

# The Standard Bearer

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## If the Lord wills....

Rev. Steven Key

## Herman Witsius: Still relevant (4)

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## The gift of Epaphroditus

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## Hair

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## The hard sons of Zeruiah

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## Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

# If the Lord wills....

**Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.**

**James 4:13-15**

As we begin this new year, the inspired James speaks to us. The Holy Spirit sees our need to hear the precious truth concerning the will of God, a truth to be applied to our entire life every step of the way.

### The fundamental truth

The scriptural truth concerning the will of God is an important doctrine and fundamental truth to us who confess the sovereignty of God. The text speaks of the living, active, sovereignly efficacious will of the living God. That truth has several implications.

In the first place, what God wills shall certainly come to pass. God sovereignly executes His will, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Is. 46:10). No man is able to frustrate the purpose of Almighty God. No man is able to change God’s eternal will. His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Do you believe and confess that? The confession James sets before us—“If the Lord wills, I shall live and do this or that”—is possible only on the basis of this fundamental truth.

In the second place, God’s will is all-comprehensive. There is not one detail of history that takes place without the will of God. Many years ago I sat in a church where a well-known “Reformed” theologian was the visiting preacher. This man stood in the pulpit—before the face of God—expounding Psalm 2: “I will declare the decree...thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.” This man had the audacity to stand before God and say, “Some people think God’s decree includes everything, that He even cares for sparrows, for birds. That is nonsense. God decreed one thing,

that is Christ.” From there he went on to deny God’s sovereign decree of predestination. Now, Reformed theologian or not, Reformed church or not, the god this man proclaimed was an idol, the god of his own imagination. The God of the Scriptures is sovereign. In revealing the all-comprehensive nature of His will and His tender care over us, Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, 26, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

There is not one minute of detail in history that takes place outside of the will of God. God wills the sicknesses that come to us in this life, including COVID-19, as well as the deeds and final destination of all men and angels and devils. All things come to pass under His direction and according to His sovereign determination. Unless we believe and confess this fundamental truth, we can never say, “If the Lord wills, I shall live and do this or that.”

In the third place, Christ stands at the very center of the whole counsel of God. Everything is for His sake. God’s purpose is to glorify Himself through Christ. And the living will of God becomes very personal at exactly this point, because Christ never stands alone, but always as the Head of His people. All God’s counsel is realized through the salvation of a people in Christ. The infinitely wise, supremely blessed will of Almighty God is your final blessedness in Christ!

When you sit back and contemplate this fundamental truth of the will of God, what a marvelous truth it is!

All that God determines to do is for the sake of His people in Christ. No wonder Scripture records so many speeches and songs extolling the greatness of God’s will! No wonder that the heavens resound with the songs of the angels and saints singing praises to God for all His wondrous works! No wonder that Scripture repeatedly reminds us that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

according to His purpose; that if God be for us, nothing can be against us; and that all things are ours, even as we are Christ's and Christ is God's. What a blessed truth this is!

James 4:13-15 applies that truth to our everyday lives.

The text speaks of tomorrow. A new year, 2021, lies before us. This text speaks of that. About 2021 it says, "You do not know a thing about tomorrow."

What does that mean? After all, we do know certain things in general about the future. The Lord has taught us certain things. For instance, we know that the earth here is no abiding place. We know, too, that a man will reap what he sows. That also has to do with the future. However, about the future of our own lives, about the future of my life on this earth, I know nothing. What does God's will hold for us in the year 2021? We make plans for tomorrow. Perhaps we even make New Year's resolutions. But history is not in our hands. God is writing history. He has certainly impressed us with that truth in this past year, crippling the world with a little virus.

All things concerning your life are in His hands. How many of us shall see this new year come to its conclusion? How many of us will go to heaven this year? We do not know. When I go to the pulpit, I do not know if I will make it to the *Amen*. How profoundly that truth was impressed upon the minds of several hundred people when their minister dropped dead in the pulpit Christmas eve several years ago. Many begin to die right in church. In the short time I did ambulance work, I helped carry out at least half a dozen. Even young men and young women die, and children. I have seen it many times—seemingly in the strength of health—gone.

Every breath you take, every step you walk, it is all in God's hands. Every particular event in your life is known by God and determined by Him with absolute precision and executed by His living will. You must want it that way, too. If you want to worship God as God, then you must be willing to humble yourself as the insignificant creature that you are. That is our place. Our place is to say in all humility, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

### Our failed contemplation

But we fail to contemplate this truth.

"Go to now! Wake up, look at yourselves!" the Spirit says to us. "Listen to yourselves, to your evil boastings!"

James refers to merchants, businessmen. But remember, this is only an example. This one example is all-inclusive. "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (James 4:13). We do this, do we not? We make plans, not even mindful of God's will. "Today

or tomorrow"—If not today, then tomorrow; I am the one to decide that. "We will go"—we have the willing and the means in *our* hands, don't you know. "Into this or that city"—I will look at all the demographics and projected statistics and benefits, and I'll decide; the opportunity is all mine. "And we will continue," we will work there—yes, I have that ability, too. "For a year"—however long I determine. "And buy and sell" and make great profits—there is no doubt. This is not a mere hope. This is the way it is; we are going to make it.

That is the way we speak. James is not writing to the world, but to the church, to you and me. I do not think you are much different from me. We already have begun to think about upcoming events and activities in the year 2021, and even beyond that. We make plans for the future of our children. Young people make plans for higher education, jobs, marriage. We make plans to buy houses and cars, to invest money, establish businesses. We watch our assets and investments and buy insurance policies, and all is well.

Well, is it wrong to provide for tomorrow, to plan for the future? I answer without hesitation, "No." Solomon tells us to learn of the ant, that little creature, that "provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:8). Joseph was commended for laying up food in the cities, in preparation for the coming years of famine. The Lord calls us always to be good stewards of the things with which He entrusts us.

But we sin when we make our plans in such a way that we exclude God. We know intellectually the truth concerning the will of God, but we ignore it by the way we live. We do that in many ways. We exclude the will of God from our experience when we undertake things without prayer. We ignore the truth of God's sovereign will when we place our confidence in future contingencies and events without any regard to the will of God. Maybe we spend money that we do not even have assets for, figuring all along that tomorrow I will be all set. Tomorrow, I will have earned enough to pay for this thing...tomorrow.

Then when God wrecks our plans on the rock of His unchangeable will, we are quick to complain. When the Almighty shows us that we are creatures, and that His will is different from ours, we are quick to criticize and complain. We insult the Almighty.

But notice the folly of it (v. 14): "whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Your whole life is a vapor, a breath. You go for a morning drive in an outlying area, where there are low spots in the roadway, and you see those little patches of

fog. You enter one and immediately pass through it; it is gone. The sun becomes strong; you come back that way a half hour later; the vapor is gone. It vanishes. Literally, your life appears for a little time, and then is snatched out of sight. Begin the year by looking back over your life. Where has it gone? Small and insignificant are we. There is only one Great, that is God.

Thank God that His will is sovereign, unchangeable, all-comprehensive and centered in our Lord Jesus Christ! Thank God that He is faithful to us in Christ! Now think upon that wonderful truth of God's will.

### A comforting confession

Then you will embrace this comforting confession: "For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). It is good to say this—"if the Lord wills"—to say it purposefully. But you must not only say it. The power and the comfort of this confession lies not in saying it, but in the inward attitude of the heart. The meaning of this exhortation

is this: At all times, with all things, whenever we look forward, we should remember in thankfulness God's will and the accomplishment of that will in Christ for us. Then with reverence, we will bow before Him in absolute dependence upon His will for life and for death, for health and for sickness, for the accomplishment of any purpose or expectation. We will do so knowing that whatever befalls us is not by chance, but by the hand of our Father who leads us through all our life to our home in heaven. "Thy will be done, Father."

That is our comfort. We are led by Father's hand. If we were given the direction of our own lives, we would never arrive in glory; that is sure. But to you who are in Christ Jesus, this is your comfort. Our heavenly Father seeks our good. He not only knows our place in glory, He knows the best way to lead us there.

If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that in 2021. But whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.



## Editorial

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

# Herman Witsius: Still relevant (4)

We concluded our last editorial (Dec. 15) with a lengthy quote from Witsius' book *Antinomians and Neonomians*.<sup>1</sup> His assessment of the controverted material was, "In the matter [of the disputation I was asked to assess], there is that [which] I approve, and what I disapprove" (161).

What he approved was the antinomians' desire and goal, namely, "that men may be called off from all presumption upon their own righteousness, and trained up to the exercise of generous piety, which flows from the pure fountain of Divine love" (161).

An admirable and proper desire.

But there was that which Witsius did not "equally approve," namely, "to take from good works all that

fruit and utility, so frequently assigned them in scripture" (161).

To this Witsius turns in Chapter XVI.

What governs Witsius' analysis is, as was quoted at the end of our last article, "We must accurately distinguish between a right to [spiritual] life, and the possession of [spiritual] life."

As we stated, this takes us to the heart of the antinomian dispute in Britain. Men drift in the direction of antinomianism exactly because they fail to distinguish between what grants the *right* to life, over against what God has ordained shall contribute to the *possession* (the personal enjoyment and benefits) of that new life, and may properly be promoted as such in the preaching. And by "contributes to" we simply refer to the various ways God is pleased to bring manifold blessings (spiritual enrichment) to self and to others, one of which, of course, would be prayer. Another is spelled out in the fifth commandment, which commandment is applied to the New Testament church by Paul in Ephesians 6:1-3.

As Witsius begins to make his case for the "utility of

<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.



good works” in the salvation of believers, he makes an insightful point. “What an unhappy thing is it...that immediately [upon mentioning these things], you need a tedious explication before simple and candid hearers, and an apology before the less favourable and the suspicious” (160-61).

Witsius is lamenting a climate of suspicion stirred up by those who are so extremely rigid about how every phrase is formulated that as a result, the preacher must continually assure the hearers phrase after phrase what he is neither implying nor denying. Such preaching becomes “tedious.”

Then comes Witsius’ statement that “Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved.” The question is, “done” in what sense, and “may be saved” in what sense? It matters what aspect of salvation one is speaking of. We do well to allow Witsius to explain himself.

III. [First,] Scripture teacheth that man must do something, that he may obtain the possession of the salvation purchased by Christ, “Labour, (said he) for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life,”...John vi. 27-29. And Paul expressly says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” Phil. ii. 12.

As Witsius proceeds, it becomes plain when he asserts that a man “must *do* something” that he “may obtain the possession” of his salvation, he is neither referring to doing something to give Christ the right to save one’s self nor to gaining a right to salvation. The key word is “possession.” Witsius is referring to the personal experience of one’s own salvation and one’s enjoyment of it. When the Word is preached, there must be a response to the call of the gospel in a positive, submissive, obedient way. Not just, “Well, Christ does it all. Let’s wait and see. If I am elect, there will be an indication it is so. If not, what can I do about it anyway?”

Rather, there must be a ‘responding’ to the word in a willing, active manner. And if one has been born-again, there will be.

Witsius proceeds:

IV. Neither because Christ is the way to life, is the practice of Christian piety not the way to life. Christ is the way to life, because he purchased us a right to life. The practice of Christian piety is the way to life, because thereby we go to the possession of the right obtained by Christ. For it is more than a hundred times designed [designated in Scripture] by the name of life...Prov. vi. 23 “...the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life...” And x. 17, “He is in the way of life who keepeth instruction...” And what does Christ himself understand by that narrow way *which leadeth unto life*, Matt. viii, 14 but the strict practice of Christian religion? (162-63).

From the scriptural passages Witsius quotes it is ev-

ident that Witsius is using the phrase “the way to life” in two different manners. In the first instance, Christ is the way to life in the sense of being the one only ground for approaching God and His work the sole basis for the right of access. But for Witsius, using the phrase “the way to life” in connection with that central truth does not rule out using that phrase also in connection with Christian piety. As for the second usage of the phrase, it is clear that what Witsius has in mind is what we now refer to as “in the way of.” As he states, “... because thereby we go to the possession [!] of the right obtained by Christ.” As we have stated, for Witsius, “possession” has to do with the personal experience of one’s own salvation and enjoyment of it.

Why Witsius is so insistent on this, he makes plain in his next couple of sections.

V. It is certain indeed that the true Christian lives to Christ, that is, to his glory: but it does not follow from thence that he does nothing for [with a view to] his own [spiritual] advantage. It is not contrary to the duty of a holy man to desire life, love days, and enjoy good, Psal. xxxiv. 13 [v. 12]...(163).

And keep in mind, Witsius states the above with an eye on the preaching, what a Reformed preacher may, and even, when expounding certain texts, *must* preach. As my homiletics professor never tired of saying, “Brothers, preach the *text!*” If the Holy Spirit saw fit to phrase His words that way, then do not pretend to be wiser than He, in what He evidently is pleased to use to promote and draw out godliness in the life of the redeemed. Which is to say, to preach the importance and value of the Christian life (that of godliness and good works) with the believer’s own spiritual benefit (advantage) emphasized as an incentive is not improper nor to be condemned. Not when the text phrases it in those terms.

Witsius proceeds to underscore that point with a homely figure:

VI. In fine, it is not inconsistent to do something from this principle, because we live, and to the end, that we may [!] live. No man eats indeed but that [as a result] he lives, but [for all of that] he also eats that he may [!] live...(163).

What Witsius has to say next takes us to the heart of his assessment of the value a life of holiness with its “good works.”

VII. [Secondly, we acknowledge], [a] mercenary baseness is certainly unworthy of the high-born sons of God: but their heavenly Father does not forbid them to have any regard to their own advantage in the exercise of holiness. He not only permits, but also willeth, “that by a patient continuance in well-doing, we *seek* for

glory, and honour, and immortality;” and to them who do so, he will render eternal life, Rom. ii. 6, 7.... It is also just [right and proper] that the study of holiness be excited in us by this [proper] love to ourselves. For, pray, what is the end of all these promises, whereby God hath commended his precepts to us, but that stimulated with a desire after them, we might the more cheerfully obey him? *Not to love the benefits promised, is to contemn the goodness of God who promiseth* (emphasis added). Not to be animated to piety through a desire after them is to abuse them to a purpose quite opposite to that for which they were designed of God (164-5).

Witsius’ position is that God calls and encourages His children “unto all good works” by giving them incentives that are clearly to their own spiritual advantage and will pay rich dividends (spiritually!) in the end. Witsius’ point is, this does not turn God’s prompting obedience with promised blessing into something ‘mercenary,’ that is, a kind of monetary exchange: we do what God requires simply because we decide it is to our advantage in the long run. God now, as it were, owes us. And humble gratitude and thankfulness for all the blessings so contrary to what we *really* deserve is cast away.

Such is how Rome and the Pharisees viewed things. Such is not worthy of how a high-born son of God considers his calling.

Rather, this is the proper understanding. God, as a Father, deals with us as we often deal with our own children in their weaknesses, namely, by motivating them with incentives that will not only please us but, we remind them, will profit them and be to their advantage. As it is with us and our children, so it is with God and His dear children.

Some may be inclined to object to this. It matters not. This is clearly scriptural. As Witsius points out, “Not to love the benefits promised, is to contemn [belittle] the goodness of God who promiseth.” Let us not pretend to be wiser than God when it comes to dealing with His children and His way of drawing obedience from His own. If this is what the Spirit says in Scripture, we best preach it.

Having quoted a number of texts such as Deuteronomy 6:18, I Timothy 6:6, 4:8, and Titus 3:8, Witsius proceeds to guard against any misunderstanding:

When we believe the scriptures asserting all these things, we do not believe that the exercise of virtue or religion merit any such thing, or that the efficacy of these duties is so great, that of themselves, setting aside the Divine blessing, they can procure benefits, or avert calamities: but we believe, so great is the goodness [!] of our heavenly Father, that for Christ’s sake, he liberally rewards [!] the sincere endeavors of his children, who

rejoice to please him. “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name,” Heb vi. 10 (167).

And then there is the matter of the connection between sanctification (a life of holiness) and assurance. Can there be any real connection at all, seeing our best works are always imperfect and defiled? Witsius answers:

XVII. The brethren confess that none can have a consciousness of his justification, but from faith, and by faith.... [That] I do not choose to oppose. But pray, let them tell the reason, why the soul is less conscious of its affection, than of its assent. How comes it, that I do not as well know that I frequently think with pleasure concerning God, that I eagerly desire and long after familiar communion with him, and am solicitous to do what may be pleasing to him, and in fine, am grieved when I wander from the rule of duty; as that I know the sacred whispers of God to my soul is truly the voice of God and that my soul, by the assent of faith, answers to it? Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification (172).

Witsius asks, “[W]hy they should be less conscious of its affection, than of its assent.” By “its affection” Witsius refers to what one loves and desires; by “assent” he refers to faith and what one knows as a result. By faith one assents to the gospel truth, declaring, I believe that I, a sinner, am justified by Christ’s atonement. One knows it to be true, one is “conscious” of it. But if one has a love for God and desires to serve Him, is that not also an evidence that one has been saved and justified? “I must be numbered with the saved, with the justified. Why else would I have these affections?” One is conscious, “aware” that one is saved and justified. And thus one is reassured that he is numbered with the forgiven and justified after all.

By that last phrase, where Witsius speaks of sanctification as “assuring the soul as to its justification,” he is not speaking of sanctification serving as the *basis* of justification, but of one’s sanctification (which is worked by Christ’s Holy Spirit) serving as evidence to the soul that one is *numbered* with the justified, namely, with those who have received the gift of faith by that same saving Spirit.

But now the question: How can this be, seeing our best works are imperfect and defiled? First, Witsius states that with which he does *not* disagree:

XIX. [Fifthly,] with respect to the beauty of Christian virtues, and their *acceptableness* in the sight of the Lord, I thus judge, that none in this life obtains such perfect holiness, but that it labours under its imperfections; on account of which, if God should deal with us according

to the rigour of the law, and his highest right over us, it would be rejected. Hence it is, that our righteousness can, by no means, have place before him in order to justification. And if any should presume to obtrude it upon God for that very purpose, truly it would be loss and dung to the man himself. Neither do the brethren differ here, as to the substance of the matter. For I see it taught on both sides... (175-76).

Witsius then proceeds to what he is convinced is the biblical and Reformed view:

XX. In the mean time, since that holiness to which we were predestinated by the Father, which Christ purchased for us by his blood, and which is infused into us by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, is true holiness, and the very image of God, according to which we are renewed; it cannot, but...because it is holiness, and as it is holiness, please God, and in this respect, Christian virtues are not filthiness and dung; but the beauty of the royal bride, and the comeliness where with she is all glorious within, Psal. xlv. 13, 14 (176-77).

In other words, for us simply to dismiss all the labor of the saints in service of God as being naught but filth and dung would be to disregard and belittle the work of God Himself in us, as if the Holy Spirit accomplishes nothing in the elect. Does not the Holy Spirit renew the elect in the image of Jesus Christ? Since He does, then what God has respect to in the good works of the redeemed (which he now freely and willingly does) is but the fruit of His own work in us. And that must not be belittled and simply dismissed as so much dung. Such may sound pious (and in some circles is counted the mark of deepest piety), but it is not. Rather, what such evaluation amounts to is to insult the Holy Spirit and to do despite to His work of grace in and through the redeemed.

To conclude: The great issue in this whole ‘British’

dispute was, what glorifies grace and God as the God of saving grace?

Witsius’ answer was, it is not enough or proper to focus on grace defined simply as God’s undeserved favor, salvation contrary to all one’s deserving. This was the focus of those of the antinomian persuasion, almost to the exclusion of the other aspect of grace. That other aspect of grace is the power of grace, the life-transforming work of the Holy Spirit who makes us new creatures, renewing the elect in Christ’s own image.

And this grace working newness of life not only is to show itself in faith calling upon God for mercy (whereby one is justified), but also is to show itself in a life of godliness (of all good works and of love). This too is to be addressed by the preaching, and not in such a way as to minimize the importance, value, and necessity of this godly way of life for one’s personal benefit and for the body of Christ (as if this really is impossible to expect anyway and does not glorify “it’s all of grace”). Rather, it is to be emphasized in the preaching with its exhortations and admonitions exactly because it *magnifies* grace, that is, what God Almighty can and does make out of heretofore “dead, rotten wood,” a people who can respond willingly to the incentives given by God’s Word.

And these fruits of godliness reassure the elect that they are God’s own and saved. This Witsius demonstrates by quoting I John 3:14—“We know [are conscious] that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

Next editorial, D.V., we intend to conclude our treatment of Witsius and his book by a lengthy quote with which Witsius concludes his treatise.

Witsius’ irenic, solid wisdom deserves a wide reading.

And we will also reflect on the events of this past year and what it bodes for the future.



## Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

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## The gift of Epaphroditus

[Note: In our editors’ notes for the new volume year (Oct. 1, 2020), we neglected to mention that Mr. Bruinooge has joined the SB staff under this rubric. We apologize and welcome him as a regular writer.]

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

Philippians 2:25



When we receive praise as Christians, our first reaction is often self-satisfaction. We are pleased that others are pleased with us. We need the constant reminder that all spiritual abilities and gifts are from the Lord. Paul's dear friend and companion Epaphroditus would have needed this reminder, too, as he received high praise from the great leader of the missionary program in Paul's letter to the Philippians. As the letters of Paul clearly testified, it was the amazing work of God in the hearts of his companions that made it possible for them to carry out their work to the fullest extent (Phil. 1:6). In that connection, this article will attempt to unpack the few references to Epaphroditus in the New Testament, and to reveal the important work of this humble and dedicated servant during the first century A.D.

To better understand the relationship between Paul and Epaphroditus and the impact of Epaphroditus on the spread of the gospel, it would be helpful to first understand Paul's relationship with the Philippian church. If you would read through the book of Philippians in one sitting, it would soon become evident that the Philippian church was one of the most beloved of the apostle Paul. The letter uses many terms of endearment as Paul expresses joy for his circumstances under house arrest in Rome and for their faithfulness as a Christian community (Phil. 1:7).

One of the reasons for Paul's endearing attitude toward them is because of his experiences in Philippi some ten years before writing his letter to them. He had come on his second missionary journey (early 50s A.D.), meeting Lydia and other women of prayer down by the riverside (Acts 16:14). There was a very small population of Jews in Philippi; therefore, there was no synagogue in Philippi as at least ten Jewish males were needed. This was partly why the Lord led Paul to Lydia, a member of the first Christian household in Europe (16:15). Not long after Paul's arrival, he cast out the evil spirit of a slave girl, leading to Paul and his companion Silas being unjustly flogged and beaten (16:22-23). After imprisonment, the miraculous earthquake led to the conversion of the jailer and his household, allowing Paul and Silas to safely leave the city, albeit as mistreated Roman citizens (16:37). These experiences of Paul in Philippi solidified their place in his heart, and a special bond formed between Paul and these new Christians.

Fast forward ten years from Paul establishing the Philippian church, and we find him under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial before Nero (Phil. 2:24). It is during this time that Epaphroditus, a Greek from Philippi, comes to Paul in Rome. It is not clear when Epaphroditus was converted, whether his conversion occurred during the early beginnings of the church or

some other time during this ten-year interval. Nonetheless, he was sent during the early 60s A.D. to visit Paul in Rome, and to carry out several important tasks.

The first task of Epaphroditus was to bear the greetings of the Philippian church and to report on how things were going in Philippi. Overall, this report revealed the Philippians' high spiritual condition (Phil. 1:3-11); but it also revealed to Paul the conflict between Euodias and Syntyche and how resolution was needed (4:2). Perhaps Epaphroditus was given guidance by Paul in helping to intercede in this disagreement upon his return to Philippi.

The second task given to Epaphroditus was to minister to the needs of the apostle Paul as he awaited his trial (Phil. 2:25). The descriptions used at the outset of this article to describe Epaphroditus reveal how capable and faithful this man was. He was chosen to support Paul in any way necessary for the furtherance of the gospel, a support which involved preaching to those in Rome as part of the missionary work (2:30). We are again reminded of the value of the network of people who surrounded Paul in the spread of the gospel. In a ministry that spanned roughly 25 years, the apostle Paul relied heavily on faithful men and women to help carry out the Great Commission in the Roman Empire. These faithful individuals were a support to Paul in his work. Regarding this needed support, it is worth noting that Paul lacked a spouse during his ministry (I Cor. 7:8-9), and we recognize the immeasurable support that faithful wives of pastors give to their husbands. Without this specific support in the life of Paul, faithful men and women like Epaphroditus become even more significant in the work of the gospel ministry.

In addition to bearing greetings from Philippi and ministering to the needs of Paul in Rome, Epaphroditus was given the important task of delivering a monetary gift to Paul from the Philippian church (Phil. 4:18). This gift was extremely significant for the basic needs of Paul. Certainly our penal system today bears little resemblance to what Paul experienced—it was necessary that he support himself *by his own efforts* as he endured his first Roman imprisonment under house arrest (Acts 28:30). Epaphroditus served as the courier of the gift, but ultimately the gift was from the Philippians, a genuine expression of love and affection towards Paul.

This was not their first expression of love to Paul in this way, for Philippians 4 refers to a gift they had sent on to Paul while he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16). Once again, while Paul is confined to his hired house, the Philippians, through Epaphroditus, bring a gift to help relieve some of the anxiety of having to support himself. Certainly Paul would have had the financial support of

the Roman church community (4:17), but this gift from Philippi was more than just a gift of money. It is beautifully described by Paul as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God” (4:18). The Philippians knew that this must be at the heart of the gift. The principles of proper giving were an important element of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8-9), but the other newly established churches of Asia and Greece would have understood these principles well. On his missionary journeys Paul had faithfully collected from these new churches, specifically for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:3). Now the Philippians are able to show their liberality to their dear friend Paul, carrying out these principles of giving in a specific way to him.

The scope of this gift’s significance is much greater than the money itself. The epistle to the Philippians is well known as a letter of joy, rejoicing, and thankfulness on the part of Paul in spite of his adverse circumstances. Paul expresses his thankfulness for several things in the letter, but a simple examination of the sequence of these items within the epistle places the reference to the gift towards the end of the letter, almost as an “afterthought” (Phil. 4:10, 17). In Philippians 1, Paul makes no mention of a gift, but rather expresses thankfulness for two other matters: for their good spiritual condition (1:3-6) and for his imprisonment so that he could spread the gospel to those in Rome, including those among the higher levels of authority (1:13). This demonstrates that Paul was not prompted to write to them because of the gift, but rather was led to thank them for their expressions of love and gratitude *through* the gift. The gift was a *means* by which Paul received love and affection from the Philippians.

As Epaphroditus delivered the gift and sat at the feet of Paul, what an amazing message of contentment and joy he was able to receive from Paul regardless of his difficult circumstances. How that must have strengthened and encouraged him—to be able to hear that message himself even before the Philippian church. In God’s plan, Epaphroditus would have needed that message of contentment because Philippians 2 reveals that at some point Epaphroditus became very ill, even becoming “nigh unto death” (Phil. 2:27). It is possible that he became very sick on his initial travels to Rome, for the Philippians learned of his severe sickness (2:26). Regardless of when this sickness occurred, the significance is that Epaphroditus was committed to carrying out his duty as a fellowsoldier of Paul—to deliver the gift from Philippi and support Paul in the ministry (2:25). Epaphroditus shows remarkable commitment and dedication to his work, qualities that Paul himself recognized in his

own admission that the death of Epaphroditus would have brought “sorrow upon sorrow” (2:27). Recovery from such a severe sickness during this time was rare, so you get a strong sense of Paul’s relief when Epaphroditus did recover. Clearly, Paul loved him, and was so thankful when the Lord had mercy on him and healed him. Paul cites that this mercy was therefore extending to himself by the physical restoration of Epaphroditus (2:27).

Even though the name of Epaphroditus is only mentioned twice in the New Testament, much is contained in Philippians 2 about the circumstances surrounding his trip to Rome. It becomes evident that Epaphroditus, once recovered, was the obvious choice to be the letter-carrier of Philippians back to Macedonia (Phil. 2:28). Who better for this task? Epaphroditus! The man who delivered the gift and endured severe sickness for the sake of the gospel in Rome! The man who could alleviate the Philippians’ concern for his well-being by coming to them in person with an inspired letter penned by their beloved Paul! The man who could provide first-hand details about Paul’s experiences in Rome and the spiritual condition of the Roman church!

Maybe you have assumed all along that the title of this article was referring to the monetary gift brought by Epaphroditus. If that were the case, the title would perhaps have lost some steam a while ago as we examine the gift as really coming from the Philippian church and, ultimately, from the Lord (James 1:17). However, the title regains its meaning as we reflect on the character of Epaphroditus. *He* was a gift—a gift to the early church, both in Philippi and in Rome. His references in Scripture are a gift to us, too. He teaches us about dedication, commitment, perseverance, and selflessness. He teaches us that the Word of God is more important than our physical condition. The idea of Epaphroditus being “nigh unto death” has the idea of him risking his life; meaning, he chose God’s mission over his personal desires (Phil. 2:30). While this life is good and to be valued, our view towards earthly circumstances never trump our desire for the good of the church and for the glory of the life to come (Phil. 1:23-24; Rom. 8:18). Therefore, the gift of Epaphroditus was *both* the expression of love by the Philippians to Paul *and* his spiritual example to the Philippians, Romans, and to the church of all ages. A worthwhile double-meaning.

Paul’s command to the Philippians regarding Epaphroditus upon his return to Philippi? “Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness” (Phil. 2:29). What beautiful fellowship would have been enjoyed between Epaphroditus and the Philippian church upon their reunion, with Paul’s love letter to share.



## A word fitly spoken

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

# Hair

A single hair is thin enough to be overlooked at a passing glance. Chances are you do not even see the few filaments littering the headrest of an armchair or floating aimlessly in the air. Hair in its basic unit is insubstantial and unnoteworthy. It was quite an impressive display of marksmanship, then, when the men of Benjamin with the left hand slung their stones “at an hair breadth,” and did not miss (Jud. 20:16).

On the other hand, when a collective of single hairs populates the human head, the effect can be rather marvelous. One wonders what the head of Absalom looked like before and after his annual cut, when “he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king’s weight” (II Sam. 14:26). That he cut his hair seems to indicate even he understood the law of nature, “that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him” (I Cor. 11:14). But what is a shame to a man is the glory of a woman, “for her hair is given her for a covering” (I Cor. 11:15). Thus the lover’s song, intent to relish every fair detail of his bride, begins with the textured canvas of her head—“thou hast dove’s eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead” (Song of Solomon 4:1). No ostentatious braiding of the hair is necessary (I Tim. 4:9)! No expensive plaiting of the hair, either (I Pet. 3:3)! It is the simple elegance of creation that makes “thine head upon thee like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple” (Song of Solomon 7:5).

Outward beauty, however, is a transient thing, which might explain the shelves of products in the pharmaceutical section of the grocery store designed with hair in mind. Not only will you find gels and sprays for sculpting hair, soaps and shampoos for washing hair, clips and pins for bunching hair; you will also discover paints and dyes for obscuring hair. Not obscuring its presence, of course, but its color. Nothing invokes the fear of old age more than the single white hair standing resolutely in a sea of black or brown. If it cannot be removed with the tweezers, let it be hidden with the dye! But this is the human logic that exalts in the freshness of youth and deplores the wisdom of age.

As always, divine logic is quite the opposite, which

is why we find a treasure verse hidden in the depths of Proverbs: “The hoary [silver-haired!] head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31). So how did John find the risen and exalted Lord Jesus when he fell into a trance on the Lord’s Day? Did a youthful jet of black grace the Lord’s brow? Not at all, but rather “his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow” (Rev. 1:14). It was a whiteness of hair reflecting age, austerity, wisdom, and righteousness! A different kind of glory than the flowing locks of a woman, no doubt! But a glory nonetheless! It was the same glory as the Ancient of Days, whose snowy white garments blended brilliantly with “the hair of his head like the pure wool” (Dan. 7:9).

But if there is glory in the hairy head, it contrasts with the embarrassment, or in some cases even the fear, of losing one’s hair. One of the lesser known functions of the priests in the Old Testament was the regular inspection of hair. A tell-tale sign of leprosy was discoloration or loss of hair. Thus “the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white...it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean” (Lev. 13:3). To be pronounced unclean was to be sent away from the village, away from home, away from family, and away from life. We can well appreciate the anxiety, then, with which a man approached the priest as the hair began to disappear from his forehead or crown. We can also appreciate his relief at the pronouncement of the priest after duly inspecting him: “And the man whose hair is fallen off his head, he is bald; yet he is clean” (Lev. 13:40). There is no uncleanness or genuine cause for shame in the mere baldness of the head, as the children of Bethel once learned to their peril (II Kings 2:23).

It is a different matter, however, when hair is removed on purpose. Hair might be painfully stripped away as a sign of sorrow, as Ezra at the news of Judah’s apostasy: “I...plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished” (Ezra 9:3). It may be the stigma of the now cleansed leper, who, though the leprosy itself has passed, must nevertheless “shave off all his hair off

his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off” (Lev. 14:9). It may be a sign of judgment, as the Lord who threatens against Israel, through the instrumentality of the king of Assyria, to shave “the head, and the hair of the feet” (Is. 7:20). It may even be the result of pride and misplaced trust, as the razor of Delilah that shore off the seven locks from Samson’s head (Jud. 16:19). In every case, the effect of hair removal is pain and humiliation. And it is thus that we can find the gospel even in a biblical word as innocuous as *hair*. For the Lord Jesus Christ, in addition to the wounds in his hands and feet, suffered the stigma and shame of the removal of his hair: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Is. 50:6). Oh, it was a glorious head of snow that John saw on the risen Lord’s brow in his vision on the Lord’s Day! Indeed, all the more glorious since it was a crown of hoary hair found exclusively in the way of righteousness!

It is on the basis of that very gospel, then, that hair becomes one of the most unexpected symbols of com-

fort for every Christian who confesses belonging to Jesus Christ. The Christian may be compassed by evils and surrounded by enemies “more than the hairs of mine head” (Ps. 40:12; 69:4). With Eliphaz the Temanite, he may tremble in the presence of the Almighty so that “the hair of my flesh stood up” (Job 4:15). He may even live to see the day when, looking up to the darkening sky, the sun itself turns black “as sackcloth of hair” (Rev. 6:12). Yet in the face of such troubles and fears, every Christian can be as calm and determined as Samson, gripping the two pillars in the temple of Dagon even as he felt “the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven” (Jud. 16:22). Every believer can be filled with the same gratitude and wonder as the Mary who wiped the anointed feet of Jesus “with her hair” (John 12:3). For as the Lord Himself taught us with another of His unforgettable aphorisms, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:30). And, therefore, it is not without reason that our confession confidently proclaims the total certainty of our salvation, for “without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head” (Heid. Cat., Q&A 1).



## When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Sherry Koole, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan

# Tools in the hand of the Master Builder

**Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table.**

**Psalms 128:3**

As Reformed, and as Protestant Reformed believers, we know how important the institution of the family is to the life of the church. And we know that it is God Himself who is the Builder of such an institution. From the beginning of time, God established His covenant with His chosen people and peculiar treasure. And He is pleased to continue His covenant in the line of continued generations with believers and their seed. His covenant is an everlasting covenant—the same yesterday, today, and forever. His covenant is a covenant of grace and fellowship wherein He is our God and Father and we are His people and children.

Family. Godly family. Covenant family. It is only

the Lord who can build such an unit. He establishes the institution of holy matrimony. The man and woman who marry in the Lord are united in Him and live life as one. They do not live individualistically, seeking to satisfy self with the earthly pleasures of this world. Nor do they seek to obtain the vain glory of men for some great accomplishment or work that he or she might have done. Rather, in striving to reflect the union of Christ and His Bride, the church, they live *with* one another, seeking to *serve* one another in all of their day-to-day living.

It is the desire of most—and I would like to believe *all*—godly young couples that it might please the Lord to bless them with children. Like Hannah of old, it is something the godly young woman (and man) prays for. Although the Lord of heaven hears and answers all the prayers of His children, we know that the prayers are not always answered in the way in which His children



might desire them to be. His ways are not always our ways, but His ways are best. And His ways are perfect. He may not choose to bless all couples with the gift of children. Yet He is good.

I do not think words can begin to tell the joy of a man and his wife when it pleases God to bless their love with the precious gift of life. The newborn cry, the nursing babe, the pitter-patter of little feet and all that follows can often bring more joy than any parent could wish for. But along with it comes the awesome, yet humbling, task of being tools of the Lord. They now have the God-given calling to raise these children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They have the task of teaching little ones to fold their hands and pray. And by their godly example and instruction, it is their prayer that it might please the Lord to have their children grow in love for Him and to walk in His ways.

I have heard it said a time or two that the best gift a father can give to his children is to have them see that he loves their mother, and the best gift a mother can give is to have them see that she reverences their father. If and when it pleases the Lord to bless the godly couple with children, it is paramount the children see this in their parents. They must *see* it in their daily living with each other. They must *hear* it in the conversations that they have. Children need to see the love of Christ shining in and through the lives of their parents and in the relationship they have with each other and the Lord. For the covenant family is grounded in a marriage that is based on oneness of faith—a living faith—that the couple has and shares in the living God. This *must* be true of the Christian home and family. For it is only in this way that the family is truly blessed—by having husband, wife, father, mother, and children dwelling in unity with each other and the Lord.

**“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it...” (Ps. 127:1).**

Except the Lord build. And more specifically, except the Lord build the Christian home and family, we labor in vain that build it. He is the Master Builder. It is He who builds. And in His building, He is pleased to employ the use of tools—among which of utmost importance are godly parents in the home. Parenting is that very high yet humbling calling that the Lord places upon many couples in the militant church here on earth. I use the words *militant church* purposefully here. For, as godly parents, we will be called to do battle. We will engage in spiritual warfare. We will face opposition in our role as parents in God’s church. For in its opposition to the church and the causes of God’s kingdom the world would love nothing better than to

break down and destroy the makings of the Christian home. For they—like the believer—know how vitally important a covenant family is to the life of the church. The Devil and his hosts will do all in their power to break down the stability and unity of the Christian home. They will attack the father and his role as head of the home for the ‘foolishness’ of using hard-earned money for the education of his children in the Christian day schools, for church obligations, and for many other kingdom causes. They will belittle the mother and her work, mocking her for her devotion and tempting her with something they consider to be *a little bit more appealing*, such as the possibility of making a name for herself with a career (outside the home) that is just *lying out there waiting for her in a world of opportunity*. Along with attacking the father and belittling the mother, they will work on the children—tempting them with all the sinful pleasures this world has to offer, laying those temptations wide open before their eyes and with easy access to their hands.

How important it is then that we have godly parents in the home, devoted to God and the cause of His kingdom. Devoted to the work He has called us to do. Devoted to the raising of *His* children. For although we are the earthly parents, it is our Lord and heavenly Father who blesses our children with the gift of life. Our children are really *His* children. He gifts them to us for a short time to raise and to love. He gifts them with the calling to raise them in the nurture and admonitions of His Name. And we do. We love the children as our own (after all, it is we, as mothers, who give them birth.) And all that the world belittles and calls foolishness we as parents view as privilege. What a beautiful and high calling God has given! And as parents, we are humbled. Truly humbled. We are but weak tools in the hand of the Builder. Yet He is pleased to use us. We are weak, but He is strong. And by the guiding hand of the Master Builder, we, as *parenting tools*—along with other useful, yet weak means—build a beautiful and lasting covenant home, pictured well in the words of Psalter #278 (Ps. 103), “Those who His gracious covenant keep the Lord will ever bless; their children’s children shall rejoice to see His righteousness.” To be used of the Lord in such a way is very humbling indeed. And it will do us good—and keep us humble—to remember that we are but tools, and only tools, in the hand of the Master Builder. We must never confuse ourselves with the Builder or give ourselves the credit that is due only to Him. *He* does the building. And unless He does so, our labors are nothing but vain.

**“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).**

Training a child in the way he should go is no easy task. In fact, as stated earlier, it can be a battle. War must be waged against the world, the Devil and his hosts, and our own sinful flesh. Training a child in the way he should go is very costly. It takes much sacrifice on the part of the parents—sacrifice of time, money and energy. Parenting can be exhausting and, at times, disheartening work. Do Christian parents ever weary of warning their very young, not so young, single adult, and even married children about the many dangers that threaten the Christian home? Do they ever tire of warning their children of the dangers that come to those who *wander and experiment* with the things of the world—seeking some so-called earthly enjoyment away from the restrictions, duties, and obligations they have as children in the home and children of the church?

I believe they do. There are times when we, as *parenting tools*, grow weary in our labors, and the work we perform is not what it should be. As *tools*, we are often times in need of sharpening. All good and experienced carpenters care for, clean, and sharpen their tools when needed. So much more so the Master Builder. He properly cares for and spiritually cleans and sharpens His *tools* on a regular basis. Godly parents pray, and pray often. Not just daily, but many times each day. Both individually and as couples. They pray for the grace, patience, and wisdom needed to deal with the blessings of children that God gives them. The Lord hears the cries of His *tools* and equips them with all things necessary to perform their parental duties. Parents must spend time in the study of God's Word, individually and as couples. They have readily available to them the only *handbook* needed for parenting in the Word that the Builder Himself provides. The Scriptures give an abundance of guidance to godly parents—not limited to, but many jewels of which can found in the book of Proverbs, where we read a myriad of loving instruction from a devoted father to his son.

And what better way for us as parents to prepare for another week of godly instruction in our homes than to begin each week in the house of the Builder. While in the Builder's house, He cleans and cares for, strengthens and sharpens us through the instruction, encouragement, admonitions, and rebukes found in the Scriptures and expounded in the faithful preaching of His Word. With the loving and proper care of the Builder, His tools are eager and able to “go forth in His service and strong in His might” (Psalter #407) encouraged and comforted to know that it is indeed the Master who is doing the building, and humbled by the fact that He is pleased to use them in the doing of His work.

As difficult and hard as the calling to *train up a child* may be, it is very rewarding and joyful too. God gives to us a promise—in the Scriptures we are told—our children taking hold of these truths will not leave them when they are old. What a comforting and godly incentive for parents to be diligent in the labors God has called us to! God is pleased to continue His covenant in the line of continued generations. How wonderful that is! He does not promise to save all our children head for head. But, as parents, we are called to raise any and all the children God gives us in the fear of His Name. We raise and love them, instruct and discipline them, all within the sphere of the covenant. And in doing so, there is no greater joy for us as parents than to see that our children walk in truth. That is joy. Pure joy. But then the opposite must also be true—there is no greater heartache than to see our children grow up to despise and leave the church we love, seeking and grabbing hold of the sinful pleasures and enjoyments of the world instead. I can only imagine such heartache. Or, rather I should say, I cannot imagine such heartache, and thank God that He has spared me such heartache thus far. We train our children in the way they should go, working diligently in service to the Builder.

But it is the Builder, and solely the Builder, who governs the heart. And so, we labor on—loving, raising, nurturing, instructing, disciplining and so forth—in faithful service to Him. We do so knowing, and comforted by that fact, that the Builder protects and preserves His own so that nothing, absolutely nothing—not persecutions from without, controversies from within, or even the worldwide pandemic in which we now live—can alter the plans He has for us and for our children. Rather, the pandemic, persecutions, and controversies are all very much a part of the Master's plan. As we labor in service to Him, may our joy and comfort rest in the fact that we and our children are being held in the palm of His almighty hand. May our labors be both diligent and faithful. And if God is so pleased to bless our labors with the fruit of godly seed, may we never puff up with self-pride at the fact that our children are walking in truth. Rather, let us fall to our knees in humble adoration and gratitude to the Builder who brought it to be. For *unless He does the building, we labor in vain that build*. Let us thank God that He does, so that we do not.

**“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6: 6 and 7).**

Next time we will look at some of the *work* the Master Builder employs His tools *to do* in obedience to His commanding them to raise their (His) children in the nurture and admonition of His Name. And although

the work of raising our children is much the same whether they be in the infant, toddler, adolescent, teen, or young adult stage, our main focus will be on that of older children in the home.



## Strength of youth

Rev. Jon Mahtani, pastor of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan

# The hard sons of Zeruiah

**These men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.**

**II Samuel 3:39b**

King David earnestly sought the unity of the church of Israel. The nation had been divided; the church...split. A full eighty percent of Israel still followed a king from the line of Saul. With a heart after God's own heart, King David waited—while yearning for the joining of twelve tribes under the one true God and His anointed king.

But there were great obstacles to this unification. General Abner's devious politicking had delayed it for seven and a half years. After Saul's death, this self-seeking officebearer led Israel to resist submission to the anointed one and duped the ten tribes into serving his puppet-king, Ishbosheth. Most of the sheep, as sadly often happens, feared, favored, and followed man instead of God. In His time, God providentially raised personal conflict between Abner and Ishbosheth, which resulted in the culpable captain flip-flopping to David's side. With Abner's defection from the line of Saul, all Israel would finally gather under the anointed one.

However, another threat arose that almost terminated the union of the King's church. Enter Captain Joab of David's army, a man not unlike Abner. Crafty and ambitious, this hothead was irate when he caught wind of David's peaceful reception of the manipulative Abner. God's anointed one had demonstrated a wise forbearance with Abner out of love for the fragile kingdom-church, but proud Joab judged such dealings as soft and foolish. The lying Abner had to be rooted out—now! And to this son of Zeruiah, the manner did not matter.

Thus Joab colluded with Abishai. They shared a

mother, a brother, and blood thicker than water. Their mother Zeruiah was the king's half-sister, making them David's nephews. Uncle David was familiar with the character of his sister, a woman whose forceful influence upon her children, David seemed to think, overruled her husband's. Thus David regularly referred to these brutal boys not as sons of their father, but as "the sons of Zeruiah."<sup>1</sup>

When David received Abner peaceably, their mother's blood boiled within these brothers. Not only were they suspicious of Abner, and not only did they view him as a threat to the church and crown, but these sons of Zeruiah had a personal vendetta—Abner was a mighty rival to their positions in the church, and Abner had slain like a dog their own brother Asahel in battle.

And so, for these members of the church militant, the ends would justify the means. "Let us take matters in our own hands," they thought. "Forego the courts of the king's government. They have all been deceived by Abner anyway. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Call Abner in the name of the king. Hide the truth slightly. Feign friendship. Then thrust him through under the fifth rib." Overcome evil with... evil.

The murder of Abner recorded in II Samuel 3 is not an anomalous one-time act of these sons of Zeruiah. Rather, it reveals their cruel character. This was the judgment of the King: "These men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me" (II Sam. 3:39). Remember that David had himself fiercely and faithfully shed the blood

<sup>1</sup> There are other possible explanations, but the stronger influence of Zeruiah over her husband's is probable. See the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (<https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/Z/zeruiah.html>).

of ten-thousands of God's enemies. He did not oppose zealous warfare, but he did detest ruthless severity. The warrior-king righteously declares these sons of Zeruiah *too* harsh for him.

In spite of David's public censure, their character did not change. We find Abishai later on, in response to the cursing Shimei, bellowing, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head" (II Sam. 16:9b). We find Joab shouting at his faithful soldiers who reported that Absalom was helplessly hanging by his hair, "Why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? And I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle" (II Sam. 18:11b). Then standing before David's son, Joab savagely thrust three darts through Absalom's heart. Later, again, we find Joab embracing Amasa: "'Art thou in health, my brother?'" and Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died" (II Sam. 20:9-10).

These sons of Zeruiah represent the militant members and officebearers of the visible church of Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as they fought in the manner of King David, they were exemplary. God's people must not lose their identity as church militant, valiant in the fight! The sins of Zeruiah's sons ought not deter us from the Davidic defense of the truth and from a sharp attack against false doctrine. "Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). "Fight the good fight of faith" (I Tim. 6:12). "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:3). Scripture honors the mighty men of David who courageously battled against the enemies of God and the church (see II Sam. 23 and I Chron. 11).

Significantly, the sons of Zeruiah were correct in many of their opinions. Their suspicions of wicked Abner were grounded upon accurate information. It is even proper to acknowledge that God providentially used their ruthless dispatch of men for the benefit of the church. Abner, Shimei, and Absalom were all indeed a danger to Israel. Just as false doctrine and impenitent sin trouble the church, these men threatened Israel. The sons of Zeruiah were exactly right in their evaluation that these men had to be eliminated. Sons of Zeruiah today are often correct—they can be conservative, and even Reformed in doctrine.

And yet God's anointed one cursed these sons of Zeruiah. Not only for their evil motivations but particularly for their harshness, David said "the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness"

(II Sam. 3:39). He cursed them, not for their correct opinions nor for their valiant fighting but for their severe *manner* of battling. David explains further that they "shed the blood of war in peace" (I Kings 2:5). That is, in a time when the king commanded patience and forbearance for the peace of the church, they surged forth with brash bloodshed.

While the sons of Zeruiah may have fancied themselves staunch defenders of the king, David called them his enemies: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?" (II Sam. 19:22). Let members of the church militant beware lest their hardness and impatience in the fight for truth be adversarial to the cause of Christ.

While the soldier in the Lord's army must fight the good fight, "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient" (II Tim. 2:24). Indeed, we must not compromise the truth, yet "if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). "Strength of Youth," the title of this rubric, refers not only to courage in the fight but also to forbearance as we fight. As we engage in spiritual warfare, we must not forget to resist the old man of sin—a son of Zeruiah—within our own souls.

With the Spirit of David's Son working in us, we must learn forbearance. As we witness to those outside the church, we must speak the truth in love, meekness, and godly fear (see Eph. 4:15 and II Pet. 3:15). Especially among those who are fellow members of the church, we must be "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27b). As correct as we feel we might be in our suspicions of Abners in the church, we must learn how to wait upon the Lord. Patience with each other is not compromise; it is the godly character of King Jesus and King David, in contrast to Zeruiah and her hard sons.<sup>2</sup>

What does the Spirit of the Anointed One say to the churches? What does He say to *you* who might quickly point at someone else as a son of Zeruiah? What does He say to *you* who might quickly deflect and disregard this call to self-examination? Does the King say to *us all*, "These men, the sons of the PRC be too hard for me"? If so, may the conquering King have mercy—the kind that pierces our pride, breaks us in true repentance, and forgives us our bloodshed...because of the shedding of His own blood.

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough explanation of the proper manner of fighting for the truth, see Professor Barry Gritters' excellent articles in the *Standard Bearer* entitled "Polemics: Fighting Words." Search the archive at <https://sb.rfpa.org/>.





## Go ye into all the world

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

# Protestant Reformed missions Years of trial: Missions threatened (1947-1953) (2)

Previous article in this series: June 2020, p. 403.

In our last article we gave a broad overview of the troubles brewing in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) during the years we are now treating. The trial God sent our churches found its focus in the person of the Dutch theologian, Dr. Klaas Schilder, and his theology of a conditional covenant. This false doctrine seeped into the hearts of many Protestant Reformed pastors, and by them into the hearts of the sheep God had entrusted into their care. Between the years 1947 and 1953 a deep division formed in the PRC between those who agreed with Schilder's view of a conditional covenant as opposed to Herman Hoeksema's view of an unconditional covenant.<sup>1</sup> This division came to a head by means of the mission work of our churches.

The order of events that led to a split in the PRC over the doctrine of God's unconditional covenant can be confusing. The focus of our writing on this history is, of course, on missions in the PRC. There were many other events that led to the split of 1953 too. For all the details of the history surrounding this split the reader will find several excellent books available that contain this history. Because the events that threatened the mission work of the PRC can be confusing, we intend to treat them in chronological order.

### The Year 1947

Synod convened in regular session on Wednesday, June 4, 1947. Rev. J. D. DeJong was elected as president. Rev. H. Hoeksema was there as a delegate from Classis East, as was usually the case. The Mission Committee

report was not treated until Monday afternoon, June 9. A momentous decision was finally reached in Article 83: "The Synod further decides in regard to Mission work that the calling church call two missionaries to labor together in the work of home missions."<sup>2</sup> This decision was grounded in what had been discussed at the 1946 Synod. First, to send two men together to do mission work is a sound scriptural principle. Second, the men who have labored on the mission field express its desirability. Third, this arrangement would promote greater efficiency and, fourth, greater continuity in the mission work.

A second decision made by the synod that is worthy of note was her approval of the Committee for Correspondence with Other Churches' recommendation to "advise our consistories to grant Prof. K. Schilder the right to preach the Word of God in our churches during his contemplated visit to our country." Of interest is the constituency of the Committee of Correspondence: Revs. H. Hoeksema, G. M. Ophoff, and J. D. DeJong.<sup>3</sup>

Synod finished its work on Tuesday, June 10, 1947.

Seven days later, June 17, Rev. H. Hoeksema lay in a hospital bed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He had suffered a stroke that left his right side paralyzed and robbed him of his ability to speak. It would take months of intense therapy to restore what this man of God lost that day. He never would fully recover. He would always walk with a limp and, though he would preach again, the fire of foregone years would not return. That Hoeksema suffered a stroke at this particular time was under the sovereign control of an all-wise God, but from a human point of view it could not have come at a worse time. It gave those who would oppose the truth of the unconditional covenant of God an opportunity to contradict Hoeksema and his view of the covenant.

1 Rev. Herman Hoeksema defended his position on the unconditional covenant in a book entitled *Believers and Their Seed*. This book first appeared in the Dutch, *De Geloovigen en Hun Zaad* in February of 1946, published by the Mission Committee and First PRC. Yet HH was not alone. In volumes 24 and 25 (1947 and 1948) of the *Standard Bearer* especially Rev. Herman Veldman but also Rev. Gerrit Vos carefully defended and explained the truth of God's unconditional covenant.

2 *PRC Acts of Synod*, 1947, Article 83 (p. 64).

3 *Acts*, 1947, Article 75 (pp. 53, 54).

If you recall, there was already opposition on the part of some of the ministers in the PRC against what was perceived as Hoeksema's unquestioned control over the denomination. These same ministers now believed that Hoeksema was finished. This gave them the boldness to assert themselves and their views upon the churches.

In September of 1947 Schilder arrived in the United States as he had planned. The purpose of his visit was to preach, lecture, and meet in conference with various Reformed churches including the PRC. He met with pastors and officebearers of the PRC on October 16, 1947, and then a little later, on November 4-6. At these conferences the differences of a conditional versus an unconditional covenant were discussed. No formal decisions were made, of course, but a discussion did follow of a closer church relationship with the PRC and the Liberated Churches (LC) of the Netherlands. Due to his stroke several months earlier, Hoeksema's participation in these conferences was limited. At the October conference he was able to read several propositions concerning the unconditional character of God's covenant established with His elect people in Christ, but he was too tired to stay and hear the response of Schilder to them. In November he was a bit stronger and forced himself to be a bit more involved. The conclusion of these conferences was an amicable impasse.

During the weeks surrounding the conference Schilder preached in several of our churches in the West and became fast friends of a number of our ministers there. It is safe to conclude from the controversy that followed that these ministers were either convinced of the views of Schilder at this time or they saw no reason to condemn them. Though the two positions regarding the covenant were obviously opposed to each other (conditional versus *unconditional*), quite a number of our Protestant Reformed pastors were convinced that these two views could exist side by side in our denomination. This certainly was not true of other of our pastors! There were those who had become suspicious and wary of what was developing in the PRC. They were opposed to the error of a conditional covenant and did not like to see such overwhelming favor shown toward Schilder and the Liberated.

During the fall of 1947 and the spring of 1948 two pastors were called to labor in home missions: Rev. Walter Hofman and Rev. Edward Knott.

## The Year 1948

The Mission Committee at its March 15 meeting decided that the Byron Center mission field was ready for organization. This took several months to accomplish, but the two missionaries concluded their labors

together in organizing Byron Center, and that, with a view toward working together in Lynden, Washington. During this time, however, Dutch immigrants from the Liberated Churches who had moved to Ontario, Canada were sending requests to the Mission Committee asking for labors among them. Also, because of our contact with Schilder, some of our ministers and consistories (mainly in the West) were convinced that it would not be difficult to persuade other immigrants of the LC who had already settled in the Christian Reformed Church to join with us. These consistories were pressing the Mission Committee to investigate a possible mission work in Canada. For these reasons, the majority of the Mission Committee was under the conviction that a work in Ontario, Canada must begin.

There were three problems, however. First, what to do with the work in Lynden, WA where the two missionaries were called to labor. Second, both of our missionaries were not proficient in the Dutch language. The Dutch immigrants in Canada could not speak English, so a Dutch-speaking missionary was necessary to carry on this work. Third, if the PRC were to take up labors among the Dutch immigrants in Canada, would the PRC allow those who believed in the conditional character of the covenant to be members in our churches? This was a serious concern that would later become a matter of hot debate.

The Mission Committee at its March 29 meeting approved the motion to investigate Ontario, Canada for possible mission work among the Dutch immigrants. This motion reads: "After lengthy discussion of various matters regarding our mission endeavors a motion is made that we further investigate the field of Ontario, Canada among the Holland immigrants by asking a Holland speaking minister to accompany one of our missionaries for a period of time of two or more weeks in this field."<sup>4</sup> It was then decided to send Rev. J. DeJong, a man proficient in the Dutch language, with Rev. W. Hofman (missionary) to perform this investigation while Rev. E. Knott (second missionary) would fill the pulpit in Creston PRC in Rev. DeJong's absence.

One can only imagine what was debated in this "lengthy discussion" that took place at this meeting. Lynden, WA, though a worthy place to work, was small in comparison to the vast labor that could possibly be accomplished among the Dutch immigrants in Ontario, Canada. Why, then, the hesitancy on the part of some on the Mission Committee to labor there? No doubt, the doctrinal differences between the PRC and the LC were discussed. These differences were on

<sup>4</sup> Mission Committee minutes of March 29, 1948, Article 10.

the foreground since the visit of Schilder in late 1947. This was obvious from articles written in the *Standard Bearer*.

Disagreement between members of the Mission Committee revealed itself at the meeting of May 24, 1948. Though the men who investigated the work in Ontario presented an optimistic report, a series of motions indicate that the Mission Committee had reached an impasse as to where to continue its mission labors:

Article 3: After some discussion a motion was made that the meeting consider Lynden as a field of labor. Further discussion of the motion followed.

Article 4: A substitute motion was made that our present missionaries labor in Canada for 1 year to the best of their ability and that they bring their findings and recommendations to the body early in 1949 that we may approach Synod of 1949 with positive advice and recommendations. This motion was supported and discussion followed.

Article 5: A motion was made to table the matter until the problem with serious points of discussion here presented be brought to Synod of 1948 by way of the

report of the Mission Committee. This motion was supported and passed.<sup>5</sup>

The “problem with serious points of discussion” was recorded in the minutes in this delicate but vague way by the secretary, Rev. Hofman. To be specific, the serious point was the danger of laboring with people who were convicted of their view of a conditional covenant. Ought we to make them the object of our mission work when they were thoroughly convinced that the view of Hoeksema and others in the PRC on the covenant was wrong? Some on the Mission Committee were of a mind that we work in Lynden with those who were not opposed to our covenant views. Others on the committee were convinced that the differences were not so great with the immigrants from the LC that they could not be worked out. So the whole matter was now brought to the Synod of 1948 to be adjudicated.

We will consider in our next articles the decisions of the 1948 Synod, the subsequent decision of the Mission Committee, and the protests that ultimately led to the momentous decisions regarding missions at the synods of 1949 and 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Mission Committee minutes, May 24, 1948, Articles 3-5.



## Pertaining to the churches in common— Domestic Mission committee

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

# Home missionary report

**What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the LORD said unto him...Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”**

**I Kings 19:13, 14, 18**

These were verses from the pericope of Scripture that Rev. Carl Haak read at our last New Fields Committee meeting of the PRC Domestic Mission Committee (DMC). The point of the Scripture reading was

Elijah’s discouragement in his labors. He was filled with self-pity and needed to be reprimanded by God. “Get back to your work! I will help you. No, you are not the only one left who serves the Lord.” God says that He has seven thousand in Israel that have not apostatized.

The point was taken that so often we become discouraged in the labor of evangelism, whether it be the church council, the evangelism committees, or as a congregation or denomination. What use is it? Who will listen to our good news? We are tempted to be filled with self-pity. But the Lord has elect children out there in our cities and countrysides, as well as in the nations of the world. The Lord will help us in our work and bless our labors!

Synod 2020, after approving the work of the DMC, Byron Center Council, and the missionary, voted to approve the following mandate: “That synod mandate the DMC to report to Synod 2021 with ways that it has increased their efforts to establish a concrete field of labor for the missionary.” That motion carried and this mandate was given to the New Fields Committee (NFC) to wrestle with. What were we doing and what things might we do to show Synod 2021 that we are striving to “increase our efforts to establish a concrete field of labor for the missionary”? How can we as churches reach out to those who are lost or are in apostatizing churches?

Through the meetings of the NFC, it was emphasized that today it is important to use technology not only for those who come to our mission webpage ([prca.org](http://prca.org)), but also to reach out to the masses around us. In the past we advertised ourselves mainly through lectures or mailings of printed material. Today the way to communicate with others is often through the Internet. We need to educate ourselves on effective ways to do this. This will require the help of those familiar with marketing on the Internet. How can we link those who respond to one of our emails so that they may quickly be added to the contact list of our individual churches, and be pointed to mission podcasts, meditations, and various activities that are going on in our churches?

Our missionary is already writing meditations for [prca.org](http://prca.org) and doing messages on the Reformed Witness Hour. He has also been asked to prepare materials that our churches can use for their own local Bible studies in their communities. There is also the need of materials for podcasts to put out on social media that introduce the gospel and the Reformed faith. Maybe there is a need for collecting or writing material dealing with personal evangelism that can be used in our societies or even in our Christian schools.

The NFC also is discussing how we can target a specific area to seek to have a church plant. The DMC has sent out a request to all of our churches’ Evangelism Committees to tell us what they are doing in local evangelism, and also to send to us the names and addresses of contacts that they have had. Then the missionary could follow up on these contacts. We have heard from several of our churches and wait for the other committees to respond. This is the best source of contacts for the missionary. It is the members of our churches who live near, work with, and socialize with people who know and care for those outside the Christian faith. Together let us renew a heart for those outside of Christ. What a precious gospel we have to share!

The NFC desires to find an area of labor by way of data gathered from various sources: the Evangelism Committees of our churches, Reformed Witness Hour mailings and contacts, responses to the PRCA website, and contacts that individuals within our churches may have. Perhaps you might advertise your church’s evening sermon title and points on Facebook or Twitter. Many Reformed churches do not have an evening service anymore for their members to attend.

Other ideas were floated around in the meetings. We could locate our missionary in an area of a struggling or isolated church in our denomination. Another idea was that the DMC could look at a map, and try to choose an area where there is little or no Reformed presence. We would like to plant a church there in that area of the United States or Canada for a Reformed witness.

Once a promising area has been identified, we would have our missionary cultivate interested contacts with online instruction, using meditations, podcasts, and other new material that he is writing. We would seek to air the Reformed Witness Hour in that area.

So the work goes on. Not with pessimism, but with a bold affirmation that God has His elect people, and uses our weak means to bring them the gospel. Please remember your missionary, the DMC, and your local evangelism committees in your prayers.

For thus saith the LORD God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 34:11-14).

“Almighty God, who called Thy servant David from following the flock to be a shepherd for Thy people, in Thy mercy, grant that we, following his example, may bring those who are lost home to Thy fold. Amen.”





## 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



*A Week in the Life of Rome*, by James L. Papandrea. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019. 223 pages. Paperback. \$16.00. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

Christians living in Rome in AD 50 endured many earthly struggles. Flimsy apartment buildings could quickly burn or suddenly collapse. People stood in bread lines by order of social status; often the bread ran out before the destitute received any. Another struggle was to live antithetically in a city filled with unregistered marriages, prostitutes, sodomy, slave markets, bribery, games pitting man against man or beast, theatrical plays, gambling, and murder plots.

Persecution—the loss of jobs, status, approval, and life (being thrown to the beasts)—was another significant struggle.

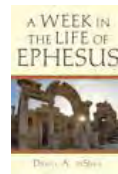
This book highlights their struggles by telling the story of Christians (“Way-followers”) in their service of Jesus (“Iesus”) who met every evening for worship and prayer. Some were strong believers, while others were weak. All lived among ungodly unbelievers during the day, and found the fellowship of other believers at night sweet. The book ends by noting the conversion of three people, two of whom had been antagonistic to Christianity, and one who had only recently heard of Christianity.

The book is historical fiction. It is *historical*: it contains more than twenty historical sidebars, each usually two or three pages long, regarding Romish customs and culture. And the main characters in the book are based on people mentioned in the Bible (John Mark, mother Mary, Rhoda, and several others), or people who were known to live in Rome at that time (Emperor Claudius and his prefect Lucius Geta).

For all that, it is *fiction*. That John Mark, Mary, Rhoda, and others were in Rome in AD 50 is fiction. The events narrated in the book are fiction. Its presupposition that the apostle Peter came to Rome in the early 40s to announce the death of James, and its record of Roman Christians smuggling him back into Rome in AD 50, is fiction. Even some of the theology reflected in the book is fiction (“every person is loved by our Lord,” 177).

One aspect of the book particularly struck me. The ancient church fathers exhorted Christians to avoid the theater, viewing it as inherently evil. The book narrates the attendance of some Christian women at the theater (155-161). These left ashamed, having seen the evils of the theater firsthand. Are we ready to turn off our TV, phones, computers, and other devices when they stream filth? Watching sin for entertainment is sin.

A junior-high reader could understand the narrative. I recommend the book to anyone who can distinguish between history and fiction.



*A Week in the Life of Ephesus*, by David A. DeSilva. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 176 pages. Paperback. \$17.00. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

Of the seven books in the series “A Week in the Life of...” this is the newest. The other volumes feature a week in the life of Corinth, the fall of Jerusalem, a slave, a Greco-Roman woman, and a Roman centurion. Each is written by a different author.

This volume regards life in Ephesus in AD 89. In Bible times, Ephesus was the center of the worship of Diana. In 89, it housed a temple to the Emperor Domitian (see sidebars on pages 32, 72, 76, 84, 111, and 148). Specifically, this book features the last week of September in 89; September 23 was the anniversary of the birth of Caesar Augustus, which date became the beginning of a new year (sidebar, 24).

Christians belonged to this idolatrous society, and were to be exemplary citizens. Could they participate in these idolatrous ceremonies at all? If so, to what degree? The narrative explores three different answers to this question.

Some Christians believed they were to take no part in these ceremonies. They were strengthened in this conviction by reading the last book of Scripture, which came to them “hot off the press.”

Another professing Christian, Nicolaus, proposed that by taking part in these ceremonies Christians could be better witnesses of their faith (40-42). For this view, he found himself barred from the Lord’s Supper (125). His unholy outburst at this barring (126) suggests that he was Christian in name only. Sadly, some assessed this barring as manifesting a lack of love (151), a view all too common in our day, but one that forgets that the table of the Lord is holy.

A third Christian, Amyntas, was nominated to hold an official position in the Temple of Domitian. Wondering if Nicolaus is right, Amyntas did not immediately decline the position. That he would even consider it concerned his fellow believers. In the end, hearing the book of Revelation read convinced him to refuse the position and to bear the consequences.

May the story line whet your appetite.

This book also is historical fiction. That Christians both then and today face outward pressure to conform to the world, and that the desire to avoid social and economic consequences adds to the temptation, is not fiction, but historical. God give us grace to be faithful.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

Who was Grandville PRC's first pastor? Answer to be found in the church profile. More trivia next time.

### Sister-church activities

From the bulletin of Provident PRC in the Philippines (November) we learn the following:

Our church worship services have been canceled today due to the flooding of Provident Village caused by Typhoon Ulysses last week. The Lord's Supper has been postponed and will be rescheduled when it is feasible to gather again in our sanctuary for worship. Our members are encouraged to remember the Sabbath day by watching the livestream, if they have an Internet connection, of our brethren in the Berean PRC (8:30 and 10:30 A.M.), the PRC in Bulacan (8:00 and 10:00 A.M.), or the Maranatha PRC (9:00 and 11:00 A.M.) on their Facebook pages.

The Essentials class will not meet today since several students do not have an Internet connection. This Saturday, the children's catechism class will meet, if possible, on Zoom for Lesson 13 on "Jehu, King of Israel" (the same lesson as last week, since catechism was canceled yesterday).

The missionary families experienced lots of rain in their sub-division. The Holstege family lost their electricity for a couple days and their Internet connection for about a week due to downed tree branches.

### Minister activities

Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN has extended a call to home missionary Rev. A. Spriensma. Hudsonville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. C. Spronk (Faith PRC, Jenison, MI) who was led to decline it on December 6. Wingham, Ontario PRC called Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA PRC). Kalamazoo, MI PRC formed a trio of Rev. D. Holstege and Rev. D. Kleyn (both foreign missionaries in the Philippines), and Rev. J. Laning (Hull, IA PRC). Rev. Holstege received this call. May God grant these ministers a clear indication of His will.

On November 16 Rev. Bernard Woudenberg, a retired pastor in our churches, passed away. He was preceded in

death by his wife Fran 12 days earlier and their bodies were laid to rest together on Wednesday, November 18. Rev. Woudenberg served churches in Grand Rapids, Edgerton, Lynden, and Kalamazoo. He was also instrumental in the formation of the congregation in Edmonton, and loved to travel in his later years for mission work—this included an extended time in Tasmania in 1992. He retired from full-time ministry in 1996.

### Young people's activities

The Federation Board canceled the Young People Thanksgiving Mass Meeting in W. Michigan due to COVID restrictions.

### Evangelism activities

Mexico: In mid-November Rev. R. Kleyn participated, with Prof. Cammenga and Rev. Griess, in giving a virtual family conference for the saints in Mexico. Rev. Kleyn gave two speeches Saturday afternoon on "The Duties of Parents" and "Youth Preparing for Marriage" followed by a Q/A session that lasted about an hour. This was a conference that Doner Bartolon organized and had people tuning in, not only from Mexico, but also Bolivia, Columbia, Peru and other parts of Central and South America. Rev. Griess gave two speeches on Thursday and Prof. Cammenga two on Friday. Doner translated the speeches into Spanish, live, for all who were tuned in, and then took questions in Spanish and put them to us in English. It really is amazing how God gives us opportunities like this, during COVID, to use technology to do something that is otherwise impossible. Pray that God will bless these labors.

### School activities

Hope school (Walker, MI) once again sold Moelker Orchard fudge for holiday gift giving. It was said to be a safe and convenient way to remember your teachers, bus drivers, neighbors, and friends and also, a great customer gift for business owners. Sounds delicious!

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

## Church profile—Grandville PRC, MI

*Submitted by Mary Beth Lubbers*

Set back a bit off 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Grandville, Michigan, along a lovely tree-lined drive is Grandville PR Church. The Grandville PR Church building does not pierce the sky with a steeple, nor does it boast those rich medieval stained-glass windows. But, I have always thought its spare, spacious architectural design to be aesthetically pleasing and

conducive to worship. The original building committee also insisted on good acoustics. The gradual sloping floor helps make the pulpit visible to all the congregation.

The sanctuary features a high-peaked ceiling braced with heavy wooden beams. Its clear-paned windows near the top one-third of the sanctuary on the east and west sides let in lots of natural light. Before the power-controlled win-

dow shades were installed, it was possible—on a rare sunlit Michigan morning—that the entire sanctuary was bathed in sunlight from the eastern windows. The presiding minister, unfortunately, who was also enveloped in this glorious light, was seen to be briskly stepping side to side behind the pulpit to avoid the intense rays glancing off his eyewear, Bible, sermon notes, and water glass. During the evening service (5:30), out of the corner of one’s eye one could glimpse great mounds of fluffy clouds drifting by the western windows. And, so, for these and other indeterminate reasons, window coverings were installed. On a given Sunday, it is fascinating to watch all sixteen of these shades on both sides of the sanctuary descend together in perfect synchronism. Innovations such as this prompted one well-known American author to lament: “Why does progress look so much like regress?”

Grandville PR Church began its existence as a daughter church of Hope PR Church in Walker, Michigan. In February of 1984, they were established as a congregation of 26 families. This newly formed group met in the auditorium of Grandville Public High School while the present church building was being built and readied for occupancy in 1990.

At an eighteen-minute congregational meeting (a record for brevity according to some) held at the Seminary, the small band called Rev. J. Kortering to be its first pastor. To their delight, he accepted the call. Rev. Kortering labored for eight years in this fledgling congregation. He preached, taught catechism, wrote articles and pamphlets, and visited the sick and elderly along with other myriad duties. Little did he know that his pastorate here would also require him to kill a struggling, trapped mouse for a distressed, neighboring parishioner whose husband was unavailable for rodent rescue. Coming straight to her house from a church meeting, still wearing his three-piece suit, Rev. Kortering took care of the matter, adding this accomplishment to his long and distinguished resume.

For the next 25 years, Rev. A. Spriensma (1992-2002) and then Rev. K. Koole (2002-2018) faithfully carried on the work of “feeding, guiding, protecting, and ruling the flock” (Form of Ordination for Ministers). During these years Grandville experienced growth both numerically and spiritually. Currently, Rev. Nathan Decker is minister here. As of today, four ministers and one professor (retired and actively serving) and their families have made Grandville PR Church their home church.

Grandville is a moderately-large congregation with about 100 families and a total membership of just under 400. With thanks to God, it is a full-orbed church with Bible study groups for every age, all of which are well-attended. Many children continue to be instructed in the catechism classes. The long-standing Evangelism Committee is diligent in its efforts to expand the witness of God’s truth. A group of compassionate women prepare meals for new mothers, the sick, and injured. Most importantly, peace and harmony, by God’s grace, continue to prevail.

Throughout the years, the various Building Committees have worked to ensure that everything is functional, attractive, and up to date inside and outside. In 2007, a handsome portico was added to the building. This structure provided protection from the capricious Michigan weather for the women and children as they exited their vehicles. Recently, the parsonage was renovated and the council room, minister’s study, and nursery were modernized. However, with all these material changes and improvements, there is one constant: Sunday after Sunday the same, age-old, glorious gospel is proclaimed.

The worship services are held at 9:30 A.M. and 5:30 P.M. If you are inclined to visit Grandville PR Church, the first evening service of each month would be a fine time to come. At 5:20, pre-service, the congregation comes together to sing a few Psalter numbers; the spirited singing will surely thrill your heart and prepare you, as it does us, for the worship service.

## Announcements

### Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado extend our Christian sympathies to our deacon Kelsey Van Bommel, his wife Ashley and their children. Our faithful heavenly Father took Kelsey’s dad, **Alan VanBommel**, to heaven on November 18 after being hospitalized around 6 weeks battling COVID-19. We rest in the Word we heard preached that Sunday from Psalm 18:30, “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.” And we, together with the VanBommel family, lay hold of the gospel that is ours in the risen Christ Jesus, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Corinthians 15:54).

Rev. Steven Key, President

Eric Solanyk, Clerk

The Council and congregation of Doon IA PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Edwin VanGinkel in the death of his dear wife, **Alice VanGinkel**; to Warren and Marshonn Boon and Warren and Cheryl VanGinkel in the loss of their mother, and to Peter VanDenTop and Elmer VanDenTop in the loss of their sister. May they find comfort in God’s Word from Psalm 48:14: “For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.”

Perry Van Egdom, Clerk

The Council and congregation of Doon, IA PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Leonard VanBommel in the death of his son, **Alan VanBommel**. May we confess the words of Philippians 1:21: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Perry Van Egdom, Clerk

## Announcements continued

### 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.

### Teacher needed

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for teaching positions in the 2021-22 school year. There is a particular need in the areas of English and Mathematics but applications will be accepted from those with secondary certification in other subject areas. We are also in need of a full or part-time English teacher for the second semester of this year (2020-21). Those who are interested in either position are encouraged to contact Mr. Rick Noorman, Administrator at ricknoorman@gmail.com or call 616-453-5048 or Mr. John DeVries, Education Committee at westmichiganrealestate@gmail.com for more information.

## Reformed Witness Hour

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

### Rev. W. Bruinsma

- January 3—"Confidence in Christ's Coming"  
Hebrews 10:35-37
- January 10—"All Things Are Yours"  
I Corinthians 3:21-23
- January 17—"Stewards of Christ"  
I Corinthians 4:1, 2
- January 24—"The Church's Authority to Discipline"  
I Corinthians 5:3-4
- January 31—"Suffering Wrong from a Brother"  
I Corinthians 6:7, 8

### 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

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hope, Redlands, CA on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 2 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hope's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

### Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2021-2022 academic year should make application at the March 18, 2021 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website (prcts.org).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 18 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418

Bob Drnek, Secretary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.