

The Standard Bearer

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Noah building the ark by faith

Rev. Dennis Lee

PRCA Synod 2021 preview

Prof. Barrett Gritters

The loyalty of Luke

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge

**The one God: The
beginning and the end**

Rev. James Laning

**Nurturing our
preschool children**

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma



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REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Noah building the ark by faith

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Hebrews 11:7

Are you diligently seeking God and living lives that please Him? Are you actively, consciously, and diligently living by the faith that abounds in all good works? Are you encouraging fellow believers to do good works by what you say and what you do? The goal of God through the inspired writer of Hebrews is not only to prompt us to *say* and answer a resounding “Yes” to these questions, but also to have us continue by faith abounding in and *doing* these good works ourselves unto the praise and glory of His great Name.

His unquestioning faith

Noah built the ark by faith, an unquestioning faith. True faith never questions God and His Word! What a wonder true faith is! In order to understand the wonderful, unquestioning character of faith, we need to understand what faith is.

There are three things we say about faith.

First, faith is the bond that grafts us into Jesus Christ and all the blessings of salvation in Him. Jesus is the Vine and we the branches are graciously joined to Jesus by the bond of faith (cf. Lord’s Day 7, Q&A 20; John 15). Through this bond the wonderful resurrection life of Jesus Christ flows to believers, to a people who in and of themselves are dead in their trespasses and sins. Christ’s life becomes ours through faith.

Second, faith is God’s gift to His people by His amazing grace, so that they repent and believe in Jesus and lead lives abounding in good works. It is God’s gracious work in them by which He saves them from their sins. That salvation and faith is all of God’s work and grace, to the exclusion of anything we are or do, is the clear testimony of every page of Scripture and a point concisely and powerfully set forth in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of

yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Accordingly, and third, Christ in all His fullness is the one cause and explanation for believers being able to lead lives that please God. And faith is the instrument that enables us to do what pleases God because it clings to Christ and draws from His fullness all that we need. The inspired writer of Hebrews had written this in a negative way in the previous verse, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” True faith alone accounts for Enoch obeying God, living unto God, and thereby pleasing Him (v. 5). And true faith alone accounts for Noah not questioning the Word of God but receiving it, for being moved with godly reverence unto that Word and building the ark, thereby pleasing Him.

Dear reader, are you living each day of your life by faith? Whom do you live to please: God or man? And what is your attitude toward the Word of God, including His commands and admonitions? Is it to receive and obey them without question, or is it to question them?

Noah had and demonstrated an *unquestioning* faith! When God told him to build the ark (cf. Gen. 6:14), he built the ark and did so in exactly the manner that God required (cf. Gen. 6:15-16). He did not question God. He could have easily done that when God told him that He would “bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh.” He could have so easily said, “How could God do that?” especially since the world at that time knew not what rain was. For at that time “a mist from the earth...watered the whole face of the ground” (cf. Gen. 2:6). Noah could have appealed to man’s understanding of the laws of nature and empirical science and asked God, “How is this flood of waters going to come about?” Though Noah did not understand how the flood would come about, he did not question God. He did not doubt that God was able and ready to do all that He had said.

What explains this unquestioning character of Noah’s faith? A concise answer is that it is the *very nature*

of true faith that it does not question the Word of God but receives all of it. True faith “holds for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word” (cf. Lord’s Day 7, Q&A 21). In the context of Hebrews 11:1, we say, faith “sees” God! It “sees” the invisible, spiritual God for all that He is, and according to the revelation of Himself in His Word: that He is holy, that He is glorious, that He is righteous, that He is love. And seeing Him for who He is, faith embraces Him and all that He says—including His commands.

But there is more. True faith does not stop with “seeing” Him and “embracing” His Word. It is followed and evidenced by godly obedience and action! Having “seen” God and embraced all that He had spoken, the faith of Noah moved him to godly fear and action. True faith is such that it, having received the Word, *always* results in action according to that Word. In a sermon on this text, Herman Hoeksema¹ states,

By faith Noah received and accepted the Word of God. He believed that Word, *and acted accordingly*. Had Noah not possessed the faith which is an evidence of things not seen and the substance of things hoped for, he would not have received the Word of God in his heart *and would not have acted upon it* [emphasis added].

True faith is not passive but active. It does not merely talk, it also works (cf. James 2:18-20)! The believer is not one who insists that God “must do it all” when it comes to the good works that *he* (not God) has been called, foreordained, and saved in order to do (cf. Eph. 2:10). That would be a gross misunderstanding of the doctrines of grace and the Reformed faith as they concern the work of the indwelling Spirit of Christ in the hearts of true believers! No, he who embraces the Word of God by faith must and will *act* according to that Word in true obedience. Thus, Hoeksema states, “By that same faith he had respect unto the command of God that told him to build the ark. And that faith, filling him with godly fear, culminated in an act of obedience: he built the ark.”

In a word, true and unquestioning faith obeys. It does *all* that God’s Word calls him to do! And what a colossal work of faith Noah performed: he built the ark! The ark was about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It had three levels and doors. It was sealed with pitch, being made of gopher wood. For 120 long

years and without a hint of any rain or flood, Noah pressed on and built the ark by faith. It was a faith that did not question God, but obeyed Him. It was a faith that was completely committed to what God had called him to do. It was a faith that persevered unto the very end. After 120 years of toiling, Noah completed the building of the ark. Dear reader, is your faith like Noah’s faith?

His faithful witness

Still more, let us understand that by building the ark, Noah gave a *faithful witness* of God—of His Word of judgment and also of His one way of salvation and mercy. And we are further told that by this witness Noah “condemned the world.”

To be sure, the converse would also be true: the world condemned Noah by his act of building the ark. That is not so hard for us to understand. It is not so hard for us to picture the reproach, the ridicule, and the mockery Noah must surely have endured for all his toiling and constructing of the ark, is it? Let us remember that God’s judgment at this time was that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (cf. Gen. 6:5). Do you not hear the voices of the impenitent wicked mocking Noah for being so committed to building the ark when there was not a drop of rain or flood waters in sight?

While the world undoubtedly condemned Noah, the Holy Spirit is pleased instead to direct our attention to Noah’s faithful deed of building the ark that condemned the world. Simply by walking by faith and obeying God, Noah’s faithful deed of building the ark showed clearly to the wicked the judgment of sin that awaits all who are impenitent, and the one way of God’s salvation and mercy in Jesus Christ. It showed them plainly the kind of godly lives of faith that God requires them and all men to live, and that they were not living. It showed them powerfully their need for the coming Messiah whom they rejected. For Noah’s faithful witness comprised both his faithful deed of building the ark and also his faithful *speech* of the perfect righteousness of God in Christ imputed to all believers through faith. This is what is meant when inspired Peter tells us that Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (II Pet. 2:4-5).

As with Noah, so it is also with all who love Jesus and would live by faith in Him today. The faithful witness of the believer—both in his life and speech—condemns the world! Do you love Jesus? Do you seek to live lives of faith that please God? Do you purpose in true thankfulness to abound in good works from a life of faith? Understand that you do not have to be a “preacher of righteousness” nor perform spectacular deeds such as building the ark. All you have to do is

¹ All quotations in this meditation of the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema are taken from a sermon he preached on this text (“Noah By Faith Building the Ark”) sometime during 1954-1956 and recorded at that time. The transcription of this sermon is by Mr. Nanning Klaver, and has been, to the best of the writer’s knowledge, transcribed just as Rev. Hoeksema had delivered it, with a minimum of editing.

what God calls you to do in the office of believer by that very faith He has graciously worked in you. Like Noah, give a faithful, antithetical witness of your God and your Christ by your mouths and your lives! “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”! (1 Peter 3:15). By faith, warn others of the coming final judgment. By faith, live godly, antithetical lives of faith personally, in singlehood and marriage, in the family, at work, in school, and in society!

His gracious reward

Hoeksema informs us that “the significance of this faith for Noah himself is that he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” This is Noah’s gracious reward. What does this mean? This does not mean that Noah obtained righteousness from God in part or whole because he built the ark, nor because of the worthiness and strength of his faith, nor because of his faith. No, Noah, like all true believers, was justified by faith alone in Christ alone—a justification that begins from all eternity in the counsel of God and that was also realized objectively in and through Jesus Christ. Through the death of the cross, Christ washed away our

sins once and for all. In this connection, Hoeksema states, “And when God raised Him from the dead, that He as the Head of His people, was eternally righteous. And all those that are in Him are forever justified before God.”

Then Hoeksema gets to the heart of the matter:

But how shall we know this? How shall we become righteous and justified before God in our consciousness? The answer is: by faith. Only by a living faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification, can we be and are we forever righteous before God. As soon as we believers, as soon as we possess that true and living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we dare say, “My sins are forgiven me,” we are heirs, possessors, of the righteousness which is by faith.

Indeed! Noah enjoyed the gracious reward of becoming heir of the righteousness which is by faith. And so will we, who by faith diligently seek Him, who give a faithful witness of Him and who live antithetical, faithful, even if unspectacular lives of faith before the face of our Jehovah and unto His glory! Praise Him from whom all blessings flow!



Editorial

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

PRCA Synod 2021 preview

God willing, the Synod of the PRCA 2021 will hold its sessions beginning on Tuesday, June 8, 2021. Many synods of other denominations, just as last year, are canceled because of the pandemic. In God’s good providence the PRCA delegates can assemble to do the work of the churches in common, that is, Christ’s work that belongs not to individual congregations alone, but to the whole denomination. Synod begins with the pre-synodical worship service on Monday evening, June 7. If you are able, please join us, either in person or online as the delegates and congregation call on God for His indispensable blessing on the work. It has often been true that the pre-synodical sermon sets the tone in a very real way for the entire week.

Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan is hosting the meeting this year. The last time Georgetown hosted synod was in 2009. We can be thankful that Georgetown is again willing to have the assembly in their comfortable and spacious facilities. Synod’s choice of venue is sometimes influenced by the membership of a seminary graduate who must be examined at that synod. This year synod will examine Seminarian Josiah Tan, who is a member of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore but has attended Georgetown PRC during his years in seminary. His church family in Georgetown will be there to support him, as will his colleagues in the seminary, who will come not only because they want to learn what an examination

entails, but also because the students become very close over the four years of training.

In 2009 when synod was last held in Georgetown, the agenda was one of the largest ever. This year the agenda is larger yet. Pray that the delegates—all of whom have their own occupations—can do justice to such a large agenda. They must not only read over 500 pages of sometimes complex material within a month, but must also digest it in such a way that they are prepared to deliberate carefully and listen to the other delegates speak in favor of or against the proposals before synod. This is a massive undertaking for the delegates. They will be in much prayer for the next few weeks. Do pray for them, beginning today, for the Holy Spirit's wisdom and understanding.

What makes the agenda so large is the inclusion of sixteen protests or appeals. Eight of them object to the deposition of a minister. Even though no major assembly actually deposes—that action is the local consistory's—both classis and synod must give their approval to deposition, and thus their approval is subject to objection. Three other protests take issue with last year's decisions on the doctrinal controversy in the churches. Synod 2020 rejected one man's objections to the teachings of sermons; these protests ask synod to overturn those decisions. One protest objects to a minister's release from the ministry under Article 12 of the Church Order and claims that the minister ought to have been deposed according to Articles 79 and 80. One appeal asks synod to adjudicate his complaint against Classis West; Classis had declared his documents illegal. One protest objects to last synod's decision not to publicize a report of a special committee. One appeal asks synod to adjudicate a protest against a sermon; the protest was rejected both by the consistory and Classis West who treated the protest. Finally, Synod 2020 warned a protestant that further protests from him (or others) must be in a reasonable form. A protest objects to this warning. Included in synod's warning were 1) unacceptable length; 2) that six or more protests came under the heading of one; 3) that a protest must be a protest, not a list of questions and demands; 4) that a protest may not ask synod to prove something but must itself prove that synod's decisions are wrong; that is, the burden of proof in a protest or appeal is with the appellant/protestant. This decision being protested is found in the 2020 PRC *Acts* (p. 92).

The rest of the agenda is the normal work of the churches laboring together in the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Following the business in alphabetical order, there is material from the Catechism Book Committee and proposals for new memory work for some of the history

classes. There are reports from both Classis East and Classis West. From the western Classis is the significant report that Bethel PRC is disbanding after thirty years of witness in the suburbs of northwest Chicago. We sorrow with the members and pastor of this small congregation, as well as for the loss of the gospel witness in this populous area of our country. Most of the members will relocate near another Protestant Reformed Church. Significantly, Rev. Dennis Lee becomes available for the vacant churches. May God provide a place for this brother who first served in Edgerton, MN, and in Bethel since 2010.

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches is always one of the busier denominational committees. This committee maintains contact with our sister churches (in Northern Ireland, the Philippines, and Singapore) as well as others with whom we communicate for mutual edification as we seek to manifest the unity of the universal church. Significantly, the CERC in Singapore asks that we discontinue seeking a minister to “loan” to them. The Lord willing, their own students—Josiah Tan and Marcus Wee—will be returning in the next two years. May the Lord accomplish this! The committee reports that Trinity PRC (Hudsonville, MI) has accepted the request to supervise the communications with contacts in South Korea. Before official relations are established with other churches, asking a local congregation to relate in a personal way helps develop the relationship. The denominational committee has only so much manpower to relate to as many as ten or more groups, and a local congregation is a fine way to have more personal communication. This method has worked well in many cases and compares to a “calling church” for a mission field. Consider the good relationships of Hudsonville PRC and Northern Ireland, Grandville PRC and Singapore, Georgetown PRC and India, Hope PRC and Myanmar, Faith PRC and Germany, and First PRC and Mexico. A local congregation is able to invest in the relationship far more than a busy sub-committee of two from the Contact Committee.

Because of the worldwide effects of the pandemic, there has been limited travel to other countries and thus little in-person contacts with any of the saints across the world. Often, Contact Committee members travel to as many as five different continents in a year. We are thankful for technology that enables good communication, but there is nothing like face-to-face contacts and personal visits when delegates spend a week or more in the homes and with the families of the people of God in other lands. May the Lord soon open the way for this again.

The Contact Committee reports also on Psalter re-

vision. Both the interdenominational committee and the PRC's own committees have made progress and will bring recommendations that synod must examine. *Standard Bearer* readers may be reminded that the project, which began five years ago with the PRCA and two other denominations that use the 1912 Psalter, now includes our own denomination's special committee of ten appointed by last year's synod to review all the suggested changes made by the interdenominational committee. This special PRCA committee has been meeting Saturday mornings every other week and has been making slow but good progress. Whether, in the end, the three denominations can all have the *same* revision (desirable) is not as important as whether the revision is acceptable to the membership in the PRCA. The meetings have gone well and should produce a Psalter that makes our singing in public worship more edifying and God-glorifying.

The Domestic Mission Committee reports on the investigation into a different calling church for a home missionary and on their increased efforts to establish new fields of labor. The report expresses gratitude for the work of Byron Center PRC and Missionary A. Spriensma for their work. Pray that the Lord provides another calling church and home missionary and that the Lord opens doors for him to bring the gospel in our land. Because of the increasing importance of the Internet for the witness of the gospel, the DMC also reports on their extensive labor to improve our denominational website and recommends that synod appoint a new denominational committee to do this work.

The Foreign Mission Committee oversees the massive work of missions in the Philippines where three PRCA pastors and their families labor: Rev. Daniel Holstege, Rev. Daniel Kleyn, and Rev. Richard Smit. Doon, IA (calling church) and the FMC (comprised of elders and ministers from IA, MN, and SD) labor together to preach in this nation of some 7,000 islands. Rev. Holstege and family are in the U.S. presently on furlough, but because of the pandemic related travel restrictions their return to the Philippines is uncertain, as is the Smit's travel to the U.S. May the Lord of the harvest bless the missionaries and their families who devote themselves to the gospel's cause in ways most of our readers cannot fathom. The Lord will not forget their work and labor of love (Heb. 6:10).

The Theological School Committee reports on one new student applying for admission in the coming school year—Mr. Aaron VanDyke, son of our Faith, Jenison, MI congregation. The TSC recommends Seminarian Josiah Tan (CERC, Singapore) for examination with a view to a declaration of candidacy. The committee re-

ports on Prof. B. Huizinga's progress toward his degree and Prof. D. Kuiper's progress in developing his courses with a view to the last year of transition with Prof. R. Dykstra. Specially significant is the TSC's presentation of four names to synod with a view to replacement of Prof. B. Gritters who turns 66 this year. Revs. Nathan Decker, Joshua Engelsma, Cory Griess, and Clayton Spronk are the TSC's four recommendations to synod. A consistory suggested to the TSC that the replacement process be delayed a year because of our vacancies and present lack of pastors. The TSC recommends that synod proceed according to plan.

The admission of only one student, the graduation of another who is a student from a sister church, and the reality of five vacant congregations are reminders to the churches of the great need for students who aspire to the ministry. Parents, grandparents, teachers, elders, fellow church members, please pray daily for godly men, and lay before the young men and boys of the high and holy calling of the servant of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, as Calvin said, "Send us wood and we will send you arrows." The harvest is great and laborers few. Lord of the harvest, send us laborers!

This report is filled with requests for your prayers for our beloved churches. You may know that the other church magazines report great distress in their denominations as well—members leaving and churches fracturing, contention over consistories' responses to government regulations, ministers collapsing and even resigning because of criticism and assaults, and the Lord's heavy hand in many different forms upon His people. Our world is full of unrest. God's church is as well. In the face of all the difficulties we face, let us be faithful, careful, humble, charitable in all things, living peaceably with all as we are able and allowed by God (Rom. 12:18). Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; He will exalt us in due time (I Pet. 5:6).

May our Sovereign God, whose hand is heavy on the world and on His church, extend mercy to us, allow us to continue in the work He gives us, and even brighten the light of our witness of His Son in this dark world. May He allow us, who have by His grace begun well, to endure even to the end. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Jehovah, bless the work of Synod 2021.

Appreciation for the *Standard Bearer*

The purpose of this letter is to express my appreciation for the continued publication of the *Standard Bearer*. The *SB* continues to give spiritual instruction in many areas where we need it. Of particular interest to myself and many of the readers is the continued articles regarding the doctrinal aspects of the controversy that has engulfed our churches for the past years.

I want to encourage the *SB* to continue to publish articles that help us maintain our balance as God's people and as a denomination of churches. We need to read articles and hear sermons that remind us of the basis of our salvation, namely, the sovereignty of God and His grace to undeserving sinners. At the same time, we need to read articles and hear sermons that lay before us the calling to live according to God's commands out of gratitude for what God has graciously given to us. As I reflect on the articles in the *SB*, every article has done that in one way or another.

I would like to encourage the *SB* to develop the idea of growing in godly piety as something that we as God's people should earnestly desire and strive for. Scripture lays before us many examples of godly piety that we should be striving for in our life as God's people—Ephesians 4:22-32, with its instruction of putting off the old man and living according to the new man; James 1:27, where we read of pure and undefiled religion, loving and serving those around us and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. These are just two of many examples.

Our confessions also give expression to this. In the Canons, Head III/IV, Article 17 ends this way: "For grace is conferred by admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is His work advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both of means and of their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due." We find here that all glory goes to God, and yet we have godly incentives placed before us as something we should pursue.

Especially in the days in which we live, where we find the world growing darker in sin and tempting us and our children to follow in their wickedness, we need to be reminded of our calling to live antithetically. The preaching must not be softened regarding our calling to live according to God's Word

and all of its exhortations, as if that would somehow detract from God's work of saving us. And certainly, there are great blessings that come to God's people in the way of a godly life. All of this to the glory of our God whom we love and want to serve.

May God continue His saving work among us as members of a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give us wisdom to rightly understand His great gift of salvation and our calling to live in gratitude. May the *Standard Bearer* continue to be a means to convey these truths to God's people around the world.

In Christ,
Ken Elzinga
Byron Center, MI

Question on obtaining wisdom

Dear Rev. Slopsema,

I write this letter as I have some concerns about the meditation you wrote in the February 1, 2021 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, and it is my hope that you can lay them to rest. In this article, wisdom is defined as living in daily repentance (turning from sin unto God in Christ). Wisdom is seeing our own sins, repenting of them, confessing them to God, and then living a life of grateful obedience to God. Then this wisdom is described as the *only way* to escape God's wrath on our sins and the *only way* to enjoy the riches of His gracious blessing.

Wisdom is something we obtain ourselves and something we are responsible for getting. It is something that we ourselves must do—"Wisdom is the *ability to act* according to reality *so that we prosper*" (emphasis added). Wisdom is an action by which we gain something—prosperity. Prosperity (enjoying the riches of His gracious blessing) is dependent upon our own wisdom (as a good work) and is *the only way* to escape God's wrath on our sins.

How does this fit with the recent decisions of our broader assemblies? In the *PRC Acts of Synod 2018* (pp. 73-74) we find this:

In conclusion: (a) Obedience—the obedience God requires [living a life of daily repentance and daily turning from sin—TH] and the obedience we gratefully give in a life of good works according to the power of His Spirit working in us—is never a *prerequisite of*, or a *condition unto*, or the *basis for*, or an *instrument/mean unto* or *the way unto*, but always a *fruit in* the covenant

relationship [or enjoying the riches of His gracious blessing—TH], and as we walk in the way of obedience we experience covenant fellowship with God.

Also, the Belgic Confession, Article 24 states:

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin.

A true faith, wrought in man by the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost makes a man new, causing him to live a life of daily repentance. This is not antinomian, for the rest of the article goes on to dismiss this charge. A true faith, with no mention of wisdom, causes daily repentance.

And also Proverbs 2:6-9:

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

True wisdom is given of the Lord, not obtained by man, and never earns anything for our salvation. But yet it appears we learn from the meditation that wisdom is something we have to obtain for ourselves (“The purpose of numbering our days is to obtain such a heart of wisdom”) so that we can act on it (“Wisdom is the ability to act...”) in order to receive something else (“... so that we prosper”).

So how does this wisdom as described in the meditation in question fit in with the quoted ecclesiastical decisions above, and (more importantly) with the confessions, creeds, and Scriptures regarding the place of good works in our lives?

Respectfully,
Travis Hanko
Wingham PRC

RESPONSE:

Dear Travis,

Perhaps we should get before us the passage upon which my February 1, 2021 meditation is based. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). In my meditation I

suggested that a better translation would be, “So teach us to number our days, that we *may obtain a heart of wisdom*. Another translation has, “gaining a heart of wisdom.”

The essence of your criticism of my meditation is that it presents wisdom as something we obtain ourselves and are responsible for getting. Furthermore, escaping God’s wrath and enjoying the riches of God’s gracious blessing are dependent on our own wisdom as a good work. In other words, you see in my meditation the lie of works-righteousness. It seems to me, however, that your problem is really with Moses, the inspired writer who penned Psalm 90:12. The plain meaning of this passage is that we are to number our days so that we may obtain or gain something, that is, a heart of wisdom. Into that passage as I explained it you are reading all kinds of things that are not there.

Let me give a fuller explanation of this passage, in light of your concerns with my meditation.

You are correct when you write that true wisdom is given of the Lord. Your reference to Proverbs 2:6 is to the point. We may add that true wisdom is graciously given to the redeemed of God in the work of regeneration. However, because the work of grace is only begun in us, this gift of wisdom does not always control our hearts. Proverbs 22:15 teaches that foolishness is bound in the heart of a covenant child, requiring the rod of correction to drive it far from him. Psalm 90 was written to the nation of Israel in the wilderness. That sad history shows that foolishness was bound not just in the hearts of Israel’s youth but in the hearts of the vast majority of the nation. This brought the Lord’s rod of correction upon the entire nation through forty miserable years of wilderness wanderings.

The plain and simple teaching of Psalm 90:12 is that in the way of counting their days in the wilderness under the rod of correction the people of God would obtain a heart of wisdom. To put it differently, God would use their recollection of His chastening to drive the folly of unbelief from the hearts and to fill it with His wisdom. And so the prayer, “So teach us to number our days, that we may obtain (gain) a heart of wisdom.”

This explanation is in harmony with the synodical decision and the quote from the Belgic Confession you cite as well as all of Scripture.

In Christian love,
Rev. James Slopsema



A word fitly spoken

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

Lion

The lion is the strongest among beasts (Prov. 30:30). With his sharp claws he can rend a man in pieces (Ps. 7:2). With his powerful jaw he can crush bones and devour a man before he hits the floor (Dan. 6:24). His roar is like the battle cry of nations or the crashing of the seas (Is. 5:29).

In the Scriptures, the strength of the lion is a powerful warning for the fierceness of our foes. The devil is not just any adversary, but a roaring lion who seeks victims to devour (I Pet. 5:8). The wicked man is a lion greedy of his prey, lurking in secret places to catch the poor in his net (Ps. 10:9; 17:12). The false prophet is a ravening lion who devours souls (Ezek. 22:25). Antichrist, too, shall be a terrible beast with the mouth of a lion (Rev. 13:2). Our Lord knew all about this fearsome strength as He hung on the cross, His enemies gaping upon Him with their mouths “as a ravening and a roaring lion” (Ps. 22:13).

The great strength of the lion says a lot, then, about the power of the one who slays him. It was testament to the bravery of one of David’s mighty men that he slew two lion-like men of Moab, and then for good measure “went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow” (II Sam. 23:20). Samson showed his strength when he rent a lion in pieces with his bare hands as easily as the lion himself might have rent a baby goat (Judg. 14:6). David, too, showed his kingly prowess already as a shepherd boy when he took a lion by the mane to kill him, with the promise to do the same to that heathen menace named Goliath (I Sam. 17:35). All these, of course, were victories won in the power of God, as Daniel, who *by faith* “stopped the mouths of lions” (Heb. 11:33).

A corollary to the lion’s strength is his boldness. Because the lion is strongest among beasts, “he turneth not away for any” (Prov. 30:30). His upright head, his flowing mane, his proud face, and his graceful strut declare a confidence that is up for any challenge. This is the confidence the Word of God ascribes to the righteous. Do you see a Jesus in the gospel who backs down at the first whisper of opposition from the Pharisees? Do you see a Lord who whimpers in the garden of Gethsemane with a plea for His life? Do you see a Man who flees at

all, even when the whole world pursues Him? Oh, the wicked man who knows his guilt will run when not a single man pursues. But Jesus Christ the Righteous is “bold as a lion” for the perfect will of God He came to do (Prov. 28:1). Despite all who clamor against Him, He shall fight for mount Zion fearlessly “like as a lion and the young lion roaring on his prey” (Is. 31:4).

Yet there is one more attribute of the lion that makes him such a striking figure—his nobility. He is counted among the four things that go well upon the earth and are comely in their going, which include the lion, the greyhound, the goat, and the king (Prov. 30:29-31). Solomon seems to have been particularly enamored of the kingly qualities of the lion, which is why he flanked his own throne on either side with twelve of them carved out of gold (II Chron. 9:18, 19). Imagine seeking an audience with the king surrounded by his golden lions! Take heed that you watch your step when you are in his presence, though, for “the king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion” (Prov. 19:12), and “whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul” (Prov. 20:2).

But, oh, how that kingly wrath is so often misguided! Oh, how the bold king, mustering all his strength like a lion, will sometimes plunge himself and his people into ruin! Solomon knew this, too, from bitter experience. Was Solomon a great king with many resources? Was he determined to pass on his throne to his son with lion-like tenacity? But that would not prevent his kingdom from being rent in pieces after his death, only to be usurped in large part by the living Jeroboam. Even Solomon in all his glory had to conclude, “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Eccl. 9:4).

Is there any king, then, who is able to keep the kingdom intact? Is there anyone found who is worthy to assume the mane and the mantle of the lion? John the Apostle sought an answer to this question with tears in his eyes: “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon” (Rev. 5:2, 3). Who is strong enough? Who is bold enough? Who possesses the nobility of person to be worthy even to look on this book, containing all the counsels of the highest God?

John, cease your weeping, and behold! “The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof” (Rev. 5:5; cf. Gen. 49:9).

Here we find the figure of the lion at his most glorious, that is, precisely in the way the gospel flips him on his head. For John looks, and what does he see? A proud face with a golden mane? Claws and fangs? No, he sees “a Lamb as it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). Ah, there is your Lion who is worthy to take the book! The One who embodies the character of the Lamb! And not just any Lamb, but the Lamb who allowed Himself to be led to the slaughter by wicked hands for the sake of your redemption. Meekness, then, must be the fi-

nal and definitive attribute of the Lion. Meekness that sets apart the true Lion, Jesus Christ, from all the ugly caricatures who prowl about seeking whom they may devour.

And it is thus that we will even find lions in the final paradise. Lions whose powerful jaws are no longer used to crush bones but instead to chew straw like an ox (Is. 65:25). Lions who are no less strong and mighty than the lions of today, but who nevertheless allow themselves to be gently led about on a halter by a little child (Is. 11:6). Lions who never lack or suffer hunger as they might today (Ps. 34:10). Lions, who for all their might and boldness, seek their meat from the hand of the God who feeds them (Ps. 104:21).



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

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The loyalty of Luke

Only Luke is with me.

II Timothy 4:11

A previous article on Onesiphorus (April 1, 2021) laid out the dire circumstances that accompanied the apostle Paul during his final days. These circumstances were the backdrop of his final epistle, a second letter to Timothy who was laboring in Ephesus. Before Paul was to leave this life and join the throng of just men made perfect, he delivered some final requests and greetings to those who were near and dear to his heart.

Onesiphorus often refreshed Paul toward the end of his life (II Tim. 1:16), but as Paul faced the reality of his death one man stood by his side. One man was willing to maintain his relationship visibly with a treasonous “criminal” against the Roman Empire. This man’s name was Luke, and in II Timothy 4:11 we find a simply stated fact, yet one rich with endearment about a faithful and dedicated figure from the early church: “Only Luke is with me.”

When most Christians think about Luke, they recall a physician who wrote the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of Luke. In Luke we find someone instrumental in recording eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1-4), and then writing the narrative that helps bridge the gospels and the letters of the apostles

in Acts (Acts 1:1-4). However, Luke was more than a writer and physician; he was a traveling missionary.

Luke was born a Gentile in Antioch of Syria, most likely around the same time as Jesus and Paul (Col. 4:10-14). Located roughly 300 miles north of Jerusalem, Antioch was the place where God’s people were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). Luke was most likely the only Gentile who wrote books of the New Testament, but he was clearly skilled in his ability to recount and tell the story of the early church.

The conversions of Paul and Luke may well have taken place around the same time, shortly after the death of Jesus Christ. The connection between their conversions is striking in other ways beside their similarity in time. As a Jewish Pharisee and rising temple leader, Paul was converted as he stood at the height of his anger towards the early church, “consenting unto Stephen’s death” (Acts 8:1). What followed was an all-out rampage of persecution towards the church, leading him to continue that persecution in Damascus until the Lord turned his heart in an instant (Acts 9:6).

Therefore, the martyrdom of Stephen, the major event that fostered Paul’s anger towards the church, led to a great persecution that brought the gospel to Antioch (Acts 11:19-20), ultimately leading to the conversion of Luke.

A Gentile pagan, Luke was converted from polytheism to monotheism, a major transformation of the heart, but in a way different than what Paul experienced. As a Pharisee, Paul was rescued from his perverted view of God and His exclusive power to save sinners, while Luke was converted from “gods, which are not yet gods” (Jer. 2:11) to “the living God which made heaven and earth” (Acts 14:15). It may seem like Paul’s conversion was much more radical and emotional; yet, Luke’s was equally significant. Both men were given the new life of Christ and a new purpose. What Paul meant for evil towards the early Christians, God meant for good (Gen. 50:20), even using Stephen’s death to bring the gospel message to Antioch, where God worked mightily in the heart of Luke and other Gentiles.

Both Paul and Luke received a complete change of heart that would transform the rest of their lives. In their many travels together, they would have pondered this mysterious truth, namely, how God’s plan always works for the good of His people. How amazing that God would tie their conversions together with Stephen’s death, yet further join these two men together in a desire for the furtherance of the missionary program. This desire culminated in the aforementioned words of II Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me.”

Many Gentiles with whom Luke labored may have questioned their qualification for church membership. Many Gentiles were intimidated by the history and piety of the Jews, but Luke’s personal testimony would have been one of encouragement and confidence concerning their place in the church.

This is why the decision of the Jerusalem Council in AD 50 (Acts 15) is so important: *Do not trouble the Gentiles*. Do not burden them with laws and requirements that even their fathers were unable to keep (Acts 15:10). Peter’s beautiful testimony spoken on the floor of this great assembly spoke directly to the Gentiles, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as *they*” (15:11).

Many Jews, specifically the Judaizers that Acts 15 directly condemned, erred in their theology that only the pious members of the church needed the saving work of Christ, foolishly thinking they could add dross to the pure gold of Christ’s work. How wrong they were! The *broken sinner* is the one who needs the Great Physician to heal him. As a physician, Luke would have been able to relay that beautiful truth in a profound and personal way, understanding intimately the words of Jesus he himself recorded in Luke 5:31, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”

In this connection, when we think of Luke, we might gravitate in interest toward his vocation as a physician.

The assumption may be that as a physician, Luke had a lofty social status with much wealth. The reality, however, may be the opposite. During this time when slavery made up one fifth of the entire population of the Roman Empire, many slaves were trained as physicians. In addition, it was common in the first century for people to be suspicious of physicians because many were dishonest and ill-qualified; therefore, physicians often held a lower social status.

It is entirely feasible that Luke was born into slavery, trained as a physician, and then freed by his master to travel with Paul during his time on the mission field. Regardless of Luke’s specific circumstance, the focus of Scripture is not on his vocation; rather, it reveals the spiritual ability and loyalty of Luke.

Paul’s main regard for Luke was that he was a traveling missionary. The first instance we read of Luke was that he joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy on the second missionary journey in the city of Troas, located in Asia Minor off the coast of the Aegean Sea. After Paul receives the vision of the Macedonian man to “come over and help us” (Act 16:16), Paul along with his three companions sets sail for Macedonia.

Because of the use of the “we” pronoun beginning in Troas (Acts 16:10), some have suggested that Luke was from Troas and was converted by Paul. The problem with this theory is that the missionaries do not seem to linger in Troas before setting sail for Macedonia. Preaching in Troas does not seem to come until some five years later when Paul wrote to the Corinthians that a door had opened for him there (II Cor. 2:12-13).

Luke’s travels seem to pause after the events that take place in Philippi, not continuing on with the missionaries to Thessalonica (Acts 16-17). Luke stays behind to encourage Lydia and the other new converts. The next mention of him (through the “we” pronoun) takes place towards the end of the third missionary journey when Paul, after backtracking through Macedonia, picks up Luke again in Philippi before sailing into Asia (20:4-6).

Luke was an eyewitness to many remarkable events during his time as a traveling missionary with Paul. One of these events is the moving farewell scene between Paul and the Ephesian elders in Miletus, located roughly 60 miles south of Ephesus. Before boarding the ship to set sail for Jerusalem, Paul gives a stirring speech. This is Paul’s last recorded speech as a free missionary, one with instruction, warning, and tears. Luke witnessed Paul’s concern for the future of the church as he prophesied that false teachers would come (Acts 20:29-30).

Paul had faithfully preached to these Ephesians over a three-year period on his third journey, more than any other church (Acts 20:31), and now he speaks to them directly: “I commend you to God, and to the word of

his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (20:32). The speech ends with what must have been a beautiful prayer, tears, and farewell kisses. Not a dry eye was to be found as they faced the reality that they may never see Paul again.

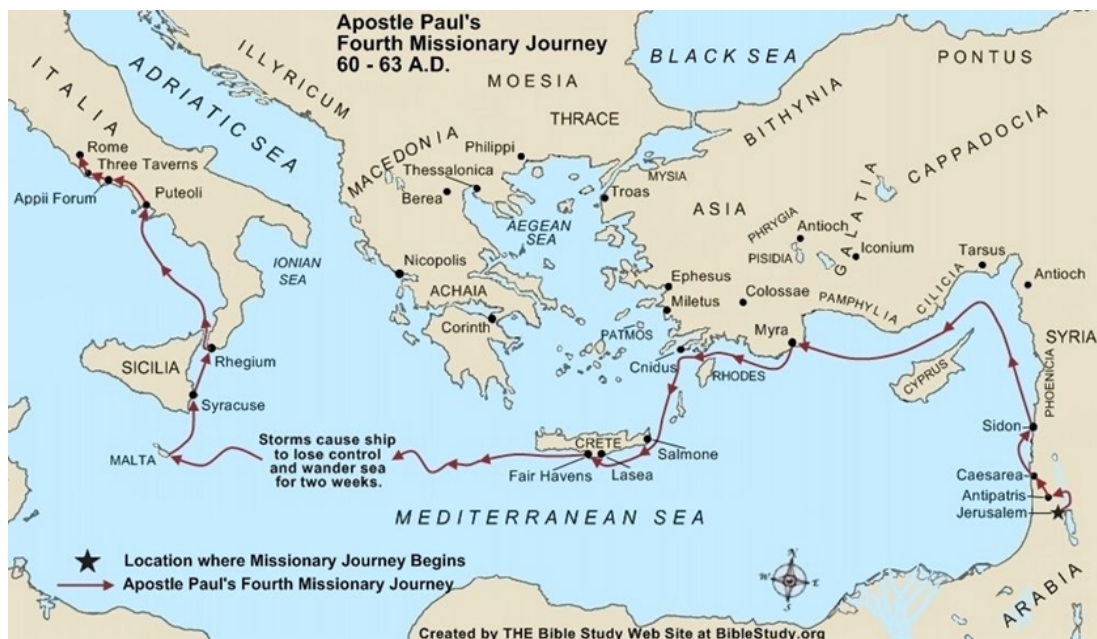
As Luke gets on the ship with Paul along with several other church representatives for the trip to Jerusalem (20:4), they endure the hard truth that Paul’s freedom as a missionary is in jeopardy. The experience in Jerusalem over the next few years will prove just that (Acts 21-26).

Luke was loyal to stay by Paul’s side, assisting him in the work of the missionary program in whatever way possible. This is seen throughout the history between the end of the third missionary journey and Paul’s arrival in Rome as a prisoner. After sitting in a dungeon for two years in Caesarea (Acts 23:33, 24:27), Paul finally appeals to Rome as the Roman ruler threatens to send him back to Jerusalem to face the Sanhedrin (25:10-11).

Luke is there, making the necessary preparations to board the ship, prepared to make the long journey to Rome, some 1,400 miles away (Acts 27:1). Luke did not know of course that this long trek would end up with him fighting for his life in the sea, but he went with confidence, wanting to witness Paul’s confession in Rome. This journey is sometimes called the Fourth Missionary Journey, as Paul and Luke were certainly witnesses of the gospel they both loved.

Maritime historians have studied the amazing descriptions of the journey to Rome at sea by Luke in Acts 27. One in particular, James Smith (1782-1867), compared his own experience and study of the Mediterranean Sea with what Luke records in Acts 27, using nautical information about prevailing winds, soundings, and coastlines, to demonstrate that Luke’s description of the shipwreck is authentic.¹

As interesting as this may be, this work by an English sailor is far from necessary to prove the accuracy



of Acts 27. God’s Word is self-authenticating, and does not need any proof from man for its infallibility.² Read Luke’s account in Acts 27 and you will be impressed by the detail; but more importantly, you will be led to see the intricate workings of God’s providence in the lives of Paul and Luke, as well as the 274 other men on board the ship who survived (Acts 27:37).

As an eyewitness to this amazing voyage, Luke would have been strengthened in his belief that God’s might and power is beyond the scope of our human understanding. He is faithful to His people, for He promised Paul (and Luke) that they would testify of Him in Rome (Acts 23:11).

He saw that promise through, leading Paul, Luke, and others to safety. As Luke and Paul kissed the ground of Italy, they were received well by the Roman church, now face-to-face for the first time after receiving Paul’s previous letter to them some five years previous (Rom. 16:1-2; Acts 28:15). While Paul waits to be heard by Nero, he lives under house arrest, preaching and teaching the kingdom of God (28:30-31).

Luke’s narrative recorded in Acts ends here in Rome with Paul’s first imprisonment, but the story is certainly far from over. Luke was in Rome for the duration of Paul’s first imprisonment (Col. 4:14; Phile. 24). After release from house arrest, Paul experiences a few years of freedom, traveling to revisit churches that he established and venturing into new territory like Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). It is possible that Luke was with him for these final years as well, and was able to continue to testify of the powerful work of God to new and old converts alike.

This freedom they shared ended as Paul was finally

¹ Smith, James. *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, 4th ed. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1880.

² Griess, Cory. “The Scriptures are self-authenticating.” *Standard Bearer*, vol. 95, no. 5 (December 1, 2019), 111-113.

arrested by Nero in Troas, the very same place where Luke had joined the group of missionaries some fifteen years earlier. This time, however, Paul is placed in a cold, dark dungeon in Rome (II Tim. 1:16, 4:6-8).

But he has Luke.

God used the spiritual refreshment of men like Onesiphorus to sustain him, but he has Luke *with him*.

He has his faithful companion, the one who refreshed Paul up to the end, giving him the spiritual medicine that he needs as he faces the reality of his death. He has someone with whom to reflect back on their past together; to see God's preservation *of them* and faithfulness *to them* as together they spread the gospel to new lands.

Luke: physician, writer, traveling missionary, and *loyal* friend to Paul.

Early tradition has cited Luke's death around AD 84 in central Greece, living some twenty years past his good friend Paul, and some thirty years after Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders. Did Luke learn of Paul's prophecy of Ephesus leaving their first love and allowing false teachers into the church (Rev. 2:2-4)? The details are beyond us, yet we can be confident that Luke stayed faithful to the service of the kingdom all the way to the end, knowing full well that his Savior would receive him into everlasting glory.

No more pain, nor more tears, for the healing power of the Great Physician was now fully realized.



God's wondrous works

Rev. James Laning, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa

The one God: The beginning and the end

Why does our Lord say in multiple places that He is the beginning and the end? Why is this mentioned in passages stressing that Jehovah alone is God? Could there be more than one who is the beginning? Could more than one be the end?

After an introductory article on the Trinity, we look now more specifically at God's oneness. Afterwards, Lord willing, we will discuss the threeness of God.

There are two subjects I plan to address in this first article on God's oneness. The first is what it means that God is "one only simple" Being, as stated in our Belgic Confession. Secondly, while searching the Scriptures to find passages emphasizing that Jehovah is the one and only God, we come across places where God says He is "the beginning and the end," "the first and the last," or something similar. We will consider the meaning of that, and what this teaches us about points for us to bring up when witnessing to others.

One only simple Being

That God is one simple Being is mentioned in the first article of the Belgic Confession: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God" (Belgic Confession, Art. 1). Perhaps one wonders what it means that God is *simple*. This means He is not

composed of parts. There are three persons in God, but those persons are not *parts* of God.

Sometimes when trying to explain the Trinity in a simple way, perhaps for children, an attempt is made to illustrate the Trinity by pointing to an object that has three parts. An egg has sometimes been used for this purpose. The white, the yoke, and the shell are three parts of the egg, yet there is only one egg. This, it is said, illustrates the Trinity. Yet, that is not correct. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each God, not part of God. As Calvin put it, the simple essence of God is not torn into three persons.¹

The persons are not parts of God, nor are God's attributes parts of Him. It is not that part of God is mercy and another part of Him is justice. Some speak of God this way and view these "parts" of God to be in tension. The part of God that is mercy wants to save everyone, but the part of Him that is justice will not allow Him to do that. Such is the way some speak of God, but that is not correct. It is incorrect not only because God does not desire to save everyone, but also because the perfections of God are not parts of Him, let alone parts that are in conflict with one another.

Jehovah is one simple Being: "So the Father is God, the

¹ Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, xiii, 2.

Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God” (Athanasian Creed). He who is one God, the only God, refers to Himself as the beginning and the end. What does that mean?

“The beginning and the end”

In a number of Bible verses God refers to Himself as the beginning and the end, or something similar. Let us take a look at some of them, keeping in mind that what God says about Himself gives us instruction as to what to say when witnessing to others.

Some of these passages are found in the prophecy of Isaiah:

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God” (Is. 44:6).

Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together (Is. 48:12-13).

In both of these passages God says He is the first and the last. In one of them He says that He alone is God, and in the other He emphasizes that He is the One who has created all things.

A similar phrase is found in the book of Revelation: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13). Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. So this is another way of saying that God is the beginning and the end.

This phrase is found repeatedly in Scripture. What does it mean? How does this distinguish the one true God from other gods?

Only one Creator and Governor of all

He who is the beginning and the end is the *eternal* God. Yet this phrase means more than this.

He who is “the beginning” or “the first” is the eternal *Creator*. Isaiah 48:13, which was quoted above, says that there were none before Jehovah. He is the One who has made all things. By Himself He created the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that are in them. Such can be said about no other god. He, and He alone, is the beginning.

He is also the end. He is the goal to which all things are directed. The one and only Creator is also the one and only Governor, who controls all things and directs them to the goal of the glory of His name and the coming of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who is the last declares the end. He declares the end from the beginning: “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Is. 46:9-10). His counsel, and His alone, is the one that stands. He who is the beginning and the end does all His pleasure. Such can be said about no other god.

Bearing witness to others

The true God, the living God, is the Alpha and Omega. This is something to be pointed out when witnessing not only to the heathen but also to many professing Christians. There are many who deny what God says about Himself. There are those who reject what He says about His work of creation. What God says about doing all His pleasure is also commonly denied. Many say that God’s desire, His goal, is that all human beings be saved. Yet this goal is not reached. The Lord of heaven and earth, in their mind, does not accomplish His purpose.

Some speak of God as though He had two contradictory wills. They say that according to God’s secret will He has chosen only some, but His revealed will is that He desires all human beings to be saved. This is a denial that God is the end, and that He is simple. His will is one. If God had two conflicting wills, He would not be one simple Being.

He who created all things has determined everything that has happened, and that will happen. He does all His pleasure. His purpose is accomplished.

The context of the passages that have been quoted, both in Isaiah and in the book of Revelation, place emphasis on this. They set forth emphatically that God has determined what is going to take place, and that He makes known to His people His counsel and will concerning their salvation in Christ.

Jehovah God is the first and the last. He is the Creator and Governor of all. He is the only One of whom that can be said. There could be only one Creator. Only one could be directing all things. All things are “of Him.” All things are also “to Him.” He, and He alone, is the first and the last.

This point, repeated often in Scripture, we do well to remember. What a comfort it is to us in all the trials we go through in this life. The prophecy of Isaiah and the book of Revelation speak of upcoming suffering for the people of God. Yet they also speak of the great comfort we have knowing that our God, the only God, the beginning and the end, is with us. He is the One governing all things, and doing so by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who died that we might live.



I believe

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

The instrumental cause of our salvation (5)

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2021, p. 302.

Review articles 1 and 2

This article is number five in a series. It is time to reflect a bit. The first two articles in this series were written to explain the importance of maintaining faith as the lone instrument in all our salvation. In order to show how important that is, I backed up a bit to give some history behind the Reformed faith's use of the word "instrument." The word was used to describe Scriptures' teaching that salvation is *by, through, and out of* faith. Faith is the sole instrument that connects the child of God to Christ. Through this pipeline alone all the salvation stored up in Christ comes to us.¹

This teaching is made sharper when we know that Calvin and the Reformers saw Scripture distinguish four 'causes' of our salvation.² First, they recognized the *efficient* cause or author of salvation, the Triune God of grace. Second, they spoke of the *material* cause, describing the substance of our salvation, Christ and His righteousness. Third, they spoke of the *instrumental* cause, faith, the lone instrument by which the Triune God connects us to Jesus Christ. Fourth, Calvin and the Reformers referred to the *final* cause of our salvation, the end or goal of salvation, namely, the glory of God. Calvin and the Reformers saw that the Scriptures give no place to works in any of these 'causes' of salvation. Indeed, with regard to the instrumental cause, though faith goes on to produce works, faith totally apart from its works is the sole instrumental cause of salvation.

We saw the importance then of defining faith. Faith is trust that arises out of true knowledge. This faith goes on to work by love as Galatians 5:6 tells us. Nonetheless, it remains distinct from its works, as actors are distinct from their actions. Both Rome and the Federal Vision refuse to distinguish faith from its working. Thus, when it comes time to speak of faith as the

instrument, they make both faith and faith's working co-instrumental in our salvation. This is how they compromise *sola fide* and is part of how they compromise justification by faith alone. It is not only the error that makes works the *meritorious ground* that is an issue; it is also the error that makes works part of the *instrument* that is an issue.

Review articles 3 and 4

In the next two articles, I spoke of the importance of maintaining what Calvin called the "order of sequence" that God has ordained in His relationship to us, without compromising faith alone as the instrument of all salvation. Explaining passages of Scripture that speak of works as "a reason for divine benefits,"³ Calvin said, "For that mode of expression indicates *not the cause* but the *order of sequence*.... He leads them into possession of it by the course of good works, that he may complete his work in them in the order which he has destined."⁴ Salvation is an organic whole. Yet we experience it in time and in covenant with God. In the way of those works we know blessings in our own lives and the lives of others, as the Heidelberg Catechism also indicates in Lord's Day 32. Yet, Calvin is very careful to avoid speaking of works as one of the fourfold causes of anything in our salvation:

The fact that scripture shows that the good works of believers are reasons why the Lord benefits them is to be so understood as to allow what we have set forth before to stand unshaken: that the efficient cause of our salvation consists in God the Father's love; the material cause in God the Son's obedience; the instrumental cause in the Spirit's illumination, that is, faith; the final cause, in the glory of God's great generosity.⁵

1 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, "...ingrafted into Him, and receive *all His benefits*, by a true faith."

2 'Causes' is in quotation marks because these are not all causes in the same sense.

3 John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (Westminster Press, 1960) 3.14.21 (Heading).

4 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.21. Emphasis added.

5 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.21.

Works are never the cause, whether material or instrumental, of anything at all in our salvation. For example, my parents raise me and the preaching is a means of grace to me. These, and other good works are means God uses to work out His good pleasure in my life. But the benefit granted to me still comes through the instrumentality of faith alone even as it comes in the way of those works.

We saw that H. Hoeksema, in the thick of the battle against a conditional covenant, maintained this order of procedure regarding God's dealings with us. He maintained that neither faith nor our works are conditions to anything in God's covenant. They are not gates that allow God to continue to work or shut Him off from continuing His work in His elect. Rather, they are the way He applies salvation in His covenant with us. Hoeksema, drawing from the Reformed tradition and from the Canons of Dordt in particular, commended the phrase "in the way of" to describe the connection between Christian living and certain blessings we receive. He also distinguished faith from its works by the use of this phrase. "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 faith, and to the obedience of faith, and therefore, we are saved through the *instrument* of faith, and *in the way of* obedience."⁶ Faith alone is the instrument, and works are the manner of living in God's covenant. Even when they are functioning at the same time (as they often are), each has its own role.

The motivation for these articles

Now that we have reviewed, let's ask the question, "Why write two articles explaining faith as the lone instrument and two articles preserving God's order of procedure in the covenant?" These articles represent my effort to explain *what* and *why* the PRC synods have decided what they did the last few years. As I hinted at toward the end of the last article, I believe God used Synod 2018 to take us out of one 'ditch,' and Synod 2019/2020 to prevent us from entering another 'ditch.'

Synod 2018

Synod 2018 recognized that the main issue in protested

sermons that came before it was that works were (unintentionally) being made part of the instrumental cause of our salvation. Statements (well known by now) were heaped up in sermons: We do good works "so that we can have our prayers answered;" "so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness;" "that our generations may thrive and flourish in God's land;" "that we might remain in God's church with His people and with our God;" as something "I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God;" because "there are requirements for him to fellowship, to approaching unto God, coming to the Father;" "in order that we may have fellowship... with God;" and for "help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone."⁷ Synod's judgment was that the *repetition* of such phrases indicated that "good works are performed in order to obtain something, or good works function as an instrument/means for the reception of something..."⁸ In other words, faith alone as the instrumental cause of salvation was compromised. *The necessary way of obedience (what Synod called the manner of living) was being made part of the instrument along with faith.*

Additionally, when the sermons were defended, they were defended as follows (read this now in light of this series of articles): "God does not wait for us to obey or depend on us for Him to do some further work of saving us. But God actually works in us that obedience; and in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly *causes* us to experience the blessings of salvation."⁹ The first sentence is good. In the second, causal language is used, apparently to describe the role of good works: "...in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly *causes* us to experience the blessings of salvation" (emphasis added). Synod 2018 stated, "If we will speak of God *causing* us to experience the blessings of salvation, then we must speak of faith, which is the *one and only instrument*. We must say, God causes us to experience the blessings of salvation through faith. Again, we experience the blessings of salvation 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)."¹⁰ Synod 2018 made clear *the issue* before her was that works were being made part of the instrumental

⁶ Herman Hoeksema, *Standard Bearer*, "As to Conditions (3)." It is certainly true that Hoeksema used "in the way of" to speak of both works and faith at times without distinction. See for example, "As to Conditions (9)." There is nothing necessarily wrong with that if the theology is understood. But in the quotation above he clearly distinguished faith's function from that of works.

⁷ *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 2018, 75.

⁸ *Acts of Synod* 2018, 75.

⁹ *Acts of Synod* 2018, 75. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ *Acts of Synod* 2018, 76. Emphasis added.

cause of salvation, a role reserved for faith apart from its accompanying works.¹¹

Synods 2019/2020

At Synods 2019 and 2020, the teaching concerning the order of procedure in God's dealings with us was threatened. A proposal came to Synod 2019 to do away with the expression "in the way of." To Synod 2020 came the charge that a minister "militated against Synod 2018 when he preached that there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God."¹² In other words, the objection was that if a minister preaches that there is an activity of a believer prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God, then that minister *necessarily* makes that activity the *instrument* of an aspect of our salvation. This is really arguing that "in the way of" must be removed—that there is no "in the way of" a believer's grateful activity that he knows a certain blessing from God. This is the other 'ditch' that both Calvin and Hoeksema avoided.

Synod 2018 had already preserved us from this over-reaction by its statement, "We experience the blessings of salvation 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)." In addition, Synod 2018 stated, "As we live in good works we have the confidence that God will, for Jesus' sake, continue to give us His grace and Holy Spirit." And, "as we walk in the way of those good works we enjoy the confidence that God will bless our generations for Jesus' sake."¹³

Synod 2020 added in response to the appellant, "It would be an error to say that one *does not have mercy at all* until after his activity of repentance." And then, speaking positively,

What Synod 2018 clearly rejected was any notion that characterizes what the regenerated believer does as

a prerequisite or condition or instrument that earns, gains, or obtains a blessing from God. The fact that an activity of the believer may occur temporally *prior* to the *experience* of a blessing from God does not automatically make such an activity a condition or prerequisite for earning, gaining, or meriting the blessing from God.

Explanation: a) This is consistent with the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching on prayer from Lord's Day 45, Q&A 116, "Why is prayer necessary for Christians? Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us; and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them." b) This is consistent with Scripture: Psalm 118:5, "I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me and set me in a large place."¹⁴

Synod stated that there are blessings of God that come to us in the way of some activities God gives us to do, thereby defending God's order of procedure even as she defended faith as the lone instrument of those blessings.

When the Westminster Assembly met to deal with suspected antinomianism in some of the ministers in England, she asked the ministers to answer a number of questions. One of the questions was, "Whether a sinner, *after* humbling himself, should be able to expect a *blessing* from God..."¹⁵ The assembly suspected that certain men would answer "no" to this question because these men believed that to answer "yes" automatically meant giving works a meritorious or instrumental role. But, to answer "no" to this question (while maintaining faith as the sole instrument) is in effect to deny that God gives certain blessings in the way of obedience. The Westminster Assembly at least considered a denial of the order of procedure to be antinomianism, a grave danger to the church of Jesus Christ. Though Synod did not label the challenge that came to her in 2019/2020, it is clear God used synod to keep us from an opposing 'ditch.'¹⁶

Next time, some concluding remarks.

11 To try to help understand the point synod was making, add the words "by faith," to the end of the sentence written in defense of the sermons so that the instrumentality of faith is included in the sentence. The sentence then reads, "God does not wait for us to obey or depend on us for Him to do some further work of saving us. But God actually works in us that obedience; and in the way of that obedience that He works in us, He wisely and sovereignly causes us to experience the blessings of salvation *by faith*." This is now a different statement. It is still not clear, but the case could be made that faith is now the instrument. It seems a slight difference, but remember these things are being stated in the context of theological debate.

12 *Acts of Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 2020, 75.

13 *Acts of Synod* 2018, 63-64.

14 *Acts of Synod* 2020, 81-82. Emphasis in the original. As the *Acts of Synod* state, synod here adopted the work of Classis East at her January, 2020 meeting (see top of 79).

15 Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law, Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 63. Emphasis added.

16 Stating this is not a minimizing of the error dealt with in 2018, but a recognition of historical facts.



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Nurturing our preschool children (3)

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2020, p. 113.

I am not a trained professional who has received a degree in child psychology or family practice. I do not have a Ph.D. in sociology or family counseling. Neither is it my life's occupation to diagnose childhood disorders or strange behavior patterns in children. I am not saying that these practices are wrong or unnecessary. I am merely saying these are not my credentials.

My credentials are more of a practical nature. I was raised in a covenant home with believing parents, my father being a strict disciplinarian and my mother a gentle, kind but firm instructor. I am a father who has now raised a family of my own. I am a grandfather who is loved by his grandchildren though I can be pretty grumpy with them at times. Life's experiences have taught me much in my life over the years. These are my credentials, first of all. Added to this, of course, are the many years I have spent in the pastoral ministry counseling, at times, parents with young children, but above all, expounding and preaching from many passages of Scripture about the calling of parents to raise their children in the fear of the Lord. It is my hope that these experiences will equip me to pass along instruction to young families who are immersed in the training of their little children.

In the last two articles we answered three general questions. First, when ought we to begin the nurturing of our children? Second, who are these little children we are called to nurture? Finally, whose calling is it to nurture them? With this article we begin to address the *methods* of nurturing our preschool children.

There is a danger we must avoid when teaching methods. The pitfall of many who teach methods is to write a handbook of exactly what to do in various situations that may arise in the life of our children. There are certain rules and regulations to follow given the circumstances. The problem with this is that circumstances will vary from one family to the next and from one child to the next. To give advice on what to do in all the particulars results in a mechanical method of nurturing our children. This must be avoided. Advice of this sort is most often tossed aside when we find it does

not work. God's people are called to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. That applies to this area of life too. Believing parents must struggle with the nitty gritty of everyday life in the home.

But there are several methods that are a given in the care of our children at every age, and now we may apply these to our little children.

Example

The most effective way of nurturing our little children in the fear of God is by means of our example as parents. This is biblical. Paul writes a short but telling exhortation to the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 5:1, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." The term "followers" in this verse literally means "imitators" or "mimickers" of God. He then adds, "as dear children." The idea is that little children are imitators of their parents. We as God's dear children must therefore be imitators of God. Children mimic or imitate their mother and father. They follow after the example left them.

Little children love their parents. They not only love good parents but they love bad parents too. To them, their parents can do no wrong. A father may beat his little son until he is black and blue, but that little child will love his father, as afraid of him as he might be. The son will believe that he deserved what he received from dad. He loves his dad. A mother may lash out at her little daughter slapping her and screaming at her for every little infraction committed, but that little girl will love her mother. Again, she is convinced that she deserved what she received from mom. Now, all of this may change when a child grows up. Love may turn into hate. But when children are young they truly desire to be just like mom and dad.

The Pelagians err when they assert that sin proceeds *only* from imitation. Scriptures clearly teach that children inherit their depraved nature from their parents. It is true, however, that when parents walk in the way of sin, except by God's grace, the children are prone to imitate the sins of their parents and follow in them as well.

In fact, usually the next generation will carry sin one step further than their parents. For example, if parents decide sporadic church attendance is acceptable, more than likely—again, except for the work of God’s grace in the hearts of their children—their children will see little need for church at all.

On the other hand, if parents walk in the way of godliness, this too will have an effect on the way their children walk. For that reason, parents must be deeply conscious of what they are teaching their little children by way of example. To use the illustration above, by faithful church attendance children learn from their parents the importance of church. Yet, this is a small part of the training children receive by the example of their parents. The larger share takes place in the home itself. When in public among God’s saints, we are on our best behavior. But when behind the closed doors of our homes where there is no urgency to impress others, our life is different. This is natural. Parents must remember that their example in the home will shape and mold the actions, not only, but the way our children perceive the world around them and therefore the way they think. When parents care little for the things of God’s kingdom but spend their time outside of church only in earthly pursuits, their impressionable, little children are learning from them. When husbands and wives communicate with each other together showing an interest in spiritual matters, their little children are learning from them.

When fathers reveal improper behavior towards their wives, such as constantly cutting them down by snide remarks and insensitive criticisms, their children are learning from them. When fathers sit in front of the television all night or play on their cell phone virtually ignoring the family except to give out an occasional shout at the children for being too noisy, their sons are watching and believe that when they grow up they may act the same way. A mean father often produces mean sons. On the contrary, a loving father who shows attention to his wife and her needs, speaking words of encouragement to her, showing her affection in the home, helping her even when she does not ask for help, is teaching his sons what they too must do to love their wives when they marry. Such fathers are teaching their daughters what they must look for in a husband.

Now, there may be fathers who are thinking, “What is this guy trying to teach, that we ought not to be men? Being a man implies rough and tough. It implies pursuing our own interests! The family must center in me!” These fathers must be reminded of two commandments of Scripture. One is in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” The second Paul gives in Ephe-

sians 6:4, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Do I need to explain what is involved in loving your wife? Do I need to explain what it means not to provoke your children to wrath?

The point is, when fathers deal with their family in this way, they are teaching by means of their example their young impressionable sons and daughters what they will become when they grow up. Think of that, fathers, the next time you do something in your home with your little children around you. They are watching you! What are you teaching them by your actions and words?

When mothers are kind and gentle, looking well to the ways of their household, when they are of a meek and a quiet spirit, giving of themselves to their family, such mothers are teaching their daughters by their example. On the other hand, when little children witness mother arguing heatedly with father, undermining his authority in the home, this too has an effect on the impressionable hearts of little daughters. When mothers are sharp and critical of their daughters, seldom encouraging them in their seemingly insignificant play, daughters will grow up acting the same way. Little girls are learning. If you want to witness what they are learning, mothers, just observe your little girl’s treatment of her dolls when she is at play.

What also falls into the category of example is this: when we as parents wish to be alone or get something done, we give our children to the ‘babysitter.’ I am not referring here to one we might hire for an evening to watch the kids while we are gone. I am referring to the television set. Let’s face it, when the children are underfoot and we are at wit’s end with their incessant squabbling, the easiest thing to do is put them in front of the television to watch cartoons or some animated feature. When we do, suddenly all is quiet! Ah! Now I can read my book! Now I can get something done in the kitchen! Now we as father and mother can visit quietly for a time! Listen! The kids are actually giggling together over something they are watching! They are discussing the movie together! Wow! This is wonderful! The ‘babysitter’ is doing such a good job of taking care of the kids! Sound familiar? When they get home from school, we let them watch TV. They hurry to finish their homework to be rewarded by watching TV. Sad to say, some parents even skip family devotions in order that the family can gather around the television rather than the table while they eat.

We forget as parents that in the place of our example we are allowing our children to learn from the example of the wicked world. They are taught the godless lifestyle of the world—vanity, permissiveness, feminism, swearing, the innate power of man to do what he wants, lawlessness (as in the Disney film “Frozen”—“It’s time

to see what I can do, to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free."), and the list goes on. It is frightening to consider the godless example of the 'babysitter' that is teaching our small children. The media is antichristian even in its 'innocent' cartoons. Perhaps we need to reexamine what example we leave as parents by allowing our children to follow the example of the world around us. Perhaps we need to look for another 'babysitter,' such as a good book, playing in the backyard, crafts, or constructive toys. Certainly, we as parents must be the example our children follow and not that of the media. The very holiness of our children and of the future church is at stake.

If there is anything that plagues the church today, it is a lack of godliness. This stems from the home. This is why we ask: What kind of an atmosphere do we establish as parents in the home? Is it one in which we as husbands and wives converse together about spiritual goals and desires? Do we sing the songs of Zion? Will

our children learn to pray by seeing us in prayer? Life in the home is so important because there our little children watch and follow after their parents—whether that be our good habits or bad. Our example is perhaps the most important “method” of nurturing our preschool children in order to mold them for their lives in this world.

We end on this note: parents must by their example reveal to their children what sin is and the need for the cross of Jesus Christ. This is accomplished in part when our children see that we as parents confess our sins and daily look to the cross. Our children will see in us a life of thankfulness in the way we live in the home and church. They will see in us the fear of God, and they by God's work of grace in their hearts will seek to walk in that same fear.

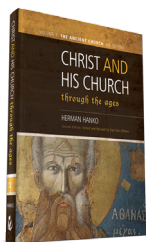
In our next article we will examine a second important method of nurturing our preschool children, that of discipline.



Bring the books...

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

Christ and His Church Through the Ages, vol. 1, *The Ancient Church (AD 30–590)*, 2nd edition. Herman Hanko; edited and revised by Dan VanUffelen. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 272 pages, hardcover. \$36.95. Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.



The RFPA website currently lists ten titles written by Herman Hanko, emeritus professor of Church History and New Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Publishing this survey of church history will add four more titles to those ten. These four may well be

Hanko's *magnum opus*.

The four volumes correspond to the four main eras of church history—ancient, medieval, reformation, and modern. The RFPA's goal is to publish one volume per year for the next four years.

Under review is the first volume, covering the first six centuries of church history. Three chapters cover the first period of ancient church history, the apostolic period (30–100). The material in this section is largely based on God's revelation in Scripture.

Chapters four through ten cover the post-apostolic period (100–313). During this period the church was learning how to live, grow, and develop in her doctri-

nal understanding without the guidance of the apostles. Society and the Roman government hated the church during this era. She battled against heresies that consisted of mixtures of Christian teachings and pagan philosophy; she had to recognize which books constituted the inspired Scriptures; and she had to develop in her understanding of the Trinity. By God's grace and under Christ's direction, grow and develop she did.

Chapters eleven through nineteen cover the Nicene and post-Nicene period (313–590). During this time the state stopped persecuting the church and began to favor her, to her weakening. The seeds of the Romish papacy were sown and began to sprout. The notable doctrinal controversies regarding the Trinity, Christ's person and natures, and the depravity of man's nature also characterized this period. The church was working hard to develop in her understanding of the sovereign, irresistible character of God's grace.

All of which is to say that this book highlights the main events and themes in the history of the church during her first six hundred years—exactly as you

would expect it to do, and as do many other books. So what makes this book different?

First, the work is intended for a wide public audience, not the narrow field of scholarship. Hanks is a scholar. He is well read in the field of church history, and taught it at seminary level for thirty-six years. But his goal is that the members of the church, whether highly educated or not, know the basic points of church history.

Second, Hanks's goal is to make the reading of church history an enjoyable undertaking: "I have consciously tried to make the book enjoyable and worth reading" (author's Preface). Indeed, the book tells a story, and flows like a story. It is a story—a *true* story, *His* (God's) story.

Other surveys of church history are also intended for a wide audience and are entertaining reads. So the third, and fundamental, way in which this book is different is that it evaluates church history from a Reformed and biblical viewpoint. In Hanks's words, "While the books that I read were all helpful in giving the facts of church history, some in considerable detail, I could not find one book that dealt with the history of Christ's church from a biblical and, more specifically, a Reformed viewpoint" (Preface).

In this reviewer's judgment, Hanks accomplishes all three goals, and does so well. His writing style is engaging. His explanation of complex matters (Gnosticism, and the Trinitarian and Christological heresies, for example), is simple enough that the book could be used as a high-school textbook (in fact, the first edition was a limited edition release for that purpose). And Hanks's evaluation of his material in light of Scripture is refreshing.

The book is full of church history facts, but the anal-

ysis of the historical events and themes is this book's great value. Every historian has a bias, a perspective from which he views history. Some historians, trying to be objective, do not tip their hand as to what their bias is. Hanks tips his hand: history is the unfolding of God's counsel, directed by the ascended Lord. It is the outworking of principles of history that Scripture tells us to expect—the signs of the times of our Lord's return. It is the story of men and women who sometimes abided by scriptural principles and requirements, and other times failed to abide by them.

Hanks also leaves the reader with the clear impression that the history of the church long ago is relevant for us today. History's themes repeat themselves, and the heresies that the church battled then are fundamentally the same, though repackaged, as some of the heresies that the church faces today.

I thank my former professor for taking the time to write the book, and look forward to the release of the next three volumes.

The contributions of the editor and reviser, Dan VanUffelen, are also commendable. Dan lists the ten basic categories in which he revised the first edition. Dan's work was significant and time-consuming. The addition of introductory essays, biographical sketches, sidebars, charts, and pictures makes the book more enjoyable to read, and more suitable for a textbook. The addition of an index to the book is also welcome.

The subject matter is precious. The matter is presented at a level that many can read. RFPA subscribers will not only enjoy reading the book, but likely recommend it to others interested in the church's history.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

When Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD was organized in 2010 it became the first PR church in South Dakota in how many years? The only previous South Dakota PRC was located where? Answers later in this column and more trivia next time.

Minister activities

Prof. R. Dykstra and his wife Carol returned to the USA in early May after serving the CERC of Singapore for

five months. Rev. J. Smidstra and his wife Kelly traveled to Singapore in late April and he intends to fill the pulpit there into late August.

Rev. C. Griess (First PRC in GR) declined the call from Hudsonville PRC to be their pastor. Rev. R. VanOverloop (Grace PRC) declined the call to Kalamazoo PRC. Wingham PRC (Ontario, Canada) had formed a trio, but their congregational meeting was on hold due to increased restrictions in Ontario. The Council of Byron Center PRC formed a new trio: Rev. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC), Prof. R. Dykstra

(PRCA Seminary), and Rev. C. Spronk (Faith PRC) with Prof. Dykstra receiving the call on May 2. He plans to respond by June 6.

Congregational activities

The Building Committee of First PRC of Holland, MI organized a Spring Work Bee for Saturday, May 1. Some of the main projects the committee hoped to accomplish included cleaning up around the transformer and seeding the area, adding black dirt and seeding the area by the parking lot driveway, trimming around the west side of church, and removing limbs from the lower section of pine trees.

More outdoor spring activities included the following:

- Adams Christian School Foundation held its 32nd Annual ACS Foundation Golf Scramble at Egypt Valley Country Club.
- Southwest Young People's Softball Tournament at Whistlestop Park in Byron Center.
- The 2nd Annual Hope Foundation Golf Tournament was to be held at Sunnybrook Country Club.

Young people's activities

Unity PRC Young People held a hanging basket sale on Saturday, May 8 in Byron Center from 9 A.M. to noon. A large variety of annual flower baskets and ferns were available along with free coffee and cookies. Since the Convention has been canceled for this summer, the Unity YP are donating the profits for this sale to the Unity PRC Building Fund. Thank you for your support!

Seminary activities

The faculty of the PRTS announces that the internship of Seminarian Marcus Wee will take place this summer and fall (July-December) at Faith PRC under Rev. C. Spronk. Senior student Josiah Tan is preparing to be examined at the 2021 PRC Synod at the request of his home church, Covenant ERC in Singapore.

With joy the faculty also announces that it has licensed student Matthew Koerner to speak a word of edification in the churches. His first service is scheduled for Holland PRC on May 30.

School activities

The Covenant Christian School of Lynden, WA Junior High invited all to their Geography Fair, scheduled for Friday, May 7 in the school gym. There were displays, food samples from around the world, almost-authentic costumes, games, prizes, and more! Not something you'd want to miss!

The school also held a Spring Cleaning School work-day on Saturday, May 1st. Supporters cleaned up the grounds and did some building maintenance. They brought their rakes, shovels, and wheelbarrow and joined for a morning of good Christian fellowship and hard work.

Denominational activities

Classis East met on May 12th in Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI.

A glance back in time—2009-2010

Candidate Cory Griess was led by God to decline calls to Byron Center PRC, First PRC of Holland, MI, and Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada. Candidate Griess accepted the call to Calvary PRC in Hull, IA and became Calvary's first pastor.... Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA dedicated its new building.... Men and boys of First PRC in Holland, MI enjoyed their annual camp-out at PJ Hoffmaster State Park near Muskegon.... Nine students attended our seminary.... Kalamazoo, MI PRC celebrated 55 years as a congregation.... Rev. Garrett Eriks celebrated ten years in the ministry.... Rev. Thomas Miersma accepted the call to serve as pastor in Lacombe, AB, Canada.... A senior retreat was held the first week of October at the YMCA in Estes Park, CO with 183 PRC members registered.... Our two student interns were Mr. Martyn McGeown and Mr. Dan Holstege.... Seminarians Nathan Decker, Jon Mahtani, and Brian Huizinga were assigned to internships later in the year.... Rev. S. Key accepted the call from Loveland, CO PRC.... Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI continued to make progress on their church building.... The consistory of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA decided to begin regular Bible studies with the members of the Tucson, AZ PR fellowship.... Rev. Audred Spriensma, pastor of Kalamazoo, MI PRC accepted the call from Byron Center, MI PRC.... We celebrated the organization of our new congregation in Sioux Falls, SD. Heritage PRC became the 31st congregation in our denomination and the first in South Dakota in 18 years (since Isabel). Rev. A. Brummel accepted the call to serve as their first pastor.... Rev. D. Lee accepted the call to Bethel PRC.... Rev. J. Laning accepted the call to Hull, IA PRC.... Rev. M. DeVries accepted the call to serve as the next pastor of Kalamazoo, MI PRC.

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

Announcements

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* will be published only once each month during the summer months: June, July, and August.

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Crete, IL, on Wednesday, September 29, 2021, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 30, 2021. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Crete's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Call to Synod

Synod 2020 appointed Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2021 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2021 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 8, 2021 at 8:00 A.M., in the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI.

The Pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 7, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. VanOverloop president of the 2020 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Philip VanderWall, O-3705 W. Leonard, Marne, MI. Phone: (616) 302-4725.

Consistory of
Georgetown PRC
Mr. Philip VanderWall, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. R. Kleyn

June 6—Two Kingdoms in Conflict
Mark 3:20-27

June 13—The Only Unforgivable Sin
Mark 3:28-30

June 20—Nurturing Fathers
Ephesians 6:4

June 27—Jesus' True Family
Mark 3:31-35

THROUGH MANY DANGERS

Written by P.M. Kuiper

Illustrated by Paula Barone

August 1862. Harm van Wyke and his friends leave Holland, MI to join the Union army. There they face temptations to forget God and turn from their faith, like gambling, drinking, and theft.

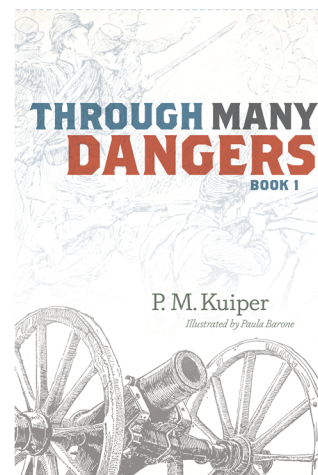
The friends gather regularly to sing psalms and discuss the Bible, but on occasion, they stumble and fall.

As the war progresses, the boys from Holland endure an arduous march to east Tennessee. Later they take part in General Sherman's prolonged and bloody Atlanta campaign.

In the midst of the harsh realities of war, Harm's faith is tried at every turn. But when his greatest conflict turns out to be spiritual, will God give him the strength to stand for what is right, even if he finds himself opposed by friends?

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