

# The Standard Bearer

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## Setting oneself to seek Jehovah

Rev. Ron VanOverloop

## A review of a book reviewed: *The Benedict Option*

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Persecution present and to come

Rev. Nathan Decker

## Jonah's discipline

Rev. Ronald Hanko

## Relating good works and justification

Prof. Brian Huizinga



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## Meditation

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan

# Setting oneself to seek Jehovah

**And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD: and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.**

**II Chronicles 20:3, 4**

There are many things that make us afraid. The coronavirus has the ability to strike fear into the hearts of many as they hear of the death of some who previously had appeared to be full of health and strength. The power of the Devil and of sin can occasion great fear at times in the lives of believers. The election of a political party whose platform contains so much that is contrary to the Word of God also can occasion fear in the minds of those who desire to see God acknowledged and honored by those who stand in positions of His authority.

The position of God's church in this world of sin is perilous. It is likened unto a small boat on a very stormy sea. There are many situations when a believer says with David, "What time I am afraid." The setting of our text occasioned fear in the mind of Jehoshaphat and the citizens of Judah.

Jehoshaphat became king over the southern kingdom of Judah at the age of 35. He was the fourth king of Judah in the royal line of David. Ahab was king over the northern kingdom of Israel and he was introducing the worship of Baal. The previous kings of Israel followed Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin by worshiping God by means of the two golden calves. Ahab introduced idolatry.

Scripture records that Jehoshaphat deliberately "sought not unto Baalim; but sought the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel" (II Chron. 17:3, 4). Jehoshaphat wanted the citizens of his kingdom to do the same, for he sent princes and Levites "to teach in the cities of Judah" from "the book of the law of the LORD" (17:7-9). Later he sent judges throughout the kingdom of Judah, admonishing them to do the right in the fear of Jehovah and not take bribes (19:4-7, 9-11). This was

in marked contrast to his grandfather and great grandfather (Abijah and Rehoboam) and, especially, in contrast to Ahab in Israel.

"And it came to pass." Jehoshaphat and all of Judah were caught by surprise when it was suddenly reported that the armies of three nations had allied themselves together and were poised to attack in Engedi, just 29 miles southeast of Jerusalem. Engedi is located along the western shore of the Dead Sea. Militarily, the situation was hopeless for Judah and Jehoshaphat. The king had no time to prepare the city for proper defense. Nor would he be able to gather an equal force in such a short time. This alliance of three nations had a force that could not lose from a human perspective. They were prepared, had the numbers, and had the initiative and surprise factor.

It is interesting to note that the three nations that made up this alliance were all "cousins" of Judah. The children of Moab and Ammon are each descended from Lot. And those from Mount Seir are the descendants of Esau. Jehoshaphat saw it important to note in his prayer to God for help that God had prohibited Israel from invading the land of these three nations when they were approaching Canaan (v. 10).

While we know that Satan was at work seeking to destroy God-fearing Judah and Jehoshaphat, God was also at work. Behind every circumstance is our God, who, in His wisdom and love, occasioned these circumstances as His way of testing and strengthening the faith of His children. Our heavenly Father wants His children never to be at ease, to be spiritually lazy. This crisis occurred, in part, because God was showing Jehoshaphat that what he sowed he would also reap. Jehoshaphat had recently returned from helping ungodly Ahab (II Chron. 18 and 19). We do know that God used this crisis to call Judah and Jehoshaphat to a higher spiritual alertness. God would have His children seek Him with all their hearts and not lean on their own understanding. He would have His children urgent in their cries for help from Him whom they knew to be their Rock, Strength, and Help.

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“Jehoshaphat feared.” That he would fear in these circumstances is understandable. His situation is humanly impossible. He was greatly concerned for himself and his nation, but also for the “little ones, their wives, and their children” (v. 13).

Fear is often a God-given occasion to “seek Jehovah” and to trust in Him. “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Ps. 56:3).

Notice that fear did not paralyze Jehoshaphat. It spurred him to activity: he “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (v. 3). The idea of setting himself is interesting. It means to devote or consecrate himself with a deep and firm resolve, allowing nothing to distract. It is a strong determination to control his thinking, to fix it on one thing.

Jehoshaphat’s resolve was to “seek” Jehovah. This refers to the activity of inquiring with care and diligence, and to do so frequently. Remember that this is what he did when he began his reign as king of Judah. He “sought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel” (17:4). The king was determined to look only to Jehovah. He did not seek first his generals for a counsel of war. He did not focus on gathering his military forces from every part of his kingdom. He did not immediately do everything to reinforce the defenses of the city of Jerusalem. Instead, he spent his mental energies in the activity of looking up—of considering the Self-sufficient and Self-existent One who had graciously established a relationship with him and in that relationship had declared and promised that He would be Jehoshaphat’s and Judah’s God. The ever-faithful God had declared that He would use all that He is for the sake of those with whom He had been pleased to establish a covenant relationship. Jehoshaphat was determined to consider Him who had promised the Messiah who is Jesus the Savior. The king sought Him whose mercy endureth forever, Him who is the God of grace. Though God smite us, we must turn to Him. It is from the hand that holds the rod that we look for help.

Jehoshaphat also gathered the people out of all Judah in order to seek Jehovah together. He led like a good undershepherd, leading the people of his kingdom in focusing their attention where it had to be: on Jehovah! “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher

than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:6-9).

Our heavenly Father uses trials to call His children to seek Him and not to seek or trust in ourselves, our skill, or human help. He calls us to fall on our knees and on our faces before Him, seeking Him only and His grace. Being exercised by divine chastening (Heb. 12:11), we are to look to Jehovah, whom we will find in His Word. Then we are to address God as we know Him from His Word, by setting before Him His own words of promise.

Note well that Jehoshaphat knew the prayer of his great, great grandfather Solomon when he dedicated the temple; Jehoshaphat quoted Solomon’s prayer: “If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or family, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help (v. 9). And thus he prayed further, quoting Solomon, “And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel. If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou has chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name; then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause” (II Chron. 6:24, 25, 34, 35).

Remember that Moses did something very similar. When God told Moses He would destroy the nation and make of Moses a new nation, then Moses interceded by using God’s own words of promise (cf. Ex. 32:11-14 and Deut. 9:25-27).

Also today we are to use the occasion of fears as a God-given opportunity to set ourselves to seek Jehovah. This is to replace all complaining with each other, or thinking up our own solutions. Let us seek our heavenly Father, setting His own promises before Him as we call upon Him for help.

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The people of Judah gave a united response. “All Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (v. 13).

Every trial God gives to His church is to be seized as an opportunity for us to teach our children and young people. They hear all the talk and can easily become disillusioned about the church. They hear the complaining and the critical words spoken of and against fellow saints. They are made to see the sins of infirmity and the spots that adhere to the works of the saints, and

they, in their youth, can quickly despair. But when they see their pastors, their elders, their parents and grandparents determined to seek Jehovah, then they are given the better perspective. They are to be shown the wonderful gospel and the right biblical responses in these God-given trials. They are to see that “our eyes are upon thee” (v. 12).

As a body of believers, young with the old, females with the males, Judah gathers under the leadership of a pleading, humble king. Parents are presenting to God the children He gave to them, praying that the little ones will be graciously saved and preserved. The young children and the young people also make their appeals to God. The children were pleading with their heavenly Father. They all stood in the court of the temple in humble and submissive expectancy.

Jehoshaphat led them in prayer. He appeals to God on the basis of His sovereignty: He identified Jehovah God as “God in heaven,” who “rulest...over all the kingdoms of the heathen.” He stated rhetorically, “in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?” (v. 6). And Jehoshaphat appeals to God on the basis of His graciously established relationship with His chosen people: “O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou our God?” and did God not “drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?”

May we trust this God every time we are afraid. May we go forward in our lives trusting Him to be with us each and every step of the way.



## Editorial

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

# A review of a book reviewed: *The Benedict Option*

A review of a book review?

Let me explain.

The book reviewed is *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, written by Rod Dreher, a former evangelical who has joined the Greek Orthodox Church. The book is reviewed by Dr. Keith Sewell, professor emeritus of Dordt University. And we are going to review his book review.<sup>1</sup> For a reason.

Dr. Sewell is of the Kuyperian persuasion, meaning, one who is yet committed to Abraham Kuyper’s perspective that by political action and infiltration of every aspect of culture we as Christians are called to and able to “redeem” this world’s culture and make it serviceable to Christ. Dr. A. Kuyper’s view was rooted, of course, in his theory of common grace. It was opposition to this theory that gave birth to this very magazine, the *Standard Bearer*. The *SB* came into being due to H. Hoeksema and H. Danhof’s commitment both to a con-

sistent ‘antithesis’ over against a ‘synthesis’ world-and-life view, and to an amillennial versus a postmillennial view of history. Common grace is incompatible with both—the antithesis and amillennialism.

I say Sewell “is yet committed,” because in light of the secular, profane culture that has overrun Europe (Kuyper’s Netherlands in particular), and that of North America as well, it has become transparent that Kuyper’s vision and dream has not materialized as he and his disciples hoped. It has been defeated on every front. I cannot refrain from saying to those still committed to this ‘Reformed’ perspective and hope, “Houston, you have a problem.”

Not only have the evangelicals’ strategies over the past century not worked to redeem culture and turn the tide to influence it in any discernible way, but culture (the minds and spirit behind it) can now be described as having become purposefully anti-Christian, with a focus on extinguishing any Judaeo-Christian reference at all.

One can sense the head of the Dragon turning towards us with a grim leer to focus at last, other distractions being resolved, on what has always been the intent of his workings in history, namely, the Christian church

<sup>1</sup> “*The Benedict Option*, Our Cultural Task, and the Call to Consistent Discipleship,” *Pro Rege*, vol. XLIX, no. 1 (Sept. 2020). All quotations of both Sewell and Dreher will be from this review article, with page numbers in parentheses.

and its destruction. “There, my human pawns, is the cause and source of all your troubles and social turmoil, the Christian church housing those who yet testify against your pleasures and vices, calling them sin, and so setting citizen against citizen. Silence them and human unity will be achieved, and with it, world peace.”

Babel’s utopia at last realized and the deadly wound healed.

Recognizing this ‘redemption of culture’ failure, Dreher wrote his book *The Benedict Option*, published in 2017. The reference is to Benedict of Nursia (AD 470-547) who began the Benedictine Order of monastic life, Christians cloistering together in communities during the Dark Ages in an attempt to preserve their lives from the barbarians overrunning Europe and their faith from pagan Rome.

Dreher’s thesis is that, in light of what Christianity now faces on every front, a similar strategy is the only option left to Christianity if it is to survive in any distinctive, identifiable way. Christians must draw-up a strategy to disengage themselves from secular society and, as unnoticeable as possible, work in communities together in the hopes of riding out the storm that is breaking and about to get worse.

Sewell (of Dordt), in light of the political and cultural developments in our society, brings this book to his colleagues’ attention. He writes,

Dreher’s diagnosis is stark and sobering. In short, he is saying that Christians in North America—particularly conservative Catholics and Evangelicals—have *lost* the “culture wars” that they waged for decades. The election of Donald Trump was a false dawn, and voting Republican is not the answer. Even where Christians have made gains, their advances have only been temporary and are insufficient to counter the deeper tide now running against them. To win an election is not to change a culture. Henceforth, and into the foreseeable future, Christians will need to entrench and hunker down, be much more intentional and purposeful about their faith, and ready themselves for marginalization, discrimination, and persecution. If they do not do this, they will perish. At stake is nothing less than the survival of spiritually obedient orthodox Christianity in the West (p. 33).

Sewell’s question to his Kuyperian colleagues (with their optimism of bringing every square inch of life and its culture under the rule of Christ) is, “What do we make of this? And where do we go from here?”

Sewell has a great deal of sympathy for Dreher’s diagnosis of where twenty-first century society and its culture of a growing anti-Christian spirit now is.

Sewell writes,

Dreher rightly emphasizes both the lack of awareness of Christians as to the strength and depth of the rejection of Christianity that has taken place, and the vehement animus of those who wish to eliminate what remains of the influence of Christianity in public life (p. 33).

Dreher, in defense of his thesis early in his book, points to the decision the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Obergefell vs. Hodges* (2015) which made it clear that, “Christians who hold to the biblical teaching about sex and marriage have the same status in culture, and increasingly in law, as racists” (p. 33).

As we know, there is no more inflammatory word these days than *racist*. To be charged with racism is the ultimate indictment, precluding the loss of all civil rights, even in a court of law. Those who maintain that sexual relationships are only to be between male and female, and that in the bond of marriage, and all others are to be condemned, fall into the category of being racists. Once legally established, against such a charge there will be no defense.

Dreher continues,

The culture war that began with the Sexual Revolution in the 1960s has now ended in the defeat of Christian conservatives. The cultural left—which is to say increasingly the American mainstream—has no intention of living in a postwar peace. It is pressing forward with a harsh, relentless occupation, one that is aided by the cluelessness of Christians who don’t understand what’s happening (p. 33).

Sewell acknowledges that Dreher is right:

Evangelicals and conservative Catholics continue to tell themselves that so-called “same-sex marriages” (SSM) and the burgeoning LGBT agenda “have been imposed by a liberal elite,” because they find it hard to face the actual truth, which is that most of the “American people, either actively or passively, approve.” The reality is that evangelicals no longer lead a silent or any other sort of majority (p. 34).

There is no silent majority any longer to be led. If it did nothing else, our recent election laid that wishful thinking to rest.

Summarizing Dreher, Sewell writes,

Furthermore, many evangelicals, in their opposition to socialism, have tended to assume that big business is their friend. They are wrong. Pro-LGBT thinking has penetrated the boardrooms and personnel departments of many large and not so large corporations. Dreher warns, “Everyone working for a major corporation will be frog-marched through ‘diversity and inclusion’

training and will face pressure not simply to tolerate LGBT co-workers but to affirm their sexuality and gender identity.” To submit to such training, he warns, is the twenty-first century equivalent to “burning incense to Caesar” (p. 35).

Dreher is right. More than one in our churches can tell you of having been required by their employer to sign a document in which they promised not only not to discriminate against (meaning, rebuke) LGBT co-workers, but also to be accepting of them. Refusing to sign, they were fired. With our new administration, that insistence is going to intensify. And if a business (yours) refuses to adopt such a document, it will be forced to shut its doors.

In the face of all this, writes Sewell,

Dreher’s expectation is that unless there are serious changes, the greater part of professing Christianity in North America and Europe is headed for extinction. As matters stand, western churches are not up to the challenges they are facing. Western Christians have been much more deeply influenced by the processes of secularization than they realise. Even in the U.S.A., many churches have lost their 18-29 demographic (p. 36).

“Demographic” refers to the age of a church’s members. Studies show that it is exactly the child-bearing and child-rearing group that is the least likely to be found attending church anymore. That means the future of congregations is in jeopardy—aging demographics. Diminishing membership roles in mainline Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and even in Baptist, bear this out.

“Heading for extinction..., Western Christians have been much more deeply influenced by...secularization than they realize.”

In what way?

Here once again, Dreher is remarkably insightful in his diagnosis.

On the one hand, he points to the loss of biblically defined worship (liturgy):

Too many churches have succumbed to modernity, rejecting the wisdom of past ages, treating worship as a consumer activity, and allowing parishioners to function as unaccountable, atomised members. The sad truth is, when the world sees us, it often fails to see anything different from nonbelievers. Christians often talk about “reaching the culture” without realizing that, having no distinct Christian culture of their own, they have been co-opted by the secular culture they wished to evangelize (p. 37).

“Churches...are allowing parishioners to function as unaccountable.” In other words, there is no Christian discipline. And that means not only that immorality is allowed to work as a leaven in a church, but also that outsiders see little to distinguish “Christian life” from their worldly lives. Why bother with church membership?

But especially Dreher hammers on the fact that in the name of ‘redeeming’ culture, these same churches have been “co-opted [absorbed] by the secular culture” they were supposedly going to “redeem” and change.

As Sewell points out,

[Too many churchmen] have permitted contemporary pop-culture to permeate their “praise and worship.” Obsessed with metrics and branding, such churches readily descend to the banal. Many evangelicals have yet to learn that instrumental music is never religiously neutral, and that they undermine the faith if they import into the church the musical styles of the disco and rock concert, even if they then add “sacred” words to the “production.” Dreher has the measure for such folly: “Every time the church embraces a new fad, especially trends that turn worship into electronic spectacle, it yields more of its soul.... Before long... the church becomes fully possessed by the spirit of this world. Authentic orthodox Christianity can in no way be reconciled with the Zeitgeist [spirit of our age] (pp. 36, 37).

In addition to the loss of biblical, reverent worship, Dreher points to the loss of biblical preaching. He rightly observes that in far too many instances “presentations of the gospel have elided [sic] into what...[may be] termed ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’” (p. 37). The heart of such preaching is presenting God simply as a benevolent Father figure watching over His creation, wishing everyone well; declaring that the central goal in life is to feel good about oneself; and that God does not seek to be involved in one’s life except when He is needed to resolve a problem. We should all be nice to each other and get along. Then everybody who has lived a reasonably good life will end up in heaven (p. 37).

“Therapeutic Deism,” indeed.

What is especially insightful is that Dreher lays his finger on a besetting evil that has permeated the church for decades and is destroying her from within, namely, the proliferation of divorce and remarriage, and with it, a dismissal of what was once the normative Christian understanding of marriage, namely, a lifelong union between a man and women (p. 38).

In light of this, what needs to take place, according to Dreher, is “...a real work of cultural reclamation and

renewal, not outside the church but *inside* the church... before we can think about much longer-term goals” (p. 38).

Dreher is right on target. Christendom’s tolerance of divorce and remarriage for every reason is a scandal of the most grievous sort, eating away at the church as a united community (its very families) from within while destroying her witness to those outside. Having sown the wind, she reaps the whirlwind. When it comes to marriage, she resembles more a harlot than the pure and faithful bride of Christ.

Such is a representative summary of Dreher’s diagnosis.

To a Christendom that is so fond of speaking of ‘redeeming culture,’ he essentially declares “Physician, before seeking to heal others, heal thyself!” The inability of contemporary Christendom to endure the challenges of this present age in any distinctive way does not have to do simply with that “hideous strength” of evil that she faces; it has to do even more with the lamentable weaknesses and corruptions tolerated within.

What does Dreher prescribe as the answer if Christianity is to survive and remain any kind of witness?

Well, not relying on politics and politicians:

For decades conservative Christians have behaved as if the primary threats to the integrity of families and communities could be effectively addressed through politics. That illusion is now destroyed. If there is going to be authentic renewal, it will have to happen in families and local church communities (p. 39).

With what Dreher states above we can agree.

Governments and politicians are not going to save the church and prevent the world from overrunning the Christian church, not when the greatest threat to the integrity and strength of the church to withstand the “gates of hell” is harbored and nurtured within herself.

Dreher emphasizes that Christians urgently need to recover a fuller understanding of the Christian past (p. 41).

In that connection he calls for a recovery of such things as an ordered liturgical worship, a recovery of faithfulness in biblically defined marriage, a return to the family as the bastion of instruction in sexual ethics and conduct, an end of using state-run secular schools

and a return to educating our children in schools not Christian in name only, but in good, Christian schools staffed by believers, or, if not available, schooled at home. This he cites as core to Christian survival in coming generations (p. 41).

Things with which we agree and have practiced as Protestant Reformed people. Things emphasized by Hoeksema, Ophoff, and the writers of this magazine since its inception. An emphasis that has served our churches well, arming our generations to discern error and to remain distinctively Reformed and Christian in doctrine and in life.

Dreher’s analysis is insightful and on target from many points of view. With his prescription to withstand the mounting evil we can agree in general. But as in most matters, the “devil is in the details.” In the details we must part ways.

An ordered liturgical worship is not sufficient. Rome has such. It must be biblically defined worship. Biblical preaching to be sure, but what is biblical? An Arminian gospel will not do. Christian education to be sure. But is it distinctively Reformed?

That said, Sewell, in light of the tide of cultural evil gathering in power, is compelled to bring Dreher’s book

to his Kuyperian colleagues’ attention and call for a re-assessment of goals, methods, and aspirations. As he states, “[W]e now seem to be entering an era when we will be tried, tested, and sifted.”

Yes, indeed. With the founders of this magazine (*SB*), who foresaw this mounting evil coming, we add our voice and declare, “To withstand such a gathering sea-surge of evil, common grace is not the answer. It does not, it has not strengthened

the Great Dikes of truth and grace to preserve the citizens huddled behind them. It has compromised them, allowing the world and its foul pollutions to flow in unimpeded.”

What is required is the apostolic gospel of particular, saving grace still declared for all to hear, faith in a sovereign God to keep and preserve His own, and educating our youth to live in purity and to prepare themselves to take hold of Christ’s name and endure to the end.

Jehovah God will never fail His own, the faithful remnant, not even in times like these. He cannot. He is Jehovah, our salvation (Rom. 8:35-39).

**With the founders of this magazine (*SB*), who foresaw this mounting evil coming, we add our voice and declare, “To withstand such a gathering sea-surge of evil, common grace is not the answer. It does not, it has not strengthened the Great Dikes of truth and grace to preserve the citizens huddled behind them. It has compromised them, allowing the world and its foul pollutions to flow in unimpeded.”**



# Letters

## Good works as fruit

In the *Standard Bearer* article “Of free will and thus of human powers” of November 15, 2020, Prof. R. Cammenga stated:

In this paragraph, the SHC [Second Helvetic Confession] makes plain that good works are not to be viewed only ever as fruit and nothing but fruit—fruit that in a sort of automatic and mysterious way simply appears in the life of the regenerate.

But fruit is not the only way in which Scripture speaks of good works. Good works are not only fruit, certainly not fruit that in some automatic and mysterious way appears in the life of the believer like apples or pears on a fruit tree. To speak of good works only as fruit overlooks the important teaching of Scripture that the child of God consciously wills and does that which pleases God.

I am concerned that these statements allow for the minimizing, belittling, and the setting aside of the critical understanding we must have that our good works are only, always, and ever fruits of faith. Also noted is that this distinction (that “works are not to be viewed only as fruit and nothing but fruit”) does not appear itself in the SHC, but is inferred by Prof. Cammenga in the article that such is the teaching of the SHC.

The moment we conceive the function, role, and place of our good works as something other than fruits of faith to the glory of God is the moment we begin to err, and adoption of false doctrine officially is right around the corner. Among the anathemas of the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic response to the Reformation, is this, “If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.”

The Reformed faith has always insisted that works are merely fruits as to their function, place, and role in salvation. The PRC Synod 2018 also set this forth, “obedience...is always a fruit in the covenant relationship” (2018 Acts, p. 73). Stating this truth with all boldness in no way takes away from the truth that God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Rather, it sets forth in clarity, with biblical and confessional basis, that our works are not the basis of any aspect of our salvation, nor are they the means of any aspect of salvation.

Certainly Scripture uses many terms to refer to our

good works. Yet we must maintain that in all of Scripture’s referencing of good works in various terms and settings and in all of Scripture’s setting forth our wondrous calling and ability in Christ to bring forth good works, nowhere does Scripture in any way whatsoever contradict or teach anything other than that our good works are only, always, and ever the fruits of faith to the glory of God.

We confess that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and thus our works are only the fruits of faith to God’s glory. We ought not be afraid that this doctrine might make men careless and profane.

May our answer to that objection always be that of our Heidelberg Catechism, “But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane? By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness” (Q&A 65).

In Christ,  
*Eric Solanyk*  
Loveland, CO

## Response:

No Reformed believer may question that we are saved by faith, altogether apart from our works. Salvation by faith alone includes both our justification by faith (Rom. 5:1) and our sanctification by faith (Acts 26:18). Neither may there be any question that our good works are always the fruit of grace, produced in us by the work of the Holy Spirit, as God has ordained them in eternity. Obedience is always a fruit in the covenant relationship (PRC *Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 73). Neither may anyone question that “it is God which worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). As Bullinger says in the Second Helvetic Confession, although “the regenerate, in choosing and doing good, work not only passively but actively,” it nevertheless remains true that “they are moved by God that they may do themselves what they do.”

Nonetheless, in the article in question, I objected to those who fail to view good works as the conscious, willing activity of the regenerated believer. They are hesitant to speak of our *willing* to do that which is good, even though Scripture clearly teaches that we who are born again by the Spirit do *actively* will that which is good. They view as suspect anyone who speaks in this way, even though Scripture makes plain that God’s “people [are] willing in the day of [His] power” (Ps. 110:1). They are of the view that anyone who speaks of

our willing and doing is walking perilously close to the edge of Arminian and conditional theology, rather than exalting God's work of grace in us. Such folk exist. I have dealt with them pastorally—more than once. I do not disagree that our works are the fruits of faith. But the point of my statements is that the concept of *fruit* must not be misunderstood. And it can be misunderstood, because fruit on a tree is not produced consciously and willingly, but automatically. A fruit tree does not consciously and willingly make the decision to produce its fruit.

The point of my comments in the article, as it is indeed the teaching of the SHC that I was explaining, is “that the regenerate, in choosing and doing good, work not only passively but actively.” We must do justice to the teaching of Scripture in this regard. Scripture speaks of the good works of the child of God not only as fruit, but also as the conscious, willing activity of the believer. One way in which Scripture does this is by speaking of our good works as the sacrifice of praise that we willingly offer up to God (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15). This is also confessional language. In Lord's Day 16, Q&A 43, the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?” The response is that “our old man is crucified, dead, and buried with Him.” This means that “the corrupt inclinations of the flesh may no more reign in us.” It also means that we “offer ourselves unto Him a *sacrifice* of thanksgiving.” Willingly we offer ourselves as sacrifices of thanksgiving to God.

There may be no question that this conscious, willing activity of the believer is the fruit (result, consequence) of God's work of grace. Absolutely! Yet at the same time, the Christian life is a life lived consciously before the face of God. John Calvin's emblem of his flaming heart in his hand, and his accompanying motto speaks to this point: “My heart I offer to thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.” To speak of good works as “gratitude,” as our Heidelberg Catechism does, also underscores this important aspect of good works. This means that anyone who is doing good works only outwardly, either because this is the way they were brought up, or to receive the praise of men, or for any other ulterior motive, is not doing good works. Good works are the willing sacrifice of praise, which we lay on the altar, for the glory of God. When the Heidelberg Catechism describes conversion in Q&A 90, especially conversion as the quickening of the new man, it teaches us that such quickening is “a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.” That language underscores the conscious, willing activity of the Christian.

In conclusion, we may not deny that our good works are *always* fruit. But Scripture does not allow us to say they are *only* fruit.

I want to thank you for your letter and for the opportunity to clarify what I wrote.

Cordially,  
Prof. R. Cammenga



## All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

# Persecution present and to come

I write this “All Around Us” article at the beginning of the new year 2021. The end and beginning of the year is a time of sober reflection for the children of God, pondering especially the end of this present age and the beginning of the age to come upon the triumphant return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As we meditate upon these truths at this time, our thoughts rest upon the many footsteps of Jesus' return as they are taught in Scripture, signs that we continue to see with increasing clarity over time. One such sign is the persecution of the church of

Jesus Christ. We read in Matthew 24:9, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.” It is this subject of the persecution of Christians that we examine in this article.

Several news outlets recently wrote about an investigative report entitled “Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea,” which came out of the Korea Future Initiative. This London-based, non-profit organization's purpose “is

to equip governments and international organisations with authoritative human rights information that support strategies to effect tangible and positive change in North Korea.”<sup>1</sup> The report documents a seven-month effort by the Korea Future Initiative to establish by first-hand accounts the violations of religious freedoms in North Korea. The overwhelming majority of violations were committed against those who adhere to the Christian faith. Undoubtedly, North Korea is one of the least safe places in the world for a Christian to live.

Considering the results of this report, reading first-hand accounts of persecution, and seeing corresponding images of the brutality is jarring to the soul. Here are snippets from a *Christian Post* article:<sup>2</sup>

The report documented the various methods of torture victims endured in North Korea’s prison camps, including strangulation, starvation, being forced to ingest polluted food, sleep deprivation, and excessive beating.

In several cases, prisoners found with a Bible or religious pamphlets were executed by a firing squad, while others were locked in electrified cages and fed watery soup. Others were executed for smuggling Bible pages into the country from China for North Koreans to make prayer books. In one instance, a victim found in possession of a Bible was publicly executed in front of over 1,000 people. The victim was tied to a wooden stake and executed by an MPS firing squad.

At North Hamgyong Provincial MSS pre-trial detention center, for example, pregnant women were forced to get an injection to trigger labor. After giving birth to live babies, the newborns would be taken from them, smothered by guards using plastic sheets or cloth sacks, and then discarded in a cleaning cupboard.

The examples of brutality could be easily multiplied. It is difficult even to read these quotes because of their gruesome nature. However, it is of value to consider the present-day reality of persecution for Christians in other places in the world. On the one hand, it is instructive because it leads us to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters throughout the world today. May this article lead to that end for readers of the *Standard Bearer*. May God keep and strengthen those for whom to own a Bible and worship Jehovah may lead to beating and even death. On the other hand, it is helpful because it leads us to be thankful for, and not take for granted, the freedoms presently that we may enjoy to serve Jesus

1 <https://www.koreafuture.org/about>.

2 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/north-korean-christians-executed-for-owning-bible-babies-killed.html>.

Christ openly. But those days for readers in Europe and the United States may be numbered.

We move our thoughts closer to home by considering a development out of Europe. How the persecution of those who hold to the Christian faith may be played out is by criminalizing any and all forms of “hate speech.” Europe is on the leading edge of this development in the West. A more recent example comes out of Norway, one of the most liberal in advancing the LB-GQT community’s causes among European countries. In late October of 2020, the parliament of Norway passed a law making it illegal to speak hateful words toward those who identify as transgender. What is striking is that the law includes that which may be said in public *or in private*. As reported by Reuters, “People found guilty of hate speech face a fine or up to a year in jail for private remarks, and a maximum of three years in jail for public comments, according to the penal code.”<sup>3</sup> As commented on by conservative legal expert Jonathan Turley, “Such speech controls in Europe have led to a chilling effect on political and religious speech. In their homes, people will often share religious and political views that depart from majoritarian values or beliefs. This law would regulate those conversations and criminalize the expression of prohibited viewpoints.”<sup>4</sup> Not just publicly to preach on but now privately to speak in conversation about the Lord’s hatred of all forms of sexual deviation and corruption as sinful may be deemed criminal behavior, worthy of fines and imprisonment.

Now consider the present reality in the United States of America. The Democratic Party is openly following very closely in the footsteps of these liberal agendas in Europe on free speech issues. In the same blog post referenced above, the author writes,

The most chilling fact is that European-style speech controls have become a core value in the Democratic Party. Once a party that fought for free speech, it has become the party demanding Internet censorship and hate-speech laws. President-elect Joe Biden has called for speech controls and recently appointed a transition head for agency media issues that is one of the most pronounced anti-free speech figures in the United States. It is a trend that seems now to find support in the media, which celebrated the speech of French President Emmanuel Macron before Congress where

3 <https://www.reuters.com/article/norway-lgbt-lawmaking/norway-outlaws-hate-speech-against-trans-people>.

4 <https://jonathanturley.org/2020/11/29/norway-criminalizes-hate-people-against-transgender-people-in-private-homes-or-conversations>.

he called on the United States to follow the model of Europe on hate speech.<sup>5</sup>

I write this article only a couple of days after the Democratic Party gained the majority of the Senate of the United States of America. The presidency, the House of Representatives, and the Senate are now controlled by the Democratic Party. The path is being paved for potentially far-reaching changes in the U.S.

Consideration of the present physical persecution of Christians in North Korea and of the potential future oppression of believers in the West does not lead us to fear or despair. All of these events are under the sovereign control of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Every attempt

<sup>5</sup> <https://jonathanturley.org/2020/11/29/norway-criminalizes-hate-people-against-transgender-people-in-private-homes-or-conversations>.

of Satan through these measures against the church will not only be frustrated but be used by our all-wise Lord for the church and for her gathering. That is our hope. That is our confidence. That is our peace. That is why we press on as pilgrims and strangers at the beginning of a new year looking for the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

But pondering present and future persecution leads each of us to face the question personally: Am I willing to lay down my life for Jesus Christ? By God's grace and strength, we will be. We would do so knowing that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. And we would do so, believing with confidence the certainty of everlasting life with Jesus in glory because we have a Savior who was willing and did lay down His life for His sheep.



## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Jonah's discipline

### Jonah 1:4-17

The doctrine of the perseverance or preservation of saints is beautifully illustrated in what happened to Jonah when he tried to escape his commission to Nineveh. God does not and cannot forsake His own or leave them to perish. He always rescues them from their disobedience and sin and brings them to repentance and new obedience. God, who has chosen His own from eternity, redeemed them by the blood of His Son, and sent His Spirit to work in them, cannot forsake them without being unfaithful to Himself. Abandoning them to their own sinfulness would mean that His counsel can change, the blood of His Son be shed in vain, and the Spirit's work come to nothing.

If our salvation depended at all on us, we would never be saved. It depends entirely on God and His gracious work, not only the beginning of our salvation, but also our continued salvation and final glory. If it had not been for God's electing purpose, for the cross, and for the sovereign operations of the Spirit, Jonah would have fled forever from the presence of God and never regretted it until he found himself not in the water but in eternal fire.

God uses many means to deliver His people from their sins and disobedience. To some whom He has saved He gives sufficient grace that they live upright and holy lives without straying long or far from the right way. With those who do stray, His Word is the principle means of restoration; but when they will not hear the Word, then He uses other means to discipline them and restore them. Thus it was with Jonah, who needed the reproofs of heathen sailors, the threat of death and of hell, and three horrifying days in the belly of a fish to bring him back from his disobedience.

The straying of some is not due to the insufficiency of God's grace, but to their own stubbornness, unfaithfulness, and hard-heartedness. So it was with Jonah, and when finally the Lord restored him, he confessed that he had observed lying vanities and had forsaken his own mercy (2:8). That must be the confession of every preserved child of God.

When in the storm Jonah was wakened by the shipmaster and exhorted to call on his God for deliverance, there is no record of his doing so. It must have been the case with him, that wickedly seeking to flee God's command, he could not pray to his God. Sin separates be-

tween us and God and, if they do not cease altogether, our prayers become a mere formality when we continue in sin. As the Canons of Dordt say: “By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor for a time, until, on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them” (V, Art. 5).

Even more striking is the contrast between the sailors and Jonah. They called earnestly on their gods (1:5), while Jonah could only acknowledge that the storm had come from his God for his disobedience. Everything the sailors did put Jonah to shame. Their praying to idols served as a reproof of Jonah, who did not and could not pray to the true God. Their fear put Jonah’s claim to fear the true God to shame. They were more afraid of his sin and its consequences than he was. Jonah should have been the one asking, “Why have I done this?” instead of the sailors. In trying to spare Jonah, they showed more compassion for him than he showed for the Ninevites—more compassion for his physical well-being than he showed for the eternal well-being of the citizens of Nineveh.

What a shame it is for a child of God to be rebuked by the ungodly and to show less zeal for God than the heathen do for their idols! God sometimes uses such things to bring His own children to their senses and to reveal their folly. It is one of the ways in which God disciplines His children, but they are shamed by such discipline.

Jonah did not acknowledge his disobedience until the sailors had used the lot to determine whom to blame for the storm, and then his acknowledgment was far from an actual confession of sin. In his heart Jonah was still fleeing from the presence of the Lord. He was not only asleep in the bottom of the boat but was asleep spiritually—still spiritually asleep when the shipmaster’s words had roused him from his physical slumber and when he was forced to admit that their peril was his fault.

Jonah needed more discipline, therefore. It is not clear from the story whether Jonah understood that God would rescue him in some miraculous way if he was thrown overboard and asked to be thrown overboard because he saw it as the will of God. He certainly understood that without him on board the sailors would not perish. Perhaps he was simply leaving the whole matter of his and the sailors’ future in God’s hands, which would have been the beginning of repentance. But perhaps he, in desperation, saw his being thrown overboard as another way to escape God and

intended it to be a kind of involuntary suicide—better to die than to go to Nineveh! We do not know.

Whatever was going on in Jonah’s mind, God would not let him perish nor would He allow Jonah to go on his disobedience and perish everlastingly. God preserved his life that he might not die disobedient and unrepentant. God used the terrors of drowning and of the fish’s belly to finish Jonah’s discipline and make him ready, though still reluctantly, to obey God. Jonah’s discipline, therefore, continued as he was thrown into the raging waves without hope of rescue. God’s ways with Jonah certainly were “in the sea.”

Jonah’s experience of the terrors of drowning are described in chapter 2:5, 6. Those terrors of being cast into the sea were for him a reminder of what it was like to be cast out of God’s presence (2:4). Even more, in the fish’s belly, he was reminded of the terrors of hell and of being forever separated from God. He was not only in the depths of the sea but also in the “belly of hell” (2:2).

There is a perfect correspondence, therefore, between what happened to Jonah in the sea and his experience of being cast out of God’s presence and perishing forever in hell. There is not always such a correspondence in our lives. More often than not we cannot connect our trials with our sins and say, “this is happening to me because I did this or that.” Nevertheless we always feel, especially when living sinfully and without repentance, that every bad thing that happens is the result of our sin. In that way we are not different from Jonah and in that way we too experience God’s discipline.

The way of sin is the way of destruction and hell, and sometimes we need to be told that by parents, pastors, elders, teachers, or friends. Jonah had run away from family and friends as well as from God, and so God had to tell him in a very graphic way that the wages of sin are death. He experienced what every sinner experiences when he goes on heedlessly and carelessly in sin: “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow” (Ps. 116:3).

So Jonah’s discipline has many parts—the special storm, his reproof by the sailors’ words and example, the lot that left him without a hiding place, his being thrown into the sea, and his being swallowed by a fish. The lot, the storm, and the fish especially were prepared by God to bring His wayward prophet to his knees. We do not usually see God’s hand as clearly in His dealing with us, but providence and grace work together through all things for the salvation of His sinning people.

It is worth noting that the lot that singled out Jonah was not chance. Jonah was far from Israel where the

lot could be used to learn the will of God and, cast by heathen sailors, it would not ordinarily have been anything but mere coincidence that the lot fell on Jonah. In this case, God used it to point His finger at Jonah and to begin the great work of grace that would save Jonah's disobedient soul. Nor is anything in our lives mere coincidence. God uses all things for our good even when we can make no connection between providences and our behavior.

The special storm and the specially created fish are a reminder, however, that God's saving grace is always miraculous and special. It is so because it flows from the cross. Storms, fish, trials, providences all serve the salvation of God's people because of what Jesus did on the cross. He made all those not judgments for sin but chastening mercy. He did so by taking all the judgment and wrath on Himself and taking it away from us. But God's grace does not make chastening unnecessary, and His chastening grace is relentless. He sends it in His own time and in His own way, but He will use whatever means are necessary. One trembles to think what might be necessary to deliver one from his own sins.

We see in Jonah clear proof that though Christ has taken the wrath of God against our sins on Himself and delivered us from the wrath to come, Christ's work does

not deliver us from the consequences of our sins, from divine chastisement, and from God's holy anger against sin. That is what we forget when we think we can go on carelessly in our sin as though God does not see. That is how we behave when we use grace as an excuse for sin. Then we say with Jonah, "I am an Hebrew and fear the God who made all things," and refuse to bow before Him.

Jonah's sin and slowness in repenting it are a lesson to us when we are wayward and hard-hearted in our waywardness. Jonah's sin brings us before the question of the sailors, "Why hast thou done this?" We have no need of the lot to mark us as sinners. Jonah's example uncovers the sin that is in every one of us. Jonah's discipline makes us tremble before the all-seeing and everywhere-present God of our salvation. His discipline forces us to say, "I fear the God who made all things: I should do better than this." Seeing Jonah's sin and the discipline, however, we also see the faithfulness and mercy of God who, though He chastises, us does it for our profit and whose grace is always sufficient to restore us. It brings us to the cross where we learn why we suffer not the destructive storm of God's wrath against sin, but the gentle showers of His correcting love. It brings us to our knees confessing that salvation is of the Lord.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

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

### As to our good works (9)

## Relating good works and justification (e)

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2020, p. 106.

Our last two articles served as an interlude of sorts in which we demonstrated that the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not minimize the importance of a holy life of good works. About this holy life we will have much more to say when in due time we take up a consideration of the relation between good works and sanctification. We concluded last time by affirming the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism that the believer's good works serve as confirming evidence to him that his faith is genuine ("that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof," LD 32). Now we return to our main point: In the matter of justification, all our good works are and must be excluded.

### The issue

While good works serve a positive function for the believer with respect to his *faith*, those same good works do not serve the believer with respect to his *justification*. *Faith* is one thing—a living bond with Christ so that the partaker of Christ consciously knows and trusts Christ. *Justification* is another thing—God's legal act of declaring the sinner perfectly righteous with the righteousness of Christ. Faith and justification are inseparably related because the believer is justified *by* faith. Nevertheless, while the believer may find some assurance of the genuineness of his *faith* by beholding the good works that spring forth from his faith, he does

not derive from those good works any confidence of his *justification*.

As soon as we enter the realm of the *courtroom*, as soon as we address the reality of our *legal standing before God*, as soon as we concern ourselves with the remedy for the testimony of a *guilty conscience*, then we are dealing with the doctrine of justification and all our good works are excluded. The believer does not find in his good works the basis for his justification before God. From his good works the believer does not derive any confidence of his legal standing before God. He does not look to any of his good works for assurance that he is acceptable before God.

To be sure, when the believer goes home from the temple enjoying a peaceful conscience quieted by God's justifying of him, he always goes forth walking gratefully in the way of sanctification, eschewing what is evil and delighting in what is good. To be sure, as the justified believer walks in the way of holiness, all his lovely, Spirit-wrought fruits of obedience spontaneously confirm to him the genuine character of his *faith*. Nevertheless, as soon as that believer consciously thinks of his legal status before God, he does not turn to any of his good works in order to confirm his status or bolster his assurance that he is righteous. Especially when his conscience begins to trouble him again, and he starts smiting his breast again, turning to his good works will only intensify his growing concern. When the issue is *justification*, that is, when the issue is the sinner's legal status before the thrice Holy God, the sinner will not give to his good works any place or function but will renounce them.

## Scripture

The Scriptures testify in the plainest language that justification is by faith alone to the exclusion of all good works (Rom. 3-5, especially). Thus the Scriptures do not ascribe to our good works any role with respect to our justification. James 2:14-26 does *not* teach that the believer looks to his good works to help assure him that he is justified. The Holy Spirit ascribes one function to good works in James 2:14-26, namely, good works demonstrate to other people that the believer's claim to possess saving faith is true. A believer says, "I am a believer and I have faith," and he adds, according to James 2:18, "and I will show thee my faith by my works." A believer is "justified by works" in the sense that his claim to have faith is demonstrated to be true ("justified") by his works.

## The confessions

When the Reformed confessions speak to the relation

between our good works and our justification, the confessions always exclude good works and give them no function whatsoever. First of all, the Heidelberg Catechism treats the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Lord's Days 23 and 24. Lord's Day 23 explains that we are righteous before God "only by a true faith in Jesus Christ." When the Catechism does give consideration to our works, it puts this confession of misery on our tongues, "...my conscience accuse[s] me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil." Should we object and say, "But, those are my *sinful* works. My sinful works accuse my conscience. What about my *good* works?" then the Catechism firmly instructs us in Lord's Day 24 "that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." Therefore, our good works cannot be the whole or even part of our righteousness before the tribunal of the absolutely perfect God. Even when Lord's Day 24 goes on to give a positive description of good works as the "fruits of thankfulness," the Catechism is still advancing its argument on behalf of justification *by faith alone apart from works*, only now defending justification by faith alone from the calumniators' incessant charge that such a renouncing of good works makes men careless and profane.

Moreover, the Belgic Confession treats the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Article 23, and then proceeds to explain sanctification and good works in Article 24. It is there in Article 24 that the Confession explains the impossibility of a holy faith being unfruitful in man, and thus a justifying faith never makes men remiss in a pious and holy life. But, then, to ward off any notion that all the lovely fruits proceeding from the good root of faith in *sanctification* can somehow serve some positive role in our *justification*, the Confession sees fit to add this reminder regarding our good works, "howbeit they are of no account towards our justification."

## The issue explained

If ever we want to find in our good works some positive function with respect to justification, even if that function is merely to provide some sort of assistance to help strengthen our assurance that we are right with God, then we must return to the fundamentals of justification. Justification always puts us in the courtroom and the governing word is *perfection*. God is the Judge of absolute moral perfection. His law is the standard demanding absolute perfection. The spotless Lamb is the perfect righteousness of God for His people. The sinner, who stands in the courtroom awaiting his

sentence before the most holy God, is the exact opposite of moral perfection. The sinner always stands as ungodly and guilty, convicted of that guilt in his conscience, and worthy of everlasting condemnation. Justification, which includes the assurance of justification, comes only by faith in God's gospel declaration, "I forgive you and declare you perfectly righteous in Christ as I impute to you all His perfect works." Justification always takes us into the courtroom, and the staggering act of justification is nothing less than the divine declaration that the ungodly sinner is as to his legal status absolutely perfect—as if he had with a perfect heart fulfilled every jot and tittle of the entire law of God.

What place and function could our good works as believers have in that courtroom? Even when we walk out of that courtroom, how could our good works truly be of any assistance to help secure within our hearts the firm conviction that the most staggering declaration in the universe was just uttered concerning us? Our good works are not perfect. They are good, but not perfect. The purest and most sincere act of heartfelt worship that we have ever given to God in His house is a good work that He ordained for us and works in us. That good work is rendered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the God of our salvation; it is a token of love for Him in a world that hates Him; it serves others as a testimony of the grace and power of God; it is to the believer himself a confirming evidence of his faith. That good work is the fruit of the Spirit's operation in us and is in principle a beautiful work as it proceeds out of the new man of perfection in Christ. However, that work is not absolutely perfect. On account of our sinful flesh, that work is tainted with corruption, mingled with pride, contaminated with selfishness, and stained with world-love.

My good work of worship does not have to be absolutely perfect in order for it to function, for example, as confirming evidence to me as a believer that my faith is genuine, that I truly am grafted into Jesus the life-giving Vine, and that I really am a true believer and not a worthless hypocrite. The fact that something truly good and spiritually beautiful springs forth from me who am by nature dead in trespasses and sins provides confirmation that there is life within me and my faith is genuine. Grapes (even with their spots) are not gathered of thorns, nor figs (even with their bruises) of thistles.

However, when it comes to *justification*, the issue is not whether I have spiritual life, or whether the Spirit has planted something good and heavenly in me, or whether I belong to the company of believers and not unbelievers. In justification the issue is *my legal standing* and whether or not I am *absolutely perfect* before a

holy and righteous God who has an infinite abhorrence of and inflexible determination to punish all sin. My conscience knows this is the issue.

What positive role, then, could my good works possibly serve in my justification? I may have more good works than all the other believers on earth combined, but it makes no difference. All my good works may be piled up like a glistening mountain of the purest, whitest, finest sugar the world has ever seen but, if there is but one molecule of a fleck of black pepper embedded somewhere inside one of the smallest granules of sugar, then the whole mountain is contaminated and condemnable. That is, if there is the smallest speck of moral taint anywhere in one of my good works, then all my good works are condemned. I am damned, and I know it. In justification, the issue is perfection. The all-searching eye of the just Judge of absolute perfection will look upon my good works and find that one black fleck, and many, many more besides, and I will hear the verdict: "Cursed!" I will not be pardoned. I will not be pronounced righteous. I will not be given a title to heavenly life. I will not be accepted and received by God. I will not enjoy His covenant communion. I will not have any assurance. When it comes to justification and finding assurance that I am right with God, all my good works are to be excluded, for as soon as I look to my good works my conscience accuses me of their imperfection and my soul is seized with terror.

### The perfect work of Christ

The fundamental issue, then, is *righteousness*—a perfect righteousness that meets the approval of God. In the upcoming articles, we shall turn our attention to the all-important subject of the perfect work of Christ, who is our righteousness. Christ's holy works constitute our righteousness before God. By Him and His obedience we have a way of access unto the God of covenant communion. Only when we understand and preach the significance of the perfect works of Christ, and how His works relate to our faith, our experience of covenant fellowship, and our good works, will we be free from any temptation to give to our good works a place and function they do not have in God's covenant.





## Believing and confessing

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

# Of free will, and thus of human powers

## (Second Helvetic Confession, 9d)

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2020, p. 90.

*The Free Will Is Weak in the Regenerate.*

Secondly, in the regenerate a weakness remains. For since sin dwells in us, and in the regenerate the flesh struggles against the Spirit till the end of our lives, they do not easily accomplish in all things what they had planned. These things are confirmed by the apostle in Romans 7 and Galatians 5. Therefore, that free will is weak in us on account of the remnants of the old Adam and of innate human corruption remaining in us until the end of our lives. Meanwhile, since the powers of the flesh and the remnants of the old man are not so efficacious that they wholly extinguish the work of the Spirit, for that reason the faithful are said to be free, yet so that they acknowledge their infirmity and do not glory at all in their free will. For believers ought always to keep in mind what St. Augustine so many times inculcated according to the apostle: “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” To this he adds that what we have planned does not immediately come to pass. For the issue of things lies in the hand of God. This is the reason Paul prayed to the Lord to prosper his journey (Rom. 1:10). And this also is the reason the free will is weak.

### Weakness of the renewed will of the regenerate

The “secondly” with which this paragraph of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) begins connects it to what has preceded. In the preceding paragraph, Bullinger had said that there are two things to be observed. The first, which he addressed in that paragraph is that “the regenerate, in choosing and doing good, work not only passively but actively.” In this paragraph, he takes up his second observation. Although the will of the regenerate has been restored, their renewed will remains weak. That weakness is not due to some flaw in God’s work of regeneration. Rather, it is because “sin [still] dwells in us,” with the result that “in the regenerate the flesh

struggles against the Spirit.” Though we are renewed, “the remnants of the old Adam and of innate human corruption [remain] in us until the end of our lives.”

This is the experience of every born-again child of God. To be sure, it is clearly the teaching of Scripture. But the truth of Scripture is reflected in the experience of every Christian.

Although he does not cite specific verses in the Bible, Bullinger references two significant chapters in the Word of God. Reading through these chapters, which I would suggest that you do, it is not difficult to determine which verses he has in mind.

The first chapter is the well known seventh chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. It is significant that along with the other Reformers, Bullinger viewed Romans 7 as a passage in which the apostle Paul relates his experience *after* his conversion. The heretic Jacob Arminius interpreted Romans 7 as relating the apostle’s experience *prior* to his conversion. He did so in the interests of maintaining the very error that this chapter of the SHC is concerned to reject, the error of free will. According to Arminius and his followers down to the present day, when Paul says in Romans 7:18, “for to will is present with me,” he is talking about an ability that he had before he was regenerated. It is clear, however, that Paul is talking about his experience *following* his regeneration. As a regenerated, Spirit-indwelt child of God, although he willed to do that which is good, he did not actually do it (Rom. 7:18). Although he delighted in the law of God “after the inward man,” he confesses that he sees “another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22-23). Because of this spiritual struggle, he cries out, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24).

We find something similar in Galatians 5. In verse 16, Paul admonishes the Galatian Christians, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” The Spirit and the flesh in the child of God are con-

stantly at war. The apostle goes on to say in verse 17, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Later in the chapter, Paul says, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts [thereof]” (Gal. 5:24).

### Life-long struggle for the Christian

Significantly, this paragraph in the SHC speaks of the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit in the child of God as a life-long struggle. So long as we live, this fierce, spiritual battle goes on. There is no ceasefire nor is there an armistice. The battle is ongoing, day after weary day, whether we are on the job, in our home, at school, or in church on Sunday. As the Heidelberg Catechism says in its explanation of the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh cease not to assault us” (A. 127). It has always struck me as a pastor that whenever I talked with the older members of the church, some of whom had experienced many losses and griefs in their earthly lives, they never talked of their hope of heaven chiefly as final deliverance from their sufferings and sorrows—all such tears being wiped from their eyes. Invariably, it was their anticipation of the battle with their sinful nature being over that was uppermost in their minds—no more tears of sorrow over sin!

Notable is the fact that Bullinger says that “the powers of the flesh and the remnants of the old man are not so efficacious that they wholly extinguish the work of the Spirit.” God’s work of grace begun in us with regeneration is always victorious. The glorious truth is that although the old Adam nature remains in us, our bondage to it has been broken. Already in this life, though for a time our sinful nature has the upper hand, the new life is victorious. We are always brought to repentance; the Spirit always has the victory over the flesh. The efficacious work of grace, which is *God’s* work in us, invariably triumphs. Nevertheless, the ongoing struggle between the old man and the new man, the fact that we have only a small beginning of the new and heavenly obedience, causes Christians to “acknowledge their infirmity” and “not [to] glory in their free will.”

Besides referencing Scripture in this paragraph, Bullinger again cites Augustine, who “so many times inculcated” what the apostle says in I Corinthians 4:7, “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” The rhetorical questions that the apostle asks, underscore the truth that what we are, we are by the grace of God. What we have, we have received from Him. If the

teaching of free will were true, we would have reason to boast because at least in part we did not receive but rather earned.

By appealing to Augustine, Bullinger shows that what he is teaching is not novelty, but the historic teaching of the church. At the same time, he indicates that it was not the churches of the Reformation that had departed the teaching of the fathers, but the Roman Catholic Church.

At the same time, we are reminded that in so many ways, the Reformation was a recovery of and return to the teachings of Augustine. This was true in many respects. I am reminded of what Calvin said: “Augustine is so much at one with me that, if I wished to write a confession of my faith, it would abundantly satisfy me to quote wholesale from his writings” (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*).

*In External Things There Is Liberty.*

Moreover, no one denies that in external things both the regenerate and the unregenerate enjoy free will. For man has in common with other living creatures (to which he is not inferior) this nature to will some things and not to will others. Thus, he is able to speak or to keep silent, to go out of his house or to remain at home, etc. However, even here God’s power is always to be observed, for it was the cause that Balaam could not go as far as he wanted (Numbers 24), and Zacharias upon returning from the temple could not speak as he wanted (Luke 1).

### Freedom in things external and natural

In this paragraph of the SHC, Bullinger makes plain that the Reformed denial of free will concerns things spiritual. Fallen as he is, no man can choose that which is *spiritually* good and pleasing to God. From a spiritual point of view, his will is bound. That spiritual bondage is due to the fact that he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, as the apostle teaches in Ephesians 2:1.

From a natural point of view, man is free. His decisions, choices, and actions are not compelled by God—God, as it were, forcing him to decide, to choose, or to act in a certain way. Bullinger says that “no one denies that in external things both the regenerate and the unregenerate enjoy free will.” And he speaks of the fact that “man has in common with other living creatures... this nature to will some things and not to will others.” He gives two examples from everyday life. A man may choose to speak or to keep silent; a man may choose to go out of his house or to remain at home. Those examples apply as much to the sixteenth century as they do to the twenty-first century. Other examples would include choosing to walk to work, to drive his car, to carpool,

or to take public transport to work each morning. If he chose to drive his own car, he could choose to turn or to go straight at the stop signs he confronts along the way.

### God's power observed

Even though Bullinger maintains the freedom of men in things natural, he goes on to circumscribe man's freedom by the power of God: "However, even here God's power is always to be observed." Although God does not compel man in the choices that he makes, forcing him to do that which he does not want to do, there are two important qualifications to observe. Both qualifications have to do with "God's power."

In the first place, the power of God in His providential government of all things is to be observed. According to His providence, God restricts the choices of men. No person living in the sixteenth century could choose to turn or to go straight at a stop sign simply because the automobile had not yet been invented. God in His providence had not yet caused Henry Ford to be born and to invent the "horseless carriage." There are unending examples of the providential power of God by which He limits the choices that human beings can make. In the two examples that Bullinger gives, God in His providence might limit whether a man speaks or keeps silent by the fact he is unable to speak because he has suffered the ravages of throat cancer. Or, God might limit a man's choice of going out or remaining in his home by the fact that He has sent a hurricane, which has destroyed his home.

In the second place, the power of God's decree is to be observed. This aspect of God's power clearly limits the choices of human beings. Even though God does not compel us in our choices, He nevertheless has determined all things, including the choices we make in our natural life. On the one hand, it is true that we freely choose to speak or to keep silent, as Bullinger says. But this is not to deny that God in His eternal decree has determined whether we will speak or keep silent. He determined that at his trial Stephen would speak up, recite Israel's history, accuse the wicked Jews of being the murderers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stir them up to stone him (Acts 6 and 7). He also determined that Peter's mother-in-law would be ill and unable to leave her sickbed, so that Jesus would go into the house of Simon Peter and heal her (Mark 1:29-31).

In both respects, God's power always limits the choices of human beings. That they choose, what they choose, and the outcome of their choices have all been determined by God and come to pass according to the providence of God.

### Heresies.

In this matter we condemn the Manichaeans who deny that the beginning of evil for man [who had been created] good, was from [the abuse of] his free will. We also condemn the Pelagians who assert that an evil man has sufficient free will to do the good that is commanded. Both are refuted by Holy Scripture which says to the former, "God made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29) and to the latter, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

### The heresy of the Manichaeans

In previous paragraphs, Bullinger has cited Augustine in support of his teaching. But before Augustine was converted to Christianity, he was a member of the sect of the Manichaeans. Among other things, the Manichaeans were dualists. They taught that there have always been two competing, eternal principles in the world, the principle of good and the principle of evil.

Part of the dualism of the Manichaeans was their denial that in the beginning God created all things good. It was only in consequence of man's abuse of the free will with which God had created him that sin entered the world. They contradicted the account of the creation and fall of man into sin, as it is recorded in Genesis 1-3. And they contradicted the teaching of the inspired apostle in Romans 5:12, that it was "by one man [that] sin entered into the world, and death by sin."

Abusing the freedom of his will, Adam chose for Satan against God; chose to disobey God rather than to obey His command; chose to believe the lie of the devil instead of the truth of God; chose for friendship with the enemy of God rather than the friendship of God. The result of that fateful choice, according to the decree of God, was that man fell away from God and into sin. This first sin was the origin of all other sins. Rebelling against the revealed will of God, man brought upon himself and the whole human race the curse of God. Now death reigned over man and over the entire earthly creation.

The creation, therefore, is not inherently evil, as was the teaching of some at the time of the Reformation, and therefore to be avoided. This was the teaching of Roman Catholic monasticism and of the Anabaptists. Instead, the creation is inherently good and to be used for the glory of God. Not the creation, but man the creature was evil.

### The heresy of the Pelagians

A second error rejected by the SHC is the teaching of the Pelagians. The teaching of Pelagius was that man is born into this world neutral. He is neither good nor bad, from a spiritual and ethical point of view. After he is

born, man becomes evil by making evil choices. Under the example of those around him or the influence of his environment, man exercises his free will in disobedience to God. Pelagianism denies that man's sinful choices are the inevitable result of the sinful nature with which every man is born.

The teaching of Scripture is contrary to the Pelagian and, later, the Arminian view of free will. It is true that man makes sinful choices, but the truth of Scripture and the Reformed faith explains these sinful choices. First, man makes sinful choices because he *is* sinful. He does not only do sinful things, but in his very nature he is sin-

ful—completely sinful. This is the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Second, because of the sinfulness of his nature, man does not only occasionally or even frequently make sinful choices, and along with those sinful choices also some good choices. But that man's *nature* is sinful means that his will is also sinful. And since his will is sinful, all the choices that he makes are sinful. His will is bound to sin and Satan.

The only remedy is the gracious work of God. The next chapter of the SHC takes up that gracious work of God with its beginning in God's decree of predestination.



## I believe

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

# The instrumental cause of our salvation (3)

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2020, p. 132.

## Review

We have been considering the instrumental cause of our salvation. In the first article I pointed out what the Reformers, and Calvin in particular, meant by the instrumental cause of salvation. Calvin referred to four “causes” of salvation. The first was the *efficient* cause, which Calvin said points to the author of salvation, the triune God of grace. The second was the *material* cause, describing the substance of our salvation, Christ and His righteousness. Next, Calvin spoke of the *instrumental* cause of our salvation, referring to faith, the sole instrument or tool God uses to grant us full salvation. Finally, Calvin referred to the *final* cause of our salvation, that which describes the end or goal of salvation, namely, the glory of God. The third cause out of this fourfold distinction is what lies behind the use of the word “instrument” in our confessions.

In the next article we saw why it was so important to maintain faith as the lone instrument in all our salvation. To add works to faith here is equally to deny the gospel as if one would add our works to the ground (material cause) of our salvation. Rome did, and does, commit both errors. In addition, the main way the Federal Vision denies the gospel today is by adding to the instrumental cause of salvation the works that faith performs. If one cannot or will not make a distinction between faith and the works faith performs at the point

of the instrumental cause, he is believing and/or teaching Roman Catholic and Federal Vision theology, and denying salvation by faith alone.

A flame has both light and heat. But when I am cooking soup over the flame, it is only the heat that is functioning to cook the soup. The light is there, but it is not the light of the flame that is cooking my food. Faith is resting in Christ. Yet that faith goes on to work. When faith is the instrument to receive any and all aspects of salvation out of Jesus Christ, however, it is not the *works* of faith that are functioning, but only the *receiving* that belongs to trust in Christ. So much so, as we pointed out last time, that not even love accompanies faith when it is functioning as the instrumental cause of all salvation. This truth we compromise to our eternal peril.

## Calvin on good works and divine benefits

I hope to return to this in a later article, but for now, let's go on to ask the question, How did Calvin speak of good works in the context of defending faith as the lone instrumental cause of salvation? Especially, in this context, how did he understand the passages of Scripture that seem to speak of good works (in his words) “as a reason for divine benefit?”<sup>1</sup> That is, passages that

1 Heading of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.21. (Four paragraphs after, he speaks of the causes of salvation, none of which include works). The whole heading reads, “Sense in which good

make a benefit or blessing come after good works. Especially, Calvin is thinking of passages that see the divine benefit of *heaven* coming after good works. For example, Matthew 25:34-35, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in.” How are these kinds of passages to be understood? Calvin answers:

Those whom in mercy he has destined for the inheritance of eternal life, he, in his ordinary administration, introduces to the possession of it by means of good works. What precedes in the order of administration is called [in Scripture] the cause of what follows. For this reason, he sometimes makes eternal life a consequent of works; not because it is to be ascribed to them, but because those whom he has elected he justifies, that he may at length glorify (Rom. 8:30); he makes the prior grace to be a kind of cause, because it is a kind of step to that which follows.<sup>2</sup>

“Works are a means God uses to introduce us to the possession of eternal life.” “Works are a kind of step to what follows.” What does Calvin mean by this exactly? We can say two things. First of all, negatively, we can say without a doubt that Calvin does not mean that these works are any part of the material cause or the instrumental cause of eternal life (nor any other of the four causes). He himself says so,

The fact that scripture shows that the good works of believers are reasons why the Lord benefits them is to be so understood as to allow what we have set forth before to stand unshaken: that the efficient cause of our salvation consists in God the Father’s love; the material cause in God the Son’s obedience; the instrumental cause in the Spirit’s illumination, that is, faith; the final cause, in the glory of God’s great generosity.<sup>3</sup>

Be gone with any Federal Visionist argument that would put into Calvin’s mouth the notion that works are part of the instrument by which we attain eternal blessings in the end!<sup>4</sup>

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works are sometimes spoken of as a reason for divine benefits.”

2 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.21.

3 *Institutes*, 3.14.21. Calvin at one point in this paragraph calls works a “lesser cause.” This is unhelpful language, as is some of the other language in Calvin. But in reality Calvin proceeds to explain that term away altogether in this paragraph and to arrive at a helpful point as explained below.

4 Some Federal Visionists have argued that since Calvin says God “introduces us into the possession of eternal life by good works” he must mean works are part of the instrumental cause of our eternal life. This is false, as Calvin himself defends himself from this preposterous conclusion in the same paragraph. He simply means this is the way God normally leads His children to eternal life (I say normally, because there are infants who die in infancy,

Second, we can say positively, that Calvin’s main point, (one we ought to take note of) is to show that these passages preserve *the order of the way God relates to us in our life*. Salvation is an organic whole, and the “order of salvation” is first of all a *logical* order. Nonetheless, the distinction is scriptural, neither can we escape it altogether in our experience. Heaven comes after a lifetime of service for most of us. Though works are no cause of any aspect of our salvation, not of any blessing either, but are evidence and fruit in salvation, yet we live in a covenant relationship with God that moves along in time and grows. And in God’s decree He determined that there would be some blessings that come to us after we do some things. These blessings are earned by Christ, come to us through the instrument of faith alone apart from any of its works, yet they come to us in the order God arranged, that is, often after faith has borne some of its fruits of obedience. Calvin gets to his main point and explains,

In short, by these expressions [in Scripture], *the order* rather than *the cause* is noted. The Lord adding grace to grace, takes occasion from a former to add a subsequent, so that he may omit no means of enriching his servants. Still, in following out his liberality, he would have us always look to free election as its source and beginning.<sup>5</sup>

### Consistent explanation in Calvin

The explanation of these passages of Scripture as the God-ordained order in which He grants some of His divine benefits (and not as the *cause* or *instrument* of those benefits) is common in Calvin. Later in the *Institutes* he says,

The passages in which it is said that God will reward every man according to his works are easily disposed of. For that mode of expression indicates not the cause but the *order of sequence*. Now, it is beyond a doubt that the steps by which the Lord in his mercy consummates our salvation are these, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). But though it is by mercy alone that God admits his people to life, yet as *he leads them into possession of it by the course of good works, that he may complete his work in them in the order which he has destined*, it is not strange that they are said to be crowned according to their works, since by these doubtless they are prepared for receiving the crown of immortality.<sup>6</sup>

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for example, who do not tread this path).

5 *Institutes*, 3.14.21. Emphasis added.

6 *Institutes*, 3.18.1. Emphasis added.

Again, in Calvin's comments on Matthew 25:34 and 35 (cited above),

*For I was hungry.* If Christ were now speaking of the cause [material, or instrumental, or any other cause—CG] of our salvation, the Papists could not be blamed for inferring that we merit eternal life by good works; but as Christ had no other design than to exhort his people to holy and upright conduct, it is improper to conclude from his words what is the value of the merits of works. With regard to the stress which they lay on the word “for,” as if it pointed out the cause, it is a weak argument; for we know that, when eternal life is promised to the righteous, the word “for” does not always denote a cause, but rather *the order of procedure*.<sup>7</sup>

Heaven is a supreme, divine benefit, and, in the order of procedure, heaven comes after we do the good works in which God has ordained us to walk. This does not make those works the material or instrumental cause of heaven granted to us. Is there not help here for thinking about other benefits God gives after we do something? The fact that He generally gives certain benefits in order of arrangement after certain expressions of obedience in this life does not in itself make those works an instrumental *cause* or *condition* to those benefits. One can certainly be guilty of that error, as happened among us in recent years. But the order itself is scriptural and must be properly explained and maintained.

It is akin to the fact that my parents' training of me is part of the God-ordained arrangement for my salvation. God used my parents' hard work unto the end of my salvation. Does the bare fact of that indicate my parents' training has become the instrumental cause along with

faith in my salvation? One could errantly teach that, I suppose, and we must be careful how we explain these things. But the fact of it, and the recognition of God's use of parents' hard work, and the calling of parents to fulfill their parental vocation also for the salvific good of the children of the covenant, does not in itself compromise *sola fide*. It is His divine arrangement.

### Hoeksema on order of procedure

When Herman Hoeksema defined a condition as “a prerequisite which man must fulfill in order to obtain the promise of God,”<sup>8</sup> this Calvinistic, God-ordained order of things that we are discussing was not the issue. Hoeksema himself said in the heat of the controversy, “That something precedes something else does not mean that it is a condition to something else.”<sup>9</sup> The issue was, did man do something (even by the grace of God) that obtained (in *any* sense) something else by that doing. Schilder's theology meant he *had* to teach that man obtained something by his doing, no matter how hard Schilder tried to argue this was not the case. That there was a chronological connection between some obedience God worked in us and something that we experienced after that was not at issue. Hoeksema (praise be to God!) steered us away from the theology of conditions, pointing out that even the term *condition* is loaded with errant theology according to the Canons. But Hoeksema retained the chronological connection between things in our experience with the use of “in the way of.” To that we turn next time.

<sup>7</sup> *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, p. 179. Emphasis in last line added.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Hoeksema, “Very Clear,” *Standard Bearer*, vol. 28, no. 17 (June 1, 1952), 388.

<sup>9</sup> Hoeksema, “Very Clear.”



## News from our churches

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

### Sister-church activities

From the bulletin of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Ireland:

In 2020 we worshiped for a total of 23 Sundays at home. The first COVID-19 lockdown was from March 29 to June 28 (we returned to the hall on July 5 for fourteen Sundays). The second COVID-19 lockdown was from October 11 to November 29 (we returned to the hall on December 6 for three Sundays). The third

COVID-19 lockdown began on December 26 and will continue until at least the end of January 2021. We are disappointed that the Irish government has made no allowances for even the smallest of gatherings for public worship. (We are thankful that our brethren in the CPRC Ballymena are allowed to gather). We ask the Lord to move the hearts of the civil government to allow us to gather again, for our one desire is to dwell in His house (Ps. 27:4).

The seminary of the PRCP in the Philippines held an Interim course from January 5-14, 2021 on “The Theology of John Calvin” by Prof. R. Cammenga, at 9 A.M. to 12 noon, with pre-recorded videos livestreamed via Zoom.

From the bulletin of the CERC in Singapore:

With the approval for Phase 3 reopening of the church and some adjustment needed, the Session decided to start the worship for the whole congregation on January 24. Though we can start to have the whole congregation coming to worship, there are still some limitations for us due to size of the church and also, we need to adhere to Safe Management Measures (SMM) prescribed by the authorities. Details of the SMM will be announced to the congregation.... One of the restrictions is that we are not allowed to have lunch in church; this will affect the timing of the second service. We have asked the congregation to do a survey to temporarily change the timing of the second service. Session will make the decision on the timing of the second service after January 10.

With the whole congregation coming to worship starting on January 24, Session also decided to shift the Lord’s Supper celebration from January 17 to January 24. The details of the preparation and distribution of the Lord’s Supper elements are printed in the bulletin. Beloved, we are thankful to God that we can come together to partake of the Lord’s Supper after a long time; let us prepare ourselves to come to the table of the Lord on January 24, God willing.

The Lord’s Supper will be administered in the usual way but with some adaptations to the COVID-19 restrictions for Safe Management Measures. Permission has been given by the MCCY for us to partake of the Lord’s Supper in the church in the usual manner. The elements of bread and wine/Ribena will be separately prepacked and sealed. For hygiene purposes, the elements of bread and wine shall be pre-packed by the sisters at home wearing gloves and laid in containers on the communion table. The Ribena will be differentiated from the wine with a coloured sticker on the cup. After the breaking of the bread, Prof. Dykstra will pass the

tray of packaged bread to the elders for distribution. To avoid contact with the members, elders will distribute the packaged bread with gloves placing the packaged bread into the palms of the communicant members (no contact). After pouring the wine, Prof. Dykstra will pass the tray of packaged wine/Ribena to the elders, who would distribute the packaged wine/Ribena in the same manner as the bread. If you wish to partake of Ribena, please advise the serving elder accordingly.

Communicant members will wear face masks except when consuming the elements....

### School activities

The Northwest Iowa PR School in Doon announced that its Winter Swim/Skate Party and pot-provision supper is being planned for Saturday, February 20, 2021 from 5:00-9:00 P.M. at the All Seasons Center in Sioux Center, IA. Swimming and ice skating in the same facility. It’s usually a big hit.

### Minister activities

Missionary-pastor Daniel Holstege and his family are on furlough in the U.S. They made a trip to the calling church of Doon, IA in mid-January. Rev. Holstege preached in Doon and in Hull, and gave an evening presentation of the work in the Philippines. It was enjoyable and well attended.

On January 10 Rev. A. Spriensma was installed as the new pastor of Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN). Rev. J. Smidstra (First PRC, Holland, MI) led the installation service.

Hudsonville, MI PRC has formed a trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar, J. Marcus, and J. Smidstra. On January 24, Rev. Smidstra received the call.

Seminarian Josiah Tan (senior) completed his internship recently at First PRC under Rev. C. Griess. He returned for his final semester on January 19.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

## Announcements

### Teacher needed

Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI 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.

## Announcements continued

### 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.

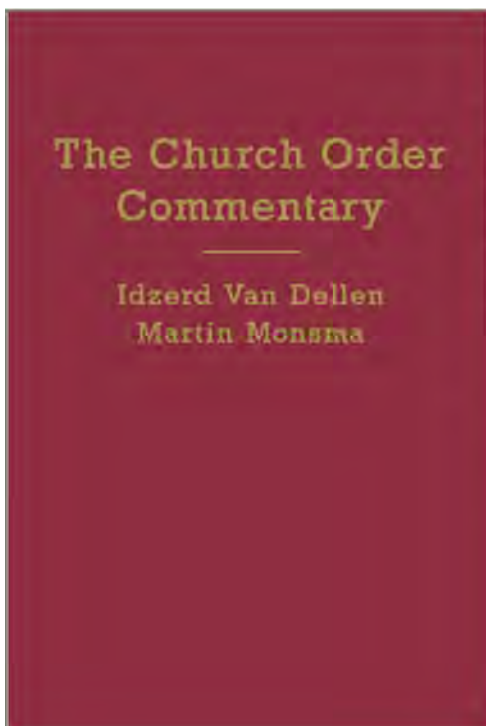
### Teacher needed

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](mailto:gr.tolsma@gmail.com) or 780-777-5780 if interested.

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Peace PRC, Dyer, IN (please note change of venue) on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Peace's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk




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