage in such with heart-felt sincerity (Joel 2:12-14; Acts 2:38).

Having in a number of chapters dealt with speculative and improper views of the implications of election, faith, and the place of repentance in the scheme of laying hold of one’s salvation—views that were not truly ‘Reformed’ and biblical, but radical and ‘deformed’—Witsius sums-up his assessment as follows:

...In fine, I know that the word of the gospel [that we are justified by faith in Christ alone] is the surest foundation of our certainty of the remission of sins. *But I know this also* [emphasis added], that sincere penitence is to us a certain evidence[!], that the word of grace pertains to us. For none knows this, but he who repents of his sin.

I conclude this chapter with the warmest [most fervent!] wishes; that these detestable words may henceforth be banished; and that it may never be heard from the mouth of any Reformed Divine, to the dishonor and reproach of our most holy religion: [namely], That sin does no manner of hurt to believers, and that a believer, immediately after committing the most atrocious crime, is as much assured of pardon, as he can be after the deepest humiliation (XIII, 143-144).

With such mentality, declares Witsius, the thoroughly Reformed man must have nothing to do.

What Witsius is saying in effect is this: God’s wonder of grace does not render an elect man passive and inactive, nor is the preaching of this salvation by sovereign, free grace to leave the impression that it does. But exactly because God’s grace is a grace that powerfully transforms life, it being the work of the Holy Spirit Himself, the commands of the gospel are to face a man with his calling, his solemn duty, setting before him the necessity of the repentant life.

And that brings us to the next subject on which Witsius was asked to give his judgment, namely, the ‘utility’ of holiness, or if you will, the benefit, usefulness, and incentive to a life of good works.

Next time, D.V.



## All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor-elect of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI, currently missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

# John MacArthur and the battle of indoor worship in California

John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California is embroiled in a legal battle with the County of Los Angeles (LA County) over the right to worship indoors during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Grace Community Church (GCC) is a non-denominational, evangelical congregation with an average weekly attendance in excess of 8,000 people.

On March 4, 2020 Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has since issued a number of executive orders to curtail public gatherings in the State of California. An order on March 19, 2020, required almost all establishments, including places of worship, to close. On June 18, 2020 the LA County Health Officer, Dr. Muntu Davis, issued an order “allowing reduced-capacity indoor operations at houses of worship,” but subsequent orders prohibited “indoor operations at a variety of establishments, including houses of worship.” Those orders are still in force at the time of writing. In California, therefore, churches may worship *only outdoors*.<sup>1</sup>

On July 24, 2020, after GCC had voluntarily ceased indoor worship services for several months (MacArthur preached in an empty auditorium to an online audience), the elders issued a statement, “Christ, not Caesar, is Head of the Church.” While the statement acknowledges that the church and Christian must obey the civil authorities in obedience to Romans 13 and I Peter 2, “whether we agree with their rulings or not,” GCC rejects any government order “regulating worship,” since by such an order the government “steps outside of the legitimate bounds of his God-ordained authority as a civic official and arrogates to himself authority that God expressly grants only to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The statement of GCC, which was modified on August 19, 2020, also declares that “government power is easily and frequently abused for evil purposes” and that “politicians may manipulate statistics, and the media can cover up or camouflage inconvenient truths.” Therefore, claims GCC, “a church cannot passively or

automatically comply if the government orders a shutdown of congregational meetings—even if the reason given is a concern for public health and safety.”

An addendum to the statement explains why GCC initially complied: “We voluntarily followed the initial recommendations of our government. It is, of course, legitimate for Christians to abstain from the assembly of saints *temporarily* in the face of illness or an imminent threat to public health.”

On July 26, two days after the publication of their statement, GCC recommenced indoor worship services. Court documents quote MacArthur in a media interview: “Last Sunday, 3,000 of them came back, and they rejoiced, and they hugged each other, and didn’t wear masks, and they sang songs.” On July 29, the LA County Health Department wrote to MacArthur requiring immediate compliance with the public health orders: “Pursuant to the State and County health orders, Grace Community Church must immediately cease holding indoor worship services... Unless written confirmation is received by...July 30, 2020 that Grace Community Church will comply with the law, the County will pursue further action.”

The following Sundays, August 2 and 9, GCC met again. Court documents note, “County officials...were denied entry. Video from the services show that large numbers of individuals were gathered indoors. Those individuals were not engaging in social distancing and not wearing masks, which would have been required if those services had been occurring outdoors as permitted.”

On August 12, LA County sought an injunction against GCC and MacArthur prohibiting them “conducting, participating in, or attending any indoor, in-person worship activities in violation of the Health Orders” and requiring them “to comply with the Health Orders with respect to outdoor services...including the wearing of face coverings and physical distancing.” The injunction was denied. Instead Judge James C. Chalfant ruled on August 14 that the defendants were “prohibited from conducting, participating in, or attending indoor worship services...*unless*, at all times, they comply with mandates of the Health Orders to wear face coverings and practice physical distancing.” That same day the County

<sup>1</sup> In this article I will quote from relevant legal documents most of which can be found on [www.thomasmoresociety.org](http://www.thomasmoresociety.org).



appealed the decision of the judge, seeking a temporary restraining order against GCC, which request was denied by Judge Mitchell L. Beckloff on August 25 ahead of a further hearing scheduled for September 10. The Court of Appeal “issue[d] a stay of that portion of the trial court’s order denying the County the right to enforce the Health Order’s ban on ‘indoor religious activity’ pending [their] final resolution of the County’s petition for a writ of mandate.” This decision meant that GCC was the *only* church permitted temporarily to hold indoor services in the State of California. Every other church was allowed outdoor worship services only. MacArthur viewed this as a victory for the GCC.<sup>2</sup>

Three days later, on August 28, LA County’s Department of Public Works wrote to GCC giving thirty days notice of the termination of the rental agreement with respect to the church’s parking lot: “The District will hereby terminate the Agreement effective October 1, 2020.... Grace shall vacate and remove all of its improvements and personal property placed on the premises...on or before October 1, 2020.” Commenting on the timing of the termination, Attorney Jenna Ellis of the Thomas More Society, representing MacArthur and GCC, said, “The church has peacefully held this lease for 45 years and the only reason the county is attempting eviction is because John MacArthur stood up to their unconstitutional power grab. This is harassment, abusive, and unconscionable.”

MacArthur’s legal victory was short lived, however, for Judge Beckloff granted a preliminary injunction, as requested by LA County, on September 10. In the ruling the Court declined to comment on the “constitutionality” of the case, since that is a matter for a future hearing. The Court, however, issued an injunction because it judged that LA County Health Order “does not discriminate on its face,” but “limits religious worship only because it applies to ‘all events and gatherings’—regardless of their purpose.... Thus the County Health Order is facially neutral.” In fact, the Court argued, “Religious services are ‘specifically allowed’ by the order.... The only reference to religion...is language specifically permitting ‘in-person faith-based services, provided that the faith-based service is held outdoors,’ for “[the Order] applies generally to all activities where people congregate indoors, often for long periods of time.”

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<sup>2</sup> The *LA Times* quotes MacArthur: “The good news is, you’re here, you’re not distancing, and you’re not wearing masks,” he told his congregation Aug. 16. “And it’s also good news that you’re not outside,” “Judge Denies L.A. County’s Request to Stop Grace Community Church from Gathering,” *LA Times*, Aug. 25, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-25/grace-community-church-la-county-lawsuit>).

Pursuant to this September 10 order for a preliminary injunction, GCC and John MacArthur are not permitted to conduct indoor, in-person worship services. Failure to comply with a legal injunction makes the non-compliant party liable to criminal and civil penalties, including fines, forfeiture of goods, and even imprisonment.

It remains to be seen, first, whether MacArthur and GCC will be successful when their case is finally adjudicated, a case they intend to bring to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary. Observers will also be interested to see what, if any, penalties the judicial system might inflict on MacArthur and GCC. Does LA County really want the negative publicity of the *arrest* of an internationally renowned preacher such as Dr. John MacArthur?

I close with a few comments.

First, MacArthur’s case must be seen within the context of American evangelicalism. Americans rightly prize civil and religious rights, which are enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Other countries do not enjoy those privileges; yet they are called to serve the Lord in their own situations. As I write, our brethren in Singapore and the Philippines are severely restricted in their worship services. They have no recourse to the judicial system for relief. Should they refuse to comply with the government and face huge fines and the threat of imprisonment, or should they continue, wisely in my judgment, patiently to bear with the demands of the authorities?

Second, some Christians behave as if restrictions on their gatherings belonged to a huge conspiracy to destroy the church. If the State of California permitted movie theaters and other comparable assemblies to function without restrictions, *while it singled out the church for closure*, this argument would have some validity, but clearly that is not (yet) the case. It is incredible to imagine that the governments of the world would react thus to a pandemic, destroying their own economies in the process, just to harm the church, although, I suppose, the malice of Satan should not be underestimated.

Third, it might be true (as GCC tried to argue in her submission to the Court) that the pandemic is not as serious and that the virus is not as deadly as public health officials present it. In fact, MacArthur stated in a sermon on August 30, “There is no pandemic,” to applause from his congregation. Neither MacArthur nor most readers of the *SB* (nor, for that matter, most politicians) are competent authorities on epidemiology. It is unwise to enter into such subjects in the course of a sermon.

Fourth, even if politicians have corrupt motives in restricting the free movement of citizens during a pandemic (God will judge), Christians are required to comply

with all lawful commands: “Submit yourselves to *every* ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (I Pet. 2:13). If we do not like the ordinance, and if we think that the ordinance is nonsensical or even counterproductive, we obey it, unless it involves us in the breaking of God’s commandments. Does the civil authority require the wearing of facemasks in public buildings, and in Christian schools, and in churches? We wear them. No commandment of God *forbids* the wearing of facemasks. Does the civil authority require that we sit six feet apart when in public places? We do so, without grumbling (Phil. 2:14), because, although we do not like it and even question the wisdom of doing it, we recognize their authority over us. Does the civil authority require that there be no more than a certain number of people in any public gathering, including ecclesiastical gatherings? We comply, not because we fear the virus—perhaps we think the virus is less dangerous than reported; perhaps we think that the government is overreaching its authority; perhaps we think that the government’s response is exaggerated—but because “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). And if the consistory, seeking to comply with such orders, requires such inconveniences of us, we obey them in the Lord (Heb. 13:17). Moreover, we must exemplify this attitude of obedience before our children. We require obedience from them to all our lawful commands. They ought to see us obeying the authorities over us.

Fifth, there is a time when “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). If the civil authority says, “You may not preach in the name of Jesus,” we certainly must obey God rather than men. No pastor in the Western world has been prohibited from preaching in the name of Jesus. Some (in certain states) have been prohibited from preaching *inside*. Some in other states have been prohibited from preaching inside *to more than a certain number of people at a time*. If the civil authority says, “You may not preach about certain sins,” we obey God rather than men. No pastor in America or in Europe has (yet) been prohibited from preaching against certain sins, although the trajectory, especially in Europe, is certainly in that direction.

Finally, if the courts rule against MacArthur and GCC, and U.S. Supreme Court precedent suggests that they will, what will MacArthur do? Faced with the threat of heavy fines and even imprisonment for their pastor, will GCC accommodate? And given their size, will they be able to implement the measures that other small churches have introduced to comply with the state’s demands? Other churches, such as our sister in Redlands, CA, have been able to comply by meeting outside. Perhaps the mega-church will divide into smaller congregations. In these difficult days, let us pray for wisdom for our civil and ecclesiastical leaders, and let us pray for a spirit of Christian submission in ourselves to the glory of God.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

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

### As to our good works (8)

## Relating good works and justification (d)

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2020, p. 11.

We have been observing the publican of Jesus’ parable in Luke 18:14 who went down to his house justified. This man represents every justified believer. The justified believer walks home *in the way of* or *on the path of* obedience, and on this path of obedience he enjoys walking in communion with God his Friend. We now turn our focus to another closely related element of the justified believer’s walk: his assurance of salvation.

### Assurance of salvation

Assurance is the believer’s conscious certainty of heart that Jehovah God, who loves and saves sinners, loves

and saves him. Assurance is always *personal*, so that the believer confidently says, “God loves *me*, saves *me*, works all things together for *my* good, and will take *me* into His tabernacle in heaven.” Assurance is always given by God the Father as a precious gift *for Jesus’ sake*; therefore, assurance is painstakingly obtained by Christ and enjoyed only by those who are in Christ. Assurance is always worked *by the Holy Spirit*, for He is the Author of faith and the Comforter who makes His abode deep within the believer, testifying with our spirit that we are the children of God. Assurance is always wrought by the Spirit *through the Word* (and sacraments) which

reveals to the believer the sure promises of God in Jesus Christ. Assurance belongs to the very nature of *saving faith*, so that those who believe in the promise of God have both the knowledge of His Word to them and the certainty of it.

The blessedness of assurance is best understood, appreciated, and accentuated when assurance is considered over against its opposite: doubt. How miserable it is to doubt, to be plagued by anxious and perplexing thoughts, to be seized with terror, to be tossed to and fro throughout the dark night, “Is God for me or against me? What if I am one for whom Christ did *not* die...a goat...alone in my sins. I’m afraid God does not love me, and how could He love someone like me anyway? The thought of dying, and the afterward of anguish and torment in hell, terrifies me.” The devil takes a peculiar and sinister delight in tormenting the souls of God’s children. You can be sure, therefore, that the fury with which God shall hurl that damned deceiver into the fiery pit that has no bottom to catch him will be spectacularly violent. How wicked is the tempter of doubt! How debilitating and wrong are doubting thoughts! Over against the temptations of Satan, against which even the strongest believers must contend, there is the blessedness of the sure confidence of faith in Jehovah God: I am loved by God, chosen by God, redeemed by God, and forever secure in God for Jesus’ sake!

The source of assurance is not located in our good works as believers. How could it be? Assurance is a gift from God. Assurance does not rest upon the sinking sand of our own doings, but upon the perfect and eternally unshakable works of Jesus Christ the Rock. Assurance is an essential element of true faith, and faith always looks to Christ and all of God’s wonderful works and covenant promises in Christ. A distraught Asaph, who struggled all through the night and refused to be comforted, finally found comfort and assurance... in works—the works of Jehovah—Psalm 77:11, “I will remember the works of the LORD...,” (“And on His deeds my thoughts shall dwell,” Psalter 210, stanza 5).

To the poor, penitent believer hounded by doubting thoughts comes the admonition, “Dearly beloved, godly sorrow is good. Taking ownership of your sins, weeping over their seriousness, and reckoning with the reality of everlasting punishment is necessary. But you need to look away now. You may not dwell on sin, punishment, and adversity. Look away from yourself, the corrupt fountain of your evil flesh, all your transgressions and shortcomings, how unlovable you think you are, and all the troubles of your path and attacks of your foes that you fear are proofs of God’s wrath against you. Behold your God! Our gracious God commends

His love toward us in that while we were yet ungodly sinners Christ died for us! God is for us, as the cross proves beyond all doubt. If God be for us, then God is not against us, and nothing is against us!” Believing in God, the believer has assurance.

### **In the way of obedience**

As we explained last time, the justified believer goes home walking on the path of obedience. It is only in that way that the believer enjoys fellowship with God and assurance of his salvation. The believer’s walk in good works of loving obedience is not *the ground* of his assurance, but the lovely *fruit* of his assurance. Since the faith by which the believer possesses assurance is always fruitful, it is always true that the believer enjoys his assurance of salvation as he walks in the way of obedience. What a beautiful sight! Confident of the love of his God who justified him as an ungodly sinner, the believer walks home responding to God in all good works of loving obedience as is his reasonable service.

Something very dreadful to the believer’s experience occurs when the believer strays off that path of obedience and continues deeper and deeper down the dark path of disobedience. He loses his assurance. What a terrible place to be! God still loves him. God is still with him. The covenant bond is unbroken and unbreakable. God is still giving him an experience in his soul. But God is no longer causing him to experience the favorable light of His countenance and the comfortable sense of His reassuring presence. God is giving him the miserable and agonizing experience of the taste of His divine displeasure. Not sweet but bitter is the rebellious believer’s experience. The Holy God whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity will not give assurance of His love to those who walk in that dark way of iniquity that He detests with infinite hatred. No one—absolutely no one—enjoys assurance of salvation while walking in rebellion against God.

When one like Naomi turns her back on God and continues long in stubborn rebellion against God’s will by forsaking God’s house and people for the conveniences of idolatrous Moab, then God the Father not only makes his daughter a miserable Mara of bitterness and chastens her sorely by taking away her husband and sons, but also uses that unpleasant experience to turn her back to Himself. God sovereignly brings Naomi back into the experience of His love and the assurance of His faithfulness. God stirs up her faith so that she acknowledges Him and her terrible covenantal infidelity against Him. In sincere repentance she cries out from a broken and contrite heart, “God be merciful to me the sinner!” and she trusts there is a way of reconcilia-

tion opened up to her through the atonement and righteousness of an all-sufficient sacrifice. Graciously, she is restored to the assurance of God's love. Returning to the promised land, she is firmly resolved to walk in obedience, and she enjoys her assurance as she walks in that way of grateful obedience (see Canons of Dort, V, Art. 7).

### Fruits confirming faith

As the justified believer enjoys personal assurance, walking by faith and in the way of obedience, his good works serve as confirming evidence that his faith is a genuine, living faith. This confirmation is a benefit of good works according to Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches "that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof."

The fruits of his faith do not give the believer his assurance of salvation. The fruits of his faith do not convince the believer that he is a believer and has true faith. The fruits of his faith are not something upon which the believer stands for confidence, nor are they even that at which he looks long and upon which he fixes his heart, for the longer and deeper he looks at the good the more pollution he discovers. The believer knows he is a believer because he has faith. He *believes*, and he believes because God has made him a partaker of Christ. Then as he walks in the way of obedience, the fruits that proceed from his faith provide a testimony that spontaneously confirms the fact of his faith.

This confirming evidence of the fruit of faith is valuable in the face of Satan's constant attempts to assail the genuine character of the believer's faith. The deceiver alleges that the believer is nothing but an ungodly hypocrite who hides behind his façade of piety with as much filthy corruption and world-love as any profane man, and who makes a sham profession of God and the cross just to impress men and hopefully escape hell. Against these assaults, the believer knows he is a believer joined forev-

er unto Christ, and the fruits of his faith, especially the more inward, unobservable fruits that no man can see, help to distinguish his living faith from dead counterfeits. Among these fruits are holy awe before and adoration of the greatness of God, excitement to magnify God's name in song, delight in frequenting God's house for worship, joy in watching the youth walk in the truth of God's covenant, love for the brethren and eagerness to minister to them in their afflictions for Christ's sake, godly sorrow over personal sin, grief over the waywardness of a loved one and the offense it is before God, desire to see an ungodly acquaintance confess the name of the Lord, horror over the blasphemy of God's name, and willingness to suffer reproach for the name of Christ. These holy fruits do not spring from the dead tree of a false faith. As the believer walks by faith and in the way of obedience, these fruits confirm to him the sincerity of his faith.

In his concluding comments on I John 2:3, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments," John Calvin sums up the matter succinctly,

But we are not hence to conclude that faith recumbs on works, for though every one receives a testimony to his faith from his works, yet it does not follow that it is founded on them, since they are added as an evidence. Then the certainty of faith depends on the grace of Christ alone; but piety and holiness of life distinguish true faith from that knowledge of God which is fictitious and dead; for the truth is, that those who are in Christ, as Paul says, have put off the old man (Col. 3:9).<sup>1</sup>

Next time we will come full circle and return to the doctrine of justification in order to demonstrate our main point that, in the matter of justification, all good works are excluded.

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, vol. 22, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 175.



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

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## Born this way (2): An identity hid in Christ

Previous article in this series: October 15, 2020, p. 41.

*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the*

*flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new*

*creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

II Corinthians 5:16-17

Who are you? Or, perhaps more specifically, how do you *define* yourself? Is the first thing that comes to mind your ethnicity or skin color? Or is it the role you have in your family as a husband, wife, parent, or child? Maybe you think first about your career or your status in society?

Are those the things that *really* define you?

What is your *true* identity?

Few readers of this article, I suppose, would answer the question posed above by trying to determine the one besetting sin that most characterizes their life and then making that sin the basis for their identity. If you truly believe that “your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3), then your identity in Christ is what matters. It is not as though all of those other things are unimportant, but they are not the defining feature of who you are if you belong body and soul, both in life and death, to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ (LD 1).

Belonging to Jesus Christ yields a radical change in the identity of a converted believer. Paul elaborates on this truth throughout the New Testament epistles, notably in Romans 7. In this passage he makes a remarkable statement: “For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (vv. 19-20). Paul’s point here is not that belonging to Christ somehow removes the believer’s responsibility for sin, but rather that the power of sin remaining in a believer does not define him or her before God’s throne of grace. Instead, every believer who is united to Christ in true faith is a *new* creature.

Sadly, this core message of the New Testament gospel has been lost in a movement that wants Christians to define themselves according to their fallen human nature. It is as if that makes for a more honest acknowledgment of reality. Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction, we are told, are “gay Christians.” They have two identities that naturally coexist side-by-side in a kind of happy symbiosis. Perhaps the one has dominance, but both are equally true and should be acknowledged as such.

Proudly so.

How we arrived at this point in time, where homosexuality has supposedly become compatible with the Christian life in Western society, was the focus of the past two articles in this series. Central to these articles was this concept of *genetic determinism*, which posits that behavior is biologically hard-wired into us to such an extent that we are essentially incapable of escaping the destiny in our genes. The implication of this theory

is that we are not culpable for those behaviors either because we are just “born that way.”

This is not a minor problem for pastors and elders to debate in consistory rooms. The world in which we live literally bombards us (and our children) daily with messages of personal rights, self-autonomy, and identity politics. Such messaging is aimed to stoke the self-idolatry and self-indulgence that dwells in all of our hearts, enticing us to capitulate to the idea that “we are who we are.” Conservative, Reformed Christians are not immune to this lie. We too can fall into this error by offering the common theological argument that says we have no need of change, just forgiveness. This argument is, of course, wrong because, belonging to the very nature of salvation is that we are both justified and sanctified by the work of our Savior Jesus Christ (LD 32). True conversion produced in us by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is always a twofold work in which the “old man” is mortified and the “new man” is quickened (LD 33). This complete change in moral direction is one that every one of us needs when it comes to our natural inclinations.

The idea of *direction* is therefore the point at which we return to a discussion of the conclusions regarding genetics and behavior that were discussed in the prior articles. Studies done with identical twins and modern genetic techniques demonstrate, from a statistical point of view, that many aspects of personality and behavior are influenced by our genes. But the complexity of this point lies in the fact that no single gene accounts for personality or behavior. Rather, it is the subtle contribution of many genes that together provide a very rough outline—or *direction*—of personality.<sup>1</sup> Instead of specifying exactly how someone will behave, genes tend to outline the boundaries and dimensions of personality. One might rightly say that we have a *propensity* or *orientation* toward some sort of behavior or personality type based on our genes, but exactly what that looks like in time depends on far more than genetics.

The idea that our genetics are *directive*, but not *determinative*, is critically important in relation to the issue of responsibility and fault. To put this in a more theologically useful framework, we might say that our genetic makeup may very well present a specific sin to us in a more intense and serious way, but our genes do not *make* us sin.

At first glance it seems that this contention might be hard to extract from Scripture. Nowhere in God’s inspired Word do we find a discussion of genetics or how our genes relate to sin. We do, however, find another

1 Siddhartha Mukherjee. *The Gene: An Intimate History* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 384-390.

useful term that encompasses this idea and is prominent throughout the New Testament. This term is the word “flesh,” which is closely related to the adjective form of the same word commonly translated as “carnal” in the King James Version.<sup>2</sup> This is how the apostle Paul refers to the sensual sins of unregenerate man, which he describes as the “lust of the flesh” or the “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:17, 19).

That the concept of ‘flesh’ or ‘carnality’ certainly includes our genetic inheritance is clear from John Calvin’s explanation of the breadth of original sin in man:

I only wished briefly to observe, that the whole man, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, is so deluged, as it were, that no part remains exempt from sin, and, therefore, everything which proceeds from him is imputed as sin. Thus Paul says, that all carnal thoughts and affections are enmity against God, and consequently death (Rom. 8:7).<sup>3</sup>

No part of our fallen being, including our genes, is naturally directed toward God apart from His gracious work of regeneration. Even our genes point us in the wrong direction relative to God’s will!

The concept of being oriented in the wrong direction is captured biblically in the Hebrew and Greek words that are often translated as “sin,” both of which draw on the image of an archer missing a target.<sup>4</sup> This is not, however, an accidental near-miss from an otherwise accurate archer who merely veered away from the target for moment. It is a miss of the target because the archer was willingly and intentionally aimed in the opposite direction.

From these words, Scripture teaches us that the natural inclination of all people is off-target—literally aimed in the wrong direction (Rom. 3:23). Sin stains every part of creation as it now exists; there is no escaping it. Whether we are talking about the genetics of disease or the cultural corruption of our society, sin is everywhere in our world. We start out in sin (original guilt and corruption) and we are bathed in it all of our life long. Re-

gardless of where we fall in the “nature-versus-nurture” debate, everything in us is naturally directed toward sin.

A biblical understanding of fallen human nature and the corruption that flows from it in the sphere of human behavior is important as we address the widely held distinction between *sexual orientation* (attraction) and *sexuality* (behavior). While we may perhaps agree that there is a real distinction between a “pre-behavioral disposition” and an actual behavior, this distinction does not strip away the moral character of even our unwanted dispositions, or the calling to fight against them. This is the point made in the following quotation:

Sin is not merely what we do. It is also who we are. As so many of our confessions have it, we are sinners by nature and by choice. All of us are born with an orientation toward sin in all its varieties. The ongoing experience of same-sex sexual attraction is but one manifestation of our common experience of indwelling sin—indeed, of the mind set on the flesh (Rom. 7:23; 8:7). For that reason, the Bible teaches us to war against both the root and the fruit of sin. In this case, same-sex attraction is the root, and same-sex sexual behavior is the fruit. The Spirit of God aims to transform both (Rom 8:13).<sup>5</sup>

This is a critical point to make because it relates back the argument over the genetics of sexual attraction and human accountability. Even if our genes do have a subtle influence upon sexual attractions, we are nonetheless unambiguously called to war against the impulses of the flesh that lead us into sin. Any disposition or behavior that is contrary to God’s Word is sin, which must be resisted by the power of the Spirit.

As we think about the issue of human *responsibility* in relation to our sinful nature, it may also be helpful to approach the question about genetics and behavior from the opposite perspective of what has been discussed to this point. Consider, for instance, another reasonable approach to the studies described in the prior article, which purport to show that one who is a homosexual is ‘born that way.’ While these studies do support a relatively *minor* correlation between genetics and homosexuality, the more important point is how minor that correlation really is. And so we ask the question: What are the more significant influences on sexual behavior, and do these influences excuse our sins any more than our genetics?

The authors of the key study on genetics and sexuality provide the answer, which they label the “unsystematic, idiosyncratic, serendipitous events” of a person’s life. To

2 “Flesh” (meaning the physical aspect of a body) is the most common translation of the Greek word *sarx*, whereas “carnal” is the most common translation of the related adjective *sarkikos*.

3 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.i.ix. Notice an important aspect of this quotation. Calvin does not say that all “carnal actions” are enmity against God, but that even our “carnal thoughts and affections are enmity against God” and, consequently worthy of death. Such is also the conclusion of the Heidelberg Catechism on this matter in LD 44 (Q&A 113), which declares that the tenth commandment forbids “even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God’s commandments.” Orientation is not justified while action is condemned. Both are enmity with God.

4 Hebrew *chata'ah* and Greek *hamartia*.

5 Denny Burk. “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 58.1 (2015), 95-115.

put it more simply, these are the unplanned and everyday experiences that a child faces due to the environment in which he or she is raised. It is these environmental influences that are almost certainly more important than genetics in directing the fallen human nature toward a given sin. Constant exposure of a child or young person to pornography, for instance, is very clearly connected to addictive behaviors, promiscuity, and sexual deviancy.<sup>6</sup> This exposure may not be the fault of the child at all, but rather a result of persistent sin in a family member who puts sexual sin before the eyes of the child early in his or her life. Nevertheless, the exposure to pornography is formative for that child and becomes an unavoidable stain on his or her conscience that—apart from God’s grace in Jesus Christ and the transformative power of His Spirit—will most probably impact sexual behavior. If we were consistently to follow through with the logic of culpability and causative identity in this instance, we would have to conclude that deviant sexual behavior or promiscuity displayed by this child is not wrong because it is part of his or her imprinted identity. It cannot be helped because it is who that child has become.

It is not hard to refute this logic with the Word of God. Whatever a child of God’s identity *was* before his or her conversion, that identity lies in the *past* at the moment of regeneration and remains in the past during lifelong conversion. As Paul notes, “such *were* some of you” (I Cor. 6:11a). That is not *who* the believer is anymore. The believer is not essentially Jewish or Greek, male or female, bond or free (Gal. 3:28). And even more importantly, no believer is essentially defined by his or her sins because the curse of sin is broken at the cross and its power is broken by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The believer is not essentially a thief, a liar, an adulterer, or a murderer. Or a homosexual. Maybe he or she committed that sin, but it does not define him

**...no believer is essentially defined by his or her sins because the curse of sin is broken at the cross and its power is broken by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The believer is not essentially a thief, a liar, an adulterer, or a murderer. Or a homosexual. Maybe he or she committed that sin, but it does not define him or her, though the rest of Paul’s words do: “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11b).**

or her, though the rest of Paul’s words do: “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11b).

And that is the problem with “identity politics” for Christians. It blasphemes the grace of God in Christ Jesus, who redeemed us, sanctifies us, and gives us the power to live a new life of resistance to besetting sins. Claiming a “gay Christian” identity is capitulation to the philosophies of this world. It defines the believer as being something other than a child of God in Christ Jesus and denies the power of the cross to effect real change. The identity of a “gay Christian” is not a biblical category, nor is it supported by the genetic science that is purported to trump Scripture.

We will end this article with a hypothetical scenario. What if the genetic studies described in the previous article had demonstrated a strong—perhaps greater than 50%—contribution of genetics to homosexual behavior? Or what if rather than a collection of minuscule contributions by many genes to this behavior, the study had been able to identify a single “gay gene” that is different in people who describe themselves as homosexuals? Would that or should that change our interpretation of the data? The answer is a resounding “No!”

The battle is not in the genetics laboratory or in the court of public opinion on personal identity. Christians need to stop chasing those ‘red herrings’ and understand where the battle really lies. The battle is sited in Scripture and in the readiness of the church to proclaim “the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God

unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Or, maybe more to the point, the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for the straight man and the homosexual man, for the straight woman and the lesbian woman. Our issue ought not to be whether there is or is not a genetic influence on sin, but rather in whether the new life in Christ, by His grace and Holy Spirit, is able to overcome any and every temptation to sin in the life of the believer. We confess that “nothing is impossible with God” in Christ Jesus. That is the rock on which we stand.

<sup>6</sup> Love, *et al.* Neuroscience of Internet Pornography Addiction: A Review and Update. *Behavioral Sciences*, 5(3), (2015), 388-433. And Luke Gilkerson, “Your Brain on Porn: 5 proven ways pornography warps your mind and the 5 biblical ways to renew it.” *Covenant Eyes*. <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2011/09/12/5-proven-ways-pornography-warps-your-mind>.



## 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 develop the doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Previous article in this series: July 2020, p. 422.

The last two articles set forth two reasons why the second ecumenical council in Constantinople (381) was necessary. One is that some denied that Christ is truly God, as the Council of Nicea (325) asserted. The second ecumenical council was necessary to reaffirm this doctrine. Another reason is that some wrongly explained *how* Christ is God. The Council of Constantinople had to explain this rightly.

In addition to these reasons, the Council of Constantinople was necessary to develop the doctrine of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As adopted at the Council of Nicea, the Nicene Creed led believers to say, “We believe in one God the Father...and in one Lord Jesus Christ...and in the Holy Spirit.” The Nicene Creed further explained our faith in God the Father and in Jesus Christ. But beyond saying, “and in the Holy Spirit,” the Nicene Creed said nothing more.

So the church had to face questions about the Holy Spirit. Is He a third person of the Godhead, or is He merely the power by which God works? If He is God, is He coequal with the Father and the Son?

### Wrong answers

The early church recognized that the Holy Spirit was “divine.” But what does that mean? Some taught He was divine in that He belongs to God. Others considered Him divine because He was the power by which God worked. According to these explanations, He belonged to God, but was not truly God. Others taught that He was a creature, and not eternal.

Still others understood that the Spirit was eternal, but could not accurately explain how He was related to the Godhead. Some said that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament as Father, during Christ’s time on earth He revealed Himself as Son, and after Pentecost He revealed Himself as the Holy Spirit. In other words, one God, one person, but three ways of revealing Himself. Others said that, regardless of how the Holy Spirit was related to the Father and the Son, the Spirit was inferior (subordinate) to them.

### Positive development

God used three men in particular to help the church see that the Spirit is truly God. These three were Basil, bishop of Caesarea; his brother Gregory, bishop of Nyssa; and their friend Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus. All three labored in Asia Minor during the years between the Council of Nicea and the Council of Constantinople.

Basil taught that the Spirit has God’s names and attributes, and performs actions that only God could perform. He also taught that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Gregory of Nyssa agreed, and added that the Spirit is of the same essence as the Father and Son. The three are all eternal, equal, and individual persons, but one God. Gregory Nazianzus advanced the thought by more clearly defending the Spirit’s individual personality.

As a result of their work, many in the church had come to a clearer understanding of the divinity of the Holy Spirit when the Council of Constantinople opened. Basil was not at the Council; he had died two years earlier. The two Gregoryses were there; in fact, Gregory Nazianzus briefly served as the bishop of Constantinople during those years, and so presided at part of the Council.

### Official declaration

The Council of Constantinople enlarged the Nicene Creed. In 325, Nicea led the church to say: “And in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> In 381, Constantinople declared: “And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceedeth from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshiped together and glorified together, who spake through the prophets.”<sup>2</sup>

The church had come to recognize that the Holy Spirit was worthy of divine honor, performed divine works,

1 “The Creed of Nicea,” in *Documents of the Christian Church*, Henry Bettensen and Chris Maunder, eds., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25.

2 *Documents of the Christian Church*, 26.



and proceeded from the Father. It would be another two hundred years before the words “and the Son” would be added to say that the Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son. But Constantinople laid a solid basis for the church’s doctrine of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Having explained the three reasons why the Council was necessary, we plan to examine the history of the Council itself in the next article.



## When thou sittest in thine house

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

# Nurturing our preschool children (2)

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2020, p. 470.

In the first article on this subject we answered the question, who are our children? We learned two important truths that are vital to the proper spiritual nurturing of our children. First, we must instruct our children as children of the promise of God’s covenant. God promises believing parents that He will save a people unto Himself in the line of those generations born into the church. This promise does not include *every* child born into the church. Rather, that promise is spoken organically to the church as a body. But this does not deter believing parents from teaching their sons and daughters in the ways of God and the fear of His name.

A second truth we considered is that our children are sinners. They are conceived and born in sin, and though redeemed in the blood of Christ and born again, they yet carry with them a sinful flesh. They are not without sin or “innocent” until they reach a certain age. Instruction of our children—even the smallest of our children—must, therefore, take sin into account.

In this article we intend to answer another question. The answer to this question is also of vital importance to the nurturing of our preschool children. Who are their teachers from birth until that time they are introduced to other instructors in school? The answer is quite simple: their parents. How exciting when a young married woman of the church learns that she is expecting a child! She and her husband wait with anxious anticipation for the birth of that child. After delivery, that little baby lies in the arms of father and mother. They gaze into the face of the baby God has given them and exclaim with the psalmist, “How fearfully and wonderfully we are made!” In due time they present their infant to be baptized. Before God and the members of the church they take upon themselves the vows of baptism:

“We vow (promise) before God and His church that we intend to see this child *instructed and brought up* in the doctrines of Scripture and the confessions to the utmost of our power.” Every believing parent takes these vows seriously: “Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee” (Ps. 56:12). Or again, “I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people” (Ps. 116:18). What, then, do parents promise at the time of baptism? That *they* will teach their children. They see it as their own particular calling carefully and diligently to instruct their children in the fear and nurture of God and of His Word.

This is the calling of the father, first of all. Fathers are instructed in Psalm 78:5, “For he (God) established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.” God has commanded fathers to make known the testimonies of God to their children. What does God say concerning Abraham in Genesis 18:19? “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” Or again, the New Testament injunction to fathers in Ephesians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The qualification of elders and deacons in the church is, “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (I Tim. 3:4, 12).

We cite these passages to remind fathers that *they* may not neglect the nurturing of their infant children. In the day of judgment fathers will be held accountable before God for the instruction and care of their children. God has given the father to be head of the family,

and as head he is responsible before God for the nurture of his children. This is not a task that fathers may simply leave in the hands of their wives as if his task is to earn a living and the work of the mother is to train his children spiritually. It is true that the wife may be busier in this regard, as we will find, but this does not dismiss the father from the work of teaching and caring for his small children. How he shares in the task we will consider in another article. At this point we simply wish to establish the necessity of father's active involvement in the nurture of his children.

It has always been assumed that the majority of the work in training children falls on the shoulders of their mother. The saying was often repeated, "From morning until setting sun a mother's work is never done." How true that is! Just read of the wife and mother of Proverbs 31. But that trend seems to be changing within the church today. Women have become career oriented today and wish to join their husbands in the work force rather than being stay-at-home moms. For this reason, it is necessary that we also turn to Scripture to establish the truth of a mother's place in the home teaching her impressionable little children. Solomon states: "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands" (Prov. 14:1). How does she build her house or family? She "looks well to the ways of the household" (Prov. 31:27, 28). She is pictured in Psalm 128 as a fruitful vine that grows along the side of her house.

The apostle Paul instructs Timothy in I Timothy 5 regarding the qualifications of certain women who were to be accepted into the number of widows. One of those qualifications was that she be "well reported of for good works, if she have brought up her children" (I Tim. 5:10). Paul continues in his instruction in that chapter, telling Timothy that the younger women must be refused from entering this number of widows. He gives the reason for this in verse 14: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Paul gives similar instruction to Titus. Titus must exhort the elderly women of the church to be in behavior as becomes holiness. They must be teachers of good things, "that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4, 5). Mothers also are called to be busy in the nurturing of their preschool children.

We find abundant proof in Scripture that testifies to the reality that the teachers of our little children must be their fathers and mothers. This is the second import-

ant principle of nurturing our preschool children. This scriptural principle stands in opposition to the worldly influence and advice of those who deem themselves "professionals" in the area of child-rearing. Where has this advice of "worldly wisdom" taken the children of today's world and society? Our world is filled with violence and immorality. Listen to the irrational reasoning of the millennials who live out the principles of entitlement, reparation, transparency, and irresponsibility, to name a few. Many of these children come from broken families or from no family at all. As little children, they were left to themselves or given to others who had little concern to shape and mold them into productive, respectful citizens of the country of which they are a part.

What is frightening, however, is when we begin to see this same trend slipping into the realm of the church. To counteract this trend we need to be reminded of the simple truth of God's Word: God gives to believing parents their children (children of the covenant) for *them* to raise to the utmost of their power in His fear. The first six years before entering school are the most impressionable, vulnerable, and influential years of our children's lives. Godly parents must be there to instill in them the necessary knowledge and spiritual values that will guide them throughout their entire lives. God entrusts such instruction to parents, not to others (except under special circumstances), but to those parents to whom He has chosen to give that child. The *responsibility* of nurturing little children rests on their parents. We emphasize the word *responsible* because it points to the fact that parents are answerable for this obligation to God. As we wrote, they accepted that responsibility at the time of baptism.

Let me give an example of the importance of parents, especially mothers, in the nurturing of their preschool children. God was pleased to place in the biblical record for us these verses in II Kings 22: "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (1, 2). Three facts are recorded in these verses. First, Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign. Second, he did that which was right in the sight of God and walked after the ways of David. Third, his mother's name was Jedidah. Now, these facts about Josiah may not stand out as remarkable. But we need to bear in mind the history of the kingdom of Judah that surrounded the reign of Josiah.

Judah was in rapid decline. She soon would be punished for her horrible sins against Jehovah. Manasseh was one of the most evil kings that had reigned in Ju-

dah, performing sinful atrocities the accounts of which make us shiver. Manasseh was Josiah's grandfather. Josiah's father, Manasseh's son, was no better. We learn that Amon walked in the same ways that Manasseh did. The servants of Amon conspired against him and assassinated him while Amon sat in his own house. Josiah was the next in line. Then we read that Josiah did that which was right in the sight of God. In fact, Josiah at eight years old walked in all the way of David without turning aside to the right hand or the left. His reign *beginning at eight years old* was righteous! What possibly could have contributed to this about-face from two horribly wicked kings to a king that walked in the way of David? I mean, Manasseh and Amon were his grandfather and father! Josiah was raised in the atmosphere of the immorality and violence that had overtaken Jerusalem and the palace. How is it possible that this boy at eight years old already would do that which was right in the eyes of God?

Have you ever wondered why the names of the mothers of many of the kings are mentioned in Scripture? Not just the names of the mothers of the good kings but of the wicked kings too. Because while the kings of Judah were consumed, for better or for worse, with the duties of the kingdom, their wives were in charge of the instruction of the children God gave them. The Scripture gives us the name of Josiah's mother. Her name

was Jedidah. She was the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. Jedidah was born in Boscath, in the hill country of Judah far away from the intrigue and sins of the palace. How Amon chose her as his wife is not recorded for us. But she gave birth to Josiah and for eight years instructed her son in the ways of God. She was there to protect him from the sin of her husband. She was there to instill in the heart of her infant son the ways of God in which David walked. She was there to fill his impressionable heart with the words of the covenant God had established with His people in Christ. We know, of course, that this instruction took root in the heart of this little child because God had by His grace regenerated him and instilled in him a child-like faith. But God used the means of this godly woman to teach her son in the way of David. And at eight years old Josiah already did that which was right in the sight of God.

We may never underestimate the labors we perform in the home with our little children. Neither may we underestimate what damage we can inflict on our children when we as parents are not busy with the instruction and care of our children, starting immediately after they are born and through their infancy and toddler years.

May we seek and use the help of others in raising our preschool children? The answer is "yes," but this will wait until our next article.

## Pertaining to the churches in common—Contact committee

### Activity of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches

As most readers know, the Committee for Contact with Other Churches is one of the permanent committees of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The PRC has long recognized the importance of seeking church unity. God commands all believers to be active in this, "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). The PRC, confessing the reality of the "one, holy, catholic church," pursue unity with other churches and denominations. For this work, the churches commission the Contact Committee (CC), which committee follows the mandates of synod in her yearly activity.

Concerning the work of the CC, significant misinformation has been circulated among members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In order that the churches may know the truth, we take this opportunity to give

the full, undistorted reality of the CC's work in two areas in particular.

#### The United Reformed Churches (URC)

The CC's dealings with the URC go back to 1998 when the Synod instructed the CC to hold a conference with the URC "to determine the issues that separate us. These issues would include, but not be limited to, common grace and the doctrine of the covenant" (*PRC Acts*, 1998, Art. 60). That conference was held in April of 1999. An extensive report of this appears in the *1999 Acts* (pp. 127-131). The report indicates that the doctrines of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel were discussed, and the URC committee expressed substantial agreement with the PRC on these doctrines. The issue of the hierarchical action of the

CRC (unjustly deposing ministers and consistories) was also discussed, and the URC men made clear their belief that their separation from the CRC and their existence 75 years after the event meant that the responsibility was not to be attributed to the URC. The PRC men expressed the opposite view but could not convince the URC committee of that.

Subsequently, the CC went on to discuss with the URC men the doctrine of the covenant, the one doctrine that more than anything else, captures the heart of Protestant Reformed teaching. There the disagreement between the two denominations was obvious, and it could not be resolved. Most of the URC committee wanted a covenant theology that was conditional and with every baptized child. The URC synod, meanwhile, did not accept their committee's agreement with the PRC on common grace and the well-meant offer. In addition, the URC was on the way to union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. In light of all this, meetings to discuss differences were ended.

It should be noted that the CC did, in fact, address with the URC committee the CRC's unjust depositions of PRC ministers and consistories. Perhaps some are of the opinion that this is all that the CC should ever discuss in a meeting with the URC committee. The CC, with synod's approval through the years, has focused on doctrinal discussions, though not leaving out, with the CRC in 2002 and the URC, the issue of the unjust deposition of H. Hoeksema, G. Ophoff, and H. Danhof and their consistories.

No longer are any meetings held with the URC in order to explore differences and seek a possible relationship. Nonetheless, the men of the URC were willing to discuss their churches' position on Federal Vision and the matter of finances on the mission field. Both of these discussions were at our request. First, we wanted to be clear on the URC's position on Federal Vision as we prepare to bring this matter up at NAPARC (see below). Second, money on the mission field or with sister churches is a knotty issue, and we believe it is wise to learn how other Reformed churches deal with finances.

## NAPARC

There are also distortions about the CC's intentions concerning the organization called the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). For many years the PRC synod has approved the CC sending observers to the annual meeting of NAPARC. Every year the CC gives reasons for doing so. Yet, the CC became increasingly uncomfortable about sending visitors year after year with no clear objective or ground. The Constitution of the CC says nothing about

such gatherings. The CC took no little encouragement from the fact that Herman Hoeksema had advocated accepting an invitation extended to the PRC in 1950 by the Reformed Ecumenical Council. At that time, the members of the REC included both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America, churches with which the PRC had significant differences, not only, but one of which had cast out the men who would found the PRC. Yet, Hoeksema did not want the PRC to be so isolationistic that they would not even attend the REC. With his support, the Synod of 1952 accepted the invitation. As it turned out, the PRC never did attend, due to the disruption of the split in 1953. Yet the Synod of 1964 adopted the following: "As a historically Reformed denomination, we stand ready to send observers to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the future" (*PRC Acts*, p. 92).<sup>1</sup>

NAPARC is comprised of what is left of the historic, confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America, with varying degrees of confessional faithfulness. In the nature of the case, the PRC has differences with all of these churches. Attending as observers does not commit the PRC to any of the decisions of NAPARC or the positions of any member churches. The observers have opportunity to address the assembly and to inform them of the distinctive doctrines and practices of the PRC. In the past our delegates have set forth our position on common grace, the well-meant offer of the gospel, divorce and remarriage, the covenant of grace, our system of catechetical instruction, and Christian schools, to name a few.

In 2016, the CC came with an extended report on this matter, as mandated by a previous synod. The report gave grounds that could be used to join a suitable Reformed ecumenical group. It also gave grounds for sending observers to such a group. In its report, the CC recommended that the PRC not seek admission to NAPARC. However, the CC recommended that observers could yet give a good witness concerning the distinctive truths and practices of the PRC. Synod agreed. But the CC has never suggested that the PRC join NAPARC.

Now addressing the distortion. It is said that "many people in the PRC want to join NAPARC." But no member of the PRC has sent a letter, approached a member of the CC, or written a blog, pressing for membership in NAPARC. And while implications have been left that the CC is considering this possibility, a simple reading

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<sup>1</sup> A few years later, the PRC declined sending observers, having discovered that the observers were required to subscribe to the "Basis" of RES, and the PRC had legitimate objections to some teachings found there.

of the *Acts of Synod 2020* indicate that it is far from the truth. Among other things the CC reports:

The CC continues to see value in sending observers to these meetings, especially that we may give witness to the distinctive Reformed truths that have been graciously given to us and to testify against fundamental doctrinal and practical errors that threaten Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. At the same time, we may be nearing a crossroad. Many of the member churches of NAPARC have adopted statements condemning the Federal Vision, but NAPARC has not officially spoken to the matter or acted regarding member churches who we believe have exonerated those who embrace the teaching of the Federal Vision (*Acts 2020*, p. 235).

The 2020 Synod approved sending observers, and included in the decision the mandate recommended by the CC, namely, that the PRC delegation to NAPARC give a “presentation regarding our view of the Federal Vision movement that also seeks to determine whether the body has any desire to deal with this serious threat to the Reformed truth” (*Acts*, Art. 36).

In conclusion, it is difficult for the CC to point out every omission and misinformation circulated in the churches. Readers can easily confirm what is written here by reading the *Acts of Synod*, and can stay informed by reading and checking the *Acts* year by year.

We do ask for your continued prayers for the work of the CC. The preamble of the CC’s Constitution remains our commitment, and we trust, the commitment of every member of the Protestant Reformed churches.

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, in obedience to Scripture as interpreted in our three forms of unity, confess that there is one holy, catholic church. They believe, further, that it is their sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in their denominational fellowship but also in conjunction with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign.



## Bring the books...

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



*Preparing for Dating and Marriage: A 31-Day Family Devotional*, by Cory Griess. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. 112 pages. Softcover. \$9.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of Doon Protestant Reformed Church.]

As the title indicates, this little book is designed to be a tool to instruct children concerning dating and marriage. That in itself is an indication of the value of the book. Anything that will help future generations develop a proper biblical and Reformed understanding of dating and marriage is a valuable asset.

But there are a number of unique features about Rev. Griess’ book that make it even more valuable. For one thing, the book is not aimed at young people in their late teens and early twenties, the typical audience for a book on dating. Rather, the book is geared toward

younger children. As the author states, “It is intended for an audience seventh grade and up, although even younger children will benefit” (3). The reason for this is the author’s conviction that our children need to be prepared for dating and marriage long before they are old enough to do so.

Another unique feature of this book is that, though it aims at the up-building of the youth, it is written especially for parents as a help to them in teaching their children about dating and marriage. The author says, “There is a void of material to help parents do this. There is not a void of material on dating and marriage itself, but there is a void of material that helps the *parents teach their children* about this important topic.... [This book] is not intended to replace parental guidance (‘here, go to your room and read this’). It is intended to *help the parents* give that guidance, and to encourage parents in the giving of it” (2–3).

What makes this book unique as well is the fact that it is designed to be used as a devotional. It is not written as a full-length treatment of the various elements of

dating and marriage, but is written to spark discussion either when the family is gathered for family worship or during nighttime devotions when tucking the children in bed. The book contains a month's worth of devotionals, each of which begins with a passage of Scripture to be read, followed by a one-page explanation, and ending with thought-provoking discussion questions. This unique approach allows parents to tie good instruction regarding dating and marriage with something they are already doing: leading their children in daily devotions.

A noteworthy aspect of the book is its pastoral and fatherly approach. The author is a father and pastor who obviously writes out of a concern for his own children and their future marriages as well as the youth of the church and their future marriages. He even notes in certain places where certain subjects might be inappropriate for very young children. Such a warm, father-

ly approach serves as a good model to parents as they nurture their children, particularly with respect to their dating and marrying.

Although in my opinion a couple of the devotionals were a little lengthy, as a parent of small children I appreciated that most of the devotionals were of manageable length, usually involving the reading of a few verses of Scripture along with a brief explanation.

I am appreciative of the work Rev. Griess put into this book and view it as a valuable resource for teaching my own children. I would encourage all parents to buy it and make use of it as well. My hope is that in the future Rev. Griess and the RFPA would produce similar devotionals on other subjects, for example, a devotional for married couples to use in strengthening their marriages.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia Question

Who were Calvary PRC's (Hull, Iowa) first two pastors? See the church profile part of this article for the answer. More trivia next time.

### Minister activities

Because of the lockdown in Ireland, Rev. M. McGeown's immigration appointment scheduled for November 6 has been canceled. The U.S. Consulate advised the McGeowns that they would be offering no routine appointments during the lockdown. The next available appointment is March 8, 2021, which the McGeowns have booked. Let us pray for one another for patience and contentment in these difficult times.

Rev. C. Spronk was led by God to decline the call extended to him from Wingham PRC. Her new trio consists of Revs. J. Engelsma, J. Laning, and N. Langerak.

The Consistory of Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN) formed a new trio from which to call a pastor. It consisted of Revs. J. Smidstra (First PRC, Holland), A. Spriensma (PRC home missionary), and C. Spronk (Faith PRC). And on November 1, Rev. Spriensma received this call.

### Young people's activities

The Crete, IL YPS held a scavenger hunt on November 7. Hopefully, they found what they were looking for!

Thursday, November 5, the Georgetown PR young people hosted a take-out soup supper. Chili, chicken noodle, cheese broccoli, and potato ham soups were available along with salad, rolls, and trifle dessert cups. A delicious ending to a Fall day!

The Doon, IA PRC young people (and not so young) competed in their annual Car Challenge on November 7. It was a gorgeous Fall day, sunny and 70 degrees. Adventure was in the air as the teams traveled to the unincorporated Lyon County towns of Beloit, Edna, and Granite to complete the challenges. They gathered at church for an awards presentation, snacks, and storytelling. Winning team members each received a new car (Hot Wheels) and a \$2 bill for their efforts. Alas, a year is a long time to wait for the next Challenge to arrive!

### School activities

Covenant Christian High School performed a band concert on Tuesday November 3 in the CCHS gym with safety precautions and physical distancing. The concert was live-streamed and a limited number of free tickets were made available.

Eastside Christian held a Honeycrisp Apple Sale—\$15 for a 6-pound bag. Orders were to be placed by Monday, November 9. The apples were to be ready for curbside pickup at Eastside on Monday, November 16 from 1-3 pm. I love a good apple...they're almost like

candy. And Honeycrisp is a good one! My personal favorites are the B-51 and the Sugar Bee. Wish I had one now!

Special Education Deficit Drive: The PRSE Fall deficit drive is currently underway. This year the approved drive is \$330,000. As we approach the end of the year, please prayerfully consider Protestant Reformed Special Education in your year-end giving. My personal plea: This cause is vital. Please support it generously! Thank you.

### Seminary news

The Seminary faculty has licensed student Marcus Wee to speak a word of edification in our churches. Brother Wee is a member of our sister church, Covenant

Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. We are thankful to God for this progress and commend student Wee to His care!

### Congregational activities

The annual lecture in Loveland, CO PRC was rescheduled for Friday, November 13. Prof. B. Huizenga spoke on the topic *Of God, Through God, and to God: Our Covenant Doctrine as Protestant Reformed Churches*.

In Pittsburgh PRC, Rev. Bruinsma spoke on “A Reformed Perspective of John Wesley.”

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

## Church profile—Calvary PRC of Hull, IA

The formation of Calvary Protestant Reformed Church started in January of 2005, when the Council of Hull PRC appointed a committee to look into the needs and desire for a daughter congregation. The Steering Committee met for the first time in November 2006. The group that later became Calvary PRC began holding separate services in March of 2007 at the Boyden-Hull Community School Theater. In June we received approval to organize from the Hull PRC Council and formal approval was given by Classis West on September 7, 2007.

The organizational worship service of Calvary PRC was held on Thursday, October 11, 2007 at Hull PRC. The charter members of Calvary PRC consisted of 43 families and 7 individuals.

The building of our new church edifice began in June of 2011. The dedication service for our new building was held on May 11, 2012. A new parsonage was built in 2015 next to the church.

Calvary welcomed Pastor Cory Griess as our first pastor in October 2009. Pastor Griess served in Calvary until January 2018. In May of 2018 we welcomed Pastor Allen Brummel and his family to our congregation as our second pastor.

Since the formation of Calvary PRC we have welcomed many new families and individuals into our fellowship. We currently have 84 families and 18 individuals with a total membership of 338. The Lord has blessed the congregation at Calvary!



## Announcements

### Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado extend our sympathies to David and Rachel Griess, Erika Griess and Nate and Megan Tanis and their children in the death of Rachel's mother, **Mrs. Wilmyrna Jansma**, who died on September 13 at the age of 93. Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado also extends our sympathies to Steve and Jody Ezinga, and Andrew and Jessica Ezinga and their children in the death of Jody's mother, **Mrs. Bernice Wolf**, who died on October 11 at the age of 87. Psalm 33:20: "Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Eric Solanyk, Clerk

### Teacher needed

The Edmonton PR Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2021-2022 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1-6 minus grade 5. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com or 780-777-5780 if interested.

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 8:00 A.M., in the Grace Protestant Reformed Church, Standale, Michigan.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

### Reformed Witness Hour

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

#### Rev. W. Bruinsma

December 6—"Malachi's Prophecy Fulfilled"  
Luke 1:16, 17

December 13—"Doubting Zacharias"  
Luke 1:18-20

December 20—"The Good Tidings of the Angel"  
Luke 2:10, 11

December 27—"The Changeless Jehovah"  
Malachi 3:6

### Wedding anniversary

With hearts full of joy and thanksgiving to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **Ed and Mary Lotterman**, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on December 12, 2020. We are thankful for their years of dedication in marriage, through many joys and trials, and for their Christ-centered home that continues to bless our family. Their wedding text was Proverbs 18:22: "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." This text was their prayer and confession 50 years ago, and they have been richly blessed. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless them in the years to come.

Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel (Psalm 128).

Larry and Amy Rypstra

David and Alaina Tolsma

Jesse Rypstra (Isaiah)

Aaron and Lydia VanDriel

Corina, Jeremy

Cornelis and Rebecca Kleyn

Jeff and Rachel Ward (Ivy)

Abbie Kleyn

Ethan and Kelsie Moore

Justin, Jared

Andy and Rebecca Lotterman

Jacob, Zachary, Nathan, Micah

Mike and Heidi Haveman

Ethan, Darcie

Herman and Lindy Hanko

Russ and Karisa Lotterman

Bradyn, Austin (in glory), Calvin, Gracie

Ryan and Katie Kooienga

Emma, Tyler, Meghan, Kayla, Ellie, Annika, Piper

Keith and Holly Feenstra

Cody, Janelle, Audrey, Trenton, Marcy

Phil and Emily Miersma

Hannah, Caleb, Titus, Miriam

Alex and Bethany Kingma

Grand Rapids, Michigan