

The Standard Bearer

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Fulfill ye my joy

Rev. Vernon Ibe

Schism: Doctrinal issues

Prof. Barrett Gritters

The instrumental cause of our salvation

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Tools in the hands of the Master Builder

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Meditation

Rev. Ibe is the pastor of the Berean PRC in the Philippines

Fulfill ye my joy

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Philippians 2:1-4

Paul, even though imprisoned, yet had nothing in mind but the spiritual welfare of these saints of God. It was a *delight* for him in the Lord to hear of their perseverance in the faith despite the pressing circumstance in which God had placed them. He was mindful of how much love they shared together in the gospel of Christ, and that this love continued to grow without measure. They lived so far away from each other, but you can sense the love they had for each other in Christ! For you will find in this letter that Paul's interest was theirs. Likewise, the saints in Philippi made his sufferings their own. Thrice they had sent him monetary support for the gospel ministry: once at Thessalonica (4:16); another time in Corinth (II Cor. 11:9); and this last time at Rome (4:18). But more than that, the saints in Philippi were so concerned about Paul that, upon learning of his imprisonment, they sent Ephaphroditus to care for him. No wonder they were dear to Paul, as he called them his "brethren dearly beloved," and thus "longed for," but especially his "joy and crown" (4:1) in the Lord Jesus Christ! And even though they were under persecution (1:28) and experiencing suffering (1:29-30), it is safe to say, they were doing well spiritually.

Such endearment, however, did not hinder Paul from admonishing them. In this passage, he pursued the theme of unity he had just mentioned "...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (1:27). He expressed the same in chapter 4:2-3, encouraging the two sisters to pursue the unity already cherished in Christ through their reconciliation for His sake. We can see the heart of Paul here, how he

greatly desired to see them living in harmony with each other and thus united in the Lord.

We can understand therefore why Paul entreats them or, as it is in the text, commands them, "*fulfill* ye my joy," that is, make me truly, completely, satisfactorily joyful. All the sufferings Paul endured and the pressing circumstance he was presently in did not prevent him from experiencing joy in the Lord; and now he asks them to complete that joy!

As it were, Paul said, "Brethren dearly beloved, longed for, my joy and my crown, I have no greater joy than to see, hear, and have you all united in the truth and endeavoring to keep that unity for the furtherance of the faith by way of serving each other in humility for Christ's sake! My dearly beloved, can we not for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the King of the church, whose name is above every name, join hands together in pursuit of this unity in the truth selflessly and thus humbly?" Hence, "fulfill ye my joy"!

The cross of Christ must be at the center of this call to unity in the truth. For apart from it, giving up one's own ambition or pride is impossible! Unity in the truth and working together for the truth is hard to achieve if self-interest gets in the way. The way to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" is the way of the cross! Jesus Himself is the ultimate example of such: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (2:5-8).

The Holy Spirit through the cross of Christ will enable each one of us to humble himself before God and before one another! In this way, and only in this way, by the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit worked in and through them, can and may God's people do all things in the church without "selfish ambition or conceit" (ESV) and thus humbly, always esteeming others better than themselves! They seek each other's welfare,

that is, they know that God has given them gifts, skills, talents, and abilities to help each other in pursuit of living in Christ-likeness! They do not serve to impress people or showcase their gifts and thus elevate themselves above the rest of the saints in Christ!

Paul commended Timothy and Epaphroditus before these saints as men of such virtues by the grace of God: “For I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel” (2:20-22). “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier...receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me” (2:25, 29-30).

What is this? It is evident that both men were endowed not only with the gifts necessary for the ministry but, first of all, a regenerated heart, soaked in the gospel of Christ by the Holy Spirit who dwelt in them and thus filled them with the mind of Christ! And through their lives and by their godly examples, we understand that a man whose mind is filled with Christ, lives daily and continually in humility, thinks not how he may be served by others but how he can be of service to others for Christ’s sake.

Likewise, God’s people today must immerse themselves in the gospel of the cross of Christ (2:5)! In and by the power of the cross, soak their mind, heart, and soul in Christ crucified. Let the love of God that flows from Him fill them. Encourage one another with Him. Think, speak, and act according to Him. And do so always with the intent of lifting up one another in the Lord, so that God is glorified!

By and in the grace of God, fulfill ye the joy of the gospel of Christ within us, brethren and sisters in the Lord. Let that be said of you and me: we are men and women whose hearts and minds are filled with Christ, united in the truth and endeavoring to keep that unity for the causes of God’s kingdom by way of serving each other in humility for Jesus’ sake.

This is how we should fulfill our calling at home—husband loving his wife as Christ loves the church; wife submitting to the husband as the church submits to Christ; children honoring their parents and submitting to their authority. This is how parents must see themselves in relation to their calling in raising up their children in the fear of the Lord!

And we are called to do the same outside of our homes. Children at school should befriend not only those who

are popular or those who do well in sports, in music, or perhaps in academics. So also in the workplace.

This is how we live with one another in the church. This is what we want to see and hear and exercise in the Consistory and Council meetings. This is what we want to manifest in our classis and synod. This is what we are praying and asking God for with regard to the leaders in our churches. May God graciously forbid that we have men serving and/or men desiring to serve in the office of pastors, elders, deacons, professors/instructors, and missionaries whose reasoning runs like, “I am the most gifted man in the church and, therefore, I am more qualified than others to serve as an elder in our church.” Or “I know better than they all do so I must be on this committee and that committee.” Or “I have been in the ministry long enough to deserve the chair of theology in the Seminary.” Or “I have the gifts necessary to be a ‘successful’ pastor, therefore I must enter the seminary.” Nay, rather, may they be filled with the mind of Christ, and thus recognize their nothingness before the face of the cross and the grace of God worked in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. And thus may they live seeking not the praise and recognition of men but the glory of the God who placed them to serve according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ, and always for the good of the neighbor!

Lest we think that we can do this on our own and by our own strength (which we do not have), Paul assured them and us that yes, peace and harmony and the unity of brotherhood in the truth of Jesus Christ will prevail until Christ comes again for us! Why? Because this is the will of God for the church in Christ and because “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (2:13). That is why Paul was so confident in the fellowship they shared together in the gospel of Jesus “from the first day until now,” for He “which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (1:5, 6). The church is in the hands of God and thus preserved by Him that she may persevere till the end unto the fulfillment of our joy in the Lord. Our confidence, too, lies not in us but in the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His promises to us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5), that indeed, you and I, may fulfill—by the grace of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us—one another’s *joy*, for God’s glory and for Jesus’ sake. Amen.



Editorial

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

Schism: Doctrinal issues

The two most recent editorials have lamented the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and warned of the continued threat to these churches. Hearts are heavy for brothers and sisters we love, who have not only left the fellowship of the PRC but charged her with the most serious evils. For them the PRC have so apostatized that it would be grossest sin not to come out from them and be separate. Their “Act of Separation” declares the PRC to have lost the marks of the true church (see the editorial of March 15). Now, those who wrote the “Act,” those who signed it, and all who join them are engaged in a determined campaign to justify their departure by further blackening the name of PRC churches, consistories, and officebearers; by this, they seek to draw as many out of her as possible. Thus, a serious threat.

For some time now, readers have asked the *Standard Bearer* to expose the untruths, half-truths, slander, and misrepresentations that they have heard. Their plea is understandable, for some who believe what they read and hear are tempted to join the schism. The PRC must be as bad as they hear. Others, of course, pray that the controversy be ended and that they hear no more about it. Most, however, plead that the magazine ‘set the record straight.’ But it is not the place of this writer to show who has violated the ninth commandment and thus is guilty of slander and schism. Especially in a bond of churches, this is the calling of individuals as they walk the way of Matthew 18, and of consistories as they call public slanderers to repentance. The *Standard Bearer* urges individuals and consistories to honor Jesus Christ, the Truth, by dealing with sin in the biblical way. In that connection, the next editorial (April 15) will address positively and negatively how troubles in the churches ought to be handled.

The present editorial describes what doctrines have been debated in the past five years, some of which have been addressed in the consistories and the broader assemblies. The editorial will attribute present error to no one. Again, that is the place of a consistory, which will charge an errorist with sin and seek to correct in love. Rather, the purpose is to warn of errors that threaten

the churches in order that believers may be kept from them. In the process, the editorial will not develop the doctrines in detail. That has been the place of many articles in these pages by many writers since 2018.¹ The purpose of this editorial is to give a perspective on the doctrines for those who ask, “What is the debate all about?”

Crucified between two thieves

In connection with errors in soteriology (the doctrine of salvation, which our controversy has been about), church fathers have said, using a well-understood analogy, “Christ is always crucified between two thieves.”² It is not the point here to decide whether these ‘thieves’ are to be labeled with the names “Legalism” and “Antinomianism” (historically, this was so), the “Two Ditches,” or the “Left” and the “Right.” For labels are often that—merely labels that, too quickly attached to a person or teaching, are then either misunderstood or just as quickly dismissed.

Rather, our purpose is twofold. First, recognizing that in the past five years some members have been concerned about one error while others about another, we ask, are both fears legitimate in our present circumstances? Second, our purpose is to urge all to recognize that there is *always* more than one threat. The church fathers’ point has been: “Christ is *always* crucified between these two thieves.”

Thus, to those who fear the thief on the left, a warning is necessary: beware the thief on the right. And to those who sound a warning about the thief on the right, a similar warning: beware the thief on the left. And then we also make a plea: When you hear someone warn about the thief on the left, do not assume that he is in the hands of the thief on the right. And when you hear another warn about the thief on the right, do not assume that he has fallen prey to the thief on the left.

Let us speak truth and judge charitably. And then

¹ We will send a list of all these to any reader who asks.

² The saying is attributed to Augustus Toplady, and later James Henley Thornwell.

let *each* of us ask whether we are inclined to miss the one error because we are so fixated on the other. Often, those who are unwilling to see both errors, or admit any blind spot, are at greatest risk.

The thief on the left (taking credit for works)

The thief on the left wants us to take credit for our works. He wants man's works to be a *condition for* or the *basis of* covenant life with God. He teaches that God fellowships with His people, in part, because of their works. He proposes that man's obedience is the *reason* for God's blessings. For him, good works *contribute* to justification. He trusts in his works for his righteousness. He is the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14).

The Reformed faith, opposing this thief, asserts that the source and fountain of salvation is the sovereign, electing grace and mercy of God in Christ—not foreseen works. It asserts that the basis, foundation, and reason for all of man's salvation and righteousness is Christ and Christ alone—not works. And the instrument by which man receives this righteousness is faith and faith alone—not works.

In 2018, the PRC Synod identified and condemned the error on the left. Synod exposed teaching that gave man's works "a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions" (*PRC Acts*, p. 61).

Members of the PRC ought to be thoroughly familiar with the decisions of the 2018 Synod, found in the *Acts* especially on pages 69-76. The editorial immediately following the 2018 Synod impressed upon the readers the seriousness of the error and the importance of the decisions. It urged readers to sit up and take notice, to study and understand the decisions, and to discuss them. Only in that way would we have a good understanding of Christ's saving work for us and in us. This editorial once again urges this upon the readers.

The last editorial (March 15, 2021) recognized that it took some time for the churches to identify and correct the error, and that several meetings of Classis East did not identify and correct the error. This painful history might not be worth resurrecting now since the point here is the doctrine and not the history, except that readers must know that Classis East has *rejected* the errors it earlier failed to condemn. In September 2018, immediately after synod, Classis East *sustained* multiple protests against its previous decisions. In sustaining the protests, classis declared three times that it had erred in significant points (Minutes, 41/43, 42, and 44, II, A). Significantly, classis grounded its decisions in Synod 2018 itself. By this, Classis East expressed agreement with synod's decisions. Then in May 2019

classis rejected of the "Doctrinal Statement" that contained errors similar to those that Synod condemned. Thus, *synod* rejected the "Doctrinal Statement." And in May 2019 *classis* affirmed: "Thus Classis East...also rejected the Doctrinal Statement."

The doctrinal error that was exposed and rejected must not be forgotten, painful as it is to be reminded of it. We must guard against it as we go forward. So it is worth emphasizing what the PRC has always believed, and what she 'underlined' in 2018.

The thief on the left appeared in PRC history prior to 1953 when some wanted to make God's covenant of grace conditional. The thief taught that God established His covenant with every baptized child, but only when the child fulfilled a condition would he enjoy the covenant's benefits. In 1953 the churches put out the thief. More recently, the PRC saw him in the "Federal Vision" error that contends that both faith and the works of faith are conditions for salvation, and that works are a part of man's final justification.

In 2018 the PRC identified this thief in the teaching that a believer's fellowship with God was dependent on his good works, and that more good works brought about better fellowship. The error was also found in the teaching that a believer's assurance of justification was dependent partly on his good works.

Having put out the error, the churches now must guard tenaciously the truth that our enjoyment of fellowship with God is never *because* of our obedience, but always and only *because* of Christ's. We will defend—because Scripture and the Reformed faith call us to do so—that we never enjoy fellowship with God *by means of* obedience, but always and only *by* faith. We will teach and defend that we cannot come to God by our works, but always and only by Christ, who for us fulfilled "*all* righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

And remember that the error on the left is a *thief*. He robs God of His glory (Rom. 4:2). To say that our works contribute to, form the basis of, or reason for, or in any way earn or merit blessings from God, is to rob Jesus Christ of His worth and to rob God of His glory in His Son (Rom. 11:36). *All* theological error robs God of His glory, but especially the error that gives man credit for salvation. Taking the glory from Christ, the thief gives it to man.

The thief on the left must be kept out. He may not be allowed any entrance into our pulpits or catechism rooms, Bible Studies or singspirations, magazines or radio broadcasts, homes or Christian schools. And if he does appear, he and any who allow him access must be dealt with by discipline, for this thief's words will "eat like a canker" (that is, 'spread like gangrene,' as the

Greek has it). They will “overthrow the faith” of our children (II Tim. 2:16, 17).

Beware the thief on the left.

The thief on the right (undermining works)

As the PRC battled the thief on the left, there were also some who were cautioning against the one on the right. They recognize that “Christ is always crucified between *two* thieves” and that we must keep up our defenses against both.

Whereas the thief on the left robs God of His glory by giving credit to man, the thief on the right robs God of His glory in a different way: by denying or minimizing the power of God’s grace in the believer. The thief on the left credits man for *doing*; the thief on the right denies or minimizes either the Christian’s duty or ability to *do*. He denies what Christ works *in* the believer, denies that the believer actually “wills and does” God’s good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). He denies any ‘good’ in the believer’s will or works (Rom. 7:16-18).

Again and again the PRC has joined the older fathers in posting a watch for this other thief. As you focus on one thief, you must not forget the other.

Interestingly, PRC writers have also recognized that the danger of falling prey to the one thief is especially great just *when* they are doing battle with the other. Fleeing the one, they run pell-mell into the arms of the other. Such are the ‘devices’ of the evil one (II Cor. 2:11).

This thief on the right can be recognized by God’s people as readily as the other. The following identifying markers are what PRC ministers have said in her almost 100-year history. This is what all living PRC members have or could have read in PRC writings in their lifetime.

- The thief on the right places such an emphasis on justification that sanctification is sold short. He emphasizes the work of Christ *for* the Christian and minimizes the work of Christ *in and through* the Christian. He rightly refuses credit to man, but he errs as seriously by detracting from the glory of Christ as a *complete* Savior. That is, he preaches

that Jesus redeems, but ignores that Jesus also *renews* His people.

- When the ‘must’ of good works comes up in the Heidelberg Catechism, this thief will not deny that there is a ‘must,’ but claims that it is not a ‘command’ to do good works; it only expresses that all Christians *will* do them. ‘Commands’ in the preaching must imply the ability to obey them, says this thief on the right, or that conditional theology is hiding somewhere near.
- At other times, this thief will have preachers deny that Christians even *do* good works, for the child of God remains spiritually dead. Christians probably cannot even be said to ‘believe.’
- If a sermon works godly sorrow in someone and he approaches the preacher afterwards to ask, “What shall I do?” the preacher, influenced by the thief on the right, reverts quickly into polemic mode against ‘free will,’ warns that no one can do anything toward his salvation, but never gets around to answering the good question with, “Repent, believe, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and save yourself from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:37-40).
- And if a good preacher resists this thief’s influence and finally does call the people of God to repentance and faith, the thief on the right convinces the congregation that the preacher is probably Pelagian or Arminian because he is emphasizing ‘works.’
- In the end, when this thief has had his way with the preacher, the preacher is convinced he should never tell people what to do. If he does, says this thief, the preacher is preaching ‘conditions.’ There are no ‘demands’ and ‘obligations’ in the covenant.

Perhaps the reader recognizes one of these thieves better than the other. For the well-being of the true church of Christ, we must familiarize ourselves with both. For Christ is always crucified between two thieves. Both thieves rob God of His glory in His work of saving His people. Let *all* praise and glory be given to God.

Letters*

Dear Rev. Koole,
After reading the five installments of your editorial series *Herman Witsius: Still Relevant*, I still have questions on statements you make, which are difficult for me to

reconcile with my understanding of the Christian life. In the third installment, you state,

...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....

* Editors’ Note: This letter of Mr. Vermeer was inadvertently omitted from the April 1 issue. Rev. Koole is responding to both Mr. Vermeer’s original letter and this letter.

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

Here you suggest 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?

The question of our good works is not one of tedium of words (as suggested in the fourth installment) but rather of what perspective we will have toward our good works. We know and understand that good works are a necessary part of the Christian life. Since they arise out of the new man of Christ we know that they are good in principle, and in their source they give glory to God. However, as these works are performed through our sinful flesh, they become (in their completed form) no better than filthy rags (Is. 64). Because of this, they are punishable (Belgic Confession, Art. 24) and we must repent even for the sinfulness of our good works. This is not dismissing good works as unnecessary, but rather having the perspective that our completed works can achieve us only punishment. However, your editorial states that living in good works provides some “benefit to one’s relationship with God.” How can we simultaneously have the perspective that our polluted good works provide a “benefit to one’s relationship to God,” and at the same time renounce those polluted works? Ought we to stop repenting of our defiled good works? Do we say, “I am not going to wear my filthy rags to the wedding, but I will still admire them”?

Your editorials express concern that believers see 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 second installment. 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?

Yours in Christ,

Mike Vermeer, Peace PRC

Witsius on sanctification (2)

With this response we conclude our answer to Brother Mike Vermeer’s letter (cf. March 15, 2021 *SB*).

We concluded last issue with the statement, “As well, we take note that Article 24 [of the Belgic Confession] states, ‘God rewards our good works.’ And ‘rewards’ implies that the labors of sinner-saints are of benefit to self, to others, and to one’s relationship to our heavenly Father Himself.”

The question arises: Is walking in godliness and in the way of charity for others of benefit to our relationship to God, that is, to its conscious intimacy and fellowship? Can this be, seeing that even our best works done in love for God’s name and the brother are imperfect and defiled?

We answer, Yes.

It is not for nothing that Scripture declares that the *greatest* of the three (faith, hope, and charity) is charity—love and its labors. Without it, one’s claim for faith means nothing (cf. I John 4:11, 12 and 20, 21).

We are called to walk in the ways of love and godliness as God’s covenant friends. We understand full well that when a believer fails to do that, being in Christ he does not forfeit his *right* to the covenant and God’s love with the inheritance. God is faithful and His love for His wayward children remains. But when one walks foolishly in sin, something *is forfeited*! What is forfeited, for a time, is conscious closeness to God, that is, hearing the words of His approval, having the joy of one’s salvation, and a peace with Him (cf. James 4:8). God is sorely displeased with such a child and friend, and His Spirit makes that known, however much a foolish believer may for a time try to suppress it.

One may be in the covenant, a covenant child, but for all that, not be close to God in any kind of conscious fellowship. Read Canons V, Article 5 as it speaks of those who “sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor for a time, until [!] on their returning into the right way of serious repentance....”

What was true of Samson in the bosom of Delilah? He was not close to God. Nor was Lot in Sodom. Both were thinking of one thing at that point in their lives—their own carnal satisfaction. Pleasing God was not in their thoughts, believers though they were. God says to such, “You are *far* from Me.” Though, due to God’s covenant mercy, not *so far* that He could not hear their cry in distress and of repentance. This is plain from Samson’s history, as he ground grain like a blind ox. There, brought to his senses, he repented, crying out to God, and obtained victory over his sin within and his enemies without.

Not by willfully departing from God’s ways, but

walking the ways of God's good commandments is the way in which we experience consciously the joys and benefits of that covenant relationship. Please take the time to read I John 2:3-5 and how it is that we "know that we are in him."

This is in accordance with decisions of Synod 2019, *as it explained the decisions of Synod 2018*). In its decision not to sustain a protestant, Synod 2019¹ quoted H. Hoeksema. "And in the way of keeping his word we taste his blessed fellowship," lifted from *Communion with God* (p. 15).²

Hoeksema, quoting the Psalms, speaks of "tasting his blessed fellowship." And tasting is a very powerful internal experience. One does not 'taste' God's fatherly fellowship and approval while in the bosom of some "Delilah" of sin, but rather "in the way of keeping" God's words, as did chaste Joseph.

You ask, somewhat rhetorically, "Do we say, 'I am not going to wear my filthy rags to the wedding, but I will still admire them?'"

I answer: the believer admiring his own imperfect labors? No, not at all. Rather, this:

First, when it comes to the marriage feast of the Bridegroom, we will base our right of entry and presence upon the righteousness of One alone, namely, that of the Great Bridegroom.

And yet take note, even in heaven the works and labors of the saints are not forgotten or dismissed. Consider Revelation 14:13 as it speaks of those who die in the Lord, "...that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them."

To be sure, such faithful labors, even unto martyrdom, do not give the righteous the right of entry to heaven and of remaining there, but they are remembered nonetheless. A Scripture passage such as this must not, out of fear of doctrinal error and abuse, be dismissed or somehow explained away. We must not, we may not, pretend to be wiser than the Holy Spirit when it comes to His encouraging believers unto living as Christians in the face of great difficulties.

Second, when it comes to the value (utility) of the works and labors of the godly, it has nothing to do with admiring one's own works. What it has to do with is the testimony of the Spirit to His saints that, as they labor for the kingdom, be it imperfectly, they must not think that their labors are forgotten or for naught. Consider the God-fearing mother who, coming to the end of the

day in which she has "suffered her little ones to come to Jesus," reviews her labors and sees all her imperfections of impatience and efforts. Worn down, she is ready to despair.

Should she? Why not?

Because the Spirit assures her that He will use those imperfect labors (done in love for her Lord) for the salvation of her home. That's Hebrews 6:10 in its entirety: "For he is not unrighteous to forget your works and labour which you have done in his name *as you have ministered to [served] the saints*" (which surely includes Christ's little ones).

Are these works and labors to be discounted and thrown on the dung heap with the deeds of the wicked? Naught but filth and defiled? God be thanked, the Lord Jesus of the mothers of Israel does not view them that way. He even declares that He would be "unrighteous" if He would forget and dismiss them. A staggering thought!

And some want to belittle the value of those labors? I am thankful we are under the Lord's mercy and not many a man's these days. It is the encouragement needed, as many mothers of Israel well know. They belong to and serve a Lord Christ of wonderful, rewarding grace.

How the Lord Christ Himself values the labors of His saints when they begin to think all their labors (works and deeds) are in vain is precisely what they need to hear at times. Luther himself and Calvin surely needed to hear this, as did John Huss, rotting in prison awaiting martyrdom. Else why labor on? The wicked triumph. What can our imperfect labors and confession accomplish after all? This: Christ uses weak and imperfect means to accomplish His purposes! God be thanked! Your labors, be they ever so imperfect, are not in vain in the Lord.

Why do we insist on this? Is it, as some are saying, because we want to put, if not all the emphasis on good works, still an undue emphasis on them, thus displacing the primacy of faith (and thereby of Christ and salvation all of grace) with works?

Not at all.

Rather, our concern is that there develops such a fear of the errors that historically have arisen about the place and importance of good works in the life and salvation of the believers, that an overreaction results when their value and importance is underscored. As a result, every time a preacher stresses their importance in the life of the believer ("This is how you *must* live, and why you *must* do good works [live godly] if you will walk closely with God and be a proper witness to the Christian faith"), either suspicions arise about the orthodoxy of the exhortations or the preacher is charged with replacing grace with works. The sentiment, "Preacher, don't

¹ Cf. PRC *Acts of Synod*, Art. 85, p. 67.

² The collection of *SB* meditations by HH from which the quotation comes, was published by Reformed Free Publishing Association in 2011.

tell us how to live, just tell us what Christ has done for us” begins to rule.

As if preaching how the Christian is to live and placing before the believer the benefits of so doing are not God-glorifying. As if such is preaching “salvation by works, not by grace.” As a result, men are hesitant to preach exhortations unto godliness with their warnings and their promises (cf. the 5th commandment). And the freedom and power of preaching “repentance unto godliness” suffers.

And when one does preach a text that emphasizes the calling to the godly, upright life (which texts abound, from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount through the epistles of James, Peter, and John), one has to so circumscribe the exhortations and warnings with explaining what one is *not* implying about merit and conditions, and why this does *not* minimize salvation all of grace, that the sharpness of the exhortations themselves is lost. And the members go home discussing whether or not what they heard really passed the test of complete orthodoxy, and if satisfied, leave it there. And that becomes the preacher’s great burden in preaching, proving his orthodoxy over and over again.

As a result, a ‘tedious,’ cautious preaching becomes the rule, instead of a bold word that sends a father home saying, “Beloved family, did you hear that? We must mend our lives in this area or that. A double-mindedness is showing itself in our lives, rather than ‘the single eye.’” Or mother saying to the children, “You wonder why we place all these restrictions on your life and instead insist on this or that? What we just heard this evening is why!”

The truth is that biblical preaching is and must be filled with incentives unto godliness. To be sure, the love of God for His own stands primary and is to be stressed. But in Scripture that does not stand alone. And when the preaching points believers to these other incentives, it is not to be condemned as promoting work-righteousness and robbing God of His glory.

Scripture is plain, God will have His children exhorted to a sanctified walk and then encouraged. And God will have His children encouraged by assuring them that walking as becometh saints will carry spiritual benefits in this life and even reach unto the life to come.

Finally, in response to your concluding statement, “Why should we add to this [that which]...draws away from (and even muffles?) the Gospel call to repent and renounce our good works?”

A most interesting and revealing statement. One could well take that statement and write a whole article on it. “Renounce our good works.” In every sense? And required to do so by the call of the gospel?

If we were speaking simply of justification and the right to God’s approval and forgiveness, that would be true. But we are not. We are dealing with the entire life of the believer in the covenant of God as His friend. And in that life ‘works’ (that is, how a child of God lives!) have an important place. This, I fear, some have lost sight of in this controversy. How important? Ask any elder called to “guard” the Lord’s “communion” table and judge who may rightly claim to be a “worthy partaker” of that table of fellowship with God (cf. “Form for the Lord’s Supper”). What is required is not just declaring, “I am right with God,” but whether one is resolved to *walking* in a worthy manner!

It is plain, there is a sense in which how one is living ties in with one’s very salvation, that is, one’s true conversion. The life of godliness is nothing less than the evidence of the Holy Spirit (Christ’s Spirit!) and what He, by means of the preaching, labors to bring forth. We must not minimize these evidences of godliness and love lest we insult the Holy Spirit Himself and, thereby Christ Himself.

Why an insult to Christ?

Because Christ died exactly in order to obtain the right to impart His Holy Spirit and sanctify a people unto living as children of God again. In other words, a people walking as the friends of God, be that walk ever so imperfect and fraught with stumbles and falls. And that walk, that life, that labor for good, is to show itself *in this life*. Are we now to minimize what the Holy Spirit by grace and means produces in us? God forbid! I will have no part of it. Neither ought any PR believer.

So, “renounce our good works” in every sense, my sincere brother? As if what the believer has done in Christ’s name for His brethren is to be considered evil? Wicked? Essentially no different than that of the enemies of the gospel?

Absolutely not!

Not, let us renounce our imperfect labors done in Christ’s name. Rather, let us sanctify them by praying, “Heavenly Father, we confess the imperfections of our good works (labors). We pray, however, that they be cleansed by the blood of Christ and that Thou wilt *use our weak and imperfect efforts* to the advance of His kingdom and to the benefit of the beloved body of Christ.”

Are we to renounce what Christ Himself has enabled one to do for His kingdom cause? As if that is piety?

Please, reconsider.

Paul did not. Consider his parting declaration to his beloved Timothy and the saints at Ephesus: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a

crown of righteousness...” (I Tim. 4:7, 8). The apostle, if he was truly a believer, was to renounce his own faithful labors? The gospel required this of him? Not at all. He would be renouncing what the Spirit of his beloved Lord had enabled him to do.

And, notice as well, the Spirit encouraged Paul to press on by holding before him what would crown his labors on behalf of his Lord and Savior, namely, perfect righteousness and eternal life. Such served as incentive.

Or, your pastor preaches an orthodox, edifying sermon (a good work). What does he say in his concluding prayer? “Lord God, knowing I was not perfect as I preached this sermon, I denounce it as wicked and no good. It is of no value, and let the congregation view it that way as well.”

Of course not.

Rather, “Lord, we have declared Thy word *in weakness and imperfection*. Yet, in Thy mercy use it to the up-building of this congregation and the glory of Thy name.”

And the Lord does. And when at last such an one enters glory, Christ says, “Well done thou good and faithful servant!” Such a thought serves as strong incentive to press on in one’s labors with greater consistency. It does me. I trust it does you too. Because if Christ does not say that, He will be saying “I never knew you! Depart into the abyss, far from Me.” Words worse than death itself.

Or, consider the good Samaritan and the mercy he showed to one he did not even know. Love for the neighbor mixed with works of mercy. To be denounced and renounced? No! It was not by Christ, and there-

fore must not be by us either. Rather, an example for us, knowing such is Christ-like and pleases our heavenly Father. When we show such charity, do we do it perfectly? Of course not. But it is still Christ-like behavior and not to be renounced. To be sure, in need of cleansing (for which we pray), but not renounced.

In conclusion, I recommend to you and all our readers some reading.

First, the 2019 PRC *Acts of Synod*, Article 85 (pp. 63-67), synod’s response to an appeal dealing with doctrinal phrases challenged. Synod did not sustain the protestant’s objections but rejected them and underscored the proper interpretation of Synod 2018.

Second, read the 2020 PRC *Acts of Synod*, Articles 51, 52 (pp. 72-88), synod’s response to a protestant’s objection to phrases found in three sermons, synod once again not sustaining the appellant’s objections.

And thirdly, the article “John Calvin and the Reward of Grace,” by Prof. B. Huizinga, found in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, April 2020.

All are helpful in arriving at a proper understanding of the vital truth of sanctification and the blessings that the God of the covenant attaches to His covenant friends’ obedience, which blessings serve as incentives. Because by our works and labor we have made ourselves worthy and now merit something? Absolutely not. But graciously, for Christ’s sake, God grants it to be so. So merciful in Christ is our covenantal Father to His imperfect children.

God be thanked.

Cordially in Christ,
Rev. Kenneth Koole



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

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The refreshment of Onesiphorus

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

II Timothy 1:16-17

A plunge into the clear water of Lake Michigan on a hot, summer day. A cold glass of lemonade after working in the garden. A long, hot shower after a

grueling day of work. Refreshment. You may relate to these illustrations, or ones similar, when you think of what brings you refreshment. We experience this in many different ways, but *spiritual* refreshment is the idea most frequently expressed in Scripture (Is. 28:12; Rom. 15:32; I Cor. 16:18; Phile. 1:7). Perhaps for most believers, rest on the Sabbath is what comes to mind as one is refreshed by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word (Ex. 31:17; I Cor. 2:4).

For the apostle Paul, refreshment was brought to him by Onesiphorus, and the timing must not be overlooked. Onesiphorus, a man whose name is mentioned only twice in the Bible, is referenced both times in II Timothy (1:16 and 4:19). Onesiphorus was most likely from the city of Ephesus, and was converted by Paul in this same city during his third missionary journey (II Tim. 1:18; Acts 19:10). Onesiphorus' name means "bringing profit," and he certainly lived up to it. Paul's second letter to Timothy, Paul's protégé laboring in Ephesus, was written under dire circumstances, for Paul was facing certain execution in Rome (II Tim. 4:6-8).

In order to understand the significance of the spiritual refreshment brought by Onesiphorus, it is important to understand what Paul was experiencing at this time. Paul experienced two Roman imprisonments: the first took place during the years A.D. 60-62, when he wrote four epistles; the second occurred shortly before his death in A.D. 67, when he wrote II Timothy. Luke's narrative of the work of the apostles, missionary journeys, and the life of Paul in the book of Acts ends with Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Because Paul had been charged with heresy by the Jews in Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third missionary journey, he was sent to Rome as a prisoner, but allowed to have his own rented house and relative freedom (Acts 28:30-31). Here he was able to receive visitors, continue his ministry, and write to different church communities (Phil. 1:13; Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:10; Phile. 1:1). In addition, because Paul had appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen, he was very optimistic of being released (Phil. 1:25; 2:23-24).

If there were an Acts 29, it would begin to tell the rest of the story, culminating in a second imprisonment in Rome. In contrast to the first Roman imprisonment, however, Paul's second Roman imprisonment was very different than his house arrest. Now Paul is being held in chains in a cold, dark dungeon, potentially knee deep in Roman sewage at times. It is no wonder that in II Timothy 4:13 he asked for the cloak that he left in Troas. This same verse gives a clue that Troas may have been where Emperor Nero arrested him, for in addition to needing his cloak, he asks for the books and parchments that had been left behind. This arrest shows that Nero now associates Paul with the Christian movement that was being seen as a threat to the polytheism of the Romans. This second trip to Rome brings Paul as a treasonous criminal, with his optimism for release shattered.

By the grace of God, Onesiphorus wanted to associate himself with such a criminal. We remember Peter's bold statement that he would never deny his Lord; yet, when pressed by the fear of man, he denied Jesus three times on the same night. This same Peter was

given the name "rock," whose confession and epistles centered on Christ would form the apostolic foundation of the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20). In contrast to Peter, we have lowly Onesiphorus, a man with only a passing reference in the New Testament; yet, he *sought Paul out and found him* (II Tim. 4:17). He searched for the apostle when the attitude of the Roman Empire towards Christianity was shifting. The same emperor who had released Paul from prison five years previous had arrested him, now charging him with a crime that required execution. This attitude of Rome towards Christianity led to one of the most severe persecutions of Christians in human history (A.D. 64-68), all orchestrated by Nero: Christians being thrown into the Roman coliseum for hungry lions; Christians sewn into animal skins, impaled, and set on fire to serve as nightly illumination while Nero walked his gardens. Under *those* circumstances, Onesiphorus braved the spiritual climate of Rome to seek Paul out. And he found him. There. In Rome.

And what did Onesiphorus do when he found Paul? He refreshed him. *Often*. He continually brought to Paul a level of spiritual encouragement that he needed as he faced the reality of death. His words were like a cool, mountain stream, cascading down the mountainside, providing refreshment to the deer who pants after those water brooks (Ps. 42:1). This refreshment that Onesiphorus brought was powerful, even exhilarating, reviving the soul of the apostle. Make no mistake. He needed it, for Paul was virtually alone at this time (II Tim. 4:11). His dungeon dwelling was not being used as punishment; rather, it was being used while he awaited trial and execution. He had Jehovah God by his side in that dungeon, of course, but according to His perfect plan, God used Onesiphorus to refresh Paul by giving him a calm facing of death and the increased certainty of experiencing heavenly communion with his Lord Jesus Christ.

Also worth noting from II Timothy 1:16 was that Onesiphorus was not ashamed to be by Paul's side. This was Peter's aforementioned sin of disassociation, when the Man he so loved and had followed for over three years was being rejected by the ungodly Jews, ready to be offered on the cross. For Paul, spending his final days in a dungeon, the same holds true as men began distancing themselves from him, men like Demas who were beginning to sense the spiritual climate change (II Tim. 4:10). What courage then for Onesiphorus to carry out this mission, traveling to Rome to that cold, dark dungeon! How significant is Onesiphorus' boldness in seeking out Paul and not being ashamed of his circumstances! He was willing to stand by the side of this faithful messenger to the Gentiles, the one who

himself was “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). Onesiphorus was *unashamed* of the gospel that Paul had so faithfully preached; therefore, he was *unashamed* of Paul’s chain, for it was that very same powerful *gospel* that had led to Paul’s chain.

Paul’s revealing of the spiritual refreshment that Onesiphorus brought to him shows us something about Paul, too. What we see in Paul in the fourth chapter of II Timothy is a man full of reflection. Read through this chapter and you will find many names—acquaintances, companions, and close friends. Was Paul thinking of his IRA? His bank account? Certainly not. His thoughts were full of remembrances of those he loved, those who supported him in the gospel ministry, and those who were used by God to spread the gospel. This same message took such strong root that it could not be stamped out by even the harshest persecutions from the Neros of the world. Clearly and beautifully, Onesiphorus and his refreshment were one of those fond remembrances of Paul, as he desired Timothy to bring greetings to Onesiphorus’ household (II Tim. 4:19). We do not know the state of Onesiphorus at this time; perhaps he had died for the cause of the gospel, and had never returned to his native Ephesus. Paul speaks of Onesiphorus in the past tense, so this very well may have been the case. If so, he became a martyr for Christ indeed.

When men like Onesiphorus and Paul died for the sake of the gospel, they were like branches being clipped off the trunk of a large oak tree. The tree will still stand, because God preserves through the root system He has established in Christ. When the emperors, kings, and presidents of the world persecute that glorious church by cutting away some branches, the church will stand secure because she has a God who has preserved her through all of history, never forsaking her. God knew exactly when to change Rome’s attitude towards Christianity; namely, when the ‘shoots’ of His church of the New Testament age were well established as He worked through Paul to establish church communities on his missionary journeys. Nero foolishly thought he was taking down the whole tree, but God knew otherwise.

His timing in working through the rulers of this world is always perfect, and His timing in sending Onesiphorus to Paul in Rome was also perfect.

Paul’s recognition of Onesiphorus’ refreshment reveals that Paul understood his place in the church. He was a leader, yet a servant. He brought the Word in its power, yet was not so high and lofty in his position as an apostle that he was beyond the scope of being refreshed by others. Paul knew his gifts and abilities to bring comfort to those in the early church; yet, he also recognized that refreshment was a two-way street, and he, too, needed encouragement as he carried out his ministry (Rom. 15:32, I Cor. 16:18; Phile. 1:20). Paul saw

in Onesiphorus a man who was bold, brave, and willing to put his life on the line to bring cool refreshment to a brother in need.

As was mentioned, Paul was refreshed by Onesiphorus during his final days, but knew exactly where he was going after death. He did not need Onesiphorus to tell him about heaven. He did not need Onesiphorus to give him hope and comfort as if he was in a state of doubt and confusion. He did not need Onesiphorus to remind him that he would soon hear from his Lord, “Well done,

thou good and faithful servant.” The child of God can easily understand this. When visitors are received at the funeral home for a dear loved one who has gone on to glory, the bereaved know where their loved ones are when they die in Jesus Christ. Yet, many of us can testify that the expressions of sympathy are sweet refreshment, lifting the spirits of those that mourn as they experience the love of the communion of the saints. God uses *our* comfort and prayers to strengthen our fellow believers in God’s all-sufficient grace.

Do you want to be an Onesiphorus to others? Do you want to be a Christian full of this cool, spiritual refreshment for those around you? Remember the dear saint Onesiphorus, who now sits at the feet of his Lord, experiencing the *ultimate* refreshment as described in Peter’s sermon in Acts 3:19, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” *That* is the refreshment for which we long.

Paul’s recognition of Onesiphorus’ refreshment reveals that Paul understood his place in the church. He was a leader, yet a servant. He brought the Word in its power, yet was not so high and lofty in his position as an apostle that he was beyond the scope of being refreshed by others. Paul knew his gifts and abilities to bring comfort to those in the early church; yet, he also recognized that refreshment was a two-way street, and he, too, needed encouragement as he carried out his ministry.



I believe

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The instrumental cause of our salvation (4)

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2021, p. 236.

Review

All our salvation is stored up in Jesus Christ. And all of it—justification, sanctification, blessings, fellowship, heaven—comes to us through the lone instrument of faith. Faith is the pipeline that unites us to Christ, bringing to us all the blessings Christ has earned for us. Scripture, nonetheless, speaks of blessings that regularly come to us through that instrument of faith *after* certain God-worked obediences we perform. This is our experience as well. Because it is, it brings the question to mind, What is the relation between those activities and the blessings that come? Especially does this question arise when we read biblical passages that seem to make obedience a “a reason for divine benefits.”¹ Last time we saw how Calvin explained this, namely, that “not the cause but the order of sequence,” is being established by such texts.

How Hoeksema described this order

Herman Hoeksema taught us to explain this order of sequence between a God-worked activity in us and certain blessings with the phrase *in the way of*. He proposed this in opposition to the explanation that used the term and concept *condition*. This term had been used in the past by Reformed writers to explain this connection between good works and blessings in a Reformed fashion. But the term more and more became a vehicle to carry an errant view of this connection. The term was used by the Arminians to teach that *our* work of faith (not God’s work in us) is what allows God to give us salvation. Teaching, then, that it was not God’s grace but man’s work that made the difference. The Reformed rejected Arminian theology at the Synod of Dordt, also rejecting the Arminian notion of conditions. For this reason, the term was not used by Reformed writers as often any longer.²

In Hoeksema’s day, however, the term condition was used by William Heyns to support an errant view of the covenant, a view to which the term commended itself very easily. Heyns said God’s grace and promise are given to all the baptized children of the church. Some grow up and remain in that covenant, others do not. What differentiated those who remain in that covenant from those who fall away was neither the grace nor the promise, both of which were common to all, but the *use* of that grace to believe the promise and to live according to it. *Man* made the difference. Again, this made the connection between our activity and God’s blessing the work of man. It was man who allowed God to carry on with His saving intentions—a true condition. Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder adopted a similar form of this errant view of the covenant, using the same term to explain the relation between our activity and the blessings of the covenant.

These views of the covenant were, and are, essentially Arminian. Because grace and promise are given to more than the elect, these views did not promote God’s grace or promise, but man’s work with that grace or promise as the power that made the difference. These views made something we do the gate that could prevent or allow God’s continued work. It was clear, Hoeksema said, “the term *condition* or *faith as a condition* is an Arminian term. We should not even attempt to use it in a sound sense.... There is absolutely no need for it in Reformed terminology.”³

Hoeksema proposed “that instead of the Pelagian term ‘condition’ we use the term ‘in the way of.’”⁴ “We are not chosen, and therefore we are not saved, on condition of faith, or of the obedience of faith; but we are chosen *to*

freely of ‘the conditions’ of the covenant. But after the nature of the covenant of grace had been more carefully considered and had to be defended against Catholics, Lutherans, and Remonstrants, many of them took exception to the term and avoided it.” *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 229.

3 Herman Hoeksema, “As to conditions (3),” *Standard Bearer*, v. 26, no. 4 (Nov. 15, 1949).

4 Herman Hoeksema, “As to conditions (5),” *Standard Bearer*, v. 26, no. 6 (Dec. 15, 1949).

1 John Calvin, (quoted in previous article). The quotation is from his *Institutes* 3.14.21 (Battles edition, 1960), 787. The whole heading reads, “Sense in which good works are sometimes spoken of as a reason for divine benefits.”

2 So Herman Bavinck: “In the beginning, Reformed theologians spoke

faith, and *to* the obedience of faith, and therefore, we are saved through the *instrument* of faith, and *in the way of* obedience. That and that only is Reformed language.”⁵ This would become the way in which the PRC would explain the order of sequence between a God-worked obedience in us and certain blessings that follow.

Short history of “in the way of”

Hoeksema was correct that “in the way of” is Reformed language. It is Reformed language theologically, as I will explain in a moment. But it is also Reformed language historically. Synod 2019 pointed this out when a protest called Synod to lead the churches to abandon the phrase “in the way of.” Synod pointed out that Calvin himself had used this language at times to describe the order of procedure between a God-worked obedience in us and His blessing that follows. For example, in the *Institutes*, shortly after the section we have been referencing, Calvin says, “Thus also it will be nothing amiss if we regard *holiness of life to be the way*, not indeed that gives access to the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom, but by which those chosen by their God are led to its disclosure. For it is God’s good pleasure to glorify those whom he has sanctified (Rom. 8:30).”⁶ Commenting on I Timothy 2:15, which speaks of the godly woman saved in child bearing, Calvin says, “The Apostle *does not argue here about the cause* of salvation, and therefore we cannot and must not infer from these words what works deserve; but they only shew *in what way* God conducts us to [final] salvation, to which he has appointed us through his grace.”⁷

Our Reformed fathers used this language of “in the way of” to describe our obedience in the Canons of Dordt: “He hath chosen us from eternity...to salvation and *the way of salvation*, which He hath ordained that we should walk therein.”⁸ And again, connecting our life of obedience to God’s blessing: “Neither does renewed confidence of persevering produce licentiousness, or disregard to piety in those who are recovering from backsliding; but it renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue *in the way of* the Lord, which he hath ordained that they *who walk therein* may maintain an assurance of persevering.”⁹

The phrase has been used in the Reformed tradition in part because it is used in Scripture, especially in the book of Proverbs. For example, Proverbs 12:28, “*In the way of*

righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.” And again, Proverbs 16:31, “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found *in the way of* righteousness.”¹⁰

The theology of the phrase

There are at least four reasons why use of the phrase “in the way of” is theologically important to explain the connection between a God-worked activity in us and some blessing that God promises us and provides for us.

First of all, it highlights God’s sovereignty. Compare the phrase *in the way of* to the term *condition* and this point will be clear. No matter how one tries, it is not possible to make God in His sovereignty the focus with the use of the term *condition*. The best attempt one can make is to say something like this: “God grants us blessings on condition of our obedience.” Besides being wrong theologically, it forces the focus away from God to man. This is why the term *condition* naturally lends itself to a view of the covenant according to which God’s grace and promise are not the deciding factor. *In the way of*, however, allows for God’s sovereignty to be the focus. One can say, “God grants us blessings in the way of working in us a life of obedience.” One is able with this phrase to keep the focus on the sovereign God conferring salvation upon His elect.

Second, using this phrase, one is also able to maintain man’s responsibility.¹¹ One can say, “God grants us this blessing *in the way of* our God-worked obedience.” This does not make man’s obedience a gate that prevents or allows God to carry on with His work but, rather, it communicates the way God confers the work of Christ upon us, while maintaining the truth that the obedience is truly our obedience that He works in us.

Third, the phrase keeps our obedience distinct from faith as instrument. We have been concerning ourselves with the instrumental cause of salvation in these articles. That instrument is faith alone. And we are determined to keep faith the only instrument. Though the phrase *in the way of* is insufficient by itself to maintain this critical truth if the theology is not understood, it does help us to maintain the distinction between faith and faith’s works when it comes to the instrument of salvation. Synod 2018 followed Hoeksema by stating, “we experience covenant fellowship with God through faith (instrument), on the basis of what Christ has done (ground), and in the way of our obedience (way of conduct or manner of living).” If Christ’s work is

5 Hoeksema, “As to Conditions (3).”

6 *Institutes*, 3.18.4, p. 825. Emphasis added.

7 *Commentary on I Timothy* (Baker edition, 1984), 71. Emphasis added. For other examples see also, *Institutes*, 2.8.42. and 3.3.25.

8 Head I, Art. 8. Emphasis added.

9 Head V, Art. 13. Both quoted by Synod 2019. Cf. *Acts of Synod* 2019, p. 66.

10 Both quoted by Synod 2019. Cf. *Acts*, 66.

11 Hoeksema pointed this out in his article “As to Conditions (5).” “This term is capable of maintaining both: the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation, and the responsibility of man.”

the *ground*, and faith is the sole *instrument*, and our obedience is something else, namely, *the manner of life* in that fellowship, then our obedience cannot be the instrument along with faith. And since faith alone is the instrument by which we have access to this fellowship, our obedience cannot be granting us access to it.¹²

Fourth, the phrase maintains the truth that this obedience is *necessary*. Again, obedience does not *grant* me the blessing as ground or instrument. Good works do not *grant* me the blessing of heaven, though heaven for most of us comes after a life of good works. Yet, those works are necessary in that they belong to the pathway on which God takes us to glory.¹³ The same is true of any other blessing God bestows on us in the future. The obedience does not grant me the blessing. But it is the necessary *way*. And, therefore, Scripture often points directly to obedience or disobedience and urges, “in this way of obedience you will know this; in this way of disobedience you will *not* know this.”

Something can be necessary without being a ground or instrumental cause or condition to something else. Luther once explained the believer’s obedience as necessary but not a cause or instrument by pointing to the necessity of death for resurrection. Death is absolutely necessary for the resurrection, but it is not the *cause* of the resurrection in any sense. It is the way along which God brings us to resurrection. So too, our life of obedience. It is not the cause, but it is necessary. The preaching must warn against obedience as ground or condition

or instrument to any blessing of salvation. The preaching must also call God’s people to gratitude-driven resolve to walk in the right way of obedience in response to the gospel. It must be able to say (without fear) that is to be expected in this way, and _____ is to be expected in rebellion against this way; therefore, walk in *this way*! The phrase *in the way of* allows us to avoid the error of making obedience a ground or instrument or condition, while also maintaining the clear exhortations and warnings of Scripture in our preaching.

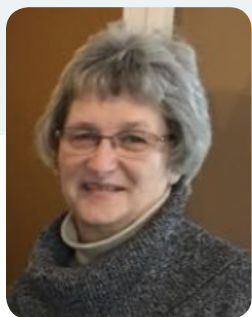
Past, present, and future

We are blessed of God. We were blessed of God before we were given faith. We are blessed of God before we perform any work of obedience. Yet, God enters into a relationship with us that moves through time and develops. There are blessings that He grants, or grants a richer measure of, after some God-worked obedience, and connects the obedience to the blessing this way. Those blessings only come through the instrument of faith! But because some come through that instrument after our obedience, Scripture calls us to that obedience and tells us we will know that blessing in that way.

This is how the PRC has maintained what Calvin called the “order of procedure” with regard to the life of obedience and blessings of God, without compromising the unconditional covenant. Recently, we did compromise, by making the way of grateful obedience take on the role of the instrumental cause, a role that is reserved for faith apart from its fruits. God corrected us in the way of good church polity. God also kept us from the error of over-correction in the way of good church polity. May God unite us in the way of humility.

12 Synod 2019 made this point. Cf. *Acts 2019*, p. 67.

13 Save for the exceptions, such as covenant children who die in infancy.



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Tools in the hand of the Master Builder (2)

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2021, p. 156.

In our previous consideration of parents being tools in the hand of the Master Builder, we looked at the knowledge we have and the comfort we derive from knowing that it is God who builds our covenant homes and families. He establishes His covenant with His chosen people and peculiar treasure, and is pleased to continue His covenant in the line of continued generations with believers and their seed.

We also acknowledged and were humbled by the fact that the divine Builder is pleased to employ the use of *parental tools* in His work of establishing these Christian homes and families. In response to the God-given calling to raise our children within the sphere of the covenant, we as parents are in duty bound to see that all the children we receive from the Lord are instructed and

brought up in the nurture and admonition of His Name. Through prayer and supplication, the Lord supplies us with all that is necessary to perform our parental duties. And it is our prayer that it might please Him to use us in the raising up of another generation that grows in love for Him and walks in His ways.

Who, O Lord, with Thee abiding, in thy house shall be Thy guest? Who, his feet to Zion turning, in Thy holy hill shall rest? He that ever walks uprightly, does the right without a fear, when he speaks, he speaks not lightly, but with truth and love sincere.

He that slanders not his brother, does no evil to a friend; to reproaches of another he refuses to attend. Wicked men win not his favor, but the good who fear the Lord; from his vow he will not waver, tho' it bring him sad reward.

Freely to the needy lending, no excess he asks again; and the innocent befriending, he desires not praise of men. Doing this, and evil spurning, he shall nevermore be moved: This the man with Thee sojourning, this the man by Thee approved (Psalter #24).

This Psalter number is based on Psalm 15 and is entitled, “Tests of Christian Character.” With whom will the Lord abide? And to whom will He grant true peace and rest? The answer is clear—to those who walk uprightly. And this is our desire for our children. This is the goal of our parenting. That we, by the guiding hand of the Master Builder, might raise our children to be those of Christian character—those of whom the Lord approves. We desire to see in our children a love for the neighbor—willing to befriend the lonely and lend a hand to those who are in need; to be those who neither slander nor backbite, but rather speak the truth in love. For there is no greater joy for us as parents than to see our young people walking in truth and living as children of light in a world of darkness. Yet, we know that to raise such an offspring is no easy task. In fact, it is quite impossible of our own accord. And neither does it simply happen by chance. Rather, the instituting of a covenant home and family is done by the Master, who in His work of building is pleased to employ the use of parents as *tools*. Thank God that He makes us both willing and able to perform that which He commands of us. The very fact that we are godly parents in the church, seeking to raise a godly seed, is in the end the work of the Master Himself. All that we are we owe to Him. And any work that we accomplish is established by Him.

God brings us and our children into His covenant. And “whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts...” therefore, are we by God given a part (Baptism Form). What does the Lord require of us? “To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with

thy God” (Micah 6:8). This is covenant family living. We and our children walking worthy of—and humbly with—the Lord. And this walk involves *all of life*. Not just some, but each and every thought, word, and deed must bring honor and glory to His Name. And in instructing our children to do so, it is important that they see us walking in the way that we desire them to go. It is of prime importance that we do so, for we are the *examples* that our children see each day.

Dear reader, we live in the *last days*. Our Lord is coming! The signs are all around us. And it could well be that, if not we ourselves, our children and/or grandchildren live during a time of great tribulation, and experience persecution like none other before for the sake of our Lord and Savior whom we worship and serve. And to think that the Lord has entrusted their instruction and preparation to *us*! He entrusts His children to *us*! The very thought is humbling indeed. Do we dare deem ourselves worthy of being used of the Lord in such a way? Are we even equipped to do so? Worthy? No. But by God’s grace—and only by His grace—we *are* equipped to do so.

As we instruct our children to walk in the ways of the Lord, they *need to see in us* what we desire to see in them. We want them to love the things we love and to care about the things we care about. And, therefore, the instruction of our children is aimed at their hearts. In adherence to the vows we take at baptism until the time they make public confession of their faith and beyond, all of our instruction is focused on or aimed at their hearts—their inner spiritual being. They need to learn who God is and what He has done. They need to learn to love and trust Him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength; to forsake the world, and crucify their old nature. They need to acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, to reject all heresies repugnant thereto, and to lead a new, godly life (Baptism Form and Questions for Public Confession of Faith). This is what they need to *hear* and *see in us*. Do we show ourselves as being the godly examples and proper role models we are called to be? Pray God that we do.

Instructing our sons we gladly record the praises, the works, the might of the Lord, for He hath commanded that what He hath done be passed in tradition from father to son (Psalter #213, stanza 2).

Building a covenant home and family involves just that—covenant *family life*. We find that most often the life of a covenant family is grounded in a marriage based on oneness of faith that the couple has and shares in the living God. God is first and

foremost in their lives. Children need to see the love of Christ shining in and through the lives of their parents and in the relationship they have with each other and the Lord. God continues His covenant in the line of continued generations. History testifies to this fact. Many, if not most of us now active in the role of parents, have received godly instruction and upbringing ourselves, and the generations before us as well. And our homes must continue to exhibit a godly atmosphere today. This atmosphere includes all of life within the home—the conversations we have, the books we read, the music that we listen to and sing, where we look to and go to for entertainment, and so forth. Our young people are watching. Are they seeing in us what we desire to see in them? Our

dinner time and family devotions ought not suffer at the hands of entertainment, work, or sports. Our homes ought to be places where our young people wish to be and often like to bring their friends. We need to be aware of where our young people go and with whom they *keep company*. They need to be reminded of who they are and to whom they belong. And that their friends and entertainment should be that of which their Lord and Master would approve.

Of what then does this instruction consist? I do not profess in any way to be an expert on the raising of children. Yet when we talk of covenantal instruction and the building of a covenant home, I do believe there are some basic guidelines that must be followed. We have readily available to us the only *handbook* needed in the Word that the Builder Himself provides. The Scripture gives an abundance of guidance to godly parents, and I share with you what I believe to be some of the fundamentals found therein. All these basics should be evident in our homes. Yet, there are Christian liberties and freedoms to be found in all these spheres, so that as parents rear their children in a way that is best suited for their family life, the application of these fundamentals may vary from one household to the next.

Discipline—“Withhold not correction from the child” (Prov. 23:13).

As much as parents desire and strive for peace and unity within the family, we know that this is not always the case. We and our children are sinners and

often times stand in need of correction. Therefore, it is important that father and mother are in agreement that the instruction of their children includes discipline. Discipline must be administered in every Christian home, and that discipline should *always* mirror the discipline that our heavenly Father renders to His children: that is, rendering correction in love. For that is what Christian discipline is—love. And though this is true, the *form* of discipline that is necessary for some children

might not be needed or as effective for others. For some children, discipline might come in the form of a simple but firm rebuke; for others, it might be a rebuke accompanied by *the rod of correction* administered to their backside; while yet for older children, the taking away of their car keys or revoking of some other

privilege might be the most effective method. The simple truth of the matter is, our children *need* and must *receive* discipline.

Prayer—“But the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8).

Parents must not only pray daily, but many times each day. They pray not only for the grace, guidance, and patience needed to rear their children, but they also pray *for* their children (starting while they are yet in the womb) and they pray *with* their children, bringing their needs and the needs of the whole family before God’s throne of grace. The responsibility of family prayer and devotions falls primarily upon the father. As head of the home, it is his calling to lead in family worship—both in prayer and the reading of Scripture.

Although my husband and I are well on in years, our table is still graced with children, but now only a few, and young adults at that. Sharing dinner and dinner time devotions with older children can be joyful and beneficial to all those present. In our reading of Scripture, all of us at one time or another have made the comment, “I don’t remember hearing (or reading) that before,” which can often then lead us to further discussion on the passage being read. Older children may also be given the opportunity to lead in family devotions and prayer as well. And it is very humbling as parents to hear and witness our children growing in a life of prayer.

And our homes must continue to exhibit a godly atmosphere today. This atmosphere includes all of life within the home—the conversations we have, the books we read, the music that we listen to and sing, where we look to and go to for entertainment, and so forth. Our young people are watching. Are they seeing in us what we desire to see in them?

Reading—“Blessed is he that readeth” (Rev. 1:3).

We need to encourage our young people to read *good* books. And we need to remember: they need to see in us what we desire to see in them. Parents, encourage your young people to read by sharing and discussing with them some of things you happen to come across in your reading. At our table, we have added discussing Rev. Cory Griess’ devotional book *Preparing for Dating and Marriage* to our Sunday morning devotions. I would love to encourage others with older children to do this also—if not this, then some other book or pamphlet. It is a humble encouragement for parents to hear and see their young people freely discussing their thoughts on dating, marriage, and all that this involves—marriage as God’s creation; who and what to look for in a spouse; and the importance of remaining chaste and pure—both in single life and in married life. These are topics that should and need to be discussed in our homes with our young people. We need to be encouraging them, with our words and by example, to read good, Reformed literature—including, but not limited to, RFPA books, the *Standard Bearer*, and *Beacon Lights*—being ready and willing to discuss these also, when opportunities arise.

Singing—“I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever” (Ps. 89:1).

We ought never stop singing with our children. We ought not only be singing when we are happy, but also when we are sad. Sing the songs of Zion. No matter what our lot in life may be, the Psalms (Psalter) can often speak to us in such a way that a song may arise in our hearts and soon spring forth from our lips. Singing can also be a way to *pray* without ceasing. Many of our children who are given the privilege to attend our own Christian schools, learn what is known as a “Song of the Week,” which has them singing both at home and at school—and possibly committing to memory—many Psalter numbers throughout the year. What a blessing we have in our schools! And our schools have a need for teachers. Are we encouraging our young people to consider this calling?

Worship—“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Ps. 122:1).

Sunday is a day set aside for worship; a day that finds the family worshipping in the Lord’s house together. Our

children—young and old—belong there with us. We need to sit under the preaching together to hear and heed the instruction of our Father. He instructs, admonishes, rebukes, encourages, and strengthens us through the faithful preaching of His Word. What a blessing we have in the provision of the faithful undershepherds He has given! And there is a need for more ministers of His Word. A great need. Are we encouraging our young men to consider the call to the ministry, and to examine themselves as to whether or not they exhibit the gifts needed?

Under the lively preaching of the Word, catechetical instruction, godly rearing in the home, and the Spirit working in their hearts, our children come to spiritual knowledge and assurance of their faith prior to confessing it publicly before God and His church. Instruction, however, does not end here. All the fundamentals of instruction found in our homes must also be observed in congregational life. The church is *our family*. We worship together; we pray together; we read and sing together; and when need be, we admonish and rebuke one another in love. This is covenantal living. Our young people need to grow in love for God’s church and the communion of the saints. They need to learn, by word and example, to be active in the life of the congregation—to visit the elderly and shut-ins, to participate in Bible society life, and lovingly and cheerfully to give to the causes of God’s kingdom with their time and abilities as well as their monetary gifts.

As parenting *tools*, we need to be faithful in our work. Children and young people learn by word and example. They need to see that God and His kingdom come *first* in their lives. And oh, what joy for us when we see this in them—when we hear and see them making public confession of their faith—confessing His truth and vowing to lead new, godly lives. They are the future church—the church of tomorrow. What joy then—pure joy—to have them walk in truth, confess their faith, and take their place alongside us in God’s church. Joyful, yet humbling, too. The Lord is using us. We are His tools. Truly, He uses weak means. Pray that He finds us faithful in our work. Not perfect, mind you (for that can never be) but faithful—striving in every way to do that which He has commanded of us. And pray that as He continues to build, preserve, and gather His church, it might please Him to bless our work with the fruit of a godly seed.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Richard Smit, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (3)

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2020, p. 138.

A fourth example is the foreign mission work of the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC) in Irian Jaya in the 1960s and 1970s. The NRC was not the only Reformed denomination laboring in that part of Indonesia, but the NRC published a small book about their mission work that gives some helpful insight into their methods and goal—a work that was truly foreign, that is, among people who in their generations had never heard the gospel.

The book, *Mission on Irian Jaya: Church Visitation and View of Building and Destruction of the Station Nipsan*, was written in a popular style, along with color photographs, for mission awareness and promotion among the Netherlands Reformed congregations in the Netherlands and in North America. This book gives details about a visitation in May 1973 by a foreign mission committee delegation to the mission of the NRC at Irian Jaya. Irian Jaya is the Indonesian, western part of New Guinea, while the other part to the east is Papua New Guinea.

The NRC mission work in Irian Jaya began in 1963 and continued into the 1970s through the labors of Rev. G. Kuyt, Rev. G. Vreugdenhil, and several assistants. The NRC mission work began in Abenaho (1963), added another mission station in Landikma (1967), a third mission station in Nipsan (1971), and a fourth mission station in Langda (1973). Each station was usually central among several villages, so that by 1973 worship gatherings were several hundred villagers from the Dani and the Jali tribes. Because each tribe had their own distinct dialect, the mission work included translation of the Scriptures into the Dani and Jali languages. The native religion of these tribes was characterized by animism (spirit worship) and much superstition.

The delegates visited native congregations that had been gathered under the preaching of the Word by the missionaries in their mission stations. Although there was regular weekly gatherings in the mission stations of believers and their seed under the administration of the Word of God by the ordained missionaries, yet, up until the time of the visitation in 1973—ten years after the mission work had begun—these gatherings had not yet become visibly instituted, with the ordination of local men into the offices of pastor, deacons, and elders.

Nevertheless, the goal of the NRC missionaries in their patient and persistent mission labors in Irian Jaya was more than just instituted gatherings of believers and their children under regular weekly preaching of the gospel and catechism training. Their goal was not merely congregations with their own native officebearers. The goal was specifically that they “become independent.”¹ The goal of “independent” meant that the gatherings of converts and their children needed to be taught, prepared, and eventually established as self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting instituted churches. As such, they would be expected to fulfill, by their own officebearers, their ecclesiastical calling in obedience to Christ within their unique cultural, linguistic, and economic setting. Reaching that goal of independence then, “the Reformed character of these congregations [would] be clearly visible.”²

In this fourth example, we can observe that the goal of foreign missions, even over a lengthy period of more than ten years, remained an enduring mindset among the missionaries and their overseeing churches. Together, they remained committed to the goal of local, autonomous churches within their own unique place in the world. Significantly, they expressed that their goal of the three-self formula was an essential element of the Reformed character of indigenous church institutes in Irian Jaya.

One example (our fifth) among Presbyterian churches that the three-self formula is needed for faithful mission work comes from the broad foreign mission experience and wisdom of Dr. John M. L. Young, found in his book, *Missions: The Biblical Aim and Motive* (c. 1962). He was born into his Presbyterian missionary family on a mission field in Korea, his father an ordained missionary of a Canadian Presbyterian church. After his years of education were finished, Young was ordained as a Bible Presbyterian missionary and sent to labor in China.

1 Rev. H. Rijksen and Rev. A. Vergunst, *Mission on Irian Jaya: Church Visitation and View of Building and Destruction of the Station Nipsan* (Rotterdam: Mission of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, no date), 19.

2 Rijksen and Vergunst, *Irian Jaya*, 113.

He labored there from 1938-1941, and then, after a pastorate in the USA from 1942-1948, presumably as a result of the effects of World War II, he briefly resumed his mission service in China until the communist revolution in China forced him and his family to move to Japan. He continued his mission labors in Japan from 1949-1966. Later in 1981, he returned to Japan to continue laboring in mission work.

With that broad experience and knowledge of foreign mission work among those who in their previous generations never had the gospel preached to them, Young wrote, as he had practiced, that “the goal of a missionary...envisions the establishing of indigenous churches as a direct growth of missionary endeavor. A truly indigenous church will be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting.”³

He repeated this conviction about the three-self formula and the goal of missions when he wrote:

Thus, an indigenous church is considered here to be a body of believers organized for worship, the edification of the saints, and the spread of the Gospel, planted in a soil foreign to the Gospel until the arrival of missionaries through whose labors a native church was produced, founded upon Jesus Christ as He is [revealed] in the Scriptures, sharing the life of the land, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating from devotion to Christ, and aiming at the extension of His kingdom.⁴

3 J. M. L. Young, *Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim*, (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, reprint 2007), 119.

4 Young, *Missions*, 120.

In this fifth example, we can observe an interesting connection between a commitment in foreign missions to three-self formula of indigenous churches and those churches being “founded upon Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures.” This example interestingly points out a connection between the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ, and the work of the church institute. This example demonstrates that the church that is built upon Christ and His truth will also be faithfully devoted to Christ in her exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven as a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating institute.

While many differences and variations of the implementation of the three-self formula may be observed from the histories of missions of other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, yet the few selective examples provided show, generally speaking, that Reformed missionaries since the late 1800s and into recent mission history more and more understood the correct goal of foreign missions according to the three-self formula.

Through almost 60 years of experience in foreign mission work, the PRC has learned and expressed the importance of the goal of newly established, indigenous church institutes according to the three-self formula. In the next article, we will look at some examples of the evidence of a growing understanding and commitment to the three-self formula in PRC foreign mission work since the 1960s in the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Classis West of the PRCA

Meeting March 3-4, 2021

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met for two full days on March 3-4, 2021, in Peace PRC (Dyer, IN). The meeting was chaired by Rev. Joshua Engelsma (pastor of Doon PRC), who was serving in this capacity for the first time in his ministry.

Twenty-six delegates from thirteen churches were physically present. The delegates from Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB) and First PRC (Edmonton, AB) were not able physically to attend the meeting due to the restrictions of the Canadian government with respect to COVID-19. Classis granted the request of these delegates to be seated and to participate virtually.

Routine reports from the stated clerk, the Classical Committee, and the Reading Sermon Library Committee were read and approved. The church visitors reported on their labors over the last year and the presence of peace, unity, and love prevailing in the churches.

On the agenda was a request from the consistory of Bethel PRC for classis to concur with its decision to disband, a decision based on her declining membership. With sadness, classis concurred and extended a word of commendation to the saints in Bethel, and to her present and former officebearers, for the labors so faithfully extended in the spread of the gospel over the past 32 years. Classis also thankfully acknowledged Bethel’s continuing heart for and gift to the denomination in her decision to forward her remaining assets to Synod. Bethel plans officially to disband at the end of June 2021.

In light of its decision to disband, Bethel also brought a request for her pastor, Rev. Dennis Lee, to be declared temporarily emeritus effective after the disbanding of the congregation, unless he should receive and accept a call to another congregation in that time. Classis approved the request, and will forward it to Synod 2021 for its approval.

Classis also had before it one appeal. An individual

had raised objections to a sermon preached in his congregation, but his consistory did not sustain his objections. After careful deliberation of the appeal, classis did not sustain the individual.

Classis also treated two protests. The first protest, which was treated in open session, was a protest of the decision of classis in September 2020 to declare the individual's appeal not legally before it. Classis did not sustain the protest and, therefore, sustained its previous decision to declare the original appeal not legally before it.

The second protest was treated in closed session. This was a protest of the decision of classis in September 2020 to declare a different appeal not legally before it. Classis did not sustain the protest and, therefore, sustained its previous decision to declare the original appeal not legally before it.

Classis also approved a request for another year's financial support of a minister released under Article 11 of the Church Order.

Classis approved the subsidy requests for 2022 for two churches and forwarded them on to synod for its approval.

Classis also voted for various classical functionaries. Rev. J. Laning was reappointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Rev. R. Barnhill was reappointed to a three-year term as a *primus* synodical deputy, and Rev. J. Laning was reappointed to a three-year term as a *secundus* synodical deputy. Classis appointed Revs. A. Brummel, S. Key, R. Kleyn, and J. Laning as church visitors for the coming year, with Revs. J. Engelsma and R. Hanko as alternates.

Ministers delegated to Synod 2021 are Revs. A. Brummel, J. Engelsma, S. Key, R. Kleyn, and J. Laning. Their alternates are Revs. R. Barnhill, E. Guichelaar, M. Kortus, D. Lee, and S. Regnerus. Elders delegated to Synod 2021 are Keith Bruinsma (Peace), David Poortinga (Loveland), Jack Regnerus (Randolph), Don Terpstra (Peace), and Ed Van Egdome (Heritage). Their alternates are Kevin Brummel (Crete), Jonathan den Hartog (Redlands), Marlin Feenstra (Redlands), Victor Solanyk (Loveland), and Steve VanDrunen (Crete).

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$7,048.47.

Classis will meet next in Crete PRC on September 29, 2021, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk, Classis West



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

In the year 2000, who labored as missionary to the British Isles? Find the answer in the "Glance Back" part of this issue.

Singles conference

Save May 7-9 for another Adult Singles' Conference! The Lord willing, there will be another three-day event in the Grand Rapids area for singles ages 25+. The weekend will include two speeches by Revs. R. Barnhill and W. Langerak, discussion groups, and several social activities. Plan to attend and be encouraged and edified by other like-minded singles!

Minister activities

Remember Rev. J. Marcus in your prayers as he awaits a call to labor in one of our churches, and Rev. M. McGeown and his wife as they await permission to travel to the USA to take up labors in our Providence congregation. Also keep our vacant congregations in your prayers, that God may sustain them during their vacancies and that God may provide them a servant

to labor in their midst. Current vacant congregations include Hudsonville, Wingham, Kalamazoo, and Byron Center.

Wingham, Ontario PRC formed a trio of Revs. N. Langerak, S. Regnerus, and J. Smidstra. On February 23 the congregation called Rev. Smidstra.

The Council of Byron Center submitted the following trio of ministers to the congregation to call from to be their pastor: Rev. R. Barnhill, Rev. J. Engelsma and Rev. D. Holstege. A congregational meeting on March 7 resulted in Rev. J. Engelsma receiving the call.

School activities

The Ladies Circle of the Northwest Iowa PR School in Doon, IA held their annual soup supper on February 16 at the Community Center, with to-go orders an option. They also hosted the annual Winter Pool Party and ice-skating night at the All-Seasons Center in Sioux Center. Some chose to skate, some chose to swim, some did both. Everyone enjoyed the food and fellowship.

Congregational activities

The congregation at Byron Center, MI PRC held their annual sledding and pizza party recently.

Adults from the Helping Hands Committee of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently aided the catechism students there in the making of greeting cards for shut-in members and elderly of their congregation. I'm sure those cards were an enjoyment to the recipients! A thoughtful gesture.

Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL has made plans to disband in June of this year. Her final worship services are planned for June 27, with the final Consistory meeting set for the night following, June 28. This decision was approved by of Classis West at its March meeting (cf. the report in this issue).

The Randolph, WI Hostess Supper was held Friday, March 5, at 7 p.m. at the school commons. This year for entertainment, Prof. R. Camminga agreed to give a presentation on the Mexico mission trip, but due to a kidney stone, he couldn't.

The Doon, IA Junior Adult Society hosted a progressive supper.

Young people's activities

"It is with regret that, after much discussion, the Federation Board, along with the recommendation of the Steering Committee of Georgetown PRC, has decided to cancel the upcoming 2021 Young People's Convention due to restrictions and health concerns pertaining to the ongoing pandemic." We hurt for our young people who have now been unable to enjoy this blessing for two summers in a row. But in the good news department, Faith PRC's 2022 Steering Committee has resumed work on planning and preparing for next year's convention.

The Consistory of Hope PRC in Grand Rapids has approved a week-long canoe trip for the young people and young adults of the church in the Boundary Waters of Ely, MN this summer (July 26-31). An informational meeting will soon be scheduled. Any adults (over 25) interested in being a chaperone should contact Pastor J. Mahtani. The young people there also invited the congregation to a singspiration on March 7.

The Cornerstone PRC young people hosted a co-ed dodgeball tournament/fundraiser on March 19.

The young people of Randolph, WI PRC held a soup supper in late February and the young people of Doon, IA held their spud night.

This from the bulletin of Southwest PRC: "Save the Date: Southwest PRC Young People are planning on hosting the annual Memorial Day Southwest Softball Tournament at Whistlestop Park on May 29th. Start getting your team together and watch for further an-

nouncements on sign ups. If you have any questions please email southwestsoftball@gmail.com."

Sister-church activities

Classis of the PRC in the Philippines met recently. Among their business was approving the disbanding of the Maranatha congregation as of March 1 because of a lack of men to serve as officebearers. Their members are transferring to the Provident PRC. Classis also approved the emeritation of their seventy-six-year-old pastor, Rev. L. Trinidad. We pray for these fellow saints as they transition to a new flock, and we thank the Lord for the faithful ministry of pastor Trinidad. May the Lord bless and keep them through these changes.

School activities

In March, Trinity Christian High in Hull, IA presented a musical program featuring both choirs in Hull PRC. Grandparents of Trinity seniors were invited to "Grandparents' Day" on March 26. They could attend class with their grandchild, enjoy a brief program, and fellowship over a delicious meal.

Notice was given for supporters of Protestant Reformed high schools to attend an evening of great band music on April 16 in Iowa. PR Christian high-school bands from Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin planned to be in attendance. Sounds like a real treat!

It is evident that there is currently a great need for teachers in our good Christian schools. Let us pray to our heavenly Father to supply us with more teachers. The young people, in particular, are encouraged to examine their gifts and abilities and consider whether God calls them to the blessed work of a Christian school teacher. There are many teaching positions available in our Christian schools for the upcoming school year!

A glance back in time to 2000/2001

Classis West met in September in Randolph, WI and in March of 2001 in Doon, IA.... Our seminary students were: William Langerak, Rodney Kleyn, David Overway, Angus Stewart, and Paul Goh.... Rev. R. Moore labored as missionary to Ghana, W. Africa. John and Judy Bouma were missionary helpers.... Classis East met in Faith PRC in September and in Georgetown PRC in January.... Rev. R. Hanko labored as missionary in the British Isles. Rev. B. Gritters and K. Koole traveled to Northern Ireland for our churches' annual visit to that mission field.... Our DMC decided to provide preaching in Fayetteville, NC.... Randolph PRC's new trio included Revs. A. denHartog, M. Dick, and J. Slopsema.... First PRC in Holland, MI was erecting a new parsonage that was completed in July.... First PRC in Holland, MI hosted the annual young people's convention at

Lake Ann Baptist Camp near Traverse City, MI.... The congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta held their annual Car Rally and Soup Supper.... Rev. G. Eriks and two men from the congregation in Loveland, CO visited the prison in Florence to lead a Bible Study there.... Prof. R. Decker taught a four-week Elder's Seminar in Grandville PRC.... Grace PRC and pastor M. Dick were busy with an outreach program at Grand Valley State University.... The congregation at Doon, IA celebrated four wedding anniversaries of 50 years or more in February.... Hudsonville, MI PRC celebrated

their 75th anniversary as a congregation.... Trinity PRC in Hudsonville was organized on July 19 and its first trio was Revs. Bruinsma, Haak, and Slopsema.... The Free Christian School of Edgerton, MN celebrated its 50th anniversary.... Rev. George Lubbers passed to his heavenly home.... A program was held in Hope PRC of Walker, MI to commemorate Rev. J. Kortering's 40 years in the ministry.

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Doon PRC, Doon, IA, extend our Christian sympathies to Rainer and Diane VanBemmel in the loss of their father, **Mr. Leonard VanBemmel**. Psalm 121:1, 2: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. J. Engelsma, president
Paul DeJong, clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 12, 2021 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 12, 2021.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

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)

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC extend our Christian sympathy to Ken and Gleny Feenstra and David and Anna Weldorf and their children Samantha and Elizabeth in the death of their sister and aunt, **Sylvia Ann VanBaren**. She went to be with her Lord on March 2, 2021. John 14:3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Steve DeVries, President
Thomas Verbeek, Clerk

Teacher needed

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

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. R. Kleyn

April 4—Fear Not for He Is Risen
Matthew 28:5-6
April 11—The Cleansing of the Leper
Mark 1:40-45
April 18—Jesus Authority to Forgive Sins
Mark 2:1-12
April 25—I Came to Call Sinners
Mark 2:13-17