

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

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A prayer for cleansing  
from secret faults

Rev. John Marcus

Schism: A great grief...and  
a serious threat

Prof. Barrett Gritters

The necessity of true prayer

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End

Rev. William Langerak

God's two ways  
of establishing  
His covenant

Rev. Daniel Holstege



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## Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, a minister of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# A prayer for cleansing from secret faults

**Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.**

**Psalm 19:12**

Psalm 19 traces the inspired psalmist's thought process leading up to his earnest prayer to God. The journey that starts as a contemplation of creation ends with a prayer for cleansing from secret faults. As we go along with David on his meditative journey, God leads us to the same prayer for cleansing.

David begins his journey by looking at creation. But, as soon as he looks at the creation, his thoughts rise above the creation to the God who created. What does creation reveal about God? That He is glorious! "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork" (v. 1). The exquisite beauty of a clear night sky studded with billions of stars loudly proclaims the majesty of the One who created it. The broadness of the expanse of the firmament preaches a message about the God who stretched it out.

So too, the occurrence of one day following another day in constant succession pours out a certain speech; and the fact that one night always follows another is an ongoing testimony (cf. v. 2). Of what does the passing of days and nights speak? Of God's eternal power and majesty!

That same testimony shines forth in the entire creation. Everything in God's creation follows His decree. He directs the sun as it makes its way from one end of the heaven to the other, causing it to pour its heat over the whole earth. And, just as none can seriously deny the self-evident fact that the sun exists, neither can any seriously deny the testimony that creation gives about God. "The heavens declare the glory of God." Creation reveals that God is and that He is to be worshiped.

Next, David turns his thoughts to "the law of the Lord," which is perfect in every respect. It reveals everything we need to know to the saving of our souls and the glory of His name. If the heavens declare the glory of God, much more does God's Word declare it. Creation truly leads us to contemplate the invisible things of God; but He makes Himself more clearly and fully known in His holy and inspired Word. Men desire to obtain the fine gold of this world; but, how much more to be desired are the treasures

revealed in God's Word! Earthly honey from the honeycomb is sweet; but, how much sweeter is the message of the gospel to weary souls!

David first contemplated God's glory and majesty in the creation. But he contemplated that glory and majesty even more clearly in the law as a schoolmaster that led him to Christ. In the light of that revelation of the glory and majesty of God, David saw his own sins and sinfulness. That's the way God leads us: from a view of His glory and majesty to a view of our own sins and sinfulness. Having such a sorrow-filled view of ourselves, we pray with David, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

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The question, "Who can understand his errors?" is tied to our knowledge of God as we learn of Him in His perfect law. God shows us something of the spotless perfection of His holiness and majesty in His law. The law demands perfection because God Himself is perfect. It is that demand for perfection that causes us to ask, "Who can understand his errors?"

"Errors," according to the parallelism found in the text, are called "secret faults." "Who can understand his *errors*? Cleanse thou me from *secret faults*." Secret faults are sins that are kept concealed.

Some sins such as gossip, slander, and backbiting we conceal from the majority of people, keeping them within a relatively small circle. Other sins, we cloak within the confines of our consciences: envy, hateful attitudes, lustful fantasies. These sins remain concealed from most, but not from God. And the Judgment Day will bring them all to light. There is no question, we must repent of and forsake those secret sins we have hidden away. We must repent of all sin in our lives.

But David is talking about secret sins that are concealed to an even greater degree. These sins are hidden even from our own consciences. As we mature spiritually and look back at our lives, God gives us to see more and more sins we committed without even realizing it. As we grow in the knowledge of His perfect law, we realize we have transgressed it far more often and to a greater degree than we were ever aware. Things we thought were

done in innocent fun we come to see as manifestations of hatred to our neighbor. Actions we justified in the past we come to see were completely unjustifiable.

One reason our sins are concealed from us is that we have wrong patterns of thinking ingrained in us. Our old man, for example, bases what is right and wrong by how something feels. The old man says, “I do right to be hatefully angry with my neighbor.” Or, “How can it be wrong to remarry when being alone is so hard?” Or, “How can it be wrong to get drunk when it helps me forget my sorrows?” “How can illicit drugs be evil when they make me feel so good?” “Surely, God doesn’t want me to be miserable.” Whenever we make feelings to be the standard of right and wrong, we easily fall into sin without realizing it.

Not only do feelings lead us astray into secret sins; we can easily fall into secret sins because we are influenced by the prevailing views of the world that surrounds us. Sadly, we are far more creatures of our culture than we realize. For example, we unthinkingly adopt the prevailing dress style of those around us. If culture proclaims the normality of living together outside of marriage or the normality of same-sex attraction, we might be tempted to allow it. If culture says marijuana is safe and legal, we might think it’s acceptable to experiment with it. The woman who reads illicit novels or the man who uses pornography excuse themselves by saying, “What’s the big deal? Everybody does it.”

Not only our sinful flesh, not only the world, but also the Devil busies himself to lead us astray. On the one hand, he makes us suspicious of what is right and good, as if the truth were dangerous. On the other hand, he tempts us to embrace what is questionable or downright wicked. He will even quote Scripture to lead us astray, as he did with Jesus in the wilderness!

When we fail to recognize our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, we are guilty of secret faults. Our errors and secret faults point us to the original corruption we inherited from Adam. They point to the fact that we are still prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor.

When we examine ourselves in the light of God’s perfect law, we come to know that we have many secret faults hidden from our consciences.

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When God gives us to realize we are guilty of secret faults, we will also say with the psalmist, “Who can understand his errors?” David is not asking for a show of hands as if he expected some of his fellow believers to answer in the affirmative. The question rather implies the confession that none of us can understand our errors and secret faults.

Furthermore, David’s question implies the personal confession: “I cannot understand *my* errors. I cannot detect them, discern them, or see their seriousness.” He admits that it was impossible for him to understand his errors.

When God opens up to us His perfect law, we begin to recognize the secret faults of the past. Then we realize, “If those sins remained hidden from view in the past, there must be many secret faults in me yet today.” We are so spiritually dull that it is hard to admit we still have secret faults. Only a work of grace can get us to see that we still have attitudes and desires and beliefs that contradict the perfect law of God. We still say, do, and think things that are contrary to God’s righteous standard without even realizing it. Our sinful hearts are still prone to those errors. By nature, we are characterized by a lack of spiritual feeling and discernment. We do not think very often about the holiness and righteousness of God as reflected in His perfect law. We do not think about His majesty and glory revealed in creation. We do not think about His sure testimony, His right statutes, and His true judgments. Jehovah’s perfect law applied by His Spirit teaches us our guilt before God.

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By God’s grace, having seen our guilt, we will also pray with the psalmist for forgiveness.

David does not at all try to excuse his secret faults. He does not say, “But how could I have known?” Instead, he says, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.”

The Hebrew word translated *cleanse* means, first, to acquit, to declare one to be exempt from punishment, to hold guiltless. Jehovah’s perfect law declares, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:10). Our prayer for cleansing is, first, that God would forgive us and cause us to know that the curse is not upon us.

We will never have peace in our hearts until we know that the guilt of all our sins, including the guilt of our secret sins, is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. All our guilt must be blotted out. Our prayer for cleansing is first and foremost a cleansing of our guilt and a release from the punishment that is due.

At the same time, our prayer for cleansing is a prayer for deliverance through sanctification. That’s implied by what David says at the end of the psalm: “Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”



(Ps. 19:13, 14). As those who are graciously cleansed, we do not want to walk in presumptuous sins. Rather, we would serve our gracious Redeemer with acceptable words from our mouths and meditations in our hearts.

We do not seek forgiveness so that we can go on sinning. Just the opposite. We cry out for forgiveness from a heart that is truly sorry for our sins. Our cry for forgiveness comes from a heart into which God has already poured His love. True sorrow for sin and a sincere desire for forgiveness cannot exist without a longing for the grace of sanctification. To pray for forgiveness without such a desire to be obedient to God would be

hypocritical. Thus, the prayer for cleansing from sin's *guilt* cannot be separated from the prayer for cleansing from sin's *pollution*.

How many are the hidden faults that lie within my heart! By the grace of God working in us, we make that personal confession. As we make this confession, may we ever pray for cleansing, trusting in the God who made the glorious heavens, and who causes the sun to run its course day by day. Praying for cleansing, may we know that our faithful covenant God is able and willing to save us to the uttermost!



## Editorial

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

# Schism: A great grief...and a serious threat

The last editorial (March 1) was a lament for the schism in the PRCA. Our hearts, grieving for the division, look to God for mercy and long for the good of the Protestant Reformed Churches and all her members whom we love. This love motivates this editorial, explaining why membership in the PRCA is membership in the true church.

In January of this year, many members of our Byron Center PRC in Michigan separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches. Two elders and three deacons led them out. These five officebearers called all the members of the congregation to come out from the PRC. Members of a few other PRCs in the Grand Rapids area have joined the group, although many of them had already transferred to Byron Center PRC in the recent past. Remaining as the original Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church are yet a goodly number of families and individuals. They are led by the remaining six elders and three deacons. We pray the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ keep them.

The departure was not peaceful. The official separation took place two days after the minister was deposed by the consistory for the sin of schism. The minister had been previously suspended, but deposition requires approval of classis and concurrence of synod through its deputies from the neighboring classis. On Friday, January 15, 2021, Classis East did approve the consistory's

actions, after which the deputies of synod from Classis West concurred. On Sunday, January 17, the deposition took place. Two days later, on Tuesday, January 19, an "Act of Separation" was distributed to the congregation by the departing officebearers. The "Act" is an explanation for the separation and a call to "come out" of the "apostatizing Protestant Reformed Churches." At the end of the "Act," the departing officebearers also declare that they "do not recognize the unjust suspension and deposition of our minister but continue to recognize him as our pastor and teacher..." Thus, the newly organized group has elders, deacons, and the former minister.

Writing about the schism gives me no joy. I said recently in public speeches about the troubles that, if God promised to bring back those who had departed on the condition that I would cut off my right arm, I would accept the proposal instantly. That would be less painful than writing, speaking about, and enduring schism. Writing publicly about it even involves a kind of shame, as David expressed in his lament over the sad death of his best friend Jonathan and Jonathan's father Saul: "Tell it not in Gath!" (And, you readers outside of the PRCA—who certainly are not in "Gath"—and who lamented with us in the last issue, please pray for us as you read of the PRCA's struggles.) I would rather write about anything else.

But writing about the schism is necessary. The schism poses a deadly threat to the church of Christ represented in the PRCA.

For the “Act of Separation” was sent out with an invitation to you and your children to join them by signing it. Since the elders who formulated the “Act” were displeased not only with the consistory’s decision to depose the pastor but also with the entire denomination’s conduct that preceded the deposition, they invite others in the denomination to join them in signing. They said, “Signing the *Act of Separation* will constitute the organization of the church....” The invitation to sign the “Act” (at a public meeting on January 21) announced that the meeting was “*open to all*, including families and children, and including members *from churches other than Byron Center*.” This broader goal of the group was repeated: “...all who are so convicted may sign... *whether you are currently a member of Byron Center PRC or not*” (emphasis added).

That is, the schismatic group aims at your family, your children, your grandchildren. Their objective is to convince you and your children that, because the PRCA has lost the marks of the true church, you and your children must “flee from the coming destruction” that awaits the PRCA.

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The “Act” is an unmistakably clear and violent assault on the PRCA. It is important to learn or be reminded how severe it is. The “Act’s” opening salvo is a citation of the Belgic Confession’s call to all believers “to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church,” and to “discern from the Word of God which is the true church” (Arts. 28, 29). The “Act” declares the “apostatizing of the Protestant Reformed Churches,” of her “corrupting the marks of the true church and the manifesting the marks of the false church.”

Specifically, those who sign the “Act” assert that the glorious gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone has been “polluted with the filth of conditional theology, while the defense of the pure gospel...has been declared schismatic and sinful.” In the PRCA, “false doctrines and errors multiply exceedingly through heretical writings.” “[D]efenders of error are exonerated and protected... while discipline is wrongly applied to faithful watchmen.” The PRCA is guilty of guarding “the empty honor of men.” At the same time, she allows Jehovah’s truth “to be trampled underfoot by the idolatry, false worship, and blasphemy of false doctrine in God’s house.” “The Word of God...has been ignored and disdained, and the will of man prevails.” The churches are accused of shrewd deception of her members. In addition, the PRCA “confesses Christ in name” but her deeds do “not acknowledge him to be the only head of the church.” They have made “false charges against God’s Word” and “strengthened the hands of the evil-

doers.” Then Jeremiah is called to witness against these churches: “...every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.” Because the PRCA “will no longer hear the Word of the Lord,” these officebearers “flee from the coming destruction” of the denomination and “separate (themselves) from this untoward generation....” They call others to join them.

Thus, it is not overstatement to say that the departure was “not peaceful” and to describe the “Act” as a violent attack on the PRCA. Everyone who remains a member of the PRCA (and her friends in her sister churches) understands what the “Act” declares about present membership in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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This editorial (and the following) are an attempt, by the grace of God, to declare and demonstrate that the PRCA are true churches of Jesus Christ and are not what the “Act” says about them. They will be an attempt, in love for the readers, and love for those who departed from us, to show that by the *grace* of God the Protestant Reformed Churches in America have, do, and will maintain the truth of the Reformed faith and defend the faith against errors (the first mark of a true church); that by God’s *grace* they have, do, and will worship God in the manner that His Word prescribes, particularly in the sacraments (the second mark); and that by His *grace* they have, do, and will exercise discipline according to the Scripture and Church Order. The editorials will be an attempt, God helping, to show that you who are members of the PRCA ought to be confident in your membership, and that those who have departed may return and be safe, even in their generations, as God continues to preserve us.

At those same public speeches recently, which I gave at the request of congregations who have no pastor at present, I offered my own personal confession about my own and my wife’s membership and that of our six children, their spouses, and their children. There is little I would not do to persuade them to remain in the PRCA. I am grateful to God for these churches, love them, and devote my life to the cause of God and truth in them. I pray that the readers of the *Standard Bearer* will have the same sentiments.

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This is not to say that there are not weaknesses in the PRCA. In fact, the Lord is using the present troubles to compel us to examine ourselves and confess our weaknesses and sins.

In the lament offered in the last editorial, I emphasized the third commandment (God’s name, His truth, and thus doctrine) and asked whether we have *taken for*

*granted* the deposit of truth the Lord so graciously has given us. Have I *presumed* that the PRCA and her sisters would always have the truth, perhaps even *deserved* to maintain the truth because of our faithfulness? Have I imagined that—over against those who do not hold the truth with the same purity as we believe we have it—that the PRCA holds it for some other reason than the free favor of God? Does the present controversy humble us to confess with fervency what has been lacking: What do we have that we have not received? (I Cor. 4:7). Are these weaknesses the reason that the Lord chastens us with doctrinal controversy?

What God requires of a church—in relation to *truth*—is more than *having* the truth in the confessions, *preaching* it in sermons, *defending* it in writings, *passing* it on in catechism classes, exposing errors and rooting out heresy. God calls the church to *love* the truth. The church that does not *love* the truth is not a church that can be said truly to *hold* the truth. Paul does not prophesy God's damnation on those who do not *hold* the truth, but upon those who do not *love* the truth (II Thess. 2:10). Have we, with the fervency of "all our heart and mind and soul and strength" *loved* God and His truth?

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I am thankful to see that PRCA love for truth is growing. Consistories are asking their ministers to speak about the truth that was threatened in the past few years. Please listen to Prof. B. Huizinga's lecture from last October explaining Synod 2018, and the more recent lecture by Rev. M. Kortus in Redlands, CA, on the doctrine at issue in 2018. There have been many others. I have received more questions about the Reformed faith and the PRC's stand on doctrinal questions in the past five years than any others of my ministry. My time has been consumed by these questions. The people of God are asking them. They are reading. They are interested in a way they have not expressed interest before. These are signs of a true church, evidences that the Lord is not forsaking the PRCA.

But our weaknesses have been more than a lack of *love* for truth. There have been errors—doctrinal errors—among us. The errors were serious. We sincerely wish it had not taken so long to correct the errors. We are grieved by how long it took. But in the end, Christ's Spirit of Truth enabled the churches to identify and condemn them. And now, if there are more signs of error elsewhere, the people of God know the proper manner in which to address them. The assemblies work. Yes, sometimes "the wheels of justice turn slowly...." We are thankful that, weak as we are, the Lord has enabled the

'wheels' to turn. But "slowly" is usually the nature of ecclesiastical process.

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In sum, first, I take comfort in the Lord's work in the churches both to identify and root out error. I believe firmly that the PRCA are not false, but in fact manifest the marks of the true. I will be encouraging my children and grandchildren to remain, but also to take more seriously what perhaps we have taken for granted. Seek first God's kingdom. Love Him and His Son.

Second, I urge all the members of the PRC to continue to confess, defend, and grow in the knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Reformed faith that the Protestant Reformed Churches are determined to maintain: 1) the truth of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, without any works; 2) the truth of sanctification and good works as the necessary and inevitable fruit of justification and the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ; 3) that these good works are never the basis for, foundation of, reason for, ground of, or instrument to God's blessings to us; 4) the decisions of Synod 2018 (confirmed and clarified by 2019), that our experience of fellowship with God is always on the ground of Christ alone, by the instrument of faith alone, and in the way of obedience—where obedience is never the ground, reason, foundation, or instrument; 5) the truth of the unconditional and gracious covenant of God with His elect in Jesus Christ—established and maintained unconditionally (which is another way of saying #1-4 above). The glorious truth of God's unconditional covenant of grace is a major reason, we believe, that God gave existence to the PRCA in the world. Our understanding of the "unconditionality" of the covenant has grown and developed in this strife. The generations to come must be fluent in all these doctrines. And the best way to do so is to read the Scripture, guided by our confessions. When one is fluent in the Scripture and confessions, he will be able to discern truth from error.

Finally, I pray that you, young people, may not have doubts about your church membership. Let me end by speaking directly to you. You must discern for yourself. But I want you to know why I will remain a member of the PRCA. I love our God and His truth in Jesus Christ. I love Him for His presence in the Protestant Reformed Churches, which are not the only true church in the world, but one of them.<sup>1</sup> I love God's truth as it is explained in our Reformed confessions. I am so very thankful that the Protestant Reformed Churches have

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<sup>1</sup> Please re-read Prof. R. Dykstra's editorial in the *SB*—about the "point of the wedge"—from September 1, 2018.



been my mother and my spiritual family for over 65 years now. This love, many of you know, explains why I seek opportunity to teach you young people whenever a vacant church needs a catechism teacher. At the same time that I am thankful, I am also sorry for my own sin that brings down God's chastening hand upon us. May He forgive and restore. May He strengthen my resolve to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that you, with me, can do that, too, as you make your own assessment of the PRCA. Together,

I pray, we can express our determination (in a spirit of love) to "strive *together* for the faith of the gospel." To God's glory.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:23).

*To be continued.*

## Letters

### Witsius on sanctification

I write in response to the December 15, 2020 editorial "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (3)." Herman Witsius is unfamiliar to me and your discussion of him is interesting. Although I am sure there is more to be said in the series, the following statements in this third installment are difficult for me to reconcile with my understanding of the Christian life:

...there arises suspicion by reflex when mention is made of good works as being necessary and having a vital value in the life of the believer in any real sense at all. If one does speak of their 'necessity,' it is only to be in the sense of good works being the necessary fruit...of being saved and an expression of gratitude....

And so...there arises a desire...to mute calling the saved with urgency to live a life of holiness; that is, if that holiness is defined in terms of doing what God's precepts require, namely, performing deeds of godliness (good works) and in terms of those deeds being motivated, in part, by their being of benefit to one's relationship to God, as well as to others.

As a result, in the name of misguided piety, an antinomian spirit shows itself. Preaching of the whole counsel of God is truncated.

Here the editorial suggests that, if we view our works as only a fruit, we show an antinomian spirit. However, recently synod decided that "Obedience [is] always a fruit in the covenant relationship.... Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God" (*PRC Acts 2018*, p. 73). How can these two ideas be reconciled?

In addition, by denying that our works are only a fruit, the editorial makes the implication that living in good works provides some benefit. However, we know that even our good works are filthy rags (Is. 64), and because of it they are punishable (Belgic Confession, Art. 24) and we need to repent of even these. How can I simultaneously think that my polluted works of holiness

provide a "benefit to one's relationship to God," and at the same time renounce those polluted works? What is this "benefit?" Ought I to stop repenting of my defiled good works?

I understand from your editorial that you have a sincere concern that believers see the urgency in a life of holiness. Our creeds point to another way to maintain this urgency, and you even imply this other way in your December 1 editorial in this series. There you write, "God's election does not mean He turns a blind eye to our sins. As if that magnifies grace. It does not. All that does is minimize God's holiness and the seriousness of sin, of our sins, be we elect in Christ." The implication here is that this elect person ought to be called first and foremost: Repent, and believe! When believers are called to see our depravity over against the love of God, "it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful" (Belgic Confession, Art. 24). Is not this motivation of love for God valuable in a very real sense? Why would we add to this motivation some benefit we get when we perform good works, when this emphasis correspondingly draws away from (and even muffles?) the gospel call to repent and renounce our good works?

In Christ,  
Mike Vermeer  
Peace PRC

### Response:

Brother Mike Vermeer:

Your questions asked and issues raised are worthy of reflection. As well, they give occasion to expand on some points that can be profitable to all our readers concerning the value of the imperfect good works of sinner-saints.

So important is this issue in our churches these days that I am going to answer in two installments.

Keep in mind, the question is not simply what perspective you have on your own good works (your Christian

life), but what perspective does *Scripture* have concerning the good works of the child of God. Scripture's perspective is to be ours. And what Scripture has in mind when it speaks of the works (the activities, the labors) of believers that God considers to be good is the life of godliness that has to do with love for others (seeking their well-being) as that love is rooted in one's love for God.

I am sure you do not deny that we love God. But perfectly, without blemish? That we do not, does that mean this imperfect love is not truly a love at all? Of course not. Surely Simon Peter was not lying when he said, "Lord, thou knowest I love thee." Christ did not discount that love, imperfect though it was. Nor must we.

Such a consideration is helpful in how we are to view the imperfect good works and labors of sinner-saints.

Scripture directs us to live in holiness. The question is, how is Scripture's calling to live that life to be prompted by the preaching? What can properly serve as incentives unto godliness?

As I read your letter, brother, you appear to be implying that what Witsius presents as incentives unto godliness contradict certain decisions of our Synod 2018 and its reference to obedience always being a fruit in the covenant relationship and not something that "gains or obtains anything in the covenant of God".

For my part, I am convinced that what Witsius presents as incentives to godliness does not contradict the decisions of Synod 2018, but is in harmony with them.

Let me explain.

Synod said: "Obedience [is] always [!] the fruit of the covenant relationship."

Note, Synod did not say obedience and the call to obedience are only to be spoken of in terms of "fruit."

To be sure, the godly life is always the fruit of covenantal grace and being a child of God (having been begotten unto spiritual life). One cannot bear fruits unto godliness apart from being engrafted into the Vine, Christ Jesus, our covenantal Head. Any fruit of godliness will be and can only be because one is engrafted into Him by His Spirit and joined to Him by the bond of faith. As Christ said, "Without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

But having been engrafted by the Husbandman, the exhortation comes, "You must be seeking to live out of Christ and unto Christ if that fruit is to show itself." That's why neglect of the means of grace is so serious for a believer. The fruits of godliness will wither and disappear until there is repentance and turning. It is by attending the means of grace that the repentant believer remains fruitful, so that good works display themselves as they should. And when they do, will the believer say, "Look what I have done!?" No. Rather one will acknowledge, "It is only because of the life of my Lord

and Savior in me that made this possible." All one's boasting is in and of Him.

The good works of a believer are always the fruit of having been brought into the covenant of God.

But, that having been said, one may *also* point to their covenantal benefits as incentives. We have in mind such things as spiritual growth, blessed marriages, and salvation in generations.

The question is, how is the Spirit pleased to draw out that life of godliness so that one's life shows that one is numbered with those "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14)? What may properly be preached in order to lead and persuade one to live as the friend of God? What does Scripture (the Holy Spirit Himself) declare?

Keep in mind, one can be a believer and yet, for a time, not have a zeal for the life of good works, a life pleasing to God. Samson in the bosom of Delilah did not; nor did Lot as he headed towards Sodom coveting wealth. Neither sinner-saint was conducting himself as a friend of God. On the other hand, Joseph, who left his coat in the fingers of Potiphar's wife, did.

Whose conduct was blessed by God, prospering them spiritually? And whose not?

A child can answer.

Our children and young people need to hear this in catechism and in sermons.

Why?

In the interests of developing their sanctification. Such instruction is necessary in the interests of giving the youth (and all of us) warnings and incentives [!] on how to live. One behavior (self-gratifying) will carry severe consequences; the other (denying self) will not only glorify God and the power of His grace, but serve one's advantage as well, that is, it will be to one's *spiritual* benefit. It may cost one freedom and position of honor. It did Joseph. But it will, as the saying goes, "pay rich dividends" spiritually.

The life of godliness will "pay rich spiritual dividends"? Do we dare even speak that way these days? We should. This is not contrary to Scripture. The phrase does not automatically compromise the doctrine of grace and imply the error of teaching that one can earn, merit, or deserve something from God. Rather, it underscores what a gracious God Jehovah is.

The Holy Spirit prompts the apostle to declare concerning our imperfect works: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have toward his name..." (Heb. 6:10).

Such was true of Joseph. Joseph was blest, even in prison where he went for a time. Though who would deny that Joseph was imperfect even as he performed the good work of fleeing temptation in Potiphar's house.



And you can add to that Hebrews 11:26, as it speaks of Moses being willing to count the high cost of discipleship, turning his back on Egypt's honors, "For he had respect unto the recompense [!] of the reward."

An eye on the "recompense." What God would graciously reimburse him, namely, the everlasting inheritance as a reward, was of infinitely greater value than what he gave up and counted as loss.

Moses' choice, in accordance with God's promise, served his own good (benefit). Because he deserved it? No, but because God tied the two together, graciously and bountifully. Moses saw that, and chose accordingly.

This, Witsius maintained, was biblical and in accordance with the Reformed fathers and confessions. It was to be preached without incurring the charge of promoting "works-righteousness." With this I concur.

You point out that Synod 2018 stated, "Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God."

To be sure. Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant as regards a *right* to the covenant relationship nor to any blessing of the covenant. Our best works are polluted, naught but filthy rags. Anything we have a right to has been gained by Christ as our Head. *That* what He has gained for us should be counted as ours and granted us, is a matter of grace beyond telling.

However, that said, Synod was not condemning the idea (the scriptural truth) that the blessings of the covenant with its fellowship and joy (which we all understand Christ earned, of course) are experienced in the way of the life of godliness. Not in the way of sin, but in the way of what the Catechism calls the life of daily conversion. This God graciously wills to do and, as our imperfect works are purified by the blood of Christ, does bless.

We must not now quibble and say that these works of ours as believers can in no sense be "good." One's quarrel then is with God's Word itself. God Himself says they are good and that is how He looks at them. They are not "*the* good," as Romans 7:18, 19 speaks of them, meaning "perfect works without blemish." This is always our grief.

But they are "good" for all that, as defined by the Catechism in Q&A 91.

And God has a regard for them. Read Proverbs 31 and its description of the virtuous woman, whose value for her labors of love for her covenantal family the Spirit Himself places above rubies. It concludes with the words "Give her the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (v. 31).

Why is that placed in Scripture if not as incentive

for mothers of Israel to do likewise and be encouraged for their self-giving labor, even praised—with God's approval! And shame on the husband who has such a wife and does not praise her.

What the mothers of Israel do for Christ's lambs as they wash their little feet (and little bottoms), perhaps even singing spiritual songs to them as they do so, is to be dismissed as naught but dung and filth? You tell their Lord Jesus that. I dare not.

If Proverbs 31 is not placed in Scripture as incentive to godly women burdened with the labors of motherhood to assure them that there is One who speaks highly of them for their faithful labors, namely, their Lord Christ Himself, even if their foolish husbands fail, then I do not know how to read Scripture.

Calvin is helpful in this matter.

Commenting on John 4:36 where Christ encourages His disciples as they will be called to the strenuous labor of sowing the Word in the face of fierce opposition, by assuring them that such will reap the 'wage' of joy and eternal life, Calvin writes:

It is for this purpose that Scripture everywhere mentions rewards, and not for the purpose of leading us to judge from it as to the merits of works, for which of us, if we come to a reckoning, will not be found more worthy of being punished for slothfulness than of being rewarded for diligence? ...But the Lord, who acts toward us with the kindness of a father, in order to correct our sloth, and to encourage us who would otherwise be dismayed, designs to bestow upon us an undeserved reward (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1. Baker Books, 2003, pp. 171-172).

Note two things. First, that Calvin agrees, when it comes to the Judgment Day, if judgment were *based* on the works of the believer, the best of them, we would still be worthy of punishment. Our good works do not work our justification.

But then note what Calvin by Scripture is compelled (and happy) to say: that for all that, the Lord graciously, with the kindness of a father (towards imperfect children) rewards those works that arise out of faith and are done in love. Notice the word "undeserved" preceding "reward." The point being, it is God's good will to be that gracious towards our imperfect works as He looks at them and us in Christ, in whose name and by whose power we are laboring.

In a sermon on II Timothy 4:8 dealing with the crown of righteousness promised, Calvin states, "Should this not inspire [!] us to walk loyally on and to fight steadfastly to the very end?" (*Sermons on 2 Timothy*, Banner of Truth, 2018, p. 403).

Calvin is always careful to point out that the mention of this reward of grace is for the believer not the *prima-*

ry incentive unto godliness, nor the power that drives a holy life—God’s redeeming love in Christ is. Rather, it is secondary as a motivating factor unto godliness.

Still, take note, Scripture makes plain it is an important factor to excite one unto godliness and encourage one to the life of discipleship even when the cost may be high, namely, the price of one’s life. Such is to be preached. And when, in accordance with Scripture, it is, the preacher ought not be judged as preaching some sort of work-righteousness.

Before we end this first part of our response, one more matter—your reference to the Belgic Confession, Article 24.

Your reference is incomplete.

The Confession does not say that as Reformed we maintain that our good works (due to their imperfections) are *useless*. It states that they are “of no account *towards our justification*.” It adds that “we do not found *our salvation* on them,” which is what Rome taught.

But note, for all the acknowledged imperfections of our works, the Confession labels them as “good and acceptable” to God. And then this especially: In the interest of a balanced, proper evaluation of the value (utility) of our works that proceed out of faith and in love, the Belgic states, “In the meantime, we do not deny that

God rewards [!] our good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts.”

What I find most significant is that the Belgic, in reference to the good works the believer performs, refers to them not as “His (God’s) *good works*,” but as “His *gifts*.” They are called “*our* works.” Not God’s. Ours! As renewed creatures, we do not become stocks and blocks in the service to our Lord. God does not do these good works for us. Nor is the preaching to leave the impression that He does. As if that is true piety. Rather, they are what *we* are called to do—the responsibility laid squarely on our shoulders. And, having been transformed by grace, we *want* to do them and are *enabled* to produce them.

Nonetheless, when good works of godliness show themselves, they are always the result of God’s gift of newness of life, freely granted so contrary to everything we deserve.

God’s glory is not diminished.

As well, we take note that Article 24 states, “God rewards our good works.” And “rewards” implies that the labors of sinner-saints are of benefit to self, others, and to one’s relationship to our heavenly Father Himself.

To this point we will return next *SB* and finish our response to Brother Vermeer’s letter.



## Search the Scriptures

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

# The sailors’ salvation

### Jonah 1:4-17

That God turns all things to good is evident in the salvation of the sailors who threw Jonah into the sea. We know nothing of these men, who they were and where they were from, how many of them there were, or what gods they worshiped. We know only that God used Jonah’s disobedience and flight for their salvation, and that therefore they too were among God’s chosen, among the few outside of Israel who were His in the Old Testament.

When their voyage began these sailors were still heathen men. While the storm raged they still prayed to their heathen gods. When finally the storm ceased after Jonah was thrown overboard, they were praying to the one true God and worshiping Him, an amazing and divinely worked change of course for these men. Their

voyage to Tarshish would continue, but spiritually they had set sail on another very different voyage, a voyage that would end in that only “haven of rest.”

Their prayer before throwing Jonah overboard was an acknowledgment that not the gods they had once worshiped but Jehovah was Sovereign and Judge: “We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee” (1:14). Confessing that, they also pleaded that He not lay Jonah’s certain death to their charge. After throwing Jonah out of the ship and witnessing the calming of the storm, they: “feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows” (2:16). These were not the actions of unsaved men.

Their fear of the Lord when all was done was not the

same as their fear of the storm or of Jonah's disobedience (1:5, 10). That fear was sheer terror over their impending doom. The fear of the Lord is a reverence and awe that understands something of His greatness and glory. It is the expression of a believing heart and is the beginning of true wisdom. It was such in the case of these sailors. Thus the contrast between 1:5: "Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them," and 1:16: "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows"! Nothing more is needed to convince us that these men will be in heaven with us someday.

God used many things for the sailors' salvation: the storm, so unusual in its fury and coming; the lot and its results; Jonah's confession of Jehovah as the true God, weak and lacking as it was; his acknowledgment that the storm had come for his sake; Jonah's insistence that he had to be thrown overboard for what he had done in disobeying God; and the immediate cessation of the storm when he was no longer in the ship. All these things preached the need for repentance and faith to the sailors, and God used them for good. God used especially the work of His Spirit, for waves and words are in vain without the presence and power of the Spirit.

Most important, though, are the words of Jonah. Those words name and show the glory of the one God and, without those words, humanly speaking, the sailors would have continued in their ignorance of Him. It was a very short sermon preached by a reluctant and still disobedient prophet, but it was enough for the power and grace of God, who continues to use weakest means—sinful preachers and the preaching itself—to fulfill His will in the salvation of many.

What happened to these sailors thereafter we do not know, any more than we know the rest of the history of the repentant Ninevites. Nor need we know, for the story is in the Word not to satisfy our curiosity but to demonstrate to all who know the story that salvation is of the Lord. He showed that again in Nineveh. He showed that in Jonah's repentance and in the salvation of these heathen sailors. He does everywhere and always according to His own will and good pleasure in heaven, on earth, in the sea, and among men.

What a lesson that is for those who preach the gospel and see only some repenting, believing and obeying, whether in the church or on the mission field! What a lesson when the fruits of the gospel seem small and unfit for the glory of God, and when the church is small and despised! How we need to learn this when in the same family some receive the teaching of their parents and others do not! When our witnessing is in vain, our good

example disregarded, when it seems we stand alone in defense of the truth and in the way of obedience to God, we must remember Jonah and the sailors: Salvation is indeed of the Lord.

That sovereign mercy of God is always shown to the disobedient and rebellious, never to those who have made themselves fit for God's mercy or who have distinguished themselves in any way before God. Whether by profane, idol-worshipping sailors, by cruel and heartless Ninevites, or by disobedient prophets, God's mercy is never merited. That lesson Israel had to learn. Priding themselves on their special place in God's purpose, thinking their privileges were deserved, they needed to learn that salvation is not of him that wills nor of him that runs but of God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16).

They would not learn it from these heathen sailors who never appeared again in sacred history. Perhaps some learned it from Jonah when he finally returned to his own people with the story that is recorded here, though we know nothing of his later history. Learn it they must, and so must we if we are to be saved, for sinful pride must be humbled and all dependence on self taken away before faith in God's great salvation can manifest itself.

How shameful, that so many in Israel worshiped the gods these men had forsaken! How shameful that the majority would not hear the Word of God that was brought to them in all its Old Testament fullness, would not repent and believe, when these heathen sailors humbled themselves at the brief testimony of Jonah. What shame that they who knew the grace and mercy of Jehovah to their nation and who had the promises turned away, when these men repented at the testimony that Jehovah was the God of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, and the Judge! What shame for Jonah who had not yet forsaken his disobedience and rebellion!

How shameful that so many today who have the gospel in all its New Testament fullness, who know that Christ has come and who know what He has done, are slow to hear and obey! How shameful it is when men and women in the visible church worship the gods of the heathen, health and wealth, pleasure and fame! What shame when converts from Africa and Asia are more zealous for God than those who have had the gospel for many generations!

That God turned the disobedience of His prophet to the salvation of these heathen is not an excuse for sin, certainly not for Jonah's gross disobedience. Perhaps that was the reason, too, why Jonah never knew that those sailors had been saved—he was not privileged to witness such a wonder and would not in his hard-heartedness have appreciated their repentance in any case. There is never an excuse for disobedience, sin, and bad behavior. It is among the "all things" that work togeth-

er for good to those who love God, but it is not itself “good.” God shows that by further chastising Jonah with the terrors of drowning and those three frightening days in the belly of the fish.

God’s sovereignty over sin is such that though He decrees and rules over sin, even brings it to pass, He is never to blame for the wickedness of saints or of the unsaved—He is not the Author of sin. That is part of His sovereignty. Such control and arrangement over the actions of others would leave us equally or more responsible for their wickedness, but God is able as Sovereign to direct and control all things without even being to

blame for the wickedness of men and devils. Thus the Belgic Confession of Faith:

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment: nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly (Art. 13).



## Believing and confessing

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington

# The necessity of true prayer

### Lord’s Day 45

*Question 116.* Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

*Answer.* Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us; and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.

*Question 117.* What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which He will hear?

*Answer.* First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested Himself in His Word, for all things He hath commanded us to ask of Him; secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.

*Question 118.* What hath God commanded us to ask of him?

*Answer.* All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He Himself has taught us.

*Question 119.* What are the words of that prayer?

*Answer.* *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Oh, how we need instruction in prayer!

Our prayers are lacking in reverence, in faith, in frequency, in content, in fervency, in confidence, and in so many other ways. Not one of us can say that we have mastered the art of prayer. In fact, the more we pray, the more we see our need of prayer.

Observing the constant prayer life of Jesus, the disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ response was to give “The Lord’s Prayer,” which is not only a prayer to be prayed by us, but also a model for

true prayer. By it He teaches us what prayer is, the appropriate content for our prayers, and the attitudes we should have as we come before God in prayer.

### What is prayer?

Prayer is a miracle and gift from God to us sinners. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God day by day. Their sin, however, put a separation between them and God and made this communion impossible. Prayer is God’s gift and means for us again



to commune with Him. In the gift of prayer, the holy God breaks down the communication barrier between us and Him. This does not mean that all prayer reaches God, for the foundation of our access to God in prayer is the saving work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19-21). In our salvation, Christ has removed the barrier of sin that separates us from God and has poured His own life into us by the Holy Spirit so that we desire to seek and commune with the Holy God. Prayer, then, is a privilege given to the children of God. In prayer, we talk to God, our Father. What intimacy! What a wonder!

In prayer, the child of God brings himself consciously into the presence of God. When we pray, we close our eyes and fold our hands, as a symbol of shutting ourselves out from all distractions, so that we may come with understanding and a focused awareness before God. Certainly, we are always in the presence of God who is inescapable (Ps. 139:7-12), but so often our minds and our lives are preoccupied with so many other things and our thoughts are far from God. Prayer is the pause from the busyness of our lives that brings us back to the reality of God. Prayer transports us from the earth into heaven, bringing us before the throne of His grace. Thinking of prayer this way helps us to be more prayerful. Too often we limit prayer to the act of bowing our heads, closing our eyes, and speaking directly to God, but the Bible says that we should pray “always” and “without ceasing” (Eph. 6:18; I Thess. 5:17). We cannot always stop to pray but, like Nehemiah, we should in our moments of crisis pray to the God of heaven as we go on with our duty (Neh. 2:4-5).

The miracle and gift of prayer is God’s concession to our human weakness and to our sinful forgetfulness of Him. What would otherwise be impossible God makes possible in the gift of prayer through His Son, Jesus Christ. Prayer is the scepter that the righteous and holy King extends to us so that we can come into His presence.

### Acceptable prayer

When we speak of true or acceptable prayer that is pleasing to God, we do not mean that God accepts us on account of our prayers. Rather, we mean that the God who has already accepted us in Jesus Christ will hear our true prayers. Not all the prayers of God’s children are acceptable to Him. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18). In fact, all of our prayers are so weak and marred by sin, that we need the constant intercession of our heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25).

Recognizing the weakness and failings of our prayer, with the disciples we want to improve in our prayers so that they better express our thankfulness to God. With

the goal of improving our prayers, the Catechism guides us in the evaluation of our prayers by giving us four qualifications of true prayer.

First, we must from the heart pray to the one true God only, as He has revealed Himself in His Word. A robust theology of God as the all-knowing, everywhere-present, almighty, sovereign, gracious, faithful, saving, and only God is essential to true prayer. He is not a God who is unaware, and needs our reminders. He is not a God who is fickle and changing, and needs our pressures. He is not a God for emergencies only, whom we do not need for the majority of our lives. He is not a weak God, unable to answer our prayers. But He is our heavenly Father, who is always for us, who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us, and who will with Him also freely give us all things (Rom. 8:31-32).

Too often in prayer we come before God with wrong ideas about Him, with little praise to Him, or with the idea that He must give us what we want simply on account of our asking. A good practice before praying, is to read a psalm of praise and include this as the introduction and approach to God in your prayer. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ teaches us to begin with praise and then with petitions for God’s name, kingdom, and will, before we come to our own needs.

Second, in true prayer, we must be directed by God’s Word both in how we pray and for what we pray. God has commanded us to rely on Him through prayer for all things necessary for body and soul, for health and salvation. Daily bread as well as constant sustaining grace come from God. Are we relying on Him for these things, or pursuing them in our own strength? Do we turn to Him for wisdom, and pray to Him with regard to every other endeavor or pursuit? Again, how forgetful we are, by nature no different than wicked Herod who “gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23).

When our petitions are directed by the Word of God, then they are themselves a form of praise, because in them we acknowledge and thank God as the Giver of every good and perfect gift. One who in prosperity is prayerless because he feels he needs little does not give God the glory. Especially in prosperity we need to examine our prayers so that we do not fall into the sin of Israel, who said in their heart, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut. 8:17). Psalm 136 is a beautiful model for thankful prayer.

Third, prayer that is pleasing to God is made in the acknowledgment of our needs and our misery before Him. That is, we should be humble in our approach to Him. True humility comes only when we know God and who He is, and know ourselves before Him. A proper understanding of our sinfulness and utter de-



pendence on God will affect our prayers. Then we will always come in the name of Jesus Christ. Then we will never come with a sense of entitlement as though God is under some obligation towards us. True prayer is offered in humility. A great pattern of humble prayer is given in Daniel 9:3-19.

Fourth, acceptable prayer is confident prayer, that is, we come in faith founded on the promises of God. Doubt in prayer, and indeed in all our life, is an affront to the character of God and the value of the cross of Christ. God, who has given His Son, promises with Him to freely give us everything else that we need. So, James tells us to “ask in faith, nothing wavering” and in Hebrews we are told to “come with boldness unto the throne of grace.” Even a person who is humble—or perhaps we should say, *only* a person who is humble—can pray this way because in humility he depends not on himself for acceptance before God, but he comes through the blood of the Son of God. That blood is the foundation for confidence in prayer.

### Prayer is necessary

Do we really need to pray? Does not God already know our needs, and does He not know every thought in our mind even before we express it in words? Jesus tells us, “Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him” (Matt. 6:8), and David confesses that God knows all his wanderings and counts all his tears (Ps. 56:8).

It is important for us to understand that when God gives to us the gift of prayer, He is not giving us something that He needs but something that we need. Imagine a life without prayer. In prayer, God ties Himself to my human need of communication, of knowledge, of dependence, and of trust in Him. God ties Himself to the means of prayer as the way in which we will consciously receive all things from His hand. Prayer changes us, not God. Prayer is a way for us to come into subjection to the will of God and His dealings with us in our lives. In that way, prayer is the way in which we receive God’s blessing in our life.

This is why we can also say that, even when God withholds from us what we ask, still He is answering our prayers. When He gives to us something different than we desire, He is giving us exactly what we need. When He denies our requests, He is helping us in a powerful way to submit to His way and will for us. Through prayer, He changes us and brings us into conformity with His own good will for us.

Jesus teaches this in Luke 11 when, instead of God giving us what *we* want, Jesus says that our heavenly Father will “give the Holy Spirit to them that ask” (Luke

11:13). This is one of the most surprising statements in the whole Bible about prayer. When a son asks for bread or a fish, he receives what he asks. But God, when He denies our requests, gives something much better, the Holy Spirit. In the way of prayer, the Holy Spirit works contentment and submission in our hearts, so that we can say with Jesus, “Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done!”

Prayer is also necessary as an expression of our obedience and gratitude to God. God has commanded us to pray. In prayer, we not only express our gratitude with our words, but the act of believing prayer is itself a part of our thankfulness—the chief part of our thankfulness. Prayer is a response in the believer’s heart to the saving grace of God. Prayer is an expression of our constant dependence and gratitude to our loving Father. One who does not pray is ungrateful and says, “I really don’t need God.”

How is your prayer life?

Lord, teach us to pray!

### Questions for discussion

1. Why do we/you need instruction in prayer? Where can you most grow in prayer?
2. What is prayer?
3. How is prayer God’s gift to us?
4. Is it possible to “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17)? How is Nehemiah 2:4-5 a good example of this?
5. Is it true that only the believer can offer acceptable prayer to God? If so, why?
6. What does it mean to pray “from the heart”?
7. What is the relation between true doctrine and true prayer?
8. What limitations does Scripture place on the content of our prayers? Are we sometimes too limited in our petitions?
9. What are some of the ways that we show humility in our prayers?
10. What does James 1:5-8 teach us about prayer? How is this possible?
11. Why is prayer necessary in the life of the Christian? How does the story of Hezekiah in II Kings 20:1-11 help us to see this?
12. How is prayer itself an expression of gratitude?
13. Did Jesus say that we should repeat the Lord’s prayer? How should we use this prayer?
14. Understanding prayer biblically can complicate and inhibit our prayers (we are trying to check all the boxes). How do you balance a proper understanding of prayer and the freedom that we should feel as we come to God our Father in prayer?



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

## End

God once said, “The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; ...I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:13). So shall it be at the end of this world when the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just (Matt. 13:49). He that shall endure unto the end shall be saved. When the gospel of the kingdom is preached in all the world for a witness, then shall the end come, and with great sound of a trumpet the angels shall gather together the elect from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:13-14, 31).

In Scripture, *end* usually means more than the final part, extremity, termination, or cessation of something. Since all things begin, exist, and occur by the eternal, mysterious and sovereign purpose and power of God in Jesus Christ, *end* often refers to the arrival, fulfillment or completion of that purpose (goal), or even the purpose (goal) itself. He hath made everything beautiful in his time: and no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end (Eccl. 3:11).

The Psalms say much about ends. Although the ungodly prosper and increase in the world, God sets them in slippery places and their end is destruction (Ps. 73:17). Mark the perfect and upright man, for the end of him is peace: but the wicked shall be destroyed and their end cut off (Ps. 37:37-38). The heavens declare the glory of God unto the end of the world; God will make wars to cease to the end of the earth; and all the ends of the world shall see His salvation, remember, turn unto, fear and praise the Lord (Ps. 19:4; 22:7; 67:7; 98:3). The righteous pray, “Lord make me to know mine end, how frail I am; Thou art the same and Thy years have no end; teach me the way of Thy statutes and I shall keep it unto the end; and to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee and not be silent” (Ps. 30:12; 39:4; 102:27; 119:33).

Jesus is the beginning and the end. Of all things, for they were created by Him and for Him (Rev. 22:13; Col. 1:16). Of the Scriptures, for they are written about Him and have their end in Him (Luke 22:37). To this

end was He born and for this cause came He into the world, that He should bear witness unto the truth (John 18:37). To this end He died and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living (Rom. 14:9). Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end (John 13:1). Therefore, He shall also confirm us unto the end that we may be blameless in the day of His coming (I Cor. 1:8).

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth (Rom. 10:4). And the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned (I Tim. 1:5). Being made free from sin and become servants to God, we have our fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life (Rom. 6:22). And Christ, whom we have not seen, we love; and though we see Him not, yet believing in Him we rejoice with joy unspeakable, receiving in Him the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls (I Pet. 1:8-9).

You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy (Jam. 5:11). Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:13). Since the end of all things is at hand, be therefore sober and watch unto prayer (I Pet. 4:7). For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (I Pet. 4:17).

Our Lord promises, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). Saith the Lord, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jer. 29:11). And the end comes when He shall have put down all rule, authority, and power and delivered up the kingdom to the Father; He shall reign forever and of His kingdom there shall be no end (I Cor. 15:24; Luke 1:33).



## Go ye into all the world

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

# The covenant of God and our mission to the world (3): God's two ways of establishing His covenant

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2020, p. 17.

In the PRC's covenant theology, there is a significant truth that, though not entirely overlooked in the past, is still frequently overlooked in the present.<sup>1</sup>

Not long ago, I revised my lecture on Lesson 18 ("The Covenant of Grace") in the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine class that I teach to the young people of Provident PRC in Metro Manila. I first made that lecture nearly ten years ago, but I had not taught it since moving to our mission field in the Philippines in 2017. Regretfully, I discovered that in my lecture I had overlooked a most glorious truth: that God, in this present age of history, is establishing His covenant with the elect in all nations of the world. I had neglected to teach the very important truth that God, in this new dispensation of the covenant, looks in two different directions and works in two distinct ways to draw those whom He loves into His bond of friendship in Christ Jesus: through faithful mission work to the nations near and far (those outside the sphere of the covenant) and through diligent instruction of the children of believers in the home, school, and church (those within the sphere of the covenant). Needless to say, I added a section to my lecture and plan to teach this significant truth to the future catechism students whom the Lord might set before me. Let me also encourage my fellow ministers to remember this truth in your teaching on the covenant of grace.

We do live, after all, in the new dispensation, not the old. We live in that exciting time of history when "many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit

down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11).

Before the coming of Christ, God established His covenant almost exclusively with one people in one way: with the children of believers in the nation of Israel. He had chosen Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be in His covenant (Gen. 17:7), and He remembered His covenant with them when the children of Israel groaned in Egypt (Ex. 2:24). He redeemed them from bondage by a mighty hand and made His covenant with them at Mount Horeb (Deut. 5:2). There at Sinai, He expressed the demands of the covenant for that age: that they faithfully keep His law and diligently teach it to their children (Deut. 6:7; Ps. 78:1ff.). He continued His covenant with Israelite believers and their seed in their generations, but He cut off the generations of those who hated Him, served idols, and taught their children to do likewise. On rare occasion, God caused the glorious light of the new dispensation of the covenant to flash into the old, as when He called Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, and others out of heathen darkness into His covenant by a wonder of grace. But those were rare exceptions. Almost exclusively, God looked to one place to draw His beloved people into the sweet bond of friendship with Himself that He calls His covenant: from the children of believers.

But after Christ came, the age of the new covenant dawned. God, in fulfillment of His promise to make Abraham a "father of many nations," enlarged the scope of His covenant to include all nations under heaven.

Through the sending of His Son and then His Spirit, God began to realize this cosmic purpose of His covenant. In the upper room, Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the new testament (or covenant) which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Jesus is called the "mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 8:6-13; 9:15-20; 12:24), for He

<sup>1</sup> See Wilbur Bruinsma, *Standard Bearer*, "Defining Missions" (Nov. 15, 2007). He writes, "Reformed churches must be fully aware that there are two distinct, yet interrelated, ways that the Son of God gathers His church in the new dispensation of the covenant. The one means is the faithful nurturing of the children of the church by believing parents and by the church itself.... But the church may never ignore the other command of God's covenant: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15). Equally important to the gathering in of the church in the new dispensation is diligent labor in the whole area of missions."

“confirmed with His death and shedding of His blood, the new and eternal testament, that covenant of grace and reconciliation when He said: It is finished.”<sup>2</sup> For “it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem *out of every people, tribe, nation, and language* all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father.”<sup>3</sup> God sent His Son to perform the greatest mission of all: to confirm the covenant of grace by shedding His blood, by taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29), so that all the elect in the whole world might receive the right to be members of God’s covenant and enter into fellowship with Him. When Jesus finished His mission on the cross, He arose from the dead as the Head of the church that would be gathered out of all nations and as the first fruits of a great harvest (I Cor. 15:20; Rev. 14:14-16). Then from heaven He poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17, 33). Through the Spirit, He draws men and women from all nations into the new covenant, by uniting them to Christ and giving them life (II Cor. 3:6). Through the preaching of the gospel near and far, He causes that regeneration life to sprout in the hearts

of the elect and to produce a true faith in Jesus Christ, whereby they experience the blessings of justification and sanctification, salvation from sin and fellowship with God, and whereby they live a godly life of gratitude in His covenant.

When God thus enlarged the scope of His covenant to embrace every people, tribe, nation, and language, the risen Christ issued a new demand of His covenant. In the old dispensation, God called parents to cherish His words in their heart and diligently teach them to their children, for in that way He would continue His cove-

nant with them and their seed after them in their generations. That demand of the covenant still fully applies to us today. But God has also given us another covenant calling in this last age of history. The risen Christ, addressing His disciples on a mountain in Galilee, expressed a new demand of the covenant when He said, “Go ye into all the world and teach all nations. Preach the gospel to every creature. Ye will receive power from the Holy Ghost and will be witnesses unto me here in Jerusalem and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). “The promise of the gospel...together with the command to repent and

believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.”<sup>4</sup> The Great Commission, which is a demand of the covenant in this present age, will remain in force until the end of history, for “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

If you were asked, “What is your calling with regard to the extension of God’s covenant,” what would come to your mind? Would you think only of your duty to train up your children in the home, school, and church? Or would you also

think of your calling to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life to your neighbors (Phil. 2:15-16)? I am convinced that a great truth is often overlooked in our thinking about the covenant, namely, that we do not live in the old but in the new dispensation; that God has expanded the scope of His covenant to include all nations; that God has two ways of gathering the elect into His covenant in this last age; that God has given us two callings in regard to the extension of His covenant. My dear readers, if we are asked about our calling with regard to the gathering of God’s covenant people, let us remember that we are called to look inward and outward. We are called to

**If you were asked, “What is your calling with regard to the extension of God’s covenant,” what would come to your mind? Would you think only of your duty to train up your children in the home, school, and church? Or would you also think of your calling to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life to your neighbors (Phil. 2:15-16)? I am convinced that a great truth is often overlooked in our thinking about the covenant, namely, that we do not live in the old but in the new dispensation; that God has expanded the scope of His covenant to include all nations; that God has two ways of gathering the elect into His covenant in this last age; that God has given us two callings in regard to the extension of His covenant.**

2 “Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper” found in the Psalter used by the PRC.

3 Canons of Dordt, Head II, Article 8. Emphasis added.

4 Canons of Dordt, Head II, Article 5.



devote ourselves to the pious and religious education of the children of the covenant, as we vowed to do when we brought them for baptism. We are likewise called to shine as lights in the world and to hold forth the word of life to our neighbors through missions and evangelism so that “by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

Since the Great Commission comes first and foremost to ministers of the gospel, allow me a word to my dear brothers in the ministry. My brethren, we are called to go into all the world to preach the good news of salvation because it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save into His covenant those who believe, because unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the preaching of Christ crucified is the power of God and wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:21, 24). What an astounding and wonderful task has been given to us! Some of us have been called to leave our homeland and go into nations afar off to preach the gospel and issue its call. Some missionaries, indeed, have suffered the loss of all things and persecution at the hand of hostile powers. But for us, the hardest thing has been to leave our beloved covenant community where we were raised and nurtured in the knowledge of the Lord; to lose close contact and regular fellowship with our Protestant Reformed friends, family, colleagues, and churches; to move far away from the official and unofficial gatherings for worship in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America; and not least, to let go of the priceless benefit of training our children through the good Protestant Reformed schools. Yet here on the mission field, our greatest joy is to participate in the formation, fellowship, and worship of new covenant communities as God establishes them through our labors.

My dear fellow ministers, if the Lord should call you to leave your community, the beloved sphere of the covenant where you now labor with believers and their seed, will you be ready to count the cost, willing to sell your earthly things, to bid farewell to your Protestant Reformed family and friends, to go and preach the gospel to those afar off whom the Lord our God shall call? Our Lord issues a very serious call when He says, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37-38). But He also adds these sweet words of hope, “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (v.

39). When we go into the world, He promises, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20).

Many ministers will never be called to leave their covenant community and go out into a foreign land for a lengthy amount of time. Yet does that mean they have no calling in respect to this great work of God establishing His covenant among the nations through missions? They most certainly do have a calling, for the Great Commission comes to the whole covenant community, the whole church, not just to a few missionaries. May the Lord give much zeal to every one of you, my fellow ministers of the Word, to be busy doing the work of an evangelist in your local area (II Tim. 4:5). May the Lord also give much wisdom to you elders who supervise the work of your pastor so that you not only allow him to do evangelism but also encourage and enable him to do so. May our God give fruit on your local outreach work so that men and women who grew up outside the covenant will be brought into it, even as many as were ordained to eternal life.

Finally, if the Great Commission is directed chiefly to ministers, does that mean there is no calling for the rest of the people of God who live within the covenant community? They most certainly do have a calling to participate in this great work. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). May it be said of you, dear readers, that you were outstanding examples of witnessing, “For from you sounded out [echoed forth] the word of the Lord... so that we need not to speak anything” (I Thess. 1:8). May our God use your joyful and faithful witness to your neighbors who are still outside the covenant to bring them to hear the preaching that takes place within the covenant, that they might be drawn into the covenant.

The Great Commission marked the end of the age when God established His covenant only in the lines of the children of believers. It signified the dawn of the age when God establishes His covenant also with multitudes from the nations. By that command to move outward into the nations, Christ signaled that God would now fulfill His promise to make Abraham the *father of many nations* (Gen. 17:4-5). In my first article in this series, I directed your attention to the promise of God to Abraham. Before God uttered the promise to establish His covenant with believers and their seed in their generations (Gen. 17:7), He first declared that He would make His covenant with Abraham *as the father of many*

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5 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, Q&A 86.



nations.<sup>6</sup> God did not mean, first of all, that Abraham would be the progenitor of many earthly nations. But, as Paul explains clearly in Romans and Galatians, God meant that Abraham would be the spiritual father of believers in Christ from all nations under heaven. God would multiply his seed like the stars of heaven, the sand on the seashore, and the dust of the earth. For the purpose of God from the beginning of time was always to establish His covenant with the world of men, though not with every man.

When we think about and use the word *covenant*, let us not assume that it is synonymous with the promise

<sup>6</sup> W. Bruinsma, “Defining Missions.” He mentions the promise to believers and their seed and asserts, “The truth of God’s covenant teaches us that God will cause His church to grow from within the confines of that church by means of the generations born to believing parents.” Then he adds, “There is another marvelous truth revealed in Genesis 17 that too often is overlooked. We read these words of God to Abraham in verses 4 and 5: ‘As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.’ Not only did God promise to establish a relationship of fellowship and friendship with Abraham and his seed, but God also told Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would come to share in that fellowship and love of God.”

of God to us and our children. Yes, we ought to speak of “covenant homes” and “covenant schools.” But we can also speak of “covenant missions” and “covenant evangelism.” For God not only uses the Christian home and school to draw His elect into the covenant, but He also uses Christian missions and evangelism. When we memorize Genesis 17:7 and treasure that verse deep in our hearts, let us also memorize Genesis 17:4-5 and treasure it just as deeply. When we teach about the recipients of the covenant in our catechism classes and sermons, let us not forget that God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, “father of a multitude,” for in this last age of history, in which we are privileged to live, He draws a multitude of people from every people, tribe, nation, and language under heaven into His everlasting covenant of grace.

When God establishes His covenant with the elect through missions, as He did with many of our ancestors in the heathen Lowlands, He then continues that covenant through the pious instruction of their children in the lines of continued generations. In the next article, I hope to consider the relation between these two ways in which God establishes His covenant.



## Strength of youth

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

# A prayer of humble confession

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

II Chronicles 7:14

*And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.*

Daniel 9:3-5

God be merciful to me. On Thy grace I rest my plea. I am the sinner. The chief of them all.

That I am chief sinner I know I ought to know. Yet my hard heart continually rejects and forgets that shameful truth. I have insisted that total depravity is true of the old man. Yet I prefer to maintain it only as a doctrine to defend rather than a humble confession about myself. O wretched man that I am! Thou dost know the inmost recesses of my heart, and the specific manifestations of my wretchedness in both my doctrine and life. Humble me, that I might recognize this more.

O God, I am evil, born in sin! Pride, that mother of all heresy, plagues my soul. Again and again, I feel my inner lawyer caught up in the strife to justify myself. I have upheld my righteousness in quiet, compet-

itive comparisons to many others I deem worse than me. The atrocities of the world and the apostasies of the church I have focused on in order to minimize my own idolatries. False doctrine and rebellion I attribute to ‘sides’ rather than self. I have sought to extract the sliver of sin in the eye of others, while not recognizing the beam of sin in mine own. More and more I have realized a gross activity of self-justification within me.

I am sorry, O my God, for non-prayers such as this: “I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are: Sabbath breakers, divorced and remarried, conditional covenant theologians, or even as these antinomians. I attend worship twice on Sunday, I pay my budget faithfully....” Father, I dare not go on to repeat all the ways my heart has exalted itself and leaned on mine own righteousness. O God, be merciful to me, the Pharisee.

I repent in dust and ashes for the irony of my folly. I have fought for grace while showing no grace. I have attacked the lie by slandered my brother. I have sought my glory under the guise of seeking Thy glory. I have used the law of love to judge others rashly. I have argued for justification by faith alone, while leaning on mine own righteous upholding of truth. I have proudly pointed out the pride of others. I have exalted my perceived humility. I have insisted on everyone else’s need to repent, except my own.

Swift to speak and slow to listen, I have not searched my heart carefully. I am a know-it-all. I have been too stubborn to listen to Thy still small voice, especially when it proceeds from those in whom I perceive weakness. Boastful and bitter contention has been my response instead of a meek and respectful answer. Father, I recognize more and more that blindness is not mainly ‘out there’ as I have often claimed, but in me. I despair in myself.

My tears can never atone and my confession never satisfy, yet I mourn in bitter grief. For looking upon my Savior’s cross, I remember again the grossness of my sin. It was for my pride that He was pierced. It was for my hate that He suffered hell. It was for my cold heart that He endured the cup of Thy consuming ire. And, still, I sin against Thy grace and provoke Thee to Thy face!

Forgive me! Justify me! Yea, Lord, declare again to my forgetful soul that precious gospel that Thou dost remember my pride no more. Assure me that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is His perfect humility imputed to me. According to Thy infinite riches of grace in Jesus, give me confidence by faith alone that Thou art the Lord my righteousness, who justifies even the proud, ungodly sinner that I am.

When Thou dost look within, Thou seest my main problem: a weak faith. There *is* faith, for I am engrafted to Christ Jesus, the living Vine. But my heart’s activity of looking upon Christ alone is awfully intermittent. Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. Turn Thou me, that I might be turned. Renew a right spirit within me. Revive my mind unto a constant consideration of Jesus—Jesus only—and His perfect holiness, from the moment of His conception until His death, counted as mine. Awaken my heart unto a perpetual upward awe of Jesus—Jesus only—and His agonizing suffering of soul and body under Thy wrath, all through His life and especially on the cursed cross, for me. Strike me, chastise me, pierce me with a thorn in the flesh, do whatever it takes, my Savior, that I might cling more desperately to Jesus—Jesus only.

Mortify that mere formal faith. Quickened in me a faith unfeigned. Return me to that “first love” which thy Spirit initially kindled in my soul. Restore unto me the joy of my salvation, and conform me more and more to the image of Jesus Christ—a foot-washing servant.

Jehovah God of abounding love, Thou art slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. Continue in Thy long-suffering, I plead. I

confess that I have fallen often into my besetting pride. Prolonged have been the times of my stiff-necked impenitence. Yet constant has been Thy forbearance and faithfulness toward me. For Jesus sake, I pray, let Thy compassions fail not. Forsake me not. Cleanse me. Uphold me with Thy free spirit, and lead me soon to glory, where I shall be satisfied to behold Thee face to face with perfect humility.

**My tears can never atone and my confession never satisfy, yet I mourn in bitter grief. For looking upon my Savior’s cross, I remember again the grossness of my sin. It was for my pride that He was pierced. It was for my hate that He suffered hell. It was for my cold heart that He endured the cup of Thy consuming ire. And, still, I sin against Thy grace and provoke Thee to Thy face!**



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

Which church was organized in 1932 as the third Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids? Find the answer later in this column.

### Minister activities

Rev. J. Smidstra (First PRC, Holland) received the call to Hudsonville PRC and, after consideration, declined it on February 14. Kalamazoo PRC formed a new trio consisting of: Revs. M. DeBoer (Edgerton, MN), E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI), and J. Laning (Hull, IA). Rev. Guichelaar received this call.

A trio was formed by the consistory of Wingham, Ontario consisting of Rev. N. Langerak, Rev. J. Smidstra, and Rev. S. Regnerus. On February 23, the congregation called Rev. Smidstra. May God supply the needs of these congregations in His time and with His servant.

### Congregational activities

The Council of Byron Center, MI called the congregation to a special evening of praise, gratitude, encouragement, and fellowship in early February. Rev. G. Eriks (pastor of neighboring Unity PRC) agreed to bring a short word from the Scriptures along with songs of praise and prayers. The congregation looked forward to spending some time together as they prepared to hear the reassuring and comforting words that the Lord Jesus Christ continues to rule all things perfectly, even during uncertain and difficult times. The Council expressed gratitude that the Classical Committee assigned Rev. G. Eriks to be Byron Center PRC's moderator during their time being vacant. Rev. Eriks will offer advice when requested and also approve of certain matters.

Byron Center, MI PRC held their annual Mystery Dinner on February 20.

The Council of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA decided to move their morning worship time to 10:00 A.M. beginning Sunday, February 14. Also, a game night for the Young People and Young Adults was held February 19.

From the bulletin of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD: "New Year, new Heritage PRC website! Along with a new look you can now find us at our new personalized domain, [heritageprc.org](http://heritageprc.org)! Feedback may be given to any

member of the Evangelism Committee. Please use the new site to tell your friends who we are and about opportunities to worship with us."

From Randolph, WI PRC: "Please reserve Friday evening, April 16, for a spring presentation hosted by the Evangelism Committee. This year the Evangelism Committee is planning to have an individual from the Trinitarian Bible Society come to speak on the King James Version, and compare it to some popular modern translations such as the NIV and ESV."

Georgetown PRC (Hudsonville, MI) is considering expansion of her building. From her bulletin recently we learn of this through her Council: "The results of the recent survey regarding church expansion vs. a daughter church showed that of the 76 responses there were 61 in favor of expansion of the building and 15 in favor of starting a daughter church. With the need for additional storage space and more classrooms, the Council has appointed a committee to investigate the future building needs of the congregation. We will have more information at a later date."

A group from First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI is again making plans to camp at Wabasis Campground this summer, from Wednesday to Saturday, August 4-7.

Everyone was invited to a presentation by Rev. Daniel Holstege after the evening service at Grace PRC on February 21 on the mission work in the Philippines over the last two years.

### Sister-church activities

Update: Sadly, because of COVID uncertainty, the British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference has been rescheduled from this summer to July 9-16, 2022. Profs. David Engelsma and Brian Huizinga will develop the glorious truth of "Union With Christ" at Castletwellan Castle, Northern Ireland. More details are online (<http://brfconference.weebly.com>).

From Maranatha PRC in the Philippines:

It is with great joy and love to the Lord to submit ourselves to the will of Christ, the King of the Church. First, the Consistory is officially informing our members that the Classis of the PRCP has approved the Emeritation of Rev. L. Trinidad effective February 28, 2021 due to his advancing age. Second, it is with great

sadness to officially announce the disbanding of our church effective March 1, 2021.

The Lord has led us and our congregation [to this point] because of the lack of eligible men to serve in the special offices of our church at this time. As a result, we are transferring our membership to Provident PRC. In March 2021 the members will join the worship services at 10:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. by live-stream broadcast via Facebook due to pandemic, and still under General Community Quarantine. Although our congregation is disbanding, we by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ continue clinging to His precious Word of mercy and kindness. Please continue to pray for us.

### Young people's activities

The Cornerstone PRC Young People will be hosting a co-ed dodgeball tournament on Friday, March 19.

At Randolph, WI the young people held a Little Caesar's pizza, bread, and cookie dough fundraiser to raise funds for the PRYP's convention.

### A glance back in time—October, 1962

Classis West met in Edgerton, MN on September 19. Rev. J.A. Heys presided, and Rev. R.C. Harbach recorded the minutes. The church visitors reported a spirit of peace and harmony in our churches. The only other business before this meeting was the difficult task of assigning classical appointments. Because of the many vacant churches and the realization that the ministers must not be absent from their own pulpits too much, Classis decided to ask Classis East for help in supplying

these vacant churches. The next meeting of Classis will, D.V., be in Doon, Iowa the third Wednesday in March. Signed by Rev. H. Veldman, Stated Clerk.

Report of Classis East held October 3 at Hudsonville, MI PRC: Rev. M. Schipper led in opening devotions. After the credentials were accepted and the Classis declared properly constituted, the Rev. G. Vos presided, while the Rev. Schipper recorded the minutes. The brethren: Prof. H.C. Hoeksema, Rev. G.C. Lubbers, Rev. J.A. Heys and Rev. G. VandenBerg were visitors at this meeting and were given advisory vote. The last two, with Elder L. Lanting of South Holland, were a committee from Classis West seeking aid from our Classis with respect to their classical appointment problem. The committee from Classis West requested that we assist them in drawing up a schedule for classical appointments. Classis decided to help them. The churches of Kalamazoo and Southeast having requested appointments also, the chair appointed a committee to meet with the committee from the West to draw up a schedule. Two of our congregations, namely, Creston and Grand Haven decided to dissolve. With sorrow and reluctance, the Classis approved of this action.

### Trivia answer

The third PRC in the GR area was the Creston, MI PRC. It was organized in 1932 and disbanded in 1962 (see above). Its last pastor was the Rev. Bernard Woudenberg. More trivia next time.

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

## Church profile—Southeast PRC, Wyoming, MI

Not many churches can claim a list of worship service locations like Southeast Protestant Reformed Church (SE PRC). On March 7, 1944, thirty-three families met and organized as Fourth Protestant Reformed Church (Fourth PRC). The meeting was held in a vacated *butcher shop* in Boston Square (a grouping of retail stores) located in south Grand Rapids. The organization of this congregation was occasioned by the rapid growth of First PRC, then over 500 families. Shortly thereafter, the congregation purchased a *two-story gas station* just south of Boston Square on Kalamazoo Ave. After renovation, this location was home for this small group. In 1952, a new church building was erected. During construction, the congregation held worship services

in the *chapel of Grand Rapids Christian High School*. The first worship services were held in the new building on March 26, 1953.

The split of 1953 affected Fourth PRC. Fifty-three families left, 36 remained. Four years later the group that left purchased (with legal guidance) the Kalamazoo property and church name. Part of this transaction was the transfer of ownership of property on Cambridge Avenue to the displaced group. Without a home, the small group decided to hold worship services in the *gym of Adams Christian School*. Plans were made for a church and parsonage on Cambridge. This construction took place in 1959 and the name was changed to Southeast PRC. The congregation survived a contentious split in



1962 with significant loss of families (only 18 families remained). In 2018, the congregation began discussions on the long-term viability at the Cambridge location. A vote was taken, the property was sold, and the final worship service was held on September 2, 2018 (see picture below). While a committee develops long-range plans, the congregation (now 55 families) is meeting in the *Adams Christian School gym* on Byron Center Ave. in Wyoming, MI.

This congregation has endured splits that caused much suffering. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, their church home has been temporary. A constant through its history has been the record of excellent min-

isters: Rev. R. Veldman 1944-1962, Rev. M. Schipper 1962-1978, Rev. C. Haak 1979-1985, Rev. S. Key 1986-1991, Rev. Dale Kuiper 1992-2003, Rev. W. Langerak 2003-2018, Rev. J. Maatman 2020-present. Seven men have served as shepherds to this church. Four came as recent graduates of our Seminary. Four additional men, born of this congregation, served as ministers in our denomination...but not at our church. Three retired ministers were members of SE. One current member is a student in the Seminary.

“And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very

small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Is. 1:8, 9).



## Announcements

### PRC Synod 2021

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2021, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Rev. Ron VanOverloop  
11243 8th Ave. NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49534  
(rvanoverloop22@gmail.com)

### 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.